

## הלכות תשובה • פרק ששי

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

## 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.*

## הלכה א

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

## פסוקים הרבה יש בתורה ובדברי נביאים

Many verses there are in the Torah and in the words of the Prophets

שהן נראין כסותרין עקר זה

that they appear as contradicting this fundamental principle of free will,

ונכשלין בהן רב האדם

and most people stumble through them by misunderstanding their true meaning,

ויצלה על דעתו מהן

and it arises in their minds from them

שהקדוש ברוך הוא הוא גוזר על האדם לעשות רעה או טובה

that the Holy One, blessed be He, decrees upon a person to do evil or good,

ושאין לבו של אדם מסור לו להטותו לכל אשר ירצה.

and that the heart of a person is not handed over to him to direct it to all that he desires.

וְהִירֵאֲנִי מִבְּאֵר עֶקֶר גָּדוֹל

And behold, I will explain a great principle

שֶׁמִּמֶּנּוּ תִדְעַ פֶּרוּשׁ כָּל אוֹתָן הַפְּסוּקִים.

from which you will know the explanation of all those verses.

בְּזֶמַן שֶׁאָדָם אֶחָד אוֹ אֲנָשִׁי מִדִּינָה חוֹטְאִים

At a time when a single person or the people of a province sin,

וְעוֹשֶׂה הַחוּטָא חֵטָא שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה מִדַּעְתּוֹ וּבְרָצוֹנוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁהוֹדַעְנוּ

and the sinner commits a sin that he does from his own mind and with his own will, as we have made known that he has the power to do,

רְאוּי לְהַפְרֵעַ מִמֶּנּוּ

it is proper to exact punishment from him,

וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יוֹדֵעַ אֵיךְ יַפְרֶעַ.

and the Holy One, blessed be He, knows how He will punish him.

יֵשׁ חֵטָא שֶׁהַדִּין נוֹתֵן

There is a sin that the attribute of justice dictates

שֶׁנִּפְרָעִים מִמֶּנּוּ עַל חֵטָאוֹ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה

that they exact punishment from him for his sin in this world,

בְּגוּפוֹ אוֹ בְּמִמוֹנוֹ אוֹ בְּבָנָיו הַקְטָנִים

in his body, or in his money, or through his small children;

שֶׁבָּנָיו שֶׁל אָדָם הַקְטָנִים שֶׁאֵין בָּהֶם דַּעַת וְלֹא הִגִּיעוּ לְכָלֵל מִצְוֹת

for a person's small children, who do not have understanding in them and have not reached the category of mitzvot,

כְּקִנְיָנוֹ הוּא

are like his possession,

וְכָתִיב "אִישׁ בְּחֵטָאוֹ יָמוּת" עַד שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה אִישׁ.

and it is written, "A man for his sin shall die," which implies that this applies only until he becomes a man.

וְיֵשׁ חֵטָא שֶׁהַדִּין נוֹתֵן שֶׁנִּפְרָעִין מִמֶּנּוּ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא

And there is a sin that justice dictates that they exact punishment from him in the World to Come,

ואין לעובר עליו שום נזק בעולם הזה.

and there is not to the transgressor of it any damage in this world.

ויש חטא שנפרעין ממנו בעולם הזה ולעולם הבא:

And there is a sin that they exact punishment from him in this world and for the World to Come.

## הלכה ב

Halacha 2 · The Power of Teshuvah to Shield Against Retribution

במה דברים אמורים

In what cases are these words said?

בזמן שלא עשה תשובה

At a time when the sinner did not do teshuvah,

אבל אם עשה תשובה

but if he did do teshuvah,

התשובה כתריס לפני הפרענות.

the teshuvah stands like a shield before the retribution and protects him from punishment.

וכשם שהאדם חוטא מדעתו ובכחו

And just as a person sins of his own knowledge and with his own will,

כה הוא עושה תשובה מדעתו ובכחו:

so he does teshuvah of his own knowledge and with his own will, for Hashem does not force him to do bad or good.

## הלכה ג

Halacha 3 · Withholding Repentance as a Punishment for Severe Sins

ואפשר שיחטא אדם חטא גדול או חטאים רבים

And it is possible that a person will commit a great sin, or many sins,

עד שיתן הדין לפני דין האמת

until the judgment will be given before the Judge of Truth, Hashem,

שיהא הפרעון מזה החוטא על חטאים אלו שעשה ברצונו ומדעתו

that the retribution from this sinner for these sins, which he committed of his own free will and with his knowledge, should be

שמונעין ממנו התשובה

that they withhold repentance from him,

וְאִין מְנִיחִין לוֹ רְשׁוֹת לְשׁוּב מִרְשָׁעוֹ

and they do not allow him permission to repent from his wickedness,

כִּדִּי שְׂיָמוּת וְיֵאבֹד בְּחַטָּאוֹ שְׁעָשָׂה.

in order that he will die and perish in his sin that he committed.

