

מאמר ב' • תקון המדות

Mussar • Hebrew with Nikud and a Literal Translation

ON THIS PAGE

This page reminds us of the Rambam's powerful teaching: every Yid has the choice to be a tzaddik like Moshe Rabbeinu or a rasha like Yeravam. We often fool ourselves into thinking we can't change, blaming our generation or our nature, but the truth is, our will is incredibly strong and can overcome anything if we truly desire it.

Nikud and the literal translation are a learning aid prepared by the editor (AI-assisted, pending review), not the sefer's own vowelization.

פרק ד.

Chapter 4.

כתב הרמב"ם:

The Rambam wrote:

רשות לכל אדם נתונה, אם רוצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות צדיק הרשות בידו,

Permission is given to every person, if he wants to incline himself to a good path and to be a tzaddik, the permission is in his hand,

ואם רוצה להטות עצמו לדרך רעה ולהיות רשע הרשות בידו וכו'

And if he wants to incline himself to a bad path and to be a wicked person, the choice is in his hand, etc.

אל יעבר במחשבותיה דבר זה שאומרים טפשי אמות העולם ורוב גולמי ישראל,

Let not this thing pass through your thoughts, which the foolish of the nations of the world and most of the unrefined among Yisrael say,

שהקדוש ברוך הוא גזר על האדם מתחלת בריאתו להיות צדיק או רשע.

That the Holy One, blessed be He, decrees upon a person from the beginning of his creation to be a tzaddik or a rasha.

אין הדבר כן.

The matter is not so.

אלא כל אדם ראוי לו להיות צדיק כמשה רבנו או רשע כירבאם.

Rather, every person is fit to be a tzaddik like Moshe Rabbeinu, or a rasha like Yeravam.

(הלכות תשובה פרק ה', הלכה י"ב).

(Hilchos Teshuvah Chapter 5, Halachah 12).

הָאָדָם, מְרֹב הֶרְגָּלָיו לְבַקֵּשׁ רַק מָה שֶׁעָרֵב לְשַׁעֲתוֹ,

Man, because of his many habits of seeking only what is pleasant for his moment,

נִסְתַּלְקָה מִמֶּנּוּ הָאֱמוּנָה בְּאִפְשָׁרוֹתָיו הַנִּתּוּנָה לוֹ לְעֻזּוֹ אֶת דְּרָכּוֹ הָרַע אֲשֶׁר בְּחִזְקַת סִכְנַת הָאֲבִדּוֹן הוּא,

The emunah was removed from him in his given ability to leave his evil path, which is in the category of danger of destruction,

וּלְבַחֵר דֶּרֶךְ הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר יִתְעַלֶּה מִכָּל הַפְּגָעִים הַמְּפִסִּידִים אוֹתוֹ,

and to choose the path of good, through which he will elevate himself above all the harms that cause him loss,

עַד כִּי יֵרָאֶה לְפָעֲמִים הַהִלָּכָה הַפְּסוּקָה הַזֹּאת,

until sometimes this halacha pesuka will appear,

שֶׁהָרְשׁוֹת נְתוּנָה לְכָל אָדָם לִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק כְּמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ,

that permission is given to every person to be a tzaddik like Moshe Rabbeinu,

מִיָּד עוֹשֶׂה פְּשָׁרָה בְּדַעְתּוֹ, כִּי אֲמָנָם,

Immediately he makes a compromise in his mind, for indeed,

בְּתַקוּפָה שְׁלֵנוּ, וּבִפְרָט לְאִישׁ כְּמוֹהוּ לֹא יָכוֹל הָרְשׁוֹת הַזֶּה לְהִתְקַיֵּם וּלְהַצְלִיחַ מִפְּנֵי חִלְשׁוֹת הַשֶּׁכֶּל
וְהַתְּגַבְּרוֹת כַּחוֹת הַטֶּבַע,

In our era, and especially for a person like him, this permission cannot exist and succeed, due to the weakening of the intellect and the strengthening of the natural forces,

וְתוֹלָה אֶת עֲצָמוֹ בְּלֹא, כִּי לוֹ יָבוֹא אֵלָיו שֶׁכֶּל יוֹתֵר חָזָק,

and he hangs himself on 'no,' for if a stronger intellect would come to him,

וְלוֹ לֹא הִגִּיעַ כַּחוֹתָיו לִהְיוֹת כָּל כֶּף מְרָגֵל וְלִהְיוֹט,

And even if his strengths did not reach to be so accustomed and zealous,

כִּי אִזּוֹ יִצְיֵר שִׁגְם הוּא יִזְכֶּה לִהְיוֹת מְשֻׁלָּם כָּל חֻקֵּי הַשְּׁלֵמוֹת וְהַמַּעֲלוֹת.

