

הלכות יסודי התורה • פרק עשירי

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

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam teaches us how we are to identify and verify a true prophet of Hashem. We learn that a prophet does not need to perform supernatural wonders that alter the laws of nature, such as splitting the sea or reviving the dead, to prove his authenticity. Instead, his primary test lies in his ability to accurately predict future events with absolute precision.

We will also explore the fundamental differences between a true prophet of Hashem and common diviners or sorcerers. While the predictions of stargazers and dreamers are like chaff mixed with a little grain, the word of Hashem spoken through a prophet is pure grain, completely free of falsehood, serving to guide Klal Yisrael in all their needs.

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

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • Testing a Prophet by the Fulfillment of Future Predictions

כָּל נָבִיא שֶׁיֵּעָמֵד לָנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר שֶׁה' שְׁלָחוּ

Any prophet who arises for us and says that Hashem sent him

אִינוּ צָרִיךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹת כְּאוֹתוֹת מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ

is not required to perform a sign like one of the signs of Moshe our teacher,

אוּ כְּאוֹתוֹת אֱלִיָּהוּ וְאֵלִישָׁע שֵׁישׁ בָּהֶם שְׁנוֵי מִנְהֲגוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם.

or like the signs of Eliyahu and Elisha, which have in them a change of the natural custom of the world.

אֶלָּא הָאוֹת שֶׁלוֹ שֶׁיֹּאמֶר דְּבָרִים הַעֲתִידִים לִהְיוֹת בְּעוֹלָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ דְּבָרָיו

Rather, his sign is that he will say things destined to be in the world, and his words will be verified,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים יח כ"א "וְכִי תֹאמַר בְּלִבְּךָ אֵיכָה גִידַע אֶת הַדָּבָר" וְגו'.

as it is said in Devarim 18:21, "And if you say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which Hashem has not spoken?'" etc.

לְפִיכָה כְּשִׁיבֹא אָדָם הָרְאוּי לְנִבְיָאָה בְּמִלְאֲכוֹת הַשָּׁם

Therefore, when a man comes who is worthy of prophecy, in the service of Hashem,

וְלֹא יָבוֹא לְהוֹסִיף וְלֹא לְגַרֵעַ אֶלָּא לַעֲבֹד אֶת ה' בְּמִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה

and he does not come to add to and not to diminish from the mitzvos, rather to serve Hashem with the mitzvos of the Torah,

אין אומרין לו קרע לנו הים או תחיה מת וכיוצא באלו ואחר כך נאמין בך.

we do not say to him, "Split the sea for us," or "Revive the dead," and the like of these, "and after that we will believe in you."

אלא אומרים לו אם נביא אתה אמר דברים העתידים להיות

Rather, we say to him, "If you are a prophet, say things destined to be in the future,"

והוא אומר ואנו מחכים לראות היבואו דבריו אם לא יבואו.

and he says them, and we wait to see whether his words will come to pass or will not come to pass.

ואפילו נפל דבר קטן בידוע שהוא נביא שקר.

And even if a small matter fell through and did not happen, it is known that he is a prophet of falsehood.

ואם באו דבריו כלן יהיה בעינינו נאמן:

But if all of his words came to pass, he shall be trustworthy in our eyes.

הלכה ב

Halacha 2. Testing a Prophet and Establishing His Authenticity

ובודקין אותו פעמים הרבה.

And we test him many times to verify his predictions.

אם נמצאו דבריו נאמנים כלן

If all of his words are found to be trustworthy, with every single prediction coming to pass,

הרי זה נביא אמת.

behold, this one is a prophet of truth whom we are obligated to believe.

כמו שנאמר בשמואל

This is as it is said concerning Shmuel in the book of Shmuel Aleph, chapter 3, verse 20:

"וידע כל ישראל מן דן ועד באר שבע

"And all of Yisrael, from Dan and until Beer Sheva, knew

כי נאמן שמואל לנביא לה":

that Shmuel was established as a prophet to Hashem."

הלכה ג

Halacha 3. The Distinction Between True Prophecy and the Predictions of Sorcerers and Diviners

והלא המעוננים והקוסמים אומרים מה שעתיד להיות.

And behold, the diviners and the sorcerers say what is destined to be in the future, so how do we distinguish a true prophet from them?

ומה הפרש יש בין הנביא ובינם.

And what difference is there between the prophet and between them?

