

הלכות עבודת פוכבים • פרק י"א

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam teaches us the vital importance of keeping ourselves separate and distinct from the non-Jewish nations. Hashem separated us to be His holy nation, and therefore we must not follow their chukim (statutes), whether in our style of dress, our haircuts, or our deeds. We will learn the specific prohibitions against trying to resemble them, including the laws of the blorit, and the rare exception made for those who must serve in the royal courts of gentile kings.

We will also delve into the Torah's strict prohibitions against various forms of superstition and occult practices that stem from dark, idolatrous roots. This includes the prohibitions of soothsaying (using omens to guide our actions), divination (entering trances to predict the future), fortunetelling through astrology, and casting meaningless spells. Through these halachos, the Rambam guides us to keep our emunah pure and untainted.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Prohibition of Following the Statutes of Idolaters and Resembling Them

אין הולכין בחקות העובדי פוכבים

We do not follow the statutes of the idolaters

ולא מדמין להן

and we do not resemble them,

לא במלבוש ולא בשער וכיוצא בהן

not in dress, and not in haircuts, and the like to them,

שנאמר "ולא תלכו בחקות הגוי".

as it is said in the Torah, "And do not follow the statutes of the nation."

ונאמר "ובחקותיהם לא תלכו".

And it is said, "And in their statutes do not follow."

ונאמר "השמר לך פן תנמקש אחריהם".

And it is said, "Guard yourself lest you be ensnared after them."

הכל בענין אחד הוא מזהיר שלא ידמה להן.

The whole of these verses is in one matter; it warns that a Jew should not resemble them.

אֵלָא יִהְיֶה הַיִּשְׂרָאֵל מְבֻדָּל מֵהֶן וְיִדּוּעַ בְּמַלְבוּשׁוֹ וּבְשָׂאָר מַעֲשָׂיו

Rather, the Jew shall be separated from them and recognizable in his dress and in the rest of his deeds,

כְּמוֹ שֶׁהוּא מְבֻדָּל מֵהֶן בְּמַדְעוֹ וּבְדַעוּתָיו.

just as he is separated from them in his thoughts and in his character traits.

וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "וְאַבְדַּל אֶתְכֶם מִן הָעַמִּים".

And so He says, "And I have separated you from the nations."

לֹא יִלְבֹּשׁ בְּמַלְבוּשׁ הַמִּיחָד לָהֶן.

Therefore, a Jew shall not wear a garment that is unique to them.

וְלֹא יִגְדֵּל צִיצִית רֹאשׁוֹ כְּמוֹ צִיצִית רֹאשָׁם.

And he shall not grow the tresses of his head like the tresses of their head.

וְלֹא יִגְלַח מִן הַצַּדִּדִּין וְיִנִּיחַ הַשָּׁעַר בְּאֶמְצַע כְּמוֹ שֶׁהֵן עוֹשִׂין

And he shall not shave from the sides and leave the hair in the middle just as they do,

וְזֶה הַנִּקְרָא בְּלוֹרִית.

and this is what is called a blorit.

וְלֹא יִגְלַח הַשָּׁעַר מִכַּנְגַּד פָּנָיו מֵאָזֶן לְאָזֶן וְיִנִּיחַ הַפָּרַע מִלְּאַחֲרָיו כְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁעוֹשִׂין הֵן.

And he shall not shave the hair from opposite his face from ear to ear and leave the long hair behind him, like the way that they do.

וְלֹא יִבְנֶה מְקוֹמוֹת כְּבִנְיַן הַיְכָלוֹת שֶׁל עֲכו"ם כִּדְּי שִׁיכְנֹסוּ בָּהֶן רַבִּים כְּמוֹ שֶׁהֵן עוֹשִׂין.

And he shall not build places like the building of temples of idolaters in order that many may enter into them, just as they do.

וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה אֶחָת מֵאלוֹ וְכִיוּצָא בָּהֶן לֹקָה:

And anyone who does one of these and the like to them receives lashes.

