

613 Laws of Torah

Laws 300 - 349

(300)

Impose a penalty of fifty shekels upon the seducer of an unbetrothed virgin and enforce the other rules in connection with the case. “If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins. (Exodus 22:16-17) The case of pre-marital sex between a man and an unbetrothed virgin is covered here and in the next two mitzvot. There doesn’t seem to be much of a distinction drawn between seduction and statutory rape in this case, presumably because the Inventor of hormones knows how it all works. As far as Yahweh is concerned, sex consummates a marriage; the physical union completes the spiritual union that betrothal initiates. So in the case described, though the beautiful picture a wedding presents has been goofed up, life goes on.

Though Maimonides calls it a “penalty,” the fifty shekels (specified in Deuteronomy 22) is actually a “bride-price,” in other words, a dowry. Any prospective husband would pay this sum to his father-in-law-to-be. However, in this case, the girl’s father has the option of forbidding the marriage, while keeping the dowry. This provision allows him to save his daughter from marriage to a total loser, or, of course, to an actual rapist. But normally, he would be prone to let mere sexual imprudence between his infatuated daughter and her amorous boyfriend—a rash and impulsive love match— proceed into marriage, for finding a mate for a daughter who wasn’t a virgin was difficult in that culture.

(301)

The violator of an unbetrothed virgin shall marry her. “If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman’s father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her.” (Deuteronomy 22:28-29) There was no option on the part of the young man, however. If the girl’s father allowed it to proceed, he would have to marry the young woman—it’s the prototypical shotgun wedding. This provision would have

tended to keep casual or experimental sex to a minimum. Under the Torah, there was no such thing as I'm not ready to make a commitment, but you're pretty hot, so let's get it on. No, it's either chastity or marriage (or stoning, if either lover were already betrothed).

We should note the radically different consequences Yahweh delineated for what to some might seem almost identical offenses—the case of sexual contact (whether presumed rape or consensual) with a betrothed virgin (as in Mitzvah #288) as opposed to with an unbetrothed virgin—death versus marriage. This makes it clear to me that it isn't sex per se that Yahweh objects to, but rather betrayal.

Sex within marriage is right and good; outside of marriage, it is treachery, treason, and deceit.

(302)

One who has raped a damsel and has then, in accordance with the law, married her, may not divorce her. "...and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days." (Deuteronomy 22:28-29) It gets even better, in a divine retribution sort of way. Not only must the young man pay the dowry and marry the young lady he has slept with, it's what you might call a no-cut contract. If it "doesn't work out," tough toenails. There's no divorce for you—ever. As one who has been married for over forty years, I can vouch for the concept of choosing your mate carefully.

Beyond the obvious practical implications of this precept, there is a far more serious side to this. There is a reason Israel, the Ekklesia, is called the "Bride of Christ," and Israel was once characterized as Yahweh's unfaithful wife. It is God's pattern that a husband and wife are to be "one flesh"—they are not to be "put asunder." When we become betrothed to Yahweh, we are His forever. But in the same way, those who foolishly jump into bed with Satan are doomed to share his fate forever—you can't change your mind and divorce him. Like I said, choose your mate carefully.

(303)

Do not inflict punishment on Shabbat (because some punishments were inflicted by fire). "Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day." (Exodus 35:2-3) In Mitzvah #109 (in Chapter 4) we discussed the Sabbath at length. It is a Torah-mandated rest from our labors, indicative of the fact that we cannot, in the end, work for our salvation. We must, rather, accept Yahweh's provision. So no one's regular work was to be done on the seventh day of the week. That, of

course, included food preparation, which was admittedly a much more laborious endeavor in Moses' time than it is today. We have also seen (in #287 above) how punishment inflicted by fire was (in rare and extreme instances) authorized in the Torah. Can you see where Maimonides is going with this? It's legalism gone stark raving haywire: he's saying that you can't burn people at the stake on the Sabbath day—because it's cooking! I honestly don't know whether to laugh or cry.

(304)

Punish the wicked by the infliction of stripes. "If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows." (Deuteronomy 25:1-2) This is the only passage in the Torah where a beating is an authorized mode of punishment. And there is only one place in the Bible where it matters: the trial of Yahshua. The record of His beating at the hands of the High Priest (in Matthew 26:67, Mark 14:65, and Luke 22:63) clearly shows that the Torah's guidelines weren't being remotely followed: (1) Yahshua wasn't involved in a dispute between two men, (2) Caiaphas the High Priest was not successful in proving Yahshua to be "wicked," and (3) He was beaten standing up, not lying down. Apparently, Maimonides' annoying practice of playing fast and loose with the requirements of scripture had a long and illustrious history.

(305)

Do not exceed the statutory number of stripes laid on one who has incurred that punishment. "Forty blows he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight." (Deuteronomy 25:3) The Torah's use of beating was designed to correct and reprove a man from his "wickedness." But the beating and mocking endured by Christ at the hands of Caiaphas was intended to do what the Law had expressly forbidden: humiliate Him. It is not recorded how many blows they dealt Him, though they doubtless held it down to forty (being the legalistic sticklers they were). The actual practice was to limit their beatings to one less than that, just to be on the safe side—see II Corinthians 11:24.

We should not gloss over the significance of the number forty. When we see it in scripture, it is invariably connected with testing, trial, or proving. Forty years of wilderness wandering, forty days and nights receiving the Law on Sinai, forty days of Yahshua's temptation, forty days between His resurrection and ascension—you get the picture.

(306)

Do not spare the offender in imposing the prescribed penalties on one who has caused damage. "If anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities [of refuge], then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you." (Deuteronomy 19:11-13) Whereas Maimonides would gleefully make withholding mercy an across-the-board mandate, Yahweh applied it (here, at least) to only one crime: murder. The city of refuge wasn't to be a "free zone" where criminals could go to escape justice. Rather, it was more like a safe-house or temporary protective custody: your court-appointed executioner couldn't reach you there until (and unless) you were brought to trial and found guilty of murder.

As we have seen, however, murder is a scriptural euphemism for preventing someone from having a personal relationship with Yahweh. The prototypical "murderers" were the scribes and Pharisees (read: rabbis). They were characterized (by Yahshua Himself) as murderers because of their relationship with "their father," Satan. And what did the Pharisees do that was so bad? They "kept" the law, didn't they? No, they didn't. They merely kept their version of it, designed not to keep them in tune with Yahweh's will, but to elevate their status and prestige among their countrymen by keeping them in chains, under submission, unaware of Yahweh's forgiveness, and subservient to them. Two millennia later, things haven't changed much.

(307)

Do unto false witnesses as they had purposed to do to the accused. "And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you." (Deuteronomy 19:18-20) This puts teeth in the Ninth Commandment. Yes, we aren't to "bear false witness against our neighbor," but what happens if someone does? For the umpteenth time, we see a perfectly fair (not to mention stunningly sagacious) solution to a human foible that God knew would happen from time to time. We're not talking about innocent inaccuracies in eyewitness testimony here. We're talking about perjury— giving false testimony with the express purpose of seeing an innocent person convicted of a crime. This is sort of the converse of "You shall love your neighbor as you do yourself." It says, "Your hatred for your neighbor will come back upon your own head."