הוּא שֶׁהִקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אָמַר עַל יְדֵי יִשְׁעָיָהוּ

This is what the Holy One, blessed is He, said through Yeshayahu:

"הַשְׂמֵן לֵב הָעָם הַזֶּה" וְגו'.

"Make fat the heart of this people..." and so on.

וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר

And so He says in Divrei HaYamim:

"וַיְהִיו מְלַעְבִּים בְּמַלְאֲכֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וּבִזְיֹם דְּבָרָיו וּמִתְעַתְּעִים בְּנִבְאָיו עַד עֲלוֹת חֲמַת ה' בָּעַמּוֹ עַד לְאִין מִרְפָּא."

"And they were mocking the messengers of God, and despising His words, and scoffing at His prophets, until the rising of the wrath of Hashem against His people, until there was no remedy."

כְּלוּמַר חָטְאוּ בְּרָצוֹנָם וְהִרְבּוּ לְפָשַׁעַ

Meaning to say, they sinned of their own free will and multiplied their transgressions,

עַד שֶׁנִּתְחַיְבוּ לְמַנַּע מִהֵן הַתְּשׁוּבָה שֶׁהִיא הַמִּרְפָּא.

until they became liable to have repentance withheld from them, which is the remedy.

לְפִיכָךְ כָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה

Therefore, it is written in the Torah:

"וְאֲנִי אֶחֱזַק אֶקְשָׁה אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה."

"And I will strengthen" and "I will harden the heart of Pharaoh."

לְפִי שֶׁחָטָא מֵעֲצֻמוֹ תְּחִלָּה

Because he sinned on his own at first,

וַחֲרַע לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הַגָּרִים בְּאֶרְצוֹ

and did evil to Yisrael who were dwelling in his land,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ".

as it is said: "Come, let us deal wisely with them."

נתן הדין למנע התשובה ממנו עד שנפרע ממנו.

The judgment dictated to withhold repentance from him until retribution was exacted from him.

לפיכך חזק הקדוש ברוך הוא את לבו.

Therefore, the Holy One, blessed is He, hardened his heart.

ולמה היה שולח לו ביד משה ואומר שלח ועשה תשובה

And why did He send to him through Moshe, saying, "Send them out and do teshuvah,"

וכבר אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא אין אתה משלח

when the Holy One, blessed is He, had already said to him, "You will not send them,"

שנאמר "ואתה ועבדיך ידעתי" וגו'

as it is said: "But as for you and your servants, I know..." and so on,

"ואולם בעבור זאת העמדתיך".

and "But indeed, for this reason I have kept you standing"?

כדי להודיע לבאי העולם

In order to make known to all who enter the world

שבזמן שמונע הקדוש ברוך הוא התשובה לחוטא אינו יכול לשוב

that at a time when the Holy One, blessed is He, withholds repentance from the sinner, he is unable to repent,

אלא ימות ברשעו שעשה בתחלה ברצונו.

but he will die in his wickedness which he committed at first of his own free will.

וכן סיחון לפי עונות שהיו לו נתחייב למנעו מן התשובה

And so too Sichon, according to the sins that he had, became liable to have repentance withheld from him,

שנאמר "כי הקשה ה' אלהיך את רוחו ואמץ את לבבו".

as it is said: "For Hashem, your God, hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate."

וכן הכנענים לפי תועבותיהן מנע מהן התשובה

And so too the Canaanites, according to their abominations, He withheld repentance from them

עד שעשו מלחמה עם ישראל.

until they waged war with Yisrael,

שֶׁנֶאֱמַר "כִּי מֵאֵת ה' הָיְתָה לְחֻזֵּק אֶת לִבָּם לְקִרְאֵת הַמִּלְחָמָה עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַעַן הַחֲרִימָם".

as it is said: "For it was from Hashem to harden their hearts to meet in war with Yisrael, in order to utterly destroy them."

