

הלכות תשובה • פרק שמיני

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam opens up a window for us to understand the ultimate reward of the righteous, which is the life of the World to Come (Olam Haba). We will learn about the nature of this spiritual existence, where there is no physical body, no eating or drinking, but rather the souls of the righteous basking in the radiance of the Shechinah.

We will also learn about the ultimate punishment of the wicked, which is Kares—the complete cutting off and destruction of the soul. The Rambam guides us to look past the physical desires of this world and understand that the true, eternal good waiting for us is entirely spiritual, far beyond any physical pleasure we can comprehend.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Hidden Reward of the Righteous and the Spiritual Excision of the Wicked

הטובה הצפונה לצדיקים

The good that is hidden for the righteous in the future

היא חיי העולם הבא

it is the life of the World to Come,

והיא החיים שאין מות עמהן

and it is the life that there is no death with them,

והטובה שאין עמה רעה.

and the good that there is no evil with it.

הוא שכתוב בתורה

It is that which is written in the Torah in the verse:

"למען ייטב לך והארכת ימים."

"so that it will be good to you and you will prolong days."

מפי השמועה למדו

From the mouth of the tradition of our Sages, they learned that this means:

למען ייטב לך לעולם שכלו טוב

"so that it will be good to you" refers to the world that is entirely good,

והארכת ימים לעולם שכלו ארך.

"and you will prolong days" refers to the world that is entirely long,

וזה הוא העולם הבא.

and this is the World to Come.

שכר הצדיקים הוא שיזכו לנעם זה

The reward of the righteous is that they will merit to this pleasantness

ויהיו בטובה זו.

and they will be in this goodness.

ופרעון הרשעים הוא שלא יזכו לחיים אלו

And the retribution of the wicked is that they will not merit to these lives,

אלא יכרתו וימותו.

rather they will be cut off and they will die.

וכל מי שאינו זוכה לחיים אלו

And anyone who does not merit to these lives

הוא המת שאינו חי לעולם

he is the dead who does not live forever,

אלא נכרת ברשעו ואבד כבהמה.

rather he is cut off in his wickedness and perishes like an animal.

וזהו כרת הכתובה בתורה

And this is the karet written in the Torah,

שנאמר "הכרת תפירת הנפש ההיא".

as it is said: "surely cut off shall be cut off that soul."

מפי השמועה למדו

From the mouth of the tradition they learned:

הכרת בעולם הזה תפירת לעולם הבא.

"surely cut off" means in this world, "shall be cut off" means for the World to Come.

כלומר שאותה הנפש שפרשה מן הגוף בעולם הזה

Meaning to say, that that soul which separated from the body in this world

אינה זוכה לחיי העולם הבא

does not merit to the life of the World to Come,

אֵלָא גַם מִן הָעוֹלָם הַבֶּא נִכָּרֶתֶת:

rather also from the World to Come it is cut off.

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 • The Spiritual Existence in the World to Come Without a Physical Body

העולם הבא אין בו גוף וגויה

In the World to Come, there is no body or physical form,

אֵלָא נַפְשוֹת הַצְּדִיקִים בְּלִבָּד בְּלֹא גּוּף כְּמַלְאַכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת.

but rather, the souls of the righteous alone, without a body, like the ministering angels.

הואיל ואין בו גויות אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה

Since there are no physical forms in it, there is neither eating nor drinking in it,

וְלֹא דָבָר מִכָּל הַדְּבָרִים שְׁגוּפוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם צָרִיכִין לָהֶן בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה.

nor any of the things that the bodies of human beings need in this world.

וְלֹא יֵאָרֵעַ דָּבָר בּוֹ מִן הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁמֵּאֲרָעִין לַגּוּפוֹת בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה.

And nothing will occur in it of the things that occur to bodies in this world,

כְּגוֹן יְשִׁיבָה וְעִמּוּדָה וְשֵׁנָה וּמִיתָה וְעֶצֶב וּשְׂחֹק וְכִיּוּצָא בְּהֵן.

such as sitting, standing, sleeping, death, sadness, laughter, and the like.

כֹּה אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים הָרֵאשׁוֹנִים גְּמָרָא בְּרֻכּוֹת יז א

So said the early Sages in the Gemara, Berachos 17a:

"הָעוֹלָם הַבֶּא אֵין בּוֹ לֹא אֲכִילָה וְלֹא שְׁתִּיָּה וְלֹא תִשְׁמִישׁ

"The World to Come has in it neither eating, nor drinking, nor marital relations,

אֵלָא צְדִיקִים יוֹשְׁבִים וְעוֹטְרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרֵאשֵׁיהֶן וְנִהְגִּין מִזֵּי הַשְּׁכִינָה."

but rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Shechinah."

