

הלכות יסודי התורה • פרק ראשון

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this opening perek of Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah, the Rambam sets down the very foundation of our entire emunah, guiding us to the ultimate knowledge of Hashem's existence. We begin by learning that Hashem is the Primary Being who brought everything into existence, and that He is completely independent of the world, while everything in creation is entirely dependent on Him.

The Rambam then brings us to understand the absolute unity of Hashem, explaining that He is not a body and has no physical form whatsoever. We will explore how the anthropomorphic expressions in the Torah are merely metaphors written in the language of man, and how even Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest of all nevi'im, was limited by his physical nature from fully grasping the ultimate essence of the Creator.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Existence of the Creator and the Derivation of All Existence from Him

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות

The foundation of the foundations and the pillar of the wisdoms

לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון.

is to know that there is there a Primary Being, Hashem, Who exists eternally.

והוא ממציא כל נמצא.

And He brings into being every existing thing in the universe.

וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם

And all the existing things from heaven and earth and what is between them

לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו:

did not come into existence except from the truth of His existence.

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 • The Absolute Necessity of the Creator's Existence for the Existence of All Beings

ואם יעלה על הדעת

And if it should arise upon the mind, as an impossible thought,

that He is not existing,

אין דבר אחר יכול להמציאות:

there is no other thing able to exist at all, because everything depends entirely on Him.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 · The Absolute and Independent Existence of Hashem

ואם יעלה על הדעת שאין כל הנמצאים מלבדו מצויים

And if it should arise upon the mind that there are not all the existing things aside from Him existing,

הוא לבדו יהיה מצוי.

He alone would still be existing.

ולא יבטל הוא לבטולם.

And He would not be nullified by their nullification,

שכל הנמצאים צריכין לו

because all the existing things need Him for their existence,

והוא ברוך הוא אינו צריך להם ולא לאחד מהם.

and He, blessed is He, is not needing them, and not even one of them.

לפיכך אין אמתתו כאמתת אחד מהם:

Therefore, His truth of existence is not like the truth of existence of one of them.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 · The Absolute Truth of the Existence of the Creator

הוא שהנביא אומר ירמיה י' י"ו 'וה' אלהים אמת'.

This is what the prophet says in Yirmeyahu 10:10, "And Hashem God is truth."

הוא לבדו האמת

He alone is the truth

ואין לאחר אמת כאמתתו.

and there is not to another any truth like His truth.

והוא שהתורה אומרת דברים ד לה "אין עוד מלבדו".

And this is what the Torah says in Devarim 4:35, "There is none aside from Him."

כְּלוֹמַר אֵין שָׁם מִצּוֹי אֱמֶת מִלְכָּדוֹ כְּמוֹתוֹ:

Meaning, there is not any other existence of truth aside from Him like Him.

הַלְכָּה ה

Halacha 5 • The Existence of the Creator and His Infinite Guidance of the Sphere

הַמִּצּוֹי הַזֶּה

This Being, Whose existence is necessary and primary,

הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָעוֹלָם

He is the God of the world,

אֲדוֹן כָּל הָאָרֶץ.

and the Master of all the earth.

וְהוּא הַמְנַהִיג הַגִּלְגָּל

And He is the One Who guides the sphere of the universe

בְּכַח שְׂאִין לוֹ קֵץ וְתַכְלִית.

with power that has no end or limit,

בְּכַח שְׂאִין לוֹ הַפְסָק.

with power that has no interruption.

שֶׁהַגִּלְגָּל סוֹבֵב תָּמִיד

For the sphere revolves constantly,

וְאִי אֶפְשָׁר שְׂיִסֹּב בְּלֹא מְסַבֵּב.

and it is impossible that it should revolve without one who causes it to revolve.

וְהוּא בְּרוּךְ הוּא

And He, blessed is He,

הַמְסַבֵּב אוֹתוֹ

is the One Who causes it to revolve,

בְּלֹא יָד וּבְלֹא גּוּף:

without a hand and without a body.

