

# PIRKEI AVOS



## ETHICS *of the* FATHERS

CHAPTERS 5/6

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THE RABBIS' MORAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL  
*and* PHILOSOPHICAL INSTRUCTION  
*for* HUMAN PERFECTION

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*Rabbi Israel Chait*

A STUDENT'S TRANSCRIPTIONS *of the* 1980'S LECTURES

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YESHIVA B'NEI TORAH

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## INTRODUCTION

Rabbi Israel Chait lectured extensively on Ethics of the Fathers—*Pirkei Avos*—throughout the 1980s. Each Sunday morning at Yeshiva B'nei Torah in Far Rockaway, N.Y., Rabbi Chait shared brilliant psychological and philosophical insights into the rabbis' (Chazal's) writings. He paused during one lecture and expressed this sentiment:

*One must have a tremendous appreciation for Chazal for the great kindness they showed us in explaining Avos and what "perfection" is on an in-depth level, on every point. Avos is an unbelievable tractate.*

We in turn express our gratitude to Rabbi Chait as he explained the Rishonim to us during those many years. Rabbi Chait enlightened us with endless Torah marvels, posing questions on Maimonides, Rabbeinu Yona and Rashi, and with his answers, he unveiled the depth of these rabbis' commentaries. Rabbi Chait's explanations struck his students with a deepened reverence for Torah. He patiently entertained our many questions.

In these lectures, the reader will find great appreciation for the Torah's depth and design, and wisdom of psychology, philosophy, morality, human character and human perfection, thereby growing in his and her love for the Creator. The reader will admire Chazal's ability to write concisely, yet encapsulate voluminous concepts and ideals.

Rabbi Chait gave 130 lectures: each one was 1.5 hours. The lectures were recently transcribed verbatim from the original audio and edited. Thus, the style of this book is a record of live classes. If certain topics were reintroduced or elaborated in later lectures, liberty has been taken to join those ideas with their original mention. As live lectures address students' questions and digress to various topics, themes within one lecture switch accordingly. Additionally, Rabbi Chait's treatment of a single mishnah spanned many weeks. Therefore, at times, new topics appear to be introduced midstream, when in fact, the new topic might indicate a week's gap in that lecture when a new perspective was introduced. Regardless, each lecture and mishnah has been recorded comprehensively. Each section and paragraph imparts coherent and novel ideas and should be studied independent of succeeding sections, or related, when warranted.

The sources which Rabbi Chait cited were researched and added in-line, and not as footnotes. For some sources, the full text has been included when deemed appropriate, although that text was not cited fully in the actual lectures.

Each lecture contains numerous vital lessons. To absorb those many concepts, a patient read and review are highly recommended.

Rabbi Chait's lectures on Pirkei Avos are a must read for any person seeking to lead a perfected Torah life.



## IN DEDICATION

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

*Lillian Heiman A”H*

Oma was a paradigm of strength and chessed who lived a life of Torah values. Oma personified righteousness, as taught by Chazal (5:16) “one who gives and is happy when others give as well is a righteous person”. She was a pillar in her community and a true Matriarch of her family. She dedicated her time to the shul and her community through various organizations, including the Young Israel of West Hempstead Sisterhood and the West Hempstead Chevra Kadisha. She helped countless people and always did so without wanting publicity or attention for her acts of kindness and generosity. She was supportive of her husband’s love of Torah and Mitzvos and encouraged his learning and Torah studies. She was thoughtful of her friends and neighbors and always knew what her children and grandchildren (and great-grandchildren) were up to, and was very proud of her family members for their accomplishments.

Oma’s core values are passed on to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and we strive to meet her excellent example as a pillar of Torah and Midos.

Oma is greatly missed.

*Renee and Zev Friedman  
Judy and Sammy Weiss  
Miriam and Neil Kugelman  
and Families*



## IN DEDICATION

IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
*Elias Friedman A”H*

Elias Friedman, our Saba, was a man of strength and boundless positivity. He went through and saw some of the most horrific atrocities during the Shoah, but throughout his life as a survivor he showed a unique perspective on how to have true Simchas Hachaim, and to enjoy every moment of life, which was his Derech Hachaim. One of his mottos was “Baruch Hashem not just day by day, but second by second” which is a true testament to how he lived his life, finding joy and happiness in everything he did, and sharing it with those around him. Saba loved Rebbe and the Yeshiva and lived his life in line with Chazal as a *שִׂמְחָה בְּהַלְקוֹתָהּ* with his riches being his wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Saba’s ability to focus on the positive no matter the circumstance is an inspiration to all of his descendants.

Saba is greatly missed.

*Zev and Renee Friedman  
Barbara and Jerry Belsb  
and Families*



## JACOB AND ESAV

[Prior to commencing chapter 5 of Pirkei Avos, Rabbi Chait spoke about Jacob and Esav. Jacob justly purchased the birthright from Esav. He later followed his mother's prophetically-inspired plan to obtain the birthright blessings from Isaac. In response, Esav wished to kill Jacob. Under the guise of disdain for Hittite women, Rivkah cunningly coerced Isaac to send Jacob to Betuel in Paden Aram for his own protection from Esav. Decades later, Jacob, his 2 wives, 2 concubines and eleven sons were approached by Esav and his 4 hundred men. To protect himself and his family, Jacob prepared a gift [a bribe] of many animal herds, he prayed, and he prepared for battle, should it come to that. Rabbi Chait now begins.]

How did Jacob fool Esav [to believe in his brotherly love] with his delivered present of the herds? Esav was brilliant and there is no reason to assume that his mind was inferior to Jacob's. If you marbeh sedra [read the weekly parsha] you will know the answer. Jacob communicated the following to Esav:

*I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves; and I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor. (Gen. 32:6)*

Chazal say that whenever there was a need to interact [politically] with the other nations [government officials], they would first review this Torah portion to learn how to appease them. On the words "in the hope of gaining your favor," Rashi comments: "*For I am at peace with you and seek your friendship.*"

Jacob won-over Esav because he expressed a desire for a close, intimate relationship with Esav as a person. He did not

merely buy him off with the animals; Esav was no fool, and the gift of animals alone would have failed. To successfully appease someone, one must impress upon the individual, “It is you who I want.” Jacob performed an amazing feat: he displayed great psychological insight. He made Esav feel that all he had done during his life until now was performed in order to spend time with Esav. Jacob told Esav, “*I stayed with Laban and I was delayed until now*” (Gen. 32:4). From what was Jacob delayed? “From meeting with you Esav.” In other words, Jacob said, “I am sorry I am late; I had to work for Laban for 20 years, but now I am here to spend time with you Esav.” What is the proof that Jacob was successful? Esav responded to Jacob saying, “*Let us travel together*” (Gen. 33:12). Jacob replied:

*My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die. Let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I travel slowly, at the pace of the cattle before me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir. (Gen. 33:13,14)*

At that moment, Jacob was able to convince Esav that he valued him personally. This assuaged Esav. The gifts that Jacob sent were meaningless alone, but here they functioned as a framework in which Jacob could impress his desire for Esav.

## 5:1 THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

WITH 10 UTTERANCES THE WORLD WAS CREATED. AND WHAT IS LEARNED FROM STATING THIS; COULDN'T IT HAVE BEEN CREATED BY 1 UTTERANCE? RATHER, [IT WAS STATED] IN ORDER TO PUNISH THE WICKED WHO DESTROY THE WORLD THAT WAS CREATED WITH 10 UTTERANCES AND TO GIVE REWARD TO THE RIGHTEOUS WHO SUSTAIN THE WORLD THAT WAS CREATED WITH 10 UTTERANCES.

The 10 utterances refer to 9 times when “vayomare” (and He said) is used, and one time when “beraishis” (in the beginning) is used. We know that beraishis indicates creation, as the verse says, “*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, by the breath of His mouth, all their hosts*” (Psalms 33:6) and this refers to “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth*” (Gen. 1:1). 10 utterances mean that God performed 10 different acts during creation. These utterances were the initiating actions, but the days were that which resulted: the units. There were different stages. The initiating acts don't necessarily correspond to the [amount of]stages which emerged. “Day 1,” “Day 2” and so on represent the various stages. That is, there could have been 2 acts of initiation, but only one stage [day] emerging. But of what importance are these 10 initiations?

AND WHAT IS LEARNED FROM STATING THIS; COULDN'T IT HAVE BEEN CREATED BY ONE UTTERANCE?

Science cannot help with these 10 statements as it can ex-

amine creation alone and not what preceded it. What is meant by, “Couldn’t it have been created by one utterance?” It is nonsensical to suggest that this is literal, that God could have created everything with one utterance. This is because God does everything with absolute wisdom, and as His wisdom decreed that creation should take place through 10 utterances, it could not have been performed through one utterance. Therefore, this does not mean that creation could have been made with one utterance.

*“And what is learned from stating this; couldn’t it have been created by one utterance?”* asks why we were told this. Meaning, the Torah’s verses could have described creation in one statement, as we said, *“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, by the breath of His mouth, all their host”* (Psalms 33:6). [But the Torah goes out of its way to describe creation as 10 utterances.] What do we gain by knowing that God used 10 utterances? This is not physics; this is beyond science. Maimonides says in his Guide that the processes involved in creating something are totally different than the created entity itself. [In the formation of human beings, the embryo does not breathe, as does the born infant. Therefore, one cannot deduce from a completed creation the laws that brought a creation into existence. In our case, breathing is not part of the human’s formation process, so assessing how man was formed based on how he is in a completed state, is an error.] Maimonides comments:

*When you observe everything that comes in the story of creation, you will find, “and He said,” 9 times. And “In the beginning” is the tenth [utterance]. And even though the word, “and He said,” does not elucidate this, the content indicates it. And it is as*

*if it said, "And God said, 'Let there be the heavens and the earth.'" As they could not have been without an utterance. And He could have spoken the entire creation with one utterance by saying, "And God said, 'Let there be the heavens and the earth and let there be the firmament and let the waters gather, etc.'" Instead, He designated a [separate] utterance for each matter, to make known the greatness of this existence and the goodness of its order; and that one who destroys it destroys something great and that one who refines it refines something great. He means to say that the one who destroys his soul - which is in his hand to refine or to destroy - destroys [the world]; since it is as if he is the final purpose from all of existence, for which He said 10 utterances - as we elucidated in the introduction of this essay of ours.*

Torah's purpose is to teach man the lifestyle of perfection and how to attain the afterlife. Therefore, a discussion about how God created the universe is irrelevant to following this lifestyle. Creation is God's area, not man's. Chazal were bothered by this problem. We are only creatures of the universe; there is no way to understand outside of the universe [i.e. how it was created]. Therefore, there is no reason for the Torah to address the details of creation.

Our mishnah offers an interesting answer. Creation's details are mentioned to give people an ethical motivation. And this fifth chapter is the last, as this chapter presupposes a certain degree of perfection of the reader [having studied the previous 4 chapters]. Most people's motivation—even for perfec-

tion—is a personal one. This mishnah teaches a second, deeper motivation [for human perfection] of which man is capable. This motivation is of a different nature and it is based on reality. For example, if a town wants to build a park, a donor will contribute as he wishes to enjoy the park. This is a personal motivation. But if one leaves that town, and before he leaves, he sees something destroying the park, he might think, “How can I allow this beautiful park to be destroyed?” This is a higher motivation based on the recognition of the reality of something of value, regardless of personal gain.

With this statement “With 10 utterances the world was created,” Chazal are saying that although selfish motivation is not wrong, the higher-level motivation is one which stems from an objective framework. If one assumes the universe was created for him, if he then does not perfect himself, it is not simply that he lacks perfection, but it means the universe is thereby rendered futile; he is destroying an entire reality as Maimonides states above. This is a higher form of motivation.

The mishnah teaches that when one embarks upon personal perfection, it is not a personal consideration. One must be on a certain level to appreciate this, explaining why this mishnah comes at the end of Avos [subsequent to one attaining the perfection outlined in the previous chapters]. This higher-level motivation is that one perfects himself due to a recognition that this is the purpose of universe; this is why reality was created. A perfected person will have this sentiment:

*There's a system of reality here and I cannot just live in my personal world...I am part of a system. What is my role within the system? If the system was created for my perfection and I forfeit my role, I forfeit the entire creation.*



One's motivation towards perfection should be—of course—his personal perfection, but also based on reality. Knowing reality should motivate a person, [as we stated], as he realizes that God created him in this framework and God's work is important. That should be the realistic motivation. It is a different kind of idea. And this higher-level of motivation can be applied equally to others: "How can I allow another person to be destroyed, to destroy their soul, when that involves the destruction of the whole creation, which is God's work?" That is an objective loss and not a personal loss.

[This explains the mishnah's statement that the righteous people "sustain" the world which was created with 10 utterances. Sustaining the world means that the righteous person gives purpose to not only one element, but to 10. He gives meaning to "all aspects" of creation. 10 utterances emphasize how far the righteous person's life breathes purpose into God's will regarding all creations. This supports Rabbi Chait's point that acting in a perfected Torah fashion with concern for fulfilling creation's purpose is greater than subjective human perfection, for one thereby provides purpose to creation.]

The importance [upon which this mishnah focusses] is God's disclosure of a number of utterances—not just one—necessary to create the universe: God used additional Torah words to inform man that our activities concern creation, and not merely our subjective lives.

This explains Rabbi Yitzchak's question in the first Rashi on Beraishis:

*Why didn't Torah commence with mitzvos, instead of creation?*

But according to our mishnah, there's a very good reason. Torah does not commence with creation to teach physics or

how creation took place; that is not Torah's purpose. Torah's purpose is to teach man the importance of the framework in which human activity takes place, in terms of objective reality. That must be Torah's very first statement. The midrash says that when God created Adam, he took him through the Garden of Eden and said to him, "I created a beautiful world; be careful not to destroy it." This is an ecological statement which means that man has the ability to destroy nature, and he has done so today. Man has destroyed parts of nature that are irreplaceable. But we are not to function essentially as ecologists. People who believe in ecology like a religion, believe the physical world is a benefit per se. But Judaism maintains the benefit of the universe lies only in its goal of bringing man into the world of ideas. The truth is that the ecologists waste their time. Since they don't believe in any purpose in man's appreciation of wisdom, their purpose is solely to preserve a beautiful world [as an end]. But a beautiful world is only a means to enable man to engage in God's wisdom. And we should be concerned about preserving the environment not only for ourselves, but for future generations:

*...that he may instruct his children and his posterity... (Gen. 18:19)*

"*I am an alien and a resident among you...*" (Gen. 23:4). The Rav commented:

*Abraham said, "In one sense I am like you, and in another sense, I am not." To join others in ecological endeavors is a shared value, but our purpose differs from theirs.*

## WHY THE UNIVERSE WAS CREATED

Insofar as a person accurately perceives the idea of creation and how it stands in relationship to himself, this will affect his ethical motivation. Therefore, this demands that we understand the meaning of “The universe was created for man.” Is this literal, that the whole universe was created for man? But we see that the mishnah ties metaphysics with ethics, as the mishnah says that one’s motivation must be in terms of objective reality. This demands that we know what that objective reality is. Therefore, we are forced to understand the meaning of “the universe was created for man.” This is an important question.

In his *Guide* (book III, chapters xiii and xxv) Maimonides discusses this. He says one can question ad infinitum. If one says, “The purpose of the universe is for me,” he will continue to ask, “What is my purpose?” The answer is to be perfected. And what is the purpose of being perfected? We cannot say it is for God, as that violates the whole Torah. Maimonides is saying that people are satisfied to stop questioning at a certain point. Once they learn that the universe’s purpose is for them to be perfected, they’re very happy with that and don’t ask why they should be perfected. That is the end of their philosophy, and for good reason. People are very comfortable with that idea, as a person likes to feel that he is extremely important. This self-centeredness complies with a person’s egocentric assessment of reality.

In motivating people towards Torah, one must harness all possible motivations. Man benefits by knowing truths and not by distorting reality. The latter leads to a corruption. Motivating people using false notions might get one on the path, but ultimately one’s happiness depends on being in line with real-

ity and truth. On the contrary, if a person realizes that he is not as great as he thinks, and that the universe was not created for him, if he comes to grips with this reality, he is a more perfected individual. And that is what this mishnah is saying. One's knowledge of creation affects one's perfection. This is not a different subject matter than metaphysics.

Maimonides says in his *Guide* (p. 274, book III, chapter xiii):

*I consider therefore the following opinion as most correct according to the teaching of the Bible, and best in accordance with the results of philosophy; namely, that the Universe does not exist for man's sake, but that each being exists for its own sake, and not because of some other thing. Thus, we believe in the Creation, and yet need not inquire what purpose is served by each species of the existing things, because we assume that God created all parts of the Universe by His will; some for their own sake, and some for the sake of other beings, that include their own purpose in themselves.*

*In the same manner as it was the will of God that man should exist, so it was His will that the heavens with their stars should exist, that there should be angels, and each of these beings is itself the purpose of its own existence. When anything can only exist provided some other thing has previously existed, God has caused the latter to precede it; as, e.g., sensation precedes comprehension. We meet also with this*

*view in Scripture "The Lord hath made everything (la-ma'anehu) for its purpose" (Prov. xvi. 4). It is possible that the pronoun in la-ma'anehu refers to the object; but it can also be considered as agreeing with the subject; in which case the meaning of the word is, for the sake of Himself, or His will, which is identical with His self [or essence], as has been shown in this treatise. We have also pointed out that His essence is also called His glory. The words, "The Lord hath made everything for Himself" express therefore the same idea as the following verse, "Everything that is called by My name: I have created it for My glory, I have formed it; yea, I have made it" (Isa. xliii. 7): that is to say, everything that is described as My work has been made by Me for the sake of My will and for no other purpose. The words "I have formed it," "I have made it," express exactly what I pointed out to you, that there are things whose existence is only possible after certain other things have come into existence. To these, reference is made in the text, as if to say, I have formed the first thing which must have preceded the other things, e.g., matter has been formed before the production of material beings. I have then made out of that previous creation, or after it, what I intended to produce, and there was nothing but My will.*

*Study the book which leads all who want to be led to the truth and is therefore called*

*Torah (Law or Instruction) from the beginning of the account of the Creation to its end, and you will comprehend the opinion which we attempt to expound. For no part of the creation is described as being in existence for the sake of another part, but each part is declared to be the product of God's will, and to satisfy by its existence the intention [of the Creator]. This is expressed by the phrase "And God saw that it was good" (Gen. i. 4, etc.).*

Sometimes Maimonides says that something is created as a means for man, and sometimes it has its own purpose. Even if one should disagree with Maimonides and suggest reasons for distant unseen galaxies, one should realize that philosophically, this answers nothing other than satisfying one's emotions. Ultimately, we must say the reason for creation is God's will, and we cannot then ask, "What is its purpose?" Just like we cannot ask, "What is the purpose of God's existence?" The question is absurd, and Maimonides makes this point: "I'd like to point out the absurdity of the question." Maimonides continues:

*You know our interpretation of the saying of our Sages, "Scripture speaks of the purpose of protecting his house by night from thieves, that being why the king was chosen." To some extent this is correct: for when his house is protected, and he has derived this benefit through the king whom the country had chosen, it appears as if it were the object of the king to protect the house of that man. In this manner we must*

*explain every verse, the literal meaning of which would imply that something superior was created for the sake of something inferior, viz., that it is part of the nature of the superior thing [to influence the inferior in a certain manner]. We remain firm in our belief that the whole Universe was created in accordance with the will of God, and we do not inquire for any other cause or object, just as we do not ask, "What is the purpose of God's existence?", so we do not ask what was the object of His will, which is the cause of the existence of all things with their present properties, both those that have been created and those that will be created.*

What does Maimonides say? An egocentric person will think that the sole purpose of government is to protect his home from thieves. Of course, he is wrong, but not totally wrong. For there is an aspect of government that functions to protect his home.

*God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; and they serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth." And it was so. God made the 2 great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars (Gen. 1:14-16).*

These verses seem to say that the purpose of the heavenly bodies is to create day and night. Maimonides says this should

be understood like the role of government. The universe was created in a way that man should benefit insofar as he needs. This was built into the plan of the universe [but it is not its sole purpose].

One can argue that Maimonides conflicts with our mishnah which indicates that the universe was made for man. For Maimonides says that most of the universe was created for its own existence. The answer is that when God in His infinite wisdom created the universe, man was taken into consideration that his needs be satisfied to enable his perfection. But this was not the essential object of creation. This is an egomaniacal notion which is false and is rooted in man's most base emotions. Asking "What is the purpose of creation?" is like asking "What is the purpose of God?" The question is absurd, and any answer will be absurd. The Rav once told a story about 2 gadolim (great minds) who were waiting to see Rav Chaim. They started discussing creation. One said that God created the world for His honor, and the other gave some other reason like, He created it for truth. Rav Chaim overheard the conversation and said that they were both wrong. He said, "God did not create the universe for any reason. You cannot give a reason why God created the universe." Then Rav Chaim walked away.

*Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who hast created all things for His honor (Sheva Berachos).*

Maimonides explains the term "His honor" to mean the same thing as "Himself." To say that God wished honor for Himself is absurd, as He has no needs nor seeks glory from man, which is the greatest absurdity.



*The Lord made everything for His purpose... (Proverbs 16:4)*

“His purpose” refers to God himself because one cannot possibly ask why God created.

## THE GUIDE: MAIMONIDES ON HOMONYMS

Maimonides explains many terms like “God’s hand” which cannot be understood literally. [Aside from anthropomorphisms wrongly applying form to God, we are also incapable of applying traits to God, as all our terminology is relegated to the physical world, of which God shares no part. Therefore, even suggesting that God is “merciful” requires understanding and cannot be taken literally.] Many scholars feel that this concern [anthropomorphisms] existed only in Maimonides’ era and is no longer applicable. But this is not so.

The reason why Maimonides commenced his Guide with homonyms contains a very deep idea. It is the most appropriate and necessary way to begin his book.

To say that the purpose of creation is because it is God’s will, is not a good choice of words. It implies something I don’t think Maimonides means. It connotes human will which is a false notion in application to God. God does not have a will like a person. Maimonides says that God’s will refers to

His wisdom, His essence, or you might say, His nature. But all of these terms are tainted. Maimonides means that creation is the result of God's essence. It is absurd to ask why God created anything.

*Blessed is the honor of God from His place.*

We praise God's honor as a means of saying that we don't know His true essence, which is alien to our minds.

*When Solomon finished praying, fire descended from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the House (II Chronicles 7:1).*

This teaches that God Himself is unrelated to the universe; He cannot occupy space. Thus, we say that "His honor" or that "the cloud" filled the Temple.

WITH 10 UTTERANCES THE UNIVERSE WAS  
CREATED.

Beraishis includes details of creation to teach that man's existence is not just for his subjective perfection, but that there is a metaphysical reality, of which man partakes. When he follows the Torah's instruction, man is part of the purpose of creation. Actually, the whole concept of the Tzelem Elohim—the intellect—which differentiates man from animal is that man can perceive another reality. Reasoning about reality uncovers a different world. Man's essence is his capacity to concern himself with this other world. A person with no concern for that reality has no part in Judaism; the idea of God

cannot mean anything to him. The idea of God that Judaism presents is found in the beginning of Maimonides' Laws of Torah Fundamentals:

*The foundation of foundations and firmest pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is an eternal Being, that He caused all beings to be, and that all beings from heaven and earth, and from between them, could not be without the truth of His Own Being.*

*"To know that there is one eternal source of all that exists."* This means to say that the only person who can have any part in the God of Israel is the one with an interest in reality. Without this interest, man is unrelated to the very first mitzvah of knowledge of God. The concept of God exists only for one with interest in perceiving ultimate reality. Man must have this concern. But a person without this interest cannot possibly have a relationship with God.

There is the distinction between man and animal, or between the instinctual part of man and his intellect. A person's existence commences with the instinctual: *"For the inclination of man is evil from youth"* (Gen. 8:21). But then with his intellect he sees a new reality open up before him. In his Guide, Maimonides distinguishes between the rasha and the tzaddik. A rasha too perceives wisdom, but to him it is a practical way of implementing his desires. That explains Maimonides' words that the thought of sin is worse than sin itself. [That is the corruption of the rasha: his thoughts and intellect are degraded to devices for implementing sin.] But to the tzaddik, wisdom opens up a whole different reality. And once he sees that reality, his concern naturally leads him to the source of that reality, which is God. The rasha remains rooted in the instinctual

where his intellect becomes servile to his desires. Whereas when the tzaddik perceives wisdom, he desires to reach forth towards its source: God.

This mishnah defines the nature of reality in terms of the role man plays in creation. The importance of human existence is tied to the purpose of reality which stems from God.

Maimonides says that none of God's actions are without purpose. But this appears to contradict his other statement that one cannot ask for a purpose to God's actions; he calls this question absurd. The answer is that the word purpose has 2 meanings. One meaning is where one does A because he desires B. [A has a purpose: it brings about B.] Another meaning of purpose is that a person does something because of its essential nature. For instance, a person works in order to earn money. He does so to obtain pleasure through that money. To the average person, gaining pleasure is the end purpose of all his activities. Therefore, we cannot ask why he desires pleasure, as pleasure is an essential thing to him. Therefore, pleasure has no purpose in the first sense of the word [for it does not serve to bring about some other objective]. But we also cannot say that pleasure is purposeless because it has intrinsic value. And that is the highest [level] of all activities [when the activity is performed for itself]. The true activity is the one for which all other activities are performed. The only activity that is essential in man is Torah study. All that man does—even gaining pleasure—are done only to place him in the frame of mind to pursue wisdom. Man was created to learn; his ultimate activity is to perceive God's wisdom. Thus, we cannot ask what the purpose is in study; learning has no purpose. Therefore, there is no contradiction in Maimonides' words. There is no purpose in God creating the universe; its existence has intrinsic value. It does not exist subordinately, to serve some other objective. Therefore, "God's works are

not without purpose” means that His actions either serve an ultimate goal, like the creation of water for irrigation, or His actions have intrinsic value.

Nothing in existence is without purpose. As God’s essence is wisdom, everything He created must reflect that wisdom. We cannot understand the purpose of the universe because that would equate to knowing God’s essence. And, as created beings, we exist within a realm, that, by definition, we cannot know the Creator: “...*for man cannot know Me while alive*” (Exod. 33:20). Creation took place due to God’s essence, and we cannot know His essence [neither could Moshe Rabbeinu].

*...the disgusting man says in his heart,  
“God does not exist” ... (Psalms 14:1)*

A disgusting person is tied to the instinctual. Therefore, he cannot perceive God. He is unconcerned with the reality that is behind the physical world; God’s existence plays no role. The framework of this mishnah is that perception of ultimate reality. One must be concerned about it. If he is not, he has a distorted personality. One who has no desire to make contact with the source of universe has no relationship to God. The ultimate human level is a longing and a striving for the source of reality. This is the meaning of love of God. Without this level, one can perform mitzvos and be a good Jew, but he is not operating on the highest level.

A question on this topic was raised long ago. How does learning a gemara about damages (one man’s ox gores another) and court considerations, relate to one’s cleaving to God [dveikus b’Hashem]? At that time, certain religious groups declared that it is not proper to spend much time on such topics. [They said] what one should do when studying such areas is to skim through them quickly and stop often to contemplate

dveikus b'Hashem. This is why Rav Chaim Volozhin wrote *Nefesh Hachaim*, roughly countering this view. He called it nonsense, and that dveikus b'Hashem is unrelated to stopping one's learning and thinking about God. Tosfos says that to understand an area, one must use his intellect and wisdom. But the religious group could not understand how this relates to God. They thought that gemaras concerning court matters are mundane and are unrelated to God.

The truth is that when one is involved in perceiving God's wisdom in any area, that is dveikus b'Hashem. There is no greater activity than studying a sugya [the gemara's analysis of a certain topic]. This is dveikus b'Hashem.

## 5:2 GENESIS: GOD'S REALITY & MAN'S ROLE

THERE WERE 10 GENERATIONS FROM ADAM TO NOAH, TO DEMONSTRATE THE GREAT EXTENT OF [GOD'S] PATIENCE. FOR EACH ONE OF THOSE GENERATIONS PROVOKED [GOD] CONTINUALLY, UNTIL [GOD] BROUGHT THE WATERS OF THE FLOOD UPON THEM. THERE WERE 10 GENERATIONS FROM NOAH TO ABRAHAM, TO DEMONSTRATE THE EXTENT OF [GOD'S] PATIENCE. FOR EACH ONE OF THOSE GENERATIONS PROVOKED [GOD] CONTINUALLY, UNTIL

ABRAHAM CAME AND RECEIVED THE REWARD  
OF THEM ALL.

Maimonides comments:

*These generations are the words of the Torah, "X begot Y," according to its order. And it mentioned this, and that which is after it because of its mentioning [the] 10 utterances, which has reproach in them for man; to arouse him and to refine his soul with the dispositional virtues [character perfection] and the intellectual virtues, which is the intention of this tractate.*

What does Maimonides mean that this mishnah follows the previous one because of the same count of 10? And what is meant by the extent of God's patience?

This goes back to what we said about Maimonides commencing his Guide with homonyms. He says that the only similarity between our use of a term and its reference to God, is the term. "*God came down to see the city and tower that man had built*" (Gen. 11:5). The only thing that God shares in common with "coming down" is the word. But then it is meaningless to use that term [as it teaches nothing]. Maimonides mentions this many times in his Guide.

Maimonides commences his book with homonyms to teach an important idea. All human terminology is inapplicable to God. What is meant that God has concern for man? Our idea of concern is a human idea. We are concerned about somebody when we have feelings for him. But can we say this about God? It is absurd. But then again, would we be correct saying that God is unconcerned with man? No, we cannot say

that either. This would mean that there is no relationship with God whatsoever. That is our understanding of a lack of concern. So, we are incorrect to say either statement about God; we cannot say He is concerned or that He is unconcerned. We find ourselves in a very difficult predicament.

This is what Maimonides intends on addressing [with homonyms]. We can only grasp “results” regarding God. Can we say God is concerned with man? Yes, but with one provision: that what we mean by concern is a negation of a lack of concern. Maimonides says that our knowledge regarding God is negative knowledge. We cannot say that God shares man’s [feeling of] “concern.” That is nonsensical and idolatrous [as this projects human qualities of God]. I one time heard a rabbi speak; he meant well but he made 2 mistakes. He asked the audience:

*Why should we serve God? If somebody loves you very much, you will do anything for that person.*

He was telling the crowd, in other words, “God loves us, and no one can love us like God, and therefore we should do anything for Him.” This is wrong on 2 counts. First, when one feels loved by another, one is emotionally moved by that sense. That is a false anthropomorphic notion [in connection with God]. Yet, we say in our maariv prayers, “*An eternal love You have loved the house of Israel Your people,*” and in shacharis we say, “*A great love You have loved us.*” The idea of God’s love is a totally different concept. This is why it is wrong to equate human love to God’s love.

The second error [that the rabbi made] is that the recipient of someone’s love feels an obligation to repay that love, and such [repayment] is impossible in relation to God [man gives



God nothing: *“If you are righteous, what do you give Him; what does He receive from your hand?”* (Job 35:7)]

The reason that Judaism is so narrowly followed [compared to other religions] is because it has never made concessions or compromised reality in any manner. [Judaism has never allowed for distortions, which other religions make for the sake of dressing it as more emotionally pleasing. Other religions project human qualities onto God, eliminating man’s uncomfortable ignorance of the Creator that Judaism strictly and accurately maintains. Thereby, people flock to other religions that satisfy fantasy and emotions, such as God becoming human, or God taking on physical traits.] Our prophets always spoke truthfully, without deviation or distortion, but the people didn’t listen to them because their messages were not emotionally satisfying.

The worst crime is distorting the idea of God. Maimonides reprimanded people trying to be apologetic, presenting Judaism in a way that pleased the masses.

There is nothing in common between God’s concern and man’s concern. But it is wrong to say God is unconcerned with man. This would imply that God is unrelated to man, which is false. Therefore, Maimonides commences his Guide with homonyms because without these ideas, one cannot progress philosophically. Without understanding the correct application [negation] of terms to God, man will project human qualities onto Him. Thus, we can know God only in terms of effects. Concern has a certain effect: your concern about another person creates the effect of benefiting him in some way. This we can say in relation to God. God “loving us” means that God is our greatest benefactor; that is in terms of effects, but not that He loves like man loves. The removal of human traits from God is the essence of Judaism. Every other religion is just the opposite; their enticement is based precisely on humanizing God.

*All the gods of the peoples are mere idols,  
but the Lord made the heavens. (Psalms  
96:5)*

Of necessity, all gods of the nations are idols. It must be that way because all their gods originated through human imagination. Thus, all their gods must be projections of their emotions. But our God is the source of universe, “...*but the Lord made the heavens.*” This is a fundamental of Judaism and differentiates Judaism from any other religion, by necessity. That is why the only reason that the Jews accepted Torah was due to Revelation at Sinai:

*...and when you have freed the people  
from Egypt, you shall worship God at this  
mountain (Exod. 3:12).*

God’s revelation at Sinai was something that the Jews saw and had to accept. There was never a condition of any type that the Jews should believe in God, just to believe [without validity from reality]. That would be idolatry. The only reason Judaism demands man to accept God and the Torah is because he has seen this as a reality.

What is meant that God is long-suffering, that He forebears man’s sin for some time? It means that God’s forbearance is unrelated to human forbearance. God’s forbearance cannot be viewed in any kind of emotional framework. Can man wait 10 generations [to mete out punishment, like God does]? No. God’s forbearance is of a different nature and stems from a different source. It is not to be compared to human forbearance. This is why Torah commences with the generations. What is the purpose in teaching us God’s patience? The mishnah teaches that God’s forbearance is real and that there is a

description of it: it has a duration of 10 generations. We must know that there is such a phenomenon.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*God does not have patience forever. That is how you must think about our exile by the Romans. Will God forever allow the Romans to keep us exiled? No. God will redeem us.*

Rabbeinu Yona's concept of God's forbearance is the concept of the coming of the messiah. He writes that the final exile will come to an end. This is a direct application of our mishnah. God's patience had a term during Noah's era, and it will terminate at the messianic era. We cannot understand how God's forbearance works, but it is a reality.

*Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani says that Rabbi Yonatan says, "May those who calculate the end of days be cursed" (Sanhedrin 97b).*

Such people attempt to calculate and forecast messiah based on human emotions and not on the concept of God's forbearance. On parshas Vayeshev, on the first verse, Rashi writes:

*After it (Scripture) has described to you the settlements of Esau and his descendants in a brief manner — since they were not distinguished and important enough that it should be related in detail how they settled down and that there should be given an account of their wars and how they drove*

*out the Horites — it explains clearly and at length the settlements made by Jacob and his descendants and all the events which brought these about, because these are regarded by the Omnipresent as of sufficient importance to speak of them at length.*

*Thus, too, you will find that in the case of the 10 generations from Adam to Noah it states “So-and-so begot so-and-so”, but when it reaches Noah it deals with him at length. Similarly, of the 10 generations from Noah to Abraham it gives but a brief account, but when it comes to Abraham it speaks of him more fully. It may be compared to the case of a pearl that falls into the sand: a man searches in the sand, sifts it in a sieve until he finds the pearl. When he has found it, he throws away the pebbles and keeps the pearl (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeshev 1).*

This Rashi is directing us to a [novel] concept as he looks at the Torah in a manner that nobody considers. Everyone thinks that Torah is the stories of Noah, Abraham and Joseph. Whereas Rashi is saying that the Torah is truly a story of X begot Y, and when the Torah came to Noah, Abraham and Joseph, the Torah no longer abbreviated history but discussed them in length. Meaning, that the stories of the “pearls of mankind” were merely an extended version of X begot Y. It is not that the Torah is a story of the Patriarchs and also includes other people who begot others. It is just the opposite: the entire Torah is history, but it expounds when it comes to the areas [personalities] through whom it wishes to teach ideas.

Rashi offers this strange explanation. Does he mean that the entire Torah is history and the rest [the histories of the Patriarchs] are extensions? On the contrary, one should say that the essence of Torah is the lessons of the Patriarchs, and that we don't understand the need for the other histories! Rashi's message ties very much into our mishnah. That is why he mentions the 10 generations.

## WITH 10 UTTERANCES THE UNIVERSE WAS CREATED

This teaches the value of human existence in the framework of reality. X begot Y and all these generations teaches the extent to which these people partook of reality. The first 10 generations partook of reality only to the extent that God is long-suffering and tolerates man's sins. But the entire book of Beraishis that deals with creation is to teach the framework of reality. When it comes to Abraham, how much did he partake of the framework of reality? A very large part [and therefore Torah elaborates on him]. When it comes to Esav, he receives Mount Seir, the physical. That is how far he partook of reality; only the physical [so his history is brief]. When it comes to Joseph the tzaddik, Torah shows us the [large] extent of reality of which he partook.

Now we understand that the stories of X who begot Y are not extraneous. But they serve an important purpose: they

measure the value of human existence. The 10 generations partook of a very small part of reality: God allowed them to exist [only] to build [populate] the world. But Abraham's life is greatly elaborated upon, as he was of great value in God's reality; many Torah parshas discuss his life. According to this Rashi, the entire sefer Beraishis is a book that teaches to what extent human activity partakes of ultimate reality, in terms of God's providence.

This explains Maimonides. Why does chapter 5 of Avos start with "*With 10 utterances the world was created*" and then progress to "*10 generations...*"? Maimonides says the 10 generations is a continuation of the 10 utterances. How? "10 utterances" teaches what reality is, that creation considers man and was designed in some measure for the tzaddik. "10 generations" then continues this theme displaying the importance of human existence in the framework of progeny. The theme of sefer Beraishis is the extent to which human existence partakes of the framework of the entire existence of the universe. Thus, Torah is a genealogy: not a historical one, but a metaphysical one. The fact that God told us of the 10 utterances teaches the importance of human existence. The genealogy shows the importance of our existence metaphysically. God's forbearance of sinners shows the importance of human society, that God tolerated these 10 generations. Despite their wickedness, they served the purpose of sustaining human society. That is why Esav is mentioned, for he too maintained society. But God elaborates histories when He discusses those who partake of His essential importance [who perfect themselves intellectually and in character] and are not just a means [viz., populating Earth].

## 5:3 ABRAHAM'S TRIALS

WITH 10 TESTS ABRAHAM OUR FATHER WAS TESTED, PEACE BE UPON HIM, AND HE WITHSTOOD THEM ALL; TO MAKE KNOWN HOW GREAT WAS THE LOVE OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER, PEACE BE UPON HIM.

This mishnah involves major problems among the Rishonim. But the way everyone else understands this mishnah seems very simple. Yet, the Rishonim—especially Maimonides—had great difficulty with trials.

The first question is, what is a trial? To the average person it is simple: it is a test to determine if one will lead the proper life, and how far one goes in his love of God, such as Abraham's trial of sacrificing Isaac when God told him, "*Please take your son, your only son that you love...*" (Gen. 22:2). Rashi comments:

*Abraham replied to God, "I have 2 sons." God answered him, "Thine only son." Abraham said, "This one is the only son of his mother and the other is the only son of his mother." God then said, "The one whom thou love." Abraham replied, "I love both of them." Whereupon God said, "Isaac". Why did God not disclose this [Isaac] to him at the very first? So as not to confuse him suddenly lest his mind become distracted and bewildered and in his confused state he would involuntarily consent, when there would have been no merit*

*in his sacrifice, and so that he might more highly value God's command and that God might reward him for the increasing sacrifice demanded by obedience to each and every expression used here (Beraishis Rabbah 55:7).*

Rashi says that God gave Abraham reward on every step. And Rashi [below] says similarly on the verse, “*Leave your land, your birth place and the house of your father and go to the land that I will show you*” (Gen. 12:1):

*He did not reveal to him at once which land it was in order that he should hold it in high esteem and in order to reward him for complying with each and every command (Ibid. Rashi).*

In both cases, every additional reference God used to identify both Isaac (“*your son, your only son, the one you love*”), and the elements of Abraham’s land (“*your land, your birthplace, the house of your father*”) to which Abraham was attached, revealed another emotion over which Abraham successfully conquered.

Among the rabbis there are 3 views of what a trial is. On his chapter on Merits and Demerits (*The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* p. 213), Saadia Gaon says the following:

*Next let me say that I find that the sufferings to which the virtuous are subjected in this world fall into 2 categories. One of these constitutes the penalties for slight failings, as I have explained previously.*



*The second consists of incipient trials with which God tests them, when He knows that they are able to endure them, only in order to compensate them for these trials later on with good. Thus, Scripture says, "The Lord tries the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence, His soul hates" (Psalms 11:5).*

Everyone seems to agree that God subjects to trials only very righteous people. Saadia Gaon continues:

*It is not, however, God's desire to act in this fashion with him who cannot bear trials since there would be no benefit therein. For the whole purpose of the suffering of the upright [individual] is that the rest of God's creatures might know that he has not chosen the former for nothing. This is known to you from the case of Job and his suffering. Hence, if the pain to which the servant of God is subjected constitutes punishment and he asks his Master to enlighten him thereon, it is a rule with Him to do so. Thus, Scripture says "And it should come to pass when you shall say, 'Why has God done all these things unto us? Then you shall say unto them...'" (Jer. 5:19).*

But there appears to be a conflict in what Saadia Gaon says. He says that the purpose of the trial is to show the rest of mankind that God did not choose the righteous person for nothing [his success in the trial displays God's love for him]. Thus, the

trial's purpose is for others. Saadia Gaon continues:

*I will go still further and say that it is even possible for a completely guiltless individual to be subjected to trials to be compensated for them afterwards, for I find that children are made to suffer pain, and I have no doubt about their eventual compensation for these sufferings. The sorrows brought upon them by the All-Wise might, therefore, be compared to the discipline that their father might administer to them in the form of flogging or detention in order to keep them from harm, or to the repulsive bitter medicines that he might make them drink in order to put an end to their illness. Thus, it is stated in the Torah, "And you shall consider in your heart that even as a man afflicts his son, the Lord your God afflicts you" (Deut. 8:5). Scripture also says in regard to such matters, "For whomever God loves He rebukes, even as a father, the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:12).*

But Saadia Gaon also says God will put an innocent person through trials to increase his reward. This is unlike what he said above, for here he says that the trial is for the person and not for others. His opinion is that to make one rise to a higher level, God puts a person through a difficult situation, and through his success God rewards him. How it works, Saadia Gaon does not seem to clarify, unless you use his analogy of the child. This analogy teaches that one can be a tzaddik who requires a difficult situation to perfect him. This does not

mean God punishes man now and rewards him later. But it means that the very trial perfects him. Through the trial he corrects a defect in his soul. The average person does not need a trial, as the mitzvos themselves are a trial. But for a highly perfected person who has accomplished the Torah's mitzvos and has the ability to rise to still a higher level, trials offer such people opportunities for greater perfection.

Ramban has a different view of trials:

*God desires to actualize a person's potential in order that he receives reward for action and not just reward for the heart. God only tests the righteous [person] as He knows he will perform his will. And God desires to render him righteous and therefore He gives him a command that involves a trial. God will never test the wicked who will not listen. And all Torah's trials intended for the improvements of those tested. (Gen. 22:1)*

The average troubles that people face are not trials. Ramban says this clearly, even though most people like to think that their troubles are a test. Saadia Gaon agrees. The area is contrary to the common opinion on the subject; most people feel their problems are in fact trials. They do not view such problems as punishments as they feel they are wholly righteous. They feel, "It must be that God is testing me, and if I succeed I will receive a great reward." The feeling of being tested is a very comfortable position psychologically.

So, Saadia Gaon says that suffering can be placed on man to provide improvement, like medicine given to a child. Ramban said differently: trials are not corrective, but they offer

the wholly righteous person an opportunity to attain an even higher level of perfection. This refers to one who has a perfected heart, but never had the opportunity to express that perfection in action. Ramban says that a trial offers this expression to the righteous person, which raises his level from potential to actual. This means that subsequent to the Akeida, Abraham was not the same person as before. This has nothing to do with corrective measures like Saadia Gaon says.

Maimonides was baffled by the whole idea of a trial. He says it is one of the most difficult areas in the Torah (*Guide* p. 304, book iii, chap. xxiv):

*The doctrine of trials is open to great objections: it is in fact more exposed to objections than any other thing taught in Scripture. It is mentioned in Scripture 6 times, as I will show in this chapter. People generally have the notion that trials consist in afflictions and mishaps sent by God to man, not as punishments for past sins, but as giving opportunity for great reward. This principle is not mentioned in Scripture in plain language, and it is only in one of the 6 places referred to that the literal meaning conveys this notion. I will explain the meaning of that passage later on. The principle taught in Scripture is exactly the reverse; for it is said: "He is a God of faithfulness, and there is no iniquity in him" (Deut. xxxii. 4).*

*The teaching of our Sages, although some of them approve this general belief [concerning trials], is on the whole against it.*

*For they say, "There is no death without sin, and no affliction without transgression" (Sabbath 55a). Every intelligent religious person should have this faith, and should not ascribe any wrong to God, who is far from it; he must not assume that a person is innocent and perfect and does not deserve what has befallen him. The trials mentioned in Scripture in the [6] passages, seem to have been tests and experiments by which God desired to learn the intensity of the faith and the devotion of a man or a nation. [If this were the case] it would be very difficult to comprehend the object of the trials, and yet the sacrifice of Isaac seems to be a case of this kind, as none witnessed it, but God and the 2 concerned [Abraham and Isaac]. Thus, God says to Abraham, "For now I know that thou fearest God," etc. (Gen. xxii. 12). In another passage it is said: "For the Lord your God proveth you to know whether ye love," etc. (Deut. xiii. 4). Again, "And to prove thee to know what was in thine heart," etc. (Ibid. viii. 2). I will now remove all the difficulties.*

Why didn't Maimonides like Ramban's view of trials? Ramban's view sits well with peoples' emotions and is therefore widely accepted. But Maimonides rejected this view because it is not a test. For he says, "*God is not testing a person in order to know what he did not know before.*" [Maimonides harshly critiques this view at the end of that chapter]:

*...we must not think that God desires to examine us and to try us in order to know what He did not know before. Far is this from Him; He is far above that which ignorant and foolish people imagine concerning Him, in the evil of their thoughts.*

Maimonides rejects this concept of trials since God knows all. Therefore, of what purpose is it to bring a person to a trial where he can fail? We read:

*Do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream-diviner. For the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you really love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul (Deut. 13:4).*

*And the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day's portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not" (Exod. 16:4).*

*Remember the long way that the Lord your God has made you travel in the wilderness these past forty years, that He might test you by hardships to learn what was in your hearts: whether you would keep His commandments or not (Deut. 8:2).*

Maimonides rejected Saadia Gaon's view, as, "*there is no affliction without sin.*" Maimonides is against the idea of afflictions of love (Berachos 5b). But what is wrong with that idea

if it helps to refine a person? Maimonides holds that it is unfair if God would cause suffering to a man who has not sinned. Maimonides' view is this: man does not need affliction to rise to a higher level of perfection. God created man to perfect himself without afflictions. If a person deviates, then punishments can help him correct himself:

*...for as a man afflicts his son, the Lord  
your God afflicts you (Deut. 8:5).*

This is a wonderful thing, that God steps in with corrective measures because he desires a high-level person to perfect himself. But if a person does not make an error, no suffering is warranted.

*A faithful God with no corruption  
(Deut. 32:4).*

*His mercy is upon all His works  
(Psalms 145:9).*

These 2 verses express that God is just and that He won't create a being in a manner where suffering is necessary to attain benefit. Man can perfect himself in a situation without pain and in total ease. According to Maimonides, pain [evil] occurs due to 1 of 3 considerations: 1) it is self-inflicted, 2) it is inflicted onto others, or 3) due to certain unavoidable natural causes (*Guide* book III, chap. xii). Inherent in creation there are defects. Chazal say that God instructed the tree to have the same taste as its fruit, but it did not heed God's words. [This midrash means that] certain things in creation are impossible, and God's wisdom dictates this impossibility. [At times, such impossibilities cause man problems.]

But a fourth pain that man suffers is God's punishments. This is a corrective measure for man when he errs. But for a perfected person, there is no need for pain.

How would Saadia Gaon reply to Maimonides? He would say that in general, God would not make man require pain for perfection, but in certain cases it is required. I would assume Saadia Gaon would say this. But Maimonides rejects it outright, as he holds that the road to perfection is the inherent struggle between the Tzelem Elohim and the instincts, devoid of any pain. Maimonides continues (Ibid.):

*The sole object of all the trials mentioned in Scripture is to teach man what he ought to do or believe; so that the event which forms the actual trial is not the end desired: it is but an example for our instruction and guidance. Hence the words "to know (la-da'at) whether ye love," etc., do not mean that God desires to know whether they loved God; for He already knows it; but la-da'at, "to know" has here the same meaning as in the phrase "to know (la-da'at) that I am the Lord that sanctifies you" (Exod. xxxi. 13) i.e., that all nations shall know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. In a similar manner Scripture says, if a man should rise, pretend to be a prophet, and show you his signs by which he desired to convince you that his words are true, know that God intends thereby to prove to the nations how firmly you believe in the truth of God's word and how well you have comprehended the true Essence of God; that you cannot*



*be misled by any tempter to corrupt your faith in God. Your religion will then afford a guidance to all who seek the truth, and of all religions man will choose that which is so firmly established that it is not shaken by the performance of a miracle. For a miracle cannot prove that which is impossible; it is useful only as a confirmation of that which is possible, as we have explained in our Mishneh Torah. (Yesodei Hatorah vii. f. viii. 3.)*

According to Maimonides, one cannot explain,

*Do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream-diviner. For the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you really love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul (Deut. 13:4)*

to mean that God allowed a false prophet to arise and that he should be successful with his miracles in order to test people. According to Maimonides, what type of meaning could that have? For the road to perfection does not require anything external. Therefore, Maimonides says that the purpose of the false prophet is for the Jews to demonstrate to others their extent of their Love of God [despite the false prophet's miracles, the Jews do not abandon what they know to be true]. If one's love of God is based upon knowledge, one cannot follow the false prophet [and reject God]. Despite his miracles, he preaches what is logically impossible. One following truths must reject the false prophet. The trial of the false prophet is to determine if one's love of God is based upon knowledge or

based upon simple emotions [which can be swayed by miracles]. And just because one cannot explain the false prophet's miracles, one cannot thereby accept what is false. Therefore, the purpose of the false prophet's miracles is to demonstrate to others how the Jew is convinced of truths and not signs. [Knowledge is what determines that God is true, and false prophets who speak of baseless notions are not to be accepted, regardless of his performed miracles.]

Maimonides writes further (Ibid.):

*Having shown that the term "to know" means "that all people may know," we apply this interpretation to the following words said in reference to the manna: "To humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou would keep His commandments, or not" (Deut. viii. 2). All nations shall know, it shall be published throughout the world, that those who devote themselves to the service of God are supported beyond their expectation. In the same sense it was said when the manna commenced to come down, "that I may prove them whether they will walk in my law or not" (Exod. xvi. 4): i.e., let everyone who desires try and see whether it is useful and sufficient to devote himself to the service of God.*

Similarly, regarding the manna, it was to demonstrate that if one follows God's mitzvos, he is rewarded, and deviation meets with loss. Maimonides says that every trial must be understood in this manner: not as a test for the individual but as a demonstration for others. Maimonides continues:

*The account of Abraham our father binding his son, includes 2 great ideas or principles of our faith. First, it shows us the extent and limit of the fear of God. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions which are believed to be contrary to human feelings. He had been without child and had been longing for a child; he had great riches and was expecting that a nation should spring from his seed. After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great must have been his delight in the child! How intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared God, and loved to do what God commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of 3 days.*

*If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it 3 days after he had received the commandment, proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of God.*

Maimonides stresses that Abraham did not suddenly kill Isaac but did so only after 3 days. This shows that the proper way to serve God—even God’s commands—is not through emotions [sudden reactions] but through knowledge [any sudden emotions of alarm or excitement at God’s command to kill his son would have abated after 3 days].

*There is no necessity to look for the presence of any other idea or of anything that might have affected his emotions. For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that God might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man’s duty to love and to fear God, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment. We have repeatedly explained this. The angel, therefore, says to him, “For now I know,” etc. (Ibid. ver. 12), that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a God-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of God.*

Maimonides says, “for now I know” does not mean that now God knows, but “now it will be known.” Rashi says the same:

*From now I have that which to respond to Satan and the nations who wonder why I love you. Now I have a response, for they see that you fear God. (Gen. 22:12)*

“Now I know” does not mean that literally, but it means “now it is apparent.”

*This idea is confirmed in Scripture: it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of God, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples, for it is said, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou may fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God," etc. (Deut. xxviii. 58). This is one of the 2 purposes of the 'akedab (sacrifice or binding of Isaac).*

*The second purpose is to show how the prophets believed in the truth of that which came to them from God by way of inspiration. We shall not think that what the prophets heard or saw in allegorical figures may at times have included incorrect or doubtful elements, since the Divine communication was made to them, as we have shown, in a dream or a vision and through the imaginative faculty.*

Maimonides says that another concept that is derived from the trial of Abraham is that when a prophet receives a prophecy, he was not in doubt about it being authentically God's words, just as a person does not doubt what his senses relate to him. Both share the identical conviction.

However, the very problem that Maimonides raised seems unanswered: Where is the test? It appears that Abraham loved Isaac deeply. But is this a test? Secondly, Maimonides quotes the gemara, "*there is no affliction without sin.*" So how could Abraham—a man without sin—be subjected to a trial?

The answer is that Maimonides' definition of a trial applies to the observer, not to the one being tried. The trial is for every person who reads this story, not for Abraham. When Maimonides details Abraham's love for Isaac and his longing to have him and then giving him up, the trial is for the observer. But Abraham did not go through any test at all. Trial refers to an event in which most people would probably fail. This is why it is referred to as a trial; it is a trial for the observer.

There is a midrash that seems to say like Ramban: "*God gives trials only to tzaddikim.*" This echoes Ramban's opinion, that there is some perfection attained. But other midrashim like the one Rashi quotes side with Maimonides. But as a midrash is not literal, it is difficult to answer if that tzaddik undergoing the trial undergoes pain. We don't have the method to actually unravel a midrash. Did Abraham suffer pain? Here we have no midrash, but we have the verse: "*Please take your son, your only son, that you love.*" Chazal ask why the verse doesn't simply say "Please take Isaac." They answer, "It was done in order to give reward to Abraham for every word" [every emotion that he conquered in his sacrifice]. Now, although this can be applied to the observer [that the observer learns to attain this degree of love of God], it seems more like this is referred to Abraham [indicating that it was painful to part with "*his son, his only son, whom he loved*"]. It seems that for every emotional attachment to Isaac that he overcame, Abraham received reward.

But the question returns: Why does God give a person pain to reward him? We said above that perfection does not require pain. This is a difficult question. But although it's difficult to deny the pain, Maimonides' objection to pain was a different one: it would be an imperfection in God to create a being who needs pain to attain perfection. But, if a person can function to demonstrate to the world the true ideas of God, then it is

appropriate that he undergoes pain to bring about a desired result. Here, the pain is not for Abraham's perfection, but to teach the world Love of God. This is not an imperfection in how God created man, as Abraham is not attaining perfection through this trial; it is a lesson for others. Therefore, there is no "imperfectly created man." This is not about man's design but about teaching Love of God.

*"There is no affliction without sin"* means that God does not create a defective system. This complies with Maimonides regarding how God created man. But in Abraham's natural love and relationship to God, he was happy to undergo stress to express or display his love for God. The degree of duress a perfected person accepts is not a reflection of a poorly designed creation. [Maimonides and Rabbi Chait say the same idea: *"And yet because he feared God, and loved to do what God commanded, he thought little of that beloved child..."*]

WITH 10 TESTS ABRAHAM OUR FATHER WAS TESTED, PEACE BE UPON HIM AND HE WITHSTOOD THEM ALL; TO MAKE KNOWN HOW GREAT WAS THE LOVE OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER, PEACE BE UPON HIM.

The language *"to make known"* sides with Maimonides. However, the Torah uses the language of "nissah"—trial—in only one case: the Akeida. There is a dispute as to what were the 10 trials. Maimonides says they are as follows:

- God's command that Abraham leave his land: *"Lech Li-cha"*
- The famine: God said he would make Abraham into a great nation and Maimonides says the famine that followed was a great trial.

- Sarah's capture by the Egyptians when they took her to Pharaoh
- Abraham's war against the 4 mighty kings
- When Abraham took Hagar as a wife after he lost hope to have a child with Sarah
- Circumcision in his old age
- When Avimelech took Sarah
- Exiling Hagar after he had Ishmael from her
- Exiling Ishmael from his home as it says, "*It was very bad in Abraham's eyes.*" But he followed God's commands and set them away.
- Sacrificing Isaac: the Akeida

Others include Nimrod and Abraham being thrown into the furnace. That case is a dispute: Maimonides does not cite that as a trial and Ibn Ezra does not accept that history. Others cite Sarah's death as a trial.

A trial is a task God gives which is difficult to accomplish. But how does that definition apply to the famine, or when Sarah was captured? What task was there for Abraham to do? The term trial does not seem applicable. I can understand when he had exiled Hagar and Ishmael; Abraham loved his son and sending him away was difficult, as cited above.

Regarding the famine the Torah says as follows:

*There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. (Gen. 12:10)*



Rashi comments:

*Famine in the land: In that land only to test him whether he would be suspicious of God's commands in that He had bidden him to go to the land of Canaan and now forced him to leave it (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 26).*

Rashi makes the problem more difficult, saying that was the only land struck with the famine. God tells Abraham to travel to this place, and now that is the only place suffering a famine. So, what was the trial?

The idea of a trial here is the same as in all other instances. A person under a command from God [leave your home town and go to a new place] naturally feels “All will now go smoothly.” People seek to feel that God is guiding their lives. This is why people tend to say, “This is min hashamayim” [God’s will].

The trial for Abraham here was that, although traveling to a new place under God’s command, that place suddenly suffered a famine. An ordinary person would, at that moment, lose his complete faith in God’s command as the ultimate life, since things went wrong and not as anticipated. When events go against a person’s emotions, one does not feel comfortable. One desires that all progresses according to his wishes. He wants to feel that he is in line with a “super force” [God]. It is every person’s desire that as he follows God’s dictates, that he experience no mishaps or disturbances. This provides an ego-tistic satisfaction.

Maimonides alludes to Abraham’s trial as he says that God told him that He would make him into a great nation, and suddenly a famine hit. Maimonides says this was a great trial for

Abraham: to follow God's command when events do not unfold the way Abraham had perceived they should. People desire a sense of security that life is working out as they wish, and that God is watching over them. But this is a regression towards the infantile psychology and has nothing to do with perfection.

There are 2 types of trials here. One type is where one must act, like the war Abraham waged against the 4 kings, or circumcision, as Abraham was old and weak, and one is afraid regarding his health. Maimonides says in his Guide that this fear is great and difficult to overcome, as seen regarding Job. The pain of one's body is most intolerable.

There is also a second type of trial—a passive trial, one of suspicion—as Rashi says, “To test Abraham if he will become suspicious of God,” whether one will detract from his relationship with God. And when Abraham took Hagar as a wife, the trial was not to marry her. Rather, taking her represented the final act of losing hope of having children with Sarah. The completion of losing hope was the trial. His life was not progressing as he desired. Under God's providence, one desires that all works out perfectly. But regarding the famine, Abraham thought, “Wait...what is happening?” A mystical thought entered his mind that he felt all should go well while following God's command. But Abraham conquered that thought [and passed that trial].

The question was raised that the gemara (Kedushin 39b) says that God does not view an evil thought as an action [that it should deserve a punishment]. Therefore, when Rashi says that Abraham was tested for any suspicion of God, even if he was suspicious, it should not be a sin.

The answer is that regarding actions, God does not construe a thought of sin as an act, and therefore no punishment is warranted. But in terms of one's relationship with God,

thought is the action; thought is the very relationship and suspicion definitely registers as a sin. Similarly regarding hirhur avodah zara—thoughts of idolatry—thought is the very essence, the very substance of the prohibition. Thoughts of idolatry are considered “action” [i.e., the violation].

Insofar as one’s belief is concerned, his understanding of life and his relationship with God, thought is considered an action [thought is culpable in relationship to God]. In comparison to the Patriarchs, Moshe was accused of being suspicious of God.

Sarah’s death was a trial because she died due to the Akeida. Rashi cites the midrash that the thought of Isaac dying had killed her. This was a tremendous trial, as Abraham returned from the mission to sacrifice his son, and his wife had passed away because of her attachment to Isaac. It was a defect in Sarah’s personality. She had hoped she would conceive by giving Hagar to Abraham. Sforno makes this point. Sarah could not give up hope on having a child. Because of that attachment, she passed away.

## THE BURNING BUSH DIALOGUE

Regarding the vision of the burning bush, we see a 3-part dialogue between God and Moshe. In the first part, Moshe asks God, “*When I tell the Jews that You sent me, they will ask, ‘What is His name?’*” God responded, “*אֲדֹנָי אֲשֶׁר אֲדֹנָי, I will be*

*that I will be,*" which later turns into just "*I will be*" (Exod. 3:14).

*Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I will be that I will be." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'" And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: this shall be My name forever, and this My remembrance for all eternity'" (Exod. 3:13-15).*

*And Moses answered and said, "And they won't believe me and will not listen to me, and say: 'The Lord did not appear to you?'" The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he replied, "A rod." He said, "Cast it on the ground." He cast it on the ground and it became a snake; and Moses fled from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail"—he put out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand— "that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you."*

*The Lord said to him further, "Put your*

*hand into your bosom.” He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous as snow. And He said, “Put your hand back into your bosom.”—He put his hand back into his bosom; and when he took it out of his bosom, it returned the flesh. “And if they do not believe you or pay heed to the voice of the first sign, they will believe the voice of the second sign. And if they are not convinced by both these 2 signs and still do not heed your voice, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and it will be—the water you take from the Nile—will turn to blood on the dry ground.” (Exod. 4:1-9)*

This dialogue is divided into 3 parts. The first part was Moshe asking God which name to use. God first says, “*I will be that I will be,*” then God says, “*I will be,*” and finally God says, “*This is My name forever and this is My remembrance [reference] for generations.*”

Then God says the second part, telling Moshe how exactly to approach the Jews: “*Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me...’*” (Exod. 3:16). God told Moshe to say “*pakod pakaditi eschem*” (I have certainly remembered you). Moshe replies that the Jews still won’t believe him, so God then provides Moshe with the 3 miracles.

The last part of dialogue is that Moshe simply rejects the mission and finally submits and accepts it.

It is interesting that after the first part, “*I will be that I will be,*” followed by “*Go and assemble the elders,*” God tells Moshe to say “*pakod pakaditi eschem.*” On the words “*and they will listen to*

*your voice*" (Ibid. 3:18), Rashi says as follows:

*Since you use this phrase, the Jews will listen to you, for they have long had this sign as a tradition from Jacob and Joseph that by mention of this phrase their deliverance will be brought about. Jacob said to them "And God will surely visit you" (Exod. 13:19), and Joseph said to them "God will surely visit you" (Gen. 50:24).*

[The intent of using this same phrase is that it will be a fulfillment of the transmission from the Patriarchs.] But of course, as the Jews had the transmission of this phrase, anyone can use it! [Therefore, how does this validate Moshe that he was truly sent by God?]

Maimonides says that anyone could make up any name they want. Therefore, what does it prove? Ramban raises the question and gives 2 answers. He said it was a promise, but I don't fully understand his answer. He says this promise was that no one will ever falsify a mission from God using this phrase. He says that he found a midrash saying that Rav Chama bar Rav Chanina says that Moshe was torn from his home at the age of 12. For if he would have been raised in his father's home, and Moshe told his father about the dialogue at the burning bush, they would not believe Moshe, explaining that he received this phrase from his father Amram, who received it from his father Kehuss, who received it from his father Levi, who received it from Joseph. For this reason, Moshe was removed from his home at an early age [to eliminate Moshe's knowledge of God's name through simple word of mouth]. The midrash says this explains why, when Moshe spoke to the Jews, "*they believed him*" (Exod. 4:31).

However, this is not foolproof. Even having left home at age 12, Moshe still could have learned of this phrase. It is a simple phrase, so what is the difficulty in learning it and repeating it?

But I think the explanation is as follows. Yes, it was a sign, but the sign was not merely verbalizing those 2 words. There is a difference between “pakod pakaditi” and just “pakod.” The single word alone is not the message, rather it is the use of both words as Jacob, who originated this phrase, meant to say:

*I do not know when it is going to happen or how it will be brought about, but I know it is God's trait to redeem you. This knowledge is not given over to man.*

The Mesora (tradition/transmission) which Jacob had was that it stems from God's nature that a messiah will come.

What was the first miracle that God gave Moshe? The staff became a snake and Moshe fled from before it. Then Moshe's hand became leprous. And the third miracle was that the Nile's water turned into blood. What was the sense of these 3 miracles? These miracles represented ideas, as Moshe came in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is conveyed by referring to the God who rules nature, the God that distinguishes between the cells in the staff and the cells in a snake. This was Abraham's lesson, that God is the source of the universe. He is the source of nature, be it biological, such as a snake, or in inanimate, such as the staff.

The second miracle represented the idea of the God who metes out reward and punishment. Chazal say that Moshe deserved to be degraded by contracting leprosy because he said that the Jews would not believe him. The fact that the leprosy was performed on Moshe—and not another person—indicates some criticism of Moshe. The essence of this leprosy was a sign, but a critique was

implied. Moshe's message here was this:

*I come in the name of the God who relates  
to the universe in terms of reward and  
punishment.*

The third sign of the Nile's water turning into blood rejected the Egyptian deification of their source of sustenance (a common primitive belief). The Nile is under God's domination: "*I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt*" (Exod. 12:12). God expressed His will to expose idolatry as false.

The formula for the Egyptian exodus included certain principles which were demonstrated in these 3 miracles. The first principle is that God controls nature. Leprosy then conveyed God's reward and punishment. God said to Moshe, "*I am God*" (Exod. 6:2). Rashi comments that this phrase refers to God Who is trustworthy to pay a good reward, the God of reward and punishment:

*Who is faithful to recompense with a full  
reward those who walk before Me.*

This applies to the Egyptians' receipt of punishment. Had the Egyptians not deserved punishment, there would not have been an exodus. And if the Jews were not deserving of a reward [due to God's promise to the Patriarchs] they would not have been redeemed. And the third miracle showed the world that God is the creator, the only source of the universe, and that idolatry is false.

*Nevertheless, I have spared you for this  
purpose: in order to show you My power,  
and in order that My fame may resound  
throughout the world. (Exod. 9:16)*



This is why God allowed Pharaoh's continued existence.

The Egyptian exodus contained 3 principles. We know that they were ideas and not just signs, as Torah says, "And if they do not believe you or pay heed to the voice of the first sign, they will believe the voice of the second sign." Voice refers to the idea of the sign.

God gave Moshe a long formula prior to sending him to Egypt on his mission. First, God told Moshe to use the name "*I will be that I will be.*" Then God refers to "*pakod pakaditi.*" And then there were the 3 miracles.

"*I will be that I will be*" is an abstract philosophical idea of God; a metaphysical concept. But God concluded with the concept of "*This is My name forever and this is My remembrance for all generations.*" This means that truthfully, God's name is "*I will be that I will be*" but this is not a definition of God. We cannot understand what God is. But this name conveyed an approach to God regarding what we do not know about Him. It refers to God's greatness and His remoteness from our intellect: "Not as I am written, am I read." We cannot refer to God by that name יהוה, but we read that name as אדני. And we also do not use either name exclusively, which would imply that we fully grasp what God is, leading us to project some nonsensical idea onto Him. After Moshe explained to the Jews the abstract idea of "*I will be that I will be,*" he explained that man cannot enunciate that idea—יהוה. For by enunciation, man deludes himself that he understands what God is, which is impossible for man to conceive. Thus, when Moshe approached the elders, he taught them concepts.

What Moshe did next was to teach them *pakod pakaditi*. This was a reference to his mission. Again, this was the principle transmitted from Jacob. I do not know in detail what that principle was, but I can give a general concept.

Why was this entire dialogue necessary? God wanted the

Jews to follow Moshe and he was to demonstrate that he was God's messenger. How did he demonstrate this? Why should the Jews follow Moshe?

Judaism maintains that there is a certain kind of knowledge that is available only to perfected individuals. The elders knew this, which is the meaning of "Mesora b'yadam," they had a transmission. Moshe impressed the elders with the ideas, with the knowledge of God. It means that the elders saw that Moshe possessed a type of knowledge which is impossible for the ordinary mortal to obtain. That is why Judaism maintains that ultimate knowledge is not simply available to anyone. But it is acquired based on one's perfection. A person who is imperfect cannot obtain certain knowledge. Achare could not obtain certain knowledge for this reason.

The Jews did not follow Moshe due to the signs. In fact, the signs did not come until later. Furthermore, God was critical of Moshe when he said that they will not believe him. Why was God critical? It was a good argument. But we see from this that had he not said, "*they won't believe in me,*" that the original plan was without any signs. God's original plan was that the Jews follow Moshe as he was a man of knowledge that was unattainable by ordinary people. This is the meaning behind the transmission that the elders had in their hands. The elders had a transmission back to Jacob and when they saw Moshe teach them true ideas about God that they themselves had not fully conceived, they immediately realized such a person must be highly perfected. The elders thought that there is good reason to follow someone on that level and accept his words as truths.

*Pakod pakaditi* was of that same nature. A person presents himself as a savior for 1 of 2 reasons: either he is following his egomania, or if he is rational, then his claim that he is the savior must be true.

False messiahs possess the desire to be a messiah; they wish to express their fantasy of omnipotence. That is his motivation [to announce oneself as the messiah]. *Pakod pakaditi* means the exact opposite: “I am nothing and I came simply because of God’s trait that He wants to redeem the Jews at this time.”

Thus, the principle that was transmitted from Jacob and Joseph of *Pakod pakaditi* was not simply the phrase, which anyone could have enunciated. But this represented the idea that Moshe did not come to the Jews with some egotistical imperfection in his nature, where he desired to be the savior. Rather, the phrase indicated that he was acting according to God’s will. Thus, Moshe was armed with the abstract idea, that being the essence of Judaism:

*The foundation of foundations and firmest pillar of all wisdom is, to know that there is a First Being, that He caused all beings to be, and that all beings from heaven and Earth, and from between them, could not be, were it not for the truth of His Own Being (Hil. Yesodei HaTorah 1:1).*

Thereby, Moshe showed his perfection as he shared certain knowledge unattainable by imperfect people. And he demonstrated that he did not come due to egomaniacal desires for leadership, but only because of God’s trait to save the Jews. That should have been enough. And if the elders were on the highest level, there would be no need to go any further. They would follow Moshe. But Moshe suspected that the Jews were not on the highest level that they would believe him. Moshe felt it was true that the Jews should follow [based on ideas alone] but emotionally, Moshe suspected that they were not on

that level [that ideas alone would be sufficient to convince them]. Therefore, Moshe was criticized. There is a principle that one who suspects others without grounds suffers bodily pain, explaining the leprosy.

Nonetheless, God said that He would provide necessary means to satisfy the Jews on an emotional level as well. Of course, that too would still be tied to some idea, but it contained an emotionally satisfying component because it was a miracle. A combination of the signs, and that they demonstrated the 3 themes necessary for the exodus is what ultimately clinched it.

But the reason why Moshe debated God for 7 days before accepting his mission is because a prophet cannot perform his mission unless he understands it. But even after God supplied Moshe with the signs, he still resisted the mission saying that the Jews would not believe him, and for this he was criticized.

God's original plan did not contain signs. Judaism does not prefer signs and wonders.

*And I will descend to save them from the hand of Egypt (Exod. 3:8).*

The Rav commented that this descending refers to something less preferable. God broke His laws of nature [through the plagues]. And again, Moshe's mission was to be without signs. He was to communicate God's nature [as a redeemer] and validate his role as the messiah through knowledge alone.

## MOSHIACH

Today, people have a false notion of the messiah, Moshiach. Moshe was the greatest Moshiach and he was supposed to function without wonders. [How much less the final Moshiach?] Maimonides says that the sages of Israel accepted Bar Kochba (Ben Coziba) and this was without wonders. Bar Kochba had a deep understanding of Judaism, he was fluent in Torah, and he presented himself as the proper individual who could be Moshiach. Therefore, he was considered to be Moshiach.

We previously mentioned regarding Abraham that one of his trials was to abandon the emotional fantasy that all would progress without failure when following God's directives. This sense of secured success stems from a low part of human nature, from man's sense of omnipotence. *Pakod pakaditi* which Moshe stated, demonstrated that he was not under the influence of such an emotion. This was the sign which the elders had in their hands. This is the same idea of Abraham's trial of the famine that struck right after God told him that He would make him into a great nation.

*It should not occur to you that the King Messiah must bring wondrous signs or perform marvels or invent new things or revive the dead or anything similar. It is not so. For Rabbi Akiva—one of the wisest of the Sages of the mishnah—was King Ben Coziba's arms bearer and he said that Ben Coziba was the King Messiah. He and all the Sages of his generation thought that he was the King Messiah, until he was killed because of his sins. Since he was*

*killed, they then understood that he was not the one (Hilchos Malachim 11:3).*

What is Maimonides saying? Of course, once he died he was not Moshiach. This is an unnecessary statement. But in truth, this expresses an idea. People are quite mystical when it comes to Moshiach because it is an area where one can project one's mysticism, just like Abraham's trial of the famine. People are deluded that all will progress without a hitch. Chazal anticipated Moshiach because they desired a state of minimal pain and distraction which would foster the greatest opportunity for Torah study. But this is not why others desire Moshiach. Others are not on that level where they desire to learn so much. Rather, others fantasize a state where they will obtain all their desires.

Moshiach is not a concept that someone at some point will realize that he is the messiah. That is a fantasy. Moshiach is a perfected person who is capable of accomplishing Torah's plans. Maimonides says as follows:

*The King Messiah will arise and reestablish the monarchy of David as it was in former times. He will build the Temple and gather in the dispersed of Israel. All the earlier statutes will be restored as they once were. Sacrifices will be offered, the Sabbatical and Jubilee years will be observed as commanded in the Torah. Anyone who does not believe in him or one who does not anticipate his coming not only denies the prophets, but also the Torah and Moses our Teacher. For the Torah has given testimony about him saying, "And*

*the Lord your God will turn your captivity and have compassion with you. He will return and gather you from all the peoples...If any of you should be dispersed at the ends of Heaven, from there God will gather you, from there He will fetch you. And the Lord, your God will bring you..."* (Deut. 30:3-4). *These matters are explicit in the Torah and include everything said by all the prophets. (Ibid. 11:1)*

According to Maimonides, the Torah says that one must anticipate Moshiach. But the Torah says the following:

*When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the Lord your God has banished you, and you return to the Lord your God, and you and your children heed His command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in love. He will bring you together again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. (Deut. 30:1-3)*

This means that we will repent. So, according to Maimonides, how does this refer to Moshiach? When people read these verses, they don't think it refers to Moshiach, but to repentance, teshuvah.

The answer is that the phenomenon of Moshiach is no different than any other phenomenon one goes through with his

free will. If one lays tefillin or helps others learn Torah, this is performed through free will. Moshiach is the same, but on a grander scale. He won't teach 1, 10, or 100 people, but he will be able to teach all of Israel.

This explains what Maimonides means that Rabbi Akiva and all the sages assumed Bar Kochba to be Moshiach, until he was killed in his sins. Meaning, if he was not a sinner, he could have been Moshiach. It is not that Moshiach is a mystical person who suddenly arrives at a certain time. Moshiach is any person who is not a sinner, and the Jewish nation is not failing. In such a case, that person can bring the redemption, which will be realized through providence over the people and the leaders. There is nothing more to it. But it is not some mystical phenomenon when someone wakes up one morning and thinks he is the messiah. Such a man is insane. There is no predestination [of a particular person]. Once Bar Kochba was killed in his sins, the sages realized he wasn't on the proper level to save the Jews.

*...and you return to the Lord your God,  
and you and your children heed His com-  
mand with all your heart and soul, just as  
I enjoin upon you this day, then the Lord  
your God will restore your fortunes and  
take you back in love.*

That is Moshiach, it is a verse in the Torah. The verse merely says that there is a promise that this will occur. And it can occur anytime that the Jewish nation and the leaders are on the proper level. If people wished to bring the Moshiach, they must perfect themselves.

Moshe Rabbeinu's miracles represent man's insubordination to his proper place regarding the universe and its source,



meaning God. Magic and superstition are the opposite; they are an attempt to control and demonstrate one's own omnipotence. That was the battle between Pharaoh's astrologers and Moshe.

Regarding Moshiach, the verse "*in its time I will hasten it*" (*Isaiah 60:22*) means to say [2 possibilities]: if the Jews are meritorious, God will hasten him to arrive. And if they are not, he will arrive in its time. The promise is that Moshiach will arrive, but how it will take place has 2 possibilities. As in the case of Bar Kochba, the people could have accomplished it. That refers to hastening it. But "in its time" means that if the Jewish nation is not meritorious, regardless, a certain time will be designated for the arrival of Moshiach. Moshe arrived at a specific time, as it says at his birth, "*The woman conceived and bore a son; and she saw he was good, she hid him for 3 months*" (*Exod. 2:2*). What does it mean that he was good? Every infant is good. The plain meaning is that he was born 3 months prematurely. That is why his mother could hide him for 3 months [from the decree of killing male infants]. Although prematurely born, he was healthy, he was "good." Rashi quotes the Chazal, "*When Moshe was born, the tent filled with light.*" This midrash means that Moshe's arrival as the messiah was "in its time." The exodus was predestined to occur at that time. Miriam was a prophetess and she said that her mother will give birth to Israel's savior. The house "filling with light" refers to a prophetic vision. Chazal say that the redemption had to occur at that moment. For if it was delayed, the Jews would have been destroyed.

Judaism requires intellectual tolerance: the ability to entertain a question which could be very difficult. Rav Chaim's method was that he was not afraid to leave a sugya (a Talmudic area) with a basic question unanswered. In learning, one cannot expect to always find the answer. Sometimes one must

leave an area without knowing its main idea. The alternative, that everyone can understand everything, is false. We are not dissatisfied when we fail to understand. We are happy that we have a question and we move on.

## 5:4 MIRACLES & TESTS

10 MIRACLES WERE PERFORMED FOR OUR ANCESTORS IN EGYPT, AND 10 [MIRACLES WERE PERFORMED] AT THE [REED] SEA. [WITH] 10 TRIALS DID OUR ANCESTORS TEST THE OMNIPRESENT, BLESSED BE HE, IN THE WILDERNESS, AS IT IS SAID (NUM. 14:22): “YET HAVE THEY TESTED ME THESE 10 TIMES, AND HAVE NOT HEARKENED TO MY VOICE.”

The commentators go through the miracles in Egypt. And those that took place at the sea were known not through Torah, but through the Mesora. The mishnah then says that the Jews tested God 10 times in the desert. The first time was at the Reed Sea [as Pharaoh and his army were drawing close] when the Jews said, “*Are there not enough graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness?*” (Exod. 14:11). The Jews desired to return to Egypt. The second test was in Marah: “*And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’*” (Ibid. 15:24). The third test was “*The Israelites said to*

*them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death'"* (Ibid. 16:3) which took place in Desert Sin. The fourth test was when they left over the manna until the morning [they did not put their full trust in God to deliver more manna the next day]. The fifth test was also regarding the manna. The sixth test was in Refidim, *"The people quarreled with Moses. 'Give us water to drink,' they said; and Moses replied to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you try the Lord?'"* (Ibid. 17:2). The seventh test was the Golden Calf. The eighth test was in Taverah: *"The people took to complaining bitterly before the Lord. The Lord heard and was incensed: a fire of the Lord broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp"* (Num. 11:1). The ninth test was in Kivros Hataivah, *"Who will feed us meat?"* (Ibid. 11:4). And the tenth test was when they sent the spies, about which God said, *"They tested Me these 10 times"* (Ibid. 14:22).

The Jews tested God only 10 times in a 40-year period. Chazal say that this generation was very knowledgeable. They were on a very high-level. But they tested God these 10 times. Of course, when we read the Torah we feel we would not test God and we would follow Moshe. But that is because we do not understand what it means to test God.

## 5:5 THE 10 TEMPLE MIRACLES

10 MIRACLES WERE PERFORMED FOR OUR FOREFATHERS IN THE TEMPLE: NO WOMAN HAD A MISCARRIAGE FROM THE SCENT OF THE MEAT; AND NO HOLY FLESH EVER WENT PUTRID; AND A FLY WAS NOT SEEN IN THE ROOM OF SLAUGHTERING; AND A HIGH PRIEST DID NOT HAVE AN ACCIDENTAL EMISSION ON YOM KIPPUR; AND RAIN DID NOT EXTINGUISH THE FIRE OF THE WOOD PILE; AND THE WIND DID NOT OVERPOWER THE PILLAR OF SMOKE; AND THERE WAS NOT FOUND A DISQUALIFICATION IN THE OMER (A SPECIAL BARLEY OFFERING, OFFERED THE DAY AFTER PESACH, WHICH PERMITS GRAIN HARVESTED IN THE NEW HARVEST TO BE EATEN) OR IN THE 2 BREADS OR IN THE SHOWBREADS; THEY WOULD STAND UP CROWDED AND BOW DOWN WITH [ENOUGH] SPACE; AND A SNAKE OR SCORPION NEVER HURT A PERSON IN JERUSALEM; AND A PERSON DID NOT SAY TO HIS FELLOW, "THE PLACE IS TOO CRAMPED THAT I SHOULD LODGE IN JERUSALEM."

These 10 miracles related to certain procedures that were carried out in the Temple. These miracles ensured that those procedures went on without interference. That was the universal of those miracles. The Temple was a unique place and the sacrifices had to be discharged properly, and [miraculously] nothing stood in their way. The mishnah lists the 10 miracles that shielded these procedures from any interference. Of course, the question is what this has to do with Pirkei Avos.