The precept requires wisdom and diligence on the part of the judges. I realize that this is a tough requirement on judges today who must work within flawed systems of human jurisprudence— hamstrung by rules of evidence, procedural foolishness, and having cases presented by people who aren't necessarily seeking the truth, but are being paid to deliver a conviction or acquittal—in other words, lawyers who lie for a living. We must remind ourselves that in the end, justice will be done. One Judge, perfect in wisdom and unfettered by human inadequacy, will decide who stands guilty before Him, and who is to be set free.

This mitzvah should serve as a dire warning to those today who would “crucify Christ” anew by denying (as the Sanhedrin did two thousand years ago) that He is who He claimed to be: the “Son” of God, Immanuel—“God with us”—Yahweh Himself manifested in flesh and blood. If we bear false witness against Him we will bring upon ourselves the fate we intended for Him— crucifixion in the physical sense, or in the spiritual, the bearing of our own sins to sheol. Not a pleasant prospect.

(308)

Do not punish anyone who has committed an offense under duress. “But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death.” (Deuteronomy 22:25-26) Maimonides is way out on a limb here. The mitzvah the way he worded it may or may not be correct, depending on the circumstances. This example in Deuteronomy, of course, is clear cut: the victim of a rape is not guilty of anything. Our esteemed rabbi is thus out of line by characterizing it as “an offense.” Concerning a rape victim’s culpability, it’s nothing of the sort. Maimonides’ patronizing platitude isn’t doing her any favors.

The wording of the mitzvah indicates a broader application than the Torah’s example—one that puts Maimonides on thin ice. The rabbi is saying that any “offense” committed under duress should go unpunished. Are you sure? How do you define “duress”? If a robber is threatening to shoot your family if you don’t open your employer’s safe, I suppose I’d be inclined to agree with Rambam. On the other hand, if it’s, “I was so broke I couldn’t pay my cable TV bill, so I went out and knocked over a 7-Eleven,” the circumstantial duress the criminal felt clearly isn’t going to cut it. Maimonides is flirting with the concept of the avoidance of personal responsibility through creative justification.

Next thing you know, we’ll be hearing him say “The devil made me do it!”

(309)

Heed the call of every prophet in each generation, provided that he neither adds to, nor takes away from, the Torah. “Yahweh your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’” (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) After the Exodus, Yahweh had told Moses to gather the elders of Israel together at Mount Sinai (a.k.a. Horeb), and there, He gave them a tiny peek at His awesome power, enveloping the entire mountain in smoke and fire, with lightning, thunder, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of God (see Exodus 19). Showing His full glory, of course, would have turned the whole planet into a charcoal briquette, but even “dialed down,” the effect was more than they could bear. The people were so afraid, they begged to be spared from such terrifying displays in the future. Yahweh agreed, and made them the promise we read above—the promise of a coming Israelite “prophet” who would do what they had “desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb,” namely, to be God in their midst, to show them how to live as men before Yahweh.

Maimonides’ mitzvah, though a fine sentiment in its own right, is a pale, twisted mischaracterization of what Moses had actually said. Moses spoke of a Prophet, not many, one who would speak with the very “voice of Yahweh my God,” a factor that makes rabbinical pontifications about whether or not he was maintaining the Torah totally superfluous. This Prophet would be a man, one born of the house of Israel—“your brethren.” Moses was referring, as we can see now, to the Messiah,

Yahshua. When Moses had said, “Him you shall hear,” it was both a command and a prophecy. Many Jews in the days following the resurrection did “hear” and follow Him—though their voice was brutally and treacherously silenced by the Jewish ruling elite. But the day is coming when the nation of Israel will hear the voice of Yahshua. The definitive Day of Atonement (October 3, 2033, if my observations are correct—see Mitzvot #112 and #133-136 in Chapter 4) will see the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy.

The thinly veiled reason that Maimonides added the stipulation that “he neither adds to, nor takes away from, the Torah” was the widely held assertion among Jews that Yahshua had violated the Torah by doing such things as healing sick people on the Sabbath. In point of fact, He had not violated the Torah—He had merely violated their interpretations, their traditions. It takes a lot of nerve to tell Bach how to play his own fugue.

(310)

Do not prophesy falsely. “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall

die.” (Deuteronomy 18:20) I wonder if Maimonides blushed when he got to this point. As we have seen, he played so fast and loose with the actual requirements of the Torah, and his agenda is so transparent, it’s a wonder he could put quill to parchment. There are two types of “false prophecy” delineated here. The first is making up what you’d like people to believe Yahweh said. It’s the kind of thing Maimonides and other rabbis did all day long. Of course, the Jews don’t have a monopoly on this tactic. Roman Catholics and quite a few Protestants routinely preach doctrines derived in this very way. Before we glibly say, “God said…” we need to be very sure of our facts.

The second category of false prophet is those who “speak in the name of other gods,” like the 450 priests of Ba’al that Elijah dealt with in I Kings 18. Don’t take comfort in the idea that there aren’t all that many “Ba’al worshippers” around these days. Any religious system that purports to have answers for this life and beyond, outside of Yahweh’s truth, is guilty. Islam’s Allah is currently the world’s number one “other god,” with over a billion souls in bondage. But there are thousands of other ones, both obvious and covert, for whom false prophets put in their two bits’ worth. And take note: “other gods” needn’t be “gods” at all in the traditional sense. Communism and secular humanism are “religions” in every sense of the word, with their own prophets and doctrines.

(311)

Not to refrain from putting a false prophet to death nor to be in fear of him (Deut. 18:22) (negative).

Do not refrain from putting a false prophet to death nor be in fear of him. “And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:21-22) The penalty for false prophecy is death. But who is to administer the punishment? In Theocratic Israel, the people were to execute the offender (see Deuteronomy 13). Does that mean that we today should be going around killing everyone who voices a religious philosophy divergent from our own? (The Islamic scriptures demand this very thing, though Muslims don’t always comprehend this.) It’s pretty clear that the answer is “no,” for during His first-century advent, Yahshua didn’t advocate holy war against Rome (as some did), even though the Romans practiced the worship of many gods (none of whom answered to the name Yahweh) and the emperor himself demanded to be worshiped as a deity. So outside of a theocratic Israel that no longer exists, all we can say for sure is, “That prophet shall die.” How? Yahweh will apparently use His enemies to do most of the wet work.

The rub here is that most prophets in the Bible predicted things that didn't take place during their lifetimes. In fact, so many prophecies still haven't been completely fulfilled, even today. I suppose that's why the Old Covenant prophets often uttered prophecies with near and far fulfillments. Warnings about Assyria and Babylon often morph into warnings about Last-Days enemies like Islam and the Antichrist. The near-term fulfillments were a down payment on the real prophetic bottom line.

