

הלכות תלמוד תורה • פרק חמישי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam brings us to the heart of the sacred bond between a talmid and his rebbe, showing us how the honor and awe we must have for our teacher actually surpasses what we owe our own parents. Since a father brings a person into this world, but a rebbe brings his talmid into the life of the World to Come, the halachah demands that we treat our teacher with the utmost reverence in all practical matters, such as returning lost objects, carrying heavy loads, and redeeming captives.

We will also learn the severe spiritual gravity of treating one's rebbe with disrespect. The Rambam warns us, based on the words of Chazal, that disputing, arguing with, complaining against, or even thinking disparagingly of one's primary rebbe is equivalent to doing so against the Shechinah itself. This chapter sets the boundaries for what constitutes disputing a teacher's authority, particularly regarding establishing a house of study or rendering halachic decisions without permission.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Obligation to Honor and Revere One's Torah Teacher Above One's Father

כָּשֶׁם שֶׁאָדָם מְצֻוֶה בְּכָבוֹד אָבִיו וְיִרְאָתוֹ

Just as a person is commanded in the honor of his father and his awe,

כִּי הוּא חַיֵּב בְּכָבוֹד רַבּוֹ וְיִרְאָתוֹ יֵתֵר מֵאָבִיו.

so he is obligated in the honor of his teacher and his awe more than that of his father.

שֶׁאָבִיו מְבִיא לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה

For his father brings him to the life of this world,

וְרַבּוֹ שֶׁלְּמַדּוֹ חֲכָמָה מְבִיא לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

and his teacher who taught him wisdom brings him to the life of the world to come.

רָאָה אֶבֶדֶת אָבִיו וְאֶבֶדֶת רַבּוֹ

If he saw the lost object of his father and the lost object of his teacher,

שֶׁל רַבּוֹ קוֹדֶמֶת לְשֶׁל אָבִיו.

that of his teacher takes precedence to that of his father.

אָבִיו וְרַבּוֹ נוֹשְׂאִים בְּמִשָּׁא

If his father and his teacher were carrying a burden,

מְנִיחַ אֶת שְׁל רַבּוֹ וְאַחֵר כֶּה שֶׁל אָבִיו.

he relieves the burden of his teacher and after that the burden of his father.

אָבִיו וְרַבּוֹ שְׁבוּיִים בַּשָּׁבִי

If his father and his teacher were captives in captivity,

פּוֹדֶה אֶת רַבּוֹ וְאַחֵר כֶּה פּוֹדֶה אֶת אָבִיו.

he redeems his teacher and after that he redeems his father.

וְאִם הָיָה אָבִיו תַּלְמִיד חֶכֶם

And if his father was a Torah sage,

פּוֹדֶה אֶת אָבִיו תַּחְלָה.

he redeems his father first.

וְכֵן אִם הָיָה אָבִיו תַּלְמִיד חֶכֶם

And likewise, if his father was a Torah sage,

אֲףִי עַל פִּי שְׂאִינוֹ שָׁקוּל כִּנְגַד רַבּוֹ

even though that he is not equal against his teacher in wisdom,

מְשִׁיב אֶבְדָּתוֹ וְאַחֵר כֶּה מְשִׁיב אֶבְדָּת רַבּוֹ.

he returns his lost object and after that he returns the lost object of his teacher.

וְאִין לָךְ כְּבוֹד גָּדוֹל מִכְּבוֹד הָרַב

And there is not to you honor greater than the honor of the teacher,

וְלֹא מוֹרָא מִמוֹרָא הָרַב.

and not awe greater than the awe of the teacher.

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים "מוֹרָא רַבָּה כְּמוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם".

The Sages said in the Mishnah in Avos, "The awe of your teacher should be like the awe of Heaven."

