

# Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 2 (Auto Translated)

English

Auto Translated

## Shiur Overview

### Summary of the Lecture – Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 2, Laws 1-4

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#### Introduction to the Chapter

The first chapter explained the "slippery slope" of idolatry – how it developed from Adam HaRishon's generation until Enosh, how Avraham Avinu fought against it, how it further developed, and how Moshe Rabbeinu saved us. The second chapter transitions to the actual laws – the essential mitzvos of idolatry.

The chapter is divided into two parts: the first half discusses **not believing in idolatry** (matters of faith/knowledge), and the second half discusses **blasphemy**, which the Rambam himself has a difficult question about why it appears here, and he attempts to answer.

Idolatry is in a certain sense **the opposite of Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Chapter 1** – the unity of Hashem and the conception of Hashem. But idolatry also has its own dimension of **faith** – not just action. The language in the Gemara "**hamodeh ba'avodah zarah**" means one who believes in idolatry (that it has power), even without serving it.

#### Innovation: The Connection Between Idolatry and Heresy/Atheism

People generally think that first there is a distinction between atheists (who don't believe in any higher power) and believers (who do believe), and then, **within** the believers, there is a question of who is the true God. But according to the Rambam **this makes no sense** as two separate categories. Because:

- An idolater thinks that a **created being** (a sphere, an angel, a star) is "God." He indeed calls it a "higher power," but his "higher power" **is not a higher power at all** – it is a lower, created thing.
- If someone is already at the "true end" of idolatry – he has forgotten about the First Creator – **he is also an atheist**, because he doesn't believe in the true higher power.
- **It turns out to be a terrible thing:** whoever doesn't understand divinity – doesn't believe.

This is the foundation of the Rambam's position that **whoever believes that Hashem is a body – is a heretic**. Because a body is a created being, and whoever believes that a created being is God, doesn't believe in the true Creator. One must **know in which Creator we believe** – simply saying "I believe in a Creator" without understanding what that means, accomplishes nothing.

#### Innovation: Answer to the Ramban's Question on the Rambam (Parshas Shemos / Moreh Nevuchim)

The **Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim** learns that when Moshe asked "mah shemo" – the Jews were asking **whether there is a God**, because they didn't know. The **Ramban (Parshas Shemos)** asks: how can it be that Jews didn't

believe in any God? Perhaps idolatry – that can be. But that they should **not believe at all** in God?

The **answer** according to the Rambam's approach: it is **the same thing**. Certainly the Jews in Egypt believed in "some higher power" – but they **didn't know about "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh"**, about the true understanding of the existence of Hashem. And according to the Rambam, **this is equivalent to not believing** – because their "higher power" is not the true higher power.

[Note: **Today** the situation is different – the Rambam, the Baal Shem Tov, and others have done so much work that almost no Jew believes that Hashem is a body. Everyone understands that Hashem is "beyond everything."]

[**Digression:** Seemingly the greatest concern of idolatry today is someone who gives **powers to his rebbe** more than appropriate, and makes him into a "mediating power" – like idolatry. But it's not so simple, because the Rambam only speaks when the person has **forgotten** that there is a God above that – and if he does remember, it's different.]

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### Law 1 – The Essential Commandment Regarding Idolatry

#### The Rambam's Words

**"The essential commandment regarding idolatry – not to worship any of the created beings, not an angel, not a sphere, not a star, not one of the four elements, and not any of the beings created from them. And even though the worshiper knows that Hashem is the God, and worships this created being in the manner that Enosh and the people of his generation initially worshiped – behold he is an idolater."**

**"And this matter is what the Torah warned against, as it says 'lest you lift your eyes to the heavens and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and bow down to them and worship them, which Hashem your God has apportioned to all the peoples' – meaning that He apportioned them to illuminate the entire world, for them to be living and coming into being and perishing according to the way of the world."**

#### Simple Meaning

The essential mitzvah of idolatry is: one should not serve any created being – not an angel, not a sphere, not a star, not any of the four elements (fire, wind, water, earth), and not anything made from them. **Even** when the worshiper knows that Hashem is the true God, and he serves the created being only because he thinks that Hashem gave it honor (as Enosh and his generation did) – **behold he is an idolater**.

The source is the verse "lest you lift your eyes to the heavens" – when a person looks at the sky and sees the sun, moon, and stars, he can come to a logical error: because they indeed run

the world (this is true), he thinks that one must serve them. Against this the Torah warned.

### Innovations and Explanations

#### 1) The list of created beings matches Yesodei HaTorah Chapter 2:

The Rambam's list here – angels, spheres, stars, four elements, and everything made from them – is **exactly the same list** as in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Chapter 2, where he describes all types of created beings. This underscores the principle: **there is one Creator, and all others are created beings** – and no created being may be worshiped.

#### 2) "Essential commandment" – the essence of idolatry is the concept, not the worship:

If a scholar were asked "what is the essence of idolatry?", he would answer with types of worship – bowing, incense, libation, slaughter. But the Rambam says: **the essence of idolatry is to serve a created being**. How one serves – these are already details. The essence is the **concept** that one serves something that is not the Creator.

#### 3) "Even though the worshiper knows that Hashem is the God" – the great innovation:

**Even** when the person knows that Hashem is the Creator, and he serves the created being only because he thinks that Hashem **wants** one to give honor to the created being (because He placed it in the heavens with such splendor – "filled with radiance and emanating light") – **he is an idolater**. The person thinks that he is giving honor to Hashem by serving the star, but this is nevertheless idolatry.

#### 4) Why is this idolatry – the "stumbling block" reasoning:

If the person himself knows that Hashem is the Creator, why is he an idolater? He is **not an atheist** – he does remember that Hashem is above the created being!

The answer: **He will cause others to stumble**. His son will already forget about Hashem and will only serve the created being. **He is the only case** where he still remembers – but he creates a reality that leads to forgetting Hashem.

In a way one can say that **the essence of idolatry has an element of "bein adam l'chaveiro"** – causing others to stumble. This fits with what we learned in Chapter 1 about **Avraham Avinu's chesed** – his fight against idolatry was a kindness to people, bringing them back to truth. **The flaw in Hashem comes through the flaw in other people**.

#### 5) "In the manner that Enosh worshiped" – the Rambam is consistent:

The Rambam brings Enosh as the paradigm of idolatry. This is **consistent with his approach** from Chapter 1, where he explained that Enosh's generation began serving stars not because they forgot about Hashem, but because they **thought** that Hashem wants one to give them honor. The Rambam understands that **Enosh essentially believed in Hashem** – and nevertheless he was an idolater. The Rambam has no clear source that Enosh's generation had a "bit of Torah" – it is a *\*necessity\**, "otherwise it cannot be."

#### 6) "You shall have no other gods before Me" – "before Me" also means "with Me":

The verse is applied to this case: **not only "against Me," but also "with Me"** – even together with Hashem, one may not serve a created being.

#### 7) The "slippery slope" – why the "sensible" idolater is worse:

Precisely the worship that "makes more sense" – which is viewed as a lesser sin – is a much greater sin. Because a person who does absurd things (like literally believing that a stone is God), no one will learn from him – he is a fool. But the "slippery slope" begins precisely from one who makes sense – who says "it is appropriate to honor the stars because they run the world." From him others learn, and by the children Hashem is already forgotten.

This is underscored with a practical point: "Since most people don't understand what one believes – that's in the head, and that's not seen. One sees what one bows to." Consequently, the children only see the action – the bowing to a created thing – and think that this is the essence.

[Digression: In places where certain created things are strongly emphasized, even when one says "b'torach sarsa" (i.e., one explains that it is only an intermediary), "the children don't know the distinction, the children say it literally." "Our rebbe was very strongly opposed to making anyone into a god."]

#### 8) Obligation of stoning according to the Rambam:

Such a person (who serves stars out of honor) is liable to stoning – "there is no doubt that according to the Rambam he is liable to stoning" – because the Rambam said that this is "the essence of idolatry," not just a rabbinic stringency. He would not have said "the essence of idolatry with all its wickedness is this" if it were only rabbinic. (A second approach – perhaps he is not liable to stoning, but he "begins the matter of idolatry" – is not developed.)

#### 9) The Ramban's position regarding the definition of idolatry:

According to the Ramban (in his sermon "Toras Hashem Temimah") this is not just a "fence" (safeguard), but the very prohibition of idolatry. When it says "you shall have no other gods," it means even one who knows that Hashem is the Creator, but thinks that one must give honor to His creations. The Ramban elaborates that asking an angel for something is literally the prohibition of idolatry.

#### 10) Simple meaning of "lift your eyes" – wandering in thought:

"Lest you lift your eyes to the heavens" means not just physically looking at the sky, but *\*contemplating\** – "wandering with your eyes, with your heart." The word "eye" in Torah often means thinking, like "the wise man's eyes are in his head." The verse means two things: one looks, and one contemplates. "Lift your eyes and see" – both together.

#### 11) Simple meaning of "which Hashem has apportioned to all the peoples":

The Rambam interprets this difficult verse not like other commentators (that Hashem "allocated" other gods to other nations). The Rambam interprets: Hashem indeed gave power to the stars to govern – **"for them to be living and coming into being and perishing according to the way of the world"**. This goes back to Yesodei HaTorah Chapter 2: the stars themselves are "living" but not "coming into being and perishing" (they don't die). But with their movements they govern the four elements, which *\*are\** coming into being and perishing. "To all the peoples" means everything that follows the four elements – people, animals, all created beings of the

world of creation. The truth is that the stars indeed govern "all the peoples" – including you. But the error is to \*serve\* them because of this.

## 12) The next verse – "But you Hashem took" – and the connection to the Exodus from Egypt:

The Rambam doesn't bring the continuation of the verse: "But you Hashem took and brought out from the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be His people of inheritance as this day." But according to the Rambam's approach, the verse would have been a beautiful continuation: at the Exodus from Egypt, Hashem revealed Himself to the Jews, and there the Jews saw that Hashem is the direct ruler of everything.

## 13) The Torah speaks to the wise, not to fools:

The Rambam's warning is directed to the wise who can think logically: "Ah, it is appropriate to honor the stars." The idolater that the Torah addresses is not one who unfortunately convinces himself that Hashem is the sun – but one who knows that Hashem is the Creator, but thinks that one must also give honor to His creations.

## 14) The distinction between contemplating creation for the sake of Heaven and idolatry:

The Rambam said earlier (in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah) that looking and contemplating the creation – the stars, the spheres – is part of serving Hashem. But here there can be a problem: instead of looking \*further\* to Hashem, one stops at the creation itself. The distinction: when one says "the Master over all creation" and speaks about the heavens and stars, one doesn't say "you are so beautiful, heavens" – one says "You are so great, Creator, You created such beautiful heavens." The direct language goes only to Hashem. And the sun itself is described as "doing with love the will of its Creator" – it bows to Him, not the reverse.

## 15) The Chassidic approach – "one may look at the heavens":

One may look at the heavens and think further – only about Hashem who made them. Instead of feeling subservient to the celestial bodies, a person should think: just as the heavens serve Hashem, so do I serve Hashem. **"I am to Hashem like the sun, and the sun and I are both servants of Hashem."** Although theoretically the heavens are higher than us, **regarding Hashem we are all equal.** Our role is even to be higher than the heavens – as it says **"and He brought him outside"** (Bereishis 15:5).

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## Law 1 (Continued) – "To Make Them an Intermediary Between Him and Hashem"

### The Rambam's Words

The Rambam continues that even to make an **intermediary (sarsur)** between you and Hashem is also forbidden, and this is also "the essence of idolatry."

### Simple Meaning

Not only directly serving a star, but even asking an angel to go ask Hashem, is idolatry.

### Innovations

#### 1) The Ramban's interpretation of "Beware lest your heart be deceived":

The Ramban interprets that the commandment (Devarim 11:16) means **"and your heart becomes haughty and you forget"** – your heart should not follow the error. He asks:

what is the "your heart be deceived"? What is so attractive? He answers: **because it is true** – they indeed have great power and great influence on us. The Ramban interprets: **"that you should not turn in contemplation toward them"** – one should not be misled in contemplating them. **The error is a very subtle error** – because the fact that they have great influence on us is true. The error only happens when one says: "Okay, therefore I must serve them themselves."

#### 2) The Ramban's key word "sarsur":

The Ramban says: **"that you should not turn in contemplation toward them to worship them, to make them an intermediary between you and your Creator"** – one should not think that the celestial bodies, the angels and hosts, can be an intermediary between us and our Creator.

#### 3) Innovation: The distinction between intermediary "down" and intermediary "up":

**They can indeed be an intermediary** – but only in one direction. Hashem sends abundance through angels, seraphim, as we learned in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah – this is the intermediary **from above downward**. But **back from you to Hashem** – you cannot use them by praying to them.

#### 4) Question: But angels do elevate prayers!

In the **Gemara** it says that angels elevate prayers – this is explicit. When a person prays, there are angels who bring up the prayer.

The answer: **This is not your focus, not your service.** There is no contradiction that he is indeed an intermediary – but you don't need to be focused on that. As proof: **Moshe Rabbeinu** himself, who tells us **"Beware lest your heart be deceived"**, he is also an intermediary between Hashem and the Jews – **but one does not serve him, one may not serve him, he is a created being.**

#### 5) The distinction between asking an angel and serving an angel:

Even according to those who **do permit** saying to the angel "I ask you, angel, carry my prayer to Hashem" – **you have not served the angel**, you know he is only a messenger. But when the person begins to think: "Why do I need to serve Hashem? Let me serve the angel" – **this is the error.**

#### 6) The Rambam's stricter position:

According to the Rambam, **even asking angels to bring the prayer** would be problematic – because when one writes in the siddur that angels should bring the prayer, **your children will already think that the angels are the god.** According to the Rambam it would even be **wrong** when a person says: "I send my prayer, whoever should receive it." **One may not!** One must know: **I pray to Hashem.**

#### 7) A new interpretation of "to make them":

**"To make them"** doesn't mean that they **are** an intermediary (because that is indeed true). **"To make them" means: to make them worshiped** – that is, to serve them **because** they are an intermediary. The distinction between an angel (messenger) and a sarsur (intermediary that one serves): an angel brings from Hashem to you, but **back from you to Hashem you cannot use them by serving them.**

#### 8) What does "serve" mean?

The Rambam doesn't say here that it is forbidden to believe that they have a role – but **"do not worship them"**, one may

not serve them. **"In their uprightness they serve"** – they serve Hashem, but you may not serve them.

### 9) What does **"benefits and harms"** mean?

The Rambam will soon say that one may not even say that he has power, **"that he benefits and harms"**. **"Benefits and harms" doesn't mean simply that he brings good or bad** (because even the weather "benefits and harms"), but **that he chooses how to benefit and harm** – that he has independent knowledge. **This is the prohibition: to think that he is independent of Hashem** – because no one is independent.

[Digression: The parable of the gabbai – when a person wants to become close to a rebbe, and instead of being "into" the rebbe, he is "into" the gabbai – he has figured out that the gabbai has the key, one doesn't need to be good with the rebbe at all, only with the gabbai. **This is a terrible chutzpah**. This is the point: when a person serves the angel instead of Hashem, he is like one who serves the gabbai instead of the rebbe.]

[Digression: Swearing in Moshe's name – the Rambam says that the custom of Israel is to swear in Moshe's name. The Gemara says "Moshe you speak well" – "Moshe" is a language of oath. It's not a problem, because a Jew inwardly knows that Moshe is a servant of Hashem, Moshe is not a god.]

[Digression: Graves of tzaddikim according to the Rambam – if one wants to be completely in accordance with the Rambam, **one doesn't even ask** the tzaddik to elevate the prayers – but one can say **"in the merit of the tzaddik"**. At the grave you don't speak to the tzaddik, you speak to Hashem. People think that the Rambam was against graves – but the Rambam himself went to the graves of the Patriarchs, and his children and grandchildren also did so. The Rambam doesn't deny that these things are holy places. **The point is that one doesn't serve them.**]

### 10) The controversy about **"bringing in mercy"**:

From the Rambam stems the great dispute about "bringing in mercy" (asking angels to bring in mercy before Hashem). The Rambam in his sermon says that he understood the Rambam, and he agrees that asking an angel for something is the prohibition of idolatry. [Note: "One can disagree with the Rambam, but one wants to disagree in the laws of idolatry with the Rambam..." – the Rambam seems very clear.]

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### Law 1 (End) – **"Do Not Turn to Idols" and the Prohibition of Reading Books of Idolatry**

#### The Rambam's Words

**"The Holy One Blessed Be He commanded us not to read those books at all, and not to contemplate them or any of their matters, and even to look at the form of the image is forbidden, as it says 'do not turn to idols'... 'lest you inquire about their gods saying how do they serve'... even do not ask about the manner of its worship what it is, even though you do not worship, for this thing causes one to turn after it and to do as they do, as it says 'and I will do likewise'."**

**"In the general prohibitions 'these are your gods', 'do not turn', 'and you shall guard yourselves', 'and lest you inquire' – is that one should not turn after**

**idolatry. Anyone who turns after it in a way that involves an action – receives lashes."**

#### Simple Meaning

The Rambam rules that one may not read books of idolatry, not contemplate their matters, not look at images of idolatry, and not even ask how one serves idolatry – even if one has no intention to serve. The reason is because it leads to being drawn after. All the verses together are one prohibition: one should not follow after idolatry. If one transgresses with an action – one receives lashes.

#### Innovations

##### 1) The compositions of idolaters:

The Rambam says: **"Many oaths the idolaters composed regarding their worship"** – idolaters authored many books. **"What is the essence of their worship"** – the root/theory of idolatry, **"and what are its laws and what are its practices"** – how to serve practically. Perhaps the first books were still "good books" – because one still remembered that there is a Creator (as we learned in Chapter 1). **"And what are its laws and what are its practices"** are already the practical instructions.

