

הלכות תשובה • פרק חמישי

Complete Word-for-Word Interlinear • Navy & Gold Edition

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam takes us to the very foundation of our avodah, establishing the absolute truth of bechirah chofshis (free will). The Rambam explains that Hashem has granted every single Yid the power to choose his own path, whether to be a tzaddik like Moshe Rabbeinu or, chas v'shalom, to go astray. There is no pre-decreed destiny forcing our hand, and we must reject the foolish notions of those who believe our spiritual standing is decided for us at birth.

We will learn how this precious gift of free choice is the very pillar upon which the entire Torah and all the mitzvos stand. The Rambam shows us how the system of reward and punishment, the calls of the Nevi'im to do teshuvah, and our personal accountability before Hashem all depend on our ability to choose good over evil. We will also explore how man's free will fits perfectly into the will of the Creator, Who desired that mankind operate with independent choice.

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

ה"א

הבחירה החפשית הנתונה לכל אדם

Halacha 1 • Free Will is Granted to Every Human Being to Choose Good or Evil

רשות לכל אדם נתונה. אם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות

and to be good to a path himself to turn he desires if is given man to every Free will

צדיק הרשות בידו. ואם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך רעה ולהיות רשע

wicked and to be evil to a path himself to turn he desires and if is in his hand the choice righteous

הרשות בידו. הוא שכתוב בתורה בראשית ג כב "הן האדם היה

has become the man Behold 22 3 Bereishis in the Torah is what is written this is in his hand the choice

כאחד ממינו לדעת טוב ורע". כלומר הן מין זה של אדם היה

has become man of this species behold meaning to say and evil good to know from us like unique

יחיד בעולם ואין מין שני דומה לו בזה הענין שיהא הוא

he that he should be matter in this him resembling second species and there is no in the world singular

מעצמו בדעתו ובמחשבתו יודע הטוב והרע ועושה כל מה שהוא

he that all and doing and the evil the good knowing and with his thought with his knowledge on his own

חפץ ואין מי שיציק בידו מלעשות הטוב או הרע. וכיון שכן הוא

it is so and since the evil or the good from doing who can prevent one and there is no desires

פן ישלח ידו:

his hand he stretch out lest

This halacha establishes the fundamental principle of free will, explaining that every person has the autonomy to choose righteousness or wickedness.

ה"ב

הבחירה החפשית של האדם להיות צדיק או רשע

Halacha 2 · The Absolute Free Will of Every Person to Choose Righteousness or Wickedness

