The Ramban's Letter

Heed, my son, the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the guidance of your mother.[1] Accustom yourself to speak gently to all people at all times. This will protect you from anger – a most serious character flaw which causes one to sin. Our Rabbis taught:[2] "Whoever flares up in anger is subject to the discipline of Gehinnom, as it is written: Banish anger from your heart and remove evil from your flesh.[3] The evil mentioned here refers to Gehinnom, as it is written: And the wicked are destined for the day of evil."[4]

Once you have distanced yourself from anger, the quality of humility will enter your heart. This sterling quality is the finest of all admirable traits, as Scripture writes: On the heels of humility comes the fear of HASHEM.[5] Through humility, the fear of God will intensify in your heart, for you will always be aware of from where you have come and to where you are destined to go. You will realize that in life you are as frail as the maggot or the worm – all the more so in death. It is this sense of humility which reminds you of the One before Whom you will be called for judgment – the King of Glory. Of Him it is written: Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You,[6] surely not the hearts of men.[7] Furthermore, it is written: Do I not fill heaven and earth? says HASHEM.[8]

After you give serious thought to these ideas you will stand in awe of your Creator and will be guarded against sin. Once you have acquired these fine qualities, you will indeed be happy with your lot.

When your actions display genuine humility – when you stand meekly before man, and fearfully before God; when you stand wary of sin – then the spirit

(1) *Proverbs* 1:8. (2) *Nedarim* 22a. (3) *Ecclesiastes* 11:10. (4) *Proverbs* 16:4. (5) *Proverbs* 22:4. (6) *I Kings* 8:27; *II Chronicles* 6:18. (7) *Proverbs* 15:11. (8) *Jeremiah* 23:24.

of God's Presence will rest upon you, as will the splendor of His Glory; you will live the life of the World to Come.

And now my son, understand clearly that one who is prideful in his heart towards other men rebels against the sovereignty of heaven, for he glorifies himself in God's own robes, for it is written, HASHEM reigns, He adons the mantle of grandeur.[1]

For indeed, of what should man be prideful? If he has wealth – it is Hashem Who makes one poor or prosperous. And if honor – does honor not belong to God? As it is written: Wealth and honor come from You[2] – how can one glorify himself with the honor of his Maker? If he takes pride in wisdom – let him understand that God may remove the speech of the most competent and take away the wisdom of the aged.[3]

Thus, all men stand as equals before their Creator. In His fury He casts down the lofty; in His goodwill He elevates the downtrodden. Therefore, humble yourself, for Hashem will lift you.

Thus, I shall explain to you how you may accustom yourself to the quality of humility, to walk with it always.

Let your words be spoken gently;
let your head be bowed.

Cast your eyes downward, and your heart heavenward; and when speaking, do not stare at your listener. Let all men seem greater than you in your eyes: If another is more wise or wealthy than yourself, you must show him respect. And if he is poor, and you are richer or wiser than he, consider that he may be more righteous than yourself: If he sins it is the result of error, while your transgression is deliberate.

In all your words, actions and thoughts – at all times – imagine in your heart that you are standing in the presence of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and

that His Presence rests upon you. Indeed, the glory of Hashem fills the universe. – Speak with reverence and awe, like a servant who stands in the presence of his master. Act with restraint in the company of others: If one should call out to you, do not answer with a loud voice, but respond gently – in low tones, as one who stands before his mentor.

Take care to always study Torah diligently so that you will be able to fulfill its commands. When you rise from study, ponder carefully what you have learned; see what there is in it which you can put into practice.

Review your actions every morning and evening, and in this way live all your days in repentance.

Cast external matters from your mind when you stand to pray; carefully prepare your heart in the presence of the Holy One. Purify your thoughts, and ponder your words before you utter them.

Conduct yourself in these ways in all your endeavors for as long as you live. In this way you will surely avoid transgression; your words, actions and thoughts will be flawless. Your prayer will be pure and clear, sincere and pleasing to God, Blessed is He, as it is written: When You prepare their heart [to concentrate], You are attentive [to their prayers.][1]

Read this letter once a week and neglect none of it. Fulfill it, and in so doing, walk with it forever in the ways of Hashem, may He be Blessed, so that you may succeed in your ways and merit the World to Come that lies hidden for the righteous. Every day that you shall read this letter, heaven shall answer your heart's desires . . . Amen, Selah!

(1) *Psalms* 10:17.

