

הלכות תלמוד תורה • פרק שלישי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam takes us into the very heart of the greatness of Torah study, showing us how the crown of Torah stands supreme above all other crowns in Klal Yisrael. We will learn how the Torah is the inheritance of every single Yid, waiting for anyone who is willing to put in the effort to acquire it, and how a talmid chacham takes precedence in honor over even a Kohen Gadol who is an am ha'aretz.

The chapter also guides us in how to balance our learning with the performance of other mitzvos. The Rambam lays down the practical halachic guidelines for when we must interrupt our learning to perform a mitzvah and when we must remain engrossed in our holy study, based on whether the mitzvah can be performed by others.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1: The Three Crowns and the Supreme Greatness of the Crown of Torah

בשלושה כתרין נכתרו ישראל.

With three crowns were crowned Israel:

כתר תורה וכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות.

the crown of Torah, and the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty.

כתר כהונה זכה בו אהרן

As for the crown of priesthood, Aaron merited it,

שנאמר במדבר כה יג "והיתה לו וליצורעו אחריו ברית כהנות עולם".

as it is said in the Torah, "And it shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of priesthood eternal."

כתר מלכות זכה בו דוד

As for the crown of royalty, Dovid merited it,

שנאמר תהילים פט לו "זרעו לעולם יהיה וכסאו כשמש נגדי".

as it is said in Tehillim, "His seed forever shall be, and his throne like the sun before Me."

כתר תורה הרי מנח ועומד ומוכן לכל ישראל.

But the crown of Torah, behold, it is placed and standing and ready for every Jew,

שנאמר דברים לג ד "תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהל יעקב".

as it is said in the Torah, "Torah commanded us Moshe, an inheritance of the congregation of Yaakov."

כָּל מִי שֶׁיִרְצֶה יָבוֹא וְיִטֵּל.

Therefore, any who desires, let him come and take it.

שָׁמָּה תֹאמַר שְׂאוֹתֵם הַכִּתְרִים גְּדוֹלִים מִכֶּתֶר תּוֹרָה.

And lest you say that those other crowns are greater than the crown of Torah,

הֲרִי הוּא אוֹמֵר מִשְׁלֵי ח טו "בִּי מְלָכִים יִמְלְכוּ וְרוֹזְנִים יַחְקִקוּ צֶדֶק" מִשְׁלֵי ח טז "בִּי שָׂרִים יִשְׁרֹוּ".

behold, it says in Mishlei on behalf of the Torah, "By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice," and it says, "By me princes rule."

הָא לְמַדְתָּ שֶׁכֶּתֶר תּוֹרָה גְּדוֹל מִשְׁנֵיהֶם:

Behold, you have learned from this that the crown of Torah is greater than both of them.

הַלָּכָה ב

Halacha 2 · Precedence of a Torah Scholar Mamzer Over an Unlearned High Priest

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

The Sages said in the Mishnah:

מַמְזֵר תִּלְמִיד חָכָם

a mamzer who is a disciple of a Sage

קוֹדֵם לְכוֹהֵן גָּדוֹל עִם הָאֶרֶץ

precedes a Kohen Gadol who is an unlearned person in honor and for saving his life,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר

as it is said in the verse in Mishlei (3:15) regarding the Torah:

"יָקָרָה הִיא מִפְּנִינִים".

"Precious it is more than pearls"—

מִכֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל

which the Sages expound to mean: it is more precious than a Kohen Gadol

שֶׁנִּכְנָס לְפָנֶי וְלִפְנֵימִים:

who enters into the innermost sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, on Yom Kippur, if he is an ignoramus.

אין לך מצוה בכל המצוות כָּלֵן

There is not for you a mitzvah among all the mitzvos, all of them,

שהיא שקולה כנגד תלמוד תורה

that is equal to the study of Torah;

אלא תלמוד תורה כנגד כל המצוות כָּלֵן

rather, the study of Torah is against—meaning, it outweighs—all the mitzvos, all of them,

שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.

because study brings to the hands of deed.

לפיכך התלמוד קודם למעשה בכל מקום:

Therefore, study precedes deed in every place.

היה לפניו עשיית מצוה ותלמוד תורה.

If there was before him a choice between the performance of a mitzvah and the study of Torah,

אם אפשר למצוה להעשות על ידי אחרים

if it is possible for the mitzvah to be done by the hands of others,

לא יפסיק תלמודו.

he shall not interrupt his study.

