



## THE FIERY SHOWDOWN

What is worse: worshiping idols,  
or doing a bit of both – idols and G-d?  
Lessons from the great showdown on Mt. Carmel.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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Elijah the Prophet called for a public showdown between himself and the priests of the Baal, in order to finally put to rest the question of who was right and who the true god was. The dramatic day climaxed with fire descending from heaven and consuming only Elijah's offering. Following that event, the Jewish people repented. (Source 1)e

The Sages tell a fascinating anecdote: the bull designated by the Baal priests as an offering refused to budge and be sacrificed to an idol, only relenting once Elijah explained to it that it too would be playing a crucial role in sanctifying G-d's name - just like the bull that he would sacrifice to G-d (Source 2). The prophets of the Baal planned to deceive the audience and hide a man under the altar who would light a fire. Miraculously, he was bitten by a snake and died. (Source 3)

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The Rebbe explains that the bull's refusal to go is a human tendency. People tend to avoid essential actions which they deem beneath their dignity, or a departure from their spiritual zone of comfort. The lesson from Elijah is that this attitude is misguided.

(Story of Reb Yosef the wagon driver - the great scholar sent to be a wagon driver to help a Jew return to G-d.)

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Elijah's call to the Jews is perplexing. Rather than asking them to serve G-d, he asks them to make a decision between the two options. Those who sit on the fence without taking a position are worse off than those who worship Baal, for three reasons: (a) It can be harder for them to repent, because they can excuse themselves saying they also believe in G-d; (b) unlike the Baal worshiper, they knew G-d, yet rebelled against Him for material gain; and (c) their influence on others is more harmful because they are still considered part of the community.

The Talmud says that the inclination towards idolatry was removed from the world (Source 4), however "fence-sitting"—the human tendency to want the best of both worlds without

committing to either—is still alive and well. There are those who believe that they can freeze their commitment to Jewish values and Torah for a short while for fame and glory or financial and social gains.

Yechidus: Without compromise.

## D. How Did Elijah Take a Chance?.....18

Something else is difficult to understand about the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel. In hindsight, it was an overwhelming success, but how did Elijah take a chance, knowing that the response to his call to “choose a path” might be a decision to stay with idolatry?

Elijah knew that when pressed, a Jew will always choose G-d.

Yechidus: Elijah didn't take a chance.

# Introduction

The faceoff at Mount Carmel, starring Elijah the Prophet, is one of the most dramatic events recounted in the Tanach.

Elijah strove to put an end to the plague of idolatry affecting the Jewish people and invited the Baal priests for a zero-sum showdown.

## השיעור פרשת כי תשא

השיעור לפרשת כי תשא  
משיחת ש"פ שמות ה'תשל"ו, בלתי מוגה.

משיחת ש"פ תשא, שושן-פורים קטן, ה'תשי"ז  
תורת מנחם, כרך י"ט, עמוד 101.

ומשיחת י"א ניסן ה'תשל"ו  
שיחות קודש ה'תשל"ו, עמוד 59 ואילך

# A. The Great Test

This week's Torah reading discusses the sin of the golden calf, and therefore the Haftorah discusses the idols that Jews worshiped many years later.

The background of the Haftorah:

The time was during the rule of King Ahab, the leader of the Kingdom of Israel. Together with his wife, Queen Jezebel, he encouraged the proliferation of idolatry, especially the worship of the idol Baal.

One of the Baal prophets, Hiel beit Ha'eli, was especially wicked. He dared to rebuild the city of Jericho, which lay in ruins since the time of Joshua. Nobody had done so until then, because Joshua had forbidden rebuilding the city, and clearly spelled out the curse which would be visited on someone who violates the prohibition: when the foundations are poured, the builder's firstborn child would die, and when the doors are installed, his youngest child would die. That is precisely what happened to Hiel; he lost his eldest son at the beginning of construction and one by one all his children died, with the last one dying as the doors were completed.

During the Shiva mourning period, Elijah as well as King Ahab came to console Hiel. Ahab turned to Elijah and asked him how the student's words (Joshua) were fulfilled in their entirety, but the teacher's words (Moses) were not fulfilled. Joshua's warning materialized, but Moses' warning in the Shema passage that if the Jews serve idols G-d will stop the heavens from raining and dew will not fall, did not materialize. Look, Ahab said, we are serving idols and we live a great life.

Elijah immediately responded by using his powers as a prophet to declare a drought during which no rain would fall. A severe famine befell the Kingdom of Israel.

After three years of hunger, G-d revealed Himself to Elijah and instructed him to help the people repent and restart the rain. Elijah suggested to Ahab that he gather the priests of the Baal and the entire nation to determine for once and for all who the true god is.

## The Rebuke

### Source 1 | Kings, 18:20-39

Student's  
pg. 1

Ahab sent notice to all of the Children of Israel, and he gathered the prophets to Mount Carmel.

וַיִּשְׁלַח אָחָאב בְּכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּקְבֹּץ אֶת  
הַנְּבִיאִים אֶל הָר הַכַּרְמֶל.

**Student's** pg. 1  
Elijah drew near to all the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the G-d is the L-rd go after Him, and if the Baal, go after him." And the people did not answer him a word.

ויגש אליהו אל כל העם ויאמר:  
עד מתי אתם פסחים על שתי  
הסעפים? אם ה' האל-להים – לכו  
אחריו! ואם הבצל – לכו אחריו!  
ולא ענו העם אתו דבר.

