

# Laws of Repentance, Chapter 5 (Auto Translated)

English

Auto Translated

## Shiur Overview

### Summary of the Lecture: Laws of Repentance Chapter 5

#### Introduction — Structure of Chapters 5–10 in Laws of Repentance

**The Rambam's words:** After chapters 1–4 (the laws of repentance proper), the Rambam transitions to "ikarim hanigra'rim imah" — principles that are connected with repentance.

**Explanation:** Laws of Repentance is divided into three groups: (a) chapters 1–4 — the laws of repentance proper; (b) chapters 5–7 — the principle of "reshut" (free will); (c) chapters 8–10 — the principle of reward and punishment / "the good stored away for the righteous," the world of souls.

#### Insights and explanations:

1. **"Reshut" and not "bechira":** The Rambam never uses the word "bechira" — he specifically says "reshut." The word "reshut" doesn't just mean permission, but rather **dominion, mastery, ownership** — a person is the master over his own actions.

2. **Logical connection between the groups:** The end of chapter 4 (that even when repentance is difficult, one can still do repentance) naturally leads into chapter 5 — because repentance is only relevant if a person has reshut. And reward and punishment are only relevant if the person himself is the one who sins. Chapter 7 makes the connection explicit: "Since every person's reshut is given to him, a person should strive to do repentance."

3. **Structure of chapter 5 itself:** The chapter is divided into three parts: (a) the basic fact that a person has reshut (halacha 1–2); (b) against the "evil opinion" of "fools" who say otherwise (halacha 2–4); (c) two questions — (1) if a person conducts himself, what is the concept of God's providence? (2) God knows everything (yediah), how does this align with reshut? (halacha 5). It is emphasized that the second question is a question on **yediah**, not on reshut/bechira.

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#### Halacha 1 — "Reshut kol adam netunat lo"

**The Rambam's words:** "Reshut kol adam netunat lo. If he wishes to incline himself to the good path and be righteous — the reshut is in his hand. And if he wishes to incline himself to the evil path and be wicked — the reshut is in his hand. This is what Scripture states: 'Behold, man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.' Meaning, this species of man has become unique in the world, and there is no other species similar to him in this matter, that he himself, with his own knowledge and thought, knows good and evil and does whatever he desires, and there is no one who can prevent him from doing good or evil."

**Explanation:** Every person has reshut (mastery) over his actions. If he wants to be righteous — he can. If he wants to be

wicked — he can too. The human species is unique in the world — no other creature can, on its own, with its own knowledge and thought, know good and evil and do what it wants, with no one able to prevent it.

#### Insights and explanations:

1. **"Lehatot atzmo" — a process, not a single act:** The Rambam doesn't say that a person "does what he wants" simply. He says "lehatot atzmo lederech tovah velihyot tzaddik" — one doesn't become righteous with a single act. "Lehatot atzmo" can take a very long time, it's a process, a long path of inclining oneself each day a bit more in the right direction, through hilchot deot, hilchot teshuva, etc.

2. **Distinction between "ratzon" and "reshut":** The Rambam doesn't say "a person does what he wants." He says: **"If he wishes... the reshut is in his hand."** Ratzon is one thing, reshut is another. If a person **wants** — he has the **dominion/power** to carry it out. No one can stop him. But the Rambam doesn't speak about the ratzon itself — he speaks about the fact that when the ratzon exists, the path is open. A person can be conflicted — he wants and he doesn't want — but if he truly wants and carries it out, he can arrive.

3. **"Ha'adam" with the definite article — the species, not Adam Harishon:** The Rambam interprets "ha'adam" not as Adam Harishon the specific person, but as **the human species** — the type of creature called human. The rule is (as the Ibn Ezra notes): a proper noun cannot receive the definite article — one doesn't say "ha'Yitzchak" or "ha'Yoel." The definite article only comes on a collective noun, a type of thing. Therefore "ha'adam" means — the human as a species.

4. **"Ke'achad mimenu" — not like the angels, but unique in the world:** The Rambam interprets **not** "ke'achad mimenu" as "one of us" (i.e., of the angels). He interprets it that man is **the only one of his kind** — "echad ba'olam," unique among all species of living creatures in the lower world (olam tachat hashamayim, not olam hamalachim). No other creature has the power of independent knowledge of good and evil. "Ba'olam" doesn't mean in the entire creation, but in the olam hatachton — tachat hashamayim. In the olam hamalachim there is indeed "ke'achad mimenu" — there too are creatures with knowledge. But in the physical world, man is unique. [Note: "Domeh lamalachim" is not the topic here — the Rambam isn't speaking here about man being similar to angels (which is perhaps the topic in Yesodei HaTorah chapter 4 regarding the soul), but about the specific point that man is the only one who has reshut.]

5. **"Lada'at tov vara" — more than just knowing:** "Yodea" doesn't just mean that he knows what is good and what is bad. The Rambam adds: "Me'atzmo, beda'ato uvemachshavto yodea hatov vеха'ra **ve'oseh kol mah shehu chafetz.**" This means: man knows on his own, from his own power, and therefore does whatever he wants — the "da'at"

leads to the "oseh." He isn't one who is forced, but one who knows and chooses.

**6. God cannot, as it were, stop man:** The Rambam brings the continuation of the verse — "Pen yishlach yado velakach gam me'etz hachayim" — as proof that even God must, as it were, "protect" against what a person can do. If God could stop man, He wouldn't have needed to expel him from Gan Eden. With an animal, God doesn't have this problem — He can make the animal's will be different, or He stops it directly. But a **person is different** — he is the only one whom God cannot control regarding his actions, because the person himself is in control of them. This is the deeper meaning of "reshut netunat lo."

**7. The Rambam's approach with verses:** The Rambam has an obligation to bring a verse for everything. The verse isn't the source of the reasoning, but the Rambam brings it as support.

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**Halacha 1 (continued) — "Hu she'Yirmiyahu amar: Mipi Elyon lo tetze hara'ot vevatov"**

**The Rambam's words: "This is what Jeremiah said: 'From the mouth of the Most High neither evil nor good comes forth.' Meaning, the Creator does not decree upon man to be either good or evil. And since this is so... it turns out that the sinner has caused loss to himself. Therefore it is fitting for him to weep and lament over his deeds that he did to his soul and repaid it with evil. And this is what is written after it: 'Why should a living man complain, a man about his sins.'"**

**Explanation:** The Rambam brings a second verse (Eicha 3:38) as proof that God does not decree upon man to be good or evil. The sinner has ruined himself, and therefore it is fitting for him to weep over his own sins.

**Insights and explanations:**

**1. Two verses on two points:** The Rambam brings two separate verses: (a) "Behold, man has become like one of us" — on the **positive** point that a person has reshut; (b) "From the mouth of the Most High neither evil nor good comes forth" — on the **negative** point that no one decrees upon him and no one makes him go any particular path.

**2. "Hara'ot vevatov" doesn't mean events — it means human actions:** The verse "From the mouth of the Most High neither evil nor good comes forth" doesn't mean bad weather or good events in creation. The Rambam interprets that it speaks of evil and good of people — God has not taken away from man the reshut and kept it for Himself, but on the contrary, God has given man the reshut himself to become good or evil.

**3. Connection to Laws of Repentance chapters 1–4:** The Rambam previously (in Laws of Repentance) taught that anguish and weeping is a good thing for a penitent. Here he brings the foundation for this: if it were that God made man a sinner, he would perhaps need to accept the decree with love. But since he did it himself, it is fitting for him to weep and complain.

**4. "Ra'ui lo" here means differently than "ra'ui" later:** Here "ra'ui lo" means — it is fitting, it is good that he should do it. Later in halacha 2, "ra'ui" means — he has the potential/possibility.

**5. "Mah yit'onen adam chai gever al chata'av" — the Rambam's interpretation:** The Rambam interprets the verse thus: "Mah yit'onen adam chai" — about what can a person complain at all? Answer: "Gever al chata'av" — a person can complain about his sins that he himself chose to be evil. "Gever al chata'av" is not a reason why one shouldn't complain, but on the contrary — this is the **only** matter about which a person can complain. If it came from God, what does a person have to blame himself for? But now when we know that the person did it himself, there is indeed a place for complaint. Rashi in Eicha agrees with the Rambam's interpretation.

**6. Rashi's two interpretations:** Rashi has two interpretations of "Mah yit'onen adam chai." The first interpretation speaks of bad things that happen to a person — he should know that it comes from his own deeds. The second interpretation (davar acher) is the Rambam's interpretation. The Rambam didn't take Rashi's first interpretation, but the second.

**7. The Rambam's interpretation of the Gemara with the ministering angels:** The statement of Chazal "The day that the Holy One said 'Behold, man has become like one of us' — the ministering angels eulogized before Him" is interpreted not about a specific day (like Rashi), but that God grieves over most people — always, with every person.

**8. "Mah yit'onen" as an answer to all of Eicha:** The verse "Why should a living man complain, a man about his sins" is an answer to the entire Megillat Eicha. Until now we weep over the destruction — comes the answer: we ourselves sinned. A person should take responsibility and weep over his own sins.

**9. "Shehreshut adayin beyadenu" — a special insight:** The Rambam doesn't just say that a person had reshut, but that "hara'ot vevatov" — the reshut is **still** in our hands. This is an insight against what a person might think that after sinning he has already lost his free will and can no longer do repentance. No — even after sinning he still has full reshut.

**10. "Nachpesa derachenu venachkora" — for people who think they have no free will:** The verse "Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem" speaks to people who think they no longer have any paths, that they can no longer. The verse says: let us search our paths — because there is still a path.

**11. Precision in "ad Hashem" — the greatness of reshut after sinning:** "Ad Hashem" — not just "let us do a bit of repentance," but until God Himself. Even after sinning, a person still has such strong reshut that he can reach the highest level. Not just become a bit better, but "ad Hashem."

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**Halacha 2 — "Al ya'avur bemachshavtecha davar zeh she'omrim tipshei ha'umot verov golemei bnei Yisrael"**

**The Rambam's words: "Let this matter not pass through your mind that the fools of the nations and most of the unformed of Israel say, that the Holy One, blessed be He, decrees upon a person from the beginning of his creation to be righteous or wicked. This is not so, rather every single person is capable of being righteous like Moses our teacher or wicked like Jeroboam, or wise or foolish, or merciful or cruel, or stingy or generous, and so with all other character**

**traits. And there is no one who compels him or decrees upon him or draws him to either of the two paths, but he himself, of his own accord and with his own knowledge, inclines to whichever path he wishes."**

**Explanation:** The Rambam warns against the false belief that God determines from the beginning whether a person will be righteous or wicked. Every person has the potential to become a righteous person like Moses our teacher or a wicked person like Jeroboam, a wise person or a fool, merciful or cruel. No one forces him, no one decrees upon him, no one drags him — he himself inclines to whichever path he wants.

#### **Insights and explanations:**

**"Al ya'avov bemachshavtecha" — the Rambam's language for errors**

1. **"Al ya'avov bemachshavtecha" vs. "Al tomar":** Whenever the Rambam states something false, he doesn't say "al tomar" (you should not say), but "al ya'avov bemachshavtecha" (it should not pass through your mind). This is not a language of prohibition to think, but a language that means this is a type of thing that is **beyond thought** — because truth can be thought, but a lie cannot enter into thought. The Rambam means that this is so false that it is literally beyond the realm of thought. (Consistent with what was learned in chapter 1.)

