

הלכות תשובה • פרק שביעי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this beautiful chapter, the Rambam teaches us the incredible power of Teshuvah and how a Yid must always strive to return to Hashem. We learn that Teshuvah is not something to put off for old age, nor is it limited to physical sins like theft or immorality; rather, a person must search his heart and do Teshuvah for bad middos like anger, hatred, and jealousy, which are even harder to break.

The Rambam warms our hearts by showing how beloved a Baal-Teshuvah is to Hashem, rising to a level so high that even the completely righteous cannot stand there. We see how Teshuvah brings us close to the Shechinah, turning a person from being far away and rejected into someone who is cherished, whose tefillos are answered immediately, and whose mitzvos are accepted with sweet favor.

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 Repent and Confess to Merit the World to Come

הואיל ורשות כל אדם נתונה לו

Since free will and the authority of every man is given to him

כמו שבארנו

just as we explained in the previous chapters, therefore

ישתדל אדם לעשות תשובה

a man should strive to do teshuvah

ולהתודות בפיו מחטאיו

and to confess with his mouth from his sins

ולנער בפיו מחטאיו

and to shake off his hands from his sins, completely detaching himself from them,

כדי שימות והוא בעל תשובה

in order that he will die and he is a master of teshuvah

ויזכה לחיי העולם הבא:

and thereby merit the life of the World to Come.

לְעוֹלָם יִרְאֶה אָדָם עַצְמוֹ

Always should a person view himself

כְּאִלּוּ הוּא נוֹטֵה לְמוֹת

as if he is leaning to die, close to his end,

וְשָׁמָּה יָמוּת בְּשָׁעָתוֹ

and perhaps he will die in his moment, suddenly,

וְנִמְצָא עוֹמֵד בַּחֲטָאוֹ.

and he will be found standing in his sin before Hashem.

לְפִיכָּהּ יָשׁוּב מִחֲטָאֵיו מִיָּד

Therefore, he should repent from his sins immediately

וְלֹא יֹאמַר כְּשֶׁאֶזְקִין אָשׁוּב

and he should not say, "When I grow old, I will repent,"

שָׁמָּה יָמוּת טָרָם שִׁזְקִין.

perhaps he will die before he grows old and lose his chance.

הוּא שֶׁשְׁלֹמֹה אָמַר בְּחֻמְתּוֹ

This is what Shlomo said in his wisdom in the Sefer of

קהלת ט ח "בְּכָל עֵת יִהְיֶה בְּגָדֶיךָ לְבָנִים":

Koheles 9:8, "At all times, let your garments be white," meaning one's soul should always be clean of sin through teshuvah.

אַל תֹּאמַר שֶׁאֵין תְּשׁוּבָה אֶלָּא מִעֲבֻרוֹת שֶׁיֵּשׁ בָּהֶן מַעֲשֶׂה

Do not say that there is no repentance except from transgressions that have in them an action,

כְּגוֹן זְנוּת וְגָזֵל וְגִנְבָּה.

such as promiscuity and robbery and theft.

אֶלָּא כְּשֶׁם שֶׁצָּרִיךְ אָדָם לָשׁוּב מֵאֵלּוּ

Rather, just as a person is required to repent from these physical sins,

כִּי הוּא צָרִיךְ לְחַפֵּשׂ בְּדַעוֹת רָעוֹת שֵׁישׁ לוֹ

so he needs to search among the evil character traits that he has

וְלָשׁוּב מִן הַפֶּעַס וּמִן הָאִיבָה וּמִן הַקִּנְיָאָה וּמִן הַהִתּוּל

and to repent from anger, and from hatred, and from envy, and from frivolity,

וּמִרְדִּיפַת הַמָּמוֹן וְהַכְּבוֹד וּמִרְדִּיפַת הַמֶּאֱכָלוֹת וְכִיּוּצֵא בָהֶן

and from the pursuit of money and honor, and from the pursuit of foods, and the like of them.

מִן הַכָּל צָרִיךְ לַחְזֹר בְּתַשׁוּבָה.

From everything, he needs to return in repentance to Hashem.

וְאֵלּוּ הָעֲוֹנוֹת קָשִׁים מְאֹדֶן שֵׁישׁ בָּהֶן מַעֲשֶׂה

And these sins of bad character traits are harder than those that have in them an action,

שֶׁבְּזִמְן שִׁאֲדָם נִשְׁקָע בָּאֵלוֹ קָשָׁה הוּא לְפָרֵשׁ מֵהֶם.

because when a person is sunken in these, it is hard to separate from them.

וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר יִשְׁעִיָּה נָה ז' "נִעְזֹב רָשָׁע" וְגו':

And so it says in the Navi Yeshayahu 55:7, "Let the wicked abandon his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts; and let him return to Hashem, and He will have mercy upon him" etc.

הַלָּכָה ד'

Halacha 4 · The Great Level of a Penitent and His Belovedness Before the Creator

וְאֵל יִדְמָה אָדָם פֶּעַל תַּשׁוּבָה

And let not imagine a person who is a master of repentance

שֶׁהוּא מְרַחֵק מִמַּעַלְתַּת הַצְּדִיקִים

that he is distant from the level of the righteous

מִפְּנֵי הָעֲוֹנוֹת וְהַחֲטָאוֹת שֶׁעָשָׂה.

because of the iniquities and the sins that he did.

אִין הַדָּבָר כֵּן

The matter is not so,

אֲלֵא אָהוּב וְנִחְמָד הוּא לְפָנֵי הַבּוֹרֵא

rather beloved and desirable he is before the Creator

כְּאִלוּ לֹא חָטָא מְעוּלָם.

as if he did not sin ever.

וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שְׂשׂוּכְרוֹ הַרְבֵּה

And not only that, rather that his reward is much,

שֶׁהָרִי טָעַם טָעַם הַחֵטָא

for behold, he tasted the taste of the sin

וּפָרַשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ וְכָבַשׁ יִצְרוֹ.

and separated from it and conquered his inclination.

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

The Sages said:

מְקוֹם שֶׁבָּעָלִי תְּשׁוּבָה עוֹמְדִין

The place where masters of repentance stand,

אֵין צַדִּיקִים גָּמוּרִין יְכוּלִין לַעֲמֹד בּוֹ.

not even complete righteous are able to stand in it.

כְּלוּמַר מַעֲלָתוֹ גְּדוּלָּהּ מִמַּעֲלַת אֵלוּ שֶׁלֹּא חָטָאוּ מְעוּלָם

Meaning to say, their level is greater than the level of these who did not sin ever,

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵן כּוֹבְשִׁים יִצְרָם יוֹתֵר מֵהֶם:

because they conquer their inclination more than them.

הַלָּכָה ה

Halacha 5 · Repentance as the Prerequisite for the Redemption of Israel

כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים כָּלָן צִוּוּ עַל הַתְּשׁוּבָה

All the prophets, all of them, commanded and exhorted the Jewish people concerning repentance,

וְאֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל נִגְאָלִין אֶלָּא בַּתְּשׁוּבָה.

and Israel are not redeemed except through repentance.

וּכְבֹּר הַבְּטִיחָה תּוֹרָה

And already, the Torah promised

שֶׁסּוּף יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה בְּסוּף גְּלוּתוֹ

that ultimately, Israel will do repentance at the end of their exile,

וּמִיָּד הֵן נִגְאָלִין

and immediately they are redeemed,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים ל' א' וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים וְגו'

as it is said in the Torah (Devarim 30:1): "And it shall be, when there shall come upon you all these things," etc.,

דְּבָרִים ל' ב' וְשָׁבַתְּ עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ

and it continues (Devarim 30:2): "And you shall return unto Hashem your God,"

דְּבָרִים ל' ג' וְשָׁבַתְּ עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְגו':

and then it promises (Devarim 30:3): "And Hashem your God will return" your captivity, etc.

הִלְכָּה ו

Halacha 6 · The Greatness of Repentance in Drawing a Person Close to the Shechinah

גְּדוֹלָה תְּשׁוּבָה שֶׁמְקַרְבֶּת אֶת הָאָדָם לְשִׁכְנָה

Great is repentance, for it draws a person close to the Shechinah,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר הוֹשֵׁעַ יֵד ב' שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

as it is said, "Return, O Israel, unto Hashem your God."

וְנֶאֱמַר עֲמוּס דו' וְלֹא שִׁבַּתְּ עָדִי נְאֻם ה'.

And it is said, "'And you have not returned unto Me,' says Hashem."

וְנֶאֱמַר יִרְמְיָה ד' א' אִם תָּשׁוּב יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם ה' אֵלַי תָּשׁוּב.

And it is said, "'If you will return, O Israel,' says Hashem, 'to Me you shall return.'"

כָּלֹמֵר אִם תִּחְזֹר בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה בִּי תִדְבַּק.

Meaning, if you return in repentance, to Me you will cling.

הַתְּשׁוּבָה מְקַרְבֶּת אֶת הָרְחוּקִים.

Repentance draws close those who are far.