##### 2) Why books are a greater danger than the first error:

If only the first book from Enosh's generation had remained, the damage would not have been so great – because there it still said that there is a Creator. But because so many books accumulated over the generations, the error became so entrenched. Yet the Rambam says that even that first book one may not read – because it has been shown that people are "poor in their heads" (short of understanding) and become drawn.

##### 3) Innovation in the interpretation of **"do not turn to idols"**:

"Turn" doesn't mean serve, but **to turn one's heart** – like in the laws of prophecy that a prophet must have "his heart free." "Do not turn" means one should not direct the heart and mind there. This includes two things: (a) reading books of idolatry, (b) looking at images of idolatry. Both are under the same prohibition.

##### 4) Innovation in **"in the form of the image"** – why images are so dangerous:

The moment one makes an image for a power, the power becomes a "personality" – it receives human attributes. One begins to be "admiring and glorifying," and even fear becomes a human emotion. This is the "slippery slope" – from an abstract power to a personal being that one can serve. **It is easier to serve something visual than something abstract**. The source: **there is an explicit Gemara** that forbids looking at the form of the image from "do not turn to idols." On reading books alone there was not such a clear Gemara – the Rambam connects the two together under the same prohibition.

##### 5) Great innovation: **Each step is its own prohibition:**

The verse "lest you inquire about their gods saying how do they serve... and I will do likewise" – the simple interpretation would be that the verse only says "don't do like them." **The Rambam's innovation is that each step is its own separate prohibition:** (a) asking how they serve – forbidden, (b) being drawn – forbidden, (c) imitating –

forbidden. Even the first step – simply being curious and asking "what does the idolatry do?" – is already a prohibition in itself.

#### 6) Why is the power of attraction so strong?

Idolatry is **not crazy** – it has a logical basis. If idolatry were plainly crazy, there would be no danger in looking. But because "the books of our early ancestors" had **good stories** – people became very impressed – there is indeed a real danger that one will be drawn.

#### 7) The prohibition is a "fence" (safeguard):

The prohibition of reading books and looking at images is **not a prohibition in essence** but a **fence** – a safeguard against what "in the end one does what they did." The ultimate prohibition is the idolatry itself.

#### 8) Practical difference: The Rambam himself read books of idolatry:

From the fact that the prohibition is a "fence" against being drawn, one can understand that **if someone learns it only for history** – to understand the errors – **it is permitted**. The Rambam himself writes in Perush HaMishnayos and other places that he read books of idolatry, but "in a permitted manner" – to understand what their errors were.

#### 9) "In a way that involves an action" – what is an action?

If one turns after idolatry **without an action** (for example only thinking), it is a **prohibition without an action** – one doesn't receive lashes, but it is still a prohibition. If however one does an action – for example one buys the book and opens it – this is already an action and one receives lashes.

#### 10) Discussion: Is the prohibition the thinking or the looking?

**The prohibition is the looking at the book itself** – "do not turn" means turning oneself there, not just thinking. Even looking at the pictures without understanding what it means is already forbidden. "Turn" means **turning oneself there**, that is directing oneself to the idolatry.

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#### Law 2 – Prohibition of Thought That Uproots Principles of Torah

##### The Rambam's Words

**"And not only idolatry alone is it forbidden to turn after in thought, but any thought that causes a person to uproot a principle from the principles of Torah – we are warned not to bring it to our heart, and we should not divert our attention to it, and we should think and be drawn after the contemplations of the heart... for a person's understanding is limited, and not all minds can grasp the truth in its purity. And if every person is drawn after the thoughts of his heart, he is found destroying the world according to his limited understanding."**

**"Sometimes he strays after idolatry, and sometimes he contemplates the unity of the Creator whether He is or is not, above below before behind, and sometimes regarding prophecy whether it is true or not, and sometimes regarding the Torah whether it is from Heaven or not, and he doesn't know the measures by which to judge until he knows the truth in its purity, and he is found going out to heresy."**

**"And you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes which you go astray after them – meaning that each of you should be drawn after his limited understanding, and imagine that his thought grasps the truth."**

**"As our Sages said: after your heart – this is heresy, and after your eyes – this is promiscuity."**

**"And not only this, but this causes a person to drive him from the World to Come."**

##### Simple Meaning

Not only idolatry, but **any thought** that can bring a person to uproot a principle from the principles of Torah, is forbidden. One may not bring up such thoughts to the heart, because people's understanding is limited and not everyone can arrive at the truth. The source is the verse "and you shall not stray after your heart," which Chazal say "after your heart – this is heresy."

##### Innovations and Explanations

#### 1) The great principle – broader application of the prohibition:

From what we learned about idolatry – that thought alone is already forbidden – the Rambam derives that **any thought that can bring to uprooting a principle from the thirteen principles** (or specifically the principles of Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah) is forbidden. This also includes the coming of Mashiach and other principles.

#### 2) Question: How can one forbid thought when there is a mitzvah to think?

The Rambam himself says that there is a mitzvah **"to know that there is a First Existent"** – one must think and investigate! How can one simultaneously say that one may not think about this?

#### 3) Answer: "A person's understanding is limited":

**Most people don't have the abilities** to think also about the falsehoods and return to the truth. Perhaps **certain people** (individuals) can indeed think also about the sides of falsehood and return to the truth – but **many people get stuck with the falsehoods** and think that this is the conclusion. Therefore the Torah forbade it for **"every person"** – for every person.

#### 4) "Measures by which to judge" – this means logic:

**"Measures"** means here **logic** – the rules of correct thinking. **"Measures by which the mind is judged"** is basically logic: what is a proof? What is not a proof? What is good evidence? Most people haven't learned logic, they don't speak logic, and therefore when they contemplate the foundations of knowledge, they come out to heresy.

#### 5) The distinction: The prohibition is not to think – but to think without order:

**The prohibition is not to think about the unity of Hashem or the foundations of knowledge.** The prohibition is to think **"after the thoughts of your heart"** – to follow imagination instead of correct intellect. **"To be drawn after the contemplations of the heart, to wander after the contemplations of the heart"** – this is the prohibition. But one who knows the **"measures by which the mind is judged"**, for him this thinking is **certainly a mitzvah**. When one learns the Rambam in

Yesodei HaTorah, when one follows the correct measures, this is good.

**6) The verse "and you shall not stray" – a broader source than "do not turn to idols":**

"Do not turn to idols" only speaks about idolatry. But where does it say in the Torah that one should not wander after all other matters – the unity of the Creator, prophecy, Torah from Heaven? The answer is the verse **"and you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes"** – this is the broader source that includes all matters of the foundations of knowledge, not just idolatry.

**7) "And imagine that his thought grasps the truth" – even when he happens upon truth:**

A sharp innovation **by way of interpretation: even when the person happens to arrive at true conclusions, but his reasoning is nonsense** – he builds on a "gut-feeling" or a "gut-intuition" – **he transgresses "and you shall not stray"**. It doesn't say "and imagine that his thought grasps the truth" **and it is not truth**. Even when it happens to be true, but the way he arrived is through imagination and not through intellect – this is the prohibition. **A person must think "within" science and Torah, not from outside.**

**8) The parable of "the line of righteousness" – truth is narrow, falsehood is unlimited:**

**Avraham Avinu found the "line of righteousness" – and the line of righteousness**

**8) The parable of "the line of righteousness" – truth is narrow, falsehood is unlimited:**

**Avraham Avinu found the "line of righteousness" – and the line of righteousness is one small narrow line.** Truth is one small line, but **falsehood is "unlimited"**, fantasy and imagination are very large. When a person lets himself wander after his intellect without logic, **the chances that he will precisely arrive at the narrow line of righteousness are impossible.** Because the line of righteousness is not a place one arrives at suddenly – **one only arrives there when one thinks with intellect.**

**9) Avraham Avinu – no contradiction to the prohibition:**

Avraham Avinu did **not** wander. He **"thought straight"** – he had good powers of the soul, he could sit down and think in an orderly manner. **He indeed knew the "good measures"** – the rules of correct thinking. And if he hadn't known the measures, he **also would not have arrived at the truth.** The Rambam's problem is with **people who go thinking without any order, without any logic.**

**10) Even for an idolater – the harm of thinking without order:**

Even for an idolater, who has no prohibition of "and you shall not stray," this wandering without order is a problem – **"it will occur to him with a greater foolishness"**. A person who is "paranoid" or not orderly in his powers of the soul – he cannot arrive at truth.

**11) The Rambam's prohibition is not "within faith" but "within intellect":**

The Rambam doesn't say that one should think **"within limited bounds"** – according to faith. He says one should think **"within intellect"** – with clear rules. The prohibition is to think confusedly, not to think at all.

**12) Innovation in the interpretation of "destroying the world":**

Two interpretations:

- **First interpretation:** "Destroying the world" means a person destroys **his own worldview** – his personal "world" of faith becomes destroyed.

- **Second interpretation (the main one):** "Destroying the world" means **the social world** – the **settlement of the world** becomes destroyed. Not the physical world, but **the state, society**. Because if every person will come up every day with a new religion according to his limited understanding, the world will go crazy – everyone will have "ten thousand religions a day." This is the destruction of the settlement of the world – the social order collapses.

- Another aspect: his children will follow like him, and **they will be forced** – because they grow up with false beliefs.

**13) The emphasis on "every person":**

The Rambam's language "if **every** person is drawn" is precise – the emphasis is on **"every"**: if **each individual** follows his thoughts, the world will be destroyed. This is a systemic danger for the entire society.

**14) "After your eyes this is promiscuity" – why does the Rambam bring this here?**

**Seemingly promiscuity doesn't belong here** – it's a different prohibition. But the Rambam simply brings the source in its entirety. And it's interesting that **heresy and promiscuity are placed together** – both are matters where **"fantasy" is very strong** – imagination drags the person.

**15) "Causes a person to drive him from the World to Come" – without an action?**

This wandering after thoughts drags him away from the World to Come, from the knowledge that lives eternally. **Here is the prohibition to think** – to think crookedly, to think without logic. Whoever hasn't learned logic, **he transgresses with the journey to think.**

**16) Learning with tradition – not a problem:**

Someone who buys a Jewish book and learns **"with the aspect of faith, with tradition"** – this is not a problem, this is not a sin. The prohibition is only when one thinks without proper tools.

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**Law 3 – "The Mitzvah of Idolatry Corresponds to All the Mitzvos"**

The Rambam's Words

**"The mitzvah of idolatry corresponds to all the mitzvos, as it says 'and if you err and do not do all these mitzvos which Hashem spoke to Moshe,' and from oral tradition they learned that the verse speaks about idolatry."**

**"Anyone who acknowledges idolatry denies the entire Torah, and all the prophets, and all that the prophets were commanded from Adam until the end of the world, as it says 'from the day that Hashem commanded and onward.' And anyone who denies idolatry acknowledges the entire Torah, and it is the principle of all the mitzvos."**

**"A Jew who worshiped idolatry behold he is like a gentile in all matters... an apostate to idolatry behold he is an apostate to the entire Torah."**

**"And so not only idolaters but also heretics – they are not like Israel in any matter. And we do not accept them in repentance ever, as it says 'all who come to her do not return and do not reach the paths of life.' And it is forbidden to speak with them and to respond to them at all, as it says 'do not approach the entrance of her house.' And the thought of a heretic is toward idolatry."**

#### Simple Meaning

Idolatry is as severe as all the mitzvos together. One who "acknowledges idolatry" is automatically a denier of the entire Torah. And conversely, one who denies idolatry acknowledges the entire Torah. A Jew who serves idolatry is like a gentile in all matters, and an apostate to idolatry is an apostate to the entire Torah. Also heretics do not have the status of Israel, one does not accept them in repentance, and one may not converse with them.

#### Innovations

##### 1) "Corresponds to all the mitzvos" – two approaches:

(a) Idolatry is **as severe** as all the mitzvos together – it is a stringency. (b) Idolatry **has an effect on all other mitzvos** – when a person is an idolater, he cannot fulfill all other mitzvos, because idolatry is the **foundation** of everything.

##### 2) The language "acknowledges" and "denies" – not faith but agreement:

Chazal's language is not "believes in idolatry" but "acknowledges idolatry." This is a language of agreement – he agrees to idolatry. "Denial" is the opposite of "acknowledgment" – like in the prayer of Modim, where "modeh" means acknowledging. A "denier" is one who does not acknowledge – does not agree – with the existence of His power and will of the Holy One Blessed Be He. This is a precise language that speaks of cognitive agreement, not just emotional faith.

##### 3) "From Adam until the end of the world" – Adam HaRishon as the first prophet:

The verse "from the day that Hashem commanded and onward" teaches us that this goes back to Adam HaRishon, who was the first prophet – he received commandments (like not eating from the Tree of Knowledge). All mitzvos that were given from Adam until the end of the world are included.

##### 4) Why is "acknowledging idolatry" equal to "denying the entire Torah"?

**The main answer:** The Rambam's position (also in Moreh Nevuchim) is that **all mitzvos came to uproot idolatry**. If the entire purpose of Torah and mitzvos is to fight idolatry, then one who acknowledges idolatry has lost the entire point of all the mitzvos. It no longer helps what other mitzvos he does – the foundation is gone.

##### 5) "Like a gentile in all matters" – what is the practical difference?

The Rambam doesn't say here clearly which specific laws this affects. The Rambam's intention here is **not to rule specific laws**, but to bring out the **principle** that idolatry is the essence of being a Jew. Specific laws (like whether he must give a get) are dealt with in other places in the Rambam.

##### 6) Distinction between "acknowledges" and "worships":

The law of "like a gentile in all matters" only applies when he has **actually worshiped** idolatry – an action. One who only believes in idolatry but doesn't serve it, does not yet have this status.

##### 7) "An apostate to idolatry behold he is an apostate to the entire Torah":

With other sins, if someone is an "apostate" regarding one mitzvah (for example he doesn't wear tzitzis), we don't consider him an apostate regarding other mitzvos. But with idolatry – because it is the essence of all mitzvos – he is automatically an apostate to **everything**.

##### 8) Who is a "heretic" regarding this law?

The "heretic" here is not someone who only had a bad thought or a momentary doubt. The heretic is someone who **has declared himself a denier** – he has raised a flag of heresy. He has **publicly** presented himself as one who doesn't believe. He says: "There is no Torah, there are no mitzvos." This is an act of chutzpah – a rebellion against Torah. He is a "free-thinker" who thinks this way all day, not just a momentary thought. He **acts according to his thought** – he acts based on his heretical thoughts.

##### 9) Why is one not accepted in repentance?

Two explanations:

(a) The heretic is a "deceiver" – a tricky person. He is "wandering in his thoughts" – he wanders in his thoughts. When he does repentance, one cannot know if it is true or a trick.

(b) He has done a great act of chutzpah – he has declared a rebellion against Torah publicly. This is not just a private thought, but a public act.

##### 10) "It is forbidden to speak with them and to respond to them":

One may not converse with them **and** one may not answer their questions. The reason: he will confuse your mind – he will make the problem worse, not better. The Rambam brings the verse "do not approach the entrance of her house." In the Gemara it says that a Jewish heretic one does not answer.

##### 11) "Haughtiness" – the heretic's character:

"Haughtiness" means arrogance, chutzpah. The heretic is a person who "is drawn after the thought of his heart" – he follows his fantasy, his own thoughts, with arrogance.

##### 12) "The thought of a heretic is toward idolatry" – a difficult law:

This is a Gemara in Chullin (regarding slaughter). A heretic doesn't even believe in anything – what does idolatry have to do with it?

Several explanations:

(a) When a heretic consecrates a sacrifice, we say that presumably he consecrated it to idolatry – because we don't know what he thought, and with a heretic the presumption is that his thought is idolatry.

(b) The Rambam **called** heretics idolatry – they fall into the same category.

(c) Rabbi David (the Rambam's son) explained with the word "sometimes" – **sometimes** the heretic is in idolatry, sometimes not. One must be stringent.

Note: **The heretic of Tractate Chullin is not necessarily the same heretic as the Rambam speaks of here** – in Chullin it can speak of a specific group of people.

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#### **Law 4 – The Law of the Blasphemer and His Connection to Idolatry**

##### **The Rambam's Words**

**"And therefore I included the law of the blasphemer... for both of them are deniers of the essence."**

**"One who blasphemes is liable to stoning, until he explicitly pronounces the special Name of four letters, which is alef dalet nun yud... and blesses the Name with the Name... as it says 'and one who pronounces the Name of Hashem'."**

**"Other appellations – are forbidden... and there is one who explains that he is only liable for the Name Y-H-V-H... and I say..."**

**"You shall not curse God"**

**"Every day they judge the witnesses with an appellation – 'may Yossi strike Yossi.' When the judgment is finished, they take all the people outside, and they ask the greatest of the witnesses and say to him 'say what you heard explicitly,' and he says. And the judges stand on their feet and tear and do not mend. And the second says 'I also heard like him.' And if there were many witnesses, each and every one of them must say 'thus and so I heard'."**

**"A blasphemer who retracted within the time of speech, his retraction is not a retraction, but he is killed."**

**"One who blasphemed the Name with the name of idolatry – zealots strike him."**

**"Anyone who hears the blessing of the Name is obligated to tear... even the blessing of an appellation... and this is when he hears it from a Jew. Both the hearer and the hearer from the hearer is obligated to tear."**

**"All the witnesses and judges place their hands one by one on the head of the blasphemer and say to him 'your blood is on your head for you caused it to yourself.' And there is no one among those executed by the court upon whom they place hands except the blasphemer alone."**

##### **Simple Meaning**

The Rambam brings in the laws of the blasphemer into the laws of idolatry, because both – the idolater and the blasphemer – are deniers of the essence. Both receive stoning and both receive hanging. A blasphemer is liable to stoning only when he explicitly pronounces the special Name (Y-H-V-H or A-D-N-Y) and curses the Name with one of the Names that are not erased. If he curses with other appellations, he transgresses a prohibition and receives lashes, but not stoning. During the trial they use an appellation ("may Yossi strike Yossi"), only after the verdict does the greatest witness say out loud what he actually heard, the judges stand and tear, and the second witness confirms. A blasphemer who retracts within the time of speech – it doesn't help. One who blasphemes the Name with the name of idolatry – zealots strike him, but the court cannot stone him. The obligation to tear is only when

one hears from a Jew. Before the death all the witnesses and judges place hands on his head – a law that is special only for a blasphemer.