וידיעת דבר זה מצות עשה

And knowledge of this matter, to know that there is a First Being Who brought everything into existence, is a positive commandment,

שנאמר "אנכי ה' אלהיך".

as it is said in the Ten Commandments: "I am Hashem your God."

וכל המעלה על דעתו שיש שם אלוה אחר חוץ מזה

And anyone who brings up upon his mind that there is there in existence another god besides this One, Hashem,

עובר בלא תעשה

transgresses a negative commandment,

שנאמר "לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני".

as it is said: "There shall not be to you other gods before My face."

וכופר בעקר

And such a person denies the fundamental principle of our entire faith,

שהוא העקר הגדול שהכל תלוי בו:

for this is the great principle upon which everything in the Torah and the world is dependent.

אלוה זה אחד הוא

This God is one,

ואינו שנים ולא יתר על שנים.

and He is not two, and not more than two,

אלא אחד.

but He is absolutely one,

שאין כִּיחודו אחד מן האחדים הנמצאים בעולם.

that there is no other one like His unity among the other unities that are found in the world.

לא אחד כמין שהוא כולל אחדים הרבה.

He is not one like a category that includes many individual entities,

וְלֹא אֶחָד כְּגוֹף שֶׁהוּא נִחְלָק לְמַחְלָקוֹת וְלִקְצוֹת.

and not one like a body that is divided into parts and into boundaries,

אֲלֵא יְחִיד שֶׁאֵין יְחִיד אֲחֵר כְּמוֹתוֹ בָּעוֹלָם.

but rather He is a unity that there is no other unity like it in the world.

אִלּוּ הָיוּ אֱלֹהוֹת הֶרֶבָּה הָיוּ גּוֹפִין וְגוֹיּוֹת.

If there were many divinities, they would have to be bodies and physical forms,

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֵין הַנִּמְנָחִים הַשְׂוִין בְּמִצִּיאוֹתֵן נִפְרָדִין זֶה מִזֶּה

because those that are numbered, who are equal in their basic existence, do not separate this one from this one

אֲלֵא בְּמֵאֲרָעִין שֶׁיֵּאֲרְעוּ בְּגּוֹפּוֹת וְהִגִּיוֹת.

except by circumstances that occur to bodies and physical forms.

וְאִלּוּ הָיָה הַיּוֹצֵר גּוֹף וְגוֹיָה הָיָה לוֹ קֵץ וְתִכְלִית

And if the Creator were a body and physical form, He would have a limit and boundary,

שֶׁאֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִיּוֹת גּוֹף שֶׁאֵין לוֹ קֵץ.

since it is impossible to be a body that does not have a limit.

וְכָל שֵׁשׁ לְגוּפוֹ קֵץ וְתִכְלִית יֵשׁ לְכַחוֹ קֵץ וְסוֹף.

And anything that has a limit and boundary to its body, there is a limit and end to its power.

וְאַלֵּהֵינוּ בָּרוּךְ שְׁמוֹ הוֹאִיל וְכַחוֹ אֵין לוֹ קֵץ וְאֵינוּ פּוֹסֵק

And our God, blessed is His name, since His power has no limit and it does not cease,

שֶׁהָרִי הַגָּלְגַּל סוֹבֵב תָּמִיד.

for behold, the sphere revolves always,

אֵין כַּחוֹ כַּחַ גּוֹף.

His power is not the power of a body.

וְהוֹאִיל וְאֵינוּ גּוֹף לֹא יֵאֲרְעוּ לוֹ מֵאֲרָעוֹת הַגּוֹפּוֹת

And since He is not a body, the circumstances of bodies do not occur to Him

כְּדִי שִׁיחַא נִחְלָק וְנִפְרָד מֵאַחֵר.

in order that He should be divided and separated from another.

לפיכך אי אפשר שיהיה אלא אחד.

Therefore, it is impossible that He should be anything but one.

וידעת דבר זה מצות עשה

And knowledge of this matter is a positive commandment,

שנאמר דברים ו ד "ה' אלהינו ה' אחד":

as it is said in Devarim 6:4, "Hashem is our God, Hashem is one."