## Elijah Suggests a Showdown

**Student's** pg. 1  
Elijah spoke to the people, "I am the only prophet of G-d left, while there are four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Let them give us two bulls and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it up and place it on the wood, but without lighting a fire. I will also prepare one bull and put it on the wood, without lighting a fire.

ויאמר אליהו אל העם, אני  
נותנתי נביא לה' לבדי, ונביאי  
הבצל ארבע מאות וחמשים איש.  
ויתנו לנו שנים פרים ויבחרו להם  
הפר האחד, וינתחיו וישימו על  
העצים ואש לא ישימו ואני  
אעשה את הפר האחד, ונתתי  
על העצים ואש לא אשים.

You will call in the name of your deity, and I will call in the name of the L-rd, and the deity that will answer with fire, he is G-d." All of the people answered and said, "The proposal is good." Elijah said to the prophets of the Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first since you are the majority. Call in the name of your deity, and do not place fire."

ויקראתם בשם אלהיכם ואני  
אקרא בשם ה', והיה האל-להים  
אשר יענה באש הוא האל-להים.  
ויען כל העם ויאמרו: טוב הדבר.  
ויאמר אליהו לנביאי הבצל:  
בחרו לכם הפר האחד ועשו  
ראשנה, כי אתם הרבים, וקראו  
בשם אלהיכם, ואש לא תשימו.

## The Baal Priests' Energetic Attempts

**Student's** pg. 2  
The Baal prophets took the bull that Elijah gave them and prepared it. They called in the name of the Baal from the morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice and no answer, and they hopped on the altar that they had made.

ויקחו את הפר אשר נתן להם  
ויעשו, ויקראו בשם הבצל  
מהבקר ועד הצהרים לאמר:  
הבצל עננו! ואין קול ואין ענה,  
ויפסחו על המזבח אשר עשה.

At noon Elijah began to mock them, saying, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god. Perhaps he is talking or he is pursuing enemies or he is on a journey; perhaps he is sleeping and will awaken.

ויהי בצהרים, ויהתל בָּהֶם אליהו  
ויאמר: קראו בקול גדול, כי א-  
להים הוא, כי שיח וכי שיג לו  
וכי דרך לו. אולי ישן הוא ויקץ?

They called with a loud voice and gashed themselves with swords and lances as was their custom, until blood poured out.

ויקראו בקול גדול ויתגדדו  
כמשפטם בחרבות וכרמחים עד  
שפך דם עליהם:

**Student's** As the afternoon passed and they feigned  
pg. 2 to prophesy until the time of the evening offering, there was no voice and no answer, no one was listening.

## Elijah's Turn

**Student's** Elijah said to all the people, "Come close to  
pg. 2 me," and all the people came close to him. He repaired the torn down altar of G-d. Elijah took twelve stones, corresponding to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of G-d came, saying, "Israel shall be your name." He built the stones into an altar in the name of G-d and he made a trench the size of two se'ah of seed around the altar.

He arranged the wood, and he cut up the bull and placed it upon the wood. Then he said, "Fill me four pitchers of water and pour them on the burnt-offerings and on the wood." "Repeat it," he said, and they repeated it. "Do it a third time," he said, and they did it a third time. The water went around the altar, and he also filled the trench with water.

**Student's** At the time during which the evening sacrifice  
pg. 3 was usually offered Elijah the prophet came and said: "L-rd, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that You are G-d in Israel and that I am Your servant, and at Your word have I done all these things. Answer me, O L-rd, answer me, and this people shall know that You are the L-rd G-d, and You have turned their hearts backwards."

וַיְהִי כַעֲבוֹר הַצֹּהָרִים וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ עַד לַעֲלוֹת הַמִּנְחָה, וְאִין קוֹל וְאִין עֲנָה וְאִין קָשָׁב.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵיהֶם לְכָל הָעָם: גִּשּׁוּ אֵלַי! וַיִּגְשׁוּ כָל הָעָם אֵלָיו. וַיִּרְפֹּא אֶת מִזְבֵּחַ ה' הַהוּא. וַיִּקַּח אֵלֵיהֶם שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂר אֲבָנִים כְּמִסְפַּר שְׁבֻטֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְבַר ה' אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהִי שְׁמִי. וַיִּבְנֶה אֶת הָאֲבָנִים מִזְבֵּחַ בְּשֵׁם ה', וַיַּעַשׂ הַעֲלָה כְּבִית סַאתִים זָרַע סָבִיב לַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת הָעֵצִים וַיִּנְתַּח אֶת-הַפָּר וַיִּשֶׂם עַל הָעֵצִים. וַיֹּאמֶר, מָלְאוּ אַרְבָּעָה כַּדִּים מַיִם וַיִּזְקְּוּ עַל הַעֲלָה וְעַל הָעֵצִים. וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁנוּ, וַיִּשְׁנוּ; וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלֹשׁ, וַיִּשְׁלֹשׁוּ; וַיִּלְכוּ הַמַּיִם סָבִיב לַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְגַם אֶת הַתַּעֲלָה מָלְא מַיִם.

וַיְהִי בַעֲלוֹת הַמִּנְחָה, וַיִּגֶשׁ אֵלֵיהֶם הַנָּבִיא וַיֹּאמֶר: ה' אֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ יִצְחָק וְיִשְׂרָאֵל, הַיּוֹם יוֹדַע כִּי אַתָּה אֱ-לֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ, וּבִדְבָרְךָ עָשִׂיתִי אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה. עֲנֵנִי ה', עֲנֵנִי, וַיִּדְעוּ הָעָם הִנֵּה כִּי אַתָּה ה' הָאֱ-לֹהִים וְאַתָּה הַסִּבֵּת אֶת לִבָּם אַחֲרֵינִי.



