

הלכות עבודת כוכבים • פרק שמיני

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, we learn the fundamental guidelines regarding what can and cannot become forbidden as an idol. Hashem made a beautiful world, and the Sages teach us a major yesod: anything that has not been manipulated or made by man—such as mountains, hills, rivers, and animals—does not become forbidden for our use, even if misguided people actually bowed down to them and worshiped them as deities.

We will also learn the specific conditions under which these natural objects can become forbidden. For instance, we look at what happens if a person performs a physical action on an animal for the sake of an idol, or if someone digs into the earth to alter it for a pagan deity, as well as the important halachic rule that a person cannot make his friend's property forbidden without his consent.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • Objects of Idol Worship That Are Permitted for Benefit

כל שאין בו תפיסת יד אדם

Any object that there is not in it the manipulation of the hand of man

ולא עשהו אדם

and man did not make it,

אף על פי שנעבד

even though that it was worshiped as an idol,

הרי זה מותר בהנאה.

behold this is permitted for benefit.

לפיכך עובדי כוכבים העובדים את ההרים ואת הגבעות

Therefore, worshipers of stars who worship the mountains and the hills,

ואת האילנות הנטועין מתחלתן לפרות

and the trees that were planted from their beginning for fruit,

ואת המעינות הנובעין לרבים ואת הבהמה

and the springs that flow for the public, and the animal,

הרי אלו מתרין בהנאה

behold these are permitted for benefit,

ומתר לאכל אותן הפרות שנעבדו במקום גדילתן ואותה הבהמה.

and it is permitted to eat those fruits that were worshiped in the place of their growth, and that animal.

ואין צריך לומר הבהמה שהקצת לעבודת כוכבים

And there is no need to say regarding the animal that was set aside for worship of stars,

שהיא מתרת באכילה

that it is permitted for eating;

בין שהקצוה לעבודה בין שהקצוה להקריבה הרי זו מתרת.

whether that they set it aside to worship it, whether that they set it aside to sacrifice it, behold this is permitted.

במה דברים אמורים שאין הבהמה נאסרת

In what words are these said, that the animal is not forbidden?

בשלא עשה בה מעשה לשם עבודת כוכבים

In a case that he did not do to it an action for the sake of worship of stars.

אבל עשה בה מעשה כל שהוא אסרה.

But if he did to it an action, any that it is, he forbade it.

כיצד,

How so?

כגון ששחט בה סימן לעבודת כוכבים.

For example, that he slaughtered in it a sign (one of the neck organs) for worship of stars.

עשאה חליפין לעבודת כוכבים אסרה.

If he made it an exchange for worship of stars, he forbade it.

וכן חליפי חליפין.

And likewise, the exchange of an exchange is forbidden,

מפני שנעשים דמי עבודת כוכבים.

because that they become the value of worship of stars.

במה דברים אמורים בבהמת עצמו.

In what words are these said? Regarding the animal of himself.

אָבֵל אִם שָׁחַט בְּהֵמַת חֲבֵרוֹ לְעִבּוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים אוֹ הָהָ לִיפָּהּ לֹא נֶאֱסָרָה

But if he slaughtered the animal of his fellow for worship of stars, or exchanged it, it is not forbidden,

שְׂאִין אָדָם אוֹסֵר דְּבַר שְׂאִינוֹ שְׁלוֹ.

since a man does not forbid a thing that is not his.

הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְקִרְקַע עוֹלָם לֹא אֶסְרָהּ.

One who bows down to ground of the world, he did not forbid it.

חָפַר בָּהּ בּוֹרוֹת שִׁיחִין וּמַעְרוֹת לְשֵׁם עִבּוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים אֶסְרָהּ:

But if he dug in it pits, ditches, and caves for the sake of worship of stars, he forbade it.

הַלָּכָה ב

Halacha 2 · The Status of Worshipped Water and Detached Mountain Stones

מִים שֶׁעָקְרוּ הַגֹּל

Regarding **water that** was detached when **the wave uprooted them** from the sea,

וְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶן

and a person **bowed down to them** as an idol while they were flying through the air,

לֹא אֶסְרָן.

he **did not forbid them** for benefit, because they were detached by a natural force and not by human hands.

נִטְלָן בְּיָדוֹ

However, if **he took them in his hand**

וְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶן

and then **bowed down to them,**

אֶסְרָן.

he has **forbidden them**, since they were detached and handled by human action.