אל יעבר בַּמַּחְשְׁבֶתָּה דְּבַר זֶה שְׂאוּמְרִים טִפְשִׁי אַמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם וְרַב
and the majority of the world nations of the fools of which say this matter in your thought let pass Do not
גְּלָמִי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהִקְדּוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא גּוֹזֵר עַל הָאָדָם
the person upon decrees He blessed that the Holy One Yisrael the children of the unformed of
מִתְחִלָּת בְּרִיתוֹ לְהִיּוֹת צְדִיק אוֹ רָשָׁע. אֵין הַדְּבָר כֵּן אֵלָּא כָּל אָדָם
person every rather so the matter not wicked or righteous to be his creation from the beginning of
רְאוּי לוֹ לְהִיּוֹת צְדִיק כְּמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ אוֹ רָשָׁע כְּיֶרֶבְעָם אוֹ חָכָם אוֹ סָכָל
foolish or wise or like Yerovam wicked or our teacher like Moshe righteous to be for him is fit
אוֹ רַחֲמָן אוֹ אֲכֻזָּרִי אוֹ כִּילִי אוֹ שׁוֹעַ וְכֵן שְׁאָר כָּל הַדְּעוֹת. וְאֵין
and there is not the character traits all the rest of and so generous or miserly or cruel or merciful or
לוֹ מִי שֶׁיִּכְפְּהוּ וְלֹא גּוֹזֵר עָלָיו וְלֹא מִי שֶׁמוֹשְׁכּוֹ לְאַחַד מִשְׁנֵי
of the two to one who pulls him anyone and not upon him decrees and not who forces him anyone to him
הַדְּרָכִים אֵלָּא הוּא מַעְצֻמוֹ וּמִדַּעְתּוֹ נוֹטָה לְאֵי זֶה דֶּרֶךְ שֶׁיִּרְצֶה. הוּא
it is that he wishes path this to which inclines and from his own mind from himself he rather the paths
שֶׁיִּרְמְיָהוּ אָמַר אֵיכָה גִּלְחָם מִפִּי עָלִיוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא הָרְעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב".
and the good the evils will go forth not the Most High From the mouth of 38 3 Eichah said that Yirmeyahu
כְּלוּמָר אֵין הַבּוֹרָא גּוֹזֵר עַל הָאָדָם לְהִיּוֹת טוֹב וְלֹא לְהִיּוֹת רָע.
evil to be and not good to be the person upon decreeing the Creator there is not meaning to say
וְכִיוֵּן שֶׁכֵּן הוּא נִמְצָא זֶה הַחוּטָא הוּא הַפְסִיד אֶת עַצְמוֹ. וְלִפְיֶכָּה רְאוּי
it is proper and therefore himself — caused loss to he the sinner this it turns out it is that so and since
לוֹ לְכַפּוֹת וּלְקוֹנֵן עַל חַטָּאֵיו וְעַל מַה שֶׁעָשָׂה לְנַפְשׁוֹ וּגְמָלָה רָעָה. הוּא
it is evil and dealt it to his soul he did what and over his sins over and to lament to weep for him
שֶׁכָּתוּב אַחֲרָיו אֵיכָה גִּלְחָם מִפִּי יִתְאוּנֵן אָדָם חַי וְגו'". וְחֲזַר וְאָמַר
and said and he returned etc. living a man should complain What 39 3 Eichah after it that is written
הוּאֵיל וּרְשׁוּתָנוּ בְּיָדֵינוּ וּמִדַּעְתָּנוּ עָשִׂינוּ כָּל הָרְעוֹת רְאוּי לָנוּ
for us it is proper the evils all we did and from our own mind is in our hands and our authority since
לְחֲזֹר בְּתַשׁוּבָה וְלַעֲזֹב רָשָׁעֵנוּ שֶׁהָרְשׁוּת עִתָּה בְּיָדֵינוּ. הוּא שֶׁכָּתוּב
that is written it is is in our hands now since the authority our wickedness and to abandon in repentance to return
אַחֲרָיו אֵיכָה גִּלְחָם מִפִּי נִחְפְּשָׁה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנִחְקְרָה וְנָשׁוּבָה" וְגו'".
etc. and let us return and let us examine our ways Let us search 40 3 Eichah after it

The Rambam explains that every individual possesses complete free will to choose their own moral and spiritual path, refuting the notion of predestined righteousness or wickedness.

וְדָבָר זֶה עֶקֶר גָּדוֹל הוּא וְהוּא עַמּוּד הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים

Devarim as it is said and the mitzvah the Torah the pillar of and it is it is great a principle this And matter

ל טו "רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים". וְכָתִיב דְּבָרִים יָא כו "רְאֵה

"See 26 11 Devarim and it is written life" — today before you I have set "See 15 30

אֲנִכִּי נָתַן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם". כְּלוּמָר שֶׁהָרְשׁוּת בְּיָדְכֶם. וְכָל שֶׁיִּחְפֹּץ

that desires and anything is in your hands that the permission meaning to say today" before you set I

הָאָדָם לַעֲשׂוֹת מִמַּעֲשֵׂה בְּנֵי הָאָדָם עוֹשֶׂה בֵּין טוֹבִים בֵּין רָעִים.

evil whether good whether he does man children of from the actions of to do the person

וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה הָעֲנָן נֶאֱמַר דְּבָרִים ה כו "מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבָבְךָ זֶה

this their heart and it would be will give "Who 26 5 Devarim it is said matter this and because of

לָהֶם". כְּלוּמָר שֶׁאֵין הַבּוֹרָא כּוֹפֶה בְּנֵי הָאָדָם וְלֹא גּוֹזֵר עֲלֵיהֶן לַעֲשׂוֹת

to do upon them decrees and not man children of forces the Creator that not meaning to say to them"

טוֹבָה אוֹ רָעָה אֶלָּא הַכֹּל מְסוֹר לָהֶם:

to them is handed over everything rather evil or good

This halacha establishes that free will is a foundational principle of the Torah, proving from verses that Hashem does not compel human actions.

