

PIRKEI AVOS



ETHICS *of the* FATHERS

CHAPTER 3

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

Rabbi Israel Chait

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

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YESHIVA B'NEI TORAH

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	5
3:1 EGO AND LUST: THE CAUSES OF SIN	9
3:2 LOVE FOR MAN, GOD & TORAH.....	17
3:3 MAN IS AN IDOL	26
3:4 DENIAL OF REALITY.....	39
3:5 THE LIFE OF TORAH STUDY.....	43
THE HOLOCAUST.....	51
WHY THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER	58
WHY THE TORAH CONCEALS THE END OF DAYS.....	60
WHY MOSHIACH IS ESSENTIAL.....	61
THE ATTRACTION TO MOSHIACH.....	61
HOLOCAUST: WERE GEDOLEI TORAH WRONG?.....	63
ASCERTAINING REALITY	66
DIVINE PROVIDENCE	67
ABRAHAM: THE TREATY BETWEEN THE PARTS	72
GOD'S NAME.....	77
EXPLAINING GOD'S NAME	80
MOSHE: GOD'S MESSENGER	84
3:6 GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG MEN	86
3:7 OWNERSHIP AND ACCOMPLISHMENT.....	95
3:8 [UNRECORDED]	109
3:9 KNOWLEDGE VS. CHARACTER.....	109
3:10 CARE FOR OTHERS AND ONESELF.....	132
3:11 METAPHYSICAL REALITY.....	139
PROPHETS AND PROPHECY.....	147
3:12 POLITICAL SAVVY.....	156
3:13 SAFEGUARDS.....	162
3:14 GOD'S LOVE FOR MAN	195
3:15 GOD'S OMNISCIENCE AND MAN'S FREEWILL.....	203
3:16 PLEASURE AND REALITY.....	212
3:17 TORAH AND CHARACTER.....	245
MESIRAS NEFESH: SACRIFICE.....	260
3:18 STUDY: ESSENCE AND ACCIDENTS.....	277

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 per-

fection, 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.

3:1 EGO AND LUST: THE CAUSES OF SIN

AKAVIA BEN MAHALALEL SAID: “CONSIDER THREE THINGS, AND YOU WILL NOT COME TO SIN: KNOW FROM WHERE YOU CAME, AND TO WHERE YOU ARE GOING, AND BEFORE WHOM YOU ARE DESTINED TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT AND A RECKONING. FROM WHERE DID YOU COME? FROM A PUTRID DROP. AND TO WHERE ARE YOU GOING? TO A PLACE OF DUST, WORMS, AND MAGGOTS. AND BEFORE WHOM ARE YOU DESTINED TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT AND A RECKONING? BEFORE THE KING OF KINGS, THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE.”

How does one approach such a saying of our Rabbis? Additionally, why is this formula limited to three matters, not five, or ten? This formula must be based on an in-depth knowledge of the human being. Once one obtains this knowledge and understands the counter forces, a formula can be prescribed that prevents man from sinning. Maimonides follows this approach:

This recognition brings man to humility as he considers from where he came. And his recognition of his ultimate end brings him to despise earthly matters. And his recognition of the greatness of mitzvah will bring him to quickly listen to the mitzvos. And when there arises in his hand [when he is occupied] with these three matters, he will not sin at all.

Maimonides breaks this down into man's two prime movers: ego (self-overestimation), and lusts. Maimonides teaches that the realization of one's origin—"a putrid drop [of semen]"—humbles man's ego. The second realization of mortality addresses man's instinctual drives. But we asked, why cannot the realization of our death also address the ego? Talmud Brachos uses this expression: "One tanna said, 'If I stand in fear before a king of flesh and blood, who today is here but tomorrow is in the grave, how much more so should I fear the King of kings?'" We see from this Talmudic source that recognition of the grave generates fear, breaking down a person's ego. We refine our question as follows: "Why does Maimonides state that it is precisely the recognition of our origin—and not the grave—that humbles our egos? The grave could function for both purposes: reducing both our egos and our instinctual drives."

Another question involves how recognizing one's origin humbles our egos. On the contrary, this can make one arrogant. One can praise himself saying, "I came from humble beginnings, but look at me now: I became a powerful individual."

A third question is how the recognition of death removes man from lusts. In fact, as Maimonides quotes, there was a philosophy to "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." People rationalize this by thinking, "Time is passing by; I

might as well get my pleasures before it's all over." Average people think they should enjoy themselves now, while they still can.

First, we must appreciate the prerequisite for man's ego: his very existence. Therefore, the biggest blow to one's ego is the lack of his existence. Man views himself as great. But when he considers his existence relates not to the current "accomplished self," but rather, to an initial putrid drop—a one-celled entity—this breaks down his ego. The ego's breakdown is that he cannot associate his [original] existence to his current self.

How then do we account for the successful business man who prides himself on his transformation from a nobody? This is because a self-made man can identify with the same self, before he achieved success. But he cannot praise himself for being a "successful one-celled being." For he cannot identify with the cell. The existence he has was given to an object with which he has no identification. This is humbling: the property of existence does not apply to the entity that he now identifies with.

This also explains why the realization of the grave does not correct the ego. For one can say, "At least now I have existence."

We also asked, "How is the recognition of death a breakdown of the lusts?" Maimonides' language is indicative:

“His recognition of his ultimate end brings him to despise earthly matters.” He does not say he will despise the “lusts” of the world, but the “matters” of the world. We must understand that a typical person will not be satisfied living purely like an animal, engaging his lusts per se. Lust alone does not propel man to act. What makes one a sinner is his attribution of importance to his activities. Any career person views his selected position as important. Whether he is a lawyer or a doctor, he views his career in an important light. However, when a person thinks of his end as dust and worms, that is a breakdown of this world. How important are earthly matters going to be to him when he is lying in the grave?

Thus, the two matters that cause man to sin are the overestimation of the self, and the overestimation of his activities. Recognizing his existence was not given to his current self but to a one-celled entity breaks down his ego. And accepting that his end is the grave breaks down the importance attributed to his activities. What good is all the money earned if it ends? It is a fantasy to believe one will be here forever.

The Talmud says that one who leaves over something for his child is a fool. Why? “In the grave, who will tell man his praise?” Man fantasizes that he will somehow enjoy the praise of his children after he dies. But this is not so. Politi-

cians too succumb to this imagined good, as they labor to be a part of history, imagining that after death, this legacy somehow benefits them. You might be part of history, but the “you” won’t be there. It’s a fantasy to think otherwise. This explains why, when Reish Lakish died, he regretted leaving over some fruits. There was no reason for it: “... and they left to others their wealth (Psalms 49:11).” Having labored for what one did not consume is futile. Reish Lakish was a totally rational person.

Some doctors feel they are doing such important work, but what do they do with their lives after they heal someone? They waste their lives. There is only one important doctor: the doctor of the soul. Maimonides teaches that one who has a sickness of the soul [poor ideas] must visit the wise men, the chochamim. Teaching someone ideas is the true method of benefitting a person.

Again, man might attribute importance to himself if he is needed by society. However, the breakdown is “who needs society?” It’s a fantasy. The overestimation of the self comes from an unconscious source. A person feels he is great for some unknown reason, and with no connection with one’s activities. The rabbis stated, “For me was the world created” (San. 37a). Most understand this egotistically, but it must be understood properly. This means man possesses an inherent sense of ego, for no other reason.

Man senses this whenever the opportunity presents itself. You will never have a problem convincing someone that he is great. The Rabbis say, "...man should very much be of humble spirit (Avos 4:4)."

The rabbis tell us is that the over-importance that man attributes to his activities makes sense under one condition: if man were to live forever. Once this premise is removed, man's pursuits do not make any sense. Yet people have a way of ignoring this premise. It is man's ability to suppress mortality that enables him to proceed in his path where he imagines there to be some benefit in all his labors. Therefore, the rabbis say that "man should consider three matters, and he will not come to sin."

How then did others use Mahalalel's formula to endorse the philosophy of "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die?" The answer is that this philosophy does not suggest a life where one faces the specter of death. Rather, it recommends that man neglects the reality of death. For man cannot enjoy a party if he truly believes he will die the next day. He must first deny his mortality. But Mahalalel says the opposite: to remove oneself from sinning, he must always live in reality. Accepting mortality is essential to living in reality, thereby exposing human activities of their short-term natures. Man will then reject "eating and drinking" as his philosophy.

“AND BEFORE WHOM ARE YOU DESTINED TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT AND A RECKONING? BEFORE THE KING OF KINGS, THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE.”

What is the concept of “giving an account and a reckoning?” And why “Before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He?” Why not simply “before God?”

If man follows the first two recommendations, he will knock out his two drives of ego and ambition, leaving him with nothing. He will become depressed. Therefore, Mahalalel gave a third prescription. These two emotions of ego and ambition are in fact important; they do have a place. But their place is only in the world of the soul, not in the physical world. In the physical world, ego is baseless since one's existence was given to a simple one-celled entity. But in the world of the soul, man does have importance: man will be “Before the King of kings, the Holy One.” Man will have an eternal relationship with God. That is real, and that is important. “Giving an account and a reckoning” means that all man's acts have an eternal effect in the next world. This is of value to the one who lives in reality following Mahalalel's prescription. Such a person will find true ego satisfaction and ambition. God designed man with these capacities so that man would apply them to the proper philosophy and find satisfaction in this proper application.

And with this formula, man will not sin.

Reviewing the opening of Mahalalel's words, we wonder why he changes his verbs. He first says "consider" three things, and you will not come to sin. But then he changes it to "know" from where you came.

There are two types of knowledge. First, a person notices something; he obtains some idea. But his complete personality doesn't yet follow that idea. He can reflect at a certain moment; he can see the idea. That is the meaning of "consider" or "looking at it." To "know" refers to one whose whole being is in line with that knowledge.

Mahalalel is outlining a formula for perfection. There are two stages. Man starts "looking" at an idea. But then he realizes its truth, and his whole being agrees and follows that truth in action. From "considering" to "knowing" is a long trip. But if one makes that trip, he will not come to sin.

3:2 LOVE FOR MAN, GOD & TORAH

RABBI CHANINA, THE DEPUTY HIGH PRIEST, SAYS: “PRAY FOR THE WELFARE OF THE GOVERNMENT, FOR WERE IT NOT FOR THE FEAR OF IT, MAN WOULD SWALLOW HIS FELLOW ALIVE.” RABBI CHANANYA BEN TERADYON SAYS: “TWO WHO ARE SITTING TOGETHER AND THERE ARE NO WORDS OF TORAH [SPOKEN] BETWEEN THEM, THIS IS A SESSION OF SCORNERS, AS IT IS SAID (PSALMS 1:1): ‘HAPPY IS THE MAN WHO HAS... NOT SAT IN THE SESSION OF THE SCORNERS.’ BUT [IF THERE ARE] TWO WHO ARE SITTING TOGETHER AND THERE ARE WORDS OF TORAH [SPOKEN] BETWEEN THEM, THE DIVINE PRESENCE RESTS WITH THEM, AS IT IS SAID (MALACHI 3:16): ‘THEN THOSE WHO FEARED THE LORD SPOKE ONE WITH ANOTHER, AND THE LORD HEARKENED AND HEARD, AND A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE WAS WRITTEN BEFORE HIM, FOR THOSE WHO FEARED THE LORD AND FOR THOSE WHO THOUGHT UPON HIS NAME.’ I HAVE NO [SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR THIS] EXCEPT [IN A CASE OF] TWO. FROM WHERE [IS THERE PROOF] THAT EVEN [WHEN THERE IS ONLY] ONE [PERSON STUDYING TORAH], THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE, DETERMINES A REWARD FOR HIM? AS IT IS SAID (LAMENTATIONS 3:28): ‘SIT ALONE AND REMAIN SILENT, YOU WILL TAKE [A REWARD] FOR IT.’”

Rabbi Chanina teaches three important psychological principles. First: man is inherently evil—“man would swallow up another [man].” Second: man is unaware of this drive. Third: man misappropriates why he acts this way.

This is why it is difficult to correct a person, for he does not agree with the cause of his actions.

One psychological experiment proves this last point. A subject was hypnotized and instructed to stand on his head at a certain time of day, and then to forget about it. The subject followed the hypnotic suggestion. He was then asked why he did that. He gave some crazy reason, like “I wanted to make people smile,” or “I wanted to scratch my head.” He fabricated some reason because man must always rationalize his actions. Similarly, a person will act properly but he does not know why. He may do so out of fear of the government, but he doesn’t consciously think this. So he gives another reason. Since man is unaware of his motives, it is quite difficult to correct him. To change one’s actions, one must first recognize his true motives. The true greatness of man is his honesty with his emotions. This is very difficult for man as it is against part of his nature.

While it is true that these three psychological truths can be deduced from Rabbi Chanina’s words, what is the essence of his message to pray for the welfare of government? Rashi and Rabbeinu Yonah agree: a person must be concerned about the government, not only his own government, but all governments. Rashi states that the seventy cows sacrificed on Succos are offered on behalf of all nations. The Talmud says if the nations knew the Jews prayed for their

welfare and how good the Temple was for them, they would have surrounded it with legions to protect it. Man must be concerned not only for himself, but for all peoples. It is a lack in man if he does not have this concern. Why is this so? The reason is that true love of God dictates that man loves all people. Each individual is a reflection of God. God desires that each person exists. Our love of that person is a love for God's will. It is not a personal attachment to a stranger. It is a philosophical view, and it is expressed through praying for all peoples. God reprimanded the angels: "You wish to sing while my creations [Egyptians] are drowning in the sea?" This is the same message. Praying for all peoples is man's expressed desire for the ultimate perfection of God's plan. Regarding visiting a gentile who is ill, Maimonides quotes the verse "And His mercies are on all His works." Maimonides says we visit a gentile due to "darchei shalom," paths of peace. Maimonides does not mean we do this out of fear of repercussion. He says that darchei shalom is actually the "ways of God; derech Hashem." This extends beyond man to all living things, explaining the law prohibiting inflicting pain on animals.

We must qualify for whom we pray. We do not pray for the wicked; not even to repent. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explained two words: *chotim* and *chata'im*. The former refers to one who performs a sin. The latter refers to one whose

very essence is sin. To pray for one too far gone like a Nazi, or Hitler, cursed be his name, is a vain prayer. One should pray that he be destroyed. In Aleinu we recite, "... and cause to pass evil rulership from Earth." Those who went so far and are inherently evil, must be destroyed. Also, "Pour out Your wrath on the nations who do not know you" (Psalms 79:6). But for sinners (chotim) which we all are, one should pray that he repents.

Rabbi Soloveitchik said that praying for the government is the lesser of two evils. You might think that since government officials are selfish, they do not deserve our prayers. And it is true that politicians have base motives. But one must live as a wise man, as a chocham. Man is better off with government than without it. For without a system of law, "man would swallow up his friend." Rabbi Yisrael Salanter proved this from the fact that heads of state do not keep the law. Those below them have superiors, but the heads have none above them to fear.

RABBI CHANANYA BEN TERADYON SAYS: "TWO WHO ARE SITTING TOGETHER AND THERE ARE NO WORDS OF TORAH [SPOKEN] BETWEEN THEM, THIS IS A SESSION OF SCORNERS, AS IT IS SAID (PSALMS 1:1): 'HAPPY IS THE MAN WHO HAS...NOT SAT IN THE SESSION OF THE SCORNERS.'"

Why is this limited to only two? Why not ten or twenty? This means that even two people uninvolved in Torah must be considered a session of scorners.

Maimonides has an interesting comment:

I see from the end of the verse that a “session of scorners” refers to any session [gathering] that does not speak words of Torah, for it says “For in God’s Torah is his desire, etc.” This is to say, since his desire is God’s Torah, he does not sit with a session of scorners that has not in it God’s Torah.”

Maimonides means to say that it’s either/or. Either a group is involved in Torah, or it is a session of scorners. Psalms 1:1,2 reads, “Happy is the man that has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the session of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord....” This means that he did not sit in a session of scorners since it was not involved in God’s Torah. Once you are devoid of Torah, you are considered a session of scorners.

But what does this mean philosophically? It doesn’t simply refer to two people in close proximity—there must be a relationship. They are involved in sin. What then is the unique phenomenon when people sin in a group, and not alone?

A collective act of sin lends more importance to that activity. This importance is the worst element of the sin. It is not simply that a sin occurred, but the sinners' value system was degenerated. By sinning alone, one does not objectify the activity. This explains why the Nazis could commit such crimes and not feel remorse. "Everybody is doing it." When others sin along with me it justifies my sin. A session of scorners lends value to the sin. The evil is that one destroys his value system.

The reason this is an either/or phenomenon is because man must attach value to one thing or another. There is no in between. Man does not operate in a neutral state.

"BUT TWO WHO ARE SITTING TOGETHER AND THERE ARE WORDS OF TORAH [SPOKEN] BETWEEN THEM, THE DIVINE PRESENCE RESTS WITH THEM, AS IT IS SAID (MALACHI 3:16): 'THEN THOSE WHO FEARED THE LORD SPOKE ONE WITH ANOTHER, AND THE LORD HEARKENED AND HEARD, AND A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE WAS WRITTEN BEFORE HIM, FOR THOSE WHO FEARED THE LORD AND FOR THOSE WHO THOUGHT UPON HIS NAME.'"

Let us first examine Malachi's words, they are quite interesting:

*Your words have been all too strong
against Me, said the Lord. Yet you say,*

*“Wherein have we spoken against you?”
You have said, “It is vain to serve God;
and what profit is it that we have kept His
charge, and that we have walked humbly
before the Lord of hosts? And now we call
the evildoers happy; yea, they that work
wickedness are built up; yea, they test God,
and are delivered” (Malachi 3:13-15).*

What is this dialogue? Do these people not know what they said against God, that God needed to repeat their words, “You say, ‘Wherein have we spoken against you?’” Are the people’s arguments against God a denial?

When God says, the people spoke against Him, it means they spoke that which was not true. If one speaks that which is true concerning God, then that is reality, and not “against” Him. The opinion of the people is that in worshipping God, there is nothing to be gained, for the evildoers find great success, and we are serving them. Additionally, these evildoers defy God without experiencing repercussion. Therefore, the opinion of the people is not “against God,” since they are speaking factually. However, God disagrees and claims the people did in fact speak against Him.

THEN THOSE WHO FEARED THE LORD SPOKE ONE WITH ANOTHER, AND THE LORD HEARKENED AND HEARD, AND A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE WAS WRITTEN BEFORE HIM, FOR THEM THAT FEARED THE LORD, AND THAT THOUGHT UPON HIS NAME.

What did those people fearful of God say? The verse doesn't say a word. What did God write? Pirkei Avos provides the answer: they spoke Torah:

BUT TWO WHO ARE SITTING TOGETHER AND THERE ARE WORDS OF TORAH [SPOKEN] BETWEEN THEM, THE DIVINE PRESENCE RESTS WITH THEM, AS IT IS SAID (MALACHI 3:16): "THEN THOSE WHO FEARED THE LORD SPOKE ONE WITH ANOTHER..."

Those who rebelled against God followed the philosophy that subjugation to God should be met with worldly success. Their love of God depended on God's implementation of world justice. Therefore, when evildoers succeeded, they abandoned God. But those who feared God do so not based on political considerations: who is successful is irrelevant. These people followed God out of a love for Torah. God is the source of all wisdom. Their love of God was based solely on that reality. To these people, it is an impossibility not to love God. One's love of God is unaffected by politics, for this does not affect one's love of

God's wisdom. Malachi reveals that at that moment when the rebellious people complained against God, those who feared God continued learning Torah.

We notice too that the word used describing the people speaking Torah is not *dibru*, but *nidbiru*, meaning they automatically spoke Torah. Politics did not affect their natural disposition of loving God's wisdom; their Torah discussions were a natural response. Their love of wisdom went unaffected by the complaints of others. The verse also states these God-fearing people "thought upon His name." Ibn Ezra comments on this phrase: "They are wise-hearted people, knowledgeable of the principle of God, the awesome and honored [One]." Their relationship to God is related to His essence, not His actions. They do not love God based on their success, but because He is the source of wisdom.

As these God-fearing people spoke Torah, God responded:

AND THE LORD HEARKENED AND HEARD, AND
A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE WAS WRITTEN BE-
FORE HIM.

This means that in this activity alone, one relates to God. When these people spoke in Torah, God "listening" means [metaphorically] they were now relating to God.

Maimonides comments on the difference between one or two people learning Torah. Two people are “written in a book of remembrance,” but this does not apply to one person who learns. Of course, one person learning is involved in the correct activity. This is due to the two levels of thought. One level is when a person is working on the ideas. But this level of thought is not yet worthy of being written (*nitan l’kasave*), his thoughts are not crystallized and worked through completely. This occurs only through *arichas sifasayim* and *pilpul chaverim*, elongated discussion and hashing out ideas with friends.

3:3 MAN IS AN IDOL

RABBI SHIMON SAYS: “THREE WHO ATE AT ONE TABLE AND DID NOT OFFER WORDS OF TORAH, IT IS AS IF THEY ATE FROM THE OFFERINGS OF THE DEAD, AS IT SAYS (ISAIAH 28:8), ‘FOR ALL OF THE TABLES ARE FULL OF VOMIT AND FECES WITHOUT [EMPTY] SPACE.’ HOWEVER, THREE WHO ATE AT ONE TABLE AND OFFERED WORDS OF TORAH, IT IS AS IF THEY ATE FROM THE TABLE OF THE OMNIPRESENT, BLESSED BE HE, AS IT SAYS (EZEKIEL 41:22), ‘AND HE SAID

TO ME, THIS IS THE TABLE THAT IS BEFORE
THE LORD.”

The teachings of Pirkei Avos are not limited to philosophical principles alone, but they also extend to the application of those principles. Chazal held that knowledge of abstract philosophical principles is insufficient; perfection demands that one grasps their application.

Idolatry is always referred to as “disgusting.” There is a psychological and philosophical disgust. The Hebrew word to’eivah does not refer to a psychological disgust, but to a philosophical disgust. It refers to that which is so distant from reality that a person who is in tune with reality finds it abominable. However, one must function on a high level to sense that repulsion. The greatest proof that to’eivah does not refer to a psychological repulsion is from idolatry itself, which contains nothing psychologically repulsive. Yet, the Torah refers to it as to’eivah.

When a person functions on a high level of perfection, his emotions relate to reality differently from others. For example, shame is sensed when one performs an act that others condemn. This is a psychological shame. But there is a philosophical shame as well. When one performs tes-huvah, he says “I am embarrassed by my actions.” A higher-level person who recognizes his sin, and his distance

from reality because of his sin, senses shame before God. His emotions relate to the philosophical realm.

... ALL OF THE TABLES ARE FULL OF VOMIT
AND FECES WITHOUT [EMPTY] SPACE.

The plain explanation of this verse is that there is no space on the table that is free of vomit and feces. What is so intolerable about three people who ate without speaking words of Torah? And what is the equation to idolatry [offerings to the dead]? Furthermore, why is this corruption present only among three people who dine, but not two or one? If the sin is overindulging in physical desires, one person performing this act should be considered equally evil.

Rashi comments: “People are accustomed to satisfy this requirement (of speaking words of Torah) through reciting the Birchas Hamazon.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

They are eating and drinking and enjoying, [but] the mention of Torah does not arise within their hearts: Woe to them and woe to their enjoyment.

This is hedonism, but where does this cross over into idolatry? It would appear that these three people did not

simply enjoy a small bite together but engaged in a long sumptuous meal. Furthermore, the condemnation does not apply to one or two people who dine without discussing Torah. [The number three is somehow significant.]

Man finds himself in two worlds: a psychological reality [the inner emotional world and interpersonal relationships], and the world of God's reality [intelligence: observing and studying the external world, i.e., the universe and the Torah], which is completely removed from the first world. A person studying the universe or a Talmudic portion is outside the world of psychological reality. He [functions] in the world of absolute reality, i.e., the universe and God's wisdom. The essence of Koheles is a definition and a description of precisely how man relates to these two worlds.

Man is strongly rooted in psychological reality: "...Man's heart is evil from youth..." (Gen. 8:21). In psychological reality, there is a very powerful emotion whose objective is idolatry; that is this emotion's grossest expression. What is the world of idolatry? Essentially, it is the drive for security. Man recognizes that he can be destroyed—he has recollections of people [who died or] who were killed—and this generates insecurity. Man feels driven to protect himself from his mortality. Idolatry is motivated by this fear. Man then attempts in the present to recreate instances from his youth where he felt security from this fear. These typically

include his parents, who offered his infantile mind a sense of security. Idolatry is an attempt to recreate those feelings of security.

Analyzing idolatrous practices reveals that they are representations of one's youth. Isaiah describes how idolatrous forms aim to represent man [parents]:

The craftsman measures in wood 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).

The idolater crafts an idol, and underlying that image, he seeks the security of man, of people. Primitive idolatry had a more elaborate system, but modern man finds his security is in man. This explains the many Torah verses such as, “Do not trust in nobles, in the sons of men in whom there is no salvation” (Psalms 146:3); “... Cursed is he who trusts in man, who makes mere flesh his strength...” (Jer. 17:5); and “Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord...” (Jer. 17:7).

The essence of tefilah is the removal from this trust in man and from the dependency on him. As stated, if one visits his friend before he davens in the morning, he relates to man as an idol. “Cease from [glorifying] man, who has breath in his nostrils! For by what (bameh) is he

esteemed?” (Isaiah 2:22). The rabbis said, “Do not read ‘bameh’ (by what is he esteemed), but read ‘bammah’ (an altar is he).” [The rabbis teach this very idea, that man looks to others for security, just as he does when performing idolatry.] From these verses, we learn that man’s psychological impulse for security leads him to people. This explains why people are by nature so gregarious. Socializing isn’t merely functional, but it provides one with a feeling of security. Man’s earliest feelings of security were derived from his parents and therefore he attempts to quell his insecurities with those initial feelings of parental protection. Psychologically speaking, in one’s mind, society takes the place of the parent. This explains why man is most elated through public acclaim.

The security man seeks has many forms. Eating with others shapes man’s identity:

You must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for [the Jews] will lust after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices. And when you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters will lust after their gods and will cause your sons to lust after their gods. (Exod. 34:15, 16).

We also see how others take offense at one's refusal to accept an invitation to eat with them at their homes, due to a lack of kashrus. Although this type of rejection is not personal, the rejected friend is personally offended. He feels that the one who rejected him cannot identify with him, which he desires as a means for his own security. In business dealings too, partners eat and drink together to foster greater identification. Therefore, Judaism prohibits our identification with idolaters by prohibiting eating and drinking with them. All of this traces back to the attachment to man, which is also the appeal of Christianity, a religion about the man Jesus. Succumbing to this level of attachment to man is evil in the eyes of Judaism.

Abraham taught the world a new idea that even today finds opposition: ignorance is synonymous with evil. No one before had ever taught this, and even today, no one believes this. Today, the world values a person who is a "nice guy." The world's idea of good versus evil is nice versus mean. Abraham taught that ignorance must be despised to the same degree that one despises evil. Maimonides says that it is a mitzvah to destroy and hate those that do not have knowledge of, or reject Judaism's Thirteen Principles. Why? What did that person do? We learn from here that Judaism views ignorance as evil.

Returning to our mishnah, there is a different psychologi-

cal phenomenon in a group versus an individual. Gathering together to eat and drink is idolatrous. Rabbeinu Yona says, “Three [dining together] is considered a group, and they recite Birchas Hamazon, and one must not join them without offering words of Torah.” Three people is a different phenomenon from two people. When one seeks security, he does not seek only one other person [to justify his actions or views]. This explains why our mishnah says that three people who convene to dine together is where the psychological need is satisfied to the highest level.

[On the verse “Also, if one attacks, two can stand up to him; a threefold cord is not readily broken” (Koheles 4:12), Rabbi Chait commented: “When two people learn together, the dynamic is ‘my idea versus your idea.’” The phenomenon of two people is two individuals; each person’s individuality is retained. But in a group of three people or more, the individual’s identity is removed and the group now attains a new level of objectivity, authority, and true value. This is what a person desires through dining with many others: to gain credibility for his lifestyle and views through the acceptance afforded to him by eating and talking in a group.]

Without words of Torah spoken, such a gathering is a purely emotional experience to enjoy the company of man. Such participants are equated to those who worship idols.

All things are wearisome, no man can ever state them; the eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear enough of hearing” (Kohel 1:8).

People do not speak for expediency, but because it satisfies their need to relate to others. People may speak about business or other matters, but the content is not the focus, rather their speech is for human interaction. What they discuss is irrelevant; what they want is to engage man. The term “wearisome” in this verse is used because the underlying desire cannot be satisfied in this expression.

How does Judaism address this problem? It instituted Birchas Hamazon. This blessing raises one’s level when he eats. He is reminded that he gained sustenance, which ultimately comes from God. One does not fulfill his obligation to recite this blessing if he omits bris and Torah. This is because the purpose of this blessing is to elevate a mundane act and place it in proper perspective: one’s purpose is to study Torah. Without mentioning the study of Torah in Birchas Hamazon, there is no Birchas Hamazon.