The translation of the phrase "you shall not be afraid of him" is a bit misleading. The word for "be afraid" is *guwr*. Its primary meaning is "to sojourn, abide, dwell in or with, to seek hospitality with." (S) Moses is actually telling us that if a prophet says things in the name of God that don't come to pass, we aren't to have anything to do with him—we're not to "enter his house." So when Muhammad tells you that the "day of doom" will take place in 1110 AD (i.e., half a prophetic "day," or 500 years, after his coronation as Allah's last messenger) that's the signal to drop him and his religion like a hot rock. When the TV preacher promises you that God will bless you financially or cure your cancer if you send him enough money, it's time to tune him out. Remember, "That prophet shall die."

Idolatry, Idolaters and Idolatrous Practices

(312)

Not to make a graven image; neither to make it oneself nor to have it made by others (Ex. 20:4) (CCN9).

Do not make a graven image; neither make it yourself nor have it made by others. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God." (Exodus 20:4-5) This, of course, is the second of the "Ten Commandments." The point is not who makes the "graven image" or for whom, but rather its intended use. Images of created things are not to be employed as objects of worship. Things that would immediately pop into the minds of the Israelites hearing these words include the sun-god and moon-god symbols of their former Egyptian hosts, the golden calf they had merrily constructed while Moses was up on the mountain receiving this very Law (oops), and the fish-god images of the Dagon worshippers they were soon to encounter in the Land of Canaan.

The word translated “jealous” is qana, from a root which means “zeal.” The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says, “It may prove helpful to think of ‘zeal’ as the original sense from which derived the notions ‘zeal for another’s property’ equals ‘envy,’ and ‘zeal for one’s own property’ equals ‘jealousy.’” Thus Yahweh was reminding the Israelites that they were His own set-apart people. They belonged to Him. And if we today are His children, He is similarly “jealous” over us.

(313)

Not to make any figures for ornament, even if they are not worshipped (Ex. 20:20) (CCN144).

Do not make any figures for ornament, even if they are not worshipped. “You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.” (Exodus 20:23-25) Maimonides has taken the “no graven images” ball and run with it, forbidding (as the Muslims do) any image of anything for any purpose. Yes, representations of any object of worship—even of Yahweh Himself, if that were possible—were strictly and specifically forbidden. And it’s clear from the passage that Yahweh doesn’t want us to try to impress Him with our skill and workmanship, the best of which—let’s face it—is pathetically anemic when compared with the glories of His creation.

That being said, only a few chapters after the Ten Commandments, Yahweh is seen selecting a man (named Bezaleel—meaning “in the shadow of God”) because of, among other things, his “filling with the Spirit of God...in all manner of workmanship to design artistic works.” And He is heard instructing Israel to place specific decorative “images” on the mercy seat: “And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.” (Exodus 25:18-20) Further, the instructions on the construction of the Tabernacle are peppered with references to “graven images” the Israelites are supposed to make—bowls shaped like “almond blossoms” on the golden lampstand; pictures of cherubim (what does a cherub look like, anyway?) woven into the curtains; golden bells and pomegranates sewn onto the hem of Aaron’s robe, etc.

So Yahweh clearly isn't prohibiting all graphic or three-dimensional representations, but rather the worship of them. The Jews, to their credit, seem to have this one down pat, though as usual, they're more restrictive than God Himself, which is pretty scary. It's the Catholics who have it all wrong. The late pope John Paul II declared, "A mysterious 'presence' of the transcendent Prototype seems as it were to be transferred to the sacred image.... The devout contemplation of such an image thus appears as a real and concrete path of purification of the soul of the believer...because the image itself, blessed by the priest...can in a certain sense, by analogy with the sacraments, actually be a channel of divine grace." (Quoted by Dave Hunt in *A Woman Rides the Beast*.) In other words (in case you couldn't follow the slippery religious gobbledygook), "A picture of Jesus—if a Catholic priest blesses it—is as good as the real thing." Not according to Exodus, big guy.

(314)

Not to make idols even for others (Ex. 34:17; Lev. 19:4) (CCN10).

Do not make idols even for others. "You shall make no molded gods for yourselves."

(Exodus 34:17); "Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am Yahweh your God." (Leviticus 19:4) Again, Yahweh doesn't particularly care who makes the image or who intends to worship it: the instruction is, "Don't do it." Notice also that Yahweh is saying that the worship of idols would entail "turning" from Him. He began this relationship with Israel right in front of them—in their midst. When they parted company, He did not leave them. They left Him.

(315)

Not to use the ornament of any object of idolatrous worship (Deut. 7:25) (CCN17).

Do not use the ornament of any object of idolatrous worship. "You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to Yahweh your God. Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing." (Deuteronomy 7:25-26) The context here is the impending conquest of Canaan. Because the inhabitants of the Land were idolaters, it could reasonably be assumed that the victorious Israelites would find idols, graven images of false gods, left behind by the defeated foe. Yahweh is saying to completely destroy them: burn them with fire. Don't adopt them as objects of worship (duh), don't put them in museums as historical artifacts, don't even recycle the intrinsically valuable or useful components of them—the gold or silver they're made of. Lesson: we need to adjust our view of what's valuable (and

what isn't) to align with Yahweh's way of thinking. He values love, faith, fellowship, and truth. Gold He uses as paving material.

(316)

Not to make use of an idol or its accessory objects, offerings, or libations (Deut. 7:26) (CCN18). See Grape Products.

Do not make use of an idol or its accessory objects, offerings, or libations. "You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to Yahweh your God. Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing." (Deuteronomy 7:25-26) Our supporting text is the same as for the previous mitzvah. Once again, the rabbis are more restrictive than Yahweh. His ban was limited to idols—the rabbis extended it to the objects that became associated with them through errant worship, which, if you think about it, is giving far more credit than is due to a dumb, lifeless hunk of wood, rock, or metal.

Paul addressed this very issue. He wrote, "Concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one." (I Corinthians 8:4) The rabbinical view was that meat that had been offered to idols in the pagan temples and subsequently offered for sale in the marketplace was tainted, and thus forbidden. Paul says, "Hey, it's just meat, the same as any other. Since the idol is nothing, it has no power to accept, consecrate, or defile a sacrifice that's offered to it. Believe me, the cow doesn't know the difference." However, Paul went on to say that there are circumstances that would make it improper to eat "things offered to idols." But they have nothing at all to do with the meat itself, but rather to the damage one could do to the weak conscience of a less mature believer. "Food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." (I Corinthians 8:8-9) In the real world, Yahweh's law of love trumps everything else.

(317)

Not to drink wine of idolaters (Deut. 32:38) (CCN15). See Grape Products.

Do not drink the wine of idolaters. "For Yahweh will judge His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is no one remaining, bond or free. He will say: 'Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge, who ate the fat of

their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you, and be your refuge.” (Deuteronomy 32:36-38) Maimonides has completely missed the point—again. Yahweh is looking forward to a time when He will have to judge His people Israel because of their idolatry—the very thing He incessantly warned them about.

