

הלכות תשובה • פרק ששי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam takes on a major question that troubles many Yidden when they learn the Torah and the Nevi'im: how do we understand those pesukim that seem to say Hashem forces a person to do bad or good, which would chalilah take away our free will? The Rambam promises to lay down a great and fundamental yesod of our emunah to clear up these difficult pesukim once and for all. He begins by explaining how Hashem runs the world with true justice, bringing retribution on a sinner in this world, in the next world, or both, depending on the sin, and how Teshuvah acts as a shield to protect a person from these punishments.

We then learn a deep and sobering concept in the ways of Hashem's judgment: sometimes, when a person chooses to commit very great or numerous sins willfully and consciously, the True Judge decrees that his punishment in this world is that the gates of Teshuvah are locked before him. The Rambam brings proofs from Pharaoh, Sichon, the Canaanites, and the Yidden in the times of Eliyahu Hanavi to show that they all started sinning on their own free will, and only afterward did Hashem harden their hearts as a punishment, preventing them from repenting so they would receive their full retribution. We also learn how the tefillos of Dovid Hamelech and the other nevi'im fit into this, as they begged Hashem not to let their sins block them from the path of truth, and how Hashem sends us prophets to guide us back to Him.

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

הליא

הבחירה החפשית ועונש החוטא בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא

Halacha 1 • Free Will and the Divine System of Retribution in This World and the Next

פסוקים הרבה יש בתורה ובדברי נביאים שהם נראין כסותרין

as contradicting appear that they prophets and in the words of in the Torah there are many Verses

עקר זה ונכשלין בהן רב האדם ויעלה על דעתן מהן שהקדוש

that the Holy One from them their mind upon and it arises the people most of through them and stumble this principle

ברוך הוא הוא גוזר על האדם לעשות רעה או טובה ושאין לבו של

of his heart and that not good or evil to do the person upon decrees He He blessed

אדם מסור לו להטותו לכל אשר ירצה. והרי אני מבאר עקר

a principle explain I and behold he desires that to all to direct it to him is handed over a person

גדול שממנו ידע פרוש כל אותן הפסוקים. בזמן שאדם אחד

one that a person At a time the verses those all the explanation of you will know that from it great

או אנשי מדינה חוטאים ועושה החוטא חטא שעושה מדעתו

from his own mind that he does a sin the sinner and does sin a province the people of or

וברצונו כמו שהודענו ראוי להפרע ממנו והקדוש ברוך הוא

He blessed and the Holy One from him to exact punishment it is proper that we made known like and with his will

יֹדֵעַ אִיךָ יִפְרַע. יֵשׁ חֵטָא שֶׁהַדִּין נוֹתֵן שְׁנִפְרָעִים מִמֶּנּוּ עַל
for from him that they exact gives that the judgment a sin There is He will punish how knows
punishment

חֵטְאוֹ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּגוּפוֹ אוֹ בְּמִמּוֹנוֹ אוֹ בְּבָנָיו הַקְטָנִים שֶׁבָּנָיו שֶׁל
of for his children the small ones with his children or in his money or in his body this in the world his sin

אָדָם הַקְטָנִים שֶׁאֵין בָּהֶם דַּעַת וְלֹא הִגִּיעוּ לְכָל מִצְוֹת
mitzvot the category of did they reach and not understanding have in them who do not the small ones a person

בְּקִנְיָנוּ הֵן וְכָתִיב דְּבָרִים כֹּד טז "אִישׁ בְּחֵטְאוֹ יָמוּת" עַד שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה
that he becomes until shall die for his sin A man 16 24 Devarim and it is written they are like his possession

אִישׁ. וְיֵשׁ חֵטָא שֶׁהַדִּין נוֹתֵן שְׁנִפְרָעִין מִמֶּנּוּ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא
the coming for the world from him that they exact gives that the judgment a sin And there is a man
punishment

וְאֵין לְעוֹבֵר עָלָיו שׁוּם נֹזֶק בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. וְיֵשׁ חֵטָא
a sin And there is this in the world damage any of it to the transgressor and there is not

שְׁנִפְרָעִין מִמֶּנּוּ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְלְעוֹלָם הַבָּא:
the coming and for the world this in the world from him that they exact
punishment

The Rambam explains that despite verses that seem to imply predestination, man has absolute free will, and Hashem punishes sinners in this world, the next world, or both, according to His perfect justice.