לְפִיכָה אָמְרוּ

Therefore they said:

כָּל הַחוֹלֵק עַל רַבּוֹ כְּחוֹלֵק עַל הַשְּׁכִינָה

Anyone who disputes against his teacher is like one who disputes against the Divine Presence,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "בְּהִצַּתָּם עַל ה'".

as it is said regarding Korach's assembly, "when they contended against Hashem."

וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה מְרִיבָה עִם רַבּוֹ פְּעוֹשֶׂה מְרִיבָה עִם הַשְּׂכִינָה

And anyone who makes a quarrel with his teacher is like one who makes a quarrel with the Divine Presence,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "אֲשֶׁר רָבוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת ה' וַיִּקְדָּשׁ בָּם".

as it is said at Mei Merivah, "which quarreled the children of Yisrael with Hashem, and He was sanctified through them."

וְכָל הַמְתָּרֵעַם עַל רַבּוֹ כְּמַתָּרֵעַם עַל ה'

And anyone who complains against his teacher is like one who complains against Hashem,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "לֹא עָלֵינוּ תִּלְנִיתִיכֶם כִּי עַל ה'".

as it is said by Moshe Rabbeinu, "Not against us are your complaints, but against Hashem."

וְכָל הַמְהַרְהֵר אַחֲרֵי רַבּוֹ כְּאִלּוּ מְהַרְהֵר אַחֲרֵי שְׂכִינָה

And anyone who harbors doubts after his teacher is as if he harbors doubts after the Divine Presence,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וַיְדַבֵּר הָעָם בֵּאלֹהִים וּבִמֹּשֶׁה".

as it is said, "And the people spoke against God and against Moshe."

הִלְכָּה ב

Halacha 2· The Prohibition of Establishing a House of Study and Ruling Halacha in One's Teacher's Presence

אִיזְהוּ חוֹלֵק עַל רַבּוֹ.

Who is considered one who disputes against his teacher?

זֶה שֶׁקוֹבֵעַ לוֹ מִדְּרֹשׁ

This is referring to one who establishes for himself a house of study

וַיּוֹשֶׁב וַדּוֹרֵשׁ וּמַלְמִיד

and sits and expounds and teaches Torah to the public

שֶׁלֹּא בְּרִשּׁוֹת רַבּוֹ

not with the permission of his teacher,

וְרַבּוֹ חַיִּים

and his teacher is still alive,

וְאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁרַבּוֹ בְּמִדְינָה אַחֶרֶת.

and even though his teacher is in another country.

ואסור לאדם להורות בפני רבו לעולם.

And it is forbidden for a person to rule on halachic matters in the presence of his teacher forever.

וכל המורה הלכה בפני רבו חייב מיתה:

And anyone who rules halacha in the presence of his teacher is liable to death at the hands of Heaven.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 · Ruling in the Presence of One's Teacher and Who is Fit to Rule

היה בינו ובין רבו שנים עשר מיל

If there was between him and his teacher a distance of twelve mil,

ושאל לו אדם דבר הלכה

and a person asked him a matter of halacha,

מתר להשיב.

it is permitted to answer.

ולהפריש מן האסור

And to separate someone from a prohibition,

אפילו בפני רבו מתר להורות.

even in the presence of his teacher it is permitted to rule.

כיצד.

How so?

כגון שראה אדם עושה דבר האסור

For example, that he saw a person doing a thing that is forbidden,

מפני שלא ידע באסורו

because he did not know of its prohibition,

או מפני רשעו

or because of his wickedness,

יש לו להפרישו

there is an obligation upon him to separate him from the sin,

ולומר לו דבר זה אסור

and to say to him, "This thing is forbidden,"

וְאָפְלוּ בְּפָנֵי רַבּוֹ

and this is permitted even in the presence of his teacher,

וְאֵף עַל פִּי שְׂלָא נָתַן לוֹ רַבּוֹ רְשׁוּת.

and even though his teacher did not give him permission to rule.

