

הלכות תשובה • פרק עשירי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this final chapter of Hilchos Teshuvah, the Rambam brings us to the very pinnacle of our avodah: serving Hashem out of pure love, ahavas Hashem. We learn the profound difference between serving out of fear of punishment or desire for reward—which is the level of children and beginners—and serving Hashem simply because He is the Master and His Torah is truth.

The Rambam paints a breathtaking picture of what true love of Hashem looks like, comparing it to a deep, constant lovesickness where a person's mind is never diverted from his beloved. We will see how this ultimate level is reached, how we must guide simple people and children toward it gradually, and how our love for Hashem is entirely dependent on our knowledge and understanding of Him.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1: Serving Hashem Out of Love Rather Than Fear of Punishment or Desire for Reward

אל יאמר אדם

A person should not say,

הריני עושה מצות התורה ועוסק בחכמתה

"Behold, I am performing the mitzvos of the Torah and occupying myself in its wisdom

כדי שאקבל כל הברכות הכתובות בה

in order that I will receive all the blessings that are written in it,

או כדי שאזכה לחיי העולם הבא,

or in order that I will merit the life of the World to Come;

ואפרש מן העבירות שהזהירה תורה מהן

and I will separate from the transgressions that the Torah warned against

כדי שאנצל מן הקללות הכתובות בתורה

in order that I will be saved from the curses that are written in the Torah,

או כדי שלא אכרת מחיי העולם הבא."

or in order that I will not be cut off from the life of the World to Come."

אין ראוי לעבד את ה' על הדרך הזה,

It is not fitting to serve Hashem in this way,

שֶׁעוֹבֵד עַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה הוּא עוֹבֵד מִיִּרְאָה

for one who serves in this way, he serves from fear,

וְאֵינָהּ מַעֲלַת הַנְּבִיאִים וְלֹא מַעֲלַת הַחֲכָמִים.

and it is not the level of the prophets, and not the level of the wise.

וְאֵין עוֹבְדִים ה' עַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה

And they do not serve Hashem in this way

אֶלָּא עַמִּי הָאָרֶץ וְהַנָּשִׁים וְהַקְטָנִים

except for common people, and the women, and the minors,

שֶׁמְחַנְכִּין אוֹתָן לְעֵבֶד מִיִּרְאָה

whom we train to serve from fear

עַד שֶׁתִּרְבֶּה דַּעְתָּן וְיַעֲבֹדוּ מֵאַהֲבָה:

until their knowledge will increase and they will serve from love.

הַלָּכָה ב

Halacha 2 · Serving Hashem Out of Pure Love and the Level of Avraham Our Father

הָעוֹבֵד מֵאַהֲבָה

One who serves Hashem out of love

עוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה וּבַמִּצְוֹת

occupies himself in the Torah and in the mitzvos

וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּנִתְיבוֹת הַחֲכָמָה

and walks in the paths of wisdom,

לֹא מִפְּנֵי דָבָר בָּעוֹלָם

not because of any thing in the world,

וְלֹא מִפְּנֵי יִרְאַת הָרָעָה

and not because of fear of the evil or punishment,

וְלֹא כְּדֵי לִירֵשׁ הַטּוֹבָה

and not in order to inherit the good of the World to Come;

אֵלָא עוֹשֶׂה הָאֱמֶת מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא אֱמֶת

rather, he does the truth because that it is truth,

וְסוֹף הַטּוֹבָה לָבוֹא בְּגִלָּהּ.

and ultimately, the good will come because of it.

וּמַעַלָּה זוֹ הִיא מַעַלָּה גְּדוּלָּה מְאֹד

And level this, it is a level great very,

וְאִין כָּל חָכָם זֹכֶה לָּהּ.

and not every wise man merits it.

וְהִיא מַעַלָּת אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ

And it is the level of Avraham our father,

שֶׁקָּרְאוּ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אוֹהֲבֵוּ

whom called him the Holy One, Blessed is He, His lover,

לְפִי שֶׁלֹּא עָבַד אֵלָּא מֵאַהֲבָה.

because that not he served except out of love.

וְהִיא הַמַּעַלָּה שֶׁצִּוְּנוּ בָּהּ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל יְדֵי מֹשֶׁה

And it is the level that commanded us in it the Holy One, Blessed is He, by the hand of Moshe,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים ו' ה' וְאַהֲבָתָ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ."

as it is said in Devarim 6:5, "And you shall love — Hashem your God."

וּבְזֶמֶן שֶׁיֵּאָהֵב אָדָם אֶת ה' אֶהְבָּה הָרְאוּיָה

And at the time that loves a person — Hashem with a love that is proper,

מִיָּד יַעֲשֶׂה כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת מֵאַהֲבָה:

immediately he will perform all of the mitzvos out of love.

