Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 1 (Auto Translated)

English

Auto Translated

Shiur Overview

Summary of the Lecture: Laws of Idolatry – Introduction, Enumeration of Commandments, and Chapter 1

Introduction: The Place of the Laws of Idolatry in Sefer HaMada

The Rambam's Words

The Laws of Idolatry is the fourth section of Sefer HaMada, after the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, the Laws of Character Traits, and the Laws of Torah Study, and before the Laws of Repentance.

Simple Meaning

Sefer HaMada consists of five sections: (1) Laws of the Foundations of the Torah – the principles of faith, (2) Laws of Character Traits – good character traits, (3) Laws of Torah Study – how one studies Torah and honors Torah scholars, (4) Laws of Idolatry – the opposite of the Foundations of the Torah, (5) Laws of Repentance.

Novel Insights and Explanations

Question on this order: The Rambam himself in his introduction to the 14 books says that one must know "first of all" – "the unity of God and the prohibition of idolatry." If so, why doesn't the Laws of Idolatry appear immediately after the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, or even within the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah after chapter 1?

First answer – positive before negative: The Rambam wants to first lay down the entire positive picture of a Jew – Foundations of the Torah, character traits (De'ot), Torah study – and only afterward does he go to "turn from evil," the negative.

Second answer – the Torah scholar as the connecting thread: The Torah scholar is the thread that connects the Foundations of the Torah with De'ot, and De'ot with Torah Study. The honor of a Torah scholar, how he makes a sanctification of God's name – this is the connecting thread that runs through the first three laws. Therefore, they cannot be separated.

Third answer – the order of Sefer HaMada as an overall structure: The first three sections are the positive, afterward comes the negative (idolatry), and afterward the "fix" for the negative – the Laws of Repentance. Repentance is the rectification for idolatry. [Note: Even the Laws of Torah Study ends with a kind of repentance – excommunication for disgracing a Torah scholar, which is a way of punishment and repentance.]

Fourth answer – idolatry is actually already included in Foundations of the Torah chapter 1: The essential prohibition of idolatry – the idea that there is only one God – is already laid down in chapter 1 of the Foundations of the Torah. There is no theoretical novelty in the Laws of Idolatry. The main novelty of the Laws of Idolatry is a **practical** matter – how the error develops, which actions are forbidden, which boundaries the Torah establishes so that one should not come to an error in the Foundations of the Torah. Idolatry is essentially "practical warnings" – a step after the Foundations of the Torah, not the Foundations of the Torah itself.

Enumeration of Commandments in the Laws of Idolatry

The Rambam's Words

"They include in total fifty-one commandments" – 2 positive commandments and 49 negative commandments.

Simple Meaning

Almost all the commandments of idolatry are negative commandments, because the main matter is "not doing" – not worshiping, not making, not deriving benefit, not following.

Novel Insights and Explanations

Why so many commandments: The Rambam understood that in the Torah there are very many commandments of not doing idolatry, not doing things that lead to idolatry. **Even commandments that seemingly have nothing directly to do with idolatry**, the Rambam understood that they belong to idolatry (for example, sorcery, a pillar, a pavement stone, etc.).

Structure of the Commandments – Categories

a) Thought and Turning Toward Idolatry

"Not to turn toward idolatry" – not to be interested in idolatry. **"Not to follow the thoughts of the heart and the sight of the eyes"** – not to follow thoughts and look at matters of idolatry.

Novelty from Sefer HaMitzvot: A person must place a boundary on his thoughts. Not everything may one think – specifically about idolatry one may not think.

Distinction between "turning" and "believing": Thinking about things that can lead to idolatry is a different prohibition than actually believing in idolatry. Believing in idolatry is a separate negative commandment (not to entertain in one's heart that there is a god besides Him – which already appears in the Foundations of the Torah). Here we are speaking of additional prohibitions – a turning that leads to idolatry.

b) Blasphemy

"Not to blaspheme" – not to blaspheme the Almighty (blessing the Name). The Rambam in chapter 2 will explain why blasphemy comes into the Laws of Idolatry, even though it is not exactly idolatry – it is similar to idolatry.

c) The Essential Worship of Idolatry

Novelty about chapter 1: Chapter 1 is not a commandment – it is the foundation that explains how idolatry developed. The Rambam asks: People are not crazy, how does it come to worshiping idolatry? And he explains very nicely how the error can develop – a small error leads to the greatest error.

"Not to worship it according to its manner of worship" – not to worship idolatry according to the specific way that particular idolatry is worshiped. Also the "universal" forms of worship – bowing down, offering incense, etc. – are forbidden even if this is not the specific manner of that particular idolatry.

d) Making Idols and Images

"Not to make an idol" – not to make an idol, neither for oneself nor for another. **"Not to make images"** – one should not make images of idolatry even for beauty, even when the images are not idolatry themselves.

e) Mesit and Madi'ach – Spreading Idolatry

Madi'ach – one who causes the masses to be led astray after idolatry. **Mesit** – one who persuades an individual to worship idolatry.

Novelty – connection to Abraham our forefather: This is the opposite of "and he called in the name of God" – instead of calling in the name of God, one calls in the name of idolatry.

Ir HaNidachat (subverted city): A city that has all become led astray after idolatry – a positive commandment to burn the entire city, not to rebuild it, and not to derive benefit from the money.

Special laws regarding a mesit: Not to love the mesit, not to cease hating him, not to save him, not to teach merit on his behalf (even though normally in a capital case there is a commandment to teach merit), and conversely – not to refrain from teaching guilt against him.

f) False Prophet

Not to prophesy in the name of idolatry – and one may not listen to such a prophet. **Not to prophesy falsely even in the name of God.**

Novelty – why this appears by idolatry: Here we mainly mean if someone says in the name of God to worship idolatry – this is one of the main ways of falsehood in God's name. But besides being a mesit, he also violates the matter of prophecy, and therefore comes an additional prohibition of prophesying falsely.

Not to fear – not to fear killing a false prophet.

g) Oath in the Name of Idolatry

Not to swear in the name of idolatry.

h) Sorcery and Similar Things

Things that are not exactly idolatry, but categories of sorcery or actions that idolaters do, which leads to idolatry: not to perform the act of ov, not to perform the act of yid'oni, not to pass [a child] to Molech, not to practice divination, soothsaying, fortune-telling, charming, inquiring of the dead, not to inquire of an ov or yid'oni.

Distinction between different types of sorcery: For ordinary people, sorcery is all one category, but according to the Rambam there are distinctions. **Performing ov** is almost like an actual act of idolatry, but **inquiring** of an ov or soothsayer is different – it is forbidden because it will lead people to idolatry, not because it is itself idolatry.

i) Pillar, Pavement Stone, Ashera

Not to erect a pillar – not to set up an altar that is not in the place of the Temple. **Not to bow down on a pavement stone** – not to prostrate oneself on a stone floor. **Not to plant an ashera** – not to plant the tree that was introduced for idolatry.

Novelty: These things (pillar, pavement stone, ashera) are not exactly idolatry itself – the novelty here is that one should not do things **similar to the customs of idolatry**, even when one does not intend it for idolatry.

j) Destroying Idolatry

Positive commandment: to destroy idolatry and everything made for it. Not to derive benefit from idolatry and all its accessories. Not to derive benefit from offerings to idolatry – an additional prohibition of benefit from offerings.

Novelty: Offerings are special because with things that do not themselves become forbidden (for example, a tree that is worshiped – the tree itself does not become forbidden because it is a living thing), but the offerings from it are indeed forbidden in benefit.

k) Not to Associate with Idolaters

Not to make a covenant with idolaters (as in this week's Torah portion – "beware lest you make a covenant"). **Not to show them favor** – not to have mercy on idolaters. **That they should not dwell in our land** – not to let them live in the Land of Israel, as the verse says – because your children will become idolaters. **Not to imitate** – not to appear with the customs and garments of idolaters.

l) Prohibitions of Customs and Garments

Not to round the corners of the head, not to destroy the corners of the beard, a man should not wear women's garments and a woman should not wear men's garments, not to make tattoo writing, not to make incisions in the body, "lo tigodedu" – not to scratch/strike oneself for a dead person, not to make a bald spot for the dead.

In total, 51 commandments belong to the Laws of Idolatry.

Chapter 1, Law 1 – The Origin of Idolatry: The Generation of Enosh

The Rambam's Words

"In the days of Enosh, mankind made a great error, and the counsel of the wise men of that generation became foolish, and Enosh himself was among those who erred. And this was their error: They said, since God created these stars and spheres to guide the world, and placed them on high, and apportioned honor to them, and they are servants who serve before Him – it is fitting to praise them and glorify them and give them honor. And this is the will of God, blessed be He, to magnify and honor those whom He magnified and honored, just as a king wishes to honor those who stand before him, and this is the honor of the king."

"Once this matter arose in their hearts, they began to build temples to the stars, and to offer sacrifices to them, and to praise and glorify them with words, and to bow down toward them... and this was the essence of idolatry... And thus said its worshipers who knew its essence, not that they said there is no God except this star."

Simple Meaning

In the generation of Enosh (son of Seth), the wise men of the generation – not just the common people – made an error. They argued: Since the Almighty created stars and spheres to

guide the world, and He placed them on high in the heavens, it is fitting to give them honor – just as a king wants his ministers to be respected. Afterward, they began building temples, bringing sacrifices, saying praises, and bowing down to the stars. All this they did because they thought this was the will of the Creator.

Novel Insights and Explanations

1) Why the Rambam tells the entire process – not just history, but to understand the definition of the prohibition:

The Rambam does this not just so one can be careful. He wants one to **understand what idolatry can be** – in a kosher way, in a good way. **Idolatry is not what you think.** It doesn't simply mean believing in another god – because what does "another god" even mean? If the concept of God is what we learned in the Foundations of the Torah (the First Existent, the Master of all power), it is very difficult to understand how someone can believe in another. Therefore, children don't understand what idolatry means.

2) Idolatry is a boundary for atheism:

According to the Rambam, idolatry is a boundary for atheism. It begins with the fact that there are many forces in the world (which there indeed are such forces), one begins to give them honor, **and in the end one forgets that there is a God at all.** From doing idolatry, one comes to forget the true God, because one serves only the intermediate things (means) and forgets the First Existent from the Foundations of the Torah chapter 1. This is the connection to Sefer HaMada – idolatry is the opposite of the Foundations of the Torah.

3) The error began with the wise men, not with the common people:

The Rambam says "the counsel of the **wise men** of that generation became foolish" – **the problem began with the wise men.** They became foolish, but they had a good reasoning. It was not an error of the masses, it was **the error of the thinkers**. Enosh himself was also among those who erred.

4) The reasoning of the generation of Enosh is not foolishness – but an error:

The first step was a **logical reasoning**: The Almighty created stars and spheres to guide the world (as it says in the Foundations of the Torah chapters 2-3), He placed them on high in the heavens, they are "servants who serve before Him" (a language from the Gemara), they stand before Him like servants standing before him. Therefore, just as a king wants his ministers to be respected (as Achashverosh commanded that Haman be respected – when one bows to Haman, one essentially bows to Achashverosh), so the Almighty wants His stars to be respected. **The reasoning sounds good! If it had remained at that, perhaps it would even have been correct.**

5) The distinction between our "Kel Adon" and idolatry:

On Shabbat we say "Kel Adon al kol hama'asim" – "full of radiance and emitting light" – we bring out how beautiful the stars are. **But** the point is "they give glory **to His name**, joy and song **to the remembrance of His kingdom**" – they are beautiful, but **to praise the Almighty behind this.** The generation of Enosh, however, saw that it is so beautiful and magnificent, and thought that the Almighty wants **them** to be thanked, **them** to be praised – **they held that honor comes to them themselves.**

6) "To achieve the will of the Creator" – means to fulfill the will, not to reach Him:

The language "to achieve the will of the Creator" does not mean to understand what the Almighty wants, but to **fulfill** the will – they thought that by building temples and bringing sacrifices to the stars, they are doing what the Almighty wants.

7) "The essence of idolatry" – means root/beginning, not essence in the sense of main thing:

The Rambam means by "essence" the **root** and **beginning** of idolatry – this is how it began, not that this is the main thing of idolatry.

8) The first idolaters still believed in the Almighty:

The Rambam emphasizes: **"And thus said its worshipers who knew its essence, not that they said there is no God except this star."** The first idolaters – "who knew its essence" – did not say that the star is the only god. They fully believed in the Almighty, but thought that He wants honor to be given to His "servants." This is different from the popular understanding that an idolater does not believe in the Almighty.