הַלָּכָה ב

Halacha 2· Cutting the Hair of an Idolater Near the Blorit

עֲכו"ם שֶׁהָיָה מְסַתְפֵּר מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

In the case of an idolater who was getting a haircut from a Jew,

כִּיּוֹן שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְבְּלוֹרִיתוֹ

once the Jewish barber reached his pagan forelock (the hair grown long for idolatrous purposes),

קרוב שלש אצבעות לכל רוח

at a distance **close** to **three fingerbreadths to every direction** around the forelock,

שומט את ידו:

the barber must **withdraw** — **his hand** and stop cutting, so as not to assist in preparing an idolatrous hairstyle.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 · Permission to Wear Gentile Clothing and Shave for One Close to the Government

ישׂראל שֶׁהָיָה קָרוֹב לַמְּלָכוֹת

An Israelite who was close to the government

וְצָרִיךְ לֵישֵׁב לִפְנֵי מַלְכֵיהֶם

and needs to sit before their kings,

וְהָיָה לוֹ גִּנְאִי לְפִי שֶׁלֹּא יִדְמֶה לָהֶן

and it would be to him a disgrace because he does not resemble them,

חֲרִי זֶה מִתֵּר לְלִבָּשׁ בְּמַלְבוּשֵׁיהֶן

behold this person is permitted to wear their garments

וּלְגַלַּח כְּפָנָיו כְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁהֵן עוֹשִׂין:

and to shave the front of his face in the manner that they do.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 · The Prohibition of Soothsaying and Relying on Omens

אִין מִנְחָשִׁין כְּעִבּוֹרִים

We do not practice soothsaying like the idolaters do,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיִּקְרָא יְיָ כו "לֹא תִנְחָשׁוּ".

as it is said in the Torah in Vayikra 19:26, "Do not practice soothsaying."

כִּיצַד הוּא הִנְחָשׁ.

How is this prohibition of soothsaying defined?

כְּגוֹן אֵלֹהֵי שְׂאֻמִּים

It is for example, those who say,

הוֹאִיל וְנִפְלָה פְתִי מִפִּי

"Since my bread fell from my mouth,

או נפל מקלי מִיָּדִי

or my staff fell from my hand,

אִינִי הוֹלֵךְ לְמָקוֹם פְּלוֹנִי הַיּוֹם

I am not going to such-and-such a place today,

שָׂאֵם אֵלֶּה אֵין חֲפָצַי נַעֲשִׂים.

for if I go, my desires will not be accomplished."

הוֹאִיל וְעָבַר שׁוּעַל מִיְּמִינִי

Or those who say, "Since a fox passed on my right,

אִינִי יוֹצֵא מִפֶּתַח בֵּיתִי הַיּוֹם

I am not going out from the entrance of my house today,

שָׂאֵם אֵצֶא יִפְגְּעַנִי אָדָם רָמָאִי.

for if I go out, a deceitful man will meet me."

וְכֵן אֵלּוּ שְׁשׁוּמְעִים צִפְצוּף הָעוֹף

And likewise, those who hear the chirping of a bird

וְאוֹמְרִים יִהְיֶה כֹּה וְלֹא יִהְיֶה כֹּה.

and say, "It will be so, and it will not be so;

טוֹב לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר פְּלוֹנִי וְרַע לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר פְּלוֹנִי.

it is good to do such-and-such a thing, and bad to do such-and-such a thing."

וְכֵן אֵלּוּ שְׁאוֹמְרִים שְׁחַט תְּרִנְגוֹל זֶה שֶׁקְּרָא עֶרְבִית.

And likewise, those who say, "Slaughter this rooster because it crowed in the evening,"

שְׁחַט תְּרִנְגֶּלֶת זֶה שֶׁקְּרָאָה כְּמוֹ תְּרִנְגוֹל.

or "Slaughter this hen because it crowed like a rooster."