אֵלָּא שֶׁהַמְעוֹנְנִים וְהַקּוֹסְמִים וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן מְקַצֵּת דְּבָרֵיהֶם מִתְקַיֵּמִין וּמְקַצֵּתֵן אִין מִתְקַיֵּמִין.

But that the diviners and the sorcerers and the like of them, some of their words are fulfilled and some of them are not fulfilled,

כַּעֲנִין שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יִשְׁעִיָּה מִזֵּי יג "יַעֲמְדוּ נָא וַיּוֹשִׁיעֶךָ הַכְּרִי שָׁמַיִם חֲזִים בְּכּוֹכְבִּים מוֹדְעִים לְחֻדָּשִׁים מֵאֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ".

as the matter that is said in Yeshayahu 47:13, "Let stand now and save you the astrologers of heaven, the stargazers, who make known for the months from what will come upon you."

מֵאֲשֶׁר וְלֹא כָּל אֲשֶׁר.

The verse says "from what" will come, and not "all that" will come.

וְאִפְשָׁר שֶׁלֹּא יִתְקַיֵּם מִדְּבָרֵיהֶם כָּלֹּם אֵלָּא יִטְעוּ בְּכָל

And it is possible that not will be fulfilled from their words anything, but they will err in everything,

כַּעֲנִין שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יִשְׁעִיָּה מִדִּ כה "מִפֶּר אֲתוֹת בְּדִים וְקֹסְמִים יְהוֹלִל".

as the matter that is said in Yeshayahu 44:25, "He frustrates the omens of imposters, and diviners He drives mad."

אֲבָל הַנְּבִיא כָּל דְּבָרָיו קִיָּמִין

But the prophet, all his words are established,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מְלָכִים ב י י "כִּי לֹא יִפֹּל מִדְּבַר ה' אֶרֶץ".

as it is said in Melachim II 10:10, "for not will fall from the word of Hashem to the earth."

וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר יִרְמְיָה כג כח "הַנְּבִיא אֲשֶׁר אֲתוֹ הָלֹם יִסְפֹּר הָלֹם וְאֲשֶׁר דְּבָרֵי אֲתוֹ יְדַבֵּר דְּבָרֵי אֱמֶת מִה לְתֵבֶן אֶת הַכֹּר נָאִם ה'".

And so he says in Yirmeyahu 23:28, "The prophet who is with him a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who My word is with him, let him speak words of truth. What is to the chaff — the grain? says Hashem."

כְּלוֹמַר שֶׁדְּבָרֵי הַקּוֹסְמִים וְהַחֲלוֹמוֹת כְּתֵבֶן שֶׁנִּתְעָרַב בּוֹ מֵעֵט בֶּר

Meaning to say, that the words of the sorcerers and the dreams are like chaff that was mixed in it a little grain,

וְדְבַר ה' כְּבֶר שֶׁאִין בּוֹ תֵבֶן כָּלֵל.

and the word of Hashem is like grain that there is not in it chaff at all.

ובדבר הזה הכתוב הבטיח ואמר

And in this matter the verse promised and said

שאותן הדברים שמודיעין המעוננים והקוסמים לאמות ומכזבין

that those the things that make known the diviners and the sorcerers to the nations, and they lie and fail to predict accurately,

הנביא יודיע לכם דברי אמת

the prophet will make known to you words of truth,

ואין אתם צריכין למעונן וקוסם וכיוצא בו

and not you need a diviner or a sorcerer and the like of him,

שנאמר דברים יח י "לא ימצא בה מעביר בנו ובתו בֵּאֵשׁ" וגו'

as it is said in Devarim 18:10, "There shall not be found among you one who passes his son and his daughter through the fire," etc.,

דברים יח יד "כִּי הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה" וגו'.

and in Devarim 18:14, "For these nations, these," etc., who listen to diviners,

ואמר דברים יח טו "נביא מקרבך... מאחריך" וגו'.

and it says in Devarim 18:15, "A prophet from your midst, from your brothers," etc. Hashem will establish for you.

הא למדת שאין הנביא עומד לנו אלא להודיענו דברים העתידים להיות בעולם

Behold, you have learned that not the prophet stands for us except to make known to us things that are destined to be in the world,

משבע ורעב מלחמה ושלום וכיוצא בהן.

such as of plenty and famine, war and peace, and the like of them.

ואפלו צרכי יחיד מודיע לו.

And even the needs of an individual he makes known to him,

כשאול שאבדה לו אבדה והלה לנביא להודיעו מקומה.

like Shaul, when was lost to him a lost item, and he went to the prophet to make known to him its place.