אֲבָנֵי הַר שֶׁנִּדְּלָדְלוּ

Similarly, **stones of a mountain that detached** from their place by natural means,

וַעֲבָדוּ בְּמָקוֹמָם

and a person **worshipped them in their place** where they fell,

they are permitted for use,

שֶׁהֵי אֵין בָּהֶן תְּפִיסַת יַד אָדָם:

since there is not in them any manipulation of the hand of man to detach them.

הִלָּכָה ג

Halacha 3 · The Laws of an Asherah Tree, Worshiped Trees, and Objects Set Aside for Idolatry

יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁזָקַף לִבָּנָה לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לָהּ

A Jew who stood up a brick with the intention to bow down to it

וְלֹא הִשְׁתַּחֲוָה לָהּ

and did not bow down to it himself,

וּבָא עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוָה לָהּ

and came a worshiper of stars and bowed down to it,

אֶסְרָה בְּהִנָּאָה

the Jew has made it forbidden for benefit,

שֶׁזִּקְיָפְתָּהּ מֵעֲשֶׂה.

because its standing up is considered an action of preparation on his part.

וְכֵן אִם זָקַף בֵּיצָה

And so if he stood up an egg

וּבָא עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוָה לָהּ אֶסְרָה.

and came a worshiper of stars and bowed down to it, he made it forbidden.

חֲתַךְ דִּלְעַת וְכִיּוֹצָא בָּהּ

If he cut a gourd and the like of it to prepare it for worship,

וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוָה לָהּ אֶסְרָה.

and then a non-Jew bowed down to it, he made it forbidden.

הִשְׁתַּחֲוָה לְחֻצֵי דִלְעַת

If the non-Jew bowed down to half of a gourd,

וְחֻצֵי הָאֲחֵר מְעָרָה בּוֹ

and the half other is attached to it,

הָרִי זֶה אָסוּר מִסִּפָּק

behold this is forbidden out of doubt,

שָׁמָּה זֶה הַחֲצִי כְּמוֹ יָד לַחֲצִי הַנֶּעֱבָד.

lest this half is like a handle for the half that was worshiped.

אֵילָן שֶׁנִּטְעָה מֵתַחֲלָה שִׁיְהִיָּה נֶעֱבָד

A tree that one planted it from the beginning that it should be worshiped

אָסוּר בַּהֲנָאָה

is forbidden for benefit,

וְזוֹ הִיא אֲשֶׁרָה הָאֲמוּרָה בַּתּוֹרָה.

and this is the asherah which is spoken of in the Torah.

הָיָה אֵילָן נִטוּעַ

If there was a tree already planted,

וַיִּגְדְּעוּ וּפָסְלוּ לְשֵׁם עֲבֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים

and he pruned it and carved it for the sake of worship of stars,

אֶפְלוּ הַבְּרִיָּה וְהִרְכִּיב בְּגוּפוֹ שֶׁל אֵילָן

or even if he bent a branch and grafted into the body of the tree

וְהוֹצִיא שְׂרִיגִים

and it produced shoots,

כּוֹרֵת אֶת הַשְּׂרִיגִים

he cuts off — the shoots,

וְהֵם אָסוּרִים בַּהֲנָאָה

and they are forbidden for benefit,

וְשָׁאֵר הָאֵילָן מֵתֵּר.

and the rest of the tree is permitted.

וְכֵן הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאֵילָן

And so one who bows down to a tree,

אף על פי שלא נאסר גופו

even though that not was forbidden its body,

כל השריגים והעלים והלולבין והפרות שיוציא

all the shoots and the leaves and the young branches and the fruits that it produces,

כל זמן שהוא נעבד

all the time that it is worshiped,

הרי אלו אסורין בהנאה.

behold these are forbidden for benefit.

אילן שהיו העובדי כוכבים משמרין את פרותיו

A tree that were the worshipers of stars guarding — its fruits,

ואומרים שהם מוכנים לעשות שֵׁכר לבית עבודת כוכבים פלוני

and saying that they are designated to make beer for the house of worship of stars of so-and-so,

ועושין מהן שֵׁכר ושותים אותו ביום חגם

and they make from them beer and drink it on the day of their festival,

הרי זה האילן אסור בהנאה

behold this tree is forbidden for benefit,

מפני שסתמו שהוא אֲשֵׁרָה

because the presumption of it is that it is an asherah,

ולפיכך עושין בפרותיו כך

and therefore they do with its fruits so,

שזו היא חֻקָּה של אֲשֵׁרָה:

since this is the custom of of an asherah.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 · Prohibition of Benefit from a House, Stone, or Tree Used for Idol Worship

אילן שמעמידין תחתיו עבודת כוכבים

Regarding a tree under which they place an idol to serve it,

כל זמן שהיא תחתיו אסור בהנאה.

all the time that it is under it, the tree is forbidden for benefit.

