

Laws of Idolatry Chapter Eleven (Auto Translated)

English

Auto Translated

Shiur Overview

Summary of Lecture – Rambam Laws of Idolatry Chapter 11

Introduction – The Place of This Chapter in the Overall Order

The previous chapters dealt with actual idolatry, then with "lo techanem" – not allowing gentiles to dwell in the Land of Israel, not being in partnership with idol worshippers. Chapter 11 moves further away from actual idolatry, to things that are not included in idolatry itself, but rather **chukat hagoyim** – customs of idol worshippers that one may not imitate. The foundation: by becoming close to them in customs, one eventually comes back to actual idolatry.

Halacha 1 – "One May Not Follow the Customs of the Gentiles"

The Rambam's Words:

"One may not follow the customs of the gentiles nor resemble them, not in clothing nor in hairstyle, as it says 'and you shall not follow the customs of the nation...' and it says 'beware lest you be ensnared after them...'"

Plain Meaning:

One may not follow the ways and customs of gentiles, not become similar to them – not in clothing, not in hairstyles.

Insights and Explanations:

1. **"Chukat" means customs, not laws:** "Chok" doesn't mean a formal law, but rather a **fixed practice, a regularity** – from the language of chakika, "something engraved," something that is constant and regular. A law is perhaps the strongest expression of a regularity, but "chukat hagoyim" simply means their customs, not their formal laws.

2. **"Chukat hagoy" applies to neutral things, not to transgressions:** Transgressions are already forbidden in themselves. The special prohibition of "chukat hagoy" applies to things that are **inherently neutral** – merely a "style" – but because gentiles do it this way, and there's no practical reason for it, it's forbidden. **If a gentile does something because it's practical, there's no prohibition of chukat hagoy.** Only when the sole reason is "this is how gentiles do it" – then it's forbidden.

3. **The verses speak in the context of forbidden relations and idolatry:** "And you shall not follow the customs of the nation" speaks in the context of forbidden relations (like marrying a sister), and "beware lest you be ensnared after them" speaks of idolatry. But the Rambam expounds it more broadly: **the foundation is that when one adopts gentile customs (even neutral ones), one becomes close to them, and eventually comes to forbidden relations and idolatry.** The Torah fears this process of "becoming close."

4. **Parallel to "lo techanem":** Just as with "lo titen lahem chen" the Rambam said it's not because one begrudges a compliment, but because it brings **kiruv hadaat** – so too here, the prohibition is because one becomes too close to them.

5. **"The principle and essence of the matter – that one should not resemble them, but rather the Jew should be separated from them and recognizable":** The Rambam summarizes that the principle of all these prohibitions is: **a Jew should be separated from gentiles and known as different.** "Separated in his other actions just as he is separated from them in character traits and beliefs" – just as a Jew thinks differently (midot = foundations of Torah; deot = laws of character traits), so should he also be different in actions and clothing. The verse "and I have separated you from the peoples" is brought as a source.

6. **"Separated" doesn't mean wearing Jewish clothing, but rather not wearing gentile clothing:** One could argue that "separated in his clothing" is a positive biblical commandment to wear specifically Jewish clothing. **But the Rambam doesn't go that way** – he only says that one should **not** wear gentile clothing. The difference: one doesn't need to seek "the Jewish garment," but one shouldn't seek what gentiles wear. A person wears what is practical (warm in winter, cool in summer) – that's enough.

7. **Parallel to Laws of Character Traits:** The Rambam uses the same language in Laws of Character Traits: "Just as the wise person is separated in his beliefs and other actions, so should he be separated in his food." There it applies to a Torah scholar – he should also in action match his higher level. **The higher your knowledge, the more your actions must match it.**

Halacha 1 (Continued) – Details: Clothing, Hair, Blorit

The Rambam's Words:

"And one should not wear clothing that is unique to them, nor grow locks like the locks of their heads... for they shave from the sides and leave hair in the middle, and this is called blorit... and one should not shave the sides opposite the face near the ears..."

Plain Meaning:

One should not wear clothing that is unique to gentiles; not make hairstyles like theirs – specifically "blorit" (shaving the sides and leaving hair in the middle).

Insights and Explanations:

1. **"Clothing unique to them" – only what is specific to them:** The prohibition is not on regular pants or normal clothes that everyone wears. **Only clothing that is "unique to them"** – specifically affiliated with gentiles/idolatry – is forbidden. If everyone wears it, it's not "unique to them."

2. **Must one know what contemporary idol worshippers do?** Seemingly, to know what one may not do,

one must know what **contemporary gentile idol worshippers** do – not just gentiles in general, but what is affiliated with idolatry.

3. **Blorit – two prohibitions:** Whoever makes a "blorit" (shaving the sides, leaving hair in the middle/front) transgresses **both** the prohibition of pe'ot (a special mitzvah), **and** chukat hagoy. These are two separate prohibitions.

4. **Jews do the opposite:** Jews shave in the middle and leave at the sides (pe'ot) – this is exactly the reverse of blorit.

Halacha 1 (Continued) – Building: "One Should Not Build Places Like the Temples of Idol Worshippers"

The Rambam's Words:

"And so too in building, one should not build places like the temples of idol worshippers so that many will gather there as they do."

Plain Meaning:

One should not build public places in the style of temples of idolatry, which are built to attract masses of people.

Insights and Explanations:

1. **The Rambam gives a reason – "so that many will gather there":** The Rambam explains **why** gentiles build this way – so it will catch the eye and attract people. One should not learn from them this trick, even for a good purpose (like a study hall).

2. **"Yitkabetzu/yitkansu bahem rabim" – a recurring motif in the Rambam:** The Rambam uses this language of "yitkabetzu/yitkansu bahem rabim" **at least three times** in different contexts (also regarding artists, regarding singing). Something bothers the Rambam about this concept of making a place extra attractive so people will "wander in."

3. **What does "heichalot" mean?** The Rambam brings from Sifrei that heichalot are "traiot and circuses" (theaters and circuses). These aren't just entertainment venues, but they had a connection to idolatry – entertainment for the people but with a tone of idolatry.

4. **A possible interpretation:** The prohibition is that a Jew should not build something that looks like a church, so that people (especially ger toshav or the masses who don't know much) will come in because they think it's a church, and through this they will "seek God" in a false manner.

5. **Is the prohibition only on synagogues or also on private homes?** The Rambam says "heichalot" – not necessarily a synagogue. Even a house or an office may not be made like gentile temples.

6. **[Digression: A synagogue should not be like a theater:]** A synagogue is a place where one goes because one wants to pray, not because it's a beautiful place. One should not imitate the gentile approach of "public relations" through architecture. Jews need to find their own way of how to "draw" people.

7. **[Digression: "Kosher entertainment":]** The Rambam would perhaps not have liked the concept that one must make heimish entertainment so people won't go to gentile entertainment.

8. **Religious Jews and buildings:** Religious Jews are careful about clothing and hair (not to be like gentiles), but about buildings one is less careful. The Reform indeed made

synagogues that look like houses of idolatry, but usually one can recognize a synagogue.

Halacha 1 (Continued) – A Gentile Being Barbered by a Jew / Blorit

The Rambam's Words:

When he reaches close to his blorit three fingers' width in any direction – he withdraws his hand and stops cutting.

Plain Meaning:

A Jewish barber cutting a gentile's hair may not make the "blorit" – a special hairstyle connected with idolatry. When he comes within three fingers of the blorit, he must stop.

Insights and Explanations:

1. **Is the blorit a service or just preparation for idolatry?** It was part of the "way of worship" – not just a secular thing, but something that has to do with the deity. The gentile himself wouldn't say it's a secular thing – it has a connection to his god.

2. **From Moreh Nevuchim:** It's said that it's not the worship itself, but a preparation – it creates humility, it makes a person "beaten down" so he can serve afterward. An analogy: why does one eat on Yom Tov? That itself isn't service of God, but a preparation so it will be a beautiful Yom Tov.

3. **In any case:** It was part of the idolatrous worship – in the category of "way of worship" – and therefore the Jewish barber may not do it, and he should let the gentile assistant finish.

Halacha 1 (Continued) – A Jew Close to the Government

The Rambam's Words:

"A Jew who is close to the government and needs to sit before them constantly, it is disgraceful for him not to be dressed like them – he is permitted to dress like them and to shave opposite his face so that he will not be despised."

Plain Meaning:

A Jew who deals with the government and must sit before them, may dress like them and shave like them, so he won't look despicable.

Insights and Explanations:

1. **What does "close to the government" mean?** The Rambam says **not** "for the needs of the many" – he only says "close to the government and needs to sit before them." This can mean simply a Jew who must do business with gentiles, not necessarily an advocate who helps Jews. In the Gemara it also only says "close to the government" without specification that it's for the benefit of Israel.

2. **The Rama in a responsum** does bring that the reason is **"so that he may protect Israel before them"** – he is close to the government in order to defend Jews.

3. **A possible broader interpretation:** Even without that – the very fact that a gentile knows he has a Jewish family/acquaintance, that he has "accountability" – that itself already helps Jews.

4. **An important proof from this leniency:** If it were a clear biblical prohibition, how can it be permitted? This shows that the prohibition of chukat hagoyim (at least in certain

details) is not such a simple prohibition. But the Rambam does count it as one of the prohibitions, and it's difficult to understand how one can permit a prohibition.

5. **[Digression: Contemporary advocates:]** In America one is allowed to come with a yarmulke, it's not disgraceful.

Halacha 4 – One May Not Practice Divination Like the Gentiles

The Rambam's Words:

"One may not practice divination like the gentiles, as it says 'you shall not practice divination.' What is divination? Such as those who say: since my bread fell from my mouth, since my staff fell from my hand – I will not go to such-and-such place today for I will not succeed... or since a fox passed on my right... perhaps I will encounter a deceitful person... the chirping of birds... and they say this snake says... it will be thus and not thus, it's good to do such-and-such and bad to do such-and-such... slaughter this rooster that crowed in the evening, or slaughter this hen that crowed like a rooster... and so too one who makes signs for himself – if such-and-such is said to me I will do such-and-such... like Eliezer the servant of Abraham... all is forbidden. And whoever does an action from these things receives lashes."

Plain Meaning:

One may not practice divination like the gentiles – this means taking signs from random occurrences (bread falls from mouth, staff falls from hand, a fox runs by, birds chirp, a rooster crows at a strange time) as a sign that one will not succeed. Also making signs for oneself (like Eliezer the servant of Abraham) is forbidden. Everything is forbidden, and whoever does an action based on this receives lashes.

Insights and Explanations:

1. **What does "like the gentiles" mean?** Does it mean that only in the manner that gentiles do it is forbidden, but a "Jewish divination" would be permitted? The Rambam brings the verse "for there is no divination in Jacob" – this shows that among Jews there should be no divination at all. The verse "it shall not be found in you" means that among Jews should not be found the sort of beliefs that exist among gentiles. But the Rambam learns that this is more than just chukat hagoyim – it's a prohibition in itself that the Torah has already forbidden, although it's also chukat hagoyim.

2. **Distinction between divination and murder:** Regarding murder one doesn't say the prohibition is because gentiles do it – murder is a problem in itself. But regarding divination the problem is **chukat hagoyim**, because one doesn't do any act of sorcery – it's only superstitious beliefs that stem from gentile ways.

3. **The fox sign – demotivation:** The fox is a cunning animal, clever – the person thinks that today he will encounter a deceiver. In both examples (fox, bread falls) the practical outcome is that he becomes demotivated – "today is not a good day, maybe tomorrow."

4. **A rooster that crowed in the evening – why slaughter:** The slaughter is not because he doesn't like the rooster, but because he sees it as a bad sign, and therefore thinks one must slaughter it to stop the bad sign.

5. **Eliezer the servant of Abraham – the Rambam's position:** The Rambam brings Eliezer's sign ("I will also water your camels") as an example of divination that is forbidden. The Rambam holds that Eliezer didn't do well – he only did it because he was a slave (not a Jew), or because it was before the giving of the Torah.

6. **Question on the Rambam regarding Eliezer:** According to the plain meaning of Eliezer, he was only seeking a woman with good character traits – "I will also water your camels" is a logical test of character, not divination! Answer: If it were only a character test, he wouldn't have needed to make a whole prayer about it – he could have simply checked her character traits. The more straightforward interpretation in the Gemara is that it was indeed divination.

7. **"All similar to these things are all forbidden" – broad principle:** The Rambam makes clear that one cannot enumerate every sort of nonsense – everything is forbidden.

8. **"Receives lashes" – what is the action?** An interesting question: The Rambam says **"whoever does an action from these things receives lashes"** – one receives lashes only with an action. But what is the action? He doesn't do the sign itself – the sign happens (he sees a bird). The action he does (a business deal) is not in itself a transgression. The transgression is that he did it **because** it was a sign – but that's a motivation, not an action!

Halacha 4 (Continued) – What is Permitted: A Sign After the Fact

The Rambam's Words:

"One who says this house that I entered is a good sign for me, or this woman I married, or this house I bought is blessed... and so too one who asks a child what verse are you learning, if he says a verse of blessings he rejoices and says this is a good sign – all these and similar things are permitted. Since he did not direct his actions and did not refrain from acting, but rather made this sign for himself for something he already wanted and saw fit to do."

Plain Meaning:

One may rejoice with a good sign after one has already done something – because one didn't make the decision based on the sign. Also asking a child "tell me your verse" is permitted, if one doesn't do any action based on it.

Insights and Explanations:

1. **The fundamental distinction – sign before vs. sign after:** The Rambam's entire distinction between forbidden and permitted is: if one does an action **based** on a sign – forbidden (divination). If one notices a sign **after** one has already done it – permitted. Regarding house/wife: he has already married, already bought, and he notices that since then things are going well – this is permitted. **"Since he did not direct his actions and did not refrain from acting"** – he didn't do or stop because of the sign.

2. **Question on "tell me your verse":** Regarding house/wife it's clear – it's already after the action. But regarding "tell me your verse" – when does he ask the child? He goes **before** the action to ask, he wants to know if today is a good day! How can the Rambam put this together with house/wife?

3. **Answer:** The Rambam says **"he rejoices and says this is a good sign"** – he just rejoices. He does nothing based on it. He only wants to have a good day, a good feeling. In both cases (house and child) the main point is that he doesn't do any action based on the sign.

4. **"Good sign and good fortune" – is this permitted?** When one says "mazal tov" at an engagement – is this divination? Conclusion: This is permitted even according to the Rambam, because one doesn't do any action based on it – one only wishes that it should be with good fortune.

Dispute Between Rambam and Raavad on Divination

Insights and Explanations:

1. **Raavad on yichudim (from previous halacha):** The Raavad says **"I don't know what this is"** – he doesn't understand what the Rambam means by yichudim.

2. **Raavad's position regarding Eliezer:** The Raavad says **"they said this is a great innovation of Abraham that is worthy to rely upon, if it is permitted"** – the Raavad holds that Eliezer's sign was permitted. His proof: The Torah relates the story not disparagingly, but positively – it cannot be a prohibition. The Raavad also holds that **"house, child and wife"** (Gemara: "although there is no divination there is a sign") means one can rely on signs, but only three times (as the Gemara says). The Rambam doesn't bring this condition of three times.

3. Fundamental dispute Rambam-Raavad:

- **Rambam:** One may never do an action based on a sign. Only a sign *after* the action (for joy alone) is permitted.

- **Raavad:** One may indeed do things based on signs (like Eliezer). Only certain types of divination are forbidden.

4. **Practical difference:** According to the Raavad one may go say "tell me your verse" and based on that make a match or not (or "goral HaGra"). According to the Rambam one may not.

5. **Open question on the Raavad:** If the Raavad holds that signs are permitted – what according to him is the distinction between a permitted sign and forbidden divination? This hasn't become clear.

6. **The Rambam's overall approach (indicated):** The Rambam wants a person to make decisions based on intellect, not based on signs. At the end of this chapter the Rambam will explain his position more explicitly.

Halacha 7 – Kosem Kesamim

The Rambam's Words:

"And what is a kosem? This is one who does an action from other actions so that his mind becomes empty and his thought ceases from all things until he says things that will be in the future..."

Plain Meaning:

Kosem is a sort of fortune-telling through emptying the mind (a sort of meditation), similar to yidoni but without the "fancy" actions. It's different from nichush – nichush is only making a sign from what one hears, kosem is an active procedure to reach a state of empty mind.

Insights and Explanations:

1. **"Yasum da'ato" – explanation:** The word "yasum" is translated from the language of shomem/mishtomem – his mind becomes empty, like "arise and be desolate." This means a state where the mind becomes completely emptied, and what then comes to him, he thinks, are "things that will be in the future."

2. **List of acts of kosem:** The Rambam brings various methods: (a) working with sand and stones with the hands; (b) bowing to the ground and shouting; (c) looking in an iron mirror or crystal ball – using the power of imagination; (d) holding a staff in hand and leaning on it until the mind becomes empty.

3. **Proof from the verse "my people inquire of wood and their staff tells them":** The plain meaning of the verse is that "wood" means idolatry. But the Rambam interprets it literally – the staff itself, because the kosem uses the staff as an instrument for divination.

4. **The law of one who asks the kosem:** The one who asks (the one who questions the kosem) receives only rabbinic lashes, but the kosem himself, if he did an act of divination, receives biblical lashes, as it says "there shall not be found in you a kosem kesamim" – because it's a prohibition with an action.

5. **Question about meditation:** A difficult question – according to the Rambam it comes out that it's forbidden to do meditation with an action (and perhaps even without an action) when the goal is to tell the future through the power of imagination. In Sefer HaMitzvot the Rambam writes that it's forbidden to arouse the power of imagination "with one of the types of arousal." Distinction: Kosem doesn't mean just using the power of imagination – it means specifically telling the future through the power of imagination. Simple meditation to calm the mind (without fortune-telling) is not the same thing. But it remains a question why the Rambam holds it's bad – perhaps because it's a sort of chukat hagoyim.

Halacha 9 – Me'onen

The Rambam's Words:

"What is a me'onen? These are those who set times, who say through astrology such-and-such day is good, such-and-such day is bad, such-and-such day is suitable to do such-and-such work, such-and-such year or month is bad for such-and-such thing."

Plain Meaning:

A me'onen is one who sets times according to astrology – he says that certain days/months/years are good or bad for certain things.

Insights and Explanations:

1. **Dispute of Rishonim on the Rambam:** Many Rishonim argue with the Rambam's position. For example, the Gemara says that when one has a case with a gentile one should do it in the month of Adar because Adar is a blessed month – this seemingly doesn't fit with the Rambam who says one may not set that a month is good for something. Also the Rama's custom that one should not make a wedding at the end of the month (because the moon is not full) goes according to the Rishonim who dispute the Rambam.

2. **"Even though he did not do an action":** The Rambam says that me'onen is forbidden even without an action –

merely saying that such-and-such day is good/bad is already forbidden, but on this there are no lashes. **Only** when one does an action – one actually goes to do something at the specific time according to what the astrologers said – then one receives lashes, as it says "you shall not practice divination."

3. Explanation of "did not do an action": Two interpretations: (a) he only said that a day is good/bad, but didn't actually do anything according to it; (b) he did the divination thing itself (said the fortune) but didn't do any other action with it. The distinction: "did an action" means one actually acted according to the me'onen's pronouncement – that's the action that makes it a prohibition with an action with lashes.

Halacha 9 (Continued) – Ochaz Et Ha'einayim

The Rambam's Words:

"And so too one who holds the eyes and makes it appear to the viewers that he does a wondrous deed but he didn't do it, this is included in me'onen and receives lashes."

