

הלכות יסודי התורה • פרק תשיעי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam teaches us a fundamental principle of our emunah: the absolute eternity of the Torah. We learn that the Torah given through Moshe Rabbeinu is perfect and unchanging, and that no prophet, whether Jew or non-Jew, can ever add a new mitzvah, take one away, or alter the received Mesorah. The Rambam guides us in how to identify a false prophet who seeks to undermine the Torah, and explains the severe punishment such an individual faces.

At the same time, the Rambam clarifies the true role of a kosher prophet, who comes only to urge the people to keep the Torah, not to start a new religion. We will learn about the unique authority of a prophet to issue temporary directives—even to temporarily suspend a mitzvah, as Eliyahu HaNavi did on Har HaCarmel—and the strict boundaries of this authority, which never applies to the worship of avodah zarah.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Eternity of the Torah and the Prohibition Against Adding or Diminishing Mitzvos

דבר ברור ומפורש בתורה

It is a matter clear and explicit in the Torah

שהיא מצוה עומדת לעולם ולעולמי עולמים

that it, the Torah, is a mitzvah standing forever and for eternity of eternities.

אין לה לא שנוי ולא גרעון ולא תוספת

There is to it no change, and no diminishment, and no addition,

שנאמר דברים יג א "את כל הדבר אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם אתו תשמרון לעשות לא תסר עָלָיו ולא תגרע מִמֶּנּוּ".

as it is said in Devarim 13:1, "All the matter which I command you, it you shall watch to do; you shall not add upon it, and you shall not diminish from it."

ונאמר דברים כט כח "והנגלת לנו ולבנינו עד עולם לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת".

And it is said in Devarim 29:28, "And the revealed things are for us and for our children until forever, to do all the words of this Torah."

הא למדת שכל דברי תורה מצוין אנו לעשותן עד עולם.

Behold, you have learned that regarding all the words of Torah, we are commanded to do them until forever.

וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם.

And so He says regarding many mitzvos, that it is "an eternal statute for your generations."

וְנֹאמַר דְּבָרִים ל' יב "לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הִיא".

And it is said in Devarim 30:12, "It is not in heaven."

הָא לְמִדַּת שְׂאִין נְבִיא רִשְׁאִי לְחִדֵּשׁ דְּבַר מַעֲתָה.

Behold, you have learned that no prophet is permitted to innovate a matter from now on.

לְפִיכָךְ אִם יַעֲמִד אִישׁ בֵּין מִן הָאֻמּוֹת בֵּין מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

Therefore, if there will arise a man, whether from the nations of the world whether from Israel,

וַיַּעֲשֶׂה אוֹת וּמוֹפֵת

and he performs a sign or a wonder

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁה' שְׁלַחוּ לְהוֹסִיף מִצְוָה אוֹ לְגַרֵעַ מִצְוָה

and says that Hashem sent him to add a mitzvah or to diminish a mitzvah,

אוֹ לְפָרֵשׁ בְּמִצְוָה מִן הַמִּצְוֹת פֶּרוּשׁ שֶׁלֹא שָׁמַעְנוּ מִמּוֹשֶׁה.

or to explain regarding a mitzvah from the mitzvos an explanation that we did not hear from Moshe Rabbeinu,

אוֹ שֶׁאָמַר שְׁאוֹתֵן הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁנִּצְטְווּ בָּהֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָן לְעוֹלָם וּלְדוֹרֵי דוֹרוֹת

or who said that those mitzvos that Israel were commanded in are not forever and for generations of generations,

אֶלָּא מִצְוֹת לְפִי זְמַן הָיוּ.

rather they were mitzvos only according to that time,

הֲרִי זֶה נְבִיא שֶׁקֶר

behold, this is a prophet of falsehood,

שֶׁהֲרִי בָּא לְהַכְחִישׁ נְבוּאָתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה.

for behold, he comes to deny the prophecy of Moshe.

וּמִיתָתוֹ בְּחֻנֵּק עַל שֶׁהִזִּיד לְדַבֵּר בִּשְׁם ה' אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּהוּ.

And his death is by strangulation for that he willfully sinned to speak in the name of Hashem which He did not command him,

שֶׁהוּא בָּרוּךְ שְׁמוֹ צִוָּה לְמֹשֶׁה שֶׁהַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם

for He, blessed is His name, commanded to Moshe that this mitzvah is for us and for our children until forever,

במדבר כג יט ו"לא איש אל ויכזב":

and as Bamidbar 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that He should lie."

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 · The Role of a Prophet and the Obligation to Obey His Secular Directives

אם כן למה נאמר בתורה

If so, why is it said in the Torah

"נביא אקים להם מקרב אחיהם כמוך".

"A prophet I will raise up for them from among their brethren like you?"

לא לעשות דת הוא בא

Not to establish a new religion does he come,

אלא לצוות על דברי התורה

but to command upon the words of the Torah

ולהזהיר העם שלא יעברו עליה.

and to warn the people that they should not transgress against it,

כמו שאמר האחרון שבהן

as that which was said by the last among them, the prophets,

"זכרו תורת משה עבדי".

"Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant."

וכן אם צונו בדברי הרשות

And so, if he commanded us in matters of permission, which are optional,

כגון לכו למקום פלוני או אל תלכו.

for example, "Go to such-and-such a place," or "Do not go";

עשו מלחמה היום או אל תעשו.

"Make war today," or "Do not make war";

בנו חומה זו או אל תבנה.

"Build this wall," or "Do not build it"—

מצוה לשמע לו.

it is a mitzvah to listen to him.

וְהַעֲוֹבֵר עַל דְּבָרָיו חַיֵּב מִיתָה בְּיַדֵּי שָׁמַיִם

And the one who transgresses against his words is liable for death by the hands of Heaven,

שְׁנֵאמַר

as it is said:

"וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמַע אֶל דְּבָרֵי אֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר בְּשֵׁמי אֲנֹכִי אֶדְרֹשׁ מֵעַמּוֹ":

"And it shall be, the man who will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it from him."

הִלְכָּה ג

Halacha 3 · Obeying a Prophet to Transgress Torah Commandments Temporarily

וְכֵן נִבְיָא שְׁעָבַר עַל דְּבָרֵי עֲצֻמוֹ

And so, a prophet who transgressed against his own words, by not doing what Hashem told him to do,

וְהַכּוֹבֵשׁ נְבוּאָתוֹ

and one who suppresses his prophecy, holding back the message and not delivering it to the people,

חַיֵּב מִיתָה בְּיַדֵּי שָׁמַיִם

is liable for death by the hand of Heaven,

וּבִשְׁלֹשָׁתָן נֶאֱמַר

and regarding the three of them—including the one who ignores a prophet's words—it is said in the Torah,

"אֲנֹכִי אֶדְרֹשׁ מֵעַמּוֹ".

"I will seek it from him."

וְכֵן אִם יֹאמַר לָנוּ הַנְּבִיא שְׁנוּדָע לָנוּ שֶׁהוּא נְבִיא

And so, if the prophet who is known to us to be a true prophet says to us

לְעַבֵּר עַל אַחַת מִכָּל מִצְוֹת הָאֲמֻרוֹת בַּתּוֹרָה

to transgress against one of all the mitzvos stated in the Torah,

אוּ עַל מִצְוֹת הַרְבֵּה בֵּין קִלּוֹת בֵּין חֲמֻרוֹת

or against many mitzvos, whether light or severe,

לְפִי שְׁעָה

as a temporary measure according to the hour,

מצוה לשמע לו.

it is a mitzvah to listen to him.

וכן למדנו מחכמים ראשונים מפיו השמועה

And so we learned from the Sages of the early generations from the mouth of the tradition:

בכל אם יאמר לך הנביא עבר על דברי תורה

In all matters, if the prophet says to you, "Transgress against the words of the Torah,"

כאליהו בהר הכרמל

like Eliyahu on Mount Carmel,

שמע לו

listen to him,

חוץ מעבודת כוכבים.

except for the worship of stars and idols, which we never listen to a prophet to perform.

והוא שיהיה הדבר לפי שעה.

And this is provided that the matter must be only a temporary measure according to the hour.

כגון אליהו בהר הכרמל שהקריב עולה בחוץ

For example, Eliyahu on Mount Carmel, who offered a burnt offering outside the Beis HaMikdash,

וירושלים נבחרת לכה

and Yerushalayim was already chosen for this service, making offering elsewhere forbidden,

והמקריב בחוץ חייב כרת.

and one who offers outside is liable for karet.

ומפני שהוא נביא מצוה לשמע לו

And because he is a prophet, it is a mitzvah to listen to him in this temporary instruction,

וגם בזה נאמר

and also regarding this it is said in the Torah,

"אליו תשמעו."

"To him you shall listen."

ואלו שאלו את אליהו ואמרו לו

And if they had asked Eliyahu and said to him,

הֵיכָרָה נִעְקָר מֶה שֶׁכָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה

"How can we uproot what is written in the Torah,

"כִּי תַעֲלֶה עֲלֵתֶיךָ בְּכָל מְקוֹם".

'Lest you offer your burnt offerings in every place'?"

הָיָה אוֹמֵר לֹא נֶאֱמַר אֶלָּא הַמִּקְרִיב בַּחוּץ לְעוֹלָם חַיֵּב כֶּרֶת

He would have said, "It was not said except that one who offers outside permanently is liable for karet,

כִּמוֹ שֶׁצִּוָּה מֹשֶׁה.

just as Moshe commanded.

אָבָל אֲנִי אֶקְרִיב הַיּוֹם בַּחוּץ בְּדִבְרֵי ה'

But I will offer today outside by the word of Hashem,

כְּדִי לְהַכְחִישׁ נְבִיאֵי הַפֶּעַל.

in order to disprove the prophets of the Baal."

