

הלכות יסודי התורה • פרק ששי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam teaches us the profound respect and awe we must have for the holy names of Hashem, as well as the physical structure of the Beis HaMikdash and sacred Torah writings. We learn the strict Torah prohibition against erasing or destroying any of the seven holy names of Hashem, which is derived from the warning not to do to Hashem what we are commanded to do to the idols of the non-Jews. The halachos outline which letters connected to the names carry this holiness, which abbreviations are protected, and how we must treat a holy name written on a utensil or even on a person's flesh.

We also learn about the severe prohibition against destroying any part of the Beis HaMikdash, such as removing a stone from the Mizbe'ach or the Azarah with destructive intent, or burning consecrated wood. The Rambam then guides us in the proper care for holy seforim and their commentaries, explaining when they must be buried and the unique, painful case of a Torah scroll written by a heretic, which must be burned to erase their memory.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1: The Torah Prohibition Against Erasing the Holy Names of Hashem

כל המאבד שם מן השמות הקדושים הטהורים

Anyone who destroys a name from the holy, pure names

שנקרא בהם הקדוש ברוך הוא

by which the Holy One, blessed is He, is called,

לוקה מן התורה.

receives lashes from the Torah for violating a negative commandment.

שהרי הוא אומר בעבודת כוכבים

For behold, It says regarding the destruction of idolatry,

גמרא שבת קכ ב

as discussed in the Gemara Shabbos 120b,

"ואבדתם את שמם מן המקום ההוא

"And you shall destroy their name from that place,"

לא תעשון כן לה' אלהיכם:

and immediately afterward the Torah warns, "You shall not do so to Hashem, your God."

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 · The Prohibition of Erasing Any of the Seven Sacred Names of Hashem

ושבעה שמות הם.

And seven names they are, which have this special sanctity.

השם הנכתב יו"ד ה"א ו"א"ו ה"א והוא השם המפורש.

These are: the Name that is written with the letters Yud, Heh, Vav, Heh, and it is the Explicit Name;

או הנכתב אדני.

or the Name that is written as Adonai;

ואל. אלוה. ואלהים. ואלהי.

and Kel; Eloah; and Elokim; and Elokei;

ושדי. וצבאות.

and Shaddai; and Tzvaos.

כל המוחק אפלו אות אחת משבעה אלו לוקה:

Any one who erases even a single letter, one from these seven holy Names, receives lashes mid'Oraisa.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 · Erasing Letters Attached as Prefixes or Suffixes to the Divine Name

כל הנטפל לשם מלפניו מותר למחקו

Any prefix to the Name from before it, meaning any letter added to the beginning of a holy Name, is permitted to erase it,

כגון למ

such as the letter lamed from the Name L'Hashem, and the letter beis from B'Elokim,

וכיוצא בהן אינן כקדשת השם.

and similar to them; these prefix letters are not like the holiness of the Name itself.

וכל הנטפל לשם מאחריו

And any suffix to the Name from after it, meaning letters added to the end of a Name,

כגון ה' של אלהיה וך

such as the final chaf of Elohecha, and the letters chaf-mem of Eloheichem,

וְכִיּוּצָא בָהֶן אֵינָם נִמְחָקִים

and similar to them, are not erased,

וְהָרִי הֵם כְּשָׂאֵר אוֹתִיּוֹת שֶׁל שֵׁם מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהַשֵּׁם מְקַדְּשֵׁם.

and behold they are like the rest of the letters of the Name, because the Name sanctifies them since they serve the Name.

וְאֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁנִּתְקַדְּשׁוּ וְאָסוּר לְמַחְקֵם

And even though they became sanctified and it is forbidden to erase them,

הַמוֹחֵק אֵלּוּ הָאוֹתִיּוֹת הַנִּטְפָּלוֹת אֵינּוּ לוֹקָה.

one who erases these letters that are attached does not receive lashes from the Torah.

אָבָל מִכֵּין אוֹתוֹ מַכַּת מִרְדּוּת:

But they strike him stripes of rebelliousness as a Rabbinic punishment.