**"Tipshei ha'umot verov golemei bnei Yisrael" — whom does the Rambam mean?**

2. **"Tipshei ha'umot" means the official doctrine of nations:** "Tipshei umot" apparently doesn't mean individual foolish people from the nations, but "umot hatipshim" — the official belief of certain religions. Specifically, the Rambam means the **Ash'ariyah** (a stream in Islam), who officially hold that man has no free will (denying reshut). They hold that God makes people righteous or wicked. They struggle with the question of reward and punishment, but their official position is thus. (The Rambam calls them elsewhere "Kahagarim.") Not the Christians — whose system is perhaps more similar to free will — but specifically the Ash'ariyah.

3. **"Golemei bnei Yisrael" — not-yet-finished Jews:** About Jews, the Rambam doesn't say "tipshim" but "golemim" — which means "not yet finished." A Jew has the potential to reach perfection, and when he doesn't arrive he remains a golem. "Golem" means not yet finished, not yet developed. The distinction between "tipshim" (by nations) and "golemim" (by Jews) is that by nations it is a fixed foolishness, by Jews it is a state of not-yet-completeness.

4. **"Rov golemei bnei Yisrael" — means most Jews:** The Rambam indeed held that most Jews are golemim — because most people are golemim, there are a few wise people and many golemim. One is a golem much longer, because when one is finished one ceases to be a golem. But every person has the possibility to become wise. The Rambam also held that people **chose** to be foolish and golemim — and since they chose to be foolish, they have wrong beliefs.

**"Ra'ui lo lihyot tzaddik keMoshe Rabbeinu o rasha keYarov'am"**

5. **"Ra'ui" doesn't mean reshut — it means possibility, potential:** "Ra'ui" means it is possible, it lies in his hands, he has the capabilities. He has the potential to become righteous or wicked.

6. **"Tzaddik keMoshe Rabbeinu" — not a prophet like Moses, but choosing good like Moses:** The Rambam doesn't mean that every person can become a prophet like Moses our teacher or a sage like Moses our teacher. He means that every person can **choose good** just as Moses our teacher did. Moses our teacher's prophecy perhaps came from God — but his righteousness he made himself. The point is: Moses our teacher made himself into Moses our teacher, Jeroboam made himself into Jeroboam. God did not make Moses our teacher become what he became.

7. **Free will in three categories — righteousness, wisdom, and character traits:** The Rambam includes in the list: righteous/wicked, wise/fool, merciful/cruel, stingy/generous, and all other character traits. Free will and reshut exist for everything: (a) righteousness and wickedness, (b) wisdom and foolishness, (c) character traits. "Wise or fool" doesn't mean one is born with a smart head — it means one can develop wisdom, one can acquire wisdom. A wise person is one who learns and knows the truth; a fool is an ignoramus who doesn't know the truth. This connects to the Eight Chapters where the Rambam speaks of "ma'alot sichliyot" — not innate intelligence, but developed wisdom.

8. **"Ra'ui" doesn't mean fifty-fifty:** The Rambam doesn't mean that every person is fifty-fifty. As he explains in Laws of Character Traits, there is a person who has a certain greater inclination toward levity (or other traits), but he still has the reshut to change himself. The main point is not that from a person's side he can start with a different type of nature — the point is: **with whom is the reshut?** With the person himself.

**"Ve'ei lo mi sheyichpehu velo gozer alav velo moshecho"**

9. **Three languages of negation — compulsion, decree, drawing:** The Rambam says three things: (a) no one compels him (kefi'ah), (b) no one decrees upon him (gezerah), (c) no one draws him (meshicha). "Moshecho" connects to Laws of Character Traits, where the Rambam speaks that sometimes a person has an attraction — but even the attraction, the person himself is responsible for it. No one drags you — you drag yourself. There is attraction, but there is no fixedness. A person cannot force himself (there is no compulsion from outside), but attraction exists — and even the attraction comes from "mida'ato, noteh" — the inclination creates an attraction, if he turns with such people, he can be drawn to such people.

10. **"Hu me'atzmo umida'ato" — two aspects:** "Me'atzmo" — from what is in him; "mida'ato" — from his own knowledge. A person can be drawn by his friends, but he also has free will over this, to want which friends he should befriend.

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**Halacha 2 (continued) — "Ve'ikar zeh hu ikar gadol vehu amud haTorah vehamitzvah"**

**The Rambam's words: "And this principle is a great principle and it is the pillar of the Torah and the commandment, as it says: 'See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil... and you shall choose life.'"**

**Explanation:** The principle of reshut is the foundation upon which the entire Torah and commandments stand — because without free will there is no relevance to any command, any reward and punishment, any repentance.

### Insights and explanations:

1. **Two types of "pillars" by the Rambam:** In Laws of Foundations of the Torah chapter 1, the Rambam writes "yesod hayesodot ve'amud hachochmot" — this is the pillar of wisdom, of knowledge of God. Here in Laws of Repentance he writes "amud haTorah vehamitzvah" — this is a **different type of pillar**. The principle of reshut is not the pillar of knowing the truth (wisdom), but the pillar of Torah and commandments — the practical life of a Jew. Because without this principle of reshut, a person can never begin to do repentance or keep Torah and commandments, because he will think he is bad because God made him that way.

2. **"Natati" — not just "before you" but "given":** The word "natati" doesn't just mean "I place before you," but "I have **given** you." All reshut belongs to God, but He has transferred it to man. It is built into creation that man should have reshut over himself.

3. **"Kol sheyachpotz ha'adam la'asoto mima'aseh bnei adam oseh" — a limitation of free will:** The Rambam limits: everything that is "within the realm of human action" a person can do — whether good or evil. But not things that are not human (like "dancing to the sky"). Free will means what people can do. If we see a person who did it, it's clear that it's a human thing, and no person is exempt from this.

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### Halacha 3 — "Mi yiten vehaya levavam zeh lahem" and why this is the pillar of Torah

**The Rambam's words:** The Rambam brings the verse "Would that they had such a heart to fear Me all the days" as proof that "the Creator does not compel people nor decree upon them to do good or evil, but everything is given over to them." Then: "If God were to decree upon man to be righteous or wicked, or if there were something that draws man by necessity from his birth to any of the paths... as the fools, astrologers, imagine in their hearts — how could God have commanded through the prophets 'do this and don't do that, improve your ways and don't follow your wickedness'... and what place would there be for the entire Torah?"

**Explanation:** After the giving of the Torah, God says "if only" Jews would always have the fear of Heaven they had at the giving of the Torah. This "if only" proves that God does not compel. Then the Rambam brings the logical argument: if God were to decree, or man's nature/mazal were to force him — there would be no place for prophets, for ethics, for Torah and commandments at all.

### Insights and explanations:

1. **Why do we need the second verse "mi yiten"?** A person might think that "See, I am setting before you" only applies **before** the giving of the Torah — but after the giving of the Torah, when God has already given the Torah, He is indeed decreeing upon us to keep it. Therefore the Rambam brings the verse "mi yiten" which is **after** the giving of the Torah — to prove that even after giving the Torah, God did not force us to keep it. He gave the Torah, but with the Torah still the reshut for us to decide.

2. **"Mi yiten" — God says "if only":** How can God say "if only"? If we believed that everything is in God's hands, there is no place for "if only." The "if only" proves that God has given

over the reshut to man. (There is a Gemara and a Midrash about the word "mi yiten" — that it means "if only" — and all commentators, Rambam, Ibn Ezra, learn this way.)

3. **Two types of errors — two types of enemies of free will:** The Rambam fights here against **two** separate systems:

- **(a) "God decrees upon man"** — certain religious systems (or certain beliefs even among Jews) that say that God Himself determines whether a person will be righteous or wicked.

- **(b) "Fools, astrologers"** — people who believe that the constellations/stars determine man's nature. This is perhaps more relevant to Jews, because Jews don't believe that God decrees evil, but they can fall into the error that mazal determines.

4. **"Toladto" means nature/mazal, not creation:** The Rambam's word "toladto" doesn't mean "techilat beri'ato" (how God created him), but his nature when he was born — that is, the mazal under which he was born. This is the connection to "astrologers" — they think that the stars determine man's nature, and nature determines whether he becomes righteous or wicked.

5. **One of the main reasons why the Rambam is against astrologers:** One of the greatest reasons why the Rambam fought so strongly against astrology is **specifically because of this** — because astrology says one can see in the stars whether a person will be righteous or wicked, and this takes away free will, which is the pillar of Torah and commandments.

6. **If not free will — prophecy, Torah, ethics fall away:** The Rambam's question: how could God have even sent prophets to say "improve your ways and deeds"? How is ethics relevant? What place did "the entire Torah" have? If man is already decreed to be that way — "kevar nigzar alav" or "toladto timshechenu ledavar she'i efshar lo lehipared mimenu" — everything is in vain.

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### Halacha 4 — Three proofs from Torah for free will, and the answer to "Kol asher chafetz Hashem asah"

**The Rambam's words:** The Rambam brings several proofs for free will: (1) from the verse "See, I am setting before you"; (2) from the entire concept of Torah — that there are commandments and warnings, one must be able to do or not do; (3) from the justice claim — "By what law and what justice would we punish the wicked or reward the righteous if it was decreed upon him?" — "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" Then the Rambam brings the question: "How can man do whatever he desires... when nothing happens in the world without the permission of its Master?" with the verse "Whatever Hashem desires, He does in heaven and on earth." **The answer:** "Know that the answer is that everything is done by His will, may He be exalted, even though our actions are given over to us... Just as the Creator desired that fire and air should rise upward... so He desired that man should have his reshut in his hand and all his actions given over to him, and there should be no one compelling him or drawing him, but he himself, of his own accord and with the knowledge that God gave him, does whatever a person is capable of doing." Then: "Therefore we judge him according

**to his deeds, if he did good we do good to him, and if he did evil we do evil to him." With the verses "From your hands this came to you" (Isaiah) and "They also chose their own ways" (Isaiah).**

**Explanation:** The Rambam answers the question of how free will aligns with God's omnipotence: God Himself wanted man to have reshut. Just as He built into fire the nature to go up, so He built into man the nature of free will. Therefore reward and punishment are just — because the person himself is responsible for his actions.

### Insights and explanations:

#### Three separate proofs from Torah — not two

1. **Three proofs:** The Rambam brings three proofs from Torah for free will, not just two:

- **Proof 1:** The verse "See, I am setting before you" — God gives it over into man's hands, thus good and evil (reward and punishment) are "because of you, not because of Me."

- **Proof 2:** From the entire concept of Torah — not from specific verses, but from the very idea: if there are commandments and warnings, man must be able to do or not do. "Not just the prophets, because the prophets give ethics based on the Torah, but also the entire Torah itself" — if there is a Torah with commandments, free will must exist.

- **Proof 3:** The justice claim — "By what law and what justice would we punish the wicked or reward the righteous if it was decreed upon him?" — "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" — it would be unjust to punish a person for something he is not responsible for.

Proof 2 is not a proof in itself — it's a proof from what already stands in the Torah. Proof 3 has two parts: (a) that without free will the Torah doesn't make sense, (b) that without free will there would be no justice.

**The interpretation of "Kol asher chafetz Hashem asah bashamayim uva'aretz" — two approaches**

#### 2. Two possible interpretations of the verse:

- **Interpretation 1 (simple):** God can do whatever He wants — He has omnipotence in heaven and on earth.

- **Interpretation 2 (the Rambam's interpretation):** Everything that happens in heaven and on earth — all actions of heaven and earth — are "chefetz Hashem." Not that God can do what He wants, but that everything that exists is His will. "Aretz" also means the people who are "in control of the earth" — and their free will is also chefetz Hashem.

The Rambam's answer relies on interpretation 2: "Know that the answer is that everything is done by His will, may He be exalted" — everything, including man's free will, is chefetz Hashem. The verse is not a question on free will — it is **proof for** free will, because free will itself is chefetz Hashem.