ה'י ב

כֹּחַה שֶׁל תְּשׁוּבָה לְהִגֵּן מִן הַפְּרָעָנוּת

Halacha 2 - The Power of Teshuvah to Shield Against Retribution

בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אֲמורִים בְּזִמָּן שֶׁלֹּא עָשָׂה תְּשׁוּבָה אֲבָל אִם עָשָׂה תְּשׁוּבָה
teshuvah he did if but teshuvah he did that not in a time are said words In what

הַתְּשׁוּבָה כְּתָרִים לְפָנֵי הַפְּרָעָנוּת. וְכַשֵּׁם שֶׁהָאָדָם חוֹטֵא מִדַּעְתּוֹ
of his own knowledge sins that a person and just as the retribution before is like a shield the teshuvah

וּבְרָצוֹנוֹ כִּךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה מִדַּעְתּוֹ וּבְרָצוֹנוֹ:
and with his will of his own knowledge teshuvah does he so and with his will

This halacha explains that teshuvah serves as a shield against punishment, and that just as sin is committed willfully, repentance must also be a willful act.

ה'י ג

מְנִיעַת הַתְּשׁוּבָה כְּעוֹנָשׁ עַל חֲטָאִים חֲמורִים

Halacha 3 - Withholding Repentance as a Punishment for Severe Sins

וְאִפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּחַטָּא אָדָם חֵטָא גָּדוֹל אוֹ חֲטָאִים רַבִּים עַד שֶׁיִּתֵּן הַדִּין
the judgment that will give until many sins or great a sin a person that will sin And it is possible

לְפָנֵי דִין הָאֱמֶת שֶׁיִּהְיֶה הַפְּרָעוֹן מִזֶּה הַחוֹטֵא עַל חֲטָאִים אֵלּוּ שֶׁעָשָׂה
that he did these sins for sinner from this the retribution that should be the Truth the Judge of before

בְּרָצוֹנוֹ וּמִדַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁמוֹנְעִין מִמֶּנּוּ הַתְּשׁוּבָה וְאֵין מְנִיחִין לוֹ רְשׁוּת
permission him they allow and not the repentance from him that they withhold and with his knowledge by his will