ואם לאו

And if not, meaning the mitzvah cannot be performed by anyone else,

יעשה המצוה ויחזור לתלמודו:

he shall perform the mitzvah and then immediately return to his study.

תחלת דינו של אדם

The beginning of the judgment of a person in the World to Come is that

אינו נדון אלא על התלמוד

he is not judged except on his Torah study,

ואחר כך על שאר מעשיו.

and after that he is judged on the rest of his deeds.

לפיכך אמרו חכמים

Therefore, the Sages said that

לעולם יעסק אדם בתורה

always should a person occupy himself in the Torah,

בין לשמה בין שלא לשמה

whether for its sake or whether not for its sake,

שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה:

for from within learning not for its sake, he eventually comes to learn it for its sake.

הלכה ו

Halacha 6 · The Proper Path to Acquire the Crown of Torah

מי שנשאף לבו לקיים מצוה זו פראוי

One whose heart inspires him to fulfill this mitzvah of learning Torah properly,

ולהיות מקתר בכתר תורה.

and to be crowned with the crown of Torah,

לא יסיח דעתו לדברים אחרים.

should not divert his mind to other matters.

ולא ישים על לבו שיקנה תורה עם העושר והכבוד כאחת.

And he should not set upon his heart that he will acquire Torah along with wealth and honor as one.

משנה אבות ו ד "כך היא דרכה של תורה.

As the Mishnah in Avos 6:4 states: "Such is the path of Torah:

פת במלח תאכל

bread with salt you shall eat,

ומים במשורה תשתה

and water by measure you shall drink,

ועל הארץ תישן

and upon the ground you shall sleep,

וחיי צער תחיה

and a life of deprivation you shall live,

ובתורה אתה עמל."

and in Torah you toil."

ולא עליך הדבר לגמור

And yet, **not upon you is the matter to complete** the entire Torah,

ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה.

and at the same time, **not are you a free man to desist from it** entirely.

ואם הרבית תורה הרבית שכר.

And if you have **increased** your study of Torah, **you have increased** your reward,

והשכר לפי הצער:

and the reward is according to the **pain** and effort you invest.

הלכה ז

Halacha 7 · Making Torah Study Fixed and the Prohibition of Delaying It

שמן תאמר

Perhaps you will say to yourself:

עד שאקבץ ממון

"Until the time **that I gather** enough **money**,

אחזר ואקרא.

only then **I will return** and **I will study**; or,

עד שאקנה מה שאני צריך

until the time **that I buy what that I need** for my household,

ואפנה מעסקי

and **I will be free** from my business affairs,

ואחזר ואקרא.

and only then I will return and I will study.”

אם תעלה מחשבה זו על לבך

If such a thought arises upon your heart,

אין אתה זוכה לכתרה של תורה לעולם.

you will not merit the crown of Torah forever.

אלא עשה תורתך קבע

Rather, make your Torah study fixed,

ומלאכתך עראי

and your work temporary.

משנה אבות ב ד

As the Sages taught in **Mishnah Avos**, chapter **two**, mishnah **four**:

ולא תאמר "לכשאפנה אשנה

“And do not say, ‘When I am free I will study,’

שמא לא תפנה":

perhaps you will not be free.”

הלכה ח

Halacha 8 · Torah is Not Found in the Proud or in Businessmen

כתוב בתורה

It is written in the Torah regarding the acquisition of Torah knowledge:

גמרא עירובין נה א "לא בשמים היא ולא מעבר לים היא".

as the Gemara in Eruvin 55a expounds on the verse, "It is not in heaven, and it is not beyond the sea."

לא בשמים היא

It is not in heaven means that

לא בגסי הרוח היא מצויה

it is not found among those of a haughty spirit who hold themselves high like the heavens,

ולא במהלכי מעבר לים היא.

and it is **not** found **among** those who travel beyond the sea constantly in pursuit of wealth.

לְפִיכָּה אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

Therefore, the Sages said in the

משנה אבות ב ה "לא כל המרבה בסחורה מחכים".

Mishnah in Avos 2:5, "Not everyone who increases in business becomes wise."

וְצִוּוּ חֲכָמִים

And the Sages commanded us in Avos 4:10,

הוֹי מִמַּעַט בְּעֵסֶק וְעֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה:

"Minimize business dealings and occupy yourself with the Torah."

