Avodah Zara Chapter 1

Rabbanit Leah Sarna | Drisha Institute for Jewish Education | 25 Nisan 5785

I. We Come From Idolators

1. Pesach Haggadah, Magid, In the Beginning Our Fathers Were Idol Worshipers 1-2

מְתְּחְלָּה IN THE BEGINNING, our ancestors were idol worshippers.

BUT NOW the Omnipresent has drawn us close in His service; as it is said: "Joshua said to all the people, 'This is what the LORD God of Israel has said: Beyond the river your ancestors always dwelled – Terah the father of Abraham, the father of Nahor – and they served other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the river, and I led him all the way across the land of Canaan, and I multiplied his offspring and gave him Isaac. And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and I gave Esau Mount Seir as an inheritance, WHILE JACOB AND HIS CHILDREN WENT DOWN TO EGYPT."

2. Avodah Zarah 14b:6

§ The mishna teaches that **Rabbi Meir says:** It is prohibited to sell **even** a good **palm tree** and *hatzav* to gentiles. **Rav Ḥisda said to Avimei:** It is learned as a tradition that the tractate *Avoda Zara* of our forefather Abraham contained four hundred chapters, and we have learned only five chapters in our tractate *Avoda Zara*, and we do not even know the meaning of what we are saying.

II. Maimonides History of Avodah Zara

3. Deuteronomy 4:15-19

For your own sake, therefore, be most careful—since you saw no shape when \overline{a} spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire— not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman, the form of any beast on earth, the form of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the form of anything that creeps on the ground, the form of any fish that is in the waters below the earth.— And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them. These your God \overline{a} allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven;

הגדה של פסח, מגיד, מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו א'-ב'

מְתְּחַלָּה עוֹרְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וְעַרְשָׁיוֹ קֵרְבָנוּ הַמָּקוֹם לַעֲבוֹדָתוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמֵר: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻעַ אֶל־כָּל־הָעָם, כֹּה אָמֵר יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעֵכֶּר הַנָּהָר יָשְׁבוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מֵעוֹלָם, תָּרַח אֲבִי אַבְרָהָם וַאֲבִי נָחוֹר, וַיַּעַבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחַרִים. וָאֶקַח אותוֹ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וָאַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעוֹ וָאָקָּת אותוֹ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וָאַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעוֹ וָאָתָּוֹרְלוֹ אֶת־יִצְחָק. וָאֶתֵּן לִיצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת־עַשִּׁו, וָבְּנִיוֹ יַרְדוּ מִצְרָיִם....

עבודה זרה י"ד ב:ו'

רַבִּי מֵאִיר אוֹמֵר: אַף דֶּקֶל וְכוּ׳. אֲמֵר לֵיהּ רַב חִסְדָּא לַאֲבִימִי: גָּמִירִי דַּעֲבוֹדָה זָרָה דְּאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ אַרְבַּע מְאָה פִּירְקֵי הָוְיָיו, וַאֲנַן חַמְשָׁה תְּנַן, וְלָא יָדְעִינַן מַאי קַאָמִרינַן.

דברים די:ט"ו-י"ט

(טו) וְנִשְׁמַרְתָּם מְאֹד לְנַפְּשׁתֵיכֶם כִּי לָא רְאִיתָם ׁ בָּל־תְּמוּבָּה בִּיוֹם דִּבָּר ה אֲלֵיכֶם בִּחֹלֵב מִתְּוֹך הָאֵשׁ: (טז)
בָּל־תְּמוּבָּה בִּיוֹם דָּבָּר ה אֲלֵיכֶם בְּחֹלֵב מִתְּוֹך הָאֵשׁ: (טז)
זָבָר אוֹ נְקֵבְה: (יז) תַּבְנִית כָּל־בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר בָּאֲרֶץ תַּבְנִית בָּל־רִמֵשׁ
בָּצְדָמָה תַּבְנִית כָּל־דָּגָה אֲשֶׁרְ־בַּמַיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ: (יט)
וּפְּן־תִּשָּׁא עִינִיף הַשָּׁמִיִם וְנְדַּחְתָּ אֶת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶת־הַיֵּרְי (יט)
וְעָבַדְתָּם אֲשֶׁר חָלֵץ ה אֱ-לֹהֶיךּ אֹתָם לְכֹל הָעַמִּים הַּחָחַנִית לָהֶם
וְעָבַדְתָּם אֲשֶּׁר חָלֵץ ה אֱ-לֹהֶיךּ אֹתָם לְכֹל הָעַמִּים הַחָּחַנִית לָהֶם
בַּלְּדַהְיִּתְּ וֹיִבְּיִם בְּלֹר בְּצָבָא הַשְּׁמִים וְנִדַּחְתָּ וְהִשְׁמִּחְנִית לָהָם
בַּלְרַהְשַׁמֵיִם:

1:1-2:1

1 During the times of Enosh, mankind made a great mistake, and the wise men of that generation gave thoughtless counsel. Enosh himself was one of those who erred.