Plain Meaning:

One who does sleight of hand – he makes it look to people like he's doing wondrous things, but in truth he's doing nothing – is also included in me'onen and receives lashes.

Insights and Explanations:

1. Question – connection to me'onen: Seemingly sleight of hand has no connection to me'onen (setting times according to stars). The Rambam however puts it under the same prohibition of "lo te'onenu."

2. What does "achizat einayim" mean according to the Rambam: The Rambam says he "medameh" – he makes you think he's doing something wondrous. This is a distinction – it could be that all sorcery-type things work through sleight of hand / power of imagination, and the distinction between different categories is only in the manner.

3. Two approaches to sorcery: (a) If one says that other wondrous acts (like ovot and yidonim) work truly, then sleight of hand is the distinction – the one who only does a trick. (b) If according to the Rambam nothing works truly (as he will say later that even idolatry doesn't work), then one must understand the distinction differently.

4. Is a modern "magic show" forbidden according to the Rambam? If a magician says clearly "this is a trick, I'm not a superman" – is he transgressing? The logic would be no, because the Rambam says the prohibition is because one fools people that people can do impossible things. But:

- **First**, the Rambam's halacha is not dependent on the reason. Even if the reason is to avoid deception, the halacha can be broader.

- **Second**, even when the magician says "it's a trick," the eyes see something different from reality – and that itself can be the problem of "ochaz et ha'einayim." The magician actively seeks to deceive the eyes.

- **Third**, the Rambam himself says "simple and confused people" – in his time people also knew it was tricks, and nevertheless he holds it's forbidden.

5. Dispute of Rishonim: The Ramban disputes the Rambam in the interpretation of "me'onen" in general, and the Rama doesn't follow the Rambam's approach. For example,

according to the Rambam it's biblically forbidden to make a wedding on Tuesday because "it's a good time" (me'onen), but the Rama says one should do so.

6. Halacha vs. reasons for commandments: One may not mix halacha with reasons for commandments. The Rambam doesn't say the prohibition is falsehood (falsehood is a different prohibition). It's a special prohibition to make someone think that people can do impossible things. But even if one understands the reason differently, the halacha remains halacha.

Halacha 6-7 – Chover Chaver

The Rambam's Words:

"What is a chover? This is one who speaks words that are not in human language and have no meaning, and imagines in his foolishness that those words are effective... until they say such-and-such about the snake that it won't harm... and holds in his hand when speaking a key or stone or bowl and the like, all is forbidden."

"And the chover himself who is the chover... if there was an action... even if there was only that he moved his fingers... he receives lashes, as it says 'there shall not be found in you a kosem kesamim... and a chover chaver.'"

"But if he spoke these words and did not move either finger or head and had nothing in his hand" – he is exempt from lashes.

Plain Meaning:

A chover is one who speaks mystical words that have no true meaning, and he believes in his foolishness that the words are effective – e.g. he says an incantation over a snake that it shouldn't harm, or he says words over a person that he should be protected. If he held something in his hand (a key, a stone, a bowl) or even just made movements with his fingers – he receives lashes. Without an action – he is exempt from lashes.

Insights and Explanations:

1. The foundation of chover – an incantation with an action: The Rambam's entire approach to chover revolves around the distinction between speaking alone (which is not an action) and speaking with an action. This is consistent with the principle that lashes require an action. The Rambam brings specifically that even if the "action" is only that he held something in his hand (key, stone) or only shook with his fingers – that's already enough for lashes. But without any action – only words – he is exempt.

2. The meaning of "abra cadabra": As an example of mystical words: "abra" = I create, "cadabra" = with my words. This is exactly the concept of chover – one who believes that through special words he can create or effect things.

3. The distinction between the chover and the client: The Rambam speaks both of the chover himself (the one who says the words) and of the one who goes to the chover (the "client" who asks the chover). Both are connected with the prohibition.

4. Shaking while speaking – is this an "action"? A sharp question: When a person speaks, he naturally shakes (body language). Does one count this as an "action" that makes him liable for lashes? The conclusion is clearly no – a natural reflex

of speaking is not the "action" the Rambam speaks of. The Rambam means when he intentionally made specific movements with his hands as part of the incantation ritual. If one would give lashes for natural body language while speaking, one would be transgressing bal toshif.

5. The distinction between achizat einayim and other acts of deception: According to the Rambam, who holds that all sorcery things don't work in truth, achizat einayim is just another way of doing the same tricks – one does a trick through "abra cadabra" and one through simple sleight of hand. The main distinction: with achizat einayim the doer himself knows he's deceiving; with other forms of sorcery the doer himself believes he truly can.

6. The Rambam's moral lesson – a mitzvah to be wise: A great foundation in the Rambam is that there's a mitzvah for a person to be wise and not be a fool. A person must know what a person can indeed do and what a person cannot do. When one loses this "sense of reality" – that's the root of all these prohibitions.

7. The verse "there shall not be found in you" – eight prohibitions: The Rambam enumerates from this verse: one who passes his son or daughter through fire, kosem kesamim, me'onen, menachesh, mechashef, and chover chaver – eight things. Each one has its own definition of "action" that makes one liable for lashes.

The Law of the "Nechbar" – The One Who Goes to the Chover

The Rambam's Position:

The person who goes to the chover and lets the chover do his chover-act on him, transgresses a **prohibition without an action**. He doesn't receive biblical lashes, but does receive **rabbinic lashes, because he participated in the foolishness of the chover** – because he participated in the foolishness of the chover.

Plain Meaning:

The chover himself makes the sounds and says the names; the person who goes to him just sits there, believing it will help him. This "sitting before him" – he sits before him – is not an action, only passive participation.

Insights and Explanations:

1. Two ways in which it's a prohibition without an action: (a) When the chover himself only spoke without any physical action; (b) When the chover did make sounds, but the **nechbar** (the person who goes to him) did nothing himself – he only sits there and convinces himself that it helps.

2. Important inquiry regarding prohibition without an action and rabbinic lashes: Is there rabbinic lashes for every prohibition without an action? The conclusion is **no**. The Rambam therefore brings a special reason why here yes – because this going to the chover is an active participation (he goes because he believes it helps), and that's enough for a rabbinic punishment.

3. Two explanations why prohibition without an action doesn't receive biblical lashes: (a) One cannot prove he did something; (b) It's not strong enough. According to explanation (a) rabbinically would also be the same problem. Therefore it seems the meaning is according to explanation (b): Biblically requires an action for lashes

because only that is serious enough, but rabbinically one can indeed punish even without an action, when he is "a partner in the foolishness of the chover."

Definition of Chover Chaver – "Sounds and Strange Ugly Names"

The Rambam's Language:

"Rather they are the sounds and strange ugly names... they have no meaning"

Insights and Explanations:

1. "Strange" vs. "ugly" – two separate categories: "Strange" designates words in a foreign language (language of nation and nation) that are odd; "ugly" designates combinations of letters that mean **nothing** – just nonsense words. The "ugliness" comes from the fact that it has no meaning – when something has meaning it has beauty, but empty words are repulsive.

2. "They do neither evil nor good": The Rambam brings the language of the verse that the words do neither bad nor good. The Rambam wants to emphasize that the prohibition is **not** because the chover uses evil forces or does harm – rather the prohibition is inherent in saying empty words that mean nothing.

3. What if the incantation does have meaning (like a verse)? Then it's not the prohibition of chover chaver (which is specifically words without meaning), but perhaps another prohibition. The Rambam will later bring the matter of one who whispers over a verse.

4. Different prohibitions can come together: Sometimes one does both chover chaver (says nonsense words), and kosher (makes a knot), and other types of sorcery. But the Rambam makes each one a **separate prohibition**.

5. The Rambam's position that chover chaver doesn't help: The Rambam holds that the prohibition is not because he uses evil forces – on the contrary, he holds that it does nothing. This is the foundation of his position on sorcery in general.

Halacha 12 – One Who Was Bitten by a Scorpion or Snake – Whispering Over the Place of the Bite

The Rambam's Words:

"One who was bitten by a scorpion or snake, it's permitted to whisper over the place of the bite, even on Shabbat... in order to settle his mind and strengthen his heart... it's not a cure"

Plain Meaning:

Because the person is in danger and in panic, they permitted him to do things that he convinces himself help, so that his mind won't become deranged.

Insights and Explanations:

1. Double leniency – both chover chaver and Shabbat: The Rambam permits this both from the side of the prohibition of chover chaver, and from the side of Shabbat prohibitions (where healing on Shabbat is forbidden except in danger). The foundation is that **settling the mind** permits both prohibitions.

2. "It's not a cure" – the Rambam's principle: The incantation is not a cure – it does nothing physically. The

entire leniency is only because it calms the patient. This fits with the Rambam's general position that sorcery/incantation has no real effect.

3. The "placebo effect" in the Rambam: The Rambam essentially describes the placebo effect – the incantation doesn't help physically, but because the person believes in it, it calms him, and that itself has a healing effect. The **Eliyahu Rabbah** interprets "to strengthen his heart" not only that the person should be calm, but that the calmness itself prevents the poison from spreading so quickly in the body – the person doesn't have a heart attack from fear. This is the mechanism that explains why people convince themselves that chover chaver works in truth – because the placebo works on a large percentage.

4. The Meiri's position (which goes with the Rambam): The Meiri also says it's a prohibition of chover chaver, but since it's a **prohibition without an action** (a lighter prohibition), it's permitted in a place of danger. Writing (writing an amulet) would perhaps not be permitted, because that's an action.

5. Important innovation – "to strengthen his heart" means more than just psychologically: The Rambam's language "to settle his mind and strengthen his heart" doesn't mean only that the person should be psychologically calm. Rather: **when the person is calm, this also helps that the poison should go out faster** – the settling of the mind has an indirect physical effect on the patient's healing process. This is an innovation in understanding the Rambam – it's not only a psychological leniency, but it has real medical significance.

6. The whisperer himself must know that it doesn't help: Part of the leniency is that the whisperer should know that he's doing it only so his mind won't become deranged – he's fooling the patient for his benefit. This is similar to the matter of ochaz einayim – the doer knows it's a trick.

7. The leniency applies only to believers: The Rambam speaks of people who believe in the incantation – for them one may do it on Shabbat. One who doesn't believe in it (like one who has learned Rambam), one may not do it for him, because for him it's chover chaver and Shabbat desecration without any benefit. The Rambam says this explicitly in **Moreh Nevuchim** on other things that the Gemara permitted.

8. Why not tell the patient the truth? Why shouldn't one simply say to the patient "the incantation doesn't work, it will only calm you"? The answer: The entire matter is only effective when the patient **believes** that it helps – otherwise it won't calm him.

Halacha 12 (Continued) – One Who Whispers Over a Wound and Reads Verses

The Rambam's Words:

"One who whispers over a wound and reads a verse from the Torah, and so too one who reads over a child that he not be frightened, and one who places a Torah scroll or tefillin on a baby so he will sleep – not only are they included in chovers and menachshim, but they are included among those who deny the Torah, for they make words of Torah a cure for the body, when they are only a cure for souls, as it says 'and they shall be life for your soul.'"

Plain Meaning:

One who whispers verses over a wound, or reads verses for a frightened child, or places a Torah scroll/tefillin on a child so he'll fall asleep – is not only transgressing chover chaver, but is also a denier of the Torah, because he makes Torah into a cure for the body, whereas Torah is only a cure for souls.

Insights and Explanations:

1. Chover chaver even with verses in human language: Earlier the Rambam defined chover chaver as saying words "that are not in human language" – but Torah verses are written in languages that people understand! There's no contradiction, because even when the verse has meaning, if the meaning has nothing to do with the cure (like "In the beginning God created" over a wound), it's still chover chaver.

2. The act as it happens: People who make segulot from verses usually distort the verse: say it backwards, only initial letters, or other distortions. This is part of the "wisdom" of segulot.

3. "Deniers of the Torah" – the meaning: The Rambam's innovation in explaining the Mishnah (Sanhedrin chapter Chelek – Rabbi Akiva says one who whispers over a wound has no portion in the World to Come): The denial is not simply that he does a transgressive act, but he doesn't understand what Torah is. He thinks that the physical sound of the verse – the "body" of Torah – heals. But in truth Torah is only a cure for souls: it heals a person's beliefs, character traits, wisdom – the rational soul. "And they shall be life for your soul" – for your soul means the intellect.

4. The verse of Rabbi Akiva – "all the illness": Rabbi Akiva brings the verse "all the illness that I placed in Egypt I will not place upon you for I am the Lord your healer." The verse means: if you keep Torah, God will heal you. But the whisperer thinks that **saying** this verse over the wound is itself magic that makes the wound go away. This is the denial – he distorts the content of the verse.

5. Distinction between whispering over a wound and whispering on Shabbat in danger: What is the distinction between "one who reads for a child that he not be frightened" (which is forbidden) and the previous law of whispering on Shabbat for a scorpion bite "so his mind won't become deranged" (which is permitted)? Answer: With a scorpion bite it's a place of danger, there the settling of the mind actually works as a cure (the fear itself can kill). But with a child who is simply frightened, there's no danger, and the settling of the mind won't help to such a great extent.

6. "Cure for the body" vs. "cure for the soul" – the deeper meaning: The Rambam's distinction is: Does one believe that the **body of Torah** (the physical sound, the letters) heals – that's denial. Or does one believe that the **content/soul of Torah** (the beliefs, character traits, wisdom) heals – that's truth. "Cure for the body" means one believes the verse's language itself has a physical power; "cure for souls" means the content of Torah makes the person better, and through that he receives more providence.

7. Question on the Rambam – "denier" for not for its own sake?: Why is it so terrible – a denier of the Torah – only because one uses Torah for cure of the body? It's like "an axe to dig with" – not for its own sake, but not denial! This remains as a question.

8. Can one believe in both – cure of soul and cure of body?: The Rambam's language "they are **only** cure for souls" implies one cannot believe in both – it's either cure for souls, or cure for the body (and then he's a denier). This is difficult.

9. Connection to "cure of soul and cure of body" in Mi Shebeirach: When a person has more knowledge of God, he has more individual providence – God watches over him. Torah guards him. This is the way that cure of soul brings to cure of body.

10. Saying Tehillim vs. praying: The Rambam doesn't speak against praying for a sick person – that's certainly permitted. Also not against simply saying Tehillim. The question is only when one uses it "as a segulah" – like the verse itself has a magical power.

Halacha 12 (Continued) – A Healthy Person Who Reads Verses

The Rambam's Words:

"But a healthy person who reads verses and a psalm from Tehillim so that the merit of reading them will protect him and he will be saved from troubles and damages – this is permitted."

Plain Meaning:

A healthy person who reads verses/Tehillim so the merit of learning will protect him – this is permitted.

Insights and Explanations:

1. The distinction: "merit of reading them" vs. power of the verse: When a person thinks that the physical saying of the verse has a magical power – it's chover chaver. When he thinks he receives merit from learning Torah, and the merit protects – it's permitted. It's like giving charity or doing a mitzvah: every mitzvah protects a person, because God judges according to merits.

2. "Healthy" – why specifically a healthy person? The Rambam says "healthy" – which means for a sick person it's different. Why shouldn't a sick person be able to say Tehillim for merit? Answer: When one stands by a sick person's bed and says a specific verse, it looks like chover chaver – like the verse has a magical power. As opposed to a healthy person who reads Tehillim – it's clear he only wants the merit.

3. Distinction between before and after: Rashi says there's a distinction whether one says verses **before** a trouble (preventive) or **after** a trouble. Before – permitted ("that it will protect him"), after – forbidden. But it's asked: there's always an "after of after" – he's already afflicted, but he now needs merits so it won't get worse.

4. The previous law (knots/whispers on Shabbat) is also cure of souls: The previous leniency of "knots for fever and for beloved" is also essentially cure of souls – it calms the person, and through that it has a good effect on the body. It could be that the only power Torah has to heal an illness is always through cure of souls – the person becomes a better person, receives more merits, and through that receives providence.

One Who Inquires of the Dead

The Rambam's Words:

"This is one who starves himself and goes and sleeps in the cemetery so that the spirit of impurity will come upon him and inform him what he asks about. And there are others who wear known clothing and say words and burn known incense and sleep alone so that such-and-such dead person will come and speak with him in a dream. The principle of the matter: anyone who does an action so that the dead will come and inform him – receives lashes."

Plain Meaning:

One who inquires of the dead is when one does actions (starving, sleeping in cemetery, wearing special clothing, bringing incense) so a dead person will come in a dream and answer questions.

Insights and Explanations:

1. Why does the Rambam bring multiple techniques?

The Rambam brings not only the first example (starving himself and sleeping in cemetery) but also other techniques (known clothing, incense, sleeping alone) – the reason is because he must show that there's an **action** involved, which is necessary for lashes. With starving himself alone, not eating is not an action, but going to sleep in cemetery or wearing clothing – that's already an action.

2. "Starving himself" and not "fasting": The Rambam uses the language "**starving himself**" and not "fasting" – this is intentional, because "fasting" can look like something positive, but "starving himself" means he torments himself, which is clearly a negative act.

One Who Asks an Ov or Yidoni

The Rambam's Words:

"It's forbidden to ask a master of ov or master of yidoni... the master of ov and yidoni himself is stoned, and the one who asks them is in violation of a positive commandment and we give him rabbinic lashes. And if he accepted an action and acted according to his statement – he receives lashes."

Plain Meaning:

The master of ov/yidoni himself receives stoning. The **asker** – the client – receives only rabbinic lashes because he doesn't do any action (he only asks). But if he does an action according to the advice of the master of ov – he receives lashes.

Insights and Explanations:

1. Why does ov and yidoni have more connection to idolatry than all other sorcerers? Ov and yidoni is a **completely different thing** – he takes a bone, he shouts – it's a specific power that he attributes to the stone/bones, which is more similar to idolatry. One who inquires of the dead, on the other hand, appeals to a dead person, which is different.

2. The distinction between the asker (client) and the master (provider): The master is stoned from the side of a separate verse; the asker is only in violation of a positive commandment because he doesn't do any action himself.

A Sorcerer is Liable for Stoning – And the Distinction of Ochaz Et Ha'einayim

The Rambam's Words:

"And the sorcerer is liable for stoning and this is one who did an act of sorcery... one who holds the eyes — and it appears he's doing but he's not doing — receives rabbinic lashes."

Plain Meaning:

A sorcerer who does a true act of sorcery receives stoning. One who holds the eyes — who makes it look like he's doing but isn't really doing — receives only rabbinic lashes.

Insights and Explanations:

1. What does "did an act of sorcery" mean according to the Rambam? The Rambam holds that all sorcery is falsehood and lies! Answer: "Act of sorcery" doesn't mean he has a true power — rather that **he himself is also taken in**, he's part of the scheme, he believes in it. He does specific rituals (knocks three times, turns a belt, puts together sticks) — that's an "act of sorcery." In contrast, ochaz et ha'ainayim does **nothing** of these rituals — he directly produces a snake from a hat without any ritual.

2. Why is a sorcerer specifically stoned but not all others? The verse "there shall not be found in you" enumerates all categories in one prohibition. But **"a sorceress you shall not let live"** is a separate verse only on a sorcerer. The principle: **a prohibition given as a warning for court-imposed death penalty — one doesn't receive lashes for it.** Therefore, the prohibition of "there shall not be found in you" for a sorcerer is given as a warning for court-imposed death penalty (stoning), and therefore one doesn't receive lashes for sorcery but rather stoning.