The land of Israel is also mentioned in this blessing, for as one enjoys the Earth’s produce, he must recognize the laws that are relegated to the land of Israel.

When this blessing is recited by three people, it attains a new level of zimun: “Exalt the Lord with me; let us extol

His name together” (Psalms 34:4). [Zimun is derived from this verse (Brachos 45a).] Here, there is a psychological phenomenon that is added to the dining situation. With three people, a totally different framework is required for one’s relationship with God. One must not find satisfaction in man, but in God, for He alone is the true source of security. [Zimun addresses this.] In a group of three people or more, when one person recites Birchas Hamazon and the others listen, this is not a case of shomaya k’oneh, listening [in place of recital] to fulfill one’s obligation. This is a new phenomenon, as a group of three or more demands a new relationship to God. [In addition to Birchas Hamazon, zimun offers additional praises to God. As the group phenomenon lends itself to man satisfying his security with man, this must be averted. Man’s security must be redirected toward God. Zimun addresses this crucial need.] When Rashi says that people are accustomed to exempt themselves with Birchas Hamazon, he means that zimun functions precisely to counteract the psychological dynamics of the group. [Rashi is making a positive statement about why people recite Birchas Hamazon/zimun.]

“HOWEVER, THREE WHO ATE AT ONE TABLE AND OFFERED WORDS OF TORAH, IT IS AS IF THEY ATE FROM THE TABLE OF THE OMNI-PRESENT, BLESSED BE HE, AS IT SAYS (EZEKIEL 41:22), ‘AND HE SAID TO ME, THIS IS THE TABLE THAT IS BEFORE THE LORD.’”

Why doesn't this say [the inverse] that these three people are “as those who don't eat sacrifices to idolatry?” How did this group excel to “eating from God's table?” Are they not still joining in a group for psychological reasons?

The purpose of Torah is not that man denies his human emotions, but that he utilizes his emotions properly. “God does not deal despotically with His creatures” (Avodah Zara 3a). “Her [Torah's] ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths, peaceful” (Prov. 3:17). God does not violate human nature; He desires that man use his nature properly and not reject it. Therefore, we get together with others and enjoy their company. But while experiencing an enjoyable psychological state, we recognize this state as a basis for involving ourselves in the higher part of our nature—our intellect—and pursue God's wisdom. Thus, “Three who ate and offered words of Torah are as if they ate from God's table.” This means that God prepared this table: God gave man the food and friendship through which man is to pursue God's wisdom. The food and company enable man to achieve the proper state of mind where he can use his

higher element, his tzelem Elohim [intellect].

When we say that three people must talk about Torah, it is not that they should offer a brief idea to fulfill an obligation. It means that Torah is their dominant conversation. A person is not initially drawn to Torah; at first, he is drawn to instinctual matters. But, once a person engages in Torah, the meal loses its focus for there is nothing that draws a person like the enjoyment of Torah wisdom. This is how a human being is constructed [to enjoy Torah wisdom over all else.] This mishnah is Judaism's philosophy in action.

Can one fulfill this obligation by discussing biology or other sciences? No, because according to Judaism, knowledge that excludes God is banal enjoyment, an entertainment like any other. Thus, someone like Maimonides, who appreciated the relationship between scientific knowledge and how it fits into God's framework, would fulfill this obligation by discussing science. But to discuss a point in math unrelated to God, one does not fulfill this obligation. Maimonides and Chazal agree that all areas of wisdom are included under what we refer to as Torah, but not for everybody. One must be a metaphysician to understand how certain wisdom ties into God. But if one does not see how that wisdom reflects God [i.e., if that wisdom does not imbue man with an appreciation for the Source of that wisdom], then it is no different from appreciating chess.

It is notable that before Albert Einstein died, he left an order that his office be used by the next scientist in line [for that office.] It was despicable to him that his office might become a shrine. For a person like Einstein who grasps reality, human worship is despicable and intolerable. If you can sense that emotion, you can understand what Chazal mean by sacrifices to the dead.

The only time we consider something idolatry is when the emotion reaches a form of fulfillment. This is when one cannot remove himself from it. The social situation offers a high level of fulfillment, and in this state, one cannot disengage. Eating with one other person does not reach this level of fulfillment.

The highest level of perfection is when one removes himself 100 percent from emotions that are associated with one's early childhood attachments. This is expressed in "Go from your land, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house..." (Gen. 12:1). Chazal say that Abraham received a reward for every word : he broke his emotional tie to his land, to his birth place, and to this father's house. Chazal also say that there are three psychological reasons that man is attached to something for no [apparent] reason: people have an affinity for where they live, even if it is in the most remote location. Man also imbues his birth place with the importance (narcissism), and one is attached

to his father's home. Man attains the highest level when he removes these emotional attachments and relates those emotions to God. This was the command that God gave to Abraham.

3:4 DENIAL OF REALITY

RABBI CHANANYA BEN CHAKHINAI SAYS: "ONE WHO IS AWAKE AT NIGHT, AND ONE WHO TRAVELS ON A ROAD ALONE, AND ONE WHO TURNS HIS HEART TO IDLENESS (ENTERTAINMENT), SUCH A ONE IS LIABLE FOR [FORFEITURE OF] HIS LIFE."

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Since they are desirable times, he should only think during them about things that are desirable before God, may He be blessed. And those [things] are words of Torah. How grand and desirable are these times for thinking about Torah, since he has no work to do and does not hear the voices of [other] people.

And one who turns his heart to idleness, such a one is liable for [forfeiture of] his life: As he wastes time in which he could have clear and correct thought, and diverts it from thoughts of Torah.

Maimonides also discusses the benefits of learning at night (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:13). Nighttime is a psychological phenomenon: “To proclaim Your steadfast love at daybreak, Your faithfulness each night” (Psalms 92:3). At night, there is a state of mind of being alone, which should be used to remove oneself from psychological reality and to engage in absolute reality: God and Torah. For at night, psychological reality is not prevalent [and this offers the added benefit that one can more readily advance his mindset into absolute reality.] As Rabbeinu Yona says, “One does not hear the voices of others.” The night is when one is most removed from psychological reality.

If one forfeits using this precious time properly, he is liable with his life. This is because he violates his very purpose: to be in that state of absolute reality. At night, when God offers man the opportunity to step right into absolute reality, and instead, he engages in fantasy and entertainment, he forfeits his entire purpose as a tzelem Elohim, an intellectual being.

Thus, this mishnah is a continuation of the previous

mishnah, which discussed perfection in the social situation, while this mishnah discusses perfection in isolation.

AND ONE WHO TURNS HIS HEART TO IDLENESS.

This statement refers either to one engaged in fantasy or to one acting out those fantasies.

What is the connection between the three items in this mishnah? People find difficulty in relating to reality that does not exist in their framework. Insofar as one is removed from reality, that is the greatness of their imperfection. Our mishnah identifies three types of negating reality, which are tantamount to forfeiting one's life.

Chazal say that the night has only two purposes: sleep and Torah study. One who remains awake at night does not take his daily obligations seriously. He forfeits the rest that he needs to perform optimally. The reality of tomorrow isn't all that real to him. Thus, the one who remains awake at night is merely an example of one who can negate responsibility. We must distinguish between controlled escapes from reality—such as sleep, where one withdraws for purposeful reasons like rejuvenating his energies—and the one who stays awake at night and ignores reality. This latter escape dooms one to failure. Our mishnah gives the most grotesque example when one can deny the most im-

minent reality: tomorrow. But people can also deny more protracted times, like one month or one year from the present in order to cater to their current fantasies.

Maimonides refers to the chocham as one who obtains work, followed by getting a home, and then marriage. He follows a rationally ordered plan. In contrast, a fool marries first, then buys a house, and then, at the end of his days, he seeks a job. This personality too can negate reality.

One who travels alone is another type of person who denies reality. In this case, his denial regards his physical life. Somehow or another he feels he will escape death. In Chazal's times, travel was very dangerous because there were wild animals, but worse, there were highwaymen. [who ambushed those who traveled alone or in small groups]. This is why we have the prayer of Tefilas Haderech. Maimonides says that one who returned from a journey was exempt from tefilah for three days due to the ordeal he suffered, resulting in a frayed state of mind. [The Rav held that today's traveler encounters no danger, thereby removing the need to recite Tefilas Haderech.]

Even great people can be subjected to denying reality, in addition to other occupational hazards such as egomania, which doctors suffer from more than others do. [They sense peoples' great dependence upon them for their very lives, generating in doctors a feeling of power.]

“One who turns his heart to idleness,” refers to one who denies the passing of time and wastes his time. This person postpones his structure and his schedule for Torah study: time is not a reality to him; time is not passing.

Chazal identify three expressions of the denial of reality through which one forfeits his life. One awake at night denies the quality of his life. One who travels alone denies the risk of his physical life. And the third—one who returns his heart to idleness —denies the reality of the life of his soul.

3:5 THE LIFE OF TORAH STUDY

RABBI NECHUNYA BEN HAKANAH SAYS: “ANYONE WHO ACCEPTS THE YOKE OF TORAH UPON HIMSELF, THEY LIFT FROM HIM THE YOKE OF GOVERNMENT AND THE YOKE OF THE WAY OF THE WORLD (DERECH ERETZ/BUSINESS). AND ANYONE WHO CASTS FROM HIMSELF THE YOKE OF TORAH, THEY PLACE UPON HIM THE YOKE OF GOVERNMENT AND THE YOKE OF THE WAY OF THE WORLD.”

Maimonides says, “Because man accepted upon himself the yoke of Torah, God will save him and remove from him all the burdens of daily life.” This is like the statement of the gemara (Brachos 35b) “And you will gather your grain” (Deut. 11:14). The Jews gathering in their own grain refers to them not performing God’s will. But if the Jews perform God’s will, “Their work will be performed by others,” as the gemara says. This does not give one license to sit and learn and have others support him. Rather, this means that God will remove man’s burden. [He must engage in work but God will lighten his load so he may pursue Torah study.]

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Since this person arranged his life where his Torah study is primary and his work is peripheral, God will guard him from any evil in order that he does not need to abandon his Torah study. God will ensure that he will not be chosen to pay a labor tax and he won't need to perform as much labor to provide for himself. With minimal work, he will be able to support himself. And the work of a tzaddik is blessed and his soul is happy with his lot.

And anyone who casts from himself the yoke of Torah, they place upon him the yoke of government: Since he thinks that if he leaves the work of Torah he will do a lot

of work, God, may He be blessed, annuls his thought and puts into the heart of the king to take him to do work for him, since (Proverbs 21:1), "Like channeled water is the heart of the king in the Lord's hand; He directs it to whatever He wishes."

As he wanders and strains for his livelihood, he cannot find it. Even when he finds it, he is not glad with his portion; and all of his days he exerts himself in vain to get rich and to add wealth to his wealth. And [it is] like the matter that is stated (Ecclesiastes 5:9), "A lover of money never has his fill of money." And it comes out that all of his days are spent in toil and exertion, and he will never have rest forever and ever.

Chazal appear to be straddling two different areas. Rabbeinu Yona says that one who makes Torah his life's essence finds greater satisfaction in his lot than others find in their lot. Why is this so? The error people make regarding a materialistic lifestyle is their assumption that the quantity of their possessions provides happiness. In truth, happiness is determined not by the quantity of possessions, but by how much enjoyment one derives from his lot, be it large or small. Although he has less, the tzaddik derives greater enjoyment from his few possessions than does the wealthy person who does not live the life of a tzaddik. But

how does this relate to the idea that God will assist such a tzaddik?

Rabbeinu Yona teaches that one whose essential activity is Torah study views life differently. [He values Torah more than materialism, so he does not pursue materialism for more than his basic needs.] Therefore, he can work less, and he also enjoys his possessions more than others do.

... THEY LIFT FROM HIM THE YOKE OF GOVERNMENT AND THE YOKE OF THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

This means that others are involved in working all day and experience many burdens from their imperfections. But the perfected person relates to work as a necessary part of life that he must address, but he does not have the burden of accomplishment. In other words, the tzaddik does not live a life of fantasy as others live today [i.e., the fantasy of becoming the president of a corporation, or the fantasy of being viewed as a wealthy man, which demands purchasing expensive homes and automobiles. All such fantasies do not allow the person any free time from work.] The tzaddik is involved in necessities—not in fantasies. Thus, for others, there exists a yoke that the tzaddik naturally eliminates due to his minimal needs. Maimonides says that the masses have many calculations (*cheshbonos harbeh*).

These fantasies burden their minds, while one who seeks Torah has a simplified life and does not have these burdens.

The concept of a yoke refers to the fact that man cannot live without some sense of accomplishment. That is why with the removal of one yoke, man takes upon himself the other yoke. The person who is driven to work and breaks off from himself the yoke of Torah, by definition, is bothered by the yoke of government and business, which means extraneous burdens. The reason for this is because when one pursues a life of business, he seeks a life of unrelenting labor. That is the definition of labor: it is not a life of rest. Thereby, extraneous burdens are disturbing, as they interrupt man's labor. Thus, he has difficulty relating to the yoke of government. [It is an interruption.] But the perfected person views his obligations to the government realistically. He accepts the need to serve the king (i.e., jury duty) without the sense of a burden. It all depends upon one's attitude. A perfected person takes everything in stride. But the person who is in hot pursuit of his labors or any involvement feels frustrated when he must undertake obligations to the government.

We must clarify the meaning of yoke. In the emotional sense, an animal or a person is guided by that which it seeks to resist. But when one is guided by the yoke of Torah, it is a different phenomenon. Functionally speaking, Torah is a

yoke, but it is not an emotional yoke. The gemara says that no one is free except for one who engages in Torah.

The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing, carved upon the tablets (Exod. 32:16).

The rabbis said, “Do not to read it as ‘carved’ (charuss) on the tablets, rather read ‘free’ (chayruss) on the tablets.” Thus, although the Torah is a functional yoke, it is not an emotional yoke, as we see that Chazal say that the Torah makes one free.

How does God come into the picture? Here, we come across Maimonides’ position on divine providence. Providence is natural, not as an extraneous intervention, but as the result of one’s relationship to the Source of wisdom. Providence follows the tracks of one’s life. This means that when one focuses his life not on work, but on the Torah’s wisdom, he alone has not reduced his involvement in worldly matters, but divine providence assists him to continue to reduce his time involved in work and in government even further. This is the meaning of “When the Jews perform God’s will, their work will be performed by others” (Brachos 35b). As mentioned, the gemara also teaches the following principle: “In the path that man desires to go in, they guide him” (Makkos 10b). Insofar as one lives in

accord with the philosophy of this mishnah and Chazal's statements, he relates to God on a higher level, and divine providence assists him in his life of Torah.

Maimonides expresses this in his *Laws of Shmitta and Yovel* (13:13):

Not only the tribe of Levi, but every human being who has entered into the world, that his spirit generously directs him and he understands from his own thinking to separate himself to stand before God, to minister to Him and to worship Him, to know God and to go upright as God created him, and he breaks off from his neck the yoke of calculations of the masses that people chase, this person is sanctified in the holy of holies and God will be his portion and his inheritance for eternity. And he will merit in this world provisions to sustain him just as the priests and Levites [are provided]. Behold, King David, peace be upon him, said, "The Lord is my allotted portion and my cup; You control my lot" (Psalms 16:5).

As wisdom is primary in God's world, one who engages in wisdom is not disturbed by physical considerations, for divine providence is the natural system that overrides the physical world. When one is close to the Source of wisdom, he will not suffer physical mishaps. "Many evils befall the

tzaddik, but God saves him from them all” (Psalms 34:20). Similarly, miracles assisted the Jews. Miracles are also different from providence, since miracles are the suspension of natural laws, whereas the divine providence assisting one who follows Torah is a natural phenomenon; it is the very design of the universe.

Maimonides says that divine providence usually operates in connection with man’s heart. “That night, sleep deserted the king and he ordered the book of records, the annals, to be brought; and it was read to the king” (Esther 6:1). [Here, King Achashverosh’s heart became God’s instrument of divine providence.] Providential actions upon man’s “heart” [his thoughts, such as the king’s thoughts] are not breaches in natural law [which is an external phenomenon operating in the physical universe. Here, God intervened through divine providence, affecting the king’s thoughts, but not his free will.]

We previously stated that the tzaddik greatly enjoys the little he has versus wealthier people’s dissatisfaction with their abundance. We must accept that we cannot fathom what [great] level of pleasure Rabbi Akiva derived from his studies. We enjoy an idea at certain times, but Rabbi Akiva was immersed in a totally different level of wisdom than we are; add to this his many years of that enjoyment. (Chazal say that he died at quite an old age.) The pleasure he experienced was unparalleled.

[At this point, Rabbi Chait digressed to address the Holocaust.]

THE HOLOCAUST

The Lord said to Moshe: "You are soon to lie with your fathers. This People will thereupon go astray after the alien gods in their midst, in the land that they are about to enter; they will forsake Me and break My covenant that I made with them. Then My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them. They shall be ready prey; and many evils and troubles shall befall them. And they shall say on that day, 'Surely it is because our God is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us.' Yet I will keep My countenance hidden on that day, because of all the evil they have done in turning to other gods. Therefore, write down this song and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this song may be My witness against the people of Israel. When I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey that I promised on oath to their fathers, and

they eat their fill and grow fat and turn to other gods and serve them, spurning Me and breaking My covenant, and the many evils and troubles befall them—then this song shall confront them as a witness, since it will never be lost from the mouths of their offspring. For I know what plans they are devising even now, before I bring them into the land that I promised on oath (Deut. 31:16-21).

The song is the parsha of Haazinu. Moshe tells the people as follows:

Gather to me all the elders of your tribes and your officials, that I may speak all these words to them and that I may call heaven and Earth to witness against them. For I know that, when I am dead, you will act wickedly and turn away from the path that I enjoined upon you, and that in time to come, misfortune will befall you for having done evil in the sight of the Lord and vexed Him with your deeds (Deut. 31:28,29).

Sforno comments:

I will mention that song for the purpose that when tragedies occur to you, you should not attribute them to chance. But

*you should attribute those tragedies to
your corruption and give heart to repent.*

This is followed by the song of Haazinu, which reveals many ideas and discusses Israel's history. And in reveii and chamishi the text mentions the tragedies again.

*How could one have chased a thousand, or
two put ten thousand to flight, unless their
Rock had sold them, the Lord had given
them up?" (Deut. 32:30).*

The downfall of the Jews will reflect divine providence, expressed in the previous verse. The song concludes with the redemption of the Jews.

Some people wish to suggest that these tragedies refer to the Holocaust. From the framework of history, I do not say this is impossible. The Holocaust is the greatest tragedy that ever befell the nation of Israel; there is no question about this. The Torah could quite possibly refer to the Holocaust—while Maimonides says, we have no definite knowledge in this area, this possibility is reasonable. After all, the Torah includes the tochahca (rebuke) at the end of parshas Vayikra, which refers to the destruction of the first Temple, and the curses in parshas Ki Savo refer to the

destruction of the second Temple. These were great tragedies, but the Holocaust was greater in terms of magnitude. So, it is certainly possible to say that the Torah refers to the Holocaust. But we do not know for certain for these are “hidden matters regarding the prophets.”

For those who wish to maintain that this Torah portion refers to the Holocaust, they must be consistent regarding the other verses that explain the cause for this tragedy:

This people will thereupon go astray after the alien gods in their midst, in the land that they are about to enter; they will forsake Me and break My covenant that I made with them.

Thus, one cannot attribute these verses to the Holocaust without attributing its cause to the Jewish nation’s sin of abandoning God. A Torah fundamental is that Israel’s tragedies are not chance occurrences, but they are divine punishments for Israel’s sins. Whether or not this part of the Torah refers to the Holocaust, the Holocaust happened because of the Jews’ sins. Throughout, the Torah is clear on this principle. If the Torah refers to the Holocaust, Haazinu is written so that the nation will at some point understand the sin that precipitated the Holocaust. That understanding and knowledge will raise the nation to a higher level, bring

them to teshuvah, and it will bring about the final stage of the Messianic Era.

I am not averse to saying that the Torah refers to the Holocaust. The problem is that people do not wish to recognize the truth. People feel that the Holocaust was a chance occurrence and not the result of the nation's sins, as God says throughout the Torah. Such a position is almost heretical.

Today, people find it difficult to maintain fault with the Jews of that era. One reason is that today's generation identifies with the Holocaust generation, and by blaming that generation for abandoning God, today's generation will be forced to admit their own sins. Another reason is that all a Holocaust victim has left is sympathy. And to condemn that generation is difficult as it removes that sympathy, which people feel they deserve. People feel such condemnation is insensitive. Therefore, we do not see such blame. But to conform to the Torah, we must understand why this tragedy occurred. We cannot deny abandonment of God as Torah's explanation for the Jews' punishments. Otherwise, one suggests that God is wrong and that the Jews suffered a tremendous punishment unjustly. That is impossible; the Torah is against such an idea. And as hard as it may be for us to accept this concept, we must accept the Torah's framework. We don't know what the sin was; we are not

great enough to understand it. We require great Jewish thinkers to uncover the sin of the Holocaust generation. But by denying the sin, we are saying that God is unjust and we deny His covenant with Israel.

The most popular justification for the Holocaust is that it was necessary for the creation of the state of Israel. But everyone would not consider that justice, that so many should die and suffer in order that others might enjoy the land of Israel. This violates any sense of justice. In the beginning of Haazinu, Moshe discusses God's justice:

The Rock!—His deeds are perfect, for all His ways are just; a faithful God, never false. Righteous and upright is He. Corruption is not His—the blemish is His children's, a perverse and twisted generation (Deut. 32:4, 5).

Moshe says that God is perfectly just and that any tragedy is the fault of the Jews. Therefore, to suggest that people should be destroyed and tortured so that others should receive Israel makes no sense and carries no justice whatsoever. The Torah clearly states this:

Fathers shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for fa-

*thers: a person shall be put to death only
for his own crime (Deut. 24:16).*

But since people are desperate for an answer to the Holocaust, they make this suggestion regarding Israel.

The Rav told a story about Rav Chaim regarding the pogroms of the 1880s. Someone told Rav Chaim that a terrible massacre occurred and that many people were killed. The person who told Rav Chaim then said, “If only we knew that this tragedy was a sign of Moshiach...” Rav Chaim replied, “Chas v’shalom, you are not allowed to say that. We would not forfeit even one Jewish life for Moshiach.” Nowhere in the Torah does it say that we sacrifice a Jewish life to usher in the Moshiach. It would not be permitted to do such a thing. Therefore, it violates the Torah to say that millions of Jewish lives were destroyed for the state of Israel to be created. That is plain viciousness. This opinion of the Holocaust is nonsensical and absurd.

WHY THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER

The righteous are punished for the generation's sins (Shabbos 33b).

There are a few reasons for this. First, the righteous are responsible for the sins of their generation since they are the leaders and assume responsibility. Second, oftentimes the righteous cannot escape the effects of the generation's sins. "The death of the righteous atones" (Moed Kattan 28a) means that their deaths affect the nation and generate their teshuvah. But it is not a Torah idea to suggest that a righteous person should be destroyed as an atonement for the generation. An innocent and righteous person is not killed as a scapegoat. The gemara says that many times a righteous person accomplishes more in his death than during his life.

How much did the Jews participate in their own destruction? How did they go as sheep to the slaughter?

And it came to pass that David was successful in all his ways, and the Lord was with him (I Samuel 18:14).

The derech of the Torah raises a person to a different plane. Whatever he does, he does with intelligence, sechel.

But using intelligence alone does not assure success. For even the greatest chocham is not in control of all variables. What is responsible for the chocham's success? "And the Lord was with him." His success is not solely his own doing. King David's enormous success could not be due to his own wisdom, but it was because God was with him. Similarly, Haazinu explains the downfall of the Jewish nation:

Were they wise, they would think upon this; they would gain insight into their future: How could one have chased a thousand, or two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, the Lord had given them up? (Deut. 32:29, 30).

When people stray from the Torah, there are two causes for the downfall. One cause is their poor actions—their sins—but more so, their sins evoke divine providence, where God punishes them. (Conversely, when one follows the Torah, divine providence assists one in his success.) Therefore, one cannot say "Had the Jews only done such and such, they would have been saved." [This statement denies divine providence, which intervenes to punish sinners.] The proper statement is, "Had the Jews followed the Torah, they would have been saved."

WHY THE TORAH CONCEALS THE END OF DAYS

Maimonides says that had people known the date of the Messianic Era and yearned for it, and if the day was far-off, those people might be lost. Again, if people knew that Moshiach was arriving this year, their fulfillment of the Torah would be on a low level and not on the level of fear. Therefore, the Messianic Era was concealed in the book of Daniel. Unfortunately, people seeking to influence the masses always refer to Moshiach.

Yaakov Avinu desired to share the end of days with his sons. This shows us that a great person is able to see the end of days. It takes a great chocham to see all the wisdom and knowledge of this era as is humanly possible. A wise man can describe certain ideas about the end of days. On his level, such ideas are not harmful for they fit into his entire scheme of knowledge. But these same ideas and facts are dangerous to others who are not on his level. This is what the incident in parshas Vayechi was about. Yaakov was on the level but his sons were not. He desired to reveal the end, but he was prevented.

WHY MOSHIACH IS ESSENTIAL

God will not allow any part of His creation to remain imperfect. In the Messianic Era, mankind will fall in line with the perfection of the universe.

[God] creates harmony in His heights (Job 25:2).

Job said that in the arrangements of the heavens there exists harmony. But due to free will, man lives in disharmony. But this disharmony is not eternal. There was a reason that it must exist temporarily.

He will create peace for us (Kaddish).

The reason one of God's names is Shalom (peace) is because He is the source of harmony.

THE ATTRACTION TO MOSHIACH

At the core of one's primitive attraction to Moshiach is the drive to satisfy one's innermost fantasies. This is

harmful, as this mindset is devoid of perfection. One is overcome by his drive toward an unconscious satisfaction and all his energies are captivated. His mind is locked into this state with no ability to direct any energies toward true love of God and that level of worship. But when one is in a state of fear of punishment, there exists enough rationality to grow out of that low level toward a state of worshipping God from love.

What is paramount in the philosophical idea of Moshiach? It is God's kingship. The primitive view of Moshiach is where one seeks personal benefit. But the proper value of Moshiach is that God's kingship is complete. The most prominent element of the Messianic Era is the sanctification of God's name:

*To Me every knee shall bend, every tongue
swear loyalty (Isaiah 45:23).*

If a person is attracted to this value, he is on the correct wavelength.

Maimonides' text of the Kaddish says, "Moshiach will sprout and draw near." Hearing this, we respond, "God's great name should be blessed eternally and to all eternity." The gemara says this is the greatest prayer. This is the sanctification of God's great name. Kaddish sets forth the proper idea of Moshiach, as Moshiach is to result from a

sanctification of God's name. The gemara says that one who offers the praise that God's name should be made great, is himself very great. The reason being that it is difficult to say this with all of one's energies. This is a philosophical principle requiring one to function on a high-level where he is concerned about God's kingship.

HOLOCAUST: WERE GEDOLEI TORAH WRONG?

This raises the issue of Daas Torah. Is one obligated to follow the opinions of the gedolim regarding political matters? "... Follow the majority" (Exod. 23:2) means that one must follow the ruling of the majority of the Sanhedrin. "You shall act in accordance with the instructions given to you and the ruling handed down to you; you must not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left" (Deut. 17:11).

There are two reasons to follow the Sanhedrin: they are right, or the Torah commands us to do so. The correct reason is the second answer. For even if we know that

the Sanhedrin is wrong, the halacha is that we must follow its rulings. On the verse, "...you must not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left," Chazal say, "Even if they tell us our right hand is our left hand, we must follow them." Meaning, although one knows with 100 percent certainty that a ruling is wrong, one must follow the Sanhedrin. If people were to disobey the Sanhedrin or beis din, there would be no halachic system. In halacha we follow beis din, which explains why Maimonides said that in philosophy there is no psak, ruling. In his *Moreh*, Maimonides disagrees with Chazal many times on philosophical points. From his writings, we see how much Maimonides respected Chazal. But respect does not make one bound to agree with any given statement, even if it was stated by Chazal. We learn that Ramban debated Pablo Christiani and did not feel bound to accept all midrashim, as one is bound to accept the Written and Oral Torahs. The Torah is not a simple system of belief; one must know what and where he must accept. Thus, regarding philosophy and halachic theory, one is not obligated to follow Chazal or gedolei Yisrael; there is no psak in this area. If one opined that we follow gedolei Yisrael because of their infallibility, then it wouldn't matter if we discuss halacha or philosophy. If infallibility is the reason we follow Chazal, disagreeing with them violates "From

a false matter distance yourself” (Exod. 23:7). [But Maimonides’ rejections of Chazal’s views demonstrates that this is not the case.] “Halacha” means to act. Thus, in philosophy, there cannot be halacha and psak, since one does not know absolute truth in this area. [Philosophy concerns our thoughts and opinions—not our actions.]

Therefore, we do not follow gedolei Yisrael in political matters, as this falls outside the sphere of halacha. In the absence of a psak, one must make his choices following a rational and consistent path. This is all we have today. As there is no psak, we follow the *Shulchan Aruch* as it presents the consensus of rational views. But if one could show how all rishonim were wrong, he could follow his view.

