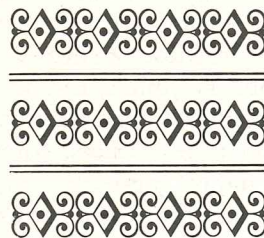


the Oral Law and its transmission, and explains the reasons for the eventual emergence of a literary corpus (Mishnah and Talmud) embodying the oral tradition. A suggestive parallel is drawn between the socio-political conditions which necessitated the compilation of the Mishnah and those of Maimonides' own time. Maimonides was convinced that there is a significant correlation between political decline and intellectual atrophy. His survey includes a dispassionate, mildly pejorative, evaluation of the literary achievements of the Geonim and calls attention to the role of regionalism and local custom in Jewish law. Only Talmudic law represents a consensus and is universally binding for the entire Jewish people; post-Talmudic developments in halakhah—e.g., Geonic ordinances or communal enactments—are restricted in their application.

The following selections from the Mishneh Torah illustrate for the most part Maimonides' original interpretations, new emphases, striking formulations, or interpolations of ethical and philosophical motifs into Talmudic material. I have included a few sections which show Maimonides' organization and rephrasing of standard halakhic material in his own clear, vigorous prose, and through which Maimonides emerges as an effective mouthpiece for historical Judaism. There are also sections where well-known Talmudic material is interpreted and presented in such a way that a new pattern of meanings seems to emerge.



ALL the precepts which Moses received on Sinai, were given together with their interpretation, as it is said, "And I will give to you the tables of stone, and the law, and the commandment" (Ex. 24:12). "The law" refers to the Written Law; "the commandment," to its interpretation. God bade us fulfill the Law in accordance with "the commandment." This commandment refers to that which is called the Oral Law. The whole of the Law was written by Moses our Teacher before his death, in his own hand. He presented a scroll to each tribe and deposited one in the Ark for a testimony, as it is said, "Take this book of the law and put it by the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you" (Deut. 31:26). "The commandment," which is the interpretation of the Law, he did not write down but gave a charge concerning it to the Elders, to Joshua, and to the rest of Israel, as it is said, "All this which I command you, that shall you do; you shall not add to, nor diminish from it" (*ibid.* 4:2). Hence, it is styled the Oral Law.

See *Book of Commandments*, introduction; Letter to Joseph ibn Gabir; *Guide of the Perplexed*, introduction and I, ch. 71.

Although the Oral Law was not committed to writing, Moses taught the whole of it, in his court, to the seventy elders as well as to Eleazar, Phineas, and Joshua—all three of whom received it from Moses. To Joshua, his disciple, our teacher Moses delivered the Oral Law and charged him concerning it. So too, Joshua, throughout his life, taught orally. Many elders received the Oral Law from Joshua. Eli received it from the elders and from Phineas. Samuel, from Eli and his court. David, from Samuel and his court. . . .

R. Judah, our teacher, the saint, compiled the Mishnah. From the time of Moses to that of our teacher, the saint, no work had been composed from which the Oral Law was publicly taught. But in each generation, the head of the then existing court or the prophet of that time wrote down for his private use a memorandum of the traditions which he had heard from his teachers, and which he taught orally in public. So too, every student wrote down, according to his ability, the exposition of the Torah and of its laws, as he heard them, as well as the new matter evolved in each generation, which had not been received by tradition but had been deduced by application of the thirteen hermeneutical rules and had been adopted by the Supreme Court. This was the method in vogue till the time of our teacher, the saint.

He gathered together all the traditions, enactments, interpretations, and expositions of every portion of the Torah, that had either come down from Moses our Teacher or had been deduced by the courts in successive generations. All this material he redacted in the Mishnah, which was diligently taught in public, and thus became universally known among the Jewish people. Copies of it were made and widely disseminated, so that the Oral Law might not be forgotten in Israel.

Why did our teacher, the saint, act so and not leave things as they were? Because he observed that the number of disciples was diminishing, fresh calamities were continually happening, the wicked government was extending its domain and increasing in power, and Israelites were wandering and emigrating to distant countries. He therefore composed a work to serve as a handbook for all, the contents of which could be rapidly studied and not be forgotten. Throughout his life, he and his colleagues were engaged in giving public instruction in the Mishnah. . . .

All these sages . . . were the great men of the successive generations; some of them were presidents of colleges, some Exilarchs, and

some were members of the great Sanhedrin; besides them were thousands and myriads of disciples and fellow-students. Ravina and Rav Ashi closed the list of the sages of the Talmud. It was Rav Ashi who compiled the Babylonian Talmud in the land of Shinar (Babylon), about a century after Rabbi Johanan had compiled the Palestinian Talmud. These two Talmuds contain an exposition of the text of the Mishnah and an elucidation of its abstruse points and of the new subject matter that had been added by the various courts from the days of our teacher, the saint, till the compilation of the Talmud. The two Talmuds, the *Tosefta*, the *Sifra* and the *Sifre*, and the *Toseftot* are the sources, from all of which is elucidated what is forbidden and what is permitted, what is unclean and what is clean, what is a penal violation and what involves no penalty, what is fit to be used and what is unfit for use, all in accordance with the traditions received by the sages from their predecessors in unbroken succession up to the teachings of Moses as he received them on Sinai. From these sources too, are ascertained the decrees, instituted by the sages and prophets, in each generation, to serve as a protecting fence about the Law, in accordance with Moses' express injunction, "You shall keep My charge" (Lev. 18:30), that is, "Ordain a charge to preserve My charge." From these sources a clear conception is also obtained of the customs and ordinances, either formally introduced in various generations by their respective authorities or that came into use with their sanction; from these it is forbidden to depart, as it is said, "You shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare to you, to the right hand, nor to the left" (Deut. 17:11). So too these works contain the clearly established judgments and rules not received from Moses, but which the Supreme Court of each generation deduced by applying the hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of the Law, and which were decided by those venerable authorities to be the law—all of which, accumulated from the days of Moses to his own time, Rav Ashi put together in the *Gemara*.*

After the Court of Rav Ashi, who compiled the *Gemara* which was finally completed in the days of his son, an extraordinarily great dispersion of Israel throughout the world took place. The people emigrated to remote parts and distant isles. The prevalence of wars and the march of armies made travel insecure. The study of the

*See Book XIV, Rebels, ch. I; also Book III, Sanctification of the New Moon, V, 3.

Torah declined. The Jewish people did not flock to the colleges in their thousands and tens of thousands as heretofore; but in each city and country, individuals who felt the divine call gathered together and occupied themselves with the Torah; studied all the works of the sages; and from these learned the method of legal interpretation.

If a court established in any country after the time of the Talmud made decrees and ordinances or introduced customs for those residing in its particular country or for residents of other countries, its enactments did not obtain the acceptance of all Israel because of the remoteness of the Jewish settlements and the difficulties of travel. And as the court of any particular country consisted of individuals (whose authority was not universally recognized), while the Supreme Court of seventy-one members had, several years before the compilation of the Talmud, ceased to exist, no compulsion is exercised on those living in one country to observe the customs of another country; nor is any court directed to issue a decree that had been issued by another court in the same country. So too, if one of the *Geonim* taught that a certain way of judgment was correct, and it became clear to a court at a later date that this was not in accordance with the view of the Gemara, the earlier authority is not necessarily followed but that view is adopted which seems more reasonable, whether it be that of an earlier or later authority.

The foregoing observations refer to rules, decrees, ordinances, and customs that originated after the Talmud had been compiled. But whatever is already mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud is binding on all Israel. And every city and country is bound to observe all the customs observed by the sages of the Gemara, promulgate their decrees, and uphold their institutions, on the ground that all the customs, decrees, and institutions mentioned in the Talmud received the assent of all Israel, and those sages who instituted the ordinances, issued the decrees, introduced the customs, gave the decisions, and taught that a certain ruling was correct, constituted the total body or the majority of Israel's wise men. They were the leaders who received from each other the traditions concerning the fundamentals of Judaism in unbroken succession back to Moses our Teacher, upon whom be peace.