## 5:6 THE 10 MIRACLES CREATED AT CREATION'S CLOSE

10 THINGS WERE CREATED ON THE EVE OF THE [FIRST] SHABBAT AT TWILIGHT. AND THESE ARE THEY: THE MOUTH OF THE EARTH [THAT SWALLOWED KORACH IN NUM. 16:32]; AND THE MOUTH OF THE WELL [THAT ACCOMPANIED THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS IN NUM. 21:17]; AND THE MOUTH OF THE DONKEY [THAT SPOKE TO BILAAM IN NUM. 22:28–30]; AND THE RAINBOW [THAT SERVED AS A COVENANT AFTER THE FLOOD IN GEN. 9:13]; AND THE MANNA [THAT GOD PROVIDED THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS IN EXOD. 16:4–21]; AND THE STAFF [OF MOSHE]; AND THE SHAMIR (THE WORM THAT HELPED BUILD THE TEMPLE WITHOUT METAL TOOLS); AND THE [HEBREW] LETTERS; AND THE WRITING [ON THE TABLETS]; AND THE TABLETS [ALL OF THE LATTER 3 ARE OF THE 10 COMMANDMENTS]. AND SOME SAY, ALSO THE MAZIKIM, AND THE BURIAL PLACE OF MOSHE, OUR TEACHER, AND THE RAM OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER. AND SOME SAY, ALSO THE [FIRST HUMAN-MADE] TONGS, MADE WITH [DIVINE] TONGS.

This means to say that God did not change nature when these miracles occurred, but during the 6 days of creation, God programmed the miracles into the universe. For example, Moshe's staff was required in Egypt. But it was not created then, but much earlier at the close of creation. And the mishnah does not mean that these 10 miracles were the only miracles programmed into creation during the 6 days, but all

miracles were programmed into creation during these days. The splitting of the Reed Sea mentioned in the previous mishnah contained many processes; these miracles too were built into the 6 days of creation. But the uniqueness of these 10 miracles was that they were programmed into creation just before sunset on that first Friday.

Again, we ask what the relationship is between these mishnayos and Pirkei Avos, which is a book that teaches about ethics and morality. Maimonides is sensitive to this question. On mishnah 5:2 he writes as follows:

*These generations are the words of the Torah, "x begot y," according to its order. And it mentioned this and that which is after it because of its mentioning [the] 10 utterances [with which God created the universe], which has reproach in them for man; to arouse him and to refine his soul with the dispositional virtues and the intellectual virtues, which is the intention of this tractate.*

Maimonides is aware that something does not align with Avos and does not belong in this tractate. And yet, strangely enough, we find these mishnayos discussing the 10 plagues, the 10 miracles at the sea, the 10 tests with which the Jews tested God, the 10 Temple miracles and the 10 miracles God created on day 6 at sunset. What is their relationship to ethics and morality? And then in mishnah 5:7 Avos returns to a more fitting matter, namely the 7 matters concerning a wise man and a boor. But, mishnayos 4-6 basically have nothing to do with Avos, on the surface. If the mishnah wishes to inform us of the miracles, that is fine, but this is not the place for it.

And interestingly enough, I have not seen one mefaraish [commentator] address this problem, including Rashi, Maimonides, and Rabbeinu Yona.

## BITACHON: TRUST IN GOD

We previously mentioned Abraham's perfection and his trials. We said that trials do not refer to a test where someone must act in a certain way. Trials refer to acceptance: the attitude of an individual regarding any untoward event.

Today, I would like to talk about the concept of bitachon, faith in God. I will first discuss it in practical terms and later I will discuss it philosophically.

We say that a person is to have bitachon in God. What is faith in God? Everyone seems to feel intuitively that they know what this means. As Maimonides says, everyone feels they know what Olam Haba is. Of course, they have no idea of it because they do not use their intellects, and they do not care to [attempt to] understand it because they feel they know what it is. This is a bad practice in Judaism. The same applies to bitachon. People feel they know what it is: an imminent catastrophe about which one says, "Have faith in God that He will help you." Does this mean that my belief in God dictates that He will help, which means to say that if the catastrophe occurs, it does so because I failed to believe in God? This produces a problem as there were people who were paragons

of bitachon, and nevertheless they experienced catastrophe. Do we say that Abraham lacked bitachon because the Torah says, “*The matter was very evil in Abraham’s eyes regarding the tidings of his son*” (Gen. 21:11 regarding Sarah’s wish to exile Hagar and Ishmael)? Abraham had to send away his son while he had natural feelings towards him. Does this mean that if Abraham had more bitachon, that this would not have happened? It is absurd to say so.

Chazon Ish raises the question of what bitachon is. He answers that bitachon does not mean that God will fulfill a person’s desire. For we see that this is false, for despite a person’s great bitachon, his wishes do not necessarily occur, like Abraham sending Ishmael away. Now, if a catastrophe might occur, what is bitachon and its role?

Chazon Ish wrote on the topic of bitachon and emunah, trust. He said that bitachon is the same phenomenon as emunah. Emunah means that a person believes that everything that occurs is due to God’s will. But we do not know how God is going to proceed [when we encounter untoward events]. Chazon Ish says that bitachon is nothing more than emunah actualized. This means that a person can be walking in the jungle and a lion approaches him. His emunah tells him, “The lion may or may not destroy me; it depends on God’s will.” Bitachon is when he personally feels that way; his emotions are in line with his emunah. Meaning, just as one knows *intellectually* if he would be walking in a dangerous place, whether the danger will befall him depends on God’s will, bitachon is the way he *feels* when actually enduring that danger. That *feeling* is bitachon. Bitachon is nothing more than emunah translated into emotional, practical terms. Those are the words of Chazon Ish.

I would like to elaborate more on bitachon. Bitachon is a certain kind of change in a person that takes place due to his



knowledge of God. Everyone has basic fears. How do they handle them? Fear is a powerful force. By nature, most people handle their fears with some type of protective device, a manufactured psychological device that they create. It is like Chofetz Chaim says: “When someone hears that another person died, at first it strikes him, but then the person denies his own death.” The mind creates such devices to offer a personal security and peace of mind. Some people engage in certain activities to protect them from their fears. But the ultimate expression of these manufactured security devices is idolatry. Idolatry is created by man precisely to ward off any evil that might befall him. It is fueled by fear. Chazal say that the denial of idolatry is the essence of the entire Torah because idolatry has many forms, such as primitive idolatry and sophisticated idolatry. In the latter, a person becomes the idol, whether it is another person or his own sense of omnipotence with which he protects himself. In modern society the protective device or sense of greatness is usually some aspect of the self. An actor once commented after suffering a heart attack, “I never thought that it would happen to me, because I am one of nature’s favorites.” This feeling also prevents a person from doing chessed because he has no identification with the person stricken with unfortunate circumstances. Maimonides says the one who does not mourn over a loss is an achzar; 2 words, “ach” and “zar,” “only a stranger” mentioned in the book of Job (30:21). He is a stranger to others without any identification.

God created man in a way where he is not in constant psychological pain. The force in man for immortality and for omnipotence is so powerful that it emerges even from those who deny immortality. But if you listen to what such people say, you hear that what drives them is a sense of immortality, but in a disguised form. Many of their activities are attempts to

grab immortality; they live a life riddled with the fear of death. Their actions attempt to overcome their own mortality, and their plunge into enjoyments were also an attempt to grab immortality. That is why it is important [to them] to have certain words inscribed on their gravestones. But as a person who passed on is no longer here, there is no way to enjoy such words. [His desire for a gravestone inscription reveals a sense of immortality, for he feels he will not leave Earth and will somehow enjoy those words.] The immortality fantasy is unavoidable. A person can disguise it and try to fool himself that he is above it. But it is the most powerful force in man.

Then you have a person who listens to the Torah. He davens on Rosh Hashannah and says:

*Man's foundation is from dust, and his end is dust. We labor by our lives for bread, we are like broken shards, like dry grass, and like a withered flower; like a passing shadow and a vanishing cloud, like a breeze that passes, like dust that scatters, like a fleeting dream. But You are the King who lives eternal (Unisaneh Tokef prayer).*

He recites the beautiful prayer that differentiates between God the true king, and between man the subservient king, who grasps for immortality as he tries to protect himself before the inevitable dangers that lie before him. Old age and death cannot be talked away. But, as immortality is such a powerful force, even one who follows Torah and accepts his mortality, where is all that psychological energy—that until now was directed towards immortality—going to be directed now? The answer is that it is converted. God created man in a way that he can exist in a psychologically happy state. Where does all that energy go?

*Yours, Lord, are greatness, might, splendor, triumph, and majesty—yes, all that is in heaven and on earth; to You, Lord, belong kingship and preeminence above all.  
(I Chronicles 29:11)*

Man takes all his unrealistic emotions about himself and transfers them onto God. All that man wishes to ascribe to himself can only be ascribed to God. And regarding the person who lives according to Torah, this transfer of energies from himself to God is what takes place. The emotions cannot be changed. God did not create man where his emotions will be frustrated. Perfected man will transfer all his emotions to God.

This is the concept of the entire book of Tehillim. It is a practical book, a unique book. It is a book [through] which the human emotions are translated and given directly towards their realistic and true expression. What book talks more about bitachon than Tehillim?

*Those who know Your name trust You,  
for You do not abandon those who seek  
You, O Lord (Psalms 9:11).*

*Trust in the Lord and do good, abide in  
the land and remain loyal (Psalms 37:3).*

*Happy is the man who makes the Lord his  
trust, who turns not to the arrogant or to  
followers of falsehood (Psalms 40:5).*

*Many are the torments of the wicked, but  
he who trusts in the Lord shall be sur-  
rounded with favor (Psalms 32:10).*

*O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and shield (Psalms 115:9).*

*It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in mortals (Psalms 118:8).*

*It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in the great (Psalms 118:9).*

*A song of ascents. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion that cannot be moved, enduring forever (Psalms 125:1).*

Bitachon is constantly mentioned in Tehillim. Bitachon is a yesod hadas (a fundamental of Judaism).

Now let us return to our question in Avos. What are these mishnayos 5:4, 5:5 and 5:6 doing here? They do not seem to follow Avos' theme of ethics and morality. And one of the mishnayos seems out of place. The second half of 5:4, the 10 tests with which the Jews tested God in the desert, does not relate to what comes before or after it. The 10 miracles in Egypt refer to God, as do the 10 miracles on the Reed Sea, the 10 in the Temple, and the 10 miracles God created at sunset. But the 10 tests now refer to the Jews and not God, which seems out of place.

Another question is, what is meant by the Jews "testing" God? And why is what they did called a test? According to Maimonides, trials or tests are intended for the observer, [not the one subjugated to the test]. According to Ramban, the test is for the person undergoing the trial. But what can be meant by "testing God?"

In my opinion, there is an idea shared by these few mishnayos. The 10 miracles in Egypt, the 10 miracles at the Reed

Sea, the 10 in the Temple and the 10 miracles that God created on the 6th day just before sunset are all related: they are a buildup. And the fact that the 10 tests with which the Jews tried God are inserted into these sets of 10 miracles, ties into those tests in a very special way. As a matter of fact, these 3 mishnayos are all a continuation of Abraham's 10 tests.

There is an interesting Ibn Ezra on parshas Terumah on the verse, "*And see and create as their structures that are being shown to you on the mountain*" (Exod. 25:40). Ibn Ezra is a bit lengthy, but it is a theme throughout Chumash. It is an interesting Ibn Ezra and I cannot fully explain him, but I think there is an idea that can be gleaned...an important idea. And there is a previous Ibn Ezra in parshas Mishpatim on the verse, "*You shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will remove sickness from your midst*" (Ibid. 23:25):

*There are great wise men of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah and they never studied nature. Therefore, I cannot explain these blessings without explaining a small amount from the sciences. Man's body is from the lower world and his higher part, the soul, is tied to the body. And in between these 2 are a means of connecting them. On the whole they are called nefesh and ruach. The neshama is wisdom and it resides in the head and from there go out to all the nerves, sense perceptions. The ruach is related to the heart (viz., one's heart beats faster when the ruach is active) and this ruach is the part of man seeking power and to overpower any opposing force. This part of man is also the part that gets angry.*

*The nefesh is the part seeking pleasures. [Thus] the 3 parts of man are the intellect/soul (neshama), power/dominance (ruach), and the pleasure-seeking element (nefesh).*

*And God gave Torah to give strength, power and greatness to the intellect, the part of man partaking of wisdom. And thereby, the body will not overpower the soul. And if Torah is not kept, then the body will rule over the soul.*

*And I will give you metaphor: God chose the Jews and taught them Torah, and if they keep it, He will give them wisdom. If they go in the proper path, nothing bad will occur to them. The rule is that one's physical nature should be guided by wisdom, and not the opposite. And when the soul becomes powerful, then the power from heaven which protects the body will increase. The blessing will come through all that man eats and drinks. For all illness comes from food and this is referred to as "blessing your bread." And some diseases originate outside the body due to the atmosphere or other matters and on this it is written "I will remove sickness from your midst." But one who follows Torah won't need doctors.*

*Now I will speak about the stars. All that occurs to a person is related to astrological phenomena in which one finds himself. This matter is very deep. If according to*

*nature a person cannot conceive, if the person is related to God, that person's nature will change, and he will beget children. That is what God said to Abraham, "I am the mighty God, walk before Me and be perfect." There is no conflict between God and other forces. The heavens were not created to perform good or evil, they have no powers. They follow God's will.*

This is a strange and cryptic Ibn Ezra, as is his usual style. First he refers to astrology, but then he denies it. That's one Ibn Ezra. Then there is the first one I cited in parsha Terumah (Exod. 25:40):

*Anything that exists, exists in 2 ways. One is a physical existence like a substance, and then there are nonphysical existences such as angels and also man's soul. These 2 things [physical substance and the non-physical beings] are created, and a created being cannot create any of these 2 existences [viz., a person can never increase the amount of matter in the universe, nor can he create a soul or an angel]. It is equally impossible that man could remove matter. There is something that is related to matter, and that is the essence of the thing. And there are also forms. One type of form are sanctified forms, like the soul. Also, there is something else that is related to matter which is subject to change, such as temperature and moisture. In the second class of things, they do not remain, but they change*

*and this, a person is capable of altering.*

*Therefore, it is impossible that God should have physical form because God is the creator of all that exists. Thus, God cannot have any physical property. I will give you a metaphor: the darkness of the moon, when the earth's shadow enters between the moon and the sun. Now I will give you another metaphor: know that the power of the soul is in the entire body and that there are certain places in man's body that have connected links to the brain (nerves) and they are more sensitive in other places in the body like the eyes and ears (bones, for example, do not have nerve sensation). And the heart is in the center part of the body, explaining why many things serve the heart.*

*The same is true regarding God. His honor fills the world, but there are some places where one sees God's power in a greater degree than in other places. This is because of 2 reasons: the nature of the recipient, and God's will. That is why the Temple mount was chosen. And if God gives you wisdom in your heart, you will understand the secrets of the Ark, the kaporets and the cherubs that have the wings spread out, and outside of that [room] is the menorah, the incense alter and the table. And outside of that is the alter of animal sacrifice and all its vessels, and the washing vessels, and all these are to honor God.*



*And this is the reason I hinted this to you, because there are in our generation, men who are wise in their own eyes. And maybe they will mock my words. And the one who knows the principle of his soul and the form of his body will be able to know the whole universe, because man is in the image of a small universe. And he was the last creature to appear on the earth and the sign for this is "He started with the greater and with the lesser He completed [creation]." God started with universe—the greater—and he concluded with man—the lesser.*

*The Gaon said there were 18 things in the Tabernacle and 18 things in the upper world. Here is the rule: every cherub is made to receive the upper force.*

In parshas Mishpatim, God says, "Behold, I will send an angel before you" (Exod. 23:21). Ibn Ezra comments:

*All those who know astronomy (math) brought conclusive proofs that the moon is a recipient of the sun's light; by itself it casts no light. That is why the moon is eclipsed. This is due to its position in relation to the sun, and they are both round. And when the Earth comes between the sun and the moon, the moon has no light. And we know that at nighttime the moon casts light on the Earth. If Ruben would say this is the moon's light, he would speak the truth.*

*And if Shimon said that this is the sun's light, he would be speaking the truth.*

That is why in Terumah, Ibn Ezra says that he is giving a metaphor. When he discusses God, he says that God cannot be physical, and then he says, "I will give you a metaphor: the spherical shape of the moon." And he says he will give another metaphor. What does Ibn Ezra mean?

Let us look at the mishnah: "*10 things were made at sunset.*" This is a delicate matter and I don't want you to misunderstand. All miracles were programmed into the plan of creation. But what was so crucial for Chazal to communicate that these miracles were created at sunset at the close of creation, and why state this in Avos? Also, what is Ibn Ezra's point that man is a miniature world? One must be very careful to formulate this idea, as we deal with areas that are dangerous regarding Judaism's fundamentals. Therefore, we must be careful to say the bare minimum and [say] nothing more than necessary.

Metaphorically, and not a conclusive concept, Ibn Ezra is saying [regarding Ruben and Shimon's statement that the moon's light is both the moon's and the sun's light] that both Ruben and Shimon are correct. But only one is the true source [of light]. All the universe's phenomena stem from God, but there are intermediaries. Strictly metaphorically speaking, God is the "soul" of the universe. That is why Ibn Ezra gives the metaphor of man as a miniature universe. Just as the soul directs the body of man when man is perfected, and there is a relationship between the metaphysical soul and the physical body, this same relationship applies to God and the universe [man]. One philosopher who was an apostate, was an intelligent student of Ibn Ezra, from whom he derived his philosophy. As the area is very abstract and he misunderstood Ibn Ezra, he became an apostate.

Again, Chazal teach that God programmed all miracles into creation. This means that God is a source of wisdom; we cannot relate to Him the way that we wish. A person would prefer to feel that God intervenes [in our time and space]. But that is alien to Judaism. Because of his physical nature and his desire for security, man is driven by his religious emotion. But Judaism denies man that satisfaction. Chazal and Ibn Ezra are teaching that God's relationship to man is completely through wisdom. During the first few moments of creation when everything was set to unravel, God's providence was also set. But it emerges as a part of God's wisdom. God's relationship [to man and the world] is impersonal, in the sense that man searches for a personal relationship. But nevertheless, God's providence is imminent in creation.

This is why it is important for us to know that these 10 matters were created just before the close of creation. This means that Judaism is telling us that the God who we accept—the creator of heaven and Earth—relates to man only through His infinite system of wisdom. But man is unhappy with that, unless he is on a very high-level. Perfected man is extremely happy with this relationship. And that which we mentioned before about bitachon, ultimately cannot reach its proper conclusion unless a person partakes of this idea of God. Ultimately, it is impossible to have bitachon on the so-called “religious level.” True bitachon is found in recognizing God as the One who reveals Himself through His infinite wisdom, and not the One that satisfies man's emotional search for security. There is only one instance in Torah that openly states that the Jews tested God, using the word “nissa.” If you analyze that case, you will understand all cases of the Jews testing God. That case was Refidim:

*From the wilderness of Sin, the whole Israelite community continued by stages as the Lord would command. They encamped at Refidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses. "Give us water to drink," they said; and Moses replied to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" (Exod. 17:1,2)*

Ibn Ezra comments:

*Not the entire nation [quarreled with Moshe] like the case of the manna, because there were 2 groups here. One group had no water, and that was the group that quarreled with Moshe. The second group had water, and they were the ones who wanted to test God to see if He would give water. [Thus, there were those who quarreled, and then there were those who tested God.] Moshe replied to those quarreling with him [the ones who wanted water due to thirst] "Why argue with me? Let's cry to God." But to the second group who had water, Moshe said "Why do you test God?"*

What does Ibn Ezra mean to say? Every one of the Jews' tests of God were the same. When they complained about wanting meat, they had plenty of animals they could have slaughtered. Here, the Jews had water, but [yet], they wanted water. Maharal from Prague asked why the Gold Calf was a test of God. The answer is that every test had one common denominator:

*Is God in our midst or not? (Exod. 17:7)*

This means is the Jews could not extricate themselves from seeking satisfaction from a “human type” of being who would satisfy them. That [precisely] was the Gold Calf [sin]:

*When the people saw that Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for the man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.” Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. This he took from them and formed it and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!” (Exod. 32:1-4)*

The Gold Calf was a tangible being [that catered to the Jews’ desire for a human type of being to satisfy them. This explains the people’s use of the word the man Moses].

10 THINGS WERE CREATED AT SUNSET AT THE  
CLOSE OF CREATION (AVOS 5:6)

It all ties in, starting with Abraham’s 10 trials. Abraham accepted everything that reality threw his way. This was be-

cause of his concept of God [God willed reality to be as it is; this must be a good and man is to embrace it]. All miracles were programmed into creation, as God relates to man through His infinite wisdom and not in a way that man desires [man desires that God adjusts His ways and “responds” in times of need]. True bitachon is when man takes his emotional energies and directs them towards God, who is the source of all creation and all events. And that can only be done if one knows that all miracles were created long ago during creation. The concept of bitachon in God can never be complete as long as one remains on the primitive level.

This is the tie between Abraham, the miracles and the Jews testing God. Abraham represents the proper attitude, and this is based on the principle of the miracles. [In contrast] the Jews testing God shows the improper attitude. It is one theme throughout. The Jews sought a humanistic relationship with God. For although they had animals and water, they tested if God would “respond”: *“Is God in our midst or not?”* Man senses greater comfort when fitting God into his time-oriented existence. “Will God respond to me here and now?” is man’s primitive desire. So, although not needing food or water, the Jews tested God.

[Rabbi Chait explained why man seeks this humanistic relationship God. This stems back to man’s original relationships, which were with his parents. The frightening insecurity and dependency of the infant finds psychological comfort in his physical parents. But man is to mature and recognize God as his sole security and abandon the security image of parents. If he does not, the psychological dependency on the parent that he carries from youth into adulthood in his infantile mind finds new expressions in idolatry, and in the Jews’ sin of testing God. In both cases, man projects the humanistic image of an authority figure onto reality and attributes truth to

idols, which he actually carves in forms of man (Isaiah 44:13).]

But the miracles that were programmed into creation teach that God relates to man through wisdom, and this relationship is not the emotional one that the Jews sought, but how Abraham lived.

Ibn Ezra says that if one is successful and reaches the level of real wisdom, then he attains a sense of bitachon which is impossible to attain on the primitive level. Perfection is only through man's true apprehension of God.

Ibn Ezra gave a metaphor for how God relates to the world: the body and soul. He said that the brain which is the faculty and force of thought, is more closely related to the soul than any other faculty. And there are certain parts of the body that are more sensitive to receive the brain's neurological messages. He means that in creation there are different levels. The Tabernacle [too] displays different levels. First there is the Ark and the cherubs, and as you move outward there are different levels. The sun and moon are the same. [The source of light is the sun that moves outward towards the moon, which merely reflects sunlight.]

But man is a creature who relates to God in a different way than inanimate matter. It's like the heart is more sensitive than bone. That is Ibn Ezra's metaphor. God's expression in the universe is proportional to the recipient. Man's soul is a more sensitive receptor to God than inanimate matter.

The entire universe is an expression of God's infinite wisdom. As man is more receptive to God, in creation God took into consideration man's existence and also less receptive creations. The universe is a harmonious whole. Man is a higher recipient of [relating to] God's honor and therefore God programmed these miracles for man.

Had God created the universe and only afterwards created man, if man would act in a certain way, God would have to

alter something in the universe to accommodate man. This is not a harmonious universe, but a dichotomized universe. Therefore, in creating the universe, man was considered and miracles were built into nature [the world is thereby designed from creation to accommodate man's needs without future intervention].

Our concept of God is that He is the source of the universe; it is all a system. Others viewed this as pantheism. While Torah maintains creationism, so to speak, God is the "soul" of universe, but He created it [unlike Aristotle's view that the universe is eternal]. The philosopher who was Ibn Ezra's student became a pantheist as he derived his view from Ibn Ezra. He drew that conclusion as he operated with human categories. But in approaching God, one cannot do so.

Ibn Ezra says that the concept of the Tabernacle is the idea that the cherubs and the Holy of Holies are recipients of God's wisdom to a higher degree, and then there are other vessels and varying degrees. Ibn Ezra means that the Tabernacle is a miniature duplicate of God's relationship to universe.

## THE GOLD CALF: A NEW RELATIONSHIP

We touched upon the story of the Gold Calf, after which God told Moshe that he would destroy the Jews. The Gold Calf was one of the cases of the Jews testing God. Moshe then



prayed to God, he caused the Jews to repent, and he then directed the tribe of Levi to kill the sinners, who violated their most powerful emotions of family to do so. The Torah continues:

*The next day Moses said to the people, "You [Israel] have been guilty of a great sin. Yet, I will now go up to the Lord; perhaps I may win forgiveness for your sin." Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Alas, this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold. Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from Your book which You have written!" But the Lord said to Moses, "He who has sinned against Me, him only will I erase from My record. Go now, lead the people where I told you. See, My angel shall go before you. But when I make an accounting, I will bring them to account for their sins."*

*Then the Lord sent a plague upon the people, for what they did with the calf that Aaron made. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Set out from here, you and the people that you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring will I give it'— I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go in*

*your midst, since you are a stiff-necked people, lest I destroy you on the way."*

*When the people heard this harsh word, they went into mourning, and none put on his adornments. The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelite people, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now, then, leave off your adornments, and I will consider what to do to you.'" So the Israelites remained stripped of the adornments from Mount Horeb (Sinai).*

*Now Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, at some distance from the camp. It was called the Tent of Meeting, and whoever sought the Lord would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he had entered the tent. And when Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, while He spoke with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud poised at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow low, each at the entrance of his tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. And he would then return to the camp; but his attendant, Joshua son of Nun, a youth, did not leave the midst of the tent. (Exod. 32:30-33:11)*

The “adornments” represent man’s true honor: his recognition of God. At Sinai, the Jews recognized God and received those adornments. But once they corrupted their idea of God through the Gold Calf, even after their repentance, they had no right to those adornments.

What is the continuity between the sin of the Gold calf and Moshe removing the tent, and then Moshe insisting that God go with the nation? The gemara says this request of God going with the nation is one of Moshe’s 3 requests that God granted. The story continues:

*Moses said to the Lord, “See, You say to me, ‘Lead this people forward,’ but You have not made known to me whom You will send with me. Further, You have said, ‘I have singled you out by name, and you have, indeed, gained My favor.’ Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and continue in Your favor. Consider, too, that this nation is Your people.” And He said, “I will go in the lead and will lighten your burden.” And he said to Him, “Unless You go in the lead, do not make us leave this place. For how shall it be known that Your people have gained Your favor unless You go with us, so that we may be distinguished, Your people and I, from every people on the face of the earth?” And the Lord said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name.”*

*He said, "Oh, let me behold Your presence!" And He answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name Lord, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. But, He said, "You cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live." And the Lord said, "See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face will not be seen."*

*The Lord said to Moses: "Carve 2 tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered. Be ready by morning, and in the morning come up to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to Me, on the top of the mountain. No one else shall come up with you, and no one else shall be seen anywhere on the mountain; neither shall the flocks and the herds graze at the foot of this mountain." So, Moses carved 2 tablets of stone, like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, taking the 2 stone tablets with him. The Lord came down in a cloud; He stood with him there and proclaimed the name Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed: "The Lord! The Lord! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger,*

*abounding in kindness and truth, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations." Moses hastened to bow low to the ground in homage, and said, "If I have gained Your favor, O Lord, pray, let the Lord go in our midst, even though this is a stiff-necked people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for Your own!" He said: "I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will work such wonders as have not been wrought on all the earth or in any nation; and all the people who are with you shall see how awesome are the Lord's deeds which I will perform for you." (Ibid. 33:12-34:10)*

God revealed to Moshe His 13 attributes, He agreed to distinguish the Jews and Moshe from other nations and then He created a new treaty. It comes out that if it were not for the Gold Calf, the Jews would not have benefited from God's providence, and they also would not be distinguished from other nations. It is like Maimonides says in the beginning of his *Guide*, that because of a sin, man achieved something good. It doesn't sound proper.

When God initially says [after the Gold Calf] that He will not go up in the midst of the Jews, this means that prior to the sin of the Gold Calf when the Jews had the proper idea of God, God was with the nation because of their knowledge ("adornments") of God. But once they sinned by creating the Gold Calf and their idea of God was distorted and deluded,

that relationship with God was lost. This is why Moshe removed the tent, “*One ostracized from the teacher is also ostracized from the student*” (Moade Katan 16a). Moshe said, in other words:

*It is not appropriate for me to remain  
among Jews as this would mislead them.  
It would imply that the Jews could truly  
relate to the proper idea of God.*

Therefore, Moshe removed his tent to teach the Jews that this was not true. They lost their adornments and their true idea of God. God is no longer related to the Jews as before. Prior to the Gold Calf, the relationship was one of knowledge. Once the Jews lost their knowledge of God, that relationship was gone. How they lost that knowledge is an interesting question. We addressed this regarding Bilam, for he too had a certain knowledge of God, and yet we know he was a rasha. So how did he achieve that knowledge?

Bilam’s knowledge was based only on circumstance. He was an intelligent person, but intellect is not the sole requirement for knowledge of God; it also requires perfection. Bilam was not perfected. However, because of the situation in which he found himself, his other emotions were completely subdued. This allowed him the clarity to perceive certain accurate ideas about God. But the moment that prophetic experience left him, he reverted back to his original [corrupt] state. Perfection in man is only valuable if man brings it upon himself. But if God brings it upon man, it does not last.

This is what happened to Klal Yisrael. Due to Revelation at Sinai and the miracles in Egypt, certain emotions were subdued, and the Jews attained a certain perfection. But the moment those [external] causes ceased, the Jews reverted back to

their state of imperfection and they created the Gold Calf. Their sin was in not sustaining that level of perfection.

Then Moshe said to God, in other words:

*I cannot lead the Jews without them somehow relating to You—of course, not in the original way of the Jews having accurate knowledge of God. That was canceled. But there must be some way in which they can relate to You.*

Moshe asked that God's shechina (presence) abide with them.

*...and whoever sought the Lord would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he had entered the tent. And when Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, while He spoke with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud poised at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow low, each at the entrance of his tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another.*

Moshe was the only one who retained knowledge of God. There was a barrier between Moshe and the people. But the people still had a connection: the tent. So, the people recognized that they lost this close relationship to God, but they

could still approach Him at Moshe's tent. For God spoke there with Moshe, "*as man speaks with his friend.*" The Jews' link to God now required a distance, explaining why Moshe moved his tent far from the Jews' camp. This distance was to teach this new "distance" between God and the people.

But Moshe said it would now be impossible for the Jews to conquer the land of Israel and endure the upcoming trials and tribulations without a relationship to God. Therefore, Moshe asked God, "*Show me Your ways.*" Moshe asked that God's presence abide with the Jews, which means that Moshe and the Jews would be distinct from all people; there should be a visible difference between the Jews and other nations regarding God's providence. This explains why God says, "*Behold I create a treaty.*" The former treaty at Sinai was lost due to the Gold Calf:

*I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will work such wonders as have not been wrought on all the earth or in any nation; and all the people who are with you shall see how awesome are the Lord's deeds which I will perform for you.*

This means that the Jews would no longer relate to God directly, but through seeing the effects, that Israel has a certain providence distinct from other nations. But there is a second possibility: one can accept that he is ignorant of God, but he can relate to certain effects. That is why Moshe said, "*Please show me Your ways.*" Moshe felt in this way he can relate the Jews to God. That is why God responded and taught Moshe the 13 attributes. God said that when the Jews recite them, "I will listen, even though the Jews do not understand what they say." Moshe—and no other—understood these 13 attributes:



*I will make all My goodness pass before you.*

*And you will see My back, but My face  
you will not see.*

Merely by enunciating these 13 attributes, by recognizing that there is something about God—there is a “way of God” expressed in these 13 attributes—we thereby relate to God in this secondary manner. This was the method Moshe Rabbeinu requested. Moshe meant that without this secondary means of knowledge of God, God is not among the Jews and Moshe could not lead the nation forward.

The problem with understanding the 13 attributes goes back to the problem of the Gold Calf and the concept that Chazal explain in the 10 things created at sunset. Man attempts to project his subjective ideas of a deity with which he feels comfortable.

*The craftsman in wood measures with a  
line and marks out a shape with a stylus;  
he forms it with scraping tools, marking it  
out with a compass. He gives it a human  
form, the beauty of a man, to dwell in a  
shrine (Isaiah 44:13).*

Isaiah says what lies behind idolatry is the form of a man. This is an attempt to anthropomorphize God. Judaism is diametrically opposed to this. While Judaism makes concessions to man due to his low level, these concessions are frustrated and do not allow man to satisfy that anthropomorphic emotion.

*To whom can you liken Me, and I will be equated? says the Holy One. (Isaiah 40:25)*

God is incomparable to anything. Man's attempts at anthropomorphism are patently false. The same human weakness—man's need to imbue God with a human form—also lies behind our inability to understand God as merciful and gracious. That is why people say about perceived tragedies, "How could God allow this to happen?" This is because God's mercy is not comparable to ours. That is the entire story of Jonah. God said to Jonah who had mercy on the plant, "*I shouldn't have mercy on the city?*" God's mercy is that of the creator and man who is a creation cannot conceive of that idea of mercy. The only way we can relate to God's mercy is through the knowledge that Moshe understood what it means. That is why we recite the 13 attributes; that is the Torah's method for us to relate to God. The whole of Judaism is based on one thing: the correct idea of God. Without that, we have nothing. Maimonides opens his mishnah Torah with these ideas:

*The fundamental of fundamentals and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a First Being, that He caused all beings to be, and that all beings from heaven and earth, and from between them, could not exist, except for the truth of His Own Being.*

A Russian priest was once asked for his proof of God. He responded, "The Jewish people." It's true, as the verse says, "*and it will be in you for a sign and a wonder*" (Deut. 28:46). The special providence of the Jew—"distinct from all nations"—the survival of the Jew in Torah and halacha, exists with no

other people. Moshe prayed that other nations should not have this providence, for if they did, the Jews could not relate to it [they would not feel unique] and they would lose their connection with God. The Jew needs that connection, that they see a difference between them and other nations. Moshe said to God, *“To establish true ideas on Earth, You must remove Your providence from all others. Otherwise, the Jews will fall away and the nation will no longer exist.”*

Why did Moshe’s face glow? *“And they feared to draw close to him”* (Exod. 34:30). This reflected Moshe Rabbeinu’s relationship with God. This is the same idea of the Jews being distinct. Moshe’s veil meant that there was a distance. The Jews knew about Moshe’s face being illuminated, but they couldn’t be in its presence. Rashi comments on that verse:

*Take a look at the force of sin. Before the sin of the Gold Calf, the verse says that God’s honor appeared as fire atop the mountain in the sight of the Jews, and the Jews did not fear nor were they affrighted. But once they made the Gold Calf, they feared even of the light of Moshe’s face.*

Chazal mean that fear represents a distance from God. Now, the only way the Jews could know God is through effects and events. After the Gold Calf, the Jews operated on a different level of knowledge. Moshe’s tent had to be removed from the camp. Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who was able to engineer a new relationship. If it was not for him, Klal Yisrael would have been destroyed.

One more point is that one should not err by confusing miracles with providence. They are 2 separate matters. Pirkei Avos says that 10 miracles were created at sunset. There are truly very few miracles, but providence is a constant phenomenon, a natural result of a person's level and how he relates to God. That is what Ibn Ezra means and why I cited him. His ability to reveal the fundamental is because it is not as one would imagine, but far from it. Ibn Ezra is trying to explain metaphysically what that concept is.

These particular mishnayos of "10 matters/miracles" are not really geared towards character and intellectual perfection, as Maimonides said. But they are brought in parenthetically. And these mishnayos were not brought in because they all include the number 10. They really don't belong in Pirkei Avos because they address metaphysics. But since Pirkei Avos began discussing intelligence and character, they were brought in because they relate the idea of ultimate perfection in terms of one's relationship to God. This is expressed in Abraham's 10 trials, how the Jews tested God, and the 10 things that were created at sunset. These are miracles and are a different phenomenon than providence; the latter regards a person's perfection in character and intelligence and how he relates to God beyond the phenomena.

In many respects, perfected man is above natural phenomena. If another person might suffer, the perfected person will not be affected, and this is not a miracle, but a natural result of God's providence. This is how the universe was created and what Ibn Ezra tried to explain, "*and I will remove sickness from your midst.*"

Tefilah (prayer) is effective, not because one pleads with God, but because one removes himself from all worldly attachments before he prays and places himself in a frame of mind where he perceives reality and true ideas in their proper

perspective, and he understands as far as possible for himself, his relationship to God. This places him on a different plane. This is why he is answered; mere pleading is not why. Tefilah must be performed properly where the first 3 prayers are praise and in their proper order.

Purim brought the Jews to a higher level than the giving of the Torah. This is because the miracle of Purim was really not a revealed miracle. It was the operation and the natural function of God's providence. Klal Yisrael saw that because Mordechai and Esther lived properly they deserved providence and the Jews recognized that was the proper lifestyle. Esther 9:7 says the Jews "*rose up and accepted...*" [The rabbis comment that this means that the Jews once again accepted the Torah, but this time it was out of love, whereas at Sinai the Jews accepted the Torah out of coercion, as the midrash says, "*God held Sinai over their heads and said, 'Accept the Torah, or here you will be buried.'*"] The Jews' reacceptance of Torah out of love during Mordechai and Esther's era teaches that one can only rise to a higher level if it is achieved through oneself. But if one is affected by externals, even the greatest miracles do not change a person, and the moment the effects are gone, it's lost [one returns to his former state].

## 5:7 KEY PERSONALITY TRAITS

7 THINGS ARE [FOUND] IN AN UNREFINED PERSON (GOLEM) AND 7 IN A WISE MAN. A WISE MAN DOES NOT SPEAK IN FRONT OF SOMEONE WHO IS GREATER THAN HIM IN WISDOM OR IN NUMBER; AND HE DOES NOT INTERRUPT THE WORDS OF HIS FELLOW; AND HE IS NOT IMPULSIVE IN ANSWERING; AND HE ASKS TO THE POINT AND ANSWERS AS IS PROPER; AND HE SPEAKS TO THE FIRST [POINT] FIRST AND THE LAST [POINT] LAST; AND ABOUT THAT WHICH HE HAS NOT HEARD [ANYTHING], SAYS, “I HAVE NOT HEARD [ANYTHING]”; AND HE CONCEDES TO THE TRUTH. AND THEIR OPPOSITES [ARE FOUND] WITH AN UNREFINED PERSON.

“Greater in number” refers to years. In general, we do not value years (age), for that is a gentile notion. But when it comes to 2 people who are chochamim, then we respect age. Respect is different. Maimonides says that for one who is old—even a gentile—we show respect by standing before him. This is because he lived through many experiences. And even if he did not gain from those experiences [we stand in respect for those experiences which are mediums to gain knowledge]. But his age represents God’s blessing: God exposed him to those experiences. But nobody holds that we must respect people simply because they are older than us.

But regarding 2 chochamim, there is a halacha regarding age. For one with more experiences must have gained more wisdom.

A second explanation of “greater in number” is similar to the halacha that one court (bais din) cannot revoke a previous

court's ruling, unless it is greater in wisdom and in numbers. The question of course is that as all courts are fixed at 71 judges, how can one be greater number?

The answer is that number refers not only to judges, but to their students. The court wishing to revoke a previous court's ruling must have more students than the previous court. The same is the case here: one should not speak before another person who has surpassed him in "wisdom and in number"—a greater number of students. But not just any student. We refer here to the greater wisdom of those students outnumbering his own. Thus, a chocham does not speak before another chocham who is greater than him in knowledge, or if his students are greater than his students.

Tosfos says that we follow the ruling of a person because he was a great head of a yeshiva and he had many students. Tosfos says that he was on a higher level in terms of rulings because students make the rebbe sharp [through their question and discussions, the rebbe must clarify and probe deeper into an area, thereby sharpening his mind and rendering him on a higher level of wisdom].

Maimonides offers a different answer. In his *Guide* he says that a greater person can help others to a greater degree. His words are interesting. He says that one person's measure of greatness is limited to helping himself alone. But a person with a higher measure of greatness is capable of helping others as well. Maimonides is trying to answer a difficult question. He was bothered by how one should help others in an altruistic manner. Thus, one with more students has reached a higher level as a gavra [personal embodiment] of Talmud Torah. The greatness of a person is reflected in his ability to increase Torah study in others.

The chocham's second trait is that he does not interrupt his friend's speech; he offers him the chance to fully express

himself. He listens to all his friend has to say without hurrying him along, and only then does he respond.

The third trait is that he is not impulsive to respond. Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*The chocham does not give a quick answer. He does not answer until his answer is perfectly clear. He does not speak until his words are as clear as the sun before him.*

The world defines a wise person as one who innovates a new theory. But according to the scientific community, how one expresses that idea is not very important. Judaism has a very special [different] idea regarding what wisdom is. Our tradition regarding the formulation of ideas is that an idea must be stated as clear as the sun. Judaism demands a clarity of thought. As Rav Chaim Brisker used to say, “If you can’t explain an idea to a 10-year-old, there’s something lacking.” An idea must have ultimate clarity. When Rav Aharon Kotler gave an idea, he would say, “It’s clear as the sun at noon!” And when Rav Chaim Brisker said that a 10-year-old should understand it, that’s predicated of course on the youngster having been acquainted with the framework [prerequisite material].

AND HE ASKS TO THE POINT AND ANSWERS AS  
IS PROPER AS IS THE HALACHA

This next trait teaches that a chocham asks and answers in the proper categorical frame. Many times, a person asks “around” the area; his category is not exact or precise. The same applies to answering; one confuses the categories. The most common confusion is when one asks a “why” question.



However, the “what” must be defined first. The phenomenon [currently being studied]—the “what”—must first be identified [defined] before answering “why” it is so. Maimonides says that if the area being discussed is a factual topic, the chocham won’t ask for a theoretical explanation, and vice versa in theoretical discussions, he will not seek factual support. Biology, philosophy and metaphysics each have a distinct framework. The chocham does not confuse his frameworks; he understands the type of thought that is appropriate for each area. In halacha, most of the confusion is regarding the distinction of halacha from philosophy. People ask, “Why is this so?” They don’t understand that the system of halacha operates in its own orbit. Halacha has a special way of thinking, in which philosophical questions have no place. And the inverse is also true: you cannot take philosophy and make it into halacha. This is what Maimonides is saying. And he says that one will not attain this level until he attains an “excessive amount of wisdom.” If the baal karban (owner of an animal sacrifice) lacked the proper intent, he must bring another sacrifice as he did not fulfill his obligation of hava’ah (bringing a karban). However, the karban is still valid and all of the sacrificial rites are performed. The question is this: How is the karban valid, but the owner is disqualified from fulfilling his obligation to bring a karban? [What is the reasoning behind this apparent conflict?] Without the proper intent—lishma—the karban was not brought as a “gift.” We see this from the prophet. What is wrong with bringing a blemished or a stolen animal as a sacrifice?

*“When you present a blind animal for sacrifice—there’s no evil! When you present a lame or sick one—there’s no evil! Just offer it to your governor: Will he accept you?”*

*Will he show you favor?”—said the Lord of Hosts. (Malachi 1:8).*

“Would you bring this to an important person?” Meaning, how then can one bring such an animal to God? We see from here that there is an institution of hava’ah—bringing. On the one hand, this is an ethical matter. But it is also a halachic institution. The ethical element became embodied in the purely halachic institution of bringing. But its source, you might say, is philosophical. Many times, there is a transition from the philosophical to the halachic. And although based on a philosophical point, once halacha takes hold, it works on its own. Halacha becomes a completely logical abstraction and works in its own framework and must be dealt with purely in halachic and logical terms. Philosophical thought is different than halachic thought. These realms are distinct.

The most renowned thinkers find fault with halacha because they do not understand this idea. They maintain that, although one brought a blemished animal, since he was fully devoted to God and Temple, he should fulfill his obligation. However, this person confuses philosophy with halacha. Such a sacrifice has an improper halachic description and is pasul, null. This person’s philosophical outlook plays no role as halacha operates on its own terms: a blemish nullifies a sacrifice. This is the meaning behind, *“He asks to the point and answers as is proper, as is the halacha.”*

The confusion of modern-day thinkers is an extension of Korach’s rebellion. Korach said that a house filled with Torah scrolls should be exempt from requiring a mezuzah. He used a philosophical argument in a halachic topic. Korach denied the system of halacha.

I can’t say why we need halacha, but I can state its benefits. I cannot say that halacha and philosophy are the only systems

through which man can perfect himself. Halacha is a highly intellectual system and its intellectuality itself is of the greatest benefits to man. Last week someone asked me as follows:

*Since Maimonides says that kosher laws intend on controlling a person [his desires], why can't I decide to control myself by not eating pork 5 days a week? I'll make up my own control [system].*

I explained that the idea of halacha is not simply that one refrains from something. But it means that when one is confronted with a question of prohibited foods, he needs to go through Yoreh Dayah [Shulchan Aruch laws] to determine if something is permitted or not. Refraining [alone] is a low level [of following laws]. The process of Torah study to refrain through an intellectual act, where one's energies are directed to a system of wisdom, that should be the essence of following halacha. The benefit of Torah is not just having a system. The Torah's benefit is that it is a system of wisdom, and without halacha there cannot be any wisdom.

Man's perfection lies in his comprehension of the world of halacha. Why did Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi daven only once a month? It was because he was always involved in wisdom. A person is exempt from davening if he is always engaged in wisdom. Since the purpose of the system is to be involved in God's wisdom, one who always learns Torah is exempt from many mitzvos because the mitzvah exists only to engage one in wisdom, and this person is already engaged.

AND HE SPEAKS TO THE FIRST [POINT] FIRST  
AND THE LAST [POINT] LAST

This is another form of intellectual perfection; it refers to the organization of [one's] ideas. On the words "*And he is not impulsive in answering,*" Rabbeinu Yona refers to the utmost clarity for one's thoughts. Maimonides says this refers to correcting something sophistical. Sophistry is argumentation that appears to be true, but is not. Critiques of Judaism are one example.

Maimonides does not define impulsiveness as a rush to answer. The Hebrew word for impulsiveness—bahala—also means confusion. The work of the chocham is to separate true ideas from sophistical notions. When asked by a confused person, the chocham clarifies for the questioner that his question means A, B and C. The chocham breaks down the question, he analyzes it and can show the questioner what precisely the question should be, and he shows him where the true idea lies. All intellectual work is the separation of true ideas from sophistical ideas. Maimonides says that the chocham has an instinctive sense of wherein lies the sophistry and wherein lies the mistake. The chocham not responding impulsively means that he is not confused. The Rav said about his grandfather Rav Chaim that upon hearing a question, immediately he intuitively knew where the answer lied. Maimonides holds that the mind continues to develop intuition and that it continues to learn. And after a while, it does not take a person as long to see through a sophistical argument as it did originally. The mind is in tune with truth. It has a dimension that perceives the truth. But before a person learns, that dimension of perceiving the truth is involved with many other dimensions of the mind so the person does not perceive the truth right away. But over time, one's learning develops

intuition, and although he may not have the answer, his mind sees where the answer lies; he knows where to go. When Einstein heard a question he would say, “If I were God, how would I work this out?” He was not haughty, but he meant to say that he tuned in to how a given phenomenon should work. In halacha, the same is true. This is the view of Maimonides.

According to Maimonides, this mishnah is the formula for intellectual perfection. It consists of 3 things. I do not think the world at large has this Torah concept that the mind is underdeveloped at first. The mind is a raw intellect requiring development. One must learn how to think properly [while the world assumes on day one of college, a student’s mind is fully capable of tackling any problem and arriving at truth]. A subject has no value if not properly approached. Our Mesora [tradition] teaches that one first needs to learn how to think properly: how to refine the mechanism of the mind. This is the essential work in Torah. The refined mind expresses itself in these 3 perfections: 1) intuition; immediately identifying the errors in sophistical arguments, 2) knowledge of the appropriate mode of thought for each subject; clear categorical thinking attained only after one has attained much wisdom, and 3) organization of material. A perfected intellect has very little to do with the amount of one’s knowledge; it is not the amount of facts [that defines the chocham] but the method of how one’s mind operates. Of course, a good memory adds as one can avail himself to many sources. But if one does not have a great memory, this does not mean that one is not a chocham. And for those of you who work in education, I want to mention that regarding organization, the last perfection, “*To organize something properly comes from tremendous wisdom*” (Rabbeinu Yona). I often tell the talmidim of the yeshiva who are giving shiurim, that when they give shiur to the younger talmidim, they should not think that they are not gaining as

much. People feel that if they taught older, college level students that they would gain more, but that's a mistake. Because when you give a shiur to a youngster, provided he is capable of understanding an idea, even a 13-year-old, to present an idea to such a young person requires greater work in organization than for older students. For a young mind to appreciate the thoughts, the shiur must be better organized. Organization is the main thing. It is a lot of work, but that work, as Rabbeinu Yona says, is "chochma gedolah"—it requires great intellect. The benefit in careful organization, first of all, is in seeing the ideas. And secondly, many times the greatest ideas emerge from proper organization.

The genius of Euclid was his organization as evidenced in his propositions, the 49 steps through which he proved the Pythagorean theorem and each step's precision and organization: "This step goes before that one, and this one after that one, etc." It is mentioned that the Gra had his student translate Euclid's works into Hebrew because he felt that it exemplified precision of thought in terms of organization.

The reason that rebbes don't spend time organizing a shiur for youngsters is because they don't care; they can get away with little preparation. But if the rebbe wants to make his shiur most appreciated by the youngsters, he must work very hard on his organization. It also perfects one's own thinking. The Rav once told someone that he works more on the organization of his shiur than on the ideas.

Proper organization comes from a proper understanding of the ideas themselves. Because when one understands the ideas well, they should fall into an order. If it doesn't fall into an order, your grasp of the ideas is not 100%.

This mishnah addresses the perfection of the emotions. Maimonides has an interesting commentary:

*Now I will explain first the various traits that Chazal mentioned many times. And they are the terms boor, am ha'aretz, golem, chocham and chassid. Boor refers to one with no kind of perfection; no intellectual perfection and no perfection of the middos. Meaning, he has no wisdom and no moral discipline. He has no hold on the true ideas as if he is naked from [bereft of] good and evil. Boor refers to an empty field upon which nothing grows.*

Maimonides says that the boor can do neither good or evil. This means that in order to perform evil, a certain talent is required. A truly evil person requires some intelligence, organization and motive. Chazal say that some of the greatest risha'im [evildoers] had offspring who learned Torah. Meaning, someone who commits a great evil has knowledge, but it is misdirected. [Knowledge, although corrupt in the evil person, finds its way to his offspring in an uncorrupted fashion, explaining why his offspring learn Torah.] Esav the wicked was not a boor. He knew what he was doing. He had perfection of intelligence and the emotions, to an extent. If a person has no control over himself he cannot do anything good or evil. He is a harmless, innocuous soul. He is on too low a level that we can assign any type of description to him, whether good or evil. A person who fails to make a blessing over food because he's too lazy is a boor. But an evil person intentionally does not make a blessing due to a corrupt philosophy.

An am ha'aretz is one step higher than the boor. He is one who possesses the level of proper traits but not intelligence. Maimonides says this is the meaning of "derech erez." He is called an "am ha'aretz" because he benefits society. He is a

good social creature [and contributes to] yishuv ha'aretz, constructive society. His friends benefit from his good qualities and people refer to him as a “nice guy” or a nice individual. He is helpful, kind, and considerate of others. Does this mean that he worked on his character [to improve himself]? It could be that he is naturally kind, or that he worked to refine himself—not due to wisdom—but due to the emotions themselves. [He changed as he felt better following certain actions, but not that he objectively grasped the truth or benefit to those actions and values.] But it is very rare that one is naturally kind. This most always requires work.

When we understand these terms that Chazal coined for these 5 individuals, a whole philosophy of Judaism is uncovered. It is an amazing thing. The am ha'aretz has all the perfections of the emotions without any deep insight.

Maimonides then addresses the golem, whom he says possesses a degree of both intellectual and emotional perfection, but they are not complete. They don't operate in a proper order but in a confused manner. Therefore, there exists an admixture of deficiency. Golem refers to an artisan's vessel which has a form, but it is not yet in a perfected state. An example is a sword that attains its form before it is sharpened and polished. These are called “golmay kli matechess; unfinished metal instruments” (Mesechta Kaylim, hilchos tumah). Golem is a Hebrew word: “*Your eyes saw my unformed limbs...*” (Psalms 139:16). [In other words], “*God, You saw my substance before I became a complete [fully-formed] human.*” Golem refers to a formed material that is not yet perfected. The question is that if a golem has perfection of character and intelligence, where is he lacking? In what manner is he incomplete?

In contrast, the chocham possesses in a complete form these 2 perfections of intelligence and character. Interesting is that our mishnah does not discuss the boor or the am ha'aretz,



but it discusses the golem and the chocham. That is what the mishnah revolves around.

The chassid is one whose character perfection exceeds that of the chocham. [But] he is not intellectually superior to the chocham. In character perfection, he moves a bit more towards one extreme where his actions exceed his wisdom. Chassid means excess, whether it is a good or evil excess. Torah says that if one lives with his sister, it is called “chassid.” Torah demands that the sexual instinct not be satisfied beyond a certain point, explaining why incestuous relations are prohibited.

Maimonides explains that one should remain equidistant from extremes in all emotional spectrums. He should not be overly haughty nor be too depressed or of low esteem. The gemara says that in this case, the chassid humbles himself more than rationality dictates. A person is psychologically happiest when he travels the middle road. One who is of too low esteem is not good and one who is too haughty inhibits himself from being reasonable. The chassid goes to the side of humility more than haughtiness, where the chocham follows rationality and stays in the middle road. The chassid forfeits the psychological comfort [pride] of being in the middle because he seeks a greater perfection, which he fears he will not attain if he caters to pride. He does not seek psychological happiness over perfection.

Tangentially I should mention something about happiness in general. It is a strange thing, but most people who find happiness are not searching for it. And those searching for happiness don't seem to find it. This is true because people cannot find happiness, as they believe they have already found it. If, for example, a person received a serious honor from his community, he enjoys that moment deeply. It registers on his mind. He thinks to himself that if he could only extend that

kind of feeling throughout his lifetime, that he would be happy. But this is false because such momentary satisfaction cannot possibly prevail throughout life. The mistake is that man thinks such moments are “happiness.” But Judaism maintains that as long as one searches for that state of mind, he can never be happy. On the contrary, happiness is when the person renounces and cares less about that psychological enjoyment. The more one seeks this type of momentary pleasure, the less he obtains it. The more capable a person is of enjoying an award, the less happy he is. Einstein received an award, stuck it in his pocket, said thank you, and walked off [stage]. He was happy not to be disturbed [by such award ceremonies]. The happy person is not seeking that kind of situation of momentary pleasure. He is involved in something external to the self. As long as one is focused on the self, it is a psychological lure that he could never achieve. Judaism maintains the happy person is the one learning Torah. He is not thinking about the next time he will receive honor. Rather, he is preoccupied with the meaning of the gemara. His mind is involved in different types of problems. His mind is far away from searching for those psychological moments.

Fame is unattainable in a consistent way. The nature of its impact is the fact that moments of honor are rare. The person seeking honor chases it, he may finally receive it, but that momentary pleasure leaves him. He becomes immediately dissatisfied; he thought he would be happy for the rest of his life, but he was wrong. Because underneath it all, that’s not what he sought. He thought he encountered happiness, but it was all too brief. The mistake is that he never encountered happiness. Theodor Reik said his happiest times were when he was pondering matters that were unrelated to himself personally. It’s not just true accidentally, but it’s a psychological principle.

Psychological happiness for the chocham is not the end

goal. It's best to keep all emotions even-keeled, and not because he seeks emotional satisfaction, but because that is the healthiest state. The chassid goes beyond that, forfeiting the psychological calm of the chocham because he seeks a certain perception. So, he suffers from a sense of inferiority as he leans towards low esteem more than haughtiness. He accepts this lack of esteem as he seeks to attain greater intellectuality. He does not want any haughtiness to impede his goal. That is the highest level. The goal of the chassid is knowledge of God. One seeking psychological happiness forfeits his knowledge of God. [His energies can be satisfied either in the pleasance of self-esteem, or in pursuing knowledge of God. Man's energies cannot be involved in both.]

In chapter 5 of his eight chapters Maimonides says:

*Man must subjugate all the energies of his soul and place before his eyes at all times one purpose, and that is understanding God blessed be He, as is humanly capable to know Him.*

Most people are not on that level. Maimonides says that anyone on that level is like a prophet. This is the chassid. The chocham is one who knows that in the physical world and in the psychological world too, one cannot attain happiness. He knows that happiness stems from wisdom. But unlike the chassid, he doesn't have a burning desire for knowledge of God. This is only found in the chassid, where all his energies are driven towards understanding God. Therefore, he must suffer psychologically to attain it.

Today we are in the final exile. And my understanding is that it is not a physical exile but an exile of the mind. We suffer an entrenchment into our own neuroses due to our up-

bringing in this society. Our society is not even in the position to contemplate perfection because the main driving force is hero worship. But Judaism does not promote hero worship, even of our greatest individuals who ever lived. And if you are sensitive when learning Torah concerning the Patriarchs, [you will recognize that] Torah does not write about them in a way of hero worship. Regarding King David, Torah discusses his sin. Even hero worship on the religious plane is not of value in Torah's eyes. In hero worship, the worshiper desires to be the hero. Even regarding a talmid chocham, there is no hero worship. The gemara says there is a dispute amongst the authors of the mishnah regarding this verse אַתְּ יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא *"You shall fear the Lord your God"* (Deut. 10:20). One should be in awe of God. This does not mean fear; that would be an infantile relationship with God. The gemara says that Shimon Hamtzuni was darshaning every word אַתְּ in Torah, until he came to this verse. He said, "How is it possible to add anything to that?" So, he gave up. He said, "I received a reward for learning, for trying to work out all the inclusions, and they were wrong." But then Rabbi Akiva explained that the word אַתְּ in the verse above is meant to include talmidei chochamim. But Shimon Hamtzuni was also a great tanna and he disagreed with Rabbi Akiva. He held that one should not be in awe of a talmid chocham. Shimon Hamtzuni never accepted Rabbi Akiva's explanation, even though it would have helped explain the אַתְּ in Torah. Shimon Hamtzuni held that although a talmid chocham is a great person and we learn from him, we do not idolize him or project any heroism onto him.

Unfortunately, today's books about Gedolei Yisrael are hero worship. But we are not to make heroes out of our wise rabbis. Rabbi Shimon Hamtzuni held that awe is reserved for God alone. Why did Rabbi Akiva say that one can be in awe of a talmid chocham? Because you can be in awe of the world

[wisdom: not the person] in which a talmid chocham lives. But Rabbi Shimon Hamtzuni said that awe of the human being is already a dangerous phenomenon.

Our society is based totally on hero worship, a worthless pursuit. Seeking honor reflects the seeker's dissatisfaction with the self. The concept of a hero is inseparable from the concept of an audience, regardless if that audience is physical or mental [imagined]. [It would appear that Rabbi Chait's critique here is that an audience is an attempt to fabricate importance where it does not exist. What is of value is independent of audiences, and what is not a value gains nothing through public acclaim.] Additionally, a hero loses part of his attraction if he gloats in his glory. The [true] hero is usually unaware of his heroics. Yet, the person striving to emulate the hero does so for one purpose: self-recognition. But the hero himself is devoid of that self-recognition. Thus, to truly emulate the hero, one cannot seek self-recognition. It is an inherent contradiction. [Similarly, Rabbi Chait once said that if a person seeks to emulate a talmid chocham, he cannot achieve this since the talmid chocham does not seek to emulate anyone.]

Hero worship is found only among the other nations: [namely] Jesus. It is recognizable immediately; instantaneously. But people at large do not understand it because it is so enthralling. It captivates people, so they do not reflect upon it. People suffer their entire lives because of the distortion of hero worship.

Chazal were not subjected to psychologically damaging societal influences from which we suffer. They were free to clearly analyze the boor, the golem and other personalities. Whereas we recognize that we must overcome the false ideas that we have been burdened with by merely living in this society.

The term “10 Martyrs” is also incorrect, as a martyr suggests a heroic act of the highest level: sacrificing one’s life. Even our societal language influences us negatively, which many of us do not even realize and which requires energy to undo. These 10 talmidei chochamim were not martyrs, but individuals who acted properly regarding sanctifying God’s name. They were on a very high-level, but they were not heroes. “*Saul has slain his thousands; David, his tens of thousands!*” (Samuel 1, 18:7) is praise but not hero worship. Recognition of one’s good deeds and indebtedness is proper, what we refer to as Hakaras Hatove. But this is not hero worship.

*I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; horse and driver He has hurled into the sea. (Exod. 15:1)*

God is the only one to whom we attach the emotion of hero worship.

Returning to the mishnah’s personalities, what is the difference between the chocham and the golem, since the latter also possesses intellect and good character? The mishnah says that one sign of a chocham is that he does not speak before one who is wiser than he is. And he does not interrupt his friend’s speech. Rabbeinu Yona says that the chocham desires a greater knowledge. Therefore, he is quiet when sitting before one wiser than himself. But the golem is not interested in knowledge. Rather, he desires to “speak his heart.” He desires to express himself. This echoes our society’s values: “Express yourself; this is important to you.” And the golem answers before he hears anything. He does not let another person express himself.

The chocham admits to truth, saying, “I have not heard this” regarding matters of which he is unacquainted. This

means that the chocham does not create false impressions about the extent of his knowledge.

Talmud Baba Metzia says that a talmid chocham is permitted to lie about 3 matters and one of them is if he is asked if he knows a specific talmudic tractate. He is permitted to lie due to the objective of acting with humility. Rav Notolovitch told me that when Rav Chaim Brisker was younger, he told others that he did not know anything, and his half-brother said the same.

But today, everyone makes a Siyum Hashas [celebration of completing all Talmudic tractates] and invite many people so they might recognize their accomplishment. This goes against Judaism's perfections. But if one makes a siyum to strengthen Torah, in that case, that is a wonderful thing, and it is important to make a 7-year public siyum. But private celebrations are questionable.

So, how do we differentiate the golem from the chocham? Again, they differ factually in 4 manners: the chocham is quiet before one who is wiser than he, he does not interrupt others, he does not falsify the extent of his knowledge, and even if he is capable of defending his view, he does not do so, but he will admit error. The last manner does not refer to when someone traps him [in an inescapable argument against his view] and he has no way out. For in this case he has no choice [defense is futile]. Rather, what we refer to here is when someone points out something to you and you know he is right, and even though you can defeat him in argumentation, you refrain from doing so [based on the pursuit of truth]. The chocham is not concerned about being defeated. This is a praise of the chocham; it is a beautiful character trait. But the golem considers intellectual defeat a degradation. Maimonides' son, Rav Avraham, said that when the chochamim discussed astronomy with the Greeks, they admitted that the

Greeks were correct, "*Their knowledge is better than ours.*" The chochamim could have defended their view, but they said that the Greeks' theory was more in tune with reality. Rav Avraham says this was a case of admitting error.

Now we are in a position to distinguish the golem from the chocham. The golem values the social world; he cares about what others think [of him], explaining why he dislikes defeat and why he desires to speak and express his heart. In his mind, society determines reality. But the chocham knows that [regarding determining truth] society is irrelevant; there is an ultimate reality. The chocham does not care if he is defeated. The golem has wisdom, but he has not abandoned his value of society's opinion of himself. The chocham's character and wisdom synthesize and interplay, resulting in a disregard for public acclaim.

Our mishnah is teaching the 4 signs of a person who has transitioned from a socially dependent state (golem) to one who follows absolute reality (chocham).

Hero worship and human infallibility are idolatrous: one seeks security. [Security is achieved through trusting that another person is of perfect stature, and somehow attaching oneself to that personality. In such a mental association or identification, one believes he somehow partakes of this person's perfection, or that loyalty to such a "perfect" person somehow affects him. This imagined association and benefit offers the person some security.] But even Moshe, the greatest man ever, made more than 1 mistake. The daughters of Tzela-fchad refuted him. The golem is emotionally imperfect and therefore believes in his own infallibility. Therefore, it is difficult for him to admit error. He views infallibility as a perfection.

The structure of this mishnah requires attention. It breaks up the ethical perfections into 2 parts. First, the mishnah dis-



cusses 2 ethical perfections, saying that a chocham does not speak before one who is wiser than himself, and he does not interrupt his friend. Then it discusses intellectual perfections: he is not hasty to respond, he has good intuition, he thinks categorically, he is a master of organization. Then the mishnah returns to the ethical perfections, saying that he admits to what he did not hear and that he admits to truth. Why does the mishnah break up the ethical perfections into 2 groups? Speaking of organization, why doesn't the mishnah follow this very advice?

The reason is because our chochamim were very well organized; they had a special method of teaching us ideas. Their very organizations are allusions to ideas. Seeing an apparent disorder, the reader will search for an intended idea behind the disorder.

The golem can be a genius. He has good character. But his mind's eye has not been directed towards the real world. His social reality is essential to his values and lifestyle. If he would lose his social status, he would be very disturbed. In contrast, the chocham values only true reality; social status is of little concern.

The soul will experience a good life when it is perfected, and a bad life when imperfect. Peoples' opinions play no role in the soul's reality, or in the level of the soul's enjoyment due to its perfection. What people think cannot add or detract from the soul's reality. The chocham recognizes that idea. A chocham applies knowledge to himself and to his life. Abstract knowledge without self-application does not describe a chocham. Many mathematicians lead crazy lifestyles. They were geniuses, but not chochamim. They were golems. As long as one's knowledge does not affect his soul's status, he is a golem.

But also, one cannot be a chocham without knowledge. The

only way to be a chocham is with knowledge. For if one does not understand what knowledge is, he has no relationship to the world of wisdom. The only way to relate to the reality of the soul is through wisdom. Knowledge must be applied to the study of reality and to understanding the reality of one's existence. Without understanding the latter, he is not a chocham.

The mishnah only discusses the chocham and the golem because it wishes to present what perfection is. There is real perfection and there is raw perfection. The latter comes from one's intellectual abilities and ethical perfection. But the chocham is a new combination. Maimonides goes into these personalities to depict how far one can be from perfection. He describes the am ha'aretz and the boor.

We questioned the structure of this mishnah. By discussing ethical perfection, then interrupting it with an insertion of intellectual perfection, the mishnah shows that the chocham is an "integrated" personality [the mishnah's "integration" alludes to this]. Chochma is inserted midpoint, between the ethical perfections [located at the beginning and at the end of the mishnah] to show that these are not 2 separate categories, but a total integration. The am ha'aretz is pleasant to people due to psychological mechanisms, like his enjoyment of people and his need for approval. The chocham too is nice to others but this is based on knowledge and a perception of reality. The chocham's pleasantries towards others are also much more extensive than those of the am ha'aretz; they are much more universal and much more reliable. He will also be their greatest benefactor as his view of the good is objective, just like God's view of the good. He will not engage in emotional battles as when other people's emotions run against each other, for he is not operating emotionally. Maimonides says that the perfected person will imitate God. This means that he

knows how God relates to the universe and he relates to people the same way, as is humanly possible. He follows God's will. He won't be careless about a stranger [as are others] because his concept of kindness is God's concept: it is universal [not based on subjective feelings]. But the am ha'aretz who acts based on psychological identification will not treat a stranger like a friend. The kindness expressed by the perfected person is attained only through wisdom. Wisdom is applied to his personal existence.

Did the mishnah choose the first 2 ethical perfections intentionally? In fact, the first 2 perfections differ from the last 2. The first is that the golem speaks before a wiser person, as he wishes approval, or he desires the recognition of [as] the wiser person. And the second is that he interrupts others. The golem displays intolerance. The basic theme is that he desires to express his heart; he must be the speaker. But the second group of ethical perfections are more difficult to control. You may find people who do not need to be the speaker, but to admit to a truth is more difficult. One may not desire to be the center of attention, but he will not be able to accept refutation. Being wrong is more difficult to accept than avoiding self-focus. Perhaps the mishnah broke up the ethical perfections this way because they are 2 different groups.

On mishnah 4:1, Rabbeinu Yona quotes King Solomon:

*For silver, the crucible; for gold, the furnace, and a man is tested by his praise  
(Proverbs 27:21).*

Rabbeinu Yona says that if a person praises the wicked, he must partake of evil. And if one praises righteous people, he must partake of righteousness. This is the meaning of the last half of the above verse. But another verse presents a question:

*...man sees only what is visible, but the Lord sees into the heart. (Sam. 1, 16:7)*

This verse refers to when Samuel incorrectly assumed that Jesse's son Eliav was God's anointed. God then told Samuel not to be impressed with his appearance or his height, for Samuel was assessing Eliav based on appearance, "*but God sees into the heart.*" Samuel was a prophet; he spoke to Jesse's son and he was convinced that he was God's anointed. But God told Samuel that only God knows man. Even the greatest prophet does not know the level of another person. How then can Proverbs say that we can accurately assess another person based on whom he praises? The answer is that this limitation [Samuel] refers to heresy [and not other matters as referred to by Proverbs], where man cannot truly detect who is a heretic, because the matter is hidden in the heart of the heretic. Rabbeinu Yona means that man can never determine another person's inner perfection. We don't even know if a talmid chocham is not a heretic. This is an amazing statement by Rabbeinu Yona.

Talmud Berachos 10b refers to the woman from Shunam. She said to her husband that they should set up an attic room with a bed, table, chair and lights for Elisha the prophet. And they did so. The woman said to her husband, "*I know this man of God is holy.*" (We learn that women are more observant of guests than are men.) The gemara asks how she could know that Elisha was holy. It answers that a fly never went into his soup. Meaning, they saw that Elisha was under God's providence. It is interesting that the gemara does not ask, "*How do we know that he was a man of God?*" but asks, "*How do we know that he was holy?*" The gemara is very exact. Because we can know who a prophet is, but we cannot know if someone is holy. We accept someone as a prophet because he passes the

test that the Torah prescribes. Thereby, the person is accepted as a man of God. But without evidence of providence that the woman saw, one cannot suggest that even a prophet is holy.

It's not that in Judaism we are merely uninvolved in hero worship, but the whole idea is alien to us. The same applies to a talmid chocham: we are obligated to honor him, but we don't know if he is a holy person. Today, people view Gedolei Yisrael [as infallible] and worship them as heroes which is alien to Judaism. So, we must respect a talmid chocham and be close to him at every opportunity to learn from his ways. But there is no hero worship.

Returning to the distinction between the chocham and the chassid, what does Maimonides mean that the chassid's sole objective is to understand God, as is humanly possible? This is a state where all one's energies are subordinated to this one purpose. To us, placing this one objective before our eyes seems very remote. What does "knowledge of God" mean? We are so far from his level, making it hard for us to conceive its meaning. We can conceive of learning Torah, but what is meant by "knowledge of God?"

I'd like to say a small point to perhaps open up this area. This week's parsha says, "*The ladder stood on the ground and its top reached the heavens*" (Gen. 28:12). The metaphor is that although we might be on the ground, it is important to see the top of ladder. It is important to see what the ultimate is [man's potential regarding knowledge of God], even though we might not be on that level.

In his *Guide* (book I, chap. xxxvi, p. 51 Dover ed.) Maimonides talks at length about people's misconceptions of God. He considers this a very basic point. He discusses how people think that God has some physical likeness, or even some emotion or feelings. Maimonides says that this is a terrible matter. And he shows how the idolaters never had this

idea. Even before Sinai, the nations possessed the idea of one God. Maimonides says this in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Star Worship 1:1). Judaism's idea of monotheism is a different concept. Judaism's contribution is that we relate to God alone and not through an intermediary, as intermediaries—a primitive emotion—rejects the idea of God. This is what Judaism established, not the idea of one God. Maimonides says as follows:

*Therefore, bear in mind that by the belief in the corporeality [physicality of God] or in anything connected with corporeality, you provoke God to jealousy and wrath and kindle His fire and anger, you become His foe, His enemy, His adversary in a higher degree than by the worship of idols.*

This is because original idol worshipers believed in a supreme being. But Maimonides says that believing that God has emotions or anything physical is worse than idol worship. Maimonides says there is no excuse for it:

*There is no excuse whatever for those who, being unable to think for themselves, do not accept the doctrine of the incorporeality of God from the true philosophers. I do not consider those [as] infidels who are unable to prove the incorporeality, but I hold those to be so [infidels] who don't believe it [incorporeality] especially when they see that Unkelos and Jonathan [Yonasan Ben Uzziel] avoid as much as possible in reference to God, expressions implying corporeality.*

Maimonides says this critique applies to any person. He says there is no excuse. For if you excuse people believing in God being corporeal [due to ignorance, incorrect training or defective intelligence], you must offer idolaters the same excuse [for their idolatry], for they too are ignorant or incorrectly trained. You also cannot blame literal readings of Torah [for assuming God is physical] as Torah was given at Sinai with targum [explanation, which dispels notions of God being corporeal, such as God's "mighty hand"].

Maimonides describes how the main theme of Torah is the abolishment of idolatry. No sin except for idolatry earns God's response of anger and wrath:

*We must know that in examining the law and the books of the prophets you will not find the expressions "burning anger," "provocation" and "jealousy" applied to God, except in reference to idolatry. And that none but the idolater is called the enemy, adversary or hater of God.*

The only time Torah says that God will turn against an individual is regarding idolatry:

*I Myself will set My face against that man and his kin and will cut off from among their people both him and all who follow him in going astray after Molech (Lev. 20:5). The Lord will never forgive him; rather will the Lord's anger and passion rage against that man, till every sanction recorded in this book comes down upon him, and the Lord blots out his name from under heaven (Deut. 29:19).*

Idolatry is the only case where God says that He will utterly destroy a person, and not only the person, but his family too. Their guilt is that it is impossible that they are not covering up for him. Otherwise he would have been discovered and they would have executed him. In summary, no other sin is as grave as idolatry. Maimonides explains why this is so:

*The prophets in their writings laid special stress on this because it concerns areas in reference to God, i.e., it concerns idolatry. For if anyone believes that, for example, Reuben is standing when in fact he is sitting, he does not deviate from the truth so much as one who believes fire is under the air, or that water is under the earth, or that the earth is a plane, or similar things. The latter does not deviate so much from truth as one who believes that the sun consists of fire, or that the heavens form a hemisphere or similar things. In the third instance, the deviation is less than the deviation of a man who believes that angels eat and drink and the like. The latter again deviate less from truth than one who believes that something besides God is to be worshiped. For ignorance and error concerning a greater thing, that is, a thing that has a high position in universe, is of greater importance than those which refer to a thing that occupies a lower place. By error I mean that the belief that a thing is different from what it really is. By ignorance I mean the lack of knowledge respecting things,*



*the knowledge of which can be obtained.*

*If a person does not know the measure of a cone or the sphericity of the sun, it is not so important as to not know if God exists, or that the world exists without a God. And if a man assumes that the cone is one half of the cylinder, or that the sun is a circle, it is not so injurious as one who believes God is more than one.*

*You must know that idolaters in worshipping idols do not believe there is no god besides them [those idols], and no idolater assumed that any image made of metal, stone or wood had created the heavens and the earth, and still governs them. Idolatry is founded on the idea that a particular form represents the agent between God and His creatures. This is clearly said in passages like the following: "Who would not fear You, O King of Nations?" (Jer. 10:7) "And in every place incense is offered to My name" (Malachi 1:11). By "My name," al-lusion is made to the being which is called by the idolaters the "first cause." We have already explained this in our larger work [Mishneh Torah, Laws of Star Worship chapter 1]. And none of our co-religionists can doubt it. (Guide, book I, chap. xxxvi)*

In fact, there is a Rashi in Trei Assar. The world is totally mistaken about what monotheism is. God was known before Torah. And if you study the primitive cultures, you will see that this is true.

But what is Maimonides' point about making mistakes regarding higher areas? His point is that a person by nature is a metaphysical being. This means that man must guide his life by ideas. But animals are guided purely by instincts and man is deficient in the instinctual area. There are areas of human life that are more essential than others. If one somehow makes a mistake regarding what he ate for breakfast, this is not such an important matter. But as health is of importance, one will occupy more time with health concerns than with other matters. But concerning how one should spend his life [one's philosophy] is of the utmost importance [more than health] and a mistake in the pervasive area will be more serious than a mistake of less important or less pervasive areas. This is because this is his whole life. As the essence of a person's life is his ideas, that is the higher part of his composition. If one errs about what his intellect is to be used for, this is much more pervasive and will affect more of his life than any other idea. There is a hierarchy of ideas; how much man uses them and how important they are [determine their level of importance more than other considerations].

This is what Maimonides means. A mistake regarding whether your friend is standing or sitting is far less important than an error regarding God. Maimonides says that every person is a metaphysician, whether he wants to be one or not. There is only good metaphysics and poor metaphysics, but every person is involved in philosophy. When one talks about his life or his concept of reality, even if he thinks the universe operates like a giant machine, he is discussing his philosophy. It cannot be otherwise. There is no escaping being a metaphysician.

The idea of God is the most pervasive idea in a person's life. This is the essence of all reality. And [with] a misconception about God, the most universal idea is affected. The most

harmful evil is when a person has the wrong idea concerning God. One's idea of God affects every aspect of one's life and strivings as a human being, which affects your [attainment of your] high-level.

This is why Judaism is so concerned that man has no false ideas about God. If one has a false idea about the basics of reality, one's entire life is negatively impacted. If one's view of God is simply that He rewards for good and punishes for evil, such a person's complete life is compromised. This idea of God will play out throughout his life. This is why Maimonides says that Torah is so against idolatry. Such primitive notions taint a person's entire existence. This also explains why Torah says that God is angered by idolatry more than any other sin.

I mention all this to explain that the greatest person is the one whose knowledge is focused on the ultimate idea of existence, on God. And he is on the level where this totally preoccupies him. This is the chassid: one who always purifies his ideas and [strives that] his whole existence should be on the highest level. All he does revolves around the true ideas of God. This affects his whole life.

The chocham is wise and is an integrated personality [his knowledge and emotions are following truth] but his preoccupation is not God. He is interested in all branches of wisdom and has love of God. He can serve God from love, but he is not fully focused on God like the chassid. The chassid is portrayed by Newton whose complete energies were focused on a problem, to the point that days would go by and he did not realize that he had not eaten. He has a different type of psychic energy investment.

All man's knowledge ultimately must find its way to knowledge of God. If it does not, then it is unrelated to the person's perfection. Therefore, the worst idea one can have is that God

is physical. This belief means that one's life revolves around a physical reality. It is all worthless. A mistake in Torah fundamentals forfeits one's afterlife.

Returning for a moment to hero worship, Talmud Sotah 21b says as follows:

*Who is an evildoer who is cunning—a “rasha arum?” Rav Yosef b' Chama said, Rav Sheishes said, “He causes others to follow in his evil footsteps.”*

Rashi comments:

*“Do like me and follow my ways.” This person's intent is to make himself appear as a chassid in other peoples' eyes, and he is not sincere, and he does not want others to see the true evil things he performs.*

But what does this mean? Does not every rebbe direct his students to follow his ways? It means to say that he sets himself up as a model; that is his purpose. It is the other side of the coin of hero worship. Hero worship is a flaw of the follower. Here, the leader possesses the flaw. The leader's intent is to set himself up as a heroic figure. This is an evildoer who is cunning. He is setting up his own personality as the ideal, but not as a means of conveying true ideas [which would be proper, as embodied in a rebbe].

In Judaism, not only is hero worship not considered a virtue and even a weakness regarding the fan, but also regarding the hero himself, if he sets himself up as a hero or a leader as the ideal, this too is prohibited.

Rashi says that the rasha arum is called a rasha because his Torah is not on its proper foundation:

*One who reads Torah and learns mishnah but does not minister before talmidei chochamim to learn the svava of the gemara and the reasoning of the mishnah, he is a rasha for he has not perfected himself and one should not learn from him.*

What is the deceitful wickedness of such person? It is that one who hears him learning a mishnah will think he is an expert and others will honor him. He impresses people with his breath of knowledge (bekiyus) but he does not possess svava [theoretical knowledge and precise definition].

When Leah gave birth to Yissachar, she said it [being blessed with a child] was due [a reward] for giving her maid-servant Zilpah to Jacob, and not due to the mandrakes [that she shared with Rachel. The latter was in closer proximity to her birth, but Leah traced her worthiness to bear Yissachar back to an earlier event: giving Zilpah to Jacob as a wife]. This relates to the difference between the golem and the chocham. The chocham perceives a different reality. He uses his wisdom to penetrate that reality, which to him or her is the real world. It is not the same world that everyone else lives in, namely, psychological reality [where what is of primary value is determined by social concerns]. Those people are golems. But the chocham sees a different type of reality and he lives in that reality; metaphysical reality [this is the world of absolute truths, of Torah and of God]. The fact that Leah gave her maidservant to her husband—the most psychologically painful act a wife can perform—expressed her desire to build the 12 Tribes (Rashi, Gen. 30:17). This act expressed her high

metaphysical level. Leah said that she received her reward of another son due to forfeiting psychological satisfaction [Jacob as an unshared husband], and in its place, she opted instead for the world of metaphysical reality, of establishing the Jewish nation. That is why Leah does not mention the mandrakes.

We must understand that the Matriarchs were not racing to have more children per se. But, as Sarah said to Hagar when giving Hagar to her husband Abraham, “*Happy are you to be with a holy body*” [Sarah was still barren and desired Abraham to have children via her maidservant Hagar]. The Matriarchs were prophetesses and knew that by being closer to the Patriarchs they would have a greater opportunity to partake of perfection. This is why the Matriarchs desired to gain favor in Jacob’s eyes. It is, as Chazal say, one should cleave to a talmid chocham, either by marrying his daughter or doing business with him. Placing oneself close in the sphere of activity of a talmid chocham offers one [invaluable] opportunities to gain knowledge from him.

People read the Torah—specifically the sections about the Matriarchs—and project onto them their own subjective feelings. People think that the Matriarchs were involved in psychological motives. It is bad enough that people are imperfect, but to be incapable of viewing perfection [only through properly understanding Torah] is a serious flaw.

Maimonides continues his theme in this commentary on Avos 5:14:

THERE ARE 4 TEMPERAMENTS AMONG THOSE WHO GO TO THE HOUSE OF STUDY: [ONE WHO] GOES BUT DOES NOT DO, [HE] OBTAINS THE REWARD FOR GOING. [ONE WHO] DOES BUT DOES NOT GO OBTAINS REWARD FOR DOING. [ONE WHO] GOES AND DOES IS A PIOUS PER-

SON. [ONE WHO] NEITHER GOES NOR DOES IS A WICKED PERSON.