One must be consistent in his decisions. Rav Moshe said that if one follows the Gra—which one has the right to do, if he assesses him as the greatest mind—he must then follow him on all matters and not pick and choose when he follows the Gra. Similarly, one has the right to follow his rav, his moreh d’asra.

Other religions have the belief that they follow absolute truth. This baseless belief is fueled by an emotional need for security. But Judaism demands a mature approach and a mature mind. We follow the system of halacha, as this is the most rational way to live, even if at times the psak might be wrong. We are not interested in being right 100

percent of the time, rather we are interested in being rational. And God's Torah is the most rational system.

ASCERTAINING REALITY

The urim v'tumim were a form of prophecy, which, at that time, the Jewish nation merited to possess. The only instrument that can ascertain reality is prophecy, not halacha. Halacha and prophecy are two distinct areas. As you know, prophecy plays no role in determining halacha. ["Lo bashamayim hee" ("it is not in heaven") is the rejection of prophecy in determining halacha.]

It is not rational to always follow a rishon. But it is rational to follow the Gra. This is because a rishon did not have the knowledge of all the other rishonim, while the Gra, who lived after the rishonim, possessed all the views of the rishonim. Additionally, his mind was akin to a rishon. Therefore, one is rational in following the Gra on all matters, as this means to say, "I will follow the greatest mind who understood all rishonim."

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

“WHOEVER ACCEPTS THE YOKE OF TORAH,
THE YOKE OF GOVERNMENT AND THE YOKE OF
DAILY LIFE ARE REMOVED FROM HIM.”

We explained that according to Maimonides this refers to divine providence, as he wrote, “God—may He be blessed—will save him and will lighten his daily burdens.” Rabbeinu Yona also mentions divine providence, but this is also a philosophical phenomenon, meaning that for one who attains the level where his main involvement is Torah and the pursuit of the world of ideas, other areas become insignificant. In this manner, he is removed from the burdens of day-to-day living. While others are preoccupied with financial and materialistic details, the perfected person is uninvolved in such concerns. Thus, he himself has removed this yoke. But in addition to his own actions, decisions, and values, divine providence works with him to further remove this yoke. This is Maimonides’ view, that divine providence is not a miracle, but a natural phenomenon.

When man partakes of wisdom, he draws closer to the Source, which is God. In doing so, man comes under God’s influence to a greater degree, and thereby, the material world, which is governed by the world of ideas [laws] can-

not approach him [create hindrances]. The world of ideas is more primary and more real. Just as the perfected person approaches reality (the world of ideas) intellectually, his physical existence too approaches reality and he is thereby removed from the effects of the physical world. [Procuring his material needs is made easy, and he does not experience mishap.] In other words, by living a life of wisdom man physically benefits from a life that enables that perfection. The yokes of government and livelihood are removed from him so that he can more fully pursue wisdom. Thereby, he is saved from the ill effects of materialism. This is the basic principle of divine providence. Again, this is not a miracle, but part of the constant divine providence from God to man.

This deals with the reality that man can uncover God's wisdom to an extent, and in doing so he is drawn into a different reality. This reality is one wherein his life is no longer subject to chance events and natural laws as is true regarding others. Living a life in the pursuit of God's wisdom, he is now governed by the laws of divine providence. There are two ways to understand why this individual is removed from concerns regarding government and livelihood. One understanding is that he operates in a different world from before, so he is unaffected by typical natural burdens. A second understanding is that divine providence

intervenes in his current world and prevents those two yokes from affecting his pursuit of wisdom. Obviously, to fully understand this [the precise providential and natural mechanisms and laws of providence], one needs to be Moshe Rabbeinu. But this is the best I can describe it.

This subject is precisely what Moshe desired to understand; he wished to comprehend the science of divine providence. We can see how difficult it is to understand physics. For 2,000 years the concepts of time and space were incorrectly understood by even the greatest minds. Super-human intellect is required to uncover even the most basic ideas. Certainly, God's providence is even more abstract. But as one progresses, he can uncover more knowledge in this area. When studying divine providence, the physical world cannot assist our search for understanding; for what we study is God. As man learns more about God and the universe, he feels further removed from God. Newly acquired knowledge makes man understand that there is a greater distance between himself and God. Also, with increased knowledge, one sees that he knows less about God than he thought. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts..." (Isaiah 55:8). "But as the heavens are high above the earth, so are My ways high above your ways and My thoughts above your thoughts" (Ibid. 55:9). With increased knowledge, one develops a different sense about the universe, which di-

rectly impacts his knowledge of God and his sense of proximity to God. As Maimonides says, our knowledge of God is negative knowledge. [We cannot know anything positive about God, for human knowledge is inherently tied to the physical world, and related to our senses in some way, and God is neither physical nor related to our senses.] The more we negate our assumed knowledge about God, we realize we know less about Him. [For example, one may previously think that God is “strong” in the natural sense, where one force is greater than an opposing force, as when man lifts a weight. But when one matures his thinking and understands that God is unrelated to the physical world, he removes this false concept of “strength” from God and accepts that he does not know what the word strength means in connection to God. All he knows is that God is not incapable of performing any feat. This newly acquired negative knowledge regarding God’s strength shows man that he has less knowledge of God than he previously thought.]

The gemara says that one who recites Ashrei three times a day inherits the afterlife. This is because Ashrei contains the statement “He [God] gives bread to all flesh,” meaning that a person recognizes a system outside of himself. There are others with whom God relates, just as God relates to him. In recognizing that God provides for all flesh, he comes in line with a certain reality where he is influenced

by that reality. He then merits to partake in that reality [of divine providence, which removes from him the yokes of government and livelihood.] One who recognizes that God provides for all flesh will not suffer, and he will benefit from receiving bread. One who partakes of such ideas in his mind, benefits from those very ideas in physical reality.

Although this is the area which Moshe Rabbeinu inquired from God, an area we inherently cannot understand, nonetheless, I say we should strive to uncover whatever we can. Whatever we can uncover is a gain [however small]. What we explore here is the topic of Judaism and how God relates to man. We must also be patient in our studies.

What I attempt to do when exploring this area is to put together what we do know about this subject, as little as it might be. But as to the process, of course, we are totally ignorant, as Rabbeinu Yona says. The mishnah addresses not the “process” [of the removal of these two yokes] but the “effects,” as the mishnah states, “There is removed from him...” Understanding the process is beyond our capacity, as we are not Moshe Rabbeinu.

ABRAHAM: THE TREATY BETWEEN THE PARTS

The word of the Lord came to him in reply, "That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He added, "So shall your offspring be." And he [Abraham] put his trust in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him a merit. (Gen. 15:4-6)

Rashi comments that God considered it a merit to Abraham that he believed in this promise. Ramban questions Rashi saying, "Of course a prophet believes in God!"

I would like to propose an answer to Ramban's question. Until now, Abraham understood God and he understood the system of reward and punishment, which is divine providence—a natural process. Divine providence is based on the fact that in nature, ideas are the essential realities [ideas are the absolutes, while physical phenomena are not absolute and are subject to this world of ideas, or guiding forces or laws. God alters natural laws at His will].

From this prophecy, Abraham understood there would be a change in the natural order to establish the Jewish nation. Such change was alien to Abraham's understanding of God. A review of Abraham's life teaches that he uncovered

God from the natural order, but here God indicates that this order will be altered. Abraham was the individual who taught that one should not follow superstitions or emotions, but that there exists a world of reality, behind which is the Creator. Abraham even understood divine providence. But he didn't understand this vision where God said that He would alter the natural world to create a Jewish nation. When Abraham learned this, he was taken aback. Nonetheless, he trusted God, as stated in the verse. He understood human knowledge of God is only negative knowledge [we cannot know what God's nature or essence is, we can only know what He is not.] Abraham expressed a total acceptance of God's promise. For he knew that this too belonged to the area of human ignorance, which demands that man believe that which he does not comprehend. Therefore, Abraham believed God's promise. At that moment, Abraham had to draw back yet another step in his understanding of God. [This surprise was due to Abraham's misconception of how God works. Abraham now recognized that he truly knew less of God than he thought.]

What did God establish at the Treaty Between the Parts (Bris Bein Habesarim) that Abraham did not know prior to this? Abraham now learned a new aspect of God: God creates covenants. God establishes such covenants with man, wherein natural law will be overridden to maintain

the covenant. This is the essence of Judaism as a religion: the same God who is the source of the universe is a creator of covenants. To Abraham, this was strange and difficult to understand, for he understood God in terms of natural law and even in terms of divine providence. While Abraham had no concept of God as a “creator of covenants,” he accepted it. (Bris is so central to Judaism that it forms an essential component of Birchas Hamazon.)

Under this covenant, the Jewish nation would not be naturally guided by divine providence as is true regarding an individual who perfects himself. God’s creation of a covenant is an expression of His will and His overriding of natural law, and is necessary for the sustenance of the Jewish nation. [Whereas providence over the individual is part of natural law, providence for the nation overrides natural law and is therefore not part of it.]

The Jews accepted God’s warning of curses (tochacha), as they accepted the Torah “b’alah u’shvuah,” with a curse and a swear (Nechemia 10:30).

These are the terms of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moshe to cut with the Israelites in the land of Moab aside from the covenant He had made with them at Horeb. (Deut. 28:69)

What is meant by “aside from the covenant?” Do we not refer to one covenant of Torah? Rashi comments: “The Jews accepted the Torah upon themselves with a curse and a swear.” We see that the curses are a separate covenant. This is because curses are in a different framework. The Jews accepted upon themselves this phenomenon of divine providence, such that their Torah deviation subjects them to punishments, the purpose of which is to sustain the Jewish nation. Thus, the punishments of the curses are different from those an individual receives [for personal sins]. Otherwise, a new covenant is redundant. [The curses are on a national level.] At times, the Jewish nation suffers a punishment that individuals would not be subject to [due to their own doings, but as part of the nation, they will suffer]. Such punishments manifest to others the relationship between God and the Jews. This means that an individual who does not deserve a punishment, as he has not sinned, will experience terrible punishments as part of the national curse.

*...aside from the covenant he had made
with them at Horeb (Sinai).”*

The giving of the Torah was not a covenant, but an act of God, an act of kindness, where God gave a nation the true way of life. But the curse and the swear is a separate cov-

enant that serves to demonstrate [God's relationship with the Jews] and sustain the Torah accepted at Sinai.

The first rebuke was the inherent treaty that came with the Torah: "But you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..." (Exod. 19:6), demanded the cutting of a treaty. Then Moshe gave a second rebuke. Now, although a covenant is not the most philosophical fundamental, it is, however, the most national fundamental as it is the foundation of the special relationship between God and Israel. This is the essence of the idea of "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Maimonides discusses the rebuke:

But if you have forsaken the Lord, and did err in eating, drinking, sinful sexuality, and the like, He will bring upon you those curses and detach from you all blessings until you end your days in confusion and dread, and you will have neither a heart of leisure nor a sound body to perform the precepts, so that you lose the life in the World to Come, as a consequence whereof you will have lost two worlds; for, as long as a man is occupied in this world with sickness, war, and hunger, he cannot be engaged in either wisdom or precepts, by which to acquire the World to Come. (Hilchos Teshuvah 9:1)

This means that God will prevent the Jews from attaining perfection. This is part of the covenant.

GOD'S NAME

The enactment of the covenant between God and the Jews commences with an interesting discussion between God and Moshe:

Moshe said to God, "When I come to Bnei Yisrael 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 Moshe, "I will be that I will be." He continued, "Thus shall you say to Bnei Yisrael, 'I will be sent me to you.'" (Exod. 3:13,14)

First, God refers to his name as, "I will be that I will be." But then He changes it to, "I will be." God continues:

And God said further to Moshe, "Thus shall you speak to Bnei Yisrael: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Yaakov, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity. (Ibid. 3:15)

In his *Guide* (book I, chap. lxiii), Maimonides asks, "What question did Moshe ask of God?" Was there a special name that the Jews knew of? If the Jews knew that name, then that is how Moshe knew it [and Moshe's re-

citing of that name is insignificant.] And if the name was one that Moshe alone knew, again this proves nothing as Moshe can make up any name he wishes. Maimonides says that it is obvious from the verses that Moshe's question about which name to tell the Jews did not concern a name per se, but the name represented an idea.

God mentions three names: 1. I will be that I will be, 2. I will be, and 3. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Which name is the correct name that Moshe should tell the Jews?

Rashi quotes an interesting statement by Chazal:

"I will be that I will be: As I am with the Jews in this trouble, I will be with them in their future troubles." Moshe then replied, "Why should I mention other troubles to the Jews? Their current troubles are enough." God replied, "You speak well. This is what you should say, 'I will be has sent me to you.'"

God gave Moshe an idea of "I will be that I will be." But as a leader, Moshe adapted the idea and consulted with God as to whether his adaptation of God's name was correct.

This is a difficult area and I cannot say with complete certainty that the explanation I will offer is the correct one.

Obviously, this area deals with metaphysical ideas that are difficult to comprehend. Maimonides himself says that the only name of God is יהוה. All other names signify attributes. אדני refers to master and אלהים refers to forces; neither refer exclusively to God. Rashi says that אלהים means multi-powers, explaining its pluralistic form. Even שדי inherently partakes of anthropomorphism to some degree. We are permitted to use these names as they are necessary to convey important ideas concerning certain results of God's actions. But these names do not describe God Himself. The only name that is free from anthropomorphism is יהוה. Maimonides explains that all God's other names came into being after creation (*Guide*, book I, chap. lxi), for all other names refer to God in His relationship to the physical world and do not refer to Him per se. But יהוה was God's name prior to creation. Meaning that יהוה reflects the idea of God's absolute existence.

“I will be that I will be” is closely tied to יהוה; you can see that. But I would like to attempt to offer an explanation of this name, although, again, I cannot say for certain that I am correct. Nevertheless, insofar as one has the right to understand the Torah, I wish to attempt an explanation. Given that introduction, allow me to offer a pshat.

EXPLAINING GOD'S NAME

A person cannot make the statement "I will be," for that is an inherent contradiction. It indicates that one does not exist now. In which case, there is no I. And if one does not exist now, he cannot say "I will exist." Instead, one should say, "I exist." Therefore, it is illogical for a person to make the statement "I will be that I will be." However, God can make this statement. The meaning of "will be" means that God's existence will enter the realm of time and space. Man exists within time and space and God exists outside of it. "I will be" is God saying that he will exist in time and space. This does not mean that God will change His existence so that He is subject to time and space. It means that man will perceive God's existence within man's time and space system. But what is the implication of this? This means that God will perform a miracle: God's alteration of natural law. And to alter natural law means that God enters the time and space system, so to speak.

The existence of the universe expresses God's creation. A miracle means that God intervenes at a certain time. In a manner of speaking, a miracle is God breaking into the realm of time and space. Unlike a miracle, the creation of the universe is not God breaking into time and space [for neither existed yet]. You can say that the universe is the result of God's essence or a spill-off of His essence. But God is not "in" the

universe. “He is the place of the universe and the universe is not his place” (Rav Yosi ben Chalifta, *Yalkut Shimoni*). [God being the “place” of the universe means that He is the prerequisite for the existence of everything, just like place or space is necessary for something to exist. Without a place or space, nothing can exist. Similarly, without God, nothing else can exist, metaphorically stated as, “He is the place of the universe.”]

A miracle means that God affects time and space, as if to say He “enters” time and space. This explains the phrase “I will be.” [God will be evident at a certain time.] But what is meant by the second half of God’s name, “that which I will be?” The full name is difficult to understand, “I will be that which I will be.” “That which I will be” refers to an idea of constancy. It modifies the first phrase, “I will be.” Thus, the meaning is, “I will enter time and space, and this will be always.” Regarding His creation of covenants, God will continually render miracles to sustain the Jewish people. This entering into time and space (as man views this from his perspective) is part of God’s eternal nature. This means that God’s capacity as a creator of covenants stems from His eternal nature.

Moshe’s reply to God was that telling the Jews that God’s intervention is a part of His eternal nature means that it will happen again; that God will need to intervene again due to future troubles from which the Jews will require salvation. It’s a forecast of future doom. [After so many years of torturous

labor and servitude] the Jews would not be able to emotionally tolerate such news. God then told Moshe to say that His name is “I will be,” meaning that God intervenes in time and space, omitting the last part, “that I will be” [with the Jews during future troubles.]

What is the meaning of the third name, “the God of your forefathers?” The answer is precisely as we are saying. In explaining to the people this abstract idea, the end result for man in pondering the abstract nature of God is that man simply gets lost: there is no idea about God to which man can relate, since the concept of God is totally abstract. While Moshe was explaining an abstract metaphysical principle, it was one that left the elders with the unidentifiable and unknowable idea of God. The elders were left with nothing with which to relate. This explains why God said:

Thus shall you speak to Bnei Yisrael: 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.

With this name, God offered man a means to relate to Him through His providence, expressed to the forefathers. Man is flesh and blood and needs some tangible way to relate to God. This third name was that bridge. The elders could relate to God’s providence, previously expressed to the forefathers.

This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity.

Chazal say the Hebrew word לעלם (forever) is written without the vav, allowing it to be read “I’alame,” meaning hidden. יהוה refers to “This shall be my name forever,” and “This is My appellation for all eternity” refers to “God of the forefathers.” The gemara says regarding God, “I am not read the way I am written.” This means that we do not pronounce יהוה, but instead we read it as אדני. [This is a means of expressing our ignorance of God’s nature; we do not enunciate His name the way it is written, as if to say we do not know what He is.]

What was Moshe’s message to the nation? He presented the people with a new, previously unheard-of religion. That religion is that God’s nature is so abstract that man cannot relate to Him. Nevertheless, man is permitted to relate to God in a certain way: the God of our forefathers. This is our closest relationship to God. Any other image, feeling, or sense behind the word God is prohibited and borders on idolatry. Moshe presented the people with a new religion where one relates to God on his emotional level, while simultaneously conveying that God is unknowable. Man cannot relate to God’s absolute [and unknowable] nature יהוה; he relates only to “God of the forefathers.”

If we only had the identity of God as “God of our forefathers,” man would project anthropomorphic notions onto God. Therefore, we do not pronounce יהוה as it is written to remind ourselves of God’s unknowable nature. This is the central idea of Moshe’s prophecy and a central idea of the new religion he established. This is the essence of Judaism.

MOSHE: GOD’S MESSENGER

How could Moshe prove that he was God’s messenger? Evidently, signs and wonders would have been insufficient. As the following verse says, the signs were for the people, not for the elders. For the elders, Moshe needed to convey the concept of “I will be that I will be.”

Then Moshe and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. Aaron repeated all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moshe, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. (Exod. 4:29,30)

God was not satisfied to have the elders believe through wonders. This is in accord with Maimonides:

One who believes because of a sign has doubts in his heart (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 8:1)

The belief in wonders does not involve all of man's faculties. Signs and wonders do not impress the inner man; ideas alone offer this impression. Therefore, the elders, who were capable of grasping the ideas, would be impressed through ideas and not signs. It is so beautiful how the verse works out. "I will be that I will be" was Moshe explaining the mesora to the elders. The only way a man can be accepted as God's messenger without signs and wonders is by explaining the meaning of the mesora that the elders possessed.

3:6 GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG MEN

RABBI CHALAF TA [BEN DOSA] OF KFAR CHANANIAH SAYS: "THE DIVINE PRESENCE RESTS AMONG TEN WHO SIT TOGETHER AND ENGAGE IN TORAH, AS IT SAYS (PSALMS 82:1), 'GOD STANDS IN THE CONGREGATION OF GOD.' AND FROM WHERE [IS THERE PROOF THAT THIS IS TRUE] EVEN [WHEN THERE ARE ONLY] FIVE? AS IT SAYS (AMOS 9:6), 'AND HE HAS FOUNDED HIS BAND UPON THE EARTH.' AND FROM WHERE EVEN THREE? AS IT SAYS (PSALMS 82:1), 'IN THE MIDST OF JUDGES HE JUDGES.' AND FROM WHERE EVEN TWO? AS IT SAYS (MALACHI 3:16), 'THEN THOSE WHO FEARED THE LORD SPOKE ONE WITH ANOTHER, AND THE LORD HEARKENED AND HEARD.' AND FROM WHERE EVEN ONE? AS IT SAYS (EXODUS 20:21), 'IN EVERY PLACE WHERE I CAUSE MY NAME TO BE MENTIONED I WILL COME TO YOU AND BLESS YOU.'"

Rashi comments on Amos: "He builds His hierarchies in the heavens and founded His band upon the earth." God created the heavens and their natural systems and established people on Earth who can perceive this wisdom. This verse teaches how God's creation operates: God created wisdom (manifest in the heavens) and then He created beings that can perceive that wisdom. Man relates to God through the wisdom that God revealed in His creation. There is an interrelation between God's creatures and His wisdom. The Earth is related to God because of those

creatures that perceive God's wisdom. This is in line with Maimonides' words in his *Guide*, where he says that everything on Earth was created for man. What is outside the Earth, Maimonides says, we cannot suggest was created for man, because its objective is to express God's wisdom. Therefore, it can have its own purpose [other than for man.] Man cannot be so egocentric to suggest that the entire universe was created for him. But everything on this planet was created for man.

Thus, God's creation is twofold: 1. There is wisdom per se [the universe], and 2. On Earth everything exists to assist in man's perception of that wisdom. Chazal say that all creations, from the smallest gnat, are created for man's purpose. If we possessed adequate wisdom, man would understand the necessity of every creature vis-à-vis man's existence. This purpose is fulfilled when five people pursue God's wisdom.

How do we know that God's shechina resides with three people who study Torah? "In the midst of judges, He judges" indicates that when a beis din convenes to rule on Jewish law, at that moment, man partakes of the divine presence. Why is a beis din comprised of three people and not four? An uneven number is essential to arrive at a majority ruling.

What about two people? The verse tells us "Then those

who feared the Lord spoke one with another, and the Lord hearkened and heard.”

And how do we know that God resides with one person who studies Torah? “In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you.” Rashi comments:

I will give knowledge in your heart to mention My name. I will come there to you, and this refers to an individual. Therefore “I will mention My name” implies that I will teach others that they will mention my name.

What does this verse mean, that God says that He will mention His name? What type of phenomenon is this?

God mentions His name to people. The phrase “the name of God” implies knowledge of God: Torah’s wisdom. God “mentions His name” when a person learns Torah. As God is the ultimate cause of people learning Torah, He mentions His name when people study. The phrase “every place” in our verse refers to even one person.

In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you.

Rashi comments on this verse and says that the only place one can enunciate God's name is in the Beis Hamikdash. That is where the priests are permitted to enunciate God's name during their blessing of the nation, Birchas Kohanim. Otherwise, one cannot utter God's name. What is the concept behind this restriction? The only place one can mention the Shem Hameforash [God's name as it is written: יהוה] is where the manifestation [shechina] of God's providence resides. The gemara says there were many miracles that occurred in the Beis Hamikdash to demonstrate the residence of the shechina.

Both Rashis are in agreement: one statement refers to the halachic formulation and the other is the philosophical phenomenon. The halachic formulation regards Mikdash. This formulation reflects the philosophy that teaches that God's name can only be mentioned where His shechina resides: Mikdash.

*And make for Me a Temple and I will
reside among you. (Exod. 25:8)*

In his *Guide*, Maimonides mentions this idea that human knowledge is not an active process of man thinking and producing thoughts. The true way that man perceives wisdom is by placing himself under God's influence. This means that God is the source of all knowledge. When man

perfects himself to a certain degree, God's influence reaches him. Thus, man does not create thoughts, but he receives wisdom from God. This is the idea of the cherubs above the Ark. Judaism has a different type of epistemology. The cherubs reflect the idea that when man understands something, this phenomenon is not a mechanical act that man performs solo, rather he places his soul in a certain attitude where it receives God's influence [wisdom]. [This is why the cherubs are above the tablets housed in the Ark: to display this system of knowledge. Cherubs represent the metaphysical system of God imparting knowledge to man, while the tablets represent the body of knowledge. Thus, the cherubs connected to the Ark that house the tablets are a physical representation of the metaphysical forces (cherubs) that endow man with knowledge (tablets).]

Man can mention God's name only when under God's influence. This situation has a halachic representation in Mikdash through the priests' blessings, for this is where the shechina resides. Shechina means that those in Mikdash are under the influence of divine providence. And when one learns Torah, he now comes under that influence. Therefore, in this situation where one studies Torah, the one who is the reciter of God's name, is God. For it is God's influence that enables this individual to understand new ideas. [Thus, we refer to man's attainment of knowl-

edge as “God mentioning His name,” i.e., God mentions His Torah to him.]

In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you.

This is a very beautiful verse. Man can only mention God’s name when he is under God’s influence. Therefore, it is God who is the true reciter.

Is it not man who mentions God’s name? Maimonides’ explanation is reflected in this verse. What then is meant by “I [God] mention My name?” This is Maimonides’ theory, as we have explained.

What is this mishnah teaching by ten, five, three, two, and one who study Torah and the shechina is among them? If God is with one person who studies Torah, certainly He will be so with greater numbers! One might suggest these five numbers refer to different levels. No doubt that is true. But if that is the lesson, Chazal should have simply stated, “The more people who study Torah, the better it is.” And in that case, there would be no need for these many verses. Furthermore, why does the statement belong in Pirkei Avos?

I believe there lies a very important idea in this mishnah. We always speak of happiness, and we say that the Torah’s

objective is to provide that happiness. And the Torah states that following it yields happiness. But we must understand what is meant by happiness or a happy life. Is a happy life of seventy years the sole objective, or is there more? And what is the nature of this happiness? Our mishnah sheds light on these questions.

Is happiness a psychological phenomenon or a metaphysical phenomenon? Meaning, when one learns Torah for its own sake (*lishma*), and he is exceedingly happy, is this happiness a phenomenon of a psychological or a metaphysical nature? Maimonides teaches that all man's experiences are psychological; there are no metaphysical experiences in this life.

All the prophets did not prophecy except regarding the Messianic Era, but regarding the afterlife, no eye has seen it God, except for You. (Talmud Shabbos 63a)

When we review God's creation, we find God's endless wisdom and that there exists a human being that can partake of that wisdom. What is human perfection? It refers to man's soul in the state where he can best partake of the metaphysical reality [perceiving God's wisdom]. Thus, Judaism is not just a philosophy of emotional happiness, it is more. It is a metaphysical system that means that Juda-

ism posits that there exists a metaphysical reality: a reality beyond our senses and beyond our emotions. This is the ultimate reality. Man has the ability to partake of that reality and this occurs when he engages in God's wisdom. However, the satisfaction of that reality is unattainable as long as man is physical. There is an attending satisfaction during the experience of learning, but that satisfaction is of a physical and psychological nature, while man is on Earth. However, through man's participation in studying God's wisdom, his soul partakes of metaphysical reality. That metaphysical reality is what remains with the soul when the body is gone. Man's partaking in a metaphysical reality is what gives his soul eternal life. The enjoyment of the next world is incomparable to anything on Earth. As the metaphysical reality is superior, its enjoyment is superior too.

The state most conducive to receiving the metaphysical reality is also the happiest emotional state. One who partakes of this metaphysical reality to the greatest degree is in fact—psychologically speaking—the happiest person.

In the same measure that the soul partakes of wisdom during life, that is the same measure of its metaphysical enjoyments in the afterlife. This being so, Chazal saw fit to teach man about this metaphysical state [that one can experience] during life. The verses in our mishnah reflect

different states of participation in that metaphysical reality. The purpose of this mishnah is to teach the different levels of metaphysical reality in which the soul partakes in its involvement in studying God's wisdom.

One person who studies, we understand: man is involved in wisdom.

Two people who study Torah is a chavrusa, and man is engaged in a higher form; dialogue is a different level of wisdom.

Three is a group.

Five is the smallest number representing a multitude who follow God.

What is ten? This reflects the entire nation. Thus, when one studies among ten people there is an additional quality, as ten who study together reflect God's will for the nation. Here, one approaches God in a different way.

Why are all the verses necessary? We are trying to uncover a situation most conducive for the perfection of the soul. And it is difficult for man to know precisely where to draw the line. As matters concerning the soul are outside human comprehension, an authoritative source is necessary. The Torah's verses define exact lines for the most favorable situation to attain human perfection [referred to as God's shechina residing with man in his various groups convened for Torah study.]

3:7 OWNERSHIP AND ACCOMPLISHMENT

RABBI ELAZAR, MAN OF BARTUTA, SAYS: “GIVE HIM FROM WHAT IS HIS, FOR YOU AND YOURS ARE HIS, AND THUS WITH DAVID IT SAYS, ‘FOR ALL COMES FROM YOU, AND FROM YOUR HAND WE HAVE GIVEN TO YOU’ (I CHRONICLES 29:14).” RABBI SHIMON SAYS: “HE WHO WALKS ON HIS WAY REPEATING HIS STUDIES, AND INTERRUPTS HIS STUDIES AND SAYS, ‘HOW LOVELY IS THIS TREE! AND HOW LOVELY IS THIS NEWLY PLOWED FIELD!’ SCRIPTURE CONSIDERS HIM AS IF HE IS LIABLE FOR [FORFEITURE OF] HIS LIFE.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

This speaks about the matter of a person's body and his money, and it is to say that a person should not withhold himself nor his money from the objects (objectives) of Heaven. And this is what he said: “For you and yours are His”; as you are not giving from yourself or from your money, but rather from God, may He be blessed, as everything is His. As a person's money is a deposit in his hand from the Holy One, blessed be He, except that there is an advantage with it over other deposits in that he can take from it according to his needs. And he should give the rest in accordance with the will of the Depositor, the King, King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He,

who commanded him. And there is much to rejoice in that he can benefit from the deposit and that he will do the will of its Owner with the rest. There is a parable [relevant to this] of a king who gave his servant a thousand zuz and said to him, "Take one hundred for your yourself and give the [remaining] nine hundred to nine people." Would he not rejoice?

