

MAIMONIDES, HILCHOT DEOT

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CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter discusses bodily health, and those services which a learned sage should make sure are available in his town.

1) The body being healthy is of the ways of the Lord, for it is impossible to understand or know the knowledge of the Creator while unwell. Therefore, one should keep away from things which destroy the body, and accustom oneself to healthy and curing matters, which are as follows: One should never eat unless one is hungry, nor drink unless one is thirsty, and nor should one hold oneself back for even a single moment from relieving oneself, for whenever one feels the need to pass water or to defecate, one should do so immediately.

2) One should not eat until one's stomach is [very] full, but one should [only] eat until one's stomach is three-quarters full. Nor should one drink water during a meal, except a little mixed with wine, but once the food begins to digest one should what one needs to drink, but one should never drink too much, even when the food digests. One should nor eat unless one has checked oneself to make sure that one does not need to relieve oneself. One should not eat unless one has first relieved oneself, or until one's body gets warm, or unless one has worked at something else first. The general rule of the matter is that one should always answer one's body. In the morning, one should work until one's body gets warm, then one should wait until one's soul has settled, and then one may eat. It is good to wash in hot water after having worked, then wait a while, and then eat.

3) When one eats, one should always sit in one's place, or recline on one's left side, and one should not ride, work or agitate one's body until the food has been digested. Someone who goes for a walk, or works, after eating will bring upon himself bad and difficult illnesses.

4) The day and night [together] are twenty-four hours long. It is sufficient to sleep for a third of this, i.e. eight hours, which should be at the end of the night, so that there will be eight hours from when one goes to sleep to sunrise. One should get up before sunrise.

5) One should not sleep on one's front or on one's back, but on one's side; at the beginning of the night one should sleep on one's left side, and at the end of the night on one's right side. One should not sleep close to having eaten, but one should first wait three or four hours. One should not sleep during the day.

6) One should not eat at the beginning of a meal things which purge one's bowels, such as grapes, figs, strawberries, pears, water melons or types of cucumber. One should not mix one's foods, but one should wait until the first course has passed from one's upper stomach before eating the second course. Those things, such as pomegranates, quinces, apples or small pears, which exert the bowels should [only] be eaten at the end of a meal, and one should not eat too many of them.

7) If one wants to eat poultry and animal meat together at the same meal, one should eat the poultry first. If one wanted to eat poultry and eggs together, one should eat the eggs first. If one wanted to eat lean animal meat and fat animal meat together, one should eat the lean meat first. One should always eat the lighter foods before the heavier foods.

8) In summer, one should eat cold foods without excessive amounts of spices, and one

should also eat vinegar. In the winter, one should eat hot foods with lots of spices, and small quantities of mustard and *Assa foetida* as well. One should also follow this rule in hot or cold places, and in any place where it is suitable to do so.

9) There are some foods which are exceedingly bad, and it is fitting never to eat them. Such foods include big fish, old salted cheese, morels, truffles, old salted meat, wine straight from the wine-press, and a cooked food which has been allowed to give off a smell. Similarly, any food which has a bad smell or which is bitter is like poison to the body. There are some bad foods which are not as bad as those already mentioned. Therefore, it is fitting to eat only a little of them, and even then only rarely, and also to accustom oneself not to having with, or as, one's food things such as big fish, cheese, milk which is more than twenty-four hours old, the meat of big oxen or big goats, broad beans, lentils, sappid, barley bread, matzah, cabbage, hay, onions, garlic, mustard and radish - all these are bad foods. It is only fitting to eat a little of them and in the winter, but in the summer one should not eat of them at all. It is not fitting to eat broad beans or lentils in both the summer and the winter, and one should eat gourds only in the winter.

10) There are some foods which are not as bad as those mentioned [above], and they include water-fowl, young doves, dates, bread which has been roasted in oil, bread which has been kneaded in oil, fine flour which has been baked until it no longer has the smell of grain, brine and pickles. It is not fitting to eat a lot of these foods. Someone who is wise and abides by the Creator, is not pulled by his desires and does not eat these foods except as a medicine, is mighty.

11) One should always refrain from [eating] the fruits of the trees, and one should not eat of them excessively, even if they have been dried and especially if they are moist; before they have been boiled they are like swords to the body. Similarly, carob and all sour fruits are bad foods, and one should not eat of them except in summer or in hot places. Figs, grapes and almonds are always good [to eat], whether they are moist or dried, and one may eat of them all that one wants to, but one shouldn't persist in eating them even though they are the best of the fruits of the trees.

12) Honey and wine are bad for children but good for adults, and especially in the winter. In the summer, one should eat two-thirds of the amount that one eats in the winter.

13) One should always endeavour to have healthy bowels throughout one's life, and one should always be close to [having] a slight diarrhoea. This is a very important general rule in health - whenever faeces is avoided or is passed with difficulty, a bad illness will follow. If one has to exert oneself [when defecating], one can cure one's bowels in the following ways: If one is a young lad one should eat salty foods early in the morning, well-cooked and mixed with olive oil, brine and salt, without bread, or one should drink the water in which spinach or cabbage has been boiled, together with olive oil, brine and salt. If, however, one is an older person, one should drink honey dissolved in hot water in the morning, wait four hours, and then eat one's meal. This procedure should be followed for one day, or three or four days if necessary, until one's bowels have been cured.

