

הלכות דעות • פרק שלישי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, we learn how a Yid must approach the physical world. The Rambam warns us against the mistake of thinking that the way to overcome the yetzer hara and bad middos is to go to the opposite extreme of asceticism. A person might think he should completely deny himself meat, wine, a nice home, or fine clothing, and live like a hermit or a pagan priest. The Rambam teaches us that this is a bad path and is actually forbidden.

Instead, we are guided to see that Hashem wants us to live in the world and serve Him through the physical. We learn the proper Torah perspective on fasting, vows, and self-mortification, showing how our Sages discouraged us from forbidding things that the Torah has already permitted. The goal is to use everything in this world to strengthen our bodies and minds for the avodah of Hashem.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Prohibition Against Asceticism and Excessive Self-Mortification

שָׁמָא יֵאמֵר אָדָם

Perhaps a person will say to himself,

הוֹאִיל וְהִקְנָאָה וְהִתְאַוָּה וְהִכְבוֹד וְכִיּוּצָא בְּהֵם דְּרַךְ רָעָה הֵן

since envy, desire, honor, and the like of them are an evil path

וּמִזְצִיאוֹן אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם.

and remove a person from the world,

אֶפְרֹשׁ מֵהֶן בְּיוֹתֵר וְאֶתְרַחֵק לְצַד הָאֲחֵרוֹן.

I will separate from them exceedingly and I will distance myself to the extreme side,

עַד שֶׁלֹּא יֵאָכֵל בָּשָׂר וְלֹא יִשְׁתֶּה יַיִן

until he will not eat meat and he will not drink wine,

וְלֹא יִשָּׂא אִשָּׁה וְלֹא יֵשֵׁב בְּדִירָה נְאוּה

and he will not marry a wife and he will not dwell in a pleasant dwelling,

וְלֹא יִלְבֹּשׁ מְלָבוֹשׁ נָאוּה

and he will not wear fine clothing,

אֶלָּא הַשֵּׁק וְהַצֹּמֶר הַקָּשָׁה וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן

except sackcloth and coarse wool and the like of them,

כְּגוֹן כֹּהֲנֵי הָעוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים.

such as the priests of the worshippers of stars.

גַּם זֶה דֶּרֶךְ רָעָה הִיא וְאָסוּר לֵילְךָ בָּהּ.

This too is an evil path, and it is forbidden to walk in it.

הַמֵּהֲלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ זוֹ נִקְרָא חוֹטֵא.

The one who walks in this path is called a sinner,

שֶׁהָרִי הוּא אוֹמֵר בְּנָזִיר "וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו מֵאֲשֶׁר חָטָא עַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ".

for behold, it says concerning a nazirite, "And he shall atone for him for that he sinned against the soul."

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים וּמָה אִם נָזִיר שֶׁלֹּא פָּרַשׁ אֶלָּא מִן הַיַּיִן

The Sages said: And what if a nazirite, who abstained only from wine,

צָרִיךְ כִּפּוּר

needs atonement,

הַמוֹנֵעַ עֲצָמוֹ מִכָּל דָּבָר וְדָבָר עַל אַחַת כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה.

the one who deprives himself from every single thing, how much more so!

לְפִיכָךְ צִוּוּ חֲכָמִים שֶׁלֹּא יִמְנַע אָדָם עֲצָמוֹ

Therefore, the Sages commanded that a person should not deprive himself

אֶלָּא מִדִּבְרֵי שֶׁמִּנְעָתוֹ הַתּוֹרָה בִּלְבַד.

except from things that the Torah prohibited him alone.

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה אוֹסֵר עֲצָמוֹ בְּנִדְרִים וּבְשִׁבוּעוֹת עַל דְּבָרִים הַמֵּתֻרִים.

And he should not be forbidding himself with vows and with oaths upon permitted things.

כֹּךְ אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים לֹא דִיָּה מַה שֶׁאִסְּרָה תּוֹרָה

Thus the Sages said: Is it not enough for you what the Torah prohibited,

אֶלָּא שֶׁאַתָּה אוֹסֵר עָלֶיךָ דְּבָרִים אֲחֵרִים.

but that you must forbid upon yourself other things?

וּבְכָלֵּל הַזֶּה אֵלּוּ שְׁמֵתָעֲנִין תָּמִיד אֵינֶן בְּדֶרֶךְ טוֹבָה.

And in this category, those who fast constantly are not on a good path.

וְאַסְרוּ חֲכָמִים שִׁיחָא אָדָם מִסַּגָּף עַצְמוֹ בְּתַעֲנִית.

And the Sages forbade that a person should be afflicting himself with fasting.

וְעַל כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּיךָ וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן צִוָּה שְׁלֹמֹה וְאָמַר

And upon all these things and the like of them, Shlomo commanded and said,

"אַל תְּהִי צַדִּיק הַרְבֵּה וְאַל תִּתְחַפֵּם יוֹתֵר לָמָּה תִּשְׁוִימִם:"

"Do not be righteous overly, and do not make yourself wise excessively; why should you make yourself desolate?"