Rabbeinu Yona's emphasis is not so much on the act of giving, but on the attitude with which one gives. When one gives his money to tzedakah or uses it for a mitzvah, it should be given with the greatest happiness. What engenders that happiness? It is engendered by living by the proper idea that everything comes from God; everything is His, and that one has the right to take [from his possessions] all that he needs.

This mishnah indicates that man really possesses nothing. But how do we explain the fact that man was given the earth to conquer (Gen. 1:28)? Man also has the ability to earn money and gain wealth. It appears that this mishnah conflicts with man's true ownership as defined by halacha. It is very difficult to merge these two attitudes. We do find both attitudes—passive individuals and conquerors—but not in one person. Those who feel that everything is from God are not motivated to conquer or work that hard. And

those who are motivated to work diligently, do not express the attitude that everything is God's possession. Furthermore, Judaism does not endorse a person who sits back and takes no action to procure his needs. And this is derived from King David's words; he certainly does not impress us as a passive individual. He was the greatest conqueror. In his day, King David made the Jewish people the most powerful nation on Earth.

The metaphor is also difficult. For if the happiness is associated with giving back to God, of what concern is it that one may keep for himself one-tenth of the money? What is this metaphor?

One thing we must posit before going further is that the passive person's emotional feeling that everything is from God, does not represent the perfected person. Our mishnah is not referring to this personality. When the king gives his subject 1,000 zuz, he tells him to take 100 for himself; that is a proactive person. But the passive person has no self-confidence and cannot conquer or act for himself. He does not feel he has any rights to anything. One who feels that everything in this world is from God is not a doer. This type of person will not become a King David.

Chazal teach that both the passive personality and the conqueror are equally wrong. The second personality is worse as he is further from reality, for he attributes credit

to himself exclusive of God. But neither personality is the perfected man.

The correct attitude is the view that God is the source of reality, where He created a system with laws with which one can work to accomplish. There are laws of causality, natural laws, laws related to business, and others. Everything operates according to a set system; nothing occurs haphazardly.

How does one view this system? Passivity is improper as man is a doer—this is Judaism's philosophy. But man also enjoys the system of wisdom in which God placed him and permitted him to accomplish. Simultaneously, man realizes that the system stems from God. The great happiness is for this system; man enjoys the fact that God presented him with such a situation.

The metaphor is that the king gives a person a situation in which he can take for himself and give to others. The happiness does not regard what he takes or what he gives, but it is about the king placing him in this situation. The totality of the picture provides this happiness. He is happy with life. Such a frame of mind is not based upon one feeling like he is nothing or he is just a recipient [the passive personality]. Neither is this happy frame of mind based on haughtiness, being a great accomplisher. Both individuals have attached their emotions to only one part of

the scene. The nature of the emotions is that they attach to particulars; in our case, they attach either to passivity or to conquest. In contrast to the emotions, the mind can span the whole scene [simultaneously incorporating truths about God's creative systems and man's capacity to conquer]. Man's happiness is generated through his reflection on, and appreciation of, the entire system that God created, and into which God placed him. Man recognizes both: that he is a doer and that it is God's system. This is man's perfection.

The result of man's recognition of this system is that he is both happy accomplishing and he also has no difficulty parting with his money to fulfill God's will. On the contrary, man's perfected attitude directs him toward following God's will. He enjoys giving of his wealth to fulfill God's will because that giving is part of the totality of the system. "Give to Him from what is His" means that if one feels that what he gives is his own and not God's, he is not the perfect man; that is the man of acquisition, who feels he has ownership. But the perfected man enjoys giving, as this is not an emotion isolated from the system, but it is a result of seeing the totality of the system. The perfected man is happy about the entire system, which includes God's will that he gives to others and to God's mitzvos. His emotions follow his mind, which beholds the truths of his own ac-

complishing and of God as the source of all he sees. This is a remarkable level of man; few people attain this level as most are caught up with either passivity or conquest. Others can straddle both emotions, but during different times in their lives. One can amass great wealth and take pride in his accomplishments, but in his later years he may feel remorse and emptiness in all his wealth and feel that God gave this wealth to him, thereby prompting him to give it all to charity. Rarely do we find a person with the proper attitude. This type of person is no happier when he takes for himself than when he gives for God's will; both actions form part of the entire picture of a system that he enjoys. He is satisfied that he can live according to reality. That is a true satisfaction.

King David said to the entire assemblage, "God has chosen my son Solomon alone, an inexperienced lad, although the work to be done is vast—for the Temple is not for a man but for the Lord God. With all my strength I prepared for the House of my God gold for golden objects, silver for silver, copper for copper, iron for iron, wood for wooden, onyx-stone and inlay-stone, stone of antimony and variegated colors—every kind of precious stone and much marble" (I Chronicles 29:1, 2).

“With all my strength” means that King David recognized the totality of the system and appreciated the framework in which God placed him.

King David blessed the Lord in front of all the assemblage. David said, “Blessed are You, Lord, God of Israel our father, from eternity to eternity. 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” (Ibid. 29:10, 11).

Recognizing this framework naturally led King David to praise and thank God.

“Who am I and who are my people, that we should have the means to make such a freewill offering; but all is from You, and it is Your gift that we have given to You. For we are sojourners with You, mere transients like our fathers; our days on Earth are like a shadow, with no hope” (Ibid. 29:14, 15).

Rashi says “no hope” refers to the fact that no person has hope that he will not die. King David says that the emotion of the conqueror is not in line with reality. For one cannot accept his mortality and simultaneously main-

tain his conquest. Death contradicts the fantasy of human conquest. There is no truth to such conquest. Regarding a flesh-and-blood king, the gemara says, “Today he is here; tomorrow he is in the grave.” As stated, joy is possible only when one recognizes the complete system. Man’s wealth, and even his very existence, is only on loan from God. One must raise himself above his personal emotions if he is to recognize this system and find this happiness. Man’s fantasy of immortality is what stands in contradiction to this happiness. But the recognition of mortality should not depress a person. One should enjoy great happiness with his recognition of reality.

Was Adam supposed to be mortal or immortal? Ibn Ezra says that God never intended for Adam to be immortal. Ibn Ezra was a scientist and a physicist, and he said that man’s physical makeup is identical to that of the animals:

For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: As the one dies so dies the other, and both have the same life-breath; man has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing (Kobeles 3:19).

From here Ibn Ezra concludes that Adam was never intended to be immortal, for as animals do not live eternally, neither does man.

However, Ramban quotes Chazal who say that Adam was intended to live immortally. But it is not our role to determine who is correct and who is in error; this debate is for the great minds. However, modern biology sides with Chazal as we now know that cells regenerate and the aging process need not result in mortality. How then do we understand the verse [describing the punishment for eating from the Tree of Knowledge] “For on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen. 2:17)?

Within Adam’s sin was the fantasy of immortality. Part of that sin also included the appeal of “being like God” (Ibid. 3:5), which Rashi interprets as “creators of worlds,” great conquerors. The conqueror does not want to think about his own death. He avoids his death by imagining that the government he establishes will endure for thousands of years. What he really means is that he will live on for thousands of years. But as he cannot consciously accept this, his fantasy of immortality attaches itself to what he produces, i.e., the city or government.

“For on the day that you eat of it you will certainly die” means that once man ate from the Tree of Knowledge, and his perception of reality was blurred, if death was not imminent in his mind he would have no chance of becoming a righteous individual. This is because the fantasy of immortality is so powerful, man could not live according to

reality. According to Chazal, death now became a reality. But according to Ibn Ezra, Adam's longevity was abbreviated. This abbreviated lifespan drives man to deny death as a rejection of the unpleasant reality of his mortality. This change occurred after the sin. After man corrupted himself further during the Generation of the Flood, man required even further abbreviation of life, explaining the sudden shorter life spans.

Why wasn't there a danger that Adam would eat also from the Tree of Life before his sin? According to what we've learned, there was no necessity for Adam to eat from that tree. Only once Adam became [more] mortal was there any concern about him taking from the Tree of Life. Adam was banished from Eden, for had he remained and eaten from the Tree of Life, that would be his complete destruction; the fantasy of immortality prevents man from seeing his true small position in this existence. But there is a way that man can recognize his reality. The gemara says regarding one whose instincts constantly surge, that he should [temper his drives by] remembering the day of his death. On that day, how will this person relate to reality?

Along these lines, Chazal say the following:

When Joseph was in the pit, "Reuben heard and saved him from his brothers' hands" (Gen. 37:21). Had Reuben known

at that time that God was going to record this event in the Torah, he would have carried Joseph on his shoulders to his father. Had Aaron known that God would write about him, "And also he is coming out to greet you" (Exod. 4:14), he would have hired a band to greet Moshe. Had Boaz known it would be written about him that he "measured out six measures of barley and he put it on her back" (Ruth 3:15), he would have given her fatted calves.

In the past, man would perform a mitzvah and the prophets would record it, and now that there are no prophets, who records it? Elijah, Moshiach, and God record it, as it says, "The Lord has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written" (Malachi 3:16).

All these midrashim teach that due to a person's emotional state, he is blinded to reality. If man were to reflect on how his current actions would be assessed one-hundred years from now, he would act differently. His fantasy of immortality prevents him from properly evaluating his values and actions in the real framework of reality. God—the source of reality—records everything.

"For from You is everything" is stated by one who lives according to the true framework. He is the one who leaves a legacy. This was King David, whose life people later

looked at with respect and admiration, for he lived according to reality.

That tzaddik will be remembered for a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot (Proverbs 10:7).

In hindsight, people are objective in their evaluation of others. A tzaddik is remembered for having lived a good life while the evil person is ridiculed.

The previous midrashim provide us with a good method to evaluate one's actions. They remove a person from the emotion [at the moment] and ask him to glimpse how he might be recorded. [Does he wish to leave behind such a history of himself?]

Regarding the acceptance that everything belongs to God, there is a custom to write the following in one's books: "The World is God's possession and everything that fills it, property of so and so." This custom stems from this mishnah. In other words, God owns everything and this book is merely a loan.

Pirkei Avos is not just an [abstract] study of the mind, it also requires [subsequent] reflection. Perfection straddles two areas: 1. The realm of the intellect, and 2. The application of ideas to one's nature. Otherwise one is considered, "one who learns not on the condition to practice." One

must sift through his emotional life and improve himself. One cannot attain perfection without applying the lessons of Pirkei Avos.

RABBI SHIMON SAYS: “HE WHO WALKS ON HIS WAY REPEATING HIS STUDIES, AND INTERRUPTS HIS STUDIES AND SAYS, ‘HOW LOVELY IS THIS TREE! AND HOW LOVELY IS THIS NEWLY PLOWED FIELD!’ SCRIPTURE CONSIDERS HIM AS IF HE IS LIABLE FOR [FORFEITURE OF] HIS LIFE.”

Rashi comments:

When one studies Torah, the Satan cannot harm him. Once he stops learning, the Satan can harm him.

As Maimonides says, when one is involved in thought, he is under the influence of providence.

Chazal were dissatisfied with actions alone; man must also know the importance of his actions. Therefore, when involved in one’s studies, one must not interrupt [such a precious moment] by appreciating a tree. One must know that while learning, one is on God’s wavelength—he is now relating to God, the source of the universe. If one can simply stop his learning to admire a tree, he fails to understand the very concept of Torah study.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

While one learns, he is not permitted to use mundane speech. For one must stand with fear and with awe before the Torah. As it says in Shabbos 32b, "Any Torah student who learns in front of his rebbe and does not feel a sense of awe, should be punished." For inasmuch as he uses the crown of Torah, the crown of God, he should not speak [interrupt] using nonsensical speech and about mundane matters. And if it is easy to switch from one's learning to mundane matters, he is worthy of death and he deserves it.

This means it is insufficient to merely engage in Torah study, rather one must be aware of the gravity of this involvement, which is the purpose of his life. [To easily interrupt one's learning indicates the person does not have the proper value of learning.] Since one does not recognize what the good is for himself, it is as if he is killing himself.

Judaism places little value on aesthetics [beautiful trees]. Sculpture is prohibited and only permitted in the Mikdash in order to use aesthetics to channel the emotions toward true values. Man's greatness is found in one area: studying God's wisdom. The blessing of "Who performs the works of Creation" (Oseh ma'aseh bereishis), recited when first seeing oceans or mountains in more than thirty days, is

Chazal's attempt to redirect man's aesthetic value toward God. But to enjoy nature's beauty on an aesthetic plane alone, is not a Torah value. [Such aesthetic appreciation must ultimately arrive at an appreciation for the Creator of that beauty, and even better, for God's wisdom that guides nature.]

3:8 [UNRECORDED]

3:9 KNOWLEDGE VS. CHARACTER

RABBI CHANINA BEN DOSA SAYS: "FOR ANYONE WHOSE FEAR OF SIN PRECEDES [IS GREATER THAN] HIS WISDOM, HIS WISDOM ENDURES. AND FOR ANYONE WHOSE WISDOM PRECEDES HIS FEAR OF SIN, HIS WISDOM DOES NOT ENDURE." HE WOULD [ALSO] SAY: "FOR ANYONE WHOSE ACTIONS ARE MORE PLENTIFUL THAN HIS WISDOM, HIS WISDOM ENDURES. AND FOR

ANYONE WHOSE WISDOM IS MORE PLENTIFUL THAN HIS ACTIONS, HIS WISDOM DOES NOT ENDURE.”

Maimonides comments:

The philosophers would agree with Chazal's view on this mishnah that one who has accustomed his character to follow perfected traits, upon gaining knowledge reflecting his exemplary lifestyle, will be extremely happy and that knowledge will further strengthen his virtues. However, if one learns the virtues prior to living virtuously, newly acquired knowledge of proper virtues will prevent him from his desires, to which he grew accustomed, and which preceded his knowledge, and that knowledge of proper virtues will become overbearing and he will abandon it [i.e., he will abandon the knowledge in favor of remaining as he was, catering to his lusts.]

One who chases after his lusts must reject wisdom that condemns such a lifestyle, for one cannot love wisdom that goes against his emotional leanings. But why should one's inability to apply virtues to his life cause him to leave the life of wisdom? Is not wisdom a separate phenomenon from applied virtues? This would also appear to doom a person not raised with virtues. The question is strengthened when we learn of so many people who did teshuvah. And what

about Reish Lakish, a former horse thief who became one of the greatest amoraim?

Chazal maintained that there exists a phenomenon of love of wisdom that is all-embracing. Man partakes of two types of activities. One person can partake of an activity because a part of his makeup enjoys it. But he can also partake of another activity because his essence gravitates to it. For example, you might speak to a friend about many topics, but when you mention science, your friend's face lights up and his essence is moved. We can term this attraction to science the person's "core" or nucleus; that nucleus can be related to only one area. Chazal held that this one area is essentially only one of two possibilities: wisdom or emotional desires. If one is attached to the desires, while he can enjoy wisdom, this is not referred to as enduring knowledge (*chochmaso miskayemess*). This term applies only to one whose essence is attached to wisdom.

Chazal held that to love the world of wisdom, one cannot love only part of it. Loving math alone is not a love of wisdom. Love of wisdom means that one is attached to wisdom in all its forms: love of ethics, metaphysics, physics, math, etc. And if one harbors a resentment in even one area of wisdom, it is impossible to be a lover of wisdom. Such a person's wisdom will not endure. His attachment to wisdom is merely a side occupation. Thus, Chazal say

that if one is essentially related to a life of lusts, and he cannot extricate himself, he must negate wisdom [for it tells him his life is a waste]. And by negating wisdom, he cannot love it. As Maimonides says, “The wisdom will be overbearing and he will abandon it.” King Solomon said, “Say to wisdom you are my sister” (Proverbs 7:4). Wisdom must be an object of love. One must love wisdom in every expression, especially in areas closest to his life. For if in those areas he has no love of wisdom, his love of wisdom is not essential.

The love of God’s Torah and God includes all areas of knowledge, from astronomy and physics to math and all areas (Maimonides). Since the western world praises success, one’s focus will remain on math, for example, as his motivation is success, and gaining wisdom in other areas will not add to his success. But this is not the life of a chocham. He explores all areas, for there is a beauty in beholding the entire gamut of wisdom. That view that encompasses every area, from psychology to halacha and astronomy to philosophy, embodies a beauty as a complete picture of wisdom. That view is a totally different spectacle that the lover of wisdom desires to behold. Albert Einstein saw that he could spend his entire life in one corner of math or science, but he said, “I want to seek God’s thoughts.” This, he knew, would require wisdom in all areas. He said, “All else

are details.” This is why the Jewish nation’s greatest thinkers, including many rishonim and acharonim, had acquired much knowledge outside of Torah. One might be surprised to learn this, as Chazal were modest, “and walk humbly before God” (Micha 6:8). Chazal were unlike people today, who run to the press with every discovery. Chazal studied all areas because of their love of wisdom.

FEAR OF SIN THAT PRECEDES ONE’S WISDOM

A person’s actions, both before and after he becomes a wise man, appear similar. In truth, there is no comparison. At first, one’s actions of davening, wearing tefillin, or learning are not based on a deep understanding. Whereas when one becomes a chocham, all his actions are motivated by reasons that are totally different from before. Before becoming a chocham, one has no understanding of the mitzvos, but he has certain emotions that keep him attached to them, whereas the chocham understands the mitzvos and is no longer motivated by emotional reasons.

The Torah targets the level of Rabbi Akiva. The goal is to follow the mitzvos out of an understanding and an appreciation to the highest degree. But living on the level of following mitzvos without that understanding also has a purpose, because, as Maimonides says, the mitzvos

accustom one to the proper traits. Thereby, once one becomes wise through continued Torah study, his study will strengthen the path he has followed until now. But, as Maimonides says, if one's knowledge precedes the perfection of his character, and he still cleaves to emotional desires, his awareness [that his desires oppose a Torah life] will become a burden and he will abandon knowledge that conflicts with his desires.

We can now answer our original question regarding Reish Lakish. We must differentiate between one's external actions and his inner capacity for following the good life. A horse thief robs because of an uncontrollable urge, therefore he cannot become a chocham. His character will prevent his wisdom from taking hold. However, if a horse thief believes that his lifestyle is good, he operates with a sense of right and wrong, but he simply has a misguided sense of morality. This would seem to be the case of Reish Lakish. Why did he change so quickly from a horse thief to a Torah student? He was convinced that horse thievery was the good in life. But then he learned that his idea of what is good was in error. Once he saw Torah as the good, he was able to adapt his character and follow the Torah lifestyle.

Most people don't change because their lives are driven by imperfect emotions. But for one whose traits are not imperfect, but are misguided by flawed convictions—like

Reish Lakish—this rare person can change in a minute. However, as most people’s emotions are not that fluid, they cannot make such a sudden change. Therefore, Reish Lakish raises no question.

“For man is not righteous in the land, who performs good and does not sin” (Koheles 7:20). It is important to distinguish between one who sins, as all people do, and one who cannot identify his life with wisdom, as Maimonides says, “Wisdom becomes a burden and he abandons it.” The latter person has too much of a contradiction between his own life and the life of wisdom. This doesn’t refer to people who occasionally sin. Therefore, Chazal say that one must raise a child with temperance, where the child learns not to satisfy every desire. This child can then live a life of wisdom. Otherwise, the child would become an adult who must shun wisdom as it conflicts with his demand for instinctual gratification.

Chazal teach, “One does not acquire the crown of Torah unless he becomes cruel to his wife and his children.” This means that if a person always seeks to satisfy the emotion of kindness, he cannot be constructive. Many times, one must partake of the emotion of cruelty, such as disciplining one’s child. If one cannot act with cruelty when necessary, he lacks control over his emotions.

Rabbeinu Yona says that “one whose fear of sin precedes

his wisdom” refers to one’s underlying motivation for wisdom. One motivation is the search for the good life. The other motivation is to become a chocham, where he does not care how he lives [whether or not he leads a good life]. Rabbeinu Yona says that the wisdom of the former will endure since he follows the most rational motivation of living the good life. This person’s wisdom remains with him since wisdom is tied to his essential nature, which is the striving for happiness. If one’s desire for wisdom is tied to his basic nature, the more wisdom he attains, the more he loves wisdom. “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God” (Psalms 111:10). His yearning for wisdom is tied to his survival, to live properly.

This is the primary idea presented by Plato and Socrates: a pursuit of the knowledge and practice of the best life. Other thinkers learned geometry and math. But Socrates felt that the most important area [of study] is human life. Rabbeinu Yona says the same, that one who learns in order to live the best life will retain his wisdom. When he gains knowledge of what the proper life is, and he learns that this life is the life of wisdom, he naturally remains living a life pursuing wisdom. But if one is driven to learn only to become wise, it remains a vocation but not a central role in his life, and he will then lose his wisdom.

Returning to the earlier point of what wisdom is, we mentioned that wisdom refers not to one area like math, but to gaining a full picture of wisdom in all its expressions. Even without today's technological advances, earlier generations had the ability to explore God's wisdom and become chochamim. Earlier generations had access to tremendous wisdom and were not limited in living their lives as chochamim by their fewer advancements. Each generation is imprisoned by the knowledge of their times. We too will be viewed as ancient by future generations. But it is not the degree of advanced knowledge that defines one as a chocham, rather it is his attitude to uncover God's wisdom in all areas of life that defines one as a chocham.

Halacha is extremely important regarding epistemology. In the world of epistemology, there are raging battles as to what the underlying approach to reality is, especially with the advent of modern science. There are various views on what human thought is: Are we perceiving reality? Are we creating it? What approach in uncovering knowledge is a successful one? All this is tied up with understanding God's thoughts. Judaism has an important basis for epistemology: the halachic system. We maintain that one can see God's thoughts in the Torah. In the beginning of the *Guide*, Maimonides details his reason for writing his book:

The truth is that I am writing only on metaphysics. But the one who studies metaphysics will uncover the ideas without me. But in the sea of metaphysics you must be a good swimmer: only he will come up with pearls. But one who cannot swim properly will drown. The intent of my book is to prevent a person from drowning and to show one how to bring up the pearls.

It is important to note that people wrongfully understand Maimonides' term "knowledgeable person" as one who excels in one area. Maimonides truly refers to one whose love of knowledge is intrinsically tied to his nature, and not one who has expertise in a particular field. This is vital to remember when reading the *Guide*.

The world of God's wisdom is vast. If one were to venture to swim in that world his chances of success would be very slim; his chances of drowning would be great. But in Judaism, with the wisdom of the Torah comes a certain epistemology, a certain way of thought. We have an opportunity in the Torah to see God's thoughts. And the same method [applied in Torah study] must be applied to understanding God's wisdom in all areas. Torah wisdom gives a person a way of thinking in every area of life. The system of halacha is isolated: one has the postulates and

the system. After many years one learns a method of thinking. If one masters this method of thinking from his Torah study, he can harness it to understand all of God's wisdom [as is humanly possible]. If we had a Maimonides today, no doubt he could demonstrate to the world the true epistemology of nature. He could demonstrate how the method of Torah thought should be applied to all areas. He would show scientists that by applying the Torah's method of thought to science, they would attain greater understanding of their findings.

Maimonides also says, "These things bring one to inherit Olam Haba." By knowing and living according to the details of halacha, one changes his life in that he is always engaged in wisdom. When one enters a room and smells coffee brewing, he thinks about which blessing to recite. This simple act of entering a room is now permeated with rational thinking. He converts the base animalistic activity of drinking coffee into an intellectual performance. This is how the halachic system brings man to Olam Haba. This explains why Maimonides says, "One is not fit to walk in the garden until he has a good meal." The garden refers to metaphysics, the meal refers to halacha. One cannot enter metaphysics until he is well-trained in halachic thought.

King David degraded himself in youth and asked others for their wisdom. He remained this way even when he be-

came king. He was not necessarily the greatest chocham, but he was the greatest lover of wisdom and this spanned all areas and his entire life. This is why he was God's messiah.

“FOR ANYONE WHOSE ACTIONS ARE MORE PLENTIFUL THAN HIS WISDOM, HIS WISDOM ENDURES. AND FOR ANYONE WHOSE WISDOM IS MORE PLENTIFUL THAN HIS ACTIONS, HIS WISDOM DOES NOT ENDURE.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

When one's actions are greater than his wisdom, his desire for wisdom is greater. It comes out that he increases his wisdom every day.

A person with a great desire to uncover the wisdom of life will be in a constant state of discovery.

Many great minds made their greatest discoveries when they were young and [their ingenuity] either remained on that level or tapered off. They say in science, “Finished at forty.” Even in the Torah we find great minds that reach a plateau. But Rabbeinu Yona felt differently. One whose desire for wisdom is greater than his wisdom will learn more every day. Whenever that person learns more about his own nature or how he relates to the world of wisdom, he

removes a barrier that blocks wisdom. Doing so, another vista appears before his mind's eye and he starts gaining wisdom in that area too. This repeats, and he constantly gains knowledge. His progress never ends.

The cause of plateauing at an early age is each person's intellectual capacity. In the sciences, the field is limited, but this is not true of human life. This area is closely tied to one's ethical level. Maimonides says that every improper character trait is a barrier between oneself and God. Thus, when one constantly explores wisdom of himself and reality, he continually removes barriers and always sees progress. Very few people live this way. Rabbeinu Yona gives us the results of one whose actions exceed his wisdom. Later he will explain the dynamics. The real chocham does not reach a plateau; he is constantly progressing. The chocham we described is a Maimonides and not a Sigmund Freud. Freud limited himself to one area of study and had no knowledge of philosophy. Maimonides' search for knowledge straddled all areas. We must appreciate the blessing, "We were chosen from all people and He gave us His Torah." [God gave us the opportunity to view all areas of wisdom.]

One should feel extreme gratitude for God giving us the Torah. The reason people don't have this recognition of God's and Torah's goodness stems from infantile fanta-

sies, feelings of entitlement, and frustrations over mishaps and disappointments. But God does not owe man anything. He gave man a great opportunity to attain true happiness through Torah. One must remove these feelings if he is ever to feel gratitude for the Torah. Man should recognize his position as a beneficiary of a great gift. At his Passover Seder, the Rav recited Hallel in a manner that appeared as if he had just left Egypt. He expressed his true gratitude. This discussion is an important lesson if one is to express the proper praise and thanks to God. On Passover, the gemara says one must commence with derogatory accounts of our history and conclude with praise. This means that if one cannot initially recount our degradation, he cannot offer praise. One must accept certain givens, including the fact that God owes us nothing and that we are beneficiaries of a great good.

Regarding infantile feelings, one must also recognize that he is bereft of knowledge of divine providence in his life. Moshe didn't gain this knowledge until he reached a high state of perfection. Thus, one's feeling that God did or didn't do something, or that such actions are a good or an evil, are all baseless notions. If one can delete what he does not know and accept what he does know, i.e., that God gave us the Torah, he could praise God saying, "We were chosen from all people and He gave to us His Torah."

Maimonides teaches that most people lead pleasant lives. We don't know all the factors explaining the small minority of people with troubles. But for the most part, the vast goodness experienced by the masses certainly deserves recognition and praise of God.

Returning to "one whose actions exceed his wisdom," Rabbeinu Yona asks a powerful question:

*How can one's actions exceed his wisdom?
If one lacks knowledge of Torah and mitzvos, how can he possibly perform them?*

All mitzvos contain highly structured details; each one requires a deep analysis [to gain an accurate understanding of that mitzvah]. The benefit of any mitzvah is its wisdom [not the mere physical action. This is because true benefit to man must benefit man's central component and that is his intellect, his tzelem Elohim.] Performance without understanding misses the objective. [Rashi states that if one has no understanding of a mitzvah that he performs, it is useless. But one must still perform the action as a halachic obligation.] How then can one's actions exceed his wisdom? Such an act would be without value. Rabbeinu Yona explains:

This mishnah gives advice to a person who does not possess knowledge so that he does not sacrifice his soul. He should accept upon himself the mission to fulfill all matters that Chazal instruct, without veering left or right: "In accordance with the Torah that they teach you, and in accord with the judgment that they speak, you shall do; don't veer from the matter that they tell you right or left" (Deut. 17:11).