הַלָּכָה ד

Halacha 4 · The Prohibition of Erasing Letters Written from the Holy Names of Hashem

כְּתַב אֶל

If one wrote the letters alef and

לָמֶ

lamed as a partial writing from the Name Elohim,

יּוּ

or if he wrote the letters yud and

הֵ

hey as a partial writing from the Explicit Name of Hashem,

אֵינּוּ נִמְחָקִים.

it may not be erased because of the holiness of these letters.

וְאֵין צָרִיךְ לוֹמַר יָהּ

And there is no need to say that the Name Kah may not be erased,

שֶׁהוּא שֵׁם בְּפָנָי עֲצֻמוֹ.

since it is a complete holy Name on its own.

מפני שזה השם

Rather, the reason the letters yud-hei from the four-letter Name may not be erased is **because this** partial Name

מקצת שם המפרש הוא.

is a part of the Explicit Name itself.

אבל הכותב שי

But one who writes only the letters shin and

דל

dalet as a partial writing from the Name Shaddai,

צד

or the letters tzadi and

בי

beis as a partial writing from the Name Tzvaos,

הרי זה נמחק:

behold, this may be erased, as these letters do not form a holy Name on their own.

הלכה

Halacha 5 · Erasing Descriptive Titles of Hashem and Other Holy Writings

שאר הכנוייין שמשבחיין בהן את הקדוש ברוך הוא

The rest of the descriptive titles with which we praise the Holy One, blessed is He,

כגון חנון ורחום הגדול הגבור והנורא הנאמן קנא וחזק וכיוצא בהן

such as Gracious, and Merciful, the Great, the Mighty, and the Awesome, the Faithful, Jealous, and Strong, and similar to them,

הרי הן כשאר כתבי הקודש

behold, they are like the rest of the sacred writings in that they have holiness but not the unique status of Hashem's actual Names,

ומותר למחקן:

and it is permitted to erase them if necessary, since the strict Torah prohibition against erasing only applies to the seven holy Names.

כְּלִי שֶׁהָיָה שֵׁם כָּתוּב עָלָיו

Regarding a utensil upon which a Name of Hashem was written,

קוֹצֵץ אֶת מְקוֹם הַשֵּׁם וְגוֹנֵזוֹ.

one must cut off the place of the Name and bury it in a genizah.

וְאִפְלוּ הָיָה הַשֵּׁם חָקוּק בְּכִלִּי מִתְּכֹת אוֹ בְּכִלִּי זְכוּכִית

And even if the Name was engraved on a metal utensil or on a glass utensil,

וְהִתִּיף הַכִּלִּי הָרִי זֶה לֹקָה

and he melted the utensil, thereby erasing the Name, behold, this person is lashed for destroying a holy Name;

אֶלָּא חוֹתְתָהּ אֶת מְקוֹמוֹ וְגוֹנֵזוֹ.

rather, he must cut out its place and bury it.

וְכֵן אִם הָיָה שֵׁם כָּתוּב עַל בָּשָׂרוֹ

And likewise, if a Name was written upon his flesh,

הָרִי זֶה לֹא יִרְחֹץ וְלֹא יְסוֹף

behold, this person shall not wash that place and shall not anoint it with oil, so as not to erase it,

וְלֹא יַעֲמִיד בְּמְקוֹם הַטְּנֵפֶת.

and he shall not stand in a place of filth while the Name is exposed.

נִזְדַּמְנָה לוֹ טְבִילָה שֶׁל מִצְוָה

If an immersion of a mitzvah happened to present itself to him,

פוֹרֵף עָלָיו גָּמִי וְטוֹבֵל.

he winds reeds upon it and immerses.

וְאִם לֹא מָצָא גָּמִי מְסַבֵּב בְּבִגְדָיו

And if he did not find reeds, he wraps it with his garments,

וְלֹא יַחְדִּיק כִּידֵי שְׁלֵא יַחֵץ.

but he must not tighten the wrapping, so that it will not intervene as a chatzitzah between his body and the water.

שֶׁלֹּא אָמְרוּ לְכַרֵּף עָלָיו

For they did not say to wind reeds upon it to cover it

אֵלָא מִפְּנֵי שְׁאֵסוּר לַעֲמֹד בְּפָנֵי הַשֵּׁם כְּשֶׁהוּא עָרֹם:

except because it is forbidden to stand before the Name when he is naked, but the water itself does not count as a forbidden exposure of the Name.