## G-d is the L-rd!

Student's  
pg. 3

The fire of the G-d descended and consumed the burnt offerings and the wood and the stones and the earth, and the water which was in the trench it licked up. All the people saw and fell on their faces, and they said, "G-d is the L-rd, G-d is the L-rd.

ותפל אש ה' ותאכל את העלה ואת  
העצים ואת האבנים ואת העפר, ואת  
המים אשר בתעלה לחכה. וירא כל  
העם ויפלו על-פניהם ויאמרו ה' הוא  
הא-להים! ה' הוא הא-להים!

## The Bull Wouldn't Budge

The Midrash recounts the following exchange which occurred when the Baal priests brought their sacrificial bull:

### Source 2 Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar 23:9

Student's  
pg. 3

What did Elijah do? "Select two twin bulls from one mother, who both were raised on the same pastures, and draw a lot to decide which goes to G-d and which to the Baal," he said. Elijah's bull ran toward him, but the Baal's bull refused to budge, even with all the priests pushing it.

"Go with them," Elijah told the bull. The bull retorted to Elijah before the entire nation: "We both came from one mother and were raised on the same pastures. It is his lot to go to G-d and sanctify G-d's name, while mine is to go to the Baal and anger G-d?"

מה עשה אליהו? אמר להם, בחרו  
שני פרים תאומים מאם אחת,  
הגדלים על מרעה אחד והטילו  
עליהם גורלות אחד לשם ואחד לשם  
הבעל. ובחרו להם הפר האחד, ופרו  
של אליהו מיד נמשך אחריו, והפר  
שעלה לשם הבעל נתקבצו כל נביאי  
הבעל ארבע מאות וחמשים ונביאי  
האשרה ארבע מאות ולא יכלו לזוז  
את רגלם.

עד שפתח אליהו ואמר לו: לך עמך.  
השיב הפר ואמר לו לעיני כל העם,  
אני וחברי יצאנו מבטן אחת, מפרה  
אחת, וגדלנו במרעה אחד, והוא עלה  
בחלקו של מקום ושמו של הקדוש-  
ברוך הוא מתקדש עליו, ואני עליתי  
בחלק הבעל להקעים את בוראי.

אמר לו אליהו, פר פר, אל תירא! לך  
עמך ואל ימצאו עליה, שפושם  
ששמו של הקדוש-ברוך הוא  
מתקדש על אותו ששמי, כך מתקדש  
עליה.

Student's  
pg. 4

Elijah responded, "Bull, bull, do not fear. Go with them. Just as G-d's name is sanctified by my bull, so will it be sanctified by you."

## The Dirty Trick

What were the Baal priests thinking? They knew they couldn't actually bring fire down from heaven ...

### Source 3 Yalkut Shimoni, Kings 214

**Student's** Hiel made the altar hollow and he was  
pg. 4 lowered into it. They instructed him: "When you hear the sound, light the fire under the bull." Immediately, G-d summoned a snake to kill him.

הִיאֵל עָשָׂא נְבוֹב, וְשָׁמוּ אוֹתוֹ  
בְּתוֹכוֹ. וְאָמְרוּ לוֹ: כְּשִׁתְּשָׁמַע אֶת  
הַקּוֹל מִיַּד חֲתָהּ הָאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדְךָ  
וְהִדְלַק מִתַּחֲתָיו. מִיַּד זִמֵּן הַקֹּדֶשׁ -  
בְּרוּךְ-הוּא נָחֵשׁ וַנִּשְׁכּוּ וָמָת.

The Baal priests knew they couldn't bring fire down from heaven through praying to their gods. Instead, they sent Hiel, who we are already familiar with as the rebuilder of Jericho, to build a cavernous space under the altar and hide inside it. At the moment they cried out to their gods, Hiel was to light a fire, and everyone would think it was lit by the Baal. G-d summoned a snake which bit Hiel and he died. At the moment of truth, there was no answer and no fire burned.

•

The Rebbe asks three fundamental questions on this incredible story:

A. Why does Elijah ask the people to pick a side? What kind of demand is that coming from a Jewish leader? He should have said, "Until when will you worship Baal?!"

B. Moreover: How could Elijah say that if Baal is god, "follow it." How could he take such a risk? What if they listened to him?

C. What is behind the Midrash that says the bull wouldn't budge until Elijah persuaded it? Why does the Midrash find it important to retell? Is there a deeper meaning to it?

The Rebbe grappled with this story on three separate occasions, each time analyzing it from another angle, and answering these three questions.

## B. Who Was Sanctifying G-d's Name?

### >> The Rebbe

**Student's** We have two drastically different bulls here.  
pg. 5 One bull was offered as a sacrifice to G-d. While this sacrifice was offered outside of the Temple based on the emergency instruction of a prophet, it bore the highest level of holiness a sacrifice can attain.

The second bull was exactly the opposite. It was offered as a sacrifice to an idol, and as a result it was impure and it was forbidden to derive any benefit from it.

Yet, both sacrifices were necessary. Moreover, both played an equal part in the sanctification of G-d's name that occurred at this event, "just as G-d's name is sanctified by my bull, so will it be sanctified by you." Thus, even the bull sacrificed to the idol played a part in influencing the people who had been sitting on the fence, convincing them to proclaim, "G-d is the L-rd, G-d is the L-rd!"

