

הלכות דעות • פרק שני

Learned like the daf, the literal words in bold, flowing with the elucidation

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam teaches us how to heal the neshama when a person's middos have become warped and spiritually sick. Just as a physically sick person craves things that are bad for his body, someone with poor middos desires bad traits and finds the good path burdensome. To cure this spiritual illness, one must go to the wise—the healers of souls—who will guide him on how to restore balance.

The Rambam explains the practical method of healing, which involves moving to the opposite extreme for a period of time until the bad trait is uprooted. However, we learn that there are certain exceptionally bad middos, such as pride and anger, where the middle path is forbidden; for these, a person must distance himself completely and adopt the furthest extreme of humility and calmness. The chapter also guides us in the proper path of silence, speaking briefly and with purpose, and the absolute prohibition of deceit and dishonesty.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • Healing the Morally Ill Through the Guidance of the Wise

חולי הגוף טועמים המר מתוק ומתוק מר.

The sick of the body taste the bitter as sweet, and the sweet as bitter, because their physical senses are distorted.

ויש מן החולים מי שמתאוה וְתאב למאכלות שאינן ראויין לאכילה

And there are of the sick those who desire and crave for foods that are not fit for eating,

כגון העפר והפחם

such as the earth and the charcoal,

ושונא המאכלות הטובים כגון הפת והבשר

and who hate the foods that are good and nourishing, such as the bread and the meat.

הכל לפי רב החלי.

Everything is according to the severity of the sickness.

כך בני אדם שנפשתייהם חולות

So too, children of man whose souls are sick

מתאווים ואוהבים הדעות הרעות ושונאים הדרך הטובה

desire and love the traits that are bad, and hate the path that is good,

ומתעצלים ללכת בה והיא כבדה עליהם למאד לפי חללים.

and are lazy to walk in it, and it is heavy upon them exceedingly, according to their sickness.

וכן ישעיהו אומר באנשים הללו

And so Yeshayahu says concerning men these:

ישעיה ה כ "הוי האמרים לרע טוב ולטוב רע

"Woe to those who say to the bad that it is good, and to the good that it is bad;

שמים חשך לאור ואור לחשך

who place darkness for light, and light for darkness;

שמים מר למתוק ומתוק למר."

who place bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

ועליהם נאמר

And concerning them it is said in Mishlei:

משלי ב יג "העוזבים ארחות ישר ללכת בדרך חשך."

"Those who leave paths of uprightness to walk in ways of darkness."

ומה היא תקנת חולי הנפשות.

And what is the remedy of the sick of the souls?

לכו אצל החכמים שהם רופאי הנפשות

They should go to the wise, for they are the healers of the souls,

וירפאו חללים בידעות שמלמדין אותם עד שיחזירום לדרך הטובה.

and they will heal their sickness with the traits that they teach them, until they return them to the path that is good.

והמכירים בידעות הרעות שלהם

And those who recognize the sickness in the traits that are bad of theirs,

ואינם הולכים אצל החכמים לרפא אותם

and are not going to the wise to heal them,

עליהם אמר שלמה

concerning them said Shlomo HaMelech:

משלי א ז "חכמה ומוסר אוילים בזו":

"wisdom and correction fools scorned."

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 · Healing the Illness of the Soul by Moving to the Opposite Extreme

וכיצד היא רפואתם.

And how is their healing from these spiritual illnesses?

מי שהוא בעל חמה

One who is a master of wrath, a person who gets angry easily,

אומרים לו להנהיג עצמו

we say to him to accustom himself to behave in such a way

שאם הפך וקלל לא ירגיש כלל.

that if he is beaten and cursed, he should not feel any anger or resentment at all.

וילך בדרך זו זמן מרבה

And he should go in this way for a long time,

עד שיתעקר החמה מלבו.

until the wrath is uprooted from his heart entirely.

