

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

# Laws Against Idolatry

***Know this day, and consider it in your heart,  
that the Lord alone is God in heaven above  
and upon the earth beneath;  
there is none else.***

— Deuteronomy 4:39<sup>1</sup>

**T**he King of the Universe warns and beseeches not only Israel but every creature with the ears to hear and the brain to heed this eternal, Universal Commandment:

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”<sup>2</sup>

For it is the principal object of the Law, and the axis around which it turns, to blot out these [idolatrous] opinions from man’s heart and make the existence of idolatry impossible. — *Maimonides*<sup>3</sup>

All Divine law comes back to the same all-important point: You shall have no other god nor gods but God, your Maker; whatever other allegiances you may have, you owe your first and last allegiance to the One holy Lord Who sustains you. He Who Created you to honor, follow and worship Him alone reveals this to you (through Israel, His special agent): you shall follow no spirit, force or deity besides God; you shall worship no one and *nothing* created but only Him, the Creator, your Judge.

People make their bellies their gods, their fine clothes their law, and their household maintenance their ethics. — *Ibn Yosef*<sup>4</sup>

An idol is a false god, a non-god — an imagined or created “god” other than God. Man, the only creature that directly confronts the Universe as he knows it as a thinking individual,<sup>5</sup>

must always follow either gods or God. Because man needs to devote himself to a leader, a cause, or at least some concept of ultimate good, to guide him. God Created us so, for our own good, for His greater Glory.<sup>6</sup>

[T]here is no god but He in Whom the people of Israel believe.  
— *Muhammed*<sup>7</sup>

We — human beings — are creatures who always seek to know who and what and where we are. We constantly need to center ourselves, to fix our position, as it were, in real existence. From the time we can speak we spend almost every waking moment orienting ourselves to personally ruling concepts of ultimate goodness and final purpose. Man takes all those concepts, all his values, from his highest allegiances. In other words, we all pursue either gods or God.

Idolatry describes the act of worshipping a non-god: of following, with attachment and devotion, any thing or being or appetite or power instead of or in preference to the One Eternal God.

Of course some kinds of idolatry are grosser and more overt than others. One thinks of wild pagan blood-cults. But conforming to peer pressure instead of conscience — what one knows or should know to be right, joined to one's fear of the All-Knowing Judge — also exemplifies idolatry.

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the Commandments is Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is One Lord.— *Mark 12:29*<sup>8</sup>

Introducing as it does the foremost Teaching of the Hebrew Revolution,<sup>9</sup> the law against idolatry outweighs all other Commandments.<sup>10</sup> Maimonides puts it first among the Noahide laws.<sup>11</sup>

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Whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, a *Ben Israel* or a *Ben Noah*, whoever professes idolatry rejects the entirety — the basis, the essence — of God's Law.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, as the rabbis say, whoever genuinely rejects idolatry affirms Israel's entire Torah.<sup>13</sup>

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