

הלכות תשובה • פרק תשיעי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam addresses a fundamental question that touches the very heart of our avodah: if the ultimate reward for keeping the mitzvos is the World to Come, and the ultimate punishment for the wicked is karet, why does the Torah constantly promise us physical rewards in this world for our obedience, and warn us of worldly suffering if we go astray? We will learn how Hashem manages the physical world to help us succeed in our spiritual journey.

We will also explore the deep yearning of the Jewish people, our Sages, and our prophets for the days of Moshiach. The Rambam explains that our desire for the Messianic era is not for physical luxury or dominance, but rather for the peace and freedom to immerse ourselves in Torah and wisdom without distraction, so that we may all merit the life of the World to Come.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Relationship Between Material Blessings and the World to Come

מאחר שנודע שמתן שכרן של מצות והטובה שנוזלה להם אם שמרנו דרך ה' הפתוח בתורה היא חייה העולם הבא

Since it is known that the giving of the reward of the mitzvos, and the goodness that we will merit if we keep the way of Hashem written in the Torah, is the life of the World to Come,

שנאמר דברים כ"ז "למען ייטב לך והארכת ימים".

as it is said in the Torah, "so that it will be good for you, and you will prolong days."

והנקמה שנוקמים מן הרשעים שעזבו ארחות הצדק התובות בתורה היא הכרת

And the retribution that is exacted from the wicked who abandoned the paths of righteousness written in the Torah is karet (spiritual excision),

שנאמר במדבר טו לא "הכרת תכרת הנפש ההיא עונה בה".

as it is said, "surely cut off shall be cut off that soul, its sin is in it."

מהו זה שפתוח בכל התורה כלה אם תשמעו יגיע לכם כה ויקרא כו יד "ואם לא תשמעו" יקרה אתכם כה.

If so, what is this that is written in all of the Torah entirely: 'if you will listen, it will reach you so,' and 'if you will not listen,' it will happen to you so?

וכל אותן הדברים בעולם הזה.

And all those things promised or warned about are in this world,

כגון שבע ורעב ומלחמה ושלום ומלכות ושפלות ושיבת הארץ וגלות והצלחת מעשה והפסדו
ושאר כל דברי הברית.

such as plenty and famine, and war and peace, and sovereignty and lowliness, and settlement of the land and exile, and
the success of deed and its loss, and the rest of all the words of the covenant.

כל אותן הדברים אמת היו ויהיו

All those things, truth they were and they will be;

ובזמן שאנו עושים כל מצות התורה יגיעו אלינו טובות העולם הזה כולן.

and at the time that we do all the mitzvos of the Torah, there will reach us the goods of this world, all of them;

ובזמן שאנו עוברים עליהן תקראנה אותנו הרעות הכתובות.

and at the time that we transgress against them, there will happen to us the evils written.

ואף על פי כן אין אותן הטובות הם סוף מתן שכרן של מצות

And even though it is so, those goods are not the end of the giving of the reward of the mitzvos,

ולא אותן הרעות הם סוף הנקמה שנוקמין מעובר על כל המצות.

and not those evils are the end of the retribution that is exacted from one who transgresses against all the mitzvos.

אלא כה הוא הכרע כל הדברים.

But thus is the resolution of all the things:

הקדוש ברוך הוא נתן לנו תורה זו עץ חיים היא.

The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave to us this Torah; a tree of life it is.

וכל העושה כל הכתוב בה ויודעו דעה גמורה נכונה זוכה בה לחיי העולם הבא.

And anyone who does all that is written in it, and knows it with a complete, proper knowledge, merits through it the
life of the World to Come.

ולפי גדל מעשיו ורב חכמתו הוא זוכה.

And according to the greatness of his deeds and the abundance of his wisdom, he merits his portion there.

והבטיחנו בתורה שאם נעשה אותה בשמחה ובטובת נפש ונהגה בחכמתה תמיד

And He promised us in the Torah that if we perform it with joy and with goodness of soul, and we meditate on its
wisdom always,

שיסיר ממנו כל הדברים המונעים אותנו מלעשותה כגון חלי ומלחמה ורעב וכיוצא בהן.

that He will remove from us all the things that prevent us from performing it, such as sickness and war and famine and the like of them;

וַיִּשְׁפֹּעַ לָנוּ כָּל הַטּוֹבוֹת הַמַּחְזִיקוֹת אֶת יְדֵינוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת הַתּוֹרָה כְּגוֹן שְׂבַע וְשָׁלוֹם וְרִבּוּי כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב.

and He will bestow upon us all the goods that strengthen our hands to perform the Torah, such as plenty and peace and an abundance of silver and gold,

כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא נַעֲסֹק כָּל יְמֵינוּ בְּדַבָּרִים שֶׁהַגּוּף צָרִיךְ לָהֶן

in order that we will not occupy ourselves all our days with things that the body needs,

אֶלָּא נֵשֵׁב פָּנוּיִים לְלַמֵּד בְּחֻכְמָה וְלַעֲשׂוֹת הַמִּצְוָה כְּדִי שֶׁנִּזְכֶּה לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

but we will sit free to learn wisdom and to perform the mitzvah, in order that we will merit the life of the World to Come.

וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר בַּתּוֹרָה אַחֲרֵי שֶׁהִבְטִיחַ בְּטוֹבוֹת הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דְּבָרִים ו' כה "וְצִדְקָה תִּהְיֶה לָנוּ" וְגו'.

And so He says in the Torah, after He promised the goods of this world: "And righteousness it will be for us," etc.

וְכֵן הוֹדִיעָנוּ בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁאִם נַעֲזֹב הַתּוֹרָה מְדַעַת וְנַעֲסֹק בְּהַבְלֵי הַזְּמַן

And so He informed us in the Torah that if we abandon the Torah willingly, and we occupy ourselves with the vanities of the time,

כְּעֵנֶיז שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים לב טו "וַיִּשְׁמֵן יִשְׁרוּן וַיִּכָּעַט",

like the matter as it is said, "And Yeshurun grew fat and kicked,"

שֶׁדִּין הָאֱמֶת יְסִיר מִן הָעוֹזְבִים כָּל טוֹבוֹת הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה שֶׁהֵן חֲזָקוֹ יְדִיהֶם לִכְעוֹט

that the Judge of Truth will remove from those who abandon it all the goods of this world, which had strengthened their hands to kick,

וּמֵבִיא עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל הָרָעוֹת הַמוֹנְעִים אוֹתָן מִלְּקַנּוֹת הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא כְּדִי שֶׁיֵּאבְדּוּ בְּרִשְׁעָם.

and He brings upon them all the evils that prevent them from acquiring the World to Come, in order that they will perish in their wickedness.

הוּא שֶׁפָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה דְּבָרִים כח מז "תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָבַדְתָּ אֶת ה'" וְגו', דְּבָרִים כח מח "וְעָבַדְתָּ אֶת

אִיְבֹיָה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלַחְנוּ ה' בָּךְ".

This is what is written in the Torah: "Because you did not serve Hashem," etc., "And you shall serve your enemies whom Hashem will send against you."

נִמְצָא פְּרוּשׁ כָּל אוֹתָן הַבְּרָכוֹת וְהַקְלָלוֹת עַל דֶּרֶךְ זו,

It is found, then, that the explanation of all those blessings and curses is on this path:

כְּלוּמַר אִם עָבַדְתָּם אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה וּשְׂמֵרָתָם דָּרְכוּ מִשְׁפִּיעַ לָכֶם הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלּוּ וּמִרְחִיק הַקְלָלוֹת מִכֶּם

meaning to say, if you serve Hashem with joy and you keep His way, He bestows upon you these blessings and He distances the curses from you,

עד שתהיו פנויים להתחכם בתורה ולעסוק בה כדי שתזכו לחיי העולם הבא

until you will be free to gain wisdom in the Torah and to occupy yourselves in it, in order that you will merit the life of the World to Come;

וייטב לך לעולם שכלו טוב ותאריך ימים לעולם שכלו ארוך

and it will be good for you in the world that is entirely good, and you will prolong days in the world that is entirely long.

ונמצאתם זוכין לשני העולמות, לחיים טובים בעולם הזה המביאים לחיי העולם הבא.

And you are found meriting two worlds: a good life in this world, which brings to the life of the World to Come.

שאם לא יקנה פה חכמה ומעשים טובים אין לו במה יזכה

For if one does not acquire here wisdom and good deeds, there is nothing with which he will merit the World to Come,

שנאמר קהלת ט י "כי אין מעשה וחשבון ודעת וחכמה בשאול".

as it is said, "For there is no deed, and accounting, and knowledge, and wisdom in the grave."

ואם עזבתם את ה' ושגיתם במאכל ובמשקה וזנות ודומה להם

And if you abandon Hashem and go astray in food and in drink and in immorality and the like of them,

מביא עליכם כל הקללות האלו ומסיר כל הברכות

He brings upon you all these curses and He removes all the blessings,

עד שיכלו ימיהם בבהלה ופחד ולא יהיה להם לב פנוי ולא גוף שלם לעשות המצות

until your days will end in confusion and fear, and you will not have a free heart nor a whole body to perform the mitzvos,

כדי שתאבדו מחיי העולם הבא ונמצא שאבדתם שני עולמות.

in order that you will perish from the life of the World to Come; and you are found to have lost two worlds.

שבזמן שאדם טרוד בעולם הזה בחלי ובמלחמה ורעבון

For at a time when a person is troubled in this world with sickness and with war and famine,

אינו מתעסק לא בחכמה ולא במצות שבהן זוכין לחיי העולם הבא:

he does not occupy himself either with wisdom or with the mitzvos through which we merit the life of the World to Come.

