

אִגֶּרֶת הַרַמְבַּ"ן

Iggeres HaRamban · Explanatory Edition

THE RAMBAN AND HIS LETTER

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, known as the Ramban, lived from about 1194 to 1270 and was one of the great Rishonim of Spain. His writings include his commentary on Chumash, chiddushim on Gemara, and works of halachah. He later settled in Eretz Yisrael, where he spent his final years.

Iggeres HaRamban is traditionally received as his letter of guidance to his son. It speaks in the voice of a father teaching his child how to live before Hashem. The letter does not name a particular incident that prompted it. Its purpose is stated in its own words: to help the reader practice these teachings and return to them regularly. Gentle speech, humility, and yiras Shamayim are brought into everyday conduct, so that Torah learning shapes the person who learns it.

Background: [Yosef Eisen](#), [Major Sepharadic Rishonim](#), [Chabad.org](#). The letter's purpose is drawn from its own opening and closing.

INTRODUCTION

The letter begins with something we can work on in an ordinary conversation: speaking gently. From there, it leads us from avoiding anger to anavah, humility, and from humility to yiras Shamayim. The Ramban brings these middos into the way we speak to people, think about our own importance, learn Torah, and stand before Hashem in tefillah. Read each passage with its explanation, then look for something to carry into practice. The letter itself asks us to return to it at least once a week.

The Hebrew is preserved from the supplied letter. The explanatory English, introduction and lemaaseh are AI-assisted study aids.

שִׁמְעַת בְּנֵי מוֹסֵר אָבִיד, וְאַל תִּטַּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ (מִשְׁלֵי א:ח).

Listen, my son, to the moral discipline of your father, and do not abandon the Torah teaching of your mother (Mishlei 1:8).

Explanation: The opening asks us to receive guidance with a willingness to be taught, rather than dismissing the words of those who guide us.

תתנהג תמיד לדבר כל דבריה בנחת, לכל אדם ובכל עת, ובזה תנצל מן הכעס, שהיא מדה רעה להחטיא בני אדם.

Accustom yourself to always speak all your words gently, to every person and at every time. Through this practice, you will be saved from anger, which is an extremely bad character trait that causes people to sin.

Explanation: Notice that the instruction applies to every person and every time. Gentle speech is presented here as a way to keep anger from taking hold, not only as good manners after we have calmed down.

וכן אמרו רבותינו ז"ל: כל הכועס, כל מיני גיהנם שולטין בו, שנאמר: "והסר כעס מלבך, והעבר רעה מבשרך" (קהלת יא:י).

And so our Sages of blessed memory have said: Anyone who becomes angry, all types of Gehinnom rule over him, as it is written: "Remove anger from your heart, and banish evil from your flesh" (Koheles 11:10).

ואין רעה אלא גיהנם, שנאמר: "וגם רשע ליום רעה" (משלי טז:ד).

And "evil" refers to nothing other than Gehinnom, as it is written: "And also the wicked for the day of evil" (Mishlei 16:4).

Explanation: This explains the proof in the previous line. The warning about removing evil is read as a warning about Gehinnom, showing how seriously Chazal view anger.

וכאשר תנצל מן הכעס, תעלה על לבך מדת הענוה, שהיא מדה טובה מכל המדות הטובות, שנאמר: "עקב ענוה יראת ה'" (משלי כב:ד).

And when you are saved from anger, there will arise in your heart anavah, the trait of humility, which is the best of all good character traits, as it is written: "The consequence of humility is the fear of Hashem" (Mishlei 22:4).

Explanation: The letter describes a progression. As anger loses its hold, there is room for anavah, and anavah leads a person toward yiras Shamayim.