ה'ל"ד

הבחירה החפשית והצדק האלמי בשכר ועונש

Halacha 4 · Free Will and Divine Justice in Reward and Punishment

אֱלֹהֵי הָאֵל הָיָה גּוֹזֵר עַל הָאָדָם לִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק אוֹ רָשָׁע אוֹ אֱלֹהֵי הָיָה שֵׁם

there there were if or wicked or righteous to be man upon decreeing were God If

דָּבָר שֶׁמוֹשֶׁה אֶת הָאָדָם בְּעֶקֶר תּוֹלְדוֹתוֹ לְדֶרֶךְ מִן הַדֶּרֶכִּים אוֹ לְמַדָּע

to a mindset or the paths from to a path his nature by the essence of man — that draws something

מִן הַמַּדְעוֹת אוֹ לְדַעָה מִן הַדַּעוֹת אוֹ לְמַעֲשֵׂה מִן הַמַּעֲשִׂים כְּמוֹ

as the actions from to an action or the character traits from to a character trait or the mindsets from

שְׂבוּדִים מִלְּבָב הַטְּפָשִׁים הַבְּרִי שָׁמַיִם הֵיֵאָר הָיָה מִצְוָה לָנוּ עַל

by us command would He how of the heavens the astrologers the fools from their hearts invent

יְדֵי הַנְּבִיאִים עָשָׂה כֹּךְ וְאֵל תַּעֲשֶׂה כֹּךְ הֵיטִיבוּ דִרְכֵיכֶם וְאֵל תֵּלְכוּ

go and do not your ways improve so do and do not so do the prophets the hands of

אַחֲרֵי רָשָׁעְכֶם וְהוּא מִתְחִלַּת בְּרִיתוֹ כְּכָר נִגְזֵר עָלָיו אוֹ תּוֹלְדוֹתוֹ

his nature or upon him was decreed already his creation from the beginning of and he your wickedness after

תִּמְשֹׁךְ אוֹתוֹ לְדָבָר שְׂאִי אֶפְשָׁר לָזוּז מִמֶּנּוּ. וּמָה מָקוֹם הָיָה

would there be place and what from it to move possible that is impossible to a thing him draws

לְכָל הַתּוֹרָה כְּלָה וּבִאֵי זֶה דִּין וְאִיזָה מִשְׁפָּט נִפְרָע מִן הָרָשָׁע אוֹ

or the wicked from is exacted punishment justice and what law this and by what entirely the Torah for all of

מַשְׁלֵם שָׂכָר לְצַדִּיק. הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט. וְאֵל
And do not justice do not the earth all Shall the Judge of to the righteous reward He pays
תִּתְמָה וְתֹאמַר הֵיאֵךְ יִהְיֶה הָאָדָם עוֹשֶׂה כָּל מַה שְׂיִחַפֵּץ וְיִהְיוּ מַעֲשָׂיו
his deeds and will be he desires that all doing man will be how and say wonder
מְסוּרִים לוֹ וְכִי יַעֲשֶׂה בְּעוֹלָם דְּבָר שְׁלֹא בְּרִשּׁוֹת קוֹנוֹ וְלֹא חֲפָצוֹ
His desire and not his Creator the permission of without anything in the world done and is it to him handed over
וְהַכְּתוּב אוֹמֵר תִּהְיוּ קִלְיָן ו' "כָּל אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ ה' עָשָׂה בַּשָּׁמַיִם
in the heavens He did Hashem desired which all 6 135 Tehillim says and the verse
וּבָאָרֶץ". דַּע שֶׁהַכֹּל כְּחֲפָצוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה וְאֵף עַל פִּי שְׂמַעְשֵׁינוּ
that our deeds though and even is done according to His desire that everything know and in the earth
מְסוּרִין לָנוּ. כִּיצַד. כָּשֵׁם שֶׁהַיוֹצֵר חָפֵץ לִהְיוֹת הָאֵשׁ וְהָרוּחַ עוֹלִים
rising and the wind the fire to be desired the Creator just as how so to us are handed over
לְמַעַל וְהַמַּיִם וְהָאָרֶץ יוֹרְדִים לְמַטָּה וְהַגִּלְגָּל סוֹבֵב בְּעִגּוּל וְכֵן שָׂאָר
the rest of and so in a circle revolving and the sphere downward descending and the earth and the water upward
בְּרִיּוֹת הָעוֹלָם לִהְיוֹת כְּמִנְהַגוֹ שֶׁחָפֵץ בּוֹ. כִּכָּה חָפֵץ לִהְיוֹת
to be He desired so for it that He desired according to their to be the world the creations of custom
הָאָדָם רִשּׁוֹתוֹ בְּיָדוֹ וְכָל מַעֲשָׂיו מְסוּרִין לוֹ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ לֹא כּוֹפֶה
forcing not for him will there be and not to him handed over his deeds and all in his hand his authority man
וְלֹא מוֹשֵׁף אֵלָּא הוּא מַעֲצָמוֹ וּבִדְעָתוֹ שָׁנַתָּן לוֹ הָאֵל עוֹשֶׂה כָּל
all does God to him that gave and with his intellect on his own he rather drawing and not
שֶׁהָאָדָם יָכוֹל לַעֲשׂוֹת. לְפִיכָךְ דָּנִין אוֹתוֹ לְפִי מַעֲשָׂיו. אִם עָשָׂה טוֹבָה
good he did if his deeds according to him they judge therefore to do is able that man
מִיִּטְבִּין לוֹ וְאִם עָשָׂה רָעָה מְרַעִין לוֹ. הוּא שֶׁהַנְּבִיא אוֹמֵר מִלֵּאכִי א ט
9 1 Malachi says what the prophet it is to him they do evil evil he did and if to him they do good
מִיָּדְכֶם הִיָּתָה זֹאת לָכֶם. יִשְׁעִיהָ סו ג גַּם הֵמָּה בָּחֲרוּ בְּדַרְכֵיהֶם.
their own ways chose they also 3 66 Yeshayahu to you this was from your hand
וּבַעֲנָן זֶה אָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה קֹהֶלֶת יֵא ט "שִׂמַּח בַּחֲוֹר בְּיָלְדוּתְיָה" קֹהֶלֶת
Koheles in your youth young man rejoice 9 11 Koheles Shlomo said matter and regarding this
יֵא ט "וְדַע כִּי עַל כָּל אֵלָּה יָבִיֵאךְ הָאֱלֹהִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט". כְּלוּמָר דַּע
know meaning to say to judgment God will bring you these all for that and know 9 11
שִׁישׁ בְּיָדְךָ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעֵתִיד אַתָּה לִיתֵּן אֶת הַדִּין:
the judgment — to give you and in the future to do power in your hand that there is