וְעַל הַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֹּאת אִם צִוּ כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים לְעֵבֶר לְפִי שְׁעָה

And in this way, if all the prophets commanded to transgress a mitzvah temporarily according to the hour,

מִצְוָה לְשָׁמַע לָהֶם.

it is a mitzvah to listen to them.

וְאִם אָמְרוּ שֶׁהַדֶּבֶר נִעְקָר לְעוֹלָם

And if they said that the matter is uprooted forever,

מִיתָתוֹ בְּחֶנֶק

the false prophet's death is by strangulation,

שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה אָמְרָה

for the Torah said,

"לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם":

"For us and for our children until eternity."

וכן אם עקר דבר מדברים שלמדנו מפי השמועה

And so, if a prophet uprooted a matter from the matters that we learned from the mouth of the tradition,

או שאמר בדיו מדיני תורה

or if he said regarding a law from the laws of the Torah

שה' צוה לו שהדין כן הוא

that Hashem commanded him that the law is so,

והלכה כדברי פלוני

and that the halacha is like the words of so-and-so,

הרי זה נביא השקר ויחנק.

behold, this is a prophet of falsehood and he is strangled by the Beis Din.

אף על פי שעשה אות.

This is the law even though he performed a sign to verify his words,

שהרי בא להכחיש התורה שאמרה

for behold, he comes to deny the Torah which said,

"לא בשמים היא."

"It is not in heaven."

אבל לפי שעה שומעין לו בכל:

But for the hour, as a temporary ruling, we listen to him in everything he says, even to temporarily bypass a mitzvah.

במה דברים אמורים

In what cases are these words said? Only regarding

בשאר מצות.

the other mitzvos of the Torah.

אבל בעבודת כוכבים

But regarding worship of stars,

אין שומעין לו

we do not listen to him,

ואפלו לפי שעה.

and even if it is only for a temporary hour.

ואפלו עשה אותות ומופתים גדולים

And even if he performed great signs and wonders,

ואמר ש' צוהו

and said that Hashem commanded him

שתעבד עבודת כוכבים היום בלבד

that there be worshipped worship of stars today alone,

או בשעה זו בלבד

or in this hour alone,

הרי זה דבר סרה על ה'.

behold, this one has spoken perversion against Hashem.

ועל זה צוה הכתוב ואמר

And concerning this, the verse commanded and said:

"ובא האות והמופת"

"And if the sign and the wonder comes...

"לא תשמע אל דברי הנביא ההוא"

do not listen to the words of that prophet...

"כי דבר סרה על ה' אלהיכם".

for he spoke perversion against Hashem, your God."

שהרי בא להכחיש נבואתו של משה.

For behold, he comes to deny the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu, which is eternal.

ולפיכך נדע בודאי

And therefore, we know with certainty

שהוא נביא שקר

that he is a prophet of falsehood,

וְכָל מַה שֶּׁעָשָׂה

and all that he did

בְּלֵט וּבְשׁוּף עָשָׂה

he did with secret arts and sorcery,

וַיִּהְיֶה:

and he is strangled by the Beis Din as a false prophet.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by establishing that the Torah is an everlasting statute that can never be changed, meaning anyone who claims Hashem sent him to permanently alter a mitzvah is a false prophet liable to strangulation. The Rambam explains that while a prophet cannot change the Torah, we must obey his personal instructions or his temporary commands to suspend a mitzvah for a short duration, just as Bnei Yisrael obeyed Eliyahu HaNavi on Har HaCarmel. However, if a prophet claims that a law has been permanently nullified, or if he tries to use prophecy to decide a halachic dispute, he is a false prophet. Finally, the Rambam rules that we must never listen to a prophet who tells us to worship avodah zarah, even for a single hour, and anyone who makes such a claim is executed as a false prophet whose signs were merely sorcery.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The central foundation of our entire emunah is that the Torah is eternal. It is not a relic of history, nor is it subject to the changing winds of time. The Rambam teaches us that even if a prophet performs the most breathtaking miracles, if he claims that a mitzvah has been permanently changed or nullified, we pay him no attention. The Torah is "not in heaven" anymore; it was given to us as an everlasting inheritance. This means that the Torah we have today is the exact same blueprint for life that Moshe Rabbeinu received at Sinai, and it remains fully alive and binding in our modern world.

Sometimes, the yetzer hara whispers that the Torah needs to be "updated" to fit the times, or that certain mitzvos are too old-fashioned for our current lifestyle. This sugya reminds us that Hashem's wisdom is infinite and transcends all generations. When we perform a mitzvah, we are not just practicing an ancient ritual; we are connecting to an eternal, unchanging reality. Our commitment to Halacha cannot be shaken by the trends of society or the pressure to conform.

Today, when you perform a mitzvah, whether it is saying a brachah with kavana, putting on tefillin, or speaking gently to a family member, stop for five seconds beforehand. Remind yourself: "I am doing an act that is eternal. This mitzvah has never changed, and by doing it, I am binding my soul to the eternal Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu."