

# THE GREAT JEWISH BOOKS COURSE

Chovot HaLevavot and Shaarei Teshuva:

Medieval Works of Ethics and Philosophy

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## I Chovot HaLevavot - Duties of the Heart

- A. Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah, in 1040
  - a. Spanish philosopher and judge (little else is known)
- B. Written in Arabic to reach the masses
  - a. Translated into Hebrew by Yehuda ibn Tibbon (1161-1180)
    - i. Many times since, often based on Tibbon's translation
- C. Approbations
  - a. Rav Yosef Karo's maggid, Ari z'l, Chassom Sofer

From his Introduction:

Man has been created with both a body and soul; both of these are great favors which the Creator has bestowed upon us. One is seen, the other unseen. We, in turn, are duty bound to serve the Creator both outwardly (seen) and inwardly (unseen). Outwardly, through the duties of the limbs: charity, the study and teaching of Torah, sukkah, lulav, tzitzit, mezuzah, making a guardrail for the roof, and any other precept which culminates in an act that is carried out by the body. Inwardly, through the duties of the heart: by acknowledging in our hearts G-d's unity, having faith in Him and in His Torah, assuming His service, by being in awe of Him, humbling oneself and feeling shame before Him, loving Him, trusting in Him, by giving over one's life to Him, abstaining from what is hateful to Him, by letting all that one does be for His sake, by contemplating His good graces toward us, and anything like this which culminates in the meditation of the heart and conscience, with no dependence on the surface limbs of the body.

Furthermore, it is clear to me that the duties of the limbs would not be complete without the accompanying will of heart and soul to do them, without the heart's strong desire to carry them out. If one could imagine that our hearts were not bound to embrace and desire the service of G-d, our limbs could not then be bound to perform the commandments which we are obligated to perform, for no act is complete if the soul does not desire it. Since, clearly, the Creator has obligated our limbs to perform the commandments, it would not, then, have been fitting [for Him] to ignore our souls and our hearts - which are our most noble parts - and not obligate them to serve Him according to their ability; for without heart and soul, the service [of G-d] is incomplete. We have therefore been assigned both outward and inward duties, so that our service be whole and complete, and both the outer life and the inner life be included [in our devotion] to the Creator, may He be exalted.

D. Introduction: I searched out the books of my time, and have not found this area addressed

a. Reason, sourced in the Torah and Talmud, apply all the time, obvious, simple

Belief in the Unity of G-d is an example: Is this something which we are obligated to investigate intellectually, or is it enough to know of it by way of tradition and declare - as the simple do - without any argument or proof, that our G-d is one?  
If you possess intelligence and insight, and are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion, then it is your duty to use those faculties until you understand the subject, so that you are certain - both by tradition and by force of reasoning. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator.

E. The First Gate: Unity of G-d

When I searched after what is the most necessary of the cornerstones and fundamentals of our religion, I found that the wholehearted acceptance of the unity of G-d is the root and foundation of Judaism. It is the first of the gates of the Torah, and it differentiates between the believer and the nonbeliever. It is the central truth of our faith, and one who strays from it will not be able to perform his religious deeds properly or hold on to any belief,  
Because of this, the first words of G-d to us at Mount Sinai were: "I am Hashem your G-d...you shall not have other gods", and afterwards He exhorted us through His prophet saying: (Shema Yisrael..) "Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One" (Devarim 6:4)

F. The Second Gate: The Gate of Reflection

Although G-d's kindness is universal and all-embracing, most people are too blind to recognize them or realize their grandeur. There are three reasons why people fail to perceive His kindness: (1) They are preoccupied with worldly affairs and their desire to achieve more than they already have, so that their blessings seem meager and their blessings few. (2) They grow up so accustomed to them that G-d's abounding favors seem routine, ordinary, innate and interminable. (3) Misfortune and harm befalls them in body and property, yet they fail to see how they serve as means to their ultimate good and the benefits gained from the trials

G. The Third Gate: Serving G-d

Should anyone be so foolish as to contest this obligation of a human being towards the Creator - when he examines and closely studies the subject of G-d's benevolence towards him and candidly acknowledges the truth to himself, the sleeper will surely awake, the negligent will be aroused, the ignorant will investigate, the intelligent will comprehend the demonstration of the obligatory character of the service of G-d, the proofs for which are so clear the evidence of which is so manifest, and the indications are so true.