Maimonides comments:

*His saying, "among those who go to the House of Study," means to say, in the going to the House of Study, there are 4 traits. Observe how he called the one that proliferates acquisition of virtues a pious man, and the one who is lazy in [their] acquisition, evil.*

*And when you know the intellectual virtues and the dispositional virtues; and you know every type of them - if you want, study of wisdom and practice - and you know the mean and the ways of deeds that can be called good; and [know] the slight supplement to the mean which is from the famous actions of the pious ones; and [when you] know the supplement [excess] and the lack [deficiency] which are both bad - just that one of them is more fit to [be called] evil and the other is called a transgression or an incorrect action, and the example with this is that caution is completely good without a doubt and excess desire is completely bad without a doubt and the lack of feeling for enjoyment is actually not like [as bad as] excess desire, even though it is [also] bad and [so] it is called a transgression or an incorrect action, [such that] leaving caution slightly towards the side of lack of feeling is fit for the complete ones - and when you under-*

*stand this matter, you will know that one who leaves caution slightly is called pious as we prefaced and that the lack of feeling is called a transgression, and that is why it stated about the nazirite (Numbers 6:11), "from that which he transgressed upon the soul," as we explained in the fourth chapter (Eight Chapters); and [when you understand] all of what we have prefaced and elucidated, you will know which [person] from among people is fitting to be called a boor and who is fitting to be called an ignoramus and who is fitting to be called an unformed person and who is fitting to be called a wise man and who is fitting to be called evil and who is fitting to be called a sinner. These 7 names apply to 7 people according to their having from the virtues and the vices and their study of the intellectual [virtues], as per what has come earlier in our commentary. And they already [added] names according to the properties of a man, as with the man who has vices in his traits - and he is called evil, as we have explained - but if he [also] has intellectual virtues that he uses for evil things, such a one is called by the sages a clever evildoer. And if he is an evildoer who hurts people - meaning to say that among his character vices are matters that hurt people, like brazenness and cruelty and [traits] similar to them - such a one is called a bad evildoer. And so [too] the one who has intellectual virtues and dispositional vices is called a wise man to do*



*evil, as it states in the verse about someone like this (Jeremiah 4:22), "they are wise men to do evil; but to do good, they do not know" - meaning to say that they use their intellectual virtues for bad actions and not for good actions. But the man who has all of the virtues gathered in him - the intellectual [ones] and the dispositional virtues - to the point that there is no intellectual virtue and no dispositional virtue not in him, and this is rarely found, and the philosophers would say that finding such a person is very unlikely but not impossible and when they find him, they would call him a Godly man. And so [too], the sages called him in our language a man of God. And I say that this man is called an angel of the Lord, as it stated (Judges 2:1), "And the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal." And the philosophers have said that it is impossible to find a man that has all of the vices gathered in him to their very end without intellectual [virtues] or ones of disposition to the point that he does not have virtue at all. And if one is found and this is improbable, they give him the name, 'an animal from the bad, dangerous animals.' And so [too] did Shlomo call him, a 'bereaved bear,' which is the gathering of stupidity and damage. And [of] these 5 compound names, 4 of them are to disparage - and they are the clever evildoer, the bad evildoer, the wise man to do evil and the bereaved bear - and one is for greatness, and there is nothing greater than it*

*- and that is the man of God or the angel of the Lord. And Scripture has already elucidated that a man that has all of the intellectual and dispositional virtues found in him is called an angel of the Lord, and that is its stating (Malachi 2:7), "For the lips of a priest guard knowledge, and they seek Torah from his mouth; for he is an angel of the Lord of Hosts." And knowledge includes all of the intellectual virtues, as he will not be complete without them. And its stating, "they seek Torah from his mouth," is a proof of his completeness in dispositional virtues - as we have explained in the fourth chapter (Eight Chapters), that it is the intention of the Torah. And for [this reason], it states (Proverbs 3:17), "and all of its ways are peace." And we have already elucidated there (Eight Chapter, chap. 4) that peace is also from the dispositional virtues. And after [these indications of his completeness in the verse in Malachi], it stated, "for he is angel of the Lord of Hosts."*

Here, the rasha is defined. The Torah study hall—bais midrash—is the place of analysis of what is good and what is evil. Rabbeinu Yona says that the one who attends the study hall and does not act, does not mean that he does not act at all. If a person does not perform mitzvos, he is a completely evil person, a rasha gamur. But this person goes to the study hall; he understands virtue and what is not virtuous. However, he allows his nature to guide his actions; he performs mitzvos only when he is naturally inclined. But the knowledge ob-

tained in the study hall does not change his nature. He does not use that knowledge to penetrate a different reality in order to change his life.

[ONE WHO] GOES BUT DOES NOT DO

This person does not penetrate deeply into wisdom, but he has a certain kind of reward. But that reward is limited since he did not go beyond his own knowledge. He does not attend the study hall to gain wisdom. Maimonides comments:

*The chassid is the one who attends the study hall and acts. The lazy person does not attend and does not act, and therefore he is a rasha. And when you have knowledge of the intellectual and character perfections and you know every species of them, and you have knowledge of wisdom and actions, you will have knowledge of the proper way to act, and which way is improper.*

Maimonides is saying that a person must know every one of these terms [personality types]. There is no such thing as a natural state of perfection. In understanding, for example, what a boor is, one has perfected himself [to a degree]. Perfection is achieved only when one has knowledge of all these designations: boor, am ha'aretz, chassid, golem, etc. That is the study of perfection; perfection requires study. If one does not know these personality types he cannot possibly attain perfection because such a person is ignorant of "man." These terms are the philosophical breakdowns of human nature. Maimonides continues:

*You know that if you go to one extreme or the other, too much or too little, both are evil, but one extreme might deserve the term evil more than the opposite extreme. The other side would be called “sin” or “incorrect.” I will give you an example: moderation regarding one’s drive for pleasure. This is called carefulness. And if one satisfies much desire [lust] he is completely evil without a doubt. But one who has no enjoyment in life [he refrains from pleasure] even though this is evil, however, it is not as bad as satisfying many desires. Refraining from pleasure is referred to as sin, improper action. And one who removes himself a little bit from the middle and leans slightly toward the extreme of abstention from pleasures, this is the proper method for perfect people. And when you understand this matter well, you will know that he who abstains in this manner is called a chassid like we said above, and one who does not partake of any enjoyments is called a sinner.*

Maimonides says that if one does not fully understand this point, one cannot partake of perfection. When Maimonides describes the perfected person, the one who lives in the middle path, people usually think that this is exactly how they live. But Maimonides says more: even a person who lives in the middle path still does not partake of perfection if he has no understanding [of this outlook and the various personality types]. It is not the “living” in the middle path per se which is perfection, but it is in the “understanding of how” the middle

path is perfection, that a person attains perfection.

Both—indulging in pleasures and abstention from pleasures—are evil. But Maimonides says that the latter is not as evil as the former. Part of perfection is understanding this point: why abstention is viewed as “sin,” and why indulgence is considered “complete evil without a doubt.” Maimonides discusses this in his Eight Chapters. In our edition it is on page 4, a bit further than halfway down in the fourth chapter:

*Many times, people make a mistake in these actions and they will think that one of the extremes is good, a virtue. Sometimes they think one extreme is good, like a fearless person [we would call him and brave]. When people see such a person who places his life at risk and sometimes escapes, people praise him for this escape and they will say he is a strong man, a gibor. And sometimes people will make the other extreme a virtue. They will say that a person with no self-esteem has great patience. And about a lazy person they will say “look how happy he is,” they will say he is happy with this portion. And about a person who does not partake in any pleasure, people will praise him as religious. [Ramban cites Jacob as possessing more fear than he should have had. He lacked proper courage. He learns the plain pshat that Jacob was afraid. Netziv says the words “and it grieved him” —“And Jacob was exceedingly afraid, and it grieved him” (Gen. 32:8)—mean that it bothered Jacob that he was overly affrighted of Esav. He was aware of his shortcoming and this disturbed him.]*

*At certain periods in history, prophets escaped the corrupt Jewish society by fleeing to the desert where there were no evil people, like Jeremiah said, "Oh, to be in the desert, at an encampment for wayfarers! Oh, to leave my people, to go away from them, for they are all adulterers, a band of rogues" (Jer. 9:1). The nation had deviated from the proper path. And when fools saw that the pious people went into the desert without understanding their underlying purpose, the fools thought such acts were inherently good and they copied them. They thought they could be like the pious people by afflicting their bodies with all forms of affliction, thinking it is a good means to draw close to God, as if God hates the body and desires to destroy it. But the fools did not know that these were bad actions.*

*A person must always watch himself and determine which way he is going, constantly supervising himself until he arrives at the proper path in every character trait. A completely whole man must always think about his character traits, weigh his actions and examine his nature daily. And as soon as he sees he is inclining towards one extreme in any character trait, he should not allow himself to get accustomed to living in this excessive and wrong way because then it becomes more difficult to remove himself. One should place before his mind's eye his poor character traits and constantly improve his traits. Because*

*it is impossible for a person not to have some deficiencies. The philosophers said it is difficult and far-fetched that somebody by nature has all character traits properly aligned, that his intellect and character be naturally proper.*

Maimonides' directive of the middle path is difficult to determine; everyone feels that they are following that path. The same is true regarding one's self-assessment of his religiosity: "Whomever is more frum is overboard, as someone who is less frum is not religious enough." Maimonides continues:

*And you know [regarding] the master of the prophets—Moshe Rabbeinu, may his memory be blessed—God said about him, "On account that you did not sanctify me in the eyes of Israel, that you rebelled against My word at the waters of contention." And Moshe's sin was that although he always inclined towards one extreme, towards patience, when he inclined towards anger and said, "Listen you rebels," God was meticulous with Moshe for these words, that one on his level should get angry in front of the Jews. The Jews thought that by following Moshe they would attain the good in this world and in the next world. The lowest of the Jews was akin to Ezekiel ben Buzi, a prophet, and the Jews followed all that Moshe said. And when the Jews saw Moshe angry, they did not think Moshe had any defective character traits.*

[Due to Moshe's accusation] the Jews concluded that they were wrong. But in fact, God was not angry with the Jews because of their request for water. But Moshe implied that God was angry with the Jews. Thus, any misinterpretation of how God relates to people is the worst thing Moshe could do, as Moshe presented to the Jews how God relates to them. As the Jews did not sin but Moshe expressed anger, Moshe misrepresented middos Hashem, God's traits. This is a chillul shame shamayim, a desecration of God's fame. This is Maimonides' opinion.

Now, even though the Jews expressed some degree of error, explaining why Moshe called them rebels, Moshe's expression was a degree further than warranted by the Jews. Therefore, due to his expression that created a profanation of God's fame, Moshe was punished. Let us now return to Maimonides' prescription of following the middle path.

By nature, a person seeks a comfortable emotional niche. And this niche is usually associated with some kind of idea, like bravery, cited by Maimonides. A person has an idea of bravery which becomes a model in his mind. He then feels comfortable when he acts according to that model. Or, a person may have an idea of religiosity. People who enjoy depriving themselves of pleasures are happy to do so, as their alignment with that image offers them comfort. That is the way most people live. There could be many images in one's mind, but some stand out more. That is the attraction of movies and literature, as they isolate [set up as role models] certain images [personality types]. Seeing an image isolated in these forms [roles] attracts their emotions, because they themselves were guided by such images.

Maimonides is saying that the perfected person cannot live according to any of those images. The perfected person must be completely objective. Maimonides holds that the most dif-



difficult thing for one to refrain from are the desires. I believe he quotes Aristotle's reasoning that one is drawn to the pleasures from early youth. And it is not just that one grows used to the pleasures, but the pleasures give a person an identity. A person views all things other than the self as "it." But one views the self as "I." Why does man make this distinction? It is because the pleasures in early youth teach a person this: "There is only one 'it' that I need to be concerned with if I'm going to experience pleasure, and that is the 'I.'"

Rationally, one should not distinguish himself from others; all things should be an "it," including himself. Chazal say, "*I am a creation and my friend is a creation*" (Tal. Berachos). That's a high-level person. But the pleasures in youth cause one to distinguish between himself and other things and other people. This is because a person notices that he experiences great pleasure when the "it" happens to be him. This establishes the concept of the "I." Were it not for physical pleasure, a person would not distinguish himself from others as "I." The activity of physical pleasure distinguishes between the "I" (the self), and all else which is extraneous to him, which is similar to him, but which is not him.

The point is that what Maimonides means by the middle road is that it is only a possible lifestyle if the person views himself not as the "I," but simply as an existence. But it is due to the "I" concept that the person determines that his way of life is the middle road [he falsely justifies his life as following the mean]. The "I" inhibits any true self-evaluation. The overwhelming "I," the sense of self, convinces a person that this is reality. To assess the true middle road, one must remove himself from the "I." The "I" is the one that seeks images [the brave or the religious me]. One seeks satisfaction when attached to a certain image. Maimonides says that one must review his character traits and gauge his activities every day. This presupposes

that he is removed from images of the self, and from the sense of the “I,” and that he can view himself as a creation [just as he views any other person]. This is necessary prior to any possible self-assessment, *cheshbon hanefesh*. That is the difference between Maimonides’ advice and typical mussar, which is simply reviewing one’s character traits, *middos*. But as long as one has not removed himself from self-attachment and from the image to which he is attached which satisfies the sense of self, he is not in a position to judge whether his actions are to one or to the other side, or in the middle path. That is why Maimonides says, “One must recall his traits regularly and weigh his actions and test the state of the soul every day.” He means that one must be capable of observing his soul like an objective observer, like he is observing somebody else.

With this concept we can understand the statement in the Neilah prayer, “that we cease from the oppression (*oshek*) of our hands.” *Oshek* refers to the grabbing of our hands. That is the main idea of Neilah. But is that the only sin in the world? There’s plenty of others.

*Oshek* refers to the overwhelming sense of self. This is why everyone thinks everything that they do is right. Grabbing of the hands means, “I come first.” The pleasures have taught a person that the satisfactions of the self are the most important things. This explains why that sin is singled out in Neilah over all others.

Maimonides’ golden mean is only possible if one steps away from the “I” and assesses his physical needs objectively, just like assessing another person. Otherwise it is impossible to be objective concerning whether one is in the middle road or not.

Now, on Avos 5:14, Maimonides says that one who is involved in lusts to the nth degree is completely evil. In this case, the self is completely overpowered. If a person goes against his physical drives, meaning an ascetic, that too is evil

because he is guided by an image; he feels he is righteous. But that person is not as evil as one who is totally immersed in lusts. This is because [regarding the acetic] the idea of the good is active, although his definition of the good is through the corrupt lens of the self-image. But one who is overcome by the lusts is overcome by the self, and for him, nothing exists outside the self. There is no objectivity whatsoever. In the case of the image, as in the case of the prophet who went to the desert, those who copied him were working with some objectivity. Here, at least there is some reality concerning what the true good is.

The idea of enjoyment is important. For if one is to enjoy wisdom, his psyche must be open to enjoyment. A psyche that is closed to pleasure cannot enjoy wisdom. It is destructive when parents remove children from all types of pleasures. A child who cannot enjoy himself will not enjoy wisdom. Such parenting destroys all potential for that child to experience enjoyment.

But this is different than our discussion regarding one who seeks pleasure [he seeks to pleasure the “I” and therefore he cannot objectively self-evaluate. All his considerations are pleasure-driven, not truthful introspections].

Maimonides’ entire premise of the Golden Mean presupposes this concept of pleasure for the sake of the self; the given axiom of human existence. [Objectivity is essential to determine if one is truly living the Golden Mean.] The Golden Mean is devoid of an image; any image [of the self] is harmful. [An example from above, are those who followed the prophet into the wilderness. The followers were ignorant of the prophet’s motives, but they were motivated by the self-image of righteousness. They did not enter into the wilderness with any idea of how it might perfect them, but they were motivated by a delusion that copying a prophet somehow

makes them righteous, in their own minds. The righteous self-image attained through copying the prophet blinds one to objectivity about the self].

The chassid sacrifices a small amount of psychological satisfaction, as we said, he seeks God's wisdom and not a psychological equilibrium, full happiness. This is expressed in the chassid moving slightly towards one pole in a spectrum as an act of vigilance. In Avos 5:14, Maimonides says as follows:

*One who energetically strives for the perfections, which are the intellectual perfections and also the character perfections, notice how the mishnah calls this one a chassid when pursuing the perfections, and a lazy person who fails to pursue perfections the mishnah calls him a rasha.*

Maimonides uses the word "histakale" (consider well). He does not elaborate, but merely points out something. It is like the Rav said:

*The problem with Maimonides is, that when you read his Guide, in some areas that are seemingly understandable, Maimonides elaborates at length. But areas that you are waiting for Maimonides to explain, he briefly says, "Note this well."*

But here, when Maimonides says histakale, he means that it is an important point. What is his lesson?

We said that the concept of the "I" is irrational. Rationally, the only concept that should exist is "it." Just as we view other people as existences, as an "it," we should equally view

ourselves as “it” and not as “I.” But psychologically we notice a great difference [between how we view ourselves versus how we view others]. The self occupies a major portion [greater importance] of the mind, while others are viewed on a much lower station. As compared to themselves, people reduce the level [of importance] of other peoples’ existences. True perfection is where even the self becomes an “it” [just another existence with no greater significance than any other person]. As the gemara says (Berachos 17a), *“I am a creature and my friend is a creature.”* There is no difference; we are equal existences. For most people, this reality is far removed from their personal lives.

From where stems this concept of the “I”? We said that the source is what psychologists refer to as the Pleasure Principle. The “I” is the only “it” [existence] that provides one with tremendous pleasure. Pleasure is not sensed from other existences, but it is derived from the self. The recognition of the self comes into play when the child notices that this particular “it” [the “I”] when satisfied, senses pleasure. The concept of “I” is tied essentially to pleasure. The objective of Judaism is not to remove a person from the Pleasure Principle; Judaism is not against pleasure. The one who shuns pleasure is one whom Maimonides refers to as a sinner, a chotei. He avoids pleasure and even seeks pain. Maimonides cites the nazirite as a sinner for he abstains from pleasure [wine]. However, Judaism is against a certain reality that is derived from pleasure. Pleasure is fine, until it starts determining reality. Here, one veers from the philosophy of Judaism.

Maimonides tells us to consider well the lazy man who fails to acquire the perfections and who is called a rasha. Why [does he earn this title]? The lazy person who does not attend the bais midrash [yeshiva] wishes to live in accordance with his own pleasures, a certain comfortable state that his emotions present

to him. That is the rasha. But one who acquires all the perfections and goes to the bais midrash, engages in the study of the ultimate reality: what is real and true. This study necessarily involves a negation of the [subjective] reality which stems from a person's natural feelings, his nature. Those who attend the bais midrash know that there exists another reality [aside from one's natural feelings] which must be learned, and which opposes the reality that his emotions portray.

Today's world is the opposite. They believe that happiness is attained through a focus on the self. The Acharonim say, "*The thoughts of a baal habayis [homeowner/average man] are the opposite of Torah's thoughts.*" Happiness cannot be attained through the self, but through a recognition of absolutes, of true ideas, where the self becomes reduced to an "it."

Maimonides tells us to observe that those who attend the bais midrash are willing to deny the comfortable feelings of how they prefer to live, which stem from their Pleasure Principle.

Interesting is this week's parshas Vayeshev regarding Joseph the tzaddik, and it is followed by the haftorah, which must always relate to the parsha. What is the connection? The haftorah reads as follows (Amos 2:6-3:8):

*Thus said the Lord: "For 3 transgressions of Israel [I will not punish, but] for the fourth, I will not let them alone.*

This is a general principle regarding how God judges the world: God excuses the first 3 sins, but institutes justice on the fourth. In his laws of repentance, Maimonides says the same. Job 33:29 also says this: "*Truly, God does all these things 2 or 3 times to a man.*"

Everyone learns the connection between Vayeshev [Joseph's sale by his brothers] and the haftorah is the common theme of selling a person, as Joseph was sold by his brothers for silver. But looking at the verses in Vayeshev, how is it similar to the haftorah? For the haftorah discusses this sin of the Jewish nation whose judges were bent on corruption of justice. God brings a verdict against those judges because they cared more about money than about justice. They took bribes and perverted justice. That is the focus of the haftorah. The plain pshat about the words "*sold out the needy for a pair of sandals*" means those judges accepted bribes for even a small amount of money.

*Because they have sold [accepted a bribe] of silver [and falsely accused] those whose cause was just, and the needy for a pair of sandals.*

The one who made the connection between "accepting a bribe to falsely accused the just" and Joseph the tzaddik was Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer:

*"Because they accepted a bribe of silver to accuse just": this refers to Joseph. "And the needy for a pair of sandals": Every one of the [10] brothers purchased shoes with the 2 pieces of silver they received [Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver].*

It seems like a far-fetched association. Let's look further into the haftorah. It describes greed to the nth degree:

*You who desire the ground's dust from the heads of the poor, and pervert the path of the humble.*

[The corrupt judges desired the monetary value of] even the small amount of dust on the poor man's head. There was no limit to their greed. The poor man needs what he has, but their greed desired even that.

*Father and son go to the same girl, and thereby profane My holy name.*

This means there was no shame regarding sexuality.

*They recline by every altar on garments taken in pledge, and drink in the house of their god wine bought with fines they imposed.*

This means that not only did they satisfy their greed by taking money to corrupt justice, but they did so without compunction. What is meant by "house of their god"?

*Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: "The Jewish people knew that idol worship is of no substance; they worshipped idols only in order to permit themselves to engage in forbidden sexual relations in public." (Sanbderin 63b)*

It is difficult for a person to be a sinner; his conscience bothers him. That is why the Jews partook of idolatry as it eased their conscience; they felt religious. They created a reli-



gion in which their conscience was satisfied and in which they could continue in their corruption and in their greed. That is the meaning of “house of their god.”

*Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose stature was like the cedar's and who was stout as the oak, destroying his boughs above and his trunk below! And I brought you up from the land of Egypt and led you through the wilderness forty years, to possess the land of the Amorite! And I raised up prophets from among your sons and nazirites from among your young men.*

The last verse refers to people removed from the lusts [perfected people].

*“Is that not so, O people of Israel?” —says the Lord. “But you made the nazirites drink wine and ordered the prophets not to prophesy.”*

The Jews enticed them and removed them from their lives of abstinence.

*“Ah, I will slow your movements as a wagon is slowed when it is full of cut grain. Flight shall fail the swift, the strong shall find no strength, and the warrior shall not save his life. The archer shall not hold his ground, And the fleet-footed shall not escape, nor the horseman save his life. Even the most stouthearted warrior shall run away naked that day” —declares*

*the Lord. Hear this word, O people of Israel, that the Lord has spoken concerning you, concerning the whole family that I brought up from the land of Egypt: "You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth—that is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities."*

[Next] God explains the reason why He will do this to the Jews is because of a special relationship he has with Israel:

*Can 2 walk together without having met?*

There's no coincidence [God's relationship with the Jews is intentional].

*Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion let out a cry from its den without having made a capture? Does a bird drop on the ground—in a trap—with no snare there? Does a trap spring up from the ground unless it has caught something? When a ram's horn is sounded in a town, do the people not take alarm? Can misfortune come to a town if the Lord has not caused it?" Indeed, my Lord God does nothing without having revealed His purpose to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared, who won't fear? My Lord God has spoken, who won't prophesy?"*

What is the continuity of this haftorah; what is the relationship between one idea and the other?

Amos depicts the essence of Judaism's philosophy. He first describes a person completely overcome by greed. Man's lowest level is when his essence is the "I," the self, as we were discussing. In this state, man has no other reality but the self. He fails to recognize a metaphysical reality. The Rav once said, "To learn Torah, one must abandon businessman's logic." But the gemara says that the one who loses his money [fails at business] lacks wisdom. So, what is the Rav's point? The gemara also says that one who partakes of wine in moderation is a good thing. Wine is called "ti-rosh." Rosh—head—means that wine improves one's mind; moderate wine drinking produces a state conducive towards thought, one is relaxed, and he can think. But ti-rosh can also be read ti-rash: rash means poor. If one overindulges in wine, he becomes poor. Thus, handling one's money properly is a good thing. So, what is the Rav's point about abandoning businessman's logic? The Rav means the businessman's logic is restricted only to the world of the senses; nothing else is real to him. This is the same phenomenon Amos depicts: the world of the senses. But Judaism maintains that there exists another reality; a reality behind the world of the senses. A metaphysical reality. That is why the verse above says, "*I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose stature was like the cedar's and who was stout as the oak.*" Why does the verse describe the Amorite's strength? "*And I brought you up from the land of Egypt and led you through the wilderness forty years, to possess the land of the Amorite!*" God tells Israel that He was the one who destroyed the Amorite. [In other words] because of the metaphysical reality, you Israel, are in existence. The Amorite was destroyed so you might have nazirites and prophets, as the verse says, to establish a nation that has abstinence, prishuss. The Amorite was destroyed in order that a nation following metaphysical reality would exist.

*Is that not so, O people of Israel?*

That is, you Israel, can't deny that your very existence depends on the metaphysical [which overpowered the Amorites' world of the physical].

*But you made the nazirites drink wine*

You removed abstinence from Israel.

*and ordered the prophets not to prophesy.*

“Don't prophesy” is the last step in Israel's corruption. It is the final separation from metaphysical reality. The prophet is the voice of reality. It is one matter if a person gets lost [on his path towards perfection]. But if he silences the prophet, it means that he cannot tolerate the voice of reality. He completely obliterates metaphysical reality.

God then says that He will deal with the Jews measure for measure. The description of the light footed, the powerful man and others refers to people who depend on physical reality. In that world, they should escape [based on the military prowess]. But God says that He will demonstrate measure for measure that it is not the physical world of sense perception [which the Amorites valued] that ensures success. God says that He will not allow Israel to find success naturally, to teach that the true reality is metaphysical reality. This is because of the special relationship God has with Israel, as the prophet says:

*Can two [people] walk together without  
having met?*

To suggest this, denies the world of causality. [This verse is a metaphor for God's relationship with the Jews.]

*A lion has roared, who won't fear?*

A lion's roar instills the greatest fear of all animals. It is a deafening roar. This refers to the senses.

*My Lord God has spoken, who won't prophesy?*

This refers to the ultimate source of reality. How is it possible to deny that?

In these few verses, Amos spells out Judaism's philosophy: the denial of the false view that the practical world of sense perception and pleasure is the ultimate causality. In Judaism, God and providence are the true "ultimate" causality. The prophet expresses man's ability to reject physical reality as the ultimate reality.

Amos discusses greed, where one is capable of taking something for himself and corrupting justice. Such a person's reality is limited only to the physical world. And what stops a person from corruption? (And we are not discussing where one fears getting caught. Amos refers to judges who were above the law.) Recognition of a metaphysical reality is what stops corruption. In Judaism, it is not merely a concept of being honest [as a mere virtue] but it is a whole philosophy. Honesty refers to the recognition of a metaphysical reality. Other people might be honest due to feeling better about themselves, to alleviate their consciences. But true honesty is brought about in only one way: the recognition of the metaphysical reality:

*So that we abandon the oppression of our hands (Neilah Prayer)*

This refers to the physical desire to take for the self.

Now, how does this haftorah of Amos relate to Vayeshev? Gemara Kesuvos (105a) discusses justice. It says that there is a prohibition upon judges: *“Do not take a bribe”* (Exod. 23:8, Deut. 16:19). However, based on *“Do not pervert justice”* (Exod. 23:6, Deut. 16:19 and 24:17), we wonder why Torah adds a second prohibition of taking a bribe, as this should be subsumed under the general rule of not perverting justice; no additional verse should be needed. The gemara says *“Do not pervert justice”* suffices to prohibit corrupting justice by acquitting the guilty and sentencing the innocent. However, this verse does not prohibit accepting bribes to acquit the innocent and sentence the guilty. For this prohibition we require the second verse of *“Do not accept a bribe,”* even to find the innocent innocent, and the guilty guilty. Taking a bribe—even to judge properly—still corrupts a judge to favor one of the litigants, as any bribe must incline a judge towards the briber. But the halacha goes even further: even if one takes the same bribe from both litigants, the prohibition is still in place, even though in this manner both litigants are treated equally. But what type of bribe is this?

In Judaism, justice is more than just being truthful. It is the conquest of the metaphysical over the physical. It is where ideas prevail over man’s instincts. The gemara says, *“One who judges a case properly is a partner with God in creation.”* This is because the creation of the universe is a metaphysical phenomenon [creation was initiated/performed prior to any physicality]. Behind creation itself is a metaphysical phenomenon [God’s will and universal intangible metaphysical laws].

Thus, taking money from litigants means the judge's energies are removed from the metaphysical world. The judgment is no longer a metaphysical phenomenon but has become a selfish act.

What is the connection between Amos and Joseph the tzaddik, Vayeshev? Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer answers. Joseph's brothers judged him as deserving death. The question then arose whether to kill Joseph or put him in a pit. Ruben desired to place him in a pit in order to return later and save him: it was 9 versus 1. Then the other brothers decided to sell Joseph. Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer says that their justice was incomplete because they took money. This reduced their judgment from being a purely metaphysical phenomenon. A certain amount of the brothers' energies were involved in material gain, namely, the 20 pieces of silver they received from the Ishmaelites. This is the connection between the Torah and the haftarah.

Rav Aharon Soloveitchik said that even a tzaddik becomes jealous. A person cannot help himself, he is a human being and it is expected. The problem is when one cannot [then] raise himself to the metaphysical level. This is when a person becomes a sinner.

It is amazing, but the condemnation of the brothers is not because they had those weaknesses; everyone has them. The brothers were jealous of Joseph because Jacob gave Joseph all his Torah that he learned from Shame and Ever. Their jealousy was not simplistic, like a father favoring one sibling. The brothers were grown men. The brothers envied the knowledge which Joseph received from Jacob their father. It was a jealousy based on love of knowledge. That was excusable. But what was inexcusable was their failure to rise to the total metaphysical level when it came to judging Joseph. Their verdict was corrupt.

*Fear no man, for judgment is God's (Deut.  
1:17)*

Judgment is a metaphysical phenomenon. Fear of a human being is an [emotional] physical phenomenon. There is no room in justice for anything else but the recognition of the absolute metaphysical [reality].

Before the giving of Torah, the halachic system was not in existence: justice and human perfection were philosophical systems. After Torah was given, the system assumed a fixed form forever. It caters to philosophical perfection, but it is more than just that. Before the giving of Torah, one could perfect himself in his own way, in line with his own nature. After Torah was given, that liberty no longer existed. A system now exists that must be upheld and not breached.

Similarly regarding judging, before Torah, it was a philosophical justice system, a different type of system. The brothers held that Joseph's existence was worthless, so he had to be removed. They considered what they would tell the father. In our current day justice system, *bais din* would not make that consideration.

*And each man said to his brother, "Truthfully, we are sinners to our brother, when we saw the bitterness of his soul when he pleaded with us and we did not listen. Therefore this tragedy has come upon us." (Gen. 42:21)*

When the brothers saw that God's providence was going against them, as strange and terrible occurrences arose, they said these words. They felt that they were coldhearted and that they closed their ears to their brother's cry: "We had no pity upon him."



The halacha is that in every judgment there must be mercy, *“And the congregation shall save him”* (Num. 35:25). The brothers reflected upon their lack of pity with their words, *“when he pleaded with us and we did not listen.”* The gemara says that one must have children in order to sit on a *bais din*. This is because how one is merciful to others is via a psychological mechanism. Basically, mercy is derived from the self. And once a person has a child, this is the first time there is a bridge: now there is someone other than himself upon whom he has mercy and identification. That is the first bridge between a person and others. A judge requires this identification with others through this bridge in order that he can have mercy and pity on litigants.

Judaism says that in every trial mercy must exist. The emotions of the court must be stacked in favor of the defendant. One might say that absolute justice demands neutrality of feelings and not an inclination towards the defendant. Not true. There must be mercy, although the verdict must be based purely on wisdom. Why must the court incline towards mercy? It is because God is merciful. If God would judge with absolute justice, no one would exist. The Rav asked, “Why does Torah say [that the guilty party pays] *“eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot”* (Exod. 21:24)? Chazal say that this refers to the monetary value of those limbs, and not that we punish a person who severed someone’s hand, by severing his hand in return. So why couldn’t Torah write “Money is paid for severing another’s hand, foot, etc.?” This is because one would say that money is absolute justice. But to suggest that money can replace a person’s eye is untrue. The only real justice is an “eye for an eye.” But man cannot tolerate absolute justice [and therefore money is paid instead].

*Truthfully, we are sinners to our brother...*

The brothers did not say that they made a false judgment; they were apparently confident in their verdict regarding Joseph. But they admitted that the method with which they judged Joseph was without pity. A small person would be more concerned with the outcome. But the brothers were on a high level. It was the way that they judged that they regretted. Their judgment wasn't on the highest level.

*God stands in the assembly of God (Psalms  
82:1)*

This means that judgment is a metaphysical phenomenon.

*...for judgment is God's (Deut. 1:17)*

Man is to imitate God in his justice as far as possible.

A common thread unifies the haftorah and Vayeshev: judgment that does not operate on the metaphysical level. Had the brothers operated on the metaphysical level, they would have copied God's trait of pity. They also would have taken no interest in the 20 pieces of silver.

Joseph underwent 2 judgments: one by the brothers and the second was the metaphysical judgment by God. The verses point to this as they say:

*Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are  
pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send  
you to them." He answered, "Here I am."  
(Gen. 37:13)*

“Here I am” refers to a certain resistance. The style of these verses indicates the metaphysical judgment. Similarly, Torah says,

*God told Abraham, “Please take your son, your only son, the one you love, Isaac.” (Gen. 22:2)*

Until God said “Isaac,” Abraham could not think of sacrificing him. Therefore, it had to be spelled out precisely. On this verse, Rashi says as follows:

*Abraham said to God, “I have 2 sons”. God answered him, “Thine only son.” Abraham said, “This one is the only son of his mother and the other is the only son of his mother.” God then said, “The one whom thou lovest.” Abraham replied, “I love both of them.” Whereupon God said, “Isaac”.*

This prophecy came to Abraham very slowly until God said, “Isaac.” This is because this was very painful. So too, when Joseph said, “Here I am,” this indicated resistance. The story of Joseph continues:

*So Jacob sent Joseph from the valley of Hebron. When he reached Shechem, a man found Joseph wandering in the fields. (Gen. 37:14,15)*

Who is this mysterious person? This is another indication of metaphysical judgment.

*The man asked him, "What are you looking for?" He answered, "I am looking for my brothers." (Gen. 37:16)*

Chazal comment on every one of these phrases. Rashi says:

*"So Jacob sent Joseph from the valley of Hebron": Jacob sent him in consequence of the necessity of bringing about the profound (עמוקה) thought of the righteous man (Abraham) who was buried in Hebron (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 22) — in order that there might be fulfilled that which was spoken to Abraham when the Covenant was made between the parts.*

*"And a man found him": This was the angel Gabriel.*

These verses are written in a mysterious manner to demonstrate that every step was planned by God's providence. Thus, Joseph the tzaddik underwent 2 verdicts. There was the judgment of his brothers, but it was the judgment of God's providence that was the underlying cause of Joseph's fate. The brothers were only a means. It was the Bris Bain Habisarim (Treaty Between the Parts) that was responsible for Joseph's sale. Torah's mysterious description of each step in Joseph's story intends to highlight God's providence at work.

[God told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years: *"And He said to Abram, 'Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed 4 hundred years'"* (Gen. 15:13). Joseph's sale and descent to Egypt was the catalyst to bring this about.]

Rav Yosef Ber spoke about 2 aspects of Joseph's dreams. The bowing of the 11 sheaves to Joseph's sheave meant that Joseph will gain financial power over his brothers. The second dream of the 11 stars, the sun and the moon bowing to Joseph meant that Joseph will be superior to his brothers and his father metaphysically. Rav Yosef Ber said that you can see the brothers' level [of perfection]. Because in the first dream the verse says that the brothers "hated" Joseph (Gen. 37:5). Hatred is a natural reaction for one who wishes to dominate you financially. But in the second dream the verse says that the brothers were "jealous" of Joseph (Gen. 37:11). The brothers valued metaphysical matters over financial matters, indicated by a higher level of jealousy, not merely hatred. This is because the brothers' emotions were in-line with wisdom.

I once mentioned the reason why Joseph had the right to treat his brothers cruelly. Penina tormented Chana so she should pray for a child, and Penina suffered tragically [as she was wrong to be cruel to Chana]. How then could Joseph do the same, subjugating his brothers to torment when the brothers descended to Egypt to purchase grain? True, Joseph intended to perfect his brothers, but he should have suffered like Penina for being cruel. In fact, one is obligated to cater to a person's emotions and not conflict with them. How then could Joseph torment his brothers and his father, causing them tremendous aggravation?

*And Joseph recalled the dreams that he had dreamed about them, and Joseph said to his brothers, "You are spies, you have come to see the land in its nakedness."  
(Gen. 42:9)*

This licensed Joseph's actions. Joseph understood his dreams as [divinely] authorizing his use of his financial superiority [viceroy of Egypt] to perfect his family metaphysically. The dreams were related. Without this license, one has no right to torment another to repent.

The Rav mentioned that the first dream was strange. The brothers were shepherds. Why then did the dream depict them as farmers? He said what Joseph the tzaddik was saying with that dream was that there will come a time when we will leave this current lifestyle of shepherds. The brothers didn't agree. The Rav said that even though in psak halacha we follow the greatest mind, but regarding forecasting the fate of the Jewish nation, there is no psak, ruling. That is why Joseph the tzaddik was entitled to his opinion, even conflicting with Jacob and his brothers.

*There we were binding sheaves in the field*

This was more than a prophecy. Because in the prophecy Joseph was telling them a message that God's will is that we will not stay here always, and Joseph was correct. That new life will be centered around grain. Similarly, before World War II when the gedolim said that the future of the Jewish nation is in Europe, that is not given over to psak or to the greatest mind. It is not that gedolim made a mistake. Rather, that area is not given over to man [to determine].

## SIN: CAUSED BY DEFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

*Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. The serpent said to the woman, "Did God really say 'You shall not eat of all trees of the garden?'" The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. It is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, for God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, so she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate. (Gen. 3:1-6)*

“Divine beings” (elohim) can refer to God or to man, like a judge. Similarly, we read:

*God (divine) of Abraham and the god (mundane) of Nabor (Gen. 31:53)*

The serpent shared with Eve that she could be a powerful

being: “You will not die. On the contrary, eating the fruit will be a great good for you.”

*And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, so she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate.*

Eve sinned only after she accepted the serpent’s advice. She never would have eaten the fruit without a misconception regarding God. This is the prototype of sin. Every sin is due to a misconception regarding one’s knowledge of God. The Rav said that teshuva’s formulation includes the words “ana Hashem” (please God) because of the lapse in one’s knowledge of God in his sin.

King David describes the sinner:

*They say, “The Lord does not see it, the God of Jacob does not pay heed.” Take heed, you most brutish people; fools, when will you get wisdom? Shall He who implants the ear not hear, He who forms the eye not see? (Psalms 94:7-9)*

God created the method of communication. This criticizes one’s lack of knowledge of God. The creator of communication has knowledge of communication.

One sins due to a notion in the back of one’s mind that mitzvah or sin was not given for his own good. If one were convinced that mitzvah benefits oneself, he could not sin.



*For [only] in this should the one who  
praises praise [himself]: that he is wise and  
knows Me (Jer. 9:23)*

Maimonides says that we cannot have positive knowledge of God. We have only negative knowledge of God. [We can say what He is not: that He is not unjust. But to say that He is just projects onto God a human concept of justice, which is inapplicable to Him, and therefore incorrect. We cannot suggest any positive term regarding God, be it justice, fairness, kindness, etc. All our terms are limited to human meaning and cannot measure God's true unknowable nature.] But our state is so poor that we don't even know how to approach the knowledge of God. The idea of God is the most pervasive idea guarding our human nature. God is the basic idea of all reality. A mistake in relationship to God is the gravest error. Chazal prayed for many hours because their idea of God was different than ours.

*Know before Whom you stand (Orchos  
Hachaim)*

Chazal's concentration was different because their knowledge of God was different.

Chessed—kindness—differs between that performed by the talmid chocham and the average person. The latter performs chessed due to psychological reasons, like identifying with the one in need. But the chocham performs chessed which is rooted in metaphysics.

What was Eliezer's test of Rivkah?

*Let the maiden to whom I say, "Please,  
lower your jar that I may drink," and who*

*replies, "Drink, and I will also water your camels"—she You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master. (Gen. 24:14)*

Eliezer's test of Rivkah was to determine the nature of her chessed. An average person performs chessed to gain a feeling that he has helped another person and he will never go beyond that point. Once one [performing kindness] evokes a good response [appreciation] in the other person, he does not go any further. But Rivkah noticed that the situation warranted greater chessed. [She did not respond to simply evoke a response in Eliezer, she did much more.] Rivka acted out of a metaphysical attachment to chessed. She had love for her fellow; another one of God's creatures. Rashi comments on "she You have decreed":

*She is fit for him since she will be charitable and will therefore be worthy of admission into the house of Abraham.*

In the case of serving the 3 men, Abraham did not go to the extremes of chessed to merely evoke a response, but because of his metaphysical view of chessed:

*Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, 3 seahs of choice flour; knead and make cakes." Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. (Gen. 18:6,7)*

Abraham's metaphysical chessed is proven from here:

*My Lord, if it please You, do not go on  
past Your servant. (Gen. 18:3)*

Here, Abraham asked God to wait while he tended to the men. Chazal derived the principle "Greater is inviting guests than receiving the divine presence." Psychological chessed cannot surpass encountering God's presence, which is a metaphysical phenomenon. [Thus, Abraham's chessed was of a metaphysical nature, explaining why he delayed his encounter with God.] Perfection is achieved more through such metaphysical chessed than through direct correspondence with God.

When one grasps how God is merciful to man, Maimonides says that such a person acts that way towards God's creations. He is not psychologically motivated. He performs chessed because he values it as the good. Proper chessed is tied to knowledge of God and cannot be accomplished otherwise.

Kindness performed by idolaters is completely false and a waste as they have no concept of the source of kindness: God. The idea of God is the most central idea, and if one's concept of God is false, one's life is false and a waste.

However, we have an obligation to be thankful to those who have helped the Jews. I personally feel that today (1990), Jews do not have sufficient recognition and thanks to this country. Never in the history of the world has another country treated the Jews as well as the United States treats us.

What was superior about Joseph's interpretations of Pharaoh's dreams [that Pharaoh accepted only his interpretation]? It is because Joseph presented Pharaoh with a plan that could convert catastrophe into great success: "During the years of plenty we can buy a grain at a low price and sell it at a high

price during the famine and thrive.” Pharaoh said, “*Can one be found like this, a man who has the spirit of God bim?*” (Gen. 41:38) Chazal commented, “If you go from one end of the world to the other you won’t find a man [Joseph] like this.”

Joseph told Pharaoh, “It is not me (biladai) but it is all God’s wisdom. When I speak, it is not [mystical] powers, but God gave man wisdom.” But [when Pharaoh sought an interpretation for his dreams] the magicians took the opposite position: “We have certain powers.”

Daas Torah [accepting our rabbis as authoritative on all matters] is similar. It is not that a great rabbi—a gadol—has a monopoly on truth. But a gadol uses wisdom like Joseph and has a place in making decisions in areas other than Torah. Daas Torah is not a mystical, 100% infallible knowledge like Pharaoh’s magicians claimed to possess. Joseph’s plan to convert 7 years of famine into wealth was Daas Torah. But today’s view of Daas Torah does not suggest that we follow rabbis due to wisdom, but it projects a mystical [infallible] image onto the rabbis. This is similar to Pharaoh’s magicians. The Rav said that everything a gadol says is not correct; he is not infallible. [However] one whose source of knowledge is wisdom is in the best position to answer. That is [the correct view of] Daas Torah.

Pharaoh was not ignorant of God. Maimonides and Rashi (in Trei Assar) say that idolaters believed in one supreme being. The Gold Calf is the best proof that belief in God and in idolatry can coexist. For those Jews did not deny that God existed, as the verse says, “*These are your gods Israel that took you up from Egypt*” (Exod. 32:4). Man’s desire is to have many gods. Judaism’s contribution was not innovating monotheism, one supreme being. Even the generation of Adam’s grandchild, Enosh, [the generation that initiated star worship] believed in one supreme being. What Judaism established was

the manner of relating to this one supreme being [that we are to relate to Him alone with no medium, not that mediums exist]. Maimonides says this in many places. Contrary to popular opinion, idolatry and the belief in one supreme being is not a contradiction. This is a verse in the Torah:

*God (divine) of Abraham and the god  
(mundane) of Nabor (Gen. 31:53)*

Lavan was pursuing Jacob because Lavan's idols were missing. He was certainly an idolater, yet he found no contradiction in placing God in the same sentence with an idolatrous belief. You see from the Torah itself that the concept of monotheism existed among idolaters. Judaism's contribution is the insistence on relating to God alone and not through any medium, which is primitivism.

This precisely was Joseph's lesson to Pharaoh. The mystics viewed the 7 years of famine as a curse. But Joseph told Pharaoh that this view that a famine is a curse is a false mystical notion. Joseph said that all we have before us is what is going to happen, as God provided this information to us. Now we must act rationally, and we can convert this famine into the greatest success. This was Joseph the tzaddik's lesson to Pharaoh: one must relate to God through wisdom alone.

Pharaoh was impressed with Joseph, "*Can one be found like this, a man who has the spirit of God in him?*" (Gen. 41:38). But how much did Pharaoh change due to Joseph's lesson?

*And when all the land of Egypt felt the hunger, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do." (Gen. 41:55)*

On this verse, Rashi mentions that Joseph instituted circumcision for the Egyptians:

*Pharaoh said, "Did he not warn you of the famine; why did you not prepare?" Egypt replied, "We did prepare but our grain rotted." Pharaoh replied, "If so, do all that Joseph says to do [circumcise yourselves]. He decreed about the grain and it rotted. What if he decrees upon us and we die?"*

It seems from here that Pharaoh was still involved in superstition. He liked Joseph's idea at the time, but Pharaoh wavered. He also had some resistance to Joseph. Pharaoh desired to use Joseph for his knowledge, and then discard him.

This encounter between Joseph and Pharaoh illustrates the difference between the primitive mind and one guided by wisdom. The essence of Judaism is the pursuit of knowledge of God. Knowledge of God means to know God through wisdom alone. Like Rabbi Bahya ibn Paquda, author of *Duties of the Heart* says, "*Know Him only through a path of proof alone.*"

It is difficult to describe exactly what knowledge of God is because it is a personal involvement. There are certain guidelines one can give for it, but ultimately, it is a personal pursuit. It requires an investigative mind and also a great degree of honesty. Knowledge of God means that one must make a thorough search and have a vision of his personality in relationship to the God in whom he believes and have an accurate idea of knowledge of God as far as he is capable. The one who expressed it best is Maimonides in his Guide (book I, chap. L, cited in full below):

*When reading my present treatise, bear in mind that by "faith" we do not understand [it as] merely that which is uttered with the lips, but also that which is apprehended by the soul, the conviction that the object [of belief] is exactly [in existence] as it is apprehended. If, as regards real or supposed truths, you content yourself with giving utterance to them in words, without apprehending them or believing in them, especially if you do not seek real truth, you have a very easy task as, in fact, you will find many ignorant people professing articles of faith without connecting any idea with them.*

*If, however, you have a desire to rise to a higher state, viz., that of reflection, and truly to hold the conviction that God is One and possesses true unity, without admitting plurality or divisibility in any sense whatever, you must understand that God has no essential attribute in any form or in any sense whatever, and that the rejection of corporeality implies the rejection of essential attributes. Those who believe that God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume plurality in their thoughts. This is like the doctrine of the Christians, who say that He is one and He is 3, and that the 3 are one. Of the same character is the doctrine of those who say that God is One, but that He has many attributes; and that He with His attributes is One,*

*although they deny corporeality and affirm His most absolute freedom from matter; as if our object were to seek forms of expression, not subjects of belief. For belief is only possible after the apprehension of a thing; it consists in the conviction that the thing apprehended has its existence beyond the mind [in reality] exactly as it is conceived in the mind. If in addition to this we are convinced that the thing cannot be different in any way from what we believe it to be, and that no reasonable argument can be found for the rejection of the belief or for the admission of any deviation from it, then the belief is true. Renounce desires and habits, follow your reason, and study what I am going to say in the chapters which follow on the rejection of the attributes; you will then be fully convinced of what we have said: you will be of those who truly conceive the Unity of God, not of those who utter it with their lips without thought, like men of whom it has been said, "Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their thoughts" (Jer. 12:2). It is right that a man should belong to that class of men who have a conception of truth and understand it, though they do not speak of it. Thus, the pious are advised and addressed, "Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still. Selah" (Psalms 4:5).*

One must think into Maimonides' words and not just read them; he has an important message here. A person can profess the articles of faith and not possess an idea of what they are.



Maimonides does not say that such a person lacks in his status of kedushas Yisrael, his definition as a Jew, as he states, *“If, however, you have a desire to rise to a higher state...”*. Maimonides means that one must search his soul to determine whether his idea of God is proper. Pharaoh reverted to his mystical notions; he could not tolerate the idea of God.

There is an often mentioned [but misquoted] Chazal used many times by certain people to suggest to the contrary, that one should not pursue knowledge of God: *“Oh, would it be that they would abandon Me but follow my Torah!”* It is based on Jeremiah 16:11:

*Say to them, “[you have been punished] Because your fathers deserted Me”—declares the Lord—“and followed other gods and served them and worshiped them; they deserted Me and did not keep My Torah.”*

People use this to suggest that God wants people to forget about Him: “Do not engage in metaphysical speculation but just keep the Torah” [people wrongly suggest]. This is a total misrepresentation; there is no such statement by the rabbis and no such statement could ever be made. That would be impossible. I would go so far to say that even if it was written that way, it could not be accepted. In fact, the intent of the rabbis is the exact opposite. (Chagiga, chap. 1, halacha 7. Mi-drash; Psikta d’Rav Kahana 15):

*“On your abandonment of my Torah”: Rabbi Chiya ben Abba said, “On abandoning Me I forgive, perhaps my Torah you will keep. For if you abandon Me but keep my Torah, you might still return to Me.”*

This is based on Jeremiah:

*And when you announce all these things to that people, and they ask you, "Why has the Lord decreed upon us all this fearful evil? What is the iniquity and what the sin that we have committed against the Lord our God?" Say to them, "Because your fathers deserted Me"—declares the Lord—"and followed other gods and served them and worshiped them; they deserted Me and did not keep My Torah" (Jer. 16:10,11).*

I mentioned regarding the Holocaust that people have a very simplistic notion regarding sin. They think that when a person sins that he is aware of his sin. People say, "My conscience is clear, I am not a sinner." But this is not Judaism's view. Judaism maintains that one can be totally at peace with himself and yet be a serious sinner; the conscience is not the barometer. Just because people are unaware of the sin that caused the Holocaust, does not mean that there was no sin. This is the verse in Jeremiah. Their sin was that their fathers *"abandoned God and followed other gods and worshiped and bowed to them."* Apparently, it wasn't a simple act of idolatry, as this is something that the Jews would have known about.

Chazal were bothered why it says both, that they abandoned God and also that they did not keep the Torah. Chazal felt that abandoning God means [ipso facto] that they do not follow His Torah. It is a redundancy [which cannot exist in Torah]. But it appears to mean that, although they abandoned God, had they maintained themselves as Torah adherents, that would have been a level [something positive]. But Chazal ask what that means. That is why Chazal say, *"Oh, would it be that*

*they would abandon Me but follow my Torah!*” does not refer to an optimum state. Knowledge of God is perfection and abandoning the search for that knowledge is bad. Chazal mean that if those Jews who already left God would have at least retained adherence to Torah, they would have had a chance: “they might still return to Me.” Like the Pinay Moshe says, “*Mitoch she-lo lishma, ba lishma; Although not acting for proper reasons, they would eventually act properly.*” Had the Jews not forsaken Torah, they would have averted this tragedy. This is because if one is at least operating within the Torah system, he has a good chance [of returning to God]. Torah is designed in a way that even if a person’s ideas are crazy, Torah can bring him back to the true idea of God. But clearly, unlike people’s misconception, ending the search for God [and just observing mitzvos] is not the preferred state. This is an impossible and absurd idea.

[Rabbi Chait now digressed to discuss the mitzvah of hatred]

## THE MITZVAH OF HATRED

Some religious Jews have an animosity towards nonreligious Jews. In truth, if one viewed his Torah as a treasure like King David—“*I am overjoyed on Your words, like finding a great treasure!*” (Psalms 119:162)—he would have pity on a Jew who

does not have Torah and he would not feel animosity. Animosity might be felt if the [religious] Jew truly values the freedom of the nonreligious Jew. But of course, this is due to a failure to understand Torah's value:

*You are close [to God] in your mouth but  
distant in your thoughts (Jer. 12:2)*

[This depicts the overtly religious Jew who is ignorant of true understanding.]

We believe there is a mitzvah of hatred which is not a bad thing:

*And for slanderers may there be no hope;  
and may all wickedness be destroyed in-  
stantly and may all Your enemies be cut  
down quickly. Quickly uproot, smash, and  
cast down the arrogant sinners and humble  
them quickly in our days. Blessed are You,  
O Lord, Who breaks enemies and humbles  
arrogant sinners. (Shmoneh Esray)*

Hatred is a mitzvah, but the [true Torah] concept of hatred is different than what people think. It is not a personal hatred. People work with their emotional foundations and as soon as they see a mitzvah, they immediately attach their emotions to it believing "I know what hate is." But they are wrong. Hatred in Judaism is a different idea. It refers to one who possesses a true love for humanity, and therefore hates anything which aims to destroy humanity. It is an abstract hatred.

Many religious Jews of all community levels feel that one should hide the mitzvah of wiping out Amalek. They are ashamed of that mitzvah. This is because they have no con-

cept of [Torah's] hatred. It is not the hatred that people experience on a daily basis. In Torah, love and hate have nothing to do with one's personal feelings. "*Love your neighbor like yourself*" (Lev. 19:18) demands one to assist his enemy with his load. The mitzvah of hatred means that due to one's love of others, he cannot tolerate forces aiming to destroy others. He realizes the benefit that humanity would enjoy, were it not for the false ideas promoted by certain individuals [Amalek]. This explains the blessing above.

Love for one's fellow is based on love of God. God's will is that man live according to Torah in the proper way, according to his nature, and have a happy existence. Those wishing to destroy this situation must be uprooted, unless they change, at which we would be very happy. But there is no personal animosity. It is due to a love of mankind that one must not tolerate destructive forces. Also, if one loves Jews and not other people, there is something wrong [with his love of mankind]. For he feels, "This is my clique, and I hate others." Love of a Jew is a subcategory of love of man. One who loves man possesses a special love for the Jew: the one who is involved in bringing about the true good for all mankind [the Jew received God's Torah to share with the world]. Love of the Jew is therefore greater than love of humankind, and not because it is a different phenomenon. No others on a national level—except Jews—are involved in bringing about the good for humankind.

Torah commands us to uproot a person misleading the Jew (masis), regardless of our personal feelings. No pity is allowed.

There is another point regarding the distinction between true chessed and emotional chessed. True chessed is relegated to the good for the human species; it is a love of God. But emotional chessed can never strive towards equality for all.

By necessity, one operating with emotional chessed will always give himself a greater share, for he is closer to [he favors] himself. This is the source of many conflicts.

Joseph the tzaddik realized this very well. He instituted the rationing system and made Pharaoh very wealthy. Because after the rationing system, Joseph instituted a tax system. Joseph used tremendous wisdom in developing this tax system. He did not merely levy a tax. He realized that one cannot simply tax and subordinate people. The king must always be concerned about his subjects removing him. Even in a monarchy the king must be sensitive to what people think.

Joseph wanted to levy a 20% tax which one would consider fair, and he did so with tremendous wisdom. First, [during the famine] Joseph allowed Egypt to buy grain. But then the people's funds were exhausted. Joseph responded to the people's need for grain by accepting cattle as payment. The second year after all funds were depleted and all cattle were sold for grain, the Egyptians came before Joseph saying, "*All we have left is our land and our lives. Buy our land and buy us*" (Gen. 47:18,19). For grain, the Egyptians were ready to sell their land and themselves as slaves. Joseph responded that he would take the land, but he did not need them as slaves. Joseph knew that the people were desperate, and that if he accepted to own them as slaves, that they would eventually hate him for that.

Now, once Joseph purchased the Egyptians' land for bread, had they returned to their homes just as before, that purchase would be meaningless. Therefore, Joseph relocated the Egyptians from their homes and their land, so the loss of their land was real. Then Joseph said, "*Work the land and give only 20% to Pharaoh.*" Sharecroppers usually receive the smaller percentage. But Joseph gave them 80%. This way they were overjoyed:

*And they said, "You have saved our lives!  
We are grateful to my lord, and we shall be  
serfs to Pharaoh." (Gen. 47:25)*

Joseph engineered a system where he achieved his desired goal of taxation in a way that the people were overjoyed. Joseph did this because he knew one premise: although people are good emotionally, there is no concept of fairness. Real fairness does not exist on an emotional level [a person always favors himself]. Therefore, regardless of how fair a deal is worked out, people will be upset. And a leader cannot run a country when the subjects are angry. Therefore, Joseph devised a plan that made it impossible for the Egyptians to claim unfairness. Real justice is only an intellectual phenomenon. Rechavam was ousted because of being overbearing on the people.

Joseph's intent was not only for Egypt. He instituted circumcision for the Egyptians so his family would not be different. And he also wanted to remove the Egyptians from the land as landowners have much arrogance and view strangers [the Jews] as lowly. Relocating the Egyptians eliminated the grounds for mistreating the Jews as lower citizens. Similarly, when Joseph told Pharaoh, "*and now Pharaoh should seek a man who is wise and understanding*" (Gen. 41:33) Maimonides said that Joseph knew very well that Pharaoh would choose him.

## THE HOLOCAUST

There is another idea I would like to mention regarding how one should understand the Holocaust. At the end of parshas Vayeshev, Joseph interprets the dreams of the wine steward and the chief baker. On the third day afterwards, all occurred precisely as Joseph had predicted: the baker was hung and the wine steward was returned to his post. But then the Torah says, *“And the wine steward did not remember Joseph, and he forgot him”* (Gen. 40:23). The simple understanding is that the wine steward forgot Joseph and there’s nothing more to the story. But on this verse, Rashi says that there is something more: Joseph committed a serious sin:

*Since Joseph depended on the wine steward to remember him, he had to remain in prison an additional 2 years, as it says, “Happy is the man who trusts in God and does not turn to the arrogant” (Psalms 40:5) and does not trust in Egypt who are called arrogant.*

The difficulty with this Rashi is that we do not see Joseph committing a sin. But if we understand this [Rashi], we will understand what is meant by “God’s decrees” on people. Everyone learns that due to Joseph’s faith in the wine steward, God decreed for Joseph 2 more years in prison in response. I say that this is a very simplistic evaluation. [But] it is not so simple that Joseph committed a sin, and now there was a decree from God. There’s much more to this account.

A person is supposed to use all diplomatic means at his disposal to benefit himself. Torah endorses this, as we see Jacob approached Esav bowing 7 times and sending him gifts.



Jacob acted properly; Joseph acted the same way. What then was Joseph's sin?

*[Joseph said to the wine steward] In 3 days, Pharaoh will pardon you and restore you to your post; you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, as was your custom formerly when you were his cupbearer. But think of me when all is well with you again, and do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh, so as to free me from this place. For in truth, I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews; nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeon (Gen. 40:13-15).*

What was wrong with Joseph asking the wine steward to assist him? The baalei mussar cite a Chazal that you could answer this in a manner of mussar—moral discipline. Jacob was punished through Dinah's rape because he placed her in a box when Esav approached. Jacob did not want Esav to see her because he would have taken her as wife. Chazal say that Jacob was not punished for putting her into a box, but because he shut it too tightly. That came from hatred. But I'm not satisfied with that kind of answer. I like to see the answer from the event itself [from the verses]. To suggest such an answer there must be some expression in this story [which is absent here in connection with Dinah].

My opinion of Joseph's mistake is that had Joseph properly thought through matters, he should not have said anything to the wine steward. There was no reason for Joseph to speak, for he performed an unbelievable feat that astounded the Egyptians—the wine steward in particular—and the wine

steward would have remembered Joseph. If the wine steward would not have been impressed with Joseph's accomplishments, he would not have been impressed with his entreaties. Pleading won't help. The language of Yonasan ben Uzziel—but more so, Targum Yerushalmi where he expands on Yonasan ben Uzziel—is how I thought of an approach:

*(Yerushalmi): Joseph abandoned the kindness from above (God) in place of the lower kindness (man). And he abandoned the kindness that accompanied him from his father's house and he placed his faith in the wine steward, made of flesh and blood that tastes death, "His breath leaves and he returns to the ground" (Psalms 146:4). And Joseph did not remember the verse, "Cursed is he who trusts in man, who makes mere flesh his strength" (Jer. 17:5)*

Of course, this verse did not yet exist in Joseph's time. But it means that all the prophets possessed all true ideas. What Joseph said was of poor judgement:

*But think of me when all is well with you again, and do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh, so as to free me from this place. For in truth, I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews; nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeon.*

One should learn from Joseph's mistake. Here, one gains very practical advice. If one tells another person, "I was mistreated by such and such person and another and I am not at

fault, and now again I am in trouble,” meaning that one claims that he has been victimized, this can result in one of 2 responses. One is that since people have psychological kindness, one can have pity and will want to help. But there’s a second effect: one listening to claims of victimization might think that himself, “It’s strange that all this happened to this person; there must be a reason. A great chocham this person certainly is not! And perhaps he is not a truly nice person, as he’s complaining that he is a victim.”

That was Joseph’s mistake. How do we know that Joseph had this second negative effect on the wine steward? Torah records the wine steward’s words 2 years later, standing before Pharaoh:

*And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but none could interpret them for Pharaoh. The chief wine steward then spoke up and said to Pharaoh, “I must make mention today of my offenses. Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and placed me in custody in the house of the chief steward, together with the chief baker. We had dreams the same night, he and I, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the chief steward; and when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us, telling each of the meaning of his dream. And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post, and the other was hung.” (Gen. 41:8-13)*

He referred to Joseph as young and as a slave. Chazal commented that with these terms, the wine steward degraded Jo-

seph. Although the wine steward wished to be the hero and save the day by producing an interpreter for Pharaoh, he did not want Pharaoh to be impressed with Joseph: “He can interpret dreams, but otherwise he is a fool, a slave who has no other qualities.” He was selfish and stripped Joseph of any good qualities other than his interpretive skills. Why? Because Joseph’s story of victimization created a poor image in the eyes of the wine steward.

Torah’s lesson is that faith is only to be placed in God; we do not confide in man. One cannot turn to man for that kind of support. This is what the Yerushalmi means that Joseph forgot the verse, “*Cursed is the man who places his faith in flesh.*” At that moment standing before the wine steward, Joseph the tzaddik experienced a moment of weakness and sought the support of a human being to comfort him and take up his plight. He misjudged and therefore remained in the pit for an additional 2 years. Joseph the tzaddik felt that people will have mercy on him when they realize that he was a victim. Doing so denies God. Only one Being can know your plight: God and no one else. We appeal to God and not flesh and blood for mercy. [When Jacob sent Esav gifts and bowed to him, he did not turn to man alone for mercy, as he also prayed to God. It appears that Joseph placed all his trust in man alone.]

*Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and he appeared before Pharaoh. (Gen. 41:14)*

Once they were bringing Joseph before Pharaoh, he abandoned the role as victim. Pharaoh’s servants wanted to whisk Joseph from the pit and bring him before Pharaoh to quickly

help resolve Pharaoh's disturbance from the dreams. But Joseph said, "Wait, I will present myself as a confident and collected individual." He shaved and changed his clothes; he no longer desired anyone's pity. And in truth, that mode of operation [dignity] was the only thing that secured Joseph's total success. He learned from the last incident that although it is very tempting to turn to one of flesh and blood to seek justice, that is not the correct way. Had Joseph not told the wine steward all the stories of victimization, the wine steward, being so impressed, would have made a bee line to Pharaoh immediately and Joseph would have been freed right away. That is what Chazal mean that he remained in prison 2 more years. [Because Joseph played the victim, he remained in prison. But had he not played the victim, this Chazal means he would have been freed from prison immediately due to the wine steward's impression of Joseph]. The diplomatic move Joseph should have made, was not to make any move at all. He should have remained silent. [The astounding impression he would have left on the wine steward would have eventuated in his release.]

Another important point is that when one is asked for a favor, that person loses respect as he now feels that the one seeking the favor [Joseph] had ulterior motives. Joseph lost respect because he asked for help. As soon as a talmid chocham derives any benefit from a typical person, the latter loses all respect for him. It is the same phenomenon.

We started by seeking to understand "God's decrees." But this does not mean what people think [that it was God who decreed those 2 additional years of Joseph's imprisonment]. A negative "decree" refers to when a person abandons wisdom. Maimonides says in Hilchos Dayos (5:11):

*The way of intelligent people is to first arrange a livelihood, then to buy a house, and then to marry. As it says, "Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her" (Deut. 20:5-7). But a fool first marries, and if he then finds that means he buys a house and afterwards at the end of his life he seeks a livelihood or lives off charity. And so it is stated in the curses, "If you pay the bride-price for a wife, another man shall enjoy her. If you build a house, you shall not live in it. If you plant a vineyard, you shall not harvest it" (Deut. 28:30). Matters will be reversed to inhibit success. And in a blessing it says, "And King David was wise in all his ways and God was with him" (I Sam. 18:14).*

The worst decree in Torah's rebukes is that man abandons the path of wisdom.

There is an issue now whether the slogan "Never Again"—a response to the Holocaust—conforms to Torah ideals. One could say that if the Holocaust and the future tragedies are

divine decrees, saying “Never Again” opposes God’s will. However, this is a question only for one harboring a primitive notion of what a decree is. But as Maimonides says, when we look deeper into Torah, an evil decree refers to one who abandons Torah and wisdom resulting in a distorted life leading to catastrophic results. [It is self-inflicted and not God’s doings.] An example is from Chanukah when a miracle took place because of the war. What would have transpired had the Jews not waged war? Would you say that they would have retrieved the Temple? If so, they wasted their efforts. But it makes no sense to suggest they would retrieve the Temple without war. Without battle, it would have been a tragedy. Would you say that tragedy was a divine decree too? No. To say that the Holocaust was a divine decree and just write it off as some unavoidable tragedy is nonsense. It is only a decree—a *gizaira*—in the sense that it was due to our abandonment of Torah and wisdom. But to claim it was a decree, yet I see a defect [that may have caused it] and not correct that defect, that is nonsensical. The only heretical notion would be if one said “Never Again” means not to follow the ways of Torah and feel certain that one’s own efforts will prevent tragedy. But that is not what Meir Kahane meant. The idea of searching for a flaw [that warranted the Holocaust] and to seek out a rational mistake that was part of the tragedy does not violate Torah. Also, if one would say “Never Again” and feels that he could abandon Torah but he’s going to fight to prevent another Holocaust, perhaps you could say such a proactive defense might prevent another Holocaust, but other decrees could take place [for leaving Torah]. Because once one abandons Torah and wisdom, one lives in distortion and it is impossible to abandon Torah and wisdom and not meet with some catastrophe.

There is no heresy in suggesting that through abandoning Torah and wisdom the Jews acted poorly [going like sheep to

the slaughter] and this contributed to the Holocaust. Perhaps they went like sheep because they did not follow wisdom. There is no heresy in saying so.

Again, Joseph's 2 additional years in prison was a decree in the sense that it was a result of his poor actions and not a direct act of God.

The brothers expressed the proper view of calamity:

*They said to one another, "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us" (Gen. 42:21).*

[The brothers did not say some decree fell upon them, but they traced their calamity back to their error.]

I personally say it should be emphasized that Israel's catastrophes are due to abandoning Torah and wisdom. When Joseph erred, he placed his trust in the wine steward because he was in a low state and sought comfort from flesh and blood. What was the wine steward's response? "*And he did not remember Joseph and he forgot him.*" "And he did not remember" refers to the removal of the wine steward's emotional impact of Joseph's interpretations. When the wine steward left Joseph's presence, his emotions favoring Joseph weakened. Yet, he felt a sense of obligation to Joseph. To relieve his burden to Joseph, all the wine steward needed was some way to explain away Joseph's significance, and then he could "forget him." He felt Joseph's many troubles were self-inflicted and this allowed him to forget Joseph, thereby relieving his sense of obligation to him.



I stress this to show how Chazal deduced this explanation from the verses because they held that Joseph made a political error. Alone in prison for many years, Joseph sought human emotional support out of weakness. Therefore, Joseph made this error [of pleading with the wine steward instead of remaining silent and allowing the impression he made through his interpretation to weigh on the wine steward]. That is how Chazal knew it was based on a sin.

[Rabbi Chait now returns to the various personality types citing Maimonides on Pirkei Avos 5:14. Some mishnayos were treated earlier than their numeric order.]

## 5:14 LAZINESS

The lazy person to whom Maimonides refers cannot overcome his psychic energies pulling towards activities other than attending the Torah study hall, the beis midrash. He allows himself to remain in a comfortable lifestyle. He is unable to go against his emotions. He can be an energetic person but he is lazy regarding fighting his emotions and trying to gain perfection. Maimonides says:

*When you understand the perfection of the intellect and character perfection and their various species, and you will understand*

*there are 2 sides to every emotion and that either side [pole] is evil. But there's a difference between these 2 sides; one is called evil and the other is called sin.*

Sin can also refer to an action that is incorrect because the Hebrew word for sin “chate,” means failure. And failure is not as bad as “evil.” Maimonides continues:

*A person who removes himself from indulging the pleasures is good. And there is no doubt that one who indulges his desires fully is called evil. But a person who does not allow himself to enjoy the pleasures at all, even though this is bad, it is not as bad as one who indulges in the instinctual. The one who refrains from pleasures performs an incorrect action [but he's not evil]. And a person who is in the Golden Mean directly in between the 2 poles is called a wise man. [His mind determines when he should engage and refrain from physical pleasures.] But the chassid is one who removes himself from pleasures a bit more from the midpoint.*

We explained that the chassid forfeits his psychological equilibrium in his pursuit of knowledge of God. But the chocham doesn't go that far and maintains a psychological balance. Whereas the chassid forfeits a psychological balance in order to have that much more energy available to direct towards seeking knowledge of God. But he does so in a small measure. For if he forfeited all physical pleasures, it reveals that he thinks the good is avoiding pleasure. In such a case he

is a sinner and he is completely wrong. We explained this above. Maimonides continues:

*If you will understand everything that we explained before you will know who should be called a boor, an am ha'aretz, a golem, a rasha, a chocham and a chassid.*

A boor is desolate of any good traits. An am ha'aretz is a nice person with fine character but not wise. The chocham uses his intellect to reflect upon his emotional life and he is in total control. The rasha completely indulges in the instinctual life. The golem has good intellect and character, but they don't work in unison. The chassid directs all his energies towards knowledge of God; he knows there is another reality besides physical reality. This is the highest level. And then there is the chotay, the sinner. So, there are 7 terms which refer to 7 people according to the perfections and imperfections.

Now Maimonides progresses onto an issue that presents a problem:

*Chazal also created terms according to people's characteristics. He who lacks certain traits is a rasha, as we have explained. If the rasha possesses intellectual capabilities which he uses for evil, Chazal call him a "Rasha Arum," a cunning evildoer. And if this rasha will harm others because of his defective character, like acting viciously or similar, he is called a "Rasha Ra," an evil evildoer. The person with intellectual capabilities and poor character where he harms others is called a "Chocham L'Hara," an intellectual bent on evil, like*

*the verse says, "They are clever at doing wrong, but unable to do right" (Jer. 4:22), meaning that they use their intellects for evil and not for good. But a person who possesses all the good qualities, intellectual perfection and perfection of character, he lacks nothing. This is a very rare person. The philosophers say that human nature is such that this is very far-fetched, but not impossible. Such a person is called a "Man of God"; and we too call him the same, "Ish Elohim." [Elijah and Elisha were referred to by this appellation.] And I say that he is called "Angel of God." Just as the verse says, "And there went up the angel of God from Gilgal" (Judges 2:1). [After Joshua passed away the angel of God rounded up the Jews and gave them rebuke. It refers to a perfect person.] The philosophers also say that it is very rare that a person should be completely evil with no good character or good intellectual capability. But it is not impossible to find such a person. And such a person is called a "Chaya," a beast. And King Solomon called such a person a "Dov Shakul," a mother bear who lost her cub. Mother bears are very attached to the young, as they say, "Don't get between a bear and her cub." This person is totally destructive. These 5 names are modified nouns. 4 are defective personalities: Rasha Arum (the cunning evildoer), Rasha Ra (the evil evildoer), Chocham L'Hara (the wise man who does evil), and Dov Shakul (the dangerous bear). And the fifth*

*we praise and speak about his greatness; no one surpasses him, the Ish Elobim (man of God) or the Malach Hashem (angel of God). And the verse already explained that a person who has complete perfection of the character traits and intellectual perfection is called an angel of God: "The lips of the kohane guard knowledge and Torah is sought from his mouth for he is an angel of the God of hosts" (Malachi 2:7).*

In this verse, the word knowledge refers to perfected intellect. There is no perfection unless he has this first. "*Torah is sought from his mouth*" refers to character perfection. "Torah" does not refer to gemara knowledge but to a whole way of life.

*Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths, peaceful (Prov. 3:17)*

What is difficult with this quote from Maimonides? It seems that the Man of God is identical to the chassid. It is very troubling when you read Maimonides' words. [It is as though he introduces a new personality with the Man of God, but in fact it seems to be the same personality as before, the chassid.] You cannot have repetition. I understand that Maimonides expands on different types of evil people; that makes sense. Who is this Man of God? It is impossible that Maimonides distinguishes between the chassid and the Man of God because he says in his introduction that the chassid is he who directs all his energies to knowledge of God. He inquires of God: an endless process. Maimonides says that such a person is like a prophet, and the Man of God is the same thing! It is impossible that in the same chapter Maimonides repeats

himself. And Maimonides juxtaposes him to the Evil Evildoer. What is this new classification with these 5 terms? These are different than the 7 personalities identified earlier. And Maimonides also refers to the Wild Bear which he doesn't mention before. On only one of these 5 do Chazal elaborate, the Cunning Evildoer (Rasha Arum). Sota 21b says as follows:

*“I, wisdom, live with cunning...” (Prov. 8:12). Once wisdom enters a man, cunning also enters him.*

Once a person gains wisdom, he gains cunning. This gemara does not mean this in a flattering sense, as the gemara says that for certain people, wisdom can be a catastrophe because it could lead to being cunning. The gemara continues:

*Words of Torah are not sustained except in the person that makes himself like nothing, as it says, “Wisdom comes from nothing” (Job 28:12).*

Is what is meant by “*words of Torah are sustained*”...that a person won't forget his studies? That is false. A person with a photographic memory does not forget his studies, even though he does not make himself as nothing. He could be haughty and yet remembers everything he learned. But the word “sustained” here does not refer to memory, but to support or sustenance. There are 2 types of Torah study: 1) an external acquisition of knowledge, 2) a Torah that sustains one's personality. This latter type is the effect on a person whose sole concern in life is knowledge of Torah [he is not focused on the self; he makes himself is nothing]. The gemara says

that words of Torah are sustained only in a person who makes himself “naked.” Rashi says this means either that he removes himself from all other involvements, “*ani v’chasare kol*,” poor and destitute of everything. This does not mean he loses all his money, but that his involvement in Torah is to such a degree that he is unconcerned about the physical world. Rashi’s second explanation of making himself naked is that he is cunning to gather Torah from every person. Most people accept only certain authority figures. But when it comes to someone not to his liking, he cannot admit that he has any value or knowledge. This is because people are tied to “images”: certain people do not fit their ideas or likings and they reject anything they say. Such a person is not completely “naked” [stripped of all concerns] to learn Torah [as he allows interpersonal concerns to prevent him from hearing ideas from certain people]. The gemara continues:

*Who is this stupid pious man (chassid shoteh)? If a woman is drowning in the river, he refuses to save her for this requires him to look at her or touch her. Tosfos quoting the Yerushalmi says it refers to one who sees a child drowning and he says, “I will first take off my tefillin and then I will save him.”*

This personality is emotionally attached to the trappings of religiosity. But it is not an attachment to wisdom. Israelis once needed gas masks due to enemy threats of chemical warfare. Certain men with beards who felt that their beards were their religious trappings refused to shave so the masks could properly protect them. They were stupid pious people.

The gemara then asks:

*Who is a Rasha Arum (Cunning Evil-doer)? R. Yochanan says that he is clever: he is summoned to court, but beforehand, he approaches the judge and explains his case. But he does so in a way to try to win over the judge psychologically and emotionally, that the judge should be pre-disposed in his favor. Alternatively, he is one who gives a poor man \$200 which disqualifies that poor man from coming to this field to gather lekhet, shikcha and peah (grain one must not collect but leave for the poor). He gives him this money to disqualify him in order that the field owner's own poor relatives have no competition gathering grain in his field.*

*R. Assi in R. Yochanan's name said Rasha Arum refers to a person who advises orphans to sell their minimal inheritance, thereby avoiding their need to collect charity. [For when an inheritance is minimal it goes to the daughters and the sons must then fend for themselves through charity or other means. But initially the sons have the right to sell that small inheritance before it is transferred to the daughters. This Rasha Arum causes the daughters to have no inheritance.]*

*Another case is one who advises an inheritor to sell his inheritance before it gets transferred to his brother at his father's will. [This Rasha Arum disrupts the justice of the inheritance going from son*



*A to son B because the father changed his mind. Justice is that son B should receive the inheritance, but the Rasha Arum used the system of sale to prevent justice from transferring the inheritance to son B. Son A was allowed to sell when he first received the inheritance, but the fulfillment of the father's wishes was thwarted.]*

Torah is the greatest system, but it is limited because halacha is a rational and conceptual system which cannot perform arbitrary patchwork. Therefore, there will be cases where injustice will prevail. In such cases, like these last 2 cases, Torah relies on the individual to act justly. But a Rasha Arum can circumvent halacha and be unjust.

The purpose of judgment is to achieve societal peace. Thus, a court will first attempt to reach a compromise before it endorses strict rulings. We try to avoid strict rulings and work first with justice.

*R. Joseph the son of Chama said in the name of R. Sheishes, Rasha Arum refers to a person who sets himself up as the ultimate model of perfection. Rashi says such a person says, "Follow me, go on my path." This person's only wish is to establish himself as a pious individual in the eyes of others. He is not internally as he appears externally, but his purpose is that no one should investigate him.*

Today we would refer to such a person as a charismatic leader. He does not reflect [embody] ideas, rather he seeks to

draw attention to his character, that people respect him and follow him and become influenced to believe that he is a great leader. This is considered cunning since his true objective is to hide his imperfections.

What is respected in today's world, Chazal usually degrades. The world's view of a great charismatic leader is, in Chazal's eyes, a Rasha Arum. This is because the world seeks success, not truth. Leadership is just another category of success. A successful businessman is not cunning; he is in fact successful. But if one sets himself up as the epitome of a perfected person—"Come follow my ways"—wishing that people believe that what he does is perfect, that is cunning.

*R. Zraika says the Rasha Arum is one who is lenient on himself and stringent on others. Meaning, when someone asks him a question, he provides a very strict ruling. But privately, he is lenient on himself. Where is the cunning in this case? Through his stringent rulings on others, this person appears like a stringent individual [people think that he operates privately as stringently as he rules publicly].*

*Ulla had a different approach. A Rasha Arum is one who learns much but does not service talmidei chochamim. Rasbi says "not servicing talmidei chochamim" is not to be taken literally but refers to one who never learned the reasons behind the law, "Taamei mishnah." Thus, his Torah is not complete. He is not theoretical or a deep thinker. He throws around his encyclopedic knowledge to impress others.*

*[The gemara elaborates on this last point] If a person learned the Written and Oral Laws but did not engage in svava (theoretical definitions) R. Elazer says he is an ignoramus (am ha'aretz) even though he is a bucki, (fluent in many texts) "I would not trust him with tithes or matters of purity (ma'asros and taharos)."*

But what does this have to do with the fact that he does not know svava? The gemara means that there's only one thing that attaches a person to halacha: svava. Without it, one does not have the proper attachment. Therefore, you cannot trust such a person regarding halachos relegated to his home (ma'asros and taharos).

*R. Shimon ben Nachman says a Rasha Arum is a boor. Rashi says that a boor is worse than an am ha'aretz. Not only can't you trust him, but he is devoid of any kind of perfection.*

*R. Yannai says a Rasha Arum is a Cuthite: you cannot eat his bread or drink his wine. Even though he knows Shas thoroughly, but if he does not understand svava, he is a Cuthite.*

*R. Acha bar Yaakov says a Rasha Arum is a magush: one who performs sorcery or witchcraft. He captivates people and steals their hearts.*

The gemara concludes that R. Acha bar Yaakov is correct.

The sorcerer does things but doesn't know what he's doing. Rashi says that the sorcerer says, "Do this action, then that will occur." He does not understand how certain causes bring about certain effects. He has no understanding of the ideas in halacha that produce the results.

In the time of the Gaonim, there was a movement to remove from gemara everything except for halacha. In his Peirush Hamishnayos, Maimonides says the fact that Chazal left aggadah [stories] in the gemara was for the greatest benefit because it teaches perfection to man. Knowing halacha alone, it is possible for one to be so far removed from perfection that he would never approach it. Therefore, Chazal left aggadah in the gemara. You see how this gemara opens up key ideas.

I do not think that the gemara's multiple explanations of the Rasha Arum mean that there is a dispute about its definition. Not every time the gemara quotes multiple opinions is there an argument. The gemara says that sometimes different views introduce different facets and different perspectives. Here too, the different cases of Rasha Arum are just that: different cases, not different concepts. All of these cases embody one idea. What then is the universal definition of the Rasha Arum? Maimonides says that one's tendencies towards evil have various expressions. What is Arum, cunning?

*And the snake was more cunning from all the beasts of the field that the Lord God made. It said to the woman, "Did God really say: 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" (Gen. 3:1)*

The snake wished to express that God was unnecessarily restrictive. Rasha Arum means that there are certain people whose tendencies are towards evil. But they cannot part with

their righteous self-image. Cunning is a dishonesty. The person desires to maintain a certain self-image that he is a tzadik, but his emotions are trapped in evil. That is why there are all these expressions: Rasha Arum, Rasha Ra, Chocham L'Hara, and Dov Shakul. The Rasha Arum tries to straddle both righteousness and evil. He is constantly searching for ways to avoid the inconveniences of perfection. He cannot openly go against righteousness, for example.

What is the Rasha Ra, the evil evildoer? Maimonides has 2 brands. One is the Rasha Ra and the other is the Chocham L'Hara: one who uses his wisdom for evil; the opposite of the Rasha Arum, the cunning evildoer. The Rasha Arum lives with the image of righteousness, but his emotions are completely rooted in the instinctual. While the Chocham L'Hara is devoid of any image of righteousness. The Rasha Arum cannot openly act evilly, explaining why he must be cunning: he must hide his objectives. He may subtly express his evil, but overtly he cannot display it due to his self-image of righteousness. But the Chocham L'Hara openly performs evil as he is not restricted by any self-image of righteousness. His intellect is fully in service of his evil emotions. He does not think that he is evil; nobody does. But his image of "good" is not restricted by Torah's definitions. He has his own image and he thinks that he is correct.

The Rasha Ra is different. Maimonides defines him as one, whom, "with arrogance and viciousness harms others." He is driven by the aggressive instinct.

The previous 7 definitions were based on a functional aspect: where each one's energies are directed. But with these new 5 definitions, Maimonides defines people by their personality traits, their character types.

The first—the Rasha Arum—is rooted in the instinctual. He is tied to a self-image of Torah righteousness. You might

call him cowardly as he must employ cunning. The second personality—the Rasha Ra—is the aggressive personality. He is dominated by aggression.

The third personality—the Chocham L'Hara—takes pride in intellectually bringing about results which strictly cater to the instinctual. His self-pride is in using his intelligence to satisfy the instincts.

The next is the Ish Elohim, the Man of God. He is a rare phenomenon as he is good by nature. He loves to benefit others. He also has a great intellect. If I were permitted to say who in our generation embodies this personality, it is Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l. He represented the Man of God. He was a very rare combination. He possessed total perfection in both character and intellect. Sigmund Freud wrote a paper on a physicist of whom he said that he never saw such a personality, as he performed the good naturally. The other extreme is a vicious beast, the Dov Shakul, who is devoid of any human perfection.

But I think the worst personality is the Chocham L'Hara. The Rasha Ra won't do too much damage. King Solomon said, *"Sooner meet a bereaved she-bear [a mother bear that lost her cubs] than a fool with his nonsense"* (Prov. 17:12). This is because a bereaved she-bear is predictable, unlike a fool [against whom you cannot guard]. The encounter with the she-bear is most horrifying. But this personality is not the most harmful to society. Some people who are less frightening are most monstrous [damaging]. People were not afraid to meet with Hitler, may his name and his memory be erased, but they were afraid to meet with a vicious killer, although Hitler harmed humanity in greater measure.

But to say who is worse depends on the barometer. If we refer to the absence of human character, it would be the she-bear personality, the Dov Shakul. But if we measure who is subhuman, that term too must be qualified. If by subhuman we

refer to who can be most evil, it is the Chochma L'Hara. I think that it is possible for a person to partake of all these personalities; they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In my opinion, Hitler possessed all these evil personality traits. In a sense, he was even the cunning evildoer, the Rasha Arum, because he portrayed a certain political "righteousness." It is difficult to even use that word to refer to Hitler.

Pirkei Avos is about perfection. Interesting from Maimonides' comments is that Judaism maintains that perfection demands one to understand all areas of evil. To understand righteousness, one must understand evil. Pirkei Avos teaches perfection of character and this demands one to understand the ultimate gross evil. If one does not understand that, he is ignorant of the good, "davar v'hepucho; a matter and its opposite."

## JUDAISM'S PHILOSOPHY

Sometimes you find a Torah verse that embodies Judaism's philosophy:

*When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and you will refrain from helping him, you must certainly assist him (Exod. 23:5).*

Rashi says "and you will refrain from helping him" is rhe-

torical. Rashi means this:

*You “think” you will refrain from helping him? No. You will help him!*

I was thinking of another explanation. “And you will refrain from helping him” describes human nature. The natural response is not to help your enemy. The mitzvah however is to overcome that emotion. Unkelos learns this way:

*Abandon what is in your heart and assist him.*

This verse displays Judaism’s psychology. Judaism does not deny human emotions; that is what other religions do and that is impossible [denying reality must fail].

This verse refers not to an enemy of the Jewish nation, but to someone you personally dislike. With the words “and you will refrain from helping him,” Torah teaches one to first recognize the emotion to refrain from assisting one’s enemy. Torah then teaches “you must certainly assist him” which directs us to overcome that emotion and assist the person. Torah teaches not to deny your emotion. This is a tremendous principle.

In our society, one of the greatest detriments to perfection is that we are raised with this type of thinking, acquired from gentiles. Tehillim says, “*You mingled with the nations and learned their ways*” (106:35). The wrong attitude is to deny one’s dislike of another. This behavior presents itself as a value: “Hatred is evil.” But you see from the gentiles, how, with their denial, they performed the most heinous murders. Denial allows the emotions to be expressed in other areas without one realizing it. The gentiles’ denial of hate with their



[self-proclaimed] “religion of love” allowed them to massacre without any compunction. Nazi Germany was the climax of Christianity’s denial of hate, and Nazism was based on Christianity. If it wasn’t for Christianity, I don’t think Nazi Germany would have risen. Nazism didn’t come about from thin air. It was due to centuries of denial of human nature.

Chazal say regarding Jacob’s wrestling with the angel that it appeared to Jacob in the form of a talmid chocham. This means that the evil inclination doesn’t always appear as an evil type of force, as people typically expect. But sometimes it appears in a veil of religiosity and that is the most dangerous form of the instincts. [In a different shiur, Rabbi Chait explained the gemara (Sanhedrin 64a) describing how the instincts emerged from the Holy of Holies as a fiery lion. He said what was most significant about that gemara is that the location from where the instincts emerged was the holiest religious site. He meant that the instincts have their strongest expression in religious matters. A “fiery lion” is a dangerous and fierce force.]

Thus, the verse does not say to deny one’s feelings. The words “and you will refrain from helping him” instruct us to recognize the emotion and overcome it, and act in accord with objective righteousness. Parshas Mishpatim (judgments) were the first matters given to the Jews after they received the Torah. This is an important principle [that matters of justice were given to the Jews first, before other matters]. The greatest hurdle to teshuvah is the inability to recognize one’s sin, which is the first step of teshuvah.

If a person finds difficulty performing a mitzvah, he must examine his psyche as there is something wrong with him. There is no mitzvah that should burden a person where he feels bothered by it. Torah is a diagnostic system; if a mitzvah disturbs you, there is something detrimentally wrong.

Hillel told the gentile that the essence of Torah it is to “*love your friend as yourself*” (Lev. 19:18). This means that the most powerful emotion is feeling special; one’s friends share your psychological makeup [they share your likes and dislikes]. This is the emotion behind cliques, friends, and “my group.” Those not in one’s close circle are viewed as enemies and worthless. Thereby, one favors his friends and feels enmity towards others. This “reality” which is a most powerful force opposes Torah. Torah demands that we look at others with only one barometer: Torah observance. Following Torah demands that we love others just as we love our best friend, even though psychologically one dislikes others. One must abandon such a psychological framework where he dislikes others because they said this or did that. And it is most difficult to do as it concerns one’s ego. People take pride in the self and the self is defined by how a person distinguishes himself from others. King Solomon said this about the dead:

*Also their loves, also their hates, also their  
jealousies have long since perished...(Kob-  
les 9:6)*

King Solomon said that people identify themselves by their likes and dislikes. Be it food, music, etc., people consider what they like as objective reality. When people hear a song that they do not like, they say [condescendingly] “Do you really like that music?!” They reject anyone who likes what they dislike. The self is identified by that part of the psyche that has likes and dislikes. A person [in his need to satisfy his ego] says, “How am I different than others? It is through the sum total of my likes and dislikes.”

Judaism asks a person to rise above this psychological plane, for the essence of a person is [not the psychological

component, but] his metaphysical component. This part of man is expressed in the system of Torah. We are obligated to love those who keep the Torah, whether or not they share our likes and dislikes. And if your best friend violates Torah, the mitzvah is to destroy him and hate him. It is not a personal hatred. To have peace in society, this principle must be followed, and it is impossible to have peace otherwise. You might have degrees of tolerance, but not peace.

Torah's ingenuity is seen just from these mitzvos alone. Torah provides the precise formula to produce a peaceful society [viz. assisting your enemy with his overburdened animal]. This is based on the removal of psychological identification with others and establishing a new kind of identification based on Torah observance. Study parshas Kedoshim regarding laws of refraining from revenge and harboring hate, and you will learn that every emotion is addressed. Only through observing these mitzvos is a peaceful society established.

Most people think only about themselves. But a gadol [Jewish leader] thinks in terms of the nation. It is a burden he is concerned about. Moshe said:

*Did I conceive all this people, did I bear them, that You should say to me, "Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant," to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers? (Num. 11:12)*

A gadol feels responsibility and compassion for the nation. And when he sees a destructive force in the nation, he is angry and this anger stems from his greatness, which most people cannot appreciate. He wishes to remove evil from others. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was a gadol and was angry about con-

servative Jews [their distortions of authentic Judaism threatened Judaism].

If a person was raised in a home where Torah was not presented properly, and he thereby develops a hatred for Torah, it is not his fault.

The Torah's stories of individuals perfect us. That is why Torah includes those stories. There is some correction that takes place in our minds when we understand—as much as we can—Torah's accounts of individuals.

## MOSHE'S MISSION

The basic question regarding the beginning of Moshe Rabbeinu's mission is the first sequence of events. God engaged Moshe Rabbeinu at the burning bush and told him to take the Jews out of Egypt. Moshe turned down this mission several times. Chazal say that this dialogue spanned a 7-day period.

*But Moses said to the Lord, "Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, not yesterday or the day before or in times past..." (Exod. 4:10)*

The verse says 3 days, but Chazal learn that it was 7. We learn that Moshe strived to avoid this mission.

When Moses saw God writing the crowns on the Torah's

letters, he asked God this:

*“Who is preventing You from giving the Torah [as is without crowns]; why do You need to write these crowns? Torah is perfect, give it already.” God replied, “Someone in the far future named Akiva will derive lessons from these crowns; what every crown stands for.” Moshe asked God to show him Akiva and God showed him. But Moshe could not understand what Rabbi Akiva was learning from the crowns. Moshe said to God, “You have a great person like this, yet you give the Torah through me?” [Why not give the Torah through Rabbi Akiva?] God replied, “It is a decree from before Me.” (Menachos 29b)*

It is an interesting gemara. It means that God perfected Torah’s theoretics to such a degree for the sake of Rabbi Akiva. [God made the Torah with such perfect design to offer an appreciation of His wisdom for even the greatest of minds; even one man.] Additionally, the correct time to give the Torah was after the Exodus—a simple answer for why God couldn’t give the Torah through Rabbi Akiva who lived much later. But that’s too simple of an answer. The truth is that Moshe Rabbeinu’s existence was an act of divine providence, as Maimonides says:

*And due to God’s love for us and to fulfill his promise to Abraham our father he created Moses our teacher (Maimonides, Laws of Star Worship 1:3)*

God caused the most perfect member of the human species to exist in that precise time.

*The woman conceived and bore a son [Moshe]; and she saw he was good, she hid him for 3 months. (Exod. 2:2)*

*Rashi: When he was born the whole house became filled with light (Sotah 12a).*

This means that Moshe's existence was an act of divine providence. Moshe felt, "If it is providence that I live at this time, You could have taken Rabbi Akiva" [perhaps meaning that God could have placed Rabbi Akiva too in any generation He desired]. Ultimately, Moshe accepted the mission. Then he returned to his father-in-law Yisro to take leave and descend to Egypt.

*And it was during his travels, at an inn, and God approached him [Moshe] and sought to kill him (Exod. 4:24).*

[It is strange] Moshe is traveling to fulfill God's mission, and God wants to kill him? Rashi comments:

*Because he had not circumcised his son Eliezer; and because he had showed himself remiss in this, he brought upon himself the punishment of death.*

What is meant that Moshe did not perform the mitzvah of circumcision? God forbid. But since Moshe was on a journey, there was a tradition (Ibn Ezra) not to endanger a child

[through circumcision while journeying]. Therefore, when Moshe came to the inn, instead of performing circumcision first, he first engaged in lodging preparations. Being remiss, as Rashi states, means that he was involved in the inn first.

We can't talk about the sin of Moshe Rabbeinu, but I would say this much. What is circumcision? It is the Bris of Abraham. It is the essence of Judaism. Besides Passover, circumcision is the only positive command for which one is punished with excision (karase) for violation. Now, what demanded Moshe's mission? It was the Bris of Abraham. So, when Moshe Rabbeinu argued with God for 7 days, he was not worthy of death; God had patience with Moshe and answered his questions and convinced him to accept the mission. But when Moshe was remiss regarding circumcising his son—Bris Abraham—then he was worthy of death. Moshe was remiss regarding the very driving force of his mission. That is the continuity of the sequence in the parsha.

As Moshe did not desire this mission, it affected the driving force of the mission: Bris Abraham. Therefore, this reluctance expressed itself by Moshe being remiss in circumcising his son.

Abraham was the founder of the nation. Isaac and Jacob were great Patriarchs as well, but we conclude our prayer with "*the shield of Abraham*" [Abraham was primary]. The nation was based on the true recognition of God. Circumcision was the mitzvah that represented the nation [a command intended for man to dominate the sensual life and follow an intellectual life]. And as Bris Abraham—circumcision—was the driving force of Moshe's mission, Moshe's resistance to fulfill the mission was expressed in a resistance towards circumcision.

*So Tziporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and it reached his [Moshe's]*

*legs [Tziporah showed it to Moshe] (Exod. 4:25)*

This caused Moshe to recognize his flaw. If not for Tziporah's action, there would be no mission of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe was not at fault when he argued with God for 7 days before accepting the mission. But if something effectuated a change in Moshe's fulfillment of God's command, there was no excuse for that and he was worthy of death.

Moshe then goes to Pharaoh, who then makes matters worse, demanding the Jews now collect their own straw without minimizing their brick quota. The Jews approached Moshe and said him:

*May the Lord look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers—putting a sword in their hands to slay us (Exod. 5:21).*

This menial straw collection reduced the Jews' self-worth and they blamed Moshe. Moshe then asked God why He made matters worse:

*O Lord, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people (Exod. 5:22,23).*

But we are struck; What is Moshe's question? [Previously at the burning bush] God told him that Pharaoh won't free the Jews:



*And I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to leave (Exod. 3:19)*

Why should Pharaoh's response be of any concern to Moshe? Moshe should simply perform his mission and God will address all else. God told Moshe that He will bring wonders and afterwards, Pharaoh will free the Jewish nation. Therefore, what was Moshe's concern [that matters worsened]? If the plagues had already taken place and Pharaoh still did not free the Jews, then Moshe has a question. But not yet.

*God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as a Mighty God (El Shaddai), but I did not make Myself known to them by My name יהוה.*

Now there is a change. God tells Moshe that there will be a new manner of His revelation, giluy shechina. The Patriarchs perceived God through El Shaddai—providence—not through miracles which would now happen, never occurring before. Moshe then communicated this to the Jews, but they did not listen:

*And Moses told this to the Israelites, but they would not listen to Moses due to exasperation, and from harsh labor (Exod. 6:9).*

Now, after God explained to Moshe this new mode of revelation, Moshe says this to God:

*The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Pharaoh heed me, a man of impeded speech? (Ibid. 6:12)*

What is Moshe's problem? The answer is that we view this incident of Moshe unrealistically, in a sort of imaginary manner. But it must be understood more maturely. God can perform countless miracles, but this is not His preference:

*I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians (Exod. 3:8)*

“Descending” [to alter nature and save the Jews through miracles] refers to something which is not God's preference. There is one principle which underlies this entire story. God can alter nature, but there is one thing God does not do: change man's free will. There were unavoidable times when God changed natural law, such as the Exodus and Revelation at Sinai. And even in these instances, the changes in nature still followed natural law somewhat, such as the wind that blew the locusts into Egypt. But to change man's nature, this never occurred and never will occur. Thus, Moshe Rabbeinu understood that with all the miracles that God could produce, they cannot affect man's free will. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu was bothered with a problem: “How can I take out a nation from Egypt? If I do, I have a nation of idolaters and what good is that?” Moshe Rabbeinu saw that the Jews were steeped in the depths of idolatry. It is like the angels said to God at the parting of the Reed Sea:

*The Egyptians are idolaters and the Jews are idolaters. Why are the Jews different that You should save them? (Zohar, Parshas Terumah)*

Moshe Rabbeinu saw that he had to reach the people [expose them to the fallacy of idolatry] but not through miracles because miracles will not accomplish anything. Moshe felt he had to reach the Jews' personalities and open their eyes to true ideas. Knowing that miracles offer only a short-lived effect and would not help [after the Exodus, 3 days into the desert the Jews already started complaining], when Moshe accepted his mission, he took it upon himself to transform the Jews. The original plan was that the Jews would travel 3 days into the desert where Moshe would give them Torah and ideas. This would remove them from their backbreaking labor which did not allow them time to think, allowing them to learn the basic principles of Judaism. Knowledge is the only way to change the Jews' personalities and relate to God. Judaism is not a religion of miracles. In his Guide, Maimonides strongly criticizes people who turn to the miraculous to perceive God (book II chap. vi):

*Say to a person who believes to belong to the wise men of Israel that the Almighty sends His angel to enter the womb of a woman and to form there the fetus, he will be satisfied with the account: he will believe it, and even find in it a description of the greatness of God's might and wisdom; although he believes that the angel consists of burning fire and is as big as a third part of the Universe, yet he considers it possible as a divine miracle. But tell him that God gave the seed a formative power which produces and shapes the limbs, and that this power is called "angel," or that all forms are the result of the influence of the Active Intellect, and that the latter is the*

*angel, the Prince of the world, frequently mentioned by our Sages, and he will turn away; because he cannot comprehend the true greatness and power of creating forces that act in a body without being perceived by our senses.*

This means to say that he cannot perceive the greatness of God through the unbelievable wisdom of nature that God created. Maimonides criticizes this person because his whole way of life is wrong. This is a fundamental of Judaism that we do not look to God to render miracles to draw close to Him. There is not a single prayer where we ask God to perform miracles. The one way to draw close to God is through Torah study, through knowledge.

*And I will cause the Egyptians to view the Jews favorably so that when you go, you will not go away empty-handed (Exod. 3:21).*

This “favor” (chane) displayed by the Egyptians to the Jews was necessary to remove the Jews’ humiliation of slavery.

*Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart [fear] when they see war, and return to Egypt” (Exod. 13:17).*

This teaches that the Jews were not yet ready for war. The only war which they were capable of was not in the capacity of the aggressor, but in defense, namely the war with Amalek.

*Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed (Exod. 17:11)*

The mishnah (Rosh Hashanna 3:8) asks:

*And was it Moshe's hands that make [success in] war or break [success in] war? Rather, [this comes] to tell you, [that] whenever Israel would look upward and subjugate their hearts to their Father in heaven, they would prevail; and if not, they would fall.*

The gemara says that [during the war with Amalek] Moshe Rabbeinu was a shliach tzibbur, a prayer leader. When the Jews saw Moshe standing in prayer, they focused their hearts on God. They [now] had the proper views. But, as the Jews had not yet totally removed their slave mentality, they needed to see Moshe's hands raised to give them strength. That is why they could not yet wage an aggressive war. During the war with Amalek, when they didn't see Moshe pray, the Jews lost their courage.

*When the people saw that Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him" (Exod. 32:1).*

Again, we see the dependency of this is slave mentality.

To establish the nation, they needed 1) true ideas and 2) they had to overcome their weakness due to slavery. This took 40 years to remove.

Now you understand the responsibility Moshe had on his shoulders. The mission wasn't simply to go to Pharaoh and tell him a story. Moshe knew that he had to convince this nation of the true ideas of God, developing them into an intellectual nation. And he knew he could not do so through miracles, as God does not change the human personality that way. Moshe also knew that it was his mission to convert Pharaoh and the Egyptians to at least accord respect to the Jews, so the Jews would gain self-esteem.

Chazal are burdened with the verse "*And God hardened Pharaoh's heart*" (Exod. 9:12, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:8) for they knew that God doesn't tamper with free will, not even for a single rasha. It is against God's will to ever tamper with any person's free will.

All the miracles could not help Moshe Rabbeinu on his mission. That is why he did not want to accept the mission. It was a tremendous responsibility. The fact that Moshe argued with God sounds strange to us. And how could Abraham our father argue with God?:

*Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly? (Gen. 18:25)*

Where do you find a people portraying their greatest leaders as arguing with God? The reason this sounds strange is

due to our improper understanding of prophecy. We view it as a mystical phenomenon [where one receives it and blindly follows orders]. But that is wrong. Moshe's free will was never impaired either. A prophet functions normally, just like us. From the prohibition for a prophet to conceal his prophecy we see that the prophet is no different than anyone else [he can choose to violate God's will and conceal his prophecy, because the prophet has free will]. Moshe Rabbeinu spoke with God "face-to-face": he was awake and could conceal his prophecy at that moment. But as all other prophets prophesied in dreams—"...in a dream I speak to him" (Num. 12:6)—they could conceal their prophecy only once they woke up.

Moshe Rabbeinu had the right to argue because the prophet is obligated to understand his mission just as we are obligated to use understanding. If Moshe had a question, he had to ask God. If he disagreed, he must say so. This is what Maimonides means in his Guide where he says that prophecy is a natural process. Just as one learning a Tosfos is foolish to say, "I believe Tosfos" [without thinking into the question], Moshe and the prophets used their minds to understand. They were obligated to argue with God.

Bilam the rasha received prophecy only as a means for Israel. But since it wasn't a natural process for him, he was overawed by it. Because he was a great intellect, he was able to see something. But Bilam's nature was not that of the prophets, and he suffered only a momentary change because it was unnatural for him. And that is why the moment that prophecy was withdrawn from him, he reverted to his evil nature and the Jews killed him. This shows you that a person cannot attain any greatness from an external phenomenon. Greatness is generated only from an internal source where one changes his own nature, and Bilam never accomplished this change. Even though Bilam had a great mind, his interests were physical:

*Though Balak were to give me his house  
full of silver and gold, I could not do any-  
thing, big or little... (Num. 22:18)*

Now we understand Moshe's complaint. Even though God said, "*I know the king of Egypt will not free the Jews,*" after Moshe first approached Pharaoh, things go bad and the Jews complain to Moshe that he worsened matters. Moshe then said this to God:

*Why did You send me? Ever since I came  
to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has  
dealt worse with this people; and still You  
have not delivered Your people (Exod.  
5:22,23)*

Moshe was not talking about the miracles. He did not doubt that God will perform those miracles. His complaint was based on his understanding that reaching the people must be without miracles, and now that things went bad, his mission was failing. Moshe complained because how could he reach the people when they hated him?

*And they said to them (Moses and Aaron),  
"May the Lord look upon you and punish  
you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh  
and his courtiers—putting a sword in  
their hands to slay us" (Exod. 5:21).*

The plagues were related to redemption; the Jews were to take a moral lesson from them. The plagues were not simply to free the Jews as they contained ideas that the Jews should derive from them. The original plan was that the Jews would



travel 3 days from Egypt with no plagues. Pharaoh would recognize the Jews as a nation. The Rav said that God's plan was that Pharaoh and Egypt too would accept Torah:

*But Moses said, "Even you will give in our hands sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to the Lord our God" (Exod. 10:25)*

That was the original plan. But Pharaoh rejected this option with his own free will. Therefore, this plan had to be scrapped. The new plan was a different method of reaching the Jews: Pesach Mitzrayim, the Paschal Lamb. This refers to the mitzvos: the halachic medium was used to reach the Jews:

*And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and I will see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (Exod. 12:13)*

The blood was on the inside of the door. Chazal say that God "seeing the blood" refers to the Jews' engagement in God's mitzvos. That is what saved the Jews. The blood on the door did not save the Jews, rather it was their performance of the mitzvah. Halacha was the medium that changed the Jews' emotions.

*Withdraw your hands, and take for yourselves a lamb (Exod. 12:21)*

Chazal comment, "Withdraw your hands from lambs of idolatry and take yourselves a lamb of mitzvah." The Passover lamb intended that in sacrifice—the greatest medium of

idolatry—the Jews convert this act into a halachic entity and remove the tumah (stain) of idolatry. The wisdom of the halachos (laws concerning the Paschal lamb) raised the Jews to a higher level. The Jews were told to take the lamb 4 days in advance of killing it in plain sight of the Egyptians to display their courage. [The lamb was Egypt’s deity. The Jews’ redemption depended on their ability to reject idolatry and accept the true God.]

We had cited the Jews’ critique of Moshe and Aaron being evildoers, having contributed to Pharaoh’s new decree that the Jews find their own straw without reducing their brick quota [a tremendous burden]. What was the purpose of the Jews now reaching this low-level? Did God cause to occur that Moshe and Aaron lose their esteem at the outset of their mission? This question is not a question because this decline was simply a result of peoples’ free will. Since God never interferes with free will, the Jews could see in Moshe and Aaron either the beginning of something great, or they could—because of their mental state—choose not to listen to Moshe.

*...but they would not listen to Moses due to exasperation, and from harsh labor (Exod. 6:9).*

The Jews’ exasperation and harsh labor blinded them from seeing the beginning of the redemption. Therefore, my answer is that there was no reason for Moshe and Aaron to suffer a failure at the mission’s outset; it was due to the people’s free will [not God]. Since God does not interfere with people’s free will, it is absurd to say that there was a reason [for this setback] other than the Jews. To say that there was a “reason for their failure,” [as if this was a necessary step] is to say that it was God’s plan that the Jews reject Moshe and Aaron.

*And the Lord said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust in you ever after" (Exod. 19:9).*

This is no guarantee. But it means that if the people properly exercise their free will, they will have the opportunity to see that what Moshe Rabbeinu says in God's name as Torah from Sinai, is in fact just that. But they can reject it too.

*"And they stood at the nether part of the mount" (Exod. 19:17), and Rav Dimi bar Hama says, "The verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned Mount Sinai above the Jews like a basin, and He said to them: 'If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there, under the mountain, will be your burial'" (Avodah Zara 2b).*

This [coercion] indicates that the Jews wanted to reject Torah. But the plain meaning is that the Jews accepted Moshe and Torah from Sinai. *"And so trust in you ever after"* was no guarantee. For if it was, there is no need for Revelation at Sinai [this possibility is wrong as it suggests that God can coerce the people's free will to believe in Moshe without Revelation].

When you see an idea, certain verses light up. They take on a new meaning [than previously understood].

Regarding Moshe's mission, I think it was a true acceptance of responsibility to reach the people. That is why Moshe argued with God for 7 days; he did not want to accept that responsibility. There are a few verses that show that once Moshe accepted this responsibility, it was an acceptance of

responsibility to the people, to teach them true ideas and that God would not help him in this realm. It laid upon his shoulders alone like any other person who takes a responsibility to accomplish a task.

*Moses heard the people weeping, every clan (Num. 11:10)*

This was the case of the Misoninim (Ibid. 11:1).

*We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic (Ibid. 11:5)*

The Jews were regressing. They were in the desert under difficult circumstances that caused their regression to the point that they wished to return to Egypt. Meaning, now they did not see the value in leaving Egypt.

*Let us appoint a chief and return to Egypt (Ibid. 14:4)*

This is the worst state of affairs because this reveals that the Jews had no appreciation for all the wisdom they learned from Moshe Rabbeinu since leaving Egypt.

*...that we used to eat free...*

Rashi comments on the word “free”: “Free from mitzvos.” That was most horrible for Moshe, for it means that he failed. Moshe gave them Torah and they are preferring “cucumbers, melons, leeks, etc.” There is no greater epitome of failure.

*And God's anger burned greatly, and in Moses eyes it was evil. And Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You dealt ill with Your servant, and why have I not enjoyed Your favor, that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me? Did I conceive all this people, did I bear them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant,' to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people, when they whine before me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me. If You would deal thus with me, kill me rather, I beg You, and let me see no more of my wretchedness!" (Ibid. 11:10-151)*

What is clear from these verses? It is the tremendous sense of responsibility Moshe had regarding his mission. He accepted this at the burning bush. From Yisro too we see that Moshe felt personally responsible to judge the people alone, but Yisro differed. Moshe could have thought of Yisro's [judge] system too, but there was no smicha [rabbinical ordination] yet [through which Moshe would ordain judges]. Moshe [then] inquired from God and God said Yisro was correct.

This responsibility was one that Moshe initially refused as he did not feel fit; he was not charismatic or a good speaker. They asked Aristotle, "What is the best way to influence people: the use of Socratic logic or a great orator?" He replied, "A combination." Moshe thought similarly and that's why he refused. But apparently God didn't think that way [as Moshe

was not charismatic or a fluent speaker]: influencing people through charisma is not proper. Ideas alone should influence people.

Evil people throughout history succeeded through their powers of oratory. Interesting is that in the Jewish nation you do not find this phenomenon. And even in Israel's good speakers, it is a different kind of phenomenon. You also do not see evangelical types in the Jewish nation [those who arouse audiences with religious fervor]. This has been alien to our people from the time the Torah was given.

50 years ago in America some rabbis were great orators who moved people with their speeches, but they fell by the wayside; you don't hear about them anymore. But that which endures are the writings of the great rabbis, the gedolim, our thinkers, writings which still inspire us today. The Vilna Gaon is more influential today than the great speakers of 50 years ago. You see this is a trait of the Jews which started with Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Jewish people are not subject to that type of influence or charismatic leadership. It doesn't exist in the Jewish nation. Take people like Rabbi Dovid Feinstein who does not speak, but his future influence is greater than the orators. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein too never aroused anybody by his speeches. The influence of the Rav is not because of his oratory skills, but because of his Torah ideas. I don't think you can find more genius in one person in generations. And those more prone to be influenced by his oratory were not of his better students.

Insofar as the Mesora [Torah transmission] is concerned, it is not even the writing that is responsible for it. The writing is necessary because without it, you could not know the Vilna Gaon's ideas. The reason why people are committed to Judaism is due to Torah She'Baal Peh; the rav/student institution. Torah exists today due to the personal relationship of the gen-

erations' leaders, from one generation to the next. That's why the Mesora exists in the same format as it did 2000 ago.

In his *Guide* (book III, chap. xxxii) Maimonides discusses man's body, saying that if one looks sharply at how humans' and animals' bodies are constructed, one sees God's wisdom:

*On considering the Divine acts, or the processes of Nature, we get an insight into the prudence and wisdom of God as displayed in the creation of animals, with the gradual development of the movements of their limbs and the relative positions of the latter, and we perceive also His wisdom and plan in the successive and gradual development of the whole condition of each individual. The gradual development of the animals' movements and the relative position of the limbs may be illustrated by the brain. The front part is very soft, the back part is a little hard, the spinal marrow is still harder, and the farther it extends the harder it becomes. The nerves are the organs of sensation and motion. Some nerves are only required for sensation, or for slight movements, as, e.g., the movement of the eyelids or of the jaws; these nerves originate in the brain. The nerves which are required for the movements of the limbs come from the spinal marrow. But nerves, even those that come directly from the spinal cord, are too soft to set the joints in motion; therefore God made the following arrangement: the nerves branch out into fibers which are covered with flesh, and become muscles: the nerves that*

*come forth at the extremities of the muscles and have already commenced to harden, and to combine with hard pieces of ligaments, are the sinews which are joined and attached to the limbs. By this gradual development the nerves are enabled to set the limbs in motion. I quote this one instance because it is the most evident of the wonders described in the book, On the Use of the Limbs: but the use of the limbs is clearly perceived by all who examine them with a sharp eye. In a similar manner did God provide for each individual animal of the class of mammalia. When such an animal is born it is extremely tender and cannot be fed with dry food. Therefore, breasts were provided which yield milk, and the young can be fed with moist food which corresponds to the condition of the limbs of the animal, until the latter have gradually become dry and hard.*

Maimonides explains how nerves, muscles, bone and ligaments all reflect God's wisdom. I want to caution you that the idea of evolution does not conflict with Maimonides' words here because his concept is that God's wisdom can be traced back to the origin of the universe. It is not merely earthly phenomena, but God's wisdom is from the origin of universe, referring to the creation of primordial matter and setting it into action in a way that the entire universe unraveled, including this little planet and all earthly phenomena. Whether what took place on Earth is the result of God's specific intervention or a result of the original primordial matter makes no difference whatsoever. But Judaism's conclusion is precisely what



Maimonides says, namely, that everything that you see, which is organized and ordered by God, was in the plans at the very beginning of creation. If certain events and creatures are results of various processes [evolution] those processes were built into the primordial matter. Maimonides continues:

*Many precepts in our Law are the result of a similar course adopted by the same Supreme Being.*

In other words, the same God who organized the limbs and natural law, created certain things not as an end goal, but as a means [for other things]. Certain components of the body are inherently necessary, while other components function to support those inherently-needed organs [the skull's thickness might serve only to protect the brain, and not require thickness otherwise]. Essential organs require certain situations, which demanded other components to exist only to serve those essential organs. God works the same way in Torah.

Maimonides goes into his famous theory of sacrifice where he says as follows:

*It is, namely, impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other: it is therefore according to the nature of man impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed. Now God sent Moses to make [the Israelites] a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. xix. 6) by means of the knowledge of God. Comp. "Unto thee it was showed that thou might know that the Lord is God (Deut. iv. 35): "Know therefore this*

*day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord is God" (ibid. v. 39). The Israelites were commanded to devote themselves to His service; comp. "and to serve him with all your heart" (ibid. xi. 12): "and you shall serve the Lord your God" (Exod. xxiii. 25); "and ye shall serve him" (Deut. xiii. 5). But the custom which was in those days general among all men, and the general mode of worship in which the Israelites were brought up, consisted in sacrificing animals in those temples which contained certain images, to bow down to those images, and to burn incense before them; religious and ascetic persons were in those days the persons that were devoted to the service in temples erected to the stars, as has been explained by us. It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan of God, as displayed in the whole Creation, that He did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service; for to obey such a commandment it would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to that to which he is used; it would in those days have made the same impression as a prophet would make at present if he called us to the service of God and told us in His name, that we should not pray to Him, not fast, not seek His help in time of trouble; that we should serve Him in thought, and not by any action. For this reason, God allowed these kinds of service to continue; He transferred to His service that which had*

*formerly served as a worship of created beings, and of things imaginary and unreal, and commanded us to serve Him in the same manner [He transferred sacrifice to false gods, to sacrifice to God].*

Maimonides discusses the custom of those days which was to worship in idolatrous fashion various sacrificial practices. Maimonides says it was necessary for God to take the concept of sacrifice and reframe it to retain some emotional satisfaction in sacrifice, but still transform the phenomenon [into a service to God]. Those who study Zevachim will understand how sacrifice can start with a primitive emotion and be converted into a halachic system. That is why Maimonides says that only the priests were entrusted [in the practice of sacrifice] because if a person were allowed to sacrifice privately he would indulge primitive fantasies and damaging notions, to the point that he would lose the correct idea of God. But Torah's sacrifices counter such dangers as they were performed only in the Temple according to halacha and performed only through the priests. Private sacrifice is the worst Torah violation for which one is punished with karase.

*These are the rules that you shall set before them (Exod. 1:1)*

*Rashi: To tell you that you should seat (i.e. provide quarters for) the Sanbedrin in the vicinity of the Temple.*

Meaning, if the Temple was only an altar, people would get lost in their fantasies. But as the wise men of Israel are [seated in session] next to the altar, all is run by their wisdom so there

is no chance for one to get lost in his subjective notions.

According to Maimonides, the Temple was safeguarded by halacha. It impressed people with proper notions. The Temple also catered to man's emotion need for sacrifice. Maimonides means that if people were on a high level, they would not need the Temple. I don't think anyone can deny it. Do you think that Moshe needed the Temple?

*His honor fills the whole Earth (Isaiah  
6:3)*

The midrash says that Adam's temple was the universe.

*Thus said the Lord: "The heaven is My  
throne and the Earth is My footstool:  
Which house could you build for Me,  
What place could serve as My abode?  
(Ibid. 66:1)*

In absolute reality [ultimate truth] Temple is absurd. But in terms of human reality, Temple is a necessity. This is Maimonides' meaning.

Maimonides (Ibid.) says that sacrificial service itself is not the primary objective of the Torah, it is only a means:

*Whilst supplication, prayer and similar  
kinds of worship are nearer to the primary  
object, and indispensable for obtaining it...*

Temple is dispensable, but prayer is not. People wonder why Maimonides says it is a positive command to pray. It is because as Temple is a positive command and is dispensable,

prayer which is indispensable most certainly is a positive command. Maimonides held without a doubt that prayer is a positive command. The Rav said that Rav Chaim held there is no doubt that Maimonides was right about this and that Ramban was wrong.

A person has a God-granted right to pray, and not as a concession. As a creature, a person must turn towards his Creator. If a person does not have that sense, then there is a disruption [in his soul]. Prayer is necessary to have that realization, to turn towards one's Creator.

Maimonides continues:

*I know that you will at first thought reject  
this idea and find it strange...*

[The entire purpose of the Temple is to blot out idolatry and to draw man to the true ideas and it is only a means and not an end in itself]

*...you will put the following question to me  
in your heart: "How can we suppose that  
Divine commandments, prohibitions, and  
important acts, which are fully explained,  
and for which certain seasons are fixed,  
should not have been commanded for their  
own sake, but only for the sake of some  
other thing: as if they were only the means  
which He employed for His primary ob-  
ject? What prevented Him from making  
His primary object a direct commandment  
to us, and to give us the capacity of obeying  
it? [In such a case] those precepts which in  
your opinion are only the means and not the  
object would then have been unnecessary."*

*Hear my answer, which will cure your heart of this disease and will show you the truth of that which I have pointed out to you.*

Sometimes Maimonides refers to a question as a “question,” and sometimes he calls it a “disease.” Why did he use the term “disease” here? Maimonides continues:

*You ask, “What could have prevented God from commanding us directly, that which is the chief object, and from giving us the capacity of obeying it?” This would lead to a second question, “What prevented God from leading the Israelites through the way of the land of the Philistines and endowing them with strength for fighting? The leading about by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night would then not have been necessary.” A third question would then be asked in reference to the good promised as reward for the keeping of the commandments, and the evil foretold as a punishment for sins. It is the following question: “As it is the chief object and purpose of God that we should believe in the Law, and act according to that which is written therein, why has He not given us the capacity of continually believing in it, and following its guidance, instead of holding out to us reward for obedience, and punishment for disobedience, or of actually giving all the predicted reward and punishment?”*

*For [the promises and the threats] are but the means of leading to this chief object. What prevented Him from giving us, as part of our nature, the will to do that which He desires us to do, and to abandon the kind of worship which He rejects?"*

*There is one general answer to these 3 questions, and to all questions of the same character, it is this: Although in every one of the signs [related in Scripture] the natural property of some individual being is changed, the nature of man is never changed by God by way of miracle. It is in accordance with this important principle that God said, "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me," etc. (Deut. v. 26). It is also for this reason that He distinctly stated the commandments and the prohibitions, the reward and the punishment. This principle as regards miracles has been frequently explained by us in our works. I do not say this because I believe that it is difficult for God to change the nature of every individual person; on the contrary, it is possible, and it is in His power, according to the principles taught in Scripture; but it has never been His will to do it, and it never will be. If it were part of His will to change [at His desire] the nature of any person, the mission of prophets and the giving of the Law would have been altogether superfluous.*

Without this concept, the mission of Moshe Rabbeinu cannot be understood at all. Maimonides says regarding miracles that it is a principle of Judaism that God never interferes with the free will of any individual.

Now, the reason Maimonides called the question a disease is for 2 reasons. First, Maimonides doesn't like "why" questions, like, "Why did God do this when He could have done that?" One can ask why God did something, provided it does not question His essence. But the moment the question concerns His essence, such a question becomes nonsensical. We cannot ask about God's essence. The beauty of the *Guide* is that Maimonides shows which questions do not touch on questioning God's essence, and which do; which are legitimate questions, and which are not. That is one of the themes of the *Guide*. Once Maimonides shows that it is God's will to never interfere with free will, we cannot ask, "Why is this God's will?" This concerns God's essence which is beyond our understanding.

People think that Maimonides dodged such questions by saying, "It is God's will." Average people say "It is God's will" because they truly don't understand certain matters. But when Maimonides says it he means, "I will show you why you cannot understand this." This is because to understand God's will, one must be in the position of the Creator, which is impossible. Realistically, the question has no legitimacy. To think how one would create the world if one were God, is nonsense [viz. creating man in a way where he naturally follows Torah]. This is one reason why Maimonides refers to such questions as a "disease." It is a disease because the questioner cannot accept the reality of what is. God's existence is the only real existence behind the universe. This is reality. Can we ask, "Why did God make man?" Maimonides explains that there is no answer to such a question. The ques-



tioner is construing this in human terms: “What purpose would I have in creating man?” But we cannot project onto God our human objectives. It is impossible by definition to do such a thing. Maimonides emphasizes this throughout his *Guide*.

But there is a second reason why Maimonides uses the term disease. The Rav mentioned in his book *Halachic Mind* that Maimonides’ interpretation of the mitzvos—Taamei Hamitzvos—were not accepted by Klal Yisrael. It is true, it wasn’t accepted at all. No one will defend Maimonides’ reasons for the mitzvos as found in his *Guide*. The Rav says regarding this matter that Maimonides failed in his goal. Ramban’s approach was more accepted.

What I wish to say is that the answer lies in this part of the *Guide* we just cited, and in the fact that Maimonides called the question a “disease.” It is somewhat of a fundamental.

There is a difference between Maimonides’ approach in his Taamei Hamitzvos, and between the religionists’ approach. The latter demands in his performance a certain kind of validity, you might say, or a certain kind of value in what he does. The average religious person is very concerned with himself and Judaism does recognize that as a level. But that’s only a stepping-stone. As one advances, he sees that his own concerns are not so earth-shattering in importance. In fact, his whole life is not that important in terms of his own fantasies and imaginations. One person expressed his main concern to be that his life is not a waste. It is as if people view their lives as the most important thing in the world: an over exaggeration of self-importance. But everybody is endowed with this mental framework and Judaism respects it, provided it is used as a tool to introduce the person to Judaism. But after this step, true perfection is total humility:

*And I am dust and ashes (Abraham,  
Gen. 18:27)*

*And what are we? (Moshe, Exod. 16:7)*

*What is man that You have been mindful  
of him? (King David, Psalms 8:5)*

[These verses share how perfected] man recognizes his insignificance, but not in the personal sense where one feels insignificant, which leads to depression. Proper insignificance like Abraham sensed, “*I am dust and ashes*” is a philosophical expression that does not border on depression. On the contrary, Abraham was the happiest person. His sense of equating to dust and ashes did not disturb him at all. His insignificance referred to a world view.

The religious person, which is a primary level, desires that his performance carries some value necessary for his mental satisfaction. Because to him, the whole sphere of religious function revolves around the self. He enjoys believing that his religious performance is of value. People are very happy with the idea that they earn a “check” for their mitzvos. On a basic level, people relate to this. But one who advanced to a higher level has other kinds of motivation. A person operating with the check system will not be happy with Maimonides’ Taamei Hamitzvos [reasons for the mitzvos] because this means his performance doesn’t carry any intrinsic value. [As an example of Maimonides’ Taamei Hamitzvos, Maimonides explains one benefit for the Sabbath is that through the Jew’s societal deviation of not working on this one day, he calls attention to himself, generating inquiries from gentiles for his rest from labor. Thereby, he is enabled to spread the concept of God Who rested after creation was completed, and Whom he cop-

ies through his Sabbath rest. But the religionist wants to feel that by observing Sabbath, he earns some reward, and does not observe for the intrinsic benefit to educate humanity on monotheism.] The religionist will find this explanation upsetting. It is also a dangerous idea for him because as he is motivated by receiving a check, removing the check will destroy his motivation. Whereas a person operating with a higher motivation does not operate with a check system; he is motivated by God's eminence. Maimonides shares that the mitzvos show God's eminence and His wisdom. This higher-level person is not motivated by any positive gain due to religious reasons. He does not concern himself with whether a mitzvah offers either a positive or negative value. This only affects a religionist who does not like to perform something as a means to avoid a negative. He wants a positive sense of attainment. He is concerned with the self and he cannot be motivated this way, and it is dangerous to remove his motivation suddenly. As Maimonides says, we are to gradually lead him from his current motivation of fear, reward and punishment, slowly substituting true recognition.

The problem with Maimonides' Taamei Hamitzvos, why they were not accepted and why even certain Jewish leaders did not promulgate them, was because people cannot tolerate motivation bereft of self-attainment, as Maimonides teaches. Maimonides' Taamei Hamitzvos share God's eminence and His endless wisdom. If one is motivated in this manner, the reasons for the mitzvos are beautiful and wonderful. But others not operating on this level will not appreciate Maimonides' reasons for the mitzvos.

Maimonides says:

*I know that at first thought you will reject this idea and find it strange. You will*

*put the following questions to me in your heart: "How can we suppose that Divine commandments, prohibitions, and important acts, which are fully explained, and for which certain seasons are fixed, should not have been commanded for their own sake, but only for the sake of some other thing: as if they were only the means which He employed for His primary object?"*

The disease is the religionists' motivation which is the concern for the self. Here, Maimonides highlights this very problem. It is an amazing piece in his *Guide*. It is a beautiful idea to be appreciated, but appreciated cautiously because it is a subtle point. It is a crucial point. It shares Maimonides' philosophy. Maimonides wrote in his introduction that he does not disclose ideas too well because certain people not on the [proper] level to appreciate them are liable to be misguided. Maimonides wrote the *Guide* for the person operating on the higher level. Klal Yisrael rejected his Taamei Hamitzvos because they never attained that higher level.

## THE BITTER WATERS

*Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled 3 days in the wilderness and found no water. They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" So, he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There He made for them a statute and judgment, and there He put them to the test. He said, "If you will heed the Lord your God diligently, doing what is upright in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the Lord am your healer" (Exod. 15:22-26).*

The word "vayorehu" (showed) "and the Lord showed him a piece of wood" can mean either to teach or to throw. Unkelos translates this verse to mean that God taught Moshe about some type of wood.

*There He made for them a statute and judgment, and there He put them to the test. He said, "If you will heed the Lord your God diligently, doing what is upright*

*in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the Lord am your healer.”*

From these final verses themselves, you see that there is more here than just a simple story. What is meant by these verses and what is their relationship to the story?

There was an event, but its nature served as a substratum for certain ideas. The physical event mirrored the world of ideas; it was a double structure.

Chazal said that this wood that sweetened the waters was actually bitter itself; a miracle inside of a miracle [bitter wood sweetened the bitter water]. They also say that the Jews received some commandments in this location of Marah. Rashi writes:

*At Marah He gave them a few sections of the Torah in order that they might engage in the study thereof; viz., the sections containing the command regarding the sabbath, the red heifer and the administration of justice (Exod. 15:25).*

What is the relationship between the physical event and these 3 sections of Torah? The Jews' complaint in Marah was unique, and for which they were criticized. Rashi comments:

*They did not consult with Moses in a respectful fashion: “Entreat mercy for us that we may have water to drink” — but they murmured (Ibid.).*

There is another incident regarding the Jews:

*In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death." And the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day's portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not" (Exod. 16:2-4).*

In this latter case, the Jews received the manna. What is the difference between this case and the previous case of the bitter waters? The difference is that in Marah, although the waters were bitter, they did have water. It was not a question of survival. But regarding the manna, the Jews had a legitimate complaint: they would starve. Therefore, God gave them manna for man cannot exist without food.

In Marah they had water, as we said. The bitterness of the water indicated a dissatisfaction: there was not sufficient enjoyment in drinking it. But it was not a question of lacking water. That incident served as a lesson. God showed Moshe a bitter piece of wood, which, by throwing it into the bitter water, the water was thereby sweetened.

The lesson is that in life, a person is dissatisfied because he does not have what is sweet: certain luxuries and desires. He lacks what he wants. The lesson is that on the contrary, the bitter wood made the waters sweet. The opposite [of one's

expectations]. The bitter wood meant that the people had to withdraw their emotions completely from their desire for the physical enjoyments and engage themselves in Torah. That is why they received 3 Torah sections at Marah.

That event was used as a basis to teach the Jews the first idea since leaving Egypt. [This event took place immediately after the splitting of the sea.] While slaves, the Jews had no choices [to pursue personal desires]. But once they were free, their desires sought luxuries. They were no longer restricted slaves.

The reason why life is bitter is precisely because one directs his energies towards luxuries. The only method to remove bitterness [bitter waters/bitter life] is through another bitterness [bitter wood/frustrating the emotional desires]: facing those emotions and removing oneself from physical desires, which is difficult and bitter, and redirecting one's energies towards wisdom. That was the lesson.

*The beginning of the righteous man's life is bitter, but its end is sweet.*

At first, it is difficult for the righteous person for he must first grapple with his emotions which are powerful, and redirect his energies towards wisdom. But his end is sweet, for when he accomplishes this, then, on the contrary, everything is very sweet. It is not that he only overcomes the bitterness, but the tzaddik experiences sweetness.

*And the waters were sweetened*

This is because the nature of life is such that if one directs his energies away from the physical desires, that is when he first enjoys life. Aristotle discusses if life is worthwhile. He



said life is pleasant, but if you look at most of humanity, you would not come to that conclusion; most people do not have a smile on their face. With all the luxuries and accommodations people have today, people are exhausted, frustrated and miserable. It is like Bertrand Russell wrote 50 years ago. This is because the more one directs his energies towards what he considers to be happiness, the unhappier he grows. It is impossible to escape. The only way out is “bitterness”: to remove the energies from seeking physical desires. The frustration [of physical desires] exists because there is not ample satisfaction derived from physical desires. [Man’s energies are too great and physical desires offer too little. Only in wisdom, which is broad and endless, does man find full satisfaction, full expenditure of his energies.]

When a person engages in wisdom, even the simple pleasures are enjoyable. [This is because as he found wisdom to offer true happiness, he no longer seeks ultimate pleasure from the physical world; he seeks from it only what it was created to offer: a functioning vehicle, sufficient income for basic needs, and a modest home. He is in line with reality. He is happy.] Waking up to the sun makes him happy. Little things. Such a person does not need the “big” pleasures. As Aristotle said, “Life is pleasant.” If man lives as God intended, he will always be happy.

*And the Lord showed him a piece of wood.*

This bitter wood will actually sweeten the waters; the bitterness of constraining the emotions will ultimately enable us to redirect our energies towards wisdom, finding the greatest satisfaction.

They received laws of the red heifer, Sabbath, and justice:

*If you will heed the Lord your God diligently, doing what is upright in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the Lord am your healer. (Exod. 15:26)*

[The one who follows Torah will experience the sweet life; a life that heals all bitterness.]

5:8 MISHNAH NOT RECORDED

5:9 MISHNAH NOT RECORDED

## 5:10–5:15 PERSONALITIES: POSSESSIONS

THERE ARE 4 TEMPERAMENTS AMONG MEN: THE ONE WHO SAYS “WHAT IS MINE IS MINE, AND WHAT IS YOURS IS YOURS” – THAT’S AN [AVERAGE] TEMPERAMENT. AND THERE ARE SOME WHO SAY THAT IS THE TEMPERAMENT OF SODOM. [A SECOND TYPE IS ONE WHO SAYS] “WHAT IS MINE IS YOURS, AND WHAT IS YOURS IS MINE” – [THAT’S AN] AM HA’ARETZ [A THIRD TYPE IS ONE WHO SAYS] “WHAT IS MINE IS YOURS, AND WHAT IS YOURS IS YOURS” – [THAT’S A] PIOUS PERSON. [A FINAL TYPE IS ONE WHO SAYS] “WHAT IS YOURS IS MINE, AND WHAT IS MINE IS MINE” – [THAT’S A] WICKED PERSON.

Mishnayos 5:10-15 each share 4 personality variations. Thus, the tanna (mishnaic author) wished to share that they are all interrelated. Here, the first personality, “what’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours” is neither a tzaddik nor a rasha, but some say he has the character of Sodom. That is the worst connotation you can express. We must understand this mishnah because the disparity of these 2 divergent opinions on this first personality is quite great; the latter meaning he is punishable with death.

WHAT IS MINE IS YOURS AND WHAT IS YOURS  
IS MINE

This person is an ignoramus. This is not meant as a pejorative, but in a good way. He possesses some good qualities. We

described him in a previous mishnah as one who everyone would enjoy having as a neighbor.

WHAT IS MINE IS YOURS AND WHAT IS YOURS  
IS YOURS

This is the most perfect person.

WHAT IS MINE IS MINE AND WHAT IS YOURS IS  
MINE

This is the worst personality.

The one who asks the most powerful question on the surface is Rabbeinu Yona:

*“What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours”: He is not a generous person, but he is good because he does not like gifts. But how can the mishnah say that this is an intermediary kind trait? One who does not give tzedaka is an absolute rasha. This goes along with the view that such person embodies the character of Sodom, as Torah says, “Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: Arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy” (Ezek. 16:49). Rather, this person gives tzedaka due to fear of God, but by nature he is stingy.*

This person’s charitable acts are due to fright. Therefore, he is an average person.

There are 6 mishnayos, but Maimonides classifies them not as 6, but as 4 and 2. mishnah 5:12 says there are 4 traits with students. In the other mishnayos, Chazal say that a person is either a chassid (pious) or a rasha (evil). That's mishnah 5:10. mishnah 5:11 discusses a person's anger and again we deal with a chassid and a rasha [label]. 5:13 refers to giving tzeda-ka and also refers to the chassid and rasha. And again, we discuss the chassid and the rasha in 5:14 regarding 4 traits belonging to those who attend the beis midrash (yeshiva). But in mishnah 5:12 which describes a student's qualities (everyone is a student) it refers to qualities of learning, and also in 5:15 it discusses traits of those who sit before wise men. In both of these mishnayos we do not find a discussion of "chassid" and "rasha."

Maimonides says that one should observe that in mishnayos 5:12 and 5:15 the appellations of chassid and rasha are not applied. He says this is because when discussing the character of a student and also those who sit before the wise men, we discuss levels of intelligence:

*The praiseworthy person in these 2 mishnayos, one with good understanding and good memory, is called wise, and the one who has difficulty learning and also forgets a lot, he does not call a rasha, as it is not an acquirable trait.*

Maimonides teaches that one cannot increase his intellect. Yeshivos promulgated the myth that if one learns, he can become the Vilna Gaon. This belief was accepted because people don't wish to accept their inherent limitations. But this is damaging since when one does not attain the level of a great scholar he will quit. I know one person who saw that he was

not attaining greatness in Torah and he closed the gemara for 25 years due to his disappointment.

The truth is that we all have limitations—both physical and intellectual. While a person can improve upon what he has—*“making the simple wise”* (Psalms 19:8)—although you can teach a fool to utilize all his potential; potential has a limit.

Maimonides says these 2 mishnayos 5:12 and 5:15 don't discuss chassid and rasha because they refer to man's inherent limitations. These 2 mishnayos refer to the characteristics and qualities of a scholar. They discuss the perfected individual who is comprised of 2 components: intellectual abilities which play a vital role in his perfection, and also his temperament. These 2 components are the sum total of a person's perfection.

Man possesses control in only one area: his temperament. But he has no control over his God-given intellectual gifts. Rabbeinu Yona says that even though it is bad [a loss] for a person to forget, he still must engage in study because the act of learning Torah perfects a person. Knowledge perfects man and is to be engaged without any objective. Nevertheless, a forgetful person cannot attain the perfection of another person naturally endowed with great intellectual capacity. One cannot attain Maimonides' level. It is not one's concern that others surpass his abilities. One must be involved in perfection regarding his own reality: how God created him. That is the 10th of the 10 Commandments: *“Do not envy others.”* Other people's realities—their advanced make ups—must play no role in one's life of perfection. That is not his reality; that is God's business. One should live like Adam the First, as if he is the only man in the world. This very acceptance of one's own reality—his limitations—is perfection itself. Maimonides mentions this as these mishnayos deal with human perfection.

Mishnayos 5:12 and 5:15 do not refer to chassid and rasha because the author wants people to accept their own limitations. One must accept that God can create other realities besides one's own reality. We believe in angels and they perceive God's wisdom on a higher level than us. We quote them in davening, "*Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of Hosts. His presence fills all the Earth*" (Isaiah 6:3). Angels recite that verse and understand it well, but we do not. It is nonsensical to be upset that one is not an angel. In the same manner it is nonsensical to be upset that other people possess greater intellectual abilities than oneself.

Even regarding one who is not a genius, there is a great difference between his life and an ignoramus, once he learns Torah. He is even greater than a great intellect with an untrained mind. One must realize the benefit of perfecting his intellect, but within the framework of his own reality, and not attempt to become a Vilna Gaon. But if he does try to become the Vilna Gaon, he will never be happy [he chases an impossible dream]. But if one's framework is his own reality; he will be very happy [accepting his intellectual capacity and limitations]. This is because he will see how much he has accomplished in his own life, leading him to a happy existence.

A person should always be involved in some type of thought. If he is not, it is due to some emotional problem. That is the answer to diligent study, hasmada. Learning does not exhaust a person because the mind does not grow tired. If one feels tired, it is not because of any strain in learning. His stress is really due to his desire for other activities; he is stressed by not engaging in his preferred activity. The psyche gets tired [stress], but the mind does not, as it can engage in thought endlessly. Even a person in the weakest physical state can think. Thought is the last of the faculties to go. By nature, a person should always be thinking. The use of the mind is the

greatest enjoyment; that is man's nature.

But there are psychological reasons why people have difficulty pursuing thought. It could be due to upbringing; in our society there are many reasons. From youth, our association to learning is not positive. It is rote and painful. This imprints on a person's mind the notion that learning is painful.

One is obligated to have intercourse with his wife, the *chiyuv ona*. A *talmid chocham* is obligated only once a week because he is weak due to his constant involvement in thought. But this refers not to physical weakness. This means that thought draws upon the same energy source as the sexual. Man's mind functions through certain "machinery" which uses the same energy as the sexual source. Maimonides says, "Fantasy comes only when one's mind is turned away from wisdom." If one is involved in thought, he doesn't think about sexual matters. This is because the energy [for the sexual] is being consumed [in wisdom]. It is the same energy source. In that sense the *gemara* says that a *chocham* is weak. But not physically. The *gemara* says that many *talmidei chochamim* were very strong. They say that the Vilna Gaon was very powerful. We also see that King David and Jacob were strong. And the *gemara* says that *Tannaim* too were strong.

Regarding the stress one feels when learning due to the desire to engage in other activities, this changes over time as one finds learning to be the greatest pleasure. This stress is due to a wrong attitude and not an inherent problem [with learning]. If one finds that he needs an outlet for his energies, learning is the best outlet.

Maimonides says there is no greater excitement than intellectual excitement. Nothing competes that is as powerful, constant and steady. And it is not just Torah. Great thinkers found the greatest pleasure in all areas of wisdom: Hawkings and mathematicians devoted every minute of their day to thought.



Returning to the 6 mishnayos, 2 address man's intellectual nature which cannot be changed and 4 address temperament: areas that man can change. The first of the 4 addresses possessions, the 2nd area is anger, the 3rd area is tzedaka and the 4th is beis midrash attendance. You must say at first glance, without even looking into the mishnayos, that obviously, these mishnayos are going to set forth the total gamut of human perfection.

mishnah 5:10 is closely related to tzedaka, discussed in mishnah 5:13. The question is why these 2 mishnayos are not grouped as 1, since the person who gives tzedaka is saying "what's mine is yours." And Rabbeinu Yona interjects that one who refrains from giving tzedaka is a rasha. Again, why aren't these 2 mishnayos the same? They both address one's attitude about one's positions. Yet, the mishnah sets apart tzedaka as a separate topic. Why?

What is meant by "4 traits in man?" It means that if we wish to evaluate human perfection, we must evaluate one's sense of fairness. That is what this mishnah (5:10) discusses. Everyone is endowed with a healthy ego, and also with an intellect. A person's ego would rather have him believe that the entire world and all of humanity up to his birth was created solely for himself. But another part of man recognizes external reality; there are other people in this world. Therefore, a person with a sense of fairness must conclude, "What's mine is mine and what's yours is yours." That is the basic raw conclusion, explaining why this attitude is called "intermediate," as there is a balance struck between the person's ego and reality. His reality principle dictates that one should not receive more than others; everybody is equal. This equality extends to rights of possessions.

And we understand the rasha, "What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine." He is completely egocentric. The event

of the vineyard of Navos (I Kings 21) typifies this personality. Navos owned a vineyard near King Achav's palace, which disturbed the king. The king's wife Jezebel provoked the king that he should have this vineyard. The king approached Navos expressing his wish to purchase the vineyard, but Navos refused to give up a family inheritance. No price would appease him. Navos was then killed and the king took the vineyard and concealed his deed. Eliyahu the prophet reprimanded the king, "*Will you kill and also inherit?*" [A king is entitled to the possessions of a criminal justly killed. But in this case, the killing was murder and not justice. This is the meaning behind Eliyahu's rebuke (Malbim, I Kings 21:19).]

"What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine,"—the rasha's attitude—does not mean to say that the rasha would utter these words, no rasha would. That is a fool. This statement refers to an inner attitude depicted in the story above. The king was shrewd, attempting to make the acquisition of the vineyard appear like an inheritance, as Navos was framed for a crime he did not commit. The king didn't want to make it look like a murder, although he would murder someone if he could get away with it.

The rasha overtly favors justice, as he desires protection for his own property. But his underlying attitude is "What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine." If he could obtain other people's property without suffering any loss, honor or safety, he would be willing to obtain the property. That is the rasha. While the attitude of the intermediate person—the baynoni—is fairness: "What's mine is mine and what's yours is yours." It is a compromise: "Don't take mine and I won't take yours."

Why do some say that the intermediate person portrays the character of Sodom? This personality maintains that there is an institution of possessions, [but only] in order that he can secure a sense of "mine." His ego satisfaction is found in

“my” possessions. That appeals to him. But the ignoramus is superior. His attitude of “what’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine” means, “We all wish to live together, so let’s forget about possessions; we can share.” But the intermediate person cannot tolerate sharing, as that would destroy his ego and his sense of possessions. Why then is the intermediate person akin to Sodom? It depends on why one says, “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours.” One can have this attitude based on a sense of compromise. But another reason one has this attitude is because the attitude of “What’s yours is yours” is a result of a feeling of “What’s mine is mine.” He does not recognize the rights of others, but wishes a system enforcing his own possessions. He must recognize others’ possessions in order to preserve his own possessions. This precisely is the character of Sodom. Sodom was a very lawful place, for we learn that Lote was a judge there. But in Sodom, there was no such thing as a person in need. If you could not attend to your own needs, you were in trouble.

mishnah 5:10 is not a case of one-party arguing on the other, they’re both right: *“One master holds one view, and the other master holds another view, and there is no argument”* (Chullin 105a). There are 2 types of people that come to the conclusion of “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours.” One is from a sense of fairness, which is what the country is built on, the intermediate personality. The other one finds his possessions so enjoyable that he cannot part with them. Therefore, the system of “What’s yours is yours” protects what’s mine. That is the character of Sodom. Such a person wishes for an egocentric world. “What’s yours is yours” means “You stay out of my world.” Sodom’s main law was to prevent entrance by all outsiders.

The rasha is worse and is more in line with his underlying ego: “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is mine.” The

Sodom personality consciously abandoned egocentricity but reasserted itself in a sublimated form. That's Shakespeare: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." Despite accepting other people's rights with the attitude of "What's yours is yours," this personality is called a rasha: "*Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the Lord*" (Gen. 13:13). Their essence was evil. If man's egocentricity is compromised by a legal mechanism, he remains the same rasha. The only time man has improved is through fairness. For in fairness, man achieves some sense of objectivity.

## TZEDAKA

Rabbeinu Yona says that one who does not give tzedaka is a rasha, for he can't perceive of tzedaka due to his inherent character. He cannot tolerate tzedaka and is thereby a rasha. But if one gives tzedaka, as Torah says it is proper, he is an intermediate person and not a rasha. He does not give tzedaka intrinsically, but only after being told to do so.

"4 character traits in man" sets forth to define man's goodness. Man's first evaluation is in mishnah 5:10, his sense of possessions. The greatest imperfection is one who relates improperly to his possessions. This explains a passage in tefilas Neilah:

*So that we abandon the oppression of our*

*hands and that we repent and perform the statutes of Your will with a complete heart (Yom Kippur closing Neilah prayer).*

The last moment before Yom Kippur passes, we mention this mishnah's theme. The worst sin is not overcoming one's sense of possession.

The last possibility is the chassid, the pious man, who says "What's mine is yours and what's yours is yours." He operates on a different level which is the underlying concept of tzedaka; the height of tzedaka.

Tzedaka forms the very core of Judaism. Wherever one looks in Torah one finds tzedaka:

*For I have selected him, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is tzedaka and right..." (Gen. 18:19)*

God's very first words to Abraham regarding the founding of the nation concerns tzedaka: the institution that is Judaism's very essence and core.

*And Rabbi Chiyya bar Rav of Difti taught, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha says: "Anyone who averts his eyes from the obligation to give charity, it is as if he engages in idol worship. It is written here concerning charity: 'Beware that there be not a base [beliya'al] thought in your heart...and you will not give him' (Deut. 15:9), and it is written there concerning idolatry: 'Certain base [beliya'al] fellows have gone out'*

*(Ibid. 13:14). Just as there, in the latter verse, the word 'base [beliya'al]' is referring to idol worship, so too here [regarding charity] this expression [beliya'al] indicates a sin equal to idol worship" (Kesuvos 68a).*

Why is an uncharitable person considered an idolater? He's a metaphysician, he believes in God, he has knowledge! You would not think such a person is on par with an idolater. Maimonides explains why this is so at the end of his *Guide* (book III, chap. liv):

*Thus, says the Lord, "Let not the wise man glory in his [moral] wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorifies himself glory in this: that he understands and knows Me, for I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and tzedaka in the world; for these I desire," declares the Lord. (Jer. 9:22,23)*

Knowledge of God means that one possesses knowledge of the total reality; he understands the source of all reality as far as he is capable. He is related to God. In this matter, a person can feel proud. This pride is not egoism. It is the one healthy pride permitted to us. This pride is where one realizes his place in the universe, which is tied to the greatest humility. This is because once a person realizes his place in universe, he is filled with the greatest humility.

*"...for I the Lord act with kindness, jus-*

*tice, and tzedaka in the world; for these I desire," declares the Lord.*

Maimonides says, [God says], "as I am, so should you be" [mah Ani, af atah]. This means that if a person perceives God's character [middos Hashem], his own charitable acts should be a natural result. One should give tzedaka because God gives tzedaka. One understands that this is the underlying system of the universe and the scheme of creation. Once a person understands that, his meager positions are worthless. That is why tzedaka is the mark of an individual's level of perfection. If one possesses all other perfections but not tzedaka, it is worthless. He is a fraud because he may have intellectual knowledge, and he might be a great scholar and rav, but it's all worthless, because without giving tzedaka the person does not believe in what he is saying. His emotions don't follow his mind. Tzedaka is the barometer of perfection.

Why does the gemara equate the uncharitable person to an idolater? This is because his idea of God must be distorted. Torah holds of a psychological principle: if one harbors a bad trait and does not break it, his mind must become distorted. It is impossible to quarantine a bad trait where it will not affect the rest of one's personality and intellect. Why did Chazal prohibit the study of metaphysics until one excels to a great level? It is because one cannot obtain knowledge while harboring emotional distortions. Here, Judaism disagrees with the world's educational institutions which have no demand for prerequisite intellectual training or perfection of character. One cannot be a great metaphysician while partaking of poor character. Poor character must affect one's mind; it is impossible otherwise. This is a foregone conclusion in Judaism. This is why we are prohibited from reading the writings of flawed personalities. This is why the rabbis wrote Pirkei Avos.

Without perfection, all areas of study will be distorted. Maimonides says that one can study Torah, but if he has the wrong idea about God, he has no portion in Olam Haba [the after-life]. Tzedaka is the barometer [of perfection]. If one gives, then his ideas about God are true:

*“...for I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and tzedaka in the world; for these I desire,” declares the Lord.*

That refers to metaphysical knowledge. Judaism’s metaphysician is not limited to the intellect, but to metaphysics regarding God and how He relates to the world. Judaism’s metaphysician will follow the principle of imitating God— “as I am, so shall you be”—and he will give tzedaka because he is in line with God’s will to be charitable. But if one’s idea of God is corrupt [as he does not give tzedaka] he is akin to an idolater, for the definition of idolatry is harboring a wrong notion about God. If one’s idea of God is correct, he would have to copy God; it is a natural result. Maimonides says, “The perfected individual emulates God and acts towards the creatures as God does.” Meaning, just as God does not act out of selfishness [as God is bereft of all emotions] and God’s actions are purely in terms of His wisdom, so too an individual must remove himself from his emotion of selfishness and operate on a broader perspective of sustaining the species, acting out of kindness for others apart from himself [his own emotional desires] and apart from his own interests. But as long as one is tied to his self-interests like selfishness, self-recognition, and money, he is not functioning in a way similar to God but on an instinctual plane. Whereas God is completely removed from any instinctual activity.



*And you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy (Lev. 11:44)*

How are we holy like God? This is achieved by acting without any instinct, acting purely objectively. When operating under this framework of kindness, one performs a different type of kindness. This is why the mishnah discussing the 4 traits of man commences with the discussion of man's possessions, for this is the area of perfection: tzedaka is the barometer of perfection. In fact, the only mitzvah where God says one can test Him is tzedaka:

*"Please test Me in this" said the Lord of Hosts. "I will surely open the storehouses of heaven and empty out for you a blessing that is more than sufficient" (Malachi 3:10).*

This means that God returns one's tzedaka tenfold. Chazal say that one cannot perform a mitzvah just to receive a reward, but in tzedaka it is permissible. This is because if it is performed properly, it means God has to return the kindness because God is the source of all kindness, of all tzedaka.

Why is the idea of tzedaka the most paramount and the most basic idea in Judaism? It is because tzedaka runs contrary to a very strong type of thinking: "hedonistic logic" as I would call it. Hedonistic logic tells you that if you give something away, you are losing. And you cannot show that to be wrong. But the essence of Judaism is that this type of logic is absolutely false. Beyond the hedonistic reality is a greater reality. If one is not in line with that greater reality he is simply not in line with Judaism. He denies the whole basis of Judaism, which is that a reality exists beyond the physical and in-

stinctual reality that man perceives sensually. [God's promise above of abundant wealth for giving tzedaka overrides the hedonistic mathematical logic.] When one gives tzedaka it is not a loss, but a gain, because now he is in line with God. [The physical world is governed by laws that God created, controls and alters through His providence. All miracles in Torah convey this message, as does this promise of wealth if one tests God in tzedaka.]

Who is the chassid, the pious individual? The gemara says that Yoav ben Tzaruya had no concept of possession. They say his home was "in the desert." But would such a prominent person live in the desert? In actuality it means that his home was "like" a desert, where anyone could just walk in. [Yoav ben Tzaruya did not act like an owner regarding his home, but it was as publicly accessible as the desert.] This is the very nucleus of Judaism. The chassid views other creatures just like God views them, but in a human manner. He views others with total objectivity and understands that they must operate with the institution of possession, since they cannot survive otherwise. That is, people must have an outlet for their egocentricity [which is expressed in ownership]. The chassid's personality is "what's mine is yours and what's yours is yours." He is above that concept [of ownership]. He gives tzedaka like God. His possessions are not "his" in his eyes. (One must reciprocate good done for him and be charitable and perform kindness first, to those who showed him kindness.)

The gemara says that if one does not give tzedaka, God takes that money from him. He may not even know how God does this. But despite this [God taking it from him] it is still considered as if he gave tzedaka. This is because through losing his possessions and his realization that his loss was due to his failure to give tzedaka, it is considered tzedaka because the person broke his emotion [his attachment to money,

through recognizing his flaw].

Very few people give 10% tzedaka; it is a difficult mitzvah. I know only a handful of people who fulfill the mitzvah. And it is unrelated to one's financial status. If one does not give tzedaka when he is poor, he will not give when he is rich, and vice versa. It [generous character] is a personality trait, a perception. Maimonides says that no one becomes poor by giving tzedaka. A person will say, "If I had \$10 million, I would give \$1 million to tzedaka." But he says this now only because the money is presently not his. But the moment it is his, he can't give it away.

The gemara says that tzedaka is performed with one's money, but kindness is greater since it is performed with one's money and one's body [actions]. Any person who gives tzedaka because of the true reason must be on the highest level. This perfection is related to knowledge of God. God is the creator of the entire universe and what He gives is pure kindness and not to satisfy any emotion [as He has no emotions]. Abraham gave Malchitzedek tzedaka, for he was a priest to God:

*And King Malchitzedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him, saying, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your foes into your hand." And [Abram] gave him a tenth of everything. (Gen. 14:18-20)*

Malchitzedek had a yeshiva where he taught true ideas. That was Yeshivas Shame v'Ever.

The gemara equates both cases—tzedaka and idolatry—as Torah refers to both using the same word “beliya-al.” [Hiding one’s eyes from giving tzedaka is akin to idolatry.] Rashi explains “beliya-al” as “bli ole”—“without a yoke” [the yoke or burden of mitzvos]. But at first sight, it is difficult to relate the refusal of giving tzedaka to idolatry. Idolatry is a misconception regarding God, and [not giving] tzedaka is a separate matter, a poor character trait. What is the correlation? The answer is related to what we previously discussed:

*“Understand and know Me, for I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and tzedaka in the world; for these I desire,” declares the Lord.*

“Understand and know Me” refers to knowing God as the creator [of the universe and of Torah]. But how do we relate to God’s ethical ways [His morality]?

How is an idolater “without a yoke?” He sacrifices his children to his god! Ancient primitive idolatry was far more difficult than any Torah command, which involves no pain. How then is the idolater without a yoke? The answer is that “yoke” does not refer to something difficult or painful. People think that *“accepting the yoke of the heavenly kingdom; kabbalas ol malchus shamayim”* refers to accepting something very difficult. The goal of the idolater is ultimately to satisfy the self. He may perform the most painful acts, but his purpose is for himself: self-security, self-preservation, or self-enjoyment. He projects a false reality and pains himself [in his idolatrous rites] as he believes he will benefit himself. Torah is not painful, *“Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths, peaceful”* (Prov. 3:17). We don’t submit to a painful system. We submit to the reality of God. We break our emotions and subordinate

ourselves to God's reality. That is the meaning of yoke. The greatest kabbalas ol malchus shamayim is reading the Shima. If a person would attempt to explain how to accept the yoke of heaven, he would not suggest that it is performed by reading the Shima. He would say it is achieved by accepting upon himself all Torah's prohibitions and difficulties. But in fact, it is achieved by saying, "*Listen Israel: God is our God, God is one.*" "He is our God" means that His providence relates to us. "He is the eternal God, and He is one" refers to the recognition of God's reality, which is a reality outside of our own small world of personal wishes. This is the true acceptance of God. Accepting the reality [existing] outside of oneself is accepting the yoke of heaven, when the purpose is not self-benefit. The acceptance is for the reality itself.

Pirkei Avos 5:23 says, "*lifum tzaar agra; in proportion to the pain is the reward.*" But this does not mean that one should seek pain. Rather, it is a barometer of how dedicated one is to the system [of Torah]. But the pain [which one might experience] is not the essence. Those who look through the Shulchan Aruch to fulfill all chumros [halachic stringencies] are not intending on what Torah says. Rather, they are interested in suffering. Many times, this mindset is due to the feeling that through suffering, one will secure for himself some great gain. In that case, one operates without the yoke of heaven [since he is self-serving]. Chazal studied Torah under the best conditions and under the worst conditions, as Maimonides says, whether sick, blind or diseased, Chazal learned Torah. This is because that is reality, and a perfected person does not learn or perform mitzvos for any other reason. [Torah is what is true, and the perfected person seeks out and acts upon truth.] Shelo lishma is for the self. It has value only if it brings one to lishma. But if not, it has no value.

What is the meaning of "Ma hu, af atah; As God is, so shall

you be?" To my mind, it is a very interesting idea; it is unique and found only in Judaism. It means that there is a common denominator between understanding God's wisdom and [understanding] His kindness. You might ask that these sound like 2 different things: gaining wisdom of God is relegated to creation, but kindness is more of a human trait and we do not understand what is meant by God's kindness. In that case, how can we emulate God? It is difficult.

However, what it means is that if a person perceives God's wisdom, even in terms of creation, if he is on a very high level, what he sees in God's wisdom is a certain objectivity. He sees a truth that is far removed from any kind of human personal trait. Anyone who investigates creation arrives at this conclusion. It is difficult to discuss because such an appreciation is based on personal experience and from the process of investigation. One's delving into God's wisdom leaves him with a sense of a Being who is far above man's small outlook. It is a grand objective sense about God. Some great natural investigators have expressed this, among them is Albert Einstein, but also others. From studying God, one's appreciation of Him, is, in a sense, an appreciation of how removed God is from our smallmindedness and our constant preoccupation with ourselves. From seeing Torah's wisdom, one certainly gains this sense. But even from studying creation one sees this.

Now, what prevents a person from being a baal chessed—a kind person—Avos 5:10 says pertains to how one relates to his possessions. The breaking of the feeling of ownership is perfection, for the chassid embodies this: "What is mine is yours and what is yours is yours." And again, as we say in the Neilah prayer, "That we might abandon the oppression of our hands." This is perfection, and this is accomplished if one perceives enough of God's wisdom. Such a person will see

how small is the sense of “mine.” He comes under a different way of thinking:

*For My thoughts are not your thoughts  
(Isaiah 55:8)*

We can't understand God's kindness. How then is there a principle to emulate Him, “Ma hu, af atah?” Moshe and Job did not understand God's kindness. [How do we copy that which we don't understand?] But this much we understand: God's kindness is furthest removed from the sense of “mine.” That much we can perceive.

Judaism maintains an interesting thesis: understanding God's wisdom enlightens us to also understand His kindness.

*The Lord passed before him and proclaimed: “God, God, the Almighty [is] merciful and gracious, long-suffering, with abundant kindness and truth, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin”  
(Exod. 34:6,7)*

These traits of God are the greatest knowledge [they were God's response to Moshe's request to understand God's honor]. But what was the great wisdom that Moshe saw in the cleft of the rock (Exod. 33:22)? Of course, the verse cannot explain it to us. A person can only understand this according to his level of understanding and his depth of thought. Moshe Rabbeinu understood this in the greatest way. But it means that Moshe Rabbeinu was able to see to the greatest degree possible, the relationship between God's kindness and His wisdom. And Moshe saw how God's kindness fits into the

realm of the same Being who also displays infinite wisdom.

Moshe was not able to understand it by himself [independent of God's words]. I once gave the analogy of the watch. A person who does not understand the relationship between the ticking sound and the watch hands' movement can understand this relationship by seeing the watch's interior mechanisms. But that person will not be able to produce the watch from scratch [for although he now sees the cause of the ticking and the movements, he remains ignorant of the machine's ingenuity]. He cannot produce the watch on his own; that is a different kind of understanding, an understanding from the beginning [of the inventor], which God referred to as "*but My face you will not see*" (Exod. 33:23). Even Moshe Rabbeinu could not understand God that way. "*You will see My back*" (Ibid.) means that Moshe could understand the relationship between God's kindness and His wisdom. Moshe could see this relationship, but not from the beginning [he didn't have God's knowledge]. Moshe could [only] see the relationship between the ticking of the watch and the hands' motion.

Every Jew is obligated to understand this much of God's kindness. This is the principle of emulating God, where a person acquires that objective sense where he loses that sense of "mine." He does so because he sees that God's wisdom is not in line with that notion but is diametrically opposed to it. Such a person's kindness can operate on a totally different level: "What's mine is yours and what is yours is yours."

As we said, the chassid knows that people have that weakness of needing to express their ownership. The chassid has reached such an objective level that he tolerates even the subjective framework in which others operate. That is emulating God. God tolerates man in spite of his nonsensical imperfections. The chassid also tolerates the "mine" in others.

We now see that the analogy is complete between the "bliya-



al” [rebelliousness] of one abstaining from giving tzedaka, and the “bliya-al” of the idolater. Because if a person is lacking in kindness, he is lacking in knowledge of God. And idolatry is a complete lack of knowledge of God and of accepting the yoke of heaven. The idolater is unable to remove himself from [catering to] the self, which is the ultimate objective of idolatry. Idolatry represents the highest level of self-indulgence.

It is the unique principle of Judaism that God’s wisdom is intricately tied with God’s kindness. An imperfection regarding man’s kindness in emulating God is also an imperfection insofar as his knowledge of God. That is the gemara in Kesuvos about bliya-al. The source of one’s abstention to give tzedaka is idolatrous. The person has no knowledge of God and he doesn’t understand God’s kindness. Therefore, he cannot emulate God. It is an exact analogy. The idolater can never conceive of kindness in any real way. He is devoid of any sense of objective kindness. And the Jew is enjoined to perform kindness, not just on an emotional level, but kindness on the level of emulating God where the sense of “mine” does not register anymore.

That is the verse of *“be wise and understand Me for I am God who performs kindness, justice and tzedaka in the land.”* Knowledge of God is related to kindness. Abraham perceived that unification between wisdom of God and God’s kindness. That was his greatness. Why did Abraham adhere to kindness over other perfections? It is because kindness is an intrinsic concept that is tied to knowledge of God.

Everyone seeks God’s kindness to be expressed in individual providence (hashgacha pratyos; God’s specific intervention in their lives) because they are interested in the self. But it should be emphasized that God’s kindness is manifest in Tehillim (Psalms), in all His creations, in natural law and in how man is created [designed]. In his *Guide*, Maimonides explains that the universe unraveled itself in a way that on the whole, man should

be able to obtain not just necessities, but even enjoyments, in infinite ways. The way the body is constructed, man can cure himself from most maladies naturally, and not only through divine intervention. A person must be outside the self to perceive God's kindness. (Emulating God is relegated only towards kindness and not to other traits, like God's jealousy.) The reason to emulate God is because a normal person desires to be in line with reality. And when one sees what the greater reality is, he should naturally strive to be in line with that reality.

## 5:11 PERSONALITIES: ANGER & APPEASEMENT

THERE ARE 4 TEMPERAMENTS AMONG DISPOSITIONS: [A PERSON WHO IS] EASY TO ANGER AND EASY TO APPEASE; HIS GAIN IS CANCELED BY HIS LOSS. [A PERSON WHO IS] HARD TO ANGER BUT [ALSO] HARD TO APPEASE; HIS LOSS IS CANCELED BY HIS GAIN. [A PERSON WHO IS] HARD TO ANGER, BUT EASY TO APPEASE; [THAT'S A] PIOUS PERSON. [A PERSON WHO IS] EASY TO ANGER AND HARD TO APPEASE; [THAT IS A] WICKED PERSON.

The first personality possesses no goodness, but he is not a rasha. And there is a question regarding the pious person, the

chassid: as it is difficult to anger him—but not impossible—one could question his piety, for he finally becomes angry [anger must never be expressed]. One who never gets angry would appear to be on a higher level. We must also understand this series of these 6 mishnayos. Perfection, as we said, comprises the intellectual and the ethical components, and this is the 2nd of the ethical mishnayos. Why is anger addressed? It is not the only character trait. Therefore, we must understand why the mishnah chose anger.

The first mishnah regarding possessions is most universal. It addresses the person's view of an external reality. That is the most basic idea. Anger is second in line; it is expressed when reality conflicts with one's wishes.

The mishnah's first personality—one easily angered and easily appeased—is [at first] unable to accept reality [expressed by his anger]. But what does his ease of appeasement imply? Appeasement is the ability to adjust to reality. Thus, his normal state is the inability to accept that which conflicts with his wishes, but he can make a [subsequent] adjustment, and even accept a conflicting reality. Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*[A person who is] easy to anger and easy to appease: His gain is canceled by his loss, as the loss is greater than the gain. For what is the use of his being appeased quickly, as [long as] his anger lay in his lap, and he will [often] come to sin. And "who will be able to fix what he has made crooked" during the time of his anger, even if he is quickly appeased.*

The second personality does not anger easily, but he also is

not appeased easily. There are some matters he finds intolerable. He can accept most matters, and therefore rarely gets angry. You might think that this personality is worse than the first, as he finds certain matters intolerable. Why is this second personality better than the first?

On a practical level, people would rather deal with someone who angers easily but is also appeased easily because you can always work with such a personality afterwards and appease him. But the second personality is stubborn and cannot be appeased easily. However, Judaism uses a different type of barometer when gauging perfection. That barometer is reality: How much in line with reality is a person's emotional state? The normal state of the easily-angered person reveals that he is not in line with reality, as his constant anger displays his intolerance for reality. While it is true that he is appeased easily, that is not his constant norm. Most of his existence conflicts with reality and therefore he is worse.

*It is a fundamental part of religion to acknowledge that God bestows prophecy upon the sons of men. But prophecy does not descend except on a wise man, eminent in wisdom, of strong character, never overcome by his instincts, but with his intellect, always rules over his instincts... (Maimonides, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 7:1)*

The second personality—one not easily angered but also not easily appeased—accepts reality on the whole. He is in a better state. It could be that this personality suffers from a greater ethical imperfection because he has areas that are intolerable, and he is not easily appeased. Nonetheless, most of

his life is lived within reality. One must understand that an ethical imperfection is an imperfection [only] insofar as it affects one's sense of reality. For example, one may be intolerant in a single matter which is never expressed. This makes such an imperfection [his intolerance] irrelevant regarding his perfection, provided his energies are in line with reality. In his *Guide*, Maimonides says that ethics is only necessary in a society. One living on an island needs no ethical perfection. He means that if one has an ethical imperfection, but he can avoid it his entire lifetime and it does not interfere with his pursuit of reality, he need not attempt to correct that imperfection. It's part of his emotional state that he loses when he dies. Everyone has their own mishigas (quirks). No one expects others to have perfect emotions; it's impossible. The value [harm] of emotions is only in as much as it interferes with one's sense of reality.

One easily angered and not easily appeased is a rasha. He conflicts with reality his entire life, and he cannot adjust to reality even after the fact. He has no concept of reality.

Finally, there is the chassid, the pious man: he is slow to anger and easily appeased. But we questioned above that this personality should never become angry. Anger should not be a rarity but an impossibility, as Maimonides said. Rabbeinu Yona answers:

*And it is not necessary that he never get angry, as sometimes a person needs to get angry out of zeal for God, like Pinchas. Hence it said, "hard to anger," since he still needs to get angry—however it should be with difficulty at the times when he is not allowed to be without anger. And about this the wise men of ethics have said, "Do*

*not be sweet, lest they swallow you up.”  
And it is also a good thing to be appeased  
immediately—even when his anger is still  
upon him. And not after his anger has left  
him, but precisely at the time of his anger  
is he easy to appease—as this is from the  
trait of piety and good-heartedness.*

Rabbeinu Yona says that the chassid gets angry as seen in Pinchas: he was angry for God’s sake. But I would say that is not anger, but a different phenomenon where one cannot tolerate a world that conflicts with God’s will. It is the exact opposite of anger. Anger is when reality is not in line with oneself. Pinchas’ anger was not personal. Why then did Rabbeinu Yona mix 2 issues? Pinchas was jealous for God’s honor, which is unrelated to personal anger.

Rabbeinu Yona was a psychologist. He is saying that it is impossible to have anger about matters that conflict with God’s reality, without that being an extension of personal anger. Otherwise [without some element of personal anger] Pinchas could not have been angry for God’s sake. In such a case, it might be disturbing that a distortion is taking place, but to have anger for God’s sake would be impossible without one feeling personal anger. It is an amazing Rabbeinu Yona. He held that a purely philosophical anger does not exist. A real philosopher never gets angry. But you see that halacha demands that one can’t always act purely philosophically. Judaism demands that anger be applied [as was the case of Pinchas]. Judaism asks man to direct his emotions towards proper purposes. But even when the anger is expressed by a chassid, he is easily appeased, even at the time of his anger. Even in the process of employing his anger he is not overcome by that anger.

Not easily angered means that the chassid reserves his anger to be expressed only when reality is in danger, as Pinchas portrayed. He is not moved emotionally and is like a good parent who displays anger to save a child from danger. The anger is supported by reality. God too expresses “anger” only when our actions can destroy or endanger our very existence. And even then, God is easily appeased, which means that since His objective is our benefit, once a person repents, God immediately accepts his teshuvah:

*He is difficult to anger and easy to appease. For He does not desire the death of the sinner, but in his return from his ways and that he lives, and until his death He anticipates his repentance. If he repents, he is immediately accepted (High Holidays “Unisaneh Tokef” prayer)*

It [difficult to anger and easy to appease] is a metaphor for God whose anger is a metaphor: punishment is only when our existence is endangered.

## THE ESSENCE OF LIFE

[Returning to Maimonides point that one’s intellectual abilities are limited], one who thinks that he can overcome his intellectual shortcomings is mistaken because it is “a gift

from God” (Abarbanel, Num. 6:23 quoting Koheles). We each have intrinsic limitations. Some people find this depressing as this removes one’s motivations to advance intellectually. [Rather,] one’s goal should be self-improvement. But this awareness of intrinsic limitation dampens a certain fire and zeal. Our society breeds this fantasy that anyone can do anything. And it’s not just society, but religious Jews echo this opinion. It is an attractive idea which the Jews attempt to support from midrashim. This leads to unhappiness as one finds that reality rebuts this fantasy.

One’s goal should be the appreciation of wisdom. This is realistic and one’s limitations do not affect this goal to a great degree. If a person trains his mind through Torah, although he may not be able to innovate the ideas of Rav Chaim, but amazingly, he can understand them. One should be comfortable and satisfied with the idea that he has this ability to understand God’s wisdom. It should not disturb a person that he cannot break open a sugya [decipher a talmudic portion] himself with the same genius and enlightened thought of Rav Chaim. It is only because one is rooted in the world of the comparative that he seeks ego gratification by comparing himself to others to view himself as superior, through which his Torah enjoyment is diminished. But if he viewed his situation objectively, although he can’t become a Rav Chaim or the Rav, he should be satisfied to understand the ideas of these great minds. It is an amazing phenomenon that an average mind who trains himself properly can understand a good amount of God’s wisdom. One’s goal should be to partake in understanding God’s wisdom, in ideas. Every person can do this. This depends on training one’s mind in methodology and understanding. If one does this, he can appreciate the wisdom of the gedolim. The fact that we can appreciate a Tosfos or a Ramban should be our concern, and not whether we innovat-



ed it. We should be very happy to understand them. This attitude should give one life and happiness. One need not originate the idea; [even without doing so] he is partaking of the wisdom. This should be the motivation of someone in the yeshiva. The Rav said that at times, people were upset with the yeshiva because it did not provide them enough [training] in learning. The Rav replied, “Success in learning depends upon one’s abilities and his desire, and desire is more important.” It is true: if one has the desire, he will be able to perfect his mind and appreciate wisdom.

The truth is that the small differences you find among friends—one is sharper than the other—does not impact one’s appreciation of wisdom. No mind, however sharp, does not miss certain points. Maybe one friend contributes more to a discussion, but in terms of contributing to the ideas of Torah through learning with a chavrusa [study partner], everyone partakes of this. A person should not value the relative [“Am I smarter?”] but the absolute: the ability to appreciate God’s wisdom. This must be one’s prime motivation, as herein lies perfection and one’s intellectual gifts do not impact this pursuit. This should be the realistic goal of someone in yeshiva. It is an opportunity in life, and one must view life on the whole and not miss out in life by not partaking of God’s wisdom. One should not be motivated by false motivation but by true motivation. That enjoyment and that appreciation of God’s wisdom is the very essence of life, the essence of a person’s enjoyment in this world.

When interpreting the words of Chazal, one must be very careful. Many times, their statements give certain implications. The question is if the implication is our own projection, or one which stems from Chazal’s words. One statement is “When will I reach the actions of my forefathers?” This can be taken to mean that one is always unhappy because he is

never as great as the Patriarchs. This person is doomed to eternal unhappiness because he will never attain that level. But the proper interpretation is the contrary: one should have before him the models of perfection, even though he can never reach their levels. That should not disturb a person. One should be able to study the perfection of previous generations and appreciate them, and always strive to partake of their models, but not because one is in competition with the Patriarchs. The competitive factor one projects onto the scene destroys one's ability to properly partake and it destroys the perspective. Aspiring to the perfections of the Patriarchs is not a competitive idea, which is self-congratulatory. Such a phenomenon is a value only in this society, and not in Torah. It destroys a person. The correct attitude is happiness in having the models of perfection before oneself to improve oneself. Ultimately, what removes one's happiness is the world of the relative and the world of the competitive. If a person can live in his own reality, he could be infinitely happy. But most people cannot. One's striving should be in self-evaluation regarding how much he is partaking in reality, versus the emotions that are destroying him.

When a person sins, it stems from his distortion of reality. But all one needs is a small bit of reality to convince him that the sin is real. And when a society supports certain ideas, one cannot cease from partaking in sinful activities. Society endorses sin as real [as value]. That is why only with wisdom can one expose society's values as distorted and corrupt and remove the influence that society projects, which gives a sense of reality to their poor values. Only through the wisdom that Moshe taught the Jews in Egypt were the Jews able to see through Egypt's culture and values and realize that Egypt was corrupt. The Jews could no longer look up to Egypt, for how much respect can one have for foolish people? Only wisdom

can break down the value one has for a society. Society's influence is a powerful force. But down deep, a person recognizes that the only thing that is real is wisdom. And no matter how prominent a person is, once you realize that he is a fool, you cannot have any respect for him. I once knew a person who had great respect for a prominent and wealthy man. The person then met this prominent man and saw that his lifestyle was very foolish, which caused him to lose all respect for him. Human nature will never respect stupidity and ignorance. There is a part of man that respects wisdom above all else. Therefore, one has a tool—wisdom—[that he may engage to conquer all other influences]. Wisdom underlies everything in Judaism. Thus, no matter the strength of the emotion, the respect for wisdom overrides other influences.

Aristotle said that no one argues that an infant has the most pleasurable existence: it eats, it sleeps, etc. But no one would want to revert to that stage where there is no knowledge yet. Although man is pleasure driven, man will never give up his knowledge and his wisdom. He recognizes these as the most valuable components, even if he could have the infant's greater enjoyment. That is the force that Torah works with.

To recap our review of mishnayos 5:10-5:15, these mishnayos address perfection, which comprises 2 areas: ethics and intelligence, which are intertwined and inseparable. Thus, a talmid chocham is at the center of Judaism: socially, philosophically and in all areas as Avos 2:5 says: "*An ignorant person cannot be pious.*" Perfection is ethical and intellectual. One without the other is not perfection.

## 5:12 PERSONALITIES: UNDERSTANDING & MEMORY

THERE ARE 4 TEMPERAMENTS AMONG STUDENTS: QUICK TO UNDERSTAND AND QUICK TO FORGET: HIS GAIN IS CANCELED BY HIS LOSS. [A STUDENT WHO IS] SLOW TO UNDERSTAND AND SLOW TO FORGET: HIS LOSS IS CANCELED BY HIS GAIN. [A STUDENT WHO IS] QUICK TO UNDERSTAND AND SLOW TO FORGET: HE IS A SAGE. [A STUDENT WHO IS] SLOW TO UNDERSTAND AND QUICK TO FORGET: THAT IS A BAD PORTION.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*Quick to understand and quick to forget: His loss is greater. Since he forgets immediately, what is the use of that which he comprehends and knows quickly; behold, he forgets everything. But slow to understand and slow to forget: his gain is greater. As even if it comes to him with great toil, he does not forget after he knows [it]. And both of them should not desist from Torah study, as they have a good reward from their labor. And we learn from this mishnah to give preference to one who remembers over one who forgets. If they do not have enough to support both of them, they should support the one who remembers. This mishnah does not mention pious or wicked as it is not relevant here, since*

*the mind of a person is from God. It is as the wise men of ethics said, "The mind is a gift, but [character] is acquired."*

Rabbeinu Yona teaches that there are personal considerations: both, one with good memory and one without good memory must equally engage in Torah study. And there's also another consideration regarding the Jewish nation, explaining why one must opt to support a person with better memory [greater minds help the nation in greater measure]. In the Slabodka kollel, they took in gedolim. [They wished to ensure the greatest Torah for future generations.] But as Rabbeinu Yona said—*"And both of them should not desist from Torah study, as they have a good reward from their labor"*—Torah study offers perfection not only from the knowledge obtained, but also from the very activity of study, explaining why even a forgetful person gains. Insofar as one is involved in Torah study, his love is Torah and that is a perfection of the soul. That is the highest level of existence, and it does not matter that one forgets all that he learns. A non-religious man once asked why a certain person always sat and learned, as he was not a great scholar. But this man did not understand this Rabbeinu Yona: the activity itself is the good. You know that one is on a high level if he has a longing to learn Torah: *"How I love your Torah, it is my speech all day"* (Psalms 119:97); *"Were not your Torah my delight..."* (Psalms 119:92). All of Psalms [share this sentiment]. It means that one must enjoy Torah. That is perfection. The perfected person enjoys the involvement in Torah and it is irrelevant if he remembers it. A person can have a great memory but learn only one hour a day. Is that the perfection of the soul? That is not perfection, for he does not enjoy learning but studies merely to accumulate knowledge. Perfection depends not on memory but on one's enjoyment of

the process of learning. But if one has retention and mastery of Torah, he has a different [greater and better] view of Torah. However, not everyone can attain that level, for that is a “gift from God,” as Rabbeinu Yona states.

In his *Guide*, Maimonides says that there is a kind of learning that requires no memory. It means that in learning, the soul attains a certain intuition. The Rav once said, “My intuition is that this is the way in halacha, and my intuition is halacha.” One does not lose this type of knowledge. You do not need memory for this.

## 5:15 PERSONALITIES: RETENTION & LOSS

THERE ARE 4 TEMPERAMENTS AMONG THOSE WHO SIT BEFORE THE SAGES: THE SPONGE, THE FUNNEL, THE STRAINER, AND THE SIEVE. THE “SPONGE”: BECAUSE IT ABSORBS EVERYTHING. THE “FUNNEL”: BECAUSE IT LETS IN AT [ONE END] AND LETS OUT AT [THE OTHER]. THE “STRAINER”: BECAUSE IT LETS THE WINE OUT AND RETAINS THE SEDIMENT. THE “SIEVE”: BECAUSE IT LETS OUT THE [INFERIOR] FLOUR AND RETAINS THE FINE FLOUR.

What is the sponge? He absorbs everything, whereas the

funnel is the opposite: the learning enters him and then it leaves. He retains nothing. The third personality is the strainer: he holds onto the dregs [the sediment and not the wine]. And the last is the sieve, as he refines the flour. This mishnah deals with creativity. mishnah 5:12 addressed retention: mastery in terms of memory. Here in 5:15 we deal with svara, definition: *“the purpose/reward of learning is definition”* (Berachos 6b). The sponge does not discriminate but absorbs everything. Why is this not a good level? Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*[This is] a metaphor for a student who does not distinguish between a correct argument [and one that is not], similar to a sponge that collects and absorbs water, whether it is dirty or whether it is clear.*

This means that regarding creativity, even when sitting before the greatest chocham, the mind is such that there exist different qualities in the rebbe’s definitions, svaras. There are different levels: some definitions are nice, but others are eye openers. A chocham [or rebbe] cannot give a definition on just one level: sometimes he has a breakthrough and other times the definition is nice [less impressive]. This is an amazing mishnah. For no matter who the rebbe/chocham is, if you are learning before him and you cannot discriminate and discern between the quality of his definitions—at his finest and also at his most mediocre levels—and you absorb everything equally, you will never become a great talmid chocham. This explains those who sit before a chocham for years and years without growing. Einstein had a student with whom he was close, but the student never amounted to much. From here we see that one can have the greatest teacher and not benefit. The

ability must exist in the student to discriminate his teacher's ideas. He must be able to discern even in what his rebbe teaches and determine if his rebbe said something wrong.

What is the purpose of these mishnayos? Either one is born as a great chocham or he is not. However, much has to do with one's approach to thinking. Training a child to merely remember everything can destroy him. You cannot change someone's natural abilities, but poor training can detract from his potential by giving him a false attitude.

The next personality is the funnel. His knowledge goes in and then leaves him. The strainer is next, he retains the bad [inferior knowledge] and throws away the good. He is attracted to the inferior definition. But as we're talking about [hearing Torah from] the wise men of Israel, when it says that he retains the "bad," the definition is still a good svara, but the student has no perception of what the good svara is. And the sponge has no opinion whatsoever. But the strainer makes distinctions in what he learns, but he follows his emotions and selects definitions emotionally and not intellectually. He functions with preconceived notions, which are the hardest to remove. The problem is that when one first comes to a rebbe to learn Torah, he is yet not a scholar, a lamdan. Without knowledge, he is unable to be discerning. Therefore, he uses his emotions to accept and reject his rebbe's definitions. The way to avoid operating as a strainer—with personal prejudice—is to listen carefully and let one's mind work. A student must be primed before entering a shiur. He must be taught to discriminate between his emotions and his intellect. He must allow his mind to hear Torah and block out his emotions, allowing the reasonable part of his mind to function [freely] so that part can discern.

Our society teaches that anyone can attain any level of intellect. However, this is limited as it is a "gift from God."



People think if they could do anything that they would be very happy. But they do not realize the amount of sadness and pain this causes, since reality always steps in and exposes their innate limitations. People would be much happier by rationally accepting their limitations. The mishnah speaks in terms of reality and therefore emphasizes man's innate abilities. Nevertheless, one cannot develop their abilities without a clear understanding of how the thinking process works, and what it means to have a theoretical appreciation. That is why the mishnah spends time explaining it.

The last personality is the sieve. He understands svara so well that he can even refine it. The Rav never [simply] repeated a Rav Chaim: when he said over Rav Chaim's ideas, it was his own [refined] version. He understood it to his finest detail. He embodied this sieve personality.

The difficult personality is the funnel: the knowledge enters him and then leaves. This seems identical to the personality in mishnah 5:12, "*quick to understand and quick to forget.*" However, the funnel teaches an interesting element necessary for one to become a lamdan, a scholar. That is that one must linger on a definition. Some people hear an idea and 2 minutes later they are on to the next topic.

Skipping to the end of Avos (6:11) the mishnah says that "*God has 5 acquisitions in His world: Torah, heaven and earth, Abraham, Temple, and the nation of Israel.*" What is meant that Abraham was an acquisition? The proof offered by the mishnah is this:

*Blessed is Abraham to the high God, Who  
acquired heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19).*

How does this show Abraham to be an acquisition? Let us look at mishnah 5:18:

## 5:18 MERIT &amp; EXISTENCE

ANYONE WHO BRINGS MERIT TO THE MANY, SIN DOES NOT RESULT FROM HIM. AND ANYONE WHO BRINGS THE MANY TO SIN IS NOT PERMITTED TO REPENT. MOSHE—WHO WAS MERITORIOUS AND BROUGHT MERIT TO THE MANY—THE MERIT OF THE MANY IS APPENDED TO HIM, AS IT IS STATED (DEUT. 33:21), “HE FULFILLED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD AND HIS STATUTES WITH ISRAEL.” JEROBOAM—WHO SINNED AND CAUSED THE MANY TO SIN—THE SIN OF THE MANY IS APPENDED TO HIM, AS IT IS STATED (I KINGS 15:30), “FOR THE SINS OF JEROBOAM THAT HE SINNED AND THAT HE CAUSED ISRAEL TO SIN.”

The gemara discusses this:

*Whomever accumulates merit for the public will not have sin come to his hand; but whoever causes the public to sin has no ability to repent. What is the reason that whoever accumulates merit for the public will not have sin come to his hand? It is so that he will not be in Gebe-nom while his students are in the Garden of Eden, as it is stated: “For You will not abandon my soul to the netherworld; neither will You suffer Your godly one to see the pit” (Psalms 16:10).*

The explanation is that since he benefited the public and his

sin would cause him to be in Gehenom, this would separate him from his students. Therefore, sin won't come to his hands in order to keep him together with his students.

*On the other hand, whoever causes the public to sin has no ability to repent, so that he will not be in the Garden of Eden while his students are in Gehenom, as it is stated: "A man who is laden with the blood of any person shall hasten his steps to the pit; none will support him" (Proverbs 28:17).*

God does not want his students in Gehenom while he is in the Garden of Eden. [He should rightly suffer the same fate as his students whom he caused to sin.] Maimonides comments:

*Whomever benefits the public, God will repay him by withholding sin from him. And whomever causes the public to sin, God punishes him by preventing him from performing teshuvah. And this is clear with no difficulty when you understand all that is included in the eighth chapter [Maimonides' introduction to Pirkei Avos].*

Apparently, Maimonides senses some difficulty here, which he says is addressed in his introduction to Avos. What is the difficulty? And regarding one who accumulates merit for the public, why does such a good person need God to protect him from a sin? He has free will [he can avoid sin himself]. He should not wind up in Gehenom if he properly exercises his free will.

The answer is that “*Sin does not come from him*” does not mean that this person who benefits the public isn’t one of the causes of sin. It means that he [bodily] is not a sinner in action. “*So he should not be in Gehenom and his students in the Garden of Eden*” means that he does not perform the act of sin that would cause him to be in Gehenom.

The other side is “*one who causes the public to sin is not permitted to repent,*” which means that God prevents his teshuvah. Now of course, such a concept produces great difficulties. How can we say that God, who is the ultimate in kindness, prevents a person from teshuvah? Had this person not been prevented by God, he would repent and be totally righteous, a tzaddik gamur. But God steps in and prevents his teshuvah, and because of that he dies as a sinner and inherits Gehenom. It’s very difficult to comprehend that God should interfere with a person’s free will that results in his utter destruction. Torah says that God is “*merciful and gracious, long-suffering, with abundant kindness and truth*” (Exod. 34:6), and here God turns against the person. Not only does God destroy him, but He prevents him from doing teshuvah. It would seem that the last resort man has is teshuvah, and here, God prevents him from engaging it.

Maimonides explains this in the eighth chapter of his introduction to Pirkei Avos and he says it is based in Prophets (Isaiah 6):

*You’re going to hear things, but you won’t understand them. You will see, but you won’t have any knowledge. The heart of this nation will be such that they won’t be able to understand and hear and gain knowledge. Lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and their hearts will understand, and they will repent, and I will be good to them.*

God tells Isaiah, “*Due to the heart of the nation, I won’t allow them to repent.*” That is one question and it obviously involves an important universal principle. But teshuvah incorporates other matters too that require understanding. Without understanding the general principle of teshuvah, many other details too won’t be clear.

On the surface, teshuvah seems like a logical phenomenon: once the person repents and is no longer the same person, he does not relate to sin as he did before. Therefore, he deserves a different fate [not punishment]. But we see it is not such a simple matter, as Maimonides says in his Laws of Teshuvah (3:14):

*Even if one who denied the existence of God all of his life but in the end repented, has a share in the World to Come, for it is said: “Peace, peace, to him that is far off, and to him that is near, says the Lord; and I will heal him” (Is. 57.19). All of the wicked, and apostates and their like who turned in repentance, whether publicly or secretly, should be accepted back into the folds of Israel, even as it is said: “Return ye backsliding children” (Jer. 3.22)—though he still be backsliding, for, he repented secretly and not publicly, yet is his repentance accepted.*

If one is no longer the same person after he repents, why do we need verses teaching that God accepts one who does teshuvah? Also interesting is the rabbis’ statement:

*King David prayed that he should not die while still tainted by sin before he could do teshuvah.*

Why did King David need to pray for this? Why does prayer help, if with free will one can avoid sin? What King David prayed for seems to be God's realm: God is the one who determines how long one lives and if he has time to repent before dying. How does such a prayer fit in?

*Do not sweep me away with sinners, or  
[snuff out] my life with murderers (Psalms  
26:9).*

If one is supposed to die at a certain time, that is his time. [Also] the prayer seems in applicable: one need not pray to have free will.

Maimonides lists 24 things that prevent teshuvah (Laws of Teshuvah chap. 4). He says,

*4 of them are great sins for which God  
does not allow one to repent because of  
their severity.*

This is the same as our mishnah 5:18. Other sins also meet with this fate, like a father who does not reprimand his son who goes off the good path and follows an evil path. Also included is one who says, "I will sin, then I will repent."

The other groups [that prevent teshuvah] are different:

*5 things close the path to teshuvah before  
those who perform them: one who sepa-  
rates himself from the public [Teshuvah  
is closed off to this person] because at  
the time that the public does teshuvah,  
he is not with them [in Temple] and is  
therefore not meritorious with them.*

*One who argues on the words of the wise men, because of his argument this causes him to separate from them and he does not know the path to teshuvah [which is learned only from the wise men.]*

Both of these make sense as reasons for one not being able to perform teshuvah.

Then there are matters to which teshuvah cannot apply, like the need to request forgiveness from another. The case is where one cannot determine whom he harmed, for he cursed the masses, in which case there is no specific person whom he cursed from whom he can ask forgiveness. Again, this is a reasonable explanation for one's inability to do teshuvah.

Another group is of matters on which one typically will not do teshuvah because he imagines these matters are not sins, but they are serious sins. An example is one who eats at his friend's house, not knowing that this friend has insufficient food, but his friend shares his food anyway. The person did not think he performed a sin [and therefore would not even think of doing teshuvah]. Maimonides means that this group are sins that are unaffected by one's conscience, to the degree that they should be affected. Certain sins awaken a person's guilt, which trigger a realization of sin. But in other sins, the sense of guilt is absent, such as gazing at a forbidden sexual partner. These cases we understand as well.

Finally, Maimonides classifies certain matters for which one might feel guilty, but by nature, one's involvement draws him in constantly, making it difficult to separate from such sins. This includes talebearing and speaking evil about others.

Now, returning to his first category where teshuvah is prevented by an external force outside the self (God does not al-

low him to do teshuvah), it is not a natural reason and is a unique case, and what our mishnah 5:18 discusses. What Maimonides says in his Laws of Teshuvah 4:6 is interesting:

*Even though all these matters hinder teshuvah, they do not prevent it, and if one does teshuvah from them, one is a penitent person and has a portion in the World to Come.*

What exactly does he mean that these 24 matters are hindrances but are not preventive? All 24 except the first make sense: one can reconsider, detect his sin and repent; there are obstacles towards teshuvah, but one can overcome them. But how does this apply to God preventing one's teshuvah? It would seem this is a preventive measure and not a mere obstacle one can overcome. Furthermore, in his Laws of Teshuvah, Maimonides uses the term "deter" (mi'akave) and not the word "prevent" (monaya) as he does in his commentary on Avos 5:18.

There is an interesting Yerushalmi [portion in the Jerusalem Talmud] (Makkos 5a, chap. 2 towards the end of halacha 6):

*They asked wisdom, "What is the punishment of the sinner?" Wisdom replied, "Sinners chase evil." They asked prophecy, "What is the punishment of the sinner?" Prophecy replied, "The soul that sins should die." They asked God, "What is the punishment of the sinner?" God replied, "Perform teshuvah and be forgiven, as it is written, 'Good and upright is God; therefore, He shows sinners the way' (Psalms 25:8)."*



We see from here that teshuvah is no simple matter. It is not that one simply does teshuvah and there's nothing more to it. For wisdom said there is no way out, and even prophecy said the sinner should die. Only God said that one should perform teshuvah. But we question how prophecy can differ from God's response, as prophecy comes from God.

Teshuvah spans 2 areas: psychology and philosophy. After repentance, one is not the same person psychologically [and philosophically], and any punishment that he deserved while he was a sinner no longer applies [there is no corruption left in the person to correct through punishment]. That is a straightforward phenomenon: he has made amends psychologically and philosophically. But in Judaism there something more: a metaphysical component.

The question is how God can prevent a person from teshuvah. In his eighth chapter in his Introduction to Avos, Maimonides tries to explain this. But after studying it, you don't feel satisfied:

*It is impossible to punish Pharaoh and Egyptians if they did teshuvah. Therefore, God prevented their teshuvah. This is not a strange thing that God punishes a person by removing teshuvah because God knows man's sins and how to evaluate them. Sometimes the punishment is in this world and sometimes in the next world, and sometimes it is in both worlds. And in this world, there are different punishments: sometimes in man's body and sometimes in his wealth, and sometimes in both. For instance, God prevented Yirovam ben Nivat from using his hand, or God prevents one from seeing like the men from Sodom.*

*That is the same way that God removes one's desire to repent until one reaches the point that he no longer desires to do teshuvah.*

But there is a large difference in this last case. In all other punishments, God intends to benefit the person by directing him towards repentance; that is the purpose of punishment. But in removing teshuvah, you cannot offer this reasoning. Maimonides says this is simple to understand, but we don't know what he means. Maimonides continues:

*This is all God's wisdom and we are not to get involved in this wisdom as far as God is concerned [by asking] "Why did God give this or that punishment?" just like we don't know why God created a certain creature with a particular form or shape, asking why it isn't otherwise.*

The answer to this question is that we don't understand one metaphysical premise found in the opening of Maimonides' Laws of Torah Fundamentals:

*God is existence and He is the source of everything else. All that exists, exists only because He exists. If you would imagine God not existing, nothing else can exist.*

Our existence is contingent existence while God's existence is essential. Maimonides continues:

*And if you would imagine that nothing else exists but God, He alone would exist.*

This means that a human's existence here and in the next world is ultimately based on God's will. God designed both: our physical and metaphysical existences. These are based on God's wisdom just like all other existences. In this area, man cannot ask any questions such as, "Why did God design man this way and not another way?" These are nonsensical questions because the answer depends on knowing God's essence and man cannot have this knowledge: "*For you cannot know Me while you are alive*" (Exod. 33:20).

Now we understand the Yerushalmi: "*Prophecy said, 'The sinner must die.'*" Here, "prophecy" does not refer to a specific prophetic message, but to ultimate knowledge beyond philosophical knowledge. Philosophical knowledge works through a process of investigation, like science. But prophecy is direct access of the idea without going through the process of analysis. It [prophecy] is like one who sees the table, but the blind man [philosophical inquiry] must use a process to prove the table exists. The prophet can see the table as he sees ideas, directly through the prophetic vision [ultimate knowledge, absolute truths].

They asked prophecy what should happen to the soul of the sinner and it said the soul should die. This means that once a person deviates from the plan of his existence, he no longer has existence. This does not mean that God will destroy him. It means that his existence depends on God's will. Therefore, the moment the sinner deviates from the proper path, metaphysically he ceases to exist. When they asked wisdom, they meant psychologically and philosophically. Wisdom's answer was that one who is steeped in sin will [psychologically and philosophically] always remain a sinner. That was not a response regarding metaphysics, like the response given by prophecy. Prophecy responded that the sinner ceases to partake of metaphysical existence and therefore teshuvah is im-

possible; there is no person [in existence] anymore. But God's reply to the fate of a sinner is, "*Do to teshuvah and I will forgive.*" This means that God does not terminate the sinner's life, even though he lives a worthless life. We cannot understand this answer, but God causes him to have existence so he should repent. Even though in terms of ultimate wisdom [prophecy] a sinner should not exist, God gives the sinner existence. That is a fact of God's "traits," but we just don't understand it.

The gemara explains, "*God, God, the Almighty [is] merciful and gracious, long-suffering, with abundant kindness and truth...*" (Exod. 34:6). The first instance of "God" refers to man prior to sin, and the second instance is after one sins and repents. But [why not] let there be just one name of God and He will be both before and after the sin? What is the need for 2 individual names of God?

The name of God יהוה reflects the source of existence. It is more closely related to God's essence than אדני as it refers to God's existence, insofar as He gives existence to His creatures. Therefore, in our verse above, the first name of God refers to God giving initial existence to man, and that [existence] should truly terminate the moment man sins. But then God gives man another existence after man sins. Why does He do this? In order that man can repent.

In chapter 6 of his Laws of Teshuvah, Maimonides again says that God prevented Pharaoh and others from repenting. But this does not mean that He removed their free will, because they originally possessed free will. Only after they chose improperly did God remove the power of their free will.

Now we can understand the answer. As we said, we understand God [punishing man by] removing his physical abilities, but that is in order to direct him towards teshuvah. But what is the purpose in a punishment which removes teshuvah

itself? The answer is that this question is based on a false assumption, that man has intrinsic existence. But that is false. The only reason a person has existence is due to God's determination that he continues to exist. But the moment a person regresses to the level where existence ceases [God deems his life as no longer worthy], there is nothing left of that person [God no longer wills that person's existence]. What Maimonides means is that when God removes from a person his power of free will, it is not a positive action acting on the free will [to remove it], but that the person has declined to the point that—as the Yerushalmi says according to prophecy's opinion—"the sinner must die." [It is not as if God blows out the flame of a person's soul, but that God removes the oil. The very force sustaining man's soul is terminated, and the soul is man's free will. Thus, free will automatically vanishes and all that remains is man's animal instincts.] It is logical, since a person's life was created to fit a certain description, deviating from that description discontinues his right to existence. But God says, "Despite prophecy's opinion that the soul of the sinner should die, I will renew his existence so he might repent." However, at times, a person will sin so greatly that he will suffer God's removal of his free will. As Maimonides says, it is no different than God paralyzing his hand [as a punishment]. This means that one's arm moves only because God gives it existence. But the moment the cause for that arm's existence is removed, the arm ceases to function. Removal of the arm's function is not a positive new evil, rather, it is the termination of its previous existence. The same applies to free will which is man's essence: "*...man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad*" (Gen. 3:22). This refers to free will. When God punishes man, it is not that man exists and free will also exists, and God is removing his free will [a faculty separate from man's essence]. But it means that due to man's

evil, God no longer sustains his existence [which is synonymous with free will, and when God terminates man's metaphysical existence, it ipso facto extinguishes man's free will as well]. Prophecy would agree with this fate for any sin. But God says, "I will renew his existence so he can repent." But not everyone deserves this renewal. For certain great sinners—exceptions—where one's essence has deteriorated to the point where he ceases to exist [metaphysically], God no longer supplies him with existence. The moment God ceases to supply that person with existence, the central part of his nature—free will—simply ceases to function. [Man's existence is contingent, as already stated. This contingency is that he lives properly. Once he does not, God no longer supports his existence, and this results in the loss of free will.] At this point of the cessation of one's Tzelem Elohim [soul], his animalistic nature [nefesh habihami] alone endures. His spiritual element no longer receives support from God, so it ceases to function, leaving him without free will.

In the Yerushalmi, when wisdom was asked what the punishment should be for a sinner, it responded that sinners chase evil. Meaning, one steeped in sinning most certainly cannot do teshuvah. Wisdom responded that a soul who desires evil will always desire it. Wisdom's concern was not with the metaphysical realm, but with the psychological and philosophical realms.

When God was asked what should be the punishment for the sinner, He said the soul exists and also quoted the verse "*Good and upright is God; therefore, He shows sinners the way*" (Psalms 25:8). Meaning that not only does God renew the sinner's existence, but He also creates certain circumstances for the sinner that he should be able to repent, to overcome the problem of "sinners chase evil." God's kindness is unfathomable.

The gemara says that illness first came to the world in Jacob's days. Illness has a purpose of causing man to reflect and do teshuvah. Man gets sick, gets out of bed, falls back into bed sick again, and through this process, he repents.

King David prayed, "*Do not sweep me away with sinners, or [snuff out] my life with murderers*" (Psalms 26:9). He desired that before he died that he have the opportunity to do teshuvah. He prayed that God should renew his existence. Prayer helps because it relates a person to God. And through relating to God, one can request renewed existence so he can exercise his free will. It is an interesting thing that prayer can give a person existence even if it is undeserved. That is the story of Chizkiyahu. Prayer helps, even without teshuvah, as King David was asking for the ability to do teshuvah.

Returning to the first part of the mishnah, it said that a sin will not come to the hands of a person who accumulates merit for the public. Sin is 2 things: it is a symptom that one is a sinner, but it also corrupts the person's soul. A person's free will functions in a certain sphere. If something happens outside that sphere, he can stumble and sin. [Certain matters in one's life are decided based on one's emotions and not one's intellect.] The gemara says that Satan appeared to Rebbe Meir and Rabbi Akiva in the form of a woman and they chased after it [they followed their emotions, depicted as Satan]. If one stumbles and falls, sin can destroy him. The principle that sin will not happen to one who accumulates merit for the public means that God, who determines a person's existence and arranges man's situations, provides a special divine providence that prevents him from the effects of the ravages of sin. Insofar as existence, he has a different right of existence [he is more perfected than others, as he accumulates merit for the public and deserves special providence]. The closer one is to God, the greater is his right to existence. The Rav said:

*Everyone of the fundamentals (ikarrim) isn't just a philosophical principle, it has a practical relevance too. What is the relevance of the first fundamental? It is that God is existence. What a person should strive for is existence.*

Insofar as a person attains a higher level of perfection, his existence is increased. This means that providence is increased in a manner that his existence is more secure. Therefore, any events that would have ordinarily challenged his free will, that would be detrimental, he is shielded from them. In the High Holiday prayers, we say “*that I should not sin anymore.*” This means that one asks God through prayer that his existence should be on a higher level so he should be prevented and protected from sins and be shielded from situations that his free will can't handle. This equates to God securing one's existence. Everyone merits existence, but through prayer, one can raise the level of his merit and that is why one prays.

Being in Gehenom while one's students are in the Garden of Eden refers to the loss of existence. So, the one who accumulates merit for the public has a more secured existence than others regarding the situations he will encounter in life that threaten his free will. [He increased the existence of others and therefore his existence is increased.]

Another point regarding one who accumulates merit for the public, it says “the merit of the public depends on him.” This means that he increased the situation for the existence of the public. Therefore, his existence is increased, “that he should not be in Gehenom while his students are in the Garden of Eden.”

The sinner who causes the public to sin means the opposite: he removed the existence of others. “One who causes the pub-



lic to sin is not permitted to repent.” In his commentary on the mishnah, Maimonides learned that he is prevented from teshuvah, he ceases to exist. But the gemara in Yoma 87a had a different version of the text:

*But whoever causes the public to sin has  
almost no ability to repent.*

“Almost” (kimat) means that it works here as above. Here, one who causes the public to sin, God ceases to give him opportunities that could have shielded him from threats to his free will. He will no longer receive situations that would cause his repentance because he does not deserve it. But if he repents, he does merit the afterlife.

King David prayed to God to accept his teshuvah in order that his son King Solomon would build the Temple. This means that if his teshuvah would not have been accepted, his relationship with God would remain the same and there would not exist the proper relationship that could affect him and Solomon positively that would enable the Temple to be built.

Rebbe Meir heard that Elisha ben Avuyah was sick, so he visited him and told him to do teshuvah. Elisha ben Avuyah replied that he could not do so because it was too late. He felt that he went too far [off the proper path] and lost his right to existence.

[Rabbi Chait now digressed to address God’s presence in the Temple and mishnah 6:11]

The sanctity of mikdash (Temple)—God displaying His shechina (presence) there—means in one sense that there were special events occurring only in mikdash and nowhere else in the world. For instance, the sotah (suspected wife) dying from drinking the water was not natural. Even her partner died. Mai-

monides' laws of the Daily and Additional sacrifices (chap. 2) says as follows:

*It is a positive command that there be fire burning regularly on the altar, as it says, "A fire should regularly burn up on it" (Lev. 6:6). And even though fire would descend from heaven, it is a command that people should bring fire, as it is stated, "And the children of Aaron the priests shall place fire on the altar" (Lev. 1:7).*

5 POSSESSIONS HAS THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE, ACQUIRED IN HIS WORLD, AND THESE ARE THEM: THE TORAH [IS] ONE POSSESSION, HEAVEN AND EARTH [ARE] ONE POSSESSION, ABRAHAM [IS] ONE POSSESSION, ISRAEL [IS] ONE POSSESSION, [AND] THE TEMPLE [IS] ONE POSSESSION. (*Avos 6:10*)

Torah counted as one acquisition means it is a special entity; God created the entity of Torah wisdom. The creation of the heavens and earth did not dictate the existence of Torah: there is an acquisition of the physical world and the acquisition of Torah. Temple is a separate entity aside from all other existences because it embodies the dwelling of God's shechina. It is interesting that Abraham too is a unique acquisition. "God's acquisitions" mean that God created an entity. The nation of Israel is also an acquisition because there is a separate providence for them that is nonexistent for any other nation. Now, because Abraham recognized his Creator by himself, he was given a different kind of existence. Everybody in the world exists because it is God's will that the species exists.

But Abraham existed because it was God's will that [the man] Abraham exist intrinsically. And the verse bears this out:

*Blessed be Abraham of God Most High,  
Maker of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19).*

Just like God desires the universe to exist intrinsically, he desired Abraham to exist intrinsically. That was Shame's blessing to Abraham. Abraham was one of God's 5 acquisitions, as he was an acquisition in terms of the nature of his existence.

## 5:16 PERSONALITIES: PROJECTION & UNHAPPINESS

ANY LOVE THAT IS DEPENDENT ON SOMETHING, WHEN THAT THING PERISHES, THE LOVE PERISHES. BUT [A LOVE] THAT IS NOT DEPENDENT ON SOMETHING, DOES NOT EVER PERISH. WHAT'S [AN EXAMPLE OF] A LOVE THAT IS DEPENDENT ON SOMETHING? THAT'S THE LOVE OF AMNON AND TAMAR. AND [A LOVE] THAT IS NOT DEPENDENT ON SOMETHING? THAT'S THE LOVE OF DAVID AND JONATHAN.

First, the mishnah states a reasonable principle: a love which

depends on a condition ceases to exist when the condition ceases to exist. And regarding intrinsic love, this never expires. Then the mishnah gives examples of both. The major question is that the statement seems self-understood. Therefore, we wonder what the lesson is. Of course, if love is contingent, once the condition is gone, so is the love. Second, why is an example necessary? Third, how is this mishnah related to Pirkei Avos, which addresses ethics? If this mishnah is a study of what is transient versus what is permanent, why place it in Avos? Additionally, the mishnah does not make any value judgment on either type of love, saying that one is wrong or that one is right. Torah does not critique Amnon's love of Tamar. His coercion was wrong, but not his love. She was not his halachic sister, and there was nothing wrong with Amnon living with Tamar. The error was living with her without marriage, kiddushin. But we do not find Torah prohibiting romantic love, which was the case here. And again, our mishnah does not say that one should refrain from love that is dependent. It only tells us a fact that such love ends when the condition ends. Without the mishnah suggesting we abstain from such love, the mishnah does not posit any ethical proposition. Additionally, one cannot suggest that [consensually] using a person [for love] is wrong, for people do this in business, as they engage in business relationships to increase their wealth. [One is no more incorrect to engage in a romantic relationship to increase one's love.]

The love between David and Jonathan had no ulterior motive; there was no causative agent [for the love] besides the person himself. Each one appreciated the other's personality; it was an appreciation for each other's perfection. This was not conditional love because had Jonathan changed, he would no longer be Jonathan; his essence would be gone. Whereas a conditional love requires the essence to remain. The next mishnah too is difficult:

## 5:17 DISPUTES

EVERY DISPUTE THAT IS FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN, WILL IN THE END ENDURE; BUT ONE THAT IS NOT FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN, WILL NOT ENDURE. WHICH IS THE CONTROVERSY THAT IS FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN? SUCH WAS THE CONTROVERSY OF HILLEL AND SHAMMAI. AND WHICH IS THE CONTROVERSY THAT IS NOT FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN? SUCH WAS THE CONTROVERSY OF KORACH AND ALL HIS CONGREGATION.

Why do we need to know that an argument for the sake of heaven will be sustained? Are we studying sociological forces? Additionally, many arguments that were not for the sake of heaven have endured for centuries. The facts seem to defy the mishnah. And what does this have to do with perfection? And here too the mishnah does not judge one or the other as right or wrong.

Let us understand the sin of Amnon. He was in love with his sister Tamar and apparently there was nothing wrong with that love. Let us review the story:

*Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and Amnon the son of David became infatuated with her. Amnon was so distraught because of his [half]sister Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, the son*

*of David's brother Shimab; Jonadab was a very clever man. He asked him, "Why are you so dejected, O prince, morning after morning? Tell me!" Amnon replied, "I am in love with Tamar, the sister of my brother Absalom!" Jonadab said to him, "Lie down in your bed and pretend you are sick. When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in front of me, so that I may look on, and let her serve it to me.'" Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. The king came to see him, and Amnon said to the king, "Let my sister Tamar come and prepare a couple of cakes in front of me, and let her bring them to me." David sent a message to Tamar in the palace, "Please go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was in bed. She took dough and kneaded it into cakes in front of him, and cooked the cakes. She took the pan and set out [the cakes], but Amnon refused to eat and ordered everyone to withdraw. After everyone had withdrawn, Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food inside and feed me." Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them to her brother inside. But when she served them to him, he caught hold of her and said to her, "Come lie with me, sister." But she said to him, "Don't, brother. Don't force me. Such things are not done in Israel! Don't do such a vile*

*thing! Where will I carry my shame? And you, you will be like any of the scoundrels in Israel! Please, speak to the king; he will not refuse me to you.” But he would not listen to her; he overpowered her and lay with her by force. Then Amnon felt a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing for her was greater than the passion he had felt for her. And Amnon said to her, “Get out!” She pleaded with him, “Please don’t commit this wrong; to send me away would be even worse than the first wrong you committed against me.” But he would not listen to her. He summoned his young attendant and said, “Get that woman out of my presence, and bar the door behind her.” She was wearing an ornamented tunic, for maiden princesses were customarily dressed in such garments. His attendant took her outside and barred the door after her. Tamar put dust on her head and rent the ornamented tunic she was wearing; she put her hands on her head, and walked away, screaming loudly as she went. (II Samuel 13:1-19)*

Tamar was from Absalom’s mother, a female captive. Before the conversion, she was pregnant with Tamar. Therefore, she was not Amnon’s maternal sister; Amnon was allowed to marry her. Halacha was respected in those days and no one would look down upon their union. Tamar said this, as she said that King David would not prevent their marriage. However, Amnon’s sin was that he had to have her immediately. He was overcome by his desires. Rashi says that Amnon hat-

ed Tamar with an “exceedingly great hatred.” The verse says that his hatred was of greater measure than the love with which he first loved her. After coercing her in relations, Amnon expelled his sister and shamed her. That was another sin. Torah says that one who coerces a woman into relations can never send her away. Such a man has an ethical responsibility to keep the woman whom he coerced.

In every sin, 2 parts of a person are involved. One part is the emotions. Without emotions, a person cannot be a sinner in any realm. But what about an apikores? Isn't this an intellectual crime? No. The crime is not intellectual: the source of this crime is an emotion. King David said, *“A vile person says in his heart that God does not exist”* (Psalms 14:1). A low person denies that God exists. His conclusion is always traced back to some emotion. One who is free of emotions and is an honest investigator would never draw such a conclusion. Every sin is traceable to the emotions.

But there is a second part of sin: the mind, which is involved in every sin. One's thought processes must be distorted if he is to sin. My question is what that distortion is. What was Amnon's distortion of mind that compelled him to have Tamar immediately?

The most crucial underlying idea operating in the sinner's mind is the notion that the sin will provide happiness. Amnon did not feel that he had a personal defect, that he was a lustful individual. If that were the case, he could have reflected on his flaw and tell himself to overcome his desire and perfect himself. Rather, the sinner commits the sin when he feels that there is nothing wrong with his personality and tells himself, “I need a certain situation, and this one is what I need for my happiness.” Meaning, “The defect is not in me, but in the situation.” Once a person is convinced of this idea, nothing will prevent him from sinning. Amnon's thought was this: “My



nature is such that Tamar is what I need to achieve eternal happiness.” Once a person feels that his nature requires something for happiness, he does not feel at fault for chasing his needs. All arguments against his desire carry no weight.

Judaism recognizes that this is true, “*It is not good man should be alone*” (Gen. 2:18). Adam’s nature was such that without Eve he could not function properly. Regarding ideas not based in reality, a person is aware that there is something wrong with him. But in our case, there was a basis for Amnon’s feelings: man needs a woman. Here, man can distort the situation and justify his sin. Halachic problems are easily swept aside once a person justifies his needs. This is because halachos are generalizations, “and I am in a specific need right now.” This is the most underlying motive of sin, the most significant idea.

How can one determine if he is under the influence of this idea? Usually, and perhaps always, this idea of justifying a desire is accompanied by some kind of compulsion. It becomes an attraction to the particular object: “I must have this one.” Our society praises the idea of “meant to be.” However, out of billions of people, this person cannot be the only possible mate. Our society equates this emotion of love with happiness. If it’s not a compulsion, people feel that they are not happy, because the most powerful emotions involve these compulsions. Therefore, they identify the compulsion with happiness. They assume the force [of the compulsion] will provide happiness. But that is not reality. A person can be very happy without being under the delusion “This is the one and only mate for me.”

When operating under the feeling of love, is one operating under one or 2 forces? If it is one force, the person wants only what is best for the one whom he loves. By definition, he would not hurt her in anyway. Or perhaps there are 2 forces: he has an attraction and wants the one whom he loves, and then

there's another part of him that prevents him from hurting her. In a good marriage, is the decency expressed by each partner a compromise, or an expression of love? [Meaning that love of itself does not perform the decency.] There is one test to answer this question: If a person's love for his partner is altruistic, he would be willing to say, "There is another better man with whom you would be happier with than with me, so I will step aside so you can be with him and be happier." You usually don't find such a phenomenon. Romantic love is selfish, and the decency expressed by both partners is a compromise, unless one partner is willing to step aside, which then, is a different type of love. And the compromise exists only when the love emotion [operates in its own sphere] to the exclusion of the other. The romantic drive is that one partner wants the other and will not step aside if a better partner is found. The decency expressed is contingent on remaining the love object of one's partner. The 2 emotions of love and decency are very close, so it is a bit confusing to separate them. But King David was the one who separated them:

*Your love was more wondrous to me than  
the love of women (II Samuel 1:26)*

Jonathan died in battle. King David mourned his loss, saying that his appreciation for Jonathan was more wondrous than the love of women. King David compared romantic love to the appreciation to another person's greatness of character and soul. He felt that appreciation was more enjoyable than romantic appreciation. He divided the 2. Typically, one does not divide these 2 in his mind and both can coexist.

Returning to Amnon's sin, he not did not feel that he had a problem dealing with his emotions. He felt that Tamar was the object of his desire and she was necessary for him, that he

must have her to exist and that she is a reality that he lacked. Amnon did not feel he required a correction of character. Amnon projected his inner workings onto reality. He viewed the phenomenon purely in external terms, and that is always the case [when one sins]. When one feels that he must have something, it is usually the case that he in fact seeks something other, but he projects his desire onto an object in reality and tells himself, “That is what I’ve been searching for.” [He feels that he has found the object of desire, but it is only a replacement which can’t offer the happiness that only his true object of desire might offer. When the person then does not attain the expected satisfaction, he is dissatisfied and disappointed. He then starts a new search [to find the object of his desire once again]. Thus, Amnon’s sin was the projection onto reality of that which was really internal.

We originally asked what the lesson is of this mishnah, and now we understand. Of course, it is logical that if love depends on a certain condition, when the condition is gone, the love is gone. If you remove the cause, the effect is gone. But the mishnah is speaking not in terms of mechanics, but in terms of human nature. The mishnah means that often times a person does not recognize the condition. That’s the key. People are blind to their underlying desires. [They project onto reality a fantasy that they have finally found what they have been looking for. But as the object in reality is only a replacement for the real object, it cannot satisfy them. If they knew that the source of their desire was in fact a personality distortion, they would not have searched reality for satisfaction, and instead, they could have reflected on their personality, identified the problem and perfected themselves.] This is where perfection comes in. Human nature is to deny a defective part of oneself, so one projects onto the external reality what’s truly an internal matter. One then truly believes in his

projection, like Amnon really felt that having Tamar would provide eternal happiness. Had Amnon thought that his love was due to some internal condition, he never would have sinned.

Thus, the mishnah is teaching that one of the greatest difficulties on the path towards perfection is recognizing what is conditional, and what is not. That requires a great personality to discriminate between the 2.

Amnon's hate for Tamar was greater than his love for her. This phenomenon occurs because once Amnon realized his fantasy was false, he abandoned Tamar. Amnon was then left with the guilt and the disgrace. Tamar then reminded him [in his mind] of his great wrong and [as he could not accept his error], he then projected onto her all his defects, expressed as hatred. That was his second sin. But that's only one half of the mishnah.

Then there is "*A love which is not conditional never expires.*" Apparently the mishnah wishes to teach a second idea. That is that there exists a unique phenomenon where one can love another for the perfection that person embodies and expresses. That was the love of King David and Jonathan. King David said that this love was stronger than romantic love. (A boor could never have such an experience.) Torah endorses such an emotional expression. In this love, the perfected personality becomes the object of love because he embodies ideas. Here, one sees the beauty of a perfect human being. It is very much tied to love of God. In the story of Ruth, there is a similar phenomenon. When Naomi was returning to Israel and said farewell to Orpa and Ruth, Torah says that "*Ruth clung to Naomi*" (Ruth 1:14). Ruth saw in Naomi ideas [truths] that she represented, explaining why Ruth could not part from Naomi. It is amazing that all the years that Ruth was with Naomi, she was not interested in converting, but she suddenly

woke up. This teaches that sometimes a person does not recognize a matter that is brewing in their mind for years, until one reaches a crossroad. Now Ruth had to choose between Naomi or her home. Ruth confronted her options of either returning to idolatry or following truth. She now actualized what she recognized internally all her life, and she remained with Naomi and returned with her to Israel. Here you see again the concept that a person can be an object of love through the higher sphere. Torah holds that the attachment to perfection always begins with a personal attachment. That is why you have a Mesora. Later, one is attached to the ideas and he can shed the personal attachment and stand on his own 2 feet.

This explains the severity of profaning God's name, chillul Hashem. Chazal say that not everyone can commit such a profanation: the greater the person, the greater the profanation. One who represents Torah and profanes God's name turns people away from Torah and makes it unavailable to them. That is the severity of this sin, which is the worst sin.

[Rabbi Chait now refers back to Avos 5:16 and Amnon's projection of his internal world onto the external world.]

A human being can only truly be happy if his energies are directed towards God's wisdom. This is the only state in which one finds happiness. In all other states, one is frustrated. By definition, human desires always lead towards frustration. [King David's sentiment about his pleasure derived from God's wisdom was] "*For I am sick with love*" (Song of Songs 2:5). Man possesses a capacity for love, as well as a tremendous amount of psychological energy which can never be satisfied in the pursuit of physical desires. In satisfying the physical desires, one is fulfilled only temporarily. The energy then

reestablishes itself and will always be expressed in frustration. As such, whenever one is tempted to commit a sin, what is the temptation? The temptation is that one thinks that the frustration he currently experiences will be removed through the sin. The person seeks relief. His fantasy tells him that he can satisfy himself through a means other than through love of God and Torah wisdom. [But] this is false. [However] this method is successful because it is partially true: there is momentary relief. Sin is a momentary phenomenon and after one sins, one finds oneself in a situation more tragic than before sinning. That was the case with Naval (I Samuel 25:37). While he was drunk, all was fine. But the moment he faced the next day and his energies regrouped, he found himself in a greater state of frustration than before. Anytime one sins, he is convinced that sinning is a proper act. He is lured by the fantasy that he can satisfy his frustrations in ways other than through love of God and Torah's wisdom. Every person is a philosopher. In the back of every person's mind is a philosophical voice telling him, "This is what you need."

Torah says, "Joseph was in Egypt." Rashi comments:

*Do we not know that he was in Egypt?  
But its purpose is to inform you of Joseph's  
righteousness: this is the same Joseph who  
tended his father's sheep; this is the same  
Joseph who was in Egypt and became king  
there, and yet he remained steadfast in  
his righteousness, and the change from a  
humble position to exalted rank in Egypt  
caused no deterioration in his character.  
(Exod. 1:5)*

Rashi refers to Joseph's righteousness by not sleeping with

Potiphera's wife [she had made several sexual advances towards Joseph, but Joseph resisted].

*One such day, he [Joseph] came into the house to do his work. (Gen. 29:11)*

Rashi comments:

*Rab and Samuel differ as to what this means. One holds that it means, to do his actual house work; the other says that it means to associate with her, but a vision of his father's face appeared to him and he resisted temptation and did not sin as is stated in Treatise Sotah 36b.*

The second position means that Joseph truly wished to sin, but he heard the voice of his father in his head: "*Do you desire that your brothers' names will be inscribed on the Ephod [the high priest's garment] and your name will not?*" This means that the voice one hears in the back of his mind is always the voice of society. One is very influenced by his society:

*Anyone who resides in Eretz Yisrael is considered as one who has a God, and anyone who resides outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered as one who does not have a God. As it is stated: "To give to you the land of Canaan, to be your God" (Lev. 25:38).*

A person who lives among gentiles can't help but absorb their norms. These notions learned from youth do not leave in adulthood. These values always remain with a person. This

society's philosophy is always playing in the back of one's mind. A philosophy that is sanctioned by the masses is always assumed to be correct. Very few people can buck the voice of society. This voice affects a person in subtle ways which he does not detect.

Torah teaches that the Joseph in Egypt was the same Joseph who shepherded his father's flock: the Joseph who remained firm in his righteousness. Joseph never lost the philosophical voice of his father. "*One such day, he came into the house to do his work*"—his instinctual drive [yetzer hara] had the most powerful attraction possible, and in the most powerful area possible in human nature. But before committing the sin, the true philosophical voice of his father presented itself: "*Do you want your name removed from the ephod?*"

*Aaron shall carry the names of the sons  
of Israel on the breastplate of justice over  
his heart when he enters the sanctuary for  
remembrance before the Lord at all times.  
(Exod. 28:29)*

These names represent man's true perfections. The true ideal of what is perfection played before Joseph's eyes. And once he saw that, he was not able to succumb to sin. Despite all those years alone in Egypt, Joseph never gave in to the voice of society.

As long as one learns, but does so only to achieve a certain level of perfection in learning [achievement oriented learning], he is not learning for the sake of knowledge [lishma], but he is learning for the same reason that society has taught him to engage in any pursuit: to achieve excellence. Society pushes one to attain a title, and not to learn for its own enjoyment. One is frustrated in learning due to a false value adopted from



society that learning must be achievement oriented. Our society reflects no perfection at all, as its values are not based on thought. There should be no frustration at all in learning; it should be a total pleasure. Even when realizing one did not know something, that is a gain. The person gained insight into the fact that he thought he knew something, and he now realized that he truly did not know it. That should be a moment of joy as he removed a false notion from his mind. What can be more joyful or beneficial? He is now closer to the truth. If one did not know a *svara* [definition] in Tosfos and then he discovers it, he should certainly be full of happiness. Learning should have a no frustration. The only frustration is, as we said, when one does not learn purely for the enjoyment of knowledge [lishma]. The truth is, the more one learns, the more he realizes that he doesn't know, and he reaches a point where he abandons learning to reach a goal, and that is precisely when he becomes happy. This is because now [when] he learns, he views it as the only worthwhile activity. As strange as it sounds, according to Judaism, happiness is attained when one reaches the level that this society views as the most frightening thing. Being a total failure is the worst thing that can happen to a person. But that is the best thing in learning [as the person abandons goal orientation and learns for learning itself]. The reason we cannot fathom this is due to being raised in this society. We do not have the voice of Jacob playing in the back of our minds.

One of the reasons that historians can't understand Judaism or Tehillim and utter nonsense about Holy Scripture [kisvei kodesh] is because they come from a society where good and evil are determined by conscience, which is not the case regarding Judaism. In Judaism, the good is the eternal; the evil is the temporal. It is a different definition of good and evil. In society, good and evil are determined by conscience. Killing

is evil unless you work for the mafia, and then it is honorable with no guilt associated to it [thus, conscience is not absolute and can't determine what is truly good or evil].

## GENDER EQUALITY

While on the subject of society and its influence, I wish to mention a few questions that were raised. One is regarding gender equality. Another concerns equality between gentile and Jew. How does Judaism treat an apikoress [Torah denigrator]? There is a tragedy which occurred due to translations of the rabbis' writings from the times of the Talmud through the Rishonim and Acharonim. Translations have caused many problems. Chazal say they instituted a fast when the Septuagint was translated [the Greek version of the Bible]. The gemara says there were 3 days of great darkness [sorrow]. This tragedy was that Torah was now out of the rabbis' control; anyone could now pass judgment on it with his preconceived [false] notions. And it turns out unfortunately that to understand certain matters in Judaism—essential matters—a certain mindset is a prerequisite. If one approaches Torah with a distorted mind, it is almost impossible to remove the distortion. That is why Chazal guarded Torah She'Baal Peh, the Oral Law. They did so because the masses could not understand it. Attempting to offer explanations for certain statements made by the rabbis would not be productive, as some

people are too attached to their own understandings learned in youth. It is akin to a child asking a parent for ice cream, knowing that the parent will say no. The parent will offer a sound reason why she cannot give the ice cream, but the reason will never register on the child. That is today's situation. I would like to give a few examples.

Anyone who thinks that Judaism places women on a lower status, is, by necessity, vicious or totally ignorant. [When adhering to Torah principles] it is impossible to make such a statement as the Matriarchs are most prominent [role models of perfection]. This is proof of Torah's value of women. The Rav said,

*Torah says, "And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27).*

Meaning that it is impossible than one should be inferior to the other.

There is a mistake in this society which is based on the false notion that ostentatiousness is a good. People are convinced that through fame one achieves a great good. Judaism holds that a person is worse off when famous. We have a prayer which is so beautiful that we attach it to Shmoneh Esray:

*My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceit. To those who curse me, let my soul remain silent and let my soul be like dust to all. Open my heart to Your Torah, then I will pursue Your commandments. As for those who design*

*evil against me, quickly nullify their counsel and disrupt their design.*

This is a recognition that man's evil takes place through his verbalization. Speech expresses and satisfies man's instincts: ego, aggression, sexual desires, etc. Speech is the medium through which man satisfies all his instincts. This is why Lashon Hara is the worst thing.

*To those who curse me, let my soul remain silent.*

This means that if an entire society curses you, you should be quiet. This is the proper level. One should be unconcerned with what society says. A perfected person needs only to walk in the proper path and that is sufficient for him. He needs nothing more [he does not need society].

*...and my soul be like dust to all*

This is an unbelievable prayer. This means that a person should want one thing: to be alone in the world of reality and not care about anyone. Others should not affect a person whatsoever. Chazal say that King David was persecuted not only by evil people, but even by Torah giants of his generation, but he did not care. This prayer shows the ultimate level of the person living in the world of reality and not society.

*...and my soul be like dust to all*

If a person truly desires this, that it does not disturb him

[that society thinks nothing of him, for he thinks nothing of society] and he does not care about what people say about him, [this discard for society's approval is a prerequisite for greater attachment to Torah, as the next statement says]:

*...open my heart to Your Torah, then I  
will pursue Your commandments.*

To feel as dust is the basis [for greater attachment to Torah]. That desire to be satisfied and happy, even though others view him as dust, will drive him more towards living a Torah life, learning for learning sake alone. And the Torah says so:

*He has told you, O man, what is good, and  
what the Lord requires of you: Only to do  
justice and to love kindness, and to walk  
modestly with your God (Micah 6:8).*

One should be modest in how one serves God; service to God is a totally private matter. That is the halacha of not presenting oneself in a haughty light [overly righteous], mechzi k'yihurah. This is a flaw in a person and not merely a social concern. A person endangers himself when he acts to appear as a holy person. The perfected individual abides by Micah's lesson to be humble. This is the ultimate level God demands of man. The ideal of Judaism is the exact opposite of society's ideal, and we pray for it.

This level of modesty was given to a woman more than to man. "The honor of the daughter of a king is internal" (Psalms 45:14) refers to the congregation of Israel and that is why there never was the institution of a Bas Mitzvah. "They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he replied, 'Behold, she is in the tent'" (Gen. 18:9). A distorted society does not view modesty

as a perfection, but as a detraction. But in our system, it is the highest level. Moshe did not want to be in the foreground, but God did not permit Moshe. Jacob was referred to as a “*simple man who dwelled in tents*” (Gen. 25:27). Man’s highest perfection is not attained publicly, but privately and humbly. Talmud Yoma 71a refers to Torah scholars as women because they are modest like women, but with the strength of men.

A woman was given that perfection of representing that idea of modesty. Historically, it was not necessarily given to a woman per se. Sometimes, a woman will need to act out the role of the man. Esther originally rejected going before the king. But the situation demanded she do so. Therefore, she engineered a plan to save the Jewish people. Therefore, she switched roles. Devorah too switched roles. Only in certain situations a woman must take on the man’s role. It is not called Megillas Mordecai, but Megillas Esther. But on the whole, man leaves the tent [home] more than a woman because his nature is more in line with accomplishment, and a woman’s nature is less inclined this way. That is why she usually does not leave that state of perfection. But it is absolutely absurd to suggest that Judaism views a woman as inferior.

Today’s talmidei chochamim too sense a certain male superiority. But this feeling is no different than how the rest of society feels. Anything that partakes of this feeling is wrong.

When Chazal say that talmidei chochamim are like women, it means that they are the opposite of the macho image.

3 people died the highest level of death—kiss—and one was a woman, Miriam. This means that no man reached her level. Only Moshe, Aaron and Miriam died through the “kiss” [a kiss is a very light thing, implying that the death of these most perfected people was a very slight change. They lived so perfectly, that there change at death from a human into a pure soul was minimal]. Miriam surpassed all other men. It is im-

possible to say that Judaism views a woman as inferior.

That is the problem: much knowledge of Torah and Judaism is available to the masses. They learn something that catches their attention and draw [false] conclusions. For example, Mondays and Thursdays we say V’Hu Rachum which has 3 parts. The first part refers to the mikdash. The second part refers to the Jews’ troubles while living among other nations in exile. And the last part is a prayer that includes the phrase “*they have despised us like tumah of a menstruous woman.*” People then derive a falsehood that a menstrual woman is on a low level and is despised because of her menstrual state. People say, “That is the low esteem Judaism has for a woman.” They say this because they have no idea whatsoever about the meaning of this prayer. But immediately, people associate to some primitive notion in their minds and become convinced of their understanding.

First of all, menstrual tumah is not a stringent form of tumah. [Had this prayer intended to be degrading] the prayer should have referred to tumah of a corpse. The danger is drawing philosophical conclusions from a different area, from halacha. And this is [compounded] without even understanding halacha. People think tumah is uncleanness. But there is no translation for the word tumah. In the English translation there should be a blank space. In our society there is no parallel for tumah. If one suggests that tumah is a terrible thing, why is it that a gentile cannot become tamei? A dog cannot become tamei. Ignorance of halacha allows one to draw false conclusions.

The one thing we can say about tumah is that, as Maimonides says in his *Guide*, it has one purpose: that a person should not have unrestricted access to the Temple. Those associating [inferior/lowly] feelings to tumah are baseless, as tumah is purely a halachic phenomenon. There is no prohibi-

tion to become tamei. There is one commonality between tumah vis-à-vis Temple and woman: separation.

*They have despised us like tumah of a  
menstruous woman*

Our prayers are based on a verse [a Torah source] as we do not rely on our own ideas. Judaism is very careful with how man relates to God [prayer/tefilah] where we stand before God. There is a danger, for if one is wrong in this area of relating to God, one is wrong in all areas of life. For our entire lives revolve around our idea of God. 120 chochamim were very careful in the words they employed when constructing prayer and it was all based on Torah verses. The verse above is a citation of Ezekiel 36:17:

*O mortal, when the House of Israel dwelt  
on their own soil, they defiled it with their  
ways and their deeds; their ways were in  
My sight like the tumah of a menstruous  
woman.*

Rashi says the metaphor is of menstrual woman, for she is awaited by the husband until he can reunite with her, for the husband desires to return to her. And this verse is a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel. Throughout Prophets, God's relationship to Israel is depicted as the relationship of husband and wife. With the phrase "*like the tumah of a menstruous woman*" the prophet wishes to convey an idea: as bad as the Jews are, Israel is like a menstrual woman for whom God waits for her to become permitted to Him. That is the reason for the metaphor. It is a beautiful metaphor because the prophet did not want to say that the Jews were distant from



God. The tumah of a menstrual woman is not a degradation. On the contrary, it depicts God's love for His bride Israel to return to him.

Something that a person can view as a pejorative can be the exact opposite. People on a low level turn this into a degradation. But Rashi's daughter used to answer her father's response. If one would ask why there were not as many women knowledgeable of Torah as there were men, I cannot answer such a question. I can only say that in no way does Torah belittle a woman who has knowledge. The proof is Devorah; Sanhedrin sought her advice. We respect any person with knowledge. And such [knowledgeable] women did not seek attention [fame], but Devorah could not remain anonymous as she was needed by the nation. But I would also say that a woman who truly desires to learn Torah can do so, and therefore she must demand knowledge.

In general, we believe it is a principle of Judaism that there are 2 types of intuition. One type is nothing more than feelings pertaining to a certain matter because we become used to understanding something in a certain light. That kind of intuition is nonsense. There is another type of intuition which is an intellectual intuition for which we have the highest respect. This intuition is that which makes up the disputes among the rabbis of the mishnah. Maimonides explains this in his *Guide*. A person dismissing the [true] idea that a table is primarily space [not solid matter] uses common intuition, which is nonsense. But the intuition the mind has from studying an area and can sense what is right, is proper intuition.

One cannot draw any inferences from the halachic system, as it functions in its own orbit. One cannot draw philosophic conclusions from halacha. The Rav gave an example: a woman cannot give testimony, and neither can Moshiach. [An incorrect inference would be to suggest a philosophical equiva-

lence of these 2 parties in areas aside from testimony.]

Someone asked that as a society that prohibits Jews from holding office is viewed as discriminatory, what do we say about Judaism that restricts women from many areas? No doubt, the society discriminates against Jews. But the same [discriminatory] conclusion that is drawn about society cannot be drawn about Torah [which restricts women from certain areas]. Halacha is a different system as it is a system based on very wise men, whereas in general, a society isn't run by intellectuals.

Another support for gender equality is that the mitzvah of loving God is commanded on both men and women. Maimonides explains that love of God refers to Torah study. It is also a Siphre. Women are not exempt from loving God, but they are exempt from the responsibility to transmit the Mesora. But personally, they are not exempt [perhaps referring to such cases like Devorah]. The Mesora is man's responsibility because on the whole, the male personality is more successful in outgoing activities than the female personality.

In the morning, man recites the blessing “...*that You did not create me as a female.*” This was instituted because people felt they would be happier with less mitzvos. This blessing intends to correct that notion. Chazal also included the blessings “*that You did not create me as a gentile*” and “*that You did not create me as a slave*” as they too have less mitzvos than a man, and therefore [following this theme of thanking God for more mitzvos than others] it is not sexist to thank God for not creating oneself as a female. It is absurd how people think it is, as they approach the area without any understanding. The genders are not the same in terms of goals, but they are equal in value.

The Matriarchs and Patriarchs had different roles as is seen in the difference between Rivkah and Isaac. Isaac gave Jacob

the blessings of Abraham, and Rivkah sent Jacob away. The woman guards the child. Rivkah saved Jacob's life from his brother Esav. That was her role in establishing the tribes. Each played a unique role. The Rav once mentioned a beautiful idea. Abraham produced Isaac who then carried on [monotheism] and it [this transmission] had to be only from Sarah and not from Hagar. It was necessary for Isaac to result from both Abraham and Sarah. Sarah was just as important in this capacity as was Abraham. And if you have any sensitivity, you see that after Abraham buried Sarah, his role in establishing the nation was over. He then lived on as a private individual. Sarah equaled Abraham in bringing about the nation Israel.

Miriam brought about the Jewish savior [Moses]. She argued with her parents and she was correct. [Miriam's parents had separated due to Pharaoh's decree of killing male infants. They viewed procreation as sacrificing life. Miriam told her parents that Pharaoh decreed only against the males, but that her parents decreed against females as well. Her parents agreed and reunited and then had Moses.]

It is absolute nonsense to say that Torah looks down upon woman. But due to this distorted society where the only value is being in the limelight, people come to the wrong conclusion of gender inequality. [Since man's role is more outgoing and accomplishment oriented, this is interpreted by today's society as the good, and the modest role of the woman is degraded.] But with any depth of understanding one immediately sees the fallacy of the claim that Torah degrades women.

Our society influences us with prejudices. Capital punishment is an example. To our society, malkus [whipping] would be viewed as brutality. But because no capital punishment was inflicted, society has no problem jailing a person to rot in a cell for the rest of his life. But there is no question that mal-

kus is a much better system. Prison destroys people and there's no improvement in the criminal. Whereas malkus is momentary and then the person is right back into society and it does not destroy his life. It is also a better deterrent than prison. But modern man feels a false sense of sophistication: "I would not touch another person." The electric chair [or lethal injections] are acceptable but beating someone is not. What is the difference? But people cannot hear such arguments because of the prejudice accepted from society. People may feel better about prison versus malkus, but a better punishment is not determined by feelings but by reason.

Marriage is another example. Society says that it is only about love. If love is gone, one is justified to end a marriage, and this trumps considerations about the responsibility towards the childrens' well-being. Judaism prioritizes responsibility over love. Man is obligated to support his wife and the wife has her domestic obligations. Neither one is more or less [important]. Judaism has a division of labor in marriage. If one partner fails to fulfill their responsibility, bais din forces that party to fulfill their obligations. It is a machlokes Rishonim whether bais din can employ physical force. The question that was raised is how can bais din force a woman to fulfill her obligations. First of all, the wife has the right to reject her obligations in exchange for the husband not supporting her; she will support herself. A Rishon says that a woman can get divorced whenever she wants if she finds her husband intolerable. In this case bais din will use physical force to make the husband give a get. So why is physical force okay when bais din coerces the husband, but people find fault if bais din forces the wife to fill her obligations? If a person today would know only about the halacha that a wife can be forced, they would criticize Torah because they don't view the halacha [and the full picture].

Historians and Bible critics had no knowledge of the depths of Torah and drew absurd conclusions based upon their ignorance, which was idiotic, vicious and unfair. They refused to recognize the wisdom of Torah.

The last point is the saying that “*women’s intellect is light.*” People draw conclusions based on the conclusion. Women liberals don’t like such statements because of the conclusion. But if it is true, you cannot fight reality. One cannot say that a mouse is as big as a giraffe. It is ridiculous. One must investigate reality and accept its findings. What Chazal meant by this statement that women’s intellects are light, is that everyone has a struggle in life between their emotions and the world seen through their mind’s eye: reality. Man’s struggle is to follow his mind in spite of the emotion’s strength. And when a person reaches a high level [of perfection] the struggle ends. Maimonides says that there are 2 types of tzaddikim: the one who must suppress his instincts and who is in constant conflict, and then there is the one who worships God from love which is the highest level [he has no conflicts]. This person is the objective of the entire Torah. Also, as Maimonides says that very few people attain this level [in all areas], it is possible to reach this level in certain areas. One can worship God from love in an individual mitzvah. In one area a person can have a struggle, and in another area, one finds enjoyment in what was once a difficulty. Shabbos might have been difficult to observe when younger. But as one matures, he enjoys it and observes it out of love. Of course, Abraham served God out of love. We strive for that level, but we do not think practically we will attain it. Nevertheless, we strive for it.

All that Chazal meant by women having light intellects is that they have a greater difficulty in the struggle between following the mind over the emotions. In certain respects, the

struggle is more difficult for women. It does not discount their capacity for success or equate their success to man's success. It means that due to women's emotional nature, in certain respects, their struggle against the world of the emotions is more difficult. The gemara's case referred to the comparative duress women can tolerate under interrogation, as compared to men. Men can take more punishment than women before breaking under pressure. In certain situations, it is more difficult for a woman to stay on a rational course because they can't tolerate a high degree of pain. Again, the woman's greater struggle does not discount her capacity for success. Men too have struggles in certain areas that are more difficult than for women. But the gemara is not discussing women's intelligence [as some people wrongly accuse]. It is only addressing their comparatively greater difficulty to endure physical torture.

Women possessing greater understanding (*bina yeseira*) is very much in line with this as it means that this very emotional attitude gives a woman a certain sensitivity that man does not possess. It is a double edged sword: in one area the woman's emotional sensitivity is a very valuable tool; it was responsible for the success of Isaac. But on the other hand, that same emotional attitude causes difficulties in other areas. This is not a degradation of women but merely identifying the reality of a woman's nature. A woman's emotional sensitivity is much keener than that of men. This is [only] a general rule, as we see when Rabbi Meir lost his sons, his wife Bruria was stronger than he was. But typically, due to the woman's greater sensitivity, she will have greater anguish over a child's death than a man. These are generalities and do not speak about specific people.

Prejudice is not in terms of universal characteristics but in specifics. If a person will say in specific that an individual is

a certain way because he was raised in a certain place, that is prejudice, for one is not judging the person on his own merit. But to deny general psychological truths and trends in human nature is not being prejudice. Rather, it is a denial of reality. There are clear differences between men and women. Chazal were pointing out such differences.

On this topic, I wish to denounce a fairly common view that is very dangerous for Judaism in general. There is an approach that offers a reason for women's exemption from Torah study and time bound positive commands. This view suggests that women are intrinsically superior and do not require the mitzvos that men require. This view maintains that when man blesses "*You did not make me a woman*" that he is accepting God's decree upon his ill fate, he is lamenting: "Unfortunately, God did not make me perfect like He made a woman." On the other hand, when the woman blesses "*You made me according to Your will*" this view maintains that God created woman in the most perfect way possible: "I, woman, am intrinsically superior to man, I do not require [many] mitzvos like men, and I can reach love of God through my own intuition and not through Torah." To my mind, this is a very dangerous view from several standpoints. Philosophically, to say that anyone can intuit what perfection is, or what love of God is, is basically idolatrous. A basic principle of Torah is that we cannot trust human intuition, male or female. The only way to reach God is through His Torah, using the intellect, which is man's ability to perceive God's wisdom as stated by all Rishonim. The moment we say that we can trust human intuition, you throw away the entire Torah. Not a single concept in Judaism has ever been forged based on pure intuition, only upon halacha, rationality and wisdom. Whether the originator of the idea was male, or female makes no difference.

From a logical standpoint, female superiority fails to answer

the question: it is unfair that man should be treated in a superior fashion. But this view suggests it is very fair that the woman is superior. You might as well retain the original question where man was superior [the issue of inequality remains regardless of which gender is superior]. Obviously, this answer is illogical if the concern is with justice. Aside from these considerations, this approach is dangerous because it negates the halachic system and destroys it. I wonder what this view would do with the mishnah at the end of Horiyus (13a):

*When saving a person's life, the man is saved before the woman.*

This means that if a ship is sinking—contrary to Western society's "Women and children first"—the halacha is that men are saved first. The same applies to returning a lost object. It depends: in certain cases, the woman takes priority. Concerning clothing, poverty and redeeming captives, women are given priority. But we cannot deny the halacha. In his commentary on the mishnah, Maimonides says the reason men are saved first is because of his comparatively greater sanctity. And this is not Maimonides' own idea because this is a continuation of the previous mishnah: *"Whomever is of greater sanctity than his friend, is prioritized over his friend"* (Ibid. 12b). But according to the approach we have rejected [female superiority], the mishnah and Maimonides were bigoted and harbored primitive ideas, while the view we rejected is more enlightened. That view rejects the Mesora. The misunderstanding also opposes the blessings said by each gender each morning as this view renders *"You made me according to Your will"* as the main blessing. However, it was not yet a blessing in the time of the gemara. The blessing did not yet exist in the time of Chazal, and furthermore, many don't even



recite this blessing. Aruch Hashulchan says our custom is not to recite this blessing because of the question of its source. Others who recite this blessing say it in a manner of accepting God's decrees [matzdik hadin]. Meaning, the woman says the blessing as an acceptance "of what God gave me." "Just as one blesses on the good, one blesses on the bad" and this is not due to superiority. For if it was, one could not make this blessing to begin with because we cannot invent new blessings after Chazal. But to matzdik the din is universally accepted, so a woman has a right to make this blessing. Therefore, from a halachic standpoint, this view holds no water.

Menachos 43b says:

*Man is obligated to make 3 blessings every day and these are them: "that you did not make me a gentile," "that you did not make me a slave," "that you did not make me a woman." But is not the slave and the woman identical [in terms of their respective commands, so why then need both blessings]?*

Why is the slave and a woman the same? This is because these blessings were established in order that man looks forward to mitzvos. Mitzvos should not be viewed as a burden, but on the contrary, one should view them as the greatest blessing. Therefore, Chazal established that one should rise each day feeling fortunate for his mitzvos. Man, who has the most mitzvos, should bless God for having them. But the gemara asked why both blessings are required ["that You did not make me a slave" and "that You did not make me woman"] seeing that both individuals have the identical amount of mitzvos. One answer is that the slave is inferior. Therefore,

this series of blessings progresses from one with the least amount of mitzvos to the one with the most [from gentile, to slave, to woman]. One explanation why the slave is inferior is that his fewer mitzvahs are due to his lower status in the Jewish nation, whereas a woman does not have lesser sanctity in Israel than men. But she is exempt from certain mitzvos.

The second explanation why both blessings are needed is because they are 2 separate cases of individuals with fewer mitzvos [with different reasons for their statuses]. But according to the view that a woman is superior, and “*You did not make me woman*” is a lament, whereas “*You did not make me a slave*” is a praise [for having greater mitzvos than a slave] the gemara should not have had any question of a man reciting both blessings, as they are 2 separate matters. However, the gemara equates a woman and a slave, which renders this female superiority philosophy in opposition to the gemara. This shows that empty philosophizing without halacha is in improper, unless one wishes to deny the Baalei Hamesora [leading Torah transmitters] and the gemara. This should serve as a warning against apologetics, which, in order to answer questions raised against Torah by our modern neurotic society, will go to any length, even if this means distorting Torah and opposing our Baalei Hamesora and the gemara. This is unfortunate.

The gemara in Horiyus that man is saved first is not a value judgment; it is simply a matter of halacha. When a man and woman are in danger, there is no method of determining whose life should be saved. It is ridiculous to even attempt to develop a formula to determine this. Western society’s “Women and children first” is equally absurd. A human life is an invaluable object. But saving the man first is because the Jewish nation accepted that in such a situation, the order of saving lives should reflect the high priority we place on mitzvos.

Since there is no way to make a determination [of whom to save first], the way it was decided was in a manner which reflects Israel's commitment and love for mitzvos. As man has greater [more] mitzvos, he is saved first to reflect this idea. But, in no way does saving a man over a woman indicate that man possesses greater value than a woman.

Regarding who is given preeminence, this is determined by the individual. Devorah the prophetess possessed the greatest knowledge of Torah. Therefore, it is stated, "*Devorah, wife of Lappidos, was a prophetess; she led Israel at that time*" (Judges 4:5). Sanhedrin were subordinated to her. The system of the nation of Israel is not a democracy or an aristocracy. It is an intellectual aristocracy, a democratic aristocracy. Judaism states that anyone who possesses wisdom is in the forefront; such a person holds the highest position. Who is honored first? A mamzare [the product of illicit relationship] precedes a convert because he has the sanctity as a member of Israel, and the convert [once] did not. One of the worst things one can do is to pain or oppress the convert for being a convert (Lev. 19:33). Today, people try to hide their status as a convert, but a convert is in no way inferior. [Kings David and Solomon and Moshiach all descend from the convert Ruth.] How then can a mamzare precede the convert? It is because the system is not based on a personal evaluation. And we see that the mamzare who is a Torah scholar comes before the high priest who is ignorant. But such [flawed] high priests existed only in the Second Temple when there was corruption. But in the First Temple they ensured that the high priest was not ignorant, an "am ha'aretz." Thus, wisdom is elevated [highly valued]. We give honor to people by reflecting our most valued matter: the sanctity of the Torah. The mamzare who is a Torah scholar reflects this greater than the high priest who is ignorant, as does a mamzare over a convert. Our com-

mitment to the system of Torah demands that we [first] honor a person who was born as part of the system. Thus, the mamzare precedes the convert. We are not honoring the person of the mamzare, but Torah. And this is not a pain for the convert for he loves Torah and desires to see Torah performed where allegiance and respect to Torah are displayed. Furthermore, it is not a personal matter that we honor a mamzare before a convert, and therefore we do not cause the person of the convert any pain.

The problem with today's society is that an honor is viewed as a personal matter. When Rav Aharon Kotler entered the yeshiva he always carried a sefer: "They're standing up for the sefer, not for me." The halacha of honoring a rebbe is also not a personal matter. The dispute whether it [his wisdom] is "his" Torah is not regarding Torah as a possession. Rather, the dispute is whether the system was established in a way that he has the right to give rulings. But people today are so tied to the physical and the tangible that they cannot perceive such an idea where we honor an objective concept, where these people are only players in reflecting an idea. We are not honoring the people. But people strongly desire honor for themselves. So, when Torah honors people, the public interprets that honor in their own personal [incorrect] terms and they cannot conceive of an honor for Torah, and not the person.

Returning to our discussion of genders, due to woman's modesty, there are far more women engaged in Torah than we know. These women are not interested in parading their knowledge. But this does not mean that they don't have this knowledge. Regarding converts, the gemara says that most don't convert for the proper reasons. But if they do, they are on the highest level. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said he was greater than a born Jew because he accepted Torah voluntarily, while we accepted it out of coercion.

The gemara says that a wise man precedes the king of Israel because if the former dies, there is no replacement, but a king can be replaced by anyone. This reflects Judaism's true value system. In this framework a woman [of wisdom] comes first.

Women are exempt from time bound mitzvos based on the Torah. But based on reason, a women's role in establishing the nation of Israel precludes them from the burdens of technical obligations [mitzvos]. And even older women who no longer raise children are exempt because halacha has a design. It takes years of learning to develop an appreciation for how halacha is structured and how it operates. It is structured in a very logical, abstract and beautiful design. Beauty in halacha is a necessary component. The gemara says, "*Honey and milk under your tongue*" (Song of Songs 4:11) refers to words of Torah. This means that if one has a Torah idea and it is not sweet like honey and milk, one should not share it. [One should only say an idea when it is well-formulated and beautiful.] The concept that halacha has a certain intellectual aesthetic is not just a drasha, but God constructed halacha in this manner. Halacha must have beauty and logic. These are the determinations God used to determine halacha's ultimate structure. Since that is the case, halacha cannot reflect philosophy. Of course, ultimately halacha has reasons. Once halacha starts with a reason, it [then] operates in its own system. It has its own criteria and a certain logic and beauty in its structure. Therefore, its operation deviates from its [original] reason which was the starting point of the halacha. Halacha cannot go hand-in-hand with a philosophy in every step. This is because halacha is a special type of subject, and once engaged in it, it demands a certain beauty, logic and structure because of the nature of the subject itself. This is so, as part of man's perfection is that he appreciates the halachic system. Just as

one needs a sense for mathematics and physics, one needs a sense for halacha, for halacha is different than all other subjects. As halacha is a separate subject, it must be separate intrinsically from philosophy. It only has certain points of contact with philosophy.

*In order that your generations know that  
I caused the children of Israel to dwell in  
succahs when I took them out of Egypt, I  
am the Lord your God. (Lev. 23:43)*

The reason for the mitzvah of succah is that we know that God caused us to dwell in huts. Thus, a succah higher than 20 cubits is invalid, as the person is unaware that he is sitting under the schach [the roof], the main part of the succah [as it is beyond his field of vision]. Until today we have no decision [psak] on whether a mitzvah requires intent [kavana]. According to this view [that intent is not required], if one does not know that he is sitting in a succah, he [nonetheless] fulfills the mitzvah. This is regardless of the reason given, “*that your generations know...*” Again, if one blows a shofar on Rosh Hashannah but he is unaware that it is Rosh Hashannah, he fulfills the mitzvah of blowing shofar. Philosophically, both cases seem absurd. The point is that halacha and philosophy are 2 separate worlds. If philosophy dictated halacha, such halachos [above] would be absurd, that one can be disengaged philosophically and still fulfill his obligation. But the person who knows halacha knows that the definition of a mitzvah requires a rigid definitive formulation. It is incorrect to say, “A mitzvah is that which brings one close to God.” That is a philosophical definition and not a halachic definition. Rather, one must approach defining a mitzvah by asking, “What in the structure of this action defines X as a mitzvah?” From the

theoretical and logical standpoint, it makes perfect sense to say that the mere fact that the action one performed conforms perfectly to Torah's description, that itself renders the act a mitzvah. Many Rishonim are of this opinion. It is a logical concept; it has nothing to do with [philosophical] reasons or one's intent. It is an objective reality. That is halacha. While it is true that God gave the mitzvah of succah to recall the succahs in which God caused us to dwell when we left Egypt, once the mitzvah was given, halacha defines whether one acted according to the description of the mitzvah. One's philosophy is not a factor.

Halacha is a unique concept which God gave to man and it is not something any human being would create, not even the most brilliant mind. No other religion has an idea anything like halacha. Even minds like Plato always developed ideas related to philosophy because a human being can't manufacture anything beyond that. Man has a goal, so he does something that is in line with that goal. No person could have invented the idea of halacha; it is a God-given logical system of abstraction of infinite depth. That is why we cannot deduce philosophical conclusions from halacha. Maimonides can because he knows halacha. People who, over the past century have philosophized Judaism, acted absurdly. Modern Jewish philosophers offer philosophical views, but they are ignorant of the essence and core of Judaism, which is halacha, and which permeates every aspect of Judaism, from time immemorial until today. As these philosophers are ignorant of halacha, how can they philosophize a system when they don't know what that system is? The entire form—every aspect—of the system of Judaism is from halacha: the commitment Jews have to Torah, the way they daven, the way they read Torah, everything they do is halacha. And yet, people philosophize a system of which they are totally ignorant of the system's core and essence. It is absurd.

However, in the world, this question is not a question. Historians ignorant of halacha come along and philosophize Judaism. They have no credentials to do so. But the Rav could philosophize Judaism because he knows halacha. Only one who knows the points of contact between philosophy and halacha can philosophize halacha.

Another example is tzitzis, where the reason given is that one will see them and recall all mitzvos: *“And you will see them, and you will remember all God’s mitzvos”* (Num. 15:39). However, there is no halacha that one must see his tzitzis; one fulfills the obligation without seeing them. (The only reason one must be aware of tefillin is not because one can’t fulfill the mitzvah without awareness, but because one cannot remove his attention from tefillin due to their sanctity.)

Why isn’t honey used in sacrifices? Maimonides says that idolaters gave their gods tasty cakes; they thought their gods enjoyed them. Therefore, Torah prohibited offering anything sweet to teach that man does not benefit God through sacrifice [and certainly He does not partake of eating or share any relationship to the physical world].

The system of halacha itself could never have been man-made because it is a commitment to a system of wisdom, and part of that system is its infinite depth and a commitment to try to ponder and understand it as far as we can. Any man-made system cannot be greater than the intellect who created it, and it cannot contain infinite wisdom. Those equally as wise as the originator would immediately see its limitation. Unfortunately, the rest of the world today is ignorant of what halacha is and they associate halacha to some familiar notion [in their feeble attempt to grasp it]. Their ideas of course must be wrong as they are removed from any concept of halacha of which they have no real knowledge since it is a unique system. A person’s commitment to the science of halacha perfects him, his char-



acter, his mind and his life, and earns him Olam Haba. When Maimonides discusses the perfection bestowed upon people by the halachic system, he mentions women:

*The life of the World to Come may also be inherited, and be accessible to all, little and great, men and women (Hil. Yesodei Hatorah 4:13)*

To say that a woman is removed from halacha opposes Maimonides.

## ANNIHILATING AMALEK

This is a sensitive topic, and regards the annihilation of Amalek. The midrash says the following:

*As a child, Moshe took Pharaoh's crown and placed it on his own head. Bilam was there and told Pharaoh to be careful because this child is a Jew and he did this out of wisdom. Moses means symbolically to take the crown of Egypt. [Bilam continued to criticize the Jews.] Abraham desired power and was a liar as he said his wife was his sister to make Egypt stumble. Isaac too lied in this man-*

*ner in Gerar. Jacob followed this path of trickery when taking the birthright from Esav and he went to Paddan Aram and took Lavan's flock leaving him with nothing, taking his daughters too. And the brothers sold Joseph. When Joseph was freed from prison, he gave his father and brothers wealth and did not charge them anything. Bilam told Pharaoh, "These are the kind of people you're dealing with."*

Bilam projected base motivations onto Torah facts. However, an event can be determined only by the underlying motive and perfection of individual. A person can corrupt the true intent of a perfected person's act by projecting onto it evil motives. The idea of annihilating Amalek and the mitzvah to have hatred towards a destructive person like our prayers state is distasteful to people:

*And for slanderers may there be no hope; and may all wickedness be destroyed instantly and may all Your enemies be cut down quickly. Quickly uproot, smash, and cast down the arrogant sinners and humble them quickly in our days" (Shmoneh Essray).*

This is because the moment such a person sees hatred, he immediately identifies it with his own base emotion of hatred and assumes what Judaism proposes is the same. But in fact, Judaism does not propose anything of this sort. What Judaism says with the command to annihilate Amalek is that a person who has a love of God and love for people must ipso facto have a hatred towards anything that destroys the Jewish na-

tion. It is not a hatred against the individual; it is a philosophical hatred. Most people cannot understand such a concept because they are rooted in the personal, and therefore they cannot understand what that means. But Judaism demands that a person attains the level of having that hatred. When you see people misguiding others with completely false ideas about Judaism and about God for no other reason than for their own advantage, you must have a hatred for such a practice. This destroys people's lives and removes them from the truth. Similarly, a person would have to hate a physician for practicing medicine while ignorant of medicine and physically destroys others. Amalek is not just the Jews' enemy, but the enemy of the entire world. A person must have a philosophical hatred towards any human being who destroys others.

People do not have a conviction in Torah from Sinai [proof of God and His Torah based on mass witnesses]. Some people feel there is an equality of beliefs: "I have my belief and you have your equally plausible belief." But this is inapplicable when one belief is true, and the other is false. One cannot speak of equality between treating disease with medicine and with witchcraft. Those who feel it is unfair how Torah treats Amalek—those wishing to destroy Judaism—feel this way due to their ignorance of what Judaism is, and its veracity.

Anyone with a love of God and a love for people must hate those seeking to destroy Judaism and ideas about God. The Nazis, may their fame be erased, embodied Amalek. Torah says that such a nation must be utterly destroyed.

How do we respond to those questioning the justice in killing the innocent Amalekite children? It is not a simple matter, as we see someone greater than us did not understand it. King Saul allowed the Amalekite children and animals to survive. He said, "Animals: Where have they sinned? Children: Where

have they sinned?" Nevertheless, God gave us the law unlike King Saul thought. A person may not understand why the children and animals must be killed. But one cannot act in accord with his lack of understanding [he must follow the law to kill all].

God does not seek the destruction of the children. On the contrary, at the Reed Sea, God lamented [about the Egyptians]: "*The works of My hands are drowning in the sea.*" God does not wish that people are destroyed. However, in order to eradicate the philosophy of Amalek, killing the entire nation is necessary. The same principle applied to the 7 nations [those whom the Jews killed upon entering Israel]. Their idolatry required eradication. Those who disagree with complete eradication of a nation are wrong. God knows better. Support is found in Germany's new movement by the Nazi's children. The children say, "Our parents could not have been the killers that history depicts. Therefore, history must be a Jewish conspiracy to condemn our parents." The children view their parents as virtuous and they are bringing back Nazism with a denial of the atrocities. This is the most dangerous kind of Nazism. This shows the justice in eradicating the children as well. We don't have the knowledge God used in creating Torah, but if one violates the halacha it must have disastrous effects. That is why it says that since King Saul did not fulfill eradicating Amalek, Haman was a result.

Eradicating Amalek does not target harm towards individuals, but the goal is to remove a force that harms the entire world. We follow the halacha, even if it conflicts with our mercy for others, even though such mercy is the emotion that Torah encourages. This is because on the whole, mercy leads to virtuous actions. But at times, we must not follow this trait of mercifulness.

Even more, not only do we follow the law of eradicating

Amalek, but we view it as the greatest kindness, because there is no one who is more merciful than God: “*God, God, the Almighty [is] merciful and gracious, long-suffering, with abundant kindness and truth*” (Exod. 34:6). Our greatest acts of mercy do not even approach God’s mercy, which is qualitatively differentiated from ours. Eradicating Amalek is a trait of justice, but it is also based on the greatest trait of mercy for the world.

In conclusion, apologetics have no place in Judaism. It is a defense, and Judaism requires no defense. Proof of Torah from Sinai validates Torah as God’s words. Once a person knows this, his likes or dislikes for Torah’s commands and philosophy have no effect upon his actions or beliefs. Anyone who needs to render Torah ideals in an appealing light is one who clearly remains unconvinced that Torah is from God. One may not like the idea of mamzare, but it is a Torah verse, and thus, God’s word. There is no recourse.

One with a frantic need to defend Torah, determines Torah truths based on an appeal to oneself, and not based on Sinai. It is absurd to keep Torah only when it is appealing. [God’s knowledge overrides man’s knowledge.] It is a denial of God giving the Torah. This point must be clear.

[We commenced discussing gender equality.] The question if there are inferior and superior genders is irrational, because we have no right to dictate what types of beings God should create. On the whole, it is accepted that angels are superior to man, and among man there are levels. Can one claim such variation in superiority is unfair? Of course not. This is God’s right. This claim is of a neurotic nature. Modern day society that claims this [unfairness] is concerned about their personal interests. And had God created either gender as superior, we would accept that as well; we abide by God’s wisdom. To say otherwise denies God. We have the right to investigate Torah,

but it must be done properly without negating the Baalei Hamesora [Torah leaders throughout time] and Chazal. And we must not draw philosophical conclusions that would imply that Chazal were bigoted, or that Maimonides or the Tur are bigoted for reciting *“That you made me according to Your will”* as accepting God’s decree, as such accusations break the entire system. Maimonides says that a denier of Torah is one who derides the Torah. Once a person speaks against Chazal, the Baalei Hamesora and the Rishonim, one destroys the system which depends on them.

An investigation reveals that genders are different with their respective unique qualities. Both genders are components of a whole: *“Male and female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Man”* (Gen. 5:2). At the end of Horiyus, Chazal say that a Torah scholar precedes the king. Maimonides says this is in thought alone, as the benefit of wisdom is greater than the benefit of the king. But in practice, no preference should be shown greater than for the king. Maimonides says this prioritization is only idealistic.

## 5:19 STUDENTS OF ABRAHAM VS. STUDENTS OF BILAM

WHOEVER POSSESSES THESE 3 THINGS, HE IS  
OF THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER;

AND [WHOEVER POSSESSES] 3 OTHER THINGS, HE IS OF THE DISCIPLES OF BILAM, THE WICKED. A GOOD EYE, A HUMBLE SPIRIT AND A MODERATE APPETITE, HE IS OF THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER. AN EVIL EYE, A HAUGHTY SPIRIT AND A LIMITLESS APPETITE, HE IS OF THE DISCIPLES OF BILAM, THE WICKED. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER, AND THE DISCIPLES OF BILAM, THE WICKED? THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER, ENJOY THIS WORLD, AND INHERIT THE WORLD TO COME, AS IT IS SAID: "I WILL ENDOW THOSE WHO LOVE ME WITH SUBSTANCE, I WILL FILL THEIR TREASURIES" (PROVERBS 8:21). BUT THE DISCIPLES OF BILAM, THE WICKED, INHERIT GEHENOM, AND DESCEND INTO THE NETHERMOST PIT, AS IT IS SAID: "FOR YOU, O GOD, WILL BRING THEM DOWN TO THE NETHERMOST PIT, THOSE MURDEROUS AND TREACHEROUS MEN; THEY SHALL NOT LIVE OUT HALF THEIR DAYS; BUT I TRUST IN YOU" (PSALMS 55:24).

Did Bilam the wicked [really] have students? Why did the mishnah frame it in this way [comparing one group of students to others, as opposed to simply identifying good and bad values]? Maimonides comments:

*Regarding Abraham, a good eye refers to satisfaction [Abraham was satisfied with his possessions]. A moderate appetite refers to caution in avoiding lusts. And a humble spirit refers to [excessive] humility. The opposite character traits are an energetic pursuit of wealth referred to as an evil eye, a limitless appetite [insatiable*

*desires] and a haughty spirit. Students of Abraham attain this designation as they follow Abraham's attributes. And whomever possesses the negative traits belongs to the students of Bilam. And I will cite the verses describing Abraham's attributes and Bilam's flawed character. Abraham's satisfaction is seen when the king of Sodom wished to reward Abraham for returning the captives and their positions. But Abraham said he would not take anything from the king, even a shoestring. And this is the height of satisfaction and that is that man abandons much wealth and refuses to benefit even in a minute amount.*

Abraham had reason not to accept a reward from the king of Sodom:

*But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I swear to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours so you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich.'" (Gen. 14:22,23)*

God told Abraham that he would make him great. And if Abraham's greatness could be attributed to the king of Sodom, it would reduce the sanctification of God's name [through Abraham's success achieved exclusively through God and no other]. Abraham realized what happens to him [now] is no longer a phenomenon in the capacity of Abraham as an individual, which was his capacity until now in Ur Casdim. There,



Abraham had no responsibility other than to himself. That is where Abraham developed his ideas about Judaism. He saw through the fallacy of idolatry to the nth degree and it is where he began teaching and developed a following. But when God appeared to Abraham at the age of 75 and told him “*Leave your land, your birth place and the house of your father*” (Gen. 12:1), that meant that God removed Abraham from living as a private individual to become an entity who will build a structure [the Jewish nation] that will benefit the world. If anyone would taint this role, it would be destructive. Taking money from the king of Sodom would reduce his role. The world must view Abraham as one whom God—and no other—made successful. Thus, it was a political reason that Abraham refused gifts from the king.

Maimonides says that for a person [Abraham] to refuse such wealth, he must possess the trait of satisfaction. Meaning, a normal person could not refuse those gifts. This is because a person by nature has an insatiable desire for wealth. Even for political motivation, a person could not walk away from a fortune unless he possesses this trait of satisfaction. Such a person is not excited over wealth; he is satisfied financially and needs no more. Most people feel that if they have a certain amount of wealth, that they would be satisfied and not seek anything more. But in truth, one’s desire for wealth is the energy of the psyche directed towards an ultimate fantasy which one seeks to attain from wealth. One who is under the sway of that fantasy cannot refuse gifts. An imperfect person will cave in to his desires even if there are reasons not to cave in [such as political reasons as in Abraham’s case]. A small person can never perform a great deed. It is impossible. If there were no reason to refuse the gift, Abraham would have accepted. Wealth has a purpose to help one function according to his needs, and anything additional should be used to

sanctify God's name. But in Abraham's case, refusing the reward was the greatest use [it maintained sanctification of God's name]. There was no difference in Abraham's emotions whether he accepted the gift or not. He decided the proper response in each case, and when it was improper, he walked away. Maimonides continues:

*Abraham's removal from lusts is seen when he said this to Sarah the day they came to Egypt: "Behold I know that you are a beautiful woman" (Gen. 12:11). Chazal say that until that day, Abraham never looked at Sarah in a way of total evaluation of her beauty [but he did so on that day because he was concerned for her danger]. And this is the height of removal from the instinctual.*

You see from Chazal that the relationships between the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs was qualitatively differentiated [from our own]. Abraham's and Sarah's relationship operated on a different basis, totally removed from the instinctual and physical aspects of love as we understand them. Also, when Abraham our father took Hagar, Rashi comments:

*And Sarah the wife of Abraham took her maid Hagar the Egyptian at the end of 10 years: She took her with words, "Happy are you that you merit to cleave to a holy body as this" (Gen. 16:3).*

This means that the relationship with Abraham was differ-

ent than with any other human being. It was a different kind of conjugal relationship. Maimonides continues:

*Abram said to Sarai, "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right" (Gen. 16:6). This teaches that Abraham had no desire to enjoy Hagar physically. And also, when Sarah demanded that Abraham chase out Hagar and Ishmael, and he would not be able to live with Hagar anymore, Torah says that Abraham was upset only about Ishmael: "The matter distressed Abraham greatly, concerning his son" (Gen. 21:11). These are demonstrations of a person who is removed from the physical, the instinctual.*

Abraham was undisturbed in losing Hagar as a physical mate for he was completely removed from the area of physical desires. Maimonides continues:

*And Abraham's humility is seen when he said, "I am dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27).*

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*Why did the author of this mishnah need to be so verbose here? It is because he wished to demonstrate what perfection consists of, namely the 3 matters: satisfaction, removal from the instinctual and humility.*

Maimonides continues:

*Due to his love of money, Bilam traveled from Aram Naharayim to curse the Jews [in spite of the difficulties]. And based on his great desire for sex, Bilam gave advice to Balak that the women act promiscuously with Israel.*

Bilam gave a brilliant counsel. The Jews succeed because they sublimate their energies into wisdom. Other nations remain in the world of lusts. After Bilam failed at cursing Jews he told Balak that he could destroy Jews by engaging them in the instinctual. That will be their end, and he was correct. Bilam was brilliant and understood very advanced psychological warfare. This is more advanced than biological warfare. Maimonides says that you learn that Bilam was very lustful:

*For were it not for his abundant lust, Bilam never would have advised Balak to entice the Jews through the women. Because man's advice is always in accord with his own thinking, for good people do not advise others on evil.*

Why is this so? Perhaps Bilam was not a baal taiveh (lustful person) but he knew how to destroy the Jews. And he advised Balak due to his desire for the money [which Balak promised him for cursing the Jews]. It is a difficult question. Maimonides also says that Bilam cohabited with his donkey. This means that he was engaged in much sexual activity. This was his way of life.

Bilam was a highly organized and sophisticated individual. He did not simply follow every passing desire like an average person. Such people get nowhere and cannot become much of a rasha. A true rasha requires organization. Bilam had a philosophy: the good in life is wealth, honor, physical enjoyments and sexual pleasure. And a person must use his mind to attain these matters. Bilam was very successful in doing so. These sound familiar in American society.

“Students” of Bilam the rasha mean that Bilam represented a “way of life” [a path that could be studied, but not indicating such a path is correct]. However, the components don’t equal the whole. For example, one person can chase wealth, but this does not necessitate a philosophy of his life; perhaps he chases wealth as he is insecure, and he has emotional problems. In one sense he is better than Bilam because he does not espouse a philosophy of lust. But in another sense, he is worse because it is a weakness in his soul; he has no control over his emotions. You hear proverbial stories of people dying with a fortune under their mattresses, yet they lived like paupers. These people had a desire for money, but they were not Bilam. They had a neurosis, but they don’t reflect a philosophy of life. The same applies to following desires. But when one spans the gamut and one is involved in wealth, physical pleasures and honor, these are not just weak emotions, which [by design] do not set themselves up in all areas. Rather, this type of personality lives with a philosophy of life. That was Bilam.

Now, if Bilam only had a weakness for money, then in general he would have been a good person and would not have had a drive for the instinctual. But Maimonides says that if that were the case, Bilam could never had advised Balak to cause others [the Jews] to engage in sexual promiscuity since “good people do not advise others on evil.” It is psychologically impossible for a good person to destroy another person

by offering destructive advice, as Bilam had advised Balak. Maimonides means that a good person never destroys another on a spiritual plane. For example, a person will not say, "I will destroy that person by preventing him from praying." This is because once a person values the good, he cannot cause others to lose it. Again, a person cannot destroy his enemy by preventing the enemy's acts of kindness so he might inherit *gehenom*. A person can only try to destroy another in an area dealing with earthly existence: he'll take his money and hurt him physically. But he cannot destroy others spiritually by removing from them a spiritual good. This is humanly impossible; no one would want to do such a thing. There is no satisfaction in such an act. If one is convinced that promiscuity is evil, and there is a higher benefit in life, he will not destroy another person with destructive advice. On the contrary, it will bother him to do so. When others try to stop us from Torah study [or living a Jewish life] it is not because they know what Torah is. Rather, they wish to strip us of an earthly superiority.

People's identification with others prevents them from destroying them spiritually. But the fact that Bilam had advised Balak in sexual promiscuity displayed that Bilam viewed promiscuity as a good, but only when it is under control. But Bilam felt the Jews will lose control and he will harm them. Bilam wished to destroy the Jews. But had Bilam felt that there was a higher good and that promiscuity was evil, he could not cause the Jews to indulge; it would disturb him.

Bilam hated the Jews because they represented the truth and because the Jews' existence conflicted with his whole way of life. That is Sinai. [Proof of God through revelation at Sinai and His selection of the Jews generates a jealous hatred in others].

A person can destroy another materialistically. For by re-

moving materialism from another, one makes more materialism available to himself.

Why did Bilam receive prophecy? It was for the sake of the Jews. Like Lavan, Bilam never received prophecy because he intrinsically deserved it. He was a rasha. He did not have the proper prerequisite character to deserve prophecy. But he did possess intellect. He was the only case of a prophet who possessed intellect without perfection of character. He received prophecy because of a certain situation that befell the Jewish nation. The term “vayikar” is used in connection with Bilam indicating that he did not deserve prophecy. [Vayikar indicates an accidental relationship. God accidentally or not essentially spoke with Bilam, indicating that intrinsically he did not deserve prophecy.] Bilam had a brilliant mind and when he was under prophetic influence, he saw true ideas. But the moment the influence of prophecy left him, he reverted back to his original state. This is because a person cannot be perfected by anything other than himself. Even if God gave him prophecy and he gained momentary perfection due to prophetic influence, when prophecy ceases, he reverts back to his evil self. That is the case of Bilam.

Chronicles calls Bilam a kosame, a soothsayer. This means that through his intelligence he caused people to believe that he could curse others. His curses affected others psychologically in a way that destroyed them; they believed that they were cursed. [But to believe that curses are effective in the mystical sense is false and idolatrous]. That is why God prevented Bilam from cursing the Jews; at that time, he could have destroyed them in this psychological manner (Ibn Ezra).

This is why our mishnah phrases this matter as “students” of Bilam and “students” of Abraham; both used intellect. Bilam and Abraham were powerful people with powerful minds. They were influential individuals. Bilam stood before

kings. The mishnah tells us that with wisdom alone without proper character, one can be as far from perfection as east is from west. Perfection is attained only through a difficult struggle with the self where a person—inch by inch—makes advances and moves his nature to come in line with his perception of perfection. But if perfection is suddenly given to a person, even though he has the greatest intellect, he will lose it. For as long as knowledge [and proper character] is not part of one's nature, it is an alien entity and cannot possibly perfect him. [The perfected state Bilam experienced under prophecy could not endure once the prophecy ended because of his corrupt nature.]

## AKEIDA

*And God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will tell you" (Gen. 22:2).*

Chazal say that the way God phrased this command with every reference to Isaac refers to some emotion: your "son," your "only" son, whom you "love." Each reference brought out every nuance of Abraham's emotional attachment to Isaac.



What was so great about Abraham sacrificing his son, while idolaters did this all the time? There was also the intellectual problem of God first saying, “*for in Isaac will your seed be called*” (Gen. 21:12), and now God says to kill Isaac. But that was not the trial; the trial was sacrificing his beloved son. The midrash says that when Abraham brought Isaac to sacrifice him, his eyes were flowing with tears.

The difference between Abraham and the idolaters was that the latter sacrificed their children easily, because it was a psychological phenomenon. To the idolater, a son represented an emotional satisfaction, but the imagined satisfaction the idolater enjoyed in appeasing his god was greater than his emotional attachment to his son. But Abraham was rational; he did not perceive any type of satisfaction in sacrificing Isaac. Abraham knew God doesn't need sacrifices. Abraham did not imagine any primitive psychological benefits in sacrifice. So, on the one hand Abraham's mind perceived the rational command to sacrifice Isaac, and on the other hand he felt attached to his son. For Abraham, this was a trial.

Whenever one studies the perfections of the Patriarchs and of Torah personalities, [one must know that] Abraham our father was not distorted psychologically. Other people who throw money away are psychologically distorted, it is a sickness. But Abraham our father was a normal individual with a normal psyche and a great mind. He followed his ideas and brought his emotions under the guidance of those ideas of reality. For such a person it is a major trial because to turn away money is not a normal thing. No one would do this. And if you will suggest that Abraham was very wealthy [to explain why he refused the reward], the response is that only people who are not wealthy [are the ones who] think that if they become wealthy, they will give away their wealth. But once they become wealthy, people grow even more attached to their

wealth; certainly, they are as attached to their wealth as they were when they were not wealthy. The rabbis teach:

*“No man leaves this world with even half of his desires fulfilled” (Kobeles Rabbah 1:13). If he has one hundred coins in his hand, he wants to make it 2 hundred. If his hand has attained 2 hundred, he longs to make them 4 hundred. And so it is written, “He that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver” (Kobeles 5:9).*

People give [or promise to give] money before they have it. But once they have it, they don't give it away. One who gives charity when earning \$30,000 per year will give charity when earning \$1,000,000. And one who does not give charity when earning \$30,000 will not give charity when earning \$1,000,000. People earning \$100,000,000 work just as hard as people earning \$30,000. That is human nature and to deny it is imagination. The \$100,000,000 per year earner does not turn away money.

The person living the life of Torah has the most emotionally satisfying life. There is no question in my mind that it is so. Knowledge of Torah affects one in every sphere of one's life: family, child rearing, in innumerable ways. If one is fortunate that his children study Torah, he has a relationship with his children on an essential level. Following a Torah lifestyle, one learns how to use his mind and overcome powerful and destructive instinctual forces [and live harmoniously with his family]. In business too he is happier and more successful and fulfilled because he knows his emotions [and controls them] while most people don't. Successful business people have a good ear, a good business sense. But one who knows himself,

his emotions and his moods, is a different kind of person. Torah helps a person in every sphere of his life.

But that is not the reason to follow Judaism. The true reason is because it is reality. Once one sees that the Torah life is the real life [the purpose of human existence and how reality operates], he cannot say to himself, “I will live a more happy and carefree existence as a child” [I will abandon Torah]. As Aristotle said, *“A person will never say, ‘I will be a child,’ even though a child’s life is more fulfilling [full satisfaction and conflict free]. He would not give up his [adult] knowledge.”* No matter how painful being an adult is, he would not give up his knowledge. He would rather suffer than give up his intellect, his mind and his essence. That is the real motivation to follow Judaism; one cannot tolerate living out of line with reality. In this framework, one follows Judaism not for any other satisfaction or fulfillment [as many people desire in their search for fulfillment]. In this framework, one adheres to Judaism because he is compelled to live in line with reality. [“Reality” being God’s Torah lifestyle, recognizing the Creator, studying His Torah wisdom and how the universe is designed and operates.] He cannot follow matters that he knows are empty [fame, fortune, success, lusts, etc.]. He must follow that which has true value.

All Torah’s blessings are 100% true, not simply in terms of Torah, but in everyday life. One living a Torah lifestyle is heaped up with blessings. He avoids the plagues of most people [what concerns most people]: how much money others are making, how his neighbors view him, what is his value in society, etc. All these are nonsensical, and the Torah personality doesn’t care about them. He does not think about these matters. When he wakes in the morning he is concerned about ideas, about self-improvement, and about God’s wisdom. He derives unbelievable satisfaction from studying, learning and

gaining insight. There is no other satisfaction that compares. It is the highest form of enjoyment one can experience. Anyone who has enjoyed this knows this to be true. It is a tremendous high that is unparalleled.

Nevertheless, even though such a person has such a blessed existence, the reason he follows Torah isn't because of that. He follows Torah because it is reality. That is Abraham our father. He did not live for ulterior motives. And those who follow Torah not for its own sake—she'lo lishma—it is a good only because it will bring one to follow Torah for its own sake—lishma. But if it would not, it is almost worthless.

Torah gives us a glimpse and insight into the lives of the Patriarchs. You must understand that although their lives may be something that we cannot relate to on our level, it is yet important to recognize our inability to relate to them [this identifies our shortcomings].

Torah talks about Abraham our father and his removal from a sensual life. We previously mentioned that when Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt, Abraham said to Sarah, “*Behold I know that you are a beautiful woman.*” Maimonides comments:

*Abraham did not gaze at her physical form  
in a complete manner except for that day.  
And this is the height of removal from the  
sensual.*

This sounds strange to us; it is hard to imagine such a matter. Torah teaches an interesting idea. Apparently, there can be a relationship between the sexes based almost purely on the ideas. The male and female character can relate on the basis of ideas [an intellectual relationship of the genders]. And this relationship was not limited to Abraham and Sarah alone: Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob and Rachel also had this rela-

tionship. Isaac didn't even see Rebecca when she was selected for him, and she was selected purely on her character and her personality. Isaac loved Rebecca only after they were wed: *"Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebecca as his wife. Isaac loved her..."* (Gen. 24:67). Their relationship was based on a higher kind of love, not a romantic and sensual love that all others are familiar with. The same is true regarding Jacob and Rachel. Jacob worked 7 years in exchange for Rachel and the verse says, *"So Jacob served 7 years for Rachel and they seemed in his eyes but a few days because of his love for her"* (Gen. 29:20). How is it possible for a man romantically involved that 7 years seems like a few days? It should seem like 50-100 years. But to Jacob it seemed like a few days because his relationship to Rachel was not a passionate physical relationship. But he valued her so much that 7 years was a small price since Rachel was worth so much more. Torah teaches that the Patriarchs and Matriarchs had a different type of relationship and that it is possible that such a relationship can exist. And I previously mentioned Sarah's words to Hagar: *"Happy are you that you merit to cleave to a holy body as this"* (Gen. 16:3). In other words, Sarah meant, "You have an opportunity to have a unique kind of relationship that rarely exists in a world of human relations."

This all shows Abraham's removal from sensuality. But he was not an ascetic, which refers to people who withhold pleasure from themselves. That is a state of pain and not endorsed by Torah. On the contrary, Abraham was in a far greater state of enjoyment than the average person. His energies were channeled to the higher, more essential and more satisfying part of his nature.

Abraham was also most humble, as he referred to himself as "dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). But what does this mean?

*When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You established, what is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him, that You have made him little less than divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty; You have made him master over Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet. (Psalms 8:4-7)*

“*You have made him little less than divine*” implies the opposite, indicating that man is of great value. This verse means that God made man a little lower than angels. How then can Abraham say otherwise?

*You have made him master over Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet.*

With modern technology man has total control over his environment.

*[Master] over sheep and oxen, all of them, and wild beasts, too; the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas. (Ibid. 8:8,9)*

This also speaks of man’s greatness; no other creature can do this. Yet King David commences by saying, “*What is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him?*” This seems to indicate that man is worthless. The transition from one verse to the next is almost unintelligible. However, when man begins to understand God’s

knowledge, he sees that he is nothing because he can't scratch the surface of God wisdom. In terms of human knowledge, man is almost nothing: "*What is man that You have been mindful of him?*" Strangely enough, in spite of that, relative to creation, man is something. He is a unique creature. One scientist put it very well: "*It is amazing how little we know, and it is even more amazing how much we can do with how little we know.*" This refers to God placing man as ruler over creation, as King David said above. Relative to creation, man has a status. But when man sees the heavens, man recognizes how crude his rank is in relation to God.

Now the question is how Abraham's "*I am dust and ashes*" fits in. This is not the same statement as "*What is man that You are mindful of him?*" Chazal say that 3 people embodied humility: Moshe, King David and Abraham. Abraham said, "*I am dust and ashes*" (Gen. 18:27). Moshe and Aaron said, "*And what are we?*" (Exod. 16:8) And King David said, "*I am a worm and not a man*" (Psalms 22:7). Of these 3 people, Chazal said that King David was on the lowest level as he perceived himself [at least] as an animate being, a worm. Abraham was on a higher level as he perceived himself as an inanimate object, dust and ashes [but still a substance]. But Moshe and Aaron were on the highest level because they said that they were nothing [most humble of all]. Why didn't Chazal cite the other verse in David's self-depiction, "*What is man that You are mindful of him?*" Apparently that verse and "*I am dust and ashes*" do not share the same idea. What is the difference?

I believe the answer deals with the concept of love of God. But to understand love of God, one must first understand man, which takes us back to the creation of Adam.

Torah depicts Adam before the sin, and also after the sin. What is the most glaring difference in Adam's function between these 2 states? Before Adam sinned, he never thought

[reflected] about himself. This changed after he sinned. Before he sinned, he was involved purely in wisdom: he was classifying animals and studying creation. But after he sinned, he said “*I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid*” (Gen. 3:10). Adam began to think about himself. He was concerned about being a sinner. From that point and onward, Adam had problems.

Torah intends to raise man to the highest [level of] existence, to try in some way to recover what Adam lost. The more perfected a person is, the less he thinks about himself. That was Adam before the sin. He was perfected. Moshe Rabbeinu was involved in a prophetic vision for 40 days and 40 nights, during which time he did not think about himself at all, not even insofar as his physical needs. It was a miracle. But that exemplifies the highest level of perfection attainable. The higher level the man, the less he reflects upon the self and the more he is engaged in God’s wisdom. But it is impossible for any individual to be totally removed from the self after Adam’s sin. Maimonides describes love of God:

*When man realizes God’s infinite wisdom and is moved by this, man is overcome by a tremendous desire to draw close to God, to understand more of God’s wisdom. But then man suddenly becomes fearful and knows that he is a small creature, lowly and dark, who stands with a very frail and minimal kind of knowledge before God of total perfection. (Hil. Yesodei Hatorah 2:2)*

Great scientists experience this. But why does man reflect upon himself that he is a low and dark creature? The first part



of this description we understand. Just like one who is interested in the mind of a great human thinker, desires to meet that thinker and is attracted to him, here too, one's desire is to draw closer to God, as he is attracted to Him. That is love of God. That is understandable. But why must one view himself as a "*low and dark creature with frail and minimal knowledge, standing before one of perfect knowledge?*" It is because after the sin, man must reflect upon himself. Upon self-reflection, a typical person assesses his value and his good qualities. But a true thinker arrives at the exact opposite self-opinion. He sees a frightening experience: he is a dark and lowly creature in comparison to the Creator, trying with his crude means to understand the works of a perfect God. This self-reflection must occur to man after the sin. I would say that before Adam's sin, Maimonides' depiction of love of God would not be true.

Man is not homogeneous: he is composed of 2 parts of different substances. Chazal say that man is a combination of animal and angel. Man has emotions, instinctual drives and an intellect. People describe man by reviewing his components. But Judaism maintains that man cannot be viewed this way. This is part of the heresy of evolution, which says that man is merely a more complicated animal. But Judaism maintains that man has 2 parts to his nature that are completely unrelated. They are different in substance. He possesses a psyche, his personality, and instinctual drives, but then somehow or other he is capable of perceiving a world which is completely removed: a world of thoughts and ideas. Man can link into that world and have a totally different experience. That part of man's nature is not to be related in any way to the other side of his nature. It is alien to it. It is a metaphysical entity. Aristotle called this part man's "divine element," Plato called it "mind," and it is what Judaism calls the "Tzelem Elo-

him.” Judaism maintains that man straddles both the instinctual/psychological world and the divine world. Most people are engaged in the instinctual world. Occasionally, man perceives the divine. Man is not one unified entity. At times man exists in the instinctual and other times in the divine. This is an essential principle of Judaism.

The question is, which part of man desires to reflect upon himself? Man’s divine component that perceives God’s wisdom has no concern about the self. When engaged in the world of ideas, the self is furthest from man’s mind. Man is attracted to something outside the self. The concern for the self is generated by man’s lower psychological component. This is why happiness is never attained directly. This is because people desiring to attain happiness directly are usually interested in the self, while happiness is attained when one is engaged in matters external to the self. It’s a no win situation.

Now, when Abraham said, “*I am dust and ashes,*” which part of man said this? It is said by the psychological part of man, even by one as great as Abraham our father. But in the great chocham, when his lower psychological part reflects upon himself, he arrives at one conclusion: the whole self, and the very source searching for what he is, is zero. The lower part initiates the process, but when initiated in a great person, he reflects on the question but also on the source of the question and upon the self as a psychological and physical being. He concludes that he is dust and ashes. The self in the psychological capacity is dust and ashes, the part that causes him to reflect upon what he is [but the divine element is not dust and ashes]. That divine part that perceives God’s wisdom is completely removed from the self [its interest is wisdom and the self doesn’t register on this component]. The “I”, the self, is the only part of man that can perceive “self” [and this exists only in the psychological part of man]. That is man as he envi-

sions himself as a physical and psychological being: *“I am dust and ashes”* is the response of a wise man to the question posed to himself by his psychological nature from which man cannot escape after Adam’s sin, no matter how great a person is.

How would we compare *“I am dust and ashes”* to *“What is man that You are mindful of him?”* The answer is that the latter is the universal, while the former is a personal reaction. King David’s words (Psalms 8:5) refer to universals, explaining why the gemara did not use them as reflecting King David’s humility [this was not self-reflection]. The gemara uses *“I am a worm and not a man”* as these words were spoken in self-reflection.

A lowly and dark creature is not a sad conclusion. Such a person who states this has no worries. He is happy to realize that he is [living] in reality and this realization gives him the greatest happiness. It also removes him from the greatest burdens and pains that people have in their everyday existence.

At nighttime when one contemplates that he is moving on in years, in a few more years he is going to be nothing, and in 30 years no one will remember him, it is a frightening experience. One is guided by the instincts and fooled by fantasy. But one who lives in reality follows his Tzelem Elohim [intellect] and lives a life of wisdom. Psychologically ill individuals must treat themselves just like individuals who are physically ill. But suggesting that psychologically or physically healthy people are happy, is incorrect. Psychological and physical health are unrelated to happiness, and such healthy people can be miserable. Our society tells unhappy people to visit psychologists. Judaism tells such people to talk to a chocham, a wise man.

People romanticize learning in a beautiful [scenic] area. However, inasmuch as one is involved in wisdom, he is oblivious to his panoramic surroundings. And inasmuch as one is

enjoying the panorama, he is not learning. [Thus, the desire to learn in a beautiful area is not rational.] People without the ability to use their minds always seek pleasant surroundings; they feel that a beautiful home will provide this. But in truth, after a short while, they are dissatisfied with the same surrounding. Even if one is viewing the most beautiful scenery, after a while, he seeks to change his view. People must have change. But a chocham is involved in the world of the mind, and provided that his surroundings do not disturb his mind, his mind is engaged, and his location is irrelevant. His “view” is a different view. Thus, this idyllic picture of living in a beautiful place is another fantasy.

Provided that one is not psychologically ill, man is intrinsically an unhappy creature. Man’s instincts and mind place him in constant conflict, *“And the wicked are as turbulent as the sea...”* (Isaiah 57:20). Man is a creature of fantasy who is destined to live in reality. Tyrants lived turbulent lives. The greater one’s involvement in instincts, the less happy he must be because he is further from reality, and he cannot deny reality.

How does Torah remove man’s conflict? It is by draining off his energy from fantasy and providing satisfaction from his very perception of reality. Man is satisfied merely by beholding the view of reality [which he sees using his mind to perceive wisdom]. In this fashion, man’s energies are removed from fantasy. This is how Torah provides happiness to man. One definition of happiness is to reflect upon oneself and approve of one’s status, that he is a success. [But] Torah’s [definition of] happiness is not self-reflection, but an existence enjoying the greatest satisfaction. Adam had a very happy existence; he partook of wisdom.

We had discussed Abraham’s humility, which he expressed in his words, *“I am dust and ashes.”* Why did Maimonides select

those words to reflect Abraham's humility, when he could have cited Abraham serving the 3 guests, where he bowed to them and fed them (Gen. 18)? The answer is that humility refers to one's psychological reality, where one feels "I am nothing" like a speck of dust in the universe. But humble actions like serving the guest are not indications of total self-evaluation, whereas stating "*I am dust and ashes*" is a total self-evaluation.

Our society which caters to the emotions, gives to children what those people themselves desire but cannot have. The child is [embodies] society [members of society live vicariously through children]. Society gives children the fantasy that they are special because society [adults] desire this feeling themselves but cannot have it, since reality tells them that this is false [by everyone being special, nobody is special]. Society believes that if it can give to others what it desires for itself, steering others [children] into believing this pleasant notion will achieve the ultimate state for them. [However], Judaism does not endorse this approach [making a child feel special]. It is wrong to make the child feel special and reinforce his feeling of [high] self-worth. At an impressionable age the child will grow attached to the need to feel special and he will try to achieve this. [But as stated, if everyone feels special, no one truly is. And in the end such children will find disappointment.] These ideas learned in youth are hard to remove. It is important to raise a child according to Torah's ideas. We have no fairy tales in our system. No false ideas should be taught to a child. One is not allowed to lie to a child.

Another point is that socializing does not need to be learned; a person socializes by nature. Feeling that a child must learn to socialize is another nonsensical notion of our society. People grab onto notions and possibly destroy children. Latest studies show that a child should remain with his mother [as a

child requires this emotional connection and he should not commence preschool until the age of 5 or 6].

Returning to the mishnah, Rashi says we see Bilam's insatiable desires from his words: *"Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, contrary to the command of the Lord my God"* (Num. 22:18). This displays Bilam's measure of his true desire. Maimonides quotes a different verse [that teaches Bilam's love of money], *"because they hired Bilam"* (Deut. 23:5). We must ask how Bilam's being hired indicates his love of money. Everyone who works is hired, but being hired alone does not indicate a great desire for money. Bilam would not have accepted to curse the Jews were it not for the money. Perhaps due to political reasons he would refrain from cursing the Jews, as such a curse might not bode well with others. But because of the money, despite political concerns, he wanted to curse the Jews. Thus, for Bilam to do what is distasteful to himself [political suicide] only for the money, displays his love of money.

Maimonides says that Bilam copulated with his donkey. Chazal say, *"Adam endeavored to find a companion [sexually] among all cattle and beasts but found no satisfaction except in Eve"* (Yevamos 63a). Dissatisfaction resulted because man's sexual satisfaction cannot be attained through the physical alone. Man requires psychological identification and therefore needs his sexual partner to be human. But Chazal teach that Bilam's sexual activity was completely instinctual, explaining why Bilam did not require the involvement of another human in his sexual activity.

Bilam's ego is seen from his words, *"The word of Bilam son of Beor, the word of the man whose eye is true, the word of him who bears God's speech, who beholds visions from the Almighty"* (Num. 24:3,4). This is the highest haughtiness as Bilam knew that he did not deserve prophecy, and yet he converted that experi-

ence into a claim of his greatness: “God speaks to me.” Bilam claimed that he knew God’s thoughts. There is no greater haughtiness. Other areas of knowledge are limited, like the sciences, but this area [God’s knowledge] is unlimited [and Bilam claimed to have this knowledge].

The 3 character traits of our mishnah are a “good eye,” referring to one’s indifference towards wealth [he is satisfied]. This person [Abraham] values wealth only insofar as it is used for God’s plan for man. Otherwise, wealth has no value. The opposite is one who has a “bad eye.” This person must have all that he sees. His eye causes him to desire endless wealth.

The second is a “low soul”—nefesh shfailya—and refers to one who does not seek instinctual gratification, embodied in Abraham. The opposite is Bilam the wicked who was steeped in the instinctual.

And the third, a “low spirit”—ruach namucha—refers to one’s humility, *“I am dust and ashes.”*

Why is the opposite of a “wide soul” a “low soul?” Shouldn’t it be a “narrow soul?” Psychologically speaking there is good insight for the selection of the term “low soul.” One who does not desire endless pleasures must have a low soul. This means that the desire for endless satisfaction stems from a certain kind of haughtiness, a high soul [the opposite of a low soul]. This is referred to in Nedarim 9b:

*Rabbi Shimon Hatzaddik said: “In all my days as a priest, I never ate the guilt-offering of a ritually impure nazirite except for one occasion. One time, a particular man who was a nazirite came from the South and I saw that he had beautiful eyes and was good looking, and the fringes of his hair were arranged in curls. I said to*

*him: 'My son, what did you see that made you decide to destroy this beautiful hair of yours by becoming a nazirite?' He said to me: 'I was a shepherd for my father in my city, and I went to draw water from the spring, and I looked at my reflection in the water and my evil inclination quickly overcame me and sought to expel me from the world. I said to myself: 'Wicked one! Why do you pride yourself in a world that is not yours? Why are you proud of someone who will eventually be food in the grave for worms and maggots? I swear by the Temple service that I shall shave you for the sake of Heaven.' I immediately arose and kissed him on his head. I said to him: 'My son, may there be more who take vows of naziriteship like you among the Jewish people.'"*

This story teaches that ego is related to desires. One who chases endless satisfaction must feel “the world is mine.” And one who is capable of withdrawing from desires it’s called a “low soul.” This is a psychological humility. This personality says to himself, “I exist here for a few years, and then I am worms and maggots.” This realistic understanding of his existence does not permit him to have fantasies. Fantasies stem from a misguided concept of the self, where if one does not obtain certain satisfactions, he is disappointed. However, a person with a realistic concept of the self will not be disappointed if he missed a certain desire. With the recognition of one’s ultimate demise, the desires don’t have a strong attraction. This is a world that does not belong to us. As one lives briefly [the intelligent person says], “What is the difference



whether or not I enjoy this or that desire?" The importance attached to desires is based on the fantasy of an unrealistic position in the world; it is based upon haughtiness.

The [praiseworthy] humility we speak of is psychological and philosophical. For one to abandon the world of the desires, one must possess this kind of humility. The highest level of humility is intellectual humility: *"I am dust and ashes."*

A "narrow soul"—nefesh kitzara—indicates minimal drive towards desires. But Chazal referred to Abraham's perfection not with that title, but with a "low soul" to teach the additional idea of the cause of this perfection: humility. A "high soul"—nefesh gavoha—indicates haughtiness, but a "wide soul"—nefesh rachava—teaches the endless "wide" amount of desire of such a person. Therefore, a "wide soul" is employed by Chazal, not a "high soul." Just by changing one word—in both cases—new insights are shared.

"Worms and maggots" is a psychological realization, whereas "dust and ashes" is philosophical. The mishnah's terminology is precise.

Now we must ask why these 3 traits in specific are the marks of perfection and imperfection. Rabbeinu Yona says that these 3 traits include everything: they incorporate the entire concept of perfection [Abraham] and they are also indicative of the essence of evil [Bilam]. Torah's description of Moshe's greatness is humility: *"And the man Moshe was more humble than all people on the face of the Earth"* (Num. 12:3). In contrast, Torah says, *"All those with haughty hearts are an abomination to God"* (Prov. 16:5). "Abomination" because he's furthest removed from God. These 2 characters should sufficiently define the greatest and worst human being respectively. Why then are the other traits in this mishnah necessary?

Judaism's goal is that one constantly strives to recognize

the self as a “low dark creature” has Maimonides describes:

*...he is an infinitesimal creature, humble  
and dark, standing with an insignificant  
and slight knowledge in the presence of the  
All Wise (Hil. Yesodei Hatorah 2:2)*

Moade Kattan cites one Amora who prayed for 2 things: the wealth of one Amora and the humility of another. Judaism has a strange kind of goal, to have this self-perception described by Maimonides above, where one looks forward to the day of having this realization, as achieving this would provide ultimate happiness. This is the goal of Judaism. Again, if this is the [praiseworthy] level, namely humility, why does our mishnah include the 2 other traits, and not simply isolate humility alone as the goal?

Although a person can be dichotomized—being a thinker in one area and not in another—Torah’s halachic and philosophical systems are designed to make one a chocham in all areas. There never was a talmid chocham who was wise in one area and not in other areas. Torah permeates the entire individual in every aspect of his life. And one’s personality is irrelevant.

It is possible to have the recognition of “*I am dust and ashes*” and yet, not be perfected. This is because a person can have a philosophical trend in his nature, where, when he reflects momentarily, he recognizes that he is but dust and ashes. But the rest of his life he expends his energies in areas that are not in line with the good. Maimonides says in his Laws of Teshuvah that one is judged on the greatness of his wisdom and his actions [there cannot be a dichotomy]. Maimonides had a letter written by one of his students saying that a gentile enjoys Olam Haba based on having proper ideas and actions. Perfec-

tion includes wisdom and actions; both are needed. This means that it is possible to separate wisdom from action. A group of people once studied Maimonides' Guide, and they stopped davening and observing mitzvos. They thought that philosophy was all that is needed to be perfected. They made a mistake: perfection requires both philosophical recognition, and also that one's expenditure of energies are directed towards the good. Maimonides says that this is the purpose of mitzvah and halacha. People view halacha as restriction. But in truth it intends to direct man's energies towards the good on a daily basis. It means the individual is expending his energies where he is constantly living with God's wisdom in every aspect of his life. Once halacha is removed from a person's life, there is also removed the constant expenditure of energy in the path towards God's wisdom.

The greatest billionaire who might be brilliant in accumulating wealth cannot answer one question: "Why are you doing this [constantly working]?" He draws a complete blank. Ultimately, what is wealth? It is the sublimated form of all the desires, including ego, power, fame etc. A psychologist explained why wealth does not make a person happy: It is because it does not satisfy the [raw] desire since wealth is a sublimated form of the real desire. [Man's true object of desire is sex, fame, ego, etc., and wealth is not one of these, but a disguised attempt to attain them. Therefore, wealth will not satisfy man.]

The person who makes the greatest use of wealth and benefits from it most is the talmid chocham. He uses it to relieve himself from work and mundane activities, in order to engage in Torah. The mishnah first addresses sublimation/wealth, a "good eye," the example of Abraham: a satisfied, perfected person who is not involved in the sublimated attempts at chasing the desires. The mishnah then identifies a second perfec-

tion: a “low spirit,” humility, “dust and ashes.” This is philosophical perfection. And the last perfection is that of the instinctual: a “low soul,” one who does not chase the raw instincts. Why does the mishnah order them this way?

Ultimate perfection is philosophical; all hinges around the “low spirit”—humility—explaining why it is placed in the center [of these 3]. But to attain that perfection, one’s energies cannot be expended in the [raw] instinctual, or in the sublimated form of the instinctual. Why is this sublimated form, the “good eye” [satisfaction/not seeking wealth] listed first? It is because most people are involved in the sublimated form. Thus, we have philosophical perfection of humility in the center of the 3, the psychological form of gratification through sublimation [wealth] is listed first before it, and the pure instinctual desires is listed after it.

Abraham was the greatest of the Patriarchs and was the originator of the system. This explains why we conclude the first blessing in the Shmoneh Essray with “*Shield of Abraham*” [excluding Isaac and Jacob, although mentioned earlier in the very same blessing]. The originator of a system is the greatest [member of that system]. Even though someone after him takes the system further, the originator required the greatest ingenuity.

From Jacob we see that it is false to assume that following a Torah life ensures a comfortable existence. Jacob had many troubles, from his brother Esav, Lavan, Rachel, through losing Joseph. Gentiles have the fantasy that believing in their god will ensure a trouble-free life. In Judaism, our leaders accepted life as it was: each having different circumstances. But living with those God-given circumstances, they used their wisdom and courage to live according to intelligence. That is the philosophy of Judaism. Other religions want God to save them from the perils of reality; idolatry is motivated

by fear. But Judaism is motivated by a pursuit of wisdom in reality; a religion demanding tremendous courage. A person cannot help his state [his health, parents, siblings, and those whom he encounters]. All one can hope for is to have the courage and ability to follow God's wisdom. [To the intelligent/perfected person] the greatest treasure is to spend his days pursuing and applying wisdom, no matter the situation he must confront. That is the philosophy of Judaism: the opposite of the philosophy of idolaters and the rest of the entire world. They withdraw into a world of escapism, thinking that God will create a situation totally in-line with all their desires. That is idolatrous. In truth, man doesn't know the situations that lie before him and he does not expect God to guarantee a life of pleasure and comfort. Of course, one following Torah prays for a life most conducive to pursuing wisdom. But he accepts reality. Jacob told Pharaoh that his years were "*few and difficult*" (Gen. 47:9), but he didn't complain. He merely stated fact: "This was my existence."

Now the mishnah addresses what the ultimate reward is of these 2 lifestyles:

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER, AND THE DISCIPLES OF BILAM, THE WICKED? THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER, ENJOY THIS WORLD, AND INHERIT THE WORLD TO COME, AS IT IS SAID: "I WILL ENDOW THOSE WHO LOVE ME WITH SUBSTANCE, I WILL FILL THEIR TREASURIES" (PROV. 8:21). BUT THE DISCIPLES OF BILAM, THE WICKED, INHERIT GEHENOM, AND DESCEND INTO THE NETHERMOST PIT, AS IT IS SAID: "FOR YOU, GOD, WILL BRING THEM DOWN TO THE NETHERMOST PIT, THOSE MURDEROUS AND TREACHEROUS MEN; THEY SHALL

NOT LIVE OUT HALF THEIR DAYS; BUT I TRUST  
IN YOU” (PSALMS 55:24).

The students of Bilam do not enjoy this world and ultimately inherit a pit of destruction. But the students of Abraham enjoy this world. Chazal did not have a negative attitude towards this world; they had the proper perspective. Horiyus says that *“righteous people don’t have this world.”* But it was asked, “What is wrong with enjoying both worlds?” Torah doesn’t negate this world, but recognizes it for what it is: a temporal state [thereby explaining “righteous people don’t have this world” to mean that the righteous do not focus on this world as an end, but use it properly for its true place in the Torah lifestyle].

Idolaters negate this world; they feel that pleasures are to be negated. It is a reaction formation against their true desires. Achitophel was a political genius. If you would seek his advice, he would advise you just as the Urim v’Tumim [located within the high priest’s breastplate, consulted for divine guidance]. Achitophel was able to logically figure out matters:

*In those days, the advice which Achitophel  
gave was like matters sought from God; so  
was all the advice of Achitophel to David  
and to Absalom (II Samuel 16:23).*

Achitophel was always correct. He was King David’s advisor. But when King David’s son Absalom rebelled, Achitophel joined him and advised Absalom against King David. And of course, the advice he gave was correct advice. King David then sent Chushai to infiltrate Absalom’s camp. Absalom sought Chushai’s advice about attacking King David then and there. Chushai presented his case well and said, “This one

time Achitophel's advice [to attack David] is wrong; no one can be right all the time." Chushai [lying to Absalom, attempting to protect King David] said that attacking King David now will be disastrous: "No matter how exhausted he is, he has the courage of lion. It is better to wait and gather all of the Jews and then attack David." But Achitophel said, "Now David is weak, and we should attack, and he will be destroyed." King David prayed to God that He should intervene in Achitophel's advice, that the Jews with Absalom should not follow him, but they should follow Chushai. And that is what occurred. The moment Achitophel saw that his advice was not followed, he committed suicide because he knew that it was all over for him [as he rebelled against the king]. This is where the verse regarding Bilam is applied: Achitophel did not live out half his years. However, that was a particular case where God's providence sided with King David; God caused the people's emotions to lean more towards Chushai's advice.

But some people question that if it were not for that circumstance [God's intervention], Achitophel and Absalom—as well as other evildoers—would still be around enjoying success. The same people say regarding Al Capone that they caught him on income tax evasion, but had he not been caught, he would have enjoyed success. Therefore, these people say that this rule [of evildoers being cut down before the time] is not conclusive. And people can also [strengthen their argument and] point to a rasha who did in fact find great success and longevity. Therefore, the question remains on our mishnah that says otherwise, that students of Bilam will always inherit *gehenom* and descend to an empty pit. It appears this does not happen all time. But the answer is this verse:

*For You, God, will bring them down to  
the nethermost pit those murderous and*

*treacherous men; they shall not live out  
half their days; but I trust in You.*

This means that this fate is inevitable. We must understand Judaism's definition of evil. The world says, "Let your conscience be your guide." This means to say that anything one's conscience values, must be correct. [However,] one raised among the mafia feels guilty if he doesn't kill someone [clearly exposing one's conscience as an invalid moral compass]. But Judaism's definition of evil is not based on the conscience.

There are 2 worlds: the temporal [earthly life] and the eternal [the afterlife]. The temporal world is the world of the instincts and the psyche. The world of the eternal is the world of the soul, the world of intelligence. "Evil" is [defined as] making a simple mistake: viewing the world of the temporal as the good [wrongly feeling that this is the essence and the eternal]. This is Judaism's definition of evil. Judaism's definition of the good is recognizing what is truly eternal, the nature of the temporal, and having the correct perspective. What happens when one errs and thinks that the world of the temporal is really the eternal good? That person immediately places all his life's energies into the life of the temporal.

The temporal is a strange [unstable] phenomenon, which depends on many circumstances. Because of his very nature and definition, a person constantly strives to make the temporal into something that it cannot be. He tries to take that which is not of a permanent nature, which depends on circumstances and is subject to the world of chance, and carve out something eternal from it. But this cannot occur for several reasons. One is that as the temporal world is subject to certain conditions [out of one's control] a person's plan does not work out. There are many variables that do not synchronize [that are vital] to cater to one's wishes. It ends up that one's entire



life in pursuit of the temporal is spent in frustration and dissatisfaction. Chazal said a beautiful statement:

*Rabbi Yudan said in the name of Rabbi Ayvu, "Man does not leave this world with half of his desires in his hand: if he has 100 he wants to make it into 200; if he has 200 he wants to make it into 400" (Kobeles Rabba 1:13).*

One does not live through this existence attaining even half his desires. This is because the temporal world is constructed this way. Every new person who arrived on this planet, who tried to achieve this, has failed. There might be moments of success, but in the end one always fails. The temporal nature of the world does not lend itself to satisfying man. It depends on certain conditions and chance, and it cannot be worked out.

*...murderous and treacherous men; they shall not live out half their days...*

This does not mean that one must die at 35 years old. If one lives to 70 or 80 and most of his life was lived in pain, he too is not attaining half his desires. His lifespan is irrelevant. Bilam dying before age 35 is merely an illustration to which Chazal attach the idea of not living to half of one's years. Achitophel too died young. But had he enjoyed longevity it would not matter. He too did not attain one half of his desires. He put all his energies into this one moment when he could achieve his "success." That success depended on conditions, chance, on Absalom, and on a good meeting with advisors: would they accept his advice? But in the end the people fol-

lowed Chushai. People have many “Chushai’s” in their lives. Why did Achitophel fail? It was not because of Chushai, but because of the universal “Chushai” [unexpected, destructive circumstance] that lurks in every area of the world of the temporal. That is why Achitophel failed. A person who is myopic and shortsighted thinks, “Had Al Capone not been caught on tax evasion, he would have made it.” [But that is not true since the temporal world does not conform to human desires. Other situations would arise to subvert Al Capone’s plans. A person’s plan for attaining his desires assumes the presence, timing and precise functioning of too many volatile variables, all of which will never conform to man’s wishes. Man’s attempt to attain his desires must fail. Torah wants us to realize that it is wrong to point at only one thing and blame it alone for our failure in attaining temporal desires. Rather, one should recognize that it is impossible that all matters upon which we depend for temporal satisfaction will align themselves precisely at the right moment to ensure that satisfaction.] Albert Einstein said, “I entered the world of physics because I don’t have patience for the regular world, which is very frustrating.” The only place which works out for man, that is in-line with his desires and his emotional needs and energies, is the world of the eternal [the world of wisdom]. And if a person works it out in that world, if he arranges his life to focus primarily on God’s wisdom and good character traits, he enjoys the temporal world too. This is because he does not invest so much effort into the temporal world to try and squeeze out of it something it is incapable of providing. On the contrary, he enjoys the temporal for what it is; it is not the essence of where he applies his energies. When the weather is pleasant, he enjoys it, but not because he views good weather as something that will provide ultimate happiness and pleasure. That would not be sufficient to satisfy person. [This answers the contra-

diction noted above between our mishnah which says that Abraham enjoyed this world, while Horiyus said, “tzaddikim don’t have this world.” Abraham/tzaddikim enjoy this world for what it truly offers, but they don’t “have this world” as an end; worldly pleasures is not their sole desire and ultimate goal.]

What did Achitophel do the moment he saw that his plan failed? He hung himself. Why does Judaism view suicide as a terrible thing? It evokes thoughts of empathy. One who commits suicide says, “There exists only the temporal world, and if I cannot have it, I will kill myself.” One person who had been very active, a mountain climber, had grown ill. He committed suicide. His suicide conveyed that his essence was the physical world. Hemingway committed suicide because he could not have his desires. And when the temporal world was gone from his life, life had no meaning to him. I do not refer to one who kills himself due to psychological issues or an unconscious force out of his control. I refer to an Achitophel, an intelligent man who has control and performs a rational suicide. There is a neurotic suicide from which Torah does not hold one accountable because he has no control over himself. But Achitophel said that since there’s nothing but the world of the temporal, when he saw that he lost it, he killed himself. This is the meaning of the verse “*For You, God, will bring them down to the nethermost pit.*”

Regarding the tzaddik, he enjoys the opposite fate:

*I will endow those who love Me with substance [yaish], I will fill their treasuries (Prov. 8:21).*

Typically, the word “yaish” refers to a predicate, as in “*there is [yaish] the power in my hand*” (Gen. 31:29). But here, yaish

refers to an object.

Perhaps this is the greatest fundamental of Judaism. A person on an infantile level can “feel” a closeness to God. In his imagination, a child does not know what God is. He extracts something from his experience and imagines an idea of God. But when one matures, he realizes that his infantile concept of God possessing emotions is false. His previous notion of how he related to God seems difficult, impossible and absurd. That’s why those people who studied Maimonides’ Guide stopped davening. For they now understood that their infantile notion of God—a warm father in the sky with emotions—was wrong and idolatrous. Thereafter, they could not daven. But Judaism demands that one recognize that God cannot be known in any manner: *“For man cannot know me while alive”* (Exod. 33:20). Moshe could only see the patterns of God’s actions [but he could not perceive any positive concept of God]: *“...be most careful, since you saw no form when the Lord your God spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire”* (Deut. 4:15). We cannot have any type of image of God; no figment of imagination whatsoever extrapolated from this world, be it a physical form or that God has emotions. These cannot in any way pertain to the Creator of universe, the Source behind all the laws of the universe.

This Creator becomes so far removed from us. How then can we possibly relate to Him? It is a problem, and yet we say, *“God is close to all His callers, to all who call Him in truth”* (Psalms 145:18). How is God “close” to those who call Him? One area in Psalms sums it up more than any other verse:

*Those who keep far from You perish; You  
annihilate all who estrange themselves  
from You. Closeness to God is good to me;  
I have made the Lord God my refuge, that*

*I may recount all Your works. (Psalms  
73:27,28)*

Judaism has a different idea of closeness to God. Just as the God of Judaism cannot be perceived in any physical or emotional sense, but He is the God who is more real than any kind of existence, so too, the non-physical laws of nature are more real than a stone in this following example. When a stone falls to the Earth and we describe its path, that stone is guided [downward] by some kind of immaterial existence. That existence [natural law] is responsible for every stone following the identical path of descent. The physical stone is less real than the law behind the stone, because a stone can be destroyed, but the laws are more real [not subject to destruction]. And God, the source of all wisdom is most real, the real existence. Maimonides says, “*There is an existing God*” (Hil. Yesodei Hatorah 1:1). He is most real. Judaism demands that a person recognize that concept of “the real” that appeals to the mind and not the real that appeals to the emotions. That is the challenge of Judaism. The sin of the Gold Calf was an attempt to support the false view with a physical entity.

But we must take a step further. In his *Guide*, Maimonides was trying to convey an idea I think missed by most readers. He says, as Torah says, that the reality of God is only perceived by our minds. When we say that God is close to us, His closeness is more real than any closeness we can entertain or have, more real than any kind of closeness we can imagine. God’s closeness to us is more real than that of a spouse, a friend or a teacher, which are physical and psychological in nature. But God’s closeness is tied to a human being’s essence; it is not a material closeness, but a closeness more real than any closeness a person can desire. A closeness one cannot feel, but is real. Judaism demands one recognize this and

understand it. That is what King David meant by, “*those distanced from God will be destroyed*” because they are not partaking of what is real. “*Closeness to God is good to me*” is a closeness only perceivable by the mind. [King David’s sentiment was] “for I know God is that which is real,” and man possesses a metaphysical component that can relate to God. Therefore, there must be the closest relationship, the only real closeness a person can experience because it pertains to man’s essence which is related to the reality behind the entire universe—God.

How does a person achieve closeness to God? It takes place when one studies Torah. In his *Guide*, Maimonides says that a prophet, when learning, is not the same as when he is not learning. That is the metaphor of the palace (book III, chap. li), teaching that there is a reality of closeness to God that can only be expressed through a metaphor, but it exists.

A second way this closeness exists is when one is standing in prayer for God. He recognizes the presence of the Creator and it is an opportunity for him to properly formulate his desires in life.

The third way one is close to God is by keeping the Torah: following the system that God gave to this world as the perfect system for man’s perfection. In these 3 matters man is close to God. He partakes of a closeness that I can’t possibly describe in an emotional sense. But it exists and it is the only real closeness man can experience. Rationality dictates that in these 3 matters man must be close to God.

If man is involved in God’s thoughts—Torah study—he must be close to God because he can approach God. If man is standing before God in prayer, organizing his values and life, and he asks God for particular needs to draw him closer to God, he must, at that moment, be close to God. God relates to him and we know that is based on the prayer’s verse, “*One*

*who bears prayer*”—shomaya tefilah. God listens to every prayer. There is a link that exists that is real.

And the third way of being close to God is following His plan: Torah. Anyone committed to following that plan must of necessity be close to God. Judaism demands man to rise above the imagination and attach his emotions to a kind of idea of closeness that only his mind [and not his emotions] can recognize.

*I will endow those who love Me with substance [yaish], I will fill their treasuries (Prov. 8:21).*

Yaish refers to existence. One cannot describe the good that God gives man. It is above the emotions and the senses. The only thing one can say about God's good is that it is real; it exists. It means that those who are close to God will inherit that which is real, that which exists. And you cannot say anything more about it. This explains why these verses are included when one concludes a tractate: "*We labor and they labor*"... "*to endow those who love Me with substance,*" the world of wisdom, the abstract world. What is the end result [of those pursuing God's wisdom, the eternal world]? Real existence, "yaish." And what is the result of a life chasing the temporal and physical?

*For You, God, will bring them down to the nethermost pit, those murderous and treacherous men; they shall not live out half their days.*

## 5:20 LESS THAN PERFECT: A VALUE

JUDAH BEN TEMA SAID: “BE BRAZEN (AZ) AS A LEOPARD, AND LIGHT AS AN EAGLE, AND FLEET AS A DEER, AND MIGHTY AS A LION TO DO THE WILL OF YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN.” HE USED TO SAY: “THE BRAZEN IS HEADED FOR GEHENOM AND THE BLUSHING [HUMBLE] FOR THE GARDEN OF EDEN. MAY IT BE THY WILL, O LORD OUR GOD, THAT YOUR CITY BE REBUILT SPEEDILY IN OUR DAYS AND SET OUR PORTION IN YOUR TORAH.”

The word “az” does not mean physical strength. It refers to boldness and brazenness. It is [the leopard’s focused will, and] disregard for anything other than seizing its prey.

“*Light as an eagle*” refers to the eagle’s light and swift flight; it soars effortlessly without any hesitation or difficulty.

“*Fleet as a deer*” references this animal’s tireless nature. These are based on a verse in Isaiah:

*But they who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. As eagles they will raise their wing; they shall run and not grow weary, they shall travel and not grow faint (Isaiah 40:31).*

“*Mighty as a lion*” refers not to strength, but to courage. The Rav spoke about the difference between gibor and koach. Gibor is a human attribute, while koach can be an animalistic attribute. Koach refers to physical strength; an animal is very



strong physically, but it is not a gibor.

A lion's behavior reflects a courage and fearlessness and reminds man of a human trait of courage. But a lion is no more courageous than a hyena; they both operate on instinct. [There is no choice in animals to veer from their designated instincts and therefore they cannot be courageous, nor do they possess any other character.] But people err when studying animals because they project onto them human traits. Scientific data is always distorted. Annotations are not inherently scientific. "Scientific" refers to totally objective observation and reasoning. But those people drawn to a specific scientific field are usually drawn to it due to certain emotions. Dian Fossey studied gorillas and lived with them. But she was not only studying them, she was actually identifying with them and she became part of that group of gorillas. I don't mean to detract from her observations, as many were correct. But one must be cautious when studying these areas because you will discover that people who are attracted to these studies have psychological causes attracting them, and you must be wary of their conclusions. The Rav asked:

*The pasuk says, "God does not prize the strength of horses, nor value the legs of men; but the Lord values those who fear Him, those who depend on His kindness (Psalms 147:10,11)." It therefore seems that the horse has strength. But it really refers to the rider.*

The second statement, "*legs of men*," refers to man. Thus, the [entire] theme refers to man. Courage is only a human quality and no animal possesses it. Therefore, "*mighty as a lion*" is a metaphor.

This mishnah became the battle cry of the Baalei Mussar because it seems so self-explanatory. The problem with this is what Chazal say (Sanhedrin 101a) that one cannot make a song out of any Torah verse, even Shir Hashirim. This is a halacha that is violated today. The problem is that the moment one uses a Torah verse as a song, one implies that the message of the verse can be conveyed in a tune. This belittles the verse into a simple statement that's self-understood. That violates all of Torah. Every Torah verse contains great depth, only understood through thought. But a verse that is sung implies that it can be explained through a simple interpretation with an emotional attachment created by singing it. That is a denial of Torah's wisdom. This explains why Chazal prohibited singing Torah verses. Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked about this and he had no way to explain [condone] how people violate this Chazal [by singing Torah verses]. But tefilah was constructed in a way to reach a person on an emotional plane. The ingenuity of tefilah is how the rabbis constructed it. Tefilah was designed to move even a plain person. Therefore, to make a song in tefilah is permissible.

The same [critique] applies regarding our mishnah, if one simply interprets it to mean that one should be similar to an animal. This understanding is just as simple and incorrect as singing a Torah verse. The song which the Levites sang were sung to move a person in the proper direction. That is our concept of song which is unrecognized by the world. But the world's song and our song are homonyms with nothing in common other than the name. The Shir Shel Yom were ideas. In all of Tehillim (Psalms) "shir" is completely unrelated to song. Shir is ideas that channel a person's emotions to the proper goals and the proper path. The musical instruments accompanied the shir, but the shir was ideas [written by King David who was very wise].

Shir Hashirim (Song of Songs) are King Solomon's deepest ideas concerning the relationship between man and God. It is called a shir because in Judaism, shir pertains to the emotions and directing them towards ideas. While the world's "song" pertains to human instincts [with no other objective than to please the emotions]. Thus, Bible critics have no concept of Torah.

In the Temple, shir was protected from error because Sanhedrin and all the wise men of Israel were there, therefore shir was permitted; [under their guidance] there was no danger of making a mistake. This relates to the prohibition of slaughtering animals outside permitted boundaries [shchutei chutz], which is a grave sin. In the Temple, one is under the auspices of Sanhedrin [so sacrifices will not fall sway to idolatrous leanings]. But away from their guidance, matters get dangerous [and unguided religious instincts can distort sacrifice towards idolatry]. Exclusive to Judaism and its mark of distinction is its view of what is dangerous. Other religions would say what is most dangerous to their religion are sexual or instinctual passions. But in Judaism, what is most dangerous is religious passion. This is because misguided religiosity becomes totally destructive. This is why from beginning to end, Torah prohibits idolatry. As idolatry is instinctual, it draws out other instinctual drives:

*Aaron took [gold] from them and cast in a mold and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron announced: "Tomorrow shall be a festival of the Lord!" The people arose early next day and offered up*

*burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; they sat down to eat and drink [excessively], and then rose to rejoice [sexual immorality] (Exod. 32:4-6).*

Idolatry is always tied to the sexual. But that's not really what's wrong with it because you find other idolatrous religions that adopt a state of denial and criticize sex. The real evil of idolatry is the denial of the intellect, of God's wisdom. Idolatry is a distortion of reality, while Judaism demands that man partake of the reality which God created. Man must recognize the source of reality: God.

Returning to the mishnah, why were these specific 4 traits identified? Furthermore, what is meant by "*to do the will of your Father Who is in heaven?*" Parenthetically, people are attached to this mishnah because it captures the emotions. The implication [doing God's will] is that we are helping God in some way. But this belief makes one an idolater and an apostate. It is idolatrous to believe that man helps God. If one performed mitzvos believing he helped God, it is preferable that he did not perform those mitzvos. Instead, it is better to have the correct idea of God than performing all the mitzvos for a false reason. For then one is as far from God as he can be. That is the danger of taking a Torah verse and putting a song to it [because one will attach any emotional notion to it].

"*Father in heaven*" is sort of an emotional expression. Therefore, we must understand why Chazal formulated this mishnah in this way. They could have wrote "to do God's will," or "to do the will of your Creator."

The mishnah continues, "*one who is brazen [shameless] goes to Gebenom, and one who is humble goes to the Garden of Eden.*" A person capable of being shamed has a sense of propriety. But what is the relationship of this statement to the first part of the

mishnah? And the third part of this mishnah is equally difficult as it ends with a prayer: *“May it be thy will, O Lord our God, that Your city be rebuilt speedily in our days and set our portion in Your Torah.”* The middle of Avos is not a place to daven. And why does it refer to rebuilding “Your city?” In tefilah we pray for the Temple to be rebuilt. But the reason why we pray for the Temple in tefilah is because tefilah takes the place of sacrifice [which requires the Temple]: *“Instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips”* (Hosea 14:3). Verbal sacrifice [tefilah] equates to literal sacrifice, but we hope to reinstate the original sacrifice in the Temple, *“and there [Temple] we will serve You like ancient days and prior years”* (Shmoneh Esray conclusion).

There is also a contradiction in this mishnah. For at first, we are told to embrace the brazenness of a leopard, and then we are told that brazenness leads one to Gehenom. Is brazenness a good or a bad? It is not coincidental that Judah ben Tema uses brazenness in 2 frameworks.

This mishnah stands out from the others because it aims at a highly specific level. Pirkei Avos was constructed to show the ideas that we received at Sinai. At Sinai, we did not receive Torah alone, but we also received philosophy and psychology. As mentioned, the greatness of Torah and the difference between Torah and abstract philosophers—who are correct in many respects—is that Torah that was given to us by God, moves a person even on a lower level. No one on a low level is moved by Aristotle’s Ethics. But Torah moves a person on various levels. Why didn’t Torah simply list the ethical principles like the philosophers wrote, instead of writing its stories [the numerous cases of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs]? Torah includes the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, their struggles in life, and the story of Joseph the tzadik as Torah knows that to reach a person, you must appeal to

the psychological component and not just the philosophical. Therefore, Torah portrays various individuals and describes their struggles because this is a beacon of light to a person undergoing his own troubles. He can thereby reflect and say, "There were others in my situation." He can study those models to learn the thoughts and actions of great individuals. This moves a person towards perfection. Philosophy alone cannot achieve this motivation. How the gap is bridged between the reality of one's emotions and the abstract philosophy is only through a presentation of another person that endured that same struggle. One can identify with that individual, study his actions and learn from that model's experiences. We don't have a system of ethics like Aristotle. Rather, what we have are *maasei avos*, the actions of our forefathers.

Torah also works in a way that teaches psychology. A person should be aware of certain psychological mechanisms that he can use for his own benefit. I believe this mishnah differs from all others as it aims at a certain level of function beneath the ultimate level, reaching a person on a lower-level.

THE BRAZEN IS HEADED FOR GEHENOM AND  
THE BLUSHING [HUMBLE] FOR THE GARDEN OF  
EDEN.