וכיוצא באלו הדברים הוא שיאמר הנביא

And the like of these the things it is that will say the prophet,

לא שיעשה דת אחרת או יוסיף מצוה או יגרע:

not that he will make a religion another, or will add a mitzvah, or will subtract from the Torah.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 · Testing a Prophet on Positive Prophecies and Not on Prophecies of Retribution

דברי הפרענות שהנביא אומר

Regarding the words of retribution that the prophet says,

כגון שיאמר פלוני ימות

for example, that he says, "So-and-so will die,"

או שנה פלוגית רעב או מלחמה וכיוצא בדברים אלו

or, "In such-and-such a year there will be famine or war," and the like with these words,

אם לא עמדו דבריו אין בזה הכחשה לנבואתו.

if his words do not stand and the punishment does not come, there is not in this a refutation of his prophecy.

ואין אומרים הנה דבר ולא בא.

And we do not say, "Behold, he spoke and it did not come to pass, so he must be a false prophet."

שהקדוש ברוך הוא ארך אפים ורב חסד ונתם על הרעה

This is for the Holy One, Blessed is He, is slow to anger and abundant in kindness, and relents on the evil decree,

ואפשר שעשו תשובה ונסלח להם כאנשי נינוה.

and it is possible that they did teshuvah and it was forgiven to them, like the people of Nineveh,

או שתלה להם כחזקיהו.

or that He suspended the decree for them to be paid later, like He did for King Chizkiyah.

אבל אם הבטיח על טובה ואמר שיהיה כן וכך

But if he promised a good thing, and said that there will be so-and-so,

ולא באה הטובה שאמר בידוע שהוא נביא שקר.

and the good that he said did not come, it is known that he is a prophet of falsehood.

שכל דבר טובה שיגזר האל אפלו על תנאי אינו חוזר.

For every matter of good that God decrees, even if it was originally said on condition, He does not retract.

ולא מצוינו שחזר בדבר טובה אלא בחרבן ראשון

And we have not found that He retracted a matter of good except during the destruction of the First Temple,

כְּשֶׁהִבְטִיחַ לַצַּדִּיקִים שֶׁלֹּא יָמוּתוּ עִם הָרָשָׁעִים וְחָזַר בְּדִבְרָיו.

when He promised the righteous that they would not die with the wicked, and He retracted His words because they did not protest the sins of their generation.

וְזֶה מְפָרֵשׁ בְּמַסֶּכֶת שַׁבָּת.

And this is explained in the tractate of Shabbos.

הָא לְמִדַּת שְׂפָדֻכְרֵי הַטּוֹבָה בְּלִבְד יִפְחוּ הַנָּבִיא.

Behold, you have learned that in words of good alone will the prophet be tested.

הוּא שִׁירְמְיָהוּ אָמַר בְּתִשּׁוּבָתוֹ לְחֲנַנְיָה בֶן עֲזוּר

This is what Yirmeyahu said in his reply to Chananyah son of Azzur,

כְּשֶׁהָיָה יִרְמְיָה מְתַנַּבֵּא לְרָעָה וְחֲנַנְיָה לְטוֹבָה.

when Yirmeyah was prophesying for evil, warning of the destruction, and Chananyah was prophesying for good, claiming the vessels of the Beis HaMikdash would return.

אָמַר לוֹ לְחֲנַנְיָה אִם לֹא יַעֲמְדוּ דִּבְרֵי אֵין בָּזֶה רָאִיָּה שְׂאֲנִי נָבִיא שֶׁקֶר

He said to him, to Chananyah, "If my words do not stand, there is not in this proof that I am a prophet of falsehood, for Hashem may have relented from the evil,

אָבָל אִם לֹא יַעֲמְדוּ דִּבְרֵי יְיָ שְׂאֲתָה נָבִיא שֶׁקֶר.

but if your words do not stand, it will be known that you are a prophet of falsehood, for a good prophecy must always come to pass."

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר יִרְמְיָה כח ז "אֶךָ שִׁמְעוּ נָא אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה" וְגו'

As it is said in the book of Yirmeyah, chapter 28, verse 7, "But hear please this word etc."

הַנָּבִיא אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֵּר שְׁלוֹם בָּבֵא דְבַר הַנָּבִיא יוֹדֵעַ הַנָּבִיא אֲשֶׁר שְׁלָחוּ ה' בְּאֵמֶת:

And the verse concludes: "The prophet who will prophesy peace, when the word of the prophet comes, it will be known that the prophet is one whom Hashem sent in truth."