הֲרִי נִתְבָּרַר לָךְ שֶׁאֵין שָׁם גּוּף לְפִי שֶׁאֵין שָׁם אֲכִילָה וּשְׁתִּיָּה.

Behold, it is clarified for you that there is no body there, because there is no eating and drinking there.

וזה שאמרו צדיקים יושבין דרך חידה אמרו.

And that which they said, "the righteous sit," they said by way of a riddle;

כלומר הצדיקים מצויין שם בלא עמל ובלא יגיעה.

meaning to say, the righteous exist there without labor and without toil.

וכן זה שאמרו עטרותיהן בראשיהן

And likewise, that which they said, "their crowns on their heads,"

כלומר דעת שידעו שבגללה זכו לחיי העולם הבא מצויה עמהן

means to say, the knowledge that they knew, because of which they merited the life of the World to Come, is present with them,

והיא העטרה שלהן כענין שאמרו שלמה שיר השירים ג יא "כעטרה שעטרה לו אמו".

and it is their crown, similar to the matter that Shlomo said in Shir HaShirim 3:11, "With the crown with which his mother crowned him."

והרי הוא אומר ישעיה לה י "ושמחת עולם על ראשם"

And behold, it says in Yeshayah 35:10, "And eternal joy upon their head,"

ואין השמחה גוף כדי שתנוח על הראש.

and joy is not a physical body that it should rest upon the head.

כה עטרה שאמרו חכמים כאן היא הידיעה.

So too, the "crown" that the Sages spoke of here is the knowledge.

ומהו זה שאמרו נהנין מזיו השכינה.

And what is this that they said, "they delight in the radiance of the Shechinah"?

שיודעים ומשיגין מאמתת הקדוש ברוך הוא מה שאינם יודעים והם בגוף האפל השפל:

That they know and comprehend of the truth of the Holy One, blessed be He, that which they could not know while they were in the dark, lowly body.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 • The Nature of the Soul in the World to Come and the Bond of Life

כל נפש האמורה בענין זה

Every soul referred to in this matter of the World to Come

אינה הנשמה הצריכה לגוף

is not the physical soul that needs the body for its existence,

אֵלָא צוֹרֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ

but rather it is the form of the soul,

שֶׁהִיא הַדַּעַה שֶׁהִשְׁיָגָה מִהַבּוֹרָא כְּפִי כֹחָהּ

which is the knowledge that it comprehended of the Creator according to its power,

וְהַשְׁגָּה הַדַּעוֹת הַנִּפְרָדוֹת וְשָׂאֵר הַמַּעֲשִׂים

and its comprehension of the abstract intellects and other works of Hashem;

וְהִיא הַצּוּרָה שֶׁבָּאֲרָנוּ עֲנִינָהּ בְּפֶרֶק רְבִיעִי מֵהַלְכוֹת יְסוּדֵי הַתּוֹרָה

and it is this form whose nature we explained in chapter fourth of the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah,

הִיא הַנִּקְרָאת נֶפֶשׁ בְּעֵינֵינוּ זֶה.

it is that which is called "soul" in this matter.

חַיִּים אֵלּוּ לְפִי שְׂאִין עִמָּהֶם מוֹת

These lives, because there is not with them death at all—

שְׂאִין הַמּוֹת אֵלָּא מִמְּאֲרָעוֹת הַגּוּף

since death is only from the occurrences of the body,

וְאִין שָׁם גּוּף

and there is no body there—

נִקְרְאוּ צִרּוֹר הַחַיִּים

are called "the bond of life,"

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְהִיתָה נֶפֶשׁ אֲדֹנִי צְרוּרָה בְּצִרּוֹר הַחַיִּים".

as it is said, "And the soul of my master shall be bound in the bond of life."

וְזֶהוּ הַשָּׂכָר שְׂאִין שָׂכָר לְמַעַל מִמֶּנּוּ

And this is the reward that there is no reward above it,

וְהַטּוֹבָה שְׂאִין אַחֲרֶיהָ טּוֹבָה

and the good that there is no good after it,

וְהִיא שֶׁהִתְאָוּוּ לָהּ כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים:

and it is that which all the prophets desired for.

