

הלכות תשובה • פרק רביעי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam takes us through a vital and sobering discussion of the twenty-four deeds that hold a person back from making Teshuvah. Hashem, in His infinite mercy, always desires our return, but there are certain severe transgressions and bad habits that block our path, making it incredibly difficult to find the way back. We will learn about the sins that are so grave that Hashem does not help the sinner repent, and those that lock the gates of Teshuvah before him.

We will also explore the practical and interpersonal hurdles to Teshuvah, such as sins between man and his fellow where the victim cannot be identified, and those subtle, everyday missteps that people tend to treat lightly. Through this, the Rambam teaches us the absolute necessity of accepting rebuke and staying connected to the community and our Chachamim, showing us how to avoid the spiritual traps of the yetzer hara.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • Twenty-Four Deeds That Prevent a Person From Achieving Complete Teshuvah

ארבעה ועשרים דברים מעכבין את התשובה.

There are **twenty and four things** that **hold back** a person from achieving Teshuvah.

ארבעה מהן עון גדול

Four of them are considered a sin so great,

והעושה אחד מהן אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מספיק בידו לעשות תשובה

and one who does one of them, does not the Holy One, Blessed is He, provide in his hand the opportunity to perform Teshuvah,

לפי גדל חטאו.

because of the greatness of his sin which blocks the path of Teshuvah.

ואלו הן.

And these are they:

א המחטיא את הרבים

1. One who causes to sin — the many,

ובכלל עון זה מעכב את הרבים מלעשות מצוה.

and in the category of this sin, this is one who holds back — the many from performing a mitzvah.

ב וְהַמְטָה אֶת חֲבֵרוֹ מִדֶּרֶךְ טוֹבָה לְרָעָה

2. And one who turns — his fellow from a path that is good to one that is bad,

כְּגוֹן מְסִית וּמְדִיחַ.

such as an individual who incites another to worship avodah zarah, and a person who misleads an entire city.

ג הָרוֹאֶה בְּנוֹ יוֹצֵא לְתַרְבוֹת רָעָה וְאֵינוֹ מְמַחֶה בְּיָדוֹ.

3. One who sees his son going out to culture that is bad, and does not protest against him.

הוֹאִיל וּבְנוֹ בְּרִשּׁוֹתָיו אֵלּוֹ מָחָה בּוֹ הָיָה פּוֹרֵשׁ

Since his son is still young and his son is in his domain, if he had protested against him, he would have separated from his bad ways,

וְנִמְצָא כְּמַחְטִיאֹ.

and it turns out as if he caused him to sin by remaining silent.

וּבְכָל־ל עוֹן זֶה כָּל שְׂאֵפֶשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ לְמַחֹת בְּאַחֵרִים

And in the category of this sin is anyone that it is possible in his hand to protest against others,

בֵּין יָחִיד בֵּין רַבִּים וְלֹא מָחָה

whether it is an individual, whether they are many, and did not protest,

אָלָא יְנִיחֵם בְּכַשְׁלונָם.

but leaves them in their stumbling.

ד וְהָאֹמֵר אֶחָטָא וְאָשׁוּב

4. And one who says, "I will sin and I will return in Teshuvah later,"

וּבְכָל־ל זֶה הָאֹמֵר אֶחָטָא וַיּוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר:

and in the category of this is one who says, "I will sin and Yom Kippur will atone for me."

הַלָּכָה ב

Halacha 2 · Five Deeds That Lock the Paths of Repentance Before Those Who Commit Them

וּמֵהֶן חֲמִשָּׁה דְּבָרִים הַנוֹעְלִים דְּרָכֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה בְּפָנֵי עוֹשֵׂיהֶן.

And from them, among the twenty-four obstacles to teshuvah, are five things that lock the paths of repentance before their doers, making it exceedingly difficult for them to find the way back.

וְאֵלּוֹ הֵן.

And these are they:

א הפורש מן הצבור,

1 He who separates from the community, choosing not to share in their pain or join in their prayers,

לפי שבזמן שייעשו תשובה לא יהיה עמָהָן

because that at the time that they do repentance, not will he be with them to be inspired and swept up in their awakening,

ואינו זוכה עמָהָן בזכות שעושין.

and he is not meriting with them in the merit that they do when the community is forgiven.