A talmid chocham performs all his actions with wisdom. Therefore, his actions cannot exceed his knowledge. However, this mishnah addresses a person on a lower level. Rabbeinu Yona says:

When he accepts it upon himself to follow Chazal with a full heart and a desirous spirit, he is rewarded as if he fulfilled all the mitzvos. And it is explained similarly in Avos d'Rav Nasan 22:1, "Anyone whose actions are more plentiful than his wisdom, his wisdom endures, as it is stated (Exodus 24:7), 'We shall do and we shall understand.'" As Israel had "do" precede "understand," they should have said, "We will understand and we will do," as before one can "do" an action, they need to understand what to do. However, they accepted upon themselves first to do all that God would command them and [then] they would understand; and they received reward from it immediately, as if they had done them.

There are two types of knowledge: 1. Knowledge regarding the performance of a mitzvah, which is knowledge of halacha, and 2. Philosophical knowledge regarding the conviction of the benefit of the system. Performance is impossible without halachic knowledge. But philosophical knowledge is necessary to lead to the conviction that the Torah is true and that it represents the best way of life. This conviction that the Torah teaches us the best life stems from knowledge. Viewing the entire system and recognizing that it is correct leads one to accept it. This is like the conviction of the many philosophers (including Socrates) who abandon the life of earthly physical pleasures. They engaged solely in God's wisdom and abandoned the instinctual pleasures. Such a person is at a high level. The philosophers' convictions were generated through investigation.

Rabbeinu Yona says that "Naaseh v'nishma" ("We will do and we will listen"), is impossible, as knowledge must precede action. [The Jews should have said, "Nishma v'naaseh," "We will listen and we will do."] However, there is one way to attain a conviction and a commitment to a philosophical way of life, even without possessing knowledge of the truth that such a philosophy is correct. This is achieved if one has an authoritative source endorsing that philosophy. But this case is only possible in one

scenario: Revelation at Sinai. Without that event, there is no such authoritative source. For if one relies on human opinion, there is no determinant that one person is more correct than another. For if one does not know, that would be a case of listening followed by doing, [and not what the Jews said.] And if one does not know the correct philosophy because he is lacking knowledge, there is no determining that one philosopher is correct and the other is wrong. In the field of medicine, one can assess an authoritative doctor by measuring his successes in healing others. But in the field of philosophy, the truth is not as obvious.

Therefore, Sinai is the only case where one without knowledge has authoritative proof for the best life. This is “Naaseh v’nishma,” “We will do and we will listen.” [The conviction in God’s existence, and His exclusive authoritative role as the only being who knows absolute philosophical truth, enabled the Jews to accept actions upon themselves without yet understanding them.] Here, total conviction can exist without knowledge. But anyone who says, “I will do and then I will listen” in any other case, is baseless in his decision. Only when God is the source of knowledge does it make sense to say, “I will do and then I will listen.”

Rabbeinu Yona says that this same reasoning applies to one who is on the path from ignorance toward a knowl-

edgeable life, and this applies to all people, for we all make that trip. Once one has the Torah, he must have total conviction in the Torah and in our wise Torah teachers:

In accordance with the Torah that they teach you, and in accord with the judgment that they speak, you shall do; don't veer from the matter that they tell you right or left.

The Torah includes a system where the truth can be transmitted throughout all generations. This plan—by definition—includes teachers, thereby demanding a total commitment to their teachings.

Then He said to Moshe, "Come up to the Lord, with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel, and bow low from afar. Moshe alone shall come near the Lord; but the others shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him." Moshe went and repeated to the people all the commands of the Lord and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying, "All the things that the Lord has commanded, we will do!" Moshe then wrote down all the commands of the Lord. Early in the morning, he set up an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He designated some young men among the Israelites, and they offered burnt offerings and

sacrificed bulls as offerings of well-being to the Lord. Moshe took one part of the blood and put it in basins, and the other part of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will listen!" (Deut. 24:1-7).

Even though at that time the Jews did not yet know the ideas behind the Book of the Covenant [Bereishis through Yisro and the mitzvos commanded to them in Marah (Rashi, Ibid. 24:7)], nor did they understand the philosophy of that path of life, nevertheless they trusted God. They knew that the Book of the Covenant was true [and they accepted the performance of all its commands by saying "Na'aseh."] The Jews then said "Nishma," "We will listen," meaning that they would continue to understand the book until they reached the conviction from their own knowledge.

"Na'aseh v'nishma" straddles two matters. "Na'aseh" refers to the acceptance of God's authority. "Nishma" means that their initial acceptance through saying "Na'aseh" is incomplete until they achieved an understanding through Torah—without the acceptance of authority of why the Torah is the best life.

People today are emotionally attracted to an incorrect

interpretation of “Na’aseh v’nishma.” They attribute value to blind acceptance. However, when such people complete their studies and finally understand the Torah’s rationale, they no longer function with blind acceptance and thereby no longer operate according to their original philosophy. Thus, we see that Judaism says that the highest level is when one’s soul identifies the good through realizing the truth and the reality of the Torah. One then follows that good naturally. [Blind acceptance is not a value.]

The first level of acting without understanding, as Rabbeinu Yona says, is good advice that one must follow until he gains knowledge of the Torah’s rationale. A person must be emotionally convinced without knowledge. This is Rabbeinu Yona’s view— it’s an interesting phenomenon.

The true “Na’aseh v’nishma” is a deathblow to both types of erring individuals: 1. Those who follow blind faith, and 2. Those who are moved by ideas alone. For the latter cannot perform without listening first and that is the opposite of “Na’aseh v’nishma.” This latter personality is the one whose wisdom exceeds his actions; he cannot have emotional conviction without knowledge.

Pirkei Avos is the breakdown of the individual’s emotional imperfections. And there exist various emotional phenomena. Here we have the appeal of blind faith and also the attraction to philosophy. Both are wrong and ir-

rational. A rational person can be emotionally convinced 100 percent, but have no knowledge, provided he bases his choice on some knowledge of a truth, like Revelation at Sinai. This person makes a rational choice when heeding Rabbeinu Yona's advice to follow God without knowledge. But at the same time this is not the [ultimate] objective of "Nishma," which refers to not following the Torah system any longer because of authority, but because of understanding.

"Na'aseh v'nishma" was not a one-time event. God foresaw that every generation must accept the Torah. Thus, each generation requires its own acceptance. "A great voice that would not continue" (Deut. 5:19) [referring to the audible phenomena at Sinai] means that this event would not be repeated. [But as each generation's acceptance is required] the system is designed precisely that evidence of Sinai is transmitted through all generations. Rabbeinu Yona says that one must be fully allegiant to the Torah's transmitters and wise teachers and adhere to all that they instruct regardless of one's understanding, but with the intent to understand.

“AND ANYONE WHOSE WISDOM EXCEEDS HIS ACTIONS, HIS WISDOM WILL NOT ENDURE.”

Rabbeinu Yona says that one must first perfect his character if his wisdom is to endure. Perfected character helps a person reject the pull of his desires. Thereby, such a person experiences no conflict between his wisdom and his actions. When one has philosophical understanding, he acts because he grasps the truth. No coercion is warranted since his mind agrees to follow the good. His emotions then switch from desiring the material good to desiring the real good. This person is called one who serves God from love. He is in a felicitous state as his emotions and his intelligence are in perfect harmony. But if one caters to his emotions and has no ability to frustrate his desires by restricting his sensual gratification [in order to live the good life] he will never attain perfection. As Rabbeinu Yona says, one must first perfect his character.

In summary, our mishnah describes two preferred personality types. One person has a greater fear of sin than he has wisdom. This person looks to wisdom as his salvation, and his wisdom will endure. The second person's actions exceed his wisdom. He accepts wisdom on the authority of the Torah's teachers, even though he has not yet acquired knowledge. His wisdom too will endure.

ADDENDUM

Rashi says that if one's fear of sin is greater than his wisdom, he will be successful in all areas as he will not stumble in his actions. For example, if one has great psychological knowledge, this does not mean he will be successful. For his own emotions can impede his progress. But if one has a fear of sin, he is always in an objective state. He now observes his own emotions and does not allow himself to fall prey to their influence.

3:10 CARE FOR OTHERS AND ONE-SELF

HE [RABBI CHANINA BEN DOSA] WOULD SAY: "ANYONE FROM WHOM THE SPIRIT OF CREATIONS [MAN] FINDS PLEASURE, FROM HIM THE SPIRIT OF GOD FINDS PLEASURE. AND ANYONE FROM WHOM THE SPIRIT OF CREATIONS DOES NOT FIND PLEASURE, FROM HIM THE SPIRIT OF GOD DOES NOT FIND PLEASURE." RABBI DOSA BEN HARKINUS SAYS: "[LATE] MORNING SLEEP, MIDDAY WINE, THE CHATTER OF CHILDREN, AND SITTING IN THE ASSEMBLY HOUSES OF

THE AM HAARETZ (UNLEARNED PEOPLE, WHO ARE LAX IN OBSERVING TITHES AND PURITY LAWS) REMOVE A PERSON FROM THE WORLD.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Anyone whose business dealings are pleasant and upright, and everyone sees that he deals in truth, is in accordance with Tal. Yuma that says, “Anyone who learns and deals with others with trust, what do others say about him? ‘Happy is this man who learned Torah and happy are his parents who taught Torah to him.’” And this is the meaning of “From him the spirit of God finds pleasure.”

One way to learn this mishnah is that if people like you, then God will like you. But Rabbeinu Yona learns otherwise. He learns that in business dealings one’s selfishness and greed are most aroused; however, if one is honest and trustful in these matters, people recognize [and admire] his truthful lifestyle and his perfected character. The world recognizes good people. Today we place value on great minds like Socrates and Galileo, despite their detractors in their days. Therefore, when one deals honestly and is a talmid chocham, people will praise the Torah. This is the meaning of “From him the spirit of God finds pleasure.” [This means that the talmid chocham’s fine reputation re-

flects on the Torah that he studies, and this is God's will, as if to say that God finds pleasure from him.] And the inverse is also true regarding a talmid chocham of poor character. The gemara says that one of the matters asked of man after he dies is whether he was honest in business: Did such a person reflect truth or did he not? (Truth—emes—is God's seal.)

Rashi says, "Whomever is loved below is certainly loved above." Does this mean that because people like somebody, that causes God to like him too? This cannot be so, since some of the greatest tzaddikim were hated.

People enjoy a pleasant person, one who is kind and his personality is a pleasure. To be such a person requires one to love humanity. And one achieves this love only by removing himself from particular situations and viewing humanity as a whole. If one views another person as a tzelem Elohim, he will be kind to him and help him. He will act like Abraham. Such a person is not involved in petty emotions. He is always on the losing end, so to speak, as he always gives to others. But he does not mind since he is not involved in emotional pettiness. And if one perfects his traits the result is a natural identification with others. Albert Einstein spent a lot of time helping the cause of Zionism despite his weak state. He did so as he possessed a love of humanity. Perfected people are concerned with mankind

now and for the state of people in the future. Einstein represents a person in whom God's creations find pleasure. Even today people express a love for Einstein. He reached a level that was aligned with God: "From him the spirit of God finds pleasure."

RABBI DOSA BEN HARKINUS SAYS: "[LATE] MORNING SLEEP, MIDDAY WINE, THE CHATTER OF CHILDREN, AND SITTING IN THE ASSEMBLY HOUSES OF THE AM HAARETZ (UNLEARNED PEOPLE, WHO ARE LAX IN OBSERVING TITHES AND PURITY LAWS) REMOVE A PERSON FROM THE WORLD."

These four descriptions refer to people who 1. Rise late in the morning, 2. Get drunk, 3. Joke around, and 4. Gather with ignorant people. The phrase "remove a person from the world" refers to one who results in a total failure: financially, spiritually, metaphysically, and in every other area.

Chazal did not say that one should never joke. A joke addresses frustrations and helps man cope during his climb toward perfection. Once man is perfected, jokes are no longer needed, as man's complete nature is in harmony with reality. But until perfection, jokes are acceptable. However, if one is in a shiur and the rebbe rebukes the students, and one student makes a joke, it can derail the other students' vital attitude of humility and take away from the rebbe's

beneficial rebuke, causing harm. For the student diverted everyone from seeing a new, important truth. Thus, jokes about death are always wrong as they deny death—a necessary reality one must accept if he is to live properly.

Joking gives a person a momentary pleasure that forfeits the attainment of the true pleasure. Joking about death distorts one's view about the nature of his life. If one does not have knowledge of the nature of his existence, he cannot have knowledge of how he should live his life. An essential feature of human existence is that it is only transitory. By denying death, one's entire way of coping with life is false. Thereby, one cannot attain any true level of perfection.

Chazal say that the improper joke is the one that impedes progress. Therefore, "the chatter of children"—joking around—is harmful as it diverts one's energies from partaking in reality.

Moshe, Jacob, and Kings David and Solomon knew when they would die, and they prepared for it. These great tzaddikim faced reality and prepared accordingly. This is the ultimate person, in contrast with one who dies in his sleep. That tzaddik embraces death as a reality and properly prepares for it.

When Chazal grew tired from their studies, they would make a joke.

Here, the joke is a means of reviving one's spirit, to ease tension and to regain an attitude to learn more. But the joke that is the end, such as joking around and the chatter of children, is damaging.

What exactly is "the chatter of children?" Young people have not yet been impacted by life's harsh realities. But for an older person, matters are more serious: he is not as physically well as he used to be, and he knows that he does not have much more time to live. His emotions don't necessarily lend themselves to joking.

... SITTING IN THE ASSEMBLY HOUSES OF THE
AM HAARETZ

How is this different from the chatter of children? This is another way of denying reality. These people raise non-sensical matters to a level of importance, and thereby feel comfortable discussing such matters.

... REMOVE A PERSON FROM THE WORLD

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Since for what was man created besides being involved with the Torah, and it is "the length of days and the years of life" and if he [engages in] such things, "Why does he have life?" And it is fit to drive him from

the world, as he is vanity and his days are vanity. And since he has lived some years and has been involved in his affairs and it has not helped—because he has neglected Torah—for what [reason] should his days be increased? There is a parable about a king who gave his servant one hundred silver coins and the servant threw them into the sea and [then] returned and requested others [coins] from the king. Is it not fitting that he did not give him more? So is it [with] one who does not involve himself with the Torah.

Rabbeinu Yona holds that one can quite literally die from engaging in these four destructive matters. Such a life is worthless, as one fails to engage in his purpose of Torah study. Such a person will receive no divine providence to sustain his life. The parable is that God gave this person life and he threw it away. Therefore, there is no reason to sustain such an individual. Rabbeinu Yona means that even if such a person prays for an extended life, it wouldn't help.

3:11 METAPHYSICAL REALITY

RABBI ELAZAR OF MODI'IN SAYS: "ONE WHO PROFANES THE KODSHIM (SACRED MATERIAL); ONE WHO DESECRATES THE HOLIDAYS; ONE WHO WHITENS (EMBARRASSES) THE FACE OF ANOTHER IN PUBLIC; ONE WHO NULLIFIES THE COVENANT OF ABRAHAM OUR FATHER, PEACE BE UPON HIM; ONE WHO REVEALS MEANINGS IN THE TORAH THAT RUN CONTRARY TO THE LAW, EVEN THOUGH HE HAS TORAH KNOWLEDGE AND GOOD DEEDS, HE HAS NO SHARE IN THE WORLD TO COME."

Kodshim is a system through which man channels his instinctual energies toward God. One who profanes kodshim—sacred material [such as a sacrifice]—denies the halachic system.

The holidays—like Shabbos—are designated for Torah study [explaining the prohibition of labor that distracts one from Torah study.] One who desecrates the holidays indicates a lack of interest in searching out God.

"His teeth are whiter than milk" [Yaakov's blessing of Yehuda] (Gen. 49:12) teaches that the white of one's teeth are superior to milk. In other words, a person's psychological well-being [which is improved when one receives a smile (white teeth) from another] is of greater value than physical sustenance (milk). Chazal teach that public embarrassment, which causes one's face to whiten as all the

blood leaves his face, is tantamount to murder. Many rabbis say that one must face death and not embarrass somebody publicly, which is derived from the incident of Yehuda and Tamar:

About three months later, Yehuda was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot; in fact, she is with child by harlotry." "Bring her out," said Yehuda, "and let her be burned." As she was brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, "I am with child by the man to whom these belong..." (Gen. 38:24,25).

Tamar chose to be burned rather than publicly embarrass Yehuda. Therefore, her message was disguised and did not identify Yehuda by name, but as "the man to whom these belong" [the items Tamar took as collateral until she was paid the animal as wage for her service]. Even though there was yet no halachic system that would prohibit Yehuda from sleeping with a harlot, he engaged in the lower human element of lust, as Maimonides writes. Tamar did not wish to embarrass Yehuda and preferred to die by fire.

Embarrassing someone also denies man's reflection of his Creator, for man possesses the tzelem Elohim. [The intellect, or soul, is called "tzelem Elohim" (form of God) as man possesses a Godlike trait of wisdom.] Meis mitzvah

(burying one who has no one else to do so) pushes aside all other mitzvos, even Megillah reading. And one who is killed by the courts and is hanged must be taken down immediately (Deut. 21:23), as this too reflects poorly on God. Thus, embarrassing a person denies the fundamental that man reflects God. Such embarrassment is a denial of God.

ONE WHO NULLIFIES THE COVENANT OF ABRAHAM OUR FATHER.

One who wishes to appear uncircumcised by extending his skin rejects bris milah, which is human perfection: “Walk before me and be perfect” (Gen. 17:1) was God’s introductory statement to Abraham upon commanding him in circumcision. The word “perfect” (tamim) in this verse refers to a person who is not a dichotomized personality. God is the focus of all his pursuits. The Treaty of the Torah is cited three times in the Torah, while the Treaty of Circumcision is cited thirteen times. The Torah is the means to perfection, while perfection is embodied in circumcision. Therefore, the Torah mentions the Treaty of Circumcision more than it mentions the Treaty of the Torah.

The Paschal Lamb and circumcision are the only two positive commandments that are punished with excision (kares) if one fails to fulfill them. The Paschal Lamb was the inception of Judaism. Circumcision embodies human

perfection, through which one diverts all his energies in the pursuit of knowledge of God. [These two mitzvos are central and therefore carry a punishment of excision.]

ONE WHO REVEALS MEANINGS IN THE TORAH
 THAT RUN CONTRARY TO THE LAW (MEGALEH
 PANIM B'TORAH SHELO K'HALACHA)

Sanhedrin 99b explains that there are two ways one violates this. An apikores is one who degrades a talmid chocham. Another manner of violation is degrading a friend in front of a talmid chocham. Thus, an apikores does not necessarily refer to one who denies the Torah system.

Mennashe said: "But did Moshe need to write only insignificant matters that teach nothing, for example: 'And Lotan's sister was Timna' (Gen. 36:22), or, 'And Timna was a concubine to Eliphaz, son of Esav' (Gen. 36:12)."

This is an example of migaleh panim b'Torah shelo k'halacha—defamation without a Torah purpose. Timna preferred to be part of a lower status and related to the Jewish nation [rather than be part of a higher social status, but unrelated to the Jewish nation]. This is the reason that the Torah wrote that she became a concubine to Eliphaz. Thus, migaleh panim b'Torah shelo k'halacha refers to one who

degrades the Torah as having unimportant verses.

A second explanation of migaleh panim b'Torah shelo k'halacha is degrading a talmid chocham, like a person who says, "What have the chochamim done that helped us? They learn for themselves and teach themselves." Abaye says that this too is a violation of migaleh panim b'Torah shelo k'halacha.

The gemara says that such a statement is a violation of denying the Torah (kofer b'Torah) because such a person rejects the principle that the chochamim sustain the Earth's very existence:

Thus said the Lord: "As surely as I have established My covenant with day and night—the laws of Heaven and Earth" (Jer. 33:25)

One who denies this principle that the talmidei chochamim give purpose to creation, is a denier of Torah, an apikores and a migaleh panim b'Torah shelo k'halacha.

Why do these imperfections forfeit one's afterlife? We can see how these matters are Judaism's fundamentals. But what is unique about these specific matters? The gravity of one who denies the concept of searching for God's wisdom (degrading the holidays) is understandable, as is the [sever-

ity of the] concept of circumcision and the idea of one who denies the Torah. But why does this mishnah identify these specific forms? Also, why is it irrelevant if one has studied the Torah and performs good actions? Is such a person not on a high level? Why then does this person forfeit his afterlife? Furthermore, if a person has studied Torah and performs good actions, how can he deny these principles?

EVEN THOUGH HE HAS TORAH KNOWLEDGE
AND GOOD DEEDS, HE HAS NO SHARE IN THE
WORLD TO COME.

The person is a philosopher, but he forfeits his afterlife because Judaism is more than just a philosophy: It demands the recognition of a metaphysical system. These matters of profaning sacred material and the other cases refer to metaphysical concepts that have been embodied in the halachic structure. And if one defiles these structures, he rejects that these halachos are dictated by God. If one is a philosopher but does not accept the halachic structure that God commanded, he loses his afterlife. This person denies the metaphysical reality that God embodied in the halachic system. This is true even though he accepts the underlying concepts [explaining why this person possesses Torah knowledge and good deeds but still rebels].

Judaism is not merely a matter of philosophical perfec-

tion, but it demands one to recognize a world of metaphysical reality. This halachic system is a “substance” so to speak; it is an entity. This is the common denominator of these five cases.

Our two questions answer each other. We first asked how one could deny these principles while possessing Torah knowledge and good deeds. The second question was why these five particular structures were chosen. It is possible to be a philosopher but break the structure. As these five cases represent Judaism’s fundamentals embodied in the halachic structure, one who violates these five matters is a denier of Judaism’s fundamentals and thereby forfeits his afterlife. But if one violated another Torah prohibition, he is not in denial of a Torah fundamental. One may ask why violating Shabbos is not listed here; certainly, such a violation is fundamental. The answer is that degrading the holidays includes Shabbos, and Rabbeinu Yona mentions that the holidays are like Shabbos.

Pirkei Avos is about ethics. Why then was this mishnah included? Pirkei Avos identifies the flaws of a type of philosopher who may engage in thought and perfection, but fails to recognize the embodiment of the ideas in the halachic system. He does not treat these halachic phenomena with the importance that their ideas dictate. Rejecting the halachic expressions of these five Torah fundamentals

denies God. One thereby forfeits his afterlife.

The three major prohibitions for which one must give up his life in order not to violate them are adultery, murder, and idolatry. Embarrassing another person is a subcategory of murder. Another case the gemara cites is of a sick person whose doctor prescribes seeing a certain woman naked in order for him to recover. Although this is not a major violation, Chazal say he must die [and not look at the woman]. Even speaking to this woman was strictly prohibited as such an action is a subcategory of adultery, for which one must forfeit his life in order not to violate. Such an action is referred to as “approaching sexual prohibitions,” for which one must sacrifice his life in order not to violate. Similarly, one is prohibited to benefit from any part of an ashaira tree, which was used for idolatry.

The reason one must forfeit his life and not murder someone is not because one causes a permanent change through killing—embarrassment can be reversed. However, it is the nature of the action that demands sacrifice of life. Murder is one type of destruction. But one can equally destroy a person emotionally through embarrassment, and that is as serious as murder.

PROPHETS AND PROPHECY

Moshe said to Korach, “If you die a natural death, you will know that God did not send me to give the Torah or send me in anyway (not just regarding the priesthood). And I will deny the Torah.” Moshe must deny the Torah because the same knowledge with which he recognized and received the Torah would be exposed as deficient. Thus, if the Earth does not swallow Korach, this would reject Moshe’s knowledge and undermine his ability to posit any belief at all.

Sometimes a prophet receives notice of an upcoming event. And other times the prophet acts [independently from any prophecy] in accordance with his own knowledge. Thus, Moshe said, “In accordance with my knowledge and my knowledge of Divine providence, what must take place is an unnatural death for Korach.” And if this does not occur, Chazal say that Moshe said he would have to deny God because the prophet must base himself on knowledge, just like any other person would. [He is not freed from this, as if all his moves are divinely driven.] Moshe said, “If my knowledge is faulty, I have no way to understand God, in which case I must assume that I am insane [for my convictions until now are that I do understand God].”

Both Moshe and Elijah were so convinced in their knowl-

edge of divine providence that they placed their full security in the events they felt had to occur. But why did both Moshe and Elijah announce to others what they anticipated God would do? [Why did they not remain silent?]

Elijah said, “How long will you straddle both sides of the fence?” [The Jews accepted God but needed some physicality in their religious practice, so they also accepted Ba’al. They straddled both sides, accepting monotheism and idolatry.] Elijah ridiculed Ba’al:

Elijah mocked them, saying, “Shout louder! After all, he is a god. But he may be in conversation, he may be detained, or he may be on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and will wake up” (I Kings 18:27).

Elijah meant that behind their desire for idolatry existed a desire for the security of a person.

Elijah wished to set himself as an example, that just as he based himself on knowledge, the Jews too should do so. Had the Jews used knowledge, they could not have accepted the contradiction of believing in both God and in Ba’al. Thus, Elijah said, “My knowledge tells me that a certain event will occur that will demonstrate God’s reality.” He was saying, “I am working with knowledge of God, and you must too.” That is the meaning of his words:

When it was time to present the meal offering, the prophet Elijah came forward and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel! Let it be known today that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your bidding" (I Kings 18:36).

It will be known that there is such an individual who has this type of knowledge. This is one of the Torah's fundamentals: God gives prophecy to man, to one who understands God's providence. Elijah placed this institution on the line. He felt that God performing as he predicted would demonstrate that there is such a person with accurate knowledge of God's providence. It is not correct for man to abandon his knowledge and believe in God as a mystical power. Moshe felt the same.

Idolatry is an attempt to project a personality onto God to gain humanistic security [in God]. But the prophet teaches that our view of God—the abstract and undefined God—is known only by virtue of His actions and His wisdom, [for] He has no attributes. There is no personality involved. In contrast, idolatry is an attempt to mask a personality onto God to offer man security. Elijah expressed that his security was based on one thing: knowledge.

Who is considered a prophet? Sanhedrin would put a

person through trials, and if he passed, he was considered a prophet and others were required to follow him, based on the obligation of “To him you shall listen” (Deut. 18:15). Outside of the framework of Torah from Sinai, there is no certainty of one’s prophetic status; all certainty stems from Sinai.

Today we have no prophets, so we must follow Elijah’s lesson of following our knowledge. This explains why the mitzvah of Torah study is so important. For if one fails to develop his intelligence and wisdom, if one cannot learn a Tosfos or a Rambam, he has nothing to guide his decisions. Torah study assumes very great importance in Judaism. One must introspect and discern which conclusions emanate from one’s intellect and which conclusions emanate from another part of his nature. Only then can one choose to follow wisdom. This is the picture of free choice, *bechira*.

Why did the era of the prophets come to an end? Every idea was stated by the prophets. Therefore, there is no need to repeatedly restate their principles or to recount them to every generation. The books of the prophets contain nothing new in addition to the Torah, but they expand upon the Torah. The books of the prophets complement the Torah and elaborate upon it, bringing out the Torah’s ideas even further. The ending of the era of the prophets meant

that every prophecy has been recorded. If one studies all the prophets, one obtains all of the ideas of prophecy; there is nothing more. Today, one must avail oneself of the books of the prophets. Although we no longer have living prophets, we have them in the writings. If one has an in-depth understanding, he will realize there is no difference between people who lived during the prophets' rebukes and people today. And their rebukes are equally valid today [man has not changed]. The current generation shares the same imperfections of ancient peoples.

Divine providence can do only so much for a person. Beyond that, one must harness his free will and work to the best of his abilities. If one fails to do this, there's very little that even a prophet can do for him. In our generation, if people do not take advantage of the prophets' writings, a living prophet would not add much. People today would not agree [with me], but they would discard a prophet just like people did during the lives of the prophets. And if people were frightened by the prophet, there would be no benefit [in having him alive in our era]. The only recourse is to follow the prophets' ideas. If one does not, he gains nothing by having a living prophet.

Returning to the point that both Moshe and Elijah followed reason, and specifically that Elijah was convinced that God would create a miracle for him on Mount Car-

mel, why did Elijah need to say in his prayer “Answer me, God, answer me”? Upon the completion of the Tabernacle, Moshe too prayed, “May it be the will of God that His shechina rest upon the work of your hands” (Rashi, Exod. 39:43). The same question arises as God already said, “And make for Me a temple, and I will dwell in your midst” (Exod. 25:8). As God already said that He would cause His Shechina to dwell among the Jews, of what need was Moshe’s prayer?

Apparently, there are two concepts of prayer, tefilah. One prayer is performed when one needs something, and therefore he approaches God with his requests. Like Rabbeinu Yona says, prayer is referred to as “Avodas Hashem” because through beseeching God, one recognizes that he is a dependent existence.

But the idea of prayer goes deeper. Prayer is a natural state of a human being coming to the total recognition of his dependency on God. Once a person recognizes this dependency, a natural state ensues without one needing to make a conscious decision to pray. If one accepts his dependency upon God but he does not pray, it indicates that a part of his nature does not comply with this realization of his dependency. But if one’s entire nature accepts this truth, he will naturally pray, and he cannot stop himself from praying.

The reason for Elijah’s prayer is because there is no providence unless man fully recognizes his position in the uni-

verse regarding God. His prayer expressed his perfected recognition of himself vis-à-vis God. This realization earned him that miracle:

Then fire from the Lord descended and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth; and it licked up the water that was in the trench (Ibid. 18:38).