**Free will as "teva ha'adam" — the parable of fire and air**

3. **Free will is the "nature" of man:** The Rambam's answer is that free will is the "nature" of man, just as going up is the nature of fire. The Rambam calls this a "minhag shechafetz bo" — every creature has its nature that God built in:

- **Fire** has a nature to go up — it has no free will, it cannot decide tomorrow to go differently.

- **A person** has a different type of nature — he can "sometimes go up, sometimes down, according to his will." But "the entire ability, the entire nature, is a nature of man."

- The difference between fire and man is not that one has a nature and the other doesn't — both have a nature. But man's nature is a different type: he has a "free power."

God "made the nature of fire, but now the nature of fire makes it go up, and not God makes it." Just so: "God doesn't want people to act directly, He wants people to have their free will."

**[Digression: The Rambam's approach to nature — against popular understanding]**

4. **The Rambam's general approach to nature:** Most people don't understand the Rambam's approach. They think that "if there is nature there is no God, and God can only be salvation of God in the blink of an eye, miracles all the time." The Rambam doesn't hold this way. He holds that there is nature, and God made the nature. "God makes there to be a nature of fire, but He doesn't make each piece of fire go up. He makes fire have such a nature that it goes up." The same principle applies to man: God made man's nature of free will, but He doesn't make each particular choice directly.

**Reward and punishment as part of nature — an insight in the "therefore"**

5. **Reward and punishment is not just fair — it's part of nature:** In the "therefore we judge him according to his deeds" lies an insight:

- **Simple interpretation:** Because he has free will, it is **fair** (just) to give reward and punishment.

- **The insight:** Reward and punishment is not just fair — it's **also part of nature**. Just as the sphere "revolves

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- **Simple interpretation:** Because he has free will, it is **fair** (just) to give reward and punishment.

- **The insight:** Reward and punishment is not just fair — it's **also part of nature**. Just as the sphere "revolves and goes" and brings with it all sorts of consequences, so the nature of free will brings with it that "good brings good to him, evil brings evil to him." This is built into the nature of creation. If a person were compelled, there would be no fairness in giving reward and punishment. But here there is more than that — not only is it fair, but it actually comes out of this. The nature of free will brings with it that good brings good and evil brings evil — "it's all part of nature."

6. **The language "mativin lo / meri'in lo" — nature, not direct providence?** The language "if he did good mativin lo, and if he did evil meri'in lo" can be interpreted that "nature does good to him, not just God does good to him." This aligns with the principle that reward and punishment is built into the nature of creation — not like a system that says reward and punishment is a miracle.

**"Miyedechem hayetah zot lachem" and "Gam hemah bacharu bedarcheihem"**

#### 7. The verses from Isaiah as proof:

- **"Miyedechem hayetah zot lachem"** — the punishment that happened to you came from your own hands. "The chooser chooses both the evil deed and the evil consequence" — when one chooses evil, one also chooses the result.

- "**Gam hemah bacharu bedarcheihem**" — people themselves chose their ways, and whatever result came from their ways was part of their choice.

[Digression: The duplication of reward and punishment — Parashat Bechukotai and here]

8. **Why does the Rambam repeat reward and punishment?** The Rambam already mentioned earlier (in halacha 2–3, regarding Parashat Bechukotai) that because there is free will there is reward and punishment. Why does he repeat this here in halacha 4? The answer: Earlier he said that free will makes reward and punishment **fair** (just). Here he adds a deeper point: reward and punishment is not just fair — it's **part of the nature** of creation, built into the same system as all other natural laws.

[Digression: Rabbeinu Yonah — "**Semach bachur beyaldutecha**" ]

9. **Rabbeinu Yonah's commentary on "**Semach bachur beyaldutecha**" (Kohelet 11:9):** Rabbeinu Yonah brings the verse "Rejoice, young man, in your youth and walk in the ways of your heart... for on all these God will bring you to judgment" — the verse means: you have the power to choose, you can walk in the ways of your heart, but you should know that for everything there will come a judgment, and the results are a consequence of your choices.

- "**Semach bachur**" — **not a command but a statement:** The Gemara asks a well-known question — how can Solomon say "rejoice, young man" when he also says "remember your Creator in the days of your youth"? The answer: "**Semach bachur**" is not a mitzvah or command, but a statement — you **can** rejoice, you **can** walk in the ways of your heart, because a young man still has full free will. A young man means he still has free will — he is not yet "stuck" in his ways like an older person who has already made many choices and can hardly change.

- **The point:** Because you are a young man and you have free will, you must know that this doesn't remove the judgment — on the contrary, the judgment is according to what you do. Make sure that "the ways of your heart" are on a good level.

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#### Halacha 5 — Knowledge of God and free will

**The Rambam's words: "Perhaps you will say: But doesn't the Holy One, blessed be He, know everything that will be before it happens — did He know that this person would be righteous or wicked, or did He not know? If He knew that he would be righteous — it is impossible that he not be righteous, and if you say that He knew he would be righteous but it is possible that he be wicked — then He did not know the matter with certainty." The Rambam's answer: "Know that the answer to this question is longer than the earth in measure and broader than the sea, and many great principles and lofty mountains depend on it... We have already explained in chapter 2 of Laws of Foundations of the Torah that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not know with knowledge that is outside of Him like people, who are separate from their knowledge, but He, may His name be blessed, and His knowledge are one, and human knowledge cannot grasp this matter with certainty... And just as man has no power to grasp and find the truth of the Creator, as it says 'for man shall not see Me and**

**live'... so man has no power to grasp and find the knowledge of the Creator... This is what the prophet said: 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways'... It is known without doubt that man's actions are in man's hand, and the Holy One, blessed be He, does not draw him nor decree upon him to do thus... and this is the principle upon which all the words of the prophets depend."**

**Explanation:** The Rambam poses the well-known problem of prior knowledge and free will: if God knows everything before it happens, how can a person have free will? Two sides: (a) if He knows that the person will be righteous — it is impossible that he not be righteous, and then there is no free will; (b) if we say He knows but it is possible otherwise — then He doesn't know, this is not knowledge. The Rambam's answer is that God's knowledge is not like our knowledge — "He and His knowledge are one" — and a person cannot understand what this means, but free will remains certain.

#### Insights and explanations:

**The problem is not just "God knows" — the problem is "there already exists knowledge"**

1. **The essential difficulty:** The problem is not just that God is a "knower" — the problem is that **there already exists knowledge**, a fact that already exists. God is "merely" the one who knows everything — but the essential difficulty is that if there already exists knowledge, how can man go against it? One could incidentally ask the same question without God — if it were possible to know the future, that too would be a problem. But without God one would answer that one cannot know the future — it's a law of nature that one cannot. But God is an exception to natural law, and He must know everything before it happens.

**The Rambam's addition: "Yodea kodem sheyihyeh"**

2. **A new element:** In Yesodei HaTorah chapter 2 it already stated that God is "yodea et hakol, hu hayodea atzmo hu hayadu'a." But **here the Rambam adds** that He is "yodea **kodem sheyihyeh**" — He knows everything **before** it happens. This is the new element that makes the question sharper.

**The depth is knowledge of God — not a contradiction**

3. **What is the "depth" — not a contradiction, but knowledge of God:** An important insight that "people don't grasp": People think that the Rambam says there is a **contradiction** between knowledge and free will, and the depth is that one must live with a contradiction. **This is not correct.** The Rambam asks a **question** — how can God know? — but he doesn't say there is a contradiction. **The true depth is knowledge of God itself** — how God knows, what "knowledge" means by God. "How many great principles" — one must understand in general what "God" means, what "knowledge" means. When one understands the depth of the matter of knowledge of God, **the question falls away.** The Rambam goes to explain this "on the tip of a fork" — but he says one should not think one understands it completely.

**The foundation: "Hu veda'ato echad"**

4. **God's knowledge is not like our knowledge:** When a person knows something, his knowledge is something **outside of him** — he wasn't born with the knowledge, he acquired knowledge, "hem veda'atam shenayim." But God's knowledge is not that type of knowledge — "hu veda'ato echad." It's not that God "became smarter" or "got more knowledge." His

knowledge is part of His essence. In Yesodei HaTorah it already stated that a person cannot understand God's essence — "kal vachomer" he cannot understand God's knowledge, because the knowledge **is** God. "There is no power in the mouth to say it nor in the heart of man to know it with certainty."

**The verse "Ki lo machshevotai machshevot Eichem"**

5. **"Ki lo yir'ani ha'adam vachai" — the essence of the Creator:** "For man shall not see Me and live" surely cannot mean seeing God physically, because God has no body. Rather it means that a person cannot understand the essence of the Creator. And if His knowledge is the same thing as He is — "hu veda'ato echad" — then if one cannot understand God, one also cannot understand His knowledge.

**The key insight: You know nothing about what you mean when you say "God knows"**

6. **The central claim:** When you ask "if God knows, how can there be free will?" — you must first understand what you mean by "God knows." You don't know at all what "knowledge of God" means! When you say "God knows," you have no idea what you're talking about — because His knowledge is part of His essence, and you don't understand His essence.

**Therefore:** Leave aside the topic of knowledge of God — you cannot understand it. But **the fact is** — God knows. "I know that He knows, but the way He knows, what knowledge means regarding God — is the same meaning as what it means to **be** God." You don't understand it — even an angel, even Moses our teacher — cannot fully understand what it means. But this need not disturb free will, because the problem only comes from a simple understanding of "knowledge."

**Free will is certain**

7. **"Noda velo safek shema'aseh ha'adam beyad ha'adam":** The Rambam repeats with strength: we know without any doubt that man's actions are in man's hand. God does not draw him to a certain side, and does not decree upon him. **Free will is certain** — and the complication of knowledge of God need not touch this, because one doesn't understand what knowledge of God means in a simple way that would be a contradiction to free will.

**Two sources for free will: Torah/prophets and words of wisdom**

8. **The distinction between "kabbalat hada'at" and "ra'ayot berurot midivrei chochmah":** The Rambam makes an important distinction — free will is not just a belief-

matter that one accepts from verses. It is also an intellectual matter — "ra'ayot berurot midivrei chochmah" — every person can see with his own intellect that he has reshut, that he is a creature that has natural free will. This is something that "ko'ach adam lehasi'gah" — a person can grasp this with intellect alone.

9. **The contrast with knowledge of God:** Ostensibly a person will argue: "But I have a verse that God knows everything — that's also true!" The Rambam's answer is: yes, God's knowledge is true, but these are "deep things" — "ein ko'ach adam lehasi'gah" — you will understand it when God gives you to understand. But free will — this is clear and simple, "midivrei hachochmah," everyone can see it. The practical difference: when it comes to a contradiction between knowledge of God and free will, a person should not discard what he knows clearly (free will) because of what he cannot understand (knowledge of God).

10. **"Vezev ikar shekol divrei hanevi'im talui bo" — God Himself says this:** When the Rambam says "kol divrei hanevi'im talui bo," he doesn't just mean that prophets said this — but that **God Himself**, through the prophets, confirms that a person is judged according to his deeds. Therefore, a person should not say "I am a greater believer in knowledge of God than the prophet" — the prophet, who speaks in the name of God, says that one judges a person according to his deeds. If you say "but God has knowledge, therefore there is no free will," you are not more believing than the prophet — on the contrary, you go against what God Himself said through the prophets.