9) The verse from Jeremiah (10:7-8) – proof that the wise men of the nations knew of the Almighty:

The Rambam brings the verse **"Who would not fear You, King of the nations, for it befits You; for among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You"** – all the wise men of the nations knew that no one is like the Almighty. **"But they have become altogether brutish and foolish; the instruction of vanities is but wood"** – but in **one thing** they become foolish: they think that **the vanity** (bowing to a stone or wood) **is the will of God**. Their only error is that they think the Almighty wants them to serve the stars through images of wood.

10) The language "yiv'aru" – how a wise man becomes foolish:

The language "yiv'aru" (from "ba'ar" – becoming foolish) is connected to the language "the counsel of the wise counselors of Pharaoh has become brutish" (Isaiah 19:11). This shows how a wise man begins to become foolish – **not all at once, but through a small error**. The Rambam probably thought of this verse when he wrote the language "became foolish" in law 1.

11) For whom did they do it – for the Almighty, not for the star:

At the first stage, they did not think that the star itself sees it or has independent power. They thought **only of the Almighty** – that the Almighty should see how one bows to His "servant," and this is an honor for the Almighty. The star still has no independence in their thought.

12) In a certain sense this is worse:

Although one can say that the error is "smaller than we thought" (because they still believe in the Almighty), but in a certain sense it is **worse** – because they say that **the will of God itself is in idolatry**. This makes it harder to fight, because one cannot say "you don't believe in God" – they do believe, but they think that God wants idolatry.

13) Perhaps they also worshiped the Almighty directly:

At the first stage, it is possible that they **also** worshiped the Almighty directly – just as one gives honor to the king **and also** to his servants. The Almighty was still in the "picture," but they **also** made time for the stars.

14) The first step agrees with "it did not arise in the heart":

It did not arise in the heart that you have another god. **The first matter had an error, but the reasoning is not foolishness – but an error in spirit.** It is not yet any error in the sense that one believes in another god.

15) Interesting point – the Rambam speaks here of stars and spheres, not of angels:

Interestingly, **the Rambam has not yet spoken here of angels** – only of stars and spheres. (Although in the Foundations of the Torah chapters 2-3 he also speaks of angels in the structure of creation.)

Chapter 1, Law 2 – The Second Stage: False Prophets, Priests, and "Other Liars"

The Rambam's Words

"And when time passed, there arose among mankind false prophets, and they said that God commanded them and said to them: Worship such-and-such a star or all the stars, and offer to it and pour libations to it thus and so, and build a temple for it, and make its image so that all the people, the women and children and common folk may bow down to it. And he informs them of an image he invented from his heart and says: This is the image of such-and-such a star that was made known to me in my prophecy."

"And they began in this way to make images in temples and under trees and on mountaintops... and they gather and bow down to them and say to all the people that this image does good and evil and it is fitting to worship it and fear it."

"And the priests say to them: Through this worship you will increase and succeed, and do thus and so and do not do thus and so."

"And other liars began to say that the star itself or the sphere or the angel spoke with them and said to them: Worship me thus and so, and informed them of the manner of its worship: Do thus and do not do thus."

"And this matter spread throughout the world to worship the images with various forms of worship different from one another, and to offer sacrifices to them and bow down."

"And when time passed, the honored and awesome Name was forgotten from the mouth of all the world and from their knowledge, and they did not recognize Him. And all the common people, the women and children, knew only the image of wood and stone and the temple of stones in which they were trained from their youth to bow down to it and worship it and swear by its name. And the wise men among them, such as their priests and the like, imagined that there is no God except the stars and spheres for which these images were made and in their likeness."

Simple Meaning

After time passed, false prophets arose who said that the Almighty had **commanded them** to serve the stars, bring sacrifices, build temples, and make images (pictures/statues). They invented images from their own imagination. Afterward, people began making statues in temples, under trees, on mountains. They told the people that "this image does good and evil." An institution of priests developed. Other liars said that the star/sphere/angel itself spoke to them. This spread throughout the entire world. In the end, the Almighty was completely forgotten – the common people knew only the image of wood and stone, and the "wise men" (priests) knew that there are stars and spheres behind the images, but no further than that did even they know.

Novel Insights and Explanations

1) Three main distinctions between the first and second stages:

(a) False prophet vs. reasoning of wise men: Previously, people **themselves thought** (reasoned in their minds) that the Almighty wants this – this is reasoning that can be refuted with better reasoning. **Now** a false prophet says that **the Almighty said so** – this is much harder to refute, because one cannot so simply disagree with a "prophecy."

(b) Images they invented from their hearts – a new level of error: The false prophet **invented images** – not a simple picture of what the sun looks like (a disk), but a **human form** (a person, a woman, an animal). "The image of the sun" does not mean a picture of the sun, but a human figure that represents the star – as in ancient mythologies where the sun is a man with two hands, the moon is a woman, and so on. This is **"invented from his heart"** – invented, because one cannot look with a telescope and see that the sun looks like this. This is **much worse**, because now people think that there is **some power, a human figure** connected with the sun – a "god of the sun" – which is already **truly a new thing**, not just giving honor to a natural creation.

[Digression: The Rambam's approach that "the image of the sun" does not mean a simple picture of the sun but a human form – this will be explained later in the laws.]

(c) "All the people, the women and children and common folk" – spreading to everyone: Previously it says only **"the wise men of the generation"** – the first error was among wise men who understood the subject. **Now** it says **"all the people"** – the false prophet spread it to **everyone**, also women, children, and common folk. This is an important distinction between a **wise man** who speaks to other wise men, and a **prophet** (messenger) who speaks to **everyone**.

2) The Almighty is pushed out of the "picture":

At the first stage, they still worshiped the Almighty **and also** the stars. At the second stage, the false prophet says that **the Almighty commanded to serve only the stars** – the Almighty is **no longer in the picture**, although He is still mentioned as the one who **commanded**.

3) False prophets play a major role in idolatry:

The Rambam shows that **false prophets** are a fundamental part of the development of idolatry – therefore it is also one of

the commandments in the Laws of Idolatry. The false prophet is **truly a liar** – the Almighty told him nothing.

4) "When time passed" – time as a causal factor:

The Rambam emphasizes that this happened **after time passed** – the first forms of worship (building temples, sacrifices, etc.) **caused** the next stage to come. When one does something long enough, one forgets the original reason.

5) The distinction between "guiding the order" and "doing good and evil" – a critical new leap:

The concept "does good and evil" is a fundamental leap. **The first wise men held that the spheres "guide the order" – they conduct the natural order, but not that they have a direct relationship with people.** "Does good and evil" already means that the sphere/star has a **personal relationship** with people – it can decide to do good or bad for a specific person. This is the first time in this process where one attributes to the forces a **personal relationship** with people, not just a cosmic function.

6) What "image" means – not a picture of a star, but a fantasy:

"Image" does not mean a realistic depiction of a star. **The Rambam already said "an image they invented from their hearts" – they invented it from their own heads.** It is like saying that Venus looks like a woman with long hair – it is not a photograph, it is a symbolic fantasy that corresponds to nothing in reality. When a person looks at the statue, he simply sees a person with a large beard – not any star.

7) Why people want something visual – the psychological driver:

A main driver of this entire process is the human need to see something visual. The Almighty cannot be seen, He is "abstract." One cannot make any image of Him. **Therefore they turned to the stars which can at least be seen, and for the children they made even more "tangible" – images that look like people.** Each stage is a movement from more abstract to more concrete (graspable): the Almighty (abstract) → stars/spheres (less abstract, one can at least see them) → images/statues (completely concrete, one can touch them).

8) The Rambam does not say that they held that one cannot serve the Almighty:

An important note: **Many people read into the Rambam that part of the reasoning was that "one cannot serve the Almighty directly."** But **in none of the stages does the Rambam say this.** He only says that they forgot in the end. He never says that part of the reasoning was that one cannot serve the Almighty. It may be correct – in other places it sounds like that – but in this text it does not say so.

9) The distinction between false prophets, priests, and "other liars" – three separate stages:

- **False prophets** – they still spoke **in the name of the Almighty**, said that the Almighty commanded to serve the stars. This is a lie, but it is still connected to the Almighty.

- **Priests** – these are **students of the false prophets**, not prophets themselves. They are already an **institution** – it is already a system, there are already special names. A priest does not need to claim that he himself had a prophecy – he is a "preacher" who transmits teachings in the name of the power. He gives "positive and negative commandments" – "do thus and so and do not do thus and so" – in the name of the image.

- **"Other liars"** – this is a new group that **no longer speaks in the name of the Almighty at all**. They say that **the star/sphere/angel itself spoke to them**. This is a fundamental leap: with the false prophets, the Almighty still commanded; here the star itself already speaks. **This makes sense because the world has already somewhat forgotten the Almighty – one cannot tell you that the Almighty commanded, because who knows who that is.** They only know the power or the image, so one must speak in their language.

10) The first time "angel" is mentioned:

With the "other liars" it says for the first time "the angel." **The angel is probably the image that was already made earlier, which has already become more "godly" in itself** – more powers have already been attributed to the image, until it became an "angel" that speaks to people.

11) Why lying has more variation than truth – "and this matter spread throughout the world with various forms of worship different from one another":

Truth is only one, lying is "the sky is the limit" – every liar can come with a different type. This explains why there became so many "various forms of worship different from one another" – because when one goes away from truth, there are unlimited possibilities of falsehood. **And this was probably part of the attraction** – with Abraham our forefather there was "one small meager way of serving the Almighty," but with idolatry there is "creativity, many types of worship."

12) "From the mouth of all the world and from their knowledge" – mouth and mind:

"From the mouth of all the world" – their mouth stopped speaking of the Almighty; "and from their knowledge" – their mind stopped thinking of Him. It is a two-fold forgetting: both from speaking (external) and from thinking (internal).

13) The final situation: two levels of ignorance:

- **Common folk (people, women, children)** – "they knew only the image of wood and stone and the temple of stones in which they were trained from their youth to bow down to it." They know only what they see before their eyes. The one who trained them perhaps still knew that there is something "beyond it," but the child learns only: "One bows to this – he is the god."

- **Wise men (priests and the like)** – they know that it is not just the image of wood and stone, but that it symbolizes stars and spheres. **But no further than this do even they go** – "they imagined that there is no God except the stars and spheres." They hold that the stars are the highest reality, and there is no Creator above them. **They are smart enough, they already feel smart, they need no more.** The wise man goes one level higher than the foolish person – he knows it is not the wood itself – but he stops at that level and thinks that this is already the whole truth. **This is the tragic result: even the "wise man" knows only one level more than the common people, but of the Almighty he knows nothing.**

[Digression: With the wise men of idolatry, who knew of spheres, this was a "bit of abstraction" – not truly abstract

(because spheres are also physical things), but still a step higher than just looking at what one sees with the eyes.]

14) "Under the trees" – connection to ashera:

"Under the trees" is a hint to the ashera that will be learned later in the Laws of Idolatry.

Chapter 1, Law 3 – Abraham Our Forefather, the Pillar of the World

The Rambam's Words

"But in the end... there was no one who recognized Him or knew, except individuals in the world, such as Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem and Eber... until the pillar of the world was born, and he is Abraham our forefather."

"Once this mighty one was weaned, he began to wander in his mind while he was small, he began to think day and night, and he was amazed: How is it possible that this sphere should continuously guide and have no one to guide it, and who turns it, for it is impossible that it turns itself. And he had no teacher and no one to inform him of anything, but he was immersed in Ur of the Chaldeans among the foolish idolaters. And his father and mother and all the people were idolaters, and he worshiped with them, but his heart wandered and understood."

"Until he achieved the way of truth, and understood the line of righteousness, from his correct understanding. And he knew that there is one God, and He guides the sphere, and He created everything, and there is no god in all existence besides Him."

"And he knew that the whole world errs, and the thing that caused them to err..."

"He began to give answers to the people of Ur of the Chaldeans... and to say the way of truth... and he broke the idols..."

"And he went about calling and gathering the people from city to city and from kingdom to kingdom until he reached the land of Canaan while calling, as it says: 'And he called there in the name of the Lord, God of the world.'"

"And when the people gathered to him and asked him about his words, he would inform each and every one according to his understanding until he would return him to the way of truth, until thousands and myriads gathered to him, and they are the people of the house of Abraham."

"And he planted in their hearts this great principle, and composed books about it, and informed Isaac his son. And Isaac sat teaching and returning [people to the truth]. And Isaac informed Jacob and appointed him to teach, and he sat teaching and returning in repentance all who joined him. And Jacob our forefather taught all his sons, and separated Levi and appointed him as head..."