וְכֵן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמֵי אֱלִיָּהוּ לְפִי שֶׁהִרְבּוּ לַפֶּשַׁע

And so too Yisrael in the days of Eliyahu, because they multiplied their transgressions,

מִנֵּעַ מְאוּתָן הַמִּרְבִּים לַפֶּשַׁע תְּשׁוּבָה

He withheld repentance from those who multiplied their transgressions,

שֶׁנֶאֱמַר "וְאַתָּה הִסַּבְתָּ אֶת לִבָּם אַחֲרָנִית"

as it is said: "And You have turned their heart backward,"

כְּלוּמַר מִנֵּעַת מִהֵן הַתְּשׁוּבָה.

meaning to say, You withheld repentance from them.

נִמְצְאָתָּ אוֹמֵר שֶׁלֹּא גָזַר הָאֵל עַל פַּרְעֹה לְהָרַע לְיִשְׂרָאֵל.

Consequently, you must say that God did not decree upon Pharaoh to do evil to Yisrael,

וְלֹא עַל סִיחֹן לְחַטֹּא בְּאֶרְצוֹ.

nor upon Sichon to sin in his land,

וְלֹא עַל הַכְּנַעֲנִים לְהִתְעִיב.

nor upon the Canaanites to act abominably,

וְלֹא עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַבֹד עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה.

nor upon Yisrael to worship idols.

אֲלֹא כֻּלָּן חָטְאוּ מֵעַצְמָן

Rather, all of them sinned of their own accord,

וְכָלֹן נִתְחַיְבוּ לְמִנֵּעַ מִהֵן הַתְּשׁוּבָה:

and all of them became liable to have repentance withheld from them.

הַלָּכָה ד'

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

וְכַעֲנִין זֶה שׁוֹאֵלִין הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַנְּבִיאִים בְּתַפִּלָּתָם מֵאֵת ה' לְעֲזֹרָם עַל הָאֱמֶת.

And like this matter, the righteous and the prophets ask in their prayer from Hashem to help them upon the truth, so that they do not stumble in sin and lose their path.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד תְּהִלִּים כֹּז יֵא "הוֹרֵנִי ה' דְּרָכֶךָ".

This is like that which Dovid said in Tehillim 27:11, "Teach me, Hashem, Your way."

כְּלוֹמַר אֵל יִמְנְעוּנִי חַטָּאֵי דְרָךְ הָאֱמֶת שֶׁמִּמָּנָה אֶדַע דְּרָכֶךָ וְיַחֲדוּ שְׂמֶךָ.

Meaning to say: Let not my sins prevent me from finding the path of the truth, from which I will know Your way and the oneness of Your Name, and thus serve You with a complete heart.

וְכֵן זֶה שֶׁאָמַר תְּהִלִּים נֹא יֵד "וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה תִּסְמְכֵנִי"

And so too, this is the meaning of that which he said in Tehillim 51:14, "and a spirit of magnanimity support me,"

כְּלוֹמַר תְּנִיחַ רוּחִי לַעֲשׂוֹת חֶפְצְךָ

meaning to say: Let my spirit rest and be willing to do Your desire,

וְאֵל יִגְרְמוּ לִי חַטָּאֵי לְמַנְעֵנִי מִתְּשׁוּבָה

and let not my sins cause me to prevent me from doing repentance,

אֶלָּא תִּהְיֶה הָרְשׁוּת בְּיָדִי עַד שֶׁאֶחְזֹר וְאֶבִּין וְאֶדַע דְּרָךְ הָאֱמֶת.

rather, let the free will be in my hand until I return and understand and know the path of the truth without any spiritual blockages.

וְעַל דְּרָךְ זֶה כָּל הַדּוּמָה לְפִסּוּקִים אֵלֶּה:

And upon this path we must explain all that is similar to these verses, where the tzaddikim pray for Hashem's guidance.

## הִלְכָּה ה

Halacha 5 · Free Will and General Prophecies Regarding the Future

וּמַהוּ זֶה שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד תְּהִלִּים כֹּה ה' טוֹב וְיָשָׁר ה' עַל כֵּן יוֹרֶה חַטָּאִים בְּדֶרֶךְ "תְּהִלִּים כֹּה ט" יִדְרֹךְ עֲנִיִּים" וְגו'.

And what is this that Dovid said in Tehillim, "Good and upright is Hashem, therefore He instructs sinners in the path. He guides the humble in justice..." etc.?

זֶה שֶׁשָּׁלַח נְבִיאִים לָהֶם מוֹדִיעִים דְּרָכֵי ה' וּמַחְזִירִין אוֹתָן בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה.

This refers to the fact that He sent prophets to them, informing them of the ways of Hashem, and returning them in repentance.

וְעוֹד שֶׁנָּתַן בָּהֶם כֹּחַ לְלַמֵּד וּלְהַבִּין.