ב וְהוֹחִילָם עַל דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים,

2 And he who argues against the words of Sages, rejecting their authority and teachings,

לפי שמחלקתו גורמת לו לפרש מהן

because that his dispute causes him to separate from them and their influence,

ואינו יודע דרכי התשובה.

and he does not know the paths of repentance, since it is the Sages who guide us in how to properly repent.

ג וְהַמְלִיעִיג עַל הַמִּצְוֹת,

3 And he who scoffs at the mitzvos, mocking their observance,

שפיון שנתבזו בעיניו אינו רוֹדֵף אַחֲרֵיהֶן וְלֹא עוֹשֵׂן

since that they are degraded in his eyes, he does not pursue after them and not perform them,

ואם לא יַעֲשֶׂה בְּמָה יִזְכֶּה.

and if not he performs them, with what will he merit to achieve atonement and life in the World to Come?

ד וְהַמְבִּזָּה רַבּוֹתָיו,

4 And he who demeans his teachers who teach him Torah,

שדבר זה גורם לו לדחפו ולטרוֹדוּ כְּגִיחֲזִי

for this thing, this disrespectful attitude, causes him to push him away and to banish him like Gechazi was banished by Elisha,

ובזמן שנטרד לא ימצא מלמד ומורה לו דרך האמת.

and at the time that he is banished, not will he find a teacher and guide for him to show him the path of the truth.

ה וְהַשׂוֹנֵא אֶת הַתּוֹכָחוֹת

5 And he who hates — the admonishments and rebukes of those who try to correct him,

שְׁהָרִי לֹא הֵנִיחַ לוֹ דֶּרֶךְ תְּשׁוּבָה.

for behold, not has he left for himself a path of repentance.

שְׁהַתּוֹכָחָה גּוֹרֶמֶת לְתְּשׁוּבָה

For the admonishment causes repentance,

שְׁבִיזְמֵן שְׁמוּדִיעֵינָ לּוֹ לְאָדָם חֲטָאִיו וּמִכְלִימֵינָ אוֹתוֹ חוֹזֵר בְּתְּשׁוּבָה

for at the time that they make known to him, to a person, his sins and shame him gently to make him realize his wrongdoing, he returns in repentance,

כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה

like that is written in the Torah when Moshe Rabbeinu rebuked Bnei Yisrael:

"זְכֹר וְאַל תִּשְׁכַּח".

"Remember and do not forget" how you angered Hashem,

"מְמָרִים הָיִיתֶם".

and "rebellious you have been" against Hashem,

"וְלֹא נָתַן ה' לָכֶם לֵב".

and "And not gave Hashem to you a heart" to understand until this day,

"עַם נָכָל וְלֹא חָכָם".

and "a nation vile and not wise".

וְכֵן יֵשַׁעְיָהוּ הוֹכִיחַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַר

And so Yeshayahu rebuked — Yisrael and said:

"הוֹי גּוֹי חַטָּא".

"Woe nation sinful",

"יָדַע שׂוֹר קִנְהוֹ".

and "Knows an ox its owner" but Yisrael does not know,

"מִדַּעְתִּי כִּי קָשָׁה אַתָּה".

and "From my knowing that obstinate are you".

וְכֵן צִוָּהוּ הָאֵל לְהוֹכִיחַ לַחֲטָאִים שְׁנֶאֱמַר

And so commanded him the Almighty to rebuke the sinners, as it is said:

"קרא בגרון אל תחשך".

"Call with throat, do not spare", raise your voice like a shofar to tell My people their sins.

וכן כל הנביאים הוכיחו לישראל עד שחזרו בתשובה.

And so all the prophets rebuked Yisrael until that they returned in repentance.

לפיכך צריך להעמיד בכל קהל וקהל מישראל

Therefore, it is necessary to appoint in every congregation and congregation of Yisrael

חכם גדול וזקן וירא שמים מנעוריו ואהוב להם

a sage great and elderly, and fearing of Heaven from his youth, and beloved by them,

שהוא מוכיח לרבים ומחזירן בתשובה,

who will be admonishing the masses and returning them in repentance.

