

הלכות עבודת כוכבים • פרק נשי

Learned like the daf, the literal words in bold, flowing with the elucidation

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam takes us deeper into the specific, dark practices of the ov and yid'oni, showing us the exact nature of these forbidden sorceries and the severe punishments they carry. We will learn how the ov involves whispering incantations over wands or skulls, while the yid'oni uses a bird's bone to fall into a trance, both being forms of avodah zarah that the Torah strictly forbids us to turn after.

We then move on to the terrible practice of Molech, where a father hands over some of his children to pagan priests to be passed through fire. The Rambam defines the precise halachic boundaries of this sin, explaining that it only applies to one's own descendants and requires both giving over and passing through the flames. Finally, the chapter addresses the prohibitions against erecting a monument (matzevah) for gathering and bowing down on a kneeling stone (even to Hashem) outside of the Beis HaMikdash.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Prohibited Practices of Ov and Yid'oni and Their Punishments

העושה אוב או ידעני

One who performs the sorcery of ov or yid'oni

ברצונו בידון

willingly and intentionally

חייב כרת

is liable for karet (spiritual excision),

ואם היו שם עדים והתראה

and if there were there witnesses and a proper halachic warning

נסקל.

he is stoned by the court.

היה שוגג

If he was acting unintentionally,

מביא חטאת קבועה.

he brings a fixed sin offering to the Beis HaMikdash.

כיצד הוא מעשה האוב.

How is the practice of the ov performed?

זה שהוא עומד ומקטיר קטרת ידועה

This refers to one that stands and burns a known incense,

ואוחז שרביט של הדס בידו ומניפו

and holds a wand of myrtle in his hand and waves it,

והוא מדבר בלאת בדברים ידועים אצלם

and he speaks softly with words known to them (the practitioners of this magic),

עד שישמע השואל

until the inquirer hears

כאלו אחד מדבר עמו ומשיבו

as if someone is speaking with him and answering him

על מה שהוא שואל

on what he asks,

בדברים מתחת הארץ

speaking with words that seem to come from under the earth,

בקול נמוך עד מאד

in a voice that is very low,

וכאלו אינו נפר לאזן

and as if it is not clearly discernible to the ear,

אלא במחשבה מרגיש בו.

but in thought the inquirer senses it.

וכן הלוקח גלגלת המת

And likewise, one who takes a skull of the dead

ומקטיר לה ומנחש בה

and burns incense to it and divines with it,

עד שישמע כאלו קול יוצא

until there is heard as if a voice comes out

מתחת שְׁחִיו שָׁפֵל עַד מְאֹד וּמְשִׁיבוֹ.

from under his armpit, which is very low, and answers him.

כָּל אֵלֹו מַעֲשֵׂה אוֹב הֵן

All these are practices of ov,

וְהַעוֹשֶׂה אֶחָד מֵהֶן נִסְקָל:

and one who performs even one of them is stoned.

הלכה ב

Halacha 2: The Practice of the Yid'oni and Its Prohibition

כִּיצַד מַעֲשֵׂה הַיִּדְּעָנִי.

How is the deed of the practitioner of yid'oni performed?

מְנִיחַ עֶצֶם עוֹף שְׁשָׁמוֹ יָדוּעַ בְּפִיו

He places a bone of a bird whose name is Yadua in his mouth,

וּמִקְטִיר וְעוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשִׂים אֲחֵרִים

and offers incense and does other deeds

עַד שִׁיפֵל כְּנִכְפָּה

until he falls like an epileptic

וַיִּדְבֹּר בְּפִיו דְּבָרִים שְׁעֵתִידִים לְהִיּוֹת.

and speaks with his mouth words that are destined to be in the future.

וְכָל אֵלֹו מִיְּנֵי עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים הֵן

And all these practices are types of worship of stars,

וּמִזֶּה הָרָח שֶׁלֹּהֶן מִנִּין

and from where do we derive the warning against them?

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "אַל תִּפְּנוּ אֶל הָאֲבֹת" וְגו':

As it is said, "Do not turn to the ovos and to the yid'onim" etc.

הנותן מזרעו למלך בְּרָצוֹנוֹ וּבְזָדוֹן חַיֵּב כָּרֶת.

One who gives of his progeny to Molech willingly and with intent is liable to karet, spiritual excision, if there was no warning.

בְּשׁוּגָג מביא חטאת קבועה.

If he did so inadvertently, he brings a fixed sin offering.

ואם עשה בעדים והתראה נסקל

And if he did so with witnesses and a prior warning, he is stoned by the Beis Din,

שנאמר ויקרא כ ב "אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן מִזְרָעוֹ לַמֶּלֶךְ מוֹת יוֹמָת" וגו'.

as it is said in the Torah, "whoever gives of his progeny to Molech, death shall he be put to death" etc.