3. The question on ochaz et ha'ainayim: Earlier (in the halacha about me'onen) the Rambam said that ochaz et ha'ainayim **receives lashes**, and here (in the context of sorcerer) he says one is **not lashed** because it's a **prohibition given as warning for court-imposed death penalty.**

4. A proposed answer: Ochaz et ha'ainayim **as me'onen** (earlier) vs. **as sorcery** (here). Ochaz et ha'ainayim is **not actually a sorcerer** — it's only **included in sorcerer** (a branch of sorcery). Therefore:

- Stoning he doesn't receive — because stoning is only for a "true sorcerer."

- Lashes he also doesn't receive — because the prohibition is **given as warning for court-imposed death penalty** (the prohibition of "a sorceress you shall not let live" stands there, even if ochaz et ha'ainayim itself doesn't receive stoning).

- He receives only **rabbinic lashes.**

5. The progression in verses:

- **A sorceress you shall not let live** — applies to a true sorcerer, therefore stoning.

- **There shall not be found in you** — applies more broadly, even something that is only **similar** to sorcery (ochaz et ha'ainayim). This is the prohibition, but because the prohibition is given as warning for court-imposed death penalty (from "a sorceress you shall not let live"), there are no lashes.

6. It remains a mystery: The Rambam doesn't write explicitly the entire progression — one must fill it in oneself. **All commentators struggle** with this.

Halacha 11 (Final Word) — The Rambam's Worldview on Sorcery, Divination, Kosem, etc.

The Rambam's Words:

"All these things are words of falsehood and lies, and they are what the ancient idol worshippers deceived the nations of the lands with so they would follow after them. And it's not fitting for Israel who are wise sages to be drawn after these vanities, nor to bring to mind that there is benefit in them... Anyone who believes in these things and similar ones and thinks in his heart that they are true and words of wisdom but the Torah forbade them — is only from the fools and those lacking understanding, and in the category of women and children whose understanding is not complete. But the masters of wisdom and those of complete understanding know with clear proofs that all these things that the Torah forbade are not words of wisdom but emptiness and vanity that those lacking understanding were drawn after and abandoned all paths of truth because of them. And therefore the Torah said when it warned about all these vanities: You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God."

Plain Meaning:

The Rambam concludes the entire chapter with a principled declaration: **All** things that were enumerated in this chapter (sorcery, divination, kosem, me'onen, ov, yidoni, etc.) are **words of falsehood and lies** — they have no reality. Idol worshippers invented it to fool the ignorant nations. A Jew, who is a wise sage, may not follow such nonsense, and not even **believe in his heart** that it's true.

Insights and Explanations:

1. The Rambam's position that sorcery is not real at all: The Rambam says **words of falsehood and lies** — it's not that it works but one may not, rather it's **truly false**, it does nothing. This applies to **all** things in this chapter — sorcery, divination, kosem, me'onen, ov, yidoni.

2. The historical progression — back to chapter 1: The Rambam connects this with the history of idolatry from chapter 1: they built beautiful temples, they planted asherot, they made false prophets — and **another one of the means** was sorcery. All parts of a great scheme to fool people into idolatry.

3. "And it's not fitting for Israel who are wise sages" — part of being a Jew is to be wise: The Rambam doesn't only say one may not because it's forbidden, but **at its root** — it doesn't fit for a Jew because Jews are wise sages. **Part of Judaism is to have intellect.** It's a great transgression to be a fool (though the Rambam says "it's not fitting" — it doesn't fit — not that one is not included in Israel at all).

4. "Nor to bring to mind that there is benefit in them" — not only to do, even to believe: "To be drawn" seemingly means to do the act. But the Rambam adds: **even to believe in one's heart** that it's true is forbidden. "Benefit" means a practical benefit, a cure.

5. The verse "for there is no divination in Jacob and no sorcery in Israel": The Rambam interprets this verse **differently** than the world: not that Jews have no mazal (there is no mazal for Israel), but that **Jews are wiser** —

they don't do divination and sorcery. This is praise for Israel's wisdom, not a metaphysical statement.

6. **"For these nations... listen to diviners and sorcerers, but you – not so has the Lord your God given you":** The Rambam interprets: the foolish nations listen to diviners and sorcerers, but **to you God has given something better – wisdom.** The Rambam doesn't bring the continuation of the verse "a prophet from among you... He will raise up for you" – because he already brought this verse in Laws of Foundations of Torah to say that a prophet doesn't innovate knowledge, but says simple things.

7. **"Anyone who believes... and thinks in his heart that they are true and words of wisdom but the Torah forbade them" – the worst mistake:** The Rambam specifically attacks the one who says: "Yes, it works, it's wisdom, but what can I do – the Torah forbade it." Such a person is **from the fools and those lacking understanding, and in the category of women and children whose understanding is not complete.** This is not a wicked person – it's a fool.

8. **"Those of complete understanding" – wholehearted means the opposite of what the world thinks:** The world thinks "you shall be wholehearted" means one should be simple, not ask questions. The Rambam says **exactly the opposite:** wholehearted means **those of complete understanding** – one should have **complete, clear understanding.** "They know **with clear proofs**" – one should know with clear proofs that it's false. **Wholeheartedness is wisdom, not naivety.** Wholeheartedness means one has a complete picture of the world – God created the world, everything fits, one understands how everything works. When sorcery comes in, **there's a lack** in the wholeheartedness, because pieces come into the "puzzle" that one doesn't understand.

9. **Faith doesn't go against reality:** An important innovation against a widespread opinion that faith requires one to close one's eyes and go against reality. The Rambam says **no** – God is the **greatest reality**, and wholeheartedness means one goes **with** reality, not against it.

10. **"That those lacking understanding were drawn after and abandoned all paths of truth because of them" – how sorcery destroys a worldview:** When a

person believes in sorcery, it takes out an important piece of his puzzle – he no longer understands how the world works. He sees "wondrous things" that he cannot explain, and then his entire worldview is destroyed. **This is the progression of how idol worshippers fooled people:** first one confuses him with sorcery-nonsense, he loses his normal worldview, and **then** one can already convince him that a piece of wood is a god. "A person who despairs of having intellect, of understanding the world – then he can follow anything you want to convince him of."

11. **The Rambam's two-layered reason for the prohibition:**

- **Layer 1** (which he said earlier): One may not because it's branches of idolatry, it makes one similar to idol worshippers.

- **Layer 2** (here, "at its root"): Even without that – **it's simply nonsense**, and a wise person may not follow nonsense. The Rambam says both reasons.

12. **[Dispute of Rishonim – Rambam against Ramban:]** The **Ramban** holds **exactly the opposite** of the Rambam. The Ramban thinks the Rambam himself is the "wholehearted" (in the sense of naive), because he goes against reality – the Ramban sees that sorcery **does indeed work** in reality. But the main point – that **"it's not fitting for Israel who are wise"** to follow such things – is **agreed upon by all opinions**, even according to the Ramban.

13. **Practical difference regarding amulets:** Even the Rambam himself would perhaps give an amulet in a situation of mortal danger when there's no other way – **"to settle his mind"**. With this one can reconcile many righteous people who gave amulets – not always did they believe it actually helps, but "to settle the mind" is also something worthwhile.

14. **Mezuzah with names:** The Rambam in Laws of Mezuzah says a similar thing against writing names in the mezuzah. But we do **not** conduct ourselves like the Rambam – we do put certain names. Not all authorities agree with the Rambam on this.

15. **Rabbi Akiva:** The Mishnah "one who whispers over a wound has no portion in the World to Come" is **Rabbi Akiva** – the same Rabbi Akiva who entered Pardes, saw angels – this is not a competition between "masters of intellect" and "masters of spirituality."

Full Transcript

Rambam Hilchot Avodah Zarah Chapter 11 – Chukat HaGoyim

Introduction: The Place of This Chapter in the Overall Laws of Avodah Zarah

Speaker 1:

We are learning Hilchot Avodah Zarah Chapter 11. We have already learned many laws about avodah zarah, many, many laws. Here there are twelve chapters with many, many laws. The previous laws taught us various mitzvot of "lo techanem," not allowing non-Jews to dwell in Eretz Yisrael, and not being in partnership with non-Jews who worship avodah zarah. Here we are going to learn not to follow chukat hagoyim, which means not to conduct ourselves with certain chukim,

with the customs that the worshippers of avodah zarah practice.

Very good. One can see, seemingly this is one chapter, but we are going further and further from matters of avodah zarah. First we spoke about actual avodah zarah, then we spoke about customs that they have, or about dealing with avodah zarah, whether to let them live at all in Eretz Yisrael. Now we're already dealing with things that aren't avodah zarah at all, rather they are things that the non-Jews who do avodah zarah do, that we shouldn't do, because obviously, through this one becomes close to them, and through this it goes back up the chapters, and one will transgress until one does avodah zarah, God forbid.

Halacha 1: "We Do Not Follow the Chukim of the Non-Jews"

The Plain Meaning of the Rambam: The Prohibition of Chukat HaGoyim in Clothing and Hair

Speaker 1:

The Rambam says, "**We do not follow the chukim of the non-Jews.**" We don't go in the chukim of the non-Jews. Chukim here doesn't mean laws, it means customs, right? Customs. The word "chok" in general in the Torah isn't necessarily clear that it means some kind of law. It could be that it always means customs. It's interesting, because today we say "chok" means a law, but it could be that "chok" means like a fixed pattern, a regularity. From the language of chakikah, like "davar hane'chak." Something that is constant, regular, that is fixed regularly. It could actually be that a law is the thing that is most regular, that is truly obligatory. But it's a natural law, not because it was written in a law book, but on the contrary, it's written in the law book because it's done regularly, and it then becomes a... or even a strong law is something that is very constant, very obligatory. But chukat hagoyim actually means simply, it doesn't mean their laws, it means their customs, right?

We don't go in the ways of the non-Jews, in the chukim of the non-Jews, "**and we don't make ourselves similar to them.**" And we don't become similar to them. "**Not in clothing and not in hair.**" We don't want to look similar to them, not with clothing, dressing like non-Jews, or making our hair in interesting ways like non-Jews. As it says, "**and you shall not walk in the chukim of the nations.**"

Discussion: What Does "Chukat HaGoy" Mean? Forbidden Relationships, Avodah Zarah, or Neutral Customs?

Speaker 1:

It's actually a question, it's interesting, because one could say "you shall not walk in the chukim of the nations" means to do sins like a non-Jew, but we see that it's an extra verse, and sins one may not do not only because of chukat hagoyim, one may not do a sin because it's a sin. "Chukat hagoy" means even when the thing itself is neutral, it's just a "hair style," but because non-Jews do it this way, it's a symbolic... Seemingly, if a non-Jew does something because it's practical, then there isn't the prohibition of chukat hagoy. If a non-Jew does something and there's no normal "reason," the only "reason" is because that's what non-Jews do, then there is the prohibition.

Speaker 2:

It's interesting, because the language "chukim" in the first two verses that you brought, "chukat hagoy," refers to forbidden relationships. It speaks almost explicitly about the custom of the non-Jews to marry their own sister or such things. But we see that it's more like a derash, we understood, perhaps as you say, that we expand it, it's not limited to that verse.

Speaker 1:

What is the other verse? "Be careful lest you be ensnared after them" also speaks explicitly about avodah zarah. In the context, the verses speak about forbidden relationships and avodah zarah. But one could say this, that committing forbidden relationships, which is one custom that non-Jews have, is actually a very bad thing, because one adopts other customs that they have, and one will later do forbidden relationships and avodah zarah. Perhaps that's the point, that if it only said in the Torah "don't do avodah zarah," that's one thing. But the fact that the Torah says a whole thing that you shouldn't follow their ways, we see that the Torah is afraid that

you will become close with them, and consequently you will adopt their "lifestyle," and that's the prohibition. It's forbidden that you should become too close.

Just like in the previous ones, you also remember when "lo techanem," "lo titen lahem chen," the Rambam said it's not because we don't give a compliment to a non-Jew, it's because this will bring you a kiruv hadaat, and you will become too close. That's the Rambam.

The Verses That the Rambam Brings

Speaker 1:

"Be careful lest you do according to the chukim of the nations," that's another verse about chukim, "and you shall not walk," and then it says "be careful lest you be ensnared after them." The verse doesn't say the same words, but it says the idea that you should guard yourself from the ways of the non-Jews. Why? "Lest you be ensnared after them," because you will stumble and do the sins that they do.

The Principle: "That He Should Not Be Similar to Them, Rather the Jew Should Be Separated from Them"

Speaker 1:

The Rambam, **the principle and matter of these things**, all these prohibitions warn about the same thing, "**that he should not be similar to them,**" you shouldn't be similar to them. **Rather**, but what then? "**The Jew, the son of Israel, should be separated from them and recognizable,**" he should be separated from them and known. **And separated in his other actions, just as he is separated from them in character traits and in knowledge**, just as a Jew is different from a non-Jew because he thinks differently, his knowledge is different, he knows about the Creator differently, and in knowledge, his customs, his character traits are different.

Speaker 2:

Very good. Character traits here seemingly means Yesodei HaTorah, and knowledge means Hilchot Deot. Very good.

Speaker 1:

He should also be different from them in his clothing and in his other actions, as it says "**and I have separated you from the nations.**" Ah. The Almighty says this after it speaks about forbidden foods. The Rambam says that regarding this He brought in Sefer Kedushah both forbidden relationships, both issurei biah, and also forbidden foods, that through both one should be distant from the non-Jews.

Speaker 2:

Yes. That means that through this one is distant from the non-Jews.

Discussion: Is There a Positive Commandment to Wear Jewish Clothing?

Speaker 2:

It should be that one could say that wearing a bekishe, according to this it's a positive Torah commandment, because he should be separated in his clothing. The Rambam doesn't go that way, he doesn't say... Separated means that you're not like the non-Jews, not... One could also make it positive, that it's a mitzvah to wear Jewish clothing. But he says that one shouldn't wear non-Jewish clothing.

Speaker 1:

What's the difference?

Speaker 2:

There's a difference, because... because... because it doesn't mean that one must seek out Jewish clothing, rather one mustn't seek out what the non-Jews wear, but rather what is practical. Just as a person wears what is most practical. For example, it's winter, he says, "give me something that's warmest," or it's summer, "give me what's coolest." In practice he didn't look at what non-Jews do, he looked simply at what is practical. Okay, that's another topic, and I don't see that the Rambam says this. But... whether chukat hagoy means specifically avodah zarah, or is it a practical thing, these distinctions the poskim discuss. I don't see that the Rambam speaks about this.

Parallel to Hilchot Deot: "Just as the Wise Person is Separated in His Knowledge"**Speaker 1:**

I just want to remind you that the same language "just as he is separated in his knowledge" the Rambam said about the interesting, Hilchot Deot chapter where, I saw it last night. He says that just as the wise person is separated in his knowledge and in his other actions, he should be separated in his food. Here we see that for every Jew there is this thing, just as a Jew is separated in his character traits and knowledge from the non-Jews, he should also be separated in his actions, his clothing. There he spoke more about character traits and about certain refined things. Yes, and actions must always align with the character traits and the knowledge.

Speaker 2:

If you're at an even higher level, if you're a Torah scholar, then you should also be separated in action.

Speaker 1:

Ah, right. It's not the higher your knowledge and mind are, the more it goes. It's not the more it should align, and the more it should be more different. Because presumably this is also built on the dispute in chapter 2, but we won't continue.

Speaker 2:

It's not only that one continues after what one lives with, but also if I wear the same hat as the non-Jew, in the end I feel at home with him, something like that.

Halacha 2: Details – Clothing, Hair, Blorit**Clothing That Is Unique to Them****Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says, "**And one should not wear like them clothing that is unique to them**" – one shouldn't wear like clothing that is unique to the non-Jews, "**and one should not grow tzitzit like the tzitzat of their heads**" – one shouldn't let hair grow like their hair, the way they make their peyot, not the way we Jews make peyot. And I mean this is seemingly the explanation for "and one should not shave" – it's just the continuation. I mean, it could be both. "**That they shave from the sides and leave hair in the middle, and this is called blorit**" – they shouldn't let grow a large patch of hair on the sides and shave at the corners. We do the opposite, we shave in the middle and leave on the sides. Yes, we're going to see this soon, it's called peyot, but it's a mitzvah. Here we're saying that aside from not making peyot, that he transgresses, that person who shaves his peyot, that he also transgresses "chukat hagoy" because he makes the blorit.

Blorit is not what we call a chup, right? That has nothing to do with it.

Speaker 2:

Blorit is both, it's in the middle.

Speaker 1:

No, no, it's not in the middle, it's in front, another thing. Here we're saying that he cuts, he has something in the middle... I mean, I don't know how it works, he has something in the middle he leaves something.

Discussion: What Does "Clothing That Is Unique to Them" Mean?**Speaker 2:**

But also, what does "clothing that is unique to them" mean? Does it mean if there is clothing that you see is the clothing of the non-Jews, not such a practical thing as you said. But seemingly, to know what one may not do, one must know what today's non-Jews who worship avodah zarah do, not non-Jews that you look out the window at. Rather look around, what is a natural style, or what is a style that is affiliated with avodah zarah? Seemingly it sounds like that. One must see the Rambam, we're not going into the details, so I don't know. But seemingly it doesn't mean that one shouldn't wear pants, rather it means that one shouldn't wear what is unique to them. Right? If it's not unique to them, everyone wears it, everyone wears it. But clothing that is unique to them, one may not do that.

Continuation of the Rambam: "And One Should Not Shave the Sides Opposite His Face"**Speaker 1:**

Further, "**and one should not shave the sides opposite his face over the ears,**" one shouldn't make a straight cut of the hair in a straight line, "**leaving peyah behind him**" he leaves in back a pony, "**as the wicked do.**" From the side, he doesn't leave in front, he leaves in back.

Halacha 2 (Continued): Building – "That One Should Not Build Places Like the Building of the Temples of Idol Worshippers"**The Rambam's Language****Speaker 1:**

He says further, "**And likewise in building, that one should not build places like the building of the temples of idol worshippers.**" Here he already says something different, "**so that many will gather in them as they do.**" This is interesting, here he already says some reason. One shouldn't build a beit midrash or I don't know what, a public place, that should look like temples of avodah zarah, which they build this way in order to catch the eye, so that the public will come. Don't think of doing this, because let's say, if the priest understands very well about public relations, he made such a building because he understood that this way the public will come, let's also build this way so the public will come, we don't do this. It's interesting, we find our own way how to attract.

Discussion: "So That Many Will Gather in Them" – A Recurring Motif in the Rambam**Speaker 2:**

I remember that this is seemingly also the prohibition of drawing. Do you agree with me? The Rambam wrote a couple of times "so that many will gather in them," remember? "That

they should not gather to him." The Rambam has something against the many, I don't know what. It's written in another place "that many will gather in them," right? Ah, "that they will gather there for song," right? Remember? Something about the gathering of non-Jews.

Speaker 1:

By the song he explained what the purpose was, "so that the people will gather there."

Speaker 2:

Very good. But you see, he keeps talking about this. Something bothers him. It was that we want that only whoever wants to go to shul should go to shul, not that we should make it extra attractive so that people will wander in and then perhaps they'll belong to the shul.

Speaker 1:

I see this is already the third time he speaks about "that many will gather in them." You're saying an interesting idea. But it's correct that seemingly the prohibition here is to make the style, one shouldn't make such a style thing as he makes. As I said, the Rambam says that even though the style itself isn't bad to you, the whole purpose of the style is only a way that it should catch the eye. It seems to me that... I would have thought that it's bad. It's bad that it should catch the eye. Perhaps you're right. A shul isn't a place where one goes because it's a beautiful place. Whoever doesn't want to come... something the... the... yes, what do you say that one only goes to three offices in shul? One doesn't go to the scandal at the rabbi's. Perhaps he doesn't mean that one makes a shul, he means one makes a theater, some such sort of thing. Perhaps that's what he means I think when he says temples? He says yes, temples of avodah zarah.