שָׁכַל מְקוֹם שִׁישׁ חֲלוּל הַשֵּׁם

For in any place where there is desecration of the Name of Hashem,

אֵין חוֹלְקִין כְּבוֹד לְרַב.

we do not divide honor to the teacher by remaining silent.

בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אָמּוּרִים.

In what cases are these words said?

בְּדָבָר שֶׁנִּקְרָה מִקְרָה.

Regarding a matter that happened by chance.

אָבָל לְקַבֵּעַ עֲצָמוֹ לְהוֹרָאָה

But to establish himself for ruling,

וְלֵישֵׁב וּלְהוֹרוֹת לְכָל שׂוֹאֵל

and to sit and to rule for all who ask,

אָפְלוּ הוּא בְּסוֹף הָעוֹלָם וְרַבּוֹ בְּסוֹף הָעוֹלָם

even if he is at the end of the world and his teacher is at the end of the world,

אָסוּר לוֹ לְהוֹרוֹת עַד שְׁיָמוּת רַבּוֹ

it is forbidden for him to rule until his teacher dies,

אֲלָא אִם כֵּן נָטַל רְשׁוּת מִרַבּוֹ.

unless he took permission from his teacher.

וְלֹא כָּל מִי שְׁמַת רַבּוֹ

And not every one whose teacher died

מִתֵּר לוֹ לֵישֵׁב וּלְהוֹרוֹת בְּתוֹרָה.

is permitted to sit and to rule in the Torah,

אָלס אַם פֿון הָיָה תִּלְמִיד שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְהוֹרָאָה:

unless he was a student who reached the level of ruling.

הַלְכָה ד

Halacha 4 · The Prohibition of Rendering Halachic Decisions Prematurely and the Obligation of Worthy Sages to Teach

וְכָל תִּלְמִיד שֶׁלֹּא הִגִּיעַ לְהוֹרָאָה וּמוֹרָה

And any student who has not reached the level of scholarship required to render halachic decisions, and yet renders halachic decisions,

הָרִי זֶה רָשָׁע שׁוֹטֵה וְגַם הָרוּחַ.

behold, this one is wicked, foolish, and arrogant of spirit.

וְעָלָיו נֶאֱמַר מִשְׁלֵי ז' כו "כִּי רַבִּים חָלְלִים הִפִּילָהּ" וְגו'.

And upon him it is said in the verse in Mishlei, "For many corpses she has cast down," etc.

וְכֵן חָכָם שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְהוֹרָאָה וְאֵינוֹ מוֹרָה

And likewise, a sage who has reached the level to render halachic decisions, and yet does not render halachic decisions when the community needs him,

הָרִי זֶה מוֹנֵעַ תּוֹרָה וְנוֹתֵן מַכְשׁוֹלוֹת לְפָנֵי הָעוֹרִים

behold, this one withholds Torah and places stumbling blocks before the blind, as people will err without his guidance,

וְעָלָיו נֶאֱמַר מִשְׁלֵי ז' כו "וְעַצְמִים כָּל הָרָגְיָהּ".

and upon him it is said in the continuation of that verse, "And mighty are all her slain."

אֵלּוֹ הַתִּלְמִידִים הַקְּטָנִים שֶׁלֹּא הִרְבּוּ תּוֹרָה כְּרָאוּי

These immature students, the small in knowledge, who have not increased their Torah study as is proper,

וְהֵם מְבַקְּשִׁים לְהִתְגַּדֵּל בְּפָנֵי עַמִּי הָאָרֶץ וּבֵין אַנְשֵׁי עִירָם

and yet they seek to make themselves great before the common people and among the people of their city,

וְקוֹפְצִין וְיוֹשְׁבִין בְּרֹאשׁ לְדִין וּלְהוֹרוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

and jump and sit at the head to judge and to render halachic decisions in Israel,

הֵם הַמְּרַבִּים הַמְּחַלְקֵת וְהֵם הַמְּחַרְיִבִּים אֶת הָעוֹלָם

they are those who increase dispute, and they are those who destroy the world,

וְהַמְּכַבִּין גִּיהַ שֶׁל תּוֹרָה וְהַמְּחַבְּלִים כֶּרֶם ה' צְבָאוֹת.

and those who extinguish the lamp of Torah, and those who ruin the vineyard of Hashem of Hosts.