הלכה ח

Halacha 8 - The Holy One Blessed Be He Has No Body or Physical Form

הרי מפרש בתורה ובנביאים

Behold, it is explicitly stated in the Torah and in the Prophets

שאין הקדוש ברוך הוא גוף וגויה

that the Holy One, blessed be He, is not a body or a physical form,

שנאמר

as it is said in the book of Yehoshua:

כי ה' אלהיכם הוא אלהים בשמים ומעל ועל הארץ מתחת

"Because Hashem your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth below."

והגוף לא יהיה בשני מקומות

And a body cannot be in two places at the same time, proving that Hashem is not physical.

ונאמר

And it is also said in Devarim:

כי לא ראיתם כל תמונה

"For you did not see any image" on the day Hashem spoke to you at Sinai.

ונאמר

And it is said in Yeshayah:

ואל מי תדמיוני ואשוה

"And to whom will you liken Me, that I should be equal?"

ואלו היה גוף היה דומה לשאר גופים

And if He were a body, He would be similar to other bodies which are created and limited.

הלכה ט

Halacha 9 · Corporeal Expressions in the Torah as Metaphors and Descriptive Imagery

אם כן מהו זה שכתוב בתורה "ותחת רגליו".

If so, what is this that is written in the Torah: "And under His feet"?

שמות לא יח "כתובים באצבע אלהים".

Or that which is written, "written with the finger of God"?

"יד ה'". "עיני ה'". "אזני ה'".

Or expressions like "the hand of Hashem", "the eyes of Hashem", or "the ears of Hashem"?

וכיוצא בדברים האלו.

And similar to these things?

הכל לפי דעתן של בני אדם הוא שאינן מכירין אלא הנפשות הגופות

All of this is according to the mind of human beings, who do not recognize anything except physical bodies,

ודברה תורה כלשון בני אדם.

and the Torah spoke in the language of human beings so they could understand.

והכל כנויים הן.

And all of these are merely descriptive metaphors.

שנאמר דברים לב מא "אם שנותי ברק חרב".

As it is said: "If I whet the lightning of My sword".

וכי חרב יש לו ובחרב הוא הורג אלא משל והכל משל.

And does He have a sword, and with a sword does He kill? Rather, it is a metaphor, and all such descriptions are a metaphor.

ראיה לדבר שנביא אחד אומר שראה הקדוש ברוך הוא דניאל ז ט "לבושיה כתלג חור".

A proof to the matter is that one prophet says that he saw the Holy One, blessed is He, with "His garment like white snow",

ואחד ראהו ישעיה סג א "חמוץ בגדים מבצרה".

and another saw Him with "crimsoned garments from Batzrah".

משנה רבנו עצמו ראהו על הים כגבור עושה מלחמה.

Moshe our teacher himself saw Him at the Sea like a mighty man making war,

וּבְסִינֵי כַּשְׁלִיחַ צָבוּר עָטוּף.

and at Sinai like a messenger of the congregation wrapped in a tallis.

לומר שאין לו דמות וצורה אלא הכל במראה הנבואה ובמחזה.

This is to say that He has no image or form, but all of these appearances were only in a vision of prophecy and in a vision.

ואמתת הדבר אין דעתו של אדם מבין ולא יכולה להשיגו ולחקרו.

And the truth of the matter, the mind of man cannot understand, nor is it able to grasp Him or to search Him out.

וזה שאמר הכתוב איוב יא ז "החקר אלוה תמצא אם עד תכלית שדי תמצא":

And this is what the verse says: "Can you find the search of God? Can you find unto the limit of the Almighty?"

הלכה י

Halacha 10 · The Request of Moshe Our Teacher to Comprehend the Truth of the Creator's Existence

מהו זה שבקש משה רבנו להשיג

What is this that Moshe our teacher requested to comprehend

כשאמר "הראני נא את כבודך".

when he said, "Show me please Your glory"?