This would also explain why the word for praying is *misparallel*. This form of the word is reflexive, referring to the auto reflex of prayer. The true person of prayer is one whose prayer emerges naturally from his nature [and is not evoked by need].

King David asked God for his Psalms to be accepted as Torah. However, if our study of his Psalms today is in fact considered Torah study, why wouldn't King David's recital of his Psalms be treated identically? For others, Psalms is considered Torah because one is learning something when he reads them. But for King David, who already knew the ideas contained in Psalms, his recital was a natural reaction of praising God. It was impossible for King David not to speak of God's praises.

I once demonstrated the concept [a reality] of a *gavra hamisparallel*, a person of prayer. Prayer is not merely an act, but [through praying] a person is rendered a certain

type of gavra whom halacha recognizes. If one were giving a public shiur and realized that he had not yet davened mincha, he would not be permitted to stop in order to daven. This also applies to one who is heavily engaged in deep Torah thought. If he were to stop learning in order to daven, he too would violate the rule of “One engaged in a mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah.” The principle here is as Chazal say, “One who turns away from Torah study, even his prayer is torn up.” Meaning, if one can turn away from learning Torah, he is not a gavra hamispallel since his relationship to learning is flawed. Man’s essence is his wisdom. Without wisdom, there is no gavra hamispallel that is praying. That is why his prayer is called an abomination.

There are two types of Toraso umnaso, one whose primary occupation is Torah study. One type is the person who learns day and night. The other is one who is deeply involved in an area of the Torah. Both are exempt from other mitzvos.

Returning to prophecy, why did Jonah suppress his prophecy? We must note that the verse does not say that Jonah fled “mipnay” Hashem, but “mi-lifnay” Hashem. The former means to run away from someone, and therefore it doesn’t say that here [for every intelligent person knows he can’t flee from God]. Jonah did not flee from before God—that is a childish notion. Rather, he tried to remove himself from being in God’s presence, i.e., from being under the influence of prophecy (says

the Ibn Ezra). This explains why he left the land of Israel [the place where prophecy is given].

Jonah said, “God, I know that You are merciful and gracious and that You repent from doing evil.” Jonah knew that God forgives. The Assyrians were an infamously wicked people. Jonah felt that when one reaches a degree of evil, he should no longer be permitted to repent. Jonah felt that the inhabitants of Ninveh embodied evil and that the benefit to the world would be their annihilation as a lesson that such evil people don’t deserve to exist.

The lesson of the kikayon was to teach Jonah that he could not understand the nature of God’s mercy for man. As the Creator, God’s mercy is based on a different foundation, of which a prophet cannot perceive. This explains why the Book of Jonah is read on Yom Kippur, for it expresses the fact that God’s pity functions on a totally different and imperceptible level. Jonah fled because in his framework, he could not fathom God’s pity on Ninveh. The kikayon taught Jonah to accept that he is ignorant of God’s pity.

A prophet’s modus operandi is wisdom; he cannot function without it. This was Jonah’s difficulty as he could not escape his mind’s assessment of Ninveh as deserving annihilation. An average person will do whatever God tells him. But the prophet cannot operate that way. If Rav Moshe gave a psak to an average person, he would follow it. But if he gave that psak to

a talmid chocham, he may find problems with the psak and would not follow it so readily. The prophet does not simply take orders. His wisdom is so engaged that if his knowledge fails, his function fails.

This explains why Moshe argued with God for seven days before heading to Egypt, and it is a lesson wherever we find a prophet arguing with God. Moshe's entire mission had to be performed with wisdom. Therefore, he argued with God until his mind was satisfied. This is like God saying, "Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do?" (Gen. 18:17). God then says, "For I have loved him, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right..." (Ibid. 18:19). If Abraham did not understand God's justice, he would not have been able to teach it.

3:12 POLITICAL SAVVY

RABBI YISHMAEL SAYS: "BE YIELDING TO AN ELDER, PLEASANT TO A YOUTH, AND GREET EVERY PERSON WITH JOY."

Rashi comments:

When one is young, he should be swift in fulfilling God's will. Also, when one is older, he should be pleasant to God.

What does Rashi mean by “also” when one is older? There are two parts to a person’s life. In youth, one’s strengths and energies are in full capacity, and he has his health. In his later years, he enters old age and becomes decrepit and he can no longer direct his energies to God because he does not have those energies. Therefore, one must not serve God in youth alone, when he is strong, but in old age he too must serve God, albeit in a different way: he should accept the reality that God created for him. Thus, Rashi teaches of the perfection in youth, which is expressed by directing one’s energies in the service of God, and he also teaches of the perfection of old age, expressed in accepting that reality.

Maimonides comments:

When one is before another person of high stature, he should serve him and not make himself appear important before [the man of high stature]. And when you are before a young man, exhibit your importance before him and do not act lightheartedly with him or show any favor to him. And by not showing favor to this young man, I do not mean you should act with anger.

Rather, one should greet every type of person with happiness, be he small or great, free or a servant. This is taking it a degree further from what Shammai said, "Greet every person with a pleasant expression."

The nature of an important person of stature [like a politician] is such that his ego cannot tolerate anyone else's ego. He is totally sufficient in his self-glorification. He will find another person's ego expression annoying. A person of such stature will favor you only if you are 100 percent subservient to him.

The mediocre person is different. Since his ego has not yet reached its full peak, and he is somewhat insecure, he seeks a strong ego onto which he might latch himself to bolster his own ego. Therefore, one who completely diminishes his ego before this mediocre personality offers him no value. However, if one expresses his ego before this person through a display of total independence with no need for others, this mediocre personality will not attach himself onto you as he perceives no gain in doing so [thereby you will not gain what you sought from this person]. As this personality views himself as moderately important, he will not accept a subservient role [for himself], which a fully independent type demands. On the contrary, one should greet this mediocre personality with happiness. Happiness

expresses that one possesses his own ego, but that he also extends himself to be pleasant to others. This is the perfect balance and demonstrates the foregoing of one's own ego to be pleasant, but not that he has no ego at all.

When Shammai said one should "Greet every person with a pleasant expression" (Avos 1:15), he meant perfection, which refers to one's character. This does not demand happiness, as in our mishnah, where Rabbi Yishmael speaks from a political standpoint. If one desires the most favorable reaction, happiness infuses another person with a sense of dignity, which everyone's ego welcomes. But this [final statement in our mishnah] refers only to initially greeting others, when happiness should be expressed to all people. But the mishnah's first two pieces of advice counsel a person on how to behave after that initial greeting. In front of the mediocre person, one should maintain his ego. And this does not contradict your initial greeting of happiness upon recognizing him.

The question arises as to why Judah spoke to Joseph with such strength (Gen. 44:18-34). [After all he was standing before the viceroy of Egypt.] This was a unique situation with no alternative if Judah was to save Benjamin. Judah assessed that a confrontation was proper in that context. But our mishnah's general advice is to avoid confrontation with a great person. To appeal to a great person, one must

show no ego expression.

Judaism maintains that one's status affects his psychology. Unlike all others, a king must act differently and bow at every blessing in the Shmoneh Esray, and he must also carry a separate Torah scroll (Deut. 17:18,19). The King's social position affects his ego. Maimonides says that the person most subject to error is he who has attained prominence in one field. Gaelan was a great physician and therefore thought he also understood philosophy as well as medicine. "The poor man speaks beseechingly; the rich man's answer is harsh" (Prov. 18:23) expresses this idea that one's social status affects his psychology.

The gemara says that there are three people who are intolerable: an arrogant pauper, a wealthy man who acts like a pauper, and an elderly person who acts like a great romantic. Near this Talmudic section is another that says that there are three people whom God loves: a pauper who returns a lost object, a wealthy man who gives charity in private, and a single man who refrains from sin. Each person has his unique trials and must grapple with his unique situation, which is affected by his social status.

The Torah cites another case of confrontation. When Jacob approached his brother Esav, he prostrated himself before him, displaying no ego whatsoever. That is how Jacob won favor from Esav. This was the correct approach and it

engendered Esav's mercy [saving Jacob's life and the lives of his family].

A major mistake that people make is attempting to impress an important person with one's own accomplishments. A second mistake is that people cannot express happiness in meeting a person of a lower status. By doing so they feel it contradicts their own importance, which is false. [Our mishnah responds to both of these errors.]

The lesson of this mishnah is one in ego psychology [which doesn't seem to belong in Avos, a tractate that focuses on perfection].

The greatest imperfection stems from one's uncontrollable energies related to his social life. In this area, the underlying emotions at play are those that are most important to people. If one is not in control, this area displays that he is overcome by unconscious influences and is therefore incapable of perfection. The perfected person is the one who can be rational in his social life. Most people cannot.

In social interactions, people's complete personalities are engaged as they seek unconscious satisfaction. This area is the stronghold of the unconscious. In their social interactions, most people act out unconscious emotions from their early youth, which is a low level of functioning. Therefore, the greatest perfection is achieved when one masters this area. Such a person is free from seeking

the satisfaction most others seek. This person has reached a level of perfection. This is a high level and the message of this mishnah.

*The fool does not desire understanding,
but only to air his thoughts (Prov. 18:2).*

The fool is not in control during his social interactions. But the perfected man interacts pleasantly with others, using wisdom (Kusuvos 17a), “*me’urav b’daas im a briyos.*” This explains why political savvy is part of perfection.

3:13 SAFEGUARDS

RABBI AKIVA SAYS: “JOKING AND LIGHTEARTEDNESS ACCLIMATE [ONE] TOWARD PROMISCUITY. TRADITION IS A SAFEGUARDING FENCE AROUND THE TORAH. TITHES ARE A SAFEGUARDING FENCE AROUND WEALTH. VOWS ARE A SAFEGUARDING FENCE AROUND ABSTINENCE. A SAFEGUARDING FENCE AROUND WISDOM IS SILENCE.”

How does joking and lightheartedness lead to sexual

violation? There is a distinction between one who jokes around and a drunkard. The latter's inebriated state disengages the superego. Thereby, he is free to indulge his fantasies. But the jokester distorts reality, thereby, his superego views prohibited acts as permissible. This is the opposite of the drunkard. Once a person breaks down the reality principle [he blurs right from wrong and good from bad], the ultimate objective is forbidden sexual satisfaction. That is, the moment one removes the reality principle, his most powerful human fantasies—the sexual emotions—take over.

Chazal are consistent on this point throughout their teachings. They hold that the most powerful emotions are the drives toward forbidden sexual actions. The sin in sexual prohibitions is that one gives himself over totally to the world of fantasy. And that fantasy is that one thinks that with this activity he will achieve the greatest happiness and satisfaction, which is false.

Forbidden sexual relations represent acting out the greatest fantasies. Chazal say that one who engages in seeking out fantasies does untold damage to his soul. It is not simply a one-time/isolated action. In this sin, energies have been released toward fantasy, which remain seeking those fantasies. And as Chazal were very concerned for the soul's well-being, they warned against certain matters that could

lead one to destroy himself. One must have a barometer for his own lightheadedness. This does not mean one cannot laugh or enjoy a joke, for even Chazal made jokes. However, a person should know the level of lightheadedness that approaches a negative change in his entire personality [and guard himself from crossing that line].

Reish Lakish said, "Man does not sin unless there enters into him a spirit of crookedness" (Sota 3a).

The sin of adultery is not because of a woman's beauty, but because of the man: [internally] he sought sexual satisfaction and this woman was the perfect object of his satisfaction.

TRADITION IS A SAFEGUARDING FENCE
AROUND THE TORAH.

Torah pronunciation—trup and ta'amim —keep the Torah intact. Rabbeinu Yona explains:

In this area, one does not find too many arguments. But regarding gemara, this is not so: the texts vary, and every day there are new definitions (svaros) that arise, and thereby people write a new textual version (girsas); and permission has been granted to do so [because in the gemara, one is sup-

posed to follow his theoretical understandings]. There is no perfect sefer, and they attributed mistakes to the sefer and not to the theoretical understanding. In the Oral Law, there is no fence, but there is a fence in the Written Law.

Trup (musical notes used in laining) is the Torah's method of transmitting expression through the written word. Sometimes a word that is read with the wrong note must be repeated [as improper trup alters the meaning]. Trup is a form of inflection [that provides additional meaning].

TITHES ARE A SAFEGUARDING FENCE AROUND WEALTH.

Rabbeinu Yona quotes Taanis 9a:

The verse says, "One should certainly tithe," "Asare ta'asare" (Deut. 14:22), give a tenth so that you become rich.

Rabbi Yochanan greeted his young nephew. He said to him, "Tell me the Torah verse you are currently learning." His nephew replied, "Asare ta'asare. What is the meaning of this double language?" Rabbi Yochanan replied, "Give a tithe in order to grow rich." His nephew replied, "How do you know this to be true?" Rabbi Yochanan answered, "Go test it out." His

nephew responded, "And is it permitted to test God? Does not the Torah say, 'Do not test God' (Deut. 6:16)?" Rabbi Yochanan replied, "This is what Rabbi Hoshia taught, 'except for tithes' [one cannot test God], as Malachi says: 'Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test, said the Lord of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you more than enough.'" Rami bar Chama said in Rav's name, "until your lips are worn out from saying enough." The nephew replied, "If I had reached that verse in my learning, I would have no need for you or your rebbe, Rabbi Hoshia." [On a different occasion] Rabbi Yochanan found the young son of Reish Lakish sitting and studying and reciting the verse, "The foolishness of man perverts his way, and his heart frets against the Lord" (Proverbs 19:3). When someone sins and every manner of mishap befalls him, he complains [against God] and wonders why these things are happening to him. Rabbi Yochanan sat down and wondered aloud about this verse, saying, "Is there anything that is written in the Writings that is not alluded to in the Torah at all? I cannot think of any hint of this idea in the Torah itself." The child said to him, "Is that to say that this idea is really not alluded to in the Torah? But isn't it written, with regard to Joseph's brothers: 'And their heart failed them and they turned trembling to one to another, saying,

‘What is this that God has done to us?’” (Genesis 42:28). This verse exemplifies the notion that when one sins and encounters troubles, he wonders why it is happening to him [he blames God]. Impressed by the youth’s wisdom, Rabbi Yochanan raised his eyes and stared at the boy.

How do we make sense out of the apparent contradiction of “Do not test God” and God saying, “Test Me” regarding tithes? Why is tithes different from any other case, and why does giving tithes actually work to enrich the one who gives?

From a natural standpoint, the optimum situation for a person is that in all his endeavors, he experiences no emotional conflict. For if one’s emotions conflict in any way, one is prone to a greater degree of error. For example, a physician should not perform an operation on himself because his emotional involvement will inhibit objective and rational decisions and he might harm himself. This applies equally to a physician who is emotionally attached to a given patient. Therefore, an objective state of mind, where one is emotionally detached, is most favorable.

A person who cannot part with his possessions lives outside of reality. God owns everything: “The Earth is the Lord’s and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants”

(Psalms 24:1). To give 10 percent of one's possessions to tzedakah is sensible. An irrational attachment to money that prevents one from giving 10 percent will—at some point—harm one's business decisions. If one can overcome this attachment, he will become a better businessman and he will earn more. This is the natural way of explaining “Tithe in order to become rich.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

One who wishes to become wealthy should give his money with a pleasant countenance. And one should not say, “I have one thousand bundles, how can I give away one hundred when they are worth so much?” But one should give them away and God will repay him and give him back double. And this is a reality.

Rabbeinu Yona says that divine providence is involved when one gives tithes or tzedakah. He continues:

Tzedakah is the same as tithes. A wealthy person who saved many people [with his charity] but did not give his full 10 percent, is worse than a pauper who gave his full 10 percent but saved fewer people. The wealthy man will not be excused on his day of judgment as he did not give his full 10 percent. But God will reward the poor man on judgment day, even though he saved fewer people.

We thereby learn that tzedakah has nothing to do with accomplishment. Even though the rich man saved more people, he will receive a punishment as he failed to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah. Rabbeinu Yona teaches that the frame of reference for tzedakah is not how much one accomplishes. In this world, accomplishment is a totally erroneous concept. For a person to attribute success to himself is vainglory, as it is God who runs the world. The fate of every person is in God's hand alone. The correct concept is whether one acted justly and properly: Did he give his full 10 percent or not? A person can take credit only for his actions and not for the results. In the end, tzedakah is more for the benefactor than it is for the beneficiary. Therefore, the one worthy of praise is not the greater donor, but the one who gave his full 10 percent.

What is meant by "Test Me?" This doesn't mean that if a person gives tzedakah to test God, success will naturally ensue. We are prohibited from testing God: it is a rule with no exceptions. "Test Me" means there is a special divine providence in connection with tithes and tzedakah. The reason for this divine providence is because this mitzvah concerns man's complete perfection and imperfection. The recognition of "The Earth is the Lord's and all that it holds..." stands in contradistinction to human possession. As long as human possession operates irrationally, one denies "The Earth is the

Lord's and all that it holds..." This is actually a denial of God and it is why so many mitzvos echo the concept of "The Earth is the Lord's and all that it holds..." Shmitta, Yovel, and Shabbos all point to this idea. Tzedakah is part of this system.

"Test me" means that a person who gives tzedakah properly has corrected his relationship to "The Earth is the Lord's and all that it holds..." and therefore comes under a special providence. Man's possessions are closest to him on an emotional level. It is in this matter that he perfects his distortion of his place in the universe.

This explains the gemara that says that tzedakah is the exception. Other areas are incidental and therefore, one cannot test God in them. But tzedakah is where one raises himself to a higher level related to his possessions and fulfills "The Earth is the Lord's and all that it holds..." Therefore, this person comes under divine providence [and grows wealthier]. In this area, one deals with the reality of providence, as stated by Malachi. In this matter, divine providence responds favorably to one's test. Other areas are unrelated to providence.

The result of one who gives tzedakah properly is, "I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you more than enough." This means that there are two states of wealth. One is the [false] relative state, what the world seeks, i.e., "Whomever has more is better." But

true wealth is the best state for man. He has security, he has enough for himself, and he has funds with which he can perform kindness. But to achieve this state of feeling wealthy, there is one condition. And it does not concern the quantity of wealth, but how one relates to it. Chazal said, “Who is rich? He who is satisfied with his lot” (Avos 4:1). Maimonides says that the “wealth” required for a man to receive prophecy refers to this type of wealth: the mental state of satisfaction and not the amassed wealth. The former is truly happy.

“Test Me” means that if one changes his relationship to his material possessions, viewing them as “The Earth is the Lord’s and all that it holds...”, and one gives his tzedakah properly because it is the right thing to do and not from coercion, one comes under divine providence and becomes wealthy. And this wealth is that state of satisfaction [with God’s gifts] where one feels a sense of “enough.” This state is realized only in a person who has perfected himself in his relationship to his possessions. He will find that state of wealth that people initially search for in their quest.

However, one who gives his 10 percent because of a greedy nature to gain more, fails to perfect himself. It is the one who corrects his relationship to his wealth and overcomes his greed through tzedakah who perfects himself and earns God’s providence. [The perfect man’s search for wealth is for the state of satisfaction, while the imper-

fect man seeks wealth for the quantity and has no concept of sufficiency.]

How do we answer why some of Chazal were very poor? We cannot suggest that they did not give their 10 percent. Why then didn't they become wealthy, as the Torah says? Some rabbis didn't want wealth, as they felt it would cause them to forfeit their Torah studies. Therefore, they put themselves in situations where they would not earn, and therefore they did not increase their wealth.

VOWS ARE A SAFEGUARDING FENCE AROUND
ABSTINENCE.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Abstinence is a superior virtue and there are several good virtues that are [needed] to acquire it, as it says (Avodah Zarah 20b), "Cleanliness leads to abstinence." And this regards one who separates from the pleasures of the world, even from the things that are permissible in eating and sexual relations; even from all of the other desires in avoiding honor and lordship and wealth and the like. And he distances himself from the roots of [the pleasures] and brings himself near to the fundamentals (essence) of the soul and its foundation. And [hence] he is close to the service of the Creator, may He be blessed.

Abstinence as an end is nonsensical, as if to say that pleasures are inherently bad. Abstinence is a separation [from pleasures], but it is only a means. Rabbeinu Yona says that abstinence targets the objective of drawing closer to the essential nature and function of the soul. This is the definition of one who worships God. Therefore, this person—by definition—must be happier than one who engages in physical pleasures. For the latter is distant from the workings of his essential nature, his soul. [He does not function with his essence, which is his soul. If the essence of a thing is absent in any function, that thing does not function in line with its nature, which we refer to as malfunctioning in inanimate things, or unhappy in animate beings.]

One philosopher said that people who chase after envy, greed, lust, honor, and money have no concept of the enjoyment of being in a perfected state. Had they sensed that state, they would abandon what they presently chase. They err regarding what the good is. Happiness is contingent on one principle: that man lives in line with the function of his soul. One who has experienced the pleasures of the soul to some degree [the pursuit of wisdom and the experience of uncovering scientific and Torah marvels] will try with all his efforts to bring himself to a state where he is close to the soul's function to a higher degree. This is the purpose of a yeshiva: to provide this experience. A yeshiva cannot

give a person perfection—since it is a very individualistic process—but it can give a person the experience of what it is like to be involved in the “essence of the soul and its foundations.” Once one experiences it, he can arrange his life to reach that goal.

Rabbeinu Yona continues on the topic of abstinence:

How is it with food? One who eats a little in order to live and be healthy to study a lot of Torah and do great service in the service of God. And he drinks to fill his thirst and not to get drunk [so] that he does not “expose himself within his tent.” And he only has sexual relations to fulfill the commandment, behold this is from the way of abstinence, as his intention is not to enjoy the world. And there is also a second benefit: that he guards his soul from sin, as when his impulse overpowers him, and he desires to sin, he will say in his heart, “I am vigilant about what is permissible, [so] how can I do this great evil?” and “I will have sinned to my Father in Heaven all of the days.” And this thing will [protect] him from all of the stumbling blocks. But one who goes after natural physicality and is pulled by his desires and his pleasures—even if he does not do something forbidden—will be found to have distanced himself from the fundamentals of his soul and its foundation. He will also have caused his soul to follow the body and the physical and “sever it with an ax from

its roots and its foundation.” And [it is] as it is written (Hoshea 4:11), “Promiscuity, wine, and new wine take the heart.” Hence, they gave a counsel to the one who is not able (to lead) to control his spirit and is pulled by the pleasures, to make a vow for some days to say, “I will not eat and not drink until time X, except like this”; or to forbid what is permissible. And [then] his habit will control him, from that which he observes his vow. It comes out that he leads himself to conquer his impulse. And with this, the benefit that is in his hand is abstinence.

One who is distant from the essence of his soul and its foundation is one who operates without knowledge. Rabbeinu Yona says that they gave advice that one makes a vow.

This mishnah identifies the difference between one who is seriously involved in perfection and one who is not. The former takes great care before he engages in a pleasure; he discerns whether the pleasure will remove him from the essence of the soul or not. This is Chazal’s greatness; it is a level on which most of us do not operate. Chazal monitored their internal selves as they led perfected lives. This dictated that they did not freely indulge in anything just because it is permissible. They realized that there is a penalty for such indulgence; if an indulgence removes one from the

essence of his soul, this endangers his very existence.

Someone recently asked, “If I have the money to live well and indulge in pleasures, is it proper to do so?” There is no mitzvah per se to be an ascetic. There is no difference between an ascetic for the sake of asceticism and a hedonist: both an ascetic and a hedonist lead improper lifestyles, as Chazal taught. One must use his intellect and be objective about the pleasures in which he engages. The determinant is whether such an engagement will bring one closer to life wisdom and perfection. One must know himself and be careful with his emotions and monitor himself. Chazal taught that this is the most essential feature in one’s life.

The simpleton allows himself every permissible pleasure. However, this violates the commandment of “Kedoshim tihiyhu,” “You shall be sanctified” (Lev. 19:2), which refers to abstinence. Enjoyments, at best, are necessary evils that enable one to be involved in the world of wisdom to a greater degree. “Evil” means that it is unfortunate that one must spend time in other areas that are necessary to enable a life of wisdom. And the greater the person is, the fewer physical enjoyments he requires to remain in his pursuit of wisdom. The more physical [indulgences] one needs, the further away he is from the essence of the soul and its foundations. When the Vilna Gaon studied Torah during the day, he closed the shades and learned by candlelight so

as not to be distracted by nature's beauty. The mind works best with the least amount of distractions. When the soul is involved in its own workings, it is completely removed from physical pleasures. This is a very high level, but it is good to know this example for self-appreciation.

Promiscuity, wine, and new wine take the heart. (Hoshea 4:11)

The pleasures remove one from the mind. A wise person will be very cautious regarding how much he involves himself in the physical world. It is important to recognize that regarding desires, it is not the pleasure itself that is so harmful, but it is the self-image that is so damaging. It is not so bad to indulge in a meal. The damage is that the person views himself as “one who eats well”—this becomes his philosophy. [He identifies himself with this value that does not embody the value of wisdom.]

Judaism's philosophy is the opposite of the world's philosophy. The world takes pride in how much acquisition one amasses, while Judaism views such involvement as a distraction from the life of wisdom. Maimonides says that it is wrong to talk about mundane accomplishments because talk itself means that one values those things. Speech is damaging since one tends to believe what he formulates and verbalizes. This explains why in this same mishnah

Chazal included the advice, “A guarding fence to wisdom is silence.” The wise man does not pride himself on his acquisitions by talking about them.

This mishnah says that one can remove himself from the very functions that are essential to his soul, to his very nature. But one can ask, “As one has desires, from where do they emanate? Are they not part of my very nature? Why then, if I follow my desires, do I remove myself from my essential nature? This seems inherently contradictory.” This is an important question in discussing abstinence, which asks one to remove himself from physical pleasures.

The answer is that one should leave the pleasures because they are false. Desire attaches itself to a fantasy; it is a phantom of something else that one desires. [The pleasure is not the true object one seeks.] Man is different from an animal. An animal desires the very thing it seeks; there is no fantasy or phantom. But when man desires something, he does not want it for its own sake. The desired object is a substitute for something in his past, which is the true object of his desire. Man’s past is his infantile state, where the child is like an animal as his desire is for the very object he seeks. People recognize that children are very happy [because they are fully satisfied when they obtain their desires].

In human maturation, somehow man’s infantile enjoy-

ments cease to offer satisfaction. A person then chooses replacements that somehow reflect the original, but they are substitutes. That new substitute becomes glorified in man's eyes and he is convinced that the substitute will offer him the identical satisfaction as his original objects of desire offered [during infancy]. A mirage is a good example, as here, one's desire is so great that he fantasizes that this is the object of his desire. Neuroses is the same phenomenon where one believes something to be real when it is nonexistent.

Man's energies require an outlet. Therefore, he can select or imagine something that will offer him the satisfaction he craves. Man becomes convinced that the substitute is the object that he needs. Therefore, he attaches his desire and even his mind [to that object of his desire] and then applies all his energies to obtain that object. But, as this object is a substitute, he never achieves full satisfaction. His disappointment compels him to search for another replacement.

Why does man have such a nature? Because without it, he would never be capable of a life of wisdom. In the pursuit of wisdom, one must remove oneself from the attachment to the physical and entertain [focus on the world of] the abstract. Man would not be able to entertain the abstract and pursue knowledge had he the capacity to gain real [complete] satisfaction from physical pleasures. [Complete satisfaction

in the physical world would deter man from seeking satisfaction elsewhere.] Therefore, God structured man in such a way that he undergoes a process where certain energies are freed from their attachments to the physical. This energy can now be redirected toward wisdom. Man differs from animals in this ability to direct his energies toward wisdom so that he can enjoy pondering wisdom. This psychological phenomenon that might appear as a curse—as man does not obtain complete satisfaction from physical desires—turns out to be man’s greatest blessing, for this enables man to enjoy the world of wisdom, which is the greatest pleasure. This is man’s purpose and design: to engage in the tremendous pleasure of wisdom. This happiness is the result of man’s ability to fully satisfy his energies seeking satisfaction. Those energies, now frustrated by dissatisfying physical pleasures, find 100 percent satisfaction in the pursuit of wisdom.

One finds happiness when he pleurably consumes [all] his energies seeking satisfaction. In the physical world, this is impossible since man’s objects of satisfaction are only substitutes, and his search ends in dissatisfaction, a relentless [unhappy] search. But in the pursuit of wisdom, man finds complete satisfaction for his frustrated energies. This was God’s purpose: to create a creature who can utilize those energies that were deflected from pursuing physical satisfaction, and direct them to the enjoyment of wisdom. This

explains why we find people like Rav Moshe Feinstein of blessed memory who engage the world of wisdom and gain great satisfaction from it.

This also explains why abstinence is the highest level. It might sound like an austere matter, but it is in fact a very happy situation. The person who attains that level is in a blissful state because he is capable of using so much energy in wisdom that he doesn't want to waste it on anything inferior. This is what Rabbeinu Yona means about one being in line with his nature.

One could ask why God didn't design man naturally attached to wisdom, instead of going through this process of redirecting his energies from the physical. But there are creatures like that—they are called angels. We have no right to ask why God created man that way. King Solomon expressed it as follows:

For what is man who comes after the King, after He already made him? (Koheles 2:12)

Man can investigate only those matters subsequent to creation. Why man was created a certain way is God's knowledge alone.

