

הלכות תלמוד תורה • פרק רביעי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, we learn the vital halachos of how a Torah shiur must be conducted, focusing on the spiritual and ethical standards required of both the rebbe and the talmid. The Rambam teaches us that Torah is a holy inheritance that cannot be given over to an improper student whose deeds are not refined, nor may we learn from a teacher who does not resemble an angel of Hashem. We must protect the purity of the Torah by ensuring that both those who teach it and those who receive it are walking on a straight path of yiras Shamayim.

Additionally, the chapter guides us in the proper derech eretz and physical setup of the bais medrash. We learn how the rebbe and the talmidim should sit in relation to one another, emphasizing a beautiful sense of mutual respect and equality in the presence of the Shechinah, where everyone sits either on the ground or on chairs together.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 - Restricting Torah Instruction to Proper Students and Proper Teachers

אין מלמדין תורה אלא לתלמיד הגון נאה במעשיו.

We do not teach Torah except to a student who is proper and attractive in his deeds,

או לתם.

or to an innocent person who has not shown any bad traits.

אבל אם היה הולך בדרכו לא טובה

But if he was walking in a path that is not good,

מחזירין אותו למוטב ומנהיגין אותו בדרכו לשרה

we return him to the good and we guide him in a path that is straight,

ובודקין אותו

and we examine him to see if he has truly changed,

ואחר כך מכניסין אותו לבית המדרש ומלמדין אותו.

and after that we bring him to the house of study and we teach him.

אמרו חכמים כל השונה לתלמיד שאינו הגון

Said the Sages: Anyone who teaches a student who is not proper,

כָּאִלּוּ זָרַק אָבֶן לְמֶרְקוּלִיס

it is as if he threw a stone to Mercury, which is an act of idolatry,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מִשְׁלֵי כו ח "כְּצֹרֹר אָבֶן בְּמַרְגָּמָה כֵּן נוֹתֵן לְכֹסִיל כְּבוֹד".

as it is said in Mishlei, "Like binding a stone in a sling so is he who gives to a fool honor".

וְאֵין כְּבוֹד אֶלָּא תּוֹרָה

And there is no honor except Torah,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מִשְׁלֵי ג לה "כְּבוֹד חֲכָמִים יִנָּחֵלוּ".

as it is said, "Honor the wise shall inherit".

וְכֵן הָרֵב שְׂאִינוּ הוֹלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ טוֹבָה

And likewise, a teacher who is not walking in a path that is good,

אֲףִי עַל פִּי שֶׁחֲכָם גָּדוֹל הוּא וְכָל הָעָם צָרִיכִין לוֹ

even though a sage great he is and all the nation need him for his wisdom,

אֵין מִתְלַמְּדִין מִמֶּנּוּ עַד שׁוֹבוֹ לְמוֹטָב.

we do not study from him until his return to the good,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מִלֵּאכִי ב ז "כִּי שְׁפָתַי כֹּהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ דַעַת וְתוֹרָה יִבְקְשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ כִּי מִלֵּאָה ה' צְבָאוֹת הוּא".

as it is said, "For the lips of a priest shall guard knowledge and Torah they shall seek from his mouth for a messenger of Hashem of Hosts he is".

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אִם הָרֵב דּוֹמָה לְמִלֵּאָה ה' צְבָאוֹת תּוֹרָה יִבְקְשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ

Said the Sages: If the teacher resembles a messenger of Hashem of Hosts, Torah they shall seek from his mouth,

אִם לֹא אֵל יִבְקְשׁוּ תּוֹרָה מִפִּיהוּ:

if not, do not seek Torah from his mouth.

הִלָּכָה ב

Halacha 2 · The Seating Arrangement of the Teacher and Students During Torah Study

כִּיצַד מְלַמְּדִים.

How do they teach Torah to the disciples?

הָרֵב יוֹשֵׁב בְּרֹאשׁ

The teacher sits at the head of the study hall,

וְהִתְלַמִּידִים מְקַפִּים לְפָנָיו כַּעֲטָרָה

and the students are surrounded before him like a crown, in a semi-circle,

כְּדִי שִׁיְהוּ כָּלָם רוֹאִים הָרֶב

so that they will be, all of them, seeing the teacher

וְשׁוֹמְעִים דְּבָרָיו.

and hearing his words clearly.

וְלֹא יֵשֵׁב הָרֶב עַל הַכִּסֵּא

And not shall sit the teacher on the chair

וְתִלְמִידָיו עַל הַקֶּרֶעַ

and his students on the ground, as this is disrespectful to them,

אֶלָּא אוֹ הַכֹּל עַל הָאָרֶץ

rather, either everyone sits on the ground,

אוֹ הַכֹּל עַל הַכִּסְאוֹת.

or everyone sits on the chairs.

וּבְרֵאשׁוֹנָה הָיָה הָרֶב יוֹשֵׁב

And originally, in earlier generations, was the teacher sitting

וְהִתְלַמִּידִים עוֹמְדִים

and the students standing out of great awe and respect for the Torah,

וּמִקֵּדָם חָרְפָּן בֵּית שְׁנִי

and before the destruction of the House, the Second Beis HaMikdash, when weakness descended upon the world,

נִהְגוּ הַכֹּל לְלַמֵּד לְתִלְמִידִים

they accustomed everyone to teach to the students

וְהֵם יוֹשְׁבִים:

while they are sitting.

הִלְכָּה ג

Halacha 3 · The Conduct of the Teacher and the Spokesman During Instruction

אִם הָיָה מְלַמֵּד מִפִּי לְתִלְמִידִים מְלַמֵּד.

If he was teaching directly from his mouth to the students, he teaches them in this manner.

וְאִם הָיָה מְלַמֵּד עַל פִּי מְתָרְגֵּם

And if he was teaching by the mouth of a spokesman who broadcasts his words to the large crowd,

הַמְתָּרְגֵּם עוֹמֵד בֵּינּוּ וּבֵין הַתְּלָמִידִים

the spokesman stands between him and between the students,

וְהָרֵב אוֹמֵר לַמְתָּרְגֵּם וְהַמְתָּרְגֵּם מְשַׁמֵּיעַ לְכָל הַתְּלָמִידִים.

and the teacher says the lesson quietly to the spokesman, and the spokesman makes it heard to all the students.

וְכִשְׁהֵם שׁוֹאֲלִין לַמְתָּרְגֵּם

And when they ask questions, they address them to the spokesman;

הוּא שׁוֹאֵל לְרֵב וְהָרֵב מְשִׁיב לַמְתָּרְגֵּם וְהַמְתָּרְגֵּם מְשִׁיב לַשׁוֹאֵל.

he asks the teacher, and the teacher replies to the spokesman, and the spokesman replies to the questioner.

וְלֹא יִגְבִּיהַ הָרֵב קוֹלוֹ יוֹתֵר מִקּוֹל הַמְתָּרְגֵּם.

And not shall raise the teacher his voice more than the voice of the spokesman, so as not to confuse the listeners.

וְלֹא יִגְבִּיהַ הַמְתָּרְגֵּם קוֹלוֹ בְּעֵת שֶׁשׁוֹאֵל אֶת הָרֵב יוֹתֵר מִקּוֹל הָרֵב.

And not shall raise the spokesman his voice at the time that he asks the teacher, more than the voice of the teacher, out of respect.

אֵין הַמְתָּרְגֵּם רֹשֵׁאִי לֹא לִפְחֹת וְלֹא לְהוֹסִיף וְלֹא לְשַׁנּוֹת

There is no the spokesman permitted not to subtract, and not to add, and not to change anything from the teacher's words,

אֲלֵא אִם כֵּן הָיָה הַמְתָּרְגֵּם אֲבִיו שֶׁל חָכָם אוֹ רַבּוֹ.

unless was the spokesman his father of the sage, or his teacher, in which case the teacher must show them extra honor.

אוֹמֵר הָרֵב לַמְתָּרְגֵּם כֹּה אָמַר לִי רַבִּי אוֹ כֹּה אָמַר לִי אָבִא מְרִי.

In such a case, says the teacher to the spokesman, "So said to me my teacher," or "So said to me my father, my master."