נִטְלָה מִתַּחְתֵּי הָרִי זֶה מִתָּר

If he removed it from under it, behold this is permitted for benefit,

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֵין הָאֵילָן עֲצָמוֹ הוּא הַנֶּעֱבָד.

because the tree itself is not the worshiped object.

בֵּית שֶׁבָּנָאוֹ הָעוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים מִתַּחֲלָה שִׁיָּהָא הַבֵּית עֲצָמוֹ נֶעֱבָד

A house that the idolater built from the beginning so that the house itself should be worshiped,

וְכֵן הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְבֵית בָּנוּי הָרִי זֶה אָסוּר בִּהְנָאָה.

and likewise one who bows down to a house that was already built, behold this is forbidden for benefit.

הָיָה בָּנוּי וְסִידוֹ וְכִירוֹ לְשֵׁם עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים עַד שֶׁנִּתְחַדֵּשׁ

If the house was already built, and he plastered it and decorated it for the sake of idolatry, until it was renovated with a new appearance,

נוֹטֵל מֶה שֶׁחֲדָשׁ וְהַחֲדוּשׁ אָסוּר בִּהְנָאָה

he removes what he renovated, and the renovation is forbidden for benefit

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁעֲשָׂאָהּ לְעִבְדוֹ וְשָׂאָר הַבֵּית מִתָּר.

because he made it to worship it, but the rest of the house is permitted.

הַכְּנִיס עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים לְתוֹךְ הַבֵּית

If he brought an idol into the house,

כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהָיָא שָׁם הַבֵּית אָסוּר בִּהְנָאָה.

all the time that it is there, the house is forbidden for benefit.

הוֹצִיָאָה הֵתֵר הַבֵּית.

If he removed it, the house is permitted.

וְכֵן אֶבֶן שֶׁחֲצָבָה מִתַּחֲלָה לְעִבְדָּהּ אָסוּרָה בִּהְנָאָה.

And likewise, a stone that he quarried from the beginning to worship it is forbidden for benefit.

הָיְתָה חֲצוּבָה וְצִיָּרָה וְכִיָּרָה שֶׁתֵּעִבֵּד

If the stone was already quarried, and he drew on it and decorated it so that it be worshiped,

אֶפְלוּ צִיר וְכִיר בְּגוּף הָאֶבֶן

even if he drew and decorated on the body of the stone itself by carving into it,

ואין צריך לומר אם כיר עליה

and there is no need to say if he decorated upon it by adding plaster on top of it,

נוטל מה שחדש והוא אסור בהנאה

he removes what he renovated, and it is forbidden for benefit

הואיל ונעשה שייעבד ושאר האבן מתר:

since it was made to be worshiped, but the rest of the stone is permitted.

הלכה ה

Halacha 5 · Laws of a Stone Used for Idolatry and a Wall Adjacent to an Idol's Temple

אבן שהעמיד עליה עבודת פוכבים

A stone upon which one placed an idol of worship of stars

הרי זו אסורה כל זמן שהיא עליה.

behold, this stone is forbidden for benefit all the time that the idol is upon it.

סקלקה האבן מתרת.

If the idol was removed, the stone is permitted for benefit.

מי שהיה ביתו סמוך לעבודת פוכבים ונפל

One whose house was adjacent to a house of worship of stars, and the wall of his house fell,

אסור לבנותו.

it is forbidden to rebuild it in its original place, because he would be rebuilding a wall that serves to close off and benefit the house of the idol.

כיצד יעשה.

How shall he do to rebuild his house?

כונס לתוך שלו ובונה

He withdraws into his own property slightly and builds the new wall there,

ואותו הרוח ממלאהו קוצים או צואה.

and that space left over between his new wall and the idol's house, he fills it with thorns or excrement

כדי שלא ירחיב לבית עבודת פוכבים.

in order that the worshippers should not expand their space for the house of worship of stars by using his vacated ground.

הָיָה הַכֶּתֶל שֶׁלּוֹ וְשֶׁל עֲבֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים

If the wall was shared, belonging both to him and to the house of worship of stars,

יְדוּן מִחֲצָה לְמִחֲצָה,

it is judged half to half.