14) The Sages stated another general rule about bodily health: Whenever one exercises and works but is not satisfied with what one eats and one's bowels are healthy, one will not become sick and one's strength will increase, even if one eats bad foods.

15) Anyone who does not exercise, or holds back from relieving himself, or who has hard bowels, will have a painful life and his strength will weaken, even if he eats good foods and looks after himself medicinally. Overeating is like poison to the body, and is the cause of many illnesses. Most illnesses are caused by bad foods and overeating, even if one overeats

good foods. Solomon said in his wisdom, "He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles", that is to say that one should guard one's mouth from eating either bad foods or unnecessarily, and one's tongue from speaking except when necessary.

16) One should wash oneself every seven days. One should not enter a wash-house shortly after having eaten, nor when one is hungry, but one may when one's food has just started to digest. One should wash with hot water whose temperature is below scalding temperature, and one should wash one's head with water that would scald one's body. Then, one should rinse oneself with lukewarm water, then with cooler water, and so on, until one is washing with cold water. One should not pour lukewarm or cold water over one's head. One should not wash with water that is so cold that one will sweat and [thereby] dehydrate. One shouldn't stay for too long in a wash-house - once one feels that one is beginning to sweat and that one is beginning to dehydrate, one should rinse oneself and then leave. One should check oneself before entering a wash-house to see that one does not need to relieve oneself. One should carry out similar checking before and after eating, before and after copulation, upon getting tired, before doing exercise and before and after sleeping. The total number [of times that one should check oneself] is ten.

17) When one leaves a wash-house one should put on one's clothes and cover one's head externally, so that one won't catch a cold. One has to be particular about this even in the summer. After coming out, one should wait until one's soul has settled and one's body has rested and become warm again before eating. One should not drink cold water after leaving the wash-house, and it need not be said that one shouldn't drink in the wash-house itself. If, however, one was thirsty when one came out of the wash-house, one should mix the water with wine or honey before drinking. In the winter it is good to anoint oneself with oil in the wash-house.

18) One should not accustom oneself to letting blood frequently, for one should not let blood unless absolutely necessary. One should not let blood in the summer or winter, but one should let a little during Nissan and Tishrei. Once one has reached the age of fifty one should not let blood at all. One should not let blood and go to the wash-house on the same day, nor should one let blood before travelling, and nor on the day when one completes a journey. One should rest on the day of letting, and one should not tire oneself, do exercises or even go on excursions on the day of letting.

19) Semen is the strength of the body, its life and the light of its eyes. If one ejaculates excessively then one's body and strength will come to an end, and one's life will be lost. Solomon said in his wisdom, "Do not give your strength to women". If one indulges [excessively] in copulation, one will age rapidly, one's strength will disappear, one's eyes will dim, a bad smell will give off from one's mouth and armpits, the hair of one's head, eyebrows and eyelashes will thin, the hair of one's beard, armpits and legs will grow [a lot], one's teeth will fall out, and many sources of suffering apart from these will befall one. The doctoring Sages said that [of people who die because of illness] one in a thousand die of miscellaneous illnesses, whereas the rest die because of excessive copulation. Therefore, one has to be careful in this matter if one wants to live well, and one should copulate only when one's body is healthy and at its strongest. If one's organ erects often without one's having thought about it, or it erects while one is thinking about other things, or one finds that one's lower loins heavy as if the vas deferens is being drawn, and the flesh is hot, then one has to copulate, for the cure for this condition is copulation. One should not copulate when full or when hungry, but only when one's food has begun to digest. One should check oneself before and after copulation to see that one doesn't need to relieve oneself. One should not copulate while

standing or while sitting, nor in a wash-house or on the day when one is scheduled to go to the wash-house, nor on a day when one lets blood, nor on a day when one starts or finishes a journey. and nor on the days preceding or following such days.

20) I can guarantee that anyone who accustoms himself to these ways which we have discussed will not become sick throughout his whole life, and will never need to take any medicines. His body will be perfect and healthy for his entire life, except if his body was imperfect from birth, or if he had been accustomed to a bad habit from birth, or if a plague, pestilence or drought occurred.

21) All of these good habits which we have mentioned are suitable only for those who are healthy. If someone is ill, or has a limb which is ill, or has been accustomed to a bad habit for many years, then there is for each one [of such conditions] other ways and habits [for a cure], depending upon the condition in question, as explained in the Book of Medicines. A change in the menstrual period [other than during pregnancy] is the beginning of sickness.

22) It is not suitable for a healthy or sick person in any town where there is no doctor to deviate from any of the ways mentioned in this chapter, for every one [of these ways] brings good.

23) It is not permitted for a learned sage to live in a town which does not have the following ten things: a doctor, a blood-letter, a wash-house, a toilet, naturally occurring water such as a river or spring, a synagogue, a midwife, a scribe, a warden of charity and a Court of Law which imprisons people.