הגע עצמך: ישנם כאן שני פרים שהם מן הקצה אל הקצה: פר אחד - שהקריבו לה', ועד שנעשה קדוש בקדושת קרבן עולה - קדשי קדשים (שהרי אף-על-פי שהקריבוהו בחוץ, בהר הכרמל, היתה הוראת שעה על פי נביא להקריבו בתור קרבן עולה),

ופר שני - שהקריבו לעבודה זרה, שלכן נאסר בהנאה ומטמא וכו'.<sup>1</sup>

ואף על פי כן, הנה לא זו בלבד שיש צורך בשני הפרים, אלא עוד זאת, ששניהם שוים בנוגע לפעולת קדושת שמו של הקדוש-ברוך-הוא: "כשם ששמו של הקדוש-ברוך-הוא מתקדש על אותו שעמי, כך מתקדש עליך", כך, שגם הפר לעבודה-זרה נוגע לפעולה על אלו ש"פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים"<sup>2</sup> שגם הם יכריזו "ה' הוא האלקים ה' הוא האלוקים"<sup>3</sup>.

### We Need To Do the Dirty Work Too

**Student's** There is a lesson for us to learn here. People  
pg. 5 may argue that they don't want to be involved in the work of negating idolatry—why have anything to do with this abomination? They aren't looking for an excuse to do nothing,

וההוראה מזה, שכאשר יהודי טוען שאין רצונו להתעסק בענין של שלילת עבודה-זרה, באמרו: מה לי ולצרה הזאת, ואין כוונתו שלא לעשות מאומה,

3. שם, לט.

1. ראה רמב"ם הל' ע"ז פ"ז ה"ג. הל' שאר אבות הטומאה פ"ו ה"ז.

2. שם, כא.

**Student's** rather, they would prefer to spend their  
pg. 6 time on holy pursuits like offering a bull to G-d. This is a very important pursuit, so they will execute it with alacrity and excitement, and that would even have a spillover effect on the outside realm.

They are told in response that we must also concern ourselves with the second bull, the one associated with idolatry. This means working to distance Jews from elements of idolatry. This extends to distancing them from any transgression, as Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad, explains in Tanya that even the most minor transgression is in a sense akin to idol worship. It is only due to the spirit of foolishness that overcomes us that we are unable to see that any transgression is akin to idol worship.

אלא רצונו להתעסק בענייני קדושה, כמו הקרבת הפר לה', ובידעו גודל מעלת עבודה זו (שהרי לאו<sup>4</sup> בשופטני עסקינן...), יעסוק בה במרץ הכי גדול ובזריזות ובחשק, ועל ידה יפעל בדרך ממילא גם בחוץ וכו' -

אזי אומרים לו שצריך לעסוק גם עם הפר השני, שקשור עם הענין של עבודה-זרה, היינו, להבדיל ולהפריש יהודי מענינים של עבודה-זרה, כולל גם שלילת כל ענין של עבירה, כפי שמבאר רבינו הזקן בתניא<sup>5</sup> (באופן המובן גם בפשטות) שהחוטא ועובר רצונו יתברך אפילו בעבירה קלה הרי זה כמו עבודה-זרה [וההפרש לחלק ביניהם הוא מצד הרוח שטות דקליפה, שעל זה אמרו<sup>6</sup> "אין אדם עובר עבירה אא"כ נכנס בו רוח שטות"], שזהו כללות הענין של סור מרע.

*When we think of idolatry we picture it as a pagan cult, worshiping an idol and offering sacrifices to it. But when we analyze the matter more deeply and consider what exactly is the sin of idolatry, we discover that the core issue is taking our focus away from our connection with G-d and turning to foreign powers.*

*Seen this way, there is a certain semblance between someone traveling to India to join an idolatrous ritual and someone who mentally says to G-d, "Sorry, I'm busy at work now, I'll get to you tomorrow." Of course, from the halachic standpoint there is a big difference between the two, but we're speaking conceptually now.*

*The Rebbe argues, if you had the opportunity now to extract a Jew from an idolatrous cult, wouldn't you go to great lengths to do so? We should take a similar attitude to helping a person extract themselves from negative modes of conduct—this is also an act of rescue.*

*Some people only want to work at tasks they see as important and meaningful. For example, a person may argue that since they are intellectually gifted they need to be a professor at a university teaching deep subjects and writing studies important to all of civilization. When such a person is asked to dedicate themselves to education, to work with at-risk teenagers to help keep them away from crime, they argue that this isn't for them. They want to do more important and meaningful things...*

4. ראה ב"ק פה, א. ב"מ מ, א. ב"ב ז, א. ועוד.

5. פכ"ד.

6. סוטה ג, א.

*This is the lesson we learn from the two bulls. The bull offered to the idol for the purpose of preventive education, proving the futility of idol worship to the Jewish people, is no less important than the bull sacrificed on the altar for G-d.*

משיחת ש"פ שמות ה'תשל"ו,  
בלתי מוגה

## Story The scholar who became a wagon driver

**Student's**  
pg. 6

Reb Yosef lived in Beshenkovitch. He was no ordinary man. He knew the Talmud virtually by heart and earned the greatest respect from the scholars of his town.

On a visit to the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, in 1804, he was advised, amongst other things: "For the benefit of your soul it is better for you to be a wagon driver than a rabbi."

Years passed by. In 1814 Reb Yosef was offered the Rabbinate in the town of Lieple. Reb Yosef recalled Rabbi Shneur Zalman's words some ten years earlier! "It is better for you to be a wagon driver than a rabbi." He realized that now was the time to fulfill the Rebbe's advice. He refused the offer of the rabbinic post.