Eventually, Moses relates, it will get so bad that He has to evict them from their Land until no Jew is left there (can you spell Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Vespasian, or Hadrian?). They will have to live out their generations in exile, wondering why the false gods they worshipped with their burnt sacrifices and to whom they poured out their drink offerings never answered them or came to their rescue. Did Maimonides not realize that he was penning his prevarications in Cairo, not Jerusalem? Was he so comfortable in exile that he didn’t notice that Yahweh had divorced his people?

Don’t skip over the line, “Yahweh...will have compassion on His servants.” Daniel predicts (in 12:7) that during the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation, the power of Yahweh’s people Israel will once again be “completely shattered”—one last time they will be driven from the Land (by the Antichrist’s “abomination of desolation”). This time, however, their exile will teach them to trust in Yahweh and His Messiah. The result will be the final and permanent restoration of Israel.

How incredibly sad it is to see that even today, the Jews take this Torah passage and torture it until they’ve derived a complicated system of what grape products are okay and which ones aren’t. The Judaism 101 website reports that because of idolatrous gentile practices, “The use of wines and other grape products made by non-Jews was prohibited. (Whole grapes are not a problem, nor are whole grapes in fruit cocktail). For the most part, this rule only affects wine and grape juice. This becomes a concern with many fruit drinks or fruit-flavored drinks, which are often sweetened with grape juice. You may also notice that some baking powders are not kosher, because baking powder is sometimes made with cream of tartar, a by-product of wine making.” I mourn for the blindness of my Jewish brothers, and long for the day when Yahshua will restore their sight.

(318)

Not to worship an idol in the way in which it is usually worshipped (Ex. 20:5) (CCN12).

Do not worship an idol in the way in which it is usually worshipped. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.” (Exodus 20:4-5) We discussed the Second Commandment in Mitzvot #312 and

following. There the rabbinical emphasis was on making idols; here it's on worshipping them. What Maimonides is missing is that an "idol" can be anything that we "serve" in place of God. It doesn't have to be a statue that we physically bow before. It can be our career, our leisure time activities, religion, sex, power, money, drugs, or any of a thousand other things that may or may not be "bad" in themselves. It can even be our interpretation of the Torah! If it takes the place of Yahweh in our affections, it is a "graven image" that needs to be removed from our lives.

(319)

Not to bow down to an idol, even if that is not its mode of worship (Ex. 20:5) (CCN11).

Do not bow down to an idol, even if that is not its mode of worship. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them." (Exodus 20:4-5) Here's the Second Commandment again. All these nuances that Maimonides has been listing for the last few entries are beside the point if we understand that we are to revere Yahweh alone.

The interesting thing to note is that under normal circumstances, Yahweh doesn't even want us "bowing down" to Him! Yes, we are to recognize His suzerainty, but He would much prefer to see us walking upright with Him, being as comfortably conversant with Him as Adam was before he fell into sin. Genesis 17:1 describes the relationship Yahweh wants to share with us. He said to Abraham, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless." Without losing sight of His majesty and power, we are to interact with our Maker confidently, honestly, face-to-face. But blamelessly? How is that possible? Strong's defines *tamiym* as "Complete, whole, entire, sound, healthful, wholesome, unimpaired, innocent, having integrity—entirely in accord with truth and fact." If we're honest with ourselves, we realize that we're sinful creatures: we are not blameless. But as with Abraham, Yahweh is willing to count our faith as righteousness.

If we trust Him, we are *tamiym* before Him.

(320)

Not to prophesy in the name of an idol (Ex. 23:13; Deut. 18:20) (CCN27).

Do not prophesy in the name of an idol. "And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth." (Exodus 23:13); "But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die."

(Deuteronomy 18:20) There are two related concepts here, both important. First, because Yahweh wants His word before us at all times, there is no room for talk of “other gods.” If we think of Him as one among a pantheon, we will not comprehend His uniqueness, His holiness.

Second, if we speak of “other gods” as if they were real like Yahweh is, we are lying; and worse, we are attempting to prevent our audience from having a relationship with Yahweh—a very bad thing, worthy of the death penalty. “Speaking in the name” of something is not some esoteric religious formula, by the way. “Name” is the Hebrew word *shem*, meaning either one’s name, reputation, character, or renown. When one says, “So-and-so says this (or does this, or thinks this),” we are “speaking in his name.” When a Muslim shouts “Allahu akbar” (“Allah is greater”) as he fires his Kalashnikov into the air, he is “speaking in the name of another god.”

Yahweh says, “That prophet shall die.”

(321)

Not to hearken to one who prophesies in the name of an idol (Deut. 13:4) (CCN22).

Do not hearken to one who prophesies in the name of an idol. “If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for Yahweh your God is testing you to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after Yahweh your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.” (Deuteronomy 13:1-4) Maimonides got this one right, though his summary misses the impact of the Torah. This is where systematically removing Yahweh’s name from the Bible really becomes a problem—which is why I’ve restored Yahweh’s name in place of the title that has been systematically substituted for it, “the LORD.” If you don’t know who your God is—by name—then you’re going to be more vulnerable when somebody comes along and does some really cool signs and wonders, attributing them to “God.” Remember how Pharaoh was led astray by the “miracles” performed by his court magicians, replicating the signs Yahweh had given Moses and Aaron to do to validate their mission? Miracles can be faked. Especially today.

There’s not a lot of this sort of thing recorded in scripture, however. Most advocates of false gods are pathetically ineffectual in presenting evidence to back their claims. But in our not-so-distant future, a false prophet will arise, performing signs that will seem to prove the deity of his counterpart, a man we’ve come to know as “the Antichrist.” John explains: “Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a

dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” (Revelation 13:11-15) There it is: deceptive signs designed to make people worship one who is not god—the very scenario about which we were warned back in Deuteronomy. The Antichrist (the “first beast”) will try to pass himself off as the Messiah. Remarkably, the lie will work on much of the world.

(322)

Not to lead the children of Israel astray to idolatry (Ex. 23:13) (CCN14).

Do not lead the children of Israel astray to idolatry. “In all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.” (Exodus 23:13) Nice thought. Too bad the rabbis never paid attention to their own mitzvah, leading Israel into the idolatry of pride, intellect, and pointless works designed to impress a god they don’t know and whose name they won’t utter. What the NKJV renders “be circumspect” is the Hebrew word *shamar*, which means keep, guard, watch, preserve, attend, observe, protect, etc. And “make no mention of” isn’t a particularly good translation either.

Zakar basically means to remember, to proclaim what has been remembered, to commemorate. Moses, then, is telling his audience to carefully observe the Torah just the way Yahweh delivered it, and not to honor and memorialize a counterfeit system of “laws.” The religion of Judaism today, far from being the key to the mind of God as the rabbis contend, is the very antithesis of this mitzvah and the Torah from which it was wrested.

(323)

Not to entice an Israelite to idolatry (Deut. 13:12) (CCN23).

Do not entice an Israelite to idolatry. “If you hear someone in one of your cities, which Yahweh your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods”’—which you have not known—then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the

inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword.” (Deuteronomy 13:12-15) This passage doesn’t only apply to apostate cities, but to individuals as well, as witnessed in the preceding verses (6-11). Yahweh, in His warnings to theocratic Israel designed to keep the nation pure and set apart for

His purpose, was really serious about dealing with idolatry among His people. Yahweh’s Messiah would be delivered to the world through this nation. If they fell into total idolatry (like the Canaanites they were instructed to displace in the Land), the very existence of Israel would have been jeopardized. Without abridging individual choice, Yahweh had to keep His people set apart from the nations.

(324)

To destroy idolatry and its appurtenances (Deut. 12:2-3) (affirmative).

Destroy idolatry and its appurtenances. “You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship Yahweh your God with such things.” (Deuteronomy 12:2-4) Without instruction, the Israelite conquerors of Canaan might have been tempted to simply use whatever worship facilities they found, change the name of the deity from Ba’al (or Chemosh, Astarte, Molech, Dagon, or any of a dozen others) to Yahweh, and call it a day. But Yahweh (being the real God) had specified a different form of worship for His people—a system of sacrifices, holidays, and “appurtenances” that told the unfolding story of mankind’s salvation in its every detail. Every nuance of the Levitical ritual prescribed in the Torah was prophetic of the coming Messiah.

The sad history of Israel from the Conquest to their final exile can be traced back to their refusal to do what Moses instructed here. Sadder still is the adoption and assimilation of pagan practices into the liturgy of the Church—a process begun in earnest at the time of Constantine. Having seen what had happened to Israel, we should have known better. What part of “You shall not worship Yahweh your God with such things” didn’t they understand? And don’t think you’re immune to the legacy of pagan infiltration just because you’re a “Protestant.” As long as you celebrate Easter and Christmas in place of Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, you remain under the indictment of this mitzvah.

(325)

Not to love the enticer to idolatry (Deut. 13:9) (CCN24).

Do not love the enticer to idolatry. “If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.” (Deuteronomy 13:6-11) Maimonides is going to wring the next five mitzvot out of this passage, so I figured I’d better quote the whole thing. The first thing we should notice is that Yahweh did not tell us not to love someone—even an idolater. What He is telling us to do is make the hard choices if we must: to put away the evil influences from among us, even if it means rejecting a member of our own family or turning our back on our best friend. The greater good must be considered. We are not being told not to love the enticer to idolatry— rather, we are being told to do something far more difficult: to slay someone we do love in order to protect the community from falling into idolatry.

The instruction to stone those who would entice us to idolatry was obviously meant to apply only within theocratic Israel. If we tried to keep this law today, we’d have to kill every politician, advertising writer, and rock star in the country, along with half the clergy. The principle, however, still applies to all of us. We are to “kill” the influence of those who would divert our affections from Yahweh to something else—anything else.

(326)

Not to give up hating the enticer to idolatry (Deut. 13:9) (CCN25).

Do not give up hating the enticer to idolatry. “If [someone] entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ ...you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him.” (Deuteronomy 13:69) This is merely the negative restatement of the previous mitzvah. Again, hatred is not part of Yahweh’s instruction—but the merciless rejection of false teaching and false teachers is. Tolerance is not a godly virtue, as strange as that may seem. God wants us to know His word and unequivocally denounce the teachings that contradict it. The sort of lowest-common

denominator ecumenical spirit that passes for “Christian unity” today makes God want to puke—and those are His words, not mine—see Revelation 3:16.

(327)

Not to save the enticer from capital punishment, but to stand by at his execution (Deut. 13:9) (negative).

Do not save the enticer from capital punishment, but stand by at his execution. “...You shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.” (Deuteronomy 13:9-11) No, Maimonides, you pathetic wimp! It says that you—the one who has been enticed to follow strange gods—are to cast the first stone. Don’t “stand by” and let the mob do your “wet work” for you. You do it! Be personally involved in defending the faith.

I should interject here that “enticement away from Yahweh your God” is not remotely the same thing as rejecting the burden of religion that men have laid upon your shoulders in an attempt to subjugate you. First-century Pharisees were guilty of this, but they were pikers compared to the Roman Catholic Church, who killed millions of Christians over the centuries who merely wished to serve God and study His Word—Hussites, Albigensians, Waldensians, Huguenots, and others. Torquemada and his ilk were defending the Roman religious system, not the Word of God.

I should also note (because Maimonides doesn’t) that the reason the enticer was to be executed was not only to “put away the evil from your midst” (Deuteronomy 13:5), but also as a deterrent, “So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.” Political liberals today contend that the death penalty has no deterrent value. Yahweh begs to differ, but it has to be applied even-handedly, consistently, and without prejudice if we want it to serve as a disincentive. Otherwise, it’s just punishment.

(328)

A person whom he attempted to entice to idolatry shall not urge pleas for the acquittal of the enticer (Deut. 13:9) (CCN26).

A person whom he attempted to entice into idolatry shall not urge pleas for the acquittal of the enticer. “...You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall

you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him.” (Deuteronomy 13:8-9) Remember, the “enticer” in these verses is characterized in a worst-case scenario: one’s brother, child, spouse, or friend—someone near and dear to you. The natural inclination is to hide the crime, to go into a state of denial. Yahweh says, “Be honest with yourself, and be honest with Me. You know what you heard. Deal with it.” If a cancerous tumor is growing, you must cut it out, remove it, throw it away. I know it will be painful, but if you don’t do what’s necessary, the patient will die.

(329)

A person whom he attempted to entice shall not refrain from giving evidence of the enticer’s guilt, if he has such evidence (Deut. 13:9) (negative).

A person whom he attempted to entice shall not refrain from giving evidence of the enticer’s guilt, if he has such evidence. “...You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him.”

(Deuteronomy 13:8-9) We must be very careful to define the circumstances under which one is not to listen to, pity, spare, or conceal the faults of the offender. This passage (quoted fully in Mitzvah #325) deals only with him who entices someone to false worship—in other words, a false or misleading prophet, someone who advocates serving something or someone other than Yahweh. It is not speaking of human retribution for ordinary sins—places where we all fall short of Yahweh’s perfect standard of conduct. In fact, our response to those foibles is precisely the opposite: “[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (I Corinthians 13:7) “Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’” (I Peter 4:8, quoting Proverbs 10:12) The point is, Yahweh knows we’re sinners. Because He loves us, He has provided a means by which our sins can be eliminated, so we can be restored to fellowship. Therefore, the only real evil is preventing people from availing themselves of God’s mercy.

(330)

Not to swear by an idol to its worshipers, nor cause them to swear by it (Ex. 23:13) (CCN13).

Do not swear by an idol to its worshipers, nor cause them to swear by it. “In all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.” (Exodus 23:13) We saw this same text back in Mitzvot #320 and #322. On the face of it, Maimonides has betrayed a total lack of understanding of the Torah’s teaching concerning idolatry. Here he is describing the fine points of how God’s people are to relate to the idol worshippers among them: “Don’t try to gain their allegiance by giving lip service to their

gods.” But the Israelites weren’t to relate with them at all—they were supposed to kill them—to rid the Land of their presence and memory. And although we no longer live in theocratic Israel (the only place physical death is prescribed), the principle still applies. We are to remain watchful, being careful not to commemorate the name or character of any entity that might vie with Yahweh for a place in our affections.