The sages, however, who arose after the compilation of the Talmud, studied it deeply and became famous for their wisdom, are called *Geonim*. All these *Geonim* who flourished in the land of Israel, Babylon, Spain, and France, taught the method of the

Talmud, elucidated its obscurities, and expounded the various topics with which it deals. For its method is exceedingly profound. Furthermore, the work is composed in Aramaic mixed with other languages—this having been the vernacular of the Babylonian Jews at the time when it was compiled. In other countries, however, as also in Babylon in the days of the *Geonim*, no one, unless specially taught, understood that dialect. Many applications were made to the Gaon of the day by residents of different cities, asking for explanations of difficulties in the Talmud. These, the *Geonim* answered, according to their ability. Those who had put the questions collected the responses which they made into books for study. The *Geonim* also, at different periods, composed commentaries on the Talmud. Some of them explained specific laws; others, particular chapters that presented difficulties to their contemporaries; others again expounded complete treatises and entire orders of the Talmud. They also made compilations of settled rules as to things permitted or forbidden, as to infractions which were penal or were not liable to a penalty. All these dealt with matters in regard to which compendia were needed, that could be studied by one not capable of penetrating to the depths of the Talmud. This is the godly work in which all the *Geonim* of Israel engaged, from the completion of the Talmud to the present date which is the eighth year of the eleventh century after the destruction of the Second Temple.*

In our days, severe vicissitudes prevail, and all feel the pressure of hard times. The wisdom of our wise men has disappeared; the understanding of our prudent men is hidden. Hence, the commentaries of the *Geonim* and their compilations of laws and responses, which they took care to make clear, have in our times become hard to understand so that only a few individuals properly comprehend them. Needless to add that such is the case in regard to the Talmud itself—the Babylonian as well as the Palestinian—the *Sifra*, the *Sifre* and the *Tosefta*, all of which works require, for their comprehension, a broad mind, a wise soul, and considerable study, and then one can learn from them the correct practice as to what is forbidden or permitted, and the other rules of the Torah.

On these grounds, I, Moses the son of Maimon the Sefardi, bestirred myself, and, relying on the help of God, blessed be He, intently studied all these works, with the view of putting together

*Cf. to this date (1177), Book III, Sanctification of the New Moon, XI, 16; Book VII, Laws of the Sabbatical Year, X, 4.

the results obtained from them in regard to what is forbidden or permitted, clean or unclean, and the other rules of the Torah—all in plain language and terse style, so that thus the entire Oral Law might become systematically known to all, without citing difficulties and solutions or differences of view, one person saying so, and another something else—but consisting of statements, clear and convincing, and in accordance with the conclusions drawn from all these compilations and commentaries that have appeared from the time of Moses to the present, so that all the rules shall be accessible to young and old, whether these appertain to the (Pentateuchal) precepts or to the institutions established by the sages and prophets, so that no other work should be needed for ascertaining any of the laws of Israel, but that this work might serve as a compendium of the entire Oral Law, including the ordinances, customs, and decrees instituted from the days of our teacher Moses till the compilation of the Talmud, as expounded for us by the Geonim in all the works composed by them since the completion of the Talmud. Hence, I have entitled this work *Mishneh Torah* (Repetition of the Law), for the reason that a person who first reads the Written Law and then this compilation, will know from it the whole of the Oral Law, without having occasion to consult any other book between them.

I have seen fit to arrange this compendium in large divisions of the laws according to their various topics. These divisions are distributed in chapters grouped according to subject matter. Each chapter is subdivided into smaller paragraphs so that they may be systematically memorized. Among the laws in the various topics, some consist of rules in reference to a single Biblical precept. This would be the case when such a precept is rich in traditional matter and forms a single topic. Other sections include rules referring to several precepts when these all belong to one topic. For the work follows the order of topics and is not planned according to the number of precepts, as will be explained to the reader.

The total number of precepts that are obligatory for all generations is 613. Of these, 248 are affirmative; their mnemonic is the number of bones in the human body. 365 precepts are negative and their mnemonic is the number of days in the solar year.

Blessed be the all-merciful who has aided us.

These are the 613 precepts which were orally imparted to Moses on Sinai, together with their general principles, detailed applications,

and minute particulars. All these principles, details, particulars, and the exposition of every precept constitute the Oral Law, which each court received from its predecessor. There are other precepts which originated after the Sinaitic Revelation, were instituted by prophets and sages, and were universally accepted by all Israel. Such are the reading of the Scroll of Esther (on Purim), the kindling of the Hanukkah lights, fasting on the Ninth of Av. . . . Each of these precepts has its special interpretations and details, all of which will be expounded in this work.

All these newly established precepts, we are duty bound to accept and observe, as it is said, "You shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare to you, to the right hand, nor to the left" (Deut. 17:11). They are not an addition to the precepts of the Torah. In regard to what, then, did the Torah warn us, "You shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (*ibid.* 13:1)? The purpose of this text is to teach us that a prophet is not permitted to make an innovation and declare that the Holy One, blessed be He, had commanded him to add it to the precepts of the Torah or had bidden him to abrogate one of these 613 precepts. But if the Court, together with the prophet living at the time, institute an additional precept as an ordinance, judicial decision, or decree, this is not an addition (to the precepts of the Torah). For they did not assert that the Holy One, blessed be He . . . ordered the reading of the Scroll of Esther at the appointed time. Had they said this, they would have been adding to the Torah. We hold, however, that the prophets, in conjunction with the Court, enacted these ordinances, and commanded that the Scroll of Esther be read at the appointed time so as to proclaim the praises of the Holy One, blessed be He, recount the salvations that He wrought for us, and that He was ever near when we cried to Him, and that we should therefore bless and laud Him and inform future generations how true is the reassurance of the Torah in the text, "For what great nation is there that has God so near to them, as the Lord our God is [to us], whensoever we call upon Him" (*ibid.* 4:7). In this way every precept, affirmative or negative, instituted by the Scribes, is to be understood.*

I have seen fit to divide this work into fourteen books.

*This refutes the Karaite contention that Talmudic law is an illegitimate accretion to Biblical law. See also the anti-Karaite polemic in Book VIII, Daily Offerings, VII, 11; and Book III, Sabbath, ch. II; *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Avot 1:3.



*M*AIMONIDES explains that he could not compose a comprehensive work on the details of practical precepts while ignoring the fundamentals of essential beliefs; he felt compelled to prefix a philosophical-theological prolegomenon to his code, thereby underscoring the unity of the philosophical and the legal components of Judaism. Book I contains Maimonides' summary of the essential beliefs and guiding concepts which provide the ideological and experiential substructure of Judaism.

The reader should be especially attentive to the following points:

(1) The identification of physics and metaphysics with classical rabbinic teachings (*Basic Principles*, II, 12; IV, 10–13) and the inclusion of these sciences in the Oral Law (*Study*, I, 11–12). Generally the chapters on *Study*—especially chapter III—throb with vitality. Maimonides' usual reticence and restrained formulation are slackened; the statements about the universality of the obligation of study and its absolute precedence are emphatic and vigorous.

(2) One sanctifies God's name not only by martyrdom but by leading a dedicated life of integrity and honesty (*Basic Principles*, V, 11; *Moral Dispositions*, ch. VI). Even in normal circumstances,

religion does not demand extremism or self-mortification; indeed, the doctrine of the golden mean is a most poignant, barbed repudiation of all forms of monasticism and asceticism, including Islamic Sufism whose spiritual claims apparently fascinated many Jews (*Moral Dispositions*, chs. I–III; see *Eight Chapters*, ch. IV).

(3) Maimonides' conception of the history of religion, affirming—contrary to the modern evolutionary view—that monotheism was the original state of belief and idolatry a corruption of it (*Idolatry*, ch. I). Abraham is depicted as a vigorous iconoclast, crusading against the rampant polytheism of his day, engaging people in ideological debate and argumentation. His life is a paradigm of ethical activism. (Cf. *Guide*, II, ch. 39; III, chs. 29 and 51.) In rejecting astrology and other superstitious practices or beliefs, Maimonides insists that this rejection be motivated by rational conviction; routine conformity without absolute conviction is inadequate (*Idolatry*, ch. XI).

(4) The description of a disinterested love of God, with no desire for any kind of reward, as the highest and purest form of religious commitment (*Repentance*, ch. X). In this context, Maimonides introduces the stunning interpretation of the Song of Songs as an allegory of the soul's relation to or communion with God.



BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE TORAH

Chapter 1

¶ 1 The basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realize that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being. All existing things, whether celestial, terrestrial, or belonging to an intermediate class, exist only through His true existence.

¶ 2 If it could be supposed that He did not exist, it would follow that nothing else could possibly exist.

¶ 3 If, however, it were supposed that all other beings were non-existent, He alone would still exist. Their non-existence would not

involve His non-existence. For all beings are in need of Him; but He, blessed be He, is not in need of them nor of any one of them. Hence, His real essence is unlike that of any of them.*

¶ 4 This is what the prophet means when he says, "But the Eternal is the true God" (Jer. 10:10); that is, He alone is real, and nothing else has reality like His reality. The same thought the Torah expresses in the text: "There is none else besides Him" (Deut. 4:35); that is: there is no being besides Him, that is really like Him.