הִלָּכָה ט

Halacha 9· Torah is Compared to Water and the Humility Required to Acquire It

דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה נִמְשָׁלוּ בַּמַּיִם

The words of Torah are compared to water,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יִשְׁעִיָּה נָה א "הוֹי כָּל צָמָא לָכוּ לַמַּיִם".

as it is said in the Navi Yeshayahu, "Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water."

לֵאמֹר לָךְ

This is to say to you:

מַה מַּיִם אֵינָם מִתְכַּנְסִין בְּמָקוֹם מִדְרֹן

Just as water does not collect in a place of a slope,

אֶלָּא נִזְחָ לִין מַעְלֵיו וּמִתְקַבְּצִים בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁבוּרָן

but flows from upon it and gathers in a place of a depression, a low and hollow basin,

כֹּךְ דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה אֵינָם נִמְצָאִים בְּגִסֵּי הָרוּחַ

so the words of Torah are not found in the haughty of spirit,

וְלֹא בְּלֵב כָּל גִּבְהַ לֵּב

and not in the heart of any haughty of heart,

אֶלָּא בְּדַכָּא וּשְׁפַל רוּחַ

but only in the humble and lowly of spirit,

שמתאבק בעפר רגלי החכמים

who makes himself dusty in the dust of the feet of the Sages,

ומסיר התאוות ותענוגי הזמן מלבו

and removes the desires and pleasures of the time from his heart,

ועושה מלאכה בכל יום מעט כדי חייו

and does melacha in every day a little, just sufficient for his sustenance,

אם לא היה לו מה יאכל

if there was not to him what he will eat otherwise,

ושאר יומו ולילו עוסק בתורה:

and the rest of his day and his night he occupies himself with the Torah.

הלכה י

Halacha 10 · The Prohibition of Benefiting from Torah and the Obligation to Work

כל המשים על לבו

Anyone who places upon his heart

שיעסק בתורה ולא יעשה מלאכה

that he will engage in Torah and not do work

ויתפרנס מן הצדקה

and will be sustained from charity,

הרי זה חלל את השם

behold this one desecrates the Name of Hashem,

ובזה את התורה

and dishonors the Torah,

וכבה מאור הדת

and extinguishes from the light of the faith,

וגרם רעה לעצמו

and causes evil to himself,

ונטל חייו מן העולם הבא.

and removes his life from the world to come.

לְפִי שְׂאָסוּר לְהִנּוּת מִדְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה.

Because it is forbidden to benefit from words of Torah in this world.

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

As the Sages said in the Mishnah in Avos, "Anyone who benefits from words of Torah removes his life from the world."

וְעוֹד צִוּוּ וְאָמְרוּ

And further they commanded and said, "Do not make them a crown to magnify oneself with them, nor an axe to chop with them."

וְעוֹד צִוּוּ וְאָמְרוּ

And further they commanded and said, "Love work and hate Rabbinat,"

וְכָל תּוֹרָה שֶׁאֵין עִמָּה מְלָאכָה סוּפָה בְּטִלָּה וְגוֹרָרֶת עוֹן.

"and all Torah that is not with it work, its end is nullified and drags sin."

וְסוֹף אָדָם זֶה שֶׁיִּהְיֶה מְלַסְטִים אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת:

And the end of this man is that he will rob the people.

הַלְכָּה יֵא

Halacha 11 · The Great Virtue of Earning a Livelihood from One's Own Toil

מַעֲלָה גְדוֹלָה הִיא

It is a great virtue

לְמִי שֶׁהוּא מַתְפַּרְנֵס מִמַּעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו.

for one who sustains himself from the work of his hands,

וּמִדַּת חֲסִידִים הָרֵאשׁוֹנִים הִיא.

and it is the trait of the pious ones of the early generations.

וּבְזֶה זִוְכָה לְכָל כְּבוֹד וְטוֹבָה

And through this, he merits all honor and goodness

שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְלְעוֹלָם הַבָּא

that is in this world and for the World to Come,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר תְּהִלִּים כַּח ב' "יִגִּיעַ כַּפְיֶךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרִיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ"

as it is said in Tehillim 128:2, "The toil of your hands when you eat, praiseworthy are you and it is good for you."

משנה אבות ו ד "אשריך בעולם הזה

And the Sages expounded in Mishnah Avos 6:4, "Praise worthy are you in this world,

וטוב לך לעולם הבא"

and it is good for you in the World to Come,"

שכלו טוב:

which is entirely good.

הלכה יב

Halacha 12 · Toil, Self-Sacrifice, and Vocalization in the Study of Torah

אין דברי תורה מתקיימין במי שמרפה עצמו עליהן.