בקש לידע אמתת המצאו של הקדוש ברוך הוא

He requested to know the truth of the existence of the Holy One, blessed be He,

עד שיהיה ידוע בלבו

until it would be known in his heart

כמו ידיעת אחד מן האנשים שראה פניו

like the knowledge of one of the men whose face he saw,

ונחקה צורתו בלבו

and his image is engraved in his heart,

שנמצא אותו האיש נפרד בדעתו משאר האנשים.

so that that man is found separated in his mind from the rest of the men.

כה בקש משה רבנו

So requested Moshe our teacher

להיות מציאות הקדוש ברוך הוא נפרדת בלבו משאר הנמצאים

to have the existence of the Holy One, blessed be He, separated in his heart from the rest of the existing entities,

עד שיֵדע אמתת המצאו כאשר היא.

until he would know the truth of His existence as it is.

והשיבו ברוך הוא

And He answered him, blessed be He,

שאין כח בדעת האדם החי

that there is no strength in the mind of a living man,

שהוא מחבר מגוף ונפש

who is composed of body and soul,

להשיג אמתת דבר זה על בריו.

to comprehend the truth of this matter upon its clarity.

והודיעו ברוך הוא

And He made known to him, blessed be He,

מה שלא ידע אדם לפניו ולא ידע לאחריו.

what no man knew before him and no one will know after him,

עד שהשיג מאמתת המצאו

until he comprehended from the truth of His existence

דבר שנפרד הקדוש ברוך הוא בדעתו משאר הנמצאים

a matter by which the Holy One, blessed be He, is separated in his mind from the rest of the existing entities,

כמו שיפרד אחד מן האנשים שראה אחריו

just as one of the men is separated whose back he saw,

והשיג כל גופו ומלבושו בדעתו משאר גופי האנשים.

and he comprehended his entire body and his clothing in his mind from the rest of the bodies of the men.

ועל דבר זה רמז הכתוב ואמר

And upon this matter the verse alluded and said,

"וראית את אחרי ופני לא יראו":

"And you shall see My back, and My face shall not be seen".

הלכה יא

Halacha 11 · The Absolute Negation of Physical Properties and Change from the Creator

וכיון שנתברר שאינו גוף וגו'ה

And since it has been clarified that He is not a body or a physical form,

יתברר שלא יארע לו אחד ממארכעות הגופות.

it is also clarified that there will not happen to Him any of the occurrences of the bodies.

לא חבור ולא פירוד.

He has not connection and not separation.

לא מקום ולא מדה.

He has not place and not measure.

לא עליה ולא ירידה.

He has not ascent and not descent.

ולא ימין ולא שמאל.

And not right and not left.

ולא פנים ולא אחר.

And not front and not back.

ולא ישיבה ולא עמידה.

And not sitting and not standing.

ואינו מצוי בזמן

And He is not found in time,

עד שיהיה לו ראשית ואחרית ומנין שנים.

so that there would be to Him a beginning and an end and a number of years.

ואינו משתנה

And He is not subject to change,

שאיין לו דבר שיגרום לו שנוי.

for there is not to Him anything that would cause to Him change.

וְאֵין לוֹ לֹא מוֹת וְלֹא חַיִּים כְּחַיֵּי הַגּוּף הַחַי.

And there is not to Him neither death and nor life like the life of the body that is living.

וְלֹא סִכְלוּת וְלֹא חֲכָמָה כְּחֲכַמַּת הָאִישׁ הַחָכָם.

And nor foolishness and nor wisdom like the wisdom of the man who is wise.

לֹא שָׁנָה וְלֹא הִקְיָצָה.

He has not sleep and not waking.

וְלֹא כַעַס וְלֹא שְׂחֹק וְלֹא שִׂמְחָה וְלֹא עֲצָבוּת.

And not anger and not laughter and not joy and not sadness.

וְלֹא שְׁתִּיקָה וְלֹא דְבוּר כְּדְבוּר בְּנֵי אָדָם.

And not silence and not speech like the speech of the children of man.