הִלְכָּה ב

Halacha 2 · Directing All of One's Physical Activities and Desires Solely for the Service of Hashem

צָרִיךְ הָאָדָם שִׁיכוֹן לִבּוֹ וְכָל מַעֲשָׂיו כָּלָם

It is necessary for a person to direct his heart and all of his actions, all of them,

לֵידַע אֶת הַשֵּׁם בָּרוּךְ הוּא בְּלִבְדּוֹ,

to know Hashem, blessed is He, alone,

וְיִהְיֶה שִׁבְתּוֹ וְקוּמוֹ וְדַבּוּרוֹ הַכֹּל לְעֻמַּת זֶה הַדְּבָר.

and his sitting, his rising, and his speaking shall all be toward this matter.

כִּיצַד?

How so?

כַּשִּׁישָׂא וְיִתֵּן אוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה לְטַל שְׂכָר,

When he buys and sells or does work to receive payment,

לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּלִבּוֹ לִקְבֹּץ מָמוֹן בְּלִבְדּוֹ,

it should not be in his heart to gather money alone,

אֶלָּא יַעֲשֶׂה דְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּיךָ כְּדִי שִׁימְצָא דְּבָרִים שֶׁהַגּוּף צָרִיךְ לָהֶם

rather he should do these things so that he may find the things that the body needs,

מֵאֲכִילָה וְשִׁתְיָה וְיִשְׁכֵּת בֵּית וּנְשִׂאת אִשָּׁה.

such as eating, drinking, dwelling in a house, and marrying a wife.

וְכֵן כַּשִּׁיאֵכֶל וְיִשְׁתֶּה וְיִבְעַל

And so, when he eats, drinks, and engages in relations,

לא ישים בלבו לעשות דברים האלו כדי להנות בלבד

he should not place in his heart to do these things in order to enjoy them alone,

עד שנמצא שאינו אוכל ושותה אלא המתוק לחה ויבעל כדי להנות,

to the point that it is found that he does not eat and drink except what is sweet to the palate, and he only engages in relations in order to enjoy;

אלא ישים על לבו שיאכל וישתה כדי להברות גופו ואיבריו בלבד.

rather, he should place upon his heart that he eats and drinks in order to make healthy his body and his limbs alone.

לפיכך לא יאכל כל שהחה מתאנה ככלב וחמור

Therefore, he should not eat everything that the palate desires like a dog and a donkey,

אלא יאכל דברים המועילים לגוף אם מרים אם מתוקים.

rather he should eat things that are beneficial to the body, whether they are bitter or sweet.

ולא יאכל דברים הרעים לגוף אף על פי שהן מתוקים לחה.

And he should not eat things that are bad for the body, even though they are sweet to the palate.

כיצד?

How so?

מי שהיה בשרו חם לא יאכל בשר ולא דבש ולא ישתה יין,

One whose constitution is hot should not eat meat or honey, and should not drink wine,

כענין שאמר שלמה דרך משל כה כו "אכל דבש וגו'.

in accordance with the matter that Shlomo said by way of parable, "To eat honey too much is not good."

ושותה מי העלשין אף על פי שהוא מר

And he should drink endive water, even though it is bitter,

שנמצא שותה ואוכל דרך רפואה בלבד

so that it is found that he drinks and eats by way of medicine alone,

כדי שיבריא ויעמד שלם

in order that he become healthy and stand whole,

הואיל ואי אפשר לאדם להיות אלא באכילה ושתיה.

since it is impossible for a person to live without eating and drinking.

וכן כְּשִׁיבְעַל לֹא יַבְעֵל אֶלָּא כְּדֵי לְהַכְרוֹת גּוּפוֹ וּכְדֵי לְקַיֵּם אֶת הַזֵּרַע.

And so, when he engages in relations, he should not engage in relations except to make healthy his body and to preserve the seed.

לְפִיכָּה אֵינוֹ בּוֹעֵל כָּל זְמַן שִׁיתְּאוּה

Therefore, he does not engage in relations every time that he desires,

אֶלָּא כָּל עֵת שִׁידַע שֶׁהוּא צָרִיךְ לְהוֹצִיא שְׂכַבְת זֵרַע כְּמוֹ דֶּרֶךְ הָרְפוּאָה אוֹ לְקַיֵּם אֶת הַזֵּרַע:

rather, at any time that he knows that he needs to emit semen, like the way of medicine, or to preserve the seed.

הִלְכָּה ג

Halacha 3 · Directing All Physical Actions and Bodily Health for the Sake of Heaven

הַמְנַהִיג עֲצָמוֹ עַל פִּי הָרְפוּאָה.

One who conducts himself according to the rules of medicine,

אִם שָׁם עַל לְבוֹ שִׁיחָהּ כָּל גּוּפוֹ וְאַיְכָּרָיו שְׁלֵמִים בְּלֻבָּד

if he places upon his heart that should be all of his body and his limbs healthy alone,

וְשִׁיחָיו לוֹ בָּנִים עוֹשִׂין מְלָאכְתּוֹ וְעִמְלִין לְצָרְכּוֹ

and that should be to him children doing his work and toiling for his need,

אִין זֶה דֶּרֶךְ טוֹבָה.

is not this a path that is good.