##### **Innovations**

#### **1) Why does the Rambam bring the blasphemer into the laws of idolatry?**

The verse "and the soul that acts with a high hand... Hashem he blasphemes" (Bamidbar 15:30) is used to show that "with a high hand" – which means idolatry – is the same matter as blasphemy. This is exactly the same section as "the gatherer of wood." The Rambam says explicitly: "for both of them are deniers of the essence" – both are deniers of the essence, therefore both receive stoning **and** hanging (which is an innovation – there is no other sin that receives hanging except blasphemy and idolatry).

#### **2) The blasphemer is "like an idolater but without idolatry":**

A blasphemer is essentially the same matter as idolatry, only without the physical act of serving another power. The blasphemer disgraces Hashem directly.

#### **3) Difficult question: How does blasphemy fit with "denier of the essence"?**

A blasphemer is the **greatest believer!** He believes that Hashem exists, he believes that only Hashem can be cursed – he is just embittered. How can one compare him to a denier of the essence? This remains a difficult question – "something is missing in the entire understanding."

#### **4) Levels of bitterness – the blasphemer as the highest level:**

Someone who is a bit embittered curses himself; someone who is more embittered curses all of existence; the greatest level of bitterness is to curse the "First Cause" – Hashem Himself. And this is only when he does it with the explicit Name, which makes it the strongest expression.

#### **5) The paradox of cursing Hashem:**

Cursing is "always with a Name" – when one curses a person, one says "may Hashem do to you..." – so when one curses Hashem Himself, how can one do this? The Rambam's formulation "may Michi strike Siusi" (may that power strike the other power) is analyzed – with idolatry it "makes more sense" because one sets two powers against each other, but with a blasphemer who believes in one God it is "really funny" – this is the essence of blasphemy, that it is absurd and yet forbidden.

#### **6) The Rambam's ruling regarding "the special Name" – A-D-N-Y:**

The Rambam rules that "the special Name of four letters" means **A-D-N-Y** – this is the way one pronounces the Name Y-H-V-H. The Rambam brings a "there is one who explains" that one is only liable for the Name Y-H-V-H as it is written, but the Rambam rules that **both** – whether Y-H-V-H or A-D-N-Y – make one liable to stoning. The reasoning: because when one says A-D-N-Y one means the Name Y-H-V-H, so it is also "the special Name." This fits with **Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Chapter 6** regarding Names that are not erased.

#### **7) Other appellations – only a prohibition with lashes:**

If someone curses Hashem with other appellations (not Names that are not erased), he transgresses a prohibition and receives

lashes, but not stoning. The prohibition is "you shall not curse God."

### 8) The appellation "Yossi" – what does it mean?

One creates a **new appellation** that is not from the true appellations at all – one doesn't use any true Name and not any true appellation, but a completely new word. "Yossi" (Y-O-S-I) is actually **not** four letters in the same manner as the explicit Name – which is interesting.

### 9) Why must the witness say it explicitly?

Two reasons: (a) **A law in testimony**: testimony must be explicit. (b) **Practical reason**: a mistake can be made – perhaps the witness didn't understand precisely how the explicit Name was said, and one cannot execute a person on a doubt.

### 10) Tearing by the judges – even by hearer from the hearer:

When the witness says out loud the words before the court, he himself is not a blasphemer – he only repeats it. Nevertheless the judges are obligated to tear. This shows that **even hearing testimony about blasphemy** requires tearing. The Rambam says "they tear and do not mend" – a tearing that is not sewn back.

### 11) The second witness – "I also heard like him":

He must confirm that he heard **the same thing** – if not, we seemingly don't have two witnesses on the same act. **But** he doesn't need to also say out loud the words explicitly – saying once is enough. When there are many witnesses, **each one** must say "thus and so I heard" – connected to the law in Tractate Makkos that when there are more than two witnesses, **all** the witnesses must be valid.

### 12) Within the time of speech doesn't help with a blasphemer:

This is one of the exceptions where within the time of speech doesn't help: **betrothal, divorce, and blasphemy/idolatry**. The Gemara has a derivation that connects betrothal and divorce with blasphemy. It is also asked: **how does warning work with a blasphemer?** – this remains an interesting question.

### 13) Blaspheming the Name with the name of idolatry – zealots strike him:

When someone says "may idolatry strike Yossi" – that is he blasphemes the Name with the name of idolatry – this is a terrible thing, but **not liable to stoning by the court**. The law is **zealots strike him** – like with one who has relations with an Aramean woman. Why not liable to stoning? **It is not a manner of idolatry** – it doesn't fall into the four services.

### 14) Obligation to tear – only when one hears from a Jew:

"**And this is when he hears it from a Jew**" – only when one hears blasphemy from a Jew. A beautiful innovation: **earlier the Rambam said that one who serves idolatry becomes a gentile in all matters** – but it seems that **with a blasphemer this is not so**. A blasphemer doesn't automatically become a "gentile in all matters" – he remains a Jew who has a sin. The distinction: **when a gentile curses, it doesn't count** – only with a Jew does blasphemy take effect.

### 15) Hearer from the hearer – what does it mean?

**Hearer from the hearer** means: someone who hears from a second person that that one blasphemed – **but the second person doesn't repeat the actual words**, but he tells that it happened. **Why may the hearer not repeat?** Because if he repeats the Names precisely as that one blasphemed – **he himself is seemingly a blasphemer!** Only before the court may he, because there it is testimony. The hearer from the hearer is obligated to tear **even though he doesn't hear the actual words**. This is seemingly the great reason why the court must tear – they are "hearer from the hearer."

### 16) The proof from Ravshakeh – an apostate:

**Elyakim and Shevna tore** when Ravshakeh (the messenger of the king of Assyria) blasphemed and cursed Hashem. **Ravshakeh was an apostate** – he was a Jew who became a gentile. Therefore Elyakim and Shevna tore – because they heard blasphemy **from a Jew** (even an apostate). But if he had been a complete gentile, they would **not** have had to tear. The Gemara in Sanhedrin brings "Shevna and his group" – Shevna and his group wanted to make a deal with Ravshakeh.

[Digression: Goliath – blasphemer of the armies of the living God – Goliath also made a mockery of Hashem. But Goliath was a gentile, and a gentile doesn't know precisely the laws of how one blasphemes – he didn't say "may Yossi strike Yossi." Therefore, he blasphemed, and he receives punishment for that itself.]

### 17) Placing of hands on the blasphemer – a special law:

**All the witnesses and judges place hands on the head of the blasphemer** before the death, and say to him "your blood is on your head for you caused it to yourself." This is a **unique law only for a blasphemer** – "and there is no one among those executed by the court upon whom they place hands except the blasphemer alone." **"All who heard"** means the witnesses – they are the ones who heard how the blasphemer said his words.

The matter of placing hands: one tells the blasphemer – you yourself are guilty of your death, your blood is on your own head. Like with a sacrifice where one places hands before it is offered, here also one places hands on the blasphemer before he is stoned. **Is he like a sacrifice?** – the law of placing hands is known from sacrifices. This remains an open question.

An ironic comment: the blasphemer said "may Yossi strike Yossi" – he wants as it were to strike Hashem – but in the end he is the only one who gets struck (stoned).

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### The Deeper Understanding of "Blasphemer" – Why It Is in the Category of Idolatry

#### Innovations

#### 1) The blasphemer is precisely a "believer":

The Rambam included the blasphemer in the laws of idolatry because a blasphemer is actually a believer – he believes that there is a Creator! Because if he didn't believe, he wouldn't say words of blasphemy. He is however an "embittered madman" who speaks against Hashem – he is a denier of the essence not by denying the existence, but by disgracing the honor of Heaven.

#### 2) What does "blasphemy" mean in practice – public disgrace:

"May Yossi strike Yossi" is not literal – no one means that one can literally strike Hashem. Blasphemy means that one publicly disgraces Hashem, one says things that bring great disgrace to the honor of Heaven. The example of Sanheriv: "Who among all the gods of the lands saved their land from my hand" – he said that Hashem cannot help.

### 3) Blasphemy is the opposite of Shema Yisrael:

Shema Yisrael is when someone acknowledges Hashem, he proclaims that there is a God. A blasphemer proclaims the opposite – that there isn't, or that Hashem cannot help. It is a reversal of accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.

### 4) "May Yossi strike Yossi" – the absurdity of blasphemy:

The blasphemer wants as it were to "hack" at Hashem – but with whom does he hack? With Hashem Himself! The power

that he uses to speak against Hashem comes from Hashem Himself. This is the deeper meaning in the language – it points to the absurdity of blasphemy.

### 5) A suggestion: Blasphemy is originally the prohibition of atheism:

Perhaps the prohibition of blasphemy is originally the prohibition of atheism – speaking against Hashem, not believing in Him, or believing in idolatry. "Bringing to mind that there is no God" or that Hashem has no power – this is all in the category of blasphemy. The prohibition of blasphemy contains within it the entire matter of heresy – whether "there is no judge and no judgment" (there is no judge), or speaking against Hashem, or believing in idolatry. This is seemingly the simple meaning of why the Rambam placed it together with the laws of idolatry – both are "deniers of the essence."

## | Full Transcript

### Laws of Idolatry Chapter 2 – The Essence of the Commandment Regarding Idolatry

#### Introduction to Chapter 2

#### Speaker 1:

Good. We are learning Laws of Idolatry, Sefer HaMadda (Book of Knowledge), the second chapter of Idolatry.

Just as in the previous chapter, very good, the Rambam explained how idolatry developed. The world isn't crazy. And we also see that the Rambam thought a bit like this: Adam HaRishon (the first man) spoke to the Almighty, so how is it that suddenly Enosh, his grandson, already had idolatry? How does that make sense? So he explained the "slippery slope" of how idolatry developed, and then how Avraham Avinu (our forefather Abraham) grasped the destruction and he fixed it, and then how it freshly developed again in the same decline, and Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses our teacher) saved us with his prophecy.

So the Rambam gave us a very beautiful introduction to idolatry, and here we're going to learn the laws, the commandments of idolatry, and the essence of idolatry. Later there are a few more chapters which are the details of worship, which types of worship one is liable for, but here he says the essence, still the essence of idolatry, not to follow after idolatry.

So, in a certain sense one can say that this chapter is really only half of the chapter, because the second half speaks about the blasphemer (megadef), which one must understand why it comes in here. The Rambam himself has a question why it comes in here, and he tries to answer. Perhaps there are perhaps deeper things that one can understand.

#### Idolatry – Matters of Belief

But the first chapter speaks simply of, one can say, not believing in idolatry. One can make such a distinction, that we learned Laws of the Foundations of the Torah (Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah), which is essentially the principles of faith. In a certain sense, idolatry is the opposite of Foundations of the Torah chapter 1, the unity of God (yichud Hashem) and the form of God (tzuyur Hashem). But there is still in idolatry, in the prohibition of idolatry there is still, and we said yesterday that idolatry is essentially the deed, that as we spoke about the

"slippery slope," if one serves a form, one ultimately forgets about the Almighty. But there are still certain matters of belief regarding idolatry, or not acknowledging idolatry. There is such a language in the Gemara which we'll see he brings, "hamodeh ba'avodah zarah" - which means that he believes in idolatry, not that he serves it. He doesn't serve, he only says that he holds that it's true, it has power.

So the first chapter, or the first half of the chapter, speaks essentially about the prohibition of believing, and perhaps in general of serving, but more in the topic that has to do with the knowledge (da'at), with the intellect (seichel) of the person. The prohibitions of idolatry which is not to believe in idolatry.

True. Clear. Later he speaks here in the chapter also about not idolatry, but heresy (kefirah), not believing at all in any higher power. Ah, I told you... with the worship of idolatry it has no connection, but with the thought of idolatry it has some connection. Because the problem with idolatry is not simply that one gives honor to the idolatry, but simply that one takes away from the honor that is due to the Supreme... from the true power.

#### Innovation: Idolatry and Atheism Are Not Two Separate Categories

Because as I learn, there isn't really such a thing as believing in a power that you call a higher power and which is idolatry. Because idolatry is simply that you think that something which is less than the first thing is a god. So every idolater, if he already holds by that false end and forgot the first, he is already an atheist as well. So I think that this is a certain... that to the extent that it stands...

But the point is not that. Yes, I just want to emphasize, because I already said yesterday, but it's a great clarity that I have, and I think that most people haven't grasped it, that people usually think, and not just people, great people too, to a certain extent, that what's built here, what you seek to believe in a god, higher power, whatever you call it, or something like that, then within the believers, yes, that's separate from atheists who don't believe in any god at all, then within those who believe in a god, there's a question who is the true god? But that doesn't make any sense, what does it mean who is the true god? What does it mean, if we mean the true god means the true god. According to the Rambam and both, that the idolater knows who the true god is, he says that the first

sphere is a god, that the first sphere, first first sphere, first thing that is created is a god. He has an error, he does call it god, but it's not that both believe in that higher power which he is. But the idolater has an error in which level stands the higher power. His higher power is not at all a higher power, it's a lower thing. It comes out a harsh thing, it's simply if someone doesn't understand divinity, and he doesn't believe.

Right. That's the Rambam. Therefore the Rambam held that whoever... we need no less than to know Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, to know in which Creator we believe. Because just saying I believe there is a Creator, is apparently still nothing done, because you don't understand what a Creator means, what the first cause (motzi rishon) means. Yes? Therefore the Rambam understands that whoever believes in a god that is a body, a body is not the Almighty, so he believes in some created thing that it is a god. Yes? Therefore he said that he is a heretic (min).

#### **Answer to the Ramban's Question – "Mah Shemo" (What is His Name)**

Or the same thing, with this I answered the Ramban's question on the Rambam. The Ramban asks on the Rambam, we also learned it yesterday, I'm telling you what's going to be Pesach. It says in the Torah, Moshe came to the Jews and said "Ehyeh sent me to you," and Moshe says "mah shemo" (what is His name) etc. And the Rambam learned simply that the Jews asked Moshe who is there a god. So the Rambam says simply in, I mean in the Moreh (Guide for the Perplexed), not that it wasn't explicit, but in the Moreh it says so clearly. And the Ramban asked on this in Parshat Shemot, how can it be that the Jews didn't believe in any god? They don't believe in that. That is, the Ramban understood that it can be that idolaters, that can be, because we see in Chazal (our Sages) that there was a portion at least of the Jews who served idolatry, as the Rambam said.

The Rambam said clearly at the end of chapter 1 that until Moshe Rabbeinu the Jews didn't believe in any god. They didn't believe, they almost forgot. They were like the flock of Avraham, that is they were completely bent over. That is he doesn't go from here to there. But the Ramban, I mean even the Ramban wouldn't say that there can't be any idolaters, but he can't understand that a Jew shouldn't believe at all in God.

But by the Rambam it's the same thing, because certainly he believed in some higher power, but he didn't know about the "Ehyeh asher Ehyeh," which is such a true understanding of the existence of God (metzi'ut Hashem). That is truly a great innovation. This is not something that one can say, "Ah, how can it be?" It can indeed be, because not everyone knows this. So that I think is the innovation of the Rambam.

But truly, that everyone knows, is there someone who doesn't know this? But today everyone already knows. The Rambam already did a lot of work, and the Baal Shem Tov, and all of them. Almost no one believes that the Almighty is a body. Not just almost no one, no Jew at all, or is one of the heretics. But everyone understands that the Almighty is something beyond everything. It's simple. Unless one is very afraid of thinking, and one says like, "the Creator that I'm afraid of Him because He's going to punish me if I'm going to think anything," then it's truly limited. But if one thinks, if one contemplates the matter of the first cause (motzi rishon), the Creator without whom nothing exists, the first power, the first power... But I say that no one...

Even one who doesn't understand today, he doesn't think that the Almighty is the heaven, yes? The Almighty lives in that, he doesn't understand what he's saying. Okay. But when we say body, we mean some body which is created. No one thinks that, so Chazal can say that most Jews already know who the Almighty is. Okay, anyway, that's a good introduction. Now we're going to go in, the Gemara won't say.

#### **Digression: The Greatest Concern of Idolatry Today**

##### **Speaker 2:**

Apparently the greatest concern of idolatry today is truly someone who gives powers to his rabbi more than how much, and he makes his rabbi into an intermediary power, like idolatry.

##### **Speaker 1:**

Let's learn, let's learn. It's not so simple to me, because I'm telling you, because the Rambam speaks that as long as the one who does it means, he forgot that there is a god that is above this. No, once that's not relevant, do you think... Okay, let's learn inside, because that's what I thought here when I heard it.

#### **Law 1 – The Essence of the Commandment Regarding Idolatry**

##### **Speaker 1:**

Okay, so let's learn the first law. Says the holy Rambam: **"The essence of the commandment regarding idolatry"**, the essence of what the Torah commands, the essential commandment of idolatry is, **"not to worship any one of all the creations, not an angel and not a sphere and not a star, and not one of the four elements, and not one of all the things created from them"**. One should not serve any creation at all, not any other creation at all. This is a continuation from the previous chapter, that the way that idolatry developed is that even a person knew that the Creator is the Creator, but he began to serve... he's going to say yes, but he began to serve one of the creations, a sphere or a star, this is the essential commandment of idolatry.