וכמה שמות נקראו לה דרך משל.

And how many names were called to it, to the World to Come, by way of metaphor in the words of the Nevi'im:

הר ה'.

the mountain of Hashem,

ומקום קדשו.

and the place of His holiness,

ודרך הקדש.

and the path of the holiness,

יחצרות ה'.

and the courtyards of Hashem,

ונעם ה'.

and the pleasantness of Hashem,

ואהל ה'.

and the tent of Hashem,

והיכל ה'.

and the palace of Hashem,

ובית ה'.

and the house of Hashem,

ושער ה'.

and the gate of Hashem.

ונחכמים קראו לה דרך משל לטובה זו המזמנת לצדיקים סעודה.

And the Sages called to it by way of metaphor, for this goodness that is prepared for the righteous, a feast.

וקורין לה בכל מקום העולם הבא:

And they call to it in every place, as its most common name, the World to Come.

הַנִּקְמָה שֶׁאֵין נִקְמָה גְדוֹלָה מִמֶּנָּה

The retribution, which there is no retribution greater than it,

שֶׁתִּכָּרֵת הַנֶּפֶשׁ

is that the soul will be cut off

וְלֹא תִזְכָּה לְאוֹתֵי הַחַיִּים

and not merit those lives of the World to Come,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בַּמִּדְבָּר טו לֹא "הַכֶּרֶת תִּכָּרֵת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִיא עֲוֹנָה בָּהּ".

as it is said in the Torah in Bamidbar 15:31, "Surely cut off shall be cut off that soul, its sin is in it."

זֶה הָאַבְדּוֹן

And this destruction

הוא שְׁקוּרִין אוֹתוֹ הַנְּבִיאִים דֶּרֶךְ מָשָׁל

is what the prophets call, by way of metaphor,

בְּיָר שַׁחַת וְאַבְדּוֹן וְתֹפֶתָה וְעֵלְיוֹקָה

the pit of destruction, and doom, and Topheth, and the leech,

וְכָל לְשׁוֹן כְּלָיָה וְהַשְׁחָתָה קוֹרְאִין לוֹ

and every term of annihilation and destruction they call it,

לְפִי שֶׁהִיא הַכְּלָיָה שֶׁאֵין אַחֲרֶיהָ תִּקְוָה

because it is the annihilation that there is no arising after it,

וְהַחֲפָסֵד שֶׁאֵינוֹ חוֹזֵר לְעוֹלָם:

and the loss that does not return forever.

שֶׁמָּא תִּקַּל בְּעֵינֶיךָ טוֹבָה זֹאת

Lest this goodness should be light in your eyes, and you look down on the spiritual nature of the World to Come,

וְתִדְמָה שֶׁאֵין שְׂכָר הַמַּצּוֹת וְהַיּוֹת הָאָדָם שֶׁלֶם בְּדַרְכֵי הָאֱמֶת

and you will imagine that there is no reward for the mitzvos, and no purpose in the being of a person complete in the paths of truth,

אֶלָּא לְהִיטוֹ אוֹכֵל וְשׂוֹתֶה מֵאֲכָלוֹת טוֹבוֹת

except for his being able to eat and drink good foods,

וּבֹעֵל צוּרוֹת נָאוֹת

and cohabit with beautiful forms,

וְלֹבֵשׁ בְּגָדֵי שֵׁשׁ וְרֻקְמָה

and wear garments of fine linen and embroidery,

וְשׂוֹכֵן בְּאֶהָלֵי שֵׁן

and dwell in tents of ivory,

וּמִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּכֵלֵי כֶסֶף וְזָהָב

and use utensils of silver and gold,

וְדִבְרִים הַדּוּמִים לָאֵלוֹ

and things that are similar to these physical pleasures,

כְּמוֹ שֶׁמִּדְמִין אֵלֶּי הָעֲרֻכִּים הַטְּפָשִׁים הָאֵוִילִים הַשְּׁטוּפִים בְּזָמָה.

just as these foolish, silly Arabs who are flooded with lewdness imagine in their descriptions of heaven.

אָבֵל הַחֲכָמִים וּבַעֲלֵי דָעָה יֵדְעוּ

But the Sages and possessors of knowledge know

שֶׁכָּל הַדִּבְרִים הָאֵלֶּי דִּבְרֵי הֶבְאִי וְהֶבֶל הֵם

that all these things are words of nonsense and vanity,

וְאִין בָּהֶם תּוֹעֵלָת

and there is no benefit in them in truth,

וְאִינָה טוֹבָה גְּדוּלָּה אֲצִלָּנוּ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה

and it is not considered a great goodness by us in this world

אֶלָּא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֲנוּ בְּעַלֵּי גוּף וְגוּיָה,

except because we are possessors of a body and physical form,

וְכָל הַדִּבְרִים הָאֵלֶּי צְרִיכֵי הַגּוּף הֵם

and all these things are needs of the body,

וְאִין הַנֶּפֶשׁ מִתְאַוָּה לָהֶם וּמִחְמֶדֶתָן

and the soul does not desire them or lust for them on its own,

אַלָּא מִפְּנֵי צָרָתָהּ הַגּוּף,

except because of the need of the body,

כְּדִי שִׁימְצָא חֲפָצוֹ וְיַעֲמִד עַל בְּרִיּוֹ.

in order that it will find its desire and stand on its health.

וּבְזֶמַן שֶׁאֵין שָׁם גּוּף

And in a time when there is no body anymore,

נִמְצָאוּ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֵּי בְטָלִים.

all these things are found to be nullified and irrelevant.

הַטּוֹבָה הַגְּדוֹלָה שֶׁתִּהְיֶה בָּהּ הַנֶּפֶשׁ בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא

The great goodness that the soul will have in the World to Come,

אֵין שׁוּם דְּרֹךְ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה לְהַשִּׁיגָהּ וְלִידַע אוֹתָהּ.

there is no way in this world to grasp it and to know it,

שֶׁאֵין אָנוּ יוֹדְעִים בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה אֶלָּא טוֹבַת הַגּוּף

for we do not know in this world anything except the goodness of the body,

וְלָהּ אָנוּ מִתְאַוִּין.

and for it we desire.

אַבָּל אוֹתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה גְּדוֹלָה עַד מְאֹד

But that goodness is great until very much,

וְאִין לָהּ עֲרֵךְ בְּטוֹבוֹת הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה אֶלָּא דְּרֹךְ מִשָּׁל.

and there is no comparison to it among the goods of this world except by way of metaphor.

אַבָּל בְּדֶרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת

But by way of truth,

שֶׁנֶּעְרָה טוֹבַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא בְּטוֹבוֹת הַגּוּף בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּמֵאכָל וּבִמְשָׁתָהּ

that we should compare the goodness of the soul in the World to Come with the goods of the body in this world in food and in drink,

אינו כן.

it is not so.

אֵלָּא אוֹתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה גְּדוּלָּה עַד אֵין חֶקֶר

Rather, that goodness is great until there is no searching.

וְאֵין לָהּ עֶרֶךְ וְדָמְיוֹן.

and there is no comparison or likeness to it.

הוא שֶׁאָמַר דּוֹד

This is what Dovid said in

מָה רַב טוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר צִפְנָתָ לִירְאֶיךָ וְגו':

"How abundant is Your goodness which You have hidden for those who fear You," etc.

הַלְכָּה ז

Halacha 7 · The Incomprehensible Good of the World to Come and Its Distinction from the Messianic Era

וְכַמָּה כָּמָה דּוֹד וְהִתְאַוָּה לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא

And how much did Dovid yearn and desire for the life of the World to Come!

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "לֹוֹיָא הָאֱמָנָתִי לְרֹאוֹת בְּטוֹב ה' בְּאֶרֶץ חַיִּים".

As it is said in Tehillim, "Had I not believed to see the goodness of Hashem in the land of the living."

כָּבֵר הוֹדִיעוּנוּ הַחֲכָמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים שֶׁטּוֹבַת הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא אֵין כַּח בָּאָדָם לְהַשִּׁיגָהּ עַל בְּרִיָּה

The earlier Sages have already informed us that the goodness of the World to Come—there is no strength in man to comprehend it in its clarity,

וְאֵין יוֹדֵעַ גְּדֻלָּהּ וְיִפְיָהּ וְעֶזְמָהּ אֵלָּא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְבַדּוֹ.

and there is no one who knows its greatness, its beauty, and its power except the Holy One, Blessed is He, alone.