**Student's**  
pg. 7

But, how could he become, of all things, a wagon driver now at the age of seventy? Eventually he mustered up enough courage and went to the local wagon station.

"Yes, rabbi," asked the drivers, "where would you like to travel?" "I have not come to travel but to learn to become a wagon driver," he answered softly. The wagon drivers could not believe their ears.

That night Reb Yosef came home dirty and bruised. He found his wife in tears. She had heard of her husband's visit to the wagon drivers.

Reb Yosef explained the Rebbe's instructions. She told him, "If the Rebbe told you this, you mustn't delay even a day. Tomorrow I will sell my jewelry and you will be able to buy a wagon."

A year passed and Reb Yosef got used to his new lifestyle. One evening he stopped over at a Jewish inn. The director introduced him to Solomon Gamitzki, a friend and employee of the Batchaikov Count. Gamitzki agreed to travel with Reb Yosef.

**Student's** Reb Yosef said, "Tomorrow morning, G-d willing, we will make our way."  
pg. 7

"What time?" asked the visitor.

"After praying," was Reb Yosef's reply.

"At what time?" retorted Gamitzki. "To me it makes no difference whether you pray or not, I need to know when we will travel, to know when to wake up, wash, and eat."

"...And pray," concluded Reb Yosef.

"That I leave for you," said Gamitzki.

When Gamitzki realized Reb Yosef would not leave until 10:00 am, he ordered another coach for 5:00 am.

Gamitzki went to sleep for the night. Shortly after midnight, he awoke bewildered. Someone was crying. He opened his door and saw Reb Yosef sitting on his floor, reading by candlelight and crying. He was reciting the special midnight prayers.

Reb Yosef's crying went deep into Gamitzki's heart. He began recalling his youth, his father, his teacher, and the wife and children he had left when he became non-religious. His entire past opened up before his eyes.

When the night came to its end, Solomon watched Reb Yosef get up for the morning prayers, praying with great devotion. He started to cry. At 5:00, the innkeeper came to Solomon and told him that his coach was ready. But Solomon had decided to travel with Reb Yosef. Hours went by. Reb Yosef was still praying. Solomon, overcome with anguish, went to the innkeeper, borrowed his Tallis and Tefillin, and prayed, too.

**Student's** Overcome by deep remorse and grief, Solomon fell ill. For several days, he  
pg. 8 hovered between life and death. The count sent his own doctor to see what he could do, but the doctor gave up hope.

Reb Yosef remained at Solomon's bedside, guiding him and helping him in his decision to return to his family and Judaism.

Eventually, Solomon was strong enough to leave the inn and Reb Yosef went home. Reb Yosef planned a visit to the Rebbe, Rabbi Dov Ber, who had succeeded his father, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, after his passing. He traveled together with other Chasidim to the city of Lubavitch.

One day, while in Lubavitch, Reb Yosef was greatly surprised to meet Solomon. Solomon had left his job with the Count and had now come to Lubavitch to study and be near Rabbi Dov Ber.

Rabbi Dov Ber had an interesting announcement for Reb Yosef: "I am appointing you as rabbi of the synagogue on Market Street. You no longer need to be a wagon driver. My father appeared to me last night and told me that Yosef of Beshenkovitch has fulfilled his mission."

## C. How Long Will You Waver?

### >> The Rebbe

**Student's** Why did Elijah press the people "How long  
pg. 9 will you waver between two opinions?" He should rather have demanded, "How long will you worship Baal? The time has come to leave Baal and proclaim "G-d is the L-rd."

לכאורה, מדוע תבע מהם אליהו "עד מתי אתם פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים"? היה לו לתבוע: "עד מתי אתם עובדים לבעל, הגיע הזמן שתפסיקו לעבוד את הבעל ותתחילו לומר "ה' הוא האלקים"8.

### Two Types of Idolaters

**Student's** We must first distinguish between idolatry  
pg. 9 and "wavering between two opinions."

ויובן בהקדמת ביאור החילוק בין עבודה זרה ל"פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים".

Idolaters actually believe that the idol is a source of influence for them. They sincerely believe that through worshipping the stars and constellations they will receive blessings.

עבודה זרה פירושה, שהוא אמנם חושב באמת שהעבודה-זרה נותנת לו השפעה. הוא באמת סבור שעל-ידי-זה שיעבוד את הכוכבים ומזלות, יתנו לו השפעה.

*There are Jews who actually believe that they will benefit materially from worshipping idols. This is why they do it.*

**Student's** By contrast, the people who "waver between  
pg. 9 two opinions" believe in G-d as well as in the idol. They believe in G-d, but they worship the idol in pursuit of material benefit.

מה-שאין-כן "פוסח על שתי הסעיפים": הוא מאמין בקדוש-ברוך-הוא וגם בעבודה זרה, להבדיל (מצד אחד הוא אכן מאמין בקב"ה, אלא שבכל זאת בשביל פניות גשמיות הוא עובד את הבעל9).

*There are other people who aren't sure. They want both - belief in G-d, as well as material benefit from Baal.*

אלא) על זה ש"פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים" (מהנחה בלתי מוגה).  
9. מהנחה, בלתי מוגה.