The Rambam explains that if man's actions were predestined, the entire Torah, commandments, and system of reward and punishment would be completely meaningless.

ה'ל"ה

הסתירה בין ידיעת הבורא ובחירה חפשית

שָׁמָא תֵּאמַר וְהֵלֵא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יוֹדֵעַ כָּל מַה שְׂיִהְיֶה וְקִדָּם

and before that will be what all knows He blessed The Holy One and is it not you will say Perhaps

שְׂיִהְיֶה יָדַע שָׁהָ יִהְיֶה צָדִיק אוֹ רָשָׁע אוֹ לֹא יָדַע. אִם יָדַע

He knows If does He know not or wicked or righteous will be that this one He knows that it is

שֶׁהוּא יִהְיֶה צָדִיק אִי אִפְשָׁר שְׂלֹא יִהְיֶה צָדִיק וְאִם תֵּאמַר שְׂיִדַּע

that He knows you say and if righteous he will be that not impossible righteous will be that he

שְׂיִהְיֶה צָדִיק וְאִפְשָׁר שְׂיִהְיֶה רָשָׁע הֲרִי לֹא יָדַע הַדָּבָר עַל בְּרִיּוֹ.

its clarity on the matter did He know not behold wicked that he will be and it is possible righteous that he will be

דַּע שְׂתִּשְׁוֹבֵת שְׂאֵלָה זֹאת אֶרְכָּה מֵאֶרֶץ מִדָּה וּרְחֵבָה מִנֵּי יָם וְכַמָּה

and how many the sea than and broader in measure than the earth is longer this question that the answer of Know

עֲקָרִים גְּדוֹלִים וְהָרָרִים רָמִים תְּלוּיִים בָּהּ אֲבָל צָרִיךְ אֹתָהּ לִידַע

to know you need But on it are dependent lofty and mountains great principles

וְלִהְבִּין בְּדָבָר זֶה שְׂאֵנִי אוֹמֵר. כְּכֹר בְּאַרְנוֹ בְּפֶקֶד שְׁנֵי מִהֲלָכוֹת

from the Laws of second in chapter we explained Already say that I this in a matter and to understand

יְסוּדֵי הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ מִדַּעָה שֶׁהִיא חוּץ

outside that is from a knowledge know does not He blessed that The Holy One the Torah Foundations of

מִמֶּנּוּ כְּבִנֵּי אָדָם שֶׁהֵם וְדַעְתָּם שְׁנַיִם. אֵלֶּא הוּא יִתְעַלֶּה שְׁמוֹ

His name may He be exalted He rather are two and their knowledge who they beings like human from Him

וְדַעְתּוֹ אֶחָד וְאֵין דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם יְכוּלָה לְהַשִּׁיג דָּבָר זֶה עַל

on this matter to comprehend able man of knowledge And there is no are one and His knowledge