וְשָׁכַל הַטּוֹבוֹת שֶׁמִּתְנַבְּאִים בָּהֶם הַנְּבִיאִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָן אֵלָּא לְדְּבָרִים שֶׁבְּגוּוֹף

And that all the good things that the prophets prophesy about to Yisrael are only for physical matters,

שֶׁנֶּהֱנִין בָּהֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל לְיָמֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ בְּזִמְנֵי שֶׁתָּשׁוּב הַמְּמִשָּׁלָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל.

which Yisrael will benefit from in the days of the Mashiach, at the time when sovereignty will return to Yisrael.

אָבָל טוֹבַת חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא אֵין לָהּ עֶרֶךְ וְדָמְיוֹן

But the goodness of the life of the World to Come has no comparison or likeness,

ולא דמוה הנביאים כדי שלא יפחתו אותה בדמיון.

and the prophets did not describe it, so that they would not diminish it in the imagination of people.

הוא שישעיהו אמר "עין לא ראתה אלהים זולתך יעשה למחכה לו".

This is what Yeshayahu said: "No eye has seen, O God, besides You, what He will do for the one who waits for Him."

כלומר הטובה שלא ראתה אותה עין נביא ולא ראה אותה אלא אלהים,

Meaning to say, the goodness that the eye of a prophet did not see, and none saw it except God,

עשה אותה האלהים לאדם שמחכה לו.

God has made it for the person who waits for Him.

אמרו חכמים כל הנביאים כלן לא נבאו אלא לימות המשיח

The Sages said: All the prophets, all of them, did not prophesy except for the days of the Mashiach,

אבל העולם הבא עין לא ראתה אלהים זולתך.

but as for the World to Come, "no eye has seen, O God, besides You."

הלכה ח

Halacha 8: The Present Existence of the World to Come and the Reason for Its Name

זה שקראו אותו חכמים העולם הבא

This that the Sages called it "the World to Come"

לא מפני שאינו מצוי עתה

is not because it is not present now,

וזו העולם אויבד ואחר כך יבוא אותו העולם.

meaning and that this world first perishes and only after that will come that world.

אין הדבר כן.

The matter is not so.

אלא הרי הוא מצוי ועומד

Rather, behold it is already present and standing,

שנאמר "אשר צפנת ליראיך פעלת" וגו'.

as it is said in the pasuk in Tehillim, "which You have hidden for those who fear You, You have made" etc.

ולא קראוהו עולם הבא

And they did not call it "the World to Come"

אֶלָּא מִפְּנֵי שְׁאוֹתַן הַחַיִּים בְּאֵין לוֹ לְאָדָם

except because those lives come to a person

אַחַר חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה שֶׁאֵנּוּ קִיָּמִים בּוֹ בְּגוּף וְנַפֶּשׁ

after the life of this world that we exist in in body and soul,

וְזֶהוּ הַנִּמְצָא לְכָל אָדָם בְּרִאשׁוֹנָה:

and this is that which is found to every person at first.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam explains that the ultimate reward for the righteous is Olam Haba, a purely spiritual realm where souls exist without physical bodies, like ministering angels, and delight in the comprehension of Hashem's truth. Conversely, the ultimate retribution for the wicked is Kares, the complete and permanent obliteration of the soul. The Rambam clarifies that all physical pleasures are merely needs of the body in this world, and he cautions us not to foolishly imagine Olam Haba as a place of physical indulgence, as the true spiritual good prepared for the righteous is the greatest possible good, which cannot be fully grasped while we are bound to a physical body.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The Rambam is teaching us a fundamental truth that changes how we look at our entire life: the ultimate reward of the World to Come is not a physical place of eating and drinking, but a state of pure, spiritual connection where we "delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence." The "crowns on their heads" refers to the very Torah knowledge and spiritual awareness we acquire in this world. This means that Olam Haba is not a new world we enter after we die; it is a reality we build right now through the spiritual vessels we shape within our own souls.

Every time you learn a piece of Torah, perform a mitzvah with heart, or choose to overcome a physical temptation for the sake of Hashem, you are not just earning points for a future payoff. You are actually developing your spiritual senses. You are building the "crown" of understanding that will allow your soul to bask in Hashem's light forever. If we only train ourselves to appreciate physical pleasures, we will have no vessels to experience the spiritual beauty of the World to Come.

Today, take five minutes to do one spiritual act, whether learning Torah, saying a brachah with deep intent, or doing a chesed, solely for the purpose of connecting to Hashem, consciously reminding yourself that you are building your eternal vessel to experience His closeness.