ואזהרה שלו מנין

And the warning for it, from where do we derive it? It is

שנאמר ויקרא יח כא "וּמִזְרָעֶךָ לֹא תִתֵּן לְהַעֲבִיר לַמֶּלֶךְ"

as it is said, "And of your progeny you shall not give to pass to Molech."

ולחלן הוא אומר דברים יח י "לֹא יִמָּצָא בָּךְ מַעֲבִיר בְּנוֹ וּבִתּוֹ בָּאֵשׁ".

And further on it says, "There shall not be found among you one who passes his son and his daughter through the fire."

כיצד היו עושים.

How did they do this service? The father

מדליק אש גדולה ולוקח מקצת זרעו ומוסרו לכהניהם עובדי האש.

kindles a great fire, and takes some of his progeny and delivers him to their priests, the worshippers of the fire.

ואותן הכהנים נותנין הין לאביו אחר שנמסר בידין להעבירו באש ברשותו

And those priests give the son back to his father, after he was delivered into their hand, to pass him through the fire with his permission.

ואביו הין הוא שמעביר בנו על האש ברשות הכהנים

And the father of the son, he is the one who passes his son over the fire with the permission of the priests,

ומעבירו ברגליו מצד זה לצד אחר בתוך השלהבת.

and he passes him on his feet from this side to the other side in the midst of the flame.

לא שהוא שורפו למלה כדרך ששורפין בניהם ובנותיהם לעבודת פוכבים אחרת

It is **not** that he burns him to Molech like the manner that they burn their sons and their daughters for other worship of stars,

אלא בהעברה בלבד היתה עבודה זו ששמה מלה.

rather, by passing alone was this worship, whose name is Molech, performed.

לפיכך העושה עבודה זו לעבודת פוכבים אחרת חוץ ממלה פטור:

Therefore, one who performs this worship for other worship of stars, aside from Molech, is **exempt** from the punishment of Molech.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4: The Prohibition of Passing One's Progeny to Molech and Its Conditions

אינו חייב כרת או סקילה

One is **not liable** to receive **karet** or **stoning** for the worship of Molech

עד שימסר בנו למלה

until he hands over his son to Molech

ויעבירו ברגליו באש דרך העברה.

and passes him with his feet through the fire in the manner of passing that is customary for this service.

מסר ולא העביר

If he **handed over** the child to the priests of Molech **but did not pass** him through the fire,

העביר ולא מסר.

or if he **passed** him through the fire **but did not hand** him over first,

או שמסר והעביר שלא בדרך העברה

or if he **handed over and passed** him, but did so **not in the manner of passing** that is typical for this worship,

פטור.

he is **exempt** from the capital punishment of stoning and from karet.

ואינו חייב עד שימסר מקצת זרעו ויניח מקצת

And he is **not liable** to these punishments until he hands over some of his offspring and leaves some of his offspring behind without passing them to Molech,

שנאמר ויקרא כג "כי מזרעו נתן למלה"

as it is said in the Torah in Vayikra 20:3, "For from his offspring he has given to Molech,"

מקצתו ולא כלו:

which implies that he only gave **some of it**, and **not all of it**.

הלכה ה

Halacha 5 · Passing Offspring to Molech and Who is Liable

אחד זרע פֿשר ואֶחָד זֶרַע פֿסוּל

Whether it is **legitimate offspring** or whether it is **illegitimate offspring**,

אֶחָד בְּנָיו וּבְנוֹתָיו בְּנֵיהֶם וּבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם

whether they are **his sons and his daughters**, their children, and the children of their children—

עַל כָּל יוֹצְאֵי יֶרְכוּ הוּא חַיֵּב

for all descendants of his loin, he is **liable** to the death penalty for passing them to Molech,

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵן זֶרְעוֹ.

because they are his offspring.

אָבֵל אִם הֶעֱבִיר אָחִיו אוֹ אֲחִיּוֹתָיו אוֹ אֲבוֹתָיו

But if he passed his brothers, or his sisters, or his fathers,

אוֹ שֶׁהֶעֱבִיר עַצְמוֹ פֶּטוּר.

or if he passed **himself**, he is **exempt** from the punishment of Molech.

הֶעֱבִיר אֶחָד מִזֶּרְעוֹ וְהוּא יָשָׁן

If he passed one of his offspring and he was sleeping,

אוֹ שֶׁהָיָה סוּמָא פֶּטוּר:

or if the offspring was **blind**, he is **exempt**.