Their mistake was as follows: They said God created stars and spheres with which to control the world. He placed them on high and treated them with honor, making them servants who minister before Him. Accordingly, it is fitting to praise and glorify them and to treat them with honor. [They perceived] this to be the will of God, blessed be He, that they magnify and honor those whom He magnified and honored, just as a king desires that the servants who stand before him be honored. Indeed, doing so is an expression of honor to the king.

After conceiving of this notion, they began to construct temples to the stars and offer sacrifices to them. They would praise and glorify them with words, and prostrate themselves before them, because by doing so, they would - according to their false conception - be fulfilling the will of God. This was the essence of the worship of false gods, and this was the rationale of those who worshiped them. They would not say that there is no other god except for this star.... Their foolish error consists of conceiving of this emptiness as Your will.

2 After many years passed, there arose people - false prophets - who told [their nations] that God had commanded them to say: Serve this star - or all the stars - sacrifice to it, offer libations to it, build a temple for it and make an image of it so that all people - including the women, the children, and the common people - could bow to it.

He would inform them of a form that he had conceived, and tell them that this is the image of the particular star, claiming that this was revealed to him in a prophetic vision. In this manner, the people began to make images in temples, under trees, and on the tops of mountains and hills. People would gather together and bow down to them and the [false prophets] would say: This image is the source of benefit or harm. It is appropriate to serve it and fear it. Their priests would tell them: This service will enable you to multiply and be successful. Do this and this, or do not do this or this.

Subsequently, other deceivers arose and declared that a specific star, sphere, or angel had spoken to them and commanded them: Serve me in this manner. He would then relate a mode of service [telling them:] Do this, do not do this.

Thus, these practices spread throughout the world. People would serve images with strange practices - one more distorted than the other - offer

הגווים אי:אי-בי:אי

(א) בִימֵי אֱנוֹשׁ טָעוּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם טָעוּת גָּדוֹל וְנְבְצְרָה צְצַת חַכְמֵי אוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר נֶאֱנוֹשׁ עַצְמוֹ וְנְבְצְרָה צְצַת חַכְמֵי אוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר נֶאֱנוֹשׁ עַצְמוֹ מִן הַטּוֹצִים הָיָה. וְזוֹ הָיְתָה טָעוּתָם. אָמְרוּ הוֹאִיל וְהָאֱלֹהִים בָּרָא כּוֹכָבִים אֵלוּ וְגַלְגַּלִים לְהָבֶּר הָעוֹלֶם וּנְתָנָם בַּמְּרוֹם וְחָלַק לָהֶם כָּבוֹד וְאוּיִין בָּבוֹד וְהֵם שַׁמָשִׁים הַמְשַׁמְשִׁים לְפָנָיו רְאוּיִין הַם לְשַׁבְּאָרם וּלְפָצְרִם וְלַחְלֹק לָהֶם כָּבוֹד. וְזֶהוּ הַנֹוֹ שָׁבְּאָרָם וְלַחֲלֹק לָהֶם כָּבוֹד. וְזֶהוּ רְצוֹן הָאֵל בָּרוּהְ הוּא לְגַדֵּל וּלְכַבֵּד הָעוֹמְדִים וְכִבּּדוֹ שֶׁל מֶלֶהְ.
 לְפַנֵּיו וְזֶהוּ בְּבוֹדוֹ שֶׁל מֶלֶהְ.

פֵּיוָן שֶׁעֶלֶה דָּבֶר זֶה עַל לְבֶּם הִתְּחִילוּ לְבְנוֹת לַכּוֹכָבִים הֵיכָלוֹת וּלְהַקְרִיב לָהֶן קֶרְבָּנוֹת וּלְשַׁבְּחָם וּלְפָּאֲרָם בִּדְבָרִים וּלְהִשְׁתַּחְווֹת לְמוּלֶם כְּדֵי לְהַשִּׁיג רְצוֹן הַבּוֹרֵא בְּדַעְהָם הָרְעָה. וְזֶה הָיָה עִקּר עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכְבִים. וְכָךְ הָיוּ אוֹמְרִים עוֹבְדֶיהָ הַיּוֹדְעִים עִקְּרָה. לֹא שֶׁהֵן אוֹמְרִים שֶׁאֵין שָׁם אֱלוֹהַ אֶּלָּא כּוֹכָב זָה. ... טְעוּתָם וּכְסִילוּתָם שֶׁמְדַמִּים שֶׁזָּה הַהֶּבֶל רְצוֹנְךָ הוּא:

(ב) וְאַחַר שֶׁאָרְכוּ הַיָּמִים עָמְדוּ בִּּבְנֵי הָאָדָם נָבִיאֵי שֶׁקֶר וְאָמָרוּ שֶׁהָאֵל צְוָּה וְאָמַר לָהֶם ּעָבְדוּ כּוֹכָב פְּלוֹנִי אוֹ כָּל הַכּוֹכָבִים וְהַקְרִיבוּ לוֹ וְנַסְכוּ לוֹ כַּדְ וְכַדְ וּבְנוּ לוֹ הֵיכָל וַעֲשׁוּ צוּרַתוֹ כָּדֵי לְהָשָׁתַּחֲווֹת לוֹ כַּל הָעָם הַנַּשִׁים וְהַקְּטַנִּים וּשְׁאָר עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ. וּמוֹדִיעַ לָהֶם צוּרָה שֶׁבָּדָה מִלְבּוֹ וְאוֹמֶר זוֹ הִיא צוּרַת הַכּוֹכָב פְּלוֹנִי שֶׁהוֹדִיעוּהוּ בִּנְבוּאָתוֹ. וְהִתְחִילוּ עַל דֶּרֶךְ זוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת צוּרוֹת בַּהֵיכָלוֹת וְתַחַת הָאִילָנוֹת וּבְרָאשֵׁי הֶהָרִים וְעַל הַגְּבָעוֹת וּמָתַקַבָּצִין וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לַהֶם וְאוֹמָרִים לְכַל ָּדָעָם שֶׁזּוֹ הַצּוּרָה מֵיטִיכָה וּמְרֵעַה וְרָאוּי לְעָבְדָה וּלְיִרְאָה מִמֶּנָּה. וְכֹהֲנֵיהֶם אוֹמְרִים לָהֶם שֶׁבַּעֲבוֹדָה זוֹ תִּרְבּוּ וְתַצְלִיחוּ וַעֲשׂוּ כָּךְ וְכָךְ וְאַל תַּעֲשׂוּ כָּךְ וְכָךְ. וְהִתְחִילוּ כּוֹזְבִים אֲחֵרִים לַעֲמֹד וְלוֹמֵר שֶׁהַכּוֹכָב עַצְמוֹ אוֹ הַגַּלְגַּל אוֹ הַמַּלְאָךְ דְּבֶּר עִמָּהֶם וְאָמַר לָהֶם ּעָבְדוּנִי בְּכָךְ וְכָךְ וְהוֹדִיעַ לָהֶם דֶּרֶךְ עֲבוֹדָתוֹ ַוַעֲשׂוּ כָּךְ וָאַל תַּעֲשׂוּ כָּךְ.

וּפָשַׁט דָּבָר זֶה בְּכָל הָעוֹלֶם לַעֲבֹד אֶת הַצּוּרוֹת בַּעֲבוֹדוֹת מְשֵׁנּוֹת זוֹ מִזּוֹ וּלְהַקְרִיב לָהָם sacrifices to them, and bow down to them. As the years passed, [God's] glorious and awesome name was forgotten by the entire population. [It was no longer part of] their speech or thought, and they no longer knew Him. Thus, all the common people, the women, and the children would know only the image of wood or stone and the temples of stone to which they were trained from their childhood to bow down and serve, and in whose name they swore.

The wise men among them would think that there is no God other than the stars and spheres for whose sake, and in resemblance of which, they had made these images. The Eternal Rock was not recognized or known by anyone in the world, with the exception of a [few] individuals: for example, Chanoch, Metushelach, Noach, Shem, and Ever. The world continued in this fashion until the pillar of the world - the Patriarch Abraham - was born.

3 After this mighty man was weaned, he began to explore and think. Though he was a child, he began to think [incessantly] throughout the day and night, wondering: How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve.

He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him. Rather, he was mired in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idolaters. His father, mother, and all the people [around him] were idol worshipers, and he would worship with them. [However,] his heart was exploring and [gaining] understanding.

Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension. He realized that there was one God who controlled the sphere, that He created everything, and that there is no other God among all the other entities. He knew that the entire world was making a mistake. What caused them to err was their service of the stars and images, which made them lose awareness of the truth.

Abraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he began to formulate replies to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim and debate with them, telling them that they were not following a proper path.

He broke their idols and began to teach the people that it is fitting to serve only the God of the world. To Him [alone] is it fitting to bow down, sacrifice, and offer libations, so that the people of future [generations] would recognize Him. [Conversely,] it is fitting to destroy and break all the images, lest all the people err concerning them, like those people who thought that there are no other gods besides these [images].

When he overcame them through the strength of his arguments, the king desired to kill him. He was [saved through] a miracle and left for Charan.

וּלְהִשְׁתַּחַוֹּת. וְכֵיוָן שֶׁאָרְכוּ הַיָּמִים נִשְׁתַּכֵּח הַשֵּׁם הַנִּכְבָּד וְהַנּוֹרָא מִפִּי כָּל הַיְקוּם וּמִדַּעְתָּם וְלֹא הִכִּירוּהוּ וְנִמְצְאוּ כָּל עַם הָאָרֶץ הַנְּשִׁים וְהַקְטַנִּים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים אָלָּא הַצוּרָה שֶׁל עֵץ וְשֶׁל אֶבֶן וְהַהֵיכָל שֶׁל אֲבָנִים שֶׁנִּתְחַנְּכוּ מִקְטְנוּתָם לְהִשְׁתַּחוּוֹת לָה וּלְעָבְדָה וּלְהִשְּׁבַע בִּשְׁמַה.