¶ 6 To acknowledge this truth is an affirmative precept, as it is said, "I am the Lord your God" (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). And whoever permits the thought to enter his mind that there is another deity besides this God, violates a prohibition; as it is said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7), and denies the essence of religion—this doctrine being the great principle on which everything depends.

¶ 8 That the Holy One, blessed be He, is not a physical body, is explicitly set forth in the Pentateuch and in the Prophets, as it is said "(Know therefore) that the Lord, He is God in Heaven above, and upon the Earth beneath" (Deut. 4:39); and a physical body is not in two places at one time. Furthermore, it is said, "For you saw no manner of similitude" (*ibid.* 4:15); and again it is said, "To whom then will you liken Me, or shall I equal?" (Is. 40:25). If He were a body, He would be like other bodies.

¶ 9 Since this is so, what is the meaning of the following expressions found in the Torah: "Beneath His Feet" (Ex. 24:10); "Written with the finger of God" (*ibid.* 31:18); "The hand of God" (*ibid.* 9:3); "The eyes of God" (Gen. 38:7); "The ears of God" (Num. 11:1); and similar phrases? All these expressions are adapted to the mental capacity of the majority of mankind who have a clear perception of physical bodies only. The Torah speaks in the language of men. All these phrases are metaphorical, like the sentence "If I whet my glittering sword" (Deut. 32:41). Has God then a sword and does He slay with a sword? The term is used allegorically and all these phrases are to be understood in a similar sense. That this view is correct is proved by the fact that one prophet says that he had a vision of the Holy One, blessed be He, "Whose garment was white as snow" (Dan. 7:9), while another says that he saw Him "with dyed

*See *Guide*, I, ch. 69.

garments from Bozrah" (Is. 63:1). Moses our Teacher himself saw Him at the Red Sea as a mighty man waging war (Ex. 15:3) and on Sinai, as a congregational reader wrapped (in his *tallit*)—all indicating that in reality He has no form or figure. These only appeared in a prophetic vision. But God's essence as it really is, the human mind does not understand and is incapable of grasping or investigating. And this is expressed in the scriptural text "Can you, by searching, find out God? Can you find out the Almighty to perfection?" (Job 11:7).*

¶ 12 This being so, the expressions in the Pentateuch and books of the Prophets already mentioned, and others similar to these, are all of them metaphorical and rhetorical, as for example, "He that sits in the heavens shall laugh" (Ps. 2:4), "They have provoked Me to anger with their vanities" (Deut. 32:21), "As the Lord rejoiced" (*ibid.* 28:63), etc. To all these phrases, applies the saying "The Torah speaks in the language of men." So too, it is said "Do they provoke Me to anger?" (Jer. 7:19); and yet it is said "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). If God were sometimes angry and sometimes rejoiced, He would be changing. All these states exist in physical beings that are of obscure and mean condition, dwelling in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust. Infinitely blessed and exalted above all this, is God, blessed be He.

Chapter 2

¶ 1 This God, honored and revered, it is our duty to love and fear; as it is said "You shall love the Lord your God" (Deut. 6:5), and it is further said "You shall fear the Lord your God" (*ibid.* 6:13).

¶ 2 And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great Name; even as David said, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:3). And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil frightened, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge. And so David said "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers—what

*See *Guide*, I, chs. 26, 33, and 46.

is man that You are mindful of him?" (Ps. 8:4-5). In harmony with these sentiments, I shall explain some large, general aspects of the works of the Sovereign of the Universe, that they may serve the intelligent individual as a door to the love of God, even as our sages have remarked in connection with the theme of the love of God, "Observe the Universe and hence, you will realize Him who spoke and the world was."*

¶ 9 All beings, except the Creator, from the highest angelic form to the tiniest insect that is in the interior of the earth, exist by the power of God's essential existence. And as He has self-knowledge, and realizes His greatness, glory, and truth, He knows all, and nothing is hidden from Him.

¶ 10 The Holy One, blessed be He, realizes His true being, and knows it as it is, not with a knowledge external to Himself, as is our knowledge. For our knowledge and ourselves are separate. But as for the Creator, blessed be He, His knowledge and His life are One, in all aspects, from every point of view, and however we conceive Unity. If the Creator lived as other living creatures live, and His knowledge were external to Himself, there would be a plurality of deities, namely: He himself, His life, and His knowledge. This however, is not so. He is One in every aspect, from every angle, and in all ways in which Unity is conceived. Hence the conclusion that God is the One who knows, is known, and is the knowledge (of Himself)—all these being One. This is beyond the power of speech to express, beyond the capacity of the ear to hear, and of the human mind to apprehend clearly. Scripture, accordingly says "By the life of Pharaoh" and "By the life of your soul" but not "By the life of the Eternal." The phrase employed is "As God lives"; because the Creator and His life are not dual, as is the case with the life of living bodies or of angels. Hence too, God does not apprehend creatures and know them because of them, as we know them, but He knows them because of Himself. Knowing Himself, He knows everything, for everything is attached to Him, in His Being.†

¶ 11 What has been said on this topic in these two chapters is but a drop in the ocean, compared with what has to be elucidated on this subject. The exposition of all the principles alluded to in these two

*See *Guide*, III, ch. 28.

†See *Guide*, I, ch. 68.

chapters forms the so-called *Maaseh Merkavah*—"Account of the Divine Chariot" (Ezek. 1).

¶ 12 The ancient sages enjoined us to discuss these subjects privately, with only one individual, and then only if he be wise and capable of independent reasoning. In this case, the chapter headings are communicated to him, and he is instructed in a minute portion of the subject. It is left to him to develop the conclusions for himself and to penetrate to the depths of the subject. These topics are exceedingly profound; and not every intellect is able to grasp them. Solomon, in his wisdom, said, in regard to them, by way of parable: "The lambs will be for your clothing" (Prov. 27:26). Thus have the sages said, in the exposition of this parable, "matters that deal with the mystery of the universe shall be for your garment, that is, for you alone; do not expound them in public." So too, Solomon said concerning these topics "Let them be for you alone and not for strangers with you" (*ibid.* 5:17).

And he further said concerning these subjects, "Honey and milk are under your tongue" (Song of Songs 4:11). This text the ancient sages have thus explained, "The things that are like milk and honey shall be under your tongue."*

Chapter 4

¶ 10 The matters just discussed are like a drop in a bucket, and are very deep, but are not as deep as those treated in the First and Second Chapters. The exposition of the topics dealt with in the Third and Fourth Chapters, is termed *Maaseh Bereshit* (cosmogony). Our ancient sages enjoined us that these matters are not to be expounded in public, but should be communicated and taught to an individual privately.

¶ 11 What distinction is there between the *Maaseh Merkavah* (Ezek. 1) and the *Maaseh Bereshit*? The subject matter of *Maaseh Merkavah* is not expounded even to an individual unless he is wise and able to draw conclusions independently; and then, only the chapter headings are communicated to him. But the topics of the *Maaseh Bereshit* are taught to an individual; and even if he is unable to form independent conclusions we nevertheless teach him as much as he is capable of learning on these matters. Why is the subject not

*See *Guide*, introduction.

taught in public? Because not every one possesses the breadth of intellect requisite for obtaining an accurate grasp of the meaning and interpretation of all its contents.*

¶ 12 When a man reflects on these things, studies all these created beings, from the angels and spheres down to human beings and so on, and realizes the Divine Wisdom manifested in them all, his love for God will increase, his soul will thirst, his very flesh will yearn to love God. He will be filled with fear and trembling, as he becomes conscious of his own lowly condition, poverty, and insignificance, and compares himself with any of the great and holy bodies; still more when he compares himself with any one of the pure forms that are incorporeal and have never had association with corporeal substance. He will then realize that he is a vessel full of shame, dishonor, and reproach, empty and deficient.