7. שם, לט. - וכפי שאכן אירע בסופו של דבר, שהתחילו בעצמם להכריז "הוי' הוא האלקים" (מהנחה בלתי מוגה).  
8. ומוזה משמע, שהענין ד"פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים" גרוע יותר, בפרטים מסויימים, מהענין דעבודה זרה עצמו, ולכן תביעתו של אלי' הנביא היתה (לא כל-כך על הענין דע"ז עצמו,



## Which is Worse?

**Student's** In fact, wavering between two opinions is—  
pg. 9 in some respects—worse than idolatry itself.

**Student's** Of course, the bottom line is that idol worship  
pg. 10 is worse, because a person who engages in such is corrupted on a permanent basis and is a heretic, G-d forbid. However, in regards to their prospects for repentance, a “waverer” is in a worse place, because such a person will find it harder to repent completely.

There are two reasons for this:

1. When an idol worshiper comes to his senses and realizes that “G-d is the L-rd” and he has been living in error, he immediately understands the gravity of his sin, and as a result he repents properly and is forgiven.

By contrast, when the waverer reaches the same recognition, he doesn't fully understand the gravity of his sin, because he did after all still believe in G-d. He thinks his mistake wasn't a big deal because he was just wavering with doubts, but really he was always a believer like all other Jews. As a result, the waverer's regret isn't sincere, and his repentance is incomplete.

ועל-פי-זה יובן שבכמה וכמה פרטים גרוע  
העניין של “פוסח על שתי הסעיפים” יותר  
מעבודה זרה:

אף שבכללות עבודה זרה היא גרועה יותר,  
שהרי הוא מקולקל בקביעות, והוא כופר  
רחמנא ליצלן - מכל מקום, בנוגע לתשובה,  
ה”פוסח על שתי הסעיפים” גרוע יותר, כי  
קשה יותר שה”פוסח על שתי הסעיפים”  
יעשה תשובה שלימה ואמיתית.

ושני פרטים בזה:

(א) מי שהאמין בעבודה זרה, הרי בשעה  
ש”תופס את עצמו” ש”ה’ הוא האלוקים”,  
ועד עתה היה בטעות מרה, מרגיש הוא את  
גודל החטא שעשה, ובמילא עושה הוא  
תשובה כדבעי, “ושב ורפא לו”<sup>10</sup>.

לעומת זאת, ה”פוסח על שתי הסעיפים”,  
כיון שמאמין גם בקדוש-ברוך-הוא, הרי  
אפילו לאחר זה, אינו מרגיש כל-כך  
את גודל החטא, בחשבו לעצמו: וכי מה  
חטאתי כל-כך? הרי מלכתחילה הייתי  
בספק אפילו בחיצוניות, ובאמת הרי אני  
כמו כל בני ישראל, תמיד הייתי מאמין  
וכו' וכו'. וממילא חרטתו איננה אמיתית  
ואין תשובתו שלימה<sup>11</sup>.

*When a person worships idols sincerely he is certainly wrong, but once he realizes his grave error he will repent completely and correct his ways.*

*A person who had a foot on either side of the fence won't repent fully because he will always reason that he always had belief in G-d and therefore didn't really sin.*

אדה”ז אורח סתר”ג. קונטרס ומעין מאמר יד פ”ב. וראה גם  
מכתב י”ג תשרי שנה זו (אג”ק ח”ד ריש ע’ כא).

10. ישע”י ו, יו”ד.  
11. בענין זה ראה גם רבינו יונה ריש ברכות. הובא ברמ”א וש”ע



**Student's** 2. A person who has full belief in idolatry  
pg. 10 is completely corrupted. He believes that Baal is god, G-d forbid. But while he is disconnected from the true G-d, he still cares about spirituality.

By contrast, the waverer maintains belief in both. This is such a deep form of corruption that not only doesn't he have a relationship with the true G-d, he has no relationship with spirituality at all. The proof is that despite knowing that "G-d is the L-rd," he is still willing to—  
**Student's** G-d forbid—exchange G-d for material  
pg. 11 benefit, forsaking the "spring of living water" and "digging broken cisterns."

(ב) מי שמאמין בעבודה זרה שלא בשיתוף הרי הוא מקולקל בתכלית רחמנא ליצלו, הוא טועה וסבור שהבעל הוא - חס-ושלום - האלקים. אבל יתכן, שאף-על-פי שהוא נפרד מאלקים אמת, מכל מקום, כללות ענין הרוחניות נוגע לו<sup>12</sup>.

לעומת זאת, ה"פוסח על שתי הסעיפים" ב'שיתוף', הרי זה מורה על השחתה גדולה כל-כך, שלא זו בלבד שאין רצונו בשייכות לאלקים אמת, אלא שאין לו שום שייכות לכללות ענין הרוחניות<sup>13</sup>. וראיה על זה, שבידעו את האמת ש"הוי' הוא האלקים", נכון בעיניו להמיר - חס-ושלום - את הקדוש-ברוך-הוא תמורת גשמיות, להמיר "מקור מים חיים" כדי "לחצוב .. בארות נשברים"<sup>14</sup>.

*An idolater may be completely corrupted, but he's seeking spirituality and the truth. He has just made the mistake of thinking that he has found what he is looking for in the form of his idol. When he realizes his mistake and discovers the truth of G-d's existence he will immediately abandon the idol and follow G-d.*

*But the waverer always knew G-d. The reason he worshiped the Baal was because he didn't care about spirituality, he was after material benefit.*

*A person so corrupt that they don't care about spirituality and will do anything for money will have a very difficult time repenting.*

**Student's** Until now we have discussed the personal  
pg. 11 problems of the waverer. But there is another respect in which the waverer is worse than the idol-worshiper—the effect on others:

כל זה הוא רק בנוגע לעצמו. אבל ישנו עוד ענין שבו "פוסח על שתי הסעיפים" הוא גרוע מעבודה זרה, והוא: בנוגע לזולתו.