Says the Rambam, the list is exactly the list of the Rambam in Foundations of the Torah, chapter 2, he says that there are angels, there are spheres, stars, the four elements, and things that are made from the four elements. These are all created beings, not creators. There is one Creator, and we have all these created beings. So this is a great innovation, a great clear thing that the Rambam says, because soon we're going to learn, and someone will ask a scholar, what is the essence of idolatry? He'll say bowing down (hishtachava'ah), worship (avodah), incense (ketoret), libation (nisuch), I don't know what. The essence of idolatry is to serve any created being. Right, how one serves, what worship means, that's already details. But this is the essence.

#### **Even When the Worshiper Knows That Hashem is the God**

Says the Rambam, **"and even though the worshiper knows that Hashem is the God"**, even the worshiper, he's a great worshiper, he knows that the Almighty is Hashem is the God, he means the idolater, even he knows that the Almighty is the God, **"and worships this created being in the manner that Enosh and the people of his generation worshiped initially"**, serves a certain created being, because he does this because the Almighty gave them honor, the Almighty placed them in heaven, with all the splendor, full of radiance and emitting light, it's a sign that the

Almighty wants one to give them honor and one should serve them, **this one is an idolater.**

I learned this, I thought that it's a bit interesting, because simply the person knows that the Almighty is the Creator, and he thinks that when he gives honor to the star he's giving honor essentially to the Almighty. So it can be that the prohibition of idolatry, the level of idolatry, is more a prohibition because he's going to mislead other people. You can say like that the level, if there is such a type of person, is only the concern because his son is already going to be an idolater and forget about the Almighty, because he's the only case that he still remembers yes that there is a Creator. He says that every idolater is simply that he's also an atheist, he's not an atheist, because he does remember yes that the Almighty is above the created being. It's very interesting. So, in a way one can say like that the essence of idolatry is a matter of a bit of interpersonal relations (bein adam l'chaveiro), a bit of being a stumbling block to other people.

**Discussion: Idolatry as Interpersonal Relations**

**Speaker 2:**

It's a foundation in the Torah.

**Speaker 1:**

Yes, but you're damaging the Almighty, but you're damaging other people, and so you're damaging the Almighty.

**Speaker 2:**

Yes, that's how it was in the previous chapter. As I understand, if it's so, you're right. That's how we understood yesterday with Avraham with the kindness (chesed), that was his first, here you see it too. This one is an idolater because he's going to be a stumbling block to other people.

**Speaker 1:**

Right, so it's very interesting. And it's truly a great innovation, the Rambam, I mean they carried out the first law, yes? The Rambam made a great innovation that the essence of idolatry, fine, this too is subject to the prohibition, the great severity, of course, you shall have no other gods before Me (lo yiheyeh lecha elohim acherim al panai), on this also comes before Me (al panai), yes? Even when you believe yes, before Me (al panai), not against Me, with Me.

**Question: Where Does It Say That Enosh Was an Idolater?**

But can it be that the Rambam takes it stands in the portion about the generation of Enosh? On whom does it stand? Does it stand somewhere on Enosh? Once the Rambam understands that Enosh essentially believed in the Almighty, does it stand somewhere that Enosh was an idolater? I mean, once we call Enosh an idolater, the Rambam is consistent (leshitato) that Enosh knew about the Almighty.

**Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 2, Law 1 (Continued) – The Essence of Idolatry and the Verse "Pen Tisa Einecha HaShamayma"**

**The Rambam's Source for Enosh's Generation – A Logical Necessity, Not a Tradition**

**Speaker 1:** From there he knows that this is called idolatry. But how it is itself, he doesn't have a clear source that Enosh had this piece of Torah. He has a logical necessity (hechreich) that otherwise it can't be.

**Speaker 2:** Yes.

**Speaker 1:** So, but I think it's an innovation.

**The Ramban's Approach – This Is Not a Definition, But the Very Prohibition**

And according to the Ramban, this doesn't mean a definition (geder). That is, we say it's a definition, we'll speak in terms of reasons for the commandments (ta'amei hamitzvot) to understand the reason. But in essence, when it says in the Torah **"you shall have no other gods"**, it doesn't mean the one who makes the error, it means even the one who doesn't have the error.

**Liability for Stoning According to the Rambam**

The Rambam didn't say here clearly for example that he's liable for stoning and he receives the punishment of an idolater.

**Speaker 2:** No, no, no, there's no doubt at all that according to the Rambam he's liable for stoning.

**Speaker 1:** Yes, so it seems. So it seems. He wouldn't have said that the essence of idolatry with the wickedness is this, and the Rabbis were stringent also on this.

**The Controversy About Introducing Mercy**

Therefore, truly, everyone knows that there's a great controversy and dispute about introducing mercy (machnis rachamim) with such things. Truly, it begins from this Rambam.

The Ramban in his sermon "Torat Hashem Temimah" says that he understood the Rambam, he elaborates there on the matter of idolatry, he says that if so, it's the prohibition of idolatry, it's not just a small thing. It's the prohibition of idolatry to ask an angel for something, because on the contrary, the angel... we don't say that the angel doesn't exist, but to make worship to an angel, this the Rambam says, he says even... asking is already worship, language of doubt. What does it mean prayer is worship.

**Discussion: Asking Angels That They Should Go Ask the Almighty**

**Speaker 2:** And will they... um, asking the angels they should go ask the Almighty?

**Speaker 1:** Yes, yes, the Rambam is going to say clearly, and we'll see that the Rambam in the next piece says clearly **"to be an intermediary between him and God"**, yes? This is at the end of the second piece it says there clearly, and I just want to say from this, not only in the first piece can one learn that he is there punished, they give honor apparently to the Almighty, but then he says clearly that even if it should be an intermediary between you and the Almighty, it's also a prohibition, and this is also apparently the essence of idolatry according to the Rambam.

**The "Slippery Slope" – Why the "Sensible" Idolater Is Worse**

So true, that according to this it comes out that on the contrary, what does it mean people say there on the contrary, I give honor to some created thing, of course I don't mean God forbid that he is the Almighty. It's true, but the generations of Enosh also initially thought that he doesn't mean that he is the Almighty, but in practice it comes out that one forgets about the Almighty.

**It's a Whole Complication – Because We Do Talk About Beauty in Prayer**

It's a whole complication, because it's certain that in our prayer (tefillah) we talk a lot about the beauty of creation, but

then we mean the Almighty directly.

### **The Difference Between Prayer and Idolatry – "The Master Over All Creation"**

For example, when we say "HaAdon al kol hama'aseh" (The Master over all creation), and we speak so beautifully about the heavens and stars, we don't say "You are such beautiful heavens," we say "You are such a great Creator, You created such beautiful heavens." The direct language goes only to the Almighty.

**Speaker 2:** Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

**Speaker 1:** Because the "HaAdon al kol hama'aseh" made it, He made a beautiful sun, He made tremendous things. The sun, we say the opposite, the sun bows to Him, yes? Where do we have this? This is what it says "oseh be'ahavah retzon kono" (does with love the will of its Creator). The "oseh be'ahavah retzon kono" is seemingly to counter idolatry which says that the sun has its own independent existence. No, the sun is an "oseh be'ahavah retzon kono."

### **The Rambam's Position Is Clear**

So it appears clear that the Rambam held this way. One can disagree with the Rambam, but someone who wants to disagree in Hilchos Avodah Zarah (Laws of Idolatry) with the Rambam... It tells me that one cannot easily go against the Rambam, but the Rambam appears very clear that one may not do all these things, and this is the essence of idolatry.

### **A Second Possibility – Perhaps Not Liable to Stoning?**

We need to see perhaps a bit later, what could still be that the Rambam doesn't hold that the person is already liable to stoning (skilah), rather he is a worshipper of idolatry, he begins the matter of idolatry. We'll see later, it could be that he only worshipped idolatry of the idols and idols...

We won't see later. It's been clarified, we won't see later, I didn't have patience for those chapters. In chapter 3 he brings a verse on this, but I mean the piece, but the Tikkunei Zohar is another thing, certainly a sefer, but this is the essence of idolatry that the Rambam is clear here, that he reckons that from this it stands later, that this is the cause.

### **Innovation: Why the "Sensible" Idolater Is a Greater Sin**

**Speaker 2:** Okay, let me think... I can think perhaps that the Rambam wanted to say that the worship that makes more sense, which you look at as a smaller sin, is actually a much greater sin, because a person who does absurd things, no one will learn from him. The slippery slope begins specifically from one who makes sense.

**Speaker 1:** Okay.

**Speaker 2:** So about this, because one who knows that the thing that influences thought that one must give honor to the star, and this way he does a greater sin, because from the second person no one will learn, because the second person is a fool.

**Speaker 1:** Okay, this is already an innovation that you're saying, could be, but...

### **Why Children Don't Understand the Difference**

It's certain that the Rambam understood that since most people don't understand what one believes, this is in the head, and this one doesn't see. What one sees, one sees what one bows to the created thing. Therefore the children think that this is the thing.

One can see, I know, it's not a distant matter, I mean, I don't want to bring out the Kuzari on Jews, but one can see that in places where certain created things are strongly emphasized, even though they say with great effort, the children don't know the difference, the children say it literally. One sees immediately that it happens, it's not something that stands only in the Rambam.

Our Rebbe who was very strongly concerned about this that one shouldn't make anyone into a god, right?

**Speaker 2:** Okay.

### **Halacha 2 – The Verse "Lest You Lift Your Eyes to Heaven"**

#### **The Torah Speaks to Wise People, Not to Fools**

**Speaker 1:** The Rambam says further, "**ve'inyan zeh hu she'hizhirah alav Torah**" (and this matter is what the Torah warned about). This is what the Torah warned people about. The Torah doesn't speak to fools, the Torah speaks to wise people. The Torah speaks to people who can think and say, "Ah, honor is due to the stars."

#### **The Rambam's Words**

He says, this is what the Torah said, "**pen tisa einecha hashamayma ve'ra'ita et hashemesh ve'et hayare'ach ve'et hakochavim**" (lest you lift your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars), and seemingly the Rambam learns, as you see how beautiful they are, and you will think that honor is due to them.

#### **The Meaning of "Tisa Einecha" – Walking in Your Mind**

The Rambam says so, clearly, what is the simple meaning of the verse "sham tasim be'ein libecha"? You go walking... Last night Avraham Avinu also walked with his mind... He means to say, "sa na einecha hashamayma" doesn't only mean looking at the heaven, it means contemplating the heaven, walking with your eyes, in your heart.

"Be'ein libecha" – true, many times "ayin" (eye), I thought about this recently, in the Torah how does one say thinking? "Tisa einecha." Sometimes it means looking, but "ayin," as it says "chacham einav berosh" (the wise man has his eyes in his head), means he has his mind, he has eyes in his head, means he thinks.

But it's very beautiful the comparison of going walking in the mind. It could be that this is walking in the eyes, like one goes walking. He says that walking in the mind is like walking with the feet. Many times it's both, walking with the feet can sometimes help.

But he means to say, it could be he means to say "tisa einecha u're'eh," like two things, not just going to look. One looks and one contemplates.

### **The Difference Between Contemplation for Heaven's Sake and Idolatry**

It's interesting, because the Rambam said earlier that looking and contemplating the awesomeness of the stars is part of service of Hashem, and through this the person becomes impressed by the Almighty. But here there can be a problem of instead of looking further to the Almighty, one stops at the awesomeness of the stars.

#### **What One Sees When Looking at Heaven**

One looks precisely at what is there, and he sees that they appear "elohei hamenihigim vehamoshim" (gods who guide and rule). Not that they are. He sees that they are in a certain

aspect they are guides of the world. He translates the spheres (galgalim) simply as the stars, and the stars simply as the offspring of the elements.

### **The Meaning of "Which Hashem Apportioned to All the Nations"**

#### **The Rambam's Translation**

He translates the verse "**asher chalak Hashem otam lechol ha'amim**" (which Hashem apportioned to all the nations). "Asher chalak Hashem otam lechol ha'amim" – the Almighty gave power to the awesomeness of the stars that they should guide, "**liheyotam chayim vehavim venifsa'dim keminhago shel olam**" (to be living and coming into being and perishing according to the way of the world), that the heavenly forces...

**Discussion: What Does "Chayim Vehavim Venifsa'dim" Mean?**

**Speaker 2:** No, no, no, no. That's not the translation.

**Speaker 1:** I saw someone say so, but the translation is, this goes back to what he learned in Yesodei HaTorah chapter 2, that the stars are not chayim vehavim venifsa'dim (living and coming into being and perishing), remember? They are living, but they are not havim venifsa'dim, they don't die.

But the stars, they are responsible, with their movements they guide the four elements, which are havim venifsa'dim keminhago shel olam. And this is "lechol ha'amim." "Lechol ha'amim" means everything that is from the four elements. The people, basically, which this must mean, also animals and other things. But yes, the creations of the world of creation.

**Speaker 2:** Right.

### **The Stars Do Indeed Guide the World – But We Shouldn't Worship Them**

**Speaker 1:** So one sees, one sees that the spheres and stars they guide, indeed lechol ha'amim, and therefore, what are the stars? One sees the spheres that guide the stars, and the stars have an influence on the four elements, and the four elements are from what we are all made, from what the entire creation is composed.

So if so you will think, "it's fitting to bow to them and worship them," if the spheres and stars have power over us, they make... they have influence on everything that is living and coming into being and perishing...

#### **The Middle Piece of the Verse**

This is the middle piece of the verse that he skipped, "**pen tisa einecha hashamayma ve'ra'ita et hashemesh ve'et hayare'ach ve'et hakochavim kol tzeva hashamayim venidachta vehishtachavita lahem va'avadtam**" (lest you lift your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and bow to them and worship them). When you think what, you will make a mistake, you will think so, "it's fitting to bow to them and worship them." About this the Torah warned us, no, good. So you shouldn't think.

#### **The Verse Is a Strong Proof**

The verse is very very strong proof, because there is the verse "asher chalak lechol ha'amim" is a difficult verse, the Almighty divided other trinkets for other nations. What does this mean? The Rambam says, it's true. The truth is that the stars guide all these nations. "Lechol ha'amim" means including you. But the mistake is that the Torah doesn't make the mistake to worship them because of this. Why not?

### **The Next Verse – "Ve'etchem Lakach Hashem" – And the Connection to the Exodus from Egypt**

But it's interesting because the next verse is very strongly connected, especially with the Rambam. The Rambam doesn't connect it though. I mean perhaps yes, that the Exodus from Egypt is proof of Creation. But therefore, there's nothing against Creation here. Creation, it's true "asher chalak lechol ha'amim."

Good, but I mean the Rambam said, if the Rambam doesn't bring the continuation of the verse, but if I would think according to the Rambam, what is the next verse? Why must I say that the idolaters don't have the wisdom?

The next verse is "**ve'etchem lakach Hashem vayotze etchem mikur habarzel mimitzrayim liheyot lo le'am nachalah kayom hazeh**" (But you Hashem took and brought out from the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be for Him a nation of inheritance as this day). After the verse of "pen tisa einecha," I thought that the verse is like a beautiful continuation, that you had the Exodus from Egypt, where the Almighty revealed Himself to the Jews, and there the Jews saw that the Almighty is indeed the direct guide of everything, that one can only serve the Almighty.

#### **The Rambam's Meaning of "Asher Chalak Lechol Ha'amim"**

The Rambam doesn't say that it's not true that they don't guide the world. What the Rambam says is that if one will worship them, one will make a mistake and forget about the Almighty. And the Rambam indeed said earlier that this was at the Exodus from Egypt, one almost indeed forgot, and at the Exodus from Egypt the Almighty told Moshe Rabbeinu to tell indeed, that one shouldn't do this, because for him this causes the mistake.

So this would have been the Rambam's meaning of "aslach lahem kidvarecha." The meaning is, "aslach lahem kidvarecha," not you shouldn't worship the asher chalak lechol ha'amim, why? Because this is the essence of idolatry.

#### **The Torah Reckons with What One Knows**

But literally one sees in this verse that indeed the Torah reckoned with what one knows, he didn't mean. The idolater that the Torah speaks to is not one who talks himself into thinking that the Almighty is the sun.

### **Hilchos Avodah Zarah, Chapter 2, Halacha 1 (Continued) – The Mistake of "Venidachta Vehishtachavita Lahem Va'avadtam"**

#### **The Essential Mistake: "Le'ovdam"**

The mistake begins with the words "**vetamah asher alu lehishtachavot lahem ule'ovdam**" (and you will err to bow to them and worship them). Here is the mistake. The mistake became "le'ovdam," because the verse says "**venidachta vehishtachavita lahem va'avadtam**" (and be drawn away and bow to them and worship them), because "**asher chalak Hashem Elokecha**" (which Hashem your God apportioned). They think that it's also fitting "and you shall worship them." Here is your great mistake.

#### **Innovation: The Chassidic Approach – One May Look at Heaven**

Gentlemen, you may look at heaven and think further only of the Almighty who made them. One can say that the Chassidic way places itself, instead of holding ourselves under the heaven, although we are indeed under the heaven, hold

ourselves as the heaven serves the Almighty, I serve the Almighty.

As we say "susim umerkavotav" (horses and his chariots), I am to the Almighty like the sun, and the sun and I are both servants of Hashem. As all the heavens serve and fear, and we are also servants of Hashem. Although it's true theoretically that the heaven is higher than us, but in relation to Hashem we are all equal.

And our task is indeed our task is indeed even to be higher than the heaven, as it says "**vayotze'eihu hachutzah**" (and He brought him outside). This is indeed what Moshe Rabbeinu showed with the finger pointing upward.