וְכֵן הַמַּשִּׁים סִמְנִים לְעַצְמוֹ

And likewise, one who sets omens for himself, saying,

אִם יֵאָרֵעַ לִי כֹה וְכֹה אֶעֱשֶׂה דָּבָר פְּלוֹנִי

"If such-and-such happens to me, I will do such-and-such a thing,

ואם לא יאֵרע לי לא אַעֲשֶׂה,

and if it does not happen to me, I will not do it,"

כַּיֵּצֵז עֲבַד אַבְרָהָם.

acting like Eliezer, the servant of Avraham.

וכן כָּל כַּיּוֹצֵא בְּדִבְרֵים הָאֵלֵּוּ הִכָּל אָסוּר.

And likewise, anything similar to these matters, everything is forbidden.

וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂה מִפְּנֵי דָבָר מִדִּבְרֵים אֵלֵּוּ לֹקָה:

And anyone who does an action because of a matter from these matters receives lashes.

הִלְכָּה ה'

Halacha 5 · Permitted Omens Regarding Events That Have Already Occurred

מִי שֶׁאָמַר דִּירָה זֶה שְׂכֻנָּתִי סִימָן טוֹב הִיתָה עָלַי.

One who said, "This dwelling that I built was a good omen for me,"

אִשָּׁה זֶה שֶׁנִּשְׁאַתִּי וּבְהֶמָּה זֶה שֶׁקִּנֵּיתִי מְבֹרָכַת הִיתָה מֵעַתָּה שְׂכֻנָּתִי עֲשֵׂרֶתִי.

or "this woman whom I married, and this animal that I purchased, was blessed; from the time that I purchased it, I became rich,"

וְכֵן הַשּׁוֹאֵל לְתִינוּק אִי זֶה פְּסוּק אֶתָּה לִוִּיד

and so too, one who asks a child, "Which verse are you learning?"

אִם אָמַר לוֹ פְּסוּק מִן הַבְּרָכוֹת יִשְׂמַח וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה סִימָן טוֹב

if the child said to him a verse from the blessings, he may rejoice and say, "This is a good omen,"

כָּל אֵלֵּוּ וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן מִתֵּר

all these and similar to them are permitted.

הוֹאִיל וְלֹא כֵּן מַעֲשָׂיו וְלֹא נִמְנַע מִלַּעֲשׂוֹת

Since he did not direct his actions based on this, and did not refrain from doing something because of it,

אֲלֹא עָשָׂה זֶה סִימָן לְעֲצָמוֹ לְדַבֵּר שְׂפָכָר הָיָה הָרִי זֶה מִתֵּר:

but rather he made this a sign for himself for a matter that already was, behold, this is permitted.

הִלְכָּה ו'

Halacha 6 · The Definition of a Diviner and the Various Methods of Predicting the Future

אִיזָהוּ קוֹסֵם

Who is a diviner that the Torah prohibits?

זֶה הַעוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה מִשְׁאָר הַמַּעֲשִׂיּוֹת

This is one who does an action from other actions

כְּדִי שִׁישׁוּם

in order that he will be entranced

וְתִפְנֶה מִחִשְׁבֹּתוֹ מִכָּל הַדְּבָרִים

and will be cleared his mind from all things

עַד שֶׁיֹּאמֶר דְּבָרִים שְׁעֵתִידִים לֵהָיוֹת

until that he says things that are destined to be,

וַיֹּאמֶר דְּבָר פְּלוֹנִי עֲתִיד לֵהָיוֹת אוֹ אֵינוֹ הוֹנֶה

and he says, "Such and such a thing is destined to be," or "it is not happening,"

אוֹ שֶׁיֹּאמֶר שְׂרָאוּי לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן וְהִזְהָרוּ מִכָּה.

or that he says that "it is proper to do so, and be careful from this."

יֵשׁ מִן הַקּוֹסְמִין שֶׁמִּשְׁמָשִׁים בַּחֹל אוֹ בַּאֲבָנִים.

There are of the diviners who use sand or stones to cast lots.

וַיֵּשׁ מִי שֶׁגוֹהֵר לָאָרֶץ וְיִנּוּעַ וְצוּעָק.