ְוְהַחֲכָמִים שֶׁהָיוּ בָּהֶם כְּגוֹן כֹּהֲנֵיהֶם וְכַיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶן מְדַמִּין שֶׁצֵין שָׁם צֵּלוֹהֵ אֶלָּא הַכּוֹכָבִים וְהַצַּלְצַּלִים שֻׁנַּצְשׁוּ הַצּוּרוֹת הָאֵלוּ בִּגְלָלֶם וּלְדַמּוֹתָן. אֲבָל צוּר הָעוֹלָמִים לֹא הָיָה שׁוּם אָדָם שֶׁהָיָה מַכִּירוֹ וְלֹא יוֹדְעוֹ אֶלָּא יְחִידִים בָּעוֹלָם כְּגוֹן חֲנוֹך וּמְתוּשֶׁלַח נֹחַ שֵׁם וְעֵבֶר. וְעֵל דֶּרֶךְ זָה הָיָה הָעוֹלָם הוֹלֵךְ וּמִתְצַּלְצֵּל עַד שָׁנּוֹלֵד עַמּוּדוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם וְהוּא אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ:

(ג) כֵּיוַן שֶׁנָּגְמַל אֵיתָן זֶה הָתִחִיל לְשׁוֹטֵט בַּדַעְתוֹ וָהוּא קָטָן וָהָתְחִיל לַחֲשֹׁב בַּיוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וְהָיָה מָּמֵהַ הֵיאַך אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּהְיֶה הַגַּלְגַּל הַזֶּה נוֹהֵג תָּמִיד וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ מַנְהִיג וּמִי יָסַבֶּב אוֹתוֹ. כִּי אִי אֶפִשָּׁר שֵׁיָּסַבָּב אֶת עַצְמוֹ. וַלֹא הָיָה לוֹ מָלַמֵּד וְלֹא מוֹדִיעַ דָּבָר אָלָא מֻשָׁקָע בָּאוּר כַּשִׂדִּים בֵּין עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים הַטִּפְשִׁים וְאָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְכָל הָעָם עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכַבִים וְהוּא עוֹבֵד עִמָּהֶם וְלִבּוֹ מְשׁוֹטֵט וּמֵבִין עַד שָׁהִשִּׂיג דֶּרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת וְהֵבִין קַו הַצֶּדֶק מִתְּבוּנָתוֹ הַנָּכוֹנָה. וְיָדַע שֶׁיֵשׁ שָׁם אֱלוֹהַ אֶחָד וְהוּא מַנְהִיג הַגַּלְגַּל וְהוּא בָּרָא הַכּל וְאֵין בְּכָל הַנָּמָצָא אֱלוֹהַ חוּץ מִמֶּנוּ. וְיָדַע שֶׁכָּל הָעוֹלָם טוֹעִים וְדָבָר שֶׁגָּרַם לָהֶם לִּטְעוֹת זֶה שֶׁעוֹבְדִים אֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים וְאֶת הַצוּרוֹת עַד שֶׁאָבַד הָאֱמֶת מַדַעְתָם.

וּכֶן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה הִכִּיר אַכְרָהָם אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ.
בּיוֶן שֻׁהִכִּיר וְיָדַע הִתְחִיל לְהָשִׁיב תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל
בְּנֵי אוּר כַּשְׂדִים וְלַצְרֹךְ דִּין עִמֶּהֶם וְלוֹמֵר
שָׁאֵין זוֹ דֶּרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת שָׁאַתֶּם הוֹלְכִים בָּהּ וְשִׁבֵּר
הַאְלָמִים וְהָתְחִיל לְהוֹדִיעֵ לָעָם שָׁאֵין רָאוּי
לַעֲבֹד אֶלָּא לֶאֱלוֹהַ הָעוֹלָם וְלוֹ רָאוּי
לְהַשְׁתַּחַוֹת וּלְהַקְרִיב וּלְנַפֵּךְ כְּדֵי שֻׁיַּכִּירוּהוּ
בָּל הַבְּרוּאִים הַבָּאִים. וְרָאוּי לְאַבֵּד וּלְשַׁבֵּר כָּל
הַבּוֹ אֵלוּ הַאָּוֹן שָׁם אֱלוֹהַ אֶלָּא הָעָם כְּמוֹ אֵלוּ
הַצּוֹן שָׁגָּבַר עֲלֵיהָם בִּרְאָיוֹתִיו בִּקֵשׁ הַמֶּלֶּוּ
כִיון שֻׁגָּבַר עֲלֵיהָם בִּרְאָיוֹתִיו בִּקֵשׁ הַמֶּלֶּוּ

[There,] he began to call in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one God in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him. He would go out and call to the people, gathering them in city after city and country after country, until he came to the land of Canaan - proclaiming [God's existence the entire time] - as [Genesis 21:33] states: "And He called there in the name of the Lord, the eternal God."