ואם היה גבה לב

And if he was haughty of heart, suffering from extreme pride,

ינהיג עצמו בכזיון הרבה

he should accustom himself with much disgrace,

וישב למטה מן הכל

and sit below everyone else in social settings,

וילבש בלויי סחכות המבזות את לובשיהם

and wear worn-out rags which disgrace their wearers,

וכיוצא בדברים אלו

and the like in these things that break his pride,

עד שיעקר גבה הלב ממנו

until he uproots the haughtiness of the heart from him,

וַיֵּחֹזֶר לַדֶּרֶךְ הָאֲמֻצָּעִית שֶׁהוּא דֶּרֶךְ הַטּוֹבָה.

and he returns to the middle path, which is the good path.

וּלְכַשְׁיֵחֹזֶר לַדֶּרֶךְ הָאֲמֻצָּעִית

And when he returns to the middle path,

יֵלֶךְ בָּהּ כָּל יָמָיו.

he should walk in it all his days.

וְעַל קוֹ זֶה יַעֲשֶׂה בְּשָׂאֵר כָּל הַדְּעוֹת

And on this line he should do with the rest of all the character traits:

אִם הָיָה רָחוֹק לְקֻצָּה הָאֶחָד

if he was far to one extreme,

יִרְחִיק עַצְמוֹ לְקֻצָּה הַשֵּׁנִי

he should distance himself to the second extreme,

וַיִּנְהַג בּוֹ זְמַן רַב

and behave in it for a long time,

עַד שֶׁיֵּחֹזֶר בּוֹ לַדֶּרֶךְ הַטּוֹבָה

until he returns by it to the good path,

וְהִיא מִדָּה בִּינּוּנִית שֶׁבְּכָל דְּעָה וְדָעָה:

and it is the middle trait that is in every single character trait.

הַלָּכָה ג

Halacha 3 · The Absolute Avoidance of Arrogance and Anger — Moving to the Opposite Extreme

וַיֵּשׁ דְּעוֹת שְׂאָסוּר לוֹ לְאָדָם לְנַהֵג בָּהֶן בְּבִינּוּנִית

And there are temperaments that it is forbidden for a person to behave with them in the middle path,

אֶלָּא יִתְרַחֵק מִן הַקֻּצָּה הָאֶחָד עַד הַקֻּצָּה הָאֲחֵר.

rather he must distance himself from the one extreme until the other extreme.

וְהוּא גְבוּהַ לֵב.

And it is haughtiness of heart, meaning pride.

שֶׁאִין דֶּרֶךְ הַטּוֹבָה שִׁיְהִיָּה אָדָם עָנּוּ בְּלִבּוֹ

For it is not the good path that a person should be humble only,

אַלֵּא שִׁיחֵיה שְׁפַל רוּחַ וְתִהְיֶה רוּחוֹ נְמוּכָה לְמָאֵד.

rather that he should be lowly of spirit and his spirit should be exceedingly lowly.

וּלְפִיכָּה נֵאֶמַר בְּמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר יב ג "עָנּוּ מָאֵד"

And therefore it is said regarding Moshe our teacher in the Torah, "exceedingly humble,"

וְלֹא נֵאֶמַר עָנּוּ בִלְבָד.

and it is not said "humble" only.

וּלְפִיכָּה צִוּוּ חֲכָמִים מָאֵד מָאֵד הָיִי שְׁפַל רוּחַ.

And therefore the Sages commanded: "Exceedingly, exceedingly be lowly of spirit."

וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ שְׁפַל הַמִּגְבִּיָּה לְבוֹ כֶּפֶר בְּעֶקֶר

And further they said that anyone who elevates his heart in pride denies the essential principle of our faith,

שֶׁנֵּאֶמַר דְּבָרִים ח יד "וְרָם לְבָבְךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ".

as it is said, "And your heart will be haughty, and you will forget Hashem your God."

וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ בְּשִׁמְתָא מֵאֵן דְּאִית בִּיה גִּסּוּת הָרוּחַ וְאַפְלֵי מְקֻצָּתָהּ.