¶ 13 The topics connected with these five precepts, treated in the above four chapters, are what our wise men called *Pardes* (Paradise), as in the passage, "Four went into *Pardes*" (Hagigah 14). And although those four were great men of Israel and great sages, they did not all possess the capacity to know and grasp these subjects clearly. Therefore, I say that it is not proper to dally in *Pardes* till one has first filled oneself with bread and meat; by which I mean knowledge of what is permitted and what forbidden, and similar distinctions in other classes of precepts. Although these last subjects were called by the sages "a small thing" (when they say "A great thing, *Maaseh Merkavah*; a small thing, the discussion of *Abbaye* and *Rava*"), still they should have the precedence. For the knowledge of these things gives primarily composure to the mind. They are the precious boon bestowed by God, to promote social well-being on earth, and enable men to obtain bliss, in the life hereafter. Moreover, the knowledge of them is within the reach of all, young and old, men and women; those gifted with great intellectual capacity as well as those whose intelligence is limited.†

Chapter 5

¶ 1 All the members of the house of Israel are commanded to sanctify the great name of God, as it is said, "But I will be hallowed

**Guide*, introduction; I, chs. 33 and 71; II, ch. 29; III, introduction.

†See *Guide*, III, ch. 51; also, I, chs. 31-34 (on prerequisites for the study of metaphysics); *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Avot 3:9.

among the children of Israel" (Lev. 22:32). They are furthermore cautioned not to profane it, as it is said, "Neither shall you profane My holy name" (Lev. 22:32). How are these precepts to be applied? Should an idolater arise and coerce an Israelite to violate any one of the commandments mentioned in the Torah under the threat that otherwise he would put him to death, the Israelite is to commit the transgression rather than suffer death; for concerning the commandments it is said, "which, if a man do them, he shall live by them" (Lev. 18:5): "Live by them, and not die by them." And if he suffered death rather than commit a transgression, he himself is to blame for his death.

¶ 2 This rule applies to all the commandments, except the prohibitions of idolatry, in chastity and murder. With regard to these: if an Israelite should be told: "Transgress one of them or else you will be put to death," he should suffer death rather than transgress. The above distinction only holds good if the idolater's motive is personal advantage; for example, if he forces an Israelite to build him a house or cook for him on the Sabbath, or forces a Jewess to cohabit with him, and so on; but if his purpose is to compel the Israelite to violate the ordinances of his religion, then if this took place privately and ten fellow-Israelites were not present, he should commit the transgression rather than suffer death. But if the attempt to coerce the Israelite to transgress was made in the presence of ten Israelites, he should suffer death and not transgress, even if it was only one of the remaining commandments that the idolater wished him to violate.

¶ 3 All the foregoing applies to a time free from religious persecution. But at a period when there is such persecution, such as when a wicked king arises, like Nebuchadnezzar and his confederates, and issues decrees against Israel, with the purpose of abolishing their religion or one of the precepts, then it is the Israelite's duty to suffer death and not violate any one, even of the remaining commandments, whether the coercion takes place in the presence of ten Israelites or in the presence of idolaters.

¶ 4 When one is enjoined to transgress rather than be slain, and suffers death rather than transgress he is to blame for his death. Where one is enjoined to die rather than transgress, and suffers death so as not to transgress, he sanctifies the name of God. If he does so in the presence of ten Israelites, he sanctifies the name of God publicly, like Daniel, Hananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva and

his colleagues. These are the martyrs, whom none ranks higher. Concerning them it is said, "But for Your sake are we killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Ps. 44:23). And to them also, the text refers, "Gather my saints together to Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice" (Ps. 50:5). Where one is enjoined to suffer death rather than transgress, and commits a transgression and so escapes death, he has profaned the name of God. If the transgression was committed in the presence of ten Israelites, he has profaned the name of God in public, failed to observe an affirmative precept—to sanctify the name of God—and violated a negative precept—not to profane His Name. Still, as the transgression was committed under duress, he is not punished with flogging, and, needless to add, he is not sentenced by a court to be put to death, even if, under duress, he committed murder. For the penalty of death or flogging is only inflicted on one who transgresses of his own free will, in the presence of witnesses and after due warning.

¶ 11 There are other things that are a profanation of the Name of God. When a man, great in the knowledge of the Torah and reputed for his piety does things which cause people to talk about him, even if the acts are not express violations, he profanes the Name of God. As, for example, if such a person makes a purchase and does not pay promptly, provided that he has means and the creditors ask for payment and he puts them off; or if he indulges immoderately in jesting, eating, or drinking, when he is staying with ignorant people or living among them; or if his mode of addressing people is not gentle, or he does not receive people affably, but is quarrelsome and irascible. The greater a man is the more scrupulous should he be in all such things, and do more than the strict letter of the law requires. And if a man has been scrupulous in his conduct, gentle in his conversation, pleasant toward his fellow-creatures, affable in manner when receiving them, not retorting, even when affronted, but showing courtesy to all, even to those who treat him with disdain, conducting his commercial affairs with integrity, not readily accepting the hospitality of the ignorant nor frequenting their company, not seen at all times, but devoting himself to the study of the Torah, wrapped in *tallit*, and crowned with phylacteries, and doing more than his duty in all things, avoiding, however, extremes and exaggerations—such a man has sanctified God, and concerning him, Scripture says, "And He said to me, 'You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified'" (Is. 49:3).



LAWS RELATING TO MORAL DISPOSITIONS
AND ETHICAL CONDUCT

Chapter 1*

¶ 1 Every human being is characterized by numerous moral dispositions which differ from each other and are exceedingly divergent. One man is choleric, always irascible; another sedate, never angry; or, if he should become angry, is only slightly and very rarely so. One man is haughty to excess; another humble in the extreme. One is a sensualist whose lusts are never sufficiently gratified; another is so pure in soul that he does not even long for the few things that our physical nature needs. One is so greedy that all the money in the world would not satisfy him, as it is said, "He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver" (Eccles. 5:9). Another so curbs his desires that he is contented with very little, even with that which is insufficient, and does not bestir himself to obtain that which he really needs. One will suffer extreme hunger for the sake of saving and does not spend the smallest coin without a pang, while another deliberately and wantonly squanders all his property. In the same way, men differ in other traits. There are, for example, the hilarious and the melancholy, the stingy and the generous, the cruel and the merciful, the timid and the stout-hearted, and so forth.

¶ 2 Between any moral disposition and its extreme opposite, there are intermediate dispositions more or less removed from each other. Of all the various dispositions, some belong to a man from the beginning of his existence and correspond to his physical constitution. Others are such that a particular individual's nature is favorably predisposed to them and prone to acquire them more rapidly than other traits. Others again are not innate, but have been either learned from others, or are self-originated, as the result of an idea that has entered the mind or because, having heard that a disposition is good for him, and should be cultivated by him, one trained himself in it till it became part of his nature.

*See *Eight Chapters*.

replies, "I will not lend it to you." The next day, the latter needs a similar favor from the neighbor and says to him, "Lend me your axe," and receives the reply, "I will not lend it to you, for you did not lend me your axe when I asked it of you." Any one who acts in this way is "taking vengeance." But when he comes to borrow aught, one should give what is asked cheerfully, and not repay discourtesy with discourtesy. And so in similar cases. Thus David, expressing his excellent sentiments, said "If I have requited him that did evil to me, or despoiled mine adversary . . ." (Ps. 7:5).*

¶ 8 So too, one who bears a grudge against a fellow Israelite violates a prohibition, as it is said, "Nor bear a grudge against the children of your people" (Lev. 19:18). What is "bearing a grudge?" A said to B, "Rent this house to me, or let me borrow this ox." B refuses. After a time, B comes to A to borrow or hire something. A replies, "Here it is. I lend it to you. I am not like you. I will not treat you as you treated me." One who acts thus, transgresses the commandment "You shall not bear a grudge." One should blot the thing out of his mind and not bear a grudge. For as long as one nurses a grievance and keeps it in mind, one may come to take vengeance. The Torah, accordingly, emphatically warns us not to bear a grudge, so that the impression of the wrong shall be quite obliterated and be no longer remembered. This is the right principle. It alone makes civilized life and social intercourse possible.†



LAWS CONCERNING THE STUDY OF THE TORAH

Chapter 1

¶ 8 Every Israelite is under an obligation to study Torah, whether he is poor or rich, in sound health or ailing, in the vigor of youth or very old and feeble. Even a man so poor that he is maintained by charity or goes begging from door to door, as also a man with a wife

*Cf. Letter to Hasdai.

†See *Guide*, III, chs. 27 and 35; also, Book I, Basic Principles of the Torah, IV, 13.

and children to support, is under the obligation to set aside a definite period during the day and at night for the study of the Torah, as it is said, "But you shall meditate therein day and night" (Josh. 1:8).

¶ 9 Among the great sages of Israel, some were hewers of wood, some drawers of water, while others were blind. Nevertheless, they devoted themselves by day and by night to the study of the Torah. They are included among the transmitters of the tradition in the direct line from Moses.