לָשׁוּב מִרְשָׁעוֹ כִּדִּי שְׂיָמוּת וְיֵאבֵד בְּחַטָּאוֹ שְׁעֲשֵׂה. הוּא שֶׁהַקְדוֹשׁ
 that the Holy One it is that he did in his sin and perish that he will die in order from his wickedness to repent
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא אָמַר עַל יָדֵי יִשְׁעִיהוּ יִשְׁעִיָּה ו' י "הַשָּׁמֶן לֵב הָעָם הַזֶּה"
 this" people the heart of "Make fat 10 6 Yeshayahu Yeshayahu the hand of by said is He blessed
 וְגו'. וְכֵן הוּא אֹמֵר דה"ב לו טז "וַיְהִיו מַלְאָכָיו
 the messengers of mocking "And they were 16 36 Divrei HaYamim II says He and so etc.
 הַאֱלֹהִים וּבִזְיוֹם דְּבָרָיו וּמִתְעַתְּעִים בְּנִבְאָיו עַד עֲלֹת חַמַּת ה'
 Hashem the wrath of the rising of until at His prophets and scoffing His words and despising God
 בָּעָמּוֹ עַד לָאִין מְרַפָּא". כְּלוּמַר חַטָּאוֹ בְּרָצוֹנָם וְהִרְבוּ
 and they multiplied by their will they sinned meaning to say remedy" there was no until against His people
 לְפִשְׁעָם עַד שֶׁנִּתְחַיְבוּ לְמַנַּע מֵהֵן הַתְּשׁוּבָה שֶׁהִיא הַמְרַפָּא. לְפִיכָךְ
 therefore the remedy which is the repentance from them to withhold they became obligated until to transgress
 כָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה שְׁמוֹת ד' כ"א "וַאֲנִי אֶחֱזֶק אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה".
 Pharaoh" the heart of — will harden will strengthen "And I 21 4 Shemos in the Torah it is written
 לְפִי שֶׁחָטָא מֵעַצְמוֹ תַּחֲלָה וְהִרְעָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הַגִּרִּים בְּאֶרְצוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
 as it is said in his land who were dwelling to Yisrael and did evil initially from himself that he sinned because
 שְׁמוֹת א' י "הִבָּה נִתְחַכְמָה לו'". נָתַן הַדִּין לְמַנַּע הַתְּשׁוּבָה מִמֶּנּוּ עַד
 until from him the repentance to withhold the judgment gave with him" let us deal wisely "Come 10 1 Shemos
 שֶׁנִּפְרַע מִמֶּנּוּ. לְפִיכָךְ חֲזַק הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת לְבוֹ. וְלָמָּה הָיָה
 was and why his heart — is He blessed the Holy One hardened therefore from him retribution was exacted
 שׁוֹלְחַ לּוֹ בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה וְאֹמֵר שְׁלַח וַעֲשֵׂה תְּשׁוּבָה וּכְבָר אָמַר לוֹ
 to him said and already repentance and do send and saying Moshe by the hand of to him sending
 הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֵין אַתָּה מְשַׁלַּח שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר שְׁמוֹת ט' ל' "וְאַתָּה וְעַבְדֶּיךָ
 and your servants "And you 30 9 Shemos as it is said are sending you not is He blessed the Holy One
 יִדְעֵתִי" וְגו' שְׁמוֹת ט טז "וְאוֹלָם בְּעָבוֹר זֹאת הָעִמְדָתִיךָ". כִּדִּי
 in order I have kept you this for the sake of "And indeed 16 9 Shemos etc. I know"
 standing"
 לְהוֹדִיעַ לְבָאֵי הָעוֹלָם שֶׁבִּזְמַן שְׁמוֹנֶע הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הַתְּשׁוּבָה
 the repentance is He blessed the Holy One that withholds that at a time the world to those who enter to make known
 לַחֲוִטָא אֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לָשׁוּב אֶלָּא יָמוּת בְּרָשָׁעוֹ שְׁעֲשֵׂה בַתְּחִלָּה בְּרָצוֹנוֹ.
 by his will at first that he did in his wickedness he will die but to repent able he is not from the sinner
 וְכֵן סִיחּוֹן לְפִי עֲוֹנוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ לוֹ נִתְחַיֵּב לְמַנַּע מִן הַתְּשׁוּבָה
 the repentance from to withhold him he became obligated to him that were sins according to Sichon and so
 שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים ב' ל' "כִּי הִקְשָׁה ה' אֶלְהֵיךָ אֶת רוּחוֹ וְאִמָּץ אֶת
 — and made obstinate his spirit — your God Hashem hardened "For 30 2 Devarim as it is said
 לְבָבוֹ". וְכֵן הַכְּנַעֲנִים לְפִי תוֹעֲבוֹתֵיהֶן מָנַע מֵהֵן הַתְּשׁוּבָה עַד
 until the repentance from them withheld their abominations according to the Canaanites and so his heart"

שָׁעָשׂוּ מִלְחָמָה עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ יָא כ "כִּי מֵאֵת ה' הִיָּתָה

it was Hashem from "For 20 11 Yehoshua as it is said Yisrael with war that they made

לְחַזֵּק אֶת לִבָּם לְקִרְאָת הַמִּלְחָמָה עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַעַן הַחֲרִימָם". וְכֵן

and so to utterly destroy them" in order Yisrael with the war to meet their heart — to strengthen

יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמֵי אֵלִיָּהוּ לְפִי שֶׁחֲרָבוּ לְפָשַׁע מִנַּע מְאוּתָן הַמֵּרְבִּים

who multiplied from those withheld to transgress that they multiplied because Eliyahu in the days of Yisrael

לְפָשַׁע תְּשׁוּבָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מַלְכִּים א יח לו "וְאַתָּה הִסְבַּתָּ אֶת לִבָּם

their heart — have turned "And You 37 18 I Melachim as it is said repentance to transgress

אַחֲרָנִית" כְּלוּמָר מִנַּעַת מֶהֱן הַתְּשׁוּבָה. נִמְצְאָת אוֹמֵר שֶׁלֹּא גָזַר

decreed that not saying it is found the repentance from them You withheld meaning to say backward"

הָאֵל עַל פְּרַעַה לְהָרַע לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. וְלֹא עַל סִיחֹן לְחַטֹּא בְּאֶרְצוֹ. וְלֹא עַל

upon and not in his land to sin Sichon upon and not to Yisrael to do evil Pharaoh upon the Almighty

הַכְּנַעֲנִים לְהִתְעִיב. וְלֹא עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַבֵּד עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה. אֲלָא כָּלָן חָטְאוּ

sinned all of them but foreign worship to worship Yisrael upon and not to act abominably the Canaanites

מֵעַצְמוֹ וְכָלָן נִתְחַיְבוּ לְמַנַּע מֶהֱן הַתְּשׁוּבָה:

the repentance from them to withhold became obligated and all of them from themselves

The Rambam explains that a person can commit sins so severe that the Divine judgment deprives them of the opportunity to repent as a form of punishment.