וזה ששונא את התוכחות

And this one who hates — the admonishments,

אינו בא למוכיח ולא שומע דבריו

he does not come to the admonisher and not hears his words;

לפיכך יעמד בחטאתיו שהם בעיניו טובים:

therefore, he will stand in his sins, which they are in his eyes good, and he will never realize he needs to change.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 - Five Sins Between Man and His Fellow for Which Repentance is Extremely Difficult

ומהם חמשה דברים העושה אותן אי אפשר לו שישוב בתשובה גמורה

And from them, the twenty-four things that hold back teshuvah, there are five things where the one who does them, it is impossible for him to return in complete repentance.

לפי שהם עונות שבין אדם לחברו

This is because they are sins that are between man and his fellow,

ואינו יודע חברו שחטא לו כדי שיחזיר לו או ישאל ממנו למחל לו.

and he does not know his fellow whom he sinned against, in order that he may return to him what he owes or ask of him to forgive him. Since he cannot make proper restitution or ask mechilah, his teshuvah remains incomplete.

ואלו הן.

And these they are:

א הַמְקַלֵּל אֶת הָרַבִּים וְלֹא קִלַּל אָדָם יְדוּעַ כְּדֵי שִׁשְׁאֵל מִמֶּנּוּ כַּפָּרָה.

1. The one who curses the many, and did not curse a known person in order that he may ask from him forgiveness.

ב וְהַחֹלֵק עִם גֵּנֵב, שֶׁלָּפִי שְׂאִינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ גֵּנֵבָה זֶה שֶׁל מִי הִיא

2. And the one who shares with a thief by buying stolen goods from him, because he does not know this theft, of whom it is,

אֲלֹא הַגֵּנֵב גּוֹנֵב לָרַבִּים וּמָבִיא לוֹ וְהוּא לֹקֵחַ.

rather, the thief steals from the many and brings the goods to him, and he takes them.

וְעוֹד שֶׁהוּא מַחְזִיק יָד הַגֵּנֵב וּמַחֲטִיאֹ.

And furthermore, by buying from him, he strengthens the hand of the thief and causes him to sin further.

ג וְהַמוֹצֵא אֲבֵדָה וְאִינוֹ מְבַרֵּן עָלֶיהָ עַד שִׁיחְזִירָהּ לְבֹעֲלֶיהָ,

3. And the one who finds a lost object and does not announce on it as required by the Torah, until he returns it to its owners.

לְאַחֵר זְמַן כְּשִׁיעֲשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה אִינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ לְמִי יַחְזִיר.

After time, when he makes repentance, he does not know to whom he shall return it, as the owner has long given up hope and moved on.

ד וְהַאוֹכֵל שׁוֹר עֲנִיִּים וִיתוּמִים וְאַלְמָנוֹת.

4. And the one who eats and consumes the ox of poor people, and orphans, and widows.

אֵלּוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם אֲמֻלָּלִין הֵם וְאִינָן יְדוּעִים וּמְפֹרָסִים

These people, unfortunate they are, and they are not known and famous,

וְגוֹלִים מְעִיר לְעִיר וְאִין לָהֶם מְכִיר

and they wander from city to city, and there is not to them anyone who knows them,

כְּדֵי שֶׁיָּדַע שׁוֹר זֶה שֶׁל מִי הוּא וַיַּחְזִירֵנּוּ לוֹ.

in order that he may know this ox, of whom it is, and return it to him.

ה וְהַמְקַבֵּל שֹׁחַד לְהַטּוֹת דִּין אִינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ עַד הֵיכָן הִגִּיעַ הַטָּהָה זֶה וְכַמָּה הִיא כֹּחָהּ כְּדֵי שִׁיחְזִיר,

5. And the one who accepts a bribe to pervert judgment; he does not know until where this perversion reached, and how much is its power of damage, in order that he may return and compensate the victim,

שֶׁהַדָּבָר יֵשׁ לוֹ רַגְלִים.

for the matter has legs—the unfair ruling causes a chain reaction of losses that cannot be easily traced.

