

הלכות יסודי התורה • פרק שמיני

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam brings us to the very foundation of our emunah, explaining how we know with absolute certainty that Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy is true. We learn that the miracles Moshe performed in Mitzrayim and the midbar were not meant to prove his prophecy, but were simply done for the practical needs of the moment. Rather, our eternal emunah rests solely on Ma'amad Har Sinai, where the entire nation saw the fire and heard the Voice of Hashem with their own eyes and ears.

We will also learn how this foundation guides our approach to any prophet who arises after Moshe Rabbeinu. The Rambam explains that we only listen to a later prophet because of the mitzvah Moshe commanded us to do so, and we are warned never to listen to anyone who uses signs or wonders to contradict the Torah of Moshe.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • Belief in Moshe Based on the Revelation at Sinai and Not on Wonders

משה רבנו לא האמינו בו ישראל מפני האותות שעשה.

In Moshe our teacher, Israel did not believe in him because of the wonders that he performed.

שהמאמין על פי האותות יש בלבבו דפי שאפשר שיעשה האות בלט וכשוק.

For the believer who believes solely by way of wonders, there is in his heart doubt, for it is possible that he performed the wonder through magic and sorcery.

אלא כל האותות שעשה משה במדבר לפי הצרה עשאו. לא להביא ראיה על הנבואה.

Rather, all the wonders that Moshe performed in the desert, according to the need he performed them, not to bring proof for the prophecy.

היה צריך להשקיע את המצרים קרע את הים והצילן בתוכו.

When he was needed to drown the Egyptians, he split the sea and sank them in it.

צרכנו למזון הוריד לנו את המן.

When we needed food, he brought down for us the manna.

צמאו בקע להן את האבן.

When they thirsted, he split for them the rock.

כפרו בו עדת קרח בלעה אותן הארץ. וכן שאר כל האותות.

When the assembly of Korach denied him, the earth swallowed them; and so the rest of all the wonders were performed only for a specific need.

ובמה האמינו בו. במעמד הר סיני

And through what did they believe in him? At the standing of Mount Sinai,

שעינינו ראו ולא זר ואזנינו שמעו ולא אחר האש והקולות והלפידים

for our eyes saw and not a stranger, and our ears heard and not another, the fire and the sounds and the torches,

והוא נגש אל הערפל והקול מדבר אליו ואנו שומעים משה משה לה אומר להן כה וכה.

and he approached to the thick cloud and the Voice spoke to him and we heard, "Moshe, Moshe, go say to them thus and thus."

וכן הוא אומר "פנים בפנים דבר ה' עמכם".

And so He says, "Face to face spoke Hashem with you."

ונאמר "לא את אבותינו כרת ה' את הברית הזאת".

And it is said, "Not with our fathers made Hashem this covenant."

ומנין שמעמד הר סיני לבדו היא הראיה לנבואתו שהיא אמת שאין בו דפי

And from where do we know that the standing of Mount Sinai alone, it is the proof to his prophecy that it is truth, that there is not in it doubt?

שנאמר "הנה אנכי בא אליה בעב הענן בעבור לשמע העם בדברי עמך וגם כה יאמינו לעולם".

As it is said, "Behold, I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear in My speaking with you, and also in you they will believe forever."

מכלל שקדם דבר זה לא האמינו בו נאמנות שהיא עומדת לעולם

We see from the implication that before this matter, they did not believe in him with a belief that stands forever,

אלא נאמנות שיש אחריה הרהור ומחשבה:

rather, a belief that there is after it suspicion and thought.

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 - Belief in Moshe at Mount Sinai and the Status of Later Prophets' Signs

נמצאו אלו ששולח להן

It turns out that these people to whom he was sent

הם העדים על נבואתו שהיא אמת

they are the witnesses to his prophecy, that it is true,

וְאֵינוּ צָרִיךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶן אוֹת אַחֵר.

and he does not need to perform another sign for them.

שֶׁהֵם וְהוּא עֲדִים בְּדָבָר

For they and he are witnesses in the matter,

כְּשֵׁנִי עֲדִים שָׂרְאוּ דָבָר אֶחָד בְּיָחַד

like two witnesses who saw a single matter together,

שָׁכַל אֶחָד מֵהֶן עַד לַחֲבֵרוֹ שֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר אֱמֶת

where each one of them is a witness for his fellow that he is speaking the truth,

וְאֵין אֶחָד מֵהֶן צָרִיךְ לְהָבִיא רָאִיָּה לַחֲבֵרוֹ.

and neither one of them needs to bring proof to his fellow.

כִּי מִשָּׁה רַבְּנוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲדִים לוֹ אַחֵר מֵעַמֻּד הָר סינִי

So too, regarding Moshe Rabbeinu, all of Yisrael were witnesses for him after the standing at Mount Sinai,

וְאֵינוּ צָרִיךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת לָם אוֹת.

and he did not need to perform a sign for them anymore.

וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּתֹחֶלֶת נְבוֹאָתוֹ

And this is what Moshe said to the Holy One, blessed is He, at the beginning of his prophecy,

בְּעֵת שֶׁנָּתַן לוֹ הָאוֹתוֹת לַעֲשׂוֹתָן בְּמִצְרַיִם

at the time He gave him the signs to perform them in Mitzrayim,

וְאָמַר לוֹ "וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלִי".

and He said to him, "And they will listen to your voice."

יָדַע מִשָּׁה רַבְּנוּ שֶׁהַמֶּאֱמִין עַל פִּי הָאוֹתוֹת

Moshe Rabbeinu knew that one who believes based on signs alone

יֵשׁ בְּלִבּוֹ דְּפִי וּמַהֲרָהּ וּמַחֲשֵׁב

has a flaw in his heart, and he wonders and doubts,

וְהָיָה נִשְׁמָט מִלִּילָה

and he was trying to withdraw from going on his mission,

וְאָמַר "וְהֵן לֹא יֶאֱמִינוּ לִי".

and he said, "But behold, they will not believe me."

עד שְׁהוֹדִיעוּ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

Until the Holy One, blessed is He, informed him

שֶׁאֵלֹ הָאוֹתוֹת אֵינָן אֶלָּא עַד שְׁיִצְאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם

that these signs are only for until they leave Mitzrayim,

וְאַחַר שְׁיִצְאוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה

and after they leave and stand upon this mountain,

יִסְתַּלֵּק הֶרְהוּר שְׁמֵהֶרְהוּרִין אַחֲרֶיהָ

the doubt that they harbor about you will be removed,

שְׁאֲנִי נֹתֵן לָהּ כָּאֵן אוֹת

for I am giving you a sign here

שְׁיִדְעוּ שְׁאֲנִי שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ בְּאֵמֶת מֵתַחֲלָה

so that they will know that I sent you in truth from the very beginning,

וְלֹא יִשָּׁאֵר בְּלִבָּם הֶרְהוּר.

and no doubt will remain in their heart.

וְהוּא שֶׁהִכָּתוּב אוֹמֵר

And that is what the verse says:

"וְזֶה לָהּ הָאוֹת כִּי אֶנֶכִּי שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ

"And this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you:

כְּהוֹצִיאָהָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה."

when you take the people out of Mitzrayim, you shall serve God upon this mountain."

נִמְצָאת אוֹמֵר

Consequently, you must say

שֶׁכָּל נָבִיא שְׁיֵעָמֵד אַחֲרַי מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ

that any prophet who arises after Moshe Rabbeinu,

אֵין אֲנוּ מֵאֲמִינִים בּוֹ מִפְּנֵי הָאוֹת לְבַדּוֹ

we do not believe in him because of the sign alone,

כְּדִי שֶׁנֹּאמַר אִם יַעֲשֶׂה אוֹת נִשְׁמָע לוֹ לְכָל מָה שִׁיאָמַר.

so that we would say, 'If he performs a sign, we will listen to him in whatever he says.'

אֲלָא מִפְּנֵי הַמִּצְוָה שֶׁצִּוָּה מֹשֶׁה בַּתּוֹרָה וְאָמַר

Rather, we believe in him because of the mitzvah that Moshe commanded in the Torah, saying,

אִם נָתַן אוֹת "אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּ".

if he gives a sign, "to him you shall listen."

כִּמוֹ שֶׁצִּוָּנוּ לְחַתּוֹת הַדָּבָר עַל פִּי שְׁנַיִם עֵדִים

Just as Hashem commanded us to decide a matter based on the testimony of two witnesses,

וְאִף עַל פִּי שְׁאִין אָנוּ יוֹדְעִין אִם הֵעִידוּ אֱמֶת אִם שָׁקֶר.

even though we do not know for certain if they testified truthfully or falsely,

כִּהְיָ מִצְוָה לִשְׁמָע מִזֶּה הַנָּבִיא

so too it is a mitzvah to listen to this prophet,

אִף עַל פִּי שְׁאִין אָנוּ יוֹדְעִים אִם הָאוֹת אֱמֶת אוֹ בִּכְשׁוֹף וְלֹט.

even though we do not know if the sign is genuine or done through magic and sorcery.

הִלְכָּה ג

Halacha 3 · We Do Not Listen to a Prophet Who Denies the Prophecy of Moshe

לְפִיכָּה אִם עָמַד הַנָּבִיא וַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים גְּדוֹלִים

Therefore, if a person arises claiming to be a prophet, and performs great signs and wonders

וּבִקֵּשׁ לְהַכְחִישׁ נְבוּאָתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ

and seeks to deny the prophecy of Moshe our teacher,

אִין שׁוֹמְעִין לוֹ

we do not listen to him;

וְאָנוּ יוֹדְעִין בְּבִאֹר שֶׁאוֹתֵן הָאוֹתוֹת בְּלֹט וּבְשׁוֹף הֵן.

and we know with clarity that those signs are performed through magic and sorcery.