וּבַעֲבוּר הָעֲנוּה, תַּעֲלֶה עַל לִבְךָ מִדַּת הִירָאָה, כִּי תִתֵּן אֶל לִבְךָ תַּמִּיד: מֵאִין בָּאתָ, וּלְאֵן אָתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, וְשֹׂאתָה רָמָה וְתוֹלַעַה בְּחַיֶּיךָ, וְאַף כִּי בְּמוֹתְךָ, וּלְפָנַי מִי אָתָּה עֲתִיד לִתֵּן דִּין וְחֶשְׁבוֹן — לְפָנַי מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:

And because of humility, the trait of fear of Heaven will arise in your heart, for you will constantly take to heart: from where you came, and to where you are going, and that you are mere rot and worms in your lifetime, and surely so in your death, and before Whom you are destined to give a full accounting and reckoning, before the King of Glory, as it is written:

Explanation: The point of this reflection is to bring our smallness and accountability before Hashem into view, so that pride gives way to reverence.

"הִנֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמַי הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא יִכְלְלוּךָ" (מְלָכִים א ח:כו), אֵף כִּי לְבוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם.

"Behold, the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain You" (Melachim I 8:27), how much less so the hearts of human beings.

וְנֶאֱמַר: "הֲלוֹא אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲנִי מְלֵא, נֹאם ה'" (יִרְמְיָהוּ כג:כד).

And it is written: "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth? says Hashem" (Yirmeyahu 23:24).

וּכְאֲשֶׁר תַּחֲשֹׁב אֶת כָּל אֵלֶּה, תִּירָא מִבּוֹרְאֶךָ וְתִשְׁמֹר מִן הַחֲטָא, וּבְמַדּוֹת הָאֵלֶּה תִּהְיֶה שְׂמֵחַ בְּחֻלְקֶךָ.

And when you contemplate all these matters, you will fear your Creator and guard yourself from sin, and through these traits you will be happy with your portion.

Explanation: The same awareness that restrains us from sin also helps us be content with our portion. The letter connects yiras Shamayim with being happy with what we have.

וּכְאֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנֶהּ בְּמַדַּת הָעֲנוּה לְהִתְבּוֹשֵׁשׁ מִכָּל אָדָם, וּלְהִתְפַּחַד מִמֶּנּוּ וּמִן הַחֲטָא — אֲזַ תִּשְׁרָה עָלֶיךָ רוּחַ הַשְּׁכִינָה, וְזִיו כְּבוֹדָהּ, וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם הֵבֵא.

And when you conduct yourself with the trait of humility, to be bashful before every person, and to be afraid of him and of sin, then the spirit of the Shechinah, the splendor of its glory, and the life of the World to Come will rest upon you.

וְעַתָּה בְּנִי, יָדַע וּרְאֵה, כִּי הַמִּתְנַפֵּא בְּלִבּוֹ עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת — מוֹרֵד הוּא בַּמַּלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם, כִּי מִתְפָּאֵר הוּא בְּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "ה' מָלַךְ גִּאוֹת לְבֹשׁ" (תְּהִלִּים צג:א).

And now, my son, know and see that one who is arrogant in his heart over other creations is a rebel against the Kingdom of Heaven, because he glorifies himself with the royal garments of Heaven, as it is written:

"Hashem reigns, He is clothed in majesty" (Tehillim 93:1).

Explanation: The image is of someone claiming the King's clothing as his own. The letter uses it to expose what is wrong with treating personal greatness as something that belongs to us independently.

וְעַל מָה יִתְנַפֵּא לֵב הָאָדָם? אִם בְּעֶשֶׂר — "ה' מוֹרִישׁ וּמַעֲשִׂיר" (שְׁמוּאֵל א ב:ז).

And over what should the heart of man be proud? If it is over wealth, "Hashem makes poor and makes rich" (Shmuel I 2:7).

וְאִם בְּכָבוֹד — הֲלֹא לֵאלֹקִים הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְהָעֶשֶׂר וְהַכָּבוֹד מִלִּפְנֵיךָ" (דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים א כט:יב), וְאִיךָ מִתְפָּאֵר בְּכָבוֹד קוֹנוֹ? וְאִם מִתְפָּאֵר בְּחָכְמָה — "מַסִּיר שִׁפְהָ לְנֶאֱמָנִים וְטַעַם זְקֵנִים יִקַּח" (אִיּוֹב יב:כ).