עֲלֵיהֶם אָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה בְּחֻמָּתוֹ שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ב טו "אֶחָזוּ לָנוּ שׁוֹעָלִים שׁוֹעָלִים קִטְנִים מְחַבְּלִים
כְּרָמִים":

Upon them said Shlomo in his wisdom in Shir HaShirim, "Seize for us foxes, little foxes, that ruin vineyards."

הַלְכָה ה

Halacha 5 • The Prohibition of Calling One's Teacher by Name and the Proper Way to Greet Him

וְאָסוּר לוֹ לְתַלְמִיד לְקַרֹּת לְרַבּוֹ בְּשֵׁמוֹ

And it is forbidden for a student to call his teacher by his name

וְאִפְּלוּ שְׁלֹא בְּפָנָיו.

and even not in his presence.

וְהוּא שִׁיחִיָּה הַשֵּׁם פְּלֵאִי שֶׁכָּל הַשּׁוֹמֵעַ יֵדַע שֶׁהוּא פְּלוֹנִי.

And this applies that it is an unusual name, so that all who hear it will know that he is so-and-so.

וְלֹא יִזְכִּיר שְׁמוֹ בְּפָנָיו

And he shall not mention his name in his presence,

וְאִפְּלוּ לְקַרֹּת לְאַחֵרִים שֶׁשְּׁמָם כְּשֵׁם רַבּוֹ

and even to call others whose name is like the name of his teacher,

כְּדֶרֶךְ שְׁעוֹשֶׂה בְּשֵׁם אָבִיו.

in the manner that he does with the name of his father.

אֶלָּא יִשְׁנֶה אֶת שְׁמָם

Rather, he shall change — their name,

אִפְּלוּ לְאַחַר מוֹתָם.

even after their death.

וְלֹא יִתֵּן שְׁלוֹם לְרַבּוֹ אוֹ יַחְזִיר לוֹ שְׁלוֹם

And he shall not give greeting to his teacher, or return to him greeting,

כְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁנוֹתְנִים לְרַעִים וּמַחְזִירִים זֶה לָזֶה.

in the manner that they give to friends and return, this one to that one.

אֶלָּא שׁוֹחָה לְפָנָיו וְאוֹמֵר לוֹ בִּירְאָה וְכַבּוֹד

Rather, he bows before him and says to him with awe and respect,

שְׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ רַבִּי.

"Peace be upon you, my teacher."

וְאִם נָתַן לוֹ רַבּוֹ שְׁלוֹם

And if his teacher gave greeting to him,

יִחְזֹר לוֹ שְׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ רַבִּי וּמֹרִי:

he shall return to him, "Peace be upon you, my teacher and my master."

הִלְכָּה ו

Halacha 6 · The Proper Conduct of a Student in the Presence of His Teacher

וְכֵן לֹא יַחְלִיץ תְּפִלִּין לְפָנֵי רַבּוֹ.

And so, a student should not remove his tefillin before his teacher because doing so is a display of disrespect, as if he is making himself comfortable in his presence.

וְלֹא יִסָּב אָלָּא יוֹשֵׁב כִּיּוֹשֵׁב לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ.

And he should not recline in his teacher's presence, unless he sits like one who sits before the king, with awe and trepidation.

וְלֹא יִתְפַּלֵּל לֹא לְפָנֵי רַבּוֹ וְלֹא לְאַחֵר רַבּוֹ וְלֹא בְּצַד רַבּוֹ.