If it were possible for man to experience his original infantile physical enjoyments, he would not be happy because his energy level is too great to be satisfied with physical enjoy-

ments. Man can only find complete satisfaction in the world of wisdom. [Wisdom is the only pursuit that enables man to consume 100 percent of his energies, which is the meaning of satisfaction.] That is why as long as man does not pursue wisdom he will fail to achieve satisfaction. [The physical world is limited, and therefore man's immense energies are not consumed in the pursuit of the physical, thereby yielding frustration.] Most psychological problems are due to man's abundant energies. People fall ill because of neuroses, and certain adolescents have a high likelihood of experiencing mental illness because of their levels of dissatisfied energies. Before adolescence, there are insufficient energies to cause problems. But with the onset of adolescence, when there is a new influx of large quantities of energies, one's emotions become dammed-up as one's psychological mechanism is incapable of enjoying so much, creating a lot of pressure. This also explains why intellectual people—despite this damage—do not fall ill, as they are capable of directing their great amounts of energy toward thought. This spares them from mental illness. This is a psychological fact.

To combat one's instincts, one must be totally honest with oneself and examine his inner workings and his mind. Only then can a person detect the fantasies lurking behind his desires. When a person sees that fantasy, he can remove his energies from it. But as long as one is fooled by the substitute object

of desire, he will not be able to remove himself as the emotion is too powerful.

Pirkei Avos strives to make a person a general over his soul. Abstinence is the end of the process where man is closest to his nature.

VOWS ARE A SAFEGUARDING FENCE AROUND
ABSTINENCE.

Maimonides felt that there are two types of philosophy: abstract philosophy, like we find in his Guide, and philosophy that directly parallels halacha, which Maimonides typically includes at the end of a section in his Mishnah Torah.

Maimonides writes the following at the end of Hilchos Shavuos:

One can have a vow nullified by a beis din, as we said, and there is no doubt that one can do so. One who is bothered and cannot bring himself to nullify his vow is a heretic [he denies the rabbis' law that permits vow nullification]. Even so, one should be very careful about it, and we do not nullify the vow unless it is for an important reason. [Some poskim hold that one should not nullify a vow.] And it is very beneficial that one never swears at all. But if one already did swear, he should abide by his pain : "One who swears to prohibit should

not retract” (Psalms 15:4). Immediately following this verse are the words, “Those who do these will never be shaken.”

Maimonides writes the following at the end of Hilchos Nedarim:

13:23—One who has made a vow in order to perfect himself is considered zealous and praiseworthy. What is the case? One who is a hedonist and ate a lot of meat and says he will not eat meat for one or two years, or a drunkard who prohibits himself from wine for a long time, or took an oath to never get drunk again, or if one chased gifts and money and he prohibited himself from receiving gifts, or not taking anything from a certain country or from a group of people, or one who took much pride in his appearance and became a nazirite ... these are all forms of worshiping God, and about these types of vows Chazal say, “Vows are a safeguarding fence around abstinence.”

13:24—Even though they are a form of divine service, one should not impose on himself many vows of prohibition, nor make frequent use of them, but should rather abstain from things that are to be shunned, without making vows.

13:25—The sages have asserted, “Anyone who makes a vow is as if he built a high

place for idolatry” (Nedarim 60b). If he transgressed and made a vow, it is a mitzvah to seek absolution from his vow so that it might not become an obstacle in his way. When does this apply? By a vow of prohibition. But a vow to sanctify something to the Temple, one should fulfill and not seek to release himself from unless under duress, as it says, “I will pay my vows to God” (Psalms 116:18).

In Hilchos Shavuos, Maimonides did not say it is a mitzvah to release oneself. He said that if one made a swear he should pain himself and stand by the swear, and he should not be released unless out of a great need. But in Hilchos Nedarim, Maimonides says nedarim are praiseworthy. Furthermore, within these three halachos of nedarim, we find a contradiction. Therefore, we ask what the difference is between a shvua and a neder.

One difference is that a shvua essentially includes God’s name:

Who swear by the name of the Lord and invoke the God of Israel (Isaiah 48:1).

In contrast, a neder contains no idea of God’s name. A neder and a shvua are two types of institutions. The purpose of a shvua is to not create prohibitions upon oneself.

One's intent is to demonstrate to others that his intention is as strong as his belief in God. One verifies his intent through that which is most dear to him: his relationship with God. This is a shvua.

Nedarim are different and are simply mechanisms to create prohibitions upon oneself. Once a person nullifies a shvua, it no longer exists. But one who breaks his shvua without nullification breaks down his acceptance of God. Even though one can nullify his shvua, he should try to keep it because fulfilling his word is in fact an honor to God, for this demonstrates a conviction in his shvua, which is as real to him as God. This explains why a shvua contains God's name. Therefore, fulfilling a shvua is a great mitzvah. And once one made a shvua he should not break it.

As a shvua can both prohibit something for oneself or benefit oneself, why is the phrase "One who swears to prohibit should not retract?" [Why is the aspect of prohibition highlighted in this verse?] If the shvua is for benefit, there's no real significance. But if it was made to prohibit a matter to oneself, it demonstrates one's allegiance to God, even though he suffers some pain. This type of vow is a greater sanctification of God. One who swears to enjoy a meal does not demonstrate allegiance to God, as does a vow to fast. Thus, once someone makes a shvua he should

not release himself from it, in order that he can create a sanctification of God's name through fulfilling it. Even so, Maimonides says that even with regards to a shvua, it is better to not even make the vow because allegiance to God should not require a demonstration, but rather, be kept in a person's heart. A shvua is where a person puts himself on the line saying, "My allegiance to God is 100 percent, and I can even demonstrate it." However, the person might fail.

One who feels that he is doing something wrong by releasing himself from a shvua is a heretic because one is permitted to do so. He feels the release of the shvua is a break in his allegiance to God even though God says it is not, as one is permitted to release himself. Thereby he rejects God's Torah. The only allegiance to God is within his Torah system. Any other allegiance is apostasy, and here Maimonides refers to it as a "trace of apostasy."

This also explains why there is nothing gained by keeping a neder. As there is no sanctification of God's name, it is simply a prohibition from which one now wishes release.

Now we must explain the reason that Maimonides both praises and condemns one who creates a neder. We must also answer why, as Rabbeinu Yona said, they condemn the one who made a neder by saying, "Are the things that God already prohibited not enough [that you increase prohibitions with nedarim]?" Here we discover from the halachic

system itself how Judaism takes a different course from the rest of the world in terms of the perception of human perfection.

One who makes a neder is considered to have built a bammah. The danger of a bammah is that one's own practice of sacrifice can be a subjective form of worship, like idolatry [he is involved in his own primitive emotions]. However, if one brings his sacrifices not on his backyard altar (bammah) but to the Temple, his sacrifice must conform to all the laws of the Temple [preventing any subjective or primitive expression]. What then is Chazal's analogy between bammah and neder when they say, "Anyone who vowed is as if he built a bammah?"

There is one key in Maimonides' words. In halacha 13:23 he praises one who takes a vow. In halacha 13:25 he disparages him. And halacha 13:24 is like an in-between state: Maimonides is not praising him, but he is not yet condemning him. Since Maimonides praises a person who makes a neder, he cannot simultaneously consider him as one who created an altar for idolatry. The answer to this apparent contradiction is halacha 13:24, where he says one should not increase or become habituated in creating vows. What is Maimonides' answer?

Halacha recognizes a tremendous danger regarding human nature. When Chazal say that a vow is like building

an idolatrous altar, they are warning of a danger that man might become inextricably attached to his superego satisfaction. Within the system of vows, self-prohibition is the greatest egocentricity. A person finds great satisfaction in his ability to endure the denial of certain involvements. Feeling satisfied in one's immense self-control is essentially idolatrous. Unconsciously, it is the greatest egocentricity. That is why monks who deny themselves all pleasures and are considered saints in their religions, are considered idolaters by Judaism. For when they maintain that they abstain from pleasures, the truth is just the opposite—they engage in the greatest pleasure of all: the glorification of their egocentricity [they pride themselves on their self-control]. This is a most dangerous emotion. One gets involved in such an emotional state precisely when making prohibitions upon himself and fulfilling them. Doing so, one feels a tremendous ego satisfaction. But this is false, as this person does not deny himself pleasure but caters to it in the form of ego: a dangerous psychological area. That is why they say to one who makes vows, “Is what the Torah prohibits not enough, but you must add things to prohibit?” This person wants to glorify himself in egocentric satisfaction. This is the most dangerous form of idolatry. What the world recognizes as great (monks), Judaism recognizes as dangerous and idolatrous.

Thus, Maimonides resolves the conflict in his halachos by writing not to increase or to habituate oneself in making vows. One whose ego seeks glory will not be satisfied with a single vow. As one increases his vows they become part of his lifestyle. Thus, Maimonides praises one who makes a vow with the intent to perfect himself and not to enjoy ego glorification.

Chazal say, “One who vows is as though he built an idolatrous altar, and one who fulfills his vow is as if he sacrificed upon it.” This is a beautiful statement. Once one makes a vow he has satisfaction in his anticipation of fulfillment, as if he built an idolatrous altar. And when he fulfills his vow, it is as if he offered a sacrifice on that altar. Chazal identify precisely when the emotion is being moved. [One’s fulfillment of his vow is akin to an idolatrous offering. That is, when man sees that he fulfills his self-denial of pleasures, it is the “sacrifice to idolatry”; this is the point of self-glorification.] Thus, one should release himself from a vow because fulfilling it is worse than making it.

Prohibitions perfect man, provided that he recognizes that they stem from a higher source, namely God. This is in contrast to self-imposed prohibitions. God’s prohibitions contribute to the system that leads man to recognize His wisdom. But when man creates his own prohibitions

through vows and other means, he endangers himself, as the rabbis say, “Are the things prohibited by the Torah not enough?” (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9). Self-imposed prohibitions reflect the need for emotional satisfaction [explaining the rabbis’ critique of one who does so]. Furthermore, the Torah’s prohibitions are not stringent; the stress of prohibitions is more psychological than real, for people dislike being bound or restricted. But the truth is that “Her [Torah’s] ways are pleasant paths” (Proverbs 3:17). Following the Torah is a beautiful lifestyle.

God’s prohibitions enhance one’s life and one’s enjoyment of life. But one who looks for stringencies (chumros) reflects a dangerous mind. The rabbis’ critique of adding prohibitions is not limited to vows, but applies to anything from which one abstains, as the Yerushalmi states. This proves that it is the state of mind that Judaism opposes. You can see Judaism’s philosophy from these two institutions of nedarim and shvuos.

SILENCE IS A SAFEGUARD TO WISDOM.

Rabbeinu Yona says that silence is a guard not only for wisdom, but for character traits as well. Why then does the mishnah refer to wisdom alone and omit any mention of character traits? Maimonides discusses a closely related

idea found in his introduction to his Commentary on the Mishnah in Zeraim:

Honey and milk keep under your tongue: Wisdom that is very sweet, from which the soul gains great enjoyment—just like the pallet enjoys honey and milk—you must hide and not speak about in anyway. These areas should not be expounded upon in institutions of knowledge. The Torah gives allusions to them. And when God removes the mask of nonsense from the heart from he whom God desires, after one has studied a lot he will understand these areas of knowledge. A person, in his search for knowledge and in his efforts to gain knowledge, must leave everything in God's hand and pray to Him and plead with Him to give him knowledge to understand, and to teach him and reveal to him the secrets stored in the Torah verses. As we find King David practiced when he said, "Open my eyes that I might behold the wonders of Your Torah" (Psalms 119:18). And when God opens man's eyes and man sees what God shows him he should keep that knowledge hidden, as we said. And if he hints to them a little, he should do so to one with a complete [sound] mind, as we find in many places in the Talmud. And a person should not reveal the secrets to others unless they are greater than him or equal to him.

Maimonides repeats that one should not reveal the secrets to others. He also describes how one is to obtain this knowledge: praying to God and asking Him to reveal these secrets—seeking God’s providence.

Maimonides teaches that a certain state of mind is required for one to gain wisdom. That state can be described as passive, where one is a perceiver. This explains why the perfected person prays to God to grant him wisdom. One type of prayer is the *ma’aseh tefilah* —the act per se, in which one is obligated. Another type of prayer is a natural human response, where one does not pray because of premeditation, but when one realizes his position with regards to the Creator and he recognizes that God has all knowledge, he naturally prays to God to see that knowledge.

Man also possesses ambition, which is necessary to accomplish all that he achieves. But regarding wisdom, ambition only goes so far. It can bring man to the gates of knowledge, but to reach the level of wisdom, one must eventually abandon his ambition and find himself in a totally passive state. This is why Maimonides repeats that one should not reveal the secrets. Because in repeating or retelling wisdom to others, one satisfies his ambitious nature. This gives one ego satisfaction, which stands in contradistinction to perceiving wisdom. Therefore, one must not use those ideas revealed to him to satisfy his egoistic nature.

This is very similar to what Rabbeinu Yona says, that silence is a safeguard to wisdom. One must become passive with regards to his rebbe, to the rabbis, and to knowledge. Speech represents the active involvement of one's ego. "Silence is a safeguard to wisdom" means that wisdom is generated from a passive state.

The fool does not desire understanding, but to reveal his heart (Proverbs 18:2).

The fool is interested in ego satisfaction. Passivity does not mean one's mind is inactive, but that his ego is passive [for one is "active" when learning his rebbe's ideas; he is attentive and energetically listening with anticipation and excitement].

Silence is the boundary of wisdom; therefore, one should not reply in haste, and not talk much. One should instruct his disciples with forbearance and calmness, without vociferation and without being verbose. That is what Solomon said, "The words of the wise men, spoken quietly, are heard" [Kobles 9.17] (Hilchos Dayos 2:5).

Maimonides states that the rebbe too has emotions and he too must follow this advice. Silence is a most important attitude because speech is man's greatest expression of his desires. Silence frustrates one's emotions. This causes one to

reflect upon the emotion and its motive. When one is not frustrated, he acts out his emotion. But frustrating the emotions [by not expressing them] bothers a person and enables him to think about them and analyze them, which explains why silence is beneficial.

3:14 GOD'S LOVE FOR MAN

HE [RABBI AKIVA] WOULD SAY: "BELOVED [PRECIOUS] IS MAN, SINCE HE IS CREATED IN THE IMAGE [OF GOD]. A DEEPER LOVE IS THAT GOD REVEALED TO HIM THAT HE IS CREATED IN THE IMAGE, AS IT SAYS (GEN. 9:6), 'FOR IN GOD'S IMAGE HE MADE MAN.' BELOVED ARE ISRAEL, SINCE THEY ARE CALLED CHILDREN OF THE OMNIPRESENT. A DEEPER LOVE IS THAT GOD REVEALED TO THEM THAT THEY ARE CALLED CHILDREN TO GOD, AS IT SAYS (DEUT. 14:1), 'YOU ARE CHILDREN OF THE LORD, YOUR GOD.' BELOVED ARE ISRAEL, SINCE A PRECIOUS INSTRUMENT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THEM. A DEEPER LOVE IS THAT GOD REVEALED TO THEM THAT THE PRECIOUS INSTRUMENT WITH WHICH THE WORLD WAS CREATED HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THEM, AS IT SAYS, (PROVERBS 4:2): 'FOR A GOOD LESSON I HAVE GIVEN TO YOU; DO NOT FORSAKE MY TEACHING.'"

Maimonides comments:

Telling man of his beneficial element—his intelligence (image of God)—is a second good. Sometimes a person does a favor for another person out of pity, but he won't inform him as he doesn't view that person as important, but lowly, in his eyes.

Maimonides says two things: God's gift to man of intelligence gives man a special position in creation; but the fact that God told man that He gave it gives man an even more unique position because man is a creature worthy of God's communication.

BELOVED ARE ISRAEL, SINCE THEY ARE CALLED CHILDREN OF THE OMNIPRESENT. A DEEPER LOVE IS THAT GOD REVEALED TO THEM THAT THEY ARE CALLED CHILDREN TO GOD, AS IT SAYS (DEUT. 14:1), "YOU ARE CHILDREN OF THE LORD, YOUR GOD."

The Jews are different and have a special relationship with God. God's communicating this rank to the Jew demonstrates His level of concern for the Jew. The Torah tells the Jew of his importance regarding his relationship to God.

BELOVED ARE ISRAEL, SINCE A PRECIOUS INSTRUMENT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THEM. A DEEPER LOVE IS THAT GOD REVEALED TO THEM THAT THE PRECIOUS INSTRUMENT WITH

WHICH THE WORLD WAS CREATED HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THEM, AS IT SAYS (PROVERBS 4:2), “FOR A GOOD LESSON I HAVE GIVEN TO YOU; DO NOT FORSAKE MY TEACHING.”

We are able to tune in to the ultimate reality; we have ideas and wisdom—Torah—with which God created the universe. Possession of the Torah is one goodness. But man might think his capacity for Torah knowledge is miniscule and not worth much. That which we don’t know is certainly greater than that which we know. Albert Einstein once said, “We only know enough to know how ignorant we are.” Therefore, we are told, “For a good lesson I have given to you; do not forsake My teaching.” Again, God gifts man and informs him of the value of that gift.

This is an interesting mishnah. It teaches man that from the Torah one can deduce his metaphysical worth. This knowledge is unknowable without the Torah sharing these truths. For if a person is a metaphysician or a philosopher, the most that he can say is that God, Who is the source of all wisdom, exists and that man’s relationship to that Source is—as Maimonides says—nothing by comparison. Thereby, man can conclude that his existence is worthless. There is no way for man to evaluate his worth in creation. Value is assessed only when measured against the entire system. And the author of that system is the only one who

can determine that value. Here we see the mishnah says that this is precisely what the Torah did with these three statements. God tells us that we have objective value. This explains Rabbeinu Yona's words:

It is extremely beneficial for man to know these truths for it assists him in approaching God.

This concept can only be given through prophecy. Philosophy leads man to consider himself as insignificant. Many professors and intelligent people express skepticism regarding human knowledge, which destroys man. But God saved us from this faulty thinking by gifting man with intellect and informing man of its worth, the Jews' worth, and the Torah's worth. The Jew must not undermine his role as a "child of God." One must equally not belittle human knowledge as do those professors and skeptics, for God expressed that He gave us a good lesson in the Torah. Human knowledge is of value.

This topic borders on a Torah fundamental, as one of the Thirteen Principles is that God gave prophecy to man. Why is prophecy one of the Torah fundamentals? It is because it teaches man of his metaphysical position in the universe. Rabbeinu Yona comments:

All creations were made only to fulfill the Torah. All that is under the heavens is only a means for the one who fulfills the Torah. The Torah is God's vessel with which He created the world.

“Torah” refers to all of God’s knowledge. In the halachic system, we can see God’s wisdom in terms of the approach and the ideas. But this exists in all areas. “Through Torah the world was created” means that the physical universe was only created through the conceptual universe. The latter is more real than the former. Rabbeinu Yona continues:

All creations were made only for the one who studies Torah and who is perfected.

How does Rabbeinu Yona know this to be true? Since wisdom is the ultimate reality, any creature who partakes of wisdom must partake in that reality. Therefore, everything else must be a means for him. Since the greatest part of the world is wisdom, all other creatures must be subordinate to the one who partakes of wisdom. Maimonides expresses this idea in his Commentary on the Mishnah. But he limits his words to sublunary creatures. Thus, everything on Earth exists for man, while the rest of the universe has a purpose aside from man. As Earth is man’s habitat, it does not make sense that other creatures exist for them-

selves. Judaism maintains that Earth was created for man: “The heavens belong to God, but the Earth He gave to the sons of man” (Psalms 115:16).

Since the planet was designed for man’s needs, it again shows the idea of man’s stature, but that stature regards his capacity as an intelligent being. Knowing the ideas of this mishnah affects man’s relationship to God.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Knowing these matters is of great importance. But man should not think that as he performs what is proper in God’s eyes and does not sin, that he is thereby close to God. And you know that man’s perception of knowledge is very limited and incomplete, and man cannot approach God, but he is far away from cleaving to God. If he is a Jew, he has a special love shown to him. And he should not view himself as a righteous person or an evil person. And a person should not attempt to draw near or pull away [from God]. Everything is according to one’s perfection. For how can we have a closeness to God, “For there is no man who is righteous in the land who performs good and does not sin” (Kobeles 7:20). As Jeremiah, peace be upon him, said, “And a great man will be of the Jews and I will draw this person near when I draw him near. But if I don’t draw him near, who is it that himself decides that he can draw close to God?” (Jer. 30:21).

What is Rabbeinu Yona's message? First, he describes man's superior nature as, "Everything was created for him." But then he says, "Do not try to draw close to God." He says that knowledge of these matters greatly helps with man's cleaving to God, but then he says that man cannot draw close to God.

Rabbeinu Yona means that knowledge generates two types of effects. One effect is on the soul and the other is on the emotions. Knowledge of man's superiority should only exist regarding one's mental knowledge, but not play any role in his emotional state.

Rabbeinu Yona is concerned about man's emotional desire to feel close to God; that is dangerous and false, as Jeremiah says, "Who is it that himself decides that he can draw close to God?" A person who feels close to God has something wrong within him. Thus, Rabbeinu Yona says, "Do not draw close and do not be distant from God." The emotion has two sides: one can feel that he walks with God, or he can feel he is no good and is distant from God. Both are dangerous viewpoints. Rabbeinu Yona says that one should not partake in either psychological framework as neither one is beneficial. But in terms of drawing close to God as a good, Rabbeinu Yona means that man should know that he is not nothing: his knowledge has some value. But this should not lead to an emotional feeling of close-

ness to God. This is false and baseless. Man's mind alone should know his position and value as one "created in God's image" [with intelligence], but this knowledge should not affect his emotions, which desire to be "God's favorite."

And all is commensurate with the quantity of one's actions.

Rabbeinu Yona means that one should not feel inherently special. Value is affected only by action.

[Rabbi Chait now spoke on an unrelated topic]

The gemara says that after Rebbe's funeral, his students sat down to eat and had a question about a bracha. They said, "Rebbe died and we don't even know the proper way to make a blessing." During Rebbe's lifetime, his students did not fully appreciate him. They only did so after he died. This is part of human nature, to be ambivalent toward others. This ambivalence was expressed toward Rebbe; a certain type of rebellion prevents others from recognizing a person's true value. But after one dies, what is left is our appreciation. This applies to any human being, not only to a rebbe. During one's life, appreciating others is almost like taking away one's own self-esteem. This stems from envy. But after one dies the identification is gone and one

can recognize another person's value: "The memory of the righteous is of blessing, but the fame of the wicked rots" (Proverbs 10:7).

3:15 GOD'S OMNISCIENCE AND MAN'S FREEWILL

EVERYTHING IS FORESEEN, AND FREEWILL IS GIVEN, AND WITH GOODNESS THE WORLD IS JUDGED. AND EVERYTHING IS IN ACCORDANCE TO THE MAJORITY OF THE DEED.

Some feel that Maimonides went beyond the true meaning of this mishnah to satisfy his own purpose, for he was a philosopher. But I do not say that I endorse that view.

Rashi comments:

Everything that man does in his innermost chambers is seen and is revealed before God. Man has the ability to act as he desires, as it is written, "See that I place before you today life and goodness and death and evil" (Deut. 30:15) ... "And choose life" (Ibid. 30:19).

Animals are constrained to follow their instincts, whereas man can rise above them, and because of his intellect, he can refuse to follow his instincts. When we say “intellect,” we don’t simply refer to a person with a high IQ. We refer to an intelligence that perceives reality, not determined by IQ. It is very possible for one with a high IQ to not see reality. One can be a great mathematician but not partake in the philosophy of reality. Thus, in Judaism, intelligence has a different meaning from what is typically meant. Intelligence refers to the ability to grasp reality beyond the senses.

As man has this ability, God gave man free will, referring to the absence of any coercion over man’s actions. Man’s rational element has the ability to subdue his instincts. The rational part is so powerful that no instinct can stand in its way [if man so chooses]. This does not mean that man can immediately conquer all his instincts. But in the long run, man’s rational component is his most formidable force. Teshuvah indicates that one cannot always control himself. But if one recoils and analyzes his emotions, through his understanding of his nature he is capable of uprooting a very powerful emotion. This is precisely what is meant by free will, *bechira chafshis*.

Our mishnah teaches that although God knows everything, this foreknowledge does not affect man’s free will.

According to Rashi, we don't [yet] understand the relationship between these two ideas, which could explain their placement together in this mishnah. [Rashi will be explained later.] Maimonides says that the mishnah refers to a famous philosophical problem, what he refers to as one of the greatest philosophical problems. And Rabbeinu Yona says that this problem is an astonishing reality, a "pelah." They refer to God's foreknowledge, while man is free to choose his actions. If God knows with 100 percent certainty which actions man will choose, how is there free choice?

As Saadia Gaon and other great minds teach, Judaism contains nothing that contradicts the human mind. We are to make judgments, first, based on our sense perceptions, and second, by accepting the reality: to use understanding and to be guided by our knowledge. We do not deny our senses or our innate categorical structure of thought. We are obligated to follow what our mind tells us. But this does not mean that we are without problems or questions. This truth is not an inherent logical contradiction (like Christianity suggesting one equals three, something the mind rejects. Once one rejects one's inherent knowledge, there is nothing left with which to operate.) God's omniscience and man's free will is a difficulty.

Maimonides discusses this problem at length in his *Mishnah Torah*, and at even greater length in his *Guide*.

He perceives the question as follows: “All is seen” means that God knows all that will occur, and yet, “Free will is given” means that man has free choice. What is the problem? Is it not like someone looking into a crystal ball and seeing the choices we will make? The crystal ball does not impede one’s free will, so what is the problem if God too knows our choices?

God’s knowledge is not the knowledge of the observer. But, as Maimonides says, “God, by knowing Himself, knows the world.” Maimonides gives the analogy of a clock maker, who knows what time the clock says even without observing it. He knows the clock’s mechanism and at what time he first set the clock. He knows the exact position of the clock’s hands two days later, two months later, and two years later. This is because he understands the clock, while an observer knows through observation. All human knowledge is knowledge of observation. But this is a weak form of knowledge that is incomparable to the clock maker’s knowledge. The observer sees only the clock’s hands and has no knowledge of the clock’s mechanism. He can deduce something about the clock’s operation, and perhaps even what type of mechanism moves the hands. This is based on some ingenuity and observation and how all scientists arrive at their knowledge. But it is limited knowledge, explaining why man has little knowledge of the uni-

verse. The way man construes the universe's operation can never be how it truly operates; he approaches the truth, but he can never obtain a true understanding. God alone has this knowledge because He constructed the universe using His wisdom.

Therefore, God knows man—not through observation—but because He knows Himself. As the clock maker knows where the clock's hands are at any moment, and this is from cause and effect, God too knows based on cause and effect. But, as man functions with free will, he operates outside cause and effect. Therefore, how could God possibly know man's free will choices? Maimonides says this is a great problem. He offers an epistemological notion that God's knowledge is not simply based on cause and effect, but surpasses that realm. Cause and effect is an observational type of tool, but the full system of the universe does not run simply on cause and effect. There is a different category of knowledge, and if a being possessed it, he could understand phenomena outside of causal knowledge, and that is God's knowledge.

God's knowledge is different from human knowledge, the latter being mere tools to perceive reality up to a certain depth. But man can never understand the universe; we don't even understand what a table is or what an atom is. Niels Bohr wanted to prove that atoms are like planets,

but that theory fell apart. All man can do is try to use his limited mind to envision a theory [for the universe], like one who never saw a man make a clock and then sees a finished clock functioning. Man can devise theories, but he has no knowledge of the reality of the true mechanism. His chances of determining that mechanism are very slim, and understanding the universe is impossible. “Man cannot know Me while alive” (Exod. 33:20). The meager tools that we use are vastly different from God’s knowledge. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us to pursue our knowledge because the more knowledge we gain, the closer we get. And the closer we get, the greater is our relationship with God. This is Maimonides’ answer. It is a tough answer to take, but Maimonides felt that man could handle this blow.

What is Rashi’s understanding of the relationship between “All is seen” and “Free will is given?” These are two different levels of human cognition. “Free will is given” means that one can do whatever he wants. Rashi says that the next mishnah is an expansion of this one.

(Rabbi Chait now discusses mishnah 3:16, but he will discuss it again with more analysis on page 212)

3:16 — HE WOULD SAY: “EVERYTHING IS GIVEN AS COLLATERAL, AND A NET IS CAST OVER ALL OF LIFE. THE SHOP IS OPEN, AND THE SHOP-KEEPER GRANTS CREDIT, AND THE ACCOUNT-

ING LEDGER IS OPEN, AND THE HAND WRITES, AND EVERYONE WHO WANTS TO BORROW CAN COME AND BORROW, AND THE COLLECTORS GO CONSTANTLY ON THEIR DAILY ROUNDS AND EXACT PAYMENT FROM MAN—WITH HIS KNOWLEDGE OR WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE—AND THEY HAVE THAT UPON WHICH TO RELY, AND THE JUDGEMENT IS A TRUE JUDGEMENT, AND EVERYTHING IS PREPARED FOR THE FEAST.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments that this is a metaphor:

Whatever one takes from this world he is responsible for and his children are responsible. And the one who inherits from his parents should not think, “This inheritance is mine and I will do with it what I wish,” because he truly doesn’t have anything; everything belongs to God. And whatever he takes he does so with a guarantee, and eventually God will make him pay for it. This is like a person who enters a city and finds no one else there. He entered one house and found a fully set table, and on it were all types of food and drink. He ate and drank and said, “I have come to own all of this, all this is mine and I’ll do with it what I desire.” But he did not notice the owner, who was watching him from a distance. And eventually he will have to pay him for all that he ate and drank, and he cannot escape.