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אגרת הרמב"ן

שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוּסַר אָבִיךָ, וְאַל תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ.[1] תִּתְנַהֵג תָּמִיד לְדַבֵּר כָּל דְּבָרֶיךָ בְּנַחַת לְכָל אָדָם וּבְכָל עֵת, וּבָזֶה תִּנָּצֵל מִן הַכַּעַס, שֶׁהִיא מִדָּה רָעָה לְהַחֲטִיא בְּנֵי אָדָם. וְכֵן אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ ז"ל,[2] כָּל הַכּוֹעֵס כָּל מִינֵי גֵּיהִנֹּם שׁוֹלְטִין בּוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: הָסֵר כַּעַס מִלִּבֶּךָ, וְהַעֲבֵר רָעָה מִבְּשָׂרֶךָ,[3] וְאֵין רָעָה אֶלָּא גֵּיהִנֹּם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְגַם רָשָׁע לְיוֹם רָעָה.[4] וְכַאֲשֶׁר תִּנָּצֵל מִן הַכַּעַס תַּעֲלֶה עַל לִבְּךָ מִדַּת הָעֲנָוָה שֶׁהִיא מִדָּה טוֹבָה מִכָּל הַמִּדּוֹת טוֹבוֹת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: עֵקֶב עֲנָוָה יִרְאַת ה'.[5] וּבַעֲבוּר הָעֲנָוָה תַּעֲלֶה עַל לִבְּךָ מִדַּת הַיִּרְאָה, כִּי תִּתֵּן אֶל לִבְּךָ תָּמִיד, מֵאַיִן בָּאתָ, וּלְאָן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, וְשֶׁאַתָּה רִמָּה וְתוֹלֵעָה בְּחַיֶּיךָ, וְאַף כִּי בְּמוֹתְךָ, וְלִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עָתִיד לִתֵּן דִּין וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן, לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: הִנֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וּשְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא יְכַלְכְּלוּךָ,[6] אַף כִּי לִבּוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם,[7] וְנֶאֱמַר: הֲלֹא אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲנִי מָלֵא נְאֻם ה'.[8] וְכַאֲשֶׁר תַּחְשׁוֹב אֶת כָּל אֵלֶּה, תִּירָא מִבּוֹרְאֶךָ וְתִשְׁמוֹר מִן הַחֵטְא, וּבְמִדּוֹת הָאֵלֶּה תִּהְיֶה שָׂמֵחַ בְּחֶלְקֶךָ, וְכַאֲשֶׁר תִּתְנַהֵג בְּמִדַּת הָעֲנָוָה לְהִתְבּוֹשֵׁשׁ מִכָּל אָדָם וּלְהִתְפָּחֵד מִמֶּנּוּ וּמִן הַחֵטְא, אָז תִּשְׂרֶה עָלֶיךָ רוּחַ

הַשְׁכִינָה, וְזִיו כְּבוֹדָהּ, וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְעַתָּה בְּנִי דַּע וּרְאֵה, כִּי הַמִּתְגָּאֶה בְּלִבּוֹ עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת, מוֹרֵד הוּא בְּמַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם, כִּי מִתְפָּאֵר הוּא בִּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ה' מָלָךְ גֵּאוּת לָבֵשׁ וגו'.[1] וּבַמֶּה יִתְגָּאֶה לֵב הָאָדָם, אִם בְּעוֹשֶׁר, ה' מוֹרִישׁ וּמַעֲשִׁיר. וְאִם בְּכָבוֹד, הֲלֹא לֵאלֹקִים הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהָעוֹשֶׁר וְהַכָּבוֹד מִלְּפָנֶיךָ,[2] וְאֵיךְ מִתְפָּאֵר בִּכְבוֹד קוֹנוֹ. וְאִם מִתְפָּאֵר בְּחָכְמָה, מֵסִיר שְׂפָה לְנֶאֱמָנִים, וְטַעַם זְקֵנִים יְקָח.[3] נִמְצָא הַכֹּל שָׁוֶה לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם, כִּי בְאַפּוֹ מַשְׁפִּיל גֵּאִים, וּבִרְצוֹנוֹ מַגְבִּיהַּ שְׁפָלִים, לָכֵן הַשְׁפֵּל עַצְמְךָ וְיַנְשְׁאֲךָ הַמָּקוֹם. עַל כֵּן אֲפָרֵשׁ לְךָ אֵיךְ תִּתְנַהֵג בְּמִדַּת הָעֲנָוָה לָלֶכֶת בָּהּ תָּמִיד: כָּל דְּבָרֶיךָ יִהְיוּ בְּנַחַת, וּרְאֹשְׁךָ כָּפוּף, וְעֵינֶיךָ יַבִּיטוּ לְמַטָּה לָאָרֶץ, וְלִבְּךָ לְמַעְלָה, וְאַל תַּבִּיט בִּפְנֵי אָדָם בְּדַבֶּרְךָ עִמּוֹ, וְכָל אָדָם יִהְיֶה גָּדוֹל מִמְּךָ בְּעֵינֶיךָ, וְאִם חָכָם אוֹ עָשִׁיר הוּא, עָלֶיךָ לְכַבְּדוֹ. וְאִם רָשׁ הוּא, וְאַתָּה עָשִׁיר אוֹ חָכָם מִמֶּנּוּ, חֲשׁוֹב בְּלִבְּךָ כִּי אַתָּה חַיָּב מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא זַכַּאי מִמְּךָ, שֶׁאִם הוּא חוֹטֵא הוּא שׁוֹגֵג וְאַתָּה מֵזִיד. בְּכָל דְּבָרֶיךָ וּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּמַחְשְׁבוֹתֶיךָ וּבְכָל עֵת, חֲשׁוֹב בְּלִבְּךָ כְּאִלּוּ אַתָּה עוֹמֵד לִפְנֵי הקב"ה,