#### H. The Fourth Gate: Trust in G-d

I saw fit to bring afterwards what is more needed than all other things for one who serves G-d - placing one's trust in Him for all matters, the reason being the great benefits this yields both in Torah and in worldly matters.

Among its benefits to him is the peace of mind and tranquility of the soul in reliance in G-d. For if one does not place his trust in G-d, he will place his trust in something else, and whoever trusts in something other than G-d, the Al-mighty will remove His providence from such a person, and leave him in the hands of the one he trusted.

#### I. The Fifth Gate: Wholehearted Devotion of all Acts

What is devotion of actions to G-d? It is the intent in all acts, public and private, in the service of G-d, to do them for His Name, to fulfill His Will alone, and not to win the favor of human beings.

#### J. The Sixth Gate: Humility

Humility is the soul's sense of lowliness and lack of self-importance. When it becomes internalized in the soul, it will express itself externally in the form of a soft tongue, a calm voice, humility at a time of anger, and little desire to take revenge when the opportunity comes...Submission comes after an elevation of the spirit, after rising above acting like the animals, with their base traits, and above acting like the lower class of men, due to wisdom and understanding of the exaltedness of one's soul, and clear knowledge of which traits are good and which are repulsive.

#### K. The Seventh Gate: Repentance

The definition of repentance is the rectification of a man for the service of G-d after he deviated from it and transgressed against it, and to complete what was lost from him. the deviation might have been due to ignorance of G-d and matters of His service, his base desires overpowering his intellect, hiding from his duties towards G-d, associating with bad company who entice him to sin or other similar reasons.

#### L. The Eighth Gate: Self Accounting

Accounting with oneself means doing some soul searching in one's Torah and worldly affairs so that one may know what one has accomplished and what one still has to accomplish of his duties. The self-accounting changes for each person according to their level of perception and intelligence, and clarity of understanding. Every person is commanded to investigate to himself his duties in the service of G-d, according to his recognition of the favors of the Creator.

#### M. The Ninth Gate: Abstinence

The plain meaning of abstinence is to bridle the inner lusts and to refrain from something that one has the ability and opportunity to do on account of a reason which obligates him to do so. It is said: "The abstainer is one who can but leaves it". The reason which obligates bridling the inner lusts divides into two categories: That which applies to human beings, and that which applies specially to men of Torah.

#### N. The Tenth Gate: Love of G-d

Regarding the matter of Love of G-d - it is the longing of the soul - and its tending, on its own, towards the Creator, so that it can cleave to His sublime light. Because the soul is of an essence which is pure and spiritual, it tends towards spiritual things similar to it. By nature, it distances itself from what is opposite to its nature, such as the coarse physical bodies.

## II Shaarei Teshuva – The Gates of Repentance, by Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona

- A. Rabbeinu Yonah of Girondi was born in 1180 in Gerona, Spain and died in 1263 in Toledo, Spain.
  - a. (He was a first cousin of the Ramban and his daughter married the son of the Ramban. He was the Rebbi of the Rashba and the Ra'ah among other. In his youth he traveled to Provence, Southern France to learn under one of the Baalei Tosofos, Rav Shlomo Montpelier).
- B. Historical Background – Rambam (next week) had fierce opponents on several fronts
  - a. Rav Shlomo of Montpellier led charge against him to ban the book. Two of his students, including Rabbeinu Yonah signed the ban against it
    - i. The dispute tore the Jewish world into two
  - b. 1233 his book was burned in Paris by Dominican Monks who had been brought in to the dispute (Pope Gregory IX had established the Papal Inquisition in 1231 to deal with heresy)
  - c. In 1242, 24 cartloads of the Talmud were burned in the exact same spot
- C. Rabbeinu Yonah understood that he had made a mistake and vowed to beg forgiveness at the Rambam's grave in Tiberius.
  - a. Held up in Barcelona, and then Toledo where he became great teacher, always quoting Rambam; died suddenly of a rare disease in 1263, without ever arriving in Israel
  - b. It is believed he wrote Shaarei Teshuva (Gates of Repentance) as part of his repentant process