11. **The Rambam presents "both things" — but with a hierarchy:** The Rambam presents both truths — knowledge of God is true, and free will is true — but he makes a clear distinction in the level of knowledge: free will is "ra'ayot berurot," clear and accessible; knowledge of God is "ein ko'ach adam lehasi'gah." A person must hold to what he knows clearly, and not discard it because of what he cannot understand. This is the Rambam's practical advice: "reshut netunat lo" — this is the principle upon which all the words of the prophets depend.

[Note: Chovot Halevavot]

12. **Comparison with Chovot Halevavot:** The Rambam's approach is compared with what is stated in Chovot Halevavot, where it also states that God knows everything — but there it is brought "just the opposite" (that is, as proof of God's greatness, not as a question on free will).

## Full Transcript

### Laws of Repentance Chapter 5 — Free Will is Given to Every Person

**Introduction: Structure of Laws of Repentance Chapters 5-10**

**Speaker 1:**

Gentlemen, we are going to learn Laws of Repentance Chapter 5. So until now we have learned Laws of Repentance. Now we are going to begin learning two principles in the Rambam, and we are going to begin learning what is called "ikkarim haniggarim imah" (principles that are drawn along with it), certain principles, and therefore he explicitly calls it an ikkar

(fundamental principle), which we are going to discuss. It is certain that he speaks of this. Perhaps there is another principle. I think that there are essentially two principles that are niggarim imah (drawn along with it), the principle called reshut (free will), which people like to call bechira (choice), but I have not found that the Rambam says the word bechira, the Rambam says reshut, and the second principle is the principle of reward and punishment. Very good.

So the Rambam told us in the last chapter that there are things that make it very difficult for a person to do teshuva (repentance), but he concluded that even though it is difficult, one can still do teshuva. So this leads very well into the

principle we want to bring out, that in order to speak at all about teshuva, and teshuva is connected with the matter of reward and punishment, reward and punishment is only relevant if a person is the one who sins, if it lies in his hands the reshut to sin. If not, if a person did not have the reshut — as Reb Yitzchak said that the Rambam does not say the word bechira, but reshut — if the person did not have the reshut to sin, the punishment would not come to him. He goes into the principle that a person has the reshut, the power is in a person to sin or not to sin, and according to this there is reward and punishment.

The Rambam in Chapter 7, that is, here we said there are two principles, that is from Chapter 5 to 7 speaks about the topic of reshut, and in Chapter 7 he brings out: **"Hoil vereshut kol adam netuna lo, yishtadel adam la'asot teshuva"** (Since free will is given to every person, a person should strive to do teshuva). He makes the connection, this is the connection that he made, but he returns to the topic that one should do teshuva because of this.

After that, Chapters 8, 9, 10, these are three chapters that speak of the next principle, which is "hatova hatzefuna livnei adam" (the good that is hidden for people), which is the good that comes to the righteous. This is also, once we speak about reward and punishment, he goes to the greater topic of eternal reward and punishment, of the world of souls. He says the essential thing, just as in Laws of Repentance, he begins from the principle, from the foundation, afterwards he goes up to all the ways, details that can come up. Here it is also so, this is the foundation. The principle called reshut netuna lo (free will is given to him), and he brings out the branches that come out from this.

Now, there are three groups in Laws of Repentance, more or less. There is the group of Laws of Repentance Chapters 1 to 4, there is the group of reshut netuna lo Chapters 5 to 7, and there is the group of repentance and crying out for the righteous which is Chapters 8 to 10.

### Structure of Chapter 5

#### Speaker 1:

So the Rambam says, and in this chapter, if I can see, it is divided into three parts, let's say. The first thing the Rambam says is the essential fact. The essential fact that a person has reshut. Reshut, by the way, we say the word reshut, but the meaning of the word reshut means dominion, yes? Reshut doesn't mean permission, reshut means rule, dominion. The person is his own master. Mastery, yes. The person's actions belong to him. That is the thing. He goes through that it is so, and he goes against the other side why one would think otherwise, from the side of the thought that people think otherwise and that it is not correct.

Afterwards he goes into two questions that can be asked about this. He asks, he says people say, he doesn't say just randomly, he doesn't ask a question, he says, there is a reshut, a de'a ra'a (bad opinion) that fools say. Yes, he says fools say otherwise, and we will see exactly what they say and why they say otherwise. Afterwards he says two questions. One is, seemingly if a person conducts himself, why does Hashem need to conduct? One question. The second question is, seemingly Hashem knows, so how can it be that Hashem knows? The question he asks is the question on knowledge, not on the bechira, what we call bechira, not on the reshut. We will see in the two questions.

This is more or less the structure of the chapter, so we should know clearly what is going on. Okay.

### Halacha 1: Free Will is Given to Every Person

#### Speaker 1:

The Rambam says a very beautiful chapter, deep matters, let's learn it. The Rambam says, just as we learned in the beginning of Foundations of Torah, the Rambam was a great expert in saying things that are one hundred percent true every word, if one would stand truthfully, one would need to learn the Rambam much deeper, but we will be able to try to say all the words that he says to know what he stands for, which is already a great thing.

**"Reshut kol adam netuna lo"** (Free will is given to every person), the reshut over every person was given to him. That is, the reshut over a child or over a slave was given to the master. The reshut of the person lies with him himself. **"Im ratza lehatot atzmo lederech tova velehiyot tzaddik"** (If he wants to incline himself to a good path and to be righteous), if the person wants to change himself and move himself to a good path and become a tzaddik, **"hareshut beyado"** (the reshut is in his hand), the reshut lies in his hand, he can become a tzaddik, they let him. **"Ve'im ratza lehatot atzmo lederech ra'a velehiyot rasha"** (And if he wants to incline himself to an evil path and to be wicked), but if a person wants, he decides that he wants to be noteh (inclined), he wants to move himself to an evil path and wants to become a rasha (wicked person), **"hareshut beyado"** (the reshut is in his hand), he also has reshut in his hand.

#### Precision in the Rambam's Language: "Lehatot Atzmo" — A Process, Not One Action

#### Speaker 1:

One must immediately be precise, the Rambam doesn't say that a person can do what he wants. He says that if he wants to become a tzaddik — a tzaddik is a type of person — he must be noteh (inclined), he bends himself to the path, how? Through all the ways of Laws of Character Traits, of Laws of Repentance, and it is a fact he is a tzaddik. One doesn't become a tzaddik with one action, but "lehatot atzmo" (to incline himself) can last very long. He doesn't say how long, it could be that the "lehatot atzmo" is a long, long process. But it lies in a ratzon (will), to move oneself, every day to be a bit more noteh in the direction of being a tzaddik.

#### Precision: Distinction Between "Ratzen" and "Reshut"

#### Speaker 1:

"Im ratza" (if he wants) — ratzen is not the reshut. If he wants, he has the dominion to be able to do. The Rambam doesn't say that a person wants what he wants. If he wants, he can do it. "Im ratza."

#### Speaker 2:

I need to translate again what you mean to say.

#### Speaker 1:

I'm saying, the Rambam doesn't say that a person does what he wants. The Rambam says that if he wants, he can. That is, there is sometimes that a person is conflicted, he wants but he doesn't want. If he wants and he actually does it, he carries it out, he can arrive at the path of being a tzaddik. I'm just saying that the reshut is not the same thing as ratzen. Let's be precise again in the language. It doesn't say "ha'adam oseh ma sheyirtze" (the person does what he wants). It says that the

person has a reshut that if he wants to be a tzaddik, no one can stop him. And he goes so not later. If he wants to be a rasha, he can become a rasha.

**The Verse: "Behold, Man Has Become Like One of Us, Knowing Good and Evil"**

**Speaker 1:**

The Rambam is the resolution of all the Torah. He is going to take here a verse in the Torah. This is what is written in the Torah, "**Hen ha'adam haya ke'echad mimenu lada'at tov vara**" (Behold, man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil), by the story of Adam Harishon in Gan Eden, it says there that after the person ate from the Tree of Knowledge, Hashem says that the person is now like one of the angels? "Hen ha'adam haya ke'echad mimenu." The Rambam doesn't go into who is the "mimenu," so we can skip it. He is like one of those who are above in Gan Eden, to what? "Lada'at tov vara" (to know good and evil).

Yes. That is, the Rambam says so: "**Hamin hazeh shel adam haya echad ba'olam**" (This species of man was unique in the world). So, first of all, "ha'adam" doesn't mean Adam Harishon, the specific person, but "ha'adam." Before it says "ha'adam." There is a rule that "adam" has two meanings. There is "adam" the proper name, the name of Adam Harishon, and "adam" also means the human species. And there is a rule, I think the Ibn Ezra notes it there, there is a rule that a proper name, a person's name, cannot receive the definite article. One doesn't say "haYitzchak" or "haYoel." It doesn't mean "the Yitzchak." Yitzchak is he. The definite article can only be on a collective noun, on a thing, on a type of thing. Therefore it says "ha'adam," it doesn't mean Adam Harishon, it means the type of thing, the person, the type of thing called person, he is what?

That is, "**Hamin hazeh shel adam haya echad ba'olam**" (This species of man was unique in the world). "Ha'adam... ke'echad mimenu" is unique in the way, "**ve'ein lo min sheni domeh lo bazeh ha'inyan**" (and there is no second species similar to him in this matter), there is no other species in the world, there is no other species of living creature, "**sheyihye hu me'atzmo uveda'ato uvemachshavto yode'a hatov vеха'ra ve'oseh kol ma shehu chafetz**" (that it should be that he himself, with his knowledge and with his thought, knows the good and the evil and does all that he desires). The person, the human species, is the only species in the world that me'atzmo (of himself), with his knowledge and with his thought, from his own reshut, from his own power, with his own knowledge and thought, can know the good or the evil, or knows the good and the evil, and can do what he wants, "ve'oseh kol ma shehu chafetz" (and does all that he desires).

**Discussion: "Ve'oseh Kol Ma Shehu Chafetz" — The Person Can Do What He Wants**

**Speaker 1:**

He can do what he wants, what his desire is, what he has a will for. **Ve'ein lo mi she'ya'akov al yado me'la'asot hatov o hara** (And there is no one who will restrain his hand from doing good or evil). And he doesn't have anyone who will restrain him from doing good or evil. **Ukhe'iyon shechen** (And since this is so), and because of this the verse ends, since the person has the power, even though Hashem said not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, but because the person does have the power to be able to choose himself, Hashem says, because

of this one must think lest he send forth his hand and he will indeed take from the Tree of Life.

**Speaker 2:**

Yes, in other words, seemingly he means to say so, that if Hashem, if the person would... if Hashem could have stopped a person, he wouldn't have needed to throw him out of Gan Eden, whatever the meaning is of the story. The Rambam doesn't go into what is the meaning, but here we see that this is a thing that a person can do, and Hashem must as it were protect himself from what a person can do. Not that Hashem will stop him, because Hashem cannot stop a person. Because a person is indeed different from all other things. For example, if an animal must do something, Hashem doesn't have a problem. He makes that the will of the animal should be, or he stops the animal directly. If a person... a person is different.

**Speaker 1:**

"Ke'echad mimenu ba'olam" I think means not in the entire world. I think "ba'olam" means in the lower world, the world that the Rambam calls the world that is under the heavens, not the world of angels, the higher things. On the contrary, there it is "ke'echad mimenu." It's interesting, the Rambam doesn't translate "ke'echad mimenu" as like one of us. The Rambam translates "ke'echad mimenu" from him, he is the only one of the species of living creatures etc. The Rambam doesn't translate...

**Speaker 2:**

You translate "ke'echad mimenu" as like one of us, one of the angels. You translate seemingly like the Rambam, because the Rambam doesn't say that a person is similar to angels. That is another topic, perhaps he learns this in Chapter 4 of Foundations of Torah, the soul. But here the Rambam speaks of what the person is the only one in the world that he can do himself, and therefore even Hashem cannot... cannot be... cannot be in control of this. He himself is in control of this.