¶ 10 Until what period in life ought one to study Torah? Until the day of one's death, as it is said, "And lest they [the precepts] depart from your heart all the days of your life" (Deut. 4:9). Whenever one ceases to study, one forgets.

¶ 11 The time allotted to study should be divided into three parts. A third should be devoted to the Written Law; a third to the Oral Law; and the last third should be spent in reflection, deducing conclusions from premises, developing implications of statements, comparing dicta, studying the hermeneutical principles by which the Torah is interpreted, till one knows the essence of these principles, and how to deduce what is permitted and what is forbidden from what one has learned traditionally. This is termed Talmud.

¶ 12 For example, if one is an artisan who works at his trade three hours daily and devotes nine hours to the study of the Torah, he should spend three of these nine hours in the study of the Written Law, three in the study of the Oral Law, and the remaining three in reflecting on how to deduce one rule from another. The words of the Prophets are comprised in the Written Law, while their exposition falls within the category of the Oral Law. The subjects styled *Pardes* (Esoteric Studies) are included in Talmud.* This plan applies to the period when one begins learning. But after one has become proficient and no longer needs to learn the Written Law or continually be occupied with the Oral Law, he should, at fixed times, read the Written Law and the traditional dicta, so as not to forget any of the rules of the Torah, and should devote all his days exclusively to the study of Talmud according to his breadth of mind and maturity of intellect.†

*See Book I, Basic Principles of the Torah, IV, 13.

†See Maimonides' Introduction to *Mishneh Torah*.

Chapter 3

¶ 1 With three crowns was Israel crowned—with the crown of the Torah, with the crown of the priesthood, and with the crown of sovereignty. The crown of the priesthood was bestowed upon Aaron, as it is said, “And it shall be to him and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood” (Num. 25:13). The crown of sovereignty was conferred upon David, as it is said, “His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me” (Ps. 89:37). The crown of the Torah, however, is for all Israel, as it is said, “Moses commanded us a law, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4). Whoever desires it can win it. Do not suppose that the other two crowns are greater than the crown of the Torah, for it is said, “By me, kings reign and princes decree justice. By me, princes rule” (Prov. 8:15–16). Hence the inference, that the crown of the Torah is greater than the other two crowns.

¶ 2 The sages said, “A bastard who is a scholar takes precedence over an ignorant High Priest; for it is said, “More precious it is than rubies” (Prov. 3:15), that is (more to be honored is the scholar) than the High Priest who enters the innermost Sanctuary.*

¶ 3 Of all precepts, none is equal in importance to the study of the Torah. Nay, study of the Torah is equal to them all, for study leads to practice. Hence, study always takes precedence of practice.†

¶ 4 If the opportunity of fulfilling a specific precept would interrupt the study of the Torah and the precept can be performed by others, one should not interrupt study. Otherwise, the precept should be performed and then the study be resumed.

¶ 5 At the Judgment hereafter, a man will first be called to account in regard to his fulfillment of the duty of study, and afterwards concerning his other activities. Hence, the sages said, “A person should always occupy himself with the Torah, whether for its own sake or for other reasons. For study of the Torah, even when pursued from interested motives, will lead to study for its own sake” (see Pesahim 50b).

¶ 6 He whose heart prompts him to fulfill this duty properly, and to be crowned with the crown of the Torah, must not allow his mind to

*A play upon the word *peninim* (rubies), taken as *lifne velifnim* (High Priest who entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement).

†See *Guide*, III, ch. 36.

be diverted to other objects. He must not aim at acquiring Torah as well as riches and honor at the same time. “This is the way for the study of the Torah. A morsel of bread with salt you must eat, and water by measure you must drink; you must sleep upon the ground and live a life of hardship, the while you toil in the Torah” (Ethics of the Fathers 6:4). “It is not incumbent upon you to complete the task; but neither are you free to neglect it” (*ibid.* 2:21). “And if you have studied much Torah, you have earned much reward. The recompense will be proportionate to the pains” (*ibid.* 5:26).

¶ 7 Possibly you may say: When I shall have accumulated money, I shall resume my studies; when I shall have provided for my needs and have leisure from my affairs, I shall resume my studies. Should such a thought enter your mind, you will never win the crown of the Torah. “Rather make the study of the Torah your fixed occupation” (Ethics of the Fathers 1:15) and let your secular affairs engage you casually, and do not say: “When I shall have leisure, I shall study; perhaps you may never have leisure” (*ibid.* 2:5).

¶ 8 In the Torah it is written, “It is not in heaven . . . neither is it beyond the sea” (Deut. 30:12–13). “It is not in heaven,” this means that the Torah is not to be found with the arrogant; “nor beyond the sea,” that is, it is not found among those who cross the ocean. Hence, our sages said, “Nor can one who is engaged overmuch in business grow wise” (Ethics of the Fathers 2:6). They have also exhorted us, “Engage little in business and occupy yourself with the Torah” (*ibid.* 4:12).

¶ 9 The words of the Torah have been compared to water, as it is said, “O everyone that thirsts, come for water” (Is. 55:1); this teaches us that just as water does not accumulate on a slope but flows away, while in a depression it stays, so the words of the Torah are not to be found in the arrogant or haughty but only in him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, who sits in the dust at the feet of the wise and banishes from his heart lusts and temporal delights, works a little daily, just enough to provide for his needs, if he would otherwise have nothing to eat, and devotes the rest of the day and night to the study of the Torah.

¶ 10 One, however, who makes up his mind to study Torah and not to work but to live on charity, profanes the name of God, brings the Torah into contempt, extinguishes the light of religion, brings evil

upon himself, and deprives himself of life hereafter, for it is forbidden to derive any temporal advantage from the words of the Torah. The sages said, "Whoever derives a profit for himself from the words of the Torah is helping on his own destruction" (Ethics of the Fathers 4:17). They have further charged us, "Make not of them a crown wherewith to aggrandize yourself, nor a spade wherewith to dig" (*ibid.* 4:7). They likewise exhorted us, "Love work, hate lordship" (*ibid.* 1:10). "All study of the Torah, not conjoined with work, must, in the end, be futile, and become a cause of sin" (*ibid.* 2:2). The end of such a person will be that he will rob his fellow creatures.*

¶ 11 It indicates a high degree of excellence in a man to maintain himself by the labor of his hands. And this was the normal practice of the early saints. Thus, one secures all honor and happiness here and hereafter, as it is said, "When you eat of the labor of your hands, happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you" (Ps. 128:2). Happy shall you be in this world, and it shall be well with you in the world to come, which is altogether good.

¶ 12 The words of the Torah do not abide with one who studies listlessly, nor with those who learn amid luxury and high living, but only with one who mortifies himself for the sake of the Torah, constantly enduring physical discomfort and not permitting sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids. "This is the law, when a man dies in a tent" (Num. 19:14). The sages explain the text metaphorically thus: "The Torah only abides with him who mortifies himself in the tents of the wise." And so Solomon, in his wisdom, said, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small indeed" (Prov. 24:10). He also said, "Also my wisdom stood unto me" (Eccles. 2:9). This is explained by our wise men thus, "The wisdom that I learned in wrath,† this has remained with me." The sages said "There is a solemn covenant that anyone who toils at his studies in the synagogue will not quickly forget." He who toils privately in learning, will become wise, as it is said, "With the lowly (literally, *the reserved*) is wisdom" (Prov. 11:2). If one recites aloud while studying, what he learns will remain with him. But he who reads silently soon forgets.

¶ 13 While it is a duty to study by day and by night, most of one's knowledge is acquired at night. Accordingly, when one aspires to win

*See *Commentary*, Avot 4:5.

†Play upon the word *aph*, meaning *also* and *wrath*. See *Commentary*, Avot 5:23.

the crown of the Torah, he should be especially heedful of all his nights and not waste a single one of them in sleep, eating, drinking, idle talk, and so forth, but devote all of them to study of the Torah and words of wisdom. The sages said, "That sound of the Torah has worth which is heard by night, as it is said 'Arise, cry out in the night' (Lam. 2:19). And whoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah by night—a mark of spiritual grace distinguishes him by day, as it is said, 'By day the Lord will command His lovingkindness, and in the night His song shall be with me, even a prayer unto the God of my life' (Ps. 42:9). A house wherein the words of the Torah are not heard at night will be consumed by fire, as it is said, 'All darkness is laid up for his treasures; a fire not blown by man shall consume him' (Job 20:26). 'Because he has despised the word of the Lord' (Num. 15:31)—this refers to one who has utterly neglected [the study of] the words of the Torah." And, so too, one who is able to occupy himself with the Torah and does not do so, or who had read Scripture and learned Mishnah and gave them up for worldly inanities, and abandoned and completely renounced this study, is included in the condemnation, "Because he has despised the word of the Lord." The sages said, "Whoever neglects the Torah because of wealth will, at last, be forced to neglect it owing to poverty. And whoever fulfills the Torah in poverty, will ultimately fulfill it amid wealth" (Ethics of the Fathers 4:11, with order of sentences reversed). And this is explicitly set forth in the Torah, as it is said, "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things, therefore shall you serve your enemy" (Deut. 28:47–48). It is also said "That He might afflict you . . . to do you good at your latter end . . ." (*ibid.* 8:16).*

Chapter 5

¶ 1 Just as a person is commanded to honor and revere his father, so is he under an obligation to honor and revere his teacher, even to a greater extent than his father; for his father gave him life in this world, while his teacher who instructs him in wisdom, secures for him life in the world to come.