הִלְכָּה ג

Halacha 3 · The Proper Measure of Loving Hashem and the Parable of Shir HaShirim

וְכִיצַד הִיא הָאֶהְבָּה הָרְאוּיָה.

And how is the nature of the love that is proper and fitting for a person to feel toward Hashem? It is

הוּא שֶׁיֵּאָהֵב אֶת ה' אֶהְבָּה גְּדוּלָּה יִתְרָה עֲזָה מְאֹד

that he should love — Hashem with a love that is great, exceeding, and strong, very much so,

עד שתהא נפשו קשורה באהבת ה'

until the point that his soul will be bound up in the love of Hashem,

ונמצא שוגה בה תמיד

and he is found obsessed with it always, with his thoughts constantly captivated by his yearning for Him,

כאלו חולה חלי האהבה

as if he were sick with the sickness of love,

שאין דעתו פנויה מאהבת אותה אשה

where his mind is not free from the love of that woman whom he desires,

והוא שוגה בה תמיד

and he is obsessed with her always,

בין בשבתו בין בקומו בין בפעם שהוא אוכל ושותה.

whether in his sitting, whether in his rising, and whether at the time that he eats and drinks.

יתר מזה תהיה אהבת ה' בלב אוהביו

Even more than this shall be the love of Hashem in the heart of those who love Him,

שוגים בה תמיד

being obsessed with it always,

כמו שצונו בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך.

just as He commanded us in the Shema, to love Him "with all your heart and with all your soul."

והוא ששלמה אמר דרך משל שיר השירים ב ה "כי חולת אהבה אני".

And this is what Shlomo said by way of parable in Shir HaShirim 2:5, "for sick with love am I."

וכל שיר השירים משל הוא לענין זה:

And all of Shir HaShirim is a parable for this matter, describing the deep, passionate love between the Jewish people and the Ribbono shel Olam.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 • Serving Hashem Out of Love and Not for the Sake of Receiving Reward

אמרו חכמים הראשונים

The early Sages said in the Sifrei:

שָׁמָא תֵאמֵר הֲרִינִי לְלַמַּד תּוֹרָה בְּשִׁבְלִי שְׂאֵהְיָה עֲשִׂיר

Lest you will say, 'Behold, I am learning Torah for the sake that I will be rich,

בְּשִׁבְלִי שְׂאֵקְרָא רַבִּי

or for the sake that I will be called

בְּשִׁבְלִי שְׂאֵקְבֵּל שְׂכָר בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

or for the sake that I will receive reward in the World to Come.'

תִּלְמוּד לומר "לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה'".

Therefore, the teaching says, "To love Hashem"—

כָּל מֶה שְׁאַתֶּם עוֹשִׂים לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ אֶלָּא מֵאַהֲבָה.

meaning, all that which you do, you shall not do except from love.

וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

And further, the Sages said on the pasuk in Tehillim:

בְּמִצְוֹתָיו חָפֵץ מְאֹד וְלֹא בְשִׂכָר מִצְוֹתָיו.

"In His mitzvos he desires greatly"—and not in the reward of His mitzvos.

וְכֵן הָיוּ גְדוֹלֵי הַחֲכָמִים מְצוּיִם לְנִבְוֵי תִלְמִידֵיהֶם וּמְשִׁכְלֵיהֶם בְּיָחִיד

And so were the great of the Sages commanding the understanding of their students and their wise ones in private:

אֵל תִּהְיוּ כְּעֹבְדֵי הַמֶּשֶׁמֶשׁ אֶת הָרֶב וְכו'.

"Do not be like servants who serve the Master for the sake of receiving a reward, etc.,"

אֶלָּא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא הָרֶב רְאוּי לְשִׁמְשׁוֹ

rather, because He is the Master, it is fitting to serve Him;

כְּלוּמַר עֲבָדוּ מֵאַהֲבָה:

meaning to say, serve Him from love.

הִלְכָּה ה'

Halacha 5 · Learning Torah for Its Own Sake and Not for Its Own Sake

כָּל הָעוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה כְּדִי לְקַבֵּל שְׂכָר

Anyone who occupies himself with the Torah in order to receive reward

אוּ כְּדִי שֶׁלֹא תִגִּיעַ עָלָיו פְּרָעָנוּת

or in order that retribution will not come upon him,

הָרִי זֶה עוֹסֵק שְׁלֹא לְשָׂמָהּ.

behold, this one is occupying himself not for its sake.

וְכָל הָעוֹסֵק בָּהּ לֹא לִירְאָהּ וְלֹא לְקַבֵּל שָׂכָר

And anyone who occupies himself with it, not out of fear and not to receive reward,

אֲלֵא מִפְּנֵי אֲהָבַת אֲדוֹן כָּל הָאָרֶץ שְׂצוּהָ בָּהּ

but because of the love of the Master of all the earth Who commanded it,

הָרִי זֶה עוֹסֵק בָּהּ לְשָׂמָהּ.

behold, this one is occupying himself with it for its sake.