And if it is over honor, does it not belong to Hashem, as it is written: "And wealth and honor come from before You" (Divrei HaYamim I 29:12), so how can one glorify himself with the honor of his Creator? And if he glorifies himself with wisdom, "He removes the speech of the trustworthy and takes away the reasoning of the elders" (Iyov 12:20).

Explanation: Wealth, honor, and wisdom cannot serve as grounds for self-importance when they are all in Hashem's hands.

נִמְצָא, הַכֹּל שָׁוֶה לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם, כִּי בְּאַפּוֹ מַשְׁפִּיל גֵּאִים, וּבִרְצוֹנוֹ מַגְבִּיֵּה שְׁפָלִים.

Consequently, all are equal before Hashem, because in His anger He humbles the proud, and by His will He elevates the lowly.

לְכֵן הַשְׁפִּיל עֲצָמְךָ, וַיִּנְשְׂאֶךָ הַמָּקוֹם.

Therefore, humble yourself, and Hashem will lift you up.

על פן אפרש לך איך תתנהג במידת הענוה ללקת בה תמיד: כל דבריך יהיו בנחת, וראשך כפוף, ועיניך יביטו למטה לארץ ולבך למעלה, ואל תביט בפני אדם בדברך עמו.

Therefore, I will explain to you how you should conduct yourself with the trait of humility to walk in it always: let all your words be spoken gently, with your head bowed, your eyes looking down toward the earth, and your heart directed upward, and do not stare directly into the face of any person when you speak with him.

Explanation: Humility is made visible in the way we carry ourselves. The lowered eyes and the heart directed upward join an outwardly modest bearing with inward attention to Hashem.

וכל אדם יהיה גדול ממך בעיניך: אם חכם או עשיר הוא — עליך לכבדו.

And let every person be greater than you in your eyes: if he is wise or wealthy, you must honor him.

ואם רש הוא ואתה עשיר או חכם ממנו — חשב בלבך כי אתה חייב ממנו והוא זכאי ממך, שאם הוא חוטא — הוא שוגג ואתה מזיד.

And if he is poor and you are wealthier or wiser than he is, consider in your heart that you are more guilty than he is and he is more innocent than you, for if he sins, he does so unintentionally, whereas you sin intentionally.

Explanation: This is an instruction about how to judge yourself when you are tempted to look down on someone else. Greater knowledge gives you more reason to hold yourself accountable; it is not an invitation to assume you know another person's intentions.

בכל דבריך ומעשיך ומחשבותיך, ובכל עת — חשב בלבך כאלו אתה עומד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ושכינתו עליך, כי כבודו מלא העולם.

In all your words, deeds, and thoughts, and at all times, consider in your heart as if you are standing before the Holy One, blessed be He, with His Shechinah resting over you, for His glory fills the entire world.

Explanation: The awareness is meant to accompany ordinary life, including thoughts and conversations, not only the moments set aside for tefillah.

ודבריך יהיו באימה וביראה כעבד לפני רבו.

And let your words be spoken with awe and fear, like a servant standing before his master.

וְתִתְבַּיֵּשׁ מִכָּל אָדָם.

And behave with bashfulness before every person.

וְאִם יִקְרָאָה אִישׁ — אַל תַּעֲנֶהוּ בְּקוֹל רָם, רַק בְּנִחָת, כְּעוֹמֵד לִפְנֵי רַבּוֹ.

And if a person calls out to you, do not answer him with a loud voice, but only gently, like one who stands before his master.

Explanation: Even a simple response when someone calls becomes an opportunity to remember before Whom we stand.

וְהָיִי זֶהִיר לְקִרְוֹת בַּתּוֹרָה תָּמִיד אֲשֶׁר תּוּכַל לְקַיְמָהּ, וְכֹאֲשֶׁר תִּקּוּם מִן הַסֵּפֶר — תִּתְחַפֵּשׂ בְּאֲשֶׁר לְמַדְתָּ אִם יֵשׁ בּוֹ דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר תּוּכַל לְקַיְמוֹ.