בְּרִיּוֹ. וְכַשֵּׁם שֶׁאֵין כַּח בְּאָדָם לְהַשִּׁיג וְלִמְצֹא אֱמֶתֶת הַבּוֹרָא שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר

as it is said the Creator the truth of and to find to comprehend in man strength there is no And just as its clarity

שְׁמוֹת לֵג כ "כִּי לֹא יֵרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחִי" כֹּה אֵין כַּח בְּאָדָם לְהַשִּׁיג

to comprehend in man strength there is no so and live the man can see Me not for 20 33 Shemos

וְלִמְצֹא דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל הַבּוֹרָא. הוּא שֶׁהַנָּבִיא אָמַר יִשְׁעִיָּה נָה ח "כִּי לֹא

not For 8 55 Yeshayah said is what the prophet He the Creator of the knowledge and to find

מִחְשְׁבוֹתֵי מִחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא דְרָכֵיכֶם דְּרָכֵי". וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁפֶן הוּא אֵין בָּנוּ

in us there is no it is that so And since are My ways your ways and not are your thoughts My thoughts

כַּח לִידַע הִיאֵךְ יָדַע הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כָּל הַבְּרִואִים וְהַמַּעֲשִׂים אֲבָל

But and the deeds the creations all He blessed The Holy One knows how to know strength

יָדַע בְּלֹא סִפֵּק שֶׁמַּעֲשֵׂה הָאָדָם בְּיַד הָאָדָם וְאֵין הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ

blessed The Holy One and there is no the man is in the hand of the man that the action of doubt without we know

הוּא מוֹשְׁכּוֹ וְלֹא גּוֹזֵר עָלָיו לַעֲשׂוֹת כֹּה. וְלֹא מִפְּנֵי קִבְּלַת הַדָּת

the religion the tradition of because of And not so to do upon him decreeing and not pulling him He

בְּלִבְד נֹדַע דָּבָר זֶה אֲלֵא בְּרָאיוֹת בְּרוּרוֹת מִדְּבָרֵי הַחֲכָמָה. וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה
this And because of wisdom from the words of clear with proofs rather this matter is known alone
נֶאֱמַר בְּנְבוּאָה שֶׁדִּנְיָן אֶת הָאָדָם עַל מַעֲשָׁיו כְּפִי מַעֲשָׁיו אִם טוֹב וְאִם
and if good if his deeds according to his deeds for the man — that they judge in prophecy it is said
רַע וְזֶה הוּא הָעֵקֶר שֶׁכָּל דְּבָרֵי הַנְּבוּאָה תְּלוּיִין בּוֹ:
on it are dependent the prophecy the words of that all the principle He And this bad

This halacha addresses the classic theological paradox of how man can have free choice if Hashem already knows the future, explaining that Divine knowledge is beyond human comprehension.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam begins by establishing that free will is granted to every human being, allowing us to choose our path on our own initiative. He strongly refutes the mistaken belief that Hashem decrees whether a person will be a tzaddik or a rasha at birth, emphasizing that every person has the potential to be as righteous as Moshe Rabbeinu. Because choice is in our hands, the sinner is responsible for his own loss, making it proper to mourn for one's sins and return to Hashem through teshuvah. The Rambam explains that free will is a fundamental pillar of the Torah and mitzvos; without it, commands, warnings, rewards, and punishments would have no justice or meaning. He resolves the apparent contradiction of human independence within Hashem's world by explaining that just as Hashem willed nature to follow physical laws, He willed that man should possess free choice and be judged accordingly. Finally, the Rambam introduces the profound tension between Hashem's foreknowledge and man's free will, noting that the depth of this question is as vast as the sea.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

It is so easy to fall into the trap of blaming our spiritual struggles on our nature, our upbringing, or the way Hashem made us. We tell ourselves, "I am just a naturally angry person," or "I don't have the head for learning." But the Rambam teaches us a fundamental pillar of the entire Torah: your spiritual destiny is never locked in. You are not forced by any decree or natural trait to be who you were yesterday. At this very moment, you have the exact same capacity to choose greatness as the greatest tzaddikim.

This means that the key to your avodah is entirely in your hands. When we realize that Hashem does not force our choices, we stop looking for excuses and start looking for ways to grow. If we made a mistake, we don't have to stay down; the same free will that allowed us to slip is the very tool we use to choose to stand back up and return to Him.

Today, catch yourself when you start to say "that's just who I am" about a negative habit or a missed mitzvah. Pause, remind yourself that Hashem gave you the power to choose otherwise, and make one small, conscious decision to act differently than your habit dictates.