For then it will be envisioned that he too will merit to complete all the statutes of perfection and the virtues.

וְאֲמָנָם, אִם נִבְקֹשׁ הַסִּבָּה הָאֱמַתִּית לְהִסְתַּלְקוֹת אֱמוּנַת הַבְּחִירָה,

And indeed, if we seek the true reason for the departure of the belief in free will,

מִעֲצָמוֹ, לֹא מִפְּנֵי חֶסְרוֹן כֹּלֵי הַמוֹחַ אוֹ רַבּוּי הַתַּפְּשָׁטוֹת הָרָצוֹן,

from himself, not because of a deficiency in the vessels of the mind or an abundance of the spread of desire,

כִּי יוֹדֵעַ בְּעֲצָמוֹ כִּי אֵין דָּבָר עוֹמֵד בְּפָנָיו הָרָצוֹן,

for he knows within himself that nothing stands before the will,

וְהַדְבָר שֶׁהוּא רוֹצֶה, הוּא יָכוֹל לְהַפֵּךְ אֶת כָּל הָעוֹלָם וּלְהַשְׁיִיגוֹ,

And the thing that he wants, he is able to turn over the entire world and achieve it,

וְאִזּוֹ לֹא יִחְסֹר לוֹ מִן הָעֲצוֹת וְהַתְּחַבּוּלוֹת,

And then he will not lack for counsel and stratagems,

וְאִזּוֹ מוֹצֵא דֵּי אַפְשָׁרוֹת לְהַגִּיעַ אֶל הַדְּרוֹשׁ,

And then he finds sufficient possibility to reach what is needed,

עַד שֶׁלֹּא יָכוֹל לְהַכְחִישׁ מְצִיאוֹת הַבְּחִירָה וְהִיכָלֶת בּוֹ,

until he cannot deny the reality of free choice and the ability within him,

וְאִם יִמָּצֵא כְּשֶׁבֶא אֶל הַשְּׁלֵמוֹת אִזּוֹ הוּא נָקִי מִן הִיכָלֶת,

And if he finds, when he comes to perfection, then he is clean from the potential,

אִין הִיכָלֶת רִיק מִמֶּנּוּ, אֲלֵא הַדְּבָר רִיק מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא חָסֵר לוֹ אֲלֵא לְהִיּוֹת לְהוֹט לְתַקֵּן חֲסָרוֹנוֹ,

The ability is not empty of it, rather the thing is empty of it, and it is not lacking to him except to be eager to fix his lack,

וְאִם יִגִּיעַ לְהַכִּיר אֶת מוֹמָיו וְיִרְצֶה בְּרָצוֹן בְּרוֹזֵל לְתַקְנָם,

And if he will come to recognize his flaws and will desire with an iron will to rectify them,

כִּי אִזּוֹ הָיָה מוֹצֵא דֶּרֶךְ הִיכָלֶת רְחֵבָה מְאֹד.

For then he would find the path of capability very wide.

הַכֹּל יֵשׁ לְאָדָם, אֲלֵא לֹא הַכֹּל עוֹמֵד בּוֹ עַל מְקוֹמוֹ הַמֻּיָּחָד לוֹ בְּאַמָּת,

Everything is available to a person, but not everything stands within him in its truly designated place,

עֲכָשָׁיו שֶׁהָאָדָם לְהוֹט לְרִדְף אַחֵר מַעֲלָתוֹ וּכְבוֹדוֹ,

Now that a person is zealous to pursue his spiritual level and his honor,

וּמוֹסֵר כָּל אוֹנוֹ וְיִכָּלְתוֹ לְבַקֵּשׁ רַק אִיךָ שֶׁהָעוֹלָם יִכִּירוּ מַעֲלָתוֹ וְיִתְרוֹנוֹ עַל אֲחֵרִים,

And he dedicates all his strength and ability to seek only how the world will recognize his greatness and his advantage over others,

אִינוֹ מוֹצֵא שׁוּם חֲסָרוֹן עַל עַצְמוֹ,

he does not find any deficiency in himself,

לְהִתְעַצֵּל בְּהַשְׁתַּדְּלוֹתוֹ וּלְפַחַד לְסַבֵּב הַדְּרוֹשׁ הַזֶּה,

to be lazy in his efforts and to fear bringing about this necessary thing,

וְאִם יִתְרַעַם לְפַעֲמִים אִין הַתְּרַעוּמוֹת עַל עַצְמוֹ אֲלֵא יִרְגִישׁ הַמְּנִיעָה מִזּוּלָתוֹ,

And if he complains sometimes, the complaints are not about himself, rather he feels the hindrance from another.