וַאֲמָרוּ חֲכָמִים לְעוֹלָם יַעֲסֹק אָדָם בַּתּוֹרָה וְאַפְּלוּ שְׁלֹא לְשָׂמָהּ

And the Sages said: Always should a person occupy himself with the Torah, and even not for its sake,

שְׂמִתוֹךְ שְׁלֹא לְשָׂמָהּ בָּא לְשָׂמָהּ.

for from within doing it not for its sake, he comes to doing it for its sake.

לְפִיכָהּ כְּשֶׁמְלַמְּדִין אֶת הַקְּטָנִים וְאֶת הַנָּשִׁים וְכָל עַמִּי הָאָרֶץ

Therefore, when we teach the children, and the women, and the generality of the common people,

אֵין מְלַמְּדִין אוֹתָן אֲלֵא לְעַבֵּד מִירְאָהּ וּכְדִי לְקַבֵּל שָׂכָר,

we do not teach them except to serve out of fear and in order to receive reward,

עַד שֶׁתִּרְבֶּה דַּעְתָּן וְיִתְחַכְּמוּ חֲכָמָה יִתְרָה

until their knowledge will increase and they will grow wise with extra wisdom;

מִגָּלִים לָהֶם רַז זֶה מְעַט מְעַט

then we reveal to them this secret little by little,

וּמְרַגְלִין אוֹתָן לְעֲנֹךְ זֶה בְּנִיחָה

and we accustom them to this matter gently,

עַד שֶׁיִּשְׁיָגוּהוּ וְיִדְעוּהוּ וְיַעֲבֹדוּהוּ מֵאַהֲבָה:

until they grasp it, and they know it, and they serve Him out of love.

דבר ידוע וברור

It is a matter known and clear

שאין אהבת הקדוש ברוך הוא נקשרת בלבו של אדם

that the love of the Holy One, Blessed is He, is not bound in the heart of a person

עד שיִשָּׁגה בה תמיד כראוי

until he is obsessed with it constantly as is fitting,

ויעזוב כל מה שפָּעוּלָם חוץ ממִנָּה.

and he abandons all that is in the world except from it.

כמו שצוה ואמר

This is just as He commanded and said in the Torah:

בְּכָל לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ.

“Love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul.”

אינו אוהב הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא בִּדְעַת שִׂידָעוֹ.

A person does not love the Holy One, Blessed is He, except with the knowledge that he knows Him.

ועל פי הידעה תהיה האהבה

And according to the knowledge will be the love:

אם מעט מעט ואם הרבה הרבה.

if the knowledge is little, the love is little, and if the knowledge is much, the love is much.

לפיכך צריך האדם ליחד עצמו

Therefore, a person needs to dedicate himself

להבין ולהשפיל בַּחֲכָמוֹת וּתְבוּנוֹת

to understand and to comprehend in wisdoms and understandings

המודיעים לו את קונו

that make known to him his Creator,

כפי כח שיש באדם להבין ולהשיג

according to the capacity that there is in a person to understand and to grasp,

just as we explained in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam begins by explaining that serving Hashem for the sake of receiving blessings, meriting Olam Haba, or escaping punishment is considered serving out of fear, which is only appropriate as a training stage for women, children, and common people. The true path, exemplified by Avraham Avinu, is serving out of love—doing what is true simply because it is true. This love must be so intense that one's soul is constantly bound up in it, as described metaphorically in Shir HaShirim. While the Sages emphasize that one should always engage in Torah and mitzvos even shelo lishmah (not for His sake) because it eventually leads to lishmah, the ultimate goal is to serve solely out of love for the Creator. Finally, the Rambam rules that this love can only take root in the heart in proportion to one's knowledge of Hashem, meaning a person must dedicate himself to understanding and contemplating the wisdom of his Creator.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear talmid, it is so easy to fall into the habit of keeping mitzvos like a business transaction. We do the ratzon of Hashem because we want the brachos, or because we are afraid of what will happen if we do not. But the Rambam is opening our eyes to a breathtaking truth: the ultimate goal of our avodah is to serve Hashem out of pure, burning love, simply because He is our Creator and His truth is the ultimate truth. This is the level of Avraham Avinu, a love so deep that it is compared to being lovesick, where a person's mind is constantly bound up with Hashem in everything they do.

How do we reach such a high level? The Rambam gives us the key: love is the child of knowledge. You cannot truly love someone you do not know. The more you dedicate yourself to understanding Hashem's wisdom, looking at His creation, and learning His Torah, the more your heart will naturally catch fire with love for Him. It is a gradual process, a 'secret' we integrate bit by bit, moving from serving for reward to serving for the sake of the Beloved.

Today, when you perform a mitzvah or sit down to learn, pause for just ten seconds before you begin. Instead of doing it out of habit or for a personal benefit, say to yourself: 'I am doing this purely because I love Hashem and want to connect to His truth.'