- i. (He never writes that himself, and he was a well-known ethicist with several other written works on similar topics)
  - c. Other major works include a commentary on Pirkei Avot, Mishlei
- D. Rav Chaim Volozhin writes about Shaarei Teshuva that when it comes to Mussar Seforim each person has a unique need and one sefer may be appropriate for him while another may be appropriate for someone else. However, he says, Shaarei Teshuva can touch the heart of every Jew, in every era, in every circumstance, until the days of Moshiach.
- E. Comprised of Four sections or Gates
  - a. The 20 Principles of Repentance

1. Regret what you've done to yourself
2. Abandoning the sin
3. Feel anguish over how you acted towards G-d
4. Take action to express your pain
5. Worry and fear about punishment that will come for sins
6. Be embarrassed about what you've done
7. Humbling Oneself before G-d
8. Humbling oneself in deed
9. Breaking physical desires
10. Doing Mitzvot that are the diametric opposite of transgressions done
11. Searching one's ways
12. Investigating the magnitude of punishments for sins one committed
13. Regarding lesser transgressions as severe
14. Vidui
15. Request Mercy for atonement rather than punishment for our sins
16. Try to make major repairs with damage done with people
17. Proactively do Chesed and learn Torah thoroughly
18. Having one's sins continuously in the backdrop of one's consciousness
19. Forsaking sins when presented the same opportunity
20. Help others do Teshuva

- b. The Six Motivators to Awaken Return to Hashem

How could I have done this to my body? To set myself up for such physical suffering?  
 How could I have been so cruel to my soul?  
 How could I have made such a poor trade-off? Do you realize who you are? What you have? And what it's for?

- c. The 10 Levels of Severity of Sin
    - d. The Divisions of Atonement

Excerpts:

Among the Blessed One's Kindness to his creations is having prepared for them the way to rise from the pit of their deeds and escape the trap of their offenses; to save themselves from destruction and to turn His wrath from them. In His great goodness and uprightness, He has taught and exhorted them to turn to Him upon having sinned against him for He knows the inclinations of their hearts.

Shaarei Teshuva 1:1

The penalty of the sinner who defers and delays repentance greatly intensifies each day, for he knows the anger has gone forth against him and there is a sanctuary to which he can flee. It is within his power to emerge from the turmoil, and yet still he persists in his rebellion and continues in his evil.

Shaarei Teshuva, 1:2

In the beginning a person does not think that the dominating Inclination will suddenly descend upon him. But after it in fact did, and he witnessed the weakness of his own strength in the face of the evil inclination's superior power over him, he should have sought means to increase the Fear of G-d and rescue and protect himself from transgression.

Shaarei Teshuva, 1:4

The First Principle in the Teshuva Process is Regret. One must understand in his heart that his having left G-d is evil and bitter. He must affirm in his heart the idea that punishment exists and sins are avenged. He must regret his evil deeds and say within his heart: What have I done? How was it that the fear of G-d was not before my eyes?

Shaarei Teshuva 1:10

Focused on Rashia and Rambam – commentaries on Chumash and Talmud. Rambam was moved – begins work on halacha.

Tonight is beginnings of new genre of works of ethics and morality philosophy. All 3 are Sefardic. (including the Moreh)

Easiest for us to discuss, we know almost nothing about his life, no controversy. Spanish philosopher and judge. 1040 is early. Rashi born in this year. Pretty modern to write a book in the vernacular of the masses. Arabic. Translated in Hebrew in 1161-1180. Over 100 years later. And then translated many times since since the original was not a modern Hebrew.

R Yosef Cairo was known to have a maggid who would study with him, reported that this is book he needs to study daily to achieve his level. Arizal also instructed his students as did the Chasom Sofer studying with his students before Shiur.

10 sections or gates., each has a synopsis from his introduction from each chapter. Start from his own introduction. Beautiful piece that defines Jewish life.