### **The Ramban's Commentary on "Hishamru Lachem Pen Yifteh Levavchem"**

The Ramban says that the command that he said, what the Almighty commanded in the verses before, "**hishamru lachem pen yifteh levavchem**" (guard yourselves lest your heart be deceived), this means in "**veram levavcha veshachachta**" (and your heart becomes haughty and you forget). "**Hishamru lachem pen yifteh levavchem**", that your heart shouldn't follow after the mistake of looking at the heavenly bodies.

### **The Ramban's Question and Answer**

What is the "yifteh levavchem"? What is the temptation? The Ramban asks seemingly the same question from previous chapters, "yifteh levavchem," what is so interesting about that world? No. What is so attractive?

He says, because it's true, because they indeed have great power and they indeed have great influence on us, therefore you can be "vesartem va'avadtem" (and you will turn away and worship).

That is, the Ramban translates, "**shelo tatu beherahur aleihem**" (that you should not err in contemplating them), that it shouldn't be mistaken in contemplating them. That is, the mistake is in the contemplation of them.

### **Innovation: A Very Refined Mistake**

It's very interesting, because the mistake is a very refined mistake, because that they have great influence on us is true. The mistake happens when one says, "Okay, because of this I must worship them themselves."

### **The Ramban's Key Word: "Sarsur"**

"**Shelo tatu beherahur aleihem la'avod otam la'asotam sarsur beinechem uvein bor'achem**" (that you should not err in contemplating them to worship them to make them an intermediary between you and your Creator), to think that the heavenly bodies, the angels and hosts, can be a sarsur (intermediary), an agent between us and our Creator. They can be, but we may not... that we shouldn't worship them because of this.

### **Discussion: What Does "Liheyot" Mean and What Is the Difference Between Sarsur and Malach?**

Ah, perhaps he means... perhaps I didn't translate correctly. I'm thinking now a new thing, I never knew. How does one translate the verse "liheyot that they are"? No, "liheyot" means to think that they are. No, this I don't know, because they indeed are. This translates as a malach (angel), they are indeed malachim. The Rambam says everything is malachim. Malachim means messengers of the Almighty.

What does a malach mean a sarsur, what is the difference? Perhaps he means to say that one shouldn't worship, since they are a sarsur one shouldn't worship them.

### **Innovation: The Difference Between Sarsur "Down" and Sarsur "Up"**

Again, but they are a sarsur to bring from the Almighty to you, but back from you to the Almighty you cannot use them as if they pray. Why not? Because they are idolaters.

The mistake is when a person goes... but we said that one may not worship them. But a sarsur... let's think, let's consider a moment.

No, he says indeed on the words "la'avod otam." I want to translate a new translation, I never knew. Let's try a new translation, I didn't catch now. Let's try to answer him, in other words, let's ask the right question.

### **Question: But Angels Do Elevate Prayers!**

The right question, I'm mixing here because it's indeed true, let's see what the Rambam says. Yes? Let's think, when a person... when the Almighty sends abundance to a person, it doesn't come directly, it comes through all the angels, the seraphim, which we learned in the chapter Yesod Ha'avodah.

So also when a person prays to the Almighty, yes? It also goes through all the appointed angels, it says in the Gemara that angels elevate prayers. It's not something that the newspaper writers I know someone thought up, it's things explicitly stated in the verses perhaps in certain places. When a person prays, there are also angels, whatever the order is, the prayer goes up.

### **Answer: This Is Not Your Focus**

This is not your focus, not your service, but it's not a contradiction that he is indeed a sarsur.

### **Proof: Moshe Rabbeinu Is Also a Sarsur**

Because Moshe Rabbeinu, the one who tells us "**hishamru lachem pen yifteh levavchem**", he is also a sarsur. Moshe Rabbeinu is called a sarsur between the Almighty and the Jews. True, but we don't worship him, we may not worship him, he is a created being.

### **Digression: Swearing by the Name of Moshe**

There's an interesting thing, that the Rambam says in one place that the custom of Israel is to swear by the name of Moshe. Although there is a prohibition of false oaths, one may not swear by the name of idolatry, but the Gemara says "Moshe you speak well," what does "Moshe" mean? It's a language of oath, I swear by the name of Moshe. And he sees that Jews used to do so.

The Rambam says, he says, there's no problem, because a Jew inwardly knows that Moshe is a servant of Hashem, Moshe is not a god.

### **Parable: The Gabbai and the Rebbe**

I'll give a small way so it will understand a bit, I need to watch that I don't now myself... When people want to have a relationship with a tzaddik, I once heard from some wealthy person, who is such a society man, he's a stingy wealthy person, he told me that people think that to be able to become close, I know, let's say, to Rav Yaakov Meir Schechter, one needs now to have a hundred thousand dollars and give a bit to the gabbai, and only then will one bring in a large check. He says, "No, I give ten thousand dollars to the gabbai and that's it."

### **This is a Terrible Chutzpah**

This is a terrible chutzpah. Yes? Imagine the Rebbe becomes aware that instead of giving money to the Rebbe, instead of giving honor, let's say, God forbid, Rebbes don't need money, but instead of being "into" the Rebbe, one is "into" the gabbai. And one has figured out that the gabbai has the power, the gabbai has the key, one doesn't need to be good with the Rebbe at all, one only needs to be good with the gabbai. This is a terrible chutzpah. Yes?

### Application of the Parable

Okay. I'm telling you, this is the point, when he serves the angel, when he says... let's say even, let's say according to those who do permit, that one should say something to the angel, "I beg you, angel, bring my prayer to the Almighty." You haven't served the angel, you've only, you know that the angel is only a messenger. But the person begins to think, "You know what, why do I need to flatter now, so to speak, why do I need to serve the Almighty now? Let me serve the angel." Very good.

### The Rambam's Stricter Approach

As I understand it, the Rambam would say that he says this part to the Sephardim, the problem is he says... The Rambam would say, even if the angels should do it, he never says it. The Rambam, other Rishonim would say that according to the Rambam one doesn't do it.

But the Rambam would say, you say, you write in the siddur that angels should bring the prayer, your children will already think that the angels are the god.

Or, seemingly according to the Rambam it would even be wrong when a person says, "I'm sending my prayer, whoever should receive it. I don't know, I don't know the system up there, I can't reach the Almighty." One may not! No, one must know, I pray to the Almighty. Who is the messenger? Let's say, one may or may not mention the messenger, or... yes.

Okay. So, up to here is the first principle. But the Zohar is very beautiful and very good in its language.

### Digression: Graves of Tzaddikim According to the Rambam

But regarding graves of tzaddikim there is this thing, there are those who say that one asks the tzaddik to elevate the prayers. But if one wants to completely fulfill according to the Rambam, one doesn't even ask that, rather one can say "in the merit of the tzaddik." I'm speaking to the Almighty. That is, even at the grave you're not speaking to the tzaddik, you're speaking to the Almighty, you say "in the merit of a tzaddik." Yes.

Because the Rambam, people think that the Rambam was against graves, but we see that the grandchildren, the Rambam's children and grandchildren, we see that graves were indeed... No, the Rambam himself went to the graves of the forefathers. But the Rambam doesn't deny that these things are holy places and the like. The point is that one doesn't serve them, on the contrary, all places are for the sake of Heaven, one serves the Almighty.

### Innovation: A New Interpretation of "Lehiyotam Sarsur"

The Rambam doesn't say here... Here I say, perhaps according to the approach that I'm now grasping, it stands even according to the Rambam, one may not say that it's a prohibition. One may not serve it, because it's a prohibition. What does serving mean? "**Lo ta'avdu et Hashem Elokeichem ken**", because "**beyoshram hem ovdim**".

"**Lehiyotam**" means to make them servants, so one can say. "Lehiyotam" – seemingly the second interpretation is better, but there's no practical difference.

### What Does "Serving" Mean?

But what does serving mean? This is the point. The Rambam doesn't say here, for example... I want to say one thing, what does it mean one speaks, one holds that they are... one holds that one believes. Soon the Rambam will go say, one may not even say that it has power, even though one thinks it's true.

### What Does "Metiv Umerei'a" Mean?

I already know what this means, that it is metiv umerei'a. We learned this language yesterday. So one may not believe that the angel is metiv umerei'a, but that it has some governance... one must understand better. Metiv umerei'a means that it chooses how to be good and bad. Okay. Not that it's a fact. In fact, the weather is also metiv umerei'a, yes? Rain, so one must understand better. But the fire doesn't have the knowledge to know how... one must understand better.

What is certain is that one should not think that it is independent, because this is the truth, no one is independent of the Almighty. And this will cause one to think this. Okay. Up to here is the main prohibition of idolatry.

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### Halacha 3 – "Al Tifnu El Ha'elilim"

Now one can learn another prohibition that the Rambam calls "**al tifnu el ha'elilim**". It's one of his negative commandments, right? He counts in the beginning the negative commandments "**al tifnu el ha'elilim**". One can learn it as another prohibition. Yes.

### The Compositions of Idolaters

The Rambam says this, he says that the mass... First of all he speaks of the oaths of idolatry. What is this? He says this, "**shevuot rabot chibru ovdei avodah zarah ba'avodatah**". What did they compose? We learned yesterday that also Avraham Avinu... our forefather composed books against this. There was a whole industry of books.

What were the compositions? "**Heich ikar avodatah**" and "**mah mishpatah umah ma'aseha**", how to serve idolatry.

### Innovation: Two Types of Compositions

Seemingly "ikar avodah zarah" means also as we saw earlier, shoshon avodah zarah, that is the theory of why one must serve idolatry, where the concept comes from, various things. "Heich ikar avodatah", perhaps the first were still good books, because they still remembered that there is a Creator.

### Continuation of Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 2, Laws 1-2 – Prohibition of Reading Books of Idolatry, Looking at Forms, and Thoughts Against Principles of Torah

#### Halacha 1 (Continuation) – Prohibition of Reading Books of Idolatry and Looking at Forms

##### The Rambam's Words

"**Sefarim rabim chibru ovdei avodah zarah ba'avodatah - heichach ikar avodatah, umah mishpatah uma'aseha. Tzivanu HaKadosh Baruch Hu shelo likrot ba'oten hasefarim klal, velo neharher bah velo bidvar midvareha, va'afilu lehistakel bidmut hatzurah asur, shene'emar 'al tifnu el ha'elilim'.**"

But how is this? Well, it could be that if there weren't so many books, says the Rambam, there wouldn't have been such a

great destruction, because there would only remain the first book from the generation of Enosh, where it would still say that there is a Creator in the world, but even that one he says one must not read. It's a mistake because it became so convoluted. If people weren't so stupid, perhaps there wouldn't be a problem. Okay, in reality, I don't want to say that people are stupid, people were so poor in their understanding.

In short, because there are all these books, because there are all these books, the Rambam says an innovation, you read the Rambam in Yiddish, you can give it in the books. You should know that there are such books. It's not missing, perhaps otherwise there is, because one should know how far we've come. But it's not missing.

Says the Rambam, "**tzivanu HaKadosh Baruch Hu shelo likrot ba'oten hasefarim klal**", the Almighty commanded, this is a mistake in the language, "tzivanu HaKadosh Baruch Hu", the Torah commanded us, that we should not read in these books. "**Velo neharher bahem**", one should not think about these books or about the things that are in these books, think how to serve all these powers, the angels, "**velo bidvar midvarehem. Va'afilu lehistakel bidmut hatzurah**", which we learned yesterday that after serving the stars and constellations they began making forms that symbolize the stars and constellations, one may also not look at this.

Even if you're not looking because you want to serve or something, you're just looking, it's ancient. It seems that the form is a great destruction, it's the place when one makes the power into a personality, as you said yesterday, that it suddenly becomes under the concept of a person, that it begins to be *metiv umerei'a*, and fear also looks like a human attribute. Okay.

#### Interpretation of "Al Tifnu El Ha'elilim"

"**Shene'emar, 'al tifnu el ha'elilim**", on this stands a verse: "al tifnu el ha'elilim", you should not turn. Turning doesn't mean serving, turning means two things according to what the Rambam has now said: both learning the books, and looking at the form. Both are the same for you.

Yes, I say that "tifnu" means to turn in the heart, as the Rambam said in the Laws of Prophecy that he must be *libo panui* thinking about something, so "al tifnu el ha'elilim".

#### "Pen Tidrosh Leloheihem"

Says the Rambam further, and about this another verse says: "**pen tidrosh leloheihem lemor eichah ya'avdu**", you should not begin to look at other ways of worship of idolatry, thinking how they serve their idolatry. Indeed the Rambam, "**afilu lo tish'al al derech avodatah heichach hi**", you should not even ask about the way of worship, how they serve it, "**af al pi she'ein atah oved**", even if you're not going to serve the idolatry, and you're only asking out of curiosity to know how one serves the idolatry, this is a great problem.

Says the Rambam, why? "**Shehadavar zeh gorem lehipanot achareha**", you yourself will begin to be more and more drawn, "**vela'asot kemo shehem osim**", and in the end you will do as they do. "**Shene'emar**", on this stands a verse, after you will look, "**tidrosh leloheihem**", you will inquire in their books, "**ve'e'eseh ken gam ani**", you will begin to think "and I will also do so".

#### Innovation: Each Step is Its Own Prohibition

It's very interesting. The simple interpretation one could have learned that the verse says you should not do as they do, and the way that it says you should not do as they do is you should not look how they do, so you won't imitate. The Rambam has added here, perhaps he has a... even when you begin to read, you're not yet thinking of wanting to imitate. No, that's what the Rambam says. The Rambam has switched. One, simple interpretation, one could have said that the verse only means you should not do. This is a long way from saying you should not do. The Rambam has learned that each step is its own prohibition.

Indeed because after you turn toward it, even if you just ask, "What, interesting, what does the idolatry do?", in the end he will... What does the Rambam mean to say here? That there is such a drawing power?

#### Why is the Drawing Power So Strong?

No, very good, because the Rambam holds that idolatry is not crazy. When idolatry is crazy, there's nothing to look at. And even today, we who are already clear that idolatry is crazy, there's no question. But in the books of our early authorities, sometimes people were very impressed by the stories that idolatry tells. If you would look, you would be drawn, because they had good stories. Therefore the Torah says, you should not even look. You should not even learn the books. Why? Because the prohibition is a fence, it's not a prohibition itself, it's a fence, because in the end one does what they did.

#### Practical Difference: The Rambam Himself Read Books of Idolatry

From this one can understand that if someone learns it indeed only, as the Rambam himself learned it in order to understand the history, just for history, he has no concern, *per se*, no prohibition. The prohibition is in a manner that causes to do as they do. He brings in the Commentary on the Mishnah and in other places, the Rambam himself writes that he read books of idolatry, but he read it in a permitted manner to understand what their errors were.

#### Discussion: Why Does the Rambam Bring "Bidmut Hatzurah" Here?

In general, it could be in general that today when there is no idolatry... Seemingly the great drawing power from it is the same reason as the Rambam wrote before, because it's difficult for a person to serve an abstract thing. One indeed wants to have a form, all these things indeed have a form. And in this it can be said immediately after what one made the *bidmut hatzurah*. It's easier to serve something that one can see, something visual.

I mean, I think, the Rambam says *bidmut hatzurah* is because there is a Gemara. On looking at books there wasn't really a Gemara that forbids it, but the looking at *bidmut hatzurah* is explicitly stated in the Gemara that it's forbidden because of "al tifnu el ha'elilim". So he connects the two things. But the Rambam doesn't say that the problem is the visual. The Rambam says that it's an explicit verse, it's not invented in the Torah. Yes, he gives a reason.

#### "Bichlal Hala'avin" – All Prohibitions are One Prohibition

Says the Rambam, "**bichlal hala'avin 'eleh elohecha, 'al tifnu, 'venishmartem lenafshoteichem, 'ufen tidrosh, is all one prohibition, one prohibition, shelo yifneh achar avodah zarah**", one should not be dragged after, one should not go after idolatry.

Says the Rambam, "**kol haponeh achareha bederech she'osin bah ma'aseh**", if someone transgresses this and he indeed turned after the idolatry, but he does it with an action, what does this mean, if one only reads without action, it's a prohibition without action, one doesn't receive lashes, it's only a prohibition. But if one indeed does an action, for example I know, one buys the book and opens the book, it's indeed an action, so there are indeed lashes.

#### Discussion: What is a "Ma'aseh" in This Context?

So in other words, what he wants to tell us here is seemingly, a person could have thought that it's a prohibition without action, because you're only buying it for preparation or what, that is the reading and the thought is without action. But it is that if one does it with an action there are lashes.

One says or certain prohibitions that are always a prohibition without action? What about can one think here that the prohibition is indeed the thinking, the book is indeed only an opening to sin, but the Rambam doesn't say so, he says that if one does it in a manner that there is an action one receives lashes.

No, the prohibition is looking in the book. Why do you say that the prohibition is the thinking? The prohibition is looking in the book. Looking in the book, because when someone looks in the book and he reads the letters without understanding what it means, must have the chutzpah to look in the book, according to what we argued. There's no difference, but to look in the book is the prohibition, this is "lo tifnu el ha'elilim".

The prohibition is not to think, the next prohibition is a bit to think completely, but looking in a book is a prohibition. Because "tifnu" doesn't mean thinking, "tifnu" means turning there. One can even say looking in the book, looking at the pictures without knowing what it means. The prohibition is in the idolatry of the book.

Every prohibition in the world one can do a similar action that is not the same action, it's not the problem. The prohibition is here what one can argue, the Rambam agrees that it can be without action, but it can be with action, and the prohibition is the action.