(1) *Psalms* 93:1. (2) *I Chronicles* 29:12. (3) *Job* 12:20.

וּשְׁכִינָתוֹ עָלֶיךָ. כִּי כְּבוֹדוֹ מָלֵא הָעוֹלָם, וּדְבָרֶיךָ יִהְיוּ בְּאֵימָה וּבְיִרְאָה כְּעֶבֶד לִפְנֵי רַבּוֹ, וְתִתְבַּיֵּשׁ מִכָּל אָדָם, וְאִם יְקָרְאֲךָ אִישׁ אַל תַּעֲנֵנוּ בְּקוֹל רָם, רַק בְּנַחַת כְּעוֹמֵד לִפְנֵי רַבּוֹ. וַהֲוֵי זָהִיר לִקְרוֹת בַּתּוֹרָה תָּמִיד אֲשֶׁר תּוּכַל לְקַיְּמָהּ, וְכַאֲשֶׁר תָּקוּם מִן הַסֵּפֶר, תְּחַפֵּשׂ בַּאֲשֶׁר לָמַדְתָּ אִם יֵשׁ בּוֹ דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר תּוּכַל לְקַיְּמוֹ, וּתְפַשְׁפֵּשׁ בְּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ בַּבֹּקֶר וּבָעֶרֶב, וּבָזֶה יִהְיוּ כָּל יָמֶיךָ בִּתְשׁוּבָה. וְהָסֵר כָּל דִּבְרֵי הָעוֹלָם מִלִּבְּךָ בְּעֵת הַתְּפִלָּה, וְהָכֵן לִבְּךָ לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם ב"ה, וְטַהֵר רַעְיוֹנֶיךָ, וַחֲשׁוֹב הַדִּבּוּר קֹדֶם שֶׁתּוֹצִאֶנּוּ מִפִּיךָ, וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי הֶבְלֶךָ בְּכָל דָּבָר וְדָבָר וְלֹא תֶחֱטָא, וּבָזֶה יִהְיוּ דְּבָרֶיךָ וּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּמַחְשְׁבוֹתֶיךָ יְשָׁרִים, וּתְפִלָּתְךָ תִּהְיֶה זַכָּה וּבָרָה וּנְקִיָּה וּמְכֻוֶּנֶת וּמְקֻבֶּלֶת לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם ב"ה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: תָּכִין לִבָּם תַּקְשִׁיב אָזְנֶךָ.[1] תִּקְרָא הָאִגֶּרֶת הַזֹּאת פַּעַם אַחַת בַּשָּׁבוּעַ וְלֹא תִפְחוֹת, לְקַיְּמָהּ וְלָלֶכֶת בָּהּ תָּמִיד אַחַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, לְמַעַן תַּצְלִיחַ בְּכָל דְּרָכֶיךָ וְתִזְכֶּה לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא הַצָּפוּן לַצַּדִּיקִים. וּבְכָל יוֹם שֶׁתִּקְרָאֶנָּה יָעֲנוּךָ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם כַּאֲשֶׁר יַעֲלֶה עַל לִבְּךָ לִשְׁאוֹל עַד עוֹלָם אָמֵן סֶלָה:

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