הלכה ו

Halacha 6 · The Prohibition of Erecting a Monument and Prostrating on a Kneeling Stone

מִצְוַת שֶׁאִסְרָה תוֹרָה

A monument that the Torah forbade

הִיא בִּנְיָן שֶׁכָּל מְתַקְבְּצִין אֵצֶלָהּ

it is a structure that everyone gathers near it

וְאִפְלוּ לַעֲבֹד אֶת ה'

and even to worship — Hashem with it, it is forbidden,

שֶׁכֵּן הָיָה דֶּרֶךְ עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים.

because so was the way of worshipers of stars to do.

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְלֹא תָקִים לָךְ מִצֵּבָה".

As it is said, "And not shall you erect for yourself a monument."

וְכָל הַמָּקִים מִצֵּבָה לֹקָה.

And anyone who erects a monument receives lashes.

וְכֵן אָבֵן מִשְׁפִּית הָאֲמוּרָה בַּתּוֹרָה

And likewise, a stone of kneeling that is mentioned in the Torah,

אֲףֵי עַל פִּי שֶׁהוּא מִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה עָלֶיהָ לְשֵׁם לֹקָה

even though he prostrates himself upon it to the Name of Hashem, he receives lashes,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְאָבֵן מִשְׁפִּית לֹא תִתֵּנוּ בְּאַרְצְכֶם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת עָלֶיהָ"

as it is said, "And a stone of kneeling not shall you place in your land to prostrate yourselves upon it,"

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיָה דֶּרֶךְ עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים לְהַנִּיחַ אָבֵן לְפָנֶיהָ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת עָלֶיהָ.

because it was the way of worshipers of stars to place a stone before their idol to prostrate themselves upon it.

לְפִיכָה אֵין עוֹשִׂין כֵּן לָהּ.

Therefore, we do not do so to Hashem.

וְאֵינּוּ לֹקָה עַד שֶׁיִּפְשֵׁט יָדָיו וְרַגָּלָיו עַל הָאָבֵן

And he does not receive lashes until he spreads out his hands and his feet upon the stone,

וְנִמְצָא כָּלּוֹ מִטָּל עָלֶיהָ

and it turns out all of him is cast upon it,

שֶׁזֶּוּ הִיא הַשְׁתַּחֲוִיָּה הָאֲמוּרָה בַּתּוֹרָה:

for this is the full prostration that is mentioned in the Torah.

הַלָּכָה ז'

Halacha 7 - Prostration on Stone Outside the Beis HaMikdash and the Custom of Spreading Mats

בְּמָה דְּכָרִים אֲמוּרִים

In what circumstances are these words said?

בְּשָׂאֵר הָאֲרָצוֹת

In the rest of the lands, meaning anywhere outside the Beis HaMikdash.

אָבֵל בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ מֵתֵר לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת עַל הָאֲבָנִים

But in the Beis HaMikdash, it is permitted to prostrate flat upon the stones,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "בְּאַרְצְכֶם",

as it is said in the Torah, "in your land,"

בְּאַרְצְכֶם אִי אַתֶּם מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים עַל הָאֲבָנִים

which teaches: in your land you may not prostrate upon the stones,

אָבֵל אַתֶּם מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים עַל הָאֲבָנִים הַמְּצֻלּוֹת בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ.

but you may prostrate upon the hewn stones in the Beis HaMikdash.

וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה נִהְגוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

And because of this, all of Yisrael customarily

לְהַצִּיעַ מַחְצְלָאוֹת בְּכִתִּי כְּנִסְיוֹת הָרְצוּפוֹת בְּאֲבָנִים

spread mats in synagogues that are paved with stones,

אוּ מִיֵּי קֶשׁ וְתֵבֶן

or types of straw and hay,

לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין פְּנֵיהֶם וּבֵין הָאֲבָנִים.

to separate between their faces and the stones when they bow down.

וְאִם לֹא מָצָא דָבָר מַבְדִּיל בֵּינוֹ וּבֵין הָאֶבֶן

And if he did not find a thing separating between himself and the stone,

הוֹלֵךְ לְמָקוֹם אֲחֵר וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה

he goes to another place and prostrates there,

אוּ שׁוּחָה עַל צִדּוֹ וּמִטָּה

or he bends on his side and inclines himself,

כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יִדְבִיק פָּנָיו בָּאֶבֶן:

in order that he will not press his face to the stone.

כָּל הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַה' עַל הָאֲבָנִים הַמִּפְצָלוֹת

Anyone who prostrates to Hashem upon the paved stones

בְּלֹא פִשּׁוּט יָדָיו וְרַגְלָיו

but without the spreading of hands and feet

אֵינוֹ לוֹקָה

is not lashed with Torah-mandated malkus,

אֲלָא מַכִּין אוֹתוֹ מַכַּת מִרְדּוּת.

but they strike him with a blow of rebelliousness as a Rabbinic punishment.