## Halacha 2 – Prohibition of Thought That Uproots Principles of Torah

### The Rambam's Words

Says the Rambam further: "**Velo avodah zarah bilvad hu she'asur lifnot achareha bamachshavah**". Says the Rambam thus, once we have here learned what idolatry is, and the great prohibition of having thoughts that lead to idolatry, the Rambam says a great principle. Once we understand that there is such a great prohibition in thought itself, that even if the worship is believing in the Almighty, anything that takes away from faith in the Almighty is so terrible. What it can cause, not what it takes away. What it can cause, what is such a type of thing? For example reading the books, sometimes it happens that hearing leads to idolatry. Similar to this there are also the other parts.

"**Kol machshavah shegomet lo la'adam la'akor ikar me'ikarei haTorah**", every thought that causes a person to uproot one of the principles of the Torah that we have already learned in the Laws of Foundations of Torah - he means the four principles, and we will say clearly what he's talking about regarding the coming of Mashiach, he's talking about principles of Foundations of Torah - "**muzharim anu shelo**

**leha'alotah al libenu**", we are warned about this shelo leha'alotah al libenu, we should not bring up the thought on our heart, we should not focus on the thought, "**velo nasiach da'atenu lechach**", and we should not let our mind go away from the truth, from what we do know, and crawl after the false thoughts, "**venachshov, venimsach acharei hirhurim**". We should not let ourselves go after the thoughts.

#### Question: How Can One Forbid Thought When There's a Mitzvah to Think?

Why? Says the Rambam, what are the problems? One can indeed think, it's just a thought, he'll come back. And the Rambam, this is the question he asks, the Almighty asks indeed, you indeed have a mitzvah to think. The Rambam says indeed that it's a mitzvah "leida sheyesh sham matzui rishon", you must indeed know, you must think, not perhaps yes, perhaps no. You must indeed think. Well, how can I say that you may not think about this? You hold indeed that it's a mitzvah of investigation, a mitzvah of thinking.

#### Answer: "Da'ato Shel Adam Ketzarah"

The answer is, why? No, "**lefi sheda'ato shel adam ketzarah**", a person's mind is not so strong, it's short. He means the mind of most people. "**Velo kol hada'ot**", not all minds, here does he mean minds or does he mean people? People. Not all possessors of minds, not all people's minds, "**yecholt lehashig emet al buryo**", can reach the complete truth, the depth of the truth.

**Therefore, \*\*\*"And if every person follows after the thoughts of his heart"\*\*\*, if we were to say that everyone may think anything in order to arrive at faith, and in the end he has arrived, he also thinks foolishness, he also thinks falsehoods, and in the end he has arrived, this is not so. Why? Because many people don't have the strength. Perhaps it could be that certain people have the strength to think also about the hypotheses, about the falsehoods, and return to the truth, but many people, they remain stuck with the falsehoods and they will think that this is the conclusion.**

#### Explanation of "Destroys the World"

"**It turns out he destroys the world according to his limited understanding**". A person, I had thought "destroys the world" means a person destroys his worldview, his world. He means destroys the world because his children will follow after him, and they will be forced.

Again, if everyone, the emphasis here is on "every person," if everyone will come up every day with a new religion, with a new faith, according to his limited understanding, most people are after all foolish, God forbid foolish, but limited in understanding, the world will go crazy. Everyone will have his ten thousand religions a day, because everyone will go his own way. This is what the Rambam explains "destroys the world." "Destroys the world" means the social world, the world of interpersonal relations will be destroyed, not the world, the trees and the houses. It means the social world, the state, yes, the settlement of the world. "Destroys the world" refers to the settlement of the world, right? The settlement will be destroyed, because everyone will go according to the strength of his understanding.

And the Rambam gives an example of how this will be. "**How so?**"

## Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 2, Laws 2-3 – "Destroys the World," the Prohibition of Thinking Without Logic, and "The Commandment of Idolatry is Equal to All the Commandments"

### Law 2 (Continued) – "Destroys the World" and the Prohibition of Thinking Without Order

**The Rambam's Words: "Sometimes he will stray after idolatry..."**

The world will tomorrow everyone will have ten thousand religions a day, because everyone will go according to his way. This is what the Rambam explains **"destroys the world"**. Destroys the world means the social world, the world of human beings will be destroyed, not the world, the trees and the houses. It means the social world, the state, yes, the settlement of the world. Destroys the world refers to the settlement of the world, right? The settlement will be destroyed, because everyone will go according to the strength of understanding.

And the Rambam gives an example of how it will be.

How so, how does a person let himself wander after bad thoughts? He says, **"Sometimes he will stray after idolatry"**. His false thoughts, his false thoughts will lead him to idolatry, and fear of serving. He describes the wishy-washy people will become, because every minute he will be different.

**"Sometimes he will think about the unity of the Creator, whether He exists or not"**. Sometimes he will delve into the matters of the unity of the Creator, he will have doubts about it, he will think, what is it, is there indeed one Creator, or perhaps not.

**"Above and below"**, he will think about **"above and below, before and behind"**.

**"Above and Below" – The Rambam's Explanation in the Mishnah**

The Rambam explains what exactly these thoughts mean. He says this is the ancient language, it's a special language from the Mishnah. And in the Mishnah it states there, one must recall what the Rambam says on that Mishnah. In the Mishnah it states, **"And whoever does not have regard for the honor of his Creator, it would have been better for him not to have come into the world"**. About this you would think **"above and below, before and behind"**.

This the Rambam says, what does **"honor of his Creator"** mean? **"Honor of his Creator"** is intellect. His thinking about things he cannot understand, this is called his intellect. And therefore, **"it would have been better for him not to have come into the world"**. This is what he says here, he destroys his world, because he doesn't understand, he confuses his mind.

No, one must think, because "above and below" is apparently what the Rambam taught us, that above is the Creator and below are the spheres and the stars. It's not that one shouldn't think, it's not that it's a contradiction to the unity of the Creator. No, no, this is not a contradiction. It could be that you're right that this is what it means. I don't know how the Rambam explains the words.

But in any case, the problem here is that he thinks without intellect. He goes, every person, the prohibition here is on every person, he thinks all day things that he doesn't have the tools and the strength to think. This he will go and do, the Rambam.

**"And he doesn't know the measures to judge with them" – Measures Means Logic**

**"And sometimes he will think about prophecy, whether it is true or not. And sometimes about the Torah, whether it is from Heaven or not. And he doesn't know the measures to judge with them"**. He doesn't know... the measure means to say he doesn't have the tools, the tools, with which to contemplate this. Someone who is intellectually sick, when he will contemplate, he will come out to heresy.

One sees very clearly, the problem is that most people don't know, haven't learned logic. Measures to judge means basically logic. And most people don't speak logic, he will think, he thinks this way, he thinks that way, and then he will confuse his mind.

**The Distinction: Thinking with Good Measures Versus Thinking Without Order**

But this could mean like a case, when he puts it in a general rule, he says this I know from the Creator, now I'll delve into this, for example what the Rambam brought in Foundations of Torah, that these are the measures, delving into this the way the Rambam taught us to think, then it's good. But if you go to think without any tools, without the proper tools, how not to let yourself wander after your thoughts, it's like the Rambam.

Measures to judge means the measures like the measures of Torah, the measures of intellect. What is intellect? What is a proof? What is not a proof? And it's very clear here that the Rambam is explaining that the problem is that most people haven't learned logic. Most people don't have intellect, it's a terrible thing. They don't have the proper way, they don't know what constitutes a good proof, what doesn't constitute a good proof, and therefore he will come out to heresy. But one who does know the measures to judge, for him this is certainly a mitzvah.

So the prohibition isn't in general. The prohibition is to think in a way that is not clear, that is not true. The prohibition is not to think about the unity of God, the prohibition is not to make it clear. The prohibition is to think after the thoughts of your heart, not after the straight intellect, to be drawn after the musings of the heart, to wander after the musings of the heart.

**The Source in Torah: "And you shall not stray after your hearts"**

But this he brings, but how does this stand in the Torah? **"Do not turn to idols"** speaks of idolatry. How does one speak of all other things? It's an interesting thing. I mean that a person who lives among people like us, who has learned books that say the truth, he may not wander after the... he may not simply wander after his understanding.

**Question: Didn't Avraham Avinu Wander?**

For Avraham Avinu, the wandering indeed brought good things. All the people around him thought wrongly, and he wandered in his understanding.

I don't agree at all, because Avraham Avinu thought straight. Avraham Avinu first demonstrated that one is wandering together with thoughts. There stands here a prohibition to think unclearly. But for an idol worshipper there is also no prohibition to think, but it will come to him with greater foolishness.

The ideal of Avraham Avinu arriving at the truth is because he did know the good measures, and if he hadn't known the

measures, he couldn't have had any prohibition, he couldn't have had any Torah. I mean, it doesn't make any sense, but he also wouldn't have come to the truth. The Rambam's problem is the people who go to think without any order, without any logic, they think into the world.

And this doesn't help. You can say it can't get worse? It can indeed get worse. Perfect, it can always get worse. The Rebbe said, going away from intellect is not truth. But one cannot arrive at truth without good measures. Who can arrive at truth? He's a paranoid person, he should be able to arrive at truth? He's one who is a bit disturbed in the soul... he's not orderly, he doesn't have order in the powers of the soul.

Avraham Avinu had good powers. He could sit down and think. He saw that he wanted to go up a stage and win trust with his surroundings.

### **"And you shall not stray after your hearts" – The Broader Source**

The Rambam says, he brings, where does this stand in the Torah? Yes, it was stated, earlier it was stated only about idols. Where does it state in the Torah that one should not, "do not turn," speaks of idolatry? We know that it's also the question of bringing idolatry into the calculation, but thinking about matters of foundations of knowledge, the principles of religion, the principles of faith.

He says, where does this stand? **"And you shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes after which you go astray"**. That is, **"that each of you should be drawn after his limited understanding, after which you go astray"**, means the thing, wandering after your understanding, **"and he imagines that his thought grasps truth"**. He thinks that even though he doesn't have clear principles and he doesn't follow the truth, his understanding, his intellect, will by itself arrive at truth.

### **Innovation in the Way of Interpretation: Even When It's True, But the Reasoning is Foolishness**

I mean, I'll say an innovation in the way of interpretation, that if someone thinks that he has some basic reasoning, he thinks he understands that there is a Creator because he has some gut reasoning, this is also the prohibition of "and you shall not stray." Someone says, he thinks, "what stands in the Torah is straight reasoning." In truth, if someone says simply, "I understand by myself," because he builds on some foolishness, he transgresses "and you shall not stray," according to the Rambam's explanation of "and you shall not stray." Because **"he imagines that his thought grasps truth"**. It doesn't say "he imagines that his thought grasps truth" and it's not truth. Even when it's indeed true, but his reasoning is foolishness.

It's not more than this, that it's truth, that it's a matter of going away from intellect. A person thinks within science and Torah, there he should understand and not from outside. If he speaks indeed about this, the Rambam speaks about this, that you shouldn't think without order. I say this only, I don't know if it's halachah, I say this only to clarify that the Rambam's prohibition is to think confusedly. The Rambam's prohibition is not to go away from Torah. His measures to judge when one wants to be "within limited," this is not what he says. "Within intellect," not "within" but according to faith one should think, this doesn't stand in the Rambam. It stands in the Rambam that one should think clearly, not the imaginary thoughts grasp truth.

### **The Parable of "The Line of Righteousness" – Truth is Narrow, Falsehood is Unlimited**

Truth. There are many people who hold he has faith because he had some gut feeling dream. It's a sharp gut feeling. I think of a way how to explain this. The world said earlier that Avraham Avinu found the line of righteousness. It's a small line! Truth is one small line! Falsehood is "unlimited"! And "fantasy," "imagination" is very large. When a person lets himself wander after his intellect, the chances that he should exactly arrive at the narrow line of righteousness is very small. Because he must after all follow... it's impossible, because the line of righteousness is not some place suddenly that one arrives at. One only arrives there when one thinks with intellect. There isn't even any chance here.

When one follows the measures to judge, one learns the Rambam in Foundations of Torah, one learns the books that teach us to think the good way, one will better and better understand. But I mean this is the wandering after intellect, **"after which you go astray"**, this is what one wanders after. As our Sages said, **"after your hearts" this is heresy, "and after your eyes" this is promiscuity.**

### **"After your eyes this is promiscuity" – Why Does the Rambam Bring This Here?**

Okay, so one must know how the Rambam explains the part about promiscuity. This is apparently a heart. Apparently... it's another topic. He brings there the statement of the Sages in its entirety. Apparently promiscuity doesn't come in here. Promiscuity is another prohibition. But it's interesting that heresy and promiscuity one puts that both is like something where the "fantasy" is very strong. But it's not... I don't mean that he must. He simply brings a source that "your hearts," the prohibition here has a source.

Were there other places where "after your eyes" the Rambam meant heresy? Yes, "and you shall not stray" I said from "and it shall be for you." "And you shall not stray," a minute ago, yes? **"And you shall not stray after your hearts"**. This I thought about the straying. But probably this is not the main source here. Probably this is simple. He brings the language here, yes.

### **"Causes a person to be driven from the World to Come" – An Action?**

The Rambam says, **"And not only this, but this causes a person to be driven from the World to Come"**. The prohibition of following imagination, even if it's very very severe, because the most severe thing is causes a person to be driven, to drive him away from the World to Come, from the truth, from the knowledge that lives forever, from the World to Come. But there must be an action, there must be lashes. Here it's hard to say if you do with some action.

This is not possible. It's possible, yes. The previous prohibition is to go after the last. You can do with an action, you can do with an action. But here, the prohibition is to think. The prohibition is to think crookedly. The Rambam is explaining, here the prohibition is to think without logic. Whoever hasn't learned logic, he transgresses with the desire to think.

### **Discussion: Learning Books – What is the Prohibition?**

And also, even if a person thought he will buy a book, he will certainly be good, but he can also fall into one of the bad books.

Okay, but the prohibition is not to buy the book, okay? The prohibition is to think. So one must buy the right book and

think the right thoughts. A great service, this is not simple.

No, right books that one trusts already, someone buys a Jewish book, he learns with the aspect of faith, he learns Kabbalah. This is not a problem, this is certainly not a transgression. Okay.

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### **Law 3 – "The Commandment of Idolatry is Equal to All the Commandments"**

#### **The Rambam's Words**

The Rambam says further, "until here" is the definition. Now the Rambam goes the next few laws to speak about the severity of idolatry, how severe it is, and also how this is the foundation. And also the definition, what is the definition of an idol worshipper. But this is also built on this, because idolatry is the foundation. One ceases to be a Jew when one doesn't believe in idolatry, in other words.

The Rambam says further, **"The commandment of idolatry is equal to all the commandments together"**. The mitzvah of the prohibition of idolatry is as severe as all other mitzvot together, or it has an influence perhaps on all other mitzvot.

As it is stated, it states that when a person worships idolatry, he cannot do all other mitzvot, he will not do all other mitzvot. As it is stated, **"And when you err"**, even if he is inadvertent, **"and do not do all these commandments which the Lord spoke to Moshe"**, states the verse in Parshat Shelach.

So, **"and from the oral tradition they learned that about idolatry the verse speaks"**, that the verse speaks of idolatry, and the Torah calls it all the commandments, because idolatry is as severe as all the commandments. It means from the oral tradition we learned, that the law doesn't speak simply of an error inadvertently, every transgression brings with it suffering.

One sees from here, because **whoever acknowledges idolatry**, one who acknowledges idolatry, there is a language acknowledges idolatry, so is the language of the Sages, but...

### **Law 3 (Continued) – "Whoever Acknowledges Idolatry Denies the Entire Torah"**

#### **The Rambam's Words and the Language "Acknowledges" and "Denies"**

So, and from the oral tradition it teaches that idolatry is severe and transgresses all the commandments. That is, the verse speaks of idolatry, and the Torah calls it "all the commandments," because idolatry is as severe as all the commandments. And from the oral tradition it teaches, that is, from the oral tradition it teaches that the law doesn't speak simply of an error inadvertently, every transgression brings from an error.

And he says there a tremendous thing, that **"all that the Lord commanded you through Moshe"**, from now until forever, one sees from here that **"whoever acknowledges idolatry"** - one who acknowledges idolatry, there is a language "acknowledges idolatry," so is the language of the Sages, but he means to say one acknowledges that there is another worship, yes, **"denies the entire Torah"**.

The language of the Sages is not that he has a kind of faith, he believes. Their word is "acknowledgment" and "denial," yes, one who acknowledges is a denier. He agrees or doesn't agree.

He agrees to idolatry, denial is the opposite of acknowledgment, like in the prayer of thanksgiving (Modim), a denier is one who doesn't acknowledge. Acknowledges the existence of His power and will.

### **"Whoever acknowledges idolatry denies the entire Torah, and all the prophets, and everything the prophets were commanded from Adam until the end of the world, as it says 'through Moses'."**

He means to say all the prophets from Adam until the end of the world, as it says **"from the day that Hashem commanded."** No, there are two verses. It says **"that which Hashem commanded you through Moses,"** and afterwards it says "that is all the commandments," and afterwards it says **"from the day that Hashem commanded and onwards,"** that is from all the commandments from Avraham Avinu, Adam HaRishon. Adam HaRishon was the first prophet, yes. He told him not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, I don't know. Before, whatever, whatever commandments were given to Adam.

### **Why is "Acknowledging Idolatry" Equal to "Denying the Entire Torah"?**

He says, one who acknowledges idolatry denies the entire Torah. Interesting. Why is he... he can be a denier, I can understand that it's a slippery slope, but someone who just thinks that he needs to give honor to the stars is not yet a denier of the entire Torah. What does the Rambam mean to say that we are concerned that he will become a denier? I don't know, what do we know how the... it says that he is. What do you know exactly how it works? He is. Just as one says... one no longer accepts his... against the entire Torah. It means that he is, I don't know, it's such a severity. A severity, yes.

It could be that on the contrary, that the entire Torah was made not to serve idolatry. It goes opposite. It could be that the word is because he runs after his fantasy, all his beliefs are no longer worth anything.