**Speaker 1:**

This is the verse. But the Rambam must bring a verse, he likes to bring on every thing a verse. So the verse that it says that reshut is given to man is the verse that "**ha'adam haya yode'a tov vara**" (man was knowing good and evil). "Yode'a," as we know, "yode'a" doesn't mean only to know, "yode'a" means... the Rambam put in many words to translate everything into this "yode'a tov vara," not simply that he knows, but that he himself knows and therefore he does which he wants, something like that. He knows good and evil, but he can also choose evil. Or good, both. He chooses good because he knows that it is good. He is the one who knows good and evil, not someone who is something else, as he will say.

**Halacha 2 — "Let Not Pass Through Your Mind This Thing That Foolish Gentiles and Most of the Ignorant of Israel Say"**

**The Language "Al Ya'avor Bemachshavtecha" — When the Rambam Says a False Thing**

Now the Rambam is going to say exactly what he means to the contrary, exactly what he means to the contrary. The Rambam says, you can think in thought, he says, you should not think a foolish thought, "**al ya'avor bemachshavtecha**" (let not pass through your mind). Always when the Rambam says a false thing, he doesn't say "al tomar" (do not say), because one can say it God forbid, but "al ya'avor bemachshavtecha," you should not think, a person should not let it pass through the

mind, he should not focus on it. As we learned in Chapter 1, when the Rambam says an error, he never says a language, because truly, one can only think the truth, a falsehood cannot enter into thought. He doesn't mean to say a prohibition that one should not think about this, he means to say that this is a type of thing that is outside of thought, because one after the other.

### "Foolish Gentiles and Most of the Ignorant of Israel" — Who Does the Rambam Mean?

You should not err with the thing "**she'omrim tifshei ha'umot verov golmei bnei Yisrael**" (that foolish gentiles and most of the ignorant of Israel say), you should not think like the fools of the nations and most of the ignorant of Jews, and most of the fools of the Jews. And on gentile fools he says fools, on Jews he says that they are not yet finished, they are not yet finished thinking. A Jew is finished, because a Jew has arrived at perfection, and knows the truth.

Seemingly I think to say so, seemingly I want to say I think to translate, foolish gentiles means all the official belief of the nations. As we learned in other places, the official belief of the nations, not of the Muslims, what the Christians believe is perhaps more similar, but the official belief of the, the Rambam calls them the Chaldeans, but a part of them there is a dispute among them, but the majority of them, which is called Ashera as the Rambam brings, officially hold that the person has no bechira, no reshut. Officially they hold that Hashem makes people righteous and wicked. Yes, there is a question, how can there be reward and punishment? They struggle with the question, but they say officially so. The foolish gentiles means seemingly the foolish nations, or the foolish nations, where nations doesn't mean here a people, it means perhaps like a religion. Their official belief, official doctrine is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu decrees. And of Israel it is only most, only the ignorant. That is, as things are among the wise, the sages of Israel don't think so, but the ignorant of Israel, most of them.

#### Discussion: What Does "Most of the Ignorant of Israel" Mean?

Does most ignorant of Israel mean that most Jews are ignorant who think so? Or does he mean most Jews, the ignorant of most of Israel, or most of the fools among the Jews?

I think it means that most... that most Jews. He held that most Jews err so?

### English Translation

11. Because look what he says. I mean like this, because most people, golem (unfinished person) is most people. There are a few wise people and many unfinished people. And it... it takes many more years to be a golem, because when one is finished, one stops being a golem. Golem means not yet finished. Yes, but there is a possibility for each person, because every person can be a wise person, which is true. But the Rambam also held that people chose to be foolish and unfinished.

### "That the Holy One, Blessed be He, decrees upon a person from the beginning of his creation to be righteous or wicked" — The False View

But because they chose to be foolish, they have false beliefs. What do they say? They say **that the Holy One, Blessed be He, decrees upon a person from the beginning of his creation**, when the Almighty creates a person He decrees upon him **to be righteous or wicked**. He doesn't give him

permission to be righteous or wicked, rather He decrees upon him, that the permission lies only in the hands of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Says the Rambam, **this is not so**, and this thing is foolishness. It's not so, it's not true.

### "Rather, each and every person is fit to be righteous like Moses our teacher or wicked like Jeroboam"

**Rather, each and every person**, every single person, **is fit**, meaning he has permission. Fit, it's possible. It lies in his hands, he has the possibilities, the capabilities. Fit doesn't mean permission, fit means it's possible. He has the potential, he has the ability **to be righteous like Moses our teacher, or wicked like Jeroboam**. He can be a righteous person like Moses our teacher, or a wicked person like Jeroboam.

#### Discussion: What does "righteous like Moses our teacher" mean?

He doesn't mean to say a prophet like Moses our teacher or a wise person like Moses our teacher, but he can choose good like Moses our teacher.

Why did he say that? Because he says righteous like Moses our teacher. Did Moses our teacher become a prophet by himself? From himself alone? From the Almighty? The Almighty gave him a greater level in prophecy than to others. Did the Almighty decree, or because Moses our teacher did so? Okay, that's a discussion in itself.

He says that one shouldn't ask this question. What the Rambam says here he says clearly, when he says righteous, he doesn't mean the fine points that you're saying. No, the Rambam says, don't think that Moses our teacher or Jeroboam - the Almighty made Moses our teacher become what he became. Moses our teacher made himself into Moses our teacher. Jeroboam made himself into Jeroboam. And from the perspective of a person, every person can be... when he says fit, let's not ask questions, let's try to understand what he's saying, because on everything one can ask questions and make - he doesn't get to the main good that he's saying.

### Free Choice Regarding Righteousness, Wisdom, and Character Traits

Every person can be righteous or wicked. **Or every person can be wise or foolish**, meaning he will use his intellect that he has in a good way, that his wisdom should grow, he should incline his mind toward the way of wisdom, or foolish. **Merciful or cruel**, a person can habituate himself to mercy or to cruelty. **Stingy or generous**, a person can adapt himself to stinginess or to generosity, nobility. **And so with all other character traits**. And so with all other traits. That means the Rambam has included here character traits and wisdom.

The choice and permission exists on everything, both on righteousness and wickedness, both on wisdom and foolishness, and both on character traits. Righteousness and wickedness itself has two types of righteousness and wickedness. One is from virtues of character traits which the Rambam calls in the Eight Chapters, one is intellectual virtues. Intellectual virtues doesn't mean to be born with a smart head. He only wants to say, one can develop wisdom, one can acquire wisdom. Knowing the truth, yes. Wisdom is by a wise person, one who learns is a wise person, he knows the truth. A fool is one who is ignorant, he doesn't know the truth.

#### Discussion: Does the Rambam mean that a person is fifty-fifty?

And he doesn't have, yes, okay, let's not stop, but I say it's very clear that he doesn't mean to say that a person is fifty-fifty, as

he will explain in Hilchot De'ot. There is a person who has a certain greater inclination toward stinginess, but he still has the permission to change himself, to move himself. The proof doesn't mean to say that from the fact that you say that from the perspective of a person can begin a different type of nature. The point is that from the perspective of who is the master over this? With whom is the permission? The permission is to become both.

**"And he has no one who compels him, nor decrees upon him, nor draws him to one of the two paths"**

**And he has no,** says the Rambam, **and he has no one who compels him,** a person doesn't have anyone who forces him, **nor decrees upon him,** no one decrees upon him, **nor draws him to one of the two paths,** there isn't anyone who draws a person to one of the two ways, **rather he himself,** the person from himself alone, what is in him, **and from his own mind,** from his own understanding, **inclines to whichever path he wishes,** he inclines to the way as he wants, as he chooses to go. Of course, a person can be drawn by his friends, but he also has the choice over which friends he should befriend, etc.

Drawing means according to what is written in Hilchot De'ot, that sometimes a person has an attraction. You say, you have an attraction, but for the attraction you are also yourself responsible. No one drags you, you drag yourself. There is attraction, there isn't fixedness, a person cannot force himself, okay, but attraction exists. But you yourself are drawn from your own mind, inclines. The inclination makes an attraction, that if he turns with such people, he can be drawn to such people and the like.

**The Second Verse — "From the mouth of the Most High do not come evil and good" (Lamentations 3:38)**

On this there is also a verse. That means, there are two things. The first thing, on the fact that a person has permission there is a verse, **"Behold, man has become like one of us lest he stretch out his hand"**, one sees that a person has permission. Afterwards, on the fact that no one decrees upon him and no one makes him go any way, there is also a verse. What does it say? **"It is Jeremiah who said, from the mouth of the Most High do not come evil and good"**, from the Almighty who dwells on high, from the Almighty doesn't come the evil and good of people, he translates. It's not bad events or good events upon creation.

Ah, okay. Ah, one doesn't say bad weather or hot weather. He says evil and good of people, **meaning, the Creator does not decree upon a person neither to be good nor to be bad.** The Almighty didn't take away from the person the permission and keep it for Himself, rather on the contrary, the Almighty gave to the person the permission himself to become good or bad.

**"It turns out that the sinner has caused loss to himself — therefore it is fitting for him to weep and lament"**

He says so, **"And since this is so"**, as the verse says, **"this being the truth"**, that this is the truth, it comes out for example relevant to us, it comes out, **"it turns out that the sinner has caused loss to himself"**. A person who is a sinner, it's not relevant that a decree came upon him that he should be a sinner, rather he himself caused loss to himself, he himself made corruption. **"Therefore it is fitting for him to weep and lament"**, we learned earlier that anguish and weeping is something that is good for a penitent. One who is a

sinner, if it would have been that the Almighty made him a sinner, he would perhaps have had to accept the decree with love. But since he did it himself, it is fitting for him, again "fitting for him", he also has the permission. "Fitting for him" here doesn't mean the same type of "fitting", here it means it's appropriate, it's good that he should do. He simply brings the verse, **"to weep and lament over his deeds that he did to his soul and dealt badly with it"**, he made bad for himself.

**The Meaning of "Why should a living person complain, a man about his sins"**

**"And this is what is written afterwards"**, this is what it says further in the verse, **"Why should a living person complain, a man about his sins"**. Because we know that "from the mouth of the Most High do not come evil and good", not the Almighty made the evil and good. If it would have come from the Almighty, what does a person have to blame himself? What does a person have to cry about? Perhaps one could still pray. But now when one knows that the person did it himself, there is indeed a place for lamenting, for complaining about oneself, for weeping over oneself. "Why should a living person complain", why should a person weep? Because "a man about his sins". He translates as "a man about his sins" is the answer to "why should a living person complain". About what can a person at all complain? About what can a person lament? About "a man about his sins", a person can lament about his sins that he himself chose badly.

I had thought that he means to say don't complain about the Almighty, rather "a man about his sins". That's how I always used to think that this is the meaning of the verse. But the Rambam figured that the Rambam says here that "he should lament".

**Discussion: Rashi's Translation in Lamentations**

What is Rashi's translation? "Why should complain"? About what should a person lament? "About his sins". That's what he said. "Why should complain"? About what should he lament? About his sins. Rashi translates like the Rambam, yes, Rashi here in Lamentations.

**Law 1 (Continued) — Rashi's Two Interpretations of "Why should a living person complain"**

Ah, Rashi is a bit different. Rashi speaks here apparently about like bad things that happen to him. He should know that it comes because of his deeds. It's not like we didn't take Rashi's interpretation. But in any case, the "why should a living person complain, a man about his sin", that this is such a thing. He brings, yes, he brings such an interpretation. Another interpretation, a second interpretation of Rashi is the Rambam's interpretation.