מִחֲצָה שֶׁלּוֹ מִתֵּר בִּהְנֵאָה

His half is permitted for benefit,

וְשֶׁל עֲבֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים הַכֹּל אָסוּר בִּהְנֵאָה.

and the half belonging to the worship of stars, the whole of it is forbidden for benefit.

אֲבָנָיו עֲצָיו וְעִפְרוֹ הַכֹּל אָסוּר בִּהְנֵאָה:

Its stones, its wood, and its dust, the whole of that forbidden half is forbidden for benefit.

הִלְכָּה ו

Halacha 6 · How to Destroy an Idol and Its Accessories

כִּיצַד מֵאַבֵּד עֲבֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים

How does one destroy an object of star worship

וְשָׂאָר דְּבָרִים הָאֲסוּרִים בְּגִלָּה

and the rest of the things that are forbidden on its account,

כְּגוֹן מִשְׁמָשִׁיָּהּ וְתַקְרֶכֶת שָׁלָה.

such as its accessories and its offering?

שׁוֹחֵק וְזוֹרֵה לְרוּחַ

He grinds it up and scatters the dust to the wind,

אוֹ שׂוֹרֵף וּמְטִיל לָיִם הַמָּלַח:

or he burns it and casts the ashes into the Sea of Salt.

הִלְכָּה ז

Halacha 7 · The Prohibition of Benefiting from the Coatings of an Idol

דָּבָר שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ תְּפִיסַת יַד אָדָם שֶׁנִּעָבַד

An object that there is not in it the grasp of the hand of man, meaning it was not created or modified by human hands, that was worshiped as an idol,

כְּגוֹן הָרִים וּבִהְמָה וְאֵילָן

such as mountains, and an animal, and a tree,

אף על פי שהנעבד עצמו מתר בהנאה

even though the worshiped object itself is permitted for benefit, since man cannot make something forbidden that is not his own and was created by Hashem,

צפוי אסור בהנאה

its coating, which was placed there by man for the worship, is forbidden for benefit.

והנחה בכל שהוא מהן לוקה

And one who benefits in any amount at all from them, from these forbidden coatings, receives lashes mid'Oraisa,

שנאמר דברים ז כה "לא תחמד כסף וזהב עליהם".

as it is said in the Torah in Devarim 7:25, "Do not covet silver and gold upon them."

וכל צפויי עבודת כוכבים הרי הן בכלל משמשיה:

And all coatings of worship of stars, behold they are in the category of its accessories, and are treated with the same severity as the vessels used to worship the idol.

הלכה ח

Halacha 8 · A Star Deity of a Non-Jew That Was Nullified Before Entering Jewish Possession

עבודת כוכבים של עובדי כוכבים

An idol of idolaters

שבטלוה

that they nullified and desecrated, thereby showing they no longer treat it as a god,

קדם שתבוא לידי ישראל

before it comes into the hand of a Jew,

הרי זו מתרת בהנאה

behold, this is permitted for benefit.

שנאמר

As it is said in the Torah (Devarim 7:25):

"פסילי אלהיהם תשרפון באש",

"The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire" —

כשבאו לידינו

this applies only when they came into our hands

וְהָיוּ נוֹהֲגִין בָּהֶם אֱלֹהוֹת,

and they still behave with them as a deity;

אָבֵל אִם בְּטוֹיִם

but if they nullified them before they came into Jewish possession,

הֲרִי אֱלוֹ מִתְּרִין:

behold, these are permitted for use and benefit.

הִלְכָּה ט

Halacha 9 • Nullification of an Idol Belonging to a Jew or a Non-Jew

עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָה בְּטֹלָה לְעוֹלָם

An idol of a Jew is not nullified forever, meaning it can never be nullified so that it becomes permitted for benefit.

אֲפִלּוּ הָיָה לְעוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים בָּהּ שְׁתָּפוּת אִין בְּטוֹלוֹ מוֹעִיל כָּלּוֹם

Even if there was to a non-Jew in it a partnership, his nullification is not effective at all because of the Jewish partner's share.

אֶלָּא אִסוּרָה בְּהִנָּאָה לְעוֹלָם וּטְעוּנָה גְּנִיזָה.

Rather, it is forbidden for benefit forever and requires entombment.

וְכֵן עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים שֶׁל עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים שֶׁבָּאת לְיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל

And so too, an idol of a non-Jew that came to the hand of a Jew before it was nullified,

וְאַחֲרַי כִּי בְּטֹלָה הָעוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים אִין בְּטוֹלוֹ מוֹעִיל כָּלּוֹם

and after that, the non-Jew nullified it, his nullification is not effective at all because once it enters a Jew's possession, it can no longer be nullified.