הלכה ז

Halacha 7: The Prohibition of Demolishing a Stone from the Temple or the Altar

הַסּוֹתֵר אֶפְלוּ אֶכּוּ אַחַת דֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁחִתָּה

One who demolishes even a single stone in a way of destruction

מִן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אוֹ מִן הַהֵיכָל אוֹ מִשְׁאֵר הָעֹזָרָה

from the Altar, or from the Sanctuary, or from the rest of the Courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash,

לוֹקָה

receives lashes,

שְׁנֵאֲמַר בְּעִבּוּדֵי כּוֹכָבִים

as it is said regarding the destruction of idol worship:

כִּי אַתָּה מִזְבַּחָתָם תִּתְּצוּן

"For you shall tear down their altars,"

וְכָתוּב

and it is written immediately afterward as a prohibition for us:

לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן כֵּן לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

"You shall not do so to Hashem your God."

וְכֵן הַשּׁוֹרֵף עֵצֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ דֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁחִתָּה

And likewise, one who burns consecrated wood of the Beis HaMikdash in a way of destruction

לוֹקָה

receives lashes,

שְׁנֵאֲמַר

as it is said regarding the destruction of idols:

וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בָּאֵשׁ

"and their Asherah trees you shall burn with fire,"

and it is written in juxtaposition to this:

לא תעשון כן לה' אלהיכם:

"You shall not do so to Hashem your God."

הלכה

Halacha 8 · The Prohibition of Destroying Sacred Texts and the Law of a Torah Scroll Written by a Heretic

כתבי הקדש כלן ופרושיהן ובאוריהן

Regarding writings of holiness, all of them, and their commentaries, and their explanations,

אסור לשרפם או לאבדם ביד

it is forbidden to burn them or to destroy them by hand,

והמאבדן ביד מפין אותו מכת מרדות.

and the one who destroys them by hand, we strike him with lashes of rebelliousness as a Rabbinic punishment.

במה דברים אמורים

In what circumstances are these words said?

בכתבי הקדש שכתבם ישראל בקדשה

Specifically regarding writings of holiness that a Jew wrote with holiness and proper intent.

אבל אפיקורוס ישראל שכתב ספר תורה

But a heretic Jew who wrote a Sefer Torah,

שורפין אותו עם האזכרות שבו.

we burn it with the Divine Names that are in it.

מפני שאינו מאמין בקדשת השם

This is because he does not believe in the holiness of the Name,

ולא כתבו לשמו

and he did not write it for Its sake,

אלא שהוא מעלה בדעתו שזה כשאר הדברים

rather, he raises in his mind that this is like the rest of ordinary things;

והואיל ודעתו כן לא נתקדש השם.

and since his mind is so, the Name was not sanctified at all.

וּמִצְוָה לְשַׂרְפוֹ

And it is a mitzvah to burn it,

כְּדִי שֶׁלֹא לְהַנִּיחַ שֵׁם לְאַפִּיקוֹרוֹסִים וְלֹא לְמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם.

in order not to leave a name to the heretics, nor to their deeds.

אָבֵל עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים שָׁכַתְבָּ אֶת הַשֵּׁם

But a worshiper of stars who wrote the Name,

גִּנְזֵין אוֹתוֹ.

we bury it and do not burn it.

וְכֵן כְּתָבֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ שֶׁבָּלוּ

And likewise, writings of holiness that became worn out,

אוֹ שֶׁכְּתָבָן עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים

or that a worshiper of stars wrote them,

יִגְנְזוּ:

shall be buried.

הִלְכָּה ט

Halacha 9 - The Sanctity of Divine Names Written in Specific Biblical Passages

כָּל הַשְּׁמוֹת הָאֲמֹרִים בְּאַבְרָהָם קֹדֶשׁ

All the names of Hashem said in the Torah concerning Avraham are sacred,

אָרְזָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בְּרֵאשִׁית יח ג "אֲדֹנָי אֵם נָא מְצָאתִי חַן" הֲרִי הוּא קֹדֶשׁ.

even this one which is said in Bereishis 18:3, "My Lord, if please I have found favor," behold it is sacred, as he was addressing Hashem.