¶ 4 A disciple who is not thus qualified and nevertheless gives decisions is "wicked, foolish, and of an arrogant spirit" (Ethics of the Fathers 4:9). And of him it is said, "For she has cast down many

*See Book III, Repose on the Festivals, VI, 20.

wounded" (Prov. 7:26). On the other hand, a sage who is qualified and refrains from rendering decisions withholds knowledge of the Torah and puts stumbling blocks before the blind. Of him it is said "Even the mighty are all her slain" (Prov. 7:26). The students of small minds who have acquired an insufficient knowledge of the Torah, and yet seek to aggrandize themselves before the ignorant and among their townsmen by impertinently putting themselves forward and presuming to judge and render decisions in Israel—these are the ones who multiply strife, devastate the world, quench the light of the Torah, and spoil the vineyard of the Lord of hosts. Of such, Solomon, in his wisdom, said, "Seize for us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vineyard" (Song of Songs 2:15).*

¶ 12 As pupils are bound to honor their teacher, so a teacher ought to show courtesy and friendliness to his pupils. The sages said, "Let the honor of your disciples be as dear to you as your own" (Ethics of the Fathers 4:15). A man should take an interest in his pupils and love them, for they are his spiritual children who will bring him happiness in this world and in the world hereafter.

¶ 13 Disciples increase the teacher's wisdom and broaden his mind. The sages said, "Much wisdom I learned from my teachers, more from my colleagues; from my pupils, most of all." Even as a small piece of wood kindles a large log, so a pupil of small attainments sharpens the mind of his teacher, so that by his questions, he elicits glorious wisdom.

Chapter 6

¶ 1 It is a duty to honor every scholar, even if he is not one's teacher, as it is said, "You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man" (Lev. 19:32). "Old man" refers to one who has acquired wisdom.

¶ 3 It is improper for a sage to put the people to inconvenience by deliberately passing before them, so that they should have to stand up before him. He should use a short route and endeavor to avoid notice so that they should not be troubled to stand up. The sages were wont to use circuitous and exterior paths, where they were not likely to meet those who might recognize them, so as not to trouble them.

*See Book XIV, Sanhedrin, XX, 8; *Guide*, III, introduction.

¶ 11 It is exceedingly iniquitous to contemn sages or hate them. Jerusalem was destroyed only when its scholars were treated with contumely, as it is said, "But they mocked the messengers of God and despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets" (II Chron. 36:16); this means that they "despised those who taught His words." So too, the text, "And if you shall abhor My statutes" (Lev. 26:15) means "if you abhor the teachers of My statutes." Whoever contemns the sages will have no portion in the world to come, and is included in the censure, "For the word of the Lord has he despised" (Num. 15:31).*



LAWS CONCERNING IDOLATRY AND THE ORDINANCES OF THE HEATHENS

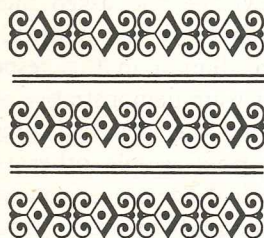
Chapter 1†

¶ 1 In the days of Enosh, the people fell into gross error, and the counsel of the wise men of the generation became foolish. Enosh himself was among those who erred. Their error was as follows: "Since God," they said, "created these stars and spheres to guide the world, set them on high and allotted to them honor, and since they are ministers who minister before Him, they deserve to be praised and glorified, and honor should be rendered them; and it is the will of God, blessed be He, that men should aggrandize and honor those whom He aggrandized and honored just as a king desires that respect should be shown to the officers who stand before him, and thus honor is shown to the king." When this idea arose in their minds, they began to erect temples to the stars, offered up sacrifices to them, praised and glorified them in speech, and prostrated themselves before them—their purpose, according to their perverse notions, being to obtain the Creator's favor. This was the root of idolatry and this was what the idolaters who knew its fundamentals said. They did not, however, maintain that there was no God except

*See Book X, Uncleaness of Leprosy, X, 16.

† See *Guide*, I, ch. 36; II, chs. 13 and 39; III, chs. 29, 37, and 51; Letter on Astrology; *Epistle to Yemen*; Letter to Obadiah; also, Book I, Repentance, X, 2.

PART ONE



INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

THE first purpose of this treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in books of prophecy. . . . It is not the purpose of this treatise to make its totality understandable to the vulgar or to beginners in speculation, nor to teach those who have not engaged in any study other than the science of the Law—I mean the legalistic study of the Law. For the purpose of this treatise and of all those like it is the science of Law in its true sense. Or rather its purpose is to give indications to a religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief—such a man being perfect in his religion and character, and having studied the sciences of the philosophers and come to know what they signify. The human intellect having drawn him on and led him to dwell within its province, he must have felt distressed by the externals of the Law and by the meanings of the above-mentioned equivocal, derivative, or amphibolous terms, as he continued to understand them by himself or was made to understand them by others. Hence he would remain in a state of perplexity and confusion as to whether he should follow his intellect, renounce what he knew concerning the terms in question, and consequently consider

that he has renounced the foundations of the Law. Or he should hold fast to his understanding of these terms and not let himself be drawn on together with his intellect, rather turning his back on it and moving away from it, while at the same time perceiving that he had brought loss to himself and harm to his religion. He would be left with those imaginary beliefs to which he owes his fear and difficulty and would not cease to suffer from heartache and great perplexity.

This treatise also has a second purpose: namely, the explanation of very obscure parables occurring in the books of the prophets, but not explicitly identified there as such. Hence an ignorant or heedless individual might think that they possess only an external sense, but no internal one. However, even when one who truly possesses knowledge considers these parables and interprets them according to their external meaning, he too is overtaken by great perplexity. But if we explain these parables to him or if we draw his attention to their being parables, he will take the right road and be delivered from this perplexity. That is why I have called this treatise the *Guide of the Perplexed*.

I do not say that this treatise will remove all difficulties for those who understand it. I do, however, say that it will remove most of the difficulties, and those of the greatest moment. A sensible man thus should not demand of me or hope that when we mention a subject, we shall make a complete exposition of it, or that when we engage in the explanation of the meaning of one of the parables, we shall set forth exhaustively all that is expressed in that parable. An intelligent man would be unable to do so even by speaking directly to an interlocutor. How then could he put it down in writing without becoming a butt for every ignoramus who, thinking that he has the necessary knowledge, would let fly at him the shafts of his ignorance? We have already explained in our legal compilations some general propositions concerning this subject and have drawn attention to many themes. Thus we have mentioned there that the "Account of the Beginning" is identical with natural science, and the "Account of the Divine Chariot" with divine science; and have explained the rabbinic saying: "The 'Account of the Divine Chariot' ought not to be taught even to one man, except if he be wise and able to understand by himself, in which case only the chapter headings may be transmitted to him" (Hagigah 11b, 13a). Hence you should not ask of me here anything beyond the chapter headings. And even those are not set down in

order or arranged in coherent fashion in this treatise, but rather are scattered and entangled with other subjects that are to be clarified. For my purpose is that the truths be glimpsed and then again be concealed, so as not to oppose that divine purpose which one cannot possibly oppose and which has concealed from the vulgar among the people those truths especially requisite for His apprehension. As He has said: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps. 25:14). Know that with regard to natural matters as well, it is impossible to give a clear exposition when teaching some of their principles as they are. For you know the saying of the sages, may their memory be blessed: "The 'Account of the Beginning' ought not to be taught in the presence of two men" (Hagigah 11b). Now if someone explained all those matters in a book, he in effect would be teaching them to thousands of men. Hence these matters too occur in parables in the books of prophecy. The sages, may their memory be blessed, following the trail of these books, likewise have spoken of them in riddles and parables, for there is a close connection between these matters and the divine science, and they too are secrets of that divine science.