And further they said: Under a ban of ostracism is whoever has in him arrogance of the spirit, and even a part of it.

וְכֵן הַכַּעַס מִדָּה רָעָה הִיא עַד לְמָאֵד

And likewise, anger is an exceedingly bad trait,

וְרֹאוּי לְאָדָם שִׁיתְרַחֵק מִמֶּנָּה עַד הַקְצָה הָאַחֵר.

and it is proper for a person that he distance himself from it until the other extreme.

וַיִּלְמַד עֲצָמוּ שֶׁלֹּא יִכְעַס וְאַפְלוּ עַל דְּבָר שֶׁרֹאוּי לְכַעַס עָלָיו.

And he should teach himself that he should not become angry, and even upon a matter that is proper to be angry upon it.

וְאִם רָצָה לְחַטִּיל אֵימָה עַל בָּנָיו וּבְנֵי בֵיתוֹ

And if he wished to cast fear upon his children and the members of his household,

אוּ עַל הַצִּבּוּר אִם הָיָה פְּרָנָס

or upon the community if he was a leader,

וְרָצָה לְכַעַס עֲלֵיהֶן כְּדֵי שִׁיחְזְרוּ לַמוֹטָב

and he wished to show anger upon them in order that they should return to the good,

יִרְאֶה עֲצָמוֹ בְּפָנֵיהֶם שֶׁהוּא כּוֹעֵס כְּדִי לְיַסְרֵם

he should show himself before them that he is angry in order to chastise them,

וְתִהְיֶה דַעְתּוֹ מְיֻשָּׁכֶת בֵּינוֹ לְבֵין עֲצָמוֹ

and his mind should be calm between himself to himself,

כָּאֶדָם שֶׁהוּא מַדְמָה כּוֹעֵס בְּשַׁעַת כָּעֲסוֹ וְהוּא אֵינוֹ כּוֹעֵס.

like a person who acts angry at the time of his anger, and he is not angry.

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים כָּל הַכּוֹעֵס כְּאִלּוֹ עוֹבֵד עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים.

The early Sages said: Anyone who becomes angry is as if he worships idols.

וְאָמְרוּ שְׁכָל הַכּוֹעֵס אִם חָכָם הוּא חֲכָמְתּוֹ מְסַתְּלָקֶת מִמֶּנּוּ

And they said that anyone who becomes angry, if he is a wise man, his wisdom departs from him,

וְאִם נָבִיא הוּא נְבוּאָתוֹ מְסַתְּלָקֶת מִמֶּנּוּ.

and if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him.

וּבַעֲלֵי כָעַס אֵין חַיֵּיהֶם חַיִּים.

And the masters of anger, their life is not a life.

לְפִיכָּה צִוּוּ לְהִתְרַחֵק מִן הַכָּעַס

Therefore they commanded to distance oneself from anger

עַד שֶׁיִּנְהַיֵּג עֲצָמוֹ שֶׁלֹּא יִרְגֵּשׁ אֶפְלוּ לְדִבְרֵים הַמְכַעֲסִים

until he accustoms himself that he should not feel even things that provoke anger,

וְזוֹ הִיא הַדֶּרֶךְ הַטּוֹבָה.

and this is the good path.

וְדֶרֶךְ הַצְדִּיקִים הֵן עָלּוּבִין וְאֵינָן עוֹלָבִין

And the way of the righteous is: They are shamed and they do not shame,

שׁוֹמְעִים חֲרָפְתָּם וְאֵינָם מְשִׁיבִין

they hear their insult and they do not answer,

עוֹשִׂין מֵאַהֲבָה וּשְׂמֵחִים בְּיִסּוּרֵים.

they act from love and are joyous in sufferings.

