

הלכות יסודי התורה • פרק רביעי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam takes us on a deep journey into the physical makeup of the world below the sky, showing us how Hashem created everything from four basic elements: fire, wind, water, and earth. We will learn how these elements combine to form every single physical thing in our world, from simple stones to the complex body of a human being, each with its own unique nature and balance of warmth, cold, dryness, and moisture.

We will also see how these elements are in a constant state of movement and change, always returning to their roots and shifting from one to another. Through understanding this beautiful, orderly cycle of creation, a Yid can come to a profound appreciation of Hashem's wisdom and the wondrous way He sustains the universe every single moment.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Four Elements Composing All Creations Below the Sky

ארבעה גופים ה'לו ש'ם אש ורוח ומים וארץ

These four bodies, which are fire, and wind, and water, and earth,

הם יסודות כל הנבראים למטה מן הרקיע.

they are the foundations of all the creations below the sky.

וכל שיהיה מאדם ומבהמה ועוף ורמש ודג

And everything that exists, from man, and from beast, and fowl, and crawling creature, and fish,

וצמח ומתכת ואבנים טובות ומרגליות ושאר אבני בנין

and plant, and metal, and precious stones, and pearls, and other building stones,

והרים וגושי עפר

and mountains, and lumps of earth—

הכל גלמן מחבר מארבעה יסודות ה'לו.

everything, their matter is composed of these four foundations.

נמצאו כל הגופים שלמטה מן הרקיע חוץ מארבעה יסודות האלו

It turns out that all the bodies that are below the sky, except for these four foundations,

מחברים מגלמן וצורה.

are composed of matter and form,

וגלם שלקם מחבר מארבעה יסודות האלו.

and their matter is composed of these four foundations.

אבל כל אחד מארבעה היסודות אינו מחבר אלא מגלם וצורה בלבד:

But each one of the four foundations is not composed except of matter and form alone.

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 - The Four Elements and the Composition of All Physical Bodies

דרך האש והרוח להיות מהלכם ממטה מטבור הארץ למעלה כלפי הרקיע.

The way of the fire and the wind is to be their movement from below, from the center of the earth, upward toward the sky.

ודרך המים והארץ להיות מהלכם מתחת הרקיע למטה עד לאמצע.

And the way of the water and the earth is to be their movement from under the sky downward until the middle,

שאמצע הרקיע הוא המטה שאין למטה ממנו.

for the middle of the sky, it is the bottom, that there is no lower than it.

ואין הליוכם לא בדעתם ולא בחפצם אלא מנהג שנקבע בהן וטבע שנטבע בהן.

And there is no their movement, not by their knowledge and not by their will, but a pattern that was established in them and a nature that was imprinted in them.

טבע האש חם ויבש והוא קל מכלם.

The nature of the fire is hot and dry, and it is light of all of them;

והרוח חם ולח.

and the wind is hot and moist;

והמים קרים ולחים.

and the water is cold and moist;

והארץ יבשה וקרה. והיא כבדה מכלם

and the earth is dry and cold, and it is heavy of all of them;

והמים קלים ממנה לפיכך נמצאים למעלה על הארץ.

and the water is lighter than it, therefore they are found above on the earth;

והרוח קל מן המים לפיכך הוא מרחף על פני המים.

and the wind is lighter than the water, therefore it hovers over the surface of the water;

וְהָאֵשׁ קָלָה מִן הָרוּחַ.

and the fire is lighter than the wind.

וּמִפְנֵי שֶׁהֵם יְסוּדוֹת לְכָל גּוּפִים שֶׁתַּחַת הָרָקִיעַ

And because that they are foundations for all bodies that are under the sky,

יִמָּצָא כָּל גּוּף וְגוּף מֵאָדָם וּבְהֵמָה וְחַיָּה וְעוֹף וְדָג וְצִמָּח וּמִתְּכַת וְאֶבֶן גְּלִמּוֹ מִחֶבֶר מֵאֵשׁ וְרוּחַ וּמַיִם וְעָפָר.

will be found every body and body, from man, and animal, and beast, and bird, and fish, and plant, and metal, and stone, its physical matter combined from fire, and wind, and water, and dust.