#### **Speaker 2:**

He's not talking about fantasy anymore, now we're talking about serving idolatry.

#### **Speaker 1:**

No, acknowledging, but it's still the conclusion. Yes, he believes in it. Yes, but you're saying never, because of this all other thoughts are worth nothing, because he's not a person who deals at all with attributes of logic. He's a person who wanders after his thoughts.

#### **Speaker 2:**

No, he wants to bring out here the relation of commandments and idolatry, that all commandments came in order to uproot idolatry. That is the way of the Rambam also here, he brings very many commandments and idolatry. That means, if very many commandments or perhaps all commandments are in order to uproot idolatry, you've already lost the point. The one who already believes in idolatry, I have nothing from all your other commandments.

#### **Speaker 1:**

Yes. And conversely, **"and whoever denies idolatry acknowledges the entire Torah, and it is the essence of all the commandments."** The thing of being a denier of idolatry is the essence of all the commandments.

### Halacha 9 – "A Jew Who Served Idolatry is Like a Gentile in All His Matters"

Is there a halacha that comes out from this, a practical halacha that is a practical difference? Yes, the Rambam, "**A Jew who served idolatry is like a gentile in all his matters.**" He has become like a gentile. "**And a Jew who serves idolatry, which is a sin punishable by stoning, also has laws.**" He is called an apostate to idolatry. What is idolatry? It's a severe sin, what is idolatry? It's a sin, idolatry is a sin that is stoning. It's an opinion that he does idolatry, he's a Jew who did a sin of stoning, he desecrates Shabbat, he desecrates Shabbat, he's a Jew. No, idolatry he is "like a gentile in all his matters." The practical difference I don't know clearly, I don't know clearly regarding which halacha this is.

#### Speaker 2:

I saw a relevance regarding testimony or a minyan.

#### Speaker 1:

He doesn't say the halacha here. Each one of those things is a separate halacha in the Rambam that one must come and learn. The Rambam doesn't say clearly here, he says that he is a gentile. He doesn't mean to say the halacha, he means here to bring out the thing that idolatry is the essential thing of being a Jew, and not serving idolatry. Therefore, if you serve idolatry...

You're a gentile. Here the word gentile doesn't appear. It's not there. They bring for example that he still needs to give a get to his wife. That's not the topic here. The topic here is to say the severity. Also, the distinction is, there's no apostate to idolatry, right? It's a worshiper. Someone who only believes in idolatry, doesn't serve it, there's still not this law, it seems. You need to actually do the deed. Yes?

### "An Apostate to Idolatry is an Apostate to the Entire Torah"

The Rambam further, another thing, **an apostate to idolatry is an apostate to the entire Torah.** What is the meaning? There are other commandments that a person doesn't do them, he's an apostate. Apostate means to say that he doesn't belong to the commandment, he's out regarding the commandment. For example, someone doesn't wear tzitzit, he does a certain sin, one doesn't count the other sins also as an apostate. But someone who believes in idolatry, therefore he's an apostate on all other commandments also.

Someone will tell you, wait a minute, I'll give you... I'll tell you... one of the commentators says that the Rambam means here to clarify, what he said that he is like a gentile in all his matters, means to say that he is an apostate to the entire Torah. Because certain laws he still has like a gentile, that his wife is a married woman. But here there are no laws. The Rambam doesn't say anything here about laws, he only says the idea that he is a gentile. Exactly what the law of a gentile means, one must know... he is a complete gentile.

But the apostate to idolatry means this, that even regarding other things, that someone transgresses one commandment, doesn't yet mean that he's excluded from another commandment. But idolatry already includes everything else. That is the word.

### Halacha 10 – Heretics, Repentance, and "The Thought of a Heretic is Idolatry"

#### Who is a "Heretic" and Why Doesn't One Accept Their Repentance?

**And not only idolaters but also the heretics,** they are those who don't have good faith in the Almighty, **they don't have the law of Israel regarding any matter,** they don't have any law like Israel regarding anything. **And we don't accept them in repentance ever,** one doesn't accept them in repentance ever. **As it says "all who come to her will not return,"** all who go into idolatry, heresy, will not return, cannot come back, **"and they will not reach the paths of life,"** they will not return to the paths of life. And what is this heretics? What should one do, that if he did repentance, let him straight into the study hall, what he speaks out and in the upper world one can't do anything, I'm speaking of the lower world. Here you have a thing, one takes him back, one gives him back, one teaches him for a lower. Yes, one can do repentance, one makes him out, but the heretic doesn't let me back, because one is always suspicious. That is apparently the word. One can't know, a heretic is a tricky person. He confuses the thought. Now he does repentance, one suspects the trick.

#### Speaker 2:

Read the Rav, but the Rav says. What is a heretic? The Rav, the heretics are those who follow the thoughts of their heart, in the foolishness of their words. They go after fantasy. They are like philosophers. They wander after the thoughts of their heart. But, he takes idolaters on the body of Torah to deny in times of persecution by others, where idolaters not someone in this. The interesting thing the heretics not only someone who has a certain thought. Thinking alone is not yet enough. Right. He is such, it's someone who one calls a free-thinker. He thinks a whole lot like this, in times of persecution belief, means when he is, but based on this thought of the above. Not precisely in times of persecution. Not that he says but a tallit. Yes. Ah, the hint of the word. The word is he says, there's no Torah, there's no commandment. That is the word. Right? And on this person... not only may he not be a Jew... what does the word times of persecution mean? Arrogance? Chutzpah? Yes, arrogance is apparently such a one of arrogance. In, but what is the meaning? They have already said once the words today. Their, one doesn't accept in repentance. So, apparently here someone the Rabbis see that he doesn't mean someone who had a bad thought, or like before. So, but he he based on this thought, he has been separated in a community. So, here is the community on thought, but the heretic is already... he has declared a separation. He has raised a flag of his heresy. Yes.

### "It is Forbidden to Speak with Them and to Answer Their Questions"

So, the Rambam, **and it is forbidden to speak with them...** one also understands why one doesn't accept repentance, because he did a great act of chutzpah, he declared a rebellion in Judaism and in Torah. Okay, another opinion. **And it is forbidden to speak with them,** one may not converse with them, because perhaps he will let repentance, generally one may not with them... one may not even answer them. Answer, yes. One may not accept their repentance, and one also may not answer a question. **As it says "do not come near the door of her house."** It is apparently further, because he will confuse your head. What does it say in the Gemara, a Jewish heretic one doesn't answer, one doesn't say "do not give." What does it say there? "You shall not intermarry with them." This means the Rambam explains, that a Jew doesn't help, because he will confuse your head, he will make the problem worse, he won't accept the answer.

### "The Thought of a Heretic is Idolatry" – A Difficult Halacha

Okay. The Rambam says, "**and the thought of a heretic,**" this is a difficult halacha. I don't know what this means. This is a Gemara, but... what does this mean? He is a heretic, he doesn't even believe in anything. What comes in idolatry? Hello? Does a heretic have a law of idolatry? I don't know. That's not what it means. If one sees that he is sanctifying a sacrifice, what should one say, that he is sanctifying it to idolatry. Just as we learned before, and there's still a Torah about... the the... I have I have I have said that he thinks it as things about things. One doesn't say that it is idolatry. This is a Gemara, he doesn't bring the Gemara here on this side. "The thought of a heretic is idolatry." I don't know what... I don't know where it comes in here in this halacha.

It seems like this, that simply, when you don't know what he thought, he thought to the Almighty or not, but such a thought is idolatry. He is a heretic, idolatry he believes yes. Idolatry can mean what he called idolatry. Heretics who are involved in idolatry. He called heretics idolatry. He will go into the same category. In Chullin it speaks about slaughter, but it's not clear that the heretic of tractate Chullin speaks of the heretic that the Rambam has now said. The heretic of tractate Chullin can speak of some group of people who were idolaters etc. And he brings a commentary of Rabbi David the Rambam, I don't know how, here is a commentary of Rabbi David the Rambam, it explained that one day... ah, the Rambam didn't say, heretics... ah, sometimes Joseph that Rabbi David the Rambam... sometimes, sometimes! Today is idolatry. Okay, in short, we need to be stringent, we need to be concerned that my neighbor is going to land on idolatry. No, perhaps that day was a day that they were in idolatry, we can't know. It's not clear.

### Laws of Idolatry Chapter 2, Halacha 4 – The Law of the Blasphemer

#### Introduction: The Rambam's Connection of Blasphemer to Idolatry

##### Speaker 1:

Often, that day was a day that they lived in idolatry. One can't know. It's not clear. The Rambam doesn't say what this should mean practically for halacha. It's not clear. The Rambam sees this apparently, he brings it simply to show, that a heretic is also a... just like idolatry which has the law of a gentile, also a heretic is like idolatry.

Now the Rambam goes to learn the laws of a blasphemer. Someone who is a blasphemer is the Almighty. It means here says the Name with curses. Yes. They will see exactly.

The Rambam says, "**whoever acknowledges idolatry**" is already true. Someone acknowledges, that idolatry is true. What means already true, I don't know. So one doesn't need, so what does already true mean? Someone who means about idolatry that it's true. That the star for example has power.

##### Speaker 2:

No, that he is taught already earlier. But one must serve it.

##### Speaker 1:

But one must serve it. Idolatry idol. Right. But what, but what the Almighty.

Ah, that is apparently the verse. He brings a verse. "**And the one who passes to anger**". He says, and passes the idolater, and passes here blasphemes them. Both are one

thing. "**As it says, and the soul that acts with a high hand, whether native or stranger.**" Does with a high hand mean serving idolatry with a high hand?

##### Speaker 2:

Yes, according to what the multitude, remember the same portion of desecrating the body to philosophy. It is exactly the same portion.

##### Speaker 1:

"**As it says**", in the continuation of the portion of slaughter. "**He blasphemes Hashem**". With this he is a blasphemer, with this of the Name the Almighty. The philosopher serves idolatry with a high hand, or perhaps other sins with a high hand. Just as we say it is "**he blasphemes Hashem**", it comes out that idolatry and blaspheming the Name is in the same category. The philosopher serves idolatry with arrogance is a blasphemer.

Because of this is the halacha that besides that one gives stoning for idolatry and for a blasphemer, one hangs them one gives them hanging, both stoning. And both receive stoning and both receive hanging. And the philosopher the reason why a blasphemer also receives stoning, is also in the category of idolatry.

Both are the same, both receive both hanging and stoning. He says to him, "**and therefore I included the law of the blasphemer**", and I mean that there's no other prohibition that receives hanging, only a blasphemer from idolatry, because idolatry is called a blasphemer, as he brings in the introduction to the Mishnayot.

"**And therefore I included the law of the blasphemer**", because I see because of this I bring here the laws of the blasphemer. Why? First because he has similar laws regarding stoning, "**because both are deniers of the fundamental principle.**" But he already said, because both receive stoning. For this they both receive stoning, and this is because all are deniers of the fundamental principle.

What is to believe in idolatry or to say that one must serve it, a blasphemer is the same sort of matter, therefore he belongs here. A blasphemer is also a denier of the fundamental principle.

#### Question: How is a Blasphemer a Denier of the Fundamental Principle?

##### Speaker 1:

It's very difficult to understand, because the blasphemer that he spoke about until now doesn't yet speak of a blasphemer who was piercing the Name with the Name. He didn't speak of this. He said someone who acknowledges idolatry. Therefore, what said the not correct words, but he is a denier of the fundamental principle. Or he believes secretly in the Almighty, he conducts himself in a manner that is blaspheming the Name, or in a manner that is denying the fundamental principle, something like this. One must understand better, I don't know.

And in general I don't understand what a blasphemer means, something is missing in the entire understanding.

#### Halacha 13: What is the Act of a Blasphemer?

##### Speaker 1:

The Rambam says, "**one who blasphemes is liable**", "one who blasphemes." Is this a blasphemer? What we're going

we're learning, there aren't such laws, a few laws, what is this a blasphemer?

There's something like... there's a nature of a blasphemer. A blasphemer is like an idolater, but without idolatry. It means someone who is sharp and someone who disgraces the Almighty. But this is something a prohibition that has no action, this is not yet an action. Here it goes around the action of a blasphemer. What is the act of a blasphemer?

**Speaker 2:**

Could be, but he says that every idolater is essentially a blasphemer, as you say, the idea of blasphemer and the exact halacha of blasphemer.

**Speaker 1:**

Ah, now, something is missing. Something is missing here, one must understand it better.

So the Rambam says, **"one who blasphemes is liable to stoning"**. Ah, the language of blasphemer in general comes from that verse, **"he blasphemes Hashem,"** which appears in the language of example, it means someone who acts with a high hand is blaspheming Hashem. Not piercing the Name...

**Speaker 2:**

Yes, very good. The language of blasphemer.

**Speaker 1:**

I say, the language of blasphemer is only... only by this example of the Torah.

**The Rambam's Ruling: The Special Name is A-D-N-Y**

**Speaker 1:**

**"One who blasphemes is liable to stoning, until he explicitly pronounces the special Name of four letters, which is aleph dalet nun yud."** It means the way how one says it, the special Name is yud heh vav heh.

**Speaker 2:**

No, no, read what the Rambam says! Read until the end of the halacha... one must say, the Rambam brings two opinions, but the Rambam says one must say aleph dalet nun yud. The special Name is yud heh vav heh, but the way how one usually says it out is aleph dalet nun yud. And the Rambam, if someone explicitly pronounces the special Name in the manner of aleph dalet nun yud...

**Speaker 1:**

Yes, yes, yes. It's true that in other... in the Gemara it says Shem HaMeyuchad, the Rambam brings here, he enters here into a certain dispute, but what he says here is that Shem HaMeyuchad means alef dalet nun yud. That's how the Rambam interprets it.

**Speaker 2:**

It could be the reason is as you say, because this is how one says it b'nimtza. He says the word "yifrash", he says it explicitly in the form of alef dalet nun yud.

**Speaker 1:**

**"Vayevarech HaShem b'Shem HaShem"**, or "vayevarech" is a lashon sagi nahor. He is nokev b'Shem, he curses the Name of Hashem, **"b'Shem HaShem HaShem HaNichbad"**. The Rambam already learned earlier in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah about... about erasing His Name, there it stated that there are a few Names that are Shem HaShem HaNimchakim, if someone... does this, he is a

megadef and he curses Shem HaShem HaNimchakim, he is a megadef who is chayav sekilah, **"she'ne'emar 'v'nokev Shem Hashem"**. Shem Hashem means the yud hei vav hei, or the alef dalet nun yud.

He says that Shem HaMeyuchad is chayav sekilah, because she'ar hakinuyim, if he is mevarech b'Shem, in one of the other kinuyim, which when one calls the Almighty, not the Name Y-H-V-H, but one is mevarech **"es HaShem"** of 4 letters **"b'echad"** from the names she'einam nimchakim, right?

**Speaker 2:**

Yes, he says should one of the names she'einam nimchakim be mevarech es HaShem A-D-N-Y, understand? That means mevarech "es HaShem b'Shem", correct?

**Speaker 1:**

That's the meaning, that's the meaning, he says so, okay. That's the Rambam, "mevarech b'Shem HaShem", yes, "b'Shem HaShem" means the Name of the Almighty, which is the Shem she'eino nimchak?

**Speaker 2:**

No, which is "Shem HaMeyuchad", and this means mevarech the Shem HaMeyuchad, which the Rambam says here is Shem A-D-N-Y, with one of the other names she'einam nimchakim, not mevarech the Shem HaMeyuchad, he is mevarech "es HaShem HaMeyuchad" with one of the names she'einam nimchakim, then he is chayav sekilah.

**Speaker 1:**

If he is mevarech one of the she'ar hakinuyim it's only forbidden, only transgresses a lav, he receives malkos, but not chayav sekilah.

**"U'she'ar hakinuyim b'issur"**, if he is mevarech b'Shem one of the other kinuyim it's forbidden. **"V'yesh mi she'mefareish, that he's only chayav on the Name Y-H-V-H"**, and when one says A-D-N-Y it doesn't mean one was mefareish the Shem HaMeyuchad, but when one said it derech she'hi nichteves, Shem Y-H-V-H.

**"Va'ani omer"**, the Rambam rules like both, that one is mevarech either Y-H-V-H or A-D-N-Y one receives sekilah. Very good.

But why? Because the Rambam understood that the Shem HaMeyuchad, when one says it b'Shem A-D-N-Y, one means the Shem Y-H-V-H, so automatically it also means what it says in the Gemara "Shem HaMeyuchad".

**Speaker 2:**

Yes, so again, in the sixth chapter of Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah the Rambam taught us that there are seven names that are called shemos she'einam nimchakim, it says Shem HaMeforash, or the way one says Shem HaMeforash A-D-N-Y, and after that he said K-L, E-lo-ah, E-lokim, Shem Eh-yeh, Shem Sh-D-Y, and Shem Tz-va-os.

So if one said, so to speak, one says should one of these names curse one of the two names Y-H-V-H or A-D-N-Y, then one is a megadef.

**Discussion: What Does a Person Do as a Megadef?**

**Speaker 1:**

A Rambam thing, what does a person do as a megadef?

**Speaker 2:**

Okay, let's not oversimplify, there's a good question on this person.

**Speaker 1:**

He's a megadef, you understand a megadef? Hello?

**Speaker 2:**

Yes. Because it's a strange thing, because especially with what the Rambam started that he's like modeh in avodah zarah, he's actually the greatest believer, because he says he believes only the Almighty can curse, but he's embittered.

**Speaker 1:**

Okay. I don't know, I think one can actually understand it, the whole existence.

**Speaker 2:**

It's another level of being a megadef.

**Speaker 1:**

Okay.