When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain [them] to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are the men of the house of Abraham.

He planted in their hearts this great fundamental principle, composed texts about it, and taught it to Isaac, his son. Isaac also taught others and turned [their hearts to God]. He also taught Jacob and appointed him as a teacher.

[Jacob] taught others and turned [the hearts] of all those who gathered around him [to God]. He also taught all of his children. He selected Levi and appointed him as the leader. He established him [as the head of] the academy to teach them the way of God and observe the mitzvot of Abraham.

[Jacob] commanded his sons that the leadership should not depart from the descendants of Levi, so that the teachings would not be forgotten. This concept proceeded and gathered strength among the descendants of Jacob and those who collected around them, until there became a nation within the world which knew God.

When the Jews extended their stay in Egypt, however, they learned from the [Egyptians'] deeds and began worshiping the stars as they did, with the exception of the tribe of Levi, who clung to the mitzvot of the patriarchs - the tribe of Levi never served false gods.

Within a short time, the fundamental principle that Abraham had planted would have been uprooted, and the descendants of Jacob would have returned to the errors of the world and their crookedness. Because of God's love for us, and to uphold the oath He made to Abraham, our patriarch, He brought forth Moses, our teacher, the master of all prophets, and sent him [to redeem the Jews]. After Moses, our teacher, prophesied, and God chose Israel as His inheritance, He crowned them with mitzvot and informed them of the path to serve Him, [teaching them] the judgement prescribed for idol worshiper and all those who stray after it.

1 The essence of the commandment [forbidding] the worship of false gods is not to serve any of the creations, not an angel, a sphere, or a star, none of the four fundamental elements, nor any entity created from them. Even if the person worshiping knows that 'a is the [true] God and serves the creation in the manner in which Enosh and the people of his generation worshiped [the stars] originally, he is considered to be an idol worshiper.

לַעַמֹד וְלָקְרֹא בָּקוֹל גַּדוֹל לְכַל הָעוֹלַם וּלְהוֹדִיעַם שֵׁיֵשׁ שָׁם אֱלוֹהַ אֶחָד לְכָל הָעוֹלָם וְלוֹ רָאוּי לַעֲבֹד. וְהָיָה מְהַלֵּךְ וְקוֹרֵא וּמְקַבֵּץ ָהָעָם מֵעִיר לְעִיר וּמִמַּמְלָכָה לְמַמְלַכָּה עַד שָׁנָאֱמַר שָׁנָאַר וְהוּא קוֹרֵא שֶׁנָאֱמַר לָאָרֶץ כְּנַעַן וְהוּא קוֹרֵא שֶׁנָאֱמַר (בראשית כא לג) "וַיָּקְרָא שָׁם בִּשֵׁם ה' אֵל עוֹלָם". וְכֵיוָן שֶׁהָיוּ הָעָם מִתְקַבְּצִין אֵלַיו וְשׁוֹאֲלִין לוֹ עַל דְּבָרָיו הָיָה מוֹדִיעַ לְכָל אֶחָד ָוְאֶחָד כְּפִי דַּעְתּוֹ עַד שֶׁיַּחְזִירֵהוּ לְדֶרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת עַד שֶׁנְּתְקַבְּצוּ אֵלָיו אֲלָפִים וּרְבָבוֹת וְהֵם אַנְשֵׁי בֵּית אַבְרָהָם וְשָׁתַל בִּלְבָּם הָעָקָר הַגָּדוֹל הַזָּה וְחָבֵּר בּוֹ סְפָּרִים וְהוֹדִיעוֹ לְיִצְחָק בִּנוֹ. וְיָשַׁב יִצְחָק מְלַמֵּד וּמַזְהִיר. וְיִצְחָק הוֹדִיעַ לְיַעֲקֹב ִי וּמְנַהוּ לְלַמֵּד וְיָשַׁב מְלַמֵּד וּמַחַזִיק כַּל הַנִּלְוִים אַלַיו. וְיַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ לְמֵד בַּנַיו כַּלָם וְהָבִדִּיל לֵוִי וּמָנַּהוּ רֹאשׁ וָהוֹשִׁיבוֹ בִּישִׁיבָה לְלַמֵּד דֶּרֶךְ הַשֵּׁם וְלִשָׁמֹר מִצְוַת אַבָרָהָם. וְצִוָּה אֶת בָּנַיו שׁלֹא יַפָּסִיקוּ מִבָּנֵי לֵוִי מִמֻנֵּה אַחַר מִמֵנָה כָּדֵי שֶׁלֹא תִשָּׁכַח הַלְּמוּד. וְהָיָה הַדָּבַר הוֹלֶךְ וּמִתְגַּבֵּר בִּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב וּבַנִּלְוִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְנַעֲשֵׂית ַבַעוֹלַם אָמַה שֶׁהָיא יוֹדַעַת אָת ה'.