And be careful to read in the Torah constantly so that you will be able to fulfill it, and when you rise from the book, search through what you have learned to see if there is something in it that you can put into practice.

Explanation: Learning is not meant to remain on the page. Before moving on, look back at what you learned and identify something you can actually fulfill.

וְתִפְשֹׁפֶשׂ בְּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ בְּבֹקֶר וּבְעֶרֶב, וּבִזְהָ יִהְיוּ כָּל יְמֶיךָ בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה.

And examine your deeds in the morning and in the evening, and in this way all your days will be spent in a state of teshuvah.

Explanation: A regular cheshbon hanefesh keeps returning us to teshuvah. The letter places that review at both ends of the day.

וְהִסֵּר כָּל דְּבָרֵי הָעוֹלָם מִלִּבְּךָ בְּעֵת הַתְּפִלָּה, וְהָכֵן לִבְּךָ לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וְטָהֵר רַעֲיוֹנֶיךָ, וְחָשַׁב הַדְּבוּר קֹדֶם שֶׁתּוֹצִיאֵנּוּ מִפִּיךָ.

And remove all worldly matters from your heart at the time of prayer, prepare your heart before Hashem, blessed be He, purify your thoughts, and think about each word before you utter it from your mouth.

Explanation: The preparation is inward as well as verbal: clear away the concerns occupying the heart, then give thought to the words themselves.

וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי הַבִּלְוָה בְּכָל דְּבַר וּדְבַר, וְלֹא תַחֲטָא.

And you should do this all the days of your fleeting life in every single matter, and you will not sin.

וּבְזֶה יִהְיוּ דְבָרֶיךָ וּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּמַחְשְׁבוֹתֶיךָ יִשְׁרִים, וּתְפִלָּתְךָ תִּהְיֶה זָכָה וּבָרָה וְנִקְיָה וּמְכוֹנֶת וּמְקַבֶּלֶת לְפָנַי הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שְׁנֵאֵמַר: "תִּכְיֶן לָבָם, תִּקְשִׁיב אָזְנְךָ" (תְּהִלִּים י:יז).

And through this, your words, deeds, and thoughts will be upright, and your prayer will be pure, clear, clean, focused, and accepted before Hashem, blessed be He, as it is written: "You will prepare their heart, You will cause Your ear to listen" (Tehillim 10:17).

תִּקְרָא הָאֲגֻרָת הַזֹּאת פַּעַם אַחַת בְּשָׁבוּעַ וְלֹא תִפְחוֹת, לְקִיּוֹמָהּ וּלְלֶכֶת בָּהּ תָּמִיד אַחֲרֵי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, לְמַעַן תִּצְלִיחַ בְּכָל דְּרָכֶיךָ, וְתִזְכֶּה לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא הַצָּפוֹן לְצַדִּיקִים.

Read this letter once a week and do not do so less, in order to fulfill it and to walk in its ways always after Hashem, may He be blessed, so that you will succeed in all your ways, and merit the World to Come which is hidden away for the righteous.

Explanation: The weekly reading is tied to living by the letter. Reviewing it is meant to bring its instructions back into our conduct, not simply to finish reading the words.

וּבְכָל יוֹם שֶׁתִּקְרָאָנָה — יַעֲנוּךָ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּפְאוֹר יַעֲלֶה עַל לִבְךָ לְשֵׂאל, עַד עוֹלָם.

And on any day that you read it, the letter promises that you will be answered from Heaven regarding whatever arises in your heart to ask, forever.

אָמֵן סְלָה.

Amen, Selah.

לְמַעֲשָׂה TAKING IT INTO PRACTICE

Choose one conversation today in which to pay attention to your tone, especially if you feel yourself becoming impatient. After learning, ask yourself what in those words you can put into practice. Before tefillah, pause to set aside what has been occupying your mind and think about the words you are about to say. The letter also calls for reviewing our deeds morning and evening. Use that review to notice where you followed these teachings and where you need to return to them. Reading the letter each week can keep that work in view.