Words of Torah are not established in one who slackens himself upon them, treating his learning with laziness or as a secondary pursuit.

ולא באלו שלומדין מתוך עדון ומתוך אכילה ושתייה.

And not in those who study from a lifestyle of pleasure and from eating and drinking, seeking physical comforts while trying to acquire Torah.

אלא במי שממית עצמו עליהן ומצער גופו תמיד

But rather, they are established only in one who kills himself upon them through intense dedication, and afflicts his body constantly by depriving himself of physical indulgences for the sake of learning,

ולא יתן שנה לעיניו ולעפעפיו תנומה.

and will not give sleep to his eyes and to his eyelids slumber, choosing instead to toil in Torah night and day.

אמרו חכמים דרך רמז במדבר יט יד "זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל"

The Sages said by way of allusion to this concept, based on the verse, "This is the Torah: a man when he dies in a tent,"

אין התורה מתקיימת אלא במי שממית עצמו באהלי חכמים.

the Torah is not established except in one who kills himself in the tents of the Sages, dedicating his entire being to the study halls.

וכן אמר שלמה בחכמתו משלי כד י "התרפית ביום צרה צר כחכה".

And so said Shlomo in his wisdom: "If you slackened in a day of distress, narrow is your strength," meaning that if one is lazy in Torah study, he will lack the spiritual strength to stand in times of trouble.

ועוד אמר קהלת ב ט "אף חכמתי עמדה לי"

And further, he said in Koheles: "Even my wisdom stood for me,"

חכמה שלמדתי באף היא עמדה לי.

which the Sages expounded to mean: the wisdom that I learned in anger and self-deprivation, it stood for me and remained with me.

אמרו חכמים ברית כרותה שכל היגע בתורתו בבית המדרש לא במהרה הוא משכח.

The Sages said: A covenant is made that anyone who wearies in his Torah study in the house of study, not quickly he forgets his learning.

וכל היגע בתלמודו בצנעה מקדים שנאמר משלי יא ב "ואת צנועים חכמה".

And anyone who wearies in his study in private becomes wise, as it is said: "And with the modest is wisdom."

וכל המשמיע קולו בשעת תלמודו תלמודו מתקיים בידו.

And anyone who makes heard his voice at the time of his study, his study is established in his hand and is preserved in his memory.

אבל הקורא בלחש במהרה הוא שוכח:

But one who reads in a whisper, quickly he forgets what he has learned.

הלכה יג

Halacha 13 · The Supreme Importance of Nighttime Torah Study and the Severity of Neglecting It

אף על פי שמצוה ללמד ביום ובלילה

Even though it is a mitzvah to study Torah both by day and by night,

אין אדם למד רב חכמתו אלא בלילה.

a person does not acquire most of his wisdom except at night.

לפיכך מי שרצה לזכות בכתר התורה

Therefore, whoever desires to merit the crown of the Torah

יזהר בכל לילותיו

should be careful with all his nights,

ולא יאבד אפלו אחד מהן

and not lose even one of them

בשנה ואכילה ושתיה ושיחה וכיוצא בהן

to sleep, and eating, and drinking, and conversation, and the like with them,

אלא בתלמוד תורה ודברי חכמה.

except in study of Torah and words of wisdom.

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אֵין רִנָּה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה אֶלָּא בַּלַּיְלָה

The Sages said: There is no song of Torah except at night,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "קוּמִי רְנִי בַּלַּיְלָה".

as it is said in Eichah, "Arise, sing out at night."

וְכֹל הָעוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה בַּלַּיְלָה

And anyone who occupies himself with Torah at night,

חוֹט שֶׁל חֶסֶד נִמְשָׁךְ עָלָיו בַּיּוֹם

a strand of favor is extended over him by day,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "יוֹמָם יֵצֵה ה' חֶסֶדּוֹ וּבַלַּיְלָה שִׁירָה עִמִּי תִפְלָה לְאֵל חַיִּי".

as it is said in Tehillim, "By day He ordains, Hashem, His kindness, and at night His song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life."

וְכֹל בֵּית שֶׁאֵין נִשְׁמָעִים בּוֹ דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה בַּלַּיְלָה

And any house in which is not heard in it words of Torah at night,

אֵשׁ אוֹכֶלֶתּוֹ

fire consumes it,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "כָּל חֹשֶׁךְ טָמוּן לְצַפּוֹנָיו תֹּאכְלֶהוּ אֵשׁ לֹא נִפָּח".

as it is said in Iyov, "All darkness is hidden for his treasures, shall consume him a fire not blown."