עַד שֶׁאָרָכוּ הַיָּמִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם וְחָזְרוּ
לִלְמֹד מַצְשֵׂיהֶן וְלַצְבֹד כּוֹכָבִים כְּמוֹתָן חוּץ
לִלְמֹד מַצְשֵׂיהֶן וְלַצְבֹד כּוֹכָבִים כְּמוֹתָן חוּץ
מִשֵׁבֶט לֵוִי שֻׁעַמִד בְּמִצְוֹת אָבוֹת. וּמֵעוֹלֶם לֹא
עָבַד שֵׁבֶט לֵוִי עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים. וְכִמְעַט קָט
הָיָה הָעָקֹר שְׁשָׁתָל אַבְרָהָם נֶעֱקָר וְחוֹזְרִין בְּנֵי
יַצְקֹר לְטָעוּת הָעוֹלֶם וּתְעִיּוֹתָן. וּמֵאַהָבַת ה'
אוֹתָנוּ וּמִשֶּׁמְרוֹ אֶת הַשְּׁבוּעָה לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ
עַשָּׁה משָׁה רַבֵּנוּ וּבָחַלָה הְלָתְיָרן בְּמִצְוֹת וְהוֹדִיעָם דֶּרֶהְ
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְנַחֲלָה הִכְתִּירָן בְּמִצְוֹת וְהוֹדִיעָם דֶּרֶהְ
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְנַחֲלָה הִכְתִּירָן בְּמִצְוֹת וְהוֹדִיעָם דֶּרֶהְ
הַטְּלֹים אָחָרִיהָ:
הַטוֹעִים אָחַרִיהָ:

(א) עָקַר הַצִּוּוּי בַּעֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים שֶׁלֹּא לַעֲבֹד אֶחָד מִכָּל הַבְּרוּאִים לֹא מַלְאָךְ וְלֹא גַּלְגַּל וְלֹא כּוֹכָב וְלֹא אֶחָד מֵאַרְבָּעָה הַיְסוֹדוֹת וְלֹא אֶחָד מִכָּל הַנְּבָרָאִים מֵהָן. וְאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁהָעוֹבֵד יוֹדֵעַ שָׁה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים וְהוּא עוֹבֵד הַנִּבְרָא הַזֶּה עַל דֶּרֶךְ שֶׁעָבַד אֱנוֹשׁ וְאַנְשֵׁי דּוֹרוֹ מְּחָלֶּה הַרֵי זֶה עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים. וְעִנְיָן זֶה הוּא שֶׁהִזְּהִירָה תּוֹרָה תּוֹרָה

עַלָיו וְאָמָרָה (דברים ד יט) "וּפֵן תִּשָּׂא עֵינֵיךְ

קשַׁמַימָה וָרַאִיתַ אָת הַשָּׁמֵשׁ" וְגוֹ' (דברים ד

יט) "אֲשֶׁר חָלַק ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֹתָם לְכָל הָעַמִּים".

בָּלוֹמַר שֶׁמָא תָּשׁוּט בָּעֵין לְבָּדְ וְתִרְאָה שֶׁאֵלוּ

לְכָל הָעוֹלָם לְהִיוֹת חַיִּים וְהוֹוִים וְאֵינַם

נָפָסַדִים כָּמִנָהָגוֹ שֵׁל עוֹלַם וְתֹאמֵר שֵׁרַאוּי לְהִשְׁתַּחֲווֹת לָהֶם וּלְעָבְדָן. וּבָעִנְיָן הַזֶּה צִּוָּה

וָאַמַר (דברים יא טז) "הָשַּׁמָרוּ לַכֶם פֵּן יָפָתָּה

לְבַבְכֶם". כִּלוֹמַר שֶׁלֹא תִּטְעוּ בָּהְרָהוּר הַלֵּב

מכילתא דרבי שמעון בן יוחאי כ"ג:י"ג

לַעֲבֹד אֵלּוּ לָהָיוֹת סַרְסוּר בֵּינֵיכֶם וּבֵין

הָן הַמַּנְהִיגִים אֶת הָעוֹלָם וְהֶם שֶׁחָלַק ה' אוֹתָם

The Torah warns us about this, saying [Deuteronomy 4:19]: "Lest you lift your eyes heavenward and see the sun, the moon, and the stars... [and bow down and worship them], the entities which God apportioned to all the nations." This implies that you might inquire with "the eye of the heart" and it might appear to you that these entities control the world, having been apportioned by God to all the nations to be alive, to exist, and not to cease existence, as is the pattern of [the other creations with] the world. Therefore, you might say that it is worthy to bow down to them and worship them.