וְאַרְבַּעֲתָן יִתְעַרְבוּ בְּיַחַד וְיִשְׁתַּנּוּ כָּל אֶחָד מֵהֶם בְּעֵת הָעֲרוּב

And the four of them mix together and change, each one of them at the time of the mixing,

עַד שֶׁיִּמָּצָא הַמִּחְבָּר מֵאַרְבַּעֲתָן אֵינוֹ דוֹמֶה לְאֶחָד מֵהֶן כְּשֶׁהוּא לְבִדּוֹ.

until that is found the combined from the four of them is not similar to one of them when it is alone.

וְאֵין בְּמִעְרַב מֵהֶן אֶפְלוּ חֵלֶק אֶחָד שֶׁהוּא אֵשׁ בְּפָנָי עֲצָמוֹ אוֹ מַיִם בְּפָנָי עֲצָמוֹ אוֹ אֶרֶץ בְּפָנָי עֲצָמָה אוֹ רוּחַ בְּפָנָי עֲצָמָה

And there is not in the mixture of them even part one that is fire by itself, or water by themselves, or earth by itself, or wind by itself,

אֲלָא הַכֹּל נִשְׁתַּנּוּ וְנַעֲשׂוּ גּוּף אֶחָד.

but the whole changed and became body one.

וְכָל גּוּף וְגוּף הַמִּחְבָּר מֵאַרְבַּעֲתָן יִמָּצָא בּוֹ קָר וְחֹם לַח וְיָבֵשׁ כְּאֶחָד.

And every body and body the combined from the four of them will be found in it cold and heat, moisture and dryness as one.

אֲבָל יֵשׁ מֵהֶם גּוּפִים שֶׁיִּהְיֶה בָּהֶם חֲזָקָה מִיְסוּד הָאֵשׁ כְּמוֹ בְּעָלֵי נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה. לְפִיכָךְ יֵרָאֶה בָּהֶם חֹם יָתֵר.

But there are of them bodies that there will be in them strength from the element of the fire, like possessors of soul living, therefore will appear in them the heat more.

וְיֵשׁ מֵהֶן גּוּפִין שֶׁיִּהְיֶה בָּהֶן חֲזָקָה מִיְסוּד הָאֶרֶץ כְּמוֹ הָאֲבָנִים. לְפִיכָךְ יֵרָאֶה בָּהֶם הֵיכָשׁ הַרְבֵּה.

And there are of them bodies that there will be in them strength from the element of the earth, like the stones, therefore will appear in them the dryness much.

וְיֵשׁ מֵהֶן גּוּפִין שֶׁיִּהְיֶה בָּהֶן חֲזָקָה מִיְסוּד הַמַּיִם. לְפִיכָךְ יֵרָאֶה בָּהֶם הַלֵּחַ יָתֵר.

And there are of them bodies that there will be in them strength from the element of the water, therefore will appear in them the moisture more.

ועל הדרך הזה ימצא גוף חם יותר מגוף אחר חם. וגוף יבש יותר מגוף אחר יבש.

And on the way this will be found a body hot more than a body another hot, and a body dry more than a body another dry.

וכן ימצאו גופים שיראה בהן הקר בלבד. וגופים יראה בהן הלח בלבד.

And so will be found bodies that will appear in them the cold alone, and bodies will appear in them the moisture alone.

וגופים יראה בהן הקר והיבש כאחד בשוה. או הקר והלח כאחד בשוה. או החם והיבש כאחד בשוה. או החם והלח כאחד בשוה.

And bodies will appear in them the cold and the dryness as one equally, or the cold and the moisture as one equally, or the heat and the dryness as one equally, or the heat and the moisture as one equally.

לפי רב היסוד שהיה בעקר התערבת יראה מעשה אותו היסוד וטבעו בגוף המערב:

According to the majority of the element that was in the essence of the mixture, will appear the action of that element and its nature in the body the mixed.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 · The Ultimate Decomposition of All Combined Entities into the Four Elements

וכל המקצר מארבעה יסודות אלו

And every entity combined from these four elements

הוא נפרד בסוף.

it separates in the end and decomposes.

יש שהוא נפרד לאחר ימים אחדים.

There is that it separates after a few days,

ויש שהוא נפרד לאחר שנים רבות.

and there is that it separates after many years.

וכל שנתחבר מהם

And everything that was combined from them,

אי אפשר שלא יפרד להן.

it is impossible that it will not separate into them.

אפלו תהב והאדם

Even the gold and the ruby,

אִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁלֹּא יִפָּסַד וַיֵּחָזֵר לִיסּוּדוֹתָיו.

it is impossible that it will not decompose and return to its elements.