וְכִשְׁאוֹמֵר הַמְתָּרְגֵּם הַדְּבָרִים לָעָם

And when says the spokesman the words to the people,

אוֹמֵר בְּשֵׁם הַחָכָם וּמִזְכִּיר שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל אָבִי הָרֵב אוֹ שֶׁל רַבּוֹ

he says them in the name of the sage, and mentions the name of of the father of the teacher, or of his teacher,

וְאוֹמֵר כֹּה אָמַר רַבָּנָא פְּלוֹנִי

and says, "So said our master, so-and-so,"

אף על פי שלא הזכיר הרב שמו של חכם.

even though that not mentioned the teacher the name of of the sage explicitly when speaking to him.

שאסור לקרות לרבו או לאביו בשמו:

This is because it is forbidden for a person to call his teacher or his father by his name.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4: The Patience Required of a Teacher and Student in Torah Study

הרב שילמד ולא הבינו התלמידים

The teacher who taught, and the students did not understand the lesson,

לא יכעס עליהם וירגז

he should not become angry with them and rage at them;

אלא חוזר ושונה הדבר אפלו כמה פעמים

rather, he goes back and repeats the matter, even several times,

עד שיבינו עמק ההלכה.

until they understand the depth of the halachah.

וכן לא יאמר התלמיד הבנתי והוא לא הבין

And likewise, the student should not say, "I understood," when he did not understand;

אלא חוזר ושואל אפלו כמה פעמים.

rather, he goes back and asks, even several times.

ואם פגע עליו רבו ורגז

And if his teacher became angry with him and raged,

יאמר לו רבי תורה היא וללמד אני צריך ודעתי קצרה:

he should say to him, "My teacher, it is Torah, and I need to learn, but my mind is short and limited."

הלכה ה

Halacha 5: The Proper Demeanor of Student and Teacher During Torah Study

לא יהיה התלמיד בוש מחבריו

The student should not be embarrassed by his colleagues

שְׁלֵמְדוֹ מִפַּעַם רִאשׁוֹנָה אוֹ שְׁנִיָּה

who learned and understood the lesson from the first or second time,

וְהוּא לֹא לָמַד אֶלָּא אַחֵר כַּמָּה פְּעָמִים.

and he did not learn and grasp it except after several times.

שָׂאֵם נִתְבַּיֵּשׁ מִדְּבַר זֶה

For if he is embarrassed by this matter,

נִמְצָא נִכְנָס וְיוֹצֵא לְבֵית הַמִּדְרָשׁ

he finds himself entering and leaving the house of study

וְהוּא אֵינוֹ לָמַד כְּלוּם.

and he is not learning anything at all.

לְפִיכָּה אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים

Therefore, the early Sages said:

אִין הַבִּיּוֹשׁ לָמַד

'The bashful person does not learn,

וְלֹא הַקּוֹפֵדֵן מְלַמֵּד.

and the short-tempered person does not teach.'

בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אֲמוּרִים

In what circumstances are these words said?

בְּזֶמַן שֶׁלֹּא הֵבִינוּ הַתְּלָמִידִים הַדְּבַר

At a time when the students did not understand the matter

מִפְּנֵי עֲמָקוֹ אוֹ מִפְּנֵי דַעְתָּן שֶׁהִיא קְצָרָה.

because of its depth, or because of their mind which is short and limited.

אָבָל אִם נִכָּר לְרַב

But if it is apparent to the teacher

שֶׁהֵם מְתַרְשְׁלִין בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה וּמְתַרְפִּין עֲלֶיהֶן

that they are lazy in the words of Torah and are lax upon them,

וּלְפִיכָּה לֹא הֵבִינוּ

and therefore they did not understand,

חַיֵּב לְרַגֵּז עֲלֵיהֶן וּלְהַכְלִימָן בְּדִבְרֵים

he is obligated to show anger at them and to shame them with words

כְּדֵי לְחַדְדֵם.

in order to sharpen them and wake them up from their laziness.

וּכְעֲנִיָּן זֶה אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

And like this matter, the Sages said:

זֶרֶק מָרָה בְּתַלְמִידִים.

'Cast fear among the students' to keep them focused.

לְפִיכָּה אֵין רְאוּי לָרַב

Therefore, it is not fitting for the teacher

לְהִהָג קָלוּת רֹאשׁ לְפָנֵי תַלְמִידִים

to behave with lightness of head before the students,

וְלֹא לְשַׁחַק בְּפָנֵיהֶם

and not to jest before them,

וְלֹא לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת עִמָּהֶם

and not to eat and drink with them,

כְּדֵי שֶׁתֵּהֱא אֵימָתוֹ עֲלֵיהֶן

in order that there shall be his fear upon them,

וְיִלְמְדוּ מִמֶּנּוּ בְּמַהֲרָה.

and they will learn from him quickly.