(מהנחה בלתי מוגה).  
14. ירמיה ב, יג.

12. והיינו, שחסרוננו הוא שהוא מקולקל בדיעות ר"ל, ולא בענין האנושיות (מהנחה בלתי מוגה).  
13. דהיינו ששום דבר אינו נוגע לו, מלבד הפניות האישיות שלו.

**Student's** When a person worships idols he won't lead  
pg. 11 any Jews astray. They will know that he is a  
heretic and have nothing to do with him.  
But the waverer is still a believer, and will  
have a negative influence on the public.  
Leading others to sin is the worst sin.

ג) מי שעובד עבודה זרה רחמנא ליצילן,  
אף יהודי לא ילמד ממנו. בידעם שהוא  
כופר, אין לאף אחד עסקים עמו. לעומת  
זאת, ב"פוסח על שתי הסעיפים", כיון  
שהוא גם מאמין, הרי הוא בכלל "מחטיא  
את הרבים", והמחטיא את הרבים קשה  
מכולם.<sup>15</sup>

*A waverer misleads others. He isn't just an individual sinner, he's a public menace.*

## Contemporary Waverers

**Student's** The Talmud states that the attraction of  
pg. 11 idolatry was removed from the world.  
But the power of "wavering between  
two opinions" is as powerful as ever.

מובא בגמרא<sup>16</sup>, שיצר הרע של עבודה  
זרה - ביטלו את כוחו. אבל העניין של  
"פוסח על שתי הסעיפים", גם היום הוא  
חזק יותר מיצר הרע של עבודה זרה, אם  
בדקות שבדקות, אם בדקות, או עוד  
יותר מזה.

*The Rebbe explains that the inclination for idolatry was abolished during the Talmudic era, but the inclination for wavering is still alive.*

15. ראה ספרי ופרש"י תצא כג, ט. במדב"ר פכ"א, ד. ועוד.  
16. יומא סט, ב ובחדא"ג שם.

Sometimes people temporarily set aside matters of Torah and mitzvot for material reason, honor, or embarrassment about what others may say. For a few days or weeks they put the code of Jewish Law—and G-d—away on the shelf. They don't want to be called old-fashioned, out of touch with the times. In America, it is said, we need to let some of the old traditions go and follow the spirit of the times.

*There are people that believe in G-d, but are willing to put the Code of Jewish Laws and its instructions away on the shelf and ignore them for a few weeks.*

With this goal in mind, or in pursuit of honor or money, these people are willing to "sell" their G-d and their souls. (In fact, money earned contrary to G-d's wishes is lacking Divine blessing and protection, so it will eventually be wasted on undesirable matters, such as doctors or the like.)

It should be noted that in some respects this conduct is even worse than idolatry, for the above reasons:

1. It is much more difficult to repent, since the sin isn't as obvious. A person can fool themselves into thinking that their sin wasn't so great because generally speaking they are G-d fearing, and it's not the end of the world if they cut a corner for financial reasons.

2. The person is corrupted. He is willing to exchange spiritual and eternal matters for temporal and temporary matters. He is selling his eternal World to Come for money and honor.

ערוך יחד עם הקדוש-ברוך-הוא, כביכול, על המדף, בכדי שלא יאמרו עליו שהוא "בטלן", שאינו מבין את הזמן ההווה, ובפרט שכאן ב'אמריקה' צריכים לוותר על הדברים הישנים, להתנהג במקצת לפי רוח הזמן כו'.

ובשביל זה, כדי שלא יאמרו עליו שהוא "בטלן", כדי שיהיה לו כבוד המדומה, או עוד ממון (שלאמיתו של דבר מתבזבז הממון על רופאים וכו', מכיוון שהממון בא שלא לפי רצונו של הקדוש-ברוך-הוא, הרי הוא מתבזבז על עניינים בלתי רצויים<sup>17</sup>, כיון שחסר הענין של "יברכך גו' וישמרך"<sup>18</sup> מן המזיקים<sup>19</sup>) - נכון בעיניו "למכור", לפי שעה על-כל-פנים, את הקדוש-ברוך-הוא, כביכול, יחד עם הנשמה שלו.

יש לדעת, שבכמה וכמה פרטים הרי זה גרוע עוד יותר מעבודה זרה, מצד הטעמים הנ"ל:

(א) קשה יותר לעשות תשובה באמת, כיוון שאינו מרגיש בתוקף כל-כך את החטא. הוא ישלה את עצמו שחטאו אינו גדול כל כך, שהרי בכלל הוא יהודי ירא-שמים, ומה הרעש על כך שלמשך זמן קצר וויתר על ענין מסויים בשביל פרנסה וכדומה?...

(ב) הוא מושחת. הוא יכול להמיר עניינים רוחניים, שהם עניינים נצחיים, בעניינים גשמיים שאינם אלא לפי שעה. הוא מוכר את עולם-הבא הנצחי בשביל ממון וכבוד.

**Student's** 3. He is a negative influence on the public.  
pg. 13  
A person who is an out-and-out heretic is dismissed and ignored, but this person conceals the fact that they are going against the Torah, arguing that it's just temporary and not so terrible. He may even misquote a verse or teaching of the Sages to justify his actions. Such a person leads others astray.

The lesson our Haftorah teaches us is that Elijah's main complaint was to those who were "wavering between two opinions." This is even worse than idolatry.