(331)

Not to turn one’s attention to idolatry (Lev. 19:4) (CCN16).

Do not turn one’s attention to idolatry. “Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am Yahweh your God.” (Leviticus 19:4) That’s pretty clear. Of special interest here is that “gods” and “God” are the same word in the Hebrew text—*elohim*, the plural form of *’el* or *eloah*, the generic name for “deity” or “mighty one.” Things that are worshiped or revered are referred to as *elohim*. But Yahweh is One. How can “He” be plural? The answer lies in His willingness to manifest Himself in less-than-infinite forms we humans can relate to and fellowship with—Yahshua: Immanuel, God existing as a man, characterized as the “Son” of God; and the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Qodesh*): the maternal manifestation of Yahweh dwelling within each believer, comforting, guiding, and admonishing us. These are real. But idols we’ve manufactured (even if only in our minds) are none of those things. They are totally unworthy of our attention and devotion.

(332)

Do not adopt the institutions of idolaters nor their customs. “I am Yahweh your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am Yahweh your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 18:2-5) “And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them.” (Leviticus 20:23) Maimonides is correct here: the Israelites were to reject the practices, laws, and customs of the world from which they were escaping, as well as those of the Land they were being given. The key to why is the phrase repeated three times in the Leviticus 18 passage: “I am Yahweh your God.” Yahweh’s character changed everything.

We need to recognize that not everything the Egyptians and Canaanites did was evil. They too had consciences, and some of their practices no doubt aligned with God’s Law—I’m sure they considered murder a bad thing, for example. But Yahweh had an entirely new paradigm

planned for the Israelites. They were to be holy—that is, set apart from the surrounding peoples for God’s purposes. That meant that every detail of their law and custom would have to be re-invented and re-defined according to Yahweh’s plan. They couldn’t just keep the “good” parts of the previous societies and try to fix what had obviously gone wrong.

That’s why Moses delivered instruction concerning everything from what you should eat, to who you could marry, to when to give your donkey a rest, to how to honor God. Even when the laws themselves bore some resemblance to the existing customs of the land, the reasons for the laws were brand new. One way or another, they all pointed toward the coming Messiah and toward Yahweh’s master plan for the redemption of the human race.

In application to our generation, we should not merely say, “Okay, I won’t do what Egyptians and Canaanites did,” and call it a day. We too are to be holy, set apart, insulated, and isolated from the influences of the world. We have to live here, but we don’t have to be of here. The land in which we sojourn has laws and customs, but we need to bear in mind that there is a Law that takes precedence—Yahweh’s law of love.

(333)

Do not pass a child through the fire to Molech. “You shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh.”

(Leviticus 18:21) Molech (or Moloch) was a permutation of Ba’al. Fair warning: this gets pretty sick. Heathen worshippers in Canaan were required to avail themselves of the temple prostitutes. The children born of these unions were unwanted baggage, so the satanic priesthood came up with a perfect way to deal with the little bastards. A bronze statue of Molech was brought to red heat and the hapless children were placed in its outstretched arms to die. No one was allowed to grieve or mourn, for the fire, it was said, was a purifying instrument through which the people’s sins were purged. One of the places that this horrendous rite was practiced was the Valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna, just south of the old city of Jerusalem—earning it the dubious distinction of being Yahshua’s chosen metaphor for hell.

So here we see Yahweh warning His people not to do this evil thing, decades before they even entered the Promised Land. Did they listen? No. Jeremiah reports, “They built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. Now therefore, thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, concerning this city... It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.” (Jeremiah 32:35-56)

If you think this abominable practice died out with the Canaanites, I've got some bad news. It was resurrected—in a less gruesome form—in the medieval holiday bonfires of European Catholicism; Christmas. And it lives on today in the myth of purgatory, which the Roman church insists (contrary to the plain teaching of scripture) is necessary for the purging of individual sin. Vatican II states: “the doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or cleansed.... In purgatory the souls of those who died in the charity of God and were truly repentant but who had not made satisfaction with adequate penance for their sins and omissions [making the Catholic church stinking rich, I might add] are cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt.” Gee, and I thought Yahshua's sacrifice on Calvary took care of all that. What was I thinkin'? Apparently Molech has moved out of Canaan and rented a condo in Rome.

(334)

Do not allow anyone practicing witchcraft to live. “You shall not permit a sorceress to live.” (Exodus 22:18) The Hebrew word translated “sorceress” is actually a verb, *kasap*, meaning to practice magic or sorcery, to use supernatural (i.e., demonic) powers. Listed among King Manasseh's many sins was *kasap*: “he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists.” (II Chronicles 33:6) Notice God's instruction here: it's not to disavow the use of sorcery. That's taken care of elsewhere. Rather, it's to make sure that no one who practices such things survives. Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem and yet no one bothered to invoke Exodus 22:18. This means all of Judah was guilty under the law for not dealing with Manasseh's sin.

It is also instructive to see the kind of things Yahweh promises to lump in with practicing sorcery when it comes time for judgment: “And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers (*kasap*), against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien — because they do not fear Me, says Yahweh of hosts.” (Malachi 3:5) One way or another, he's just touched on Commandments 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Sorcery is not only placing “another god” before Yahweh, it's also the very essence of what it is to regard the name of Yahweh as worthlessness—which is what the Third Commandment is all about.

(335)

Do not practice one in (observing times or seasons as favorable or unfavorable, using astrology). “You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying.” (Leviticus 19:26) The word translated “soothsaying” is the Hebrew *anan*, which

shows up in Maimonides' mitzvot as *onein*. Strong's defines it as: "to practice soothsaying, to conjure, to observe times [i.e., as an occult practice], practice soothsaying or spiritism or magic or augury or witchcraft." As a noun, it means, "soothsayer, enchanter, sorceress, diviner, fortuneteller, or barbarian." It also means "to bring clouds," and is used in reference to such things as the "pillar of cloud" that accompanied the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings, clouds of incense representing the prayers of the saints, or in the ubiquitous eschatological mention of the clouds (see for example Zephaniah 1:15 or Daniel 7:13) that will announce Yahweh's judgment in the last days. The "cloud" angle brings the word into focus: it's saying that we are not to do, or even simulate, the works God has reserved for Himself. Some deeds remain Yahweh's prerogative alone; some knowledge remains His exclusive purview.

(336)

Do not practice *nachesh* (doing things based on signs and portents; using charms and incantations). "You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying." (Leviticus 19:26) "Divination" is the rendering of the Hebrew *nachash*, meaning to practice divination, to observe occult or astrological signs, practice fortunetelling, or to take something as an omen. It includes interpreting omens or signs as a way to discern the will or plan of God (or the gods). The point is that when Yahweh wants us to know something specific about the future, he instructs His prophets to write it down.