הַלָּכָה ה

Halacha 5· Believing a Prophet Based on Another Prophet and the Prohibition of Excessive Testing

נָבִיא שֶׁהֶעִיד לוֹ נָבִיא אַחֵר שֶׁהוּא נָבִיא

A prophet who testified for him another prophet that he is a prophet,

הֲרִי הוּא בְּחֻזְקַת נָבִיא

behold he is in the status of a prophet,

ואין זה השני צריך חקירה.

and this second one does not need investigation.

שהרי משה רבנו העיד ליהושע

For behold, Moshe our teacher testified for Yehoshua,

והאמינו בו כל ישראל קדם שיעשה אות.

and all of Yisrael believed in him before he performed a sign.

וכן לדורות.

And so for generations to come:

נביא שנודעה נבואתו

a prophet whose prophecy was known

והאמינו בדבריו פעם אחר פעם

and they believed in his words time after time,

או שהעיד לו נביא

or who testified for him a prophet,

והיה הולך בדרכי הנבואה

and he was going in the ways of the prophecy,

אסור לחשב אחרי ו להרהר בנבואתו שמה אינה אמת.

it is forbidden to suspect after him and to question his prophecy, lest it is not truth.

ואסור לנסותו יותר מדאי

And it is forbidden to test him more than enough,

ולא נהיה הולכים ומנסים לעולם

and we shall not be going and testing forever,

שנאמר דברים ו טז "לא תנסו את ה' אלהיכם כאשר נסיתם במסה"

as it is said in Devarim 6:16, "Do not test Hashem your God as you tested in Massah,"

שאמרו שמות יז ז "ה'יש ה' בקרבנו אם אין".

when they said in Shemos 17:7, "Is there Hashem in our midst or not?"

אלא מאחר שנודע שזה נביא

Rather, since it is known that this is a prophet,

יֵאֱמִינוּ וְיֵדְעוּ כִּי ה' בְּקִרְבָּם

they shall believe and they shall know that Hashem is in their midst,

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה רוֹדֵף וְלֹא יִחָשְׁבוּ אַחֲרָיו.

and they shall not question and they shall not suspect after him,

כַּעֲנֵן שְׂנֵאֱמַר יִחְזַקֵּאל ב' ה' "וְיֵדְעוּ כִּי נָבִיא הָיָה בְּתוֹכָם":

like the matter as it is said in Yechezkel 2:5, "And they shall know that a prophet was in their midst."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter establishes that a candidate for prophecy must be tested multiple times solely on the basis of his positive predictions, as any good decreed by Hashem is never nullified, whereas prophecies of retribution may not materialize if the people do teshuvah. While diviners and sorcerers only get some predictions right and often err completely, a true prophet's words must all come to fruition down to the smallest detail. Finally, the Rambam rules that if an established prophet attests to the authenticity of another individual, we accept the new prophet immediately without requiring any further testing or wonders, and it is strictly forbidden to doubt him.

לְמַעַשׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The Rambam teaches us a profound difference between the word of Hashem and the predictions of sorcerers and dreamers. The predictions of the world are like chaff mixed with a little grain, mostly empty, with a tiny bit of truth by chance. But the word of Hashem is pure grain, completely free of chaff. Every single word of goodness that Hashem decrees is absolute truth and will never fall to the ground.

This is not just a rule for identifying a prophet; it is a fundamental guide for our own emunah and how we speak to others. In our daily lives, we are often surrounded by the 'chaff' of worldly predictions, worries, and negative voices telling us what the future holds. But a Yid must anchor his mind only in the 'pure grain', the eternal, unchanging promises of Hashem's goodness, His Torah, and His love for us.

Furthermore, we see that while a decree of retribution can be overturned through teshuvah and Hashem's mercy, a promise of good is never nullified. Hashem's default desire is always to bestow goodness upon us. When we speak to our children, our spouses, or our friends, we must emulate this divine middah. Our words of encouragement, belief, and goodness should be solid, reliable, and absolute, while any words of rebuke should be soft, conditional, and quick to be forgiven.

Today, choose to tune out the 'chaff' of worldly anxieties and focus on the 'pure grain' of Hashem's goodness. When speaking to someone close to you, make a conscious effort to offer a word of pure, unconditional encouragement or praise, giving them a solid foundation of goodness to stand on.