And furthermore, that He gave in them strength to learn and to understand.

שֶׁמִּדָּה זֹאת בְּכָל אָדָם שֶׁכָּל זְמַן שֶׁהוּא נִמְשָׁךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ הַחֲכָמָה וְהַצְדִּיק מִתְאַוָּה לָהֶן וְרוֹדֵף אוֹתָם.

For this attribute is in every man, that all the time that he is drawn in the ways of wisdom and righteousness, he desires them and pursues them.

וְהוּא מֵה שְׁאֵמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ וְכָרוֹנָם לְכַרְכָּה בָּא לְטַהֵר מְסִיעֵין אוֹתוֹ כְּלוֹמַר יִמָּצֵא עֲצָמוֹ נֶעְזֵר עַל הַדָּבָר.

And it is what our Sages, their memory for blessing, said: "One who comes to purify himself, they assist him"—meaning to say, he will find himself assisted upon the matter.

וְהֵלֹא כָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה בְּרֹאשִׁית טו יג "וַעֲבָדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם", הֲרִי גֵזֵר עַל הַמִּצְרִיִּים לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע.

And is it not written in the Torah, "And they shall serve them, and they shall afflict them"? Behold, He decreed upon the Egyptians to do evil!

וְכִתְיֵב דְּבָרִים לֹא טו "וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה וְזָנָה אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵי נֹכַר הָאָרֶץ", הֲרִי גֵזֵר עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲבֹד עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה.

And it is written, "And this nation will arise and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the land." Behold, He decreed upon Yisrael to worship foreign worship!

וְלָמָּה נִפְרַע מֵהֶן.

And why did He punish them?

לְפִי שֶׁלֹּא גֵזֵר עַל אִישׁ פְּלוֹנִי הַיָּדוּעַ שְׂיִהְיֶה הוּא הַזּוֹנֶה אֲלָא כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵאוֹתָן הַזּוֹנִים לַעֲבֹד עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה אֱלוֹ לֹא רָצָה לַעֲבֹד לֹא הָיָה עוֹבֵד.

Because He did not decree upon so-and-so, the known individual, that he would be the one who strays; rather, every single one of those who strayed to worship foreign worship, if he did not want to worship, he would not have worshipped.

וְלֹא הוּדִיעָיו הַבוֹרֵא אֲלָא מִנִּהְגוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם.

And the Creator did not inform him of anything except the custom of the world.

הָא לָמָּה זֶה דּוֹמָה לְאוֹמֵר הָעָם הַזֶּה יִהְיֶה בָּהֶן צַדִּיקִים וְרָשָׁעִים.

Behold, to what is this comparable? To one who says, "This nation, there will be among them righteous and wicked people."

לֹא מִפְּנֵי זֶה יֹאמֵר הָרָשָׁע כְּבָר נִגְזֵר עָלָיו שְׂיִהְיֶה רָשָׁע מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּדִיעַ לְמֹשֶׁה שְׂיִהְיֶה רָשָׁעִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.

Not because of this will the wicked person say that it was already decreed upon him that he would be wicked, just because He informed Moshe that there would be wicked people in Yisrael.

כַּעֲנִנֵן שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים טו יא "כִּי לֹא יִחַדֵּל אֲבִיוֹן מִקֶּרֶב הָאָרֶץ".

Like the matter that is said, "For the needy will not cease from the midst of the land."

וְכֵן הַמִּצְרִיִּים כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵאוֹתָן הַמִּצְרִים וְהַמְרַעִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלוֹ לֹא רָצָה לְהַרְע לָהֶם הָרְשׁוֹת בְּיָדוֹ.

And so too with the Egyptians: every single one of those who oppressed and who did evil to Yisrael, if he did not want to do evil to them, the permission was in his hand to refrain.



שְׁלֹא גָזַר עַל אִישׁ יָדוּעַ אֶלָּא הוֹדִיעוּ שְׁסוּף זָרְעוֹ עָתִיד לְהִשְׁתַּעַבַּד בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם.

For He did not decree upon a known individual, but rather He informed him that the end of his seed was destined to be enslaved in a land not theirs.

וּכְכֹר אָמַרְנוּ שֶׁאֵין כַּח בְּאָדָם לִידַע הַיָּדַע הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא דְּבָרִים הָעֲתִידִין לְהִיטוֹ:

And already we have said that there is no strength in man to know how the Holy One, blessed is He, knows things that are destined to be.

#### 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.

#### לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

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.