הלי"ד

בְּקִשַּׁת הַצְּדִיקִים לְסִיוַע מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנוֹ

Halacha 4 • The Request of the Righteous for Divine Assistance to Do God's Will

וּבְעֶנְיָן זֶה שׁוֹאֲלִין הַצְּדִיקִים וְהַנְּבִיאִים בְּתַפִּלָּתָם מֵאֵת ה' לְעֲזָרָם

to help them Hashem from in their prayer and the prophets the righteous ask this And like the matter of

עַל הָאֱמֶת. כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד תְּהִלִּים כז יא "הוֹרֵנִי ה' דִּרְכָּךְ". כְּלוּמָר

meaning to say Your way" Hashem "Teach me 11 27 Tehillim Dovid that said like the truth upon

אַל יִמְנְעוּנִי חַטָּאֵי דְרָךְ הָאֱמֶת שֶׁמִּמֶּנָּה אֲדַע דִּרְכָּךְ וְיִחִיד שְׁמֶךָ.

Your name and the oneness of Your way I will know from which the truth the path of my sins prevent me do not

וְכֵן זֶה שֶׁאָמַר תְּהִלִּים נא יד "וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה תִּסְמְכֵנִי" כְּלוּמָר תִּנְחֵן

let rest meaning to say support me" magnanimity "and a spirit of 14 51 Tehillim that said this and so

רוּחִי לַעֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצְךָ וְאַל יִגְרְמוּ לִי חַטָּאֵי לְמַנְעֵנִי מִתְּשׁוּבָה אֲלָא

rather from repentance to prevent me my sins to me cause and let not Your desire to do my spirit

תְּהִיָּה הַרְשׁוּת בְּיָדִי עַד שֶׁאֲחֲזֹר וְאֶבִּין וְאֲדַע דְּרָךְ הָאֱמֶת. וְעַל

and upon the truth the path of and know and understand that I return until in my hand the free will let be

דְּרָךְ זֶה כָּל הַדּוּמָה לְפִסּוּקִים אֵלֶּה:

these to verses that is similar all this the path of

This halacha explains that the prayers of the righteous for guidance do not contradict free will, but rather ask that their sins not prevent them from choosing the path of truth.

ומהו זה שאמר דוד תהילים כה ח "טוב וישר ה' על פן יורה

instructs · therefore Hashem and upright "Good 8 25 Tehillim Dovid that said this And what is

חטאים בדרך" תהילים כה ט "יִדְרֶה עֲנוּיִם" וגו'. זה ששלח נביאים

prophets is that He sent This etc. the humble" "He guides 9 25 Tehillim in the path" sinners

להם מודיעים דרכי ה' ומחזירין אותן בתשובה. ועוד שנתן

that He gave And furthermore in repentance them and returning Hashem the ways of informing to them

בהם כח ללמד ולהבין. שמדה זו בכל אדם שכל זמן שהוא נמשך

is drawn that he time that all man is in every this for attribute and to understand to learn strength in them

בדרכי החכמה והצדק מתאווה להן ורודף אותם. והוא מה שאמרו

said is what And it them and pursues them he desires and righteousness wisdom in the ways of

רבתינו זכרונם לברכה בא לטהר מסייעין אותו כלומר ימצא

he will find meaning to say him they assist to purify himself One who comes for blessing their memory our Sages

עצמו נעזר על הדבר. והלא כתוב בתורה בראשית טו יג "ועבדום

"And they shall serve 13 15 Bereishis in the Torah written And is it not the matter upon assisted himself them

וענו אתם", הרי גזר על המצריים לעשות רע. וכתוב

And it is written evil to do the Egyptians upon He decreed behold them" and they shall afflict

דברים לא טז "וקם העם הזה וזנה אחרי אלהי נכר הארץ",

the land" the foreigners of the gods of after and stray this the nation "And will arise 16 31 Devarim

הרי גזר על ישראל לעבד עבודה זרה. ולמה נפרע מהן. לפי שלא

not Because them did He punish And why foreign worship to serve Yisrael upon He decreed behold

גזר על איש פלוני הידוע שיהיה הוא הזונה אלא כל אחד

one every unless the one who strays he that he will be the known so-and-so man upon did He decree