You should not think that these great secrets are fully and completely known to anyone among us. They are not. But sometimes truth flashes out to us so that we think that it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in an obscure night, almost as we were at first. We are like someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes time and time again. Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day. That is the degree of the great one among the prophets, to whom it was said: "But as for you, stand here by Me" (Deut. 5:28), and of whom it was said: "that the skin of his face sent forth beams" (Ex. 34:29), and so on. Among them there is one to whom the lightning flashes only once in the whole of his night; that is the rank of those of whom it is said: "They prophesied, but they did so no more" (Num. 11:25). There are others between whose lightning flashes there are greater or shorter intervals. Thereafter comes he who does not attain a degree in which his darkness is illumined by any lightning flash. It is illumined, however, by a polished body or something of that kind, stones or something else that give light in the darkness of the night. And even this small light that shines over us is not always there, but flashes

and is hidden again, as if it were the "flaming sword which turned every way" (Gen. 3:24). It is in accord with these states that the degrees of the perfect vary. As for those who never even once see a light, but grope about in their night, of them it is said: "They know not, neither do they understand; they go about in the darkness" (Ps. 82:5). The truth, in spite of the strength of its manifestation, is entirely hidden from them, as is said of them: "And now men see not the light which is bright in the skies" (Job 37:21). They are the vulgar among the people. There is then no occasion to mention them here in this treatise.

Know that whenever one of the perfect wishes to mention, either orally or in writing, something that he understands of these secrets, according to the degree of his perfection, he is unable to explain with complete clarity and coherence even the portion that he has apprehended, as he could do with the other sciences whose teaching is generally recognized. Rather there will befall him when teaching another that which he had undergone when learning himself. I mean to say that the subject matter will appear, flash, and then be hidden again, as though this were the nature of this subject matter, be there much or little of it. For this reason, all the sages possessing knowledge of God the Lord, knowers of the truth, when they aimed at teaching something of this subject matter, spoke of it only in parables and riddles. They even multiplied the parables and made them different in species and even in genus. In most cases the subject to be explained was placed in the beginning or in the middle or at the end of the parable; this happened where a parable appropriate for the intended subject from start to finish could not be found. Sometimes the subject intended to be taught to him who was to be instructed was divided—although it was one and the same subject—among many parables remote from one another. Even more obscure is the case of one and the same parable corresponding to several subjects, its beginning fitting one subject and its ending another. Sometimes the whole is a parable referring to two cognate subjects within the particular species of science in question. The situation is such that the exposition of one who wishes to teach without recourse to parables and riddles is so obscure and brief as to make obscurity and brevity serve in place of parables and riddles. The men of knowledge and the sages are drawn, as it were, toward this purpose by the divine will just as they are drawn by their natural circumstances. Do you not see the following fact? God, may His mention be exalted, wished us to

be perfected and the state of our societies to be improved by His laws regarding actions. Now this can come about only after the adoption of intellectual beliefs, the first of which being His apprehension, may He be exalted, according to our capacity. This, in its turn, cannot come about except through divine science, and this divine science cannot become actual except after a study of natural science. This is so since natural science borders on divine science, and its study precedes that of divine science in time as has been made clear to whoever has engaged in speculation on these matters. Hence God, may He be exalted, caused His book to open with the "Account of the Beginning," which, as we have made clear, is natural science. And because of the greatness and importance of the subject and because our capacity falls short of apprehending the greatest of subjects as it really is, we are told about those profound matters—which divine wisdom has deemed necessary to convey to us—in parables and riddles and in very obscure words. As (the sages) have said: "It is impossible to tell mortals of the power of the 'Account of the Beginning.' For this reason Scripture tells you obscurely: In the beginning God created (Gen. 1:1)," and so on.* They thus have drawn your attention to the fact that the above-mentioned subjects are obscure. You likewise know Solomon's saying: "That which was is far off, and exceeding deep; who can find it out?" (Eccles. 7:24). That which is said about all this is in equivocal terms so that the multitude might comprehend them in accord with the capacity of their understanding and the weakness of their representation, whereas the perfect man, who is already informed, will comprehend them otherwise.

We had promised in the *Commentary on the Mishnah* that we would explain strange subjects in the "Book of Prophecy" and in the "Book of Correspondence"—the latter being a book in which we promised to explain all the difficult passages in the Midrashim† where the external sense manifestly contradicts the truth and departs from the intelligible. They are all parables. However, when, many years ago, we began these books and composed a part of them, our beginning to explain matters in this way did not commend itself to us. For we saw that if we should adhere to parables and to concealment of what ought to be concealed, we would not be deviating from

*Cf. *Midrash Sheni, Ketuvim, Batei Midrashot, IV.*

†Maimonides uses here and subsequently the term *derashot*.

the primary purpose. We would, as it were, have replaced one individual by another of the same species. If, on the other hand, we explained what ought to be explained, it would be unsuitable for the vulgar among the people. Now it was to the vulgar that we wanted to explain the import of the Midrashim and the external meanings of prophecy. We also saw that if an ignoramus among the multitude of rabbanites should engage in speculation on these Midrashim, he would find nothing difficult in them, inasmuch as a rash fool, devoid of any knowledge of the nature of being, does not find impossibilities hard to accept. If, however, a perfect man of virtue should engage in speculation on them, he cannot escape one of two courses: either he can take the speeches in question in their external sense and, in so doing, think ill of their author and regard him as an ignoramus—in this there is nothing that would upset the foundations of belief; or he can attribute to them an inner meaning, thereby extricating himself from his predicament and being able to think well of the author whether or not the inner meaning of the saying is clear to him. With regard to the meaning of prophecy, the exposition of its various degrees, and the elucidation of the parables occurring in the prophetic books, another manner of explanation is used in this treatise. In view of these considerations, we have given up composing these two books in the way in which they were begun. We have confined ourselves to mentioning briefly the foundations of belief and general truths, while dropping hints that approach a clear exposition, just as we have set them forth in the great legal compilation, the *Mishneh Torah*.

My speech in the present treatise is directed, as I have mentioned, to one who has philosophized and has knowledge of the true sciences, but believes at the same time in the matters pertaining to the Law and is perplexed as to their meaning because of the uncertain terms and the parables. We shall include in this treatise some chapters in which there will be no mention of an equivocal term. Such a chapter will be preparatory for another, or it will hint at one of the meanings of an equivocal term that I might not wish to mention explicitly in that place, or it will explain one of the parables or hint at the fact that a certain story is a parable. Such a chapter may contain strange matters regarding which the contrary of the truth sometimes is believed, either because of the equivocality of the terms or because a parable is taken from the thing being represented or vice versa. . . .

ting one to enter places the gates to which were locked. And when these gates are opened and these places are entered into, the souls will find rest therein, the eyes will be delighted, and the bodies will be eased of their toil and of their labor.



CHAPTER 1

Image (*tzelem*) and *likeness* (*demut*). People have thought that in the Hebrew language *image* denotes the shape and configuration of a thing. This supposition led them to the pure doctrine of the corporeality of God, on account of His saying: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). For they thought that God has a man's form, I mean his shape and configuration. The pure doctrine of the corporeality of God was a necessary consequence to be accepted by them. They accordingly believed in it and deemed that if they abandoned this belief, they would give the lie to the Biblical text; that they would even make the Deity to be nothing at all unless they thought that God was a body provided with a face and a hand, like them in shape and configuration. However, He is, in their view, bigger and more resplendent than they themselves, and the matter of which He is composed is not flesh and blood. As they see it, this is as far as one can go in establishing the separateness of God from other things. Now with respect to that which ought to be said in order to refute the doctrine of the corporeality of God and to establish His real unity—which can have no true reality unless one disproves His corporeality—you shall know the demonstration of all of this from this treatise. However, here, in this chapter, only an indication is given with a view to elucidating the meaning of *image* and *likeness*.

Now I say that in the Hebrew language the proper term designating the form that is well known among the multitude, namely, that form which is the shape and configuration of a thing, is *toar*. Thus Scripture says: "Beautiful in form (*toar*) and beautiful in appearance" (Gen. 39:6); "What form (*taoro*)* is he of?" (I Sam.

*From word *toar*.