ממילא נבין מזה כי לו העמיד כח הבקוש שלו להיות להוט בכל דרכי היכלת לתקן חסרוננו ולשפר מדותיו המגנות,

From this, we will naturally understand that if he would have established his power of yearning to be zealous in all possible ways to rectify his deficiencies and to break his undesirable character traits,

כי אז לא יולד במציאות תרעומות כלל,

For then, no grievances whatsoever would be born into existence,

כי מצד זולתו אין לו מניעה,

For from the side of another, he has no prevention,

ומצד עצמו הוא מסור בכל לב ונפש כי ודאי היה בא למדרגה גבוהה,

And from his own perspective, he is devoted with all heart and soul, for certainly he would have reached a high madreiga,

ואם נבחין לדעת ההבדל בין משה רבנו ובין ירבעם בן נבט,

And if we will discern to know the difference between Moshe Rabbeinu and between Yeravam ben Nevat,

מה היה באמת שרש הדבר אשר הבדילם לשני דרכים נפרדים מקצה אל הקצה,

What was truly the root of the matter that separated them into two distinct paths from one end to the other,

כי ודאי כל אחד לא נולד עם דרכו בדרך טבעי,

For certainly, each person was not born with his path in a natural way,

אלא בדרך הבחירה הגיעו כל אחד למהותו,

Rather, through the path of free choice, each one reached his essence,

ובמה זכה משה להצליח כל כך,

And with what did Moshe merit to succeed so much,

ומפני מה ירד ירבעם כל כך,

And because of what did Yeravam descend so much,

נמצא שגם המה נבדלו בשרשי הבקוש וההתלהטות.

It is found that they too differed in the roots of their seeking and their fervor.

במשה מציינו שהעידה עליו התורה כי היה עניו מאוד מכל האדם אשר על פני האדמה (במדבר י"ב),

Regarding Moshe, we find that the Torah testified about him that he was exceedingly humble, more than any person who was on the face of the earth (Bamidbar 12:3),

וכאשר שלח לו ה' למצרים,

And when Hashem sent him to Mitzrayim,

עָנָה לוֹ "שְׁלַח נָא בְיַד תִּשְׁלַח" (שְׁמוֹת ד' י"ג).

He answered him, "Please send through whomever You will send" (Shemos 4:13).

וּבֵאֵר הָרַמְבַּ"ן, כִּי אָמַר בָּזֶה, כִּי אִם תִּשְׁלַח כָּל אָדָם מִן הַשּׁוּק הוּא יוֹתֵר הֶגוֹן וּמְסָגֵל מִמֶּנִּי.

And the Ramban explained, that he said with this, that if you send any person from the marketplace, he is more fitting and capable than I.

נִפְלֵא מִדְּרָגָתוֹ מְאֹד, עַד כַּמָּה נָקַב וַיִּרְד הַתִּרְגּוּזוֹתָיו עַל חֶסְרוֹנוֹ וּרְצוֹנוֹ הַלְהוּט מְאֹד לְתַקְּנוֹ,

His level is wondrously great, to what extent his agitation over his lack and his very fervent desire to fix it has pierced and descended,

עַד שֶׁהָיָה מִמְּלֵא בּוֹ הִרְעִיזוֹן הַזֶּה כָּל כֹּחוֹת מַחְשַׁבְתּוֹ וְכָל תִּשְׁוּקוֹת לְבָבוֹ וְהִתְפַּעַל מִמֶּנּוּ בְּמִדָּה כָּל כֹּךְ מְרַבָּה,

until this idea would fill all the powers of his thought and all the yearnings of his heart, and he would be so greatly moved by it,

עַד שֶׁהָשִׁיג הִתְפַּשְׁטוֹת הַמַּעֲלֹת לְגַמְרִי,

until he achieved the complete expansion of the middos,

וְלֹא מָצְאוּ בּוֹ הָאֶפְשָׁרוֹת, שִׁיפְרִיעוּ הַמַּעֲלֹת הַרְגָּשָׁת הַחֲסָרוֹנוֹת.

And they did not find in him the possibility that the good qualities would disturb the feeling of the deficiencies.