הַלְכָּה ו

Halacha 6 · Proper Conduct for Asking Questions in the House of Study and Testing Students

אֵין שׁוֹאֵלִין אֶת הָרַב בְּשִׁיכָּנִס לְמִדְרַשׁ

We do not ask questions of the teacher when he enters the house of study

עַד שֶׁתַּתְּיָשֵׁב דַּעְתּוֹ עָלָיו.

until his mind settles upon him so he can focus properly.

ואין התלמיד שואל כש'כנס

And the student himself does not ask a question immediately when he enters

עד ש'יתישב וינח.

until he settles and rests from the exertion of his journey.

ואין שואל'ין שנים כאחד.

And we do not ask, meaning two students should not ask questions as one.

ואין שואל'ין את הרב מענ'ין אחר

And we do not ask the teacher on another subject

אלא מאותו הענ'ין שה'ן עסוקין בו

except from that subject that they are occupied with at that moment,

כדי שלא יתביש.

in order that he will not be embarrassed if he does not have the answer immediately ready.

ויש לרב להטעות את התלמידים בשאלותיו

And there is permission for the teacher to mislead the students with his questions

ובמעשים שעושה בפניהם כדי לחדדן.

and with the actions that he does before them in order to sharpen them and test their reasoning.

וכדי שידע אם זוכרים הם מה שלמד'ם או אינם זוכרים.

And in order that he will know if they remember what he taught them or if they do not remember.

ואין צרי'ה לומר שיש לו רשות לשאל אותם בענ'ין אחר שאין עוסקין בו

And there is no need to say that he has permission to ask them on another subject that they are not occupied with

כדי לזרזם:

in order to stimulate them and keep them alert.

הלכה ז

Halacha 7: Proper Conduct and Laws of Questioning One's Teacher

אין שואל'ין מעמד

One does not ask a Torah question while standing,

ואין משיב'ין מעמד

and one does not answer a question while standing,

ולא מגבוה

and not from a high place,

ולא מרחוק

and not from far away,

ולא מאחורי הזקנים.

and not from behind the elders who are sitting before the teacher.

ואין שואליו הרב אלא בענין שהן קורין בו.

And one does not ask the teacher except on the subject that they are currently reading in it, so as not to embarrass him.

ואין שואליו אלא מיראה.

And one does not ask except with awe and respect for the Torah.

ולא ישאל בענין יותר משלש הלכות:

And he should not ask on the subject more than three halachot at one time, so as not to burden the teacher.

הלכה ח

Halacha 8 · The Order of Precedence When Multiple Questions Are Asked of a Teacher

שנים ששאלו.

If there are two who asked questions of the teacher at the same time, we must prioritize them as follows:

שאל אחד בענין ושאל אחד שלא בענין

if one asked to the point, regarding the topic currently being studied, and one asked not to the point, regarding a different topic,

נזקקין לענין.

we attend to the one who asked the point first.

מעשה ושאינו מעשה

If one asked about a practical case that requires an immediate halachic ruling, and the other asked about something that is not a practical case,

נזקקין למעשה.

we attend to the one with the practical case.

הלכה ומדרש

If one asked about a practical **halacha and** the other about **midrash**, the analytical derivation of a law,

נִזְקָקִין לְהִלְכָּה.

we attend to the halacha.

מִדְרָשׁ וְאַגְדָּה

If one asked about **midrash and** the other about **aggadah**, homiletic teachings,

נִזְקָקִין לְמִדְרָשׁ.

we attend to the midrash.

אַגְדָּה וְקַל וָחֹמֶר

If one asked about **aggadah and** the other about a **kal vachomer**, an a fortiori logical derivation,

נִזְקָקִין לְקַל וָחֹמֶר.

we attend to the kal vachomer.

קַל וָחֹמֶר וְגֵזֵרָה שְׁוָה

If one asked about a **kal vachomer and** the other about a **gezeirah shavah**, a derivation based on identical words in different verses,

נִזְקָקִין לְקַל וָחֹמֶר.

we attend to the kal vachomer, as it is based on logical reasoning.