Maimonides, quoting Chazal, says that the Jew has certain traits: he is merciful, possesses shame and is kind. The Jew possesses compassion. He also possesses shame, and if shown to be wrong, he will experience greater pain than others. He also possesses kindness which is closely related to compassion. This is also God's trait: "*And His mercy is upon all His works*" (Psalms 145:9). This explains why we give *tzedaka* to gentiles too. As we are descendants of Abraham, we follow God's traits. And because of years of Torah commitment, the

Jew has this emotional makeup. Gemilas chessed is more than compassion: one reaches into his pocket and generously gives of himself financially and personally; he joins himself to his fellow in his sorrow and his needs, in terms of his own time and effort. Others can be compassionate and then walk away, but a Jew does more. Gemilas chessed can exist without being merciful; one can do the act but not be compassionate. But one must partake of the emotion as well. [Giving tzedaka requires us to also commiserate with the poor person.] Conversely, feeling sorry and not acting is also not perfection. And the trait of shame is the absence of arrogance.

Performing mitzvos has value, provided they are not performed on an emotional plane. Emotions can get a person into trouble. If one is merciful when he should not be, he is acting incorrectly. Had Esther been merciful on Haman when he was begging her for his life, it would have resulted in the worst catastrophe. He didn't affect her and she had him destroyed. On the one hand, no emotional attitude leads one to perfection. But on the other hand, we praise this emotion of shame. King David made a decree against marrying anyone who does not possess these qualities. How do we reconcile these 2 positions?

Other religions defend ethics based on their emotional appeal. But there is no logical argument to be ethical; one can follow "survival of the fittest" [with equal justification]. And using the approach of an emotional appeal, you get into trouble because which emotion should one follow, and when should one follow it? If a child wishes to play in traffic and the parent gives in to sympathy, the result is obvious. Any intelligent person knows that there is no way to follow emotions that results in perfection. Yet, Judaism endorses the emotions of shame and mercy.

The answer is that Judaism maintains that a person is emo-

tional; there is no escaping this part of our makeup. But Torah maintains that a certain emotional attitude is good as it leads to perfection. Mercy removes one's focus on the self. It generates feelings towards an external reality [other people]. On a basic level, a person must have this emotion. For without this emotion, one is totally narcissistic, and perfection is impossible. Shame comes from the superego: one feels shame when doing what is improper. If this emotion is removed [not followed], the instincts will overpower oneself. Shame counters the instincts. As people are emotional and they can't escape the emotions, Judaism says to follow shame as the emotional plane on which to operate. Without the sense of dignity that doing what's wrong is an indignation to one's personality, one can never be perfected. The instincts will take over.

Therefore, Torah endorses 2 emotions. Of course, they are just a platform on which to begin, and subsequently one's wisdom must be able to control all the emotions. But he must have that emotional makeup; it's the mark of a Jew. Maimonides says the Jews have shame:

*Moses answered the people, "Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may ever be upon your faces, so that you do not sin" (Exod. 20:17).*

When Nathan explained to David that he sinned (II Samuel 12:7) David felt a sense of shame and could not answer Nathan. There is a blank space in the scroll of Samuel before David responded "*I have sinned to God*" (Ibid. 12:13) indicating that at first, David could not talk. When one is in total shame he cannot talk; he cannot move. That is what the space in Samuel indicates. These 2 emotions of shame and mercy form the correct emotional base for one to be perfected.



Shame, mercy and kindness are all emotions, but Chazal deemed them worthy of being followed. One should not use these emotions to guide his life under all circumstances, like Esther who would not be merciful to Haman when he begged her for his life. [A single attitude cannot guide one towards perfection. At times, one must be cruel, and at other times, merciful. A single attitude cannot work at all times, as King Solomon states throughout Koheles chapter 3.]

Kindness intends to counter man's narcissism. Thereby one recognizes others. And to counter the desires, shame tells a person, "How will I feel if I do this act? How will I feel if people know that I did this?" Kindness and shame reflect a totality of the human personality in terms of the emotions which counter imperfection. The ability to identify with others through kindness leads to perfection, and shame counters the desires.

The underlying key to answering the questions we raised on this mishnah is a part of Judaism's philosophy, which is unique to Judaism. This mishnah is exclusively directed towards that concept.

The part of the mind used to understand physics and math is different than the part of the mind used to understand psychology. Philosophers are disturbed by this, that various areas of human knowledge are unrelated. Man cannot understand the whole of creation, but only parts, which manifest themselves in different ways. Man finds methods of knowledge to understand gross phenomena, which fail to function when studying subatomic phenomena. Man gropes, attempting to unify both worlds. It is a struggle. Unification is questionable and the more man investigates, the more he detects problems. Man approaches his investigation in a compartmentalized fashion: philosophy is one field of study while psychology is another field. The world has not bridged various sciences: phi-

losophers are totally ignorant of psychology. And the inverse is equally true: psychologists are ignorant of philosophy.

The greatness of Judaism is that it unifies both. Judaism recognizes that to attain perfection in life, these 2 fields cannot be separate. Perfection is impossible otherwise. Philosophy teaches the way of life that is sensible, that will offer man satisfaction and happiness. But man isn't finished yet [he is incapable to embark on that life] because there are matters that he does not understand, preventing him from acting in line with philosophy.

Many times, people have questions on Judaism, important philosophical questions. Judaism has the answers. But then, even after one receives satisfying answers, he has a problem. For once he has the answer [which should steer him towards following Judaism] he no longer can excuse his failure to follow Judaism. Now he has a psychological struggle [emotional reluctance to change]. That's why it is necessary in the path of perfection to understand psychology. You can't have philosophy without psychology. The Greeks made this error. As we said, Torah's personalities—models of perfection—guide a person [through the psychological dynamics inhibiting perfection]. More than anything else, role models can help a person through his struggles. Torah's clear representations of other individuals who endured identical struggles [and how they worked with their personalities and others and succeeded] can help one the most. The uniqueness of Judaism is that it combines philosophy and psychology and guides a person through his personal struggles. To attain perfection, God, with His eternal kindness provided a system that combines both philosophy and psychology. The secular world does not possess the subject [system] of perfection. What they have [as isolated subjects] are philosophy and psychology.

Our mishnah is directed towards the appreciation of psy-

chological and philosophical factors in an essential way. Knowledge is supremacy of the mind [and] knowledge of God: *“Listen Israel, God is our God, God is one”* (Deut. 6:4). The rebuke of the prophet is *“A foolish people”* (Jer. 5:21), *“they abandoned Me And went after delusion and were deluded”* (Ibid. 2:5), *“O dull and witless people”* (Deut. 32:6). Knowledge and the lack thereof are mentioned throughout Torah. Torah’s criticism is the failure to follow wisdom and knowledge; foolishness is the worst crime. But removing all the emotions is wrong. Shame is necessary. Emotions are to be harnessed properly on the path towards perfection. But one cannot dispose of the emotions. The mishnah criticizes brazenness as this opposes shame. But the mishnah also says *“Be brazen as a leopard to perform the will of your Father in heaven.”* This means that brazenness is proper when expressed in the rational framework. True shame should be towards our *“Father in heaven”*; an emotional term that promotes the idea of shame on a philosophical plane. [The shame of failing to follow one’s Father in heaven.] And this shame must be guided. One cannot cower towards those condemning him for following the Torah. Instead, one must employ a brazenness towards such people to fulfill God’s will and express a shame or humility towards God. This mishnah instructs us to take an emotion and place it in a philosophical sphere: the combination of philosophy and psychology. To be *“brazen as a leopard”* refers to a singlemindedness: a brazenness to follow reality. One disregards others and adheres to reality with the same focus and determination as a leopard hunting its prey.

To be *“light as an eagle”* refers to a part of the personality which is detrimental towards perfection: resistance. A person possesses a resistance towards following the good. A person will experience a delay when sitting down to learn; it will take a while until he opens the gemara. But once he is in-

volved, he enjoys learning. It is difficult to stop learning once involved due to the enjoyment. Since the sin of Adam, man resists the good. "*Light as an eagle*" is the antidote. The resistance is the orlas halave, the foreskin of the heart, referring to the emotions that do not follow the mind.

To be "*fleet as a deer*" means to be tireless as a deer:

*They shall run and not grow weary, they shall travel and not grow faint (Isaiah 40:31).*

Why do people grow tired? Repetition tires a person; it is a psychological weariness. Years ago, the Rav was walking by a bookstand and someone showed him a book titled "Peace of Mind." The Rav said, "Peace of mind is for the dead." The milchemmes hachaim, battle of life, refers to an unavoidable struggle in life. In Judaism, life and struggle are synonymous. One problem with the struggle [to follow Torah] is to transition into that life. But another problem is man's worries.

*7 times the righteous man falls and gets up, while the wicked are tripped by misfortune (Proverbs 24:16)*

The tzaddik never tires from the struggle. He falls, but each day he starts again fresh.

"*Mighty as a lion*" means that man's greatest trait is courage. But Chazal say that humility is the greatest trait. Which one is it? The answer is that humility is greatest if we are speaking about [the state of] perfection. But in attaining perfection [the process], courage is the greatest trait. This is because without courage a person cannot face difficulties. Plato asked regarding military courage if it was needed when an army knows

that they will win. The answer is no. Is courage needed when an army knows it will lose? Again, the answer is no. We see that people do not have a clear definition of courage [as it seems there is never a reason for it]. Judaism has one definition of courage and it is not what people think, like being victorious in war. This is because most of that type of courage is based on fear: one is afraid to face himself if he does not go to battle.

*Who is mighty? He who subdues his [evil] inclination (Avos 4:1)*

This courage is of a special type, a rare type. It is a courage that's necessary when a person's mind shows him one picture, and his emotions show him something else. He is caught in a free will decision and he must follow his mind. That is courage; the only definition of courage. Without this quality a person cannot accomplish anything great. King David told King Solomon when the latter was about to take over the kingship, "*Be strong and be a man*" (I Kings 2:2). This refers to courage. That is the true gibor and the answer to Plato's question. Plato sought a purely philosophical definition. [This is] why Judaism combines philosophy and psychology: courage is the ability of the soul to follow the ideas in the face of the most powerful emotion.

These 4 traits don't operate isolated from each other; they are superimposed [all 4 are found together in one individual]. The most difficult challenge is to oppose the masses.

*Rabbi Yehudah said, "The entire world was on one side and Abraham on the other" (Bereishis Rabbah 42:8).*

Abraham was called the “Ivri” (side). Abraham’s monotheism was on the “other side” of world opinion: idolatry. To my mind, Socrates was the greatest philosopher of the secular world. But it is a joke compared to what Abraham accomplished. In contrast to Socrates, whose society was not completely opposed to him and recognized wisdom, Abraham’s society was primitive. It was most difficult for Abraham to follow his wisdom in the face of society’s disapproval. Yet, Abraham did so. Fear is the most destructive force and to follow one’s mind and be as mighty as a lion is the greatest trait. Gibor does not refer to only following rationality, but doing so in the face of fear.

Fear plays a greater role in people’s lives than they imagine. One does not even want to realize the fears that he has. When sensing one’s fear, one runs from it, hoping not to confront it. “*4 entered paradise [confronted reality]*” (Chagiga 14b) and one went crazy because of fear. People have false securities and if a person would realize how temporary life is, fear would overpower him, and he wouldn’t be able to live. The chocham, the philosopher, always lives in reality. He recognizes reality and it does not disturb him. But the average person is constantly plagued by avoiding his fears. He can’t accept reality; his fear is immense, and he can lose his equilibrium. Courage is to embrace the world of reality in spite of fear. That is the greatest quality. Of course, one must go step-by-step and not exceed his abilities. Rabbi Elazar lost his mind because he went beyond his own abilities. People seek support from false securities: to be young, strong, healthy, etc.

The mishnah’s main lesson is that one must sometimes employ emotional means to achieve a higher degree of perfection. True courage is not what this mishnah discusses. This mishnah discusses being as “mighty as a lion,” the employ of an emotional attachment to follow Torah. A lion is not ratio-

nal and is not acting with might [he follows its instincts and has no choice]. But man views the lion as displaying might; there is something majestic about this animal and man admires that trait; he identifies with it. The mishnah endorses that identification, even though operating on an emotional level. Similarly, when seeing an eagle in flight, one is impressed by its swift and effortless movement. That emotional admiration too should be employed in one's mimicking of the eagle in following Torah swiftly and effortlessly. This is necessary for one to achieve perfection. The grace and ease of the deer's run impresses a person. The mishnah teaches us to use these emotional components of our mind when necessary to attain perfection. One should use the impact of these animal traits to identify with their qualities and employ them in following Torah.

One should marry young at age 20, for it will make a difference then and it will impact the remainder of his life psychologically:

*Rav Chisda would praise Rav Hamnuna to Rav Huna by saying that he is a great man. Rav Huna said to him: "When he comes to you, send him to me." When Rav Hamnuna came before him, Rav Huna saw that he did not cover his head with a cloth, as Torah scholars did. Rav Huna said to him: "What is the reason that you do not cover your head with a cloth?" Rav Hamnuna said to him: "The reason is that I am not married." Rav Huna turned his face away from him in rebuke, and he said to him: "See to it that you do not see my face until you marry."*

*The gemara notes: Rav Huna conforms to his standard line of reasoning, as he says: "If one is twenty years old and has not yet married a woman, all of his days will be in a state of sin concerning sexual matters." The gemara asks: "Can it enter your mind that he will be in a state of sin all of his days? Rather, say that this means the following: All of his days will be in a state of thoughts of sin."*

Sigmund Freud says the same thing; he too cites age 20. In one of his essays, Freud says that if by age 20 one isn't married, the frustration of the sexual libido will be such that it will affect him to a degree all his life. Since the person was sexually unsatisfied by age 20, it leaves a mark for the rest of his life and he will not be able to find satisfaction; he is always going to be looking elsewhere. It doesn't detract from Torah if someone can arrive at the same conclusion [as Torah]. On the contrary, it enhances it: it shows you it is a truth and that man is capable of perceiving that truth if he is a genius in the area.

Society suppresses sexuality and doesn't wish to discuss it. The Christian world brought the greatest evils to mankind. Problems are created through sexual repression and children are harmed. The sexual drive is powerful, and must be recognized and dealt with, not suppressed. In contrast, Judaism is always open about sexuality. Hiding truths only hurts man. The gemara continues:

*Rav Chisda said: "The fact that I am superior to my colleagues is because I married at the age of sixteen, and if I would have married at the age of fourteen I*



*would say to the Satan: 'An arrow in your eye [I would have spat in his eye].'" (Kid-dushin 29b)*

What is the idea of spitting in Satan's eye? One should simply follow what is proper and rational [spitting in Satan's eye seems additional and extraneous to perfection].

The answer is that sometimes a person is confronted with the evil inclination [Satan, i.e., the yetzer hara] and must take a more aggressive demeanor [to overcome the urge]. "*Spitting in Satan's eye*" embodies that aggressive demeanor. At times, one needs to employ that emotion to attain perfection. [Times when one's instincts are fiercer, one must combat those drives with his own fierce response, if he is to overcome his instincts.]

Our mishnah is the same. It discusses employing psychologically attractive mechanisms to attain perfection in the struggle. But this must be performed under the mind's guidance towards truth. As Maimonides says, his mind must see the truth.

THE BRAZEN IS HEADED FOR GEHENOM AND  
THE BLUSHING [HUMBLE] FOR THE GARDEN OF  
EDEN.

These emotional qualities will lead one towards destruction and truth respectively. But this society tries to remove shame and guilt. The emotional neurotic guilt has as its goal the philosophical guilt. That's what the mishnah discusses.

But this reliance on the emotions is still a low level. Therefore, the author concludes this mishnah with a prayer that one attains a higher [proper] level not dependent on the emotions:

MAY IT BE THY WILL, O LORD OUR GOD, THAT  
YOUR CITY BE REBUILT SPEEDILY IN OUR DAYS  
AND SET OUR PORTION IN YOUR TORAH.

The prayer anticipates the messianic era when the city of Jerusalem—the city of wisdom—is restored. “*And set our portion in your Torah*” means “And it should be that our portion is in your Torah.” That is the meaning Rabbi Greenblatt told me, and he is correct. This phrase doesn’t mean that every person has a portion that he wants to receive. [Rather, it is a prayer that God should render it such that our portion in life is a Torah life.] This Sephardic siddur says, “*And it should be that our share...*”

In the future we won’t be dependent upon the emotional state, but on a level of wisdom:

*For the earth shall be filled to know the  
glory of the Lord as water covers the sea.  
(Habakuk 2:14)*

Another gemara relates as follows:

*The school of Eliyahu taught that although Rabbi Akiva said, “Make your Shabbat like a weekday and do not be beholden to other beings” however, one should nevertheless perform some small alteration in his house to distinguish Shabbat from a weekday. What is this alteration? Rav Pappa said: “For example, one should serve small, fried fish. As we learned in a mishnah: ‘Rabbi Judah ben Tema says: ‘Be bold like a leopard, light like an eagle, run like a deer, and be strong*

*like a lion to perform the will of your Father in Heaven.”*

Rashi comments: “*Strengthen yourself in performing mitzvah greater than your capacity.*” Meaning that a person should grab mitzvos and not just let them go. The poor man is truly exempt from making a lavish shabbos meal. But doing so lacks in being “strong in mitzvah.” Therefore, the gemara says to make one small change. Shulchan Aruch commences with “*One should strengthen himself like a lion to get up in the morning to serve his Creator.*” When first facing the day it is important to employ psychological motivations.

*Rabbi Chiyya bar Ashi said that Rav said: “Torah scholars have rest neither in this world nor in the World to Come” (Berachos 64a).*

This is because perfection is a constant process, even in the World to Come. But it is an enjoyable struggle.

In Maimonides’ Haggadah, he skips to Rabbi Yossi Haglili, omitting Dayanu. Maimonides also writes:

*It is a positive command to tell on the eve of the fifteenth day of Nisan all about the miracles and wonders that were performed for our forefathers in Egypt, as it says, “Remember this day when you went out from Egypt” (Exod. 13:3) (Hil. Chometz Umatza 7:1).*

What is interesting is that Maimonides refers only to what happened to our fathers in Egypt. Why does he exclude the

miracles at Yam Suf (the Reed Sea)? The method of discussion is to address the miracles in Egypt and not those at the sea. Maimonides also writes:

*Moses our Master was not believed in by Israel because he delivered signs, for whosoever bases his belief contingent upon signs retains suspicion in his heart, for it is possible that the sign was delivered by means of enchantment and witchcraft. But all the signs delivered by Moses in the wilderness were responsive to necessities, and not as testimony for prophecy. When it became necessary to have the Egyptians sunk, he divided the sea and drowned them therein; when our need was food, he brought down for us Manna; when they became thirsty, he split open the rock for them; when the Korach confederacy denied him, the earth swallowed them up. Likewise came to pass all the other signs (Hil. Yesodei Hatorah 8:1).*

If all these miracles were not to make the Jews believe in Moshe, how then do we understand the verse “*Now the Lord had said to Moshe, ‘Pharaoh will not heed you, in order that My marvels may be multiplied in the land of Egypt’*” (Exod. 11:9)? This verse openly states that God ensured that Pharaoh would not listen to Moshe in order to increase the miracles. Apparently from here, miracles were performed to instill belief.

There is a difference between the miracles in Egypt and between those occurring afterwards. The miracles in Egypt were performed to increase God’s wonders as stated above, and also:

*That you may speak in the ears of your sons and of your sons' sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am the Lord (Exod. 10:2).*

These miracles intended to lead people away from idolatry and show them that there is a God. The level of the people demanded miracles, as this lesson could not be accomplished otherwise.

After convincing the people through miracles of these intended lessons, miracles were no longer used as a proof for God's existence and abilities. Miracles were a temporary situation to deliver the Jews from Egypt and [that they] follow Moshe. But the good is Torah, knowledge. Thus, after the Exodus, miracles were no longer necessary. Those performed by Moshe were, as Maimonides says, for the needs of the moment. The splitting of the sea was performed because the Jews required a route of travel. While it is true that the Jews believed in Moshe due to that miracle (Exod. 14:31), that was only the effect. But the purpose was, as Maimonides says, to drown the Egyptians. Furthermore, evidently the splitting of the sea was insufficient for the Jews to believe in Moshe, as later God says the following:

*Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after (Exod. 19:9).*

This verse referring to the upcoming Revelation at Sinai is what provided the Jews with a lasting belief in Moshe. What

then is the purpose of the Torah section addressing the splitting of the sea? The splitting of the sea was shira/song, a different idea; it is an interruption, followed by the giving of the Torah.

Maimonides is consistent: he omits the splitting of the sea from his Haggadah as those miracles are not part of the miracles in Egypt. Maimonides is precise.

What is shira? It is when one directs all his emotions towards God. On Passover, there is one halacha of retelling to your son “*the miracles and wonders that were performed for our forefathers in Egypt.*” That is the act of the mitzvah, the maaseh mitzvah. But the kiyum mitzvah—the fulfillment—is shira:

*Therefore we are obligated to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, lavish, bless, raise high, and acclaim He who made all these miracles for our ancestors and for us: He brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to [celebration of] a festival, from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption. And let us say a new song before Him, Halleluyah! (Hallel)*

The proof is that the fourth seder cup is totally shira. This last cup refers not to what happened in Egypt, but to the future which will not be followed by any troubles.

What is Hallel? It is comprised of 5 matters: the Egyptian exodus, the splitting of the sea, the giving of Torah, resurrection of the dead, and the messianic era. The songs are tied to events. And when one’s song is tied to an event, it is not shira on the highest level. One recites shira regarding an event that he experienced. But the ultimate shira does not need an event;

it is an affirmation of God and His wisdom, and the song that comes forth is regarding God's wisdom. This refers to Hallel Hagadol:

*The soul of every living being shall bless  
Your Name, Lord our God; the spirit of all  
flesh shall glorify and exalt Your remem-  
brance always, our King. From the world  
and until the world, You are the Power,  
and other than You we have no king.*

That is a verse from Tehillim (106:48). The midrash says, "*From the world that we were not in, to the world we do exist in.*" The shira in Egypt refers to the world in which we exist; the world that relates to man. But shira which is independent of ourselves, a world in which we do not exist, is a completely objective praise of God divorced from ourselves, sung solely because we recognize God's greatness. That is the highest level of shira—the new song (shira chadasha) in the future. That's not tied to anything related to man emotionally. The Hallel of the future is the Hallel of knowledge of God. The Hallel of the past recognizes God for certain events, such as the splitting of the sea and the Egyptian exodus. But the Hallel of the future has nothing to do with any event. It is about knowledge of God. And that is what we say:

*The soul of every living being shall bless  
Your Name, Lord our God; the spirit of  
all flesh shall glorify and exalt Your re-  
membrance...*

"Every" and "all" refer to every human being, regardless of his experiences:

*Thank the Power of powers since His kindness is forever. To the Master of masters, since His kindness is forever. To the One who alone does wondrously great deeds, since His kindness is forever (Hallel).*

This Hallel addresses knowledge of God.

Returning to the mishnah, why does it say that God should build His “city” as opposed to building the “Temple” as we say in our prayers? The idea behind building the Temple recited in prayer is because tefilah is in place of sacrifice, “*Instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips*” (Hosea 14:3). Verbal sacrifices are just as good as literal sacrifices. But we hope to reinstate the original sacrifice, “*and may we serve You there with reverence as in the days of old and the earliest of years*” (Shmoneh Essray). This means to return the Temple and sacrifices. But here in our mishnah we must answer why it says that God should rebuild the city, as opposed to the Temple.

[At this point Rabbi Chait digressed to a new topic]

## THE EMOTION’S RAPE OF THE MIND

The philosophers referred to the “rape of the mind by the



emotions.” Is it possible for the emotions to coerce and subdue the mind and cause a person to act against knowledge? In other words, if we say that perfection of man is only through knowledge, is it possible for a drunkard to recognize that his life is being destroyed and continue to destroy himself? On the surface, one would say yes, because every drunkard knows that he’s ruining his life, and yet, he continues to do so. This would suggest that the mind is powerless in the face of the emotions. On the other hand, we do notice that before one returns to his bad habits, his mind will always tell him, “This one time I need this drink.” Meaning, one rationalizes and loses his previous knowledge of his self-destructive activities. This means that no human being can contradict what his knowledge tells him is true [explaining the rationalization]. One might then suggest this drunkard’s weakness is regarding his ability to retain previous knowledge. Therefore, to attain perfection it is clear that in addition to knowledge, something else is required to ensure that one does not lose that knowledge; one requires control over losing his knowledge. Thus, emotions can overpower the mind, but not directly. There is some method through which the emotions operate.

There is an interesting Chazal regarding Joseph the tzaddik:

*And he [Joseph] came to the house to do his work (Gen. 39:11). Rashi writes: “Rab and Samuel differ as to what this means. One holds that it means, his actual house-work; the other that it means to associate with her [Potiphar’s wife], but a vision of his father appeared to him and he resisted [sexual] temptation and did not sin” (Sotah 36b).*

Chazal say this refers to Joseph giving in to the urge to sleep with Potiphar's wife. At that moment, Joseph experienced an image of his father which told him that if he sins, his name will not appear on the high priest's breastplate alongside his brothers' names. This stopped Joseph from sinning. Joseph was overpowered by the forceful emotion of love, which carries with it a narcissistic satisfaction. Love elates a person due to the feeling of acceptance by one's partner. Joseph thought to himself, "This powerful emotion of acceptance [by Potiphar's wife] will cause me to forfeit an even stronger recognition: the ultimate recognition through my name appearing on the breastplate." Viewing the bigger picture, not having his name on the breastplate is a great net loss. Chazal say that once Joseph realized that loss, he was able to refrain from sin. A very interesting commentary and advice is contained here.

This advice is not limited to the particular case of Joseph and the breastplate. But in every person's life, there is a "breastplate." When involved in sin, for that momentary pleasure, one forfeits that same objective [recognition], but on a grander scale in the future. It need not be the breastplate, it could be recognition through people or otherwise [that one forfeits when sinning]. Chazal say that had Reuven known that the Torah would record of him "*and he saved him [Joseph] from their hands*" (Gen. 37:21) [when he was thrown into the pit], Reuven would have carried Joseph on his shoulders to save him. Chazal say that every person's life is "written." Every person has a "sefer Torah" being written about him: the sefer Torah of his life. This refers to an ultimate reality of every person. If one would think into a sin, he would feel that it's not worth it: "What will people say about me in the future?" It is not so much people's recognition per se, but the recognition of the truth. Shallow people seek any form of rec-

ognition, paying off others to receive a big dinner in their honor and they do not care how they gain that recognition. But a more realistic person values a true recognition of himself, as it reflects reality. The value comes from the reality reflected in that recognition by others.

What Chazal teach is that this is not just a case of Joseph the tzaddik, but every person has his own breastplate. What saved Joseph wasn't philosophical knowledge. When in the grips of an emotion, one's ability to philosophize is impaired. But within the framework of the emotion itself, if one can realize the net loss of sin, that can save him from sin. Again, in sin there is a momentary satisfaction or recognition. But if one realizes the net loss in the future [through either public ridicule or philosophical imperfection], that great loss can stop one in his tracks. This method of reflecting on the loss uses the emotion [of recognition] itself but forces the person to abstain from sin.

Although already in the grips of the emotion and too late for philosophizing, as reflected by "*and he came to the house to do his work,*" and although Joseph wouldn't be alive to see his name on the breastplate, he realized an ultimate reality. One can't ignore this stark reality: one's name on the breastplate is an eternal recognition on an eternal entity. Maimonides' method was never to take a Chazal and say that it solves a philosophical question. So, we must investigate Chazal's words ourselves.

Returning to the question of the emotions controlling one's mind, one can say that we have provided no proof that the mind can be subordinated to the emotions. This is because the drunkard who realizes the damage of drinking, doesn't realize the philosophical damage to his soul; he is not a philosopher. The only realization that he has is based on instinctual: he sees that his instinctual life will be destroyed. He will lose

his wife, home, children, and his job if he keeps drinking. He has no philosophical insight. Thus, he has no knowledge of why drinking is bad.

The instinctual desire that is close at hand exerts greater power [it is far more appealing] than a future satisfaction. That is how the emotions operate [instant gratification]. When he has the bottle in front of him, the desire is very powerful. It's like one philosopher said, "Whenever one sins, he is suffering from nearsightedness." The immediate pleasure obscures the pain in the future. Therefore, this case is not a battle of emotions versus knowledge. If, however, one recognized philosophically how an improved life [without drinking] will elevate his existence to a greater plane, he would never sin. But this drunkard isn't a philosopher. He is merely in a tug-of-war between 2 emotions. One will thereby conclude that there's never a case that displays the emotions overpowering the mind.

Alternatively, one can suggest that even the drunkard's mind tells him that it's illogical to keep drinking [thus, he is using his mind]. However, it might be true that he is following logic, but he is not following knowledge, and only knowledge controls the soul. The soul is subordinated only through knowledge, and without knowledge, the soul is not moved. Therefore, while it is true that it is not logical to continue drinking, the soul is uninvolved in that decision. He has no knowledge of why drinking is detrimental [he is only acting on the fear of the effects: losing his job, his wife and kids, etc.]. The soul is moved only by knowledge, and without it, the soul is uninvolved. Therefore, the emotions can overpower this person as the soul is uninvolved. But the moment that one attains true knowledge of the harms of drinking, nothing can budge a person from that knowledge.

The difference between logic and knowledge is that logic is

a consistency in a certain framework [a framework isolated from reality with a set of rules. In chess, for example, it is logical to protect the queen. But this logic is limited to the framework of chess. Outside of chess, protecting the queen is irrelevant. But knowledge differs from logic: it refers to an objective apprehension of reality.] With knowledge, nothing can separate the soul from that knowledge. No matter the emotional strength, the soul will always remain rigidly fixed embracing that knowledge.

To review the argument, let's imagine the soul talking:

*Soul: Do I really know that drinking is harmful? I do not. I have no position on this question.*

Therefore, there is nothing to move the soul. But there is another position one can take. The only way man can control his passions and live virtuously is through knowledge. Let's say the drunkard is somewhat aware of the harm of drinking on a practical level. Even though he is overpowered at the moment before he decides to drink, I would say he is overpowered due to a lack of knowledge: not philosophical knowledge, but psychological knowledge. The world is trying to support an argument for the drunkard that willpower exists; another force necessary for one to attain perfection. I disagree; there is no other force. Intellect/reason is the only force. However, for reason to work [succeed] there cannot be any blind spots. Here, reason is adequate to determine the foolishness of drinking. But the drunkard has no self-knowledge regarding why he is drawn to drinking. And if he would understand his own emotional forces, his emotions could not exercise any control to make him drink.

Action requires 2 things: knowledge of the objective good,

and how to apply oneself to that good. But the latter requires knowledge of the self. If one understands his emotions and why one is driven by a specific emotion, that knowledge of the self can help control the emotion. [But without self-knowledge, one can fall prey to one's emotions, even though one has knowledge of the objective good.] This is because performance or human action requires both: ideas and "you." Inasmuch as one is ignorant of how he functions, he is unable to change his behavior.

Chazal state that a tzaddik must know himself. They say that one must be aware of the instincts' subtle workings. That is part of the milchemmes hachaim, the battle of life. Chazal had intricate knowledge of the workings of their minds; they did not maintain that philosophical knowledge alone is sufficient.

In summary, a blind emotion can overpower the mind. But the mind, when understanding the emotion, can undermine it. To review, the mind is overpowered because it does not have true philosophical knowledge. But as the mind has some kind of knowledge, why should it be overpowered? The answer is that the mind functions in 2 different realms. Sometimes it functions in the service of the emotions and instincts, and other times it functions in its own world. In most people's lives the mind is merely used in the service of the instincts. Otherwise, one would have to say that a rasha is an intellect as he uses his mind to obtain his desires. But in truth, a rasha's thoughts and plans for his desires use his mind unconnected to his soul. His mind is used solely to service his instincts. But when we speak about the soul, we speak about the mind functioning on its own as a free agent. That is a different kind of human function. And as long as one's driving force is the instincts, you cannot speak about the mind. When we say the mind can't be overpowered by emotion, we refer to

the function of the mind, the agency of the mind. The mind [in the capacity of] a functional agency, is only when the mind is operating on its own energies. That is a different functional entity compared to when a person uses his brain to service his instincts. The latter is a different energy system [than mind when engaging in reality]. In one case, energy flows freely to the mind and the mind determines where it goes: investigating different areas based upon its desire for truth. [In this function or capacity, mind cannot be overpowered by emotion.] Energy is used under the drive and quest for knowledge. But when one thinks about how to kill someone, he is not using his mind, but his brain. A rasha uses his intelligence, but it is not as a function of the soul; his instincts harness his intelligence and the soul is not functioning.

Let us clarify the second argument. If one's mind had true knowledge of how the emotions work, he would not be overpowered by the emotions. But we said that one still possesses some knowledge and yet he is overpowered [that knowledge being the loss of his family and work]. But with increased knowledge of the instincts, one can ward off the instincts. How does this work?

As long as one is unaware of what the instinct is truly after, the instinct will always succeed. This is because the instincts must have an outlet. There is no way to restrict the instincts. The question is how possessing knowledge changes this. There is only one answer: When one possesses knowledge, the instincts have an outlet through the knowledge itself. Meaning, when one knows what the instinct truly desires, that itself is the outlet and one does not need to perform the action. But when one does not know the object of his desires, the instinct forces one to action because he has no way to vent the energies. But with knowledge, one can vent his energies through his mind, which is what Torah tells us. When thoughts

enter one's mind, the sinner is the one who does the performance. But the thoughts of sin are not sin: "*God does not consider an evil thought as action*" (Kiddushin 39b). If a person thinks that he wants to kill someone, that is not his fault. But if that thought puts into process a system of attack, a plan, that's already an evil thought, but even at that stage we say God does not view it as action. As long as one refrains from action, he is not considered a sinner. If a person desires to kill his friend but is unaware of his desire, his friend is in serious danger. But if the person is aware of his desire, his friend is safe, for the awareness itself vents the energy. But if the energy cannot reach the mental apparatus, the energy is not free, it must express itself, so it will express itself in action. The drunkard doesn't know why he is drinking. Meaning, that he is drinking for some reason, to gain some satisfaction that he is completely unaware of, and he has no way of venting. Drinking is the only way he can vent this desire. We are positing that one does not drink for drinking sake.

*"Thoughts of sin are worse than sin itself"* (Chidushei Agadot on Yevamos 63a, Rabbeinu Bahya, Devarim 29:18:2). Thoughts of sin are worse in the sense that one degrades the faculty that God gave man for the higher sphere [pursuit of wisdom] by using it for the lowest sphere [instinctual fantasy]. Thereby, one channels valuable energy through thought, whereas the act of sin itself merely occurs only in the physical realm.

The question is, if one's mind tells a person one thing and his emotions tell him something else, can the emotions overpower the mind? This depends upon free will. For if we say that the mind can never be overpowered by the emotions, there is no free will. And if we say that the emotions can overpower the mind, again there is no free will. Judaism holds that neither of these possibilities are true. Judaism posits that man



has free will. Free will is not when one chooses one food over another; that's merely a tug-of-war of the emotions: the stronger emotion will win. The same applies to one who chooses to stay at home and not go to work due to the rain. Free will is when the philosophical mind sees reality clearly and the emotional tug is still present. One has the knowledge of the mind's free activity together with the pull of the emotions, and the following occurs. There is a soul which is attracted to both the mind and the emotions in 2 ways. When the soul sees the world of ideas and reality, the soul is attracted to it; it seems correct. On the other hand, when the soul sees the world of the emotions, it is attracted there as well. Free will means that man can determine which world he will follow.

When Joseph "*went to the house to do his work,*" he made a poor decision and failed: he wished to sleep with Potiphar's wife. But at the last moment, he saved himself through a different kind of argument, based upon the emotion itself. He used his mind to show that the emotion itself was in contradiction [he sought recognition through romance, but simultaneously Joseph recognized that through this romance, he would forfeit recognition of his name on the breastplate; a far greater recognition]. We must say that Joseph used his free will, since due to this abstention, he is viewed as one of the greatest tzaddikim. Joseph's free will was to [choose between] attaching himself to that rationality, or following the instinct of the moment. Joseph attached himself to the values his father taught to him [his name on the breastplate] and that is why he was a tzaddik. The attachment to a rational system, even within the framework of the emotions [desiring one's name to be on the breastplate] is an exercise of free will. Perhaps you will ask: "How is this free will, since Joseph used his mind in the service of his emotions?" The answer is that Joseph was not using his mind in the service of his emotions.

He was not saying that his desire to be on the breastplate was greater than his desire for Potiphar's wife. If that were the case, it would not be free will. Joseph did not lose philosophical knowledge. Joseph supported that knowledge with a rationale of the destruction that results intrinsically from sin. That is the mind functioning [not the emotions]. Joseph's recognition that following the emotion is self-destructive is an extension of the philosophical. His mind was not operating in the service of the emotions; his mind utilized the emotions in the service of reason. That is why this case is an exercise in free will. Joseph was able to remove himself from the emotion. Joseph may not illustrate the ultimate in terms of how to conquer the emotion because the ultimate is through knowledge itself. But he is the ultimate in terms of the dynamics of the situation. Joseph demonstrated the greatness of man, to control his forceful emotions, as he did.

## 5:21 THE SOUL'S JOURNEY

JUDAH BEN TEMA USED TO SAY: "AT 5 YEARS OF AGE THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE; AT 10 THE STUDY OF MISHNAH; AT THIRTEEN TO FULFILL COMMANDMENTS; AT FIFTEEN THE STUDY OF TALMUD; AT EIGHTEEN FOR MARRIAGE; AT TWENTY FOR PURSUIT; AT THIRTY THE PEAK OF STRENGTH; AT FORTY FOR UNDERSTAND-

ING; AT FIFTY TO GIVE COUNSEL; AT SIXTY OLD AGE; AT SEVENTY FULLNESS OF YEARS; AT EIGHTY FOR STAMINA; AT NINETY A BENT BODY; AT ONE HUNDRED, AS GOOD AS DEAD AND GONE COMPLETELY OUT OF THE WORLD.”

A child should not be taught before the age of 5. The modern world sends children to school at the age of 2 or 3; they have a fantasy that by doing so the child will be more advanced. But it turns out that it was just a fantasy. Because by the age of 12 or 13, those children ended up no more advanced than others. Judaism does not hold that a child should be forced to study and concentrate before the age of 5. Concentration is not natural for a child and it does not benefit him; in fact, it harms the child. Rashi says you are not to teach children Torah earlier than 5 because Torah strains the strength of the child.

*Jacob went out from Beer Sheba and went to Haran (Gen. 28:10).*

The Rav asked why both words were needed, that Jacob “left” and also “went.” In the previous parsha, Isaac blessed Jacob. But Rebecca was concerned about the danger of Esav. She told Jacob to flee to Haran so Esav would not harm him. The Rav said that it is the role of the mother to protect the child; the father’s role is to help him progress. There are 2 different processes in child education. “Going out” was due to the blessings of Abraham. “Going to” was to flee from Esav. Jacob fulfilled the command of honoring his father and his mother.

The biggest problem in child education is that the parents’ egos are always involved. The parents want to advance the

child as this provides greater pride for the parent. Parents invest much fantasy in their child, which is dangerous and harmful for the child and it always backfires. But people do not learn from others' mistakes.

Before the ages of 5 to 7, a child should remain in his natural environment with his mother and develop naturally. The uniformity system where all children start school at age 5 is a problem and this hurts the child as some children are not yet ready. Each child must be evaluated individually. Chazal's idea was to follow each individual child's nature: "*Teach a child according to his nature...*" (Prov. 22:6). A child that develops at a slower rate is unrelated to intelligence. Development progresses in psychological stages. A child can be very intelligent but grow out of his developmental stages slower than others. To force such a child to learn sooner than he is ready can cause great psychological damage where any gain is forfeited.

Mishnah is to first be taught at the age of 10. This comprises the Oral Torah and is more difficult than Scripture (Chumash). And gemara study does not start until age 15 as it is analysis, and one's mind is not capable of this activity until more developed, at approximately age 15 when one is capable of theoretical knowledge. I was taught gemara at age 9 and I didn't understand it. It made no sense to me. I remember trying to grasp it. I was forced to memorize it as it was a praiseworthy matter to memorize the amud (page). I thought it was a good idea so I did it, but I gained nothing, and it was actually a harmful process because my mind could not grasp any ideas. I was taking something that was supposed to be ideas and trying to grapple with it, to place it in some compartment in my mind which I really could not find. The whole study was alien to me; it was a waste of time and harmful. But Mishnah—the facts of the Oral Torah—a person can handle

at age 10. At that age, one is not ready to juggle big theories, but one can commence on material that lends itself to further theoretics, but without going into them. That is a proper approach and how a child should be taught.

Something in learning that frustrates a person is bad for him. To force a person to grasp what he is yet not ready for is harmful. It causes strain and makes the learning something alien. One rabbi says that from ages 5 to 10 it is proper to study Chumash, meaning that one should not start before age 5 or continue past age 10. It does not mean to stop totally, but that the emphasis should now shift from Chumash to Mishnah. In gemara Berachos, Rashi says to minimize the study of Tanach because it draws the emotions. Historically this is absolutely correct; all the movements that denied the Oral Torah loved studying Tanach. These movements were enamored by the areas of the prophets which draw the emotions, especially the eschatological areas: areas dealing with the end of time. The prophets discuss this area with great beauty. But in Judaism, there must be a balance. The catastrophe of the people emotionally drawn to this area was their abandonment of reason and rationality. In the second Temple, all the sects—the Essenes and others—went off the track and denied Torah’s wisdom. That is what Rashi said, “Do not teach too much Tanach.” Transitioning to the study of Mishnah at age 10 and to gemara at age 15 shows the child Torah’s wisdom and he won’t be drawn by the emotions. This almost parallels the principle to divide one’s daily study into thirds:

*Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai says, “A person should always divide his years into thirds as follows: One third for Chumash, one third for Mishnah and one third for Talmud” (Avodah Zara 19b).*

This of course speaks of a mature person. But there is a dispute on this halacha, as the gemara continues:

*Does a person know the length of his life, [that he can calculate how much a third will be? The gemara answers:] When we said that one should divide his time into thirds, the intention was with regard to his days, i.e., he should devote one third of each day to Chumash, Mishnah and Talmud, respectively.*

Maimonides says that of the 9 hours of each day [available to a person outside of his obligations and sleep] he should learn Scripture for 3 hours, Mishnah for 3 hours and gemara for 3 hours (Hil. Talmud Torah 1:11,12):

*If one was a craftsman and engaged himself 3 hours daily to his work and to Torah 9 hours, of those 9 hours he should devote 3 hours to the study of Written Torah, and 3 hours to Oral Torah and the last 3 hours to mental reasoning, to deduct one matter from another. (Ibid. 1:12)*

But this is only when one first commences learning. As one advances, one should spend all 9 hours in gemara. gemara refers to theoretical analysis. Maimonides says that one should occasionally return to Scripture and Mishnah to ensure that he does not forget either: all in accordance with the person's theoretical capabilities.

Rabbeinu Tam asks why this 3-part division is no longer followed. He says it is because we learn Talmud Bavli which

contains all 3. “Bavli” means mixed together. Rabbeinu Tam did not give the same answer as Maimonides. Rabbeinu Tam held that the halacha of dividing one’s learning into these 3 areas is a halacha in derech halimud, the manner of study, and applies even when one becomes advanced. He held that the prescription for Torah study is to always be involved in these 3 subjects. According to Maimonides, the study of Scripture and Mishnah are [only] preparations for theoretics; the latter being the essence. He held that Scripture and Mishnah are only to provide one with the facts. Attaining perfection is through theoretical knowledge. But Rabbeinu Tam held that there is an intrinsic gain in learning all 3 subjects daily; one can never abandon studying Scripture and Mishnah. When learning Talmud Bavli and encountering a verse from Scripture, one should study the chapter and know that verse.

Today, yeshivas focus on gemara and not Scripture and Mishnah. This is because once a talmid leaves yeshiva at the age 20, or 25 if he is lucky, he won’t be able to become a lamdan [talmudic scholar] later on [and therefore he must focus solely on gemara while attending yeshiva]. People work far greater than 3 hours today [leaving less time to study gemara] so the yeshiva must focus on gemara. Furthermore, the need for fluency in Scripture and Mishnah today is unlike earlier years when Tanach was written on a klaf [scrolls] and not everyone had one, requiring Tanach to be memorized. The gemara says that they couldn’t even afford a klaf for a shul. But today, all the [Scriptural and Mishnaic] sources are available in print. Therefore, the yeshivas are justified in abandoning the focus on Scripture and Mishnah since the goal is to create a lamdan. If during a talmid’s time in yeshiva he divides his study into these 3 parts, we will not produce talmidei chochamim.

Another reason to focus on gemara is because it’s focus is

ideas, which students like. But to focus on language and how to make a learning is not attractive to teenagers, and once they leave yeshiva they will not continue learning because they did not come to enjoy it.

#### AT THIRTEEN TO FULFILL COMMANDMENTS

A change occurs at this age. It is the time of life when a person has the ability to exercise his rational control over his instinctual nature. I often tell people not to tell a child “Control yourself.” It is a mistake. Parents tell children, “Don’t do X because it is not good.” They try to explain to the child why X is not good. However, the child does not yet have that compartment of his mind. The child does not have the will to exercise control. This harms a child because his inability to exert self-control results in guilt. Teaching control by beating the child is also not right. As this does not teach control, rather, it teaches the child to fear the parent.

It is not necessary to teach a child to exert rational control; this comes naturally. The same is true regarding socializing. Placing children in school at age 2 to teach them how to socialize is wrong, as socializing too is a natural phenomenon [it is not a learned behavior, but it is as natural to socialize as it is to laugh at humor; the latter too does not need to be taught].

Children must not perform harmful actions. The only way to prevent them is by force: simply take the child away [from whatever harmful activity he is engaging in]. There’s nothing wrong with a child experiencing frustration. In fact, it is healthy because by not frustrating a child and instead, catering to his every need, the child will not be prepared for life. This is because one does not fulfill every wish in his life. Parents don’t like frustrating a child because the child cries



and the parent thinks that if she cried, it would be painful [the situation causing the parent's cry must be bad]. But parents fail to realize that the child's cry is unlike the cry of an adult. The child cries as he wishes for everything. While the parent's wishes are tempered by their knowledge of reality [a person cannot get everything he desires], which cancels out many wishes, so parents curb their desires. [Therefore, when a parent does cry, it must be due to a real trouble. The parent then projects that severity onto a child's cry, feeling bad for the child, when in fact, like the adult has properly learned, every wish cannot be realized. The child learning this lesson through frustration is good for him. Thus, the parent should not view the child's cry as something bad.]

There are people who can't tolerate protracted satisfaction, where the benefits or results of their labors are not immediate, but very far off. Some people can't go to medical school because it takes 5 to 10 years. They are accustomed to immediate gratification. Thus, the denial of immediate gratification benefits a child. Frustration within reason is good. Everyone including children must enjoy life. The mistake is to identify with a child and view him as a "little man," which he is not. You must use reason when raising a child and not identification.

The reason adults can't exercise control later in life is not because they weren't taught. It is precisely because they were taught to do something which they were not ready to do. Thereby, they developed hatred against it and no longer wish to associate with that matter. Therefore, they refuse to exercise control. The natural process [of developing an affinity towards something] that would have taken place, has been thwarted. That is why a mistake in this area is a dangerous mistake.

When frustrating a child, it is okay to explain to him why

you are not giving him what he wants. You do not have to make the child think that you are being mean. But you cannot expect the force of that reason to control a child, when he lacks the compartments of the mind that is capable of doing such a thing [grasping the reason and exerting control].

People who are least prepared for life are those to whom others constantly catered. They suffer all their lives because they can't exercise control. Adoniyahu ben Chagis—King Solomon's brother—was arrogant and politically foolish. This was for a reason, as the verse says:

*His father had never scolded him saying,  
"Why did you do that?" He was also very  
exceedingly handsome and was born after  
Absalom (I Kings 1:6).*

King David never made Adoniyahu depressed or accountable. He never reprimanded him; King David overlooked anything he did. Apparently, depression [through reprimanding] is a good thing. After the age of 12, a parent is prohibited from exerting physical control over his child, but psychological control is permitted.

It is important for a child to develop a close relationship with his mother when the child is young. But that does not mean that there is no control over the child. They say regarding the most brilliant people that they remained close with their mothers until age 6 with no schooling until that age. But the mother does not cater to every want of the child. There can exist a close relationship without spoiling the child; the 2 are not mutually exclusive. If controlling and frustrating the child is not done out of anger, but rationally, the child knows it and the positive relationship is never broken or minimized. The key is that the relationship with the child must be man-

aged with wisdom. It is difficult to control one's emotions. Aristotle said that raising a family is like being a general: "*As a general of an army dispatches his troops logically, one must dispatch his emotions logically.*" He was correct.

At age 13 one engages in mitzvos for then one is accountable. At that age, one possesses the psychological ability to exert rationality and control [and can choose to follow the mitzvos].

#### TWENTY FOR PURSUIT

Pursuit (ridifah) typically refers to running. The commentators say this refers to war:

*5 of you shall give chase to a hundred,  
and a hundred of you shall give chase to  
10 thousand; your enemies shall fall before  
you by the sword (Lev. 26:8).*

This refers to battle. If that is the case, it is not just a physical phenomenon of running, but it also refers to psychological orientation. Interesting is that one is not culpable for *dinei shamayim* (heaven-bound judgments) until he is 20 years old, but Bais Din will punish after age 13. This is because the age of 20 marks full maturity: psychologically, physically, physiologically and in all ways. Apparently, although Chazal held maturity to be age 20, in matters of marriage—socially—one is suitable at age 18. In truth, some say that marriage is preferable earlier than 18 because romantic preference exists even earlier. This is predicated on one living within a halachic society where all people follow Torah. But in other societies, one may need to wait longer than age 18 when one is mature enough to better assess the girl. [In societies that do not fol-

low Torah there is the danger that a prospective mate is unfit.] But it is true, if you understand modern psychology, even in a person's teens, one can accurately choose a proper romantic partner. Romantic preference is important, as the gemara says that one cannot marry until he sees his mate; there must be mutual attraction. Without it, one cannot fulfill "...and you shall love your friend like yourself" (Lev. 19:18).

Chazal set marriage at 18 years of age due to practical reasons, such as having sufficient time to learn Torah and to get a job. This is sensible and also makes sense psychologically. However, today's society presents a danger because one can be in love with the most harmful individual. In a halachic society rational parents guide the child to find a mate with proper character and livelihood. Then all that remains is romantic preference and the child could select that on his or her own. But in our society there are many more decisions to be made, such as the partner's values, which, at an early age, one is not ready to judge accurately. Chazal's selection of age 18 was in a specific situation [not pertaining to today's society].

#### AT THIRTY THE PEAK OF STRENGTH

Some explain this physically: peak physical strength is at age 30. At age 20—maturity—a person naturally embarks upon some form of conquest: "pursuit," or battle. But battle doesn't necessitate being in the army. It means that at age 20 one forms in his mind the conquest of his life: what he is going to accomplish in his lifetime. A teenager doesn't want to be bothered with this; he is happy wasting time. This is also true intellectually, as they say that Nobel Prize winners enjoy most of their greatest breakthroughs in thought in their 20s. Newton made his breakthroughs at age 20; Einstein too was in his early 20s [when he made his breakthroughs]. At this age

a person is mature and at the height of his powers. Rav Chaim too made his breakthroughs at an early age. Of course, the person keeps going and his Torah grows on. But that's different than making an initial breakthrough.

Strength refers to after the ground is broken, in one's 20s, and one proceeds strongly in his 30s along his previously chartered path. After that period in his 30s one won't ever again have that strength. Carrying the Mishkan (Tabernacle) demonstrated the ideas of life. The priests started carrying it at age 30 to convey this idea.

People like to feel they have time. Therefore, Chazal informed us of these stages so one does not pass up these valuable one-time chances to harness various levels of development and their accompanying benefits.

#### FORTY FOR UNDERSTANDING

Animals partake of maturity and nothing more. But man has the ability to perfect himself. As Maimonides says, "*Just as no one is born a carpenter, no one is born perfected.*" Man is subject to a "process" of perfection. There are 2 components: maturity and the process; the latter acts on the organism and perfects it. Age 20 speaks in the framework of natural maturity, in which all living creatures partake. But in man, maturity is only a potential which must be developed and realized. What acts on the potential is how one lives. Assuming that one lives a life of wisdom during his 30s, after he places all his energy into this wisdom, he reaches his potential. After this point he will not realize any great qualitative breakthroughs. That's what is meant by "40 for understanding." Understanding means that at age 20 his potential is completed, and his realization of his potential is at 40. One's prime is age 40.

Someone might feel sad to reach one's prime at 40. But it is just the opposite. The reason that scientific breakthroughs are made when a person is young is because science is a specific type of subject: succeeding generations build on previous ones and uncover new areas. Genius is required to identify a new area: a new qualitative opening. Science progresses through such openings: qualitative leaps. And since at age 20 one's potential is realized, and he is now engaged in pursuit—mapping out one's life's plan—now is when one will act optimally to make breakthroughs. The brilliant mind will spot the opening. If he does not spot the opening at age 20, he will not do so at age 40. In Science, after age 20, one is spent: you need another individual to come and spot the next opening. In Torah too, like Rav Chaim who saw a new approach when he was young, that's like a scientific breakthrough. Everyone is attracted to the glory of the breakthrough. But ego aside, the benefit of the breakthrough is that the person is a chocham. He lives as a chocham and has the penetrating knowledge and he continues to uncover ideas and gains knowledge throughout his life. That is the real benefit. Man's greatness is to have this knowledge and to live with it and to continue to uncover ideas. This is reached at age 40. Now, wherever he turns, he perceives matters with depth. That is man's benefit, not the glory of the breakthrough and the accompanying sensationalism.

Therefore, it is a happy matter to be 40 and have understanding. The important thing is benefiting from realizing your potential. The wisdom that benefits man's life is the wisdom that he develops at age 40 when his potential is realized, and he can apply it and continue to gain knowledge in every area. That is the best time in life, it [his wisdom and intelligent approach to life] improves his life, and is what gives him life in this world and in the afterlife. That's the most important thing.

Understanding is [occurs] when one has sharpened all his tools. Age 20 is the brilliant light of genius to chart one's course in life. Age 40 is when one's abilities have reached their optimal level. But that's not the ability to scan and spot your mark:

*Rabba said, "Conclude from here that a person does not understand the opinion of his teacher until after forty years" (Avodah Zara 5b).*

At age 40 there is an added depth, a quantitative increase that provides a certain qualitative depth. Even those holding that Kabbalah is correct (the Gra learned it), we do not know if what we possess today is the same Kabbalah. But all agree that one should not study it until one is 40 years old; it is prohibited. This is because the person will come up with nonsense. Not only is one required to possess intelligence and the ability to learn, but one requires a depth of understanding.

When I say "understanding" this means that one is honed to the finest degree, it is not a perfect analogy [to honing a tool]. This is because honing a tool means that one keeps sharpening it until it reaches a certain [quantitative] point. But in knowledge it is a qualitative point. It's where one reaches a certain depth. Although one is engaged in the same process for 20 years, when he reaches a certain point, there is a qualitative change [unlike sharpening a tool where one only reaches a quantitative point]. When one realizes his potential, it is a different kind of perfection of the mind. And only that kind of person can delve into these areas, otherwise he will come up with absolute nonsense. All these people who are attracted to Kabbalah are attracted due to primitive reasons. And it's the most dangerous thing and they are guaranteed to come up with nonsense because it is nonsense that attracts

them to begin with. Chazal recognized that one has no right to delve into this area unless he is 40 years old. This does not mean chronologically but intellectually. Wisdom affects the total personality; it is a fundamental of Judaism. I would differentiate here between the mathematician at age 40, and the talmid chocham at age 40. The mathematician's knowledge did not affect him as a person. But in Torah, the more one learns and sharpens his faculties and realizes his potential, this affects the total person. At age 40 he is now a different person, and only then can he study Kabbalah. But before age 40 he will come up with nonsense. Ramah says in a teshuvah (responsa) that he was criticized for studying philosophy. But he says that more harm came about by studying Kabbalah than by studying philosophy. I believe he said more kefirah [heresy] came from Kabbalah than from philosophy.

#### AT FIFTY TO GIVE COUNSEL

This refers simply to politics. Experiences and a stage in life are necessary to understand political savvy. A certain personality is also needed. This is not just the sharpening of the mind; another quality is required. Experience affects a person as his fantasies have been blunted. In youth, the fantasies are very strong and cause immoderate reactions. In youth, one responds strongly: when offended, one retaliates harshly and immediately. But at age 50, one has lived through experiences and he is settled and in line with reality. He feels that whatever he is, he is. He is not embarking on a new course. Youth and fantasy are over. That is the type of person from whom to seek political advice. Such a person thinks impartially without the sharp emotions tugging. You might say that he is a certain degree removed from life. He is not so excitable. Rechavam rejected the advice of the elders and followed



the advice of the young men that he grew up with, who gave him the advice he wanted (I Kings 12:8). Counseling on human affairs requires a stability of mind. Incidentally, this entire progression of our mishnah refers to the perfect situation.

AT SIXTY OLD AGE

It is learned from a verse in Job that a person at age 60 is ready to die:

*You will come to the grave in ripe old age  
as shocks of grain are taken away in their  
season (Job 5:26).*

“In ripe old age” in Hebrew is בַּכְּלָה which numerically equals 60. But what changes at the age of 60? Death becomes a reality, changing one’s personality. The fantasy of immortality is over; life is no longer endless. One is removed from what I would call the “clamor of life,” a difficult thing to face. Today, the sentiment is “always be youthful,” which means to always be foolish and not realize what’s going to happen. It means to deny reality. That is the American ideal. In Judaism, we have to adjust to how God created man [we must adjust to our mortality].

A different version of this mishnah says “*At 60 for wisdom.*” However, we said “*At 40 for understanding,*” so what is this wisdom referred to here? This is a different kind of wisdom that one gains when he withdraws from the nonsense of this world. His mind is steeped in the world of the absolute. For when a normal person recognizes his mortality, he withdraws and directs his energies towards those matters that are eternal. That is what wisdom means. Not in terms of sharpness or abilities, but where his energies are in the world of wisdom.

Einstein wrote in a letter that it is hard to write a biography; a man of 50 is not the same man of 30 [one who writes a biography at age 50 is not writing as the man he was at age 30. Thus, the biographical portion that records his 30s is tainted by his current age of 50 and is inaccurate to that degree]. And a man of 60 years is not the same as he was when he was 50. Einstein was a normal human being and he underwent these changes as Chazal state. He said that when he grew older, he tremendously enjoyed being alone because he would withdraw from the nonsense of the clamor of life and direct his concentration onto the world of ideas and wisdom. As a wise man progresses, he changes. One cannot be 60 at the age of 30. You cannot jump ahead, and you must live life at the stage in which you are at. It is important to know the stages.

#### AT SEVENTY, FULLNESS OF YEARS

*And Abraham died at a good ripe age, old  
and contented (Gen. 25:8)*

Maimonides said Abraham wasn't looking for additional life anymore. One comes to a time in his life when, in terms of accomplishments, one looks backward instead of forward. שיבה means that whatever one has done, he has done. It refers to the acceptance of reality regarding accomplishments. But he progresses, "*In old age they still produce fruit*" (Psalms 92:15). The gemara says that as a talmid chocham ages, he becomes more secure, calmer. Reality fits in line with what he has learned all his life and it makes him a more total person. In that sense it is the best part of his life. But שיבה means there is no more push forward.

AT EIGHTY FOR STAMINA

Basically, at 70 years old, one is done. This now deals with something else. But people live beyond their lifespan. This does not mean physical stamina, but it also includes psychological stamina. This is because at 80 years of age, the difficulties one encounters, he never encountered previously. And that is why this stage in life requires strength, a certain strength of character to be able to cope with the physical difficulties. One needs courage at this part of life and some people can't do it; they give up. When one gives up psychologically, it affects his body.

AT NINETY A BENT BODY

If you see centenarians, they have a fixed glaze, like they're removed from this world.

Maimonides did not make a single comment on this entire mishnah. Obviously, his edition did not have this mishnah.

This is a beautiful mishnah and you can appreciate it only if you have one idea: the human soul. A person with this idea realizes that in man there is an essence, a metaphysical essence. The soul is brought into this world and it travels through a journey: 5, 15, 20...100 years, and then it exits this world. The mishnah is not a sad one. It is the story of the journey of the soul in this physical existence. So, if one has fantasies of unbelievable conquest and endless success, this mishnah will depress him greatly. But if one recognizes what the human soul is and what his eternity is in terms of his soul, and he knows that this world is a journey with a beginning and different stages, and then the soul removes itself and eventually continues in its eternal state, it is not a sad matter that one recognizes this. It is a difficult thing, but that's what the mish-

nah is about. And finally, at age 100 there is no purpose in a person's journey any longer.

There are certain philosophical ideas which are abstract and difficult, and which require one to devote his mental energies to resolve their difficulties. All our lives we are confronted with philosophical problems. That is the nature of life.

There are 2 different types of philosophical ideas. One type demands energy and work to understand the question and gain knowledge. Then there is another type of philosophical idea that a person must keep in the back of his mind. You might say it is a compass which guides a person throughout life. This mishnah presents such an idea. It discusses the stages of life and goes through the various ages and what one is capable of at each age. It discusses a person's peak in his inherent qualities, it discusses human development [of those qualities], and how he reaches that peak 20 years later. Man then reaches a peak regarding how he can handle the affairs of this world because his energies are in a proper balance, at 50, 60 and 70 years of age. And then the mishnah describes man's decline.

This mishnah is true: it describes reality, but people are reluctant to face it. In our society, people deny their mortality, striving for eternal youth where one goes to all ends to preserve it. But if he can't, he will try to retain at least the appearance of youth. People go through painstaking operations which are dangerous and harmful. But people take chances because of the illusion of youth. This means that a person cannot adjust to reality. People either deny reality or go into depression. In our society it is either or. Man cannot find that niche in his mind where to place this life: a happy way of viewing life [and aging]. People go to extremes: either they indulge maniacally in this physical existence, or they withdraw completely. People do not find a happy medium.

The greatness of Chazal is that they handled life properly.

They were happy in life. They valued wealth. They recognized that this existence is temporal; it had a place in their minds where they were happy with it and accepted it. They enjoyed the benefits of earthly existence without maintaining that it is the ultimate. But in our society people cannot share this philosophy. Rava told his students, *“Don’t be like those people who lose 2 worlds.”* They lose the next world because they don’t learn Torah lishma since they are learning for ulterior motives, and they lose this world because they are not enjoying daily life. It is true, this life is transient, but nevertheless it is something. The Yerushalmi says that one who cannot enjoy life has a blemish. The sin offering of the nazirite is because he withheld from himself the pleasure of wine. The inability to enjoy this life is related to our neurotic society which stems from a Christianized philosophy/religion, a distortion of human nature. Advancing in Torah brings greater happiness.

## 5:22 ALL IS IN TORAH

BEN BAG BAG SAID, “TURN IT OVER, AND [AGAIN] TURN IT OVER, FOR ALL IS THEREIN. AND LOOK INTO IT; AND BECOME GRAY AND AGED THEREIN; AND DO NOT MOVE AWAY FROM IT, FOR YOU HAVE NO BETTER PORTION THAN IT.”

The next mishnah is authored by Ben Hay Hay. He was a convert. He called himself the son of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham received an additional letter ה [God changed his name from Abram to Abraham: אַבְרָם-אַבְרָהָם], as did Sarah [God changed her name from Sarai to Sarah: שָׂרַי-שָׂרָה]. Therefore, he calls himself a direct descendent of these 2 people: their intellectual descendent. Ben Bag Bag means the same thing, as Bag is composed of the letters ב ג which equal 5, the numerical amount of ה.

Ben Hay Hay said to constantly turn over Torah, digging beneath the surface, investigating and pondering it. This is because he said everything is in Torah. Is that true? If I wish to know astronomy, should I study Torah? You might say like Maimonides, that we had our own astronomy: “*The children of Issachar, knowing understanding of times*” (I Chron. 12:33). They knew astronomy before the Greeks. But even so, is there nothing more to study than “their” astronomy? Was every astronomical discovery that was ever to be made, known through their astronomy? I don’t agree. What about biology and other areas? Besides the major headings and the particulars, the [scientific] subjects are almost infinite. So, what is meant by “Everything is in Torah?” Maimonides acquired his knowledge in all fields by studying the field and not studying Torah. You cannot learn biology by studying Chumash. That makes no sense.

If someone would study Torah and nothing else, he would achieve total perfection. Maimonides says love of God is tied to knowledge of the universe. But in his Sefer Hamitzvos he cites Torah wisdom [too] as a means towards loving God. Thus, if one studies Torah alone and learns proper ethics and philosophical ideas, Torah is a complete system. That is not a bad explanation of “All is in Torah.” [But there is another explanation.]

Every area of knowledge is based on certain philosophical premises. “Turn it over” means that all the underlying philosophical premises of every science are in Torah. There’s no such thing as a science with philosophical conclusions that oppose the philosophical conclusions of Torah. If a science’s philosophical conclusions oppose Torah’s philosophical conclusions, that science’s ideas are wrong. The question in modern physics of materialism versus mentalism is definitely one that Judaism can resolve. That is, the underlying entities of the universe are mental: ideas [expressed in laws]. The physical is only an aberration, an illusion. Scientists stated this through the centuries and it is clear from Judaism. Torah’s analytic approach and methodology are all metaphysical and corroborates that conclusion. These exist not only metaphysically, but they reach down deep into the world of human thought.

There is a current argument among the scientists: “How should knowledge of man proceed: Should we follow the beauty of arguments? Or should we concentrate more on practical experiments and forget about the appreciation of ideas, [for] is that really part of the mind?” The greatest scientists in the world debate this. Judaism casts its vote for the appreciation of ideas. If there is no beauty to an idea, you might as well abandon it; it’s worthless. Judaism definitely tells us which approach is correct. It is true, today most scientists go in the other direction. And 50 to 60 years ago they leaned the other way, our way. And before that, again and they leaned away from ideas and favored experimentation. Judaism might not discuss the atom, but it provides the idea for the correct approach in human thought. *“Turn it over, turn it over for all is therein”* does not refer to details but to general principles. Judaism’s principles are correct and if one wants to know where to go, if he is lacking intuition, Judaism can point the direction.

The same is true regarding psychology, there are many views. But the question is whether the behavioristic approach is the correct one, or is the conceptual approach correct? Again, most favor the behavioristic approach; there's always a draw away from the ideas [and towards what's tangible]. Judaism says this too is incorrect. Man, from youth, believes that what is sensual is real. Man finds it difficult to break away from this belief; he is very partial to it. But Judaism maintains this is wrong: investigations into animal behavior bear no insight into human behavior. This is nonsensical and it is heretical. *"And He blew into his nostrils a soul of life"* (Gen. 2:7) says that man has a different element than animal; human intelligence is different. It is a waste of time to investigate animals intending to correlate them to man. The attempt to recognize the uniqueness of the human mind, to find out what it is, would be time better spent.

Judaism's principles affect every area, even epistemology. It is nothing short of amazing that when one studies Torah and sees that these ideas existed in Chazal's time, one recognizes how advanced was their method of thinking. The Rav says that when you study the most advanced methods of science today, they are not nearly as advanced as our methods of gemara analysis. The great [scientific] minds don't even approach Chazal's and the Rishonim's perfection of thought; the former are almost shallow. Our methodology and approach surpass even today's scientific approach, let alone the dark ages.

Aristotle's big mistake was thinking that the world was simpler than it is; it's called "naïve realism." One example is that one assumes a table is in reality what a person senses. This was rejected as false. The world is more complex and deeper and even surface phenomena that we experience are not real, in this sense that our minds tell us that it is real. [A



solid table actually has more space than matter; there is greater space between atoms and molecules than there are atoms and molecules.] Aristotle assumed that God's wisdom is simpler than it is. Humility demands human experimentation. We must be humble and not assume but learn through experimentation. Once we uncover truths through our findings, then we can theorize. But the question is, where does the quest end? Am I at the end [of intellectual query] when I see a beautiful idea, or when I can simply summarize a phenomenon, regardless of its beauty?

Every science is based on principles, and those principles are found in Torah. There is a tremendous value in checking for the principles, for by checking and learning the principles, you gain insight into how to further yourself in other areas. Thus, Torah study is significantly related to every area of investigation.

*How great are Your works? You made all of them with wisdom; the world is full of your acquisitions... Almighty, blessed, great is Your wisdom, You prepared and made the sun's light...*

This forms part of our morning prayers. God's endless wisdom in forming light was recognized by the Anshei Kinesess Hagadola (The Men of the Great Assembly) and this is what scientists have focused on. In light lies tremendous wisdom. The Anshei Kinesess Hagadola predated the scientists and recognized God's wisdom in light. God created all man's necessities. Even drugs are derived from natural sources. We don't know the way most of them work. And the ones that we do understand, we arrived at that understanding only after years of unraveling [their properties]. But anyone who tells

you what science will be able to do [in the future] is day-dreaming. A matter that [at first] seems most simple can [ultimately] be the most difficult task. One does not know what he will encounter. It is like studying a sugya; one can't say he will understand it tomorrow. Scientists who say, "We are about to do X," are arrogant people. You must differentiate between science and a scientist. A scientist has the same emotions as everyone else. Therefore, when he's talking with his emotions [making grandiose predictions of discoveries] there is no reality to his words. When I was a teenager, they said it doesn't pay to quit smoking because by the time you get cancer, a cure will have already been discovered. Everyone was convinced that cancer would be obliterated in 5 years. They said this because they had just cured a series of diseases; they were very successful. All infectious diseases were falling one after the other. Man gets very arrogant and feels that he will cure every disease. To say, "We are about to make a breakthrough" is nonsense. You don't know about a breakthrough until you discover it.

Knowing how the mind works itself is a tricky endeavor. This is because what you are using to discover the mind's mechanics, is the mind itself. So already you are in trouble. The main thing is to know what the mind is. For if you don't know what the mind is [assuming it is the right tool to explore, when maybe it is not] you might be using the wrong faculty to begin with [to explore the mind]. In such a case, you can't possibly get any further than where you started from. [It is essential to learning that one knows how to explore, question, reason and deduce. Otherwise, one is stuck and cannot advance his knowledge.]

Torah has very significant information regarding what the mind is. If people had greater knowledge of Torah's basic principles, they would advance quicker. This is because they

would know which areas to approach, instead of waiting for centuries for one person who happens to find an opening due to his good intuition. Science has no rules. If you can show predictability and make discoveries, people will listen to you [you will be accepted by the scientific world]. There is no specific formula of how to think in science. If you can explain your idea and people understand you, then you are in the realm of science. But what kind of thought should be applied concerns none, other than Judaism.

When explaining a Tosfos, I can communicate the explanation and yet I did not fulfill my obligation. This is because I did not say it any certain way. No one thinks this way. But in explaining Tosfos, I must use precision. [In Judaism] we have in our mind a certain formula for an idea. An idea must properly align with the formula. Once it fits, it clicks in the mind. Then we understand, and not before, even though one communicated and described one's thoughts [to us]. In Judaism there is an insistence on a type of precise thinking. That is why a talmid chocham can listen to any area and define the concept better than the originator. This is because the talmid chocham knows how to define any matter in concise terms, where it fits in properly and exactly into the categories of the human mind and thought. Here is where Judaism reigns supreme and is far advanced over other methods. Judaism demands more than simple communication: it requires a certain type of thinking.

Torah holds that the mind is an area unto itself. A Torah student recognizes aspects of his internal life. A typical person will vote for a particular politician because of his appeal, although the person does not know why he finds him appealing. The person cannot analyze why; people can't think beyond a certain point. But when a person studies Torah, he learns that there is an area of mind, which he distinguishes

from the rest of his internal life. One must recognize what is mind and what is not. When an idea has appeal, that appeal can be emotional, explaining why the idea is accepted. But with intellect, one applies a sense of reality to phenomena, [a reality] beyond the physical. No animal can do this. An animal cannot conceptualize a principle causing fruit to fall from trees. [Animals are engaged purely in physical interaction; they are unrelated to any metaphysical reality, such as thought and concepts which exist beyond the physical world.] An animal's instincts drive it towards something. It can even accustom itself to follow a series of actions to obtain its instinctual desires. But it can never think, "There is a reality here."

The specifics [like this animal example] are not found in Torah. But you also won't find anything in Torah that opposes the truths and realities of the universe. There is no doubt that the many years of research that ended in dead-ends could have been avoided, if these researchers knew Torah.

Throughout time, the way of Torah thinking—in both Torah She'Bicsav and Torah She'Baal Peh —demanded that if an idea was not in line with Torah thinking, the idea must be wrong. One is obligated to then question such an idea, and not simply bury the question. One must question every aspect of Torah, and if he does not, he is forfeiting his entire right of free will regarding knowledge.

Another example is the psychoanalytic approach in psychology. This approach divides the mind into components: superego, ego and id. I have seen other positions which oppose the psychoanalytic approach because they claim, "When you examine the brain you don't find labels for these 3 parts." Any Torah student knows that such opposition is nonsensical; the person has no concept of what thinking is all about. Thinking means [for example] that if I claim people have emotions, and I can demonstrate that certain emotions share a

common root, it is a logical deduction [that a commonality exists between emotions]. My next deduction is that these emotions emanate from a common source. I do not need to open up the brain and find them. One who wished to find them in the brain operates without rules and principles. [People feel they can make any claim] “It doesn’t say ‘superego’ on the brain” [and feel justified in their claim]. It’s a free-for-all in the world of science, and when you get away from the pure sciences the free-for-all is even greater. In areas like sociology and psychology, people’s claims get worse.

Judaism teaches one how to think and how to recognize how certain approaches are unrelated to the mind. The nonsense quoted above demonstrates that such people seek something physical and tangible, and that they are not thinking.

In his *Guide* (book II, chap. xii) Maimonides discusses magnetic fields:

*The magnet attracts iron from a distance through a certain force communicated to the air round the iron. The magnet therefore does not act at all distances...*

When 2 magnets attract each other, it is not that one magnet attracts the other magnet through space. For how can one object attract or affect another object through space? There must be some connection. That is why they say there exists a field. Field means the space between these 2 magnets is somehow changed. That is why the 2 magnets relate; they relate through the medium of the space. Maimonides said this exactly long before this rather recent theory by physicists. A talmid chocham would conclude that action at a distance is impossible. His mind would tell him so. But much effort has been spent trying to defend action at a distance.

Another question is whether an idea is based on a physical phenomenon in the brain. If you hit a person [hard enough] on his head, you will incapacitate his thinking. It is therefore obvious that the brain's mechanisms are tied to thought. But we maintain that the appreciation of thought and thought itself are not functions of the brain, but they are functions of the soul. As one of the ancients put it,

*With degeneration of the eye in old age, sight decreases. But if you replaced old eyes with young and healthy eyes, vision would be perfect. This is because the brain upon which vision registers is fine. Now, just as the eye is to the brain, the brain is to the soul; it stands in the same relationship. If one's brain is damaged and he can't think, it is a brain issue and not that the soul is impaired or gone.*

The ideas are there but he can't access them in this existence unless the mechanics of the brain operate properly. The brain is a tool like the eye, but the appreciation of wisdom and the ideas themselves exist in the world of the soul.

This last idea is important and is based on the universe. In the universe as well, physical objects are only instances of ideas which are present in some unknown way. Ideas are somehow present and guide all physical phenomena. Every phenomenon is one instance, but the idea [natural law] is an eternal concept. A particular rock which was just destroyed after it fell can no longer fall since it was destroyed. But other rocks can fall because the principle exists. That principle is not a physical phenomenon. It exists, but not as the rock exists. Now, the mind can tune itself into that world beyond the

physical. That is the uniqueness of human thought and the human mind. That is why the world of ideas is a world beyond physical. The world of mind is also beyond the physical. But to function in this existence, the brain must be functional.

Maimonides says that there is knowledge that does not require memory. When the mind learns how to think and improves itself and has intuition, that intuition needs no memory. It is like an intrinsic improvement in the apparatus of the soul itself, not the brain. It is the same brain this person had 20 years ago; the soul is what has been refined. The existence of the soul and the existence of ideas are interrelated. Just like ideas exist beyond physical phenomena, the soul that can tap into those ideas is also beyond the physical. That is the part of man that is beyond the physical world, the Tzelem Elohim: the uniqueness of human thought, the special gift that God gave man and why we say, *“Who gave from His wisdom to flesh and blood”* (Berachos 58a), the blessing recited upon seeing the wise men of Israel.

#### AND LOOK INTO IT

Maimonides says this refers to seeing the truth. But what does this add to the previous statement of turning over the Torah from all sides? The next statement in the mishnah is, *“Grow old and aged in the Torah and never remove yourself from Torah for there is no portion better than it.”* When asked what Judaism is, one philosopher correctly said, “The sum total of human knowledge.” This mishnah says the same.

The secrets of knowledge are all in Torah. Many times, they are staring at you and you cannot see them because they are not on the level, but they are right there. As one grows in knowledge, certain things start “lighting up.” But at first, one cannot see them because one is in the hold of his emotions. As

one progresses, he sees the secrets of Torah, as it says in Avos 6:2. The secrets are certain matters that one who is on the [required and advanced] level starts recognizing. He was going in the wrong direction before [explaining why he didn't see them]—sometimes because of his desires, and sometimes because of his yetzer hatov. Chofetz Chaim said, "*Satan gets us from the front and the back.*" The front I understand [our instincts attack us face-on]. But what is the back? This means the instincts get behind you and push you in your current direction, from the "back." For example, a person learns many hours and wants to sleep. But Satan says, "Keep learning all night." That is Satan pushing in from the back, and this will run him down. Sometimes one's mistakes are not due to desires, but because one does not see reality due to an incorrect self-image that blocks the truth. The answers are all found in Judaism, but you have to be able to see them.

The story of Jonah contains a primary fundamental. But the person operating on an infantile level will be blind to it. In Judaism as one develops, he sees deeper and deeper ideas, different ideas. But he wasn't ready to see such truths beforehand. "*And look into it*" means if you look with your mind's eye, you will see it.

What is the truth? It is that which is contrary to the emotional conclusion. Truth is based upon wisdom, not emotions. Previous conclusions were emotionally made and false. As you progress, you see true ideas and you are astounded at them. You see your mistakes. "*Age in Torah*" is the same idea. One gains knowledge in 2 ways: through advancement and through age. Age provides a special kind of progress. Socrates said, "*When the eye of the body is weak, the eye of the mind is strong.*" As one ages, he uncovers new matters in Torah and new ideas that he could not see as a younger person. To become gray and aged in Torah, new ideas become part of his



life and his makeup; part of his existence and his nature.

AND DO NOT MOVE AWAY FROM IT, FOR YOU  
HAVE NO BETTER PORTION THAN IT.

In other areas, one advances and there is a hierarchy: once in calculus, one no longer studies algebra. But in Torah it is not that way: one does not advance to another subject. Torah is an unusual subject: one is raised in it, he advances in it, and he never advances out of it. And if you do leave it, you're leaving a trait that is integral to your nature. Rabbi Akiva entered *pardase* [the study of metaphysics] and exited successfully. Did he stop learning? No. The prophets studied the abstract halachic area of Taharus and could not fully comprehend it. One cannot get away from Torah; everything is in it: metaphysics, Maaseh Mercavah, all the principles are in Torah as we said. And I did not even discuss the principles in metaphysics because they are so far removed from our personal lives. Maaseh Mercavah is the highest metaphysics.

*“And do not move away from it”* refers to halacha. One should never abandon Torah She’Baal Peh because it fits a person’s mind, the method of thinking, the approach. It is akin in a physical sense to one saying that he will abandon exercise. It is impossible because if man stops moving, he dies. So too, the abstract method of halachic thought is a natural environment for one’s mind. It is constructed that way, satisfying every component of the intellect: the mathematical component the conceptual component, [all components].

## 5:23 PAIN &amp; REWARD

BEN HAY HAY SAID, "PROPORTIONAL TO THE PAIN IS THE REWARD."

This seems to say, the more pain, the better it is. However, we have a contrary principle: Torah is extremely enjoyable; learning Torah lishma is the ultimate enjoyment. Such a person is in the most beautiful and enjoyable world, the most fortunate human being. How do we reconcile these 2 views? (Maimonides already wrote to reconcile this in his introduction to Avos, chapter 6 of his Eight Chapters.)

On this mishnah in Avos he writes as follows:

*In accord with the amount of pain one has from Torah, that determines one's reward. And they said that what remains is the knowledge that one learns with a tremendous amount of effort and fear from his teacher. But enjoyable reading in relaxation, that learning does not last and there's no benefit in it. An explanation on this is King Solomon's words, "But (af) my wisdom stood by me," "Wisdom that I learned in anger (af), aggressively" remained with King Solomon. And because of this they commanded to instill fear in students.*

The talmid should sense a certain fear; the rebbe is obligated to do this. And if the rebbe fails to do so, he fails at his role as a rebbe and fails to create the proper situation for learning.

The mishnah doesn't seem difficult: in the proportion to the emotional strain and expenditure of effort will be the gain from the learning. And Maimonides says that if one learns in this manner, his learning will be sustained; the wisdom will remain with him. Avos 6:4 depicts this in detail:

*Such is the way [of a life] of Torah: you shall eat bread with salt, and rationed water shall you drink; you shall sleep on the ground, your life will be one of privation, and in Torah shall you labor. If you do this, "Happy shall you be and it shall be good for you" (Psalms 128:2): "Happy shall you be" in this world, "and it shall be good for you" in the world to come.*

Maimonides writes in Hilchos Talmud Torah 4:5 as follows:

*A talmid should never be shy and even ask his question many times. And if the rebbe grows angry, the talmid should appease him. He should also not be ashamed because of his peers. Therefore, the wise men say, "One who is bashful cannot learn and one who is strict cannot teach." Whereof are such things said? In instances when the disciples did not understand a subject because of its depth or because their mind is short; but if it appears to the master that they are indolent to study the words of the Torah, and sluggish in acquiring them, because of which they did not understand, he is obliged to rebuke them and shame them with words in order to make them ener-*

*getic. And on this subject the sages said, "Throw fear into the disciples" (Ketubot, 103b). It is, therefore, unbecoming for a master to conduct himself light-headedly in the presence of the disciples, not to amuse himself in their presence, nor eat or drink with them, so that they will stand in awe before him and receive instructions from him quickly.*

A rebbe who does not maintain a relationship where he instills awe, has failed to create the proper manner for teaching Torah. Maimonides goes so far to state that learning done in a relaxed fashion is worthless. Why is this so? I can understand if he would say that relaxed learning does not lead to true understanding; it is not an in-depth kind of learning. According to this mishnah, to become a talmid chocham, one requires the ability to tolerate pain. In Europe they produced talmidei chochamim because they could tolerate pain. But America is a pampered mentality and it is difficult to produce talmidei chochamim. One must be capable of tolerating suffering to become a talmid chocham. One must know what it means to work on a svara [theoretical definition] and be bothered to apply oneself—no matter what—to studying and thinking so as to understand the svara. This attitude is difficult to create later in life. A person must learn this when young.