Simple Meaning

After long years in Egypt, the Jews began to imitate the Egyptians' deeds and worship idolatry. Only the tribe of Levi held to the commandments of the forefathers and never worshiped idolatry. The children of Jacob almost fell back to the error of the nations. Out of love for the Almighty and from the oath to Abraham our forefather, the Almighty made Moses our teacher the master of all the prophets and sent him. When Moses received prophecy and God chose Israel, He crowned them with commandments, informed them of the way of His worship, and what the judgment is for idolatry.

Novel Insights and Explanations

1) "Length of days causes great destruction":

The language "until time passed" – staying too long in a bad environment is itself a cause for decline. "Length of days" – time itself – causes destruction. This is a principle: one must always "freshly fix" – renew the strengthening of truth, because time erodes.

2) The source of "and they returned to learn their deeds" – Ezekiel:

The Rambam relies on Ezekiel, where it says that the Jews worshiped idolatry in Egypt. In the Torah itself this does not come out so clearly.

3) Why the tribe of Levi held fast – "commandments of the forefathers":

The tribe of Levi held fast because they remembered that their role is to teach – "an appointee after an appointee." The system that Jacob established functioned. This is also the source of why Moses our teacher – who is specifically from the tribe of Levi – was the redeemer.

4) The tribe of Levi at the [Golden] Calf:

The fact that the tribe of Levi never worshiped idolatry is also proven at the sin of the Calf – other Jews, who had just been freed from Egypt a few minutes ago, immediately fell back. But Levi was still strong. The Brisker Rav's Torah on this matter is mentioned, which brings the Shalmai Emunah (Sukkot) on this topic.

5) Whether the tribe of Levi did not work on buildings for idolatry:

Perhaps the Rambam thought that in Egypt they built temples for idolatry, and only the tribe of Levi did not participate. The priestly status of the tribe of Levi perhaps meant that they did not have to do any work. Perhaps the first Jews willingly participated in the buildings (for idolatry), and only later did it become slavery.

6) "And almost" – the source for "the fiftieth gate":

The language "and almost" – in another moment the children of Jacob would have been lost – is the source for why all Chassidic books say that there was one more minute left in "the fiftieth gate" of impurity. The Rambam does not use the language "fiftieth gate," but the idea is here: another bit of remaining, "and the root of Abraham our forefather would have been uprooted" – the root that Abraham planted ("Abraham planted an eshel") would have been torn out.

7) "To the error of the nations and their straying" – back to the error of Enosh:

The Rambam means that it is the same error: one forgets the Almighty, one is drawn after the stars. This is always a danger, not just happened once. The stumbling block that one sees only idolatry around oneself, one thinks this is the whole world – this is always a danger.

8) The distinction between the first time (Enosh) and later:

The first time (the generation of Enosh) one needed explanations – how does one come to such an error? But later, after thousands of years of already doing so, the nations no longer need any explanation – "this is the rabbi, and the rabbi does it this way." The Rambam's explanation in laws 1-2 is more an explanation of how the first man knew of God and how the error began at all. But later the novelty is that one does know the truth, not that one doesn't know.

9) The Egyptians did not follow Abraham at all:

The Egyptians perhaps remained with their error all the years – they never accepted Abraham's teaching. The Jews simply "became gentile-ized" – were drawn after their bad neighbors.

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The Rambam uses the language of the verse "out of God's love for you" (Deuteronomy 7:8). The Almighty loves us, and together with the oath to Abraham our forefather, He saved us.

11) Why a "shortcut" through Moses – and not again the long way of Abraham:

Why didn't the Almighty again take a person who would have the truth and spread it (like Abraham)? That would have taken forty years! The answer: because the oath of Abraham our forefather requested that there should be a "nation that knows God" – not just that one person knows. The entire novelty of Abraham our forefather was not that an individual knows (an individual can always grasp philosophy), but that there should be a nation. If the nation would have lost their "continuity" – their continuation from Abraham our forefather – it would have been very difficult. Moses our teacher could have done what Abraham originally did, but the Almighty made a "shortcut" through prophecy, because it came as an accord – the oath. Without Abraham our forefather's oath it would not have been.

12) The novelty that "we are from Abraham our forefather" – something would be missing without this:

The matter of "knowledge of God" is that we are from Abraham our forefather. If one would have started again "from scratch" – even if it would have been technically possible – something would be missing. The continuation, the continuity from Abraham our forefather, is an essential part of the nation's identity.

13) "Made Moses our teacher" – the Almighty created him:

The language "made Moses our teacher" is explained: the Almighty created him – but just like every person. He did not create him as a special creation, but He later chose him.

14) "Crowned them with commandments" – the language of "crown":

The Rambam uses the language "crowned them" – He crowned them with commandments. This is a language of honor – commandments are a crown, not a burden.

15) The parallel between Abraham's wisdom and Moses's prophecy:

Everything that Abraham our forefather "removed" (took away) with wisdom – the error of idolatry – Moses our teacher showed again with prophecy. Abraham used intellectual arguments; Moses received direct prophecy. Both accomplished the same thing: "the judgment of idolatry and all who stray after it."

16) "The way of His worship" – the same language as by Abraham:

The Rambam uses the language "the way of His worship" – which is the same language he used earlier by Abraham our forefather's teaching ("the way of God"). This shows that Moses's Torah is a continuation of Abraham's way, but on a higher level – through prophecy instead of through wisdom alone.

17) The distinction between Abraham's and Moses's manner – despite the continuity:

In other matters – like love of God and fear of God – Moses our teacher forbade things with different rules than Abraham. It is not necessarily according to the same rules.

The fundamental distinction in reality: Abraham our forefather was not yet a separate nation. He had love and sympathy for all people. When he spoke about "all who stray after it" – he meant: the person is crazy, one must enlighten him, but not kill him. **Abraham our forefather did not kill anyone.**

Moses our teacher – by him there is already a separate nation. One no longer needs to care so much for the other people. By Moses our teacher can already come through prophecy – with stricter laws, including death penalty for idolaters.

18) Abraham's principles vs. Moses's laws:

Abraham our forefather worked with principles (love, proofs, explanations), but Moses our teacher received specific laws. It is according to the same principles, but the detailed laws of idolatry (which the Rambam will explain in the coming chapters) are Moses's specific working out of Abraham's broader principles.

Chapter 1, Law 3 (end) – Jacob Our Forefather, the Tribe of Levi, and the Mechanism of Tradition

The Rambam's Words

"Jacob our forefather taught all his sons, and separated Levi and appointed him as head, and seated him in a yeshiva to teach the way of God and to guard the commandments of Abraham. And he commanded his sons that they should not cease from the seed of Levi an appointee after an appointee, so that the learning should not be forgotten."

"And the matter went on and strengthened among the children of Jacob and those who joined them, and there was made in the world a nation that knows God."

Simple Meaning

Jacob our forefather taught all his children, but separated Levi as the "head" – the leader of the tradition – and placed him in a yeshiva to learn the way of God. He also commanded that the tribe of Levi should always have an "appointee after an appointee" – each generation a successor, so that the learning should not be forgotten. This strengthened among the children of Jacob and "those who joined them" until it became a "nation that knows God."

Novel Insights and Explanations

1) "And to guard the commandments of Abraham" – the source in the verse:

The Rambam connects this to the verse "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord" (Genesis 18:19). "The commandments of Abraham" is the way of God that Abraham transmitted.

2) "Appointee after appointee" – the mechanism of tradition:

Jacob did not just learn with Levi – he established a system: each generation must have an appointee from the tribe of Levi, "so that the learning should not be forgotten." This is a formal institution of tradition-transmission.

3) The source that Levi is the teacher – from Jacob's blessing and Moses's blessing:

Jacob said about Simeon and Levi "I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel" (Genesis 49:7), and the Gemara learns that this means they go around teaching. Moses our teacher later said "They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:10) – this confirms that the tribe of Levi's role is to teach.

4) "And those who joined them" – converts and children of Noah:

"Those who joined" means not only Jews, but also converts and other people – "children of Noah who join to God." The language is similar to "and all who joined them" in the Scroll of Esther (Esther 9:27).

5) "And there was made in the world a nation that knows God" – from individuals to a nation:

A progression: from individuals (Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Eber) to thousands and myriads – until it became a "nation." This is a beautiful parallel to the development of idolatry – there too individuals began with an error, and it spread until the whole world.

Chapter 1, Law 4 – The Descent into Egypt, the Tribe of Levi, and Moses Our Teacher's Mission

The Rambam's Words

"Until time passed for Israel in Egypt, and they returned to learn their deeds and to worship idolatry like them... except the tribe of Levi who stood by the commandments of the forefathers, and the tribe of Levi never worshiped idolatry."

"And almost the children of Jacob returned to the error of the nations and their straying."

"Out of God's love for us and from keeping the oath to Abraham our forefather, He made Moses our teacher the master of all the prophets and sent him. Once Moses our teacher prophesied and God chose Israel as His inheritance, He crowned them with commandments and informed them of the way of His worship, and what will be the judgment of idolatry and all who stray after it."

Simple Meaning

After long years in Egypt, the Jews began to imitate the Egyptians' deeds and worship idolatry. Only the tribe of Levi held to the commandments of the forefathers and never worshiped idolatry. The children of Jacob almost fell back to the error of the nations. Out of love for the Almighty and from the oath to Abraham our forefather, the Almighty made Moses our teacher the master of all the prophets and sent him. When Moses received prophecy and God chose Israel, He crowned them with commandments, informed them of the way of His worship, and what the judgment is for idolatry.

Novel Insights and Explanations

1) "Length of days causes great destruction":

The language "until time passed" – staying too long in a bad environment is itself a cause for decline. "Length of days" – time itself – causes destruction. This is a principle: one must always "freshly fix" – renew the strengthening of truth, because time erodes.

2) The source of "and they returned to learn their deeds" – Ezekiel:

The Rambam relies on Ezekiel, where it says that the Jews worshiped idolatry in Egypt. In the Torah itself this does not come out so clearly.

3) Why the tribe of Levi held fast – "commandments of the forefathers":

The tribe of Levi held fast because they remembered that their role is to teach – "an appointee after an appointee." The system that Jacob established functioned. This is also the source of why Moses our teacher – who is specifically from the tribe of Levi – was the redeemer.

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Summary of Chapter 1 Overall – The Rambam's Structure

Novel Insights and Explanations

Chapter 1 is an introduction – "the negative side":

- **Laws of the Foundations of the Torah** (beginning) = the **positive side** – he explains the basics: what the world is, what the Almighty is.

- **Laws of Idolatry chapter 1** = the **negative side** – he explains what idolatry is, how it developed, and how the truth emerged from there (through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the tribe of Levi, and Moses our teacher).

- **Chapter 2 and onward** = the actual "judgment of idolatry" – the practical laws that will be learned from here on.

This means, chapter 1 is truly an introduction to the entire book, just as the beginning of the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah is an introduction to understanding the Almighty, so chapter 1 of the Laws of Idolatry is an introduction to understanding the opposite – the error of idolatry and the historical context.

[Digression: It is mentioned that perhaps there are other approaches in other Rishonim – one can learn the **Ramban on the Ten Commandments**, he lays out his interpretation in other places. But the Rambam lays out very strongly **his**

way of how to understand what is the idolatry that the Torah forbids.]

Full Transcript

Laws of Idolatry – Introduction and Enumeration of the Commandments

The Place of the Laws of Idolatry in Sefer HaMada

Rabbosai, we are beginning today, the Laws of Idolatry. We are holding in the middle of Sefer HaMada. Sefer HaMada consists of:

- Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, which are the fundamentals of faith, one can say

- Laws of Character Traits, where there are good character traits

- Laws of Torah Study we have just finished, how one learns Torah, how one honors Torah scholars

- And now we are going to learn the Laws of Idolatry, which is the opposite of the Foundations of the Torah

The Foundations of the Torah is what yes, who the Almighty is and how one must serve the Almighty, and the opposite is serving idolatry. So the Rambam is going to give us very many laws, a whole long section of laws, and very many commandments.

A Question on the Order

It is true, it should have been right next to the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, seemingly comes the Laws of Idolatry, because it is literally "You shall have no other gods." And the Rambam in the, if I remember, when he spoke about the fourteen books that he made, he says that this is the thing that one must know first of all, such as the unity of Hashem and the prohibition of idolatry. The unity of Hashem is Foundations of the Torah chapter 1, and the prohibition of idolatry is literally the opposite of that.

It is almost a question for me why it doesn't stand right after the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, or even in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, after chapter 1 should stand the prohibition of idolatry.

