

CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF CHAUTAUQUA

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Maimonides – “Health and Living” – Week 4 - 2020

1. When, at times, some of the pious ones deviated to one extreme by fasting, keeping nightly vigils, refraining from eating meat or drinking wine, renouncing sexual intercourse, clothing themselves in woolen and hairy garments, dwelling in the mountains, and wandering about in the wilderness, they did so, partly as a means of restoring the health of their souls, as we have explained above, and partly because of the immorality of the towns-people.
2. When the pious saw that they themselves might become contaminated by association with evil men, or by constantly seeing their actions, fearing that their own morals might become corrupt on account of contact with them, they fled to the wildernesses far from their society, as the prophet Jeremiah said, (Jeremiah 9:1) "Oh that someone would grant me in the wilderness the dwelling of a wanderer, and I would quit my people and abandon them; for they are all adulterers, a troop of faithless evil-doers."
3. When the ignorant observed saintly men acting thus, not knowing their motives, they considered their deeds of themselves virtuous, and so, blindly imitating their acts, thinking thereby to become like them, tortured their bodies with all kinds of afflictions, imagining that they had acquired perfection and moral worth, and that by this means man would approach nearer to God, as if He hated the human body, and desired its destruction.
4. It never dawned upon them, however, that these actions were bad and resulted in moral imperfection of the soul. Such men can only be compared to one who, ignorant of the art of healing, when he sees skillful physicians administering to those at the point of death [purgatives known in Arabic as] colocynth, scammony, aloe, and the like, and depriving them of food, in consequence of which they are completely cured and escape death, foolishly concludes that since these things cure sickness, they must be all the more efficient in preserving the health, or prolonging life.
5. If a person should take these things constantly, and treat himself as a sick person, then he would really become ill. Likewise, those who are spiritually well, but have recourse to remedies, will undoubtedly become morally ill.
6. This perfect Torah which leads us to perfection as one who knew it well testifies by the words, (Psalms 19:8) "The Torah of the Lord is perfect restoring the soul; the testimonies of the Lord are faithful making wise the simple" recommends none of these things (such as self-torture, flight from society etc.).
7. On the contrary, it aims at man's following the path of moderation, in accordance with the dictates of nature, eating, drinking, enjoying legitimate sexual intercourse, all in moderation, and living among people in honesty and uprightness, but not dwelling in the wilderness or in the mountains, or clothing oneself in garments of hair and wool, or afflicting the body.
8. The Torah even warns us against these practices, as we interpret it according to what tradition tells us is the meaning of the passage concerning the Nazarite, (Numbers 6:11) "And he (the priest) shall make an atonement for him because he hath sinned against the soul." The Rabbis ask, "Against what soul has he sinned? Against his own soul, because he has deprived himself of wine. Is this not then a conclusion a *minori ad maius*? If one who deprives himself merely of wine must bring an atonement, how much more incumbent is it upon one who denies himself every enjoyment."
9. By the words of our prophets and of the sages of our Torah, we see that they were bent upon moderation and the care of their souls and bodies, in accordance with what the Torah prescribes and with the answer which God gave through His prophet to those who asked whether the fast-day once a year should continue or not.

They asked Zechariah, "Shall I weep in the fifth month with abstinence as I have done already these many years?" His, answer was, (Zachariah 7:3-7) "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh (month) already these seventy years, did ye in anywise fast for me, yea for me? And if ye do eat and if ye do drink are ye not yourselves those that eat and yourselves those that drink?" After that, he enjoined upon them justice and virtue alone, and not fasting, when he said to them, (Zachariah 7:9) "Thus hath said the Lord of Hosts. Execute justice and show kindness and mercy every man to his brother." He said further, (Zachariah 8:19) "Thus hath said the Lord of Hosts, the fast- day of the fourth, and the fast-day of the fifth, and the fast of seventh, and the fast of the tenth (month) shall become to the house of Judah gladness, and joy, and merry festivals; only love ye truth and peace." Know that by "truth" the intellectual virtues are meant, for they are immutably true, as we have explained in Chapter 2, and that by "peace" the moral virtues are designated, for upon them depends the peace of the world.