אֶלָּא אִסוּרָה בְּהִנָּאָה לְעוֹלָם.

Rather, it is forbidden for benefit forever.

וְאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל מְבַטֵּל עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים

And a Jew does not nullify an idol,

וְאַפִּלּוּ בְּרִשּׁוֹת עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים.

and even in the domain of a non-Jew, a Jew has no power to nullify it.

עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים קָטָן אוֹ שׁוֹטֵה אִינוֹ מְבַטֵּל עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים.

A non-Jewish minor or a fool does not nullify an idol because they lack halachic da'as.

ועובד כוכבים שפטל עבודת כוכבים בין שלו בין של עובדי כוכבים אחרים

And a non-Jew who nullified an idol, whether his own or of other non-Jews,

בעל כרחו אף על פי שאנסו ישראל על כך הרי זו בטלה.

against his will, even though a Jew coerced him upon this, behold, this is nullified.

ובלבד שיהא העובד כוכבים המפטל עובד עבודת כוכבים.

And only that the non-Jew who nullifies be a worshiper of idols.

אבל מי שאינו עובד עבודת כוכבים אין בטולו בטול.

But one who is not a worshiper of idols, such as a non-Jew who has renounced idolatry, his nullification is not a nullification.

המפטל עבודת כוכבים בטל משמשיה.

One who nullifies an idol has nullified its accessories along with it.

בטל משמשיה משמשיה מתירים והיא אסורה בהנאה כמו שהיתה עד שיבטלנה.

If he only nullified its accessories, its accessories are permitted, and it, the idol itself, is forbidden for benefit just as it was, until he nullifies it.

ותקרבת עבודת כוכבים אינה בטלה לעולם:

And an offering of an idol is not nullified forever.

הלכה י

Halacha 10· How an Idol is Nullified and Actions That Do Not Constitute Nullification

ביצד מבטלה.

How does a non-Jew nullify it, the idol, so that a Jew may derive benefit from it?

קטע ראש הטמה

If he cut off the tip of its nose,

ראש אזנה

the tip of its ear,

ראש אצבעה

or the tip of its finger,

פחסה בפניה

or if he flattened its face,

אף על פי שלא חסרה

even though by flattening it he did not diminish any of it,

או שמכרה לצורף ישראל

or if he sold it to a Jewish smith who will surely melt it down,

הרי זו בטלה.

behold, this idol is nullified.

אבל אם משכנה

But if he merely gave it as security for a loan,

או מכרה לעובד פוכבים

or if he sold it to another worshiper of stars,

או לישראל שאינו צורף

or to a Jew who is not a smith and might keep it intact,

או שנפלה עליה מפלת ולא פנה.

or if there fell upon it debris and he did not clear it away,

גנבוה לסטים ולא תבעוה.

or if robbers stole it and he did not demand it back,

רקק בפניה.

or if he spat in its face,

השתין בפניה.

or he urinated in its face,

גררה.

or he dragged it on the ground in anger,

זרק בה את הצואה

or he threw excrement at it,

הרי זו אינה בטלה:

behold, this idol is **not nullified**, because these actions are done out of temporary anger, not out of a permanent rejection of its divinity.

עבודת פוכבים שהניחיה עובדיה בשעת שלום

An idol that its worshipers left in a time of peace

מתרת בהנאה שהרי בטלוה.

is permitted for benefit, for surely they nullified it before leaving.

בשעת מלחמה אסורה

But if they left it in a time of war, it is forbidden

מפני שלא הניחיה אלא מפני המלחמה.

because they did not leave it except because of the war, and they still intend to return to it.

עבודת פוכבים שנשברה מאליה

An idol that broke by itself,

שבריה אסורים בהנאה עד שיבטלוה.

its pieces are forbidden for benefit until they nullify it, because the worshipers still revere the broken pieces.

לפיקה המוצא שברי עבודת פוכבים

Therefore, one who finds pieces of an idol,

הרי אלו אסורין בהנאה

behold, these are forbidden for benefit

שמא לא בטלוה העובדי פוכבים.

lest the idolaters did not nullify it.

ואם היתה של פרקים

And if it was an idol made of joints,

והדיוט יכול להחזירם

and a layman is able to reassemble them,

צריה לבטל כל פרק ופרק מפרקה

the worshiper must nullify every single joint of its joints.