וְיָשׁוּב מִקְצָתוֹ לָאֵשׁ.

And a portion of it will return to the fire,

וּמִקְצָתוֹ לַמַּיִם.

and a portion of it to the water,

וּמִקְצָתוֹ לָרוּחַ.

and a portion of it to the wind,

וּמִקְצָתוֹ לָאֲרֶז:

and a portion of it to the earth.

הַלָּכָה ד

Halacha 4 · The Return of All Decomposing Entities to the Four Elements

הוּאִיל וְכָל הַנִּפְסָד יִפָּרֵד לִיסּוּדוֹת אֱלֹהֵי

Since, indeed, every decomposing entity will separate eventually to these four basic elements,

לָמָּה נֶאֱמַר לְאָדָם "וְאֶל עָפָר תָּשׁוּב".

why was it said to Adam in the Torah, "and to dust you shall return"?

לְפִי שֶׁרַב בְּנִינּוּ מִן הָעָפָר.

This is because most of his structure is made from the dust.

וְלֹא כָּל הַנִּפְסָד בְּשִׁיפּוֹסֵד מִיָּד יֵחָזֵר לְאַרְבָּעָה הִיסּוּדוֹת.

And not every decomposing entity, when it decomposes, immediately will return to the four elements directly.

אֶלָּא יִפָּסַד וַיֵּחָזֵר לְדָבָר אֲחֵר

Rather, it decomposes and returns to another thing,

וְדָבָר אֲחֵר לְדָבָר אֲחֵר

and that another thing decomposes and turns to yet another thing,

וְסוֹף הַדְּבָרִים יֵחָזֵר לִיסּוּדוֹת

and at the end of the things, it will return to the basic elements.

ונמצאו כל הדברים חוזרין חלילה:

And thus all things are found returning in a cycle.

הלכה ה

Halacha 5 · The Constant Transformation of the Four Elements into One Another

ארבעה יסודות האלו משתנים זה לזה תמיד בכל יום ובכל שעה

These four elements change into one another constantly, every day and every hour,

מקצתן לא כל גופן.

but only a portion of them, not their entire body.

כיצד.

How so?

מקצת הארץ הקרובה מן המים משתנית ומתפוררת ונעשית מים.

A portion of the earth which is close to the water changes and crumbles and becomes water.

וכן מקצת המים הסמוכים לרוח משתנים ומתמסמסין והוין רוח.

And so, a portion of the water which is close to the wind changes and dissolves and becomes wind.

וכן הרוח מקצתו הסמוך לאש משתנה ומתחולל ונעשה אש.

And so the wind, a portion of it which is close to the fire, changes and transforms and becomes fire.

וכן האש מקצתה הסמוך לרוח מתחולל משתנה ומתכנס ונעשה רוח.

And so the fire, a portion of it which is close to the wind, transforms, changes, and condenses and becomes wind.

וכן הרוח מקצתו הסמוך למים משתנה ומתכנס ונעשה מים.

And so the wind, a portion of it which is close to the water, changes and condenses and becomes water.

וכן המים מקצתו הסמוך לארץ משתנה ומתכנס ונעשה ארץ.

And so the water, a portion of it which is close to the earth, changes and condenses and becomes earth.

ושנוי זה מעט מעט ולפי ארה הימים.

And this change happens little by little, and over the course of time.

ואין כל היסוד משתנה עד שיעשה כל המים רוח או כל הרוח אש.

And not all of the element changes, so that all of the water becomes wind, or all of the wind becomes fire,

שאי אפשר שיבטל אחד מן היסודות הארבעה.

for it is impossible that one of the four elements should be completely nullified.

אֶלָּא מִקְצֵת יִשְׁתַּנֶּה מֵאֵשׁ לְרוּחַ וּמִקְצֵת יִשְׁתַּנֶּה מֵרוּחַ לְאֵשׁ.

Rather, a portion will change from fire to wind, and a portion will change from wind to fire.

וְכֵן בֵּין כָּל אֶחָד וְחֻבְרוֹ מֵצֵא הַשְּׁנוּי בֵּין אַרְבַּעַתָּן וְחֻזְרוֹת חֲלִילָה לְעוֹלָם:

And so between each one and its fellow, this change is found among the four of them, and they return in a cycle forever.