**Speaker 2:**

It just looks like someone who is very embittered, someone who is a bit embittered curses her, someone who is more embittered curses the whole existence.

**Speaker 1:**

The greatest level of bitterness is cursing the Motzi Rishon.

**Speaker 2:**

Something more, we're only talking when he does this b'Shem HaMeforash.

**Speaker 1:**

Well, it makes sense.

**Speaker 2:**

How does one curse? Generally cursing a person, what does cursing a person mean? Cursing is always b'Shem.

**Speaker 1:**

Means it's something strong.

**Speaker 2:**

The Almighty should... should... for this.

**Speaker 1:**

It's actually funny what you're saying before the Almighty Himself for what He does, how else can one curse?

**Speaker 2:**

I want to ask you a question, when he says yakeh me es Yosi, does it make more sense or does it make less sense?

**Speaker 1:**

Because you're weak before the Almighty.

**Speaker 2:**

It's actually funny, it's actually not more than a megadef, which is funny, it's also forbidden, it's also chayav sekilah, but what he means.

**Speaker 1:**

Okay. Alright.

**Speaker 2:**

What is this avodah zarah? It's also a bit interesting, because someone who is an oved avodah zarah he says yakeh the power the other power, he hasn't said anything.

**Speaker 1:**

They should fight, they should actually fight each other.

**Halacha 14: The Lav of Megadef**

**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says, "**The azharah of megadef from where?**" Where is the lav? We already learned here from nokev Shem Hashem. What does it say there? "From the days of Moshe", "from the days of Moshe"? What is the lav? He says "**she'ne'emar Elokim lo sekalel**". By the way, when we speak of Elokim, it also means Elokim means powers, judges, but it's also the simple mikra which it means.

**Halacha 14: Seder HaDin – Every Day They Judge the Person with Kinuyim**

**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says: "**Every day they judge the person with kinuyim**". Okay, until now we learned the main laws, now we're going to learn how one arranges, how one summons, witnesses come and say that person was liable.

**Seder HaDin of Megadef: Testimony, Tearing, and Semichas Yadayim**

**Halacha 4 (Continued) – Seder HaDin of Megadef**

**The Kinui "Yakeh Yosi es Yosi"**

**Speaker 1:**

What is the lav? He says, "**Shem elohim acherim lo tazkiru**". By the way, there's an Eliyahu Rabbah that learns that it also means... Eliyahu means powers, talmid chacham nasi, but on the simple mikra what it means... The Rambam says, "**Every day they judge the witnesses with a kinui**".

Okay, so until now we learned the main law, and now one can learn how one arranges, how one arranges the testimony.

The witnesses come, they say that person was a megadef. Here begins the question, the judges are not allowed to say what he said, because it's one of the names that one is not allowed to say in that manner. So, one makes a new kinui that isn't from the kinuyim at all, and one says "yakeh Yosi es Yosi". A new kinui, not a real kinui.

What does it mean one says Yosi? Yosi is presumably also four letters, yes? Is that what kinui means, one says Yosi? Or does it mean one says one of the kinuyim, "yevarchem" or something like that, and one says Yosi? One makes a new kinui, it seems. One doesn't use the kinuyim for one of the kinuyim, but one makes something, one creates a kinui that is normal, because Yosi is yud vav samech yud, I wanted to say it's good. Yosi isn't four letters. Interesting.

**Nigmar HaDin – The Greatest Witness Says It Explicitly**

**Speaker 1:**

Okay, nigmar hadin. After one has already... so practically one can do so, but just to make an actual din is yes. Nigmar hadin, **they take all the people outside, and ask the greatest of the witnesses**, one of the witnesses, it's the greater of the two witnesses, **and they say to him, "Say what you heard explicitly". And he says.**

He must say it, because it seems there's a law in testimony, one must say clearly what he heard. It could also be because sometimes a mistake can be made, and one cannot kill a person perhaps until the end he didn't understand the law of exactly how the Shem HaMeforash, how they need to say it.

**V'hu omer.** He says it. But when they say it, it's a terrible thing, he said the terrible thing. **V'hadayanim omdim al ragleihem v'kor'im v'lo me'achin.** Even if he says that the other person said, it doesn't help. The halacha is, since he says the words... perhaps this is to show the seriousness, to show that it's not something to be disrespectful about. **V'hadayanim omdim al ragleihem v'kor'im v'lo me'achin.** They make a tearing. And such a type of tearing that one doesn't sew back. If he had learned for example before Hilchos Talmud Torah, that a rav tears v'lo megaheh. When the Kohen Gadol says the Name, one makes another type of tearing, tearing with a kuf. One is kore'a, one bows. But this is perhaps something else...

**Discussion: Kri'ah by Berachah**

**Speaker 2:**

Even when one says that he says b'verachah, here we're talking about megadef, that's not the same thing.

**Speaker 1:**

Okay. The second witness says "**af ani kamohu shamati**". Isn't that already enough? Why must he say this? Because he says "af ani kamohu shamati", if he also heard the same thing, if not, he apparently doesn't have two witnesses. "Af ani kamohu shamati", but he doesn't need to also say it. It was already said once, that's the law of every witness, even when one must say clearly. The other says "kemo she'amar", that's the same thing.

**When There Are Many Witnesses**

**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says, "**And if there were many witnesses, each and every one of them must say thus and thus I heard**". Not enough that only two, because when there are many witnesses, each one has a law of testimony. As we learn in Maseches Makos, right? "They don't exempt him except with all of them together, they don't exempt with two, but exempt with three". Because if there are more than three witnesses, all the witnesses must be kosher.

**Megadef She'chazar Bo Toch Kedei Dibur**

**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says further in Hilchos Megadef, "**A megadef who retracted within the time of speech, his retraction is not a retraction, but he is killed, for blasphemy with witnesses is stoned**". What does it mean he becomes a megadef when there were two witnesses there? He's stoned. I wondered a bit, how does hasra'ah work in such a case? Witnesses generally also means hasra'ah. It could be that the witnesses warned him before he said it, or what?

It's interesting, usually in very many halachos in the Torah toch kedei dibur helps. But the Gemara says that on a few halachos toch kedei dibur doesn't help. This is clear, kiddushin and gittin and megadef of avodah zarah. Here we're talking about avodah zarah, so no retraction within toch kedei dibur helps. There's a derasha by the halachos of kiddushin, something that one sees that kiddushin and gittin have the same law as megadef of avodah zarah.

**Megadef HaShem B'Shem Avodah Zarah – Kana'im Pog'in Bo**

**Speaker 1:**

Okay, anyway. Yes, he says, "**One who blasphemed the Name with the name of avodah zarah**", if someone did

differently, instead of saying "yakeh Yosi es Yosi", he said "yakeh avodah zarah es Yosi", this is also a terrible thing, but it's not the same law of megadef that brings him sekilah, but there's a punishment for this, **kana'im pog'in bo**. For this there's a law that it's also a type of chayav misah, not chayav misah from the court, but it's chayav misah through kana'im pog'in bo and they kill him. Like a bo'el aramis, which there are a few halachos like kana'im pog'in bo.

Ah good. The Rambam says, **and if the kana'im didn't kill him**, if there aren't enough kana'im, **and he came to beis din**, and one comes to beis din, **he is not stoned, until he blesses with a Name from the special Names**.

Okay, very good.

**Discussion: Why Isn't This Chayav Sekilah?**

**Speaker 2:**

Why? It means, it's not a way of avodah zarah. Being megadef HaShem b'Shem, avodah zarah, not a way of avodah zarah.

**Speaker 1:**

You're right.

**Speaker 2:**

No, as a law of avodah zarah it doesn't become.

**Speaker 1:**

If it's not one of the 4 avodahs, which is an avodah, which is avodah shebechach, I don't know.

**Chiyuv Kri'ah – Only When One Hears From a Jew**

**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says further, **all who hear the blessing of the Name are obligated to tear**. We learned this essentially, that this requires witnesses. Someone who hears the blessing of the Name is obligated to tear, as we learned earlier that the judge who hears it from the witnesses. But there it's a novelty, because even if he doesn't hear it, the witnesses don't say it as a blessing of the Name, they only say it over, he's obligated to tear. But here we're talking about an actual blessing of the Name, one must tear a tearing. **Even blessing the kinui**, even if one doesn't say, even if one doesn't say blessing the kinui, which for this is only an obligation of a lav, he's also obligated to tear, **and this is when he hears it from a Jew**.

Ah, it's interesting, earlier he says that someone who serves avodah zarah is a goy for all matters, but it seems megadef not yet. On megadef it applies that he's a goy for all matters.

**Speaker 2:**

Why? Because even when a goy curses, he can curse from today until tomorrow, that doesn't count. Only a Jew counts it as something.

**Speaker 1:**

Yes, who is very cursing? He's asked.

**Speaker 2:**

Makeh Yosi, I don't know, one must figure it out.

**Discussion: Shome'a Min HaShome'a**

**Speaker 1:**

How do we hold here? **One who hears and one who hears from the hearer**. This is apparently the reason why the beis din must tear a tearing.

**Speaker 2:**

Someone who heard that the other person said.

**Speaker 1:**

That the hearer, not that the other person said. Shome'a min hashome'a isn't so interesting. He says that the other person was a megadef. Shome'a min hashome'a is only because the hearer is not allowed to repeat it. If the hearer says it over just like that he himself is a megadef.

**Speaker 2:**

Yes.

**Speaker 1:**

But if he goes before beis din, because then he may.

**Speaker 2:**

No, he says, the other person was a megadef. Yes, but when the other person doesn't repeat the names with everything, if the other person repeats the names exactly as the other person was a megadef, he himself is apparently a megadef, he also wouldn't have needed to go to beis din. He says, I heard that yes, but it's not blasphemy, it's a shome'a min hashome'a, he must also be kore'a, therefore one is not allowed to... the way it was stated earlier that he may only say it once and the second witness is not allowed to say it.

**Speaker 1:**

True, true, because one can receive a chiyuv sekilah. I wouldn't say chiyuv sekilah, but it's terrible. It's a shome'a min hashome'a, means that he says it over with the words, but the fact that he's mis'aretz, but remember that even when he doesn't do it in beis din he's not chayav sekilah, it's not blasphemy, and there one doesn't need to be kore'a.

**Speaker 2:**

I don't know which issur this is, I don't know. He says that he said this, now he says good earlier, but one can't tell the news like that. Once tell the news, and the other person is a maggid, that's also not a way. Like the cheder boy who didn't want to speak in Yiddish, he repeated what the other person said in Yiddish, that's not...

**Speaker 1:**

But a shome'a from a goy, one is obligated to tear. I would have understood, earlier the Rambam said that a megadef is like an oved avodah zarah, and he immediately receives a law of a goy.

**Speaker 2:**

Okay, so he's already an established goy.

**Speaker 1:**

No, a goy who was born a goy, he's not a complete goy.

**Speaker 2:**

A complete goy, yes, a goy.

**The Proof from Ravshakeh – A Meshumad**

**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says, "**And Elyakim and Shevna didn't tear**", and in Melachim there's a story that there was someone, Ravshakeh, who was mecharef and megadef the Almighty.

**Speaker 2:**

Yes, and he was an enemy of the king of Ashur, and he knocked on the Almighty. He said, "Did the Almighty help you? I took a hitzilu elohei hagoyim es artzam, did the other

gods save anything? I conquered all the lands." In short, he made fun of the Almighty. He didn't say Y-K V-K. It's very interesting, one sees from the Gemara perhaps...

**Speaker 1:**

The verse he brings, so the verse makes like the shome'a min hashome'a.

**Speaker 2:**

No, something a sign that this is called blasphemy too. I can be that this is the Gemara's example, it's the most terrible way. But actually, someone says, "Oh, the Almighty is nothing," that's also blasphemy.

**Speaker 1:**

Ela Menashe Ravshakeh meshumad havah, Ravshakeh was a meshumad.

**Speaker 2:**

Because he was a meshumad before, it didn't have a law of mecharef and megadef.

**Speaker 1:**

No, the opposite, the opposite, the opposite. It says that Elyakim and Shevna were the... they did tear. "Vayavo Elyakim... el Chizkiyahu keru'ei begadim".

**Speaker 2:**

Ah, the Rambam says, the reason why Elyakim and Shevna tore was because he was a meshumad. He was a Jew, and he became a goy. But if he had been a goy, they wouldn't have needed to tear a tearing.

**Speaker 1:**

There was some call, he was called... Elyakim is the king, and Shevna was... Elyakim and Shevna were two officials there, they came. Yes, two officials. Shevna and his group. The Gemara brings in Sanhedrin, I remember, Shevna and his group. Yes yes, they wanted to make with Ravshakeh.

**Digression: Goliath – Mecharef Ma'archos Elokim Chaim**

**Speaker 2:**

I think that in David's time when Goliath blasphemed the armies of the living God (macheref ma'arachot Elokim chaim), he was also subject to tearing (keriah). I don't remember exactly, but he tore keriah over Goliath. He tore him apart with his stones. But also Goliath, what did he say? He also said, "Yakov Yosi Yosi". He was also blaspheming (macheref), he was strengthening the idea that the Almighty cannot help, and so on. It could be that a non-Jew doesn't know exactly the laws of how one blasphemes, but he tries, and he already receives punishment for that alone.

**Speaker 1:**

If it were a Jew, they told him he should be a member of the community (ben chaver kneset), and he didn't have enough ease to tear everyone's flesh, or a Jew who holds that his students shouldn't actually say "Yakov Yosi Yosi", okay, what does one do? How does one conduct oneself? Does one go back to the law of the blasphemer (megadef)?

**Semichat Yadayim on the Megadef**

**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says, "**All the witnesses and judges place their hands one by one on the head of the blasphemer, and say to him 'Your blood is on your head, for you have caused this to yourself'**". They place

their hands on his head before he is punished, and they say to him, "Your blood is on your head, for you have caused this to yourself". You yourself caused this with what you said, the words of blasphemy.

**"And there is no one among all those executed by the court upon whom they place hands except the blasphemer alone".** There is no law of semicha (laying of hands) for other punishments, only for a blasphemer. It's not like a korban (sacrifice). Is he a korban? Must one be somech (lay hands) on him?

### **Continuation of Laws of Megadef – Law of Semicha, Nature of Blasphemy, and Connection to Idolatry**

#### **Law 17 – Law of Semicha by a Megadef**

**"And there is no one among all executions by the court upon whom they place hands except the blasphemer alone, as it says 'And all who heard shall place their hands on his head'"**

There is no law of semicha for other punishments except for a blasphemer, it is written in Parshat Emor regarding the law of the blasphemer.

#### **Who Are "The Hearers" (HaShomim)?**

It appears that the witnesses are also hearers (shomim), they heard how the witnesses say it again, that means the hearers.

So the blasphemer said "Yacheh Yacheh", in the end the only one who gets struck is he himself.

#### **The Concept of Semicha – "Your Blood is on Your Head"**

Ah, what does the semicha accomplish? It appears that it's a matter of honor (kavod), and before the korban becomes three years old one must tell him you yourself are guilty, now, one can perform stoning (sekilah) now.

#### **Why the Rambam Included Megadef in the Laws of Idolatry**

The only reason the Rambam included megadef in the same category as idolatry is because a blasphemer appears as if he is a great believer, but he is some kind of embittered madman who blasphemes. Because if he didn't believe that there is a Creator he wouldn't say words of blasphemy.

#### **The Nature of Blasphemy – Public Degradation of the Almighty**

Now I understand, now I understand. Blasphemy doesn't mean, "Yacheh Yosi et Yosi", first of all, "Yacheh Yosi" doesn't mean literally. It doesn't mean literally.

Second, it is a degradation (zilzul) of the Almighty, one says that He has a name. He already clearly said "Yacheh Yosi et Yosi". He said "Who among all the lands has saved their land

from my hand", and the Almighty struck him too. That is called blasphemy.

Blasphemy means that he degrades (mezalzel) the Almighty publicly. "Yacheh Yosi et Yosi" is some kind of funny thing that one means.

So megadef is a way of degrading the Almighty in public (berabim), one says things that bring great degradation to the honor of Heaven (kavod shamayim).

#### **Megadef is the Opposite of Shema Yisrael**

Megadef is the opposite of Shema Yisrael. Shema Yisrael is one who acknowledges Hashem (modeh b'Hashem), he proclaims that there is a God. He proclaims that there isn't, or that the Almighty cannot help. It is the opposite of Shema Yisrael.

#### **The Absurdity of Blasphemy – "Yacheh Yosi et Yosi"**

He says it very well, and afterwards there is the law in practice exactly when one says it and the words. But the clearer picture is the soul aspect (b'sha'at nefesh), the spitefulness (lehach'is).

A mistake, against the Almighty, not against the denial.

Just as, as one says in English, megadef, yes, "blasphemy".

It is "blasphemy".

Yakov Yosef means that he is attacking the Almighty.

Yakov Yosef Yosef, he perhaps wants to bring out that it is indeed absurd, you attack the Almighty, the Almighty is stronger.

With whom are you going to attack the Almighty?

With the Almighty Himself.

#### **Megadef as the Prohibition of Atheism – "There is No Judge and No Judgment"**

Okay, this is indeed a question, but I think that, this is what I think, I once thought that perhaps megadef is actually a prohibition of being an atheist, God forbid, a prohibition of judgment above and judgment below, "there is no judge and no judgment" (leit din v'leit dayan).

The Rambam said, one who brings to mind not to unify Him (liyachdo), he says one who brings to mind there is no God (ein Eloah), that the Almighty has no power.

What prohibition is it to say that the Almighty has no power, or that there is no Almighty?

That is megadef.

It could be that the prohibition of megadef at its source is the prohibition of atheism, as if speaking against the Almighty, or not believing at all, or believing in idolatry and so on.

This is apparently the simple meaning (peshuto shel mikra).

So.