Hilchot Chukat HaGoyim – Halacha 11 (Continued): Building Temples, Blorit, and Being Close to the Monarchy; Halacha 12: Divination

Halacha 11 (Continued) – Building Temples Like Non-Jews

Speaker 1:

Very good. Something... but you see, the Rambam speaks about this. Something there was a problem that we only want that whoever wants to go to shul should go to shul, and not that we should make it extra attractive so that people will wander in, and then perhaps they'll belong to the shul. I don't know, something about it, it bothered the inner, inner people.

I'm telling you, I don't know, I see that it's already the third time he speaks about the... it jumps to many. You say, it's an interesting idea. I don't know. But it's correct that seemingly the prohibition here is to make the style, one shouldn't make such a style thing as he makes. And as I said, perhaps the Rambam says, even though the style isn't bad, the whole reason why one makes the style is only a way that it should catch the eye, still one may not. Yes, I would have thought that it's bad that it should catch the eye. Perhaps you're right. A shul isn't a place that one goes because it's a beautiful place.

What Does "Temples" Mean?

Perhaps he means more, perhaps he doesn't mean when one makes a shul, he means one makes a theater, some such sort of thing. Perhaps that's what he means I think when he says temples. He says yes, **temples of avodah zarah**. He says that temples is **tratiot and circuses** in Sifrei. It could be that

here he means something different. It could be that a Jew shouldn't make something that should look like a church, and people will come in because they think it's a church. Ah, such an open... there is indeed a great multitude, such a group of gerim toshavim, who don't know much.

Perhaps that's the point. It could be that that's the point, that a Jew should think, there are people who seek to seek God, and they don't know who God is. They should come, "He is whom God, the God I will serve." Yes, Master... He says that the Sifra is mentioned "that they should not say tratiot," tratiot means theaters, I remember the word. And I mean that once theaters were a matter of avodah zarah, it wasn't just anything. It was entertainment for avodah zarah. Yes, it was entertainment for the people, but somehow it had some connection with the idols.

Digression: Kosher Entertainment

Perhaps the Rambam also has a problem with this, that every time people want to make entertainment, they say that one must make heimish kosher entertainment, because if not they'll do non-Jewish entertainment. Yes. The Rambam perhaps wouldn't have liked this. I heard... someone told me that there's an explanation on Shlomo, "every bitul Torah." What does it mean? He says that a rabbi has no entertainment, no melaveh malka, and no Tu B'Shvat, what does he make a hachnasas sefer Torah?

Halacha 11 (Continued) – A Non-Jew Cutting a Jew's Hair / Blorit

Okay, the Rambam says, here we're going to learn the law that one may not shave... ah, here we're going to learn about a Jew shaving. Because we said that there is a prohibition of shaving like the non-Jews do. The Rambam says, one must be careful when a person goes to get a haircut at a non-Jewish barber, at a non-Jewish barber.

On the contrary, on the contrary, on the contrary, a Jew is not permitted to cut a non-Jew's hair. No, **goy hamisatafer min Yisrael**. A Jew cuts a non-Jew's hair. Ah, a Jew cuts a non-Jew's hair, don't let the non-Jew cut your hair, making a bloris, which is a matter of avodah zarah (idolatry).

Is Bloris the Avodah (Service) Itself or Preparation?

Now, there's a question, is this itself an avodah? Is it only a preparation? What is the matter? **Keivan shehigi'a karov lebloriso shalosh etzba'os lechol ruach shomet yado umisatafer**. That means that the bloris was, it's hard to grasp what this whole structure was with the hairstyles, it's hard to say what exactly is avodah zarah.

There are those who say, someone says that if a non-Jewish scholar wants to explain what Kiddush Levanah (sanctification of the moon) is, he should go to a group of ten Jews and ask them, they'll tell him that Kiddush Levanah is avodas Hashem (service of God), it's only a symbolic thing, it's a custom, he'll also get ten opinions from ten Jews about what Kiddush Levanah is.

True, it's the bloris that the Gemara speaks of, it's correct, it's not exactly as he says, but it's more like a Kiddush Levanah thing, but it turns out that they called it avodah zarah, you'd think they had candles at night, one night, the day of the completion of his bloris is some kind of holiday.

If I remember correctly, there was a Moreh Nevuchim (Guide for the Perplexed) back then, they say that this isn't the avodah, rather it's a preparation, they want to be, it creates

humility, it makes a person be brought low so he can afterwards.

Ask a person why do you eat on Yom Tov? Say is this itself avodas Hashem? It's a preparation so that Yom Tov should be beautiful.

But in any case, here we see that this itself had, it was a part of the... it was simply a part of the avodah zarah, there is, it's in the category of... it's a part of the derech avodah (way of worship), it has to do with avodah zarah. Not simply he asks a non-Jew, he doesn't say it's a secular thing, it has something to do with the idol, it has something to do with his god.

And therefore, the Jew shouldn't be involved, he shouldn't be the barber, and he comes close to the bloris shomet yado umisatafer, because he shouldn't make the perfect bloris, let the non-Jew, the non-Jewish helper there finish it. Something like that, we see that he can be a barber for a non-Jew.

Halacha 11 (Continued) – Yisrael HaKarov LaMalchus (A Jew Close to the Government)

The Rambam says further, on this halacha of bloris there is a heter (permission) that a Jew who must dress himself so that he can be accepted at non-Jewish functions. **Yisrael shehu karov lamalchus**, you know, Reuven Aristobulus, he was a barber, you know the Gemara, yes. So in the Gemara we see that there were certain Jews who had to move around in Rome, Aptulumus ben Reuven had to move around in Rome among the non-Jews, they permitted them to shave themselves and dress like the non-Jews. **Yisrael shehu karov lamalchus vetzorich leishav lifneihem tamid**, he must negotiate with the non-Jewish kings, **harei zeh gnai lo shelo yihyeh melubash kemosam**, and the non-Jew looks down on a Jew who isn't dressed so sophisticatedly, **harei zeh mutar lo libosh kemosam**, he may indeed wear the clothing like the non-Jews, **ulegalei'ach keneged panav kedai shelo yisnavel**, he may shave himself, shave himself like they do.

What Does "Karov LaMalchus" Mean?

So, it's an interesting heter. That means a Jew, you know exactly how one merits to be karov lamalchus? We assume it means he's an askan (communal activist), he helps Jews there. It doesn't say in the Rambam, it's interesting. "Karov lamalchus," "vetzorich leishav," for the needs of the community. It doesn't say "letzorchei rabim." "Karov lamalchus," karov lamalchus means he travels there and he works there, I don't know. It doesn't say. The Rambam doesn't say that the heter is only because he does it leshem avodas Hashem (for the sake of serving God), rather he does it leshem because he needs to be with the non-Jews. He does it perhaps simply because he needs to do business with non-Jews. I mean in the Gemara it's implied that, how does it say there in the Gemara? And he needs to do it for Jews. And we assume so. I don't see that it even says in the Gemara. The Gemara says "kerovim lamalchus," that's the Gemara's language. We're just imagining that this means it's letovas Yisrael (for the benefit of Israel). It doesn't say. Perhaps simply a Jew who moves among non-Jews, he can't be... perhaps that's a better explanation. Therefore he doesn't do it to be a non-Jew, he does it to be accepted by the non-Jews.

He brings from the Rama in a responsum, he says yes, **kedai sheyagen al Yisrael etzlam**. He is karov lamalchus and he must defend Jews before the non-Jews.

Teshuvos HaRambam. Perhaps in general, that there are Jews who are kerovei hamalchus, this already helps that the non-Jew knows that Jews aren't crazy in his fire. Even if he doesn't go intercede, but simply the very fact that the non-Jew should have a family, he should have accountability, that he must answer tomorrow to his Jewish family. Like it is R' Malka, I mean a person, what's a good explanation? But it's interesting... what? They travel to Albany. There aren't Jews who travel there? But those Jews don't conduct the matter. Perhaps that's a problem. Perhaps the heimishe (insular Orthodox) askanim who come with their small beards. There are also those types of Jews who do it. They go with the kappel (yarmulke), but they don't go with the non-Jewish... even those Jews go with the kappel... okay, perhaps in America, it's a beautiful country, they let you come with a kappel, they don't look down, it's not a disgrace, I don't know.

The Nature of the Prohibition – Is It a Lav (Negative Commandment)?

So he may do both things, both the clothing and the hair, he may make his bloris, he may make the clothing like them. So from this you see that it's not a clear lav, when it would be a lav they wouldn't permit it. I see that a lav can't be a heter. A clear lav can't be a heter? I don't know, the Torah gives a heter, the rabbis can permit a lav? No, but it's a big thing. It's seemingly more like... it's actually a lav, the Rambam counts it as one of the lavim. I don't understand. Yes, but I don't know if you can say specifics. The lav is that one should see who is a Jew. He says, okay, he has another sign. All these things, it's like detailed laws in "bechukoseihem lo seileichu" (you shall not follow their statutes), but I don't see why we're now transgressing the lav. There's still enough about how to show that one is a Jew. Okay. Um. Yes, maybe. Okay.

Summary: Three Things – Clothing, Hair, Building

So, until here is the laws of chukas hagoy (statutes of the nations). We can say the non-Jews. Or the hair, these are two things, the Rambam says he fulfills with this, but he doesn't bring other things from the Gemara. Ah, he does bring, the buildings. He brings three things, dressing oneself, the hair and a building. I would have thought the pious Jews are very careful about dressing themselves and the hair. I haven't heard that one shouldn't be careful about the building. Perhaps yes? Perhaps we don't build... the Reform indeed made it look similar to houses of avodah zarah, but... usually, you can recognize a shul. Does it mean we shouldn't have any beautiful magnificent shul? Unless you would learn the simple meaning kedai shelo yomru (so they shouldn't say) in public. Yes. So you build a shul so it should fit large congregations from here. But even a house, even an office, one may not make it like the large office. It doesn't say specifically a shul. A theater. A theater. I know. There is Jewish architecture, interesting. I don't know. Okay.

Halacha 12 – Ein Menachshin KeGoyim (We Don't Practice Divination Like the Non-Jews)

So, now we're going to learn other things that are seemingly also a matter of chukas hagoyim, but the Rambam learns that these are the details, because the Torah has already prohibited them on their own. It's already a separate prohibition. It's also chukas hagoyim, but it's a prohibition in its own right, right? Yes. The Rambam says, **ein menachshin kegoyim**. Nachash means it's calling, eating like predicting the future. Let's see, the Rambam will say the examples. **Shene'emar**

"**lo senacheshu**". You shall not practice nachash. The Rambam will explain what this is. But what does "kegoyim" mean? Because the Torah says there something that it's like the non-Jews do? It doesn't say there. In another place it says... what does "ein menachshin kegoyim" mean? Ein menachshin. With this view, can I not kegoyim is indeed permitted? It says **ki lo nachash beYa'akov** he brings. Perhaps it means only in a manner that is the custom of the non-Jews? If there will be a type of nachash that is entirely a Jewish nachash, will it be permitted?

It's simple, **lo yimatzei becha**, means that there shouldn't be found in you this type of thing called ma'avir beno uvito ba'eish (passing his son and daughter through fire), like his futures, because it exists among the non-Jews. Among the Jews shouldn't be found this type of beliefs, this type of... I understand, I can say among the Jews there shouldn't be any murder, because that doesn't mean that murder is a problem of non-Jewishness. Murder is a problem. Non-Jews are the type of people who do this problem. But here the Rambam says that the problem is chukas hagoyim, because you're not doing any act of kishuf (sorcery).

Examples of Nachash

So, let's see. The Rambam says, **keitzad hi hanachash o hanachosh? Kegen eilu she'omrim ho'il venafal pisi mipi, ho'il venafal makli miyadi**, the meaning is that here is a bad sign, bad mazal, therefore **eini holech lemakom peloni hayom**, I'm not going to do a certain thing, **she'eini matzli'ach**, because if I go I will have **cheifetz peloni einona'aseh hayom**, I won't have any success. This is a sign that today I'm not going to have any success. **O ho'il ve'avar shu'al mimini**, if a black cat ran by, people say, or a fox on the right side, it's a bad sign, **eini yotzei mipesach beisi hayom shema yifge'eini adam ramai**. A fox is usually a cunning animal, clever. This is a whole calculation. I'm afraid I'll fall into this. If I see a fox, it's a sign that today someone will deceive me. This is already whole torahs. But in practice, both is like I'm not going to do it.

Nichush: Definitions, Examples, and the Distinction Between Forbidden and Permitted

Halacha 4 (Continued) — Examples of Nichush

The Rambam's Words

"**Ho'il venafal pisi mipi, o nafal makli miyadi — eini holech lemakom peloni hayom, she'im eilech ein chaftzai na'asin**"

"**Ho'il ve'avar shu'al mimini — eini yotzei mipesach beiso hayom, shema im yeitzei yifge'enu adam ramai**"

A black cat ran by — people say, here we're talking about a fox — next to me on the right side, it's a bad sign. He doesn't leave the house today.

A fox is usually a cunning animal, clever, this is a whole calculation, I'm afraid I'll fall in with a deceiver, a sign that today someone will deceive me, it's already a whole teaching.

But both is like he's not going to do it, he becomes demotivated — "Ah, today isn't a good day, perhaps tomorrow."

Let's see, let's see, the Rambam holds that one may not do anything based on a sign.

I know, yes, there's no difference regarding the prohibition, there is indeed one thing that one may do, let's see at the end,

but let's see.

Tziftzuf HaOfos (Chirping of Birds)

The "menachesh," he hears the "**tziftzuf ha'ofos**", he hears how the birds are used in kishuf, as earlier there was also something with birds.

No, back then it was a bone of a bird, now we're talking about live birds, he hears the birds chirping, "**ve'omrim nachash zeh omer**", he hears them saying, as if the birds are saying, they have "sichas chayos ve'ofos" (conversation of animals and birds), yes.

"**Ve'omrim yihyeh kach velo yihyeh kach**", or "**tov la'asos peloni vera la'asos davar peloni**", he makes decisions based on such hints that he hears from the "**tziftzuf ha'ofos**".

Tarnegol SheKara Arvis (A Rooster That Crowed in the Evening)

"**Vechen eilu she'omrim shachatu tarnegol zeh shekara arvis**", the rooster that started chirping early in the morning, he crowed in the middle of the night, it's a bad sign or something.

"**O shachatu tarnegoles zo shekara kemo tarnegol**", she acts like a male rooster, it's a bad sign.

Usually only the father crows, once the mother also gives a crow, we'll slaughter him. Feminist, tough times.

Okay, he sees this as a sign, but we're talking here because it's a bad sign, not just, that's why he must slaughter him.

No, but not because he doesn't like the rooster because he didn't crow well, rather because since it's a bad sign, since he must slaughter him, we don't know.

Yes. Ah, you're saying that since it's a bad sign.

Simanim KeEliezer Eved Avraham (Signs Like Eliezer Servant of Avraham)

He says further "**vechen hasam le'atzmo simanim**". He makes signs, he says "**im yomar li kach vechach e'eseh davar peloni, ve'im lo yomar li lo e'eseh**", he makes his actions based on the sign. **KeEliezer eved Avraham**, like Eliezer servant of Avraham made a certain sign that if the woman will say "gam ligmalecha ashkeh," that story, "**vechen kol kayotzei badevarim eilu hakol asur**".

Discussion: The Rambam's Position Regarding Eliezer

The Rambam holds that Eliezer means he didn't do well, he only did it because he wasn't a Jew, he was a servant. As the Gemara says "kol hanachash" is Eliezer ben Avraham, and the Rambam learns that indeed Eliezer wasn't permitted. Perhaps it was before Matan Torah (the giving of the Torah), perhaps it was before Moshe Rabbeinu, perhaps back then it was permitted.

It's interesting, because if you say the simple meaning in Eliezer, that if you're going to see that she has such good character traits that she'll say "gam ligmalecha ashkeh," it's not a crazy sign, it's a simple sign of how I know her good character traits. True, but the Gemara didn't see it that way. The Gemara saw that Eliezer was more of a nichush, doing such an act. It doesn't look like it was a... because then he doesn't need to make the whole prayer, then he can simply check if she has good character traits. I mean that's what they tell the children in cheder, I mean the more simple meaning is that it's nichush.

Kol Kayotzei Badevarim Eilu Hakol Asur (All Similar Things Are Forbidden)

"**Vechein kol kayotzei badevarim eilu hakol asur**". That means, more signs, one can't enumerate every type of craziness that a person can fall into, everything is forbidden, as if because non-Jews do this.

Discussion: Is Nichush Forbidden Because Non-Jews Do It?

But... no, it could be that one may not do the types that non-Jews do. I don't understand, one may not do nichush because non-Jews do it, or one may not do the types of nichush that non-Jews do? The Rambam says, I'm afraid, perhaps the non-Jews is simply a way to connect it to the previous halacha, but actually nichush is forbidden in general.

Let's see, in general, here the Rambam will say, the Rambam would want that a person must make decisions based on intellect, not based on some... at the end of this chapter the Rambam will say his position about this, perhaps we'll get there and understand the logic better. Okay, the Rambam says that these are things that the idol worshippers used to manipulate their people, but it's simply false, therefore it's not fitting to do at all. Perhaps the Rambam holds in general that it's foolishness. A non-Jew is one who believes in foolishness, that's the point. Or these types of foolishness the non-Jews used. The idol worshippers used to use such things in order to confuse people's minds, therefore the Torah forbade it. But it's not only forbidden because it's non-Jewish, I don't see that there's really a place to think so. Perhaps believing in nichush is perhaps terrible, but it doesn't look that way. Because people say that one can say that a Jewish sign is permitted, like a goral haGra (lottery of the Vilna Gaon), because it's Jewish. It could be that there are poskim (halachic authorities) who understand this way, but the Rambam doesn't look that way.

What Is the Ma'aseh (Act) in Nichush?

The Rambam doesn't say it's forbidden, rather one receives malkos (lashes), yes, "**bechol asah ma'aseh**".

Ah, I'm not correct, that was about chukas hagoy. This is a more specific thing. Ah, this is certainly a lav, also about chukas hagoy. Ah, the Rambam indeed says that people receive malkos, yes.

Ah, perhaps we're going back to the sign. We struggled last night in the previous paragraph, I said that I don't know how we know which things are actually a prohibition. Perhaps what it says "lokeh," we know for certain that it's actually a lav. "**Bechol asah ma'aseh midevarim eilu lokeh**". What is the ma'aseh? The ma'aseh is that he did. But it's interesting, because the ma'aseh should have been on the sign. Because he does a thing based on the sign. He doesn't do the sign, the sign happens. The sign is that he saw a bird, he did business based on a sign. The ma'aseh that he did isn't a sin. The sin is that he did it because there was the sign.

It's interesting, we say "siman tov umazal tov" (a good sign and good luck). Okay, the Rambam says a mazal tov. Let's see.

Law 5 — Siman Tov (Good Sign): What is Permitted

The Rambam's Words

"**Siman tov**". Ah, one minute, here it stands to see what one may indeed do. "**Mi she'omer**". "**Mi she'omer**". "You could have it". No, it's not in English, it's in Ashdodit. "You could have it". Whoever said, "**Mi she'omer dirah zo shebaniti siman tov hu li**", it was a good sign for me. Did he do it

because of a good sign? He had a sign that this is the right apartment.