הִלְכָה ו

Halacha 6 · The Combination of the Elements and the Bestowal of Form by the Tenth Angel

וְשְׁנוּי זֶה יִהְיֶה בְּסִבִּיבַת הַגִּלְגָּל

And this change in the elements will be brought about by the revolution of the sphere,

וּמִסִּבִּיבָתוֹ יִתְחַבְּרוּ אַרְבַּעַתָּן

and from its revolution, the four of them will combine together,

וְיִהְיֶה מֵהֶן שְׁאֵר גִּלְמֵי בְּנֵי אָדָם

and from them will be formed the rest of the physical matter of the bodies of sons of man,

וְנִפְשׁ חַיָּה צֶמַח וְאֶבֶן וּמִתְכֶּתֶת.

and the soul of the beast, as well as the physical matter of plant, and stone, and metal.

וְהָאֵל נוֹתֵן לְכָל גֶּלֶם וְגֶלֶם צוּרָה רְאוּיָהּ לוֹ

And God gives to every matter and matter a spiritual form appropriate to it,

עַל יְדֵי מַלְאָךְ הָעֲשִׂירִי

by the hands of the tenth angel,

שֶׁהִיא הַצּוּרָה הַנִּקְרָאת אִישִׁים:

which is the level of angelic form that is called Ishim.

הִלְכָה ז

Halacha 7 · The Connection Between Matter and Form and the Perception of Formless Beings

לְעוֹלָם אֵין אֶתָּה רוֹאֶה גֶלֶם בְּלֹא צוּרָה אוֹ צוּרָה בְּלֹא גֶלֶם.

Forever, you do not see matter without form, or form without matter in the physical world, as they are always bound together.

אֶלָּא לֵב הָאָדָם הוּא שֶׁמְחַלֵּק גּוּף הַנִּמָּצֵא בְּדַעְתּוֹ

Rather, the heart of man, meaning his intellect, is that which divides and separates a physical body that is found before him, doing so in his mind,

וידע שהוא מחבר מגלם וצורה.

and knows that it is composed of matter and form, understanding that these are two distinct conceptual components.

וידע שיש שם גופים שגלמם מחבר מארבעת היסודות.

And the intellect knows that there are bodies in the lower world whose matter is composed of the four elements, fire, wind, water, and earth;

וגופים שגלמם פשוט ואינו מחבר מגלם אחר.

and there are celestial bodies whose matter is simple and is not composed of any other matter, meaning they do not consist of the four elements and cannot change form.

והצורות שאין להם גלם אינן נראין לעין

And the forms that do not have matter at all, such as the angels, are not seen by the physical eye,

אלא בעין הלב הן ידועין.

but with the eye of the heart, through intellectual comprehension, they are known and understood;

כמו שידענו אדון הכל בלא ראית עין:

just as we know the Master of everything, Hashem, without seeing of the eye, but rather through the clear recognition of our mind.

הלכה ח

Halacha 8 · The Form of Man and the Distinction Between Soul and Physical Appearance

נפש כל בשר היא צורתו שנתן לו האל

The soul of all flesh is its form which God gave to it,

והדעת היתרה המצויה בנפשו של אדם

and the extra intellect that is found in the soul of man

היא צורת האדם השלם בדעתו.

is the form of the man who is perfect in his knowledge.

ועל צורה זו נאמר בתורה נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו

And concerning this form it is said in the Torah, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,"

כלומר שתהיה לו צורה הידעת ומשגת הדעות שאין להם גלם

meaning that there will be to him a form that knows and comprehends the ideas that do not have a physical body,

כְּמוֹ הַמַּלְאָכִים שֶׁהֵם צוּרָה בְּלֹא גֵלָם עַד שְׂיִדְמָה לָהֶן.

like the angels who are form without a physical body, until he resembles them.

וְאֵינוֹ אוֹמֵר עַל צוּרָה זֹאת הַנִּכְּפֶרֶת לְעֵינַיִם

And it does not speak concerning this form which is recognized by the eyes,

שֶׁהִיא הַפֶּה וְהַחֹטֶם וְהַלְּסָתוֹת וְשָׁאֵר רֶשֶׁם הַגּוּף

which is the mouth and the nose and the cheeks and the rest of the outline of the body,

שֶׁזֶהוּ תַאֲרָ שְׁמָהּ.

for this physical appearance, "appearance" is its name.

וְאֵינָהּ הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַמְּצוּיָה לְכָל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

And it is not the soul that is found in every living soul,

שֶׁבָּהּ אוֹכֵל וְשׂוֹתָה וּמוֹלִיד וּמְרַגֵּשׁ וּמַחֲרֵהָ.

with which it eats and drinks and reproduces and feels and thinks.