ואם אינו יכול להחזיר

And if he is not able to reassemble it,

כיון ששטל איבר אחד ממנה

once he has nullified one limb from it,

בטלו כל השברים:

all the pieces are nullified.

הלכה יב

Halacha 12 · Nullifying Altars, Platforms, Stones of Marculis, and Asherab Trees

מזבח עבודת כוכבים שנפגם

An altar of worship of stars that was damaged

עדין הוא אסור בהנאה

still it is forbidden for benefit

עד שינתץ רבו ביד עובד כוכבים.

until there is smashed its majority by the hand of a worshiper of stars.

ובימז שנפגם מותר.

But a platform that was damaged is permitted.

אי זהו בימז ואי זהו מזבח.

Which is a platform and which is an altar?

בימז אבן אחת.

A platform is made of stone, one.

מזבח אבנים הרבה.

An altar is made of stones, many.

וכיצד מבטלין אבני מרקוליס.

And how does one nullify the stones of Marculis?

כיון שפנה מהם בנין

Once that he built from them a building

או חפה בהן את הדרךים וכיוצא באלו

or paved with them the roads and the like of these,

הרי הן מותרים בהנאה.

behold they are permitted for benefit.

כִּיצַד מְבַטְלִים אֶת הָאֲשֵׁרָה.

How does one nullify the asherah?

קָרַסּוּ מִמֶּנָּה עֵלָה אוֹ זָרַק מִמֶּנָּה יוֹנֵק

If he trimmed from it a leaf or pruned from it a shoot,

נָטַל מִמֶּנָּה מִקֵּל אוֹ שְׂרָכִיט

took from it a stick or a staff,

אוֹ שִׁשְׁפָּאָה שֶׁלֹּא לְצִרְכָּהּ

or that he planed it not for its benefit,

הָרִי זוֹ בָטֵלָה.

behold this is nullified.

שִׁשְׁפָּאָה לְצִרְכָּהּ הִיא אֲסוּרָה וְשִׁשְׁפָּאִיהָ מְתֻרָּם.

If he planed it for its benefit, it is forbidden but its shavings are permitted.

וְאִם הָיְתָה שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל

And if it was of a Jew,

בֵּין לְצִרְכָּהּ בֵּין שֶׁלֹּא לְצִרְכָּהּ

whether for its benefit whether not for its benefit,

בֵּין הִיא וּבֵין שִׁשְׁפָּאִיהָ אֲסוּרָה לְעוֹלָם

whether it or whether its shavings is forbidden forever,

שֶׁעֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵין לָהּ בְּטוֹל לְעוֹלָם:

because worship of stars of a Jew has no for it nullification forever.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter establishes that natural, unaltered creations like mountains, springs, and animals remain permitted for benefit even if they were worshiped. However, if a person performs a physical action on an animal for an idol (such as shearing it or cutting a sign of shechitah), or exchanges it for an idol, it becomes forbidden—provided it is his own animal, as one cannot forbid another person's property. Similarly, while bowing to the earth does not forbid it, digging pits or channels in the ground for the sake of a false deity alters the land and renders those changes forbidden.

The deep chiddush of this sugya lies in the boundary between what is untouched and what has been manipulated by human hands. The Rambam teaches us that the natural world, the mountains, the springs, the trees, and the animals, cannot become forbidden as an idol, even if people worshiped them, because "there is no manipulation by human hands." But the moment a person performs even a small action on an object, or exchanges it, he stamps his own intention onto it and changes its status.

This contains a profound lesson for our daily avodah. Hashem created a beautiful, pure world, and He gave us a pure neshama that is naturally drawn to holiness. But Hashem also gave us the power of "tfeisas yad adam", the power of human action and choice. With a single action, a person can take something neutral and elevate it to a mitzvah, or, chas v'shalom, drag it down into the realm of the forbidden. Our actions are not light things; they stamp a spiritual reality onto the physical world around us.

Look at how much power Hashem put into your hands. Just as a negative action can ruin, a positive action has the power to sanctify. When you use your hands to give tzedakah, your mouth to speak words of Torah, or your home to host guests, you are taking the physical world and stamping it with the seal of the King. You are choosing not to let the world remain merely "natural," but to actively make it a dwelling place for the Shechinah.

Today, make a conscious effort to stamp one physical action with holy intention. Before you eat, make a berachah with real focus, or use your hands to do a physical favor for another Yid, consciously dedicating that action to the service of Hashem.