And he should not pray the Shemoneh Esrei not before his teacher, and not behind his teacher, and not at the side of his teacher, as this appears as if he is setting up a separate authority or acting with arrogance.

וְאִין צָרִיךְ לוֹמַר שְׂאֵסוּר לוֹ לְהֵלֶךְ בְּצַדוֹ.

And there is no need to say that it is forbidden for him to walk at his side, as this looks like he is making himself equal to his teacher.

אָלָּא יִתְרַחֵק לְאַחֵר רַבּוֹ וְיֵהָא מְכֻּן כִּנְגַד אַחֲרָיו וְאַחֵר כֶּף יִתְפַּלֵּל.

Rather, he should distance himself behind his teacher, and he should not be aligned directly behind him, and after that he should pray.

וְלֹא יִכְנֵס עִם רַבּוֹ בַּמְּרִחָץ.

And a student should not enter with his teacher into the bathhouse, because seeing his teacher undressed diminishes his awe of him.

וְלֹא יֵשֵׁב בְּמָקוֹם רַבּוֹ.

And he should not sit in the place of his teacher, even when the teacher is not there.

וְלֹא יִכְרִיעַ דְּבָרָיו בְּפָנָיו.

And when others are debating a halachic matter, **he should not decide against his words in his presence**, by saying that another opinion is more correct than his teacher's.

וְלֹא יִסְתֵּר אֶת דְּבָרָיו.

And he **should not contradict his words** by arguing with him directly.

וְלֹא יֵשֵׁב לְפָנָיו עַד שְׂיֹאמַר לוֹ שֵׁב.

And he **should not sit before him until** the teacher says to him, "Sit."

וְלֹא יַעֲמֵד מִלְּפָנָיו עַד שְׂיֹאמַר לוֹ עֲמֵד אוֹ עַד שְׂיִטַּל רְשׁוֹת לַעֲמֹד.

And he **should not stand up from before him until** the teacher says to him, "Stand," or until he takes permission to stand.

וְכַשִּׁיפְטֵר מִרְבּוֹ לֹא יַחְזֹר לוֹ לְאַחֲרָיו

And when he departs from his teacher, he **should not turn his back to him** to walk away,

אֶלָּא נִרְתַּע לְאַחֲרָיו וּפָנָיו כְּנֶגֶד פָּנָיו:

rather, he backs away backwards, walking in reverse, and his face remains facing his face until he is out of sight.

הַלָּכָה ז

Halacha 7 · Standing Before One's Teacher and Greeting Him on the Festival

וְחַיִּב לַעֲמֹד מִפְּנֵי רַבּוֹ

And a student is obligated to stand before his teacher

מִשִּׁירְאָנוּ מִרְחוֹק מְלֵא עֵינָיו

from when he sees him from afar, as soon as he is within the fullness of his eyes' sight,

עַד שְׂיִתְכַסֶּה מִמֶּנּוּ

and he must remain standing until the teacher is hidden from him

וְלֹא יִרְאֶה קוֹמָתוֹ

and the student no longer sees his stature,

וְאַחֵר כִּךָּ יֵשֵׁב.

and after that, he may sit down.

וְחַיִּב אָדָם לְחַקְבִּיל פְּנֵי רַבּוֹ בְּרֵגֶל:

And a person is obligated to greet the face of his teacher on the festival.

אין חולקין כבוד לתלמיד בפני רבו

We do not accord honor to a student in the presence of his teacher

אלא אם כן דרה רבו לחלק לו כבוד.

unless it is the way of his teacher to accord him honor.

וכל המלאכות שהעבד עושה לרבו

And all the tasks that a servant does for his master,

תלמיד עושה לרבו.

a student does for his teacher.

ואם היה במקום שאין מכירין אותו

And if he was in a place where they do not know him,

ולא היו לו תפילין

and there were not to him tefillin on his arm and head to show he is a free Jewish man,

וחש שמא יאמרו עבד הוא

and he feared lest they will say, "A servant he is,"

אינו נועל לו מנעלו ואינו חולצו.

he does not put on for him his shoe and he does not remove it.