אֲבָל לְעִבּוּדַת כּוֹכָבִים

But for the worship of stars and idols,

אֶחָד הַשְׁתַּחֲוִיָּה בְּפִשּׁוּט יָדָיו וְרַגְלָיו

it is the same whether it is prostration with the spreading of hands and feet

אוּ בְּלֹא פִשּׁוּט יָדָיו וְרַגְלָיו

or without the spreading of hands and feet;

מִשְׁעָה שֶׁיִּכְבֹּשׁ פָּנָיו בַּקֶּרֶעַ

from the moment that he presses his face into the ground before the idol,

נִסְקָל:

he is stoned by the Beis Din.

הַנוֹטֵעַ אֵילָן אֶצְלֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ

One who plants a tree near the altar

אוּ בְּכָל הָעֶזְרָה

or in any part of the Temple courtyard,

בֵּין אֵילָן סָרֵק בֵּין אֵילָן מֵאֲכָל

whether it is a tree of barrenness which does not produce fruit, whether it is a tree of food which does produce fruit,

אף על פי שֶׁעָשָׂאוֹ לְנוֹי לַמִּקְדָּשׁ וְיָפִי לוֹ

even though he made it for beauty for the Temple and attractiveness for it,

הֲרִי זֶה לוֹקָה

behold this one receives lashes mid'Oraisa,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "לֹא תִטַּע לָךְ אֲשֶׁרָה כָּל עֵץ אֲצִל מִזְבַּח ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ".

as it is said in the Torah, "Do not plant for yourself an asherah, any tree, near the altar of Hashem your God."

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיָה זֶה דְּרֶגֶךְ עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים

This is prohibited because it was this the way of worshipers of stars

נוֹטְעִין אֵילָנוֹת בְּצַד מִזְבַּח שְׁלָה

that they would plant trees beside altars of theirs

כְּדֵי שִׁיתְקַבְּצוּ שָׁם הָעָם:

in order that they would gather there, the people, for their pagan worship.

הִלְכָּה י

Halacha 10 · The Prohibition of Constructing Wooden Porches in the Temple

אָסוּר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲכַסְדְּרָאוֹת שֶׁל עֵץ בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ

It is forbidden to make porches of wood in the Temple

כְּדֶרֶךְ שְׁעוֹשִׁין בַּחֲצֵרוֹת,

like the way that they make in private courtyards,

אף על פי שֶׁהוּא בְּבִנְיָן וְאִינוּ עֵץ נִטּוּעַ

even though that it is in a building and it is not a tree planted in the ground.

הִרְחָקָה יִתְּרָה הִיא

This is an extra distancing to guard against the prohibition of Asherah,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "כָּל עֵץ".

as it is said in the Torah in Devarim 16:21, "You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah, any tree" near the Altar of Hashem.

אֵלָּא כָּל הָאֲכַסְדְּרָאוֹת וְהַסְּבָכוֹת הַיוֹצְאוֹת מִן הַכֶּתֶלִּים שֶׁהָיוּ בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ

Rather, all the porches and the lattices that protrude from the walls that were in the Temple

שֶׁל אָבֹן הָיוּ לֹא שֶׁל עֵץ:

were of stone; they were not of wood.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlines the severe prohibitions of ov, yid'oni, and Molech, detailing their specific rituals and the liabilities of kares, stoning, or a sin offering depending on whether the act was intentional or inadvertent. The Rambam clarifies that the worship of Molech requires passing some, but not all, of one's descendants through fire with the priests' permission, and does not apply to other relatives or to oneself. Lastly, the Rambam explains the prohibitions against erecting a matzevah and prostrating oneself on a kneeling stone outside the Beis HaMikdash, noting that while bowing on hewn stone was permitted in the Temple, we must use mats or lie on our sides to create a separation when davening on stone floors in our synagogues today.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear talmid, look at what the Rambam is teaching us here. The Torah forbids us from erecting a monument (matzeivah) or bowing on a stone floor, even if our entire intention is to serve Hashem! Why? Because this was the way of the pagans. The Torah is telling us something profound: when it comes to serving Hashem, the end does not justify the means. We cannot use the methods of the street, the styles of the secular world, or the gimmicks of the outside culture, even if we think it will bring us closer to Shamayim or help us gather people for a holy cause.

True avodah requires us to be pure not only in our hearts, but in our vessels. If we try to inspire ourselves using the loud, superficial, and self-centered ways of the world around us, we profane the very connection we are trying to build. Hashem wants us to serve Him in the way He commanded, with the quiet, modest, and holy pathways of the mesorah.

Today, take a look at how you perform your mitzvos and run your Jewish home. Make sure you are not bringing the 'monuments' of the outside world into your sacred space. Choose one small area of your daily life, whether it is how you dress, how you speak, or how you celebrate a simcha, and ensure it is done with pure, authentic Jewish warmth, completely untouched by the trends of the street.