וְעוֹד שֶׁהוּא מַחְזִיק יָד זֶה וּמַחֲטִיאֹ:

And furthermore, by accepting the bribe, he strengthens the hand of this litigant who bribed him, and causes him to sin.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 · Five Sins That Prevent Repentance Because People Regard Them Lightly

ומהן חמשה דברים העושה אותן אין חזקתו לשוב מהן.

And among them are five things where the one who does them, there is no presumption for him to repent from them,

לפי שהם דברים קלים בעיני רב האדם

because they are matters that are light in the eyes of most people,

ונמצא חוטא והוא ידמה שאין זה חטא.

and it turns out that he sins, and he imagines that there is no sin in this.

ואלו הן.

And these they are:

א האוכל מסעדה שאינה מספקת לבעלה

1. The one who eats from a meal that is not sufficient for its owners,

שהוא אבק גזל הוא.

for this is a shade of theft,

והוא מדמה שלא חטא ויאמר כלום אכלתי אלא ברשותו.

and he imagines that not did he sin, and says, "Anything did I eat except with his permission?"

ב המשתמש בעבוטו של עני

2. The one who uses the pledge of a poor person,

שהעבוט של עני אינו אלא כגון קורדום ומחרשה

for the pledge of a poor person is not but such as an axe and a plow,

ויאמר בלבם אינן חסרים ויהרי לא גזלתי אותו.

and he says in his heart, "They are not losing value, and behold, not did I steal it."

ג המסתכל בעריות מעלה על דעתו שאין בכה כלום

3. The one who gazes at forbidden relationships brings upon his mind that there is not in this anything,

שהוא אומר וכי בעלתי או קרבתתי אצלה.

for he says, "And did I engage in relations, or did I draw close to her?"

וְהוּא אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁרְאִיתַת הָעֵינַיִם עוֹן גָּדוֹל

And he does not know that the seeing of the eyes is a sin great,

שֶׁהִיא גִּזְרֶמֶת לְגוּפוֹן שֶׁל עֲרִיּוֹת

for it causes the body itself of forbidden relationships,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְלֹא תִתְּרוּ אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶּם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם".

as it is said, "and do not explore after your heart and after your eyes."

דִּמְתַּכְּבֵּד בְּקִלּוֹן חֲבֵרוֹ אוֹמֵר בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁאֵינוֹ חֵטָא

4. The one who honors himself with the shame of his fellow says in his heart that it is not a sin,

לְפִי שֶׁאֵין חֲבֵרוֹ עוֹמֵד שָׁם וְלֹא הִגִּיעַ לוֹ בִּשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא בִּישׁוֹ

because there is no his fellow standing there, and not reached him shame, and not did he shame him directly,

אֶלָּא עֲרָה מַעֲשָׂיו הַטּוֹבִים וְחֻכְמָתוֹ לְמוֹל מַעֲשֵׂה חֲבֵרוֹ אוֹ חֻכְמָתוֹ

but he compared his deeds the good and his wisdom opposite the deeds of his fellow or his wisdom,

כְּדִי שֶׁיֵּרָאָה מִכָּלֹּל שֶׁהוּא מְכַבֵּד וְחֲבֵרוֹ בְּזוּי.

in order that he will appear from its implication that he is honorable and his fellow is disgraceful.

הַ וְהַחוּשָׁד כְּשֶׁרִים אוֹמֵר בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁאֵינוֹ חֵטָא

5. And the one who suspects worthy people says in his heart that it is not a sin,

לְפִי שֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר מָה עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ וְכִי יֵשׁ שָׁם אֶלָּא חֹשֶׁד

because he says, "What did I do to him? And did there is there except suspicion?"

שָׁמָּה עָשָׂה אוֹ לֹא עָשָׂה

Perhaps he did or not he did."

וְהוּא אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁזֶּה עוֹן שֶׁמְשִׁים אָדָם כְּשֶׁר בְּדַעְתּוֹ כְּבַעַל עֲבֵרָה:

And he does not know that this is a sin, for he places a person worthy in his mind as a master of transgression.

הַלָּכָה ה'

Halacha 5 · Five Bad Traits that Prevent Repentance and the Proper Conduct of a Penitent

וּמֵהֶן חֲמִשָּׁה דְּבָרִים

And among them, the twenty-four things that hold back teshuvah, are five things where

הָעוֹשָׂה אוֹתָם מְשַׁךְ אַחֲרֵיהֶם תָּמִיד

the one who does them will be drawn after them always,

וְקָשִׁים הֵם לְפָרֹשׁ מֵהֶן.

and they are difficult to separate from once a person gets used to them.