It is our responsibility to read the Scriptures and use them to discern what Yahweh has revealed about our future. We are not to do the kind of thing Constantine did. He saw a cross in the sky and "heard" a voice saying, "In this sign conquer," and proceeded to act upon the omen, slaughtering his enemies to attain temporal power and then using that power to subjugate millions in the name of religion. He was not listening to the voice of God, no matter what the omen said; he was merely practicing *nachash*.

Yahshua Himself addressed the problem, for the religious elite of His day—who, having the Torah, should have known better—demanded a sign, an omen, that would prove His credentials. "When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had arrived, they came to argue with him. Testing him to see if he was from God, they demanded, 'Give us a miraculous sign from heaven to prove yourself.' When he heard this, he sighed deeply and said, 'Why do you people keep demanding a miraculous sign? I assure you, I will not give this generation any such sign.'

So he got back into the boat and left them, and he crossed to the other side of the lake." (Mark

8:11-13 NLT) They had the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms, and all of it spoke of the Messiah, one way or another. The Pharisees didn't want to believe any of that, but they were all too willing to accept an occult "sign" if it would demonstrate His standing with God.

Yahshua, knowing the Torah, wouldn't play their game.

(337)

Do not consult ovoth (ghosts). "Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am Yahweh your God." (Leviticus 19:31) The Hebrew word translated "medium" here is 'owb, which according to the Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains means either a "medium, i.e., a spiritist or necromancer that conjures and communicates with ghosts," or the ghost itself, a "spirit of the dead, i.e., a spirit which can communicate with human mediums, called from the underworld of the dead." The word is derived from its primary meaning: a wineskin—something that holds, contains, or dispenses something else. The point is not that ghosts don't exist, but rather that information about the future is not to be sought from anything or anyone but Yahweh Himself.

The definitive anecdote on this subject is, of course, King Saul's consultation with the witch of En Dor, recorded in I Samuel 28:7-25. Samuel the seer had died, and the disobedient king's prayers for guidance were bouncing off the ceiling, as it were. So he consulted an 'owb to bring Samuel back from the dead for a little chat. In a hilarious scene, the medium, more used to channeling demons (or merely faking her séances) to hoodwink her gullible clientele, actually did call up Samuel's ghost. Oops. The prophet, annoyed at having been disturbed from his well-deserved rest, bluntly informed Saul that the Philistines were going to defeat Israel in battle, and that Saul and his sons would be killed. The moral of the story: don't cut off communication with Yahweh, and if you do, don't expect any good news you hear from another source to be true.

(338)

Do not consult yid'onim (wizards). "Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am Yahweh your God." (Leviticus 19:31) A yidoni is similar to an 'owb. In fact, the two words always appear in parallel in scripture. Yidoni is alternately translated wizard, familiar spirit, fortune teller, magician, or sorcerer. As with 'owb, there is some ambiguity as to whether the word refers to the spirit or the one who conjures it up. Yahweh is very clear on this issue: do not regard them; do not seek them—they will defile you. He ends His warning with the ubiquitous raison d'être for following His instructions: He is Yahweh our God. As always, that is reason enough for doing what He says.

(339)

Do not practice *kisuf* (magic using herbs, stones and objects). “There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh, and because of these abominations Yahweh your God drives them [the Canaanites] out from before you. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) Mitzvot #339 through #344 are all taken from the same couple of verses. Yahweh is denouncing the practice of seeking esoteric knowledge in as many ways as the Hebrew language will allow. He wants us rather to rely on Him for revelation. His Word is a lens through which we can discern the truth or falsehood of a matter, while everything listed here is an attempt to circumvent our reliance on Him. Bear in mind that the anglicized spelling of these Hebrew words varies widely from source to source. This first word is *kashaph*, translated “sorcerer” here. It is a verb meaning to engage in witchcraft, be a sorcerer, or to practice the black magic arts.

(340)

Do not practice *kessem* (a general term for magical practices). “There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) The phrase “practices witchcraft” is rendered from the Hebrew *qasam qesem*. It means “to practice divination, to seek an omen, or to state or determine the future (or hidden knowledge) through signs, omens, or supernatural power.” (Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains) There are “four broad classes of divination: (1) the position of stars; (2) speaking with dead spirits; (3) examining animal parts or potsherds [reading palms or tea leaves would fall into this category]; (4) casting lots for a yes or no answer. A ‘lot’ is a specially marked small stick, pebble, or shard thrown down for making decisions based on pagan views of chance, or believers using the lot perceived as quasi-chance, but believed to be guided by God.” In other words, *qasam qesem* is arranging your life according to astrology, necromancy, voodoo, or even just flipping a coin. All these things are an abomination to Yahweh. We are to be guided by His Word and Spirit, not by chance or self-deception.

We do have examples of Joshua casting lots to find out the sin of Achan. We also have examples of lots being cast to decide which goat was the Azazel goat at The Day of Atonement. You have another in Proverbs 16:33 and another when the sailors cast lots to find out Jonah’s sin.

As we have been reading it is when you do these things and are not consulting Yehovah. The casting of lots when not done in association with Yehovah is wrong. What we have and what we are looking at are those who consult with demonic powers. This is what we are not to do.

(341)

Do not practice the art of a chover chaver (casting spells over snakes and scorpions). “There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.”

(Deuteronomy 18:10-12) The phrase “conjures spells” is chabar cheber, another related verb-noun combination like qasam qesem. Chabar means “to unite, join, bind together, be coupled, be in league with, heap up, or have fellowship with.” (S) Likewise, the noun cheber connotes association, co-habitation, a banding together. The phrase therefore suggests casting magic spells uniting the object with demonic forces via incantations. This type of illicit religious charm would be used to invoke satanic power. The incantation could be made either verbally or through actions like tying magic knots. Thus a chabar cheber is an enchanter, one who makes and invokes unlawful incantations of various kinds. The Islamic Hadith makes it clear that Muhammad was a chabar cheber.

(342)

Do not enquire of an ob (a ghost). “There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) We’ve seen this warning before (in Mitzvah #337). If you’ll recall, an ’owb is either a “medium, i.e., a spiritist or necromancer that conjures and communicates with ghosts,” or the ghost itself, a “spirit of the dead, i.e., a spirit which can communicate with human mediums, called from the underworld of the dead.” Once again, the instruction is to rely on Yahweh alone for information concerning future or hidden events. And even if He hasn’t told you specifically what to expect tomorrow, He has at least told you what to do today: Love God, and love your neighbor.

(343)

Do not seek the maytim (dead). “There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) To darash muwth is to “call up the dead.”

The phrase fully amplified means to resort to, seek, enquire of, consult, investigate, or worship the dead. This, of course, is precisely what Saul did in I Samuel 28. But it also warns against the kind of ancestor worship we see in Eastern religions. And closer to home, it is a stern indictment of the Catholic-style “veneration” of saints, praying not to Yahweh through His “Son” Yahshua, but to an unnamed and misunderstood deity through the good graces of “saints,” dead people to whom has been attributed some sort of magical power. Mary, for example, was a good and faithful woman, but she has no power to help you—and if she came back from the dead like Samuel did, she would tell you as much! Yahweh has spoken: You shall not call up the dead.