For this reason, [Deuteronomy 11:16] commands: "Be very careful that your heart not be tempted [to go astray and worship other gods]." This implies that the thoughts of your heart should not lead you astray to worship these and make them an intermediary between you and the Creator.

> III. It's Not Just About Jews Refraining From Worship

שמות כ"ג:ר"ב-ר"ג

הַבּוֹרֵא:...

ַ שָׁשֶׁת יָמִים ֹ תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶֶּׁידְ וּבַיָּוֹם הַשָּׁבִיעִי תִּשָּׁבָּת לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ שְׁוֹרְדְּ וַחְמֹלֶרךּ וְיָנָפָשׁ בָּן־אֲמָתְהָּ וְהַגִּר: וּבְכֶּל אֲשֶׁר־אָמַרְתִּי אֲלֵיכֶם תִּשְּׁמֵּרוּ וָשָׁם אֱלֹהָים אֲחַרִים לֹא תַזְבִּירוּ לֹא יַשַּׁמַע עַל־פִּידְ:

5. Exodus 23:12-13

Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed. Be on guard concerning all that I have told you. Make no mention of the names of other gods; they shall not be heard on your lips.

6. Mekhilta DeRabbi Shimon Ben Yochai 23:13

ושם אלהים אחרים לא תזכירו. שלא ידור אדם בשם ע"ז ולא יקיים

בשמה ולא יעשה את הגוי שידור בשם ע"ז שלו: ד"א ושם אלהים אחרים לא תזכירו זו אזהרה לנביא המתנבא בשם ע"ז לפי שהוא אומר (דברים יש כ') ומת הנביא ההוא עונש שמענו אזהרה מניין ת"ל ושם אלהים אחרים לא תזכירו: ד"א לא תזכירו לא יאמר אדם לחבירו שמור לי אצל ע"ז פלונית ואני אשמור לך אצל ע"ז פלונית וכל ע"ז שבמקרא מותר להזכירה כגון פעור ובל וגבו וכמוש: לא ישמע על פיך. זו אזהרה למדיח ולמסית:

7. Mishnah Avodah Zarah 1:7

One should not sell them bears, lions or anything which may injure the public. One should not join them in building a basilica, a scaffold, a stadium, or a platform. But one may join them in building public or private bathhouses. When however he reaches the cupola in which the idol is placed he must not build.

משנה עבודה זרה אי:זי

אַין מוֹכְרִין לָהֶם דָּבִּין וַאָרַיוֹת וְכָל דָּבָר שֶׁיֶשׁ בּוֹ נֵזֶק לָרַבִּים. אֵין בּוֹנִין עִמֶּהֶם בָּסִילְקִי, גַּרְדּוֹם, וְאָצְטַדְיָא, וּבִימָה. אֲבָל בּוֹנִים עִמֶּהֶם בִּימוֹסְיָאוֹת וּבֵית מֶרְחָצָאוֹת. הָגִּיעוּ לַכְּפָּה שֶׁמַצְמִידִין בָּה עֲבוֹדָה זַרה, אַסוּר לְבָנוֹת:

8. Mishnah Avodah Zarah 1:9

Even in such a place where the letting of a house has

משנה עבודה זרה אי:טי

אַף בִּמְקוֹם שָאָמָרוּ לְהַשָּׂכִּיר, לֹא לְבֵית דִּירָה אָמָרוּ, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא

been permitted, they did not say [that this was permitted if it was] for the purpose of a residence, since the idolater will bring idols into it; for it says, "you shall not bring an abomination into your house" (Deut. 7:26). In no place may one let a bath-house to an idolater, as it is called by the name of the owner.

מַכְנִיס לְתוֹכוֹ עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמֵר (דברים ז) וְלֹא תָבִיא תוֹעֵבָה אֶל בֵּיתֶךָ. וּבְכָל מָקוֹם לֹא יַשְׂכִּיר לוֹ אֶת הַמֶּרְחָץ, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא נִקְרָא עַל שָׁמוֹ:

IV. Avodah Zara Has Rules

9. Mishnah Avodah Zarah 1:5

The following things are forbidden to be sold to idolaters: iztroblin, bnoth-shuah with their stems, frankincense, and a white rooster. Rabbi Judah says: it is permitted to sell a white rooster to an idolater among other roosters; but if it be by itself, one should clip its spur and then sell it to him, because a defective [animal] is not sacrificed to an idol. As for other things, if they are not specified their sale is permitted, but if specified it is forbidden. Rabbi Meir says: also a "good-palm", hazab and niklivas are forbidden to be sold to idolaters.