לְפִיכָּהן צָרִיף אָדָם לְהִזָּהֵר מֵהֶן

Therefore, a person needs to be careful of them

שָׁמָּה יִדְבַק בָּהֶן

lest he will cling to them,

וְהֵן כֻּלָּן דְּעוֹת רָעוֹת עַד מְאֹד.

and they are, all of them, bad traits of character until very extreme.

וְאֵלֵּיוֹ הֵן.

And these they are:

רְכִילוֹת.

gossip, which stirs up strife;

וְלִשׁוֹן הָרַע.

and evil tongue, speaking disparagingly of others;

וּבַעַל חֵמָה.

and a master of wrath, an angry person who loses control;

וּבַעַל מַחֲשַׁבֶּה רָעָה.

and a master of evil thought, who constantly harbors improper thoughts;

וְהַמִּתְחַבֵּר לָרָשָׁע

and one who associates with the wicked,

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא לּוֹמֵד מִמַּעֲשָׁיו

because he learns from his deeds

וְהֵן נִרְשָׁמִים בְּלִבּוֹ.

and they are engraved in his heart.

הוּא שֶׁאָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה

That is what Shlomo HaMelech said in

משלי יג כ "ורעה כסילים ירוע".

Mishlei 13:20, "and a companion of fools will suffer harm."

וכבר בארנו בהלכות דעות

And already we explained in the Laws of Deos

דברים שצריך כל אדם לנהג בהן תמיד,

the things that every person needs to conduct himself with always to refine his character,

כל וחמר לבעל תשובה:

all the more so for a master of repentance, who must be extra vigilant to stay on the right path.

הלכה ו

Halacha 6· Repentance is Effective Even for Sins that Hinder It

כל אלו הדברים וכיוצא בהן

All these things and others similar to them,

אף על פי שמעכבין את התשובה

even though they hold back and make it difficult to achieve repentance,

אין מונעין אותה

they do not completely prevent it.

אלא אם עשה אדם תשובה מהן

Rather, if a person made repentance from them,

הרי זה בעל תשובה

behold, this person is a master of repentance,

ויש לו חלק לעולם הבא:

and he has a portion in the World to Come.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam details the twenty-four obstacles to Teshuvah, categorizing them into four distinct groups. First, he lists four severe sins—such as causing the masses to sin or saying "I will sin and repent"—where Hashem does not grant the sinner the opportunity to do Teshuvah. Next, he identifies five deeds that lock the paths of Teshuvah, including separating from the community, demeaning one's teachers, and hating rebuke. He then presents five sins against our fellow man where complete Teshuvah is nearly impossible because the victim cannot be identified to receive restitution, such as eating the food of the poor or taking a share of a thief's spoils. Finally, he warns against five transgressions that people mistakenly view as minor, such

as looking at forbidden women or using a poor person's pledge, which prevent Teshuvah because the sinner does not even realize he has done wrong.

לְמַעַן WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The most frightening part of this Rambam is not the list of severe sins, but the category of things we do without even realizing they are wrong. When we eat from a meal that isn't really enough for the host, use a poor person's tool thinking 'it won't hurt it,' look at things we shouldn't, or elevate ourselves by highlighting a friend's shortcomings, we tell ourselves, 'What did I do wrong? I didn't steal, I didn't hurt anyone!' This self-justification is the ultimate lock on the door of teshuvah.

To break this lock, we must cultivate a deep love for truth and a willingness to hear rebuke. The Rambam teaches that the one who hates admonishment shuts his own path to growth because he remains blind to his faults, viewing his bad deeds as good. We must become people who welcome correction, who actively seek out the guidance of Torah sages, and who are willing to look honestly at the 'small' things we do every day.

Today, pay close attention to your interactions and thoughts. If you catch yourself justifying a small slight, a questionable glance, or a minor misuse of someone else's property with the words 'it's nothing,' stop and acknowledge it honestly before Hashem without making excuses.