Answers to the Order

I think there is on this an explanation, a certain understanding. It could be that the Rambam understood that first he wants to lay down the entire positive picture of what a Jew looks like. Yes, a Jew is Foundations of the Torah, with character traits, with learning Torah. Afterwards he goes to the negative, to the negation, turn away from evil.

But I think the way it happened is, the matter of the Torah scholar is what connects the Foundations of the Torah with Character Traits, and then Character Traits with the Laws of Torah Study. Honoring a Torah scholar, how a Torah scholar makes a sanctification of Hashem's name, and so on and so forth. The Torah scholar is the thread that runs through between the first few laws of Sefer HaMada.

And also how one can also understand the Laws of Repentance comes afterwards. It's like the first three parts is the positive, then you deal with the negative, how idolatry, if one hasn't done repentance, and then the fix of the negative you say. Yes. Repentance is on the Laws of Idolatry. Every shame draws it... essentially the Laws of Torah Study ends with a kind of repentance on disgracing a Torah scholar, because excommunication is a way of punishment and repentance to do on disgracing a Torah scholar.

Another point one can also say, we will see perhaps better we will see at the end of chapter 1, that idolatry, the essential prohibition of idolatry, the idea, the essence of it, is essentially already included everything in chapter 1 of the Foundations of the Torah, that there is one God and He runs everything. Idolatry is basically not that. There isn't really a novelty in this, theoretically. The main novelty seemingly of idolatry we will see is a certain practical thing, how the Torah develops, how the Torah lays down, in what kinds of things. Because idolatry is essentially like a fence, it's all a practical thing, that one shouldn't do the things that cause an error in the Foundations of the Torah. So for this it could be that it's not really Foundations of the Torah, it's more like a step afterwards, it's more practical warnings.

The Enumeration of Commandments of the Laws of Idolatry

So when the Rambam begins the Laws of Idolatry, he enumerates all the commandments as is his order, and this is a long list, because **"there are included in them fifty-one commandments"**. The commandments of idolatry has 51 commandments, in total only two positive commandments, because almost everything is negative commandments. Two positive commandments and 49 negative commandments, **"and this is their detail"**.

This is simply because the Rambam understood that there are indeed in the Torah very many commandments of not doing, not doing idolatry, not doing a thing that leads to idolatry. And also even certain commandments that seemingly don't really have to do with idolatry, the Rambam understood that it belongs to idolatry. I brought the chart that Rabbi Rabinowitz made, a beautiful chart. It's the same order, but he simply shows how the commandments divide up in order, and instead of reading a long list, one can see more clearly this way.

Structure of the Commandments – Categories

Thought and Turning Toward Idolatry

The first prohibition of the prohibitions of idolatry is **"not to turn after idolatry"**, it means not to turn, not to interest oneself in idolatry. We will see in chapter 2 of idolatry, **"not to follow after the thoughts of the heart and the sight of the eyes"**, one should not follow the thoughts of the heart and the sight of the eyes regarding idolatry. One should not think too much or look at matters of idolatry.

He brings a very beautiful language from Sefer HaMitzvos, he says that a person must place a boundary on his thoughts. One cannot think about anything. A person sometimes thinks what? Thought I may anything. No. Anything that is not Torah and mitzvos, that is not maintained by Torah and mitzvos, one may also not think. About idolatry one may not think, so says the Rambam. Yes, we will see in chapter 2 the details of this.

Discussion: Distinction Between Turning and Believing

Speaker 1: Bringing to mind is indeed, is thinking about things that can bring after it idolatry.

Speaker 2: Right, and not thinking that it is believing in idolatry is another prohibition, believing in idolatry is a negative commandment. Here it speaks of other prohibitions that a turning that brings to idolatry, that brings to the essential idolatry, or perhaps idolatry itself one can call the practical commandments, as he gives for this the serving on the first willnesses. Very good.

Blasphemy

Yes, further, **not to blaspheme**. Not to blaspheme, to blaspheme the Almighty. The Rambam in chapter 2 will justify why blasphemy comes in, it's not really idolatry. Blaspheming is like blessing the Name, but the Rambam will explain that it's similar to idolatry. Yes, good.

The Essential Worship of Idolatry

Further, its essential worship, the essentials about how one serves idolatry. You will see for example in chapter 1. Chapter 1 is not a commandment, chapter 1 is the foundation that explains why, how did idolatry come about and so forth. How does it come to people to serve idolatry? People aren't crazy. So the Rambam will very nicely explain how the error can develop.

So further is its essential worship, the usual manner of worship. Yes. Also the interesting thing is that seemingly if there is yes a commandment from chapter 1, it is indeed yes an idolatry from the Torah, because there was a commandment **not to bring to mind that there is a god besides Him**, so idolatry from the Torah, which that is seemingly the essential heresy of idolatry. But idolatry looks like it speaks only of the next levels, it doesn't speak of the error. That is not yet idolatry. When one has a small... It's not chapter 1 shows that a small error can bring us to the greatest error of actual idolatry. Right.

Afterwards there is the ways of worship of idolatry, which is all forbidden, right? **Not to worship it in its manner of worship**, the way how one serves that idolatry. And afterwards there is, even if it's not the way how one serves that specific idolatry, but that is always the worship, like bowing down, later one sees the rest idol, burning incense and so forth.

Making Idols and Forms

Further, **not to make**, not to make an idol. That is an external commandment. Ah, okay, we will see. What making an idol?

And not for oneself and not for another, and one should not make any forms of idolatry even for beauty. Even the forms are not idolatry, but ah, a beautiful thing, making a form itself is a matter of idolatry.

Inciter and Enticer – Spreading Idolatry

Further, afterwards there is, as we heard before, the great things that have to do with when there are creatures to idolatry, that is he makes a movement, small things, idolatries, this is the subject of positive commandments, not to be an enticer, a wayward city, to burn a wayward city, a positive commandment on a city that all became enticed after idolatry, one must burn the entire city, one may not rebuild the city afterwards, not to rebuild it, and one may not have benefit from the money of the wayward city.

Further, one may not incite even an individual. Enticer is that one means a multitude, and inciter is that one means an individual. Ah, that is the distinction. It's very good. So that is like all things that are like by Abraham our father, the difference is there "and he called in the name of Hashem," and the opposite side is and he called in the name of idolatry, that is an inciter and enticer. Or not by the name of Hashem, yes. We will see, yes.

Not to love an inciter, one should not love one who is an inciter. And not only that, but **not to cease hating him**, one should not stop hating him, one should not try to save him, and one should not learn to defend him, as usually a person who is sentenced to death there is a commandment to defend. And the opposite, **not to refrain from teaching against him**, on the contrary, if one has a teaching of guilt, one can say about him something that makes worse his situation, one should yes say it.

False Prophet

Further, one should not prophesy in the name of idolatry, and if one prophesies in the name of idolatry, one may not listen to the one who prophesies in the name of idolatry. Further, a branch of this is not to prophesy falsely even in the name of Hashem, to say falsely that one has a prophecy in the name of Hashem. Yes, this is hard to understand why is it after idolatry, it was already yes stood, the essential thing is already yes stood in another place in the Torah. It could be here he means mainly if one says in the name of Hashem to serve idolatry, because then it is indeed one of the essential ways how one can be false in the name of Hashem, therefore it lies here. But besides that he is an inciter, he has indeed violated also the matter of prophesying, comes to another prohibition of prophesying falsely. Yes.

Not to fear, one should not fear from killing a false prophet.

Oath in the Name of Idolatry

Not to swear in the name of idolatry, one should not swear in the name of idolatry.

Sorcery and Similar Things

Now there are things that are not really idolatry, but one can call categories of sorcery or other actions that idolatry does that leads to this. Yes:

- **Not to perform the act of ov**, one should not do the sorcery called ov

- One should not do the sorcery called **yidoni**

- One should not pass the children through the fire which was introduced for the idolatry of Molech, **not to pass to Molech**

Pillar, Figured Stone, Ashera

One should not set up a **pillar**, that is an altar that is not in the place of the Temple. By pillar there are three times an interesting explanation, three times there is another explanation on this.

Not to bow on a figured stone, one should not bow on a stone floor.

Not to plant an ashera, one should not plant the tree that was introduced for idolatry.

Even for the sake, even the things are even, that is not only idolatry, idolatry that is idolatry, but it is already included in previous commandments, but here one said one should not do the things similar to the customs of idolatry, that is...

Destroying Idolatry

Already, the commandments are of destroying idolatry, **to destroy idolatry and all that is made for it**. That is that when Jews come into the Land of Israel or a Jew has control

over a city, one should destroy idolatry from there. And the prohibition is **not to benefit from idolatry and all its accessories**, one should not benefit from idolatry, and not only that, but one should not benefit from the beautiful things that one places on the idol. And there we will further enumerate which benefits are permitted.

And **not to benefit from the offerings of an idol**. Offerings is the word that here things that don't themselves become forbidden, for example one serves a tree, a tree itself doesn't become forbidden, a tree is a living thing, one doesn't kill it, one sees it, but if the offerings from it, yes, if one has benefit, that means that this is an external prohibition of benefit to be from the offerings, as it stands there inside in Parshas Chukas.

Not to Associate with Idolaters

Already, further are the commandments of prohibition from other things similar to idolatry and so forth, but not to associate with idolaters:

- **Not to make a covenant with idolaters**, we learned it this week in the parsha by "beware lest you make a covenant"

- **Not to show them favor**, one should not have mercy on idolaters

- **They shall not dwell in our land**, one should not let them live in the Land of Israel, as the verse says because lest you intermarry with them, and your children will become idolaters

- **Not to imitate**, one should not look with the customs and garments like idolaters, to be similar to them

Other Types of Sorcery

Afterwards there are a few types of sorcery:

- Not to do the sorcery called **nachash**

- Not to do the sorcery called **kosem**

- Not to do the sorcery called **me'onen**

- Not to do the sorcery called **chover chaver**

- Not to do the sorcery called **doresh el hameisim**

- And one should not ask from the sorcerer called **ov**

- One should not ask from the sorcerer called **yidoni**

- And also making curses

Chapter 1 Law 1 – The Origin of Idolatry

Continuation of Enumeration of Commandments – Prohibitions of Idolatry

But if the bird from it is yes, that means that there is external to benefit from the bird, that stands there inside in chapter 8.

Afterwards there are the prohibitions of... other things similar to idolatry and so forth, and not to associate with idolaters. "You shall not make a covenant" with idolaters, this we learned this week in the parsha, "lest you make a covenant". "Do not show them favor", one should not have mercy on idolaters. "They shall not dwell in your land", one should not let them live in the Land of Israel, as the verse says, because so that it should not intermarry with them and your children will become idolaters. "Do not imitate them", one should not look with the customs and garments like idolaters, to be similar to them.

Afterwards there are a few prohibitions of sorcery: not to do the sorcery called nachash, not to do the sorcery called kosem, not to do the sorcery called me'onen, not to do the sorcery called chover chaver, not to do the sorcery called doresh el hameisim, and one should not ask from the sorcerer called ov, one should not ask from the sorcerer called yidoni, and another general one should not do sorcery.

Distinction Between Different Types of Sorcery

I want to clarify for you sorcery. First, sorcery is one thing, and that is even in the Jewish, everything is sorcery. They look at it all from the "spooky category". But according to how it looks here, it looks like this is different. Like for example, to perform ov is more like actually an action of idolatry almost. But asking the ov or the kosem, that is not really... not forbidden, it's forbidden because it will bring one should go to idolatry. The Rambam will explain the matters.

Prohibitions of Customs and Garments

And afterwards there are more prohibitions besides what was said a general thing one should not look with the customs and garments of idolaters, one enumerates certain customs and garments. That idolaters used to round the corners of the head, we should specifically yes leave the sidelocks and not round the corners of the head. One should not destroy the corners of the beard. A man should not wear women's garments, and a woman should not wear garments of a man, men's garments, which we learned this week. One should not make tattoos, one should not cut into the body, and "they shall not cut themselves", one should not scratch and not strike oneself over a dead person, and "not to make a bald spot over a dead person".

And these are the 51 commandments that belong to the Laws of Idolatry.

Why the Rambam Tells the Process of Idolatry

Now the Rambam will explain, for some reason, not what we Jews, the Rambam will explain to us something that is strange for people, one reads so much about idolatry, it was a test, and we look at idolatry, some little thing that one bows to it, deep down one means god, or how one makes a golden calf and one says "these are your gods, Israel", it looks to us like an absurd thing. And the Rambam says that this is a caricature, but underneath this there is something of a process.