And there are some who bend down to the ground and sway and scream to enter a trance.

וַיֵּשׁ מִי שֶׁמִּסְתַּכֵּל בְּמִרְאָה שֶׁל פְּרִזָּל אוֹ בַּעֲשָׂשִׁית וּמִדְּמִין וְאוֹמְרִים.

And there are some who look in a mirror of iron or in a glass lantern and imagine and speak their predictions.

וַיֵּשׁ מִי שֶׁנוֹשֵׂא מַקֵּל בְּיָדוֹ וְנוֹשֵׁעַ עָלָיו וּמַכֶּה בוֹ עַד שֶׁתִּפְנֶה מִחִשְׁבֹּתוֹ וּמִדְּבָר.

And there are some who carry a staff in his hand and lean on it and strike with it until that is cleared his mind and he speaks.

הוא שֶׁהַנְּבִיא אוֹמֵר הוֹשֵׁעַ ד יב "עַמִּי בָּעֲצוֹ יִשְׁאֹל וּמִקְלוֹ יַגִּיד לוֹ":

This is what the prophet says in Hoshea 4:12, "My people of its wood inquires, and its staff tells it."

הַלְכָה ז

Halacha 7 · The Prohibition of Divination and Inquiring of a Diviner

אָסוּר לְקַטֵּם

It is forbidden to divine

ולשאל לקוסם

and to inquire of a diviner,

אֲלֵא שֶׁהַשּׂוֹאֵל לְקוּסִים

except that the inquirer of a diviner does not receive Torah-mandated lashes; rather, the Beis Din strikes him with

מִכֵּין אוֹתוֹ מִכַּת מִרְדּוּת

stripes of rebelliousness.

אֲבָל הַקּוֹסֵם עַצְמוֹ

But the diviner himself,

אִם עָשָׂה מַעֲשֵׂה מִכָּל אֵלֵי וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן

if he performed an action of any of these and similar to them,

לוֹקָה

receives lashes from the Torah,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר

as it is said in the Torah (Devarim 18:10):

לֹא יִמָּצֵא בָּךְ מַעֲבִיר בְּנוֹ וְגו'

"There shall not be found among you one who passes his son" etc.,

קִסָּם קְסָמִים

and the end of the verse states: "one who practices divination."

הַלָּכָה ח

Halacha 8 · The Definition of a Fortuneteller Who Predicts Auspicious Times

אִיזְהוּ מְעוֹיִן

Who is a fortuneteller who is forbidden by the Torah?

אֵלֵי נֹתְנֵי עֵתִים

These are those who set times,

שְׂאוֹמְרִים בְּאַצְטְגִּינוֹת

who say through astrology and star-gazing:

יוֹם פְּלוֹנִי טוֹב

day so-and-so is good for a certain activity,

יום פלוני רע

day so-and-so is bad,

יום פלוני ראוי לעשות בו מלאכה פלונית

day so-and-so is proper to do on it melacha such-and-such,

שנה פלונית או חודש פלוני רע לדבר פלוני:

or year such-and-such or month so-and-so is bad for a matter such-and-such.

הלכה ט

Halacha 9: The Prohibition of Telling Fortunes, Astrology, and Optical Illusions

אסור לעונן

It is forbidden to tell fortunes

אף על פי שלא עשה מעשה

even though the person did not do an action,

אלא הודיע אותן הכוזבים

but merely made known those falsehoods

שהפסילים מדמיון שהן דברי אמת ודברי חכמים.

that the fools imagine that they are words of truth and words of wisdom.

וכל העושה מפני האצטגנינות

And anyone who acts because of astrology,

וכוון מלאכתו או הליכתו באותו העת

and directed his work or his travel to that time

שקבעו הכרי שמים

that the astrologers, the stargazers of heaven, set,

הרי זה לוקה

behold, this one receives lashes,

שנאמר "לא תעוננו".

as it is said in the Torah, "Do not tell fortunes."