That Rabbi Yochanan said, the day that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said "Behold, man has become like one of us", the ministering angels eulogized before Him. According to the Rambam it's not on that day, it's always. It's with every person. That the Almighty grieves over most people.

Okay, it's a bit different. He doesn't speak of "why should a living person complain", but in any case, therefore "why should a living person complain, a man about his sin". Basically, this is an answer for the rest of Lamentations, right? The whole until now one weeps in Lamentations how it was a tragedy. The answer is that we ourselves sinned.

### **The Rambam's Translation: "Why should complain" — Weep over your own sins**

We weep about one thing, about one thing you should weep, but mainly about yourself. That this is what the Rambam writes, "and weep over the destruction of your house and over the destruction of your Temple", but this itself was. The Rambam translates the verses this way. "About what did we sin" doesn't come bad things, one speaks that a person should himself take responsibility and weep over his own sins.

Why does he say, about this the next verse speaks about repentance. Why? "And the permission is not in our hands", the permission is in our own hands, "and from our mind and will we did all these evils", all bad things we did from our own choice, from our own understanding, "it is fitting for us to return in repentance and leave our wickedness", there is a place for doing repentance, turning back, and leaving our bad ways.

### **Innovation: "That the permission is still in our hands" — Even after sinning**

Why? "That the permission is still in our hands", the permission is still now in our hands. This is apparently another innovation, that you might have thought that there is sometimes a person who sees that there is such a thing that he cannot do repentance. But the essence of permission says that one can still, you still have the permission.

"And we have the power", and about this it says "let us search and examine our ways", let us again begin to search our ways. Because there is such a person who thinks that he no longer has the ways. Let us search our ways and examine, and the verse says, let us search our ways and examine, let us search his ways. Now he says, you still have a choice, and examine, and you should investigate this, and let us return to Hashem. You can do repentance.

That means, the verse speaks to the people who think they don't have any choice. He says, no, because on these things my eye grieves and weeps, and because this is so, it's only weeping over your transgressions, and in order now to do repentance. This is the next verse, let us search our ways, and consequently, let us do repentance.

### **Precision in "to Hashem" — The greatness of permission after sinning**

Says the Rambam, I see clearly that the conclusion is repentance, the thing that the topic of permission, from this comes out repentance, is in the verse. Apparently there is also here a precision in the word "to Hashem". As if, if you can do repentance, you can now go up to Moses our teacher, you can now go very high, not you can become a drop better. Even after sinning you still have a strong permission.

### **Summary: Two foundations that we have learned**

Okay, we have learned, let's make clear, we have learned two things already. First of all, that a person has permission. Second, that no one prevents him, consequently he himself is guilty, on this was the verse. Now he's going to begin to explain that the topic is indeed an important topic.

### **Law 2 — "A great principle and it is the pillar of the Torah and the commandment"**

Says the Rambam, "And this principle, it is a great principle, and it is the pillar of the Torah and the commandment". The principle, the thought, the knowledge, the belief, is a great principle, it's a very great principle, like

the pillar of the Torah and the commandment, it's the pole upon which stands Torah and commandment.

### **Two types of pillars by the Rambam**

Let's remember, it was in chapter 1 of Foundations of Torah written that there is the foundation of foundations and pillar of wisdom. The existence of God is the pillar of wisdom, the pillar of knowledge. Now there is a different type of pillar. The principle of permission is not a pillar of wisdom, it's not the topic of knowing the truth, and regarding this it's perhaps not the principle, but it is the principle regarding Torah and commandment.

Because Torah and commandment is that he wants indeed to become a better person, and on this stands, everything stands on the topic of permission. Because apparently, when a person will think that he is bad because the Almighty made him bad, he can never do repentance, he can never begin to do Torah and commandments. Because he knows that he can always begin, he can always begin to do repentance and begin to keep Torah and commandments.

### **The Verse "See, I have placed before you today"**

As it is said, because of this it says in the verse, "**See, I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil**". I give to you, I have given to you, I have given you the permission, on life and on good, and on death and on evil.

And here one also sees that it is the pillar of the Torah and the commandment, because this is indeed the topic here, that consequently there is the commandment of "and you shall choose life". Or do you think that through the fact that a person will do good he will receive life? Yes, because the whole topic of permission is indeed an introduction to the topic called reward and punishment, that the deed from the fact that he's going to explain soon that through this he will have eternal life, the soul will pass over after... to a life in this world.

### **Precision in "I have given" — Not just "before you" but "given"**

The innovation is that life in this world also is a... permission I have given to you, it's only placed before you. I don't mean only I lay before you, rather I give you. I have given it to you. As if, all permission is with the Almighty, but the Almighty has transferred to us the permission. It is given, it is placed in creation that the person should have the permission over himself.

### **"Whatever a person desires to do from the deeds of people he does"**

**Whatever a person desires to do from the deeds of people he does**, everything that is within the realm of human deeds a person can do, **whether good or bad**. Good, you can't dance to the heavens, because it's not a human deed. A person is a lower person, if choice is also can, but choice means what people can do. If you see a person who has done it, it's simple that it's a human thing, and you're not exempt from it.

### **Law 3 — "Who would give that their heart be thus for them"**

One knows the matter of "**Who would give that their heart be thus for them**". After the giving of the Torah it says in Deuteronomy when Moses our teacher speaks about and discusses about the giving of the Torah, the Almighty says, the Almighty says if only, "who would give" that Jews should always have the heart that they had after the giving of the

Torah, the fear of Heaven that they had after the giving of the Torah they should always have.

#### What does it mean that the Almighty says "if only"?

What does it mean that the Almighty says if only? The Almighty, if we would have believed that everything is only in the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, there isn't any place for if only. What's the practical difference? **The Creator does not compel people.** The Almighty doesn't force any people to go in a certain way, rather the Almighty made that people should have themselves the permission.

Consequently, because **the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not compel people, does not decree upon him to do good or bad,** He prefers to leave their will in their own hands, consequently the Almighty says "who would give", it would be wonderful, if only.

#### Why does one need the second verse?

#### English Translation

The verse is very similar to the verse of "See, I place before you." The Rambam brings two verses on the same subject. Earlier he brought it regarding the greatness of man, now he brings it regarding Torah and mitzvos. "Who would give that their heart be thus," as the Almighty wishes, He says "if only." He understands that what He says also helps us, He is arousing us in this matter. But He only brings out that the Almighty does not negate our free choice. He doesn't say "I will do," He says "if only you would do."

It's very interesting, where does the verse come from? "Who would give that their heart be thus." There is a Gemara about this, that "mi yiten" means "if only." But there is about this some midrash that one should say "mi yiten" and not "mi yiten."

The question is indeed, because simply we see in the Torah that all the commentators, like the Rambam, the Ibn Ezra, they all learn that this is the plain meaning. Perhaps it's very interesting, perhaps I'm thinking too much, perhaps the earlier verse of "See, I place before you today" wasn't enough. Perhaps a person could have thought that this applies before the giving of the Torah, but regarding Torah and mitzvos He does decree something. No. When the Almighty gave the Torah, the giving of the Torah doesn't mean He forced us to keep the Torah. He gave the Torah, but He gave us with the Torah still the authority for us to decide whether we should go with the Torah or not.

#### If No Free Choice — Torah and Mitzvos Fall Away

Now the Rambam goes to explain why this is a foundation of Torah and mitzvos. He explains this with the verse of "See, I place before you," that one must understand that a person himself decides to be a tzaddik or a rasha, and afterwards he receives the reward and punishment, the good and evil, etc. He says that with the knowledge that a person has free choice within himself, only with this knowledge does one understand so many foundations in the Torah.

#### Two Types of Errors — Two Types of Enemies of Free Choice

He says thus: **"If God decreed upon man to be a tzaddik or a rasha, or if there were something that draws man by necessity from his birth to any of the paths,"** if this were something that draws the person essentially from his birth, from his birth onward, from his nature, from when he is born, **a path from among the paths,** it's a certain way from

among ways, **or an opinion from among opinions,** or certain beliefs or understanding certain ways, or an opinion means wisdom, right? Wisdom, yes, a certain thinking a certain way, or an opinion from among opinions, which will lead to certain character traits, certain habits, **or an action from among actions,** to do certain actions, **as the fools imagine in their hearts,** fools, as they think it out from their own hearts, the people who choose to believe, **astrologers,** people who think that all power lies in the celestial causes.

Yes, very good, very good. In other words, who is it that says this? Earlier, there are two types of people that the Rambam is against both. There is one group of people who say thus, God decrees upon man, these are certain religions that say this, or certain people, foolish people, foolish Jews, say that the Almighty, the Almighty decrees, this is one approach.

Then there are the fools, the astrologers, perhaps this is more what disturbs the Jews, because they don't believe that the Almighty says so, but there are people who say, I know whether that one will be a tzaddik, because he was born with such and such a mazal, and one who was born with such and such a mazal, he becomes a tzaddik, or vice versa.

#### "Toldato" Means Nature/Mazal

And this he translates with the beginning of his creation, not with the beginning of his creation, but his birth, when he was born, he was born with this mazal or... But in any case toldato means his nature, the nature, who makes the nature? The mazalos, the astrologers, they, one of the reasons why the Rambam was against the astrologers is only about this, that the astrologers say that they can see in the stars whether the person will be a tzaddik, they can see in the stars, and the stars make it according to his nature, and the nature makes him to be a tzaddik or a rasha.

#### If So — Prophecy, Torah, Rebuke Fall Away

If so, if this were true, **how can I say that God commanded the prophets,** how can I say that the Almighty commanded the prophets, **do this and don't do that,** and we learned earlier that the work of the prophets is to rebuke the Jews, they give rebuke, how could the Almighty have given rebuke at all? And this is what the verses say, **"Make good your ways and don't do evil in your deeds,"** do good, do teshuva, how is this relevant if we would have believed in this error?

It would be blocked, there would be an argument from the beginning of his creation. **It is already decreed upon him,** but a person is already decreed to be so. **"The foolishness of man"** or his nature **draws him to something from which he has no escape,** from which he cannot get away. **And what place would all the Torah have had,** what place would the entire Torah have had that the prophets gave us, that they come to tell us rebuke,

#### Three Proofs from Torah for Free Choice

And not only the prophets, because the prophets give rebuke based on the Torah, but also the entire Torah itself, that there are mitzvos, and there are warnings, that you can do it, and you can not do it.

Further, another proof, another point: **And with what justice and with what law,** with what fairness, with what logic of justice, **can we punish the wicked,** can one punish the wicked, take away the debt from the wicked, **or pay**

**reward to the tzaddik**, or pay reward to the tzaddik, **if it is decreed upon him?** It would be unjust, because the free choice is not in the hand of the person. Is this what it says **"Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?"** That the Almighty, who is the Judge of all the earth, doesn't do justice? He gives people reward and punishment unjustly?

So this piece is both an explanation of the verse **"See, I place before you,"** meaning, since I give it to you, the free choice is with you, then the good and evil, which is the reward and punishment, is **because of you, not because of Me**, the Almighty is not guilty.

#### The Structure of the Three Proofs

And it's also another proof, it's another proof, two proofs, it's another proof from the Torah. That is, we bring two proofs already from the Torah, that there is free choice. He brings two proofs. Now he brings a third proof, not only from certain verses, but from the entire idea of Torah.

If there is a Torah and there are prophets, it must be that the Torah is correct, that there are prophets. That is, this is another proof from what is already stated in the Torah, that there are prophets. This is not a proof in itself, this is a proof from the Torah. If the Torah said that there is, make yourself that you should be good, it must be that the Torah is correct.