כִּי הִגִּיעַ לְהִרְגִּישׁ הַחֲסָרוֹן כְּאִלוּ לֹא הָיָה מַעֲלָה בְּמִצִּיאוֹתָיו,

For he came to feel the lack as if there was no advantage in existence,

כְּמוֹ שֶׁמִּצְוֵי בָנוּ בְּהִרְגָּשָׁת חֲסָרוֹן הַחוּמָרִי,

Just as it is found within us in the feeling of material lack,

כְּחִתִּיכַת הָאֶצְבַּע, אֲשֶׁר הִרְגָּשָׁת כְּאִבּוֹ גּוֹזֵל מִמֶּנּוּ הִרְגָּשׁוֹתָיו מְכֹל גּוּפוֹ וְאַבְרָיו,

Like the cutting of a finger, where the feeling of its pain robs him of his feelings from his entire body and limbs,

וְלֹא יַעֲרִיךְ בְּאוֹתוֹ זְמַן אֶת חֲשִׁיבוֹת חֲסָרוֹנוֹ וְכְאִבּוֹ בְּאֶבֶר פְּרָטִי נֶגֶד שְׁלֵמוֹת גּוּפוֹ וְאַבְרָיו בְּכָלָּו.

And he will not value at that time the importance of its lack and its pain in a particular limb against the completeness of his body and its limbs in general.

אָמֵנָם, מִתְקַבֵּץ כָּל הִרְגָּשׁוֹתָיו וּפּוֹנִים לְהִרְגִּישׁ רַק הָאֶצְבָּע הַחֲתוּךְ הַזֶּה.

Indeed, all his feelings gather and turn to feel only this cut finger.

כֵּן הִגִּיעַ מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ בִּיכְלָתוֹ לְהִרְגִּישׁ חֲסָרוֹנוֹ עַד שֶׁהִרְגָּשָׁת כָּל שֶׁהוּא מִן חֲסָרוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֵין אָדָם צָדִיק בְּאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה נָקִי מְכֹל וְכָל מִמְּנָה,

So too, Moshe Rabbeinu reached, with his ability, to feel his lack, until the feeling of any bit of lack, of which there is no righteous person on earth who will be entirely clean from it,

הָגִיעַ לְהִתְפַּעֲלוֹת כָּל כֶּף מְרֵבָה עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִרְגִישׁ מַעֲלוֹתָיו כָּלוּם וְלֹא נִמְצָא אֶצְלוֹ הַמַּעֲלוֹת גַּם בְּאוֹכְלוֹ
שִׁיגְרָעוּ בְּרוּשָׁם מִשָּׁהוּ,

He reached such abundant awe, until he did not feel his own virtues at all, and the virtues were not found with him even in a way
that they would diminish the impression in any measure,

דִּק מִן הַדִּק, בְּהִרְגֵּשׁת חֲסָרוֹנוֹ,

finer than fine, in feeling its lack,

וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁכָּל הַיּוֹם הִרְגִישׁ חֲסָרוֹנוֹ וְהָיָה לָהוּט לְתַקְּנוֹ,

And since all day he felt his lack and was eager to fix it,

וְהַמַּעֲלוֹת הִתְפַּשְׁטוּ מִמֶּנּוּ לְגַמְרִי וְלֹא יָדַע מֵהֶם כְּלָל,

And the virtues completely departed from him, and he knew nothing of them at all,

לְכֵן כִּאֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח לוֹ הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ לְמִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא אוֹתָם,

Therefore, when Hashem Yisbarach sent him to Mitzrayim to take them out,

אָמַר "שְׁלַח נָא בְּיַד תִּשְׁלַח",

He said, "Please send by the hand of him whom You will send,"

וְכָל מִי שֶׁתִּשְׁלַח הוּא יוֹתֵר מְסָגֵל מִמֶּנִּי,

And anyone You send, he is more capable than I,

כִּי הוּא מִדֹּד אֶת כָּלָם בְּמִדָּה יוֹתֵר גְּדוּלָּה מִמֶּנּוּ וְכָל אָדָם הִכְרִיעַ אֶת הַכֶּף בַּעֲת שֶׁשָּׁקַל בְּדַעְתּוֹ אוֹתָם
לְעֻמָּתוֹ,

For he measured them all with a measure greater than himself, and every person tipped the scale when he weighed them in his mind
against himself,