בְּזֶה דִּבְרָה ה' זֶה שֶׁלֹּא הִשְׁגִּיתָ עַל דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה כָּל עֶקֶר.

The pasuk says, "Because the word of Hashem he has despised" — this refers to one who does not pay attention to words of Torah at all.

וְכֵן כָּל שֶׁאִפְשָׁר לוֹ לְעֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה וְאֵינוֹ עוֹסֵק

And likewise, anyone for whom it is possible for him to occupy himself with Torah and he does not occupy himself,

אוֹ שֶׁקֵּרָא וְשָׁנָה וּפִרְשׁ לְהַבְלִי עוֹלָם

or who read Chumash and studied Mishnah and turned away to the vanities of the world,

וְהִנִּיחַ תַּלְמוּדּוֹ וּזְנָחוֹ

and left his study and abandoned it,

הֲרִי זֶה בְּכָלֵל בּוֹזֵה דִּבְרָה ה'.

behold, this one is in the category of one who despises the word of Hashem.

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים כָּל הַמְבַטֵּל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מֵעֶשֶׂר

The Sages said: Whoever neglects the Torah from wealth,

סוֹפוֹ לִבְטָלָהּ מֵעֶנִי

his end is to neglect it from poverty;

וְכָל הַמְקַיֵּם אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מֵעֶנִי

and whoever maintains the Torah from poverty,

סוֹפוֹ לְקַיְימָהּ מֵעֶשֶׂר.

his end is to maintain it from wealth.

וְעֵנִין זֶה מְפָרֵשׁ הוּא בַּתּוֹרָה,

And this matter, this is explicit in the Torah,

הָרִי הוּא אוֹמֵר "תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָבַדְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מִכָּל"

behold, it says: "Because that not you served Hashem your God with joy and with goodness of heart from an abundance of everything,"

"וְעָבַדְתָּ אֶת אֹיְבֶיךָ."

"and you shall serve your enemies."

וְאוֹמֵר "לְמַעַן עֲנִתֶךָ"

And it says: "In order to afflict you,"

וְאוֹמֵר "לְהֵיטֵבָךְ בְּאַחֲרִיתֶךָ."

and it says: "To do you good in your end."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam begins by explaining that while the crowns of priesthood and royalty were given to Aaron and Dovid respectively, the crown of Torah is set aside for every Jew to acquire through diligent effort. Because the Torah is more precious than anything else, the study of Torah is equated to all the other mitzvot combined, as study ultimately leads to proper deed. Practically, if a Yid is learning and is confronted with a mitzvah that can be performed by someone else, he should not interrupt his learning; however, if there is no one else available to perform the mitzvah, he must interrupt his study to fulfill Hashem's will.

My dear talmid, look at the beautiful words of the Rambam. The crown of priesthood was given to Aaron and his children; the crown of royalty was given to Dovid HaMelech and his descendants. But the crown of Torah? It is not a closed dynasty. It is sitting in the corner, waiting, ready for any single Yid who wants to come and take it. It does not matter where you come from or what your background is. The Rambam tells us that even a manzer who is a talmid chacham takes precedence over an ignorant Kohen Gadol who enters the Holy of Holies. The crown of Torah is yours for the taking, but it requires you to step forward and claim it.

How do we claim it? The Rambam gives us the secret: "Make your Torah fixed and your work temporary." The yetzer hara loves to whisper, "Just wait until I finish this business deal, or until I get my finances in order, then I will sit down and learn properly." Do not fall into this trap! If you wait until you are free, you may never be free. The Torah is compared to water, which only flows down to the lowest place. It does not stay with the haughty or those who seek luxury and ease. It rests with the humble, with those who are willing to squeeze themselves, to minimize their worldly involvements, and to put their learning first.

True acquisition of Torah comes when a person is willing to exert himself, especially in the quiet hours of the night when the world is asleep. The Sages tell us that the sweet song of Torah is heard most clearly at night. When you make sacrifices for your learning, even small ones, that Torah becomes a part of your very essence. It is not about angelic perfection; it is about a real, working Yid choosing to carve out holy time from the physical demands of this world.

Today, do not say "when I have time, I will learn." Instead, set a fixed, unbreakable time for your learning today, even if it is just fifteen minutes, and treat it as the most important appointment on your calendar, letting nothing else push it aside.