There are two parts to this: one, that the Torah wouldn't be correct, and two, that there would be no justice. Is it just to punish a person because he was born with a bad mazal? A bad mazal he has nothing to do with, so he's not guilty. If he's not guilty, he shouldn't be guilty.

#### The Question: "Whatever Hashem Desires He Does in Heaven and Earth"

A person will ask a question, wonder, people always wonder like this. A person can wonder such a frightening thing. You're saying now that man has complete free choice over his actions. Who is the master? Who is the master? Who is the lord? Ah, the person.

You're saying, you're taking away with this a great power from the Almighty. The Almighty is the ruler over the world, the Almighty is the Master of the Universe. You're saying that all the actions of people are in their hands. The actions of people have such a huge part of the world. You're taking away as if, so to speak, you're taking away a great power from the Almighty.

He says, a person who will wonder, **"How can man do whatever he desires, and his actions be given over to him, and doesn't anything happen in the world without the permission of his Creator and without His desire?"** Can one do things in the world without permission from the Creator, from the Almighty who is the Owner of heaven and earth, the Creator, the Creator, the master, without His desire?

**"And it is written, isn't it said 'Whatever Hashem desires He does in heaven and earth.'"** The verse says, **"Whatever Hashem desires He does in heaven and earth."** Everything that the Almighty wants He can do, both in heaven and on earth. Earth means presumably the people who are here in control of the earth.

#### Two Possible Interpretations of the Verse

Yes, so he perhaps interprets the verse that it says **"All that is in heaven and earth"** is **"the desire of Hashem He does."** Perhaps this is indeed the interpretation. I could have interpreted, the Almighty can do what He wants. Not the

Almighty can do what He wants, but everything that happens in heaven and earth is the desire of Hashem. Or all the actions of heaven and earth are the desire of Hashem. As the Rambam...

#### The Rambam's Answer: Free Choice as Human Nature

So the Rambam's answer is that the question doesn't begin, because this is indeed what the Almighty wants. The Almighty wants that on earth the people should do. Read what he says.

The Rambam says, **"Know that the answer is that everything is done with the will of the Exalted One."** You should know, the answer is that everything is indeed done with the will of the Almighty. **"Even though our actions are given over to us."** Also with His permission. Even though the actions were in our hands, this itself is the will of Hashem. The Almighty indeed gave over the actions into our hands. The Almighty made everything. He made that our actions are given over to us.

#### The Parable of Fire and Wind

**"How? Just as the Creator desired that fire and wind should rise upward,"** just as the Almighty wanted, just as the Almighty placed in creation that fire and wind should go up, and water and earth should go down, as he already said earlier in the Laws of the Foundations of Torah.

Because the sphere the Almighty made that it should revolve, like a circle should go around forever in a circle, besides the rest of the creation of the world, without any interruption. So too when the Almighty made all the celestial bodies and forces in the world, the Almighty made a certain way how they should always be. And also on the other creations of the world He made a custom that the heart should be the great need, and so on.

#### The Concept of "Teva" — "Custom That He Desired"

In other words, this is a word for nature. The Almighty gave each thing its nature, each thing has its nature. The Rambam calls this **"a custom that He desired."** Each thing has its nature, and this is what it is. What is it for fire, that it should go up. What is it for the creation of the world, like each one according to its nature.

Just as He made the nature of the sphere that it should always go in a circle, so He made the nature of man that he should always have his own power, his own free choice. Free power.

So the Almighty wanted, **"that man should have free choice in his hand,"** that a person should have free choice in his hand, **"and all his actions are given over to him,"** he should be the master of choice over his actions. **"And he should have neither a coercer nor a drawer,"** he should not have a coercer, not a forcer, and not a drawer, not one who draws him. **"But he himself with his own mind that God gave him does whatever a person can do."** But with his own free choice and his own mind that the Almighty gave him, a person can do everything he wants, everything he can do.

#### The Interpretation of "Whatever Hashem Desires He Does in Heaven and Earth" — Nature of Heaven and Nature of Earth

He would interpret **"Whatever Hashem desires He does in heaven and earth,"** that in heaven He made the nature of heaven, and on earth the nature of heaven. This is all the desire of Hashem. What is the nature of earth? That on earth man should do his things. This is the nature of man. Just as on

earth there are many more actions, a person is special that he said "human power."

### **Digression: The Rambam's Approach to Nature — Against Popular Understanding**

In other words, the answer to the question how can it be that human action is not in him, is that there is generally the same answer as there can be for each thing a nature.

People think... The Rambam has already answered that question, and one must add to this again some certain note to understand. Because for people, for people it's very difficult that same thing. Most people don't grasp that either.

Most people would say, why does fire go up? The Almighty makes it go up, or the nature of fire makes it go up? Which?

Reb Shabtai says thus, they need to understand that according to how the Rambam learns that there is such a thing as the nature of fire, it's true, not the Almighty makes it, or you can say not directly. The Almighty made the nature of fire, but now the nature of fire makes it go up, and not the Almighty makes it.

And certainly the Almighty made, the Almighty wants, the Almighty made the nature of fire, and since then it always goes so. Not since then, it's not any simple way to say, because but in any case, the Almighty still makes. The Almighty makes that there should be a nature of fire, but He doesn't make that the piece of fire should go up. He makes that fire has such a nature that it goes up.

### **The Difference Between Fire and Man — Both Have a Nature**

But fire doesn't have any choice, it doesn't have any free will, it can't decide tomorrow to go differently, because fire is something that doesn't change. But a person precisely is indeed something that does change, it's something that he can today go this way, but the whole thing that he can today go this way and he can go that way, from the side that there is a certain nature that lies in man, is no different than the nature that lies in fire. One is a different type of nature.

A person has a different type of nature, the power of choice, it's interesting that he can himself sometimes he goes up, sometimes down. Fire can only go up, and air, which is earth, can only go down. A person can go up and down at his will, but that he can, the entire ability, the entire nature, is a nature of man, human nature, but this is not...

### **The Rambam's Approach: Nature and the Almighty Are Not a Contradiction**

Therefore, just as here, whatever the answer is, or not whatever the answer is, as with the Rambam it appears to you that you understand yourself that it can be, but most people don't understand it. Most people think that if there is nature there is no Almighty, and the Almighty can only be the salvation of Hashem in the blink of an eye, miracles all the time.

But the Rambam doesn't hold so. The Rambam holds that there is nature, and the Almighty made the nature. The Almighty doesn't want that He should make the thing directly, the Almighty wants that nature should make it. Just as the Almighty doesn't want that people should make directly, He wants people should have their free choice.

If so, what does it mean that a person goes against the Almighty? The Almighty wants that people should be able to do what they want.

### **Reward and Punishment as Part of Nature**

**Therefore**, now we understand what he's going, why there is room for reward and punishment. **Therefore we give to him according to his actions, if he did good we do good to him, and if he did evil we do evil to him.**

Because it could be that he means to say this, that this is also part of nature. And the nature is that He gives people the free choice, and the result that comes from this is already also that he will receive good for the aspect that he was good.

### **Discussion: Reward and Punishment as Nature — A Novel Point in the "Therefore"**

Ah, you say very interesting indeed, because I have here a simple question. The Rambam already said this once, in Parshas Bechukosai he already said that about this there is reward and punishment. Suddenly he asked a question about free choice, again he mentions the topic of reward and punishment. There's some duplication, it appears twice.

You say that the secret is, the Rambam means to say that nature also includes the nature of reward and punishment. It's simple that there is a nature that a person has free choice in his hand to act, part of the free choice is, what does **"from your hands was this to you"** mean? Simply, your actions cause the... The chooser chooses in evil action and in evil consequence.

No, good. As if the reward is also not the Almighty directly, it's also a part of nature. Not like the Rambam who says that reward and punishment is a miracle, for example. Here it's very clear that reward and punishment is the consequence, it's part of... not in other words consequence, but one can say the consequence is, it's in order to make reward and punishment.

It's not in order. If when a person would be compelled there wouldn't be any reason to give reward and punishment. One can't say that it's in order because there is free choice. What you're adding here is that it's at minimum more than that. That not only is it in order, but it actually comes out from this.

Because the wheel turns and goes around, there happen many more things that are drawn from this. But this is all a part of the nature of the wheel turning and going around. And the nature of the fact that people can choose brings with it one of the things that good brings good and evil brings evil.

### **The Language "Metivah Lo / Meri'ah Lo" — Nature, Not Direct Providence**

And the language here is **"tovah metivah lo, ra'ah meri'ah lo"**. It's all a part of this verse. And **"tovah metivah lo"** one can say means, nature is metivah lo, not only the Almighty is metivah lo. All of these, I who am built into nature, so that the good is metivah lo and the evil is meri'ah lo.

### **The Verses from Yeshayahu — "Miyedeichem Hayetah Zot Lachem" and "Gam Hemah Bacharu Bedarkheihem"**

Just as it says in the verse, **Yeshayahu the prophet says, "umiyeichem hayetah zot lachem"**. The punishment that happened to you happened from your hands. Ah, the problem is why does it say there "lachem". Ah, the problem is why does it say there "lachem". In any case, here I understood.

And also the verse, **"gam hemah bacharu bedarkheihem"**. People chose their ways, and whatever the result happened from their ways was a part of their choice. **"Gam hemah bacharu bedarkheihem"**. And I answer this, I want to receive the punishment, because the punishment is a part of your bad choice.

### Digression: Rabbi Yonasan Eibshitz — "Semach Bachur Beyaldutekha"

Says Rabbi Yonasan Eibshitz zt"l, that Shlomo, "**semach bachur beyaldutekha**". Shlomo... what? Shlomo said a difficult verse. Shlomo in Koheles says like this, "**semach bachur beyaldutekha... vehalekh bedarkhei libbekha**".

### Halakha 4 (End) — The Verse "Semach Bachur Beyaldutekha" (Koheles 11:9) — Rabbeinu Yonah's Explanation

And the part of the responsibility why you receive the punishment is because this is a part of your bad choice.

Says Rabbeinu Yonah, and Shlomo said a difficult verse in Koheles, he says like this, "**semach bachur beyaldutekha**", make your choices, "**vehalekh bedarkhei libbekha**", and know, "**ki al kol eleh yeivi'akha HaElokim bamishpat**", but you should know that whatever you choose will afterwards bring with it the results in the judgment.

He says, that is to say, know that you have the power to do, you should know that you can do it, and it's "vehalekh bedarkhei libbekha", it's things that you chose, and you should just know that the judgment that will come with this is a result of this, which is there a consequence of this.

### "Semach Bachur" — Not a Mitzvah But a Statement

Perhaps he means to say, "semach bachur", he doesn't mean a mitzvah from Shlomo, it's a difficult question, the Gemara asks the question, what does "semach" mean? A young man should also, we learned "zekhor et bor'ekha bimei bechurotekha", it also stands in Shlomo.

He means to say, you can be "semach bachur", in other words, see that you can, "semach bachur", a bachur means that he already has choice, yes, he can do many things, because a person in old age is already stuck, he already made many choices before, he can't always change.

See that you can, therefore you should know that it doesn't take away the judgment, the judgment is according to what you do. So, you think that you're a bachur, you must be this way? You don't have to be this way, you can be this way, you can be happy, you can go bedarkhei libbekha, make sure to go in the right darkhei libbekha, your heart should be on a good level to do the right thing.

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### Halakha 5 — God's Knowledge and Free Choice

#### The Question: Prior Knowledge and Free Choice

Now there's another difficult question, one question was asked, now it's a basic thing, the first thing is even, how did it stand? "Ve'al titmah veto'mar", one question that people can ask is, "hareshut adam netunah lo", what does it mean, the Almighty isn't the master? It's not a contradiction with this, because every thing has its nature.