וְכָךְ אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים

And thus said the Sages of blessed memory:

אֵין לְמַעְלָה לֹא יְשִׁיבָה וְלֹא עֲמִידָה וְלֹא עֶרְף וְלֹא עֲפוּי:

there is not Above neither sitting and nor standing and nor separation and nor connection.

הִלְכָּה יב

Halacha 12 · Physical Descriptions of the Creator as Metaphor and Imagery in the Torah

וְהוֹאִיל וְהִדְבֵּר כֵּן הוּא.

And since the matter is so, that Hashem has no physical form or body,

כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הֵלָלוּ וְכִיּוּצָא בָּהֶן שֶׁנֶּאֱמָרוּ בַּתּוֹרָה וּבַדְּבָרֵי נְבִיאִים

all these things and the like of them that were said in the Torah and in the words of the Prophets describing Hashem with physical actions or emotions,

הַכֹּל מָשָׁל וּמִלִּיצָה הֵן.

all of them are metaphor and imagery.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "יּוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק".

This is like that which is said in Tehillim, "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh."

דְּבָרִים לֵב כֹּא "כַּעֲסוֹנֵי בְּהִבְלִיָּהֶם".

And as it says in Devarim, "They angered Me with their vanities."

דברים כח סג "כִּאֲשֶׁר שָׂשׂה" וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן.

And as it says, "As Hashem rejoiced," and the like of them.

על הכל אמרו חכמים דברה תורה כלשון בני אדם.

Regarding all such expressions, the Sages said, "The Torah spoke in the language of human beings," so that the human ear can grasp the concepts.

וכן הוא אומר "האיתי להם מכעסים".

And so He says in Yirmeyahu, "Is it Me they anger?" showing that Hashem is not affected by human actions.

הרי הוא אומר "אני ה' לא שנית".

Behold, He says in Malachi, "I, Hashem, have not changed."

ואלו הנה פעמים כועס ופעמים שמח הנה משתנה.

And if He were at times angry and at times happy, He would change from state to state, which is impossible for Hashem.

וכל הדברים האלו אינן מצויין אלא לגופים האפלים השפלים

And all these things, like emotions and changes, are not found except in the dark, lowly bodies of this physical world,

שוכני בתי חמר אשר בעפר יסודם

the dwellers of houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, namely, human beings.

אבל הוא ברוך הוא יתברך ויתרומם על כל זה:

But He, blessed is He, shall be exalted and shall be elevated above all this, completely free from any physical attributes or changes.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by establishing the positive mitzvah to know that there is a Creator who sustains all of existence with infinite power, and the negative commandment against believing in any other deity. The Rambam then demonstrates that Hashem is absolutely one, possessing a unique unity that is completely non-physical, as any physical body is inherently limited. He explains that all physical descriptions of Hashem in the Torah are purely metaphoric, meant to help human minds relate to the Divine, and concludes by explaining that while Moshe Rabbeinu sought to comprehend Hashem's true essence, such complete understanding is impossible for any living human being.

The Rambam begins our entire avodah with a staggering realization: Hashem is not just the most powerful force in the universe, but He is the only true, independent reality. Everything else in creation, from the vast heavens to the chair you are sitting on, only exists because His constant, infinite power wills it to be. If He were to stop willing it for a single second, everything would vanish. This is the meaning of "Ein od milvado", there is no true existence besides Him.

When we go about our day, we easily fall into the trap of thinking that the world has its own independent power. We worry about our parnassah, we stress over what people think of us, and we treat our daily challenges as if they are independent forces we must battle. But the Rambam is teaching us that there is no other power. The person standing in front of you, the obstacle in your way, and the very breath in your lungs are all being actively sustained by the Creator this very moment.

To live with this emunah means to look past the physical surface of our lives and see the hand of the Creator in everything. When you realize that Hashem is the only true reality, your worries begin to shrink. You realize you don't need to manipulate the world or fear anyone; you only need to connect to the One who is constantly bringing the entire world into being.

Today, take one minute during a busy moment to stop and look around you. Remind yourself: "Nothing in this room, and no one in my life, has any power of their own. Hashem is creating all of this right now, and He is the only truth."