וְעַלֵּיהֶם הַכָּתוּב אוֹמֵר שׁוֹפְטִים הֵם לֹא "וְאַהֲבָיו כְּצֹאת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּגִבְרָתוֹ":

And upon them the verse says: "And those who love Him are like the going out of the sun in its strength."

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 · The Virtue of Silence and Restricting One's Speech

לְעוֹלָם יִרְבֶּה אָדָם בְּשִׁתִּיקָה

Always should increase a person in silence,

וְלֹא יִדְבֹר אֶלָּא אוֹ בְּדִבְרֵי חֻכְמָה

and not speak except either with matters of wisdom

אוֹ בְּדִבְרֵי שְׁצָרֵיךְ לָהֶם לְחַיֵּי גּוּפּוֹ.

or with things that are necessary for them for the life of his body.

אָמְרוּ עַל רַב תַּלְמִיד רַבְּנוּ הַקָּדוֹשׁ

They said about Rav, the disciple of our teacher the holy Rebbi,

שֶׁלֹּא שָׁח שְׂיִחָה בְּטִלָּה כָּל יָמָיו.

that not he spoke conversation idle all his days.

וְזוֹ הִיא שְׂיִחַת רַב כָּל אָדָם.

And this idle chatter it is the conversation of most of all people.

וְאַפְּלוּ בְּצָרְכֵי הַגּוּף לֹא יִרְבֶּה אָדָם דְּבָרִים.

And even regarding the needs of the body, not should increase a person words.

וְעַל זֶה צִוּוּ חֻכְמִים וְאָמְרוּ

And on this commanded the Sages and said,

כָּל הַמְרַבֶּה דְּבָרִים מְבִיא חַטָּא.

whoever increases words brings sin.

וְאָמְרוּ מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת אִי "לֹא מָצָאתִי לְגוּף טוֹב אֶלָּא שְׁתִּיקָה".

And they said in the Mishnah Avos 1:17, "Not have I found for the body better than silence."

וְכֵן בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה וּבְדִבְרֵי חֻכְמָה

And likewise in words of Torah and in words of wisdom,

יְהִיוּ דְּבָרֵי הָאָדָם מְעֻטִּים וְעֲנִינֵיהֶם מְרֻבִּים.

should be the words of the person few and their content abundant.

וְהוּא שִׁצְווֹ חֲכָמִים וְאָמְרוּ גַּם בְּ"לֵעֹלָם יִשְׁנָה אָדָם לְתַלְמִידָיו דֶּרֶךְ קִצְרָה".

And that is what commanded the Sages and said in the Gemara Pesachim 3b, "Always should teach a person to his students a way concise."

אָבֵל אִם הָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים מְרֻבִּין וְהָעֲנֵן מְעַט

But if were the words many and the content scant,

הֲרִי זֶה סִבָּלוּת

behold this is foolishness,

וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר קהלת ה ב "כִּי בָּא הַחֲלוֹם בְּרַב עֲנָן וְקוֹל כְּסִיל בְּרַב דְּבָרִים":

and on this it is said in Koheles 5:2, "For comes the dream with a multitude of matters, and the voice of a fool with a multitude of words."

הִלְכָּה ה

Halacha 5 · The Importance of Silence and Teaching Students with Tranquility

משנה אבות ג יג "סֵיג לַחֲכָמָה שְׁתִּיקָה".

As the Mishnah in Avos 3:13 states, "A safeguard for wisdom is silence."

לְפִיכָּה לֹא יַמְהֵר לְהַשִּׁיב

Therefore, a person should not hasten to answer impulsively,

וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה לְדַבֵּר.

and he should not increase to speak excessively.

וַיִּלְמַד לְתַלְמִידִים בְּשׁוֹכֶה וְנִנְחָה

And he should teach the students with calmness and tranquility,

בְּלֹא צִעָקָה וּבְלֹא אֲרִיכוּת לְשׁוֹן.

without shouting and without lengthiness of tongue and unnecessary wordiness.