The Rambam says this not so that one should be able to be careful, there is no advice of not thinking about idolatry, but the Rambam makes us here think in a good way, in a proper way, so that one should understand what idolatry can be.

I don't know if the Rambam came to defend the idol worshippers that they weren't so foolish. I mean that he wants very strongly that one should understand that avodah zarah is not what you think. That is, he doesn't simply say that one must understand this better. The Rambam doesn't properly explain here, but in a certain way, but one must understand better that avodah zarah doesn't mean to believe in another god. What does another god even mean? If the concept of God means what we learned in Yesodei HaTorah, it's very difficult to understand. Therefore children don't understand what avodah zarah means.

Avodah Zarah is a Boundary for Atheism

The Rambam explains that avodah zarah doesn't begin from this. It begins from the fact that there are many forces in the world, which indeed there are such forces, and one begins to give them honor, and in the end one forgets that there is a God at all. So as I told you, according to how it comes out in this chapter, avodah zarah is a boundary for atheism. From doing

avodah zarah, one comes to forget entirely that there is a true God, because one begins to serve only the intermediate things, and one forgets the previous ones, the first thing, the Metzui Rishon that stands in Yesodei HaTorah chapter 1.

And regarding this the Rambam wants to explain this very strongly, because if one doesn't know what the prohibition of avodah zarah is, one thinks that avodah zarah means another god. The question arises, another god doesn't make any sense at all, right? Because if you believe in the correct way that He is the great Master of Power, that He is the true God, not the word, the name that we give Him. So here the Rambam explains how the errors can develop. Right, so more than just understanding why there were such foolish people, it's also to understand the definition, what the meaning of avodah zarah is according to the Rambam's approach.

Other Approaches

Perhaps there are other approaches and other Rishonim and other interpretations, but one can learn the Ramban in Aseret HaDibrot, he lays down his interpretation in other places.

But the Rambam lays down very strongly his way, how to understand at all what is the avodah zarah that the Torah prohibited and what one should [understand] from them.

The Error of the Generation of Enosh – The First Step

The Rambam says... did I tell you a history lesson? Yes. The Rambam lays down a long beautiful story of how avodah zarah developed over the course of generations.

The Rambam says, in the days of Enosh, in the times of Enosh, Enosh was a son of Seth, Seth, I'm sorry, Seth. In the days of Enosh, in the times of Enosh, as it says in the Gemara that idol worshippers are like the generation of Enosh, that the generation of Enosh began with avodah zarah. What happened?

The Rambam says thus, **ta'u bnei ha'adam ta'ut gedolah**, people made a great error, **nivrah etzat chachmei oto hador**, the counsel, the wisdom of the sages of that generation became foolish. Instead of being wise they all became foolish.

The Error Began from the Sages

It's interesting how he means to say that the problem began from the sages. They became foolish, but they had a good reasoning. It wasn't an error of the masses, it was the error of the thinkers.

The Rambam says, **ve'Enosh atzmo hayah min hato'im**, it wasn't only in the days of Enosh, but Enosh himself was a ben achar ben, he too was in error.

The Rambam says, **vezo haytah ta'utam**, this was their error. Yes. They said thus, **amru**, they said thus, yes?

Speaker 2: Hoil, what should I read? Is the foundation that the errors, what does it say here errors? The yud is an error. It's an error in the word error, nu? Someone who says thus, he says, I don't know. Nivrah etzat, the error is, he already thought the joke. Anyways.

The Reasoning of the Generation of Enosh

Speaker 1: They said thus, **hoil veha'El yitbarach bara kochavim elu vegalgalim lanhig et ha'olam**, ah, that's the introduction. In order to understand one must remember Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah chapters 2, 3, 11, where stands the entire structure of the world.

Hoil veha'El yitbarach bara kochavim elu, stars are the stars, **vegalgalim**, on which lie the stars, **lanhig et ha'olam**, they lead the world, as they understood there that through the spheres all changes occur, and through the forms all the forms in the world occur. **Unetanam bamarom**, and besides this, first of all through them He leads the world. So they are honored, the spheres, and they are placed in heaven. That they are in the heavens. So much more the stars, because the spheres one doesn't see, but I don't know if one can give them honor.

Speaker 2: Okay, is ge... okay. Because taken they put in the stars. Very good. But the Almighty... what they serve. This is a language from the Gemara. Shemesh meshamesh lefanav umimeila yes. Lo ta'asun iti. They are also not only that He honored them. They are like close to the kingdom. They are close to the Almighty. They are His servants who stand before Him. That they are not like we should stand from afar and they should stand near us.

Speaker 1: So if so **re'uyim hem leshabbecham** it's fitting for them. Yes **re'uyim hem** what does it mean. Either it's due to them. Yes. It's coming to them that one should praise them, to praise them. They are allowed, one can give honor, to give honor.

Whoever it's not only for them important things that honor is fitting. But **vezehu retzon ha'El baruch hu**. This is also what the Almighty wants. **Legadel, lechabbeid, mi shegidlo, vechabbedo**. It's what the Almighty wants, and he brings a proof. **Kemo shehamelech rotzeh lechabbeid avadav ha'omdim lefanav, vezehu kevodo shel melech**. It's the meaning, he says the Almighty, the Almighty said it, but the people have a claim, like a king of flesh and blood, he has his ministers, his close ones to the kingdom, who stand before him, and he wants one should respect them, like Achashverosh commanded one should respect Haman. I know why he said, isn't it not only, yes, he says the king's command? Yes, but not only when one bows to Haman, one doesn't bow only to Haman, he essentially bows to Achashverosh. One shows that one respects what the king said, that one should respect it! So the Almighty respected thus the stars, the spheres, all these... he didn't speak here of angels yet, didn't he? Interesting. The stars, the spheres, so the Almighty wants one should respect them. Yes?

The Rambam Further Questioned the Reasoning

The Rambam further questioned the reasoning. A good reasoning, it sounds good. But actually on Shabbat we say "Kel Adon", yes? We say there "mele'im ziv umefiqim nogah", we bring out how beautiful they are, we bring out honor. But the point is "pa'arim kavod notnim lishmo, tzahalah verinah lezekher malchuto". They are beautiful, they are glorious to praise the Almighty behind this. But they saw that it's so beautiful and it's so magnificent, simply, the Almighty wants one should thank them, one should say good job for their work that they do, although they do the work only in the name of Hashem, the Almighty is their activator and they activate those beneath them. But they held that they themselves deserve honor.

The Rambam will describe until Avraham Avinu, he will describe precisely why they don't deserve any honor. Because the reasoning is not essentially a good reasoning, one must see what is wrong with it. One must think, a king, why doesn't a king want everyone should come only to bow to him? Why does he also want for the smaller ones? Seemingly, this itself is honor for the king, that it's a kal vachomer, that he took a little

bit from my honor. But the Almighty didn't want that there should be a manner of intermediaries where one gives honor to Him. The Almighty wanted that... until the complaint that David said.

"Shelo Alah Al HaLev" – The First Step is Not Yet Foolishness

Okay, seemingly, this is a good reasoning. If it had remained here, perhaps it would have even been correct. The problem is that it brings the next thing. It's a further slide, not a further slide. Now, what did they do? This is one thing. **Keiwan she'archu hayamim**, this is still a step like this. **Keiwan she'archu hayamim**, this is a love to have. One has **keiwan she'archu hayamim**, this is a love to have. It fits with the "shelo alah al halev". It didn't occur to the heart that you have another god. He still doesn't have any error. The first matter had an error, but the reasoning isn't foolishness. Only an error in spirit.

The Second Step – "Keiwan She'alah Davar Zeh Al Libbam"

It occurred to them, and the fools began to think, began, **livnot lakochavim heichalot** – one began to build temples, I mean temples, yes? Sanctuaries, like buildings, where one should pray, where one should do service for the stars. **Ulehakrivlehen korbanot** – they brought sacrifices for them. **Uleshabbecham ulefa'aram bedvarim** – one said praises and laudations to this, not only about them, because ours can also say about them. It means to their height, in the manner of divinity. One said blessed are You, Hashem, who makes such beautiful for.

Hilchot Avodah Zarah Chapter 1 Laws 1-2 – The Development of Avodah Zarah (Continuation)

Chapter 1 Law 1 (Continuation) – The First Stages of Avodah Zarah

The Four Services for the Stars

Sanctuaries, like buildings where one should pray, where one should do service for the stars. Ulehakrivlahem korbanot, they brought sacrifices for them.

These, there are three levels of things, yes? Or four, let's see how many things there are. First, one built buildings for them. Second, they made sacrifices. Third, **leshabbecham ulefa'aram bedvarim**, one said songs and praises for to these, not only about them, because we can also say about them, it means to theirs, in the manner of divinity, one said "blessed are You the sun" who makes such a beautiful sun, and the like. **Ulehishtachavot mulam**, to bow to them.

"Lehashig Retzon HaBoreh" – To Fulfill the Will

Vezeh kedei lehashig retzon haboreh beda'atam, they didn't mean to say that with this they honor or want... what does "mashig ratzon" mean? They achieve the will, as if fulfilling the will. The will of the Creator is that one should give honor to the stars, because with this that He made them so beautiful. They did it in order to fulfill the will, I will make a special temple for the... It could be they also made a temple for the Almighty Himself, could be, he doesn't say it here, but they also made for the stars and constellations. It's interesting, he doesn't say here if one can perhaps at all. So they did these things because they understood that the Almighty wants this.

"Ikkar Avodah Zarah" – Root and Beginning

Vezeh hayah ikkar avodah zarah, "ikkar" means seemingly here root, the beginning, the root. The beginning of avodah zarah began from this, that one holds that the Almighty wants one should give honor and bow and so on to His great servants.

The First Idol Worshippers Believed in the Almighty

Vechach hayu omrim, here comes in what you said, that this is what they mean, until now let's say originally meant, perhaps the great sages mean thus. Not like one usually thinks that an idol worshipper doesn't believe in the Almighty, he believes that something else is a god. But **vechach hayu omrim ovdeiha hayode'im ikkarah, lo shehem omrim she'ein sham eloha ela kochav zeh**, not they say that there is no god except this star, the sun for example.

The Verse from Yirmiyahu – The Sages of the Nations Knew of the Almighty

Vezehu sheYirmiyahu omer, as Yirmiyahu says, **"mi lo yira'acha melech hagoyim ki lecha ya'atah"**, who doesn't fear You, King of the nations, for You it befits, as "ki lecha ya'atah" means for You befits kingship.

As he says on Pesach, yes? **"Ki mikol chachmei hagoyim uvechol malchutam me'ayin kamocha"**. Among all the sages of the nations there is none, I mean to say seemingly, no one doesn't hold an eloka like You, no one doesn't think that there is an eloka like You. But what? **"Uve'achat yiva'aru veyichsalu musar havalim etz hu"**. But in one thing, how does one translate "uve'achat"? They become foolish, they fool themselves? The sages of the nations fool themselves? And they something... nu, how does one translate this verse? With one thing they fool themselves? Ah, that they think one can serve the wood? I hold that they are musar havalim, they say it's a teaching, a teaching of vanities, wood, that this is the vanity which is simply a stone, simply wood.

And the Rambam translates, **kelomar**, I already translated the verses that I mean to tell you, **kelomar, hakol yode'im she'atah hu levadecha**, that all the sages of the nations, the sages, those who know the essence thus know that me'ayin kamocha. But on one error that they have, **"yiva'aru veyichsalu"**, because **ta'avatam vechislutam iz shemedamim shezeh hevel retzoncha hu**. They think that this vanity, they don't say that the vanity is itself a... he doesn't want to do the will of the power, he wants to do the will of Hashem through the fact that he bows to the wood, and this is a vanity. The only vanity is only this, and it's also not such a great vanity, it's smaller than we thought, because they think they're doing the will of Hashem with this. In a certain sense it's worse, because he still says that the will of Hashem is in avodah zarah, but there was still talk what is the problem. Seemingly the problem is that it brings the next step.

The Language "Yiva'aru" – How a Sage Becomes Foolish

It's interesting the language "yiva'aru", wisdom yiva'aru, is this what he began "nivrah etzat chachmei yo'atzei Pharaoh". This is a way how a sage begins to become foolish. A sage doesn't become foolish at once, it had to happen with a small error. The error that the Almighty wants one should give honor to other than Him, to certain forces, this is the error that begins to make a sage into a fool. It must be that the Rambam thought of this verse when he wrote "nivrah", because here he indeed brings it out thus.

Discussion: For Whom Did They Do It?