"**O ishah zo shenasati, o bayit zeh shekaniti, mevorach hu, o she'at kinyan zo shekaniti she'arti**". This made him successful. From this it shows that the sign is a blessing in some certain aspect, in a certain thing that he did. A thing that already was. That is, the wife, the thing that he did, he sees that since he got married to her, everything goes well for him. He sees that it was successful, it was a good sign, a good mazal. "**Vechein kol kayotzei bazei**". Stop a moment.

Asking a Child

And so, and so, **Hasho'el letinok, eizo pasuk atah lomed?** So, so, like Haman did, huh? Like Haman, yes. But this doesn't mean, one says many times "pasuk li pasukecha". **Eizo pasuk atah lomed? Im amar lo pasuk shel berachot**, and he tells him a blessing, some good verse, if he rejoices, he has a good sign, **kol elu vechayotzei bahen mutar**. This one may indeed do.

Discussion: Why is This Permitted?

Why? Why does the Rambam say? Because **ho'il velo kiven ma'asav velo nimna me'la'asot**, when a person doesn't know what he should do something, and he asks someone for a sign, and based on that he does it, he transgresses on nichush. But he doesn't do it, he's just looking for something like that, he's looking to feel good, he takes such a sign after doing. **Ela asah siman zeh le'atzmo ledavar shekevar ratzah vera'ah la'asoto**, this one may do.

So, so, granted on this, I don't understand, something I don't understand very basically. On the apartment, that I don't feel, I understand. That is, it's already all set, that's the difference apparently. It's already set. I noticed that such a type of apartment goes well for me. Okay. It's not forbidden, perhaps it's also foolishness, I don't know, but it's not forbidden. Because he doesn't do any action, not only is it permitted, it's not just that it's a law like a lav she'ein bo ma'aseh, it's permitted, it's more than that.

And then the child sounds yes that he's going to do something, I don't understand that. **Yismach**, the Rambam doesn't make something different. **Yismach veyomar zeh siman tov**. And granted what? Granted he's going to do something? No, it's before. **Yismach**, he rejoiced in the world. Just like that, he'll have a good day, a sign for today, today is a good day. But he doesn't do anything based on it, in both cases the thing is that he doesn't do something based on the... It's weird, no? When does he ask the child for a sign? He goes and says, he wants to know, do I have a good day today or a bad day? And he depends on whatever the child will tell him what he learned. I don't understand the difference that the Rambam makes. It's a gemara, it's a gemara, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, bayit, tinok, ve'ishah, af al pi she'ein nachash yesh siman. Nachash, what does one say? I don't understand.

Dispute Between Rambam and Ra'avad

The Ra'avad on Yichudim (from Earlier)

The Ra'avad, the holy Ra'avad indeed says... ah, by the way, we must say another Ra'avad from earlier. Look at the Ra'avad here. Yes. The Ra'avad, we got confused on the yichudim. The Ra'avad already said he doesn't understand what he means. I'm not the first. The Ra'avad says "**eini yode'a mah zeh**". If the Ra'avad means to say not to make any forms or chamunim,

that is forms which are idolatry, that he understands, but he's not clear what the Ra'avad, what in general the yichudim mean.

The Ra'avad's Position on Signs

Ah, and the holy Ra'avad says on this, "**amru Avraham zeh chidush gadol, shera'ui lismoch alav, i mutar hu**". And so on. That is, the Ra'avad says, but the Ra'avad holds that signs in general, like Eliezer, one may not do. Because the Ra'avad says that it stands in the gemara, Eliezer eved Avraham, indeed that is permitted. Why could it be that Eliezer one will say that he did a sin? He is a servant of the Ra'avad. And the same thing he also says on the next piece, on the "bayit tam lecho'rah tashlitato".

So how did the Ra'avad hold that the Torah doesn't tell the story to the disgrace of Eliezer, rather the Torah says it positively, it appears that it can't be forbidden. Right. Also on "bayit tam lecho'rah tashlitato" the Ra'avad says that it doesn't mean that it's permitted, it means to say that one can rely on it, that it's good. But the gemara says that this is specifically three times. The Rambam doesn't bring that. The Rambam learns it that yes, it stands that it's permitted, so how should I rejoice? The Ra'avad explains that no, if the Ra'avad holds that a sign is permitted, that is nichush one may not. So what is the difference according to the Ra'avad between a sign and nichush? I don't know clearly.

Fundamental Dispute

It's interesting, the Rambam holds that one never does things based on a sign. So only here things that are... and one doesn't do something. The Ra'avad holds that one may indeed do things based on a sign. And which not? Only certain signs, only certain... So the Ra'avad, it's a dispute in halacha. According to the Ra'avad one may go say pasuk li pasukecha and according to that make the shidduch or not, and so on. According to the Rambam one may not.

Practical Ramification: Siman Tov and Mazal Tov

May one say with my free. What is when one says mazal tov at a shidduch? I mean to say that the wife should I make a good mazal, but this is not forbidden, because one doesn't do anything based on it. Even the Rambam admits such a thing, or in any case that one may say such a thing.

According to the Ra'avad one will even be able to make a siman tov. It's interesting. One must understand which things are forbidden from the Torah.

Can one perhaps say bemazal tov? It's the opposite. It's to say that one shouldn't need to ask a question, rather we wish that it should be with mazal without any... I hear. Yes. It should be with mazal without any... I hear. Yes. It should be in any case.

Chapter 11: Menachesh, Kosem, Me'onen, and Ochetz Et Ha'Einayim

Law 7 (Continued) – Kosem Kesamim

Speaker 1:

Exactly, one shouldn't say mazal tov is the opposite, it's to say that there is no mazal tov. One shouldn't even ask a question, rather to wish him that it should be a mazal tov and rain.

Yes, so in any case, the commentators struggle much to explain the eved Avraham, how one does this. I want, it's relevant to practice, it's relevant to practice, no? One must know. A bit. Okay, let's go on a little.

The Rambam's Language: "And Who is a Kosem"

Already, the Rambam says further, "**Ve'eizehu kosem**". So until here is nachash. Nachash and kosem. "**Lo nachash beYa'akov velo kesem beYisrael**". "**Ve'eizehu kosem?**" He says, kosem is similar things, it's a bit different how one does it. A completely different thing. Nachash is simply one makes a sign from something one hears. Kesem is a certain prediction of the future. It's already more similar to ov yide'oni, but without such fancy things.

"Zeh ha'oseh ma'aseh mish'ar hama'asiyot kedei sheyashom da'ato vetitvatel machashavto mikol hadevarim ad sheyomar devarim she'atidim liheyot, veyomar davar peloni atid liheyot o eino atid liheyot, o sheyomar she'atid liheyot ra'ah lazeh vetovah lazeh, o sheyomar shehadavar peloni tov la'asoto vehizaharu mikach".

Explanation of the Language

"Kedei sheyashom da'ato" – his mind should become astonished. **"Yashom"** means he should become empty, no? Like **"kum vehashom"**, yes, shomem. **"Vetitvatel machashavto mikol hadevarim"** – he becomes completely empty. It's some sort of meditation, emptying his thought. **"Ad sheyomar devarim she'atidim liheyot"** – until his mind becomes so empty, and what falls into it are correct things, **"devarim she'atidim liheyot"**. **"Veyomar davar peloni atid liheyot o eino atid liheyot"** – he says this will be or won't be. **"O sheyomar she'atid liheyot ra'ah lazeh vetovah lazeh"** – or he will say future things that will happen for himself, or he will say this and this thing is a good thing to do, or **"vehizaharu mikach"**, this and this thing guard yourself from doing. This means future predictions.

List of Acts of Kesem

How does one do this?

Yesh min hakosemim who do, there are the first who do it through thought, through emptying the thought.

Ha'osim, this is a list of the actions. What does one do through thought? A kosem is one who does any of the actions that causes that there should be this emptying of thought from things.

Yesh min hakosemim shemeshamesh bechol uve'avanim, one does something with handling with the hands on something, on sand and stones. **Veyesh mehem mi shego'eh la'aretz vetzo'ek**, one lies down on the earth and screams. Okay. **Veyesh mehem shemitsakel bemar'eh shel barzel o yasheshu'a umedameh ve'omer atidiyot**, or they look at a... means a silver... a crystal ball, or they look at some mirror, or in a glass, and they are medameh, they begin to use the power of imagination and they say future predictions. **O yesh mehem she'ochetz makel beyado venish'an alav ad shetifneh machashavto umedaber**, or he holds a rebbe's stick in his hand and he leans on it until he comes to the empty thought and he speaks.

Proof from a Verse

And on this the prophet stands... all these things are types of kesem. He says, **harehu omer**, "**ami be'etzo yish'al umaklo yagid lo**", the prophet speaks out that Jews ask advice from, I don't know what, from idolatry, and the stick tells him what to do. The simple peshat is he's right, that etz means idolatry, but the Rambam interprets literally the stick,

because he takes the stick and he strikes and he does something with the stick, and the stick tells him, and this is a proof from the verse that there is such a type of kosem that works with a stick. He strikes or...

Law 8 – The Law of the Kosem and One Who Asks a Kosem

The Rambam says, all these things one may not do. **Asur leksom**, one may not do this kesem, one may not be the kosem, and one also may not be the one who asks the kosem. Rather, what is there the difference in halacha? **Hasho'el lekosem makin oto makat mardut**, one doesn't give him lashes, rather one gives him makat mardut, rabbinical lashes, **aval hakosem atzmo im asah ma'aseh miklal ma'aseh kesem**, if he did his kesem through an action, he gets lashes, since he transgresses on the lav sheyesh bo ma'aseh, **shene'emar "lo yimatze becha... kosem kesamim"**.

Question: Why is Meditation Forbidden?

It comes out according to the Rambam, I don't know what the peshat is, HaGaon Rabbi Shimon Mundstein holds elementarily that there is a prohibition.

He also doesn't speak, he can't mention why, what the things that he also indeed holds are with. It comes out from this Rambam that it is forbidden to do like a meditation with an action. It can be even without an action he says forbidden, but according to tradition and action. It's very interesting, because we may not use the power of imagination, something is missing here our information.

Speaker 2:

No, meditation with saying some sort of future predictions.

Speaker 1:

Apparently look in the language of Sefer HaMitzvot, apparently it's the power of estimation or the power of imagination, uve'echad minei orerut. It is forbidden to arouse the power of imagination, says the Rambam.

Speaker 2:

No, but the word kosem doesn't mean the power of estimation, kosem means saying future predictions through the power of imagination.

Speaker 1:

Everyone who has imagination says future predictions, and if he says things that were yesterday... when we ask a person what the matter of meditation is, he says to calm the mind and it should be clearer, one should be able to do things better. And be able to what?

Speaker 2:

No, be able to... meditation is not for any future predictions, not from what I know.

Speaker 1:

Why is indeed not? I ask the Rambam, why is it bad? Something is missing me. The Rambam says that it's bad. One may not, because what? Perhaps it's like chukat hagoyim. The Rambam puts it in under the same category as chukat hagoyim. Perhaps because of this when one asks a verse one may yes, because the gentile doesn't ask any verse. The Rambam doesn't say, the Rambam says a verse also doesn't weigh, only for healing one may, when it doesn't do anything anyway. Or what simply one makes him happy. I don't know. I already didn't understand this.

It's interesting from the Ramban, perhaps because the Rambam says that imagination is not a good thing, and perhaps one shouldn't use this. Perhaps the Rambam at the end of chapter 11 will say what to maintain in this. Perhaps the Rambam will further... Yes, I mean that we must understand the peshat in this Rambam, that the prohibition is apparently a prohibition. No? Okay, it's a lav.

Law 9 – Me'onen

The Rambam says further, section 9, **"Eizehu me'onen?"** What is this me'onen? We'll see, I mean that we should stop here. We've already sat around twenty minutes, can we perhaps finish this chapter. If not, we'll finish it tomorrow or later.

Anyway, we continue. A me'onen. **Eizehu me'onen**, yes? Yes. What did you say? **Eizehu me'onen**.

We learned, one of the... we're learning here chukat hagoyim and various types of things that are similar to kishuf, menachesh, me'onen, and these types of things.

The Rambam's Language: Givers of Times

What is a me'onen? The Rambam says, **elu noteni itim**, people who establish that certain times are auspicious times, are good times. **She'omrim be'itztaginot**, they look at the stars, and according to that they say **yom peloni tov, yom peloni ra, or yom peloni is good to do in it melachah pelonit, shanah pelonit o chodesh peloni is bad**, and so on. Already.

Dispute of Rishonim on This Rambam

In practice, there are many who argue on this Rambam. Like for example there is the gemara that if one has a dispute with a gentile one should do it in the month of Adar, because Adar is a blessed month. The Rambam here says one may not do that the month is a good month for something. And for example there is the custom that the Rema learns that one shouldn't make a wedding at the end of the month because the moon is not full, it's not a good sign. So also this goes according to all these Rishonim who argue on this Rambam with the matter of me'onen.

The Law of Me'onen: "Even Though He Didn't Do an Action"

Further the Rambam says, **asur le'onen**, one may not do this... establish times according to what one sees in the stars. What is the Rambam? **Asur le'onen, af al pi shelo asah ma'aseh**. One may not establish a time according to the wisdom of the stars, **af al pi shelo asah ma'aseh**, even if one didn't do an action, **ela hodi'a**. What does establishing a time mean?

Speaker 2:

No, yes, that is, it means to say not establishing a wedding at a time. One may say the day is a good day, the day is a bad day, if one doesn't establish according to it at all.

Speaker 1:

No, no, the Rambam says one may not establish things based off the thing of me'onen.

Explanation of "Didn't Do an Action"

Because doing an action is like we learned earlier, for example by menachesh, he does an action that he says **"shachat tarnegol zeh"**, and he indeed slaughters the rooster. **Lo asah ma'aseh**, he says means, he only says and he doesn't do. It's however me'onen, means so says the Rambam, even **lo asah ma'aseh. Lehodi'a she'oten hakezavim**

shehasakalim medamin shehen divrei emet vedivrei chochmah. He says that yom peloni tov. The Tosafot indeed don't say that yom peloni tov. He interprets "**lo ya'aseh ma'aseh**". I mean perhaps "**lo ya'aseh ma'aseh**" means that when he did the me'onen thing he didn't take any bird in the hands, or I don't know what. He simply said that that day is a good day, and according to that one should decree something.

Speaker 2:

No, he didn't say anything. He didn't decree. If he decreed, he made an action. He said the action of...

Speaker 1:

Certainly, how do I know that he didn't make an action? He went and did.

Speaker 2:

Went and did. That's what the Rambam says, "**vechol ha'oseh ma'aseh**". Yes yes. What is an action? "**Vechol ha'oseh ma'aseh mipnei hatiganinot zo**". If one does indeed specifically at the time that the me'onen said, then it's called an action.

Speaker 1:

Discussion on Achizat Einayim, Me'onen, and Chover Chaver

He says that even if he didn't do a deed, he only did the deed of me'onen itself, he said... he said... he imagined "**those lies that fools imagine are words of truth and words of wisdom**", what fools think is truth and wisdom, he committed a prohibition, but on this there cannot be lashes. But if one does indeed do a deed, and one intended to do or go at a certain time according to the time that the chovrim bashamayim, the people who look at the sky who convince themselves that they see things in the sky, **hareih zeh lokeh**, he receives lashes, **as it says "velo te'onenu"**.

Halacha 9 (Continued) - Ochaz Et Ha'ainayim

And likewise, in "lo te'onenu" there is another category, **one who does a sort of magic, "ha'ochaz et ha'ainayim umidameh bifnei haro'im she'oseh ma'aseh timhon vehu lo asah"**. One who knows how to do the trick so that it should appear to people as if he's doing something wondrous, and he's not really doing it, it's just a kind of achizat einayim, "**hareih zeh bichlal me'onen velokeh**", he receives lashes.

Question: Connection to Me'onen

Also a wonder, because this apparently has no connection with... according to today's magic shows, it has no connection with, no one claims that he has powers. The Rambam doesn't say that achizat einayim means that one does a trick. The Rambam says that he makes you think that he's doing a trick. How he works it I don't know. It could be everything is through achizat einayim anyway, everything is through koach hadimyon anyway. The word achizat einayim is apparently just a distinction. There is a dispute about this.

If one says that other things, ma'aseh timhon, work truly, he can say that ovot veyid'onim means one who does a trick, and it doesn't work truly. But if, there are two other ways that one can say, if both don't work truly, just as the Rambam will say further, that even the avodah zarah doesn't work truly at all...

Discussion on Achizat Einayim, Me'onen, and Chover Chaver

Continuation of Discussion on Achizat Einayim and Magic Tricks

Speaker 1:

The Rambam says that he makes you think that he's doing a trick. How he works it I don't know. One can say that everything is achizat einayim anyway, that everything is koach hadimyon anyway. The word achizat einayim is apparently just a distinction, there is like a dispute about this.

That means, if one says that the other things, ma'aseh ta'atu'im, work truly, he can say that achizat einayim is when one does a trick and they don't work truly. But if both... there are two other ways that one can say. If both don't work truly, just as the Rambam will say at the end that all these things don't work truly at all, then automatically achizat einayim is just another way of doing the same tricks. One does a trick through saying abracadabra, and one does a trick through plain achizat einayim, whatever that exactly means.

Achizat einayim doesn't mean he does a trick, explicitly, it makes magic, because magic also has a falsehood. Or you say the opposite, if one thinks yes that everything works, he can also further think that there is kishuf that works through one of the ways, and there is one who works directly on your eyes, which is further some kind of magic. Do you understand?

I think he notes that in Sefer HaMitzvot the Rambam explains a bit better. He says that these things one does, whatever tricks one has how one does it, but me'onen actually is more like one says that he sees it in the stars, or there are people who are more clever and they do with their hands so it should look like they're doing certain things that are wondrous, actually magic.

The Rambam's Reason for the Prohibition: Fooling People About Reality

And the Rambam says that the prohibition is because one convinces people that one can do impossible things. One makes people believe in alternative realities. One fools people. It's very important that people should be smart. I mean we'll learn at the end, I mean much of the moral lesson from the Rambam is that there is a mitzvah for a person to be smart and not be a fool.

And if a person loses his sense of reality and he doesn't know what yes and what no, he convinces himself that people can do impossible things... perhaps the same prohibition will also be if one believes that people cannot do what they can indeed do. But in any case, a person must know what a person can indeed do and what a person cannot do.

And if one fools the other and makes the other believe that one can do wondrous things, whether one does it really like a swindle, like one makes certain movements with the hands that make sounds, or one does it more perhaps when the person himself believes in it. I don't know what exactly is the distinction between when one does it with achizat einayim and the others.

Speaker 2:

No, the distinction is that achizat einayim is when he himself knows that he's fooling the other. The other case is when he himself thinks that he can.

Back to the Halacha: Achizat Einayim is the First Deed

Speaker 1:

Okay, let's go back, let's say a bit simpler. Until now we haven't seen anyone who does anything that we call magic, he does things, we haven't seen any one of the prohibitions that stood as a menachesh, who only says, he doesn't do other things. He says when it will be, or he says chassidut. Achizat einayim is the only one, the first is only this. There isn't any other, there isn't. Perhaps we'll soon see what mekhasheif means. For example, he makes the other think that he can fly, for example.

Speaker 2:

Ah, the Rambam I remember exactly, where he takes out a rabbit from his hat, exactly the example. This wasn't from the previous ones, there wasn't any other previous thing that stood that this is a thing that he does. But this is achizat einayim.

Discussion: Is a Magic Show Prohibited?

Speaker 1:

So according to this, what we just discussed, that one who is a magic show, he says clearly that I have a trick how I do it, that you shouldn't think that I'm some kind of superhuman, is not oved. Because the Rambam says that the sin is because one fools the other that people can do things that they cannot. It's part of fooling.