וכל המונע תלמידו מלשמשו

And anyone who prevents his student from serving him

מונע ממנו חסד

prevents from him kindness

ופורק ממנו יראת שמים.

and removes from him fear of Heaven.

וכל תלמיד שמזלזל דבר מכל כבוד רבו

And any student who treats lightly a matter of any of the honor of his teacher

גורם לשכינה שתסתלק מישראל:

causes the Divine Presence to depart from Israel.

רָאָה רַבּוֹ עוֹבֵר עַל דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה

If he saw his teacher transgressing against the words of the Torah,

אוֹמֵר לוֹ לְמַדְתָּנוּ רַבֵּנוּ כֵּן וְכֵן.

he should not rebuke him sharply, but rather say to him, "You taught us, our teacher, thus and thus."

וְכָל זְמַן שֶׁמִּזְכִּיר שְׁמוּעָה בְּפָנָיו

And any time that he mentions a teaching in his presence,

אוֹמֵר לוֹ כֵּן לְמַדְתָּנוּ רַבֵּנוּ.

he should say to him, "Thus you taught us, our teacher."

וְאֵל יֹאמֵר דְּבַר שֶׁלֹּא שָׁמַע מֵרַבּוֹ

And let him not say a matter that he did not hear from his teacher as if he heard it from him,

עַד שֶׁיִּזְכִּיר שֵׁם אוֹמְרוֹ.

until he mentions the name of its actual author.

וּכְשִׁימוֹת רַבּוֹ קוֹרֵעַ כָּל בְּגָדָיו

And when his teacher dies, he rends all his garments

עַד שֶׁהוּא מְגַלֶּה אֶת לְבוֹ

until he reveals his heart,

וְאֵינוּ מְאַחָה לְעוֹלָם.

and he does not mend them with a proper sewing forever.

בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אֲמוּרִים בְּרַבּוֹ מְבָהֵק

In what words are these said? Regarding his outstanding teacher,

שֶׁלְּמַד מִמֶּנּוּ רַב חֻקְמָתוֹ.

whom he learned from him the majority of his wisdom.

אָבֵל אִם לֹא לְמַד מִמֶּנּוּ רַב חֻקְמָתוֹ

But if he did not learn from him the majority of his wisdom,

הֲרֵי זֶה תִּלְמִיד חֵבֵר

behold, this is considered a student-colleague,

ואינו חייב בכבודו בכל אלו הדברים.

and he is not obligated in his honor in all these things.

אבל עומד מלפניו

But he still stands before him

וקורע עליו כשם שהוא קורע על כל המתים שהוא מתאבל עליהם.

and rends over him just as he rends over all the dead whom he mourns over them.

אפלו לא למד ממנו אלא דבר אחד

Even if he did not learn from him except one matter,

בין קטן בין גדול

whether small or great,

עומד מלפניו וקורע עליו:

he stands before him and rends over him.

הלכה י

Halacha 10 · The Proper Conduct of a Torah Scholar in the Presence of a Greater Sage

וכל תלמיד חכם

And every Torah scholar

שדעותיו מכוננות

whose character traits are proper

אינו מדבר

does not speak

בפני מי שהוא גדול ממנו בחכמה

in the presence of whoever is greater than him in wisdom,

אף על פי שלא למד ממנו כלום:

even though he did not learn anything from him.

הלכה יא

Halacha 11 · A Teacher Forgoing His Honor and the Student's Remaining Obligation

הרב המבזה שרצה למחל על כבודו

The outstanding teacher who desired to forgo his honor

בְּכָל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אוֹ בְּאֶחָד מֵהֶן

in all of these matters of respect or in one of them,

לְכָל תַּלְמִידָיו אוֹ לְאֶחָד מֵהֶן

to all of his students or to one of them,

הִרְשִׁית בְּיָדוֹ.

the permission is in his hand to do so.