כָּל הַשְּׁמוֹת הָאֲמֹרִים בְּלוֹט חַל

All the names of Adonai said concerning Lot are non-sacred, as he was addressing angels,

חוּץ מִזֶּה גִּמְרָא שְׁבוּעוֹת לה ב "אַל נָא אֲדֹנָי הִנֵּה נָא מְצָא עֲבָדְךָ חַן".

except from this one mentioned in Gemara Shevuos 35b, "Do not please, my Lord, behold please has found your servant favor," which was addressed to Hashem.

כָּל הַשְּׁמוֹת הָאֲמֹרִים בְּגִבְעַת בְּנִימִין קֹדֶשׁ.

All the names of Hashem said concerning the hill of Binyamin in the episode of the concubine of Givah are sacred.

כָּל הַשְּׁמוֹת הָאֲמוּרִים בְּמִיכָה חֵל.

All the names said concerning Michah and his idol are non-sacred.

כָּל הַשְּׁמוֹת הָאֲמוּרִים בְּנִבְיֹת קִדְשׁ.

All the names of Hashem said concerning Navot and his trial are sacred.

כָּל שְׁלֹמֹה הָאֲמוּר בְּשִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים קִדְשׁ

Every mention of Shelomoh said in the Song of Songs is sacred, referring to the King to Whom peace belongs, which is Hashem,

וַהֲרִי הוּא כְּשֵׁאֶר הַכְּנוּיִין

and behold it is like other descriptive terms of Hashem which may not be erased,

חוּץ מִזֶּה שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ח יב "הָאֶלֶף לָךְ שְׁלֹמֹה".

except from this verse in Song of Songs 8:12, "The thousand for you, Shelomoh," which refers to King Shlomo himself.

כָּל מַלְכֵיָּא הָאֲמוּר בְּדַנְיָאֵל חֵל

Every mention of king said in Daniel is non-sacred, referring to mortal kings,

חוּץ מִזֶּה דַּנְיָאֵל ב לו' "אַתָּה מַלְכָּא מְלִךְ מַלְכֵיָּא"

except from this verse in Daniel 2:37, "You, O king, King of kings," which refers to Hashem,

וַהֲרִי הוּא כְּשֵׁאֶר הַכְּנוּיִין:

and behold it is like other descriptive terms of Hashem.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by identifying the seven holy names of Hashem that may never be erased, detailing the status of prefixes, suffixes, and partial names, while distinguishing them from other descriptive praises of Hashem which may be erased. The Rambam rules on how to handle a holy name written on a utensil or on one's skin, and details the Torah prohibition against destroying any part of the Beis HaMikdash or burning consecrated wood. Finally, the halachos address the prohibition of destroying sacred texts, the requirement to bury worn-out seforim or those written by non-Jews, the mitzvah to burn a Torah scroll written by a Jewish heretic, and a detailed guide clarifying which ambiguous names in Tanach are kadosh and which are chol.

When we learn about the severe prohibition of erasing or destroying Hashem's holy names, it is easy to think of this as a technical law reserved only for Sofrim (scribes) or those handling worn-out sefarim. But the Rambam reveals a profound principle of kedushah here: the letters that are attached to the end of Hashem's name, like the "chaf" in "Elohecha" (your G-d), become holy themselves simply because they are connected to the Name. The Rambam writes, "the name conveys holiness upon them."

Think about what this means for you. If ink on parchment becomes so holy that it is forbidden to erase it just because it is attached to Hashem's name, how much more does this apply to a Jewish neshama? You are connected to Hashem. Your very existence is bound up with His name. Because of that connection, you possess an inherent, untouchable holiness. Every mitzvah you do, every word of Torah you speak, and every moment you spend striving to do His will attaches you even closer to Him, elevating your entire physical being.

This awareness must also transform how we look at our fellow Yidden. Every single Jew is connected to the Creator. When you see another person, you are looking at someone who carries a spark of the Divine, someone whose very essence is "attached to the Name." Just as we would never treat a holy name of Hashem with disrespect or carelessness, we must treat every single Yid with the utmost reverence, love, and sensitivity, recognizing the kedushah that rests upon them.

Today, when you speak to or about another person, pause for a moment before you react or speak, and remind yourself: "This person is connected to Hashem; I must treat them with the same respect and care that I would show to a holy sefer Torah."