Speaker 2:

I don't know, I don't know. This one should ask the rabbis. I don't know. That's why I'm here. Ah, the question arises. But the Rav wants to be lenient, I'm not asking.

I don't know, the Rambam says that there is a prohibition of me'onen. This is exactly like... one can argue on the Rambam. One can argue on the Rambam that he says for two reasons, but according to the Rambam it could be that it's prohibited. Just as according to the Rambam it's certainly prohibited to make a wedding on Tuesday because it's that time, it's a Torah prohibition according to the Rambam. But what then, the Rema says that one should do so, that's because he is generally in disagreement with the Rambam, he doesn't go in the shitah of the Rambam.

The Ramban is lengthy, I mean on the contrary, it's not that he doesn't go in the shitah of the Rambam, the Ramban generally doesn't hold that this is the explanation of me'onen, and he argues on the halacha. But according to the Rambam it's prohibited. I think there is a dispute.

Speaker 1:

Achizat einayim is a thing in itself. Either way, but why did the Rambam... ay, that has to do with the dispute of Rishonim about astrology, whether those who believed that one can indeed see things.

But it's not only from yes around. Okay, in short, one can go into it. But it's a lot according to the Rambam, you're going into a part of a mitzvah. Because why is it prohibited? If according to the Rambam it's prohibited, it's prohibited. If according to another who says that it means something else, "ochaz et ha'einayim" and doesn't understand the Gemara, it's permitted. One must know what...

Okay, we'll see. I think when the Rambam finishes the chapter he explains the reason for the prohibition a bit better. Perhaps there we'll be able to understand. But again, the halacha is not dependent on the reason. The halacha can be...

Halacha vs. Ta'amei HaMitzvot

The Rambam gives you clarity many times. It's good to understand the derasha, the moral lesson, or whatever you

want to call it, but it could be that the halacha remains halacha. Here it can certainly be that the Rambam would say that the magic trick is prohibited from the Torah.

Speaker 2:

No, if he tells you clearly, "it's a game, I can teach you how one does it"?

Speaker 1:

Let's think into it. What does it mean he tells you clearly? Why are you going to the trick? It's very nice, it's very interesting.

Speaker 2:

Usually a part of magic tricks is usually that he shows, one magic he shows how he does it, and the other you have to...

Speaker 1:

No, only the religious people do that because they think that thereby they'll satisfy the Rambam. I'm not so sure.

Speaker 2:

Okay, why doesn't he say any names?

Speaker 1:

Part of the interest of the show is, one only shows one of the tricks, one shows how the trick works.

Speaker 2:

No, that's plainly not correct. The normal people who do the magic tricks, they want one to think that... later it comes out what they're ashamed of, they say they fooled us.

Speaker 1:

If there is a magician who truly claims that he has supernatural powers, then similarly one can say according to the Rambam. But you can also buy a magic trick show, and one buys a few boxes with a few eggs...

Let's remember one thing: there are halachot and there are ta'amei hamitzvot. The Rambam doesn't say that the prohibition is to say falsehood. Falsehood is another prohibition in the Torah. There is a special prohibition to make the other think. That's what the Rambam says. The Rambam speaks exactly like now, he says "anashim peta'im umehudrim" that one does such things. In the Rambam's times one also found people who knew, whoever was a bit interested knew how this works. It's nothing different today than then. The Rambam holds that this is prohibited.

The question is what you do with the Rambam. What they seek a heter, a way out, could be. But I don't see that one can say that because the reason is only... and besides when what I'm not sure that it's correct.

In other words, if I only you... in practice, your eyes see one thing and the fact is different... could be that this is also the problem.

Not only that he doesn't know... but he seeks to fool the eyes.

Speaker 2:

Yes, he knows... me'onen! Me'onen! It says in the Gemara. Me'onen - zeh hame'achaz et ha'einayim.

Speaker 1:

Okay, you say so... I can still say, but... me'onen means this according to the Rambam.

Speaker 2:

No, the Rambam doesn't say, this the Rambam says in Hilchot Avodah Zarah.

Halacha 11: Chover Chaver**Speaker 1:**

Now we're going to chover... now we're going to chover.

Says the Rambam, **eizehu chover?** Further it says me'onen, **vechover chaver**.

The next thing, another sort of chukat hagoy that has a connection to kishuf, is what the Rambam says that there are all these things.

Speaker 2:

No, **eizehu chover?** He begins eizehu chover, he doesn't say... never the verse that you say to him, shenakdimah.

Speaker 1:

He didn't bring the verse.

Speaker 2:

No, he brings out... shene'emar, he brings out, yes, I don't know.

Speaker 1:

But when he enumerated all the mitzvot he did indeed say, shelo liksom, shelo le'onen, shelo lenachesh.

Speaker 2:

He said earlier, shelo le'onen, shelo lenachesh.

Speaker 1:

Now he says, what is the shelo le'onen? Okay, **eizehu chover?** Which does this go? As long as it's...

Okay. Okay. He usually doesn't say... he usually doesn't match up with what he says earlier...

Okay. He usually says to himself not to me about what he says earlier.

Lo yenachesh is one thing.

The Definition of Chover

And eizehu chover? says the Rambam, **zeh shemedaber devarim she'einam lashon am**, a person speaks some mystical language, he speaks words that no one understands what they mean, **ve'ein lahem inyan**, it has no true meaning.

Ume'aleh al da'ato besichluto she'otam hadevarim mo'ilim. He convinces himself in his foolishness that these words are effective, like one says abracadabra, yes, abra - I am created, cadabra - with my words, that's what I know, that's the correct original meaning of abracadabra.

But basically that I'm going to say mystical words, special words, what he says...

Speaker 2:

No, but abracadabra itself has in it the evra kadabra, like I create with my words, borei omer ve'oseh...

Examples of Chover**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam says, a person who convinces himself that if he's going to say... specific holy words, there are certain lechashim, it will have an influence. **Ad she'amru**, they convince themselves, **she'omer kach vechach al hanachash shelo yazik**. One because there is a terrible snake in the city, he's going to say specific words to the snake, he's going to charm it with a lechash. Or he says so on a person, he says to the person, "I'm going to say these words on you, and you won't be able to be harmed by the snake".

Ve'ochaz beyado besha'ah shemedaber, when he says the wondrous words, when he speaks his words, he holds some special item in his hand, **mafteach o even o ke'arah vechayotza bahen, hakol asur**. All these things are prohibited.

Ah, what's missing the mafteach o even ochaz? Because this can make us that there is a lechash sheyesh bo ma'aseh, right? Just as the whole time we're seeking that there should be a deed. Look he says, "ve'ochaz atzmo".

Chover Sheyesh Bo Ma'aseh - Liable for Lashes

He says, **vechover atzmo shehu hachover**, I yes, the client, the chover... there is the one who asks from the chover, the chassid who goes to the ish hachover, and there is the chover himself. The chover who held something in his hand when he said the words, if he did some deed in the performance, he did something when he spoke, because speaking itself is not a deed. **Aflu im lo hayah sham ela**, even if the thing was that he made movements with his hands, with his fingers, **hareih zeh lokeh**, he receives lashes, **shene'emar "lo yimatze becha... kosem kesamim"** etc., the entire language of the verse, and the last thing is **"vechover chaver"**.

Very good. Me'avir beno uvito ba'eish, kosem kesamim, me'onen, menachesh, mekhasheif, vechover chaver. The chover chaver is one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Eight things, look already, all these things more or less we're learning that there is a deed and a deed and a deed. A few the Rambam has already taught, and a few we'll still see further.

Halacha 12: Chover Without a Deed - Exempt from Lashes

Shu"t HaRambam, "aval im diber devarim elu", one who was a chover but he did it without a deed, **"lo henid lo etzba velo rosh"**, he didn't shake a hand or a head, **"velo hayah beyado kelum"**, he held nothing in his hand.

Because this is very difficult, because we shake ourselves everyone when we speak. Yes, but that doesn't make a lechash sheyesh bo ma'aseh. I say, when one speaks and when one speaks one makes body language, does it mean a deed? No, certainly not. Here we're speaking when he has in mind that he has a certain way how he does with and this is a part of the...

Speaker 2:

No, not clear so. Because if one has a reflex of his body when he speaks, he doesn't want to, why does he shake when he speaks? Because he wants, as one says in a derasha, "it's part of the deed". No, no, no. If one is going to give one lashes because he shook while speaking, he gave a Jew lashes, he transgresses bal tosfif.

Speaker 1:

No, he says clearly that he made certain actions with his hands.

Chover Chaver - Lav She'ein Bo Ma'aseh, Yishuv HaDa'at, and Locheish Al Mekom HaNeshicha**The Law of One Who Goes to the Chover - Lav She'ein Bo Ma'aseh**

Speaker 1: Nu, and I ask you, when Jews pray and they shake, is that a part of the ritual of prayer?

Speaker 2: No.

Speaker 1: Vecha'ein adam somech yado al hachover, or the person who went to a chover chaver. There is one way how it's a lav she'ein bo ma'aseh, is when the chover didn't do any deed at all, he only spoke. Or when the person went to the chover chaver, and the chover made otan hakolot, the chover did it, the chover himself did it. But the person who went to the chover, the believer in this, is like yoshev lefanav, he is there medameh lo sheyesh lo bazeh hana'ah, he convinces himself that from this comes out a benefit, that I know that he won't be able to be bitten by the snake, this is when a violation of a lav she'ein bo ma'aseh.

What happens with a lav she'ein bo ma'aseh (prohibition without an action)?

There is still some sort of malkos (lashes). What kind of malkos? **They strike him with makkas mardus (lashes of rebellion), because he participated in the foolishness of the chover chaver,** because he was part of a transgression, he participated in the foolishness of the chover chaver.

Speaker 2: So yes, but the point is, so for every lav she'ein bo ma'aseh is there malkos d'rabbanan (rabbinic lashes)?

Speaker 1: No. So therefore the Rambam says the reason, that you go, so in general, you can say what am I going? You go because you hold that it will help, so the going itself is already a rabbinic enactment that one should give malkos. It's an extra law, or perhaps yes, you won't receive malkos d'oraisa (Torah lashes), will you receive malkos d'rabbanan? Every time by a lav she'ein bo ma'aseh? It was presumably a place no.

I mean to say, because you can learn two ways why for a lav she'ein bo ma'aseh one doesn't receive malkos. You can say that for a lav she'ein bo ma'aseh one cannot prove that you did something, or it's not strong enough. Then d'rabbanan would also have the same problem. Here it appears that the lav she'ein bo ma'aseh is simply that the more severe ones are from the Torah, and when he does an action, but d'rabbanan, or it's forbidden even without the prohibition it is anyway, but malkos - there is malkos d'rabbanan when he does without an action, because he is not a partner in the foolishness of the chover, as he calls it.

Speaker 2: Very good.

The strange and ugly sounds and names - what is chover chaver

Speaker 1: Let's continue. You should know, he's talking to himself here, you'll get excited here, where, there are so many interesting types of forces here. You should know, **"rather they are the strange and ugly sounds and names"**, the sounds that people speak out when doing one of these types of witchcraft that is calculated, or one calls certain names, certain shemos (names). Shemos means like one takes from angels, or whatever names to whom he calls. Meshunim (strange), it's like crazy, and they are me'ucharim (ugly).

What makes them ugly? I don't know, because they don't have any meaning.

Speaker 2: No, because they don't have any meaning.

Speaker 1: But on the contrary, if it has a meaning, then it has a certain beauty. But the Rambam argues that **"ein lahem inyan"** (they have no content), it has no content at all, it doesn't mean anything.

Speaker 2: That is strange, for example you said that it's in a language of a nation, it's not...

Speaker 1: It's two things: in a language of a nation is meshuneh (strange), and "ein lahem inyan" is me'uchar (ugly), which is just a combination of letters that don't mean anything. It's disgusting.

It's a wonder, because what happens when he says yes things that do have meaning, which we'll later see that he brings a verse? Then there's no prohibition of chover chaver, it's perhaps another prohibition.

Speaker 2: Chover chaver?

Speaker 1: It's very interesting, because all these things can go together. Sometimes there's someone who does both - he says foolish words, and he makes a keshet (knot), and he does all these things.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: But each one of them is extra, the Rambam makes them extra, extra lavs (prohibitions) so to speak. The point is that many sorcerers among the ancients had this matter of saying such foolish letters, words that mean nothing, that is the text of the chover.

The Rambam shouldn't mean that the prohibition thereof is because they have a power, and I don't want them to use some power. Rather on the contrary, **"lo yarei'u"** (they cannot harm), they cannot do any evil with this, **"v'gam heitev ein osam"** (and also do good they cannot), he brings the language of the verse. They don't do any evil with this, nor any good.

Speaker 2: That he'll say at the end, yes.

Speaker 1: But it could be that he wants to say that if it would help it would perhaps be permitted.

Speaker 2: On the contrary, that he'll also say this matter.

Speaker 1: On the contrary, he can say this on the contrary, one would have thought that the transgression is because he uses evil forces, or he uses forces of wickedness, or because he does him evil, he makes him sick. According to this is a face that you say, I understand what you mean.

Speaker 2: Okay, but what does this come in here?

Speaker 1: It comes in here because the Rambam wants to tell that the prohibition is the prohibition of saying words that don't help, perhaps that is the definition of the prohibition. Or perhaps he wants to explain how an ochaz einayim (illusionist) is included in sorcerer, in this way they are both the same, because ochaz einayim basically uses a trick, or he doesn't even believe in what he himself does.

Speaker 2: No, but here he speaks specifically about the names of the chover chaver, ochaz einayim is another thing.

Speaker 1: Ah, ah, wait a minute. The general topic is Shabbos, it's specifically the topic of chover chaver.

Speaker 2: Okay, yes.

Speaker 1: The Rambam says further, it's specifically the topic.

Speaker 2: Okay.

One who was bitten by a scorpion or snake - whispering over the place of the bite

Speaker 1: The Rambam says, something has a connection, we said here that a chover chaver is used to be saved from a snake and a scorpion. He says thus, **mi she'neshakho akrav**

o nachash (one who was bitten by a scorpion or snake), it's a thing that people do, one says a lachash (whisper) over the place of the bite, one bends down to the place of the bite, one says a lachash, you know what is a quiet prayer, it's chover chaver.

The Rambam says, permitted, one may indeed do it, **one may whisper over the place of the bite, even on Shabbos**, because on Shabbos one may not do certain remedies, healing on Shabbos has many laws, this one may do as chover chaver, and one may also do it on Shabbos.

Speaker 2: Healing on Shabbos is forbidden except if it's a danger.

Speaker 1: Regular healing, there are remedies that are forbidden on Shabbos. But this one may do **in order to settle his mind and strengthen his heart**. From what? The Rambam says, **it is not healing**.

Speaker 2: Seemingly it's similar to chover chaver.

Speaker 1: What do you mean similar to? It is it.

Speaker 2: Perhaps one doesn't say specifically things that don't have a language of a nation, and grabbing things, perhaps this is another type of lachash, not such a dramatic one.

Speaker 1: The Rambam says, obviously, someone who is a thing that doesn't help at all, meaning that one says things that don't help at all, but the world follows its custom, but since the person is in danger, and because he is in danger he is also in panic, I mean that's the simple meaning, and he is now the patient, poor thing, very distressed. **They permitted him to trouble him so that his mind should not become confused**, they permitted him to do in his eyes, to do things for him that he thinks, that he convinces himself that it will help him.

Speaker 2: He says that he took out a snake from his hat, and because he took it out from its hole, but here he does indeed, because yishuv da'as (settling of mind) of people is the soul of the person, that he feels bad.

Speaker 1: They permitted the lav for a sick person, or it says here even if it's not exactly a lav, rather even perhaps it's a branch thereof.

Speaker 2: It's true so, because he doesn't say here, when one does the lachash, perhaps one doesn't do it this way, but he doesn't say the way, he says that one is not bitten in him, I don't know what.

Speaker 1: No, it could be that it's such a lav, and not exactly a real one.

Speaker 2: Why shouldn't one then say that when one does this, one should say to the person, "the lachash doesn't work, it will only calm"?

Speaker 1: Only that is only when one fools him, someone who is certain, certain, yes, that here there is a lav, there is pikuach nefesh (saving a life). Here it was understood to calm the patient. One is only permitted for a patient that one knows it will calm him.

Speaker 2: Certainly, if he wasn't in a lack of mind, let's do the world in, except if you think that it helps automatically, but the Rambam who holds that simple meaning one can say in the Gemara that it helps.

Speaker 1: Automatically if it helps then it's obvious that one may, because it's pikuach nefesh or such a sort of thing. If the

Rambam who holds that it doesn't help, automatically he's answered why one may, because it's forbidden yishuv hada'as (settling of mind).

Speaker 2: In the same way as this yishuv hada'as, yes, do you understand that yishuv hada'as is a permission on the prohibition of desecrating Shabbos?

Speaker 1: Although perhaps it's only d'rabbanan the prohibition of not going out with an amulet, and it's even on d'oraisa, it's not so, here it wouldn't be, because that's not a Shabbos prohibition, but let's say that it permits prohibitions, why? Because yishuv hada'as is a thing, that the Rambam says.

If so I understand that yishuv hada'as permits also the prohibition of chover chaver. It's not one of the prohibitions for which one must give one's life, idolatry, one must give one's life, truth we speak of idolatry. It's such a sort of prohibition that one permits, so it sounds.

Speaker 2: But it can't be that chover chaver should be permitted for a place of danger, it's that a place of danger is that permitted.

Speaker 1: He doesn't bring the piece of chover chaver, I don't see where it should say here. But he brings the Meiri who usually goes with the Rambam in these things, and he indeed says that it's the prohibition of chover chaver, but since it's a thing without an action, perhaps a kosev (writer) wouldn't be permitted, but the chover chaver he sees what a lighter prohibition it is, and one permits in a place of danger.

By the way, it's only for the foolish person who didn't learn any Rambam, he would want that it doesn't help. I can with the Rambam with the will as if the one who whispers should know that it's one mouth clamping, and he does it only so that his mind should not become confused, it's a part of the permission, then I won't have any lav.

Speaker 2: No, no, understood. Still, again, on your question, what did you innovate the previous ten.

Speaker 1: But the Rambam didn't say any hundred.

Speaker 2: But the simple story is to answer the Gemara's, it would be permitted, the Rambam, I mean that the Elishiv there, "to strengthen his heart", is not only that the person should be calm, rather that which the person is calm also helps that the poison should already stop going out.

Law 12: Whispering over a scorpion bite on Shabbos - the "placebo effect" in Rambam

The Rambam's permission: whispering on Shabbos in danger

He says, when it helps, one would understand why it's permitted. If it doesn't help, then it's still permitted because the masses believe in this.

And on the contrary, the Rambam agrees, I mean he says it explicitly in Moreh Nevuchim on certain other things that the Gemara permitted, that on the contrary, the one who learned Rambam and he holds that it doesn't help, one indeed may not do it. He may not do what is chover chaver, and what is desecration of Shabbos.

The Eliyahu Rabbah's explanation: "to strengthen his heart" - the mechanism of yishuv hada'as

What is already interesting, I mean that the Eliyahu Rabbah explains "to strengthen his heart" is not only that the person should be calm, rather that which the person is calm also helps that the poison should not spread so quickly in the body, the

person should not be so activated and have a heart attack from fear.

Which is very an interesting cycle, because here you already see how the chover chaver indeed works, and why people convince themselves that the chover chaver works. Because the Rambam tells you here that it calms him so that his mind should not become confused. So basically he says here the placebo effect, that the placebo effect works on a large percentage, automatically it's already not so false.