הוא שֶׁאָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה קהלת ט יז "דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים בְּנִיחָה נִשְׁמָעִים":

That is what Shlomo said in Koheles 9:17, "The words of the wise in tranquility are heard."

הִלְכָּה ו

Halacha 6 · The Prohibition of Deceiving People and the Obligation of Truthful Speech

אָסוּר לְאָדָם לְהִנָּהִיג עֲצָמוֹ בְּדַבְרֵי חֲלָקוֹת וּפְתוּי.

It is forbidden for a person to conduct himself with words of smoothness and enticement, speaking insincerely to win favor.

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה אֶחָד בִּפִּי וְאֶחָד בְּלֵב

And he shall not be one in the mouth and one in the heart, saying one thing while thinking another,

אֶלָּא תוֹכוֹ כְּבָרוֹ

rather his inside should be like his outside,

וְהָעִנְיָן שֶׁבְּלֵב הוּא הַדָּבָר שֶׁבִּפִּי.

and the matter that is in the heart, it is the thing that is in the mouth.

וְאִסּוּר לְגַנֹּב דַּעַת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וְאֶפְלוּ דַּעַת הַנִּכְרִי.

And it is forbidden to steal the mind of the people through deception, and even the mind of the non-Jew.

כִּיצַד.

How so?

לֹא יִמְכֹּר לְנִכְרִי בֶּשֶׂר נִבְלָה בְּמָקוֹם בֶּשֶׂר שְׁחוּטָה.

He shall not sell to a non-Jew meat of a carcass that died on its own, presenting it in place of meat of a slaughtered animal, even if they taste the same, because he misleads him into thinking he is receiving higher-quality meat.

וְלֹא מִנְעֵל שֶׁל מֵתָה בְּמָקוֹם מִנְעֵל שֶׁל שְׁחוּטָה.

And he shall not sell a shoe of a dead animal, whose leather is weak, in place of a shoe of a slaughtered animal.

וְלֹא יִסְרְהֵב בְּחֵבְרוֹ שִׂיאֵכָל אֲצִלּוֹ וְהוּא יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁאֵינוֹ אוֹכֵל.

And he shall not press his fellow that he should eat with him, urging him repeatedly, and he knows that he will not eat, just to appear generous.

וְלֹא יִרְפֶּה לוֹ בְּתַקְרֻכָּת וְהוּא יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁאֵינוֹ מִקְבֵּל.

And he shall not offer abundantly to him with gifts, and he knows that he will not accept them.

וְלֹא יִפְתַּח לוֹ חֲבִיּוֹת שֶׁהוּא צָרִיךְ לְפָתַחן לְמַכְרֵן כְּדֵי לְפַתּוֹתוֹ שֶׁבִּשְׂבִּיל כְּבוֹדוֹ פָּתַח

And he shall not open for him barrels of wine that he needs to open them to sell them anyway, doing so in front of his guest in order to entice him into thinking that for the sake of his honor he opened them.

וְכֵן כָּל כִּיּוּצָא בּוֹ.

And so too with all that is similar to it.

וְאֶפְלוּ מִלֵּה אַחַת שֶׁל פְּתוּי וְשֶׁל גִּנְבַת דַּעַת אִסּוּר,

And even word one of enticement and of stealing of the mind is forbidden,

אֶלָּא שְׁפַת אֱמֶת וְרוּחַ נָכוֹן וְלֵב טָהוֹר מִכָּל עֲמָל וְהוֹוֹת:

rather a person must have a lip of truth and a spirit proper and a heart pure from all deceit and mischief.

הלכה ז

Halacha 7 • Following the Middle Path in Temperament and Avoiding Extreme Character Traits

לא יהא אדם בעל שחוק ומחתלות

A person should not be given to laughter and jesting,

ולא עצב ואונן

and not sad and mourning,

אלא שמח.

but always happy and content.