28:14); "As the form (*toar*) of the children of a king" (Judges 8:18). This term is also applied to an artificial form; thus: "He marks its form [*yeta'arehu*] with a line, and he marks its form [*yeta'arehu*] with a compass" (Is. 44:13). Those terms are never applied to the Deity, may He be exalted; far and remote may this thought be from us. The term *image*, on the other hand, is applied to the natural form, I mean to the notion in virtue of which a thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is. It is the true reality of the thing in so far as the latter is that particular being. In man that notion is that from which human apprehension derives. It is on account of this intellectual apprehension that it is said of man: "In the image of God created He him" (Gen. 1:27). For this reason also, it is said: "You are contemptuous of their image" (Ps. 73:20). For *contempt* has for its object the soul, which is the specific form, not the shape and configuration of the parts of the body. I assert also that the reason why idols are called *images* lies in the fact that what was sought in them was the notion that was deemed to subsist in them, and not their shape and configuration. I assert similarly with regard to the Scriptural expression: "images of your emerods" (I Sam. 6:5). For what was intended by them was the notion of warding off the harm caused by the emerods, and not the shape of the emerods. If, however, there should be no doubt concerning the expressions "the images of your emerods" and *images* being used in order to denote shape and configuration, it would follow that *image* is an equivocal or amphibolous term applied to the specific form and also to the artificial form and to what is analogous to the two in the shapes and configurations of the natural bodies. That which was meant in the Scriptural dictum, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26), was the specific form, which is intellectual apprehension, not the shape and configuration. We have explained to you the difference between *image* and *form*, and have explained the meaning of *image*.

As for the term *likeness* (*demut*), it is a noun derived from the verb *damah* (to be like), and it too signifies likeness in respect of a notion. For the Scriptural dictum, "I am like a pelican in the wilderness" (Ps. 102:7), does not signify that its author resembled the pelican with regard to its wings and feathers, but that his sadness was like that of the bird. In the same way in the verse, "Nor was any tree in the garden of God like it in beauty" (Ezek. 31:8), the likeness is

with respect to the notion of beauty. Similarly the verses, "Their venom is in the likeness of the venom of a serpent" (Ps. 58:5), and "His likeness is that of a lion that is eager to tear in pieces" (Ps. 17:12), refer both of them to a likeness in respect of a notion and not with respect to a shape and a configuration. In the same way it is said, "the likeness of a throne . . . the likeness of the throne" (Ezek. 1:26), the likeness referred to being in respect of elevation and sublimity, not in respect of a throne's square shape, its solidity, and the length of its legs, as wretched people think. A similar explanation should also be applied to the expression, "the likeness of the living creatures" (Ezek. 1:13). Now man possesses as his proprium something in him that is very strange as it is not found in anything else that exists under the sphere of the moon, namely, intellectual apprehension. In the exercise of this, no sense, no part of the body, none of the extremities are used; and therefore this apprehension was likened to the apprehension of the Deity, which does not require an instrument, although in reality it is not like the latter apprehension, but only appears so to the first stirrings of opinion. It was because of this something, I mean because of the divine intellect conjoined with man, that it is said of the latter that he is "in the image of God and in His likeness" (Gen. 1:26-27), not that God, may He be exalted, is a body and possesses a shape.



CHAPTER 2

Years ago a learned man propounded as a challenge to me a curious objection. It behooves us now to consider this objection and our reply invalidating it. However, before mentioning this objection and its invalidation, I shall make the following statement. Every Hebrew knew that the term *Elohim* is equivocal, designating the Deity, the angels, and the rulers governing the cities. Onkelos the Proselyte, peace be on him, has made it clear, and his clarification is correct, that in the dictum of Scripture, "And you shall be as Elohim, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5), the last sense is intended. For he has translated: "And you shall be as rulers."

After thus having set forth the equivocality of this term, we shall begin to expound the objection. This is what the objector said: It is manifest from the clear sense of the Biblical text that the primary purpose with regard to man was that he should be, as the other animals are, devoid of intellect, of thought, and of the capacity to distinguish between good and evil. However, when he disobeyed, his disobedience procured him as its necessary consequence the great perfection peculiar to man, namely, his being endowed with the capacity that exists in us to make this distinction. Now this capacity is the noblest of the characteristics existing in us; it is in virtue of it that we are constituted as substances. Now it is a thing to be wondered at that man's punishment for his disobedience should consist in his being granted a perfection that he did not possess before, namely, the intellect. This is like the story told by somebody that a certain man from among the people disobeyed and committed great crimes, and in consequence was made to undergo a metamorphosis, becoming a star in heaven. This was the intent and the meaning of the objection, though it was not textually as we have put it.

Hear now the intent of our reply. We said: O you who engage in theoretical speculation using the first notions that may occur to you and come to your mind and who consider withal that you understand a book that is the guide of the first and the last men while glancing through it as you would glance through a historical work or a piece of poetry—when, in some of your hours of leisure, you leave off drinking and copulating—collect yourself and reflect, for things are not as you thought following the first notion that occurred to you, but rather as is made clear through reflection upon the following speech. For the intellect that God made overflow to man, and that is the latter's ultimate perfection, was that which Adam had been provided with before he disobeyed. It was because of this that it was said of him that he was created "in the image of God and in His likeness." It was likewise on account of it that he was addressed by God and given commandments, as it says: "And the Lord God commanded" (Gen. 2:16), and so on. For commandments are not given to beasts and beings devoid of intellect. Through the intellect one distinguishes between truth and falsehood, and that was found in (Adam) in its perfection and integrity. Fine and bad, on the other hand, belong to the things generally accepted as known, not to those cognized by the intellect. For one does not say: it is fine that heaven

is spherical, and it is bad that the earth is flat; rather one says true and false with regard to these assertions. Similarly one expresses in our language the notions of truth and falsehood by means of the terms *emet* and *sheker*, and those of fine and bad by means of the terms *tov* and *ra*. Now man in virtue of his intellect knows *truth* from *falsehood*; and this holds good for all intelligible things. Accordingly when man was in his most perfect and excellent state, in accordance with his inborn disposition and possessed of his intellectual cognitions—because of which it is said of him: “You have made him but little lower than Elohim” (Ps. 8:6)—he had no faculty that was engaged in any way in the consideration of generally accepted things, and he did not apprehend them. So among these generally accepted things even that which is most manifestly bad, namely, uncovering the genitals, was not bad according to him, and he did not apprehend that it was bad. However, when he disobeyed and inclined toward his desires of the imagination and the pleasures of his corporeal senses—inasmuch as it is said: “that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes” (Gen. 3:6)—he was punished by being deprived of that intellectual apprehension. He therefore disobeyed the commandment that was imposed upon him on account of his intellect and, becoming endowed with the faculty of apprehending generally accepted things, he became absorbed in judging things to be bad or fine. Then he knew how great his loss was, what he had been deprived of, and upon what a state he had entered. Hence it is said: “And you shall be like Elohim knowing good and evil”; and not: “knowing the false and the true,” or “apprehending the false and the true.” With regard to what is of necessity, there is no *good* and *evil* at all, but only the *false* and the *true*. Reflect on the dictum: “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen. 3:7). It is not said: “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they saw.” For what was seen previously was exactly that which was seen afterward. There had been no membrane over the eye that was now removed, but rather he entered upon another state in which he considered as bad things that he had not seen in that light before. Know moreover that this expression, I mean, “to open,” refers only to uncovering mental vision and in no respect is applied to the circumstance that the sense of sight has been newly acquired. Thus: “And God opened her eyes” (Gen. 21:19); “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened” (Is. 35:5);

“Opening the ears, he hears not” (*ibid.* 42:20)—a verse that is analogous to its dictum, “That have eyes to see and see not” (Ezek. 12:2).



CHAPTER 17

Do not think that only the divine science should be withheld from the multitude. This holds good also for the greater part of natural science. In fact we have repeatedly set down for you our dictum: “The ‘Account of the Beginning’ ought not to be taught in the presence of two men.” This is not only the case with regard to people adhering to Law, but also with regard to the philosophers and learned men of the various communities in ancient times. For they concealed what they said about the first principles and presented it in riddles. . . . Now as even those upon whom the charge of corruption would not be laid in the event of clear exposition used terms figuratively and resorted to teaching in similes, how much all the more is it incumbent upon us, the community of those adhering to Law, not to state explicitly a matter that is either remote from the understanding of the multitude or the truth of which as it appears to the imagination of these people is different from what is intended by us. Know this also.



CHAPTER 27

Onkelos the Proselyte was very perfect in the Hebrew and Syrian languages and directed his effort toward the abolition of the belief in God’s corporeality. Hence he interprets in accordance with its meaning every attribute that Scripture predicates of God and that might lead toward the belief in corporeality.