Okay, I want to understand one more small thing, either way, when they praise or they bow to the stars, do they want they do it because they want that the Almighty should see it and have

pleasure, ah, and give honor to my sphere, ah? Or they think, yes, that it should make a connection with the star? Can the star see it? He doesn't say here, he says by the first step, perhaps by the next step it could be that one will think differently. Until now by this, he thinks about a thing from the Almighty. He doesn't even think that the star has an independent power, he can turn against the Almighty, he only thinks that the Almighty loves that one will give respect and one will bow to the star.

That is, you ask a question why, why does the Almighty love? Because this is the parable of the king that he brings, it's not such a bad parable. It's a reasoning. It's indeed interesting, the first error, they're still a bit wise, that the Almighty should only be impressed, but they think that the Almighty sees it and the Almighty has pleasure, so essentially they mean halfway the Almighty. They do the stars but they mean the Almighty.

How does the error develop further?

Chapter 1 Law 2 – The Second Stage: False Prophets

"Keiwan She'archu HaYamim" – Time as a Causing Factor

Ah, this was first of all. After this, "vecheiwan she'archu hayamim", ah, **"vecheiwan she'archu hayamim"**, it took, it went, yes, says the Rambam, **"vecheiwan she'archu hayamim"**, after time passed from when the service to the stars began with the calculation that the Almighty wants that one should honor them, **"amdu bivnei adam nevi'ei hasheker"**. False prophets arose. Here we see that false prophets play a great role in avodah zarah, that he becomes, he says that a part of the commandments of avodah zarah is false prophets.

The False Prophet Says that the Almighty Commanded

"Ve'amru", they said thus, **"sheha'El tzivah lahem ve'amar lahem"**, the Almighty told them, **"ivdu kochav peloni o kol hakochavim"**, or serve the stars, **"vehakrivulolonischu lo kach vechach"**, make such and such libations, **"veivnu lo heichal"**, build him a temple, **"veya'asu tzurato"**, make a form of the stars, **"kedei lehishtachavot lo kol ha'am hanashim vehakatanim ushe'ar am ha'aretz"**. And **"umodi'a lahem"**, and the false prophet informs the public **"tzurah shebadah milibo"**, a form that one must be, **"ve'omer zo tzurat hakochav peloni shehoda'tini binvu'ati"**. This is the form of the star that was made known to me in the prophecy.

Tzurot Shebadu Milibam – A New Level of Error

Laws of Idolatry Chapter 1, Law 2 (Continued) – From Forms to Priests to Forgetting God

The Rambam's Words (Continued)

Speaker 1:

Friends and scholars. A prophet, he understands that he speaks to everyone. This is one of the differences between a prophet and an emissary that we learned, right? Prophet here means an emissary, not just personal attainment. Personal attainment they could have had earlier too, through their will, their wisdom, their prophecy, for example. But now he speaks of everyone. Now, it's understood that the women that we'll still discuss, the common people don't always understand the symbols, they take it literally. Okay, that's going to be the next step. But this is the... and according to the Rambam it was truly a lie. God never spoke to them, right? And he said so. It was simply a lie.

The Need for Something Visual – From Abstract to Tangible

But I mean something else that we see here in both things is that people very strongly want to see something visual. So God one cannot see. I'm speaking of the first sages, they know that God is the essence, but one cannot make any form of God. Therefore they also held that one cannot make any temple for Him, because He is abstract. So first let's take the servant who is abstract, the minister, the servant who is more abstract. And for the children one makes it even more abstract. Going into the temple one cannot see any star, and one builds here a star in the temple that's more abstract, it looks less abstract, more tangible.

The Rambam Doesn't Say They Held One Cannot Serve God

This is how truly, the Rambam didn't say, many people still say that the Rambam says that they said one cannot serve God. I don't see in any of the stages that he says this. He only says that in the end they forgot. He never says that part of the reasoning was that one cannot serve God. He doesn't speak of this topic at all. It could be that it's correct, in other places it sounds like that, but until now it hasn't been stated. It only said that they held that one must serve the stars, therefore they made forms, and afterward there arose false prophets who said that God says so.

But I don't know, the reason, he doesn't say a reason, he doesn't say, he doesn't explain why. But one can think, one can think that they held that for God, because He is abstract, one can also only serve Him in an abstract manner. One cannot do certain things because you don't have any picture to do with. Which is not so with stars, you can paint it, you can make a temple that should look similar to the star, that should have some connection to the star. And for the children one did even much more coarse and corporeal. I mean to say that the form that looks like a person is still not for the stars, it's just a bluff. Yes. Okay.

Stage 4: Forms in Temples – "That This Form Does Good and Harm"

Okay, afterward, **and they began in this way to make forms in temples**. In the temples that were built they began making forms. And not only in the temples, but **under the trees and on the mountaintops**, because temples is of course above the asherah that we're going to learn soon. I'm preparing all forms, they made forms that should symbolize the stars with the spheres. **And they gathered and bowed to them and said to all the people**, here they already went further, they said to the people, **that this form does good and harm**, the form does good and harm.

The Difference Between "Conductor of Order" and "Does Good and Harm"

Already, the first sages already knew the truth that the spheres have a certain power over the world, they do things to the world. But here they already said something that does good and harm, meaning that they already have a direct connection with people.

This is the first time it was stated that the sphere is a conductor of order, but not doing good and harm. Doing good and harm is already a relationship with people, it can decide something like this. Here it says that the spheres have a relationship with people, they do good and harm. **And it is**

proper to serve it and to fear it. Not only that when one gives them honor it's honor for God, but one should serve them and one should fear the spheres.

What "Form" Means – Not a Star, But a Fantasy

And here it doesn't say anything about spheres anymore, one has long forgotten about the spheres. Here it says forms. No, not even stars. Pictures. Forms means literally, statues, which usually look like people, right? Or perhaps like animals. They say that the form does good and harm. The masses, he's going to say soon.

Speaker 2:

No, but how did it happen from a star to a form? It could be that form means the form of the star.

Speaker 1:

No, no, he already said a form that they invented from their hearts. That's how it happened. Because I would have said a form that they invented from their hearts that is similar to the star.

Speaker 2:

No, no, form, I know what form means here. He says "this is the form of such-and-such star."

Speaker 1:

Exactly, but it's not. Forms means like a picture of Venus. Venus looks like a woman with long hair. It's not a picture, it's like one makes for children, like one says, one makes for children, one makes that the letter aleph has long sidelocks, I don't know. It's some crude calculation, but it's not true, it doesn't correspond to anything in reality. And when one looks at the statue, one simply sees a person with a big beard, I don't know, the deity has a big beard. And he has a small belly, etc. etc. And one tells people that the form, that this is truly a lie. One can interpret it, but this is already completely completely incorrect. Here one already has completely the priests, one says the medium, these are already false prophets.

The Process: From Natural Force to Personal Relationship

So, I would say perhaps like this, that first the star is only a force that conducts naturally, it goes its way in a certain way, and it conducts the world with its movement. And here they made it into something that has a relationship, they gave it a human, they attributed human...

But not it, you should be clear, people don't see any star, they see a creation. A form they associate with the name of a star, they say the creation is a power of so-and-so. But they don't see any star, they see the form. And the star has the personality of such-and-such person, and through the personality it has a relationship with us, and one must serve it. He's going to say very clearly in the next step what happened from the second step. It's to see the difference between what the masses mean and what the sages mean, not the sages, what he calls the priests, the speakers, the false prophets what they say. But I looked further, so I understand according to what he says.

Stage 5: Priests with Teachings – "Do Thus and So and Don't Do Thus and So"

Yes, **and the priests say to them**. Because he wants to explain to you how one came to the stage where one says that the statue, the form means a statue or a picture, and I know that the statue does something. He's explaining to you how one came to this.

"And the priests say to them", here priests have already grown, it's already a system, there are already special names. It's not false prophets, one doesn't even need to say anymore "I saw something in my dream, I said something". It's already an institution. **"And the priests say to them"**.

Speaker 2:

Could be the priests are themselves the false prophets.

Speaker 1:

Ah, the student of the false prophet is already a priest, not a prophet. He's only a student, he's already heard from the prophet. A preacher. They already say, **"through this service, if you will thus and so serve the form, you will increase and succeed, and do thus and so, and don't do thus and so"**. They already transmit teachings in the name of the power. Positive commandments, negative commandments. Yes, in the name of the form.

Stage 6: "Other Liars" – The Star/Sphere/Angel Speaks Itself

Afterward it begins, with this everything began from the prophets who still spoke in the name of God. Afterward begin people who don't speak at all in the name of God, he will say **"hear from me, liars and deceivers"**. Other liars arose to say, they began saying **that the star itself, or the sphere, or the angel**, here is the first time an angel, yes. Already the angel is the form that was mentioned which is already more God in the form. Again, it symbolized maybe. Yes. **spoke with them, and said to them serve it thus and so**. Not like before when they said that...

Speaker 2:

Right, it makes sense, but...

Speaker 1:

The false prophets said that God commanded. Here they already see, the powers already receive more and more... The angel already speaks to them. One already attributes to it more and more powers.

Speaker 2:

Right, it makes sense according to what we're going to see, because the masses have already forgotten a bit about God. One cannot tell you that God commanded, because who knows who that is. They know the power or the form.

Speaker 1:

And said to them serve it thus and so, and informed them of the way of its service. The power, as one says, that the power or sphere or angel informs the way of its service, **do thus and don't do thus**.

Why Lies Have More Variation Than Truth

And the Rambam says, **and this matter spread throughout the entire world**. The lies began spreading throughout the entire world, **to serve the forms with various services different from one another**. With different services, besides the forms. There were very many other forms, each one had its own... He likes kugel and he likes pepper. I mean, it looks like this, because truth is only one, lies - the sky is the limit. Every liar can come with a different type. It became very... and this was probably perhaps part of the attraction. The one Abraham our father, there is some one small meager way of serving God, whatever. The truth is only little, but here is a whole multitude. It's creativity, there's a lot of creativity happening, many types of services. **And to**

sacrifice to them and to bow down. Okay, so this is what was done.

Stage 7: The Final Result – "The Honored and Awesome Name Was Forgotten"

Now, you see the result of this, this is the result. I wanted to make stage 3, it's not really stage 3. The result of the stages, after they conducted themselves this way, what remained? **"And when the days lengthened,"** it happens, yes, **"and when the days lengthened,"** perhaps this is the same lengthening of days from before. Since it had already been a long time, people didn't even remember anymore. Previously there were still people who remembered that essentially it was a way of honoring the Creator, and meanwhile it acquired more and more its own power, the fantasy of the power. And afterwards, what happened? People forgot that there was a Creator behind it.

I can tell you what happened, what remained is now, there are still chachamim (sages) and hamon am (common people), but what the current chachamim know is about the spheres, the hamon am only knows the pictures of them. But when the Creator is not even mentioned by the chacham, he is concerned about what the masses will say.

"And when the days lengthened, the honored and awesome Name was forgotten." The Creator, the true Creator, became forgotten. **"This honored and awesome Name, whose existence could be seen, became forgotten from the mouth of the entire universe and from their knowledge."** The entire universe, the entire existence, the entire world, all people. Universe is a heavier expression than it says, the entire world upon which we stand, the Creator's name was forgotten and from their knowledge. People forgot from their knowledge. Ah, perhaps he means **"from the mouth of the entire universe and from their knowledge,"** their mouth stopped speaking about this, and their mind stopped thinking about this. **"And they did not recognize Him."** They didn't recognize Him at all anymore.

The Hamon Am – "They Know Only the Form of Wood and Stone"

"And it turned out that all the people of the land, men and women and children, know only the form of wood and stone and the temple of the building that they were trained from their youth to bow down to it and worship it and swear by its name." They were small, the one who trained them knew that there was something beyond it. He doesn't say it so clearly, but they were trained from youth to bow down and worship it and swear by its name of the form. He says simply, you're taught, you bow down to this, what do you think? He is the god. That's what a simple person understands, only what one can see.

The "Chachamim" – "Imagining That There Is No God Except the Stars and Spheres"

"And the chachamim among them, such as priests and the like, were imagining that there is no god except the stars and spheres for which these forms were made and in their likeness." They don't think so foolishly, they don't mean that it's only the form of wood and stone, they know a bit deeper. What do they mean? That the wood and stone symbolizes something that is a bit higher than this. And they think that there is no divinity, **except the stars and spheres for which these forms were made and in their likeness.**

Speaker 2:

Or in their likeness, yes, according to what they convince themselves that it looks like or symbolizes it this way. It's a confusion. I think here that he's saying that the foolish person sees only what he sees before his eyes. The chacham goes one level higher. He says it's not the wood that the wood needs to resemble, yes?