יַעַן כִּי מִדַּת הַגְּדֻלוֹת הִיָּתְה נִפְשָׁטת מִמֶּנּוּ לְגַמְרִי,

Because the trait of greatness was completely removed from him,

וְהָיוּ פּוֹעֲלִים הִרְגֵּשׁוֹתָיו עָלָיו לְהִרְגִישׁ חֲסָרוֹנוֹ וְעַל זֻלָּתוֹ,

And his feelings would work upon him to feel his lack and for his fellow,

הָיָה פּוֹנֶה תָּמִיד לְהִרְגִישׁ מַעֲלָתוֹ,

He would always turn to feel his own greatness,

כִּי אִם יִרְגִישׁ חֲסָרוֹן עַל חֲבִירוֹ זֶה גּוֹפָא הוּא חֲסָרוֹן אֶצְלוֹ כִּי לֹא בַּעַל עֵין טוֹבָה הוּא,

For if he feels a deficiency regarding his fellow, this itself is a deficiency within him, for he is not a baal ayin tovah (one with a good
eye).

ועל חסרונו היה להוט, לכן לא יוכל מעולם להרגיש חסרון על זולתו,

And for his own lack he was zealous, therefore he will never be able to feel a lack for another,

ונמצא שהתפעלות מחסרון שלו,

And it turns out that the being affected by his lack,

פעלו עליו שני הענינים האלה שהן אחת,

These two matters, which are one, acted upon him,

להיות מעלותיו כלא היו וחסרונות זולתו כלא נמצא כלל,

that his own good qualities should be as if they never were, and the shortcomings of others as if they were not found at all,

והיה נשאר הרגשתו חסרונו מזוקקה שבעתים,

And his feeling of lack would remain purified sevenfold,

מכל רשם דק של מעלת עצמו,

from every subtle impression of his own virtue,

וחסרון זולתו, ולכן אמר שלח נא ביד תשלח,

and the deficiency of another, and therefore he said, 'Please send by the hand of whom You will send,' (Shemos 4:13)

כמו שביאר הרמב"ן שהיה סובר באמת כי כל אדם הוא יותר מסגל ממנו והוא יותר ראוי להיות מנהיג ומנהל ממנו,

Just as the Ramban explained, that he truly believed that every person was more capable than him, and he was more worthy to be a leader and manager than him,

וישפיע על אחרים יותר ממנו,

and he will influence others more than himself,

ונמצא לפי שהיה בו שרש הזה זכה על ידו להגיע למדרגתו להיות זוכה ומזכה את הרבים.

And it turns out that because this root was in him, through it he merited to reach his level, to be meritorious himself and to bring merit to the many.

ובירכעם מצינו שעקר השרש הזה מעקרו,

And regarding Yeravam, we find that he uprooted this root from its very core,

והיה כל מפתו ומגמתו להרגיש מעלותיו ולברוח מן מצב כזה שיכול העולם לטעות בו כי הוא פחות במעלה מזולתו.

And his entire gaze and intention was to feel his own good qualities and to flee from such a situation where the world could err about him, thinking he is lesser in quality than his fellow.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁמִּצִּינוּ שֶׁמִּנֵּעַ אֶת עֲצָמוֹ לַעֲלוֹת לְרֵגֶל כִּי שָׁמָּה יֹאמְרוּ "הֲאֵל מֶלֶכָּא וְהָא עֲבָדָא" (סְנֵהֲדִין ק"א).

Just as we find that he prevented himself from going up to Yerushalayim for the Regalim, lest they say, "Here is the king and here is the servant" (Sanhedrin 101a),

אִם יַעֲמֹד בְּעֶזְרָה וְרַחֲבָעַם יוֹשֵׁב שָׁמָּה,

If he stands in the Azarah and Rechavam sits there,

כְּפִי גְזֵרַת הַבּוֹרָא, וְלִכֵּן נִסְתַּבֵּב מִזֶּה שֶׁעָשָׂה עֲגָלִים בְּדֶרֶךְ,

in accordance with the decree of the Creator, and therefore it came about from this that he made calves along the way,

וּמִנֵּעַ גַּם אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲלוֹת לְרֵגֶל וְהִחָטִיא אוֹתָם בַּעֲבוּדָה זָרָה.

And he also prevented Yisrael from going up for the pilgrimage, and he caused them to sin with avodah zarah.

WHAT TO TAKE FROM IT

Let's internalize that our free will is a gift from Hashem, allowing us to choose our path. Instead of making excuses, we must cultivate a burning desire to fix our faults and grow, just like Moshe Rabbeinu, who constantly felt his shortcomings despite his greatness. By focusing on our own avodah and not comparing ourselves to others, we can achieve true spiritual heights.