The problem with Maimonides is the contradiction between his explanation of the mishnah in Avos, and the 6th chapter (in his Eight Chapters) where he cites this mishnah in a totally different framework. In chapter 6 Maimonides asks, *"Who is greater: one who naturally desires the good, or one who desires what's evil, but controls himself?"* The world feels that the greater person is the one who endures greater pain. A gentile

philosopher was asked this question and that was his conclusion. [General opinion is] one who has no conflicts and naturally performs the good is not as great; it's easy for him. But Maimonides says that the greater reward is earned by the one who has it easier; the one who naturally performs the good. He says the philosophers proved this and it must be true logically. This is because reward is not what God gives a person in place of something else. That is a childish idea: the more the child controls himself the more the parent rewards him. But the way God works is that reward is naturally deserved by the soul. If the soul is on a higher level, it naturally attains a greater state of being, and a greater state of being [itself] is the greater reward. Reward is not an external thing; it is intrinsic. A soul operating on a higher level naturally partakes of the good to a greater degree. The soul that loves wisdom is on a higher level. But the soul that despises wisdom and good, even though it forces itself to act properly, is not on the same high level as a soul naturally drawn to the good. Therefore, the soul that coerces itself to act properly cannot partake of the same good [as a soul naturally drawn to the good]. Thus, when a conflict exists, the attachment to the good cannot be as great; the relationship of the soul to the good is conflicted. Even though the side of the soul that desires the good is stronger—as we see that the person controls himself—nonetheless, there is conflict. Since God's reward is unlike a parent's reward and is based on the soul's relationship to the good, the soul without conflict, by definition, is more related to the good. By necessity, one must say that this soul reaps a greater reward.

[The next idea is] a little philosophical and metaphysical, but not beyond our understanding. Man has 2 kinds of existence: an instinctual aspect, and the soul's existence, when it partakes of the eternal world of ideas. Insofar as it partakes of

that eternal world, its existence is more real; it partakes of true existence to a greater degree. Man's physical and instinctual existence is akin to an animal's existence, which is of the world of the temporal. But regarding existence insofar as the world of wisdom is concerned, that area is eternal; there is no change there. Inasmuch as the soul is attached to that world, it partakes of true existence to a greater degree. Therefore, if the soul is conflicted with regards to the eternal world of ideas, it cannot partake of the eternal to that degree. Conflict means a division of energies. This person has less energies attached to the good. It's impossible [for this person] to attain the same attachment to reality and reward as one who is not conflicted. The true reward is the partaking of existence [the world of wisdom]. Maimonides explains this in Sanhedrin. The enjoyment is one that attends this type of existence. But the existence is the barometer.

Emotionally, one feels that if he worked harder [controlled his desires for evil] he should receive the greater reward. But in this case, it is not true. [The soul that is not conflicted regarding the good and needs no self-control gains the greater reward, even though it applied less effort.] This idea of fairness [more pain, more gain] expressed here is childish and plays no role in philosophy and reality. While it is true that one person might have a disposition and nature that is more in line with reality and therefore receives greater reward, this is inconsequential to your reality; his reality is unrelated to yours. One who is concerned that another person is free from your specific limitations violates envying others. You have no right to dictate your reality. God gave you this reality and that is all that should concern a person. Why God gave another person a better reality is not a human affair. God created creatures greater than us, namely angels. It makes no sense to feel bad about this as well. Judaism demands us to accept our real-

ity and not concern ourselves with others who have better fates. It is a waste of time.

Returning to the 6th chapter, Maimonides says as follows:

*After investigation it comes out that the one with more desires is in fact greater than one with less desires. He has more pain when refraining from them. "One who is greater than his friend has a greater instinctual drive than his friend." Even more they said, "The reward of one who controls himself is greater in proportion to the greatness of his pain, as it says, 'In accordance with the pain is the reward.'" Even more, one should not say, "I don't desire to sin (through eating pig, milk and meat, wearing shatnez or through illicit sexual relations), rather, one should admit his desire for these but [feel] 'What can I do, as God prohibited them.'"*

According to a superficial understanding of these texts, it appears to contradict what we said earlier. But Maimonides says that's not the case:

*They are both true and there is no contradiction. There are 2 kinds of evil. One kind is what the philosophers referred to: philosophical evil. In this matter, one with no desire is greater than one with the desire and controls himself. These are matters that all people are aware of: murder, stealing, cheating, damage, doing evil to someone, repaying evil for good and em-*

*barrassing one's parents. One who desires these things but controls himself from acting out the desire is on a lower level than one who naturally does not have these desires.*

Yoma 67b states, “*Had these not been written (commanded), they are fit to be written.*” These are called mitzvos, philosophical perfections. Socrates studied philosophy and concluded that there are many things that are good, which in his mind it would be proper to call mitzvos, and Torah agrees. These are proper [to follow] even without God giving these to Moshe. Maimonides continues:

*But what the chochamim addressed regarding matters where one who must control himself is better and his reward is greater, these refer to matters that Torah taught us. Without Torah, we would not know that these matters are good. These refer to chukim. If it weren't for the Torah's laws, these would not be evil at all. Because of that, the chochamim said that one must allow his soul to love these matters. For if he prevents himself from loving them, that is an imperfection. The only thing that should stop a person from partaking of these prohibited chukim (pig, milk and meat, shatnez, etc.) is Torah. If one feels an emotional dislike to these things, that is an imperfection.*

Some people feel that as Torah prohibited pig, one must abhor it. This is what the Rav would relegate to “homo-religi-



osis”; religious man. Maimonides says on the contrary, one is to allow his soul to enjoy [be attracted to] these matters:

*They never said, “One should not say, ‘I don’t want to murder, steal, or lie,’ rather say, ‘I do desire these, but what can I do, as God prohibited them.’” These philosophical matters are not where Chazal said that a person should desire them, but refrain because of God’s commands. The better person is one who naturally detests murder, stealing, etc. Chazal said one should say, “I desire it but can’t have it” only regarding pig, meat and milk, shatnez, etc. These and similar commands are what God referred to as chukim. Chazal said, “Of statutes that I commanded you in, you have no permission to be suspicious. And the idolaters retaliate against the Jews on these, and Satan antagonizes on them, such as the red heifer and the scapegoat.”*

*It is clear from all that we said, which kind of sins that a person desires is greater than one without a desire, and which mitzvahs the opposite is true. And this is an astounding discovery. And their language shows the truth, as we have explained.*

Now, how do we understand our mishnah, “*In proportion to the pain is the reward?*” If one smells bacon and tells himself he dislikes it, when in fact he desires it, he renders Torah into a taboo system. For he says the bacon is evil, while Maimonides held that one should admit his desire for it. God never said

that bacon is evil; He never said that pig is worse than cow. A taboo is a total distortion and with it, a person renders the halachic system into a taboo, and he is corrupting himself. He's taking the idea of perfection, which is where the mind is the guide, and instead he makes his emotions the guide. This distorts the perfection that should emerge from Torah's mitzvahs. Taboo emotions are primitive and contrary to Torah. That is Maimonides' language, "*One should allow himself to love these things,*" and "*For without Torah, these matters would not be evil at all.*" These things aren't evil and therefore one should change his desires, but should allow himself to love these things. The gemara says regarding illicit sexual relations, "*Even if Torah would not have commanded them, they are fit to be written.*" But Maimonides includes these prohibitions in the other category: matters that are only evil due to God's commands—a contradiction.

But we answer this as follows. Regarding energies invested into prohibited sexuality, any philosopher will say that one who is preoccupied with sex is a low-level individual. It is unnecessary for Torah to state this. This is what Yoma means. But regarding one's innate tendencies, there is no such thing as perfection and imperfection. The drive for sex is natural. One should not say that he does not desire someone because she is his sister-in-law. That is not true because the sexual desire is not based on family status; sexual desire is gender-based (Berachos 57a). Therefore, a person is not responsible for feeling attracted to forbidden partners, as that is man's instinctual nature. And there is no reason for one to suppress that desire [acting on the desire is the prohibition]. But regarding investing energies into the sexual, here one can perfect himself. Maimonides says, "*Sinful thoughts do not occur except for one whose heart is turned away from wisdom.*" A person engaged in learning naturally and is [then] not drawn by sexual

desire, is greater than one who must control his desire.

How does this apply to Torah study? Who is greater: one who naturally enjoys learning, or one who doesn't but says, "What can I do, as God commanded me to study Torah?" One who naturally desires learning is of course greater. Learning is the greatest mitzvah (Moade Kattan 9b). It is impossible to say that one who learns under coercion is greater than one who learns from a love of wisdom. And yet, Maimonides says precisely in learning "*In proportion to the pain is the reward.*" That is what he discussed about instilling fear in students on Avos 5:23, which, on the surface, contradicts what he says in the 6th chapter regarding the greater person being naturally drawn to Torah without conflict.

To clarify the problem, here you have Maimonides—a Rishton—who would seem to contradict himself in the fact that he is relegating "*In proportion to the pain is the reward*" to 2 opposite areas. But this statement must refer to only one. Maimonides sets up 2 groups: group A are matters that one should naturally like, and group B are matters that one should naturally dislike. In the 6th chapter he says this statement applies to group B. But on the mishnah in Avos, he applies it to group A.

There is a misconception about the 6th chapter. One thinks that when Maimonides elevates the person naturally drawn to the philosophical perfections, that he thereby degrades the other person who must coerce himself in these perfections. I suspect that Maimonides did not mean it in that way.

We stated that one who desires bacon and refrains is greater than the person without that desire. Controlling one's desire is a barometer of one's perfection. If refraining is difficult, it conveys that this person is on the right level as he did not distort his mind through creating a taboo. But our mishnah says, "*In proportion to the pain is the reward.*" It should say,

“If there is pain there is reward.” “In proportion” suggests that with greater pain, one has greater reward than one with lesser pain. It doesn’t make sense. Even in Maimonides’ view, we must say that man’s perfection is in his capacity to control his passions and commit himself to perfection. This is the meaning of *“In proportion to the pain is the reward.”* All Maimonides is saying is that one should not distort his nature in these areas. But that’s only the negative; there’s also a positive gain: in proportion to one’s ability to commit himself to controlling his desires, that is how great the gain is. The ability to withstand pain is a mark of greatness. Despite this greatness, the greater soul is the one who is not in conflict and is naturally attracted to the good. But one who makes a taboo of bacon expresses no greatness, as he does not control the desire, but actually denies the desire by creating a taboo: a false distaste towards the desire.

*Of statutes that I commanded you in, you have no permission to be suspicious. And the idolaters retaliate against the Jews on these, and Satan antagonizes on them.*

This means that even though one does not understand a certain chok, and the desire attracts the person, and Torah demands one to express greatness through controlling his desire, if one creates a taboo for the prohibited object, he never experiences self-control. For in such a case his desire is inactive due to the taboo. Man’s greatness is in remaining firm in his attachment to truth, despite the strength of his instincts. That is the story of Joseph the tzaddik.

Maimonides says you can see Chazal’s greatness in that they did not say, “Don’t say I don’t desire murder, but say that I do, but I can’t murder because God prohibited it.” Had they

said so, it would imply that man's greatness is in his suffering: an alien and primitive idea. Chazal were very careful in the category they chose: pig, milk and meat, shatnez, etc. It is impossible for a human being to always be attracted to the good. And if one lacks the ability to control his instincts, he cannot attain perfection. Maimonides speaks philosophically and categorically: there is no question that insofar as the soul is operating in a way that it enjoys every moment, that is the soul operating par excellence. But in the varying instances of life it is impossible that his emotions won't attract him, even in areas where the soul is to be involved for its own sake. Otherwise, if man could always avoid temptation, we would look down on Joseph the tzaddik [for having experienced an emotional conflict]. On the contrary, he had to conquer his active instincts that were pulling at him. Joseph was not on a low level.

Man cannot do without the ability to conquer his desires. One cannot perfect himself without this ability. But when we speak of perfection per se, in abstract, there is no question about it: the highest functioning soul is without conflict. But in terms of man's perfection on a practical level, there is no perfection without self-control, even in the areas where the soul is naturally supposed to enjoy and benefit, like Torah study.

Why then does Maimonides apply "*In proportion to the pain is the reward*" to the greatest area of Torah study? One who conquers his instincts demonstrates the most powerful force in man, which is responsible for his greatness. And this doesn't contradict the idea of man's greatness being freely involved in wisdom.

Maimonides teaches that Ben Hay Hay's principle of "*In proportion to the pain is the reward*" means that self-control is the perfection of man. The greatest benefit is in the greatest

area: Torah study. Thus, when one is lazy in learning, which is human nature, here is where self-control has the greatest reward.

Why is there no benefit when one learns in a relaxed state? This is because the purpose of Torah study is that Torah becomes part of the person and this is only through learning with aggressiveness. All the wisdom that King Solomon gained was because he wasn't lazy in Torah study. He forced himself towards wisdom when he wanted to be lazy. The purpose and ultimate fulfillment of conquering one's drives is realized in Torah study.

*Anyone who is greater than his friend has greater instinctual desires than him.*

When Abaye was not learning, he would have fallen prey to a desire. The greatness of the man was that he had all this energy and invested it in learning. That's man's greatness. But when he is not learning, he is in danger like everyone else.

To become a lamdan [a proficient Torah student] one must have the ability to withstand pain. The ultimate purpose of the soul is the enjoyment of wisdom. But to get there you must have the ability to conquer your drives. Ben Hay Hay meant that conquering one's drives is the primary requirement to becoming a lamdan. One might think that self-control is good for refraining from sin. But Ben Hay Hay meant to teach that conquering one's drives is the human ability required to make one into a great Torah scholar. It is indispensable.

There are 2 types of learning in a relaxed state. Learning in a relaxed state will give you ideas. But such learning won't make you a chocham. Once a person perfects himself, he will enjoy the learning; there will be a high energy level and he

will enjoy it. But learning must always be an energetic phenomenon. Relaxed learning means that energy is lacking. Even in enjoyable learning there is an intensity. At first when starting to learn in early youth, one is lazy. That is why Maimonides talks in terms of “*throwing fear into students.*” But later in life when one enjoys learning, one need not force himself. But that type of learning is a different type: an energetic learning. There is a difference between relaxed learning which won’t create a lamdan, and enjoyable learning.

## MOSHIACH II

In his Iggeres Teiman, Maimonides says that without a doubt, prior to Moshiach’s arrival, prophecy will return to Klal Yisrael. People err by saying that Maimonides predicted Moshiach’s date of arrival. That is false. He only predicted when prophecy will return.

Daniel 11:14 states as follows:

*...lawless sons of your people will raise themselves to establish the vision, but they will fail.*

Metsudas Tzion comments that these lawless people (pritzim) are “*wicked people who break down fences of truth and justice.*” Fences are those things that keep the soul on its prop-

er path. These people raise themselves up to establish the vision of Moshiach, and they will stumble. Metsudas Dovid comments:

*These wicked people will die and will be lost because of this.*

We see that Daniel already predicted that people will rise and try to establish the end of days and they will stumble. Another similar verse is Daniel 12:10:

*...the wicked will act wickedly and none of the wicked will understand but those with understanding will understand.*

Rashi comments:

*People will try to explain the calculation in Daniel and many will try to understand them. The wicked will distort their calculation and establish them against their truths, and when the false predictions fail [to occur], they will deny the redemption altogether.*

This means that the attempt to make these predictions leads to a denial of the redemption. Prior it says that Daniel heard the predictions and didn't understand them:

*I heard and did not understand, so I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these things?" He said, "Go, Daniel, for these words are secret and sealed to the*



*time of the end. Many will be purified and purged and refined; the wicked will act wickedly and none of the wicked will understand; but those with understanding will understand (Daniel 12:8-10).*

Rashi explains “*those with understanding will understand*”:

*When the end arises, the intelligent ones will understand it.*

This breaks down into 2 parts. The first is “*lawless sons of your people will raise themselves to establish the vision*” (Ibid. 11:14). We know the motivation of such people is evil because of the words “lawless” and “raise themselves up.” Moshiach is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is one of the Torah’s fundamentals. On the other hand, we always looked with very great caution towards Moshiach because it is a dangerous area, where people express their egomania; “Raise themselves up” echoes this danger. That is the nature of this type of phenomenon. Here we have a true phenomenon, but it is one that caters to man’s most base emotions. Man wishes to identify with this most powerful figure and man insists that it must happen. It is an irrational demand for the end of days. The verse states openly that these people are involved in an evil action: “*the wicked will act wickedly*” and “*and none of the wicked will understand.*” It is evil because they are catering to their egomania and their fantasies: the basest parts of their natures.

The second point is that no wicked person can understand the end of days. Only one who understands Torah can understand it. That is why the verse says, “*those with understanding will understand.*” They will understand at that time because

they know what redemption is about (Rashi). They know what the end of days is. The vision of the end of days can never be greater than a person's vision of Torah. In as much as one's vision of Torah and perfection is distorted, his vision of the end of days must be distorted. This is because the end of days is the ultimate that a person anticipates. Conversely, one who does understand Torah will have an accurate understanding of this ultimate goal. And those with understanding who exist at the time that the events unravel, will be able to put it together. They see the end goal and they will see events that lead up to that goal. They will understand exactly how the redemption will take place—at that time and not prior.

Regarding knowledge of the end of days, there are 2 groups: those with understanding and those who are evil. And there is a very simple way to distinguish who is who. Those with understanding have a conviction that stems from understanding. If the conviction stems from frenzied emotion and mass hysteria, then you immediately know that this is an evil person. Those with understanding do so in a quiet manner, they are not forceful. The verse describes it beautifully:

*...lawless sons of your people will raise  
themselves to establish the vision*

This [*“raise themselves”* and *“establish”* forcibly] depicts an emotionally-driven force. But people of understanding have a quiet nature which is related to the conviction of Moshiach's coming. Daniel specified the characteristics and signs of the true relationship to the end of days, and also the false views.

The difference between Neviim and Kesuvim—Prophets and Writings—is that Neviim is open. The prophet's vision was given to him to be transmitted to the nation. In his *Guide*, Maimonides says that Kesuvim is a lower level of prophecy

[than Neviim]. Rav Chaim said otherwise: the difference between the 2 is that Neviim became Kisvei Kodesh through the transmission, niv siphasayim. But Kesuvim was rendered Kisvei Kodesh through ruach hakodesh, divine inspiration. The words of the prophets were given over to the people to understand. Kesuvim are [matters] like the angel told Daniel, “*secret and sealed,*” not given over to the people. It was written with divine inspiration but not given to the people to digest.

In his Iggeres Teiman, Maimonides says that it will be very clear when Moshiach comes that he is Moshiach. But when Daniel says, “*those with understanding will understand*” it refers to before Moshiach’s arrival. They will see the events unraveling leading up to his arrival. But for the nation in general it will be clear only once it occurs.

There’s one more idea. Anyone who claims that he is Moshiach ipso facto is not Moshiach. He can’t be, it’s a contradiction. This is because one of the Torah fundamentals is free will. Moshiach will bring about certain events because he chooses to live the proper way. And if he should make a mistake, he forfeits being Moshiach. And we see this in the accounts of the Jewish saviors like Moshe Rabbeinu. God told Moshe to take out Israel from Egypt. But Moshe never told the people “I am the savior.” He said as God instructed:

*Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said, ‘I have taken note of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt’” (Exod. 3:16).*

Moshe didn’t say “I am the savior.” He said, “This is the prophecy that I received.” He described the mission. Addi-

tionally, Moshe almost didn't make it:

*And it was on his journey, at an inn that  
God approached him and sought to kill  
him (Exod. 4:24)*

Moshe sinned and was not diligent in a mitzvah. He involved himself in lodging prior to circumcising his son. He was punishable with death. He escaped only due to his wife's actions. We see that it is possible for the Jews' savior who sins to forfeit his mission. Someone else would replace him. But to say that a person is intrinsically Moshiach, that he is destined for this role and that he can't sin and lose the mission, this means that he no longer has free will. That's an impossibility. There's a difference between prediction and between intrinsic causality. If one says "I am Moshiach" he means he is the magical person, which does not exist in Judaism. What exists is a regular human being who has free will. And God never interferes with one's free will. It is only in very specific circumstances when one is reduced to the level where he loses entitlement to free will: an extreme rasha. But in general, all people have free will.

*A prophet who suppresses his prophecy is  
punishable by death*

This means that the prophet retains his free will and can violate his mission to transmit his prophecy.

These people making false predictions of Moshiach are called "*pritzei amcha*" (breachers of your people) because their actions are tied very closely to human deification. That is why they are always looking for the "person." They believe he is a special mystical person with powers. He is inhuman. That is

deification of man. They are breachers because they broke down the Torah's fences constructed to guide the human being through his emotional cobweb, the maze of the emotions. Torah gave a person fences to navigate through that maze. And one of the strongest emotions is the emotion of idolatry. People are looking for supernatural powers and think that a human being can partake of such powers. Their minds are distorted, and Daniel referred to them as "*the wicked who acted wickedly.*"

## WHY FOLLOW MITZVOS: SERVING GOD OR ONESELF?

The term  $\text{אל שדי}$  means God is self-sufficient and has no needs.  $\text{די}$  means sufficient. Man does nothing for God:

*And if you are righteous what do you give  
Him? (Yom Kippur prayers)*

To say that God creates people and then enjoys what they do "for" Him is absurd. [As God is self-sufficient, existing perfectly prior to all creation, there is nothing another being can do "for" Him.] Even a person would not derive enjoyment from a robot he created that praises him. Doing "for" God is anthropomorphic. People don't think clearly so they hedge both premises [following Torah for both the self and for God].

The question must be asked clearly: “Why is one following Torah and mitzvos?” If one says he’s doing it for God, as we just said, God does not need man. That’s heresy. Is the person doing it for himself? In that case he is selfish and is no different than anyone else who is selfish. It is a dilemma that somehow people can’t resolve. Both, following Torah for yourself or for God appear as poor reasons.

One intelligent person wrote of his “heightened desire to perform mitzvos.” He said, “it is a desire that can’t be attributed to personal gain.” [However] there alone is great satisfaction [gain] in feeling that he is on a heightened-level. He said further, “I lost the need to rationalize mitzvos, to look for the mitzvos’ reasons [benefits to man] that have meaning, aside from performing them due to the will of God.” That is against Torah.

We are very fortunate that we have Torah. We don’t appreciate it. The Torah system contains all that’s necessary to steer us away from the wrong courses. Daniel is a prime example; the message was right there. Torah is unbelievable. Here too, this person wants to follow Torah for the will of God. But Chazal are against that [following Torah purely to submit to God’s will] and say instead that the greatest [manner of following Torah] is through understanding it [its benefit to man]. For Maimonides wrote his *Guide* and his *Taamei Hamitzvos* precisely to share the benefits and beauty of mitzvos and Torah. This idea to follow Torah and mitzvos only as God’s will and not seek understanding of their value and purpose is nonsensical. We are fortunate to have the prophets’ words that guide us on the mark. Even a brilliant man can go off into all kinds of foolish ideas. You must always check Torah to determine if you veer from it. The guidelines are clearly found in the prophets’ words. The writer continued:

*It has been said that as long as man seeks religion as a source of satisfaction for his own needs, it is not God whom we serve, but ourselves.*

That is his dilemma: how do you serve God if you're actually serving yourself? And he is caught because once he has this emotional satisfaction due to the fact that he is not serving himself, that itself is the greatest satisfaction. He tries to escape the problem by saying the following:

*I didn't recognize the initial manifestation of my nascent spirituality. The unique experience could not be placed in any of my previously existing categories of emotional states.*

That's because he's not a psychologist and can't define the human mind. But a good psychologist could define the nature of his satisfaction.

The greatness of Torah is in what it says, and in what it doesn't say. Torah never says to serve God because of God [for no other reason than to submit to His will]. Torah says just the opposite:

*So it shall be good for you (Deut. 5:16, 5:26, 6:18, 12:28, 22:7)*

*Choose life so you and your offspring would live (Deut. 30:19)*

Torah tells us why to follow it. You do not have to be a great

philosopher; it's right there in the verses. Torah repeats this message many times, that our adherence is for our own benefit. It is especially highlighted in sefer Devarim where Moshe Rabbeinu outlines Torah's entire framework. It is Moshe Rabbeinu's mussar. Instead of looking into books on mussar, one should look into sefer Devarim.

People think there something wrong with being selfish. They view it as doing something for one's own pleasure. The mistake is that while it may be true that being selfish in one manner is wrong, the wrong is because one is not "intelligently" selfish. Meaning, one does actions which he only thinks are beneficial. He's just following emotions that are self-seeking and provide one with the fantasy of immediate satisfaction. But regarding true benefit of the self, does God not desire this for us? Is it wrong to benefit oneself?

One who benefits himself, and is then accused of being selfish, is wrongly attacked. The use of the word selfish in this case is incorrect. Typically, one who is selfish, cares little of others. But here it means to benefit the self [no different than taking medication to benefit itself]. Selfish in the bad sense is only when one harms others and is evil. Evil means it is not good for him either. Most people don't believe that doing things that are evil is really harmful. People define as good, those things that provide joy and great pleasure. And the way to serve God is by abstaining from those good things, and then God gives you some other kind of reward. This is the basic childish idea that people have, and they can't grow out of it. When one then discovers that the real good is that which is self-beneficial, they feel it is wrong because they can't think intellectually. They think about it emotionally as a selfishness. However, selfish is a wonderful thing. A truly selfish person is involved with Torah, tefilah and mitzvos. God wants people to be selfish. For some reason, I don't know why, peo-



ple can't see this very simple basic point. If one performs mitzvos in order that God helps him in business, that's wrong because he distorts the true benefit of mitzvos which is to improve his soul, his mind and his life. He acts like a child who goes to school to get good grades and not for the benefit of knowledge itself, which is the most important thing.

*Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot, as it is said: "You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors, you shall be happy and you shall prosper" (Psalms 128:2) "You shall be happy" in this world, "and you shall prosper" in the world to come. (Avos 4:1)*

Enjoyment in this world depends essentially on one thing: the inner harmony of the personality. Possessions are meaningless, for if a person is distorted, if he is fraught with conflict, if his internal self is in strife, if he is not at peace, what good would it do to put him in the most beautiful place? This person cannot enjoy life. Conversely, a person who is relaxed and happy, who is enjoying an idea and is gaining true pleasure, he can be nowhere and yet have the greatest pleasure and satisfaction. If Judaism teaches one thing, it is the idea to be happy in this world. One makes a mistake by looking outside the self to attain that happiness:

*It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we*

*may observe it?" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it. (Deut. 30:12-14)*

This means that one's happiness is dependent primarily on the internal state of his soul and there's nothing that can compensate.

*Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Leaving Pharaoh's presence, Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt. (Gen. 41:46)*

Here's a person who reached the height of success; only Pharaoh was greater. Yet, what did Joseph say when he had a son?

*Joseph named the firstborn Menasheh, meaning, "God has made me forget completely my toil and my father's home" (Ibid. 41:51)*

God saved Joseph from being psychologically distraught [he was distraught, even though he was the viceroy]. You can make a miserable person a leader and it doesn't change a thing if the internal world is distraught. Joseph was ripped out from his home; he was all alone in Egypt. What good is it to make him a leader? Inside he was depressed. To the nth degree American society expresses this imperfection that happiness depends on externals [wealth, fame, success]. It is false and anyone with knowledge of psychology knows this. If one follows wisdom, he will be happy in this world. Hillel was a very

poor man, but the enjoyment he experienced [in Torah] no person can enjoy if internally he is in turmoil. “*The wicked are turbulent as the sea*” (Isaiah 57:20).

A person who lives a good life will naturally enjoy Olam Haba. Ramban says that Olam Haba is not mentioned in Torah because it is a natural phenomenon and Torah only speaks of God’s providence. The soul is nonphysical and therefore it is indestructible. Man’s soul partakes of wisdom which is a nonphysical entity. Therefore, man’s soul continues to exist after life, in a different way than we perceive. The continuation of the soul is one of the fundamentals of Torah.

Up to this point all sounds sensible: one should learn Torah because it is the best activity in which man can engage. But why is it the best activity? It is the most enjoyable activity as we say, “*God please make sweet the words of your Torah...*” (Morning prayers). Epicurus (341–270 BCE) said the world is wrong to choose physical pleasures, as the pleasures of the mind far exceed physical pleasures. He decided to live on bread and water and engage his mind at all times.

People need satisfaction. If between all man’s intermittent, brief enjoyable moments he would sleep, people would never do drugs [their entire waking state would be happy]. But as people’s lives aren’t enjoyable, drugs are a way to escape that painful existence.

What is wrong with saying that the ultimate purpose of Torah is to enjoy oneself with ultimate pleasure? We say that Olam Haba—the ultimate state—is the greatest pleasure. So, it appears that God wants man to enjoy himself. It is a gentile idea that pleasure is evil. Their philosophy is reactionary. As they feel that money and sexuality are evil, they say that one should give away all his money and abstain from sex. Judaism does not endorse this.

Learning is exhilarating; it is a tremendous enjoyment. It re-

duces all other pursuits and involvements as meaningless. One loses interest in other enjoyments and social concerns when he sees the beauty of an idea. Learning is always a new adventure. It is also very convenient as you need not transport your body anywhere to engage wisdom. The enjoyments of the mind outweigh any other enjoyment, by far. One chocham said that if you take a look at people on the whole, you can gauge what people enjoy most and who gets the greatest high from the fact that those who have the greatest choices always select a certain objective. People will forfeit physical pleasure to become a great politician. The tremendous ego pleasure is the drive. They'll spend millions of dollars to get elected. The reason is because the greatest high is honor. But this philosopher said that there are those people who could have enjoyed honor—rare individuals—but they avoided it, and instead, selected a life pursuing wisdom. Albert Einstein ran away from honor. The fact is that he was the greatest scientist and he could have capitalized financially. He had the choice of honor and success, but since he knew the greatest enjoyment is wisdom, he selected that life. Thus, one who has the choice of the greatest enjoyment, selects it. Is there anything wrong in doing so? Even children who are shown a puzzle or a riddle find the desire to solve the problems more enjoyable than anything else. This applies to a person on any level. Any person on any level enjoys the process of thought. You need not be working on great matters like Einstein. Compared to God, Einstein was zero, so your level is inconsequential. Every person can enjoy wisdom.

But we are not saying that any intellectual activity is the goal; Torah is not saying that learning gemara is the best chess game. Torah is saying that these ideas themselves have value. Therefore, knowledge of those ideas should be a good. It is the knowledge that is the good, not the activity. [That is why chess doesn't satisfy as the best activity.] Of course, the activ-

ity of learning is enjoyable. But Judaism says that its ideas have intrinsic value. And to where do all these ideas lead? To an understanding of reality which brings a person close to God. This means to say that a person's enjoyable state is not simply because of the activity, but because of a certain kind of knowledge. This knowledge is important and affects the soul. The knowledge draws the person. The good soul is the soul that is drawn toward the good. In this state, all one's energies are preoccupied with these important ideas. He is therefore disengaged from the self. In pursuit of knowledge, the self is obscured. The process commences where one wishes to benefit the self. One sees that physical enjoyments constantly frustrate oneself. The person seeks a superior involvement. He enters the area of thought. Once engaged, he becomes attracted to the thoughts and ideas themselves. He commences a journey away from the self. The self does not seem that important anymore because knowledge has displaced the spot in his mind that occupies "importance." That is the greatest vision of reality one can attain. That is what a great chocham is after: the truth, the ideas. Einstein wrote to a bar mitzvah boy, "You should be able to see through the veil that covers reality." It's a good way to describe it. One who is searching for wisdom always seeks a greater view of reality. The greater the view, the more he pursues it. It is an endless pursuit, and in that pursuit the self becomes smaller. He is interested in things far greater than himself. He seems unimportant. This is the true selflessness of Torah. That's what the writer I quoted was searching for, but you can't find it in the emotional state. Ibn Ezra spells this out best in Koheles, where he discusses 3 parts of the soul:

*Man's nefesh (animalistic nature) desires  
physical pleasures: to eat, to be happy and*

*sexuality. Man's neshama is the intellect.  
When engaged in the nefesh, the neshama  
is blotted out.*

This represents our society: the mind is blotted out. The media never mentions a person thinking or enjoying an idea. It does not exist. Everything is pure instinct. No movie hero is interested in thinking.

*And the neshama has no power or strength  
to oppose the force of the nefesh because  
the nefesh has a body which strengthens  
the nefesh. One who engages in eating and  
drinking will never grow wise. And with  
the teaming of the neshama with the ruach  
(will/ego), then he can conquer the nefesh.  
Then the eyes of the neshama are opened a  
bit to understand wisdom.*

That is why one can have deep engagement in wisdom because of the ruach, because man's ruach wants rulership and it uses wisdom for that end. One who says "I won't let the lusts defeat me" is working with the ego, to which he is completely enslaved. How does one escape the ego's grip?

*And after the neshama conquers the nefesh  
with the help of the ruach, the neshama  
needs to now engage in wisdom and aban-  
don the ruach.*

Judaism's sequence in development is interesting. Torah teaches that one must first subdue his instincts, his nefesh. Without doing this first, you cannot move. Then you use the

ego to facilitate the function of the soul. Once the soul starts functioning and appreciating wisdom, it then abandons the ego; it is a 2-stage process. That's perfection.

This is an introduction to the 6th chapter of Avos, Torah lishma. This shows you precisely what perfection is. And when you think about it, it removes all the common misunderstandings people have in this area. People have problems in this area because they fear facing one of the underlying premises of the system [i.e., What is the true reason to perform mitzvos and learn Torah]. They don't know that premise, and they are afraid that if they don't grasp it [were they to investigate it], they will fall apart. They are afraid to face it clearly. But the greatest enjoyment for a person is to see the true underpinnings of the system.

The religious emotion is overcome by an attempt to subdue the instincts, achieved only by suppressing the instincts with another instinct. One gets caught in a circle with no the escape. One desires to be righteous—an ego emotion; one is caught. Once a person is satisfied that he is superior due to his religiosity, he can perpetrate atrocities in the name of religion.

A person is motivated by self-seeking desires. It is impossible to ever escape doing anything that is not for the self. There is nothing wrong with a person being concerned about himself; that is a rational matter. Therefore, one should choose the best life. Judaism's solution is the only possibility. One is always motivated by desire for the self. If one tries to deny this through the guise of being religious, he is just fooling himself.

The best life is when a person is not involved in the self. How is such a life possible as one always desires to satisfy this self? One is concerned about himself; he wants the best life. But that life is when one is not focused on the self. How can one possibly get out of this contradiction? There is only

one possibility: one must place himself in a situation where his mind is directed outwards towards knowledge and thought. Then the person is in the best possible state. Therefore, the initial motivation is for the self. We do not deny this motivation. But the [ultimate] activity is one of pursuing knowledge outside the self. That is the best possible state. It is a transition. But that's [true] only regarding a Torah personality, for he becomes interested in knowledge of God [through Torah adherence and study]. But when other religious people try to solve this dilemma they fail because their systems have no wisdom. They remain in the religious/emotional sphere, so they never escape the self. But in Judaism, once a person exposes himself to its system, his focus redirects towards God's wisdom and to God. The only escape from the self is into the world of wisdom. Before the sin, Adam was immersed in pondering nature, God's wisdom [that was the best state for man]. The world of wisdom is the only world that takes man away from the self.

Whether people choose religion or money as a vehicle, their focus is the self and therefore happiness escapes them. Who is happy?

*Happy is the man who does not follow the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the path of sinners, and he does not sit in the company of scorners; rather, the Torah of the Lord is his desire, and in His Torah he accustoms himself day and night. (Psalms 1:1,2)*

This is where man finds happiness.

It is vital that one can follow what his mind tells him is true and guide his life by that truth. Otherwise, one forfeits his



entire purpose [of his existence]. One must have the courage to follow what his mind sees as true.

The difference between a talmid chocham and an am ha'aretz [average person] is from where comes one's convictions. The talmid chocham follows his mind and the am ha'aretz follows his emotions. [The talmid chocham distinguishes between mind and emotions, as he is aware of his inner world. He identifies which of his thoughts emanate from his emotions and which emanate from his mind.] People in general are so close-minded that they can be self-destructive and unhappy.

The moment one is interested in something outside the self, he becomes very happy. One great psychologist said at the end of his life that his happiest moments were those when he was thinking about his work. The whole approach of humanity is incorrect [that happiness is derived elsewhere].

Chazal lived very private lives. They had no desire to "make it," [become greatly successful] even in their society.

One might agree with this principle but feel that he cannot make the change. This is where the mitzvos come in. One can't make an immediate transformation. But each day one leaves his house and sees the mezuzah; he is reminded of the ideas. This happens everyday. Chazal say as follows:

*[Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it (Avos 2:16)*

The second stage is possible in small quantities. [If one isn't trying to complete it all it is possible to make a change and follow the system.] If one can sit and learn for an hour, he sees it is possible to engage in different degrees. Whenever one can involve himself more in ideas, he is improving his life.

That is the goal of Judaism. One should establish fixed times for Torah study and make it part of his life every day. One does not realize how superior his life would be by learning Torah and performing mitzvos. All the activities which other people resort to is a sign of serious unhappiness. Not only are the minutes and hours improved while engaged in learning, but one's entire day benefits. Every time one increases his involvement in thought lishma, he gains and grows and becomes a different individual. But even in the first step there is a tremendous qualitative difference. But regarding people chasing fantasies, as soon as they attain them, they see that they are empty and that is their worst nightmare.

*We give thanks before You, Lord, our God and God of our fathers, for you gave us a share among those who sit in the study hall, and not among those who sit on street corners. For we arise early, and they arise early; we arise for words of Torah, and they arise for words of emptiness. We work, and they work; we work and receive a reward, and they work and do not receive a reward. We run, and they run; we run towards eternal life, and they run to a pit of desolation. As it says: "And You, O Lord, bring them down into a pit of desolation, people of blood and deceit will not live out half of their days; and I will trust in You" (Psalms 55:24). (Hadran)*

Others labor but do not benefit their central natures: their souls. They may run to their activities, but our goal is most fulfilling—Olam Haba—the perfect life.

If you examine those people who you feel, that, if you had

their lives you would be happy, you will see that they are not happy. And even those who do not exhibit the “tragedy,” [empty lives] if you look at their lives, they are not living the way you would expect them to live [the wealthy are not constantly traveling and purchasing luxuries.] And such people who present themselves as happy are merely fabricating a veneer, as they wish to give that impression, but inwardly they are not happy. Look closely at their day-to-day lives and you will not see the great joy that you would expect.

Every fantasy or physical pleasure is followed by either another desire or depression. What one fantasized he would enjoy, he does not. So, he grows upset and is depressed, or he fantasizes that the next desire will provide the happiness he seeks. But this does not exist in learning as there is no fantasy about learning. Once a person learns and reflects back, he realizes how he enjoyed the involvement in ideas, and the ideas themselves. In our society, one who finds that he actually enjoyed learning may not communicate that enjoyment because he fears the masses don’t share that value. When one enjoys an idea there is no ego; it could be his idea or someone else’s. True enjoyment is based on the idea itself.

Returning to the prayer above, why is it that those who organized this prayer included a degradation of others? The answer is that one’s energies must be involved in some area. The Shima says that one “*turns aside and serves the gods*” (Deut. 11:16). This means that once a person turns away [from the correct path] he must go off the track [and follow other gods]. It’s either or.

One must have the realization of the benefit of a Torah life. The purpose in this prayer of putting down the wrong life is not to make one happy. Here, for the soul to realize that the Torah life is the good, even if one does not learn today, [this prayer identifies] the other life as false. This prayer isn’t only

saying that we are more fortunate with pursuing the true good, but we are also fortunate not to be pursuing a harmful life—“a pit of desolation.”

Mitzvos guide a man in 2 ways. One way is through controlling the desires. People involved in satisfying their desires, to a certain level, are hopeless. The generation of the Flood is an example. Also, every mitzvah directs one towards the higher goal. Every mitzvah has ideas. In order to perform it properly you must engage in its ideas. When sitting in a sucah, one ponders it and discusses the various laws: the number of walls, its height, and its shade, and thereby is engaged in the ideas. One starts seeing the wisdom of that mitzvah. Not a single mitzvah is without an abundance of wisdom. Therefore, mitzvah works in 2 ways: it controls one’s desires and it also offers man the opportunity to engage God’s wisdom.

*For My people have done a twofold wrong:  
They have forsaken Me, the Fount of living waters,  
And hewed them out cisterns,  
broken cisterns, which cannot even hold water. (Jer. 2:13)*

What are the 2 wrongs above? One is that they abandoned God. The second is that their cisterns do not hold water. Look at Jews who abandon God. What type of lives do they have? When observant Jews gather to eat, they know there is no such gathering without discussing an idea. Otherwise it is like eating from idolatry (Avos 3:3); a pagan feast. One loss is abandoning God. But with what do they replace it [that life]? They replace it with a “*broken pit that does not hold water*”; an empty life. Those are the 2 negatives the prophet describes.

Our society focuses on ego. When we learn, we study the

highest level individuals: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Although we are not on their levels, we are affected by their perfection and it should not be depressing.

## 6:1 LEARNING LISHMA: FOR ITS OWN SAKE

THE SAGES TAUGHT IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE MISHNAH. BLESSED BE HE WHO CHOSE THEM AND THEIR TEACHING. RABBI MEIR SAID: "WHOMEVER OCCUPIES HIMSELF WITH THE TORAH FOR ITS OWN SAKE, MERITS MANY THINGS. NOT ONLY THAT BUT HE IS WORTH THE WHOLE WORLD. HE IS CALLED A FRIEND AND BELOVED; ONE THAT LOVES GOD; ONE THAT LOVES HUMANKIND; ONE THAT GLADDENS GOD; ONE THAT GLADDENS HUMANKIND. AND THE TORAH CLOTHES HIM IN HUMILITY AND REVERENCE, AND EQUIPS HIM TO BE RIGHTEOUS, PIOUS, UPRIGHT AND TRUSTWORTHY; IT KEEPS HIM FAR FROM SIN, AND BRINGS HIM NEAR TO MERIT. AND PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM HIS COUNSEL AND STRENGTH, AS IT IS SAID, "COUNSEL IS MINE AND SOUND WISDOM; I AM UNDERSTANDING, STRENGTH IS MINE" (PROVERBS 8:14). AND IT BESTOWS UPON HIM ROYALTY, DOMINION, AND ACUTENESS IN JUDG-

MENT. TO HIM ARE REVEALED THE SECRETS OF THE TORAH, AND HE IS MADE AS AN EVER-FLOWING SPRING, AND LIKE A STREAM THAT NEVER CEASES. AND HE BECOMES MODEST, LONG-SUFFERING AND FORGIVING OF INSULT. AND IT MAGNIFIES HIM AND EXALTS HIM OVER EVERYTHING.”

Torah lishma—learning for its own sake—is a unique idea in Klal Yisrael. A person was arguing with a professor. The latter maintained that it’s impossible to learn for the sake of learning. He held that one learns only due to some ulterior motive. People in the higher echelons of our educational system deny that learning lishma can exist. In terms of education, the world—compared to Judaism—is in the prehistoric age. They don’t know the basics of Torah’s view of education: Torah’s methodology, what it demands, and the rigid system of thought in terms of abstract formulation. Torah differs in its objective: to affect the person, to change [improve] him. For if education does not affect the person, it does not qualify as education at all. And Torah differs from the world’s idea of education as it has no ulterior motive, but that a person learns for the enjoyment of the ideas—lishma. But we must understand how one can learn lishma with no ulterior motive. What exactly is meant by “Torah lishma?”

It is interesting that the 6th chapter is not part of Avos. This chapter is not Mishnah, but Braisa (Rashi). If so, why is this chapter here? Rashi says that since these are words of aggadata which discuss the involvement in Torah study, therefore it was a custom to say these matters in shul together with Pirkei Avos.

More important, one would think that this 6th chapter should be the chapter of Pirkei Avos par excellence [not an addendum]. For Rabbi Meir cites all the praises of one who learns

lishma. This is the ultimate [goal]: all the chapters in Pirkei Avos should service this chapter. How then is it not possible to have this chapter form part of Pirkei Avos? It is strange that the end goal of perfection is omitted from Pirkei Avos.

The answer is as follows. There are 2 ways for man to gain perfection. One method is by working in each area, on each character trait, using all available means to gain perfection. Perfection is all-encompassing involving all emotions and many life situations. One must revisit various parts of his nature and correct them. Perfection is a lifetime process. This is what Pirkei Avos addresses up to chapter 6: how one should work on each aspect of his personality.

However, a person cannot will himself to learn Torah lishma. Ibn Ezra (Koheles 7:3) mentioned above discusses perfection. There are 3 parts of human nature: the soul, the instincts, and the controlling part that can steer one away from the instincts. But as long as one is involved in the controlling part of nature, he still is not involved in the highest part of nature. Once the controlling part subdues the instincts, a process must ensue: one's intelligence must start taking over. The intelligence must grow [become dominant]. But intelligence is not the ruling part as Ibn Ezra has it. When one's intelligence starts seeing God's wisdom, that is a natural process. All one can do is set the stage for this natural process to take place. But, by definition, logically, one cannot force that because all forceful attitudes emanate from man's ruling part, and not from his intelligence. Learning lishma is man's highest level but it cannot be forced. It is an amazing phenomenon. Maimonides says that one who worships God based on love, does the truth because it is the truth:

*The worshiper because of love, engages himself in the study of the Torah and*

*the observance of precepts and follows the paths of wisdom on no account in the world, neither for fear of evil nor in order to inherit the good; but he does the true thing because it is true, and in the end the good comes because thereof. That degree is a great degree, indeed and not every scholar is zocheh (attains it); for such was the degree of Abraham our father, whom the Holy One, blessed is He called "His beloved," because he worshipped only because of love, and it is, furthermore, the degree concerning which the Holy One, blessed is He commanded through Moses, saying: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6.5); for, when man will love the Lord with a proper love, he will immediately perform all of the commandments because of love. (Hil. Teshuvah 10:2)*

This means that this level is one to which one is "zocheh." Certain things one can accomplish through will. But this level is something that simply happens and not every chocham is fortunate enough to attain this level of existence. Maimonides refers here to a chocham, a perfect person. Whenever Chazal use the term zocheh, they refer to that which man cannot control:

*If one is zocheh (deserving), the Torah becomes a potion of life for him. If one is not zocheh, the Torah becomes a potion of death for him. (Yoma 72b)*

*"And not every scholar is zocheh"* means that one can't do any-



thing about it. In a way it is a sad state of affairs. Thus, that which is not under our will does not belong in Pirkei Avos. Why then is it placed here? The reason is because as this epitomizes Pirkei Avos, the custom was to say this chapter. When we run out of the power to control, when we do not have the ability to accomplish something, we have an additional method: study the ideas of perfection themselves. This draws a person's soul. They had the custom to learn this chapter after learning Pirkei Avos, which discusses how one perfects himself willfully. One then thinks he can't do anything further [than what he can will]. But that is not so. Minhag Yisrael (our people's custom) is to still think about the ideas of perfection [embodied in chapter 6]. The hope is that by one thinking about perfection, one will be drawn to it and zocheh to it.

Shittas Mussar [views concerning self-improvement] said that a person could control himself through the study of the rabbis' sayings. For example, to stop speaking lashon hara, one would study how horrible it is. The psychological Shittas Mussar was an intellectual mussar. It was not just emotional. The Rav distinguished Chassidus from Mussar: the former originated from ignorant people whereas Mussar originated from intellectuals. The father of Shittas Mussar was Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1809-1883). He studied psychology and was involved in the world of knowledge. Rav Chaim Bentzion Nottolovitch, a rebbe of mine, attended a convention where Rabbi Salanter gave mussar to the rabbanim. It was a very private meeting and he told them, "You do not study enough psychology; you don't know psychology." His position on mussar was that one can be a great Torah scholar, yet have terrible character traits. Rabbi Salanter said that it was easier to learn through Shas [all Talmudic tractates] than to change a single character trait. No doubt, that is true. Rabbi Salanter had a sensitivity for human emotions. Shittas Mussar held that the subcon-

scious mind exists. And if you could penetrate it, you could reach deeper into the personality and change it. Rabbi Aharon Kotler zt”l used to say, “Rabbi Yisrael Salanter invented mussar with a nigun [tune].” [A greater praise than just inventing mussar alone.] The purpose of a tune is to reach the language of the emotions, to dig deep into the emotional sphere so that these ideas become part of you. That was Shittas Mussar.

Opponents of this view held that you cannot change a person through reaching the unconscious emotion. The only recourse is to gain knowledge of perfection, through which the person would be drawn to that good. The difference would be, for example, if one stumbled and sinned through lashon hara. Should one learn Shmiras Halashon [a book] and learn it emotionally so the person realizes the terrible nature of the sin and the punishments? Shittas Mussar disagreed and held that perfection is attained by understanding why lashon hara is bad. And once one realizes this through wisdom and realizes the harm one inflicts on oneself he will be drawn away from lashon hara towards proper speech.

Let’s return to the question: What is learning lishma? Maimonides’ grandson has a commentary on Pirkei Avos, “*Midrash Dovid*.” He writes:

*You should think into the greatness of learning Torah and love of God, not because of any material gain or wealth and not to raise your esteem among others, like Rabbi Meir says, “Whomever learns Torah lishma gains many good things.” Meaning that one learns Torah without any goal.*

Let’s say that one has a natural curiosity for learning; is that

the definition of Torah lishma? He has no end goal and he learns because of an interest in the area. Is that Torah lishma? Maimonides' grandson said that one learns due to 2 things: a love of God and without any objective. Maimonides says,

*One who worships God based on love, engages himself in the study of the Torah and the observance of precepts and follows the paths of wisdom on no account in the world, neither for fear of evil nor in order to inherit the good; but he does the true thing because it is true.*

Thus, lishma and love are identical. And Maimonides says this is what God commanded through Moshe, “*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God*” (Deut. 6.5).

What is lishma? A person can be curious about a puzzle too, but that is unrelated to lishma. Curiosity itself is a natural phenomenon. But the lishma personality's curiosity is drawn not towards puzzles or math, but towards reality. Thus, it must focus on the source of all reality, namely God. That is what is meant by love of God. Curiosity about puzzles and math are unrelated to God, and therefore are not considered Torah lishma. But Torah relates to God. One's curiosity about an area in gemara is not simply because he doesn't understand the area. The highest level—lishma—refers to one who is curious about the area, because he's curious about God's Torah. The source of Torah is God; God is the source of truth, and his love of truth drives his curiosity about how the Creator formulated the system of sacrifices or tefillin for example. In his *Commentary on the mishnah*, Maimonides always says “*The Creator said you must perform...*”. The curiosity about Torah is the curiosity about God. That's why lishma is considered

“worshiping God based on love.” This is the definition of lishma. This also explains why Maimonides refers to such a person as “*beloved*” because he is drawn towards God. Maimonides defines love of God as being drawn towards God, the Creator. To be drawn towards the Creator, one must be interested in what the Creator did; to understand from the Creator’s actions. One is drawn towards God because of His universe, and also because of His system of Torah. Eicha Rabba on Jeremiah 2:13 says, “*Would it be that you forsake Me but you would observe My Torah.*” Meaning that even if one forsook God, at least live a beneficial way. Then the verse says this will bring one back to God. Even if one follows Torah due to his desire to live the best life, he will return to God because the system is geared to draw one back.

*God looks down from heaven on mankind to see if there exists a man of understanding, a man searching for God. (Psalms 53:3)*

What is the meaning of “searching” in this verse? It does not mean that he is agnostic. It means his “process” is a search for God: endless searching.

As we said, the moment one tries to learn lishma, he cannot. Because then he is working with an ulterior motive, to satisfy some kind of pangs of conscience.

In numerous locations the rabbis’ say:

*Always, one should learn Torah even not lishma, because by doing so he will come to learn lishma.*

One cannot possibly coerce himself to learn lishma because then he is involved in a self-evaluation, a certain kind of satisfaction derived by thinking, “I am such a person; I have reached such a high level.” The moment one does this it is not lishma.

One should not be depressed. The philosophy of placing chapter 6 here is to teach that even though one is not on the level of lishma, one gains immensely from perceiving the level. Perception and knowledge gains access to man’s soul, the Tzelem Elohim.

A negative product of this society is the “All or nothing” philosophy: either I will obtain the ultimate, otherwise it’s worthless. [Applied to lishma, people desire to feel that they are on this level of lishma. But this is promoted not from Torah, but from our society’s poor values of “accomplishment.” In contrast, Torah says that one can use the perception of this ultimate level of lishma presented in chapter 6 to affect his knowledge of that level. This knowledge is a value, like all truths.]

A person does not realize how fortunate he is on all those levels that are in between [from first starting to learn, and all the subsequent levels on the path towards lishma]. However, one must break his ego and perceive the ultimate level, even though it is not in line with him. Our society is bent on self-satisfaction. One desires to be happy with oneself. But if you show a person something [lishma] that he will never be able to accomplish, it will depressed him. And therefore, our society won’t present this [view of lishma] as it isn’t something achievable that one can be proud of. This society’s goal is egoistic satisfaction. While the goal of Judaism is the perception of reality.

In Torah lishma too there can be a lot of pain involved. Chazal ask (Kiddushin 30a):

*Why are the wise men of Israel referred to as sofrim? Is because they counted (sofare) every letter in the Torah.*

A question arose so the rabbis took out the Torah and counted the letters from Beraishis until the middle. Counting letters is not the greatest enjoyment. But it reflects the love of truth. God's Torah demands that at times, a person goes through painful types of experiences due to his love of the truth. This is the difference between one who is intellectually curious, an intellectual pleasure seeker—an epicurean—and between one learning Torah lishma. The epicurean will not count letters; one learning Torah lishma will.

A person who is uninterested in perfection can master any area and that area will have no affect on him whatsoever. Torah teaches that the purpose of learning is to gain perfection and the halachic system is the means. Shas (the whole of Talmudic tractates) is set up as a medium for attaining perfection. But if one uses it as an end goal for personal gain, one can do so but it is wrong. Shas is part of the substance of perfection, but one can thwart the goal and use it for his subjective motivations. That is not the fault of the system, but of the person. A person needs only to look at Torah She'Bicsav: the perfection of the avos. From Moshe's rebuke in Devarim, one sees that the Torah's goal throughout is perfection: there is sefer Iyove (Job), Koheles, Mishlei, Tehillim, and the prophets. If perfection was not Torah's focus, all these sefarim [books] would not exist. But the reason why one can learn through Shas and not change a single character trait is because his goal is distorted, and Torah cannot shield a person from distortion. If one is bent on distortion you cannot change him. Maimonides says that even God can't say things in a clear way where one won't distort it [if he so desires]. He

brought a proof from the Christians: Torah says, “*Listen Israel, God is our God, God is one*” (Deut. 6:4). Nothing could be stated more clearly, yet Christians say that God is 3.

The nature of a person is to be goal oriented and a person must work with that [reality]. But Judaism prescribes that a person moves beyond goals to a higher level. Lishma in terms of a total person like Abraham is out of reach. But every person can partake of lishma at times; there are moments of lishma. In the beginning of his intro to his *Guide*, Maimonides says as follows:

*At times the truth shines so brilliantly that we perceive it as clear as day. Our nature and habit then draw a veil over our perception, and we return to a darkness almost as dense as before. We are like those who, though beholding frequent flashes of lightning, still find themselves in the thickest darkness of the night. For some [more perfected people] the lightning flashes in rapid succession, and they seem to be in continuous light, and their night is as clear as the day. This was the degree of prophetic excellence attained by (Moses) the greatest of prophets.*

The “flash of lightning” refers to a person being tuned into reality [a matter is “lit up” for him]. The greater person experiences more flashes. And for tzaddikim like the avos, night is like consecutive flashes of lightning. Every person on his own level can experience lishma. Maimonides says that “*not every chocham is zocheh*” to lishma, following God based on love alone. One cannot be zocheh like Abraham. But it doesn’t mean one cannot be zocheh to gain some sense of what lish-

ma is: a realization of the experience to act without goals. Our society says happiness is found in achieving goals. But Judaism says happiness is found when you have no goals. When one is involved in something for its own sake with no concerns about the self, that is the only way for a person to be happy.

A person operates on different levels. This is the idea behind the mezuzah. One sees the mezuzah in the morning and sees it again when he returns at night. Next morning, this repeats. It's a reminder because one gets lost in his day. We don't strive for perfection; we strive for a gain. If a person has a life in which he has moments where he is involved in truths, that is a high level. Most of the world doesn't see truth at all. For them, Maimonides' metaphor does not apply: their lives are a black night with no flashes of light whatsoever. A totally empty existence. But if a person is zocheh to gain some insight during his lifetime, one must value those moments where one partakes of lishma.

A danger about learning this mishnah is that one will say he will abandon goals. But in yeshiva, one must be goal oriented as one requires motivation. That was Ibn Ezra's point: one must utilize the ruling part of his nature. The way to save one's life is by using the ruling factor of the soul. He must set goals, learn for a set amount of time [daily], cover a certain amount of gemara and work on certain ideas that apply to him. Goals must be set and achieved. After one has reached a level where he has mastered chochma and attains a certain kind of knowledge, suddenly the knowledge takes over. But one cannot expect this at the beginning of his studies.

AND IT BESTOWS UPON HIM ROYALTY, DOMINION, AND ACUTENESS IN JUDGMENT. TO HIM ARE REVEALED THE SECRETS OF THE TORAH,



AND HE IS MADE AS AN EVER-FLOWING SPRING,  
AND LIKE A STREAM THAT NEVER CEASES. AND  
HE BECOMES MODEST, LONG-SUFFERING AND  
FORGIVING OF INSULT. AND IT MAGNIFIES HIM  
AND EXALTS HIM OVER EVERYTHING.

He understands Torah's hidden ideas: ideas most people don't encounter in their lifetimes. Obviously, this refers to a highly developed chocham. One can't even approach the sphere of having the potential for Torah lishma unless he has mastered chochma to a great degree. In one's years at yeshiva, one must concentrate on mastering chochma.

BECOME OLD AND AGED IN WISDOM (AVOS 5:22)

After many years, one becomes aged in chochma. There comes a time when the chochma starts taking over and drawing the personality: a further and far more advanced stage. After learning Pirkei Avos in his younger years, one will amass enough wisdom that he will be thrown into a different gear. It is a process that must take place and "*not every chocham is zocheh.*" That is the highest degree. But all can engage in some measure. So, you might say it's quantitative: some people partake more or less. But in fact, it is a qualitative experience. Maimonides says the quantity leads to a certain quality.

*It is known that love of God is not tied to man's heart until he is constantly involved as it is fit and he abandons all else in the world except for it (Hil. Teshuvah 10:6).*

The state of mind described in this mishnah results from a certain quantity of involvement in lishma.

THE SAGES TAUGHT IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE  
MISHNAH. BLESSED BE HE WHO CHOSE THEM  
AND THEIR TEACHING.

This is an interesting introduction, but what is the purpose of stating this? This is an important point in Torah fundamentals. Our belief is based on Revelation at Sinai. Everything traces back to it. Maimonides says regarding every prophet who rises after Moshe Rabbeinu that we do not validate his words due to a sign alone. Rather, we accept him due to Moshe's command:

*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; to him you shall heed. (Deut. 18:15)*

Just like in a court case when 2 witnesses testify and we do not know if they speak truthfully, nonetheless we accept their testimony because these are the rules of the court system, the same applies to a prophet: it is a mitzvah to listen to him, even though we do not know if he speaks the truth (Hil. Yesodei Hatorah 9:3).

We believe in Torah solely due to Revelation at Sinai. But any event short of that magnitude, if a prophet gives us a sign, do we know that he is a truthful prophet? The answer is no, because as Maimonides says, if the prophet tells us to violate Torah, we don't listen to him [even if he gives a sign]. That is a prescription. We don't believe anything except Moshe's Torah. And when a prophet arises, Moshe's Torah instructs us to listen to him, provided that he follows certain guidelines. It comes out that we don't know the truth of the prophet [his legitimacy]. If that's the case, do we know if, for example, Isaiah was a tzaddik or a prophet? I'm not asking about fol-

lowing his commands, but can we confirm that he is a true prophet? If the only matter that we accept is Revelation at Sinai, why should we accept that Isaiah was a prophet?

*Bless are You God, our God, King of the universe, who chose good prophets and desired their words stated with truth. Blessed are you God, Who chose Torah and in Mosbe His servant and in Israel His people, and in the truthful prophets and righteousness. (Haftorah Blessings)*

One cannot say the words of the prophets are not true, but how do we know?

The answer is that there are 2 kinds of knowledge. There is a knowledge through signs, and a first-hand knowledge through wisdom. In Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, Maimonides discusses knowledge through signs, through which he says we accept only one thing: a command of the prophet. But through knowledge, through wisdom, we cannot know the perfection of another person. [There are 2 matters here: 1) following the commands of a prophet and 2) determining the perfection of another person.] Samuel the prophet could not detect which of Jesse's sons was to be Moshiach: "*Man looks with his eyes, but God looks into the heart*" (I Sam. 16:7). Does this mean that we can never know [the perfection of] another person? Do we not know that Rabbi Akiva was a tzaddik or not? God forbid. It means that through signs we cannot evaluate a person, but through wisdom we can. And what is the only wisdom available that is trustworthy? That is Torah's wisdom. We know that Rabbi Akiva was a tzaddik, that the 10 martyrs were tzaddikim and that the Tannaim and Amoraim were tzaddikim. This is known not through a sign but through

wisdom. Without a system of wisdom all is worthless. The giving of Torah was to give Israel a system of wisdom.

BLESSED BE HE WHO CHOSE THEM AND THEIR  
TEACHING.

Maimonides says that if a person should speak against Rava, he violates the prohibition of mocking Torah's teachers (Makchish Maggideha), he speaks against Chazal and is an apikoress. For he is denying that wisdom that was given to Israel. He is saying, "I don't know that Rava was a tzaddik. I don't know that Chazal were truly the wise men of Israel and great tzaddikim." This we know not through signs but through study. "*Blessed be He who chose them and their teaching*" means that God gave us a system of wisdom. If Isaiah gave us a sign, that's one thing. But he was one of the Torah transmitters. There was no question if he was a prophet or telling the truth. The nation and Israel's wise men knew who Isaiah was. They understood the words of the prophets, and they recognized Isaiah's words and knew his perfection based on wisdom. Using wisdom, one recognizes our Torah transmitters: the prophets, Tannaim, Amoraim, and Gaonim. This is belief not based on a sign.

Chazal determined through their wisdom what became part of the Torah She'Bicsav. Revelation at Sinai was not needed to determine this, for it was based on the system of the Mesora:

*Bless are You God, our God, King of the  
universe, who chose good prophets and de-  
sired their words stated with truth.*

Christians thought Jews would be easy prey for their Bible. They thought that Jews are impressed by miracles as Torah is

replete with them. The only things we believe are matters based on one of 2 methods. A prophet's primary prerequisite is that he is a chocham from the wise men of Israel. Without that, he is nothing. It's an impossibility. But even if he proves that he is a wise man from Israel, he still must make predictions involving great detail and every detail must transpire. He must do this many times. Then, if he gives a command that adheres to Torah's formula, we follow him. But knowing that he is a prophet is accomplished only through wisdom. The wise men of Israel know the person. But even with this knowledge, following his commands must adhere to Torah's formula [viz. suspending a command only temporarily, and he doesn't command us to violate idolatry].

In the prophecy of the burning bush, Moshe asked God the following:

*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take out the children of Israel from Egypt?" (Exod. 3:11).*

God replied:

*I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain (Ibid. 3:12).*

God saying that He will be with Moshe meant "Moshe, it doesn't matter who you are [I will ensure the mission's success]." And when God said that the people will worship Him on the mountain, this indicated their purpose in leaving. Moshe thought that the Jews were not worthy of leaving. Apparently, if not for the institution of Revelation at Sinai, the

children of Israel would not have deserved to have left Egypt. But because of God's will to establish a "*kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Exod. 19:6) the Jews deserved to leave. But due to their suffering alone, apparently there would not have been an exodus. Moshe asked God:

*When I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is His name?" what shall I say to them? (Ibid. 3:13)*

God replied:

*I am that I am (Ibid. 3:14)*

This is the special idea of the name of God. And God said further to Moses:

*Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, this is My appellation for all eternity. (Ibid. 3:15)*

God thereby told Moshe a second idea of providence. "*I am that I am*" is the greatest knowledge we can have regarding the idea of God. And "*God of your fathers...*" refers to God's providence due to the Patriarchs, the Bris Avos. Then God said:

*Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said, 'I have taken note of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt, and I have declared: I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.' They will listen to you; then you shall go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt and you shall say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, manifested Himself to us. Now therefore, let us go a distance of 3 days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God.'"* (Ibid. 3:16-18)

Moshe responded:

*They will not believe me or listen to my voice, but they will say, "The Lord did not appear to you." (Ibid. 3:19).*

How could Moshe say this? God explained to him the ideas through which he will influence the people. He will explain to them ideas of God and providence.

The answer is that there were 2 groups whom Moshe must impress. Moshe was to impress the elders with ideas. But the masses were unable to understand deep abstract thought. Moshe was concerned how to impress this second group. How will he convince them that he is God's messenger? To this, God said, "*What is in your hand?*" and God gave Moshe

certain signs. We see 2 types of knowledge. For the elders, Moshe was to use ideas. And for the masses he was to use signs. The verses follow through:

*Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. Aaron repeated all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. (Exod. 4:29,30)*

In Torah, 2 kinds of knowledge are mentioned clearly. This is extremely important because our belief in our prophets is based upon knowledge. We recognize the prophets through knowledge and not through signs. Maimonides says the following regarding one who doesn't believe in knowledge:

*Anyone who does not believe in Moshiach or one who does not anticipate his coming not only denies the prophets, but also the Torah and Moses our Teacher. (Hil. Malachim II:1)*

Maimonides refers to 2 groups: prophets, and Torah and Moshe. We see that there are 2 types of knowledge: that based on signs (the only true sign we believe in is Revelation at Sinai), and that based on knowledge. After Sinai, we believe in prophets based on knowledge, which stems from knowledge of Torah and its transmitters, the Baalei Hamesora.

Chazal believed that one can know if a person is a tzaddik. Moade Kattan 28a says:

*Rava said: "Length of life, children, and*



*sustenance do not depend on one's merit,  
but rather they depend upon chance."*

But do we not read next [what seems to question this premise]:

*Rabba and Rav Chisda were both pious sages. One Sage would pray during a drought and rain would fall, and the other Sage would pray, and rain would fall.*

This does not mean that the response of rain validated these sages as tzaddikim. As Avodah Zara 55a says that idolaters also "bring rain." This gemara means that they knew that the sages were tzaddikim. But the fact that their prayers brought rain indicates the extent of their perfection. But the occurrence of rain itself can never validate one as a tzaddik. They were both complete tzaddikim. Rav Chisda lived to the age of 92, while Rabba died at age 40. Therefore, longevity is unrelated to one's righteousness. (Interestingly, things one wants most in life are longevity, children and income.) A chocham who is wise with a perfected mind, and knows human emotions evaluates a person on a different level. The average person cannot determine who is a tzaddik; they [freely] give this appellation to someone who was nice to them. It's oversimplified. Only a rare person says that someone who was not nice to him is a tzaddik. Chazal say that if someone is a talmid chocham, even though he is mean to you, you should wrap him around yourself. One must be on a high level to do this. Since this person is a talmid chocham, you will benefit from him. Through his knowledge he will be more beneficial to you than your greatest friend who is an ignoramus. The gemara says on the contrary, steer far away from a very nice

ignoramus because his niceness will lead to your undoing. To be friends with such a person, you must partake of his philosophy [his ignorance will cause you harm].

More than anything else, friendship is the sharing of a philosophy. Recently, a gentile started recognizing Judaism as the truth. He began learning more and he told me that now he is very lonely and no longer has any friends. He said that when he gets together with his former friends, they view him as strange and can't figure out where to place them in their minds. They ask, "Are you becoming a Jew?" He replied to me, "If I would tell them yes, at least they would have a box to put me in. But when I tell them 'No, I am only interested in certain ideas,' the friendship is over." But the general formula for friendship is treating another person's fantasy as your own.

There is a difference between before and after the giving of Torah. Maimonides says that regarding a prophet who comes now, we don't request his performance of miracles like Moshe Rabbeinu. This means that before Torah was given, those miracles were necessary because there were masses with no relationship to Torah [ideas]. But once you have a system of Torah, everyone is tied into that system of wisdom. Without a system of Torah, the ignoramus is lost in terms of knowledge. But no prophet after Moshe justifies his prophecy through signs; the prophet is tied into the Mesora, Torah transmission. That's why it says that anyone who degrades the Baalei Hamesora denies Torah. Meaning, he no longer has the excuse to question the authority of the Baalei Hamesora. Such denial would be if one would say that Hillel was lenient in his rulings because he was a nice person. One can no longer say this because the whole system of chochamim filters down from each generation's leaders to the average person. But this is only after the Torah was given. Beforehand, signs were needed.

What is meant by “*There is no chance [mazal] for Israel*” (Shabbos 156b)? But we said earlier that lifespan, children and finances are due to chance. Tosfos says this does not mean that prayer cannot help. For we learn regarding Hezekia that he was supposed to die, but due to his prayer, God gave him more years. The idea is that for these 3 matters, there is no correlation to one’s merit. Sometimes matters can change like in the case of Hezekia. We don’t know where providence moves in and overrides nature. But “chance” does not mean that prayer cannot work. It means that we can’t say that one who died young was not righteous, or that one who lived long was righteous. There is an overall system of chance. It depends on one’s genes and physical makeup. It’s part of nature. But this does not dismiss instances of providence. One prays for livelihood, or for children like Chana did. Due to one’s level, he or she can invoke God’s providence. The essence of prayer is servitude to God, not primarily one’s requests. But the process of tefilah raises a person to the highest level. Whereas most people pray for selfish reasons.

People say that Maimonides’ *Guide* caused harm and it is true that people abused it. But the truth is that once the *Guide* was published, personalities with corrupt notions regarding God ceased to exist. The first part of the *Guide* addressed that where Maimonides addresses anthropomorphisms. Maimonides wiped out that problem. After that you never had such personalities.

The question was raised proposing a situation: Could the Baalei Hamesora be at odds if someone was Moshiach or a prophet? It is impossible that such a dispute would ever exist. This is because we have a formula: the person must make predictions with great detail, which transpire exactly, and he must do so many times. This is similar to the prophet Samuel of whom it is said, “*Not one of his words failed to come true*” (I

Sam. 3:19). But regarding whether someone is Moshiach, there is no problem of a possible dispute because it is purely conjecture. There is no mitzvah to believe that someone is Moshiach. The gentiles have this belief because they are idolatrous. King David was definitely Moshiach, and nobody believed in him. There's no such thing as believing in Moshiach; it is a totally gentile idea. It is idolatrous to believe in the person of Moshiach. Moshiach will bring about a situation; you either have that situation or you don't. There's no belief in the person. We believe that there "will be" a Moshiach, but we do not "believe in" the Moshiach. There's one view in the gemara that there is no [upcoming] Moshiach since this view holds that Hezekia was Moshiach:

*Rabbi Hillel said there is no Moshiach in Israel because the Jews already ate from him in Hezekia's days. (Sanbedrin 99a)*

*Rashi: But [in the future] rather God will reign alone and redeem them alone.*

We say that Moshiach is one of the 13 Principles. Does this mean that Rabbi Hillel did not accept this principle? God forbid, he was not an apikoreess. But the answer is that the principle is not "Moshiach," but rather, "Ultimate Redemption." Torah openly says this about the end of days:

*And you will return to God, your God and you will listen to His voice... (Deut. 30:2)*

This verse says the Jews will repent. We see that the principle is the future redemption [not Moshiach]. But you will ask that Maimonides did not say this. He says that one must

believe that Moshiach will definitely come, a question on Rabbi Hillel. The answer is that essentially, as we said, we believe in an ultimate redemption, and it will come about through Moshiach. That is what Chazal say. Now, if someone like Rabbi Hillel believes that the redemption will come about through God alone, he is not an apikoress. But the reason Maimonides wrote that he is an apikoress is because if a person today says that he holds like Rabbi Hillel, his opinion is not based on understanding Rabbi Hillel. It is because he denies the idea of Moshiach. Therefore, he is an apikoress. Directly from Tanach, all the wise men of Israel said that the redemption will come about through Moshiach. That is the plain understanding of the verses. It is true that Rabbi Hillel had his own unique view. He was a Torah giant and worked out his own theory. But if a regular person says that he holds like Rabbi Hillel, it is not because he understands Rabbi Hillel's arguments against all the Amoraim and Tannaim. It is because he does not like the idea about Moshiach. Therefore, he is an apikoress. Today, the form of the redemption via Moshiach is part and parcel of the idea of redemption.

The idea that the ultimate redemption is the essence [not Moshiach per se] is simple logic. The purpose of Moshiach is that *"the whole earth will be filled with knowledge of God"* (Isaiah 11:9). The gentiles turned this into idolatry [Jesus "the man" as Messiah]. But we view Moshiach as facilitating knowledge of God [the person of Moshiach is not the essence].

*David, Your righteous messiah (Siddur)*

King David was Moshiach because he set up the kingdom of Israel like never before, and it was never paralleled after his son King Solomon. The Jews reigned supreme in King David's time. It is historical fact that they were the most power-

ful nation in the world. No nation could stand up to them. The king Moshiach will accomplish that once again. The Jews will eventually be the most powerful nation on the face of the Earth. The king Moshiach will bring that about. That is why King David was the king Moshiach and why the future Moshiach is modeled after King David: he is like King David and shares his qualities. It is almost like Moshiach will be a replica of King David because King David had all the qualities necessary to be Moshiach. The future Moshiach will naturally share those qualities.

If you learn through a little of Isaiah, you see an interesting thing. The way Isaiah talks about Hezekia is unbelievable. The prophet says that in God's eyes, those 30 years of Hezekia's reign were like an eternity; they reflected eternal ideas. Eternity is not measured by years but by the quality of the situation: all of Israel followed Torah; it was an unbelievable time. We maintain that level of perfection will recur in the messianic era. The essential idea of the messianic era is simply that those people with the true ideas concerning reality and concerning God will also be the ones in control politically. There won't be a distortion where people without wisdom of Torah and God possess might, as is true today.

WHOEVER OCCUPIES HIMSELF WITH THE TORAH FOR ITS OWN SAKE, MERITS [ZOCHEH] MANY THINGS.

“Zocheh” means to merit and to attain; he gains many things. To attain many qualities, one must work on each one individually; it does not happen by itself. Ordinarily one achieves something because he works on each individual area. But here it is different, “*he merits many things.*” One who learns for the sake of learning itself is the singular phenomenon which generates

many attainments. And it is not because he worked on all those other areas that he attains. Those other areas are all side benefits of learning lishma. It comes out that learning lishma is a certain state of the personality which gives the person tremendous gains: added dimensions that he did not work on.

NOT ONLY THAT BUT HE IS WORTH THE WHOLE  
WORLD.

“Worth”—kidai—means that it is enough. It means that the world was created for this kind person; that’s the world’s purpose.

*Rava said the world was created only for  
the completely righteous and completely  
wicked (Ein Yaakov, Berachos)*

But the people in between suffer. The rasha is completely involved in this [physical] world and the tzaddik is involved in the world of wisdom and minimizes his enjoyments in this world, partaking only as much as necessary for his involvement in the higher world. The rasha—insofar as he functions in a purely animalistic manner—makes use of the physical. But it’s not a praise. “*It is enough—kidai—for him*” means that one who learns lishma is totally happy with the world. The world is perfect for his life of wisdom. It’s more than enough for him.

*...Who creates many souls and their short-  
comings, on all that He made... (Borei Ni-  
fashos blessing)*

The world perfectly fits his nature and he is extremely happy.

## HE IS CALLED A FRIEND AND BELOVED

This refers to God: he is a friend to God and is loved by God. We understand “*loved by God*”: it means that God relates to him in the ultimate fashion as the Shema’s morning prayer says, “*An eternal love God has loved us.*” In the strongest possible way God relates to this person [“love” here is a metaphor as God does not partake of human love]. Therefore, we understand the use of the word love because this person who learns lishma is the epitome of man. But “friend” is an odd term for a relationship between God and man. Had this mishnah not used this term, it would be impossible to utter it. What is the quality of a friend and in what way is he a friend to God? Psalm 139 reads as follows:

*O Lord, You have examined me and know me. When I sit down or stand up You know it; You discern my thoughts from afar. You observe my walking and reclining, and are familiar with all my ways. There is not a word on my tongue but You, O Lord, know it well. You hedge me front and back; You lay Your hand upon me. It is beyond my knowledge; it is a mystery; I cannot fathom it. Where can I escape from Your spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I descend to the grave, You are there too. If I take wing with the dawn to come to rest on the western horizon, even there Your hand will be guiding me, Your right hand will be holding me fast. If I say, “Surely darkness will conceal me, night will provide me with cover,” darkness is not dark*



*for You; night is as light as day; darkness and light are the same. It was You who created my conscience; You fashioned me in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am awesomely, wondrously made; Your work is wonderful; I know it very well. My frame was not concealed from You when I was shaped in a hidden place, knit together in the recesses of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed limbs; they were all recorded in Your book; in due time they were formed, to the very last one of them...*

One does not hide anything from a true friend. The highest symbol of friendship is when one confides his innermost secrets with another. It means there is nothing hidden in his mind from God. There is nothing which he feels he must hide from God. This is only possible for one who functions on the level of Torah lishma. He is enraptured by love of God and there is no concealed part of his personality. Most people cannot confront God on a total level; there is a part of their personality that remains removed. Because they operate on an emotional level, they feel guilty about certain things. Those parts they wish to keep hidden from God. But the person on the highest level conceals nothing. He is a friend. And what causes a person to think that way? Not only when he does mitzvos, but even when he sins he knows that he is not hidden from God. King David was a sinner regarding Batsheva. But it did not remove him from God.

*When I sit down or stand up You know it; You discern my thoughts from afar. You observe my walking and reclining, and are fa-*

*miliar with all my ways. There is not a word on my tongue but that You, O Lord, know it well. You hedge me before and behind; You lay Your hand upon me. It is beyond my knowledge; it is a mystery. I cannot fathom it.*

On the other hand, King David says his understanding of God is impossible. It is a one-way friendship, as far as man is concerned, in that he doesn't conceal anything from God. This is because there's no way to escape:

*Where can I escape from Your spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I descend to the grave, You are there too. If I take wing with the dawn to come to rest on the western horizon, even there Your hand will be guiding me, Your right hand will be holding me fast.*

This entire chapter carries this theme. This is all based upon understanding God's wisdom. Through understanding it a person realizes that the idea of hiding from God is an absurdity. But it is something that people commit. When one does something wrong, he does not want to relate to God in that area and he wishes to deny it. One wants to relate to God only regarding one's good actions, but not as an individual who God knows thoroughly in every aspect of his instinctual nature.

*You hedge me front and back.*

One who relates to God this way is already functioning with a different level of knowledge of God: a "friend" to God.

That is why he gives these 2 appellations, friend and beloved.

In Hilchos Teshuvah 7:6, Maimonides writes:

*Yesterday this sinner was hateful before God, scorned, ostracized and abominate, and today he is beloved, desirable, close and a friend.*

*Beloved*: This refers to the strongest relationship possible between God and man. *Desirable*: His life exemplifies the most desirous existence. *Close*: Metaphysically he is close to God because of his level of knowledge and wisdom. When one lives an emotional life, there is no relationship to God. This is because God does not have any emotions, so essentially there is no relationship. But God is the source of wisdom. When one is involved in endless wisdom, then he is, insofar as humanly possible, relating to God essentially. *Friend*: This means he does not hide anything. His innermost secrets are revealed to God.

*God who has been my shepherd (ro'eh) from my birth to this day (Gen. 48:15)  
Ramban: Ro'eh, the language of friendship, God who befriended me.*

It means there was nothing concealed from God.

*An eternal love You loved us... and You have taught us statutes of life*

This means to say the strongest relationship is God's giving the Torah to us.

## DAAS TORAH

This has achieved prominence in the past few generations. What is it? Do we say that when a gadol—a Torah leader—says something that we call it Daas Torah [absolute truth]?

There is Daas Torah, but it is not what people think. To some people it is a magical phenomenon where all that a gadol says must be true, because he has Daas Torah. The truth is that a gadol has a right to make rulings, psak halacha, but outside of halacha he has no jurisdiction. He has no infallibility. Maimonides said that the wise men of Israel assumed that Bar Koziba was Moshiach. But they erred. We see that the wise men from Israel are fallible. Gentiles have such ideas of human infallibility. Judaism does not. We have prophets but that is not Daas Torah. Daas Torah exists and refers in part to chapter 6 in Avos:

*People benefit from his counsel and strength*

One who achieves a level of knowledge and perfection, his analysis is of a different kind. The gemara says that Chazal say when a person attains Torah, he also attains a level of wisdom in every area:

*I am wisdom, slyness dwells with me*  
(Proverbs 8:12)

Slyness is derogatory, it means crookedness. That is what Jacob said to Rachel, “*I am his brother in trickery*” (Rashi, Gen. 29:12). Jacob meant to say, “If Lavan thinks he can scheme me, I can scheme him quicker.” On “*I am wisdom, slyness dwells with me,*” Chazal say that once one learns Torah, slyness in all

matters enters him. This means that the subject of Torah is different than any other subject. People who are wise in other areas are different than our wise men. Their wise men may be great mathematicians, but in other areas they talk like fools. The talmid chocham has abilities to analyze a problem which others do not possess. This is Daas Torah. It stems from Torah. The talmid chocham has an edge in every area, but this does not make him infallible. Only God is infallible. But the talmid chocham has something important to contribute; you should listen to him carefully and weigh his words very carefully.

What we call trust in chochamim—emunas chochamim—is where one relies on his knowledge, even though he does not understand how it works. This is just like trusting a doctor. But it does not mean belief in the person of the chocham, for every man is fallible. Discussing the sickness of man (machla ha'anushis), Maimonides says as follows:

*If you see a wise man and he is emotionally attached to an idea, and he likes it, don't even believe him on the facts.*

We don't trust a human being. But if one is a true chocham and he is objective, his wisdom of Torah places him in a certain vantage point where he can see things others cannot. This is Daas Torah. It exists but you cannot misconstrue it. [Daas Torah is also addressed on page 180.]