וְכֵן הָאוֹחֵז אֶת הָעֵינַיִם

And likewise, one who holds the eyes of people through sleight of hand

וּמַדְמָה בְּפָנֵי הָרוֹאִים שְׁעוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה תַמְהוֹן

and creates an illusion before the onlookers that he does an act of wonder,

וְהוּא לֹא עָשָׂה

and he did not actually do anything,

הָרִי זֶה בְּכֹל לַמְּעוֹנִין וְלוֹקָה:

behold, this one is in the category of one who tells fortunes and receives lashes.

הַלָּכָה י

Halacha 10 · The Prohibition of Casting Spells and Chanting Incantations

אִיזְהוּ חוֹבֵר

Who is a spell-caster that the Torah forbids? This is one

שֶׁמְדַבֵּר בְּדִבְרִים שְׂאִינָן לְשׁוֹן עַם

who speaks with words that are not the language of any people

וְאִין לָהֶן עֲנָן

and there is not to them any logical meaning,

וּמַעֲלָה עַל דַּעְתּוֹ בְּסִכְלוּתוֹ שְׂאוֹתָן הַדִּבְרִים מוֹעִילִין.

and he brings up upon his mind in his foolishness that those words are effective to accomplish things.

עַד שֶׁהֵן אוֹמְרִים שְׁהָאוֹמֵר כֶּה וְכֶה עַל הַנָּחָשׁ אוֹ עַל הָעֶקְרָב אֵינוֹ מְזִיק

It goes to the point that they say that one who says such and such upon the snake or upon the scorpion, it does not harm,

וְהָאוֹמֵר כֶּה וְכֶה עַל הָאִישׁ אֵינוֹ נִזְזָק.

and one who says such and such upon the man, he is not harmed by any danger.

וּמִהֵן אוֹחֵז בְּיָדוֹ בְּעֵת שֶׁמְדַבֵּר מִפֶּתַח אוֹ סֶלַע

And of them, there is one who holds in his hand at the time that he speaks a key or a stone

וּכְיוּצָא בְּדִבְרֵיהֶם הָאֵלוּ הַכֶּל אָסוּר.

and similar to things these; everything is forbidden as the practice of spell-casting.

וְהַחֹכֵר עֲצָמוֹ שְׁאֵחֵז בְּיָדוֹ כָּלֹם

And the spell-caster himself who held in his hand anything

אוֹ שְׁעָשָׂה מַעֲשֶׂה עִם דְּבוּרוֹ

or who did an action with his speech,

אֲפִלּוּ הִרְאָה בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ

even if he merely pointed with his finger,

הֲרִי זֶה לוֹקָה

behold this one receives lashes mid'Oraisa,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים י' "לֹא יִמָּצֵא בָּךְ" וְגו' דְּבָרִים יח יא "וְחֹכֵר חֶכֶר".

as it is said in the Torah, "There shall not be found among you..." etc. "and a caster of spells."

אָבֵל אִם אָמַר דְּבָרִים בְּלִבּוֹ

But if he said words alone

וְלֹא הִנִּיד לֹא אֶצְבָּע וְלֹא רֹאשׁ

and did not move not a finger and not a head,

וְלֹא הָיָה בְּיָדוֹ כָּלֹם.

and there was not in his hand anything, he does not receive Torah lashes, though it is still forbidden.

וְכֵן אָדָם שֶׁאָמַר עָלָיו הַחֹכֵר אוֹתָן הַקּוֹלוֹת

And likewise, a person whom was said upon him by the spell-caster those sounds,

וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב לְפָנָיו וּמַדְמָה שֵׁישׁ לוֹ בְּזֶה הַנֶּאֱחָה

and he sits before him and imagines that there is to him in this some benefit,

מִכֵּין אוֹתוֹ מַכַּת מִרְדּוּת

we strike him stripes of rebelliousness as a Rabbinic punishment,

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁנֶּשְׁתַּתַּף בְּסִכְלוֹת הַחֹכֵר.

because that he participated in the foolishness of the spell-caster.