אֶלָּא יָשִׁים עַל לְבוֹ שִׁיחָהּ גּוּפוֹ שָׁלֵם וְחָזֵק

Rather, he should place upon his heart that should be his body healthy and strong,

כְּדֵי שֶׁתְּהִיָּה נִפְשׁוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדַעַת אֶת ה'.

in order that should be his soul upright to know Hashem.

שֶׁאִי אָפֶשֶׁר שִׁיבִין וְיִשְׁתַּכַּל בַּחֲכָמוֹת

For it is impossible that he understand and contemplate in the wisdoms of Torah

וְהוּא רָעֵב וְחוֹלָה אוֹ אֶחָד מֵאַיְכָּרָיו כּוֹאֵב.

and he is hungry and sick, or if one of his limbs pains him.

וְיָשִׁים עַל לְבוֹ שִׁיחָהּ לוֹ בֵּן

And he should place upon his heart that should be to him a son,

אוֹלֵי יִהְיֶה חָכָם וְגָדוֹל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.

perhaps he will be wise and great in Israel.

נִמְצָא הַמַּהֲלֵךְ בְּדַרְךָ זוֹ כָּל יָמָיו

It turns out that the one who walks in a path like this all of his days,

עוֹבֵד אֶת ה' תָּמִיד.

serves Hashem constantly.

אֲפֹלוּ בַּשָּׂעָה שֶׁנּוֹשֵׂא וְנוֹתֵן וְאֲפֹלוּ בַּשָּׂעָה שֶׁבוֹעֵל.

Even at the time that he conducts business, and even at the time that he has marital relations,

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁמִּחְשַׁבְתּוֹ בְּכָל

because that his thought in everything he does

כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּמְצָא צֹרְכָיו עַד שֶׁיִּהְיֶה גּוֹפּוֹ שָׁלֵם לְעַבֵּד אֶת ה'.

is in order that he find his needs, until that will be his body healthy to serve Hashem.

וְאֲפֹלוּ בַּשָּׂעָה שֶׁהוּא יָשָׁן

And even at the time that he sleeps,

אִם יָשָׁן לְדַעַת

if he sleeps with intent,

כְּדֵי שֶׁתִּנּוּחַ דַּעְתּוֹ עָלָיו וְיִנּוּחַ גּוֹפּוֹ

in order that should rest his mind upon him and should rest his body,

כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹא יִחָלֶה וְלֹא יוּכַל לְעַבֵּד אֶת ה' וְהוּא חוֹלָה,

in order that not he fall ill, and not he will be able to serve Hashem and he is sick,

נִמְצָאת שְׁנָה שְׁלֹו עֹבֵדָה לְמָקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

it turns out sleep of his is service to the Omnipresent, blessed is He.

וְעַל עֲנָנָן זֶה צִוּוּ חֲכָמִים וְאָמְרוּ מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת בִּיב "וְכָל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ יִהְיוּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם".

And on matter this commanded the Sages and said in Mishnah Avos 2:12, "And all of your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven."

וְהוּא שֶׁאָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה בְּחֻמְתּוֹ מִשְׁלֵי גו "בְּכָל דְּרָכֶיךָ דַּעְהוּ וְהוּא יַיִשֵּׁר אַרְחֹתֶיךָ":

And that is what said Shlomo in his wisdom in Proverbs 3:6, "In all of your ways know Him, and He will make straight your paths."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by condemning asceticism and self-mortification, explaining that one who abstains from permitted physical pleasures, like wine or meat, is called a sinner, just as the Torah requires a nazir to bring a sin offering. The Rambam quotes our Sages who ask if what the Torah prohibited is not already enough for us, and he warns against making vows to forbid permitted things or fasting constantly. He concludes by citing Shlomo HaMelech's warning in Koheles not to be overly righteous, showing that the true path of a chacham is to serve Hashem with a healthy, balanced body and mind without resorting to extreme self-denial.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

It is easy to think that to be a good Jew, we must run away from the physical world, fast, and deny ourselves any pleasure. But the Rambam teaches us a beautiful, life-changing truth: Hashem created this world for us to live in it, not to escape it. When you deny yourself the permitted pleasures of this world, the Torah calls you a sinner! Hashem does not want you to be a hermit; He wants you to bring holiness into your everyday physical life.

The secret of this avodah is in your intention. When you eat a good meal, sleep, or go to work, do not do it just for the raw physical pleasure or to amass wealth. Do it with the conscious thought: "I am taking care of my body so that I have the strength, health, and peace of mind to learn Torah, do mitzvos, and serve Hashem." When you live this way, your physical acts are elevated. Your eating becomes a holy service, and even your sleep is considered an avodah to the Creator.

Today, before you eat a meal or go to sleep, stop for three seconds and say to yourself: "I am doing this to give my body the strength to serve Hashem."