וְאַף עַל פִּי שְׂמַח

And even though he forgave his honor,

חַיֵּב הֵתֵלֵמִיד לְהַדָּרוֹ

the student is still obligated to glorify him and show him respect,

וְאַפְּלוּ בְּשָׁעָה שְׂמַח:

and even at the very time that he forgave it.

הַלָּכָה יב

Halacha 12 · The Obligation of a Teacher to Honor and Love His Students

כְּשֵׁם שֶׁהַתַּלְמִידִים חַיִּבִּין בְּכַבּוּד הָרַב

Just as the students are obligated in the honor of the teacher,

כִּי הָרַב צָרִיךְ לְכַבֵּד אֶת תַּלְמִידָיו וּלְקַרְבָּן.

so the teacher needs to honor — his students and to draw them close to Torah and mitzvos.

כִּי אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

So said the Sages in the

משנה אבות ד יב "יְהִי כְבוֹד תַּלְמִידְךָ חָבִיב עָלֶיךָ כְּשִׁלְךָ."

Mishnah, Avos 4:12: "Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own."

וְצָרִיךְ אָדָם לְהִזָּהֵר בְּתַלְמִידָיו וּלְאַהֲבָם

And a person needs to be careful with his students and to love them,

שֶׁהֵם הַבָּנִים הַמְּהֵנִים לְעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וּלְעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

for they are the sons who bring pleasure and benefit to this world and to the World to Come.

התלמידים מוסיפין חכמת הרב

The students increase the wisdom of the teacher

ומרחיבין לבו.

and broaden his heart to understand and analyze deeper concepts.

אמרו חכמים

The Sages said in the Gemara:

הרבה חכמה למדתי מרבותי

Much wisdom I learned from my teachers,

ויותר מחברי

and more wisdom I learned from my colleagues,

ומתלמידי יותר מכלם.

and from my students I learned more than all of them.

וכשם שעץ קטן מדליק את הגדול

And just as a small piece of wood ignites the large piece of wood when building a fire,

כה תלמיד קטן מחידד הרב

so a small student sharpens the teacher

עד שיוציא ממנו בשאלותיו חכמה מפארה:

until he brings out from him, with his questions, glorious wisdom that the teacher would not have reached on his own.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by establishing that a person's primary rebbe—from whom he learned the majority of his Torah wisdom—demands a level of honor and awe that exceeds even that of his father, which manifests in giving the rebbe priority in returning lost items, relieving burdens, and redemption from captivity, unless the father is also a Torah sage. The Rambam then details how any rebellion, controversy, criticism, or complaint against one's rebbe is viewed as a direct rebellion against Hashem. Finally, the halachah defines 'disputing one's teacher' as establishing a house of study to teach and render halachic decisions without receiving explicit permission from one's primary rebbe, whereas a student who is also a colleague is not bound by these same strictures.

The Rambam teaches us a fundamental truth about our connection to Torah: a person's relationship with their rebbe is not just a matter of social respect or academic appreciation. It is the very channel through which we connect to the Shechinah. When we treat our rebbe with the utmost awe, standing before him as we would before a king and guarding our speech in his presence, we are training our souls in yiras Shamayim.

This is why the Sages warn so severely against disputing or complaining about one's rebbe. It is not about protecting the teacher's ego; it is about preserving the purity of the chain of mesorah. If we allow ourselves to treat our teachers like peers, arguing with them or acting with familiarity, we break the vessel that carries the light of the Torah into our lives. True growth in Torah requires us to bend our minds and hearts to those who came before us.

Today, make a conscious effort to elevate how you speak about or interact with your rebbe or a local talmid chacham. When mentioning their name, do not just say it casually; add a title of respect like 'Rabbi' or 'my teacher,' and consciously remind yourself that through their wisdom, you are being brought closer to Hashem.