Speaker 1:

Yes, it's just clear why. It's just clear why. Because he says that one step level is true, is true. They are smart enough, they already feel smart, they don't need more.

Laws of Idolatry Chapter 1 Law 3 – Avraham Avinu's Recognition of the Creator

Continuation: The Chachamim and the Spheres

Speaker 1:

Or in their likeness. Yes, according to what they convince themselves that this looks like or symbolizes it.

I think here that he's saying that the foolish person sees only what he sees before his eyes, the chacham goes one level higher. He says it's not the wood that the wood needs to be resembled. Yes?

Speaker 2:

Yes, it's not clear why, but... It's not clear why. Because this says that one step level... It's true, they were smart, they already feel smart, they don't need to think more about this. It's not clear why.

The real answer in the Rambam's world is that the spheres and the chachamim are also physical things in the end. It's not more abstract. It's not that what one sees one cannot see, because you cannot see. If you had a picture that you look at the sun, you see the sun. It's not hard to see the sun. It's a thing that one can see. But the spheres is already yes a bit of abstraction. It's not an abstraction, it's a physical thing. But he must say that because he sees stars there must be spheres that carry them. That's not the big problem.

Speaker 1:

No, I mean to say that a chacham feels good that he has already been abstract, he has already grasped something a drop deeper.

Speaker 2:

They stopped speaking. He doesn't explain why the chachamim stopped knowing about the Ein Sof, about the First One. He never explains this. The Rambam brings in other places that the army, the idol worshippers, said that the sphere is the god. But what is their side? He says here that the Creator Himself remained alone. But in the end...

Law 3 – Individuals in the World: Chanoch, Metushelach, Noach, Shem and Ever

Speaker 2:

Amudo shel olam (pillar of the world) means the strength of all these worlds.

"There was no one who recognized Him or knew, no one knew Him or knew about Him, except individuals in the world, a few people did know."

Ah, previously he says "the entire universe" and from their knowledge, it appears that the entire universe means the majority of the world, but there were yes a few who separated

themselves from the world. Ah, very good. Not part of a group, but as individuals. Very good.

Such as Chanoch, Metushelach, it says "and Chanoch walked with God." Metushelach it also says, Chazal say that Metushelach lived very long, he still remembered the first chachamim. **Noach,** it says "and Noach walked with God," **Shem and Ever,** who are known that they were tzaddikim.

Ah, there were yes those who remembered. Not simply no one remembered, but the majority of the world didn't remember. But they remained individuals, they didn't have the strength to go shout against the sphere that goes forward, the descent of the world.

And the world is rolling, yes, it turned from the truth to a bit of falsehood, to more falsehood, to completely total falsehood. It went on the "slippery slope," **until the pillar of the world was born,** until the pillar of the world was born. There are eternal trees and there is the pillar of the world, who established a point to the Creator.

Avraham Avinu – Pillar of the World and Eisan

Speaker 2:

Okay, the pillar of the world is Avraham Avinu. Yes, what was Avraham Avinu innovating? He understood.

He says, **"When this eisan (strong one) was weaned,"** because he is the eisan, the strong person. He was a pillar of the world, now he is an eisan. This is built on the fact that eisanim are strong. Yes, eisan is spirit, it says. I think he means apparently more the strength. Why? Because he holds up the world, he brought back the Creator to the people. It appears that one must have strength to go against the entire world, and be a strong force, a strong... that upon him stands the next faith, the correct faith.

When Did Avraham Begin to Think?

Speaker 2:

He began to wander in his mind, he began to walk around in his mind, he began to think a lot, to walk around in beautiful thoughts. He was no more than three years old, he stopped nursing. He was no more than three years old. Literally, two three years old. "And Yitzchak was weaned," this means two years old simply. The midrash means it... He stopped nursing. Simple peshat means knowledge. By Yitzchak himself there are opinions that this means three years old. But simple peshat means, when he began to be able to think a bit on his own.

He began to wander in his mind, and the Rambam says **"and he was small,"** he was still small. He began to think, he began to think deeply in his mind.

What did he begin to do? **He began to think day and night,** he began to think about the sun and about the moon. He thought during the day and at night. He thought about day and night.

Also, he will say, **"And he was amazed how it could be that this sphere is conducted always and it has no conductor."** How can it be that the sphere turns and no one turns it? **"And who turns it?"** Perhaps it turns itself? It turns all the time, and who turns it?

The Parallel to Foundations of Torah Chapter 1

Speaker 2:

This is basically what it says in Foundations of Torah Chapter 1, that the sphere turns always, and it's impossible that it should turn without a mover, it would turn always. He says, Avraham Avinu knew this. That means, he knew about the spheres, he didn't know about the Aristotelians who only know about the forms. But on this itself he struggled.

Why Didn't He Have a Teacher?

Speaker 2:

And why didn't he go to Chanoch or Metushelach, I don't know? **"He had no teacher."** He says, look, **"He had no teacher."** Why didn't they live there? I don't know.

"And who turns it? For it's impossible that it should turn itself." This he knew, that it cannot turn itself. This he grasped.

"And he had no teacher and no one to inform him of anything, but he was immersed in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idol worshippers."

Speaker 1:

So why didn't he go to Chanoch?

Speaker 2:

Perhaps they didn't live near him? Until they didn't make themselves known to the world that he should understand differently. He didn't have any foundation by himself.

Speaker 1:

Alone, this he didn't say.

Avraham Was an Idol Worshipper

Speaker 2:

"And his father and mother and all the people were idol worshippers, and he was worshipping with them." He was also an idol worshipper, why? Because that's how they taught him. **"But his heart was wandering and wondering,"** his heart was always struggling, wandering.

Very nice, he goes poor thing there in the house of idolatry with Terach, and while he is there he walks somewhere else. He stands there, but his heart is somewhere else. He turns with the sphere and he tries to figure out what's going on here, why does this turn by itself?

Avraham's Achievement: The Path of Truth and the Line of Righteousness

Speaker 2:

"Until he grasped the path of truth," until he understood the path of truth, the true way. **"And understood the line of righteousness,"** he understood the line of righteousness, the straight line, the equal line, the correct line.

Perhaps line of righteousness means practical halacha, what one should do, as we will see. Line of righteousness, one would say, means the path of mitzvah, but we're not yet at the path of mitzvah. Perhaps he means Avraham Avinu learned the way of Hashem. Perhaps the path of mitzvah, perhaps the way of Hashem.

Perhaps line of righteousness means that you have two things: there is that you must know that there is a Creator, and there is also that you must still serve the Creator, "to serve Him and bow down to Him." Perhaps this is the line of righteousness, that this is already the action, which strengthens the faith.

The Four Conclusions of Avraham Avinu

Speaker 2:

"From his correct understanding," with his own understanding, no one taught him this.

"And he knew," he became aware, he grasped, he made a conclusion:

- **"That there is one God,"** that there is only one single Creator. And all others held that there are multiple spheres, there are multiple gods, multiple powers.

- **"And He conducts the sphere,"** He leads the sphere

- **"And He created everything,"** He created everything

- **"And there is no god in all of existence except Him,"** there is no power, no force, there is no god except Him, except the one God.

They all knew about the sphere, but they thought that the sphere is a god, or one of the stars is a god, and the like. Avraham Avinu understood that god doesn't mean that at all, because it cannot turn itself, there must be one God who leads the sphere and He made everything, so automatically He is the only God.

From a Small Truth to the Entire Truth

Speaker 2:

And not only did Avraham Avinu know, he also learned. The error began from a small... everything began from a small error, and all truth also began from a small bit of truth. The bit of truth that a sphere cannot turn itself brought him to understand the entire truth truly. It's also the entire truth. There's nothing more that there is. But with this he understood the four things that he counts. But it's all the same thing, but it began with wanting to understand how the sphere turns.

Alright, but if you remember in that chapter, it's not so simple. One must learn in other places to precisely understand the proof. Anyway, but besides this he knew another thing. He also knew the entire chapter 1. He knew both the Foundations of Torah, and also knew the Laws of Idolatry.

Avraham Understood the Source of the Error

Speaker 2:

"And he knew that the entire world errs." He knew that... He understood the matter with such clear conviction that it must be that all others are erring. But **the thing that caused them to err...** He understood at least the prophets were, that one should only serve the Creator.

Avraham Avinu wasn't only innovating the unity of Hashem. This is perhaps... I also already knew, Avraham Avinu was innovating something about the prohibition of idolatry. This he knew, that this is the source of the error. Where did the error happen? Because he feels that this is the source of the error.

Discussion: When Did Avraham Understand Everything?

Speaker 1:

What he says, do a percent, I'm a strange selector, Avraham Avinu is a selector. It's interesting, the Rambam made a pass, which the Raavad says that there's a dispute, there are great ones of the world who say three, there are those who say differently.

Speaker 2:

No, but the Rambam himself says both opinions, because he says that when he was weaned he began, and the final when he had the clarity... It could be that the forty years old was when he understood the idolatry that you're saying, the Laws of Idolatry, that one must throw away everything else. There is the essence of the Creator, but... the essence of the Creator exclusively.

Speaker 1:

Very good, no, it's very good, because the Rambam understood that this is a deep thing. The one who thinks that it's just some easy thing, every boy can ask the question, that's true. To understand that the sphere runs, it's true, the basic question perhaps every boy can ask. But to bring out the entire thing correctly, took another thirty-seven years, and to decide that everyone is erring, is also great courage.

Ah, but I thought now, that I grasp, he didn't just decide that everyone is erring, he also understood why they are erring. Perhaps if he wouldn't have understood this, he wouldn't have been able. Perhaps I'm right.

Speaker 2:

No, I also understand what you're saying, it's part of... It's no wisdom to be Avraham Avinu in my speaking. It's also a kind of theory, it's also sympathy. He didn't hold that they are a bunch of fools. They are fine, poor fools, poor heretics. The entire idolatry comes out as they come... It's his way. Here one sees Avraham Avinu's chesed. He didn't just look down on them, but he understood how their error comes.

Laws of Idolatry – Chapter 1 Law 3 (Continuation) – Avraham Avinu's Way of Explaining, His Actions, and the Continuation to Yitzchak and Yaakov

Avraham Avinu's Sympathy to Those Who Err – He Didn't Consider Them Fools

Perhaps if he wouldn't have understood this he wouldn't have been able to do so. Perhaps I'm right, no, I also understand what, it's part of it's no wisdom to be Avraham Avinu. It's also something sympathetic, he didn't hold they are a bunch of fools. They are fine poor fools, poor heretics, who have... the entire prohibition of idolatry comes out as they come. It's a nice way, it's also... Rabbi at least, he innovated a new thing, prohibition of idolatry, so that it shouldn't become again the error.

If he would have had gevurah, he could have said, they are fools, and he would never have understood the root problem of idolatry. So somewhat slightly. Still, he was a tzaddik, he knew the Creator, he says everyone, he thinks they are wicked. Ah, very good, also, if he would have had gevurah, one would never have thought that they will fix anyone, because they don't understand how their error comes, they would have had to separate from the world. Everyone is crazy, there is one good person who understands the truth.

Rabbi Avraham held that people are not so crazy, at least one must understand their error, finally they can be explained to.

"And He Broke the Idols" – With Arguments, Not With Hands

Laws of Idolatry Chapter 1, Law 3 (end) and Law 4 – Yaakov Avinu, the Tribe of Levi, Egypt, and Moshe Rabbeinu

Yaakov Avinu's Education and the Role of the Tribe of Levi

The Rambam's Words: Yaakov Taught All His Children

Speaker 1:

It's not so simple, one must know how to answer each person according to his wisdom, according to his time.

And Yaakov Avinu taught all his sons, Yaakov Avinu taught his children, all of them, unlike Avraham and Yitzchak who only taught Yaakov, Eisav didn't understand... he didn't have any yishuv hadaas (settled mind), he didn't want to learn. Yaakov taught all his children, this was his complete gift.

Levi is Designated as the Head

But **"vayavdel Levi vayimnehu rosh"**, he took a kind of successor, that is Levi, and appointed him the head of the tribes, **"vayoshivehu beyeshiva lilmod derech Hashem"**, he taught him the way of Hashem, **"velishmor mitzvos Avraham"**, this is as it says "ki tzivah es banav ve'es beiso acharav veshamru derech Hashem," yes? "Lema'an asher tzivah es banav ve'es beiso acharav veshamru derech Hashem," these are the commandments of Avraham, very good.