כך אמרו חכמים

So said the Sages in the Mishnah:

שחוק וקלות ראש מרגילין את האדם לערוה.

Laughter and lightness of head accustom a person to lewdness.

וצוו שלא יהא אדם פרוץ בצחוק

And they commanded that a person should not be unrestrained in laughter,

ולא עצב ומתאבל

and not sad and mourning,

אלא מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות.

but receiving every person with a pleasant expression of face.

וכן לא יהיה בעל נפש רחבה נבהל להון

And likewise, he should not be a possessor of a wide soul, meaning a greedy person, rushing for wealth,

ולא עצב ובטל ממלאכה.

and not lazy and idle from work,

אלא בעל עין טובה

but rather a possessor of a good eye, being satisfied with what he has,

ממעט בעסק ועוסק בתורה.

limiting his involvement in business and occupying himself with Torah.

ואותו המעט שהוא חלקו ישמח בו.

And with that little which is his portion, he should rejoice in it.

ולא בעל קטטה

And he should **not** be a possessor of quarrel,

ולא בעל קנאה

and not a possessor of envy,

ולא בעל תאוה

and not a possessor of desire,

ולא רוֹדֵף אַחֵר הַכְּבוֹד.

and not pursuing after honor.

כֹּה אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

So said the Sages:

הַקִּנְיָאָה וְהַתְּאֻהָ וְהַכְּבוֹד מוֹצִיִּים אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם.

Envy and desire and honor remove a person from the world.

כָּל־לוֹ שֶׁל דָּבָר

The general principle of the matter is:

יֵלֶךְ בַּמִּדָּה הַבִּיְנוּנִית שֶׁבְּכָל דָּעָה וְדָעָה

he should walk in the middle path that is in every trait and trait,

עַד שֶׁיִּהְיוּ כָּל דַּעוֹתָיו מְכוּוֹנוֹת בְּאַמְצָעוֹת.

until all his traits will be aligned in the middle.

וְהוּא שֶׁשְׁלֹמֹה אָמַר מִשְׁלֵי ד כו

And this is what Shlomo said in Mishlei, chapter four, verse twenty-six:

"פֶּלֶס מַעְגַּל רַגְלְךָ וְכָל דְּרָכֶיךָ יִכְנוּ:"

"Balance the path of your foot, and all your ways will be established."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by comparing moral illness to physical sickness, explaining that those with bad middos must seek out the wise to heal their souls. The Rambam outlines the method of spiritual healing: a person who has strayed to one extreme must accustom himself to the opposite extreme for a long time until he can return to the proper middle path. However, for pride

and anger, one must completely distance himself to the furthest extreme, as the Sages warned that anger is akin to idol worship and pride is like denying Hashem's presence. Finally, the Rambam instructs us on the great value of silence, teaching that one should speak briefly and only when necessary, and strictly forbids any form of deceit, smooth-tongued behavior, or dishonesty, even toward a non-Jew.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

When a person is physically sick, their taste buds get warped; they crave dirt and charcoal while despising wholesome bread and meat. The Rambam is teaching us a profound truth about our spiritual lives: when our middos are damaged, our spiritual taste buds are broken too. We actually begin to crave the very things that poison our souls, like anger, pride, and empty chatter, while finding the sweet, healthy path of Torah and refined character to be heavy and bitter.

To heal, we cannot rely on our own warped taste buds. We must go to the 'healers of the soul', our chachamin, and follow their prescription, which often requires us to bend all the way to the opposite extreme to break the habit. If we suffer from anger, we must practice absolute silence and restraint, even when we feel entirely justified in exploding. We must train ourselves to act calm on the outside, even if we have to pretend, until the quiet penetrates our hearts and restores our spiritual health.

Today, identify one area where your 'spiritual taste buds' might be slightly warped, perhaps a tendency to snap in anger or engage in idle gossip. For just this one day, practice the opposite extreme: if you feel the urge to speak sharply or gossip, choose absolute silence instead.