משנה עבודה זרה א':ה'

אֵלּוּ דְבָרִים אֲסוּרִים לִמְכּׁר לְגוֹיִם, אִצְטְרוֹבָּלִין, וּבְנוֹת שׁוּחַ וּפְטוֹטְרוֹתֵיהֶן, וּלְבוֹנָה, וְתַרְנְגוֹל הַלְּבָן. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר, מֵתָּר לִמְכּוֹר לוֹ תַּרְנְגוֹל לָבָן בֵּין הַתַּרְנְגוֹלִין. וּבִזְמַן שָׁהוּא בִפְנֵי עַצְמוֹ, קוֹטֵעַ אֶת אֶצְבָּעוֹ וּמוֹכְרוֹ לוֹ, לְפִי שָׁאֵין מַקְרִיבִין חָסֵר לַעֲבוֹדָה זְרָה. וּשְׁאָר כָּל הַדְּבָרִים, סְתָמֶן מֻתָּר, וּפֵרוּשָׁן אָסוּר. רַבִּי מֵאִיר אוֹמֵר, אַף דֶּקֶל טָב וַחֲצָב וְנִקְלִיבָם אָסוּר לְמִכּּר לְגוֹיִם:

10. Jerusalem Talmud Avodah Zarah 1:5:5

If it had a defect. The verse says that they sacrifice defectives in pagan worship. *If you present a blind one to be sacrificed, is there nothing bad*? This says that they sacrifice defectives in pagan worship.

תלמוד ירושלמי עבודה זרה אי:הי:הי

הָיָה חָסֵר. קִרְייָא אָמַר. שֶׁמַּקְרִיבִין חָסֵר לָעֲבוֹדָה זָרָה. וְבִי־תַגִּישׁוּן עַנָּר לְזְבּוֹחַ אֵין לָע. הָדָא אָמְרָה. שֶׁמַּקְרִיבִין חָסֵר לָעֲבוֹדָה זָרָה.

11. Malachi 1:8

When you present a blind animal for sacrifice—it doesn't matter! When you present a lame or sick one—it doesn't matter! Just offer it to your governor: Will he accept you? Will he show you favor?—said the LORD of Hosts.

מלאכי א:ח

וְכִי־תַגִּישׁׁוּ עָנָּר לִּוְבַּחֵׁ אֵין דָּע וְכִי תַגִּישׁוּ פָּפֵחַ וְחֹלֶה אֵין בֶע הַקְריבֵּהוּ נָא לְפָחָתֶּךְ הַיִּרְצְךְּ אוֹ הַיִּשָּׂא פָּנִּיךְ אָמַר יְהֹנָה צָבַאִוֹת:

12. Avodah Zarah 14b:4-5

§ Rav Ashi raised a dilemma: If a gentile asks the merchants: Who has a damaged white rooster, what is the *halakha* with regard to whether it is permitted to sell him an unblemished white rooster? Do we say that from the fact that he says that he wants a damaged rooster, it may be inferred that he does not need it for idol worship, as gentiles do not sacrifice defective animals, and therefore it is permitted? Or perhaps he is only employing artifice. In other words, he knows that a Jew will not sell him an undamaged white rooster upon request, and as it is unlikely that someone has a damaged white rooster to sell him, he hopes that he will receive an undamaged one. If so, it is prohibited to sell him a white rooster. If you say that this gentile is employing artifice, and it is prohibited, in a case where he said: Who has a

עבודה זרה י"ד ב:ד'-ה'

בָּעֵי רַב אָשֵׁי: ״תַּרְנְגוֹל לָכָן קטוּעַ לְמִי״, מַהוּ לְמְכּוֹר לּוֹ תַּרְנְגוֹל לָכָן שָׁלֵם? מִי אָמְרִינַן: מִדְּקָאָמַר ״קטוּעַ״, לָא לַעֲבוֹדָה זָרָה קָבָעִי, אוֹ דִלְמָא אִיעָרוֹמֵי קָא מֵעֲרִים? אִם תִּימְצֵי לוֹמַר הַאי אִיעָרוֹמֵי הוּא דְקָא מַעֲרִים, ״תַּרְנְגוֹל לָכָן לְמִי, תַּרְנְגוֹל לָכָן לְמִי״, וִיהַבוּ לֵיה שַׁחוֹר וּשְׁקַל, וְיהַבוּ לֵיהּ אָדוֹם white rooster, who has a white rooster; and they brought him a black rooster and he took it, or in a case where they bought him a red one and he took it, what is the *halakha* with regard to whether it is permitted to sell him a white rooster? Do we say: Since they brought him a black rooster and he took it, or they bought him a red one and he took it, evidently he does not need the rooster for idol worship? Or perhaps, here too he is employing artifice? The Gemara comments: These dilemmas shall stand unresolved.

וּשְׁקַל, מַהוּ לִמְכּוֹר לוֹ לֶבָן? מִי אָמְרִינַן: כֵּיוָן דִּיהַבוּ שָׁחוֹר וּשְׁקַל, אָדוֹם וּשְׁקַל, לָאו לַעֲבוֹדָה זָרָה קָא בָּעֵי, אוֹ דִּלְמָא אִיעָרוֹמֵי קָא מַעֲרֵים? תֵּיקוּ.