הָיוּ הַשּׁוֹאֵלִין שְׁנַיִם

If **the questioners were two** people asking about the same type of topic, but they differ in stature:

אֶחָד חָכָם וְאֶחָד תַּלְמִיד

one is a sage and **one** is a student,

נִזְקָקִין לְחָכָם.

we attend to the sage first.

תַּלְמִיד וְעַם הָאָרֶץ

If one is a **student and** the other is a **common person**,

נִזְקָקִין לַתַּלְמִיד.

we attend to the student.

שְׁנֵיהֶם חֲכָמִים שְׁנֵיהֶם תַּלְמִידִים שְׁנֵיהֶם עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ

If **both of them** are sages, or **both of them** are students, or **both of them** are common people,

שאלו שניהם בשתי הלכות

and both of them asked about two halachos of equal weight,

או בשתי תשובות

or about two answers they required,

או בשתי שאלות שני מעשים.

or about two questions regarding two practical cases of equal urgency,

הרשות בידי המתרגם מעתה:

the choice is in the hand of the spokesman, the teacher's assistant who communicates the lessons, to decide whom to answer from this point on.

הלכה ט

Halacha 9 • The Sanctity of the House of Study and Proper Conduct Within It

אין ישנים בבית המדרש

We do not sleep in the house of study,

וכל המתנמנם בבית המדרש

and anyone who dozes in the house of study,

חכמתו נעשית קרעים קרעים.

his wisdom becomes shreds shreds, meaning it becomes fragmented and forgotten.

וכן אמר שלמה בחכמתו משלי כג כא "וקרעים תלביש נומה".

And so said Shlomo in his wisdom in the Sefer of Mishlei 23:21: "and rags will clothe drowsiness."

ואין משיחין בבית המדרש אלא בדברי תורה בלבד.

And we do not converse in the house of study except with words of Torah alone.

אפלו מי שנתעטש אין אומרים לו רפואה בבית המדרש

Even one who sneezed, we do not say to him "healing"—meaning "Assuta" or "get well"—in the house of study so as not to interrupt the learning,

ואין צריק לומר שאר הדברים.

and there is no need to say that we do not speak of other matters of mundane conversation.

וקדשת בית המדרש חמורה מקדשת בתי כנסיות:

And the sanctity of a house of study is stricter than the sanctity of houses of assembly, which are shuls.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlines the strict qualifications for teaching and studying Torah, ruling that we only teach a student whose deeds are proper and refined, while an improper student must first be guided to teshuvah. Similarly, one must never learn from a teacher who does not follow a proper path, as a rebbe must resemble a messenger of Hashem. Finally, the Rambam details the physical arrangement of the shiur, explaining that the teacher sits at the head with the students around him so they can see his face, and establishes that the teacher and students must sit on the same level—either all on the ground or all on chairs—to maintain the proper honor and environment for learning.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The very heart of our avodah in the beis midrash is the understanding that Torah is not a mere academic subject; it is the ultimate 'honor' of Hashem, and it demands a vessel of pure character. Chazal teach us that 'ein habayshan lamed', the one who is embarrassed to ask does not learn. When you sit to learn, you must strip away all pretense and pride. If you did not understand, even after the teacher repeated it multiple times, you must have the courage to say, 'Rebbi, I do not understand, and I need to learn.' True kabalas haTorah requires us to value the truth of Hashem's wisdom far more than our own social standing or the fear of looking foolish in the eyes of others.

At the same time, we must treat the place and the process of learning with the utmost awe and seriousness. The Rambam warns us that one who sleeps or even dozes in the beis midrash will find that his wisdom becomes 'torn into shreds.' This is because Torah cannot be acquired with a lazy, half-hearted attitude. It requires our full presence, our sharpest focus, and a deep reverence for the holiness of the space, which is even greater than that of a shul.

Today, make a conscious effort to elevate your learning. If there is a concept or a halacha you are learning that you do not fully grasp, do not let your pride silence you; ask, review, and seek clarity. Before you begin learning, take a moment to sit up straight, clear your mind of idle chatter, and remind yourself that you are standing in the presence of the King, receiving His holy Torah.