The condition: only for believers

But the problem is that... a person remembers how it works... a person remembers the mechanism. A person who believes in it, the Rambam speaks of people who believe in it. People who believe in it one may do it for them on Shabbos. Someone who doesn't believe in it, one may not do it.

A placebo works indeed also only when the person who receives it doesn't know that it's a placebo the whole time. Could be yes, could be no. The permission doesn't say here.

The Rambam's answer to the Gemara

The point is that the Rambam answered the Gemara. A Gemara was difficult for him. The Gemara says that one may do on Shabbos. The Rambam says that it doesn't help. How can one do it on Shabbos? The answer is, it helps for... psychologically it helps.

Law 14: One who whispers over a wound - denial of Torah

The Rambam says further... I come here to a bit of a sensitive Rambam, and I want to say beforehand, rabbosai (gentlemen), he says further, **"hanging on the illness of Israel"**. Let's learn Rambam as he means it. No, the Rambam doesn't speak of saying Tehillim (Psalms), of praying. Let's be very clear. No, no, he doesn't speak of that.

The Kashauer Rav's position: "one who whispers over a wound"

The Kashauer Rav took a stand. Look what he says: **"one who whispers over a wound"**. Yes, that's exactly what we just spoke about, bitten by a scorpion. It's whispering over the wound, right? Saying a lachash next to the wound, it means like before he said, over the place of the bite, over the place of the wound. He says some verse from the Torah.

Even before the chover was when he says things that are not in a language of a nation, but the Torah is indeed yes, the Torah is indeed written in languages of all nations. The Torah is indeed specifically in the language of a nation. And he reads the verse.

"And all the firstborn" - revelation, not healing

And the Rambam says this is revelation. What is this revelation? He says that by the wound, the "and all the firstborn" verse indeed goes up on all plagues, right? All the plagues of Egypt. Yes, I know what he means, literally that he whispers it in. The point is, he does it for the revelation, not for the healing.

Yes, there it said **"and so one who reads over a child that he should not be frightened"**. A child is frightened, he says verses that the child should not be frightened. Or, **"one who places a Torah scroll or tefillin on the child so that he should sleep"**. He takes a Torah scroll or he puts tefillin on a child so that he should fall asleep. Like the child

once said that the Gemara helps sleep, because he always sees father fall asleep on the Gemara. Yes, now it's not revelation, now it's simply the way of the Torah. Yes, he takes a holy thing, an object of holiness, so that he should fall asleep, the child should calm down.

"Not enough for them that they are included in chovrim and menachashim"

The Rambam says, **"not enough for them that they are included in chovrim and menachashim"** - those who do this transgress the prohibition of chover chaver and menachashim.

Well, you see that chover chaver is not specifically when it's not a word that has meaning. Should there be a contradiction in Rambam that the Rishonim can answer? No, it's not a contradiction, because the Torah didn't permit this. It's clear that the Rambam has... as I told you, when you say a verse "In the beginning God created", I don't know, the verse has, let's say, it has a meaning, and the meaning has nothing to do with the... how is it called... with the healing. So regarding this it's still not relevant, it's still a chover chaver.

How segulos (remedies) work

The Rambam told how it usually went. Also an interesting thing is that the people who make segulos from verses, usually a part of the wisdom is to twist the verse, yes, one says it backwards. The verse means you yes something, but he says the verse only the acronyms, only the... yes, that's how segulos go.

"Rather they are included in deniers of Torah"

Yes, so the Rambam says, **"not enough for them that they are included in chovrim and menachashim, rather they are included in deniers of Torah"**. They are included in deniers of Torah. Why? Why are they deniers of Torah? Because they pervert the knowledge of the Torah. **"For they make the words of Torah healing of the body"**. They make the Torah for some lachash that helps to heal the body. **"But they are only healing of souls"**. But in truth the Torah is not healing of the body, the Torah is healing of souls, it is said **"and they shall be life to your soul"**. "To your soul" here means the intellectual soul, the intellect of the person, the soul. Yes, the Torah is... it heals a person's opinions, a person's character traits, a person's wisdom. But it doesn't help the person's body. And the person convinces himself that mumbling a verse... he thinks that the verse is a healing.

The Mishnah: Rabbi Akiva says

This is essentially the Mishnah. The Mishnah says, Rabbi Akiva says, one who whispers over a wound has no portion in the World to Come. And Rabbi Akiva brings specifically a verse that is very strongly similar to the matter, **"all the disease which I placed in Egypt I will not place upon you"**. The verse means to say that if you will conduct yourself with the Torah, God will heal you. The person thinks that saying the verse is some lachash, some magic, that if you say it by the wound, the wound goes away.

There is a way seemingly how to do it. One says to the person the whole verse, one tells him, "take upon yourself from now on to keep the Torah". That one indeed speaks, healing of the soul. That is healing of the soul.

Question: difference between whispering over a wound and whispering on Shabbos in danger

And the One Who Whispers Over a Wound, Is the Wound a Wound from Danger? But *One Who Recites [Verses] for a Child So That He Should Not Be Frightened***, How Is This Different from One Who [Does It] "So That His Mind Should Not Be Disturbed"? Yes, When the Siren Sounds, Yes, a Child Runs to the Bunker, and You Say a Chapter of Psalms to Calm Him, This Is Exactly Like What We Saw Before.**

Here we're talking about a place of danger. Perhaps in a place of danger one may indeed say these things. Here we're talking about just a young boy, a child who is frightened, there's no danger, it won't help. Even the settling of the mind won't help in such a great case. Perhaps, as we said, that there it actually does help a bit with the settling of the mind.

The Rambam's Innovation: Kofer = Doesn't Understand What Torah Is

Says the Rambam, but... The Rambam said here a new interpretation. In the Mishnah it says that he's a kofer, it says "he has no portion in the World to Come." The Rambam explains that the meaning is, he doesn't understand what the Torah means. He thinks that the Torah is to heal his body, instead of it being to heal his soul. It's interesting, because other commentators learn "one who whispers over a wound" with making oaths when one does the spitting, and the Rambam in Perush HaMishnayos says so there. Okay, but here the Rambam says differently.

Halacha 14 (Continued): The Healthy Person Who Recites Verses – The Permission

But there is one permission, yes. Says the Rambam, "**But the healthy person who recites verses and a psalm from Psalms so that the merit of their recitation should protect him**" – a healthy person who reads verses or he reads a psalm from Psalms, and he does it so that the merit of their recitation should protect him, so that the merit of learning Torah, the merit of learning Psalms, should protect him, "**and he should be saved from troubles and damages**", and he should be saved from troubles and damages. How will he be saved? Because he has more merits. Yes, the Almighty judges people according to their merits. If so, there's no question at all, I don't need to say it. So it's permitted. So it looks like there are two things.

Explanation: The Distinction Between "Merit of Their Recitation" and the Power of the Verse

Seemingly the Rambam says here that it has to do with... Okay, he says the word "the healthy person." Right, it has to do with how one looks at it. It could be that the sick person also, the sick person now needs the merit. But it seems that when one stands and has said a certain verse, it doesn't look like one wants to have the merit of a bit more Torah. It sounds like the verse has a power, like the chover does it. Seemingly that's the point. How the person thinks the verse works. If he thinks that now the person has another merit, one can also give charity there, another mitzvah, every mitzvah protects a person, that he calls protecting.

I don't know if the point is so strongly the distinction. But when one does it for a sick person, one does it like chover chaver does things. It looks very similar to chover chaver. I don't think he means that it's the same thing.

Rashi: Distinction Between Before and After

It's not clear. The distinction he says he brings here in Rashi, that it explicitly says that there's a distinction whether it's before or after. He says, one shouldn't say "song of afflictions," he says "writing in a booklet of Psalms that it should protect him," he says that's before. After one may not. What's the distinction? It's not clear.

It's actually interesting, there's always an after from after. Yes, he was afflicted, can one say he shouldn't die now. It should stop now, from now he needs more merits.

Perhaps: "To Heal the Body" Is the Distinction

Also what the Rambam says "to heal the body," also here are subtle things. It could be, it could be that's the point. If one says after he's already afflicted, he wants something to happen that should fly out of his body. He's going to convince himself, let's say a person has a growth, and someone convinces himself "I'm going to say verses and the growth will go, whoops, it will fly out." That's more like witchcraft.

Whereas one says, I want the person to have merits, or medicine should work for him. That's things that the Almighty works that way, that one person has more merits he gets more. The Rambam believes in this. A person has more merits, he has more... he should be better. Well, well, it's very unclear.

Discussion: Questions on the Rambam

Question 1: Saying Psalms vs. Praying

I can't understand two things. First of all, what you're asking is not necessarily about saying Psalms. The Rambam doesn't say tefillah, he says "prays." There are two ways how one says Psalms, yes? Just like that is no question, because not all chapters of Psalms are actually prayers, okay. But even if one prays, I'm not sure that the halacha is against praying, right? Someone has a wound, certainly he must pray. How he prays, he says Psalms, one looks at miracles, what actually, how he prays is certainly not the question. The question is he uses it as a segulah, it's more such a sort of thing.

Question 2: Why Is It Heresy?

And the Rambam says an interesting thing, that healing of the body, healing of the soul, because it can count as shelo lishmah. One may not use Torah shelo lishmah. He says that the Almighty says yes to healing of the body, as it says. It's like an axe to dig with it, such a thing. Yes, because also, it's subtle, it's so terrible, it's a denier of Torah one who only studies so that his children should live? That's a normal thing.

Question 3: Can One Believe in Both?

Something is also interesting like the Rambam, it seems that one must believe that it's only healing of souls. Like a person would think that it's certainly healing of souls, but I think it has more than that. Because he says "he is nothing but a denier." It seems like one can't believe in both. Either it's healing of souls, or it's healing of the body, and then he's a denier of Torah.

Explanation: Body of Torah vs. Soul of Torah

I thought that there's an interpretation, I don't know if it's really the interpretation, but I feel that from the whole language that he speaks with all these subtle expressions with everything, it comes out. That the question is whether the Torah, certainly the Torah is a healing. The question is for

what, how is the Torah a healing? The body of Torah or the soul of Torah?

What does a new interpretation mean? In other words, someone says that the Torah is a holy thing, or the verse, the language of the verse, the physical sound of the verse heals. No, that's the body. You must hold that the content of the verse, the Torah says this, "**if you shall surely observe all this commandment**", there's no argument, that's the healing of the body. It certainly means the person, but as far as I understand.

Connection to the Previous Halacha

It's interesting, because the previous thing that we learned for example, that "knots for a bull and knowledge of love," is also essentially healing of souls that has a good influence, yes, because it calms the person, is a matter of healing of souls. It can always be that the only power that can heal an illness is always through healing of souls. That is, a person becomes a bit better person, that's healing of souls, and then he'll have the merit.

No, I think here lies something certain, that if one believes, that's why we're always told, one asks for healing of the soul healing of the body. Yes? One says in Mi Sheberach healing of the soul healing of the body.

The Way That Healing of the Soul Brings to Healing of the Body

I think it fits very well with the Rambam, because if we understand that when a person has more knowledge of Hashem, he has more Divine Providence, the Almighty watches him, the Torah guards him.

One Who Inquires of the Dead, Ov and Yidoni, and Sorcerer

Continuation: Torah as Healing — End of Discussion

Speaker 1: The Torah makes a person into a better person, a better person has more chances for a healing. But if a person thinks that the Torah can go directly to healing of the body and skip healing of the soul, that he calls "fools."

But I think we need here generally to understand more when the Rambam says "they will not have a portion in the World to Come, rather they are included among sorcerers and diviners." He didn't say it about a transgression of lashes. Seemingly, when he takes a Torah scroll and he places it on a child, did he do a negative commandment with an action? The Rambam doesn't say "negative commandment." He says that it's so rabbinic, that it's similar. And he doesn't bring the sharp language "they have no portion in the World to Come," he brings it a bit "included among the deniers," like "included among sorcerers and diviners."

We need to think, when the Rambam says about something that he's included among such and such people, does he mean to say that he's a sinner, he's a denier, or he touches upon, he goes... We need to be concerned that he shouldn't become attached to the deniers.

We need to remember that what you say, I don't know what it means in Mi Sheberach, I don't know what it means, but the word "healing of the soul" has here two different interpretations. Healing of the soul is what we call healing of the soul, or also what the Rambam calls here, is one with the healing of the body. It can mean like blood of the soul, blood of a soul. But the Rambam here, soul means to say his intellect.

Yes, it means his goodness, his soul, however you want to call it. It can also be that, and we need to keep that clear.

The Rambam in Laws of Mezuzah

The Rambam brings that the Rambam in Laws of Mezuzah says a similar thing, those who write names on the mezuzah. We don't conduct ourselves like the Rambam, we do put names in the mezuzah, certain names at least, a bit of a compromise. We write names that have no meaning, the Y-H-V-H's after the Name Havayah and the like. And it seems that not everyone agrees with this law of the Rambam, and there are those who hold that yes, it helps.

Speaker 2: Hey, what does one do with the Mishnah?

Speaker 1: Actually a question. What's wrong, one must write. One must look at the commentators on the Mishnah there.

Speaker 2: By "he broke the copper serpent" I think the answer of the Rambam was that...

Speaker 1: The Rambam needs when a Mishnah. The Mishnah says that Chizkiyahu didn't hold.

Speaker 2: Yes, yes, no, one must look how the Rambam explains it there, yes.

Speaker 1: The Rambam there talks about the Book of Remedies, on the contrary, that it was idolatry, because if it would be true remedies, he should do it.

In short, I don't know. It could be that not everyone agrees with the Rambam. But the Rambam's approach is certainly that the Torah heals, but through the soul. That's the content of the Torah, it heals the soul of a person. And certainly, it also has an influence on healing of the body, to an extent, as you said. But not the simple meaning that the words of the Torah magically heal the body of a person. Magically, that's according to the Rambam heresy in Torah.

The Mishnah and Rabbi Akiva

According to the Mishnah, the commentators on the Mishnah. One must remember, it's a Mishnah. This isn't that the Rambam came up with it. The Mishnah says that "one who whispers over a wound has no portion in the World to Come." It's Rabbi Akiva, the teacher of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. There's no competition between the masters of intellect and masters of... Yes, the same Rabbi Akiva who went into Pardes, went into heaven and saw the angels and everything.

Yes, ah, one must think what is... One sees here a few things.

"So That His Mind Should Not Be Disturbed Upon Him"

One also sees that "so that his mind should not be disturbed upon him." I think "so that his mind should not be disturbed upon him" is also very similar, because it affects the mind of a person, and that helps him. And that's the compromise. It's not that the Torah heals, rather it affects the mind of a person.

And by the way, that's the compromise. That is, we submit to the person who is unfortunately, he believes in this. The Rambam doesn't say that "so that his mind should not be disturbed" is a mitzvah. He says it's a permission. It's a permission for the one who is unfortunately convinced.

In other words, it could be that this is also here a permission. Like I say pikuach nefesh, someone gives a... even the Rambam himself, imagine there comes a Jew who is in a situation of pikuach nefesh, and there's no way to help him except to give him some amulet that the Rambam holds doesn't help. Maybe he would give him the amulet, because "to

settle his mind." And it's... one can reconcile with this many righteous people who gave amulets. Not always they believed always that it helps. That settling the mind is also something worthwhile.

Okay, enough, this is the matter of... let's finish, they need to move.

Halacha 15: One Who Inquires of the Dead

Says the Rambam further, he went with one who inquires of the dead.

Speaker 2: Very good. What is that?

Speaker 1: Says the Rambam further in the verse, "**And there shall not be found among you... and one who inquires of the dead**". What is that?

Says the Rambam, "**This is one who starves himself**", the practice is like this, the ritual is, one starves oneself, one fasts, "**and goes and sleeps in the cemetery**", this is the definition of a typical, the Gemara says, a fool. He goes and he sleeps in the cemetery, "**so that the spirit of impurity should come upon him**", so that the spirit of impurity should come upon him, "**and inform him what he asks about**", so that the dead person should come in a dream and inform him whatever the person will ask from the dead person, the dead person will answer him.

"**And there are others**", he says, "**who wear known garments**", they put on certain garments, "**and say words**", they say certain words, "**and burn known incense**", they bring specific incense, "**and sleep alone**", they sleep alone, "**so that so-and-so dead person should come and speak with him in a dream**".

Says the Rambam, "**The general principle is, anyone who does an action so that the dead person should come and inform him**", one does actions so that the dead person should come and inform, "**receives lashes, as it says 'there shall not be found among you... one who inquires of the dead'**".

Discussion: Why Does the Rambam Bring Known Garments?

Speaker 2: Ah, it's before he brought known garments, because then it's an action.

Speaker 1: It could be starving oneself and sleeping, I don't know how, perhaps that's also an action. He wants to say, not only that, but if there are other techniques.

Speaker 2: What is the technique that one does? What is a technique that there's an action and one asks from the dead?

Speaker 1: Not eating is not an action. Perhaps going to sleep in the cemetery.

It's interesting that one sees that starving oneself, not fasting. It's simple, he torments himself. Not because it would be a good thing to go fast.

Halacha 16: One Who Inquires of Ov and Yidoni

And further it says there, "one who inquires of ov and yidoni." Says the Rambam, what does that mean?

And we already learned before that the one who does ov and yidoni, we already learned in Laws of Idolatry, that he's much harsher than all these sorcerers, and he receives stoning, because ov and yidoni has an actual connection with idolatry.

But only here, the one who inquires of ov and yidoni, he doesn't receive stoning, he's the same harshness as all other sorcerers or asking from sorcerers.

Says the Rambam, "**It's forbidden to inquire of a master of ov or a master of yidoni**". He doesn't ask, the person who does ov and yidoni. He already learned before, one takes a bone and various things, as it says.

Discussion: Why Does Ov and Yidoni Have More Connection with Idolatry?

Speaker 2: I can't know myself, but one must understand why ov and yidoni has more connection with idolatry than all this that he enumerated. They look like quite similar techniques.

Speaker 1: No, that's different. Ov and yidoni, he takes a bone and he screams, no, it's a completely different thing.

Speaker 2: Well, well. I see a distinction. He should starve himself and go to the cemetery and burn incense.

Speaker 1: No, but that's aiming for a dead person.

Speaker 2: No good, he says generally to the dead.

Speaker 1: The practitioner of yidoni seems that it's some power from the stone in bones.

The Distinction Between Master of Ov and Yidoni and Inquirer

He says the Rambam, the person who asks ov and yidoni transgresses the negative commandment. There's an extra verse for a master of ov and yidoni that it's by stoning, but normally here in the negative commandment of all sorcerers it says "and one who inquires of ov and yidoni." The one who inquires of ov and yidoni is different from the master of ov and yidoni who receives stoning, he receives lashes.

Says the Rambam, "**We were commanded not to inquire of the master of ov and yidoni himself**", the one who provides the services of ov and yidoni is by stoning. "**And the one inquired of through them**", the client of this, is by a positive prohibition, "**and we give him lashes of rebellion**", because he doesn't do an action, he only asks him.

But, says the Rambam, "**And if he received an action and did according to his statement**", if he asked the ov and yidoni and he did what the ov and yidoni advised him, and he did God forbid seemingly an action, then his negative commandment with an action receives lashes.

Halacha 17: A Sorcerer Is Liable to Stoning

Further says the Rambam, and further it says, "**And the sorcerer is liable to stoning and that is when he did an act of sorcery**".

The Rambam's View on Sorcery and Reality

The Rambam says, all the other things until now, all the things until now he calls a mechashaf (sorcerer), and what's a new thing? Perhaps a mechashaf is like this, and whatever else it may be like this, and every generation can come up with new types of kishuf (sorcery) and tricks.