וְכָל אוֹתָן הַקּוֹלוֹת וְהַשְּׁמוֹת הַמְשָׁנִים הַמְכַעְרִים

And all those sounds and the names, strange and ugly,

לֹא יָרְעוּ וְגַם הֵיטֵב אֵין אוֹתָם:

do not do harm, and also good there is not in them at all, for they are completely empty and false.

הלכה יא

Halacha 11 · Permissibility of Whispering Incantations Over a Snake Bite to Settle the Victim's Mind

מי שנשכו עקרב או נחש

One whom a scorpion or a snake has bitten,

מותר ללחש על מקום הנשיכה

it is permitted to whisper a charm upon the place of the bite,

ואפילו בשבת

and even on Shabbos,

כדי לישב דעתו ולחזק לבו.

in order to settle his mind and to strengthen his heart so he does not panic.

אף על פי שאין הדבר מועיל כלום

Even though the matter does not help at all from a medical standpoint,

הואיל ומסכן הוא

since he is in danger of his life,

התירו לו

the Sages permitted this to him

כדי שלא תטרה דעתו עליו:

in order that his mind will not be distracted and overwhelmed by fear, which could worsen his physical condition.

הלכה יב

Halacha 12 · The Prohibition of Using Words of Torah for Physical Healing

הלוחש על המכה וקורא פסוק מן התורה.

One who whispers a charm over a wound and recites a verse from the Torah as a cure,

וכן הקורא על התינוק שלא יבצע

and likewise one who recites a verse over a child so that he will not be frightened,

והמנחם ספר תורה או תפלין על הקטן בשביל שיישן.

and one who places a Sefer Torah or tefillin upon a minor for the sake of helping him sleep,

לא די להם שהם בקלל מנחשים וחוכרים

it is not enough for them that they are in the category of soothsayers and charmers,

אלא שהן בקלל הפופרים בתורה

but rather they are in the category of those who deny the Torah,

שהן עושין דברי תורה רפואת גוף

because they make the words of Torah a healing of the body,

ואינן אלא רפואת נפשות

whereas they are not intended for this, but only as a healing of souls,

שנאמר משלי ג כב "ויהיו חיים לנפשך".

as it is said in Mishlei, "And they shall be life for your soul."

אבל הכריא שקרא פסוקין ומזמור מתהלים

But a healthy person who reads verses and a psalm from Tehillim

כדי שתגן עליו זכות קריאתו

in order that the merit of their reading will protect him,

וינצל מצרות ומנזקים

and that he will be saved from troubles and from damages,

הרי זה מותר:

behold, this is permitted.

הלכה יג

Halacha 13 · The Prohibition of Seeking Information from the Dead and the Forbidden Methods

איזהו דורש אל המתים

Who is the Torah referring to when it forbids one who seeks to the dead?

זה המרעיב את עצמו

This is one who starves himself

והולך ולן בבית הקברות

and goes and sleeps in a cemetery

כדי שיבוא מת בללום

in order that a dead person will come to him in a dream

וְיִדְּעֵהוּ מַה שֶּׁשָּׁאֵל עָלָיו.

and inform him of the answer to what he asked about.

וְיֵשׁ אֲחֵרִים שֶׁהֵם לּוֹבָשִׁים מְלִבוּשִׁים יְדוּעִים

And there are others who wear specific garments

וְאוֹמְרִים דְּבָרִים וּמְקַטִּירִין קִטְרֶת יְדוּעָה

and say certain words and burn specific incense

וְיֵשְׁנִים לְבֶדֶן

and sleep alone

כְּדֵי שֶׁיָּבוֹא מֵת פְּלוֹנִי

in order that a specific dead person will come

וְיִסְפֹּר עִמּוֹ בְּחִלּוֹם.

and speak with him in a dream.