ומפני זה נתאוו כל ישראל נביאיהם וחכמיהם לימות המשיח

And because of this, all of Israel, including their prophets and their Sages, yearned for the days of the Messiah,

כדי שינוחו ממלכות שאינן מניחות להן לעסוק בתורה ובמצוות כהלכן.

in order that they may rest from the kingdoms that do not allow them to occupy themselves with the Torah and with the mitzvos properly.

וימצאו להם מרגוע וירבו בחכמה כדי שיזכו לחיי העולם הבא.

And they will find for themselves rest, and they will increase in wisdom, in order that they will merit the life of the World to Come.

לפי שבאותן הימים תרבה הדעה והחכמה והאמת

Because in those days, knowledge, wisdom, and truth will increase,

שנאמר ישעיה יא ט "כי מלאה הארץ דעה את ה'".

as it is said in Yeshayahu 11:9, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Hashem."

ונאמר ירמיה לא לג "ולא ילמדו איש את אחיו ואיש את רעהו".

And it is said in Yirmeyahu 31:33, "And they shall no longer teach, every man his brother and every man his fellow saying, 'Know Hashem,' for they shall all know Me."

ונאמר יחזקאל לו כו "והסרתי את לב האבן מבשרכם".

And it is said in Yechezkel 36:26, "And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

מפני שאותו המלך שיעמד מזרע דוד בעל חכמה יהיה יתר משלמה.

Because that king who will arise from the seed of Dovid, a master of wisdom, will be greater than Shlomo,

ונביא גדול הוא קרוב למשה רבנו.

and he is a great prophet, close in stature to Moshe our teacher.

ולפיכך ילמד כל העם ויורה אותם דרך ה'.

And therefore, he will teach all of the nation and instruct them in the path of Hashem,

ויבואו כל הגוים לשמעו

and all of the nations will come to hear him,

שנאמר ישעיה ב ב "והיה באחרית הימים נכון יהיה הר בית ה' בראש ההרים".

as it is said in Yeshayahu 2:2, "And it shall be in the end of days, that the mountain of the House of Hashem shall be established at the top of the mountains."

וְסוֹף כָּל הַשָּׂכָר כָּלוּ וְהַטּוֹבָה הָאַחֲרוֹנָה שֶׁאֵין לָהּ הַפְסֵק וְגִרְעוֹן הוּא חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

And the end of all the reward entirely, and the ultimate good which has no interruption or decrease, is the life of the World to Come.

אָבֵל יָמוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ הוּא הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְעוֹלָם כְּמִנְהַגּוֹ הוֹלֵךְ אֲלָא שֶׁהַמְּלָכוּת תִּחְזֹר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל.

But the days of the Messiah is this world, and the world goes on according to its custom, except that sovereignty will return to Israel.

וְכִכָּר אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים אֵין בֵּין הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה לְיָמוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ אֲלָא שְׁעָבוֹד מַלְכוּת בְּלִבָּד:

And already the earlier Sages said, "There is no difference between this world and the days of the Messiah except for subjugation to the kingdoms alone."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam resolves the apparent contradiction regarding Torah rewards by explaining that the physical blessings promised in this world—such as peace, health, and prosperity—are not the ultimate reward for mitzvos, but rather a divine means to remove obstacles so we can study Torah and gain the wisdom needed to merit the World to Come. Conversely, worldly curses are a form of retribution that deprives the wicked of these conducive conditions, leaving them to forfeit both worlds. This understanding clarifies why Klal Yisrael and our Sages yearn so deeply for the Messianic era: it will be a time of rest from the oppression of the nations, allowing us to freely pursue the knowledge of Hashem under the guidance of Moshiach, a great prophet and teacher who will instruct the entire world in the ways of Hashem.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear talmid, when you look at the physical blessings the Torah promises us, health, peace, and livelihood, you might think these are the ultimate goals of our avodah. But the Rambam teaches us a profound secret about how Hashem runs His world: physical comfort is not your reward; it is your workspace. Hashem promises to clear the obstacles of worry, illness, and financial stress from your path for one reason only, so that you can have a 'lev panui', a free and quiet heart, to learn His Torah and do His mitzvos without distraction.

This means that every moment of ease, every dollar of profit, and every day of good health you are blessed with is actually a divine vote of confidence. Hashem is saying, 'I am giving you this peace so you can use it to build your neshama for the World to Come.' If we take those blessings and use them only to indulge in the physical world, we miss the entire point and risk losing both worlds. Our physical life is the ultimate preparation ground; there is no Torah study or growth in the grave.

Today, look at whatever peace or comfort you have in your life, even a quiet hour or a comfortable room, not just as a convenience, but as a holy gift of time and space given to you by Hashem to connect with Him. Use that quiet moment to learn a halacha or do a chesed with joy.

Takeaway for today: Identify one area of comfort or free time you enjoy today, and consciously dedicate at least five minutes of that quiet space to learning Torah or doing a mitzvah, recognizing that Hashem gave you this peace specifically for this purpose.