Now there's even a better question, that is, that question didn't answer the question, there's still a deeper question. Let's see what he says, "shema tomar", a person will ask like this, "**vahalo HaKadosh Barukh Hu yode'a kol mah sheyiheyeh kodem sheyiheyeh**", the Almighty knows everything before it happens, He knows everything that will be. He knows, He knows, He knows. He knows. If so, let Him... if He knows if so...

#### The Problem Isn't Just "The Almighty Knows" — The Problem Is "There Already Exists Knowledge"

Either a or b. When the Almighty knows kol hadevarim, and not only that, it's not written there, but we imagine that the Almighty already knows before the sin happens. Why should you only know what it says in the Yesodei HaTorah? Not clear. He sees that the Almighty knows before the sin.

Okay, in any case, the Rambam says such a thing... because he already stands like a few, therefore there's no before and after. Okay, okay. And where was it written that the Almighty is yode'a et kol hama'asim? In chapter 2? Yes. The Almighty is yode'a et hakol, hu hayode'a atzmo hu hayadu'a. But the Rambam adds here that He is yode'a kodem sheyiheyeh. Therefore we come to the two sides.

The question is a famous question. Either He knows that you will be a tzaddik or a rasha, or He doesn't know, right? He asks, **im yada**, if the Almighty knows that the person will be a tzaddik, **i efshar shelo yiheyeh tzaddik**. How can you afterwards go against the knowledge, because the Almighty already knows?

Not that it's impossible he goes against the knowledge, because then He doesn't know. The Almighty knows, the problem is that there already exists knowledge. The problem isn't just that the Almighty is a knower, the problem is that there already exists knowledge. The Almighty is merely the one who knows everything.

One can by the way ask the same question without the Almighty, but then it wouldn't be difficult, because then he would say that we don't know, because the nature is that one can't know. The Almighty is seemingly an exception from the rule of nature. The Almighty seemingly one must say that He knows yes everything before it will happen. If so, will you say either you don't know, the Almighty doesn't know something, or the Almighty knows, can I afterwards go against the Almighty?

And the Rambam, **im tomar sheyada sheyiheyeh tzaddik ve'efshar sheyiheyeh rasha, harei yada**. That wasn't knowing. The Almighty knew that he would be a tzaddik, and in practice he became a rasha. The simple meaning is that the Almighty's knowledge wasn't any knowledge. He meant so.

The question is, how does the Almighty's knowledge work? We hold that a person can always choose. How does this fit with the Almighty's knowledge that He knows everything in advance?

#### The Rambam's Answer — "Arukah Me'erezt Midah Urechavah Mini Yam"

The Rambam asks a question about the Almighty, how can the Almighty know something that is in the hands of man? And in practice, if we say that He doesn't know, isn't that a deficiency, that we should say that the Almighty doesn't know something. So one must say seemingly that the Almighty knows yes. He doesn't bring any proof, he says it can't be. And obviously, the second side of the question is, if the Almighty knows yes, isn't that a contradiction, because then people don't have any choice.

The Rambam says like this: "**da she'atah tzarikh lada'at**, yes, the Almighty knows, and you should also know, yes, you should know... there's a jump here. No, here, you should know... did the fire already translate the aleph? What does it say here? I still have here the... ah, they ran here. Okay, you should know, **da she'atah tzarikh lada'at sheteshuvah she'elah zo, arukah me'erezt midah urechavah mini**

**yam**, it's longer than the size of the world and wider than the sea. It's very deep, it's a profound thing. **Vekhamah ikarim gedolim veharim ramim teluyim bah**, many great principles and great mountains are dependent on it, are dependent on the answer to this question. **Va'eini nikhnas badavar hazeh**, and I'm not going to enter into this whole thing, **aval omer lekha me'at**, but I'll tell you a little, **vetzarikh atah lehavin badevarim she'omar**, and you need to understand a bit the things that I'm now going to tell you.

#### **Important Note: What Is the "Depth" — Not a Contradiction, But God's Knowledge**

I need to say an important note that people don't catch, what is the subject of the depth? People think that the Rambam said that there's a contradiction, seemingly. The Rambam doesn't say that there's a contradiction, he asks a question, how can the Almighty know? But people think that there's a contradiction, and therefore it's so deep that there can be a contradiction. The depth is that there's a contradiction, and we must say about the Almighty.

But the truth is, what the Rambam says what is deep, is yedi'at Hashem. How the Almighty knows, yedi'at Hashem is a wonder. He understands that yedi'at Hashem, the Almighty is a very deep thing. How many great principles, one needs to understand at all what Almighty means, what knowledge means. How everything is explained elsewhere. Reb Nosson spoke about this a bit, but also very briefly.

So obviously, in other words, the depth is understanding the Almighty. In other words, the Rambam says, you want to understand how the Almighty knows? And yedi'at Hashem, you want the Almighty to know, obviously it's a deep matter. So when you think about the Almighty's knowledge in a small way, there is indeed room for the question. But once one understands the depth of the matter of yedi'at Hashem, the question falls away. And this he's going to explain on the tip of a fork how this falls away. But he says that you shouldn't think that you understand it completely.

#### **The Foundation: "Hu Veda'ato Echad" — The Almighty's Knowledge Isn't Like Our Knowledge**

He says like this: **Kevar beirarnu befrek yud alef mehilkhot yesodei hatorah**, that what we say that the Almighty knows everything, doesn't mean to say like we say about a person that he knows everything. **SheHaKadosh Barukh Hu eino yode'a biyedi'ah shehi chutz mimenu**, when a person knows, the knowledge is something that is outside of him. He wasn't born with the knowledge, he acquired some knowledge, he has some knowledge and he grasped it. **Kivnei adam shehem veda'atam shenayim**, they and their knowledge are two. Obviously, he didn't have the knowledge, and afterwards he received the knowledge.

**But the Almighty's knowledge isn't this type of knowledge, ela hu yitbarakh shemo veda'ato echad**, the Almighty and His knowledge is one. It's not the simple meaning that the Almighty became smarter, He received more knowledge. So the Almighty veda'ato echad.

He says, **ve'ein da'ato shel adam yekholah lehashig davar zeh al buryo**, a person with his small knowledge can't grasp the knowledge that the Almighty has.

#### **The Verse "Ki Lo Yir'ani Ha'adam Vachai" — One Can't Understand the Essence of the Creator**

In Yesodei HaTorah it was written that a person can't understand what is matter, *kal vachomer*, as it was written there. A person is composed of body and soul, this he can't understand. This was written in Yesodei HaTorah chapter 2. I just want to be precise in the language that was written there. He also said there the same thing, *ein koach befeh le'omro velo belev ha'adam lehakhiro al buryo*, a person can't understand it completely.

We learned then, since the Almighty knows, His knowledge is different from our knowledge, He knows us in a better way than we can know that He knows us.

**Ukheshem she'ein koach ba'adam lehashig velimtzo amitah haborei**, just as a person doesn't have the power to grasp and to catch the essence of the Creator, what the Almighty is, **shene'amar "ki lo yir'ani ha'adam vachai"**, a person can't see the Almighty. To see the Almighty can't mean to see the Almighty with a body, because the Almighty doesn't have any body. But what does it mean one can't see the Almighty? There's no power in man to understand the essence of the Creator what He is, and if His knowledge is the same thing and a part, and he says it is He yes, then we'll say we don't understand the Almighty, we say we don't understand the knowledge, **kakh ein koach ba'adam lehashig velimtzo da'ato shel borei**.

#### **The Verse "Ki Lo Machshevotai Machshevotekhem" (Yeshayahu 55:8)**

Just as the prophet will say, and this the prophets say **"ki lo machshevotai machshevotekhem velo darkhekhem derakhay"**. My knowledge isn't the same, my knowledge like a person's knowledge, he says, and since we don't have the power, we don't have the ability to understand how the Almighty knows what the knowledge of He means...

#### **The Key Innovation: You Know Nothing About What You Mean When You Say "The Almighty Knows"**

In other words, the Rambam says like this, you have a question, and you want to be consistent with the plan, you don't understand how it can be that the Almighty knows, and you want to say this, if so it must be that people don't have any permission? Say no more, what do you mean at all that the Almighty knows, you know that the Almighty knows, His knowledge is a part of Him, you don't have any idea what you're talking about, when you say the Almighty knows you don't know any concept what you're saying.

So let go, let go of the subject of yedi'at Hashem, it's a fact that the Almighty, I know that He knows, but the way that He knows, what it means at all about the Almighty knowledge, is the same meaning as what it means to be the Almighty, you don't know at all what you mean, you can let go of more questions, it becomes greater, perhaps it's possible an angel I don't know Moshe Rabbeinu now understands what it means, but let go of yedi'at Hashem because yedi'at Hashem doesn't come in here, you don't understand it.

#### **What You Do Need to Know — Choice Is Certain**

But what do you need to know yes?

Ah, because **noda velo safek, shema'aseh ha'adam beyad ha'adam, ve'ein HaKadosh Barukh Hu moshkho, velo gozer alav la'asot kakh, velo shelo la'asot kakh**.

And again with strength this thing that choice is very important, a person should understand that there is choice,

and this thing, this complication of yedi'at Hashem that we know that the Almighty has indeed knowledge, but not this knowledge that you should understand in such a simple way and this should be a contradiction to choice.

**Note: Chovot HaLevavot**

Someone will say, but the Rambam says, he heard, he believes in the Torah, the earlier one says that it says in the Torah, it's necessary, he wants to do it.

But the Almighty, the Torah also says the Almighty knows.

The Rambam says, that the Almighty has knowledge, that the Almighty has knowledge.

Just as it says in words of wisdom, it says there in Chovot HaLevavot, "hada'at", he brings there exactly the opposite, it says there that the Almighty knows everything.

The Rambam says, no, that the Almighty has knowledge, that a person has permission, isn't only from receiving the knowledge alone. The Rambam said earlier that we know it because the Torah and the prophets say reward and punishment, but not only about this, but the matter is that a person has permission in his hand, **ela bire'ayot berurot midivrei chokhmah**. One can also understand it with words of wisdom.

So what he means to say is, seemingly a person will say, I have a verse to the contrary, it says that the Almighty knows everything that I do, I believe in that verse, the Almighty is almighty. What we know clearly, from words of wisdom, it says

here, it's simple, and seemingly that wisdom isn't beyond human power to grasp, everyone can see that a person is a thing, a nature, that has permission.

This you need to know clearly. One, believe me that the Almighty is truth, but this is already deep things, you'll understand when the Almighty will make you understand.

**"Vezev Ikar Shekhol Divrei HaNevi'im Talui Bo" — The Almighty Himself Says This**

So this is seen very much, the Rambam puts in both things, that **one judges a person on all his deeds according to his deeds**, one judges a person on all his deeds according to how he did them, **im tov ve'im ra**, that a person is responsible for his deeds, **vezeh ikar shekhol divrei hanevi'im talui bo**. This is the principle that all the words of the prophets, all the words of the Torah and the prophets, perhaps the prophets he means to say, that the prophets come from the Almighty, yedi'at Hashem, the Almighty Himself says this, not only... it's also, we held that we know it, but the Almighty Himself says this.

Therefore, don't say that you're not a greater believer in the Ribbono Shel Olam (Master of the Universe) than the prophet. When the prophet says that a person is judged according to his deeds (lfi ma'asav), don't say "I think that the Ribbono Shel Olam has foreknowledge (yediah)". On the contrary, all the words of the prophets (kol divrei haneviim) depend on knowing that a person has free will (reshus netunah lo).