10. ... In this connection, I have never heard a more remarkable saying than that of the Rabbis, found in the Jerusalem Talmud, in the ninth chapter of the tractate Nedarim, where they greatly blame those who bind themselves by oaths and vows, in consequence of which they are fettered like prisoners. The exact words they use are, "Said Rabbi Iddai, in the name of Rabbi Isaac, 'Dost thou not think that what the Law prohibits is sufficient for thee that thou must take upon thyself additional prohibitions?' "
- (Maimonides eight chapter, Chapter 4)
11. 2:2 How are they to be healed? We tell the wrathful man to train himself to feel no reaction even if he is beaten or cursed. He should follow this course of behavior for a long time, until the anger is uprooted from his heart.
The man who is full of pride should cause himself to experience much disgrace. He should sit in the lowliest of places, dress in tattered rags which shame the wearer, and the like, until the arrogance is uprooted from his heart and he returns to the middle path, which is the proper path. When he returns to this middle path, he should walk in it the rest of his life.
One should take a similar course with each of the other traits. A person who swayed in the direction of one of the extremes should move in the direction of the opposite extreme, and accustom himself to that for a long time, until he has returned to the proper path, which is the midpoint for each and every temperament.
12. 3:1 A person might say, "Since envy, desire, [the pursuit] of honor, and the like, are a wrong path and drive a person from the world, I shall separate from them to a very great degree and move away from them to the opposite extreme." For example, he will not eat meat, nor drink wine, nor live in a pleasant home, nor wear fine clothing, but, rather, [wear] sackcloth and coarse wool and the like - just as the pagan priests do.
13. This, too, is a bad path and it is forbidden to walk upon it. Whoever follows this path is called a sinner [as implied by Numbers 6:11's] statement concerning a nazirite: "and he [the priest] shall make an atonement for him, for his having sinned regarding [his] soul." Our sages declared: If the nazirite who abstained only from wine requires atonement, how much more so does one who abstains from everything.
14. Therefore, our Sages directed man to abstain only from those things which the Torah denies him and not to forbid himself permitted things by vows and oaths [of abstention]. Thus, our Sages stated: Are not those things which the Torah has prohibited sufficient for you that you must forbid additional things to yourself?
15. This general statement also refers to those who fast constantly. They are not following a good path, [for] our Sages have forbidden a man to mortify himself by fasting. Of all the above, and their like, Solomon directed and said: "Do not be overly righteous and do not be overly clever; why make yourself desolate?" (Ecclesiastes 7:16).
16. 3:2 A person should direct his heart and the totality of his behavior to one goal, becoming aware of God, blessed be He. The [way] he rests, rises, and speaks should all be directed to this end.
For example: when involved in business dealings or while working for a wage, he should not think solely of gathering money. Rather, he should do these things, so that he will be able to obtain that which the body needs - food, drink, a home and a wife.
Similarly, when he eats, drinks and engages in intimate relations, he should not intend to do these things solely for pleasure to the point where he will eat and drink only that which is sweet to the palate and engage in

intercourse for pleasure. Rather, he should take care to eat and drink only in order to be healthy in body and limb.

17. Therefore, he should not eat all that the palate desires like a dog or a donkey. Rather, he should eat what is beneficial for the body, be it bitter or sweet. Conversely, he should not eat what is harmful to the body, even though it is sweet to the palate. ...for then, he will be eating and drinking for medical reasons only, in order to become healthy and be whole - for a man cannot exist without eating and drinking...
18. 3:3 A person who accustoms himself to live by [the rules of] medicine does not follow a proper path if his sole intention is that his entire body and limbs be healthy and that he have children who will do his work and toil for him. Rather, he should have the intent that his body be whole and strong, in order for his inner soul to be upright so that [it will be able] to know God. For it is impossible to understand and become knowledgeable in the wisdoms when one is starving or sick, or when one of his limbs pains him...
19. Thus, whoever walks in such a path all his days will be serving God constantly; even in the midst of his business dealings, even during intercourse for his intent in all matters is to fulfill his needs so that his body be whole to serve God.
Even when he sleeps, if he retires with the intention that his mind and body rest, lest he take ill and be unable to serve God because he is sick, then his sleep is service to the Omnipresent, blessed be He.
On this matter, our Sages have directed and said: "And all your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven." This is what Solomon declared in his wisdom: "Know Him in all your ways and He will straighten your paths" (Proverbs 3:6).
20. 4:1 Since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of God - for one cannot understand or have any knowledge of the Creator, if he is ill - therefore, he must avoid that which harms the body and accustom himself to that which is healthful and helps the body become stronger.
21. 4:14 They have given another principle with regard to physical well-being: As long as one exercises, exerts himself greatly, does not eat to the point of satiation and has loose bowels, he will not suffer sickness and he will grow in strength. [This applies] even if he eats harmful foods.
4:15 [Conversely,] whoever is idle and does not exercise, ...even if he eats the proper foods and takes care to follow the rules of medicine, will be full of pain for all his days and his strength will fade away.
22. Overeating is like poison to anyone's body. It is the main source of all illness. Most illnesses which afflict a man are caused by harmful foods or by his filling his belly and overeating, even of healthful foods.
This was implied by Solomon in his wisdom: "Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from distress" (Proverbs 21:23); i.e., "guards his mouth" from eating harmful food or eating his fill and "his tongue" from speaking [about things] other than his needs. (Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot)
23. Rav Chizkiyah the priest said in the name of Rav: "A person will ultimately be called to judgment for everything which his eye saw and which he did not taste."
Rav Lazar was concerned because of this teaching. He saved his pennies and would [purchase] and eat from every fruit once a year. (Jerusalem Talmud, *Kiddushin* 4:12)
24. *Zohar* (Vol. II, p. 42b): God created the world "in order to let Himself be known."
25. *Tanya* (Chapter 33): God created the world because He desired to have a dwelling place in the lower worlds. Thus, a person who tends to otherworldliness and asceticism, defeats God's purpose in creation.

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