כָּלֹּל שֶׁל דְּבָר

The general rule of the matter is:

כָּל הָעוֹשֶׂה כְּדֵי שֶׁיָּבוֹא הַמֵּת וְיִדְּעֵהוּ

anyone who does an action in order that the dead person will come and inform him of something,

לוֹקָה

receives lashes,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "לֹא יִמָּצֵא בָּךְ מַעֲבִיר" וְגו' "וְיִדְרֹשׁ אֶל הַמֵּתִים":

as it is said, "There shall not be found among you one who passes his son or daughter through the fire... and one who seeks to the dead."

הַלָּכָה יד

Halacha 14 · The Prohibition of Inquiring of an Ov or Yid'oni and Its Punishment

אָסוּר לְשָׁאֵל בְּעַל אוֹב אוֹ בְּעַל יִדְעֹנִי

It is forbidden to inquire of a master of an ov or a master of a yid'oni,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים יח י "לֹא יִמָּצֵא בָּךְ מַעֲבִיר" וְגו' דְּבָרִים יח יא "וְשָׁאֵל אוֹב וְיִדְעֹנִי".

as it is said in the Torah, "There shall not be found among you one who passes his son or daughter through the fire..." etc., and then the verse continues, "and one who inquires of an ov and a yid'oni."

נמצאת למד שבעל אוב וידעני עצמן בסקילה

You find yourself learning from the Torah's warnings that a master of an ov and a master of a yid'oni themselves, who perform these sorceries, are punished by stoning if they acted willfully with witnesses and warning,

והנשאל בהן באזהרה

and the one who inquires of them is in violation of a prohibition,

ומכין אותו מכת מרדות.

and they strike him with lashes of rebelliousness, which is the Rabbinic punishment for violating a negative commandment that does not carry the Torah punishment of lashes.

ואם כוון מעשיו ועשה כפי מאמרו לוקה:

And if he directed his deeds and acted according to their word, thereby performing a physical action based on their sorcery, he receives lashes from the Torah.

הלכה טו

Halacha 15 · The Punishment of a Sorcerer and One Who Deludes the Eyes

המכשף חייב סקילה

The sorcerer is liable to the penalty of stoning,

והוא שעשה מעשה כשפים.

and this is specifically he who did an actual act of sorcery.

אבל האוחז את העינים

But one who holds the eyes, meaning an illusionist,

והוא שיראה שעשה והוא לא עשה

and this is he who appears to the onlookers that he did an action, and yet he did not actually do anything,

לוקה מכת מרדות.

is lashed lashes of rebelliousness mid'Rabbanan.

מפני שלא זו שנאמר במכשף

This is because the Torah's negative prohibition, this which is said regarding a sorcerer,

בכל דברים יח י"לא ימצא בך" הוא

is in the category of the general warning in Devarim 18:10, "not shall be found among you" any sorcerer, it is the source for the prohibition;

וְלֹא שְׁנִיתָן לְאַזְהַרֶּת מִיתַת בֵּית דִּין הוּא

and it is a prohibition which is given for the warning of death of the House of Judgment, meaning it is a negative commandment that carries a capital punishment, it is so,

וְאִין לֹקִין עָלָיו

and the rule is that not do they lash upon it with Torah malkus, since any prohibition carrying a death penalty does not receive lashes,

שְׁנַאמַר שְׁמוֹת כֹּב יִז "מְכַשְׁפָּה לֹא תַחֲיֶה":

as it is said in Shemos 22:17, "a witch not you shall let live".

הַלָּכָה טז

Halacha 16 · The Vanity of Sorcery and Divination and the Obligation of Perfect Faith in God

וּדְבָרִים הָאֵלֹו כָּלֹו דְּבָרֵי שְׁקֵר וְכֹזֵב הֵן

And all of these matters of divination and sorcery, all of them are words of falsehood and lies,

וְהֵם שֶׁהִטְעוּ בָּהֶן עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים הַקְדָּמוֹנִים לְגוֹיֵי הָאֲרָצוֹת כְּדֵי שִׁינְהֻגוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן.

and they are the very notions with which the ancient idolaters misled the nations of the lands, in order that they should follow after them and submit to their authority.