אָמַשׁ הָיָה זֶה שְׂנֹאֵי לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם מְשֻׁקָּץ וּמְרַחֵק וְתוֹעֵבָה.

Yesterday, this person was hated before the Omnipresent, disgusting, distanced, and an abomination.

וְהַיּוֹם הוּא אֲהוּב וְנִחְמָד קְרוֹב וְיָדִיד.

And today, he is beloved, desirable, close, and a friend.

וכן אתה מוצא שכל שון שהקדוש ברוך הוא מרחיק החוטאים בה מקרב את השבים בין יחיד בין רבים.

And so you find, that with the very same language that the Holy One, Blessed is He, distances the sinners, with it He draws close those who return, whether an individual or many.

שנאמר הושע ב א "והיה במקום אשר יאמר להם לא עמי אתם יאמר להם בני אל חי".

As it is said, "And it shall be, in the place where it was said to them, 'Not My people are you,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the Living God.'"

ונאמר ביכניהו ברשעתו כתב כתבו ירמיה כב ל "את האיש הזה ערירי גבר לא יצלח בימיו",

And it is said concerning Yecheniah in his wickedness, "'Write down this man as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days,'"

ירמיה כב כד "אם יהיה כניהו בן יהויקים מלך יהודה חותם על יד מיני' וגו'.

and 'Even if Chonyahu son of Yehoyakim, king of Yehudah, were a signet ring upon My right hand...' etc.

וכיון ששב בגלותו נאמר בזרובבל בנו חגי ב כג "פיום ההוא נאם ה' צבאות אקחה זרובבל בן

שאלתיאל עבדי נאם ה' ושמתיך כחותם":

And once he repented in his exile, it was said concerning Zerubavel, his son, "'On that day,' says Hashem of Hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubavel son of Shaltiel, My servant,' says Hashem, 'and I will place you as a signet ring.'"

הלכה ז

Halacha 7 • The Exalted Level of Teshuvah and Clinging to the Shechinah

כמה מעלה מעלת התשובה.

How exalted is the level of Teshuvah! See how it completely transforms a person's relationship with Hashem.

אמש היה זה מבדל מה' אלהי ישראל

Only yesterday, this sinner was separated from Hashem, the God of Yisrael,

שנאמר "עונותיכם היו מבדלים בינכם לבין אלהיכם".

as it is said in the pasuk, "Your sins were separating between you and between your God."

צועק ואינו נענה

He would cry out in prayer and is not answered,

שנאמר "כי תרבו תפלה" וגו'.

as it is said, "Even when you multiply prayer, I will not hear" etc.

ועושה מצות וטורפין אותן בפניו

And if he performs mitzvot, they tear them up and throw them back before him, rejecting his service,

שֶׁנֶאֱמַר "מִי בִקֵּשׁ זֹאת מִיָּדְכֶם רִמְסֵהוּ חֲצָרִי",

as it is said, "Who requested this from your hand, to trample My courts?"

מִלֹּאכֵי אֵי "מִי גַם בָּכֶם וְיִסְגֹּר דְלֹתֵיכֶם" וְגו'.

and as it is written in Malachi, "Who is there also among you that would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My Altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you" etc.

וְהַיּוֹם הוּא מְדַבֵּק בְּשִׁכְנָה

And today, now that he has done Teshuvah, he is clinging to the Shechinah,

שֶׁנֶאֱמַר "וְאַתֶּם הַדֹּבְקִים בִּי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם".

as it is said, "And you who cling to Hashem your God are all alive today."

צוֹעֵק וְנִעָנֶה מִיָּד

He cries out and is answered immediately,

שֶׁנֶאֱמַר "וְהָיָה טָרֵם יִקְרָאוּ וְאֲנִי אֶעֱנֶה".

as it is said, "And it shall be, before they call, and I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

וְעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוֹת וּמִקְבְּלִין אוֹתָן בְּנֶחֱת וּשְׂמֵחָה

And when he performs mitzvot, they accept them with pleasure and joy in Heaven,

שֶׁנֶאֱמַר "כִּי כְבֹּד רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיךָ".

as it is said, "For already has God favored your deeds."

וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שְׂמֵתָאִים לָהֶם

And not only that, but they even desire them up Above,

שֶׁנֶאֱמַר "וְעִרְכָּה לָהּ מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשָׁנִים קְדָמָנִיּוֹת":

as it is said, "And it shall be pleasing to Hashem, the offering of Yehudah and Yerushalayim, as in the days of old and as in years ancient."

הַלָּכָה ח

Halacha 8 · The Conduct of Penitents and the Prohibition of Verbally Oppressing Them

בְּעָלֵי תְשׁוּבָה דִּרְכָן לְהִיּוֹת שְׂפָלִים וְעֲנוּיִם בְּיוֹתֵר.

Masters of repentance, their way is to be lowly and humble exceedingly.

אִם חִרְפוּ אוֹתָן הַכֹּסִילִים בְּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם הָרָאשׁוֹנִים

If shamed them the fools for their deeds the first,

וַאֲמָרוּ לָהֶן אֲמַשׁ הָיִיתָ עוֹשֶׂה כֹּה וְכֹה וְאֲמַשׁ הָיִיתָ אֹמֵר כֹּה וְכֹה.

and said to them, "Yesterday you were doing so and so, and yesterday you were saying so and so,"

אַל יִרְגִּישׁוּ לָהֶן

do not they feel to them any resentment;

אֶלָּא שׁוֹמְעִין וְשִׂמְחִים וְיוֹדְעִין שֶׁזֶּה זְכוּת לָהֶם.

rather they hear and rejoice, and know that this is a merit for them.

שָׁפַל זְמַן שֶׁהֵם בּוֹשִׁים מִמַּעֲשֵׂיהֶם שֶׁעָבְרוּ וְנִכְלָמִים מֵהֶן

For all time that they are ashamed of their deeds that passed, and humiliated by them,

זְכוּתָם מְרֻבָּה וּמַעֲלָתָם מֵתַגְדֶּלֶת.

their merit is abundant and their level is raised.

וְחֵטְא גָּמוּר הוּא לוֹמַר לְבַעַל תְּשׁוּבָה זְכֹר מַעֲשֵׂיךָ הָרָאשׁוֹנִים

And a sin complete it is to say to a master of repentance, "Remember your deeds the first,"

אוּ לְהַזְכִּירָן לְפָנָיו כְּדִי לְבִישׁוֹ.

or to mention them before him in order to embarrass him,

אוּ לְהַזְכִּיר דְּבָרִים וְעֲנִינִים הַדּוֹמִין לָהֶם כְּדִי לְהַזְכִּירוֹ מָה עָשָׂה.

or to mention matters and subjects that are similar to them in order to remind him what he did.

הַכֹּל אָסוּר וּמִזְהָר עָלָיו בְּכָל הַזְנִית דְּבָרִים שֶׁהִזְהִירָה תּוֹרָה עָלֶיהָ

Everything is forbidden and warned against it in the category of wrongdoing of words that warned the Torah against it,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת עֲמִיתוֹ":

as it is said, "And not you shall wrong a man — his colleague."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter outlines the practical and spiritual path of the Baal-Teshuvah, beginning with the urgency of immediate repentance and the need to purify one's inner character traits. The Rambam emphasizes that Israel's ultimate redemption depends entirely on Teshuvah, which has the power to completely transform a person's relationship with Hashem from separation to total closeness and clinging to the Shechinah. Finally, the halachos teach us the proper conduct for a Baal-Teshuvah, who should embrace humility, and the strict Torah prohibition against reminding a Baal-Teshuvah of his past sins, which falls under the severe sin of verbal abuse.

My dear talmid, look at the incredible chiddush the Rambam is teaching us here. We often think of teshuvah as a heavy, bitter court case meant only for the 'big' sins of action, like stealing or breaking Shabbos. But the Rambam opens our eyes to a much deeper avodah: the real battlefield of teshuvah is inside our own hearts, in our middos. It is about turning back to Hashem from anger, jealousy, the constant chase after honor, and the hunger for physical desires. These quiet, internal struggles are actually harder to fix because they get woven into who we are.

But look at the sweetness the Rambam reveals to us! The moment you make the decision to turn back, you are not just 'forgiven' like a pardoned criminal who is tolerated from a distance. No, the Rambam says you become 'beloved, desirable, close, and a dear friend' to Hashem. Yesterday, a person's bad middos created a wall, making his tefillos feel blocked. Today, after teshuvah, he is clinging to the Shechinah, and Hashem promises, 'Before you even call out, I will answer.' Your mitzvos are not just accepted; Hashem literally desires them.

Do not let the yetzer hara tell you that you are too far gone or that your struggles with anger or jealousy make you unworthy. The Sages tell us that in the place where a baal teshuvah stands, even the completely righteous cannot stand. Every single time you conquer your nature, even in a small way, you create an closeness with Hashem that is unimaginably precious.

Today, choose one internal middah, like holding back from a sharp word of anger, or stopping yourself from chasing a bit of honor, and make a quiet, immediate teshuvah in your heart, knowing that this very moment makes you deeply beloved and close to Hashem.