אֲלָא הַדַּעַה שֶׁהִיא צוּרַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ

Rather, it is the intellect, which is the form of the soul,

וּבְצוּרַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַכְּתוּב מְדַבֵּר בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדַמוּתֵנוּ.

and concerning the form of the soul the verse speaks when it says, "in our image, in our likeness."

וּפַעַמִּים רַבּוֹת תִּקְרָא זֹאת הַצּוּרָה נֶפֶשׁ וְרוּחַ.

And many times this form is called "nefesh" and "ruach."

וּלְפִיכֶּה צָרִיךְ לְהִזָּהֵר בְּשִׁמּוֹתֶיהָ שֶׁלֹּא יִטְעֶה אָדָם בָּהֶן.

And therefore, one must be careful with their names so that a person will not err with them,

וְכָל שֵׁם וְשֵׁם יִלְמַד מֵעֲנִיָּנוּ:

and each and every name is learned from its context.

הַלְכָּה ט

Halacha 9 • The Eternity of the Form of the Soul and Its Separation from the Body

אֵין צוּרַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַזֹּאת מִחֻבְרַת מִן הַיְסוּדוֹת כְּדִי שֶׁתִּפְרֹד לָהֶם,

The form of this soul is not composed of the elements so that it would separate into them upon death, like physical matter does,

וְאֵינָהּ מִכֹּחַ הַנֶּשְׁמָה עַד שֶׁתִּהְיֶה צְרִיכָה לְנֶשְׁמָה כְּמוֹ שֶׁהַנֶּשְׁמָה צְרִיכָה לְגוּף.

and it is not from the power of the animal soul so that it would be needing the animal soul just as the animal soul needs the body for its existence.

אֲלֵא מֵאֵת ה' מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם הִיא.

Rather, from Hashem, from the heaven, it is—a direct spiritual creation.

לְפִיכָה כִּשְׂפִיפֶרֶד הַגִּלְם שֶׁהוּא מְחֻבָּר מִן הַיְסוּדוֹת

Therefore, when the physical matter, which is composed of the elements, separates and decomposes,

וְתֹאבֵד הַנֶּשְׁמָה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֵינָהּ מְצוּיָה אֲלֵא עִם הַגּוּף וְצְרִיכָה לְגוּף בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂיהָ

and the animal soul perishes because it is not found except with the body and it needs the body for all its deeds and physical functions,

לֹא תִכָּרֵת הַצּוּרָה הַזֹּאת.

this form—the intellectual soul—will not be cut off and destroyed.

לְפִי שֶׁאֵינָהּ צְרִיכָה לְנֶשְׁמָה בְּמַעֲשֶׂיהָ.

Because it does not need the animal soul for its deeds and perceptions.

אֲלֵא יוֹדַעַת וּמַשְׁגֶּת הַדְּעוֹת הַפְּרוּדוֹת מִן הַגִּלְמִים

Rather, it knows and comprehends the intellects—the angels—which are separated from physical matters,

וְיוֹדַעַת בּוֹרֵא הַכֹּל וְעוֹמֶדֶת לְעוֹלָם וְלְעוֹלָמֵי עוֹלָמִים.

and it knows the Creator of everything, and endures forever and for eternity of eternities.

הוּא שֶׁאָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה בְּחֻמָּתוֹ קֵהֶלֶת יב ז

This is what Shlomo said in his wisdom in the Sefer of Koheles, chapter twelve, verse seven:

"וְיָשָׁב הָעָפָר עַל הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַןָּהּ:"

"And the dust shall return upon the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God Who gave it."

הַלָּכָה י

Halacha 10 · The Definition of Ma'aseh Bereshit and the Prohibition of Expounding It in Public

כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלּוּ שֶׁדִּבַּרְנוּ בְּעֶנְיָן זֶה

All of these matters that we spoke about concerning this subject of the physical universe

כְּמַר מִדְּלֵי הֵם

are like a drop from a bucket compared to what there is to know,

וידברים עמקים הם.

and yet they are deep matters in their own right.

אבל אינם פענזין עמק פרק ראשון ושני.

But they are not like the matter of the depth of the first and second chapter, which deal with the spiritual realms and the Creator.