ג) הוא מחטיא את הרבים. אם ייצא, חס-ושלום, בכפירה גלויה, אזי יסלקוהו מד' אמות אלו, אבל כשעוטף ומכסה את העניינים שהם היפך התורה, באמרו שלפי שעה הדבר לא נורא, ומביא עוד "ראיה" מפסוק או מאמר רז"ל - הרי הוא מחטיא את הרבים.

על כך היא ההוראה מההפטרה, שעיקר התביעה היא: "עד מתי אתם פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים", דבר זה גרוע עוד יותר מעבודה זרה.

משיחת שבת פרשת תשא, שושן-פורים קטן, ה'תשי"ז

תורת מנחם, כרך יט עמוד 101

19. ספרי ופרש"י עה"פ. במדב"ר פי"א, ה. ועוד.

17. ראה גם שיחת יו"ד שבט סמ"ד (לעיל ע' 63). וש"נ.  
18. נשא ו, כד.

## Yechidut Without compromise

Herbert Weiner, author of *Nine-and-a-Half Mystics*, a book on Jewish mysticism, interviewed the Rebbe in a private audience. The discussion covered a wide range of topics. Here is one idea the Rebbe shared with him, as written by Rabbi Weiner in his book:

**Student's** "Many Jews today are searching," I said to the Rebbe, "they want to return.  
pg. 13 What would you say to them to help them find their way?"

The Rebbe paused for a moment. "I would say that the most important thing is 'no compromise.' I would send to them the words spoken by the prophet Elijah: 'How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be G-d, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' Compromise is dangerous, because it sickens both the body and the soul. A compromiser who tries to mediate between religion and the environment is unable to go in either direction and unable to distinguish the truth."

But would not people reject such rigid alternatives?

"This is the contribution of Chabad Hasidism," the Rebbe pointed out. "It's important to know that one must do everything, but at the same time we welcome the doing of even a part. If all we can accomplish is to save only one limb, we save that. Then we worry about saving another."

The Rebbe gave him a message to pass on to other Jews – enough with the compromises! We cannot – as the Yiddish phrase goes – “dance at both weddings.” Decide what you believe in, and live accordingly.

When Herbert Weiner asked the Rebbe if such a message would alienate people, the Rebbe stressed that Chabad accepts everyone, irrespective of their current level of Torah observance. This message of not compromising means not compromising in principle, and to know what is expected of us. After we know what the right thing is, then we can slowly and steadily proceed there, without plunging and leaping too quickly.

## Video (40 seconds)

Herbert Weiner recalls his encounter with the Rebbe.

<https://jemtv.page.link/UcRu>



## D. How Did Elijah Take a Chance?

### >> The Rebbe

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There is a puzzling story in the Tanach about a period in which the state of the Jewish people was so poor that there were 450 false prophets of Baal among them, and only one true prophet of G-d - Elijah. In Elijah's own words, "I am the only prophet of G-d left."

At this time, Elijah's demand of the Jewish people was not "stop worshipping Baal!," but rather, "how long will you waver between two opinions?"

This doesn't appear to make any sense! It's much better that they should waver between the two positions than commit to Baal as the sole power, G-d forbid!

The explanation is that Elijah the Prophet knew that when you put a Jew up against the wall and force him to choose between G-d or an idol, they will always choose G-d. In the words of the Alter Rebbe, "a Jew does not want, nor is he able, to detach himself from G-d."

The fact that until now he has been going down the wrong path is only because he has convinced himself that it is OK, that he is still acting like a good Jew.

ישנו סיפור מוזר בתנ"ך, שבזמן שמצב היהודים היה כזה, שבתוכם היו ארבע מאות חמישים נביאי הבעל, ורק נביא אחד לה' - אליהו הנביא, כפי שהוא עצמו אמר "אני נותרתי נביא לה' לבדי",

הנה אז, הטענה של אליהו ליהודים לא הייתה - "הפסיקו לעבוד את הבעל", אלא - "עד מתי אתם פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים".

לכאורה זה כלל לא מובן! הרי הרבה יותר טוב שיפסחו על שתי הסעיפים, מאשר שיאמרו שה' בעל' הוא האלוקים היחיד רחמנא ליצלן!

וההסבר בדבר: אליהו הנביא ידע, שכשיצמידו יהודי לקיר ויאמרו לו, שהוא חייב להחליט באם ה' הוא האלוקים או להיפך, אז כלשון אדמו"ר הזקן, "יהודי לא רוצה ולא יכול להתנתק מאלוקות".

זה שהוא מחזיק בדרך עקומה, זהו מפני שהוא משכנע את עצמו שזה בסדר, שהוא עודנו ביהדותו.

משיחת י"א ניסן ה' תשל"ו  
שיחות קודש, ה'תשל"ו, עמוד 59 ואילך,  
בתרגום המערכת

## Yechidus Elijah did not take a chance

Rabbi Fabian Schoenfeld, who served as the president of the Rabbinical Council of America, once visited the Rebbe with a rabbinical delegation. The Rebbe asked the group: How did Elijah on Mount Carmel tell the Jews to choose between the Baal and G-d? How can one give a Jew a choice to worship idols?! What would Elijah have done had they decided to follow Baal? How did he take on such a grave responsibility?

**Student's**  
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Elijah knew, the Rebbe explained, that when a Jew is put against the wall they will declare "G-d is the L-rd!" Elijah did not take any chances! He was certain that when faced with such a choice they will declare their belief in G-d.

## Video (2 ½ minutes)

*Rabbi Schoenfeld tells over this story of his Yechidus with the Rebbe*

[https://he.chabad.org/multimedia/media\\_cdo/aid/481256](https://he.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/481256)