לְפִי שֶׁנְּבוּאָת מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ אֵינָה עַל פִּי הָאוֹתוֹת

This is because the prophecy of Moshe our teacher is not established by way of the signs he performed,

כְּדִי שֶׁנַּעֲרָה אוֹתוֹת זֶה לְאוֹתוֹת זֶה.

so that we would have to compare the signs of this new prophet to the signs of that one, Moshe.

אַלֶּא בְּעֵינֵינוּ רָאִינוּהָ וּבְאָזְנֵינוּ שָׁמַעְנוּהָ כְּמוֹ שֶׁשָּׁמַע הוּא.

Rather, with our own eyes we saw it, and with our own ears we heard it, just as he, Moshe, heard it directly from Hashem.

הָא לְמַה הַדָּבָר דּוֹמֶה

To what is this matter comparable?

לְעֵדִים שֶׁהֵעִידוּ לְאָדָם עַל דָּבָר שֶׁרָאָה בְּעֵינָיו שֶׁאִינוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁרָאָה

It is like witnesses who testified to a man about a matter that he himself saw with his eyes, claiming that it is not as he saw.

שֶׁאִינוֹ שׁוֹמֵעַ לָהֶן אֶלָּא יוֹדֵעַ בְּוַדָּאִי שֶׁהֵן עַדִּי שָׁקֵר.

In such a case, he does not listen to them, but rather knows with certainty that they are false witnesses.

לְפִיכָךְ אִמְרָה תּוֹרָה שֶׁאֵם כָּא הָאוֹת וְהַמוֹפֵת

Therefore, the Torah stated that even if the sign and the wonder come to pass, as it says in

דְּבָרִים יג ד "לֹא תִשְׁמַע אֶל דְּבָרֵי הַנָּבִיא הַהוּא".

Devarim 13:4, "Do not listen to the words of that prophet."

שֶׁהָרִי זֶה בָּא אֵלֶיךָ בָּאוֹת וּמוֹפֵת לְהַכְחִישׁ מַה שֶׁרָאִיתָ בְּעֵינֶיךָ

For behold, this one comes to you with a sign and a wonder to deny what you saw with your own eyes at Har Sinai.

וְהוֹאִיל וַאֲיֵן אֲנוּ מֵאֲמִינִים בְּמוֹפֵת אֶלָּא מִפְּנֵי הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁצִּוְּנוּ מֹשֶׁה

And since we do not believe in any prophet's wonder except because of the commandment that Moshe commanded us to do so,

הֵיכָן נִקְבֵּל מֵאוֹת זֶה שֶׁבָּא לְהַכְחִישׁ נְבוּאָתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה שֶׁרָאִינוּ וְשָׁמַעְנוּ:

how can we accept a sign from this prophet who comes to deny the prophecy of Moshe, which we ourselves saw and which we heard?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter establishes that the Jewish people's belief in Moshe Rabbeinu was not based on wonders, which can be faked through sorcery, but on the revelation at Mount Sinai where everyone witnessed his appointment firsthand. Because of this, any later prophet who performs wonders is only believed because of Moshe's command to do so, similar to how a court relies on two witnesses. Consequently, if a prophet arises and performs wonders to dispute the Torah of Moshe, we disregard him completely, knowing his signs are false, since a wonder can never override what we saw and heard with our own eyes at Sinai.

The Rambam is teaching us a fundamental truth about the human soul: miracles, wonders, and external excitement do not build lasting emunah. A faith built on 'signs' is fragile; it leaves room for doubts and second-guessing. True, unbreakable connection only comes from direct, personal experience, the 'face to face' encounter of Ma'amad Har Sinai, where we saw and heard the truth for ourselves.

In our daily avodah, we often find ourselves waiting for 'signs' or waiting for inspiration to strike from the outside. We think, 'If only I had a great spiritual breakthrough, or if my prayers were answered with an obvious miracle, then I would be a different person.' But Hashem is telling us that real, enduring connection is not built on spectacular, fleeting moments. It is built on the quiet, steady reality of Torah and mitzvos that we live with every single day.

Stop looking for external wonders to jumpstart your yiras Shamayim. Instead, look at the Torah you learn and the mitzvos you perform as your own personal Har Sinai. When you sit down to learn or stand up to daven, you are not relying on hearsay or looking for magic; you are stepping directly into the reality of Hashem's presence.

Today, choose one mitzvah or one halacha and perform it not because you feel a sudden burst of inspiration, but simply because you stand before Hashem. Do it with the quiet, absolute certainty of someone who knows the truth in their very bones.