ובאור כל אלו הדברים שפפרק שלישי ורביעי

And the explanation of all these matters that are in the third and fourth chapter

הוא הנקרא מעשה בראשית.

is that which is called the esoteric study of Ma'aseh Bereishis, the Work of Creation.

וכך ציוו החכמים הראשונים

And thus commanded the early Sages of the Mishnah,

שאין דורשין בדברים האלו ברבים

that we do not expound on these matters in public,

אלא לאדם אחד מדיעין דברים אלו

rather, to a single person who is wise and understands on his own, we make these matters known

ומלמדין אותן:

and teach them in private.

הלכה יא

Halacha 11 · The Difference Between Ma'aseh Merkavah and Ma'aseh Bereshit

ומה בין ענזין מעשה מרכבה לענזין מעשה בראשית.

And what is the difference between the subject of Ma'aseh Merkavah, the deepest secrets of the Divine Chariot, to the subject of Ma'aseh Bereshit, the secrets of creation?

שענזין מעשה מרכבה אפלו לאחד אין דורשים בו

The difference is that the subject of Ma'aseh Merkavah, even to one individual we do not expound on it

אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו

unless he was wise and understanding from his own mind, possessing deep intuitive comprehension,

מוסרין לו ראשי הפרקים.

and even then, we do not teach him the whole thing, but rather we transmit to him only the outlines of the chapters, the briefest headings.

וענין מעשה בראשית מלמדין אותו ליחיד

And the subject of Ma'aseh Bereshit, we teach it to an individual

אף על פי שאינו מבין אותו מדעתו

even though that he does not understand it from his own mind and cannot figure it out on his own,

ומודיעים אותו כל מה שיכול לידע מדברים אלו.

and we inform him of all that he is able to know of these matters of creation.

ולמה אין מלמדין אותו לרבים.

And why do we not teach it, even Ma'aseh Bereshit, to the public in a large gathering?

לפי שאין כל אדם יש לו דעת רחבה

Because not every man has broad understanding

להשיג פרוש ובאור כל הדברים על פניו:

to grasp the interpretation and explanation of all the matters to their depth and absolute clarity, and they might come to misunderstand these deep concepts.

הלכה יב

Halacha 12 - Contemplating the Creations to Achieve Love and Fear of Hashem

בזמן שאדם מתבונן בדברים האלו

At the time that a person meditates on these matters of the cosmos and the spiritual realms,

ומכיר כל הברואים ממלאך וגלגל ואדם כיוצא בו

and recognizes all the creations, from angel and sphere and man and the like,

ויראה חכמתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא בכל היצורים וכל הברואים.

and he will see the wisdom of the Holy One, blessed is He, in all the creatures and all the creations,

מוסיף אהבה למקום

he increases his love for the Omnipresent,

ותצמא נפשו ויכמה בשרו לאהב המקום ברוך הוא.

and his soul will thirst and his flesh will yearn to love the Omnipresent, blessed is He.

וירא ויפחד משפלותו ודלותו וקלותו

And he will fear and he will dread from his lowliness and his poverty and his insignificance,

כְּשִׁיעָרֵיהָ עֲצָמוֹ לְאַחַד מֵהַגּוֹפּוֹת הַקְּדוּשִׁים הַגְּדוֹלִים.

when he compares himself to one of the holy, great bodies like the celestial spheres.

וְכָל שֶׁכֵּן לְאַחַת מֵהַצּוּרוֹת הַטְּהוֹרוֹת הַנִּפְרָדוֹת מִן הַגְּלִמִּים

And all the more so when he compares himself to one of the pure forms that are separate from physical matter, namely the angels,

שֶׁלֹּא נִתְחַבְּרוּ בְּגִלְמֵם כָּלֵל.

that were not joined with physical matter at all.

וְיִמָּצֵא עֲצָמוֹ שֶׁהוּא כְּכֵלִי מָלֵא בּוֹשָׁה וּכְלִמָּה רֵיק וְחֶסֶר:

And he will find himself to be like a vessel full of shame and disgrace, empty and lacking.

הַלְכָּה יג

Halacha 13 - Precedence of Halachic Study to the Esoteric Pardes

וְעַנֵּינִי אַרְבָּעָה פְּרָקִים אֵלּוּ שֶׁבְּחֵמֶשׁ מִצְוֹת הָאֵלּוּ

And the matters of these four chapters, which deal with these five mitzvos of knowing and loving Hashem,

הֵם שְׁחֻכְמִים הָרֵאשׁוֹנִים קוֹרְאִין אוֹתוֹ פְּרִידֶס

they are what the early Sages call Pardes, the orchard of deep spiritual wisdom,

כִּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ אַרְבָּעָה נִכְנְסוּ לַפְּרִידֶס.

just as they said, "Four Sages entered the Pardes."

וְאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁגְּדוּלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיוּ וְחֻכְמִים גְּדוֹלִים הָיוּ

And even though they were great men of Yisrael and they were great Sages,

לֹא כָּלָם הָיָה בָּהֶן כֹּחַ לֵידַע וּלְחַשֵּׁיג כָּל הַדְּבָרִים עַל בְּרִיָּן.

not all of them had the strength in them to know and to comprehend all the matters with absolute clarity.

וְאֲנִי אוֹמֵר שֶׁאֵין רֹאוי לְטַיֵּל בַּפְּרִידֶס

And I say that it is not proper to stroll in the Pardes

אֲלֵא מִי שֶׁנִּתְמַלֵּא כֶּרֶסוֹ לֶחֶם וּבָשָׂר.

unless one has filled his belly with bread and meat.

וּלֶחֶם וּבָשָׂר הוּא לֵידַע הָאֶסוּר וְהַמְּתָר

And "bread and meat" is to know the practical halachos of the forbidden and the permitted,

וכיוצא בהם משאר המצוות.

and the like of them from the rest of the mitzvos.

ואף על פי שדברים אלו דבר קטן קראו אותן חכמים

And even though the Sages called these matters of practical halacha a "small matter,"

שהרי אמרו חכמים דבר גדול מעשה מרכבה

for behold, the Sages said, "A 'great matter' is the workings of the Chariot,

ודבר קטן היות דאביי ורבא.

and a 'small matter' is the debates of Abbaye and Rava,"

אף על פי כן ראויין הן להקדימן.

even so, they are fitting to be given precedence in one's learning,

שהן מישבין דעתו של אדם תחלה.

because they settle the mind of a person first.

ועוד שהם הטובה הגדולה שהשפיע הקדוש ברוך הוא

And furthermore, they are the great goodness that the Holy One, blessed is He, bestowed

ל'שוב העולם הזה כדי לנחל חיי העולם הבא.

for the settling of this world, in order to inherit the life of the World to Come.

ואפשר שיידעם הכל קטן וגדול איש ואשה

And it is possible for everyone to know them, small and great, man and woman,

בעל לב רחב ובעל לב קצר:

one of a broad mind and one of a limited mind.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam explains that all physical creations below the sky are made of a combination of fire, wind, water, and earth, which are themselves combinations of matter and form. Each element has its own natural weight and characteristics—fire being warm and dry, wind warm and moist, water cold and moist, and earth cold and dry—which determine how they combine and how the resulting bodies behave. Ultimately, every combined entity must decompose back into these four elements, though this often happens through a gradual cycle of changing into other entities first. Furthermore, these four elements themselves are in a constant state of flux, with portions of them continually transforming into one another in an unceasing cycle driven by the revolution of the sphere.

The Rambam teaches us a profound truth about our physical existence: everything in this world below the heavens, including our very bodies, is a mixture of the four basic elements of fire, wind, water, and earth. These elements are in a constant state of flux, shifting and changing from one to another, and ultimately, every physical structure is destined to decompose and return to its source. Even the most precious physical things, like gold and rubies, cannot escape this reality.

When you realize that your physical body is made of these shifting, temporary elements, it changes how you look at yourself. The Rambam explains that what truly makes you a human being, the "tzellel Elokim", is not your physical form, but your neshama, the spiritual form given to you by Hashem that is capable of knowing Him. Your body is just a temporary vessel, a combination of dust and wind that will eventually return to the earth, but your spiritual essence is eternal.

This understanding is a powerful tool for your daily avodah. It helps you put your physical desires and worries into perspective. When the yetzer hara tries to make you overly anxious about material comforts, physical beauty, or worldly possessions, remind yourself of this sugya. These things are just temporary combinations of the four elements, constantly changing and destined to dissolve. Your real focus must be on nurturing your neshama, which connects you directly to the Creator.

Today, when you find yourself getting upset or overly invested in a physical frustration or material desire, pause for a moment. Remind yourself: "This is just temporary matter, but my neshama is eternal." Redirect that energy into a spiritual act, like learning a line of Torah or saying a brachah with deep kavana.