(344)

Do not enquire of a yid’oni (wizard). “There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) We’ve run into the yidoni before, back in Mitzvah #338, which is practically identical to this one, though based on a different Torah passage. A yidoni, you’ll recall, is a wizard, familiar spirit, fortune teller, magician, or sorcerer, and the word can apply to either the spirit or the guy who conjures him up.

There are a few words in Moses’ list here in Deuteronomy 18 that Maimonides covered elsewhere, so I’ll take this opportunity to reprise them. The word translated “soothsayer” here is ‘anan, which we covered in Mitzvah #335. It’s a verb meaning: “to practice soothsaying, to conjure, to observe times [i.e., as an occult practice], practice soothsaying, spiritism, magic, augury, or witchcraft.” (S) Its noun form denotes a “soothsayer, enchanter, sorceress, diviner, or fortune teller.” We’ve also seen “one who conjures spells” or “interprets omens” (as its worded in the NASB) elsewhere. Mitzvah #336 prohibited nachash, a verb meaning “to practice divination, to observe occult or astrological signs, practice fortunetelling, or to take something as an omen, including interpreting omens or signs.” The bottom line: Yahweh is crystal clear about His hatred of occult practices. Consult Him alone.

(345)

Do not remove the entire beard, like the idolaters. “You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard.” (Leviticus 19:27) Maimonides is correct in connecting the practice of “disfiguring” the beard with the style that had been practiced by the idolaters of Canaan. The connection is clear in the larger context in Leviticus. I get the feeling that Yahweh isn’t so much interested in condemning a particular fashion statement as He is in

warning us not to emulate the world. This principle is particularly timely today, when we are bombarded with images of wannabe “idols.” I remember back in the mid-60s when the Beatles hit the scene. Almost overnight, everyone was wearing his hair a little longer than before. God may not have objected to slightly longer hair per se, but to grow it out in imitation of a group of musicians was wrong.

The fashions we adopt say a lot about us. The more extreme our personal styles—the more they differ from the societal norm—the stronger our statements become. For example, in Israel, groups of “Hasidic” style ultra-orthodox Jews (popularly known as “black-hats”) compete with each other in modes of dress. The goofier the outfit, the more fundamental and strict the doctrine—or at least that’s what they’d like you to believe. The mode of dress is based not on what the typical Israeli would wear, but rather on what would have been worn by the average Jewish guy in an Eastern European ghetto two or three hundred years ago. In short, the black-hats are showing off—displaying their religious pride by flouting convention.

We’re left with a quandary. Fashions shift with time and place. Are believers to follow style trends, or are we to petrify our fashion sense in some bygone century? I believe the answer is: neither. As usual, the key is motive. Going out of our way to look like one thing or another is probably not such a hot idea. But if everybody in your community—regardless of their political, religious, or economic persuasion—is dressing one way, there’s no reason to buck the trend. There is no such thing as “Christian fashion” (provided, of course, that men look like men, women look like women, and your wardrobe isn’t designed to engender lust in the opposite sex—see Mizvot #365-367). There is nothing particularly “holy” about fashion that’s thirty years out of date.

To learn more about the maring of the beard you can go to:

News Letter 5846-038 Thou Shalt Grow a Beard! Really? & Judah the Lawgiver?

https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/?page_id=686

News Letter 5846-039 Tonsuring or Shaving the Head and the Kipa

https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/?page_id=690

Do not round the corners of the head, as the idolatrous priests do. “You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard.” (Leviticus 19:27) Same song, second verse. Again, Moses was warning his people not to adopt the fashion statements of idolaters because they’re idolaters. It’s all a question of motivation. Don’t cut your hair (or grow it out) because some rock star does it. Don’t wear baggy pants because you want to look tough like a gang banger.

Don’t wear a daisy in your lapel because your favorite news anchor does.

Leviticus 19:17 is speaking to the custom of disfiguring your head when people mourn for the dead. This is not to be done as the next verse shows us it all done to honour the dead. We are not to do this.

(347)

Do not cut oneself or make incisions in one’s flesh in grief, like the idolaters. “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:28) “You are the children of Yahweh your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God, and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

(Deuteronomy 14:1-2) God is not talking about fashion here—earrings and the like. He’s warning against self-mutilation done in the name of religion. The classic Biblical illustration is in I Kings 18, where Elijah challenged the priests of Ba’al to a “prophets’ duel” to demonstrate once and for all whose god was really God. “And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.” (I Kings 18:27-29) Satan loves to see us bleeding and in pain, and if it’s self-inflicted, so much the better.

Yahweh, though—the inventor of life—tells us that our “life is in the blood.” And pain was something He built into our bodies to warn us when something’s wrong. The last thing He wants to see is for us to suffer pain and shed our blood in a misguided attempt to placate Him. So why do tens of thousands of Muslims cut their flesh in Ramadan rites at the Kaaba every year trying to gain the blessing of Allah—a false god who’s never blessed anybody? Why do twenty million pilgrims a year visit the shrine of the “Virgin of Guadalupe” in Mexico City, many walking for

days and then crawling on bloodied knees the last few hundred meters of the journey to show their devotion to an apparition some guy named Juan says he saw back in 1531? Yahweh plainly said not to do such things.

(348)

Do not tattoo the body like the idolaters. “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:28) Tattoos have grown quite popular of late. I have no idea why. I even have Christian friends who advertise their faith with Christian tattoos. The passage at hand, as Maimonides notes, is primarily a warning against emulating the idolaters in our midst. Does it apply to “faith-neutral” tattoos or Christian body art? I’d be inclined to take Yahweh’s word for it and call it a day. Yahweh has issued these instructions for our benefit—we can either heed them or not—it’s our skin that’s at risk. Maybe it’s like eating pork and shellfish: if there are consequences, He didn’t enumerate them. He just said, “Don’t.”

(349)

Do not make a bald spot for the dead. “You are the children of Yahweh your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead.” (Deuteronomy 14:1) Here is one more example of something that might have been done in imitation of the idolatrous people of Canaan. Although there’s not much of this going on today (quite the opposite, in fact, with baldness-remedy sales going through the roof) the principle still applies:

we are God’s people. We are not to pattern our lives, beliefs, or even fashions, after the godless world we see around us.

My personal “favorite” contemporary example of this sort of thing is the “baggy pants” look favored by inner city youth. Why in the world do they prefer ill-fitting trousers? It turns out that the “fashion” got started in jail, where such things as belts and shoe laces were taken away from the inmates so they couldn’t be used as weapons or implements for suicide. Without belts to hold them up, the offenders’ pants tended to droop a bit. In time, this droop became an indicator of prison experience, and kids wanting to look as tough as these convicts affected the same falling-pants style. My pants are falling off—That means I’m a bad dude—don’t mess with me or my crew.... I know it sounds stupid—as stupid as shaving a bald spot on your forehead so you’ll look like a bigwig with Ba’al. That’s the kind of foolishness Yahweh is warning against here.