Says the Rambam, this is, this is "**v'hu she'asah ma'aseh keshafim**" (and he who performed an actual act of sorcery), he did a true act of sorcery. He performed certain techniques and perhaps certain things came to him, I don't know.

Discussion: What Does "Ma'aseh Keshafim" Mean According to the Rambam?

Speaker 2: A true act of sorcery doesn't mean for the Rambam that he did something with true power, because he's going to say in a minute that it's all sheker v'chazav (falsehood and lies).

Speaker 1: No, but at least he himself, he did some kind of act. He did some kind of act, which I mean that he himself, the difference between the ochez einayim (illusionist) apparently is a complete... and he himself is also taken in, he's part of the... he's in the scheme.

I translate it very simply. Ochez es ha'einayim, instead of doing, he doesn't do any act of sorcery and illusions, he puts together two bears and with the magic wand he turns it, I don't know what. Ochez es ha'einayim doesn't do anything. He does the act directly, he brings out a snake from his hat. But he doesn't do anything in between, before that he knocks three times on the back of a bear, I don't know what. That's the difference.

Ochez Es Ha'einayim

V'yera'eh she'oseh v'eino oseh (it appears he's doing but he's not doing), it looks like he's doing something, but he's not doing anything. Ochez es ha'einayim, v'yera'eh she'oseh v'eino oseh, he makes it so the person watching should think he's doing something, receives makkas mardus (lashes of rebellion). Why? Because a stage where he's already in mechashef (sorcery) in general, lo yimatzei b'cha (there shall not be found among you), is still, but ochez es ha'einayim, one doesn't do the... again, a mechashef is chayav sekilah (liable to stoning).

Discussion: Why Is a Mechashef Liable to Stoning?

Speaker 2: Why? What is the verse that a mechashef is liable to stoning? Mechashef doesn't appear in the verse of...

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: What is the verse for mechashef?

Speaker 1: Mechashefah lo sechayeh (a sorceress you shall not allow to live)?

Speaker 2: Mechashefah lo sechayeh means...

Speaker 1: Yes, mechashefah lo sechayeh is a separate verse on mechashef. All the others, ma'avir b'no u'vito ba'eish (passing his son or daughter through fire), kosem kesamim (diviner), me'onen (soothsayer), it doesn't say... it only says the prohibition. Mechashefah lo sechayeh, sekilah (stoning) comes.

Lav She'nitna L'azharas Misas Beis Din

Therefore one who does this, he does an act of sorcery, he doesn't receive sekilah. Ochez es ha'einayim doesn't receive sekilah, he doesn't receive malkus (lashes), he only receives makkas mardus. Why? Because the prohibition that appears by mechashef, it says lo yimatzei b'cha all these things, ma'avir b'no u'vito ba'eish, etc. etc. etc. and so on. So the prohibition is not l'azharas misas beis din (as a warning for court-imposed death penalty). So it's obvious that one of these things, part of the prohibition, receives misas beis din. But why is there no... mechashef specifically, not all, because all are not nitna l'azharas misas beis din, all don't have misas beis din. Only mechashef.

But the act is not nitna l'azharas misas beis din, only the act is nitna l'azharas misas beis din. The azharas beis din doesn't mean only, the mussar beis din means only when it's a true obstacle.

Example from False Testimony

Shomer edusav (one who withholds his testimony), it's also false testimony, is indeed included in lo yamus bachus (they shall not die outside), but because it's also false testimony, they're exempt from malkus. What is the word false testimony? Because there was no act. Because if there was no act, he doesn't get sekilah and also not malkus.

Chapter 11, Laws 17-18: Mechashef, Ochez Es Ha'einayim, and the True Nature of Sorcery

Law 17: Discussion About Ochez Es Ha'einayim – Question and Attempt to Understand the Rambam

Speaker 1:

And the azharas misas beis din means only when it's a true mechashef.

Speaker 2:

No, no, no, no, no.

Speaker 1:

So therefore the one who is ochez es ha'einayim is indeed included in lav yamus in general, but because it's also ochez es ha'einayim, because he didn't do any act?

Speaker 2:

Exactly, that's what he says. Because he didn't do any act, he doesn't get sekilah and also not malkus?

Speaker 1:

Exactly. And therefore he gets a... no, no, no, he's talking about it's a lav she'nitan l'azharas misas beis din, not about it's a lav she'ain bo ma'aseh (a prohibition without an act). If it's a lav she'ain bo ma'aseh he can indeed receive.

Speaker 2:

No, one cannot receive.

Speaker 1:

It's a contradiction with the previous Rama, where the Rama says that an ochez es ha'einayim is...

Speaker 2:

Here we're talking about ochez es ha'einayim which is b'toras kishuf (in the category of sorcery), because there it was ochez es ha'einayim b'toras me'onen (in the category of soothsaying), so I can say.

Speaker 1:

Yes, but what's the difference? It's the same thing. There it explicitly said that one receives lashes, here it says one doesn't receive lashes. What you're saying b'toras kishuf, what does b'toras kishuf mean? You know ochez es ha'einayim, one must say.

Speaker 2:

The ochez es ha'einayim isn't clear, because what you're asking, it doesn't say that lav she'nitan l'azharas misas beis din needs to have a warning. So mechashef, when is the mechashef who doesn't receive malkus? He receives sekilah. So what will you say that he receives malkus when? When he's ochez es ha'einayim, suddenly he receives malkus? Where does it come in? Something is weird here, something isn't clear.

Attempt to Understand: Ochez Es Ha'einayim Is Not Really Mechashef

Speaker 2:

It could be the point is because ochez es ha'ainayim is not included in mechashef, it's not really mechashef, but it's included in mechashef. And therefore even if one is ochez es ha'ainayim and one does it indeed with an act, it seems the point here is ochez es ha'ainayim even if he does it indeed with an act, the reason why he doesn't receive malkus is because it's a lav she'nitan l'azharas misas beis din, not because it's a lav she'ain bo ma'aseh. And why doesn't he receive sekilah? Because mechashef means specifically when he does other acts of sorcery, not ochez es ha'ainayim.

Speaker 1:

From where comes the prohibition of ochez es ha'ainayim then? Something is missing. Do you understand that something is missing?

Speaker 2:

Why it is indeed included and why it's not included? When something is missing, one needs to learn the Gemara about this, when something has been put in is missing already. A novelty that it seems in the Rambam is, that a true mechashef is when there's a true act of sorcery, whatever that means. Ochez es ha'ainayim is also a branch of mechashef, but it's not the essence of mechashef, because an essential mechashef gets sekilah. And on this ochez es ha'ainayim because sekilah can overcome it's not really mechashef, but it's only included in mechashef, and because it's a prohibition, a prohibition the connection is indeed there, but because it's a prohibition that... I shall not have here misas beis din on it.

The Progression in the Verses: Mechashefah Lo Sechayeh and Lo Yimatzei B'cha

Speaker 2:

That's the point, I would perhaps say like this, mechashefah, when it says in the Torah, mechashefah means a true mechashef, whatever that means. Lo yimatzei which means something that is even only similar, because there shouldn't be among you something that is a type of sorcery. Therefore it becomes a lav she'nitan l'azharas misas beis din, and it means that in the prohibition there is the one who... one can transgress the prohibition in a way that one should receive sekilah for it, and a lav she'nitan l'azharas misas beis din, and there's no malkus on it.

Speaker 1:

Something I'm missing, what does he say? I read that the reason it's a lav she'nitan l'azharas misas beis din which doesn't get malkus is because the warning is not a warning of malkus, the warning is indeed a warning of... when there's death in the prohibition one tells him he'll receive sekilah.

Speaker 2:

In short, we're not going to spend the whole shiur on this piece of Rambam. We can also admit that we don't understand it, it's not clear. It could be that this Rambam says, maybe it doesn't go on ochez es ha'ainayim at all, perhaps it goes on mechashef itself? And then what will one understand?

Speaker 1:

No, he's not going up for the but ochez es ha'ainayim. He won't go to the but ochez es ha'ainayim when he says makkas mardus. Why? He says lav she'nitan l'azharas misas beis din... it has no connection and something is missing. Something is certainly missing in the sentence. He doesn't say anything about prohibition it's a not being different mechashef, why

would both, the mechashef is a lav she'nitan so it's obvious. What he says in the last sentence, is that mechashef is a lav she'nitan so it's obvious, and needs to put it in itself with the whole thing already. No, again, a mechashefah lo sechayeh goes further on, because he receives a mechashef sekilah. But an ochez es ha'ainayim is a prohibition of summer is and doesn't enter within the boundaries of mechashefah lo sechayeh, he only enters within the boundaries in the verse of lo yimatzei b'cha.

Speaker 2:

I don't see, you're adding a whole piece of Rambam, which the Rambam usually writes clearly what he wants to say. One can say he's trying to say simply that it's talking about mechashef, like every time one receives sekilah one doesn't receive malkus. I don't know if that's true, that's tishareif sham misaso (his death will burn it), like a nazir who drinks wine. Every time there's sekilah one doesn't receive malkus. I don't see then that it would have been much simpler. I'm not sure.

Speaker 1:

Okay, all the commentators struggle. It's a mystery there.

Speaker 2:

Perhaps there's a law of malkus but not death? Perhaps this is makkas mardus, this isn't from the law of Scripture. Malkus one receives...

Law 18: Devarim Eilu Kulam Divrei Sheker V'chazav Hen – The Rambam's Worldview on Sorcery and All These Matters

Speaker 1:

Now the Rambam is going to finish with such an acharis davar (final word), with his conclusion on this whole chapter. From... from... from... yes, not chukas hagoyim (statutes of the nations), except for menachesh. Except for the second law, from menachesh. **Devarim eilu kulam** (all these things), this also goes on mechashef and ov v'yidoni which we learned earlier. **Devarim eilu kulam divrei sheker v'chazav hen** (all these things are words of falsehood and lies), this is all sheker v'chazav. It's not true powers, the mechashef doesn't bring down any powers from heaven and so on. Divrei sheker v'chazav. **V'hem she'hit'u bahem ovdei avodah zarah hakadmonim l'goyei ha'aratzos kedei she'yinhu achareihem** (and they are what the ancient idol worshippers used to deceive the ignorant nations so they would follow them). Crude liars, folks, invented it, they themselves didn't believe in it, it's a scheme. And the idol worshippers came up with this, to fool the ignorant nations.

Back to Chapter 1 – The History of Idolatry

Speaker 1:

They already have many things with which the idol worshippers fooled everyone. They made beautiful buildings, temples, they planted asheiros (sacred trees). This goes all the way back to chapter 1, basically. It's like it's something of chapter 1. They made false prophets. Another one of the things they did is all this sorcery. Yes, they fooled with this the ignorant nations, by saying that there are great powers and yes. The Rambam himself doesn't mention the words that you say powers, because I guess he sees from something that there is. He says divrei sheker v'chazav. He doesn't explain what the trick is. You say that the trick is some angel or some power

does it. Yes, in chapter 1 he hinted a bit that it's the powers of angels, stars.

V'ein Ra'ui L'Yisrael She'hem Chachamim Mechukamim — Part of Being a Jew Is to Be Smart

Speaker 1:

Therefore, **v'ein ra'ui l'Yisrael she'hem chachamim mechukamim limshoch acharei** (and it's not fitting for Israel who are wise and intelligent to be drawn after) me'onen and kosem. He says, he doesn't say here only that one may not do it because then one becomes similar to idol worshippers or branches of idolatry. He says more fundamentally, because a Jew may not follow after falsehood and foolishness, "v'ein ra'ui l'Yisrael she'hem chachamim mechukamim". Here we see that part of being a Jew is one must be a wise and intelligent person. Do you hear? A Jew must be smart, there's no way out. Jews are indeed smart. Therefore the non-Jew, the foolish non-Jew, believes in all these foolish things, okay. You're indeed a Jew, you're indeed a smart Jew, what do you believe? It doesn't fit for you to believe. It's a great sin to be a fool. Where. Ah, from here is a proof, indeed, one always looks for a proof. One is not at all included in Israel if one is a fool. No, it's not fitting for a smart person to believe in all these things.

V'lo L'ha'alos Al Lev She'yeish Bahem To'eles — Not Just to Do, Even to Believe

Speaker 1:

And not only that, "**limshoch**" (to be drawn) means apparently to do the act, "**v'lo l'ha'alos al lev she'yeish bahem to'eles**" (and not to bring to mind that there is benefit in them). To'eles means a benefit, a cure. Ah, I know. **She'ne'emar** (as it says), you see indeed a verse, "**ki lo nachash b'Ya'akov v'lo kesem b'Yisrael**" (for there is no divination in Jacob and no sorcery in Israel). The Jews don't follow nachash and kesem. What does it mean? You thought "lo nachash b'Ya'akov" means that the Jews have no mazal (fortune), there's no mazal for Israel? No, the Rambam says that a Jew is smarter, he doesn't do nachash and kesem.

V'ne'emar, "ki hagoyim ha'eileh asher atah yoresh osam el me'onenim v'el kosemim yishma'u" (and it says, "for these nations that you are dispossessing listen to soothsayers and diviners"), the foolish non-Jews, the idol worshippers, they listen to me'onenim and kosemim. **V'"atah"** (and "you"), you're indeed a smart Jew, "**lo chen nasan l'cha Hashem Elokecha**" (not so has Hashem your God given you), to you the Almighty gave much better than this, He gave you wisdom. A prophet appears there later, but yes, the Rambam doesn't bring the continuation of that verse "navi" (prophet), right? He indeed brought this verse earlier in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah to say that a prophet doesn't innovate knowledge, but just tells you simple things. But the Rambam says, true, he says there, is "ein ra'ui l'ha'alos al lev". The Rambam says there what he brings here, the star worshippers, perhaps the Torah prohibited it, yes, because this causes one to be drawn to idolatry. But the Rambam says, even if not, it's just foolishness.

Kol Ha'ma'amin B'davarim Eilu... Eino Ela Min Hasechalim — The Worst Mistake

Speaker 1:

Look at the next piece, there it's clearer: "**Kol ha'ma'amin b'davarim eilu v'chayotza bahen, u'mechashev b'libo she'hen emes v'divrei chochmah, aval haTorah asaran**" (whoever believes in these things and similar ones,

and thinks in his heart that they are true and words of wisdom, but the Torah prohibited them), he thinks like this, but what can I do, it's a good thing, but I'm not allowed. One of the fools and those lacking understanding, and not of the Jews who are wise and intelligent.

Bichlal hanashim v'haketanim (in the category of women and minors), here he wants to say, I'm speaking if they're not wicked, not evil, just a simple Jew, just a simple Jew, just a simple Jew, he's a sin, the sin is to do it, but to believe is in the category of women and those of small understanding. **Aval ba'alei hachochmah temimei hada'as** (but the masters of wisdom, those of complete understanding), and here he says, the tamim tiyeh im Hashem Elokecha (you shall be wholehearted with Hashem your God), one shouldn't follow these things, he's going to say, tamim means temimei hada'as, those who have complete understanding, **yed'u b'ra'ayos beruros** (will know with clear proofs), should know, yed'u b'ra'ayos beruros, **she'kol eilu hadevarim she'asrah Torah einam divrei chochmah** (that all these things that the Torah prohibited are not words of wisdom), all these things that the Torah prohibited are not words of wisdom, **ela tohu vahevel** (but emptiness and vanity), it's empty and foolish and nonsensical, tohu vahevel, it's things without substance, doesn't work physically, **she'nimshchu bahem chasrei hada'as v'natshu kol darchei ha'emes biglalan** (that those lacking understanding were drawn to them and abandoned all paths of truth because of them). The chasrei hada'as, because of this they completely lost touch with reality, they lost the paths of truth, because if a person, his whole worldview has been destroyed, because this I don't understand, you see that sorcery, it takes out an important part of the puzzle, and now one no longer has a clear worldview at all, now one no longer understands how the world works, because you see indeed wondrous things that cannot be explained.

Digression: The Process of Idolatry — How Sorcery Destroys a Worldview

Speaker 1:

But this is perhaps the explanation of taste, why the non-Jews used this, after they were drawn to idolatry, the paths of truth, the truth of Avraham Avinu. They wanted to fool a non-Jew, he wouldn't have believed that a piece of wood can be his god, first they made him so he shouldn't have a normal worldview, he should already be so confused, well you can convince him of anything.

It's a good explanation, it's true that all these foolish things, it's either this or the paths of truth, it's a competition. In practice, a person who despairs of having intellect, of understanding the world, then you can make him follow anything you want to convince him. Or just, because the non-Jews who sell this say, "ah, it works like this, because the so-and-so said," little by little one becomes twisted and one loses faith.

U'mipnei Zeh Amrah Torah... Tamim Tiyeh Im Hashem Elokecha — Tamim Means Temimei Hada'as

Speaker 1:

U'mipnei zeh amrah Torah keshe'hizharah al kol eilu hahavalim (and therefore the Torah said when it warned about all these vanities), for this the Torah warned, when the Torah warned not to follow the foolishness, the Torah said "**tamim tiyeh im Hashem Elokecha**" (you shall be

wholehearted with Hashem your God), one should be smart, one should have a wholehearted understanding, one should have a clear understanding, because this way one won't follow these things.

Exactly opposite of what people think, people think that tamim means one must be a tam (simpleton), one must be without taste. On the contrary, one must be smart. The Torah said one should have a clear understanding. But one must be a great sage to be able to...

Temimus Da'as – The Rambam's Approach in Hilchos Avodah Zarah

The verse "Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha" – Temimus doesn't mean naivety, but rather completeness of understanding

Just as the Rambam says such a concept in Hilchos Avodah Zarah, **when all those who ascend to the world became confused**. Before that, the Torah warned, when the Torah warned that one should not follow the foolishness, the Torah said, "**Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha**" - you should be wise, you should have temimus da'as, a strong clear understanding, and because of this you should not follow these things.

This doesn't mean that you should be a tam, a fool, on the contrary, you should be wise. The Rambam says that you should have great wisdom to be able to know that this is foolishness. The Rambam says that "tamim," what is the meaning of tamim? Tamim means complete, not a minor who is lacking understanding, but rather complete understanding. And then you will be "im Hashem Elokecha," because the Almighty is the truth.

A Novel Idea: Faith doesn't go against reality – The Almighty is the greatest reality

One strange thing that many people think is that in order to have faith one must go somewhat against reality, one must be able to close one's eyes. The Rambam says no, forget about that. The Almighty is the greatest reality, and this is also temimus. Temimus means that you go well, you go with reality. This is the proper temimus. The Rambam translates tamim - completeness and understanding.

Temimus as a complete worldview

But it's interesting, temimus can also mean that one has a full worldview, the Almighty created the world and one understands that everything fits. The opposite of temimus is when so many things happen that I don't know what it means, and one begins to see sorcery. It takes out pieces from the puzzle, now you don't have the full puzzle. Tamim as you say means that everything fits, the Almighty created the world and one understands everything, one understands how it works, because everything fits. When sorcery comes in, the temimus is lacking, because pieces come in that one doesn't understand.

A dispute among the Rishonim: Rambam versus Ramban

Yes, one can also remember that there is a dispute about this. The Ramban said exactly the opposite, that the Rambam is a tam, he says that he is too pious, he says that he goes against reality, he sees that sorcery does work. In short, there is in this a dispute among the Rishonim, but the Rambam's approach is still a good approach.

Agreed upon by all opinions: ***"It is not fitting for Israel who are wise"*******

The Tehillim must be understood, and there is there an important chapter and it is a difficult chapter. But this is according to all opinions, this however is agreed upon by all opinions, that "**It is not fitting for Israel who are wise**"