ואחד מאותן הזונים לעבד עבודה זרה אלו לא רצה לעבד לא היה

would he have not to serve he wanted not if foreign worship to serve who strayed from those and one

עובד. ולא הודיעו הבורא אלא מנהגו של עולם. הא למה זה

this to what Behold the world of the custom unless the Creator did He inform him And not served

דומה לאומר העם הזה יהיה בהן צדיקים ורשעים. לא מפני

because of Not and wicked righteous among them there will be this the nation To one who says is comparable

זה יאמר הרשע כבר נגזר עליו שיהיה רשע מפני שהודיע למשה

Moshe that He informed because wicked that he will be upon him it was decreed already the wicked will say this

שיהיו רשעים בישראל. כענין שנאמר דברים טו יא "כי לא

not "For 11 15 Devarim that is said Like the matter in Yisrael wicked people that there will be

יִחְדַּל אֲבִיוֹן מִקֶּרֶב הָאָרֶץ". וְכֵן הַמִּצְרִיִּים כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵאוֹתָן

from those and one one every the Egyptians And so the land" from the midst of the needy will cease

הַמִּצְרִים וְהַמֵּרְעִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלֹהִים לֹא רָצָה לְהַרְעֵם לָהֶם הָרְשׁוֹת בְּיָדוֹ.

was in his hand the permission to them to do evil he wanted not if to Yisrael and who did evil who oppressed

שֶׁלֹא גָזַר עַל אִישׁ יָדוּעַ אֲלָא הוֹדִיעֵנו שְׂסוּף וְרָעוּ עֲתִיד

is destined his seed that the end of He informed him unless known man upon did He decree for not

לְהִשְׁתַּעֲבֹד בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם. וְכִבָּר אָמַרְנוּ שֶׁאֵין כֹּחַ בְּאָדָם לֵידַע

to know in man strength that there is no we have said And already theirs not in a land to be enslaved

הֵיאֵךְ יֵדַע הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא דְבָרִים הָעֲתִידִין לֵהָיוֹת:

to be that are destined things is He blessed the Holy One knows how

The Rambam explains that general prophecies about future events do not compromise the free will of any specific individual.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam explains that while every person has the free will to choose good or bad and to do Teshuvah, a sinner can commit such severe or repeated sins that the True Judge punishes him by withholding the opportunity for Teshuvah, causing him to die in his wickedness. This explains why Hashem hardened the hearts of Pharaoh, Sichon, and the Canaanites, and why He turned the hearts of the people backward in the days of Eliyahu—not because He decreed they should sin from the start, but as a punishment for the terrible sins they chose to commit on their own initiative. Because of this, the righteous and the prophets, like Dovid Hamelech, constantly pray to Hashem to support them and not let their sins block them from the path of truth, while Hashem in His goodness sends prophets to teach and guide sinners back to the right path.

My dear talmid, we often think of Teshuvah as a safety net that will always be there, waiting for us whenever we finally decide to get around to it. But the Rambam here reveals a sobering, shaking truth about how the spiritual world works: the freedom to choose is a gift, and like any gift, it can be lost. When a person willfully and repeatedly hardens their own heart against the truth, there comes a point where Heaven says, "You wanted to close the door? Now, the door is closed." The ultimate punishment for sin is not always a physical blow; sometimes, it is the loss of the desire and the ability to change. Pharaoh and Sichon were not born wicked, but by their own choices, they locked themselves in a prison of their own making.

This is not meant to bring us to despair, chas v'shalom, but to wake us up to the preciousness of the present moment. Every single time you feel a small awakening in your heart, a sudden desire to daven with more kavanah, a urge to stop yourself from speaking lashon hara, or a pull to learn one more mishnah, that is a direct gift from Hashem. It is a door opening. If you ignore it, the next time it will be harder to hear. But if you seize it, you create a vessel for even more help from Shamayim. As Chazal teach us, "One who comes to purify himself is assisted."

This is why Dovid HaMelech cried out in Tehillim, "And let a willing spirit support me." He was davening that his past mistakes should not block his path to growth, begging Hashem to keep his heart open and soft. We must have the same yiras Shamayim. Do not wait for tomorrow, and do not assume your heart will always be this open. When the spark of inspiration is there, you must act on it immediately.

Today, the very moment you feel a slight inner push to do the right thing or to pull back from a temptation, do not hesitate for even a second, act on that holy impulse immediately to keep your heart open and receptive to Hashem.