וְאִין רְאוּי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהֵם חֲכָמִים מְחַכְמִים לְהִמָּשֵׁךְ בַּהֲבָלִים אֵלֹו

And it is not fitting for Israel, who are wise and exceedingly wise, to be drawn after these vanities,

וְלֹא לְהַעֲלוֹת עַל לֵב שִׁישׁ תּוֹעֵלֶת בָּהֶן.

and not to bring up upon their heart that there is any real benefit in them,

שְׁנַאמַר "כִּי לֹא נִחַשׁ בְּיַעֲקֹב וְלֹא קָסָם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל".

as it is said in the Torah, "For there is no divination in Yaakov, and no soothsaying in Israel."

וְנִאֲמַר "כִּי הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה יוֹרֵשׁ אוֹתָם אֶל מַעֲנָנִים וְאֶל קְסָמִים יִשְׁמָעוּ וְאַתָּה לֹא כֵן" וְגו'.

And it is said, "For these nations whom you are driving out, to astrologers and to diviners they listen, but you, Hashem your God has not allowed you so," etc.

כָּל הַמֵּאֲמִין בַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֹו וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶן

Anyone who believes in these matters and similar to them,

וּמַחֲשֵׁב בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁהֵן אֱמֶת וּדְבַר חֲכָמָה אֲבָל הַתּוֹרָה אָסְרָתָן

and thinks in his heart that they are truth and a matter of wisdom, but that the Torah merely forbade them as a decree,

אִינָן אֵלֶּה מִן הַסְּכָלִים וּמַחֲסְרֵי הַדַּעַת

is not except from the fools and those lacking understanding,

ובכלל הנשים והקטנים שאין דעתן שלמה.

and in the category of the women and the children whose intellect is incomplete and easily swayed.

אבל בעלי החכמה ותמימי הדעת ידעו בראיות ברורות

But masters of wisdom and those of perfect understanding know with clear proofs

שכל אלו הדברים שאסרה תורה אינם דברי חכמה אלא תהו והבזל

that all these matters which the Torah forbade are not matters of wisdom, but emptiness and vanity,

שנמשכו בהן חסרי הדעת ונטשו כל דרכי האמת בגללן.

that those lacking understanding were drawn after them, and abandoned all paths of the truth because of them.

ומפני זה אמרה תורה כשהזהירה על כל אלו ההבזלים

And because of this, the Torah said when it warned against all these vanities:

"תמים תהיה עם ה' אלהיך:"

"Wholehearted you shall be with Hashem your God."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by forbidding us from imitating the dress, hairstyles, and building styles of the gentiles, establishing that a Jew must remain distinct in his appearance and conduct, with lashes as the penalty for violations. The Rambam then details the prohibitions against soothsaying (acting based on superstitious omens, though noting that merely looking back at past events as a good sign or asking a child for a pasuk is permitted) and divination (using trances, sand, or staffs to predict the future). Finally, the chapter defines and prohibits fortunetelling through astrology, performing optical illusions and magic tricks, and casting meaningless spells, emphasizing that relying on these foolish practices is strictly forbidden by the Torah.

The Torah is teaching us a profound lesson about where a Yid looks for direction and identity. The Rambam describes how the nations of the world look to external signs, astrology, and omens to guide their steps, or try to find security by blending into the crowd. But a Jew is meant to be completely different. We do not let a dropped stick, a passing animal, or the 'lucky' days of the calendar dictate our choices. Our identity is anchored from within, in our connection to Hashem, and our steps are guided solely by His Torah and mitzvos.

When we look for 'signs' or try to copy the ways of the world to feel secure, we are forgetting who we are. A Yid is 'mevudal', distinct and elevated. We don't need to look at what the street is wearing or what the stars are saying to know how to live. True peace of mind and real success come from living with simple emunah, knowing that everything comes directly from Hashem, not from coincidences or external forces.

Today, catch yourself if you start relying on a superstitious thought or feel the urge to blend in just to fit the surrounding culture. Instead, make one conscious decision based purely on ratzon Hashem, showing that your steps are guided by emunah alone.