"Vetzivah es banav shelo yafsiku mizera Levi memuneh achar memuneh", that the tribe of Levi should always carry the service, the job of transmitting the truth, memuneh achar memuneh, each generation **"kedei shelo tishtakach halimud"**.

Discussion: The Sources for Levi's Role as Teacher

Speaker 2:

Ah, this means that we already see in Yaakov's blessing that Levi is the kohen who teaches. Okay. Yoru mishpatecha leYaakov.

Speaker 1:

Yoru mishpatecha leYaakov, I mean it says in the blessing, no?

Speaker 2:

How does it say Avraham Avinu said?

Speaker 1:

Chalak Yaakov... not Avraham Avinu, sorry, Yaakov said "achalkem beYaakov afitzem beYisrael," about Shimon and Levi.

Speaker 2:

Shimon and Levi, yes, achalkem beYaakov, the Gemara learned that this means they will teach. Moshe said "yoru mishpatecha leYaakov," that should be by you.

From Individuals to a Nation

Speaker 1:

"Vehaya hadavar holech umitgaber bivnei Yaakov vehanilvim aleihem", the truth was becoming stronger and stronger. "Vehanilvim aleihem" means not only the people, but also the converts, also other people. Bnei Noach hanilvim el Hashem, as it says in the Megillah "vechol hanilvim aleihem," yes? That a convert must also make Purim.

"Vena'asu ba'olam umah sheyode'as es Hashem", until now they were individuals, they became a large group, now they became a nation, a community that teaches the knowledge of Hashem. Very good, yes.

Speaker 2:

Ah, interesting, yes.

Speaker 1:

This is the Rambam's interpretation. From individuals to thousands and myriads is a nation. A nation.

Discussion: The Parallel to the Development of Idolatry

Speaker 2:

It's interesting, because by the error it was also like this. First there were individuals who taught an error, and the individuals still held the truth to the side of the error.

Speaker 1:

Ay, good. It became a nation until the entire world became complete.

The part of Avraham Avinu is the whole thing that he learned melamed daas kolti, he learned the way of piety from idolatry and used it against them. In the good way.

After that there was a story of the Egypt problem.

Law 4 – The Descent to Egypt

Length of Days in Egypt

Speaker 1:

"Ad sof arba me'os shanah", it's also the truth, it seems it is known and also made known, yes? Because the work of Avraham didn't end, one must continue to make known to each person.

But **"ad she'heerichu hayamim leYisrael beMitzrayim vechazru lilmod ma'aseihem"**, yes, here a problem occurred. He stands at "vayavo'u me'es mehem," yes, here he holds "arichus hayamim" causes great destruction. Too long. Yes, **"vechazru lilmod ma'aseihem"**, which means from there a whole word to fix, fresh to fix on what goes through time.

"Vechazru lilmod ma'aseihem vela'avod avodah zarah kemosam", among the Egyptians. As it says in Yechezkel a lot... vechazru lilmod ma'aseihem from the Egyptians. Yes, what there it doesn't say so clearly.

The Tribe of Levi Held Fast

It's in brief, come hear, every word the Rambam divided the words, one cannot write it before this. **"Chutz mishevet Levi"**. That they indeed succeeded, because they remembered that they must teach each person. The wall of the commandments of the fathers, **"ume'olam lo avad shevet Levi avodah zarah"**. Yes, tremendous.

And Moshe is indeed from the tribe of Levi, apparently this is the word, right?

Speaker 2:

The Brisker Rav in Torah brings the Shalmi Emunim Sukkos, this is the... okay, from this we see further by the calf. Because they simply other Jews, they barely that one had just a few minutes ago repented from Egypt, fell back. But Levi was still...

Discussion: Whether the Tribe of Levi Didn't Work on Buildings for Idolatry

Speaker 1:

It could be that the Rambam thought something like that in Egypt they built temples for idolatry and only the tribe of Levi didn't participate in the work.

Speaker 2:

You mean the buildings that were made... a bit Rambam it was something... could be one researched it. But perhaps one didn't proceed in Egypt as it was...

Speaker 1:

No, he says, except the kohanim who are like the tribe of Levi, they didn't have to do any work.

Speaker 2:

It could be that the first Jews voluntarily participated in building the structures.

Speaker 1:

Okay, perhaps it goes both together. The Rambam...

"Kimeat Kat" – One More Minute Remained

This is the source for what people say, the piece in the Rambam, "kimeat kat," is the source for why all Chassidic books say that there was one more minute remaining in the fiftieth gate (sha'ar hachamishim), and they wouldn't have been able to leave. It says in the Rambam, it uses the language sha'ar hachamishim. But the idea is, they stay there a little longer, "and the root that Avraham Avinu planted would have been uprooted." Just as earlier it said "Avraham planted an eshel," what remains is only "uprooted," what he had planted.

"Kimeat vechazru bnei Yaakov lit'ot ha'amim veta'ayatam". The error of Enosh, Enosh himself erred, the error, yes, "ta'ut ha'amim." Well, the translation, "asher chalak lahem lit'ot bema'ahem." Yes, idolatry, it's interesting, ah, "lit'ot bema'ahem." "Veta'ayatam," they mislead you. They also began to wander and err with the... a little longer.

Discussion: Is This the Same Old Error of Enosh?

Speaker 2:

But here he doesn't tell us clearly that they began again with the same error, that the stars have power, or...

Speaker 1:

No, he says that they began to be drawn after the nations who were stuck in the error, and they would forget. But the same old error?

Speaker 2:

Yes, the same old error that one forgets the Almighty. Not the specific teaching of Enosh.

Speaker 1:

This is the same teaching of Enosh. It's the same error. There's no new way, or did they have to answer at all?

Speaker 2:

No, it seems that the stumbling block of seeing only idolatry, thinking that's the whole thing... that's always a danger, not just something that happened once.

The Difference Between the First Time and Later

Speaker 1:

It could be that the first time it needed explanations, afterwards it's already... for thousands of years they've been doing it this way. The nations don't need any explanation anymore. They say, you don't need an explanation, this is the rabbi, and the rabbi does it this way, and he does it this way.

So the certain way that the Rambam says here, the first reason here was, is more of an explanation of how Adam Harishon supposedly knew about Hashem, how the error began at all. But later one doesn't know a purpose at all, it's not a question. The novelty is that one does know, not that one doesn't know.

The Egyptians Never Followed Avraham at All

And one can say that the Egyptians never followed Avraham Avinu at all. It could be that they remained with the error all those years. How the Jews developed, it could be that they became paganized, and they no longer thought about the truth. And it's not as difficult as the Jews forgetting again.

Speaker 2:

No, one must forget, and nature is what forgets. As was said, the nature of human beings, following bad neighbors. One doesn't need an explanation anymore, because after all, even today, it's difficult.

Speaker 1:

But not if you live after the first creation, the experience stopped being a new world that was maintained in brit milah (covenant of circumccircumcision).

Speaker 2:

Okay, maybe, maybe, but we don't have there, okay, that perhaps the critics have a question here. But truly the novelty is to know, not the novelty is not to know.

Speaker 1:

The Rambam indeed began as you say, because from the critics one cannot begin to say that no one knew. But certainly where we hold, the novelty is to know, the novelty is not to know the same thing.

Avraham Avinu made a whole enactment, perhaps maybe so that one should remember, but after a while, one mixes with the nations, one sees that the whole side fears the idolatry, not because fearing will become like the matter he writes, because fearing from a simple one will forget the idolatry.

Halacha 4 (Continued) – Moshe Rabbeinu's Mission

Me'ahavat Hashem Otanu – The Almighty Made a Shortcut

Speaker 1:

The Rambam says here beautiful words, **me'ahavat Hashem otanu**, because the Almighty loves us, as it says in the verse, me'ahavat Hashem etchem lakach nekmat al amim, yes? The oath that already told us that He made an oath to Avraham Avinu, that He remained eternally with his children?

Speaker 2:

No, but it says in the Torah.

Speaker 1:

Ah, we can promise for those who know from the Torah. **Asah Moshe Rabbeinu**. No, He made Moshe our rabbi. And took the Jew who ate Moshe made for Moshe Rabbeinu. The Rav thinks promises all the prophets and sent him.

Discussion: Why a Shortcut Through Moshe?

And I think and the shortcut says he, why here did the Almighty make a shortcut, because it was a shortcut. Because why couldn't He again take a person who should have the truth and spread his teachings, but that takes from them, it takes forty years.

Because the oath of Avraham Avinu wanted, it means that there should be an umah yoda'at Hashem (a nation that knows Hashem). The whole novelty of Avraham Avinu was not simply that one person knows, one person knows, one can always grasp philosophy. The novelty is that there's an umah yoda'at Hashem, and if the nation would lose their continuity, their continuation from Avraham Avinu, it would be very difficult.

But Moshe Rabbeinu could again do what Avraham Avinu originally did, but we weren't told, because it came as a shortcut, and it wouldn't have been any Avraham Avinu. Very good, very good.

Part of the yedi'at Hashem (knowledge of Hashem) is that we are from Avraham Avinu, something is missing. One cannot simply if someone enacts again from scratch completely.

Speaker 2:

Ha, it would have been again from scratch, as if perhaps I can't.

Speaker 1:

Yes, it's difficult. If something is already over it has power.

"Asah Moshe Rabbeinu" – The Almighty Created Him

He created him, but He created him like every person. Later a teacher of Israel, and wise. He took him so that he should be created as Moshe of Israel from Moshe. What is a language of the verse, He very well sent and the prophets. The prophets sent. Moshe Rabbeinu.

"Vayivchar Hashem BeYisrael LeNachalah" – He Crowned Them with Mitzvot

Vayivchar Hashem vayivchar Hashem beYisrael lenachalah when he was perhaps with the same level of prophecy of Moshe. When He took one Jew and He made him the main prophet, He thereby made that all Jews who will follow him will be his inheritance.

I do mitzvot, they were given the crown of mitzvot yes the at the giving at Har Sinai. The the the giving through His service... taught me for the Jews who are driving, but it says?

The Parallel Between Avraham's Wisdom and Moshe's Prophecy

The giving through service is also very similar to help. They were shown the derech Hashem (way of Hashem), which Avraham Avinu had previously known. The same language that I said earlier, about the liars, about the false prophecy, and he added the language of the way of service. They will be similar, like all these ways of service.

Speaker 2:

Very good.

Speaker 1:

The power didn't say for the genius, the Almighty truly said to Moshe Rabbeinu, and he doesn't just say how he serves the Almighty in mitzvot. They will be similar, the destruction of idolatry and all the errors after it. Very beautiful.

Avraham's Wisdom vs. Moshe's Laws

And this is the next very beautiful thing. One sees here that everything that Avraham Avinu removed with wisdom, Moshe Rabbeinu eventually did with prophecy. Also the way that Avraham Avinu removed the error of idolatry, and Moshe Rabbeinu also received the destruction of idolatry and all the errors after it.

What shouldn't be the same, there are parts, for example one mitzvot, love, fear, and Moshe makes a law, it means according to the same principles, but it could be the laws for Moshe Rabbeinu are according to what he holds.

Summary of Chapter 1 – The Difference Between Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu

The Difference Between Avraham's and Moshe's Approach in Dealing with Idolatry

There is also the way that Avraham Avinu explained the error of idolatry, and Moshe Rabbeinu also received this, the judgment of idolatry and all who err after it.

Question: Why Must It Be the Same?

Why must it be the same? There are differences. For example, love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, Moshe Rabbeinu forbade. It's not according to the same principles. It could be that the laws of Moshe Rabbeinu are not according to the same principles.

The Fundamental Difference: Avraham Avinu Was Not Yet His Own Nation

Another thing that is different is, Avraham Avinu was not yet his own nation. He had love, it came with sympathy. But Moshe Rabbeinu, there's already a separate nation, one doesn't need to care so much for the other people anymore. Can already come with prophecy.

Like Avraham Avinu, he said **"kol hato'im acharehah"**, he means to say, he's crazy, one shouldn't kill him. He's crazy, one shouldn't kill him. Avraham Avinu didn't kill anyone.

By Moshe Rabbeinu, yes, you're right, that's a difference. But it will say later a bit.

The Rambam's Structure: Chapter 1 is an Introduction

Okay, this is the first chapter of Hilchot Avodah Zarah (Laws of Idolatry), and seemingly this is truly the introduction, and the judgment of idolatry, that's what we'll learn from further on, chapter 2 and onwards.

Just as the beginning of Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah) he explains the basics so that one should understand what the world is and one should understand what the Almighty is, here he explains the negative side, what idolatry is and how it developed, and how the truth emerged from there.