What is the metaphor? Man lives in two frameworks of reality. In one framework, people imagine themselves as all-powerful. People feel that this world offers them complete freedom to do as they wish. God does not constrain a person in any way. This is the meaning of “Free will is given.” But the meaning of “All is seen” means that God monitors everything that one does. This means that there is a second framework operating. The person who entered the house and ate and drank, feeling in total control, operated in one framework of reality, which denies the other framework. He is oblivious to the owner from whom he will have no escape from paying for all that he took. This person’s view of reality is very limited: he does not see the entire system. This myopic view of reality stems from one’s blinding emotions that “All is under my control” [I have the right to do whatever I want]. This sense of free will is a contradiction to “All is seen.” This explains why the person did not see the house owner. [Similarly, because of this emotion, one denies “All is seen” during his earthly life and pays no attention to the reality that one must ultimately answer to God for his every action.]

King Solomon describes this phenomenon:

My son, heed my words; and store up my commandments with you. Keep my commandments and live my teaching as the

apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your mind. Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding a kinswoman. She will guard you from a forbidden woman; from an alien woman whose talk is smooth. From the window of my house, through my lattice, I looked out and saw among the simple, I noticed among the youths, a lad devoid of sense. He was passing through the market, near her corner, walking toward her house. In the dusk of evening, in the dark hours of night (Proverbs 7:1-9).

The Torah doesn't simply offer principles, but provides examples, as the Torah is interested in the experiential as well. What is meant by "Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'"? One must recognize that wisdom is the underlying reality. One's strong feelings toward his family [sister] are the reality guiding his actions, but one must trade those emotions for an attachment to wisdom that should guide his life.

"Passing through the market" indicates some unconscious force driving the young man to walk near the alien woman's home. He thinks it is an accident. "In the dusk of evening, in the dark hours of night" means that he has blocked out the other reality. This is a beautiful step-by-

step description of how this young man falls.

Why does King Solomon place himself in the scene as the person looking through the window? It is like a painter who paints himself in the corner of his painting. King Solomon does so to depict the existence of the framework of reality in this scene. [Within this young man's world is the true reality he does not see, but that reality is real and present, just like King Solomon is present in the scene looking through the window. This parallels the house owner who looks from a distance.]

3:16 PLEASURE AND REALITY

HE [RABBI AKIVA] WOULD SAY: "EVERYTHING IS GIVEN AS COLLATERAL, AND A NET IS CAST OVER ALL OF LIFE. THE SHOP IS OPEN, AND THE SHOPKEEPER GRANTS CREDIT, AND THE ACCOUNTING LEDGER IS OPEN, AND THE HAND WRITES, AND EVERYONE WHO WANTS TO BORROW CAN COME AND BORROW, AND THE COLLECTORS GO CONSTANTLY ON THEIR DAILY ROUNDS AND EXACT PAYMENT FROM MAN—WITH HIS KNOWLEDGE OR WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE—AND THEY HAVE THAT UPON WHICH TO RELY, AND THE JUDGEMENT IS TRUE

JUDGEMENT, AND EVERYTHING IS PREPARED
FOR THE FEAST.”

As stated, Judaism differs from other philosophies in that it expresses ideas in experiential terms, rather than listing a philosophical system of principles, as Aristotle does. Mishlei, Koheles, Tehillim (Psalms), and Pirkei Avos all take an approach different from other philosophies because Judaism seeks to teach the perfection of the soul. Therefore, it invented a psychological philosophy. In order for the soul to be perfected, one requires the proper psychology. This helps one avoid the problems of neuroses and psychoses. But then, although the human species achieves psychological health, the [healthy] species [itself] is inherently flawed. Therefore, philosophy too is required to remove one from the illnesses of the species. Psychologically healthy means “normal” for the species. But normal does not equate to perfection because man is an inherently sick being. Without Torah and knowledge, man cannot rise above the normal state. Thus, a combination of psychology and philosophy is required to attain perfection.

To instruct man in these two areas, it is necessary [for the Torah] to identify [and present examples of] the specific states in which the human mind lives. Without identifying these states, one cannot perceive perfection. The

mistake of the ancient philosophers was that although they made many points corroborated by the Torah, they lacked a system that displayed various psychological states that could offer recognition of these states so as to rise above them. This is why the Torah teaches through psychology and philosophy. Avos is an expansion on this, as we see the commentators—especially Rabbeinu Yona—always quote verses from various sources in the Prophets and Writings ; but primarily from Writings.

One should know the difference between Prophets and Writings. Megillah 3a discusses Daniel, which is part of Writings:

“I alone saw the vision and those with me did not see it, but a great fear fell upon them and they fled and hid” (Daniel 10:7). Who are these people [who hid]? R. Jeremiah, and some say R. Chiya bar Abba, says these are the prophets Chaggai, Zachariah, and Malachi. They were superior to Daniel and he was superior to them. They were superior to Daniel because they were prophets and Daniel was not a prophet. And he was superior to them for he was able to see the vision and they were not.”

Rashi explains that these three prophets prophesied to the people as God's emissaries, but Daniel was never sent on such a mission.

There are two types of prophecies. One type is given to the prophet for him to inform the nation. This was Chaggai, Zachariah, and Malachi. A perfection is required to receive such prophecy from God, for the gemara says that these three prophets were superior to Daniel. But Daniel was superior to them, as Daniel says, "I alone saw the vision, but the men with me did not see it." This means that Daniel was capable of a certain perception and understanding, of which the others were incapable. It would seem that Daniel was superior because he saw a vision and the others were incapable of seeing it. He was able to perceive a deeper understanding of God's knowledge than Chaggai, Zachariah, and Malachi.

The difference between Prophets and Writings is that Prophets contain the prophets' words sent by God, while Writings are ideas and concepts; the verse refers to them as "closed matters," hidden from our understanding until the end of time. Thus, Writings contains deep ideas unavailable even to the prophet. They were not words spoken to the people. Rav Chaim says the difference between Prophets and Writings is that Prophets became *kisvei kodesh* (holy writ) because they were spoken, unlike Writings, which

became *kisvei kodesh* through the perception of ideas and philosophical principles. In his *Guide*, Maimonides says the closed matters [Writings] were *ruach hakodesh*, which is a lower level. Rabbeinu Yona addresses the mishnah as follows:

For everything that a person takes from this world, he is a guarantor and his children are guarantors. And one who inherits from his father and his mother should not think, "This money is my inheritance, I will do anything that I want with it." As nothing that he has is his, since everything is God's. And that which he took from Him, he took it on collateral; and in the future, he will have to pay for it. There is a parable [relevant to this] about a man who came into a city and did not find [anybody] there. He went into a house and there he found a table set with all types of food and drink. He ate and drank and said, "Have I not acquired all of this, and is it not all mine? I will do what I want with it." And he did not see the owners who were observing him from another place. And in the future, he will have to pay [for] all that he eats and drinks, as he cannot escape.

AND A NET IS CAST OVER ALL OF LIFE.

This is death and a person cannot be saved from it—“like fish caught in an evil net” (Kobeles 9:12).

THE SHOP IS OPEN.

As people go in there and take everything they need now and don't see what the future holds. And they don't think about whether they will be able to pay for it when it comes time for the payment, since they find the store open and they can take all they need now. Such are people in this world.

... AND THE SHOPKEEPER GRANTS CREDIT

This is the owner of the store who gives to others on credit—he is the judge and he is paid by them later. So is the Ruler over His world: He grants all the wants of those that come to the world—whether good or bad—and in the end, He will eventually collect.

... AND THE ACCOUNTING LEDGER IS OPEN.

This is said for two reasons. One is a metaphor; God doesn't forget because he writes it down and loans to many people. If the storekeeper does not keep a ledger he might forget small items. But God forgets nothing, whether great or small. God does not forget man's first sins. The second idea is to teach us that there is no time lapse between committing a sin and God writing it down. But at the conclusion of one's act it is already recorded so that a second doesn't transpire where this sin is not recorded. Even though his sin is forgiven for one who repents, it was first written immediately after sinning, but later, after repentance, he is forgiven. As stated by the midrash, he is not like a person who never sinned. Rather, he sinned, but was forgiven. For greater is the one who never sinned than one who sinned and was forgiven. And what then is meant by "Perfectly righteous people cannot stand where the penitent person stands"? [This implies that the penitent person is on a higher level than the perfectly righteous person who never sinned.] On the contrary, one who sins and repents is not on the same level as one who never sinned. The sinner must always be aware of his sin and must remove himself from even permissible things. For if one sinned in sexual matters, he must remove himself further since he once vio-

lated in this area. Thus, the penitent person is worse off and not better off. This is the meaning of "Perfectly righteous people cannot stand where the penitent person stands." [Perfectly righteous people are on a higher level and do not occupy the same lower status as the penitent person.]

In Hilchos Teshuvah 7:4, Maimonides disagrees:

Let not a penitent man imagine that he is removed at a distance from the degree of the righteous on account of the iniquities and sins that he had committed. It is not so, indeed, but the Creator considers him beloved and desirable, as if he had never known of sin. Moreover, his reward is great, for, after having partaken of the taste of sin, he separated himself therefrom and conquered his passion. The Sages say: "The place on which the penitent stands, the wholly righteous could not stand"—their degree is above the degree of those who never sinned because it is more difficult for them to subdue their passion than for the others.

The question is based on the gemara that seems to be against Rabbeinu Yona:

Rabbi Yochanan says, "All the good that the prophets predicted refers only to one

who marries his daughter to a talmid chocham, or to one who does business with a talmid chocham, or to one who gives of his possessions to a talmid chocham to enjoy them. But the prophet does not refer to the talmid chocham himself” (Talmud Brachos 34b).

There are two levels of perfection. One level is where a person recognizes what a perfected person is. Will Durant wrote about the philosophers: “I am a lover of the lovers of wisdom.” He appreciated great minds, but he wasn’t a great mind himself. The gemara says that prophets who forecasted good were referring to people who possess this appreciation for a talmid chocham, and therefore associate with them via marriage, business, and property. But regarding the talmid chocham himself, only God knows the good that they will receive, and it is a different kind of good.

The talmid chocham, who has the perception of the true good, lives in a completely different world. Therefore, the good forecasted by the prophet is not appropriate for the talmid chocham, as that good is relegated to physical matters. The one who values the talmid chocham but is not one himself still pursues the physical world [and thus, he is the one that Rabbi Yochanan said the prophets addressed concerning physical benefits. But the talmid chocham

himself is not addressed regarding Earthly benefits, as the good he seeks is metaphysical]. Plato says, “On the road to perfection, one attaches himself to perfected people.” But later on, once he becomes a great talmid chocham, all he sees before him is reality. [He no longer pursues the physical world but enjoys beholding reality, which refers to the world of wisdom.] The gemara continues:

And Rabbi Chiya bar Abba says that Rabbi Yochanan says, “All the prophets only prophesied with regard to the days of the Moshiach. However, with regard to the World to Come, “No eye has seen it, God, aside from You” (Isaiah 64:3).

The Messianic Era will be great, but the only one who knows the state of the World to Come is God. (The gemara records an argument about the Messianic Era: Shmuel says the only difference will be the end of our subjugation to other governments, while another position says that that era will experience a complete overhaul.)

The gemara continues:

Rabbi Chiya bar Abba says that Rabbi Yochanan said, “All of the prophets only prophesied with regard to penitent people, but of the full-fledged righteous it is stated, “No eye has seen it, God, aside from You.”

Even the prophets did not know the reward of perfectly righteous people; God alone knows this. The perfectly righteous people will exist in a way where the nucleus of their perfection is satisfied. It is a different type of phenomenon. The benefits that the prophet discusses are perceivable; they are comprised of physical phenomena. But the true good is abstract and integrally tied to the soul [it is not physical and is outside the range of prophecy]. This gemara distinguishes between the penitent person and the totally righteous person. The gemara then says that this statement contradicts R. Abahu, for he says:

In the place where the penitent person stands, the fully righteous cannot stand, as it is stated "Peace, peace to those far and near, does God say" (Isaiah 57:19).

Those who are far are mentioned first, meaning that those who were sinners but became penitent are those to whom God is closest.

Rabbi Yochanan says, "What is meant by far? This is a person who was originally distant from sin."

Rabbi Yochanan apparently disagrees with R. Abahu. Another gemara adds to the difficulty:

Reish Lakish says, "Great is teshuvah, as willful sins are rendered accidental sins: 'Return Israel to God, for you have stumbled in your sins' (Hosea 14:2)." Here we refer to a purposeful sin, but it is referred to as a stumbling. But this isn't so, for Reish Lakish says, "Willful sins are rendered into merits," as it is stated, "And when the wicked turns from his wickedness, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby" (Ezekiel 33:19). There is no conflict: In one case, we refer to repentance from love, and in the other case, we refer to repentance from fear (Talmud Yuma 86b).

This gemara says that sins are converted to merits after repentance, while Rabbeinu Yona says that the penitent person is eternally damned and can never attain the higher level because of his sin. Another gemara in Brachos says as follows:

If a person makes a mistake in any of the brachos [of Shmoneh Esray] we do not remove him [from serving as the prayer leader]. But if he makes a mistake in V'Lamalshinim [the blessing to destroy the destroyers of the Torah], we do remove him because we suspect that he might be an apikores. Why didn't they remove Shmuel HaKattan when he made a mistake in this blessing? He was different since he was

the one who instituted this blessing. But why not be concerned that he changed his mind [and became an apikores]? Abaye says that if one is good, he will not become evil. But does not the Torah say, "And when the righteous person repents from his righteousness and does crookedness" (Ezekiel 18:24)? No, this refers to one who was initially evil, but one who was initially righteous will not repent from his righteousness. Didn't we learn the following in a mishnah: "Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die" (Avos 2:4), as Yochanan the High Priest served in the high priesthood for eighty years and ultimately became a Sadducee. Abaye responded, "He is Yannai, he is Yochanan." Rava says, "Yannai is distinct and Yochanan is distinct." Yannai was wicked from the outset and Yochanan was righteous from the outset. If so, it works out well according to Abaye's opinion; however, according to Rava's opinion, it is difficult. Rava could have said to you: "There is also room for concern that one who is righteous from the outset will perhaps reconsider and turn wicked, as was the case with Yochanan the High Priest." If so, the original question is difficult: Why did they not remove Shmuel HaKattan from serving as the prayer leader? Shmuel HaKattan is different, as he began reciting the blessing.

The gemara says that according to Abaye, we suspect a penitent person of turning evil, while Rava says that even if one was always righteous, he too is suspect. But the gemara seems to indicate that a penitent person is more suspect. This gemara seems to contradict the one that differentiates a penitent person from one who was always righteous—“In a place where a penitent person stands, the totally righteous cannot stand,” as either person can turn bad according to Rava.

The answer is based on the gemara in Yuma that distinguishes between one who repents from love and one who repents from fear. This is the same idea that Maimonides mentions in his Eight Chapters in his introduction to Pirkei Avos. He says that there are two types of righteous people. One type conquers his instincts. It is difficult for him to perform the mitzvos, but he exerts himself. Then there is a righteous person who worships God out of love. He has a natural love for Torah. [There is no need for self-control as his energies naturally desire the good.] This person must be a *talmid chocham*; he is one who falls in love with the halachic system and the wisdom that he sees in the Torah. He is in a love affair with the Torah, as King Solomon depicts in Shir Hashirim. This type of person is never caught in a trial since all his energies are drawn toward the Torah. [But the one who needs to conquer his instincts finds the

need to exert control in fulfilling the Torah's mitzvos since his energies are not naturally drawn toward worshipping God.]

Thus, if one repents out of love, his sins are turned into merits. But this does not apply to one who worships God out of fear. And these two types of personalities—the one who worships out of love and the one who worships out of fear—can exist simultaneously in one person. One can love learning and love certain mitzvos, but simultaneously have difficulty with other areas of the Torah.

The gemara cited says that once a person sins, it leaves an indelible trace on his soul. Indulging in an act of sin means that one experiences a certain satisfaction that stamps itself on his psyche. The enjoyment creates a bond to his psyche and the attraction remains even though he removes himself from the sin. In contrast, one who never performed the sin has no attachment to it. The gemara says, “One should marry before [he is] twenty years old. If he does not, all his days will be in sin. Does this mean literal sin? No, we mean in thoughts of sin.” Once a person's desire reaches a certain point of fantasy, pathways of psychic energy have now been fixed and they cannot be removed. Because a person is pleasure oriented, once he experiences pleasure, this attraction remains permanently. Therefore, this righteous person always has the possibility

of regressing back to his former sins.

But one who worships God from love can remove all his psychic energies from seeking physical desires and sublimate them to seek satisfaction in higher areas. This penitent person has removed all his former pathways.

Maimonides says that the penitent person has conquered his instinct even after tasting sin. This displays a greater distance from sin than one who never sinned. But this does not negate the other side of the coin. Since he experienced the sinful pleasure, he is capable of regressing. The argument regarding “In a place where a penitent person stands, the totally righteous cannot stand” regards conquering one’s instincts. Thus, susceptibility to regression does not discount the greatness of conquering one’s instincts. This refers to the righteous person requiring self-control and not the righteous person who worships God out of love, who is on a different level altogether as his sins are turned into merits. Once a person transforms himself completely through worshiping God from love, all traces of prior sins are gone, the meaning of “His sins are turned into merits.” But the righteous person who repents from fear and requires self-control has a negative element of possible regression, plus the positive elements of conquering his drives. Thus, there are grounds to say that he surpasses the totally righteous person [he conquered his drives while the

totally righteous person did not] and he is inferior to the totally righteous person [as he retains traces of the sin and is susceptible to regressing]. The argument is whether the person requiring self-control has gained more from conquering his drives, or does the loss of possible regression outweigh that gain.

What about reward? Maimonides says that the penitent person shouldn't think he is lower than a righteous person:

Let not a penitent man imagine that he is removed at a distance from the degree of the righteous because of the iniquities and sins that he has committed. It is not so, indeed, but the Creator considers him beloved and desirable, as if he had never known of sin. Moreover, his reward is great, for after having partaken of the taste of sin, he separated himself therefrom and conquered his passion. The Sages say, "The place on which the penitent stand the wholly righteous could not stand," meaning, their degree is above the degree of those who never sinned, because it is more difficult for them to subdue their passion than for the others (Hilchos Teshuvah 7:4).

Maimonides also says that one who naturally loves the good is greater than the penitent person because one who values evil [or valued evil, as he repented] has an inherent defect in his soul. Thus, we wonder how Maimonides could

say that the penitent person's reward is great.

One's personality is not simply a "conqueror of instincts" alone, or a "lover of God" alone. One who conquers his instincts also possesses aspects of his personality that worship God out of love. When Maimonides says that the one who conquers his instincts has a great reward, he is referring to the person's capacity that conquered his drives. Therefore, he should not think that he is far from the level of a totally righteous person, since he has this advantage. But that doesn't mean there is no disadvantage. This was the gemara's debate.

Continuing Rabbeinu Yona's metaphor, he says as follows:

People can take what they wish from the store, but the storekeeper records everything in his ledger. The fools think the world was created purely for human pleasure, but the intent of the righteous people and their enjoyment is only so they are free to fulfill the mitzvos. Happy is he who chooses the good.

But did we not learn that the righteous people attain the greatest pleasure in life? Therefore, what difference is there between the fool who seeks pleasure and the righteous person who seeks pleasure?

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

“God exacts payment from man with his knowledge.” How is this? When he knows and remembers the sin that he does [so] that when the punishment comes to him, he recognizes and discerns that it is for that sin. And happy is he, as through this, he justifies the judgement and repents, and the sin is atoned for him.

“...Or without his knowledge.” How is that? For example, when afflictions come to him and he does not remember the sins that he did. And there are some that think that the afflictions come to them unjustly, as they say, “We are righteous, and we have not sinned, and why is there this great evil [that has come] to us?” And they will die without repentance. And their worms will not die, as they vilified the judgement and justified themselves. Woe to them and woe to their carcasses—as they sinned against their bodies. There is a parable [relevant to this] about a king who says to his servant, “Go and take collateral from X.” [So] he went and took collateral from X, but that man does not remember the debt. And he yells and is in wonder about [why] they are taking collateral from him, and it is given over to his heart. Such is the one who payment is taken from, from the Heavens, “without his knowledge.” But when he remembers the debt and knows that the

taking of collateral is justified, the matter is not given over to his heart so much.

“And they have that upon which to rely for their deeds”: Upon [God’s] trait of justice, and the judgement is true judgement.

On Mishnah 3:15, “All is seen,” Rabbeinu Yona’s comments parallel Psalm 139:

God, you have analyzed me, You understood and have knowledge of me.

Ibn Ezra says:

This Psalm is of great value [every honored] in the paths of God and there is not in these five books of Psalms any poem like it. And in accord with a man’s understanding in the ways of God and the ways of the soul, one should ponder its reasoning.

The Psalm says as follows:

YOU UNDERSTAND MY SITTINGS AND MY RISINGS. YOU ESTABLISHED ALL MY WAYS BEFORE ME. THERE IS NO WORD ON MY TONGUE; YOU, GOD, KNOW EVERYTHING. YOU FORMED ME, MY FRONT AND MY BACK; YOU PLACED YOUR HAND UPON ME. THE KNOWLEDGE IS ASTONISHING, IT IS TOO HIGH; I AM INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING. WHERE WILL I GO FROM YOUR SPIR-

IT AND WHERE CAN I ESCAPE FROM BEFORE YOU? IF I ASCEND TO HEAVEN, THERE YOU ARE, IF I DESCEND TO THE NETHERWORLD, THERE YOU ARE. IF I TAKE FLIGHT WITH DAWN EVEN AT THE ENDS OF THE OCEAN, YOUR HAND LEADS ME, YOUR RIGHT HAND WILL HOLD ME....

I WILL PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR ASTONISHING WORKS, MY SOUL UNDERSTANDS VERY WELL.

King David goes on to say that God has knowledge of every aspect of his existence. He expresses how valuable God's friendship is to him.

What is the meaning of this poem? Rabbeinu Yona says on "Man is exacted without his knowledge" that people complain that their suffering is unjust. Rabbeinu Yona says that this is the worst state as one does not recall the sin that earned his suffering. What is the essence of Rabbeinu Yona's metaphor? Man sees the world in two frameworks. In one framework, he functions as a pleasure seeker. The store represents the satisfaction of one's fantasies. The shopper tries not to be concerned about the price of his purchases, for that is a painful element. So, he represses the price he must pay, which explains why people run up so much debt. People are in denial about their ultimate obligation to pay. This is not the state of mind of the shopper alone, but of people in general and how they look at life. That's why Rabbeinu Yona says that the fool thinks the

reason for life is solely to attain pleasure.

Then Rabbeinu Yona describes those who are punished without knowledge, who feel their punishment or suffering is unjustified, and so they die without repentance. What is the connection between the pleasure seeker and the feeling of unjustified suffering?

Rabbeinu Yona explains the psychology of the pleasure seeker. His mindset is maintained because he can't recognize that he did something wrong, which stems from narcissism. This element defends all of man's feelings and strivings as just and correct. Narcissism maintains a flawless self-image where one cannot perceive any wrong in himself. There is a tremendous need to love the self. Self-love becomes identified with self-seeking, so that the pleasure seeker is an expression of self-love in the first instance. As such, how does the self-loving pleasure-seeking shopper overcome the painful reality of the price of his pleasurable purchases? His narcissism enables him to deny the reality of payment. This narcissism maintains the person as a pleasure seeker. As one is a pleasure seeker and he comes to terms with the reality that he must pay for his pleasures, what new direction in life should he take? He must follow reasoning and view himself as a small entity in the scheme of reality. His life is brief. With this perspective, one no longer gives any significance to whether or not

he enjoyed this or that pleasure. His sense of value now detaches from the self, and attaches to the grand picture. One's intelligence thereby turns on the pleasure seeker [part of his personality], which is a narcissistic function: an overestimation of the self. Once one steps out of the state [of narcissism] by seeing the larger picture, the self becomes very small. Whether he had a pleasure today or not becomes an insignificant matter.

What is the meaning of King David's Psalm 139? A pleasure-seeking person views himself as distinct from God. The pleasure seeker views God as a source of obligations. At times, he cannot live with the idea of God constantly in his presence; it is disturbing. He feels he is doing things that take him away from God [he feels conflict that he cannot avoid God]. God becomes to him as something to which he approaches, but from which he also wants to withdraw. This is not a description of one who worships God from love. This idea of escaping from God was expressed by the Jews at Sinai: "And you [Moshe] speak to us" (Deut. 5:24). Rashi says, "Moshe became weak like a woman." Rashi meant that he became incapacitated: Moshe wanted the Jews to worship God out of love [and not push God aside by asking Moshe to be an intermediary]. One who worships God out of love is a person who is constantly in God's presence. One who worships God based on fear can-

not envision himself as always in God's presence; it is too disturbing psychologically. This Psalm describes a man who never withdraws from God:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I escape? If I go to the heavens, there You are. If I go to the netherworld, there You are.

King David depicts a person who is constantly in awe of God. There is not a moment that he is removed from God. This is the highest level; this is the one who worships God out of love. On this level, the self is gone, and one is enveloped by God. He is always involved in the appreciation of God's wisdom. Even in the appreciation of his own self, he sees God's wisdom:

My front and my back You formed; You lay your hand on me. It is beyond my knowledge, it is a mystery, I cannot fathom it.

And this is the very point of the statement, "For my sake was the world created." This tanna [mishnaic author] did not say this as a pleasure seeker. Rather, because he experienced the level that human perfection could reach; he was awed by how God created man to live such a good existence. The tanna's experience was converted into an appreciation

for God. His own personal pleasures were meaningless and nonsensical. The appreciation of God's wisdom, how man was created to appreciate that wisdom, and what perfection of man is, are all astonishing. The knowledge that is involved in the entire universe awes such a perfect person. Perfected man stands in awe of God for his external physical universe and for His design of man as well [his inner world]. Man is called a miniature world for in man's design itself exists a world of wisdom, and it reflects the wisdom of the cosmos because there is an interrelation between the cosmos and man. Perfected man becomes so removed from himself that he views himself as an object of appreciation reflecting God's wisdom.

This lesson of Psalm 139 contains similar ideas to the metaphor of the storekeeper: to teach man to rise from the level of the pleasure seeker where he views himself distinct from God and endows himself with great importance, and reaches the level of reality where he sees himself as a wondrous creature of God, and in perceiving himself he perceives God's greatness. This is the praise to God in Psalm 139 and indeed this is what Psalms is all about. It's not so much the ideas, as these ideas are found elsewhere, but Psalms represents the perfect state and attitude of the perfected man. Therefore, the ideas of course are important, but the focus is not the ideas alone but how they affect an

individual and how they place one in a frame of mind.

This is based on the idea stated earlier: Judaism is not just a logical system of ethics, rather Judaism says it is important to identify states of perfection and what is involved in those states. Here, Judaism differs from all of the philosophies [providing experience and examples]. This is what Psalms is about.

This is the institution of the nazirite, one who abstains from pleasure. Why does the gemara say that the nazirite is a sinner and must bring a sacrifice? It is because that is not the perfect state. In the ultimate state, one does not need to deny himself anything. Denial is necessary on the road to perfection, but it is not perfection in itself. In the perfected state, there is indifference to the pleasures because one is not self-seeking. But he is also not involved in denial. One's instincts still exist in the perfect state, but they seek what is natural: "The righteous man eats to satisfy his soul" (Proverbs 13:25). The righteous man does not eat for the pleasure of the food but to sustain his soul. Maimonides wrote a book for the Sultan, on the preservation of youth. He says that the only happy person is one who is philosophically perfected. He tries to impress upon the Sultan that happiness is achieved only with philosophical perfection and he calls that state the "even keel." In that state are neither great pleasures nor great disappointments.

The Torah's curses say the following:

One will marry a woman but someone else will take her; one will build a house but won't live in it; one will plant a vineyard but will not harvest it (Deut. 28:30).

Maimonides says there are actually two curses mentioned: the overt curse and the covert curse. The overt curse is obvious. But the covert curse is that one operates in an illogical fashion. The curse says that one first gets married, then builds a house, and finally he seeks livelihood (planting a vineyard) at the end of his life. This person's actions are reversed from the logical progression. Although this curse is implicit and not explicit, it is no less severe a curse than the explicit curse. Maimonides says the real curse is for one to function illogically.

Why didn't the Torah write this curse explicitly? The Torah speaks in the language of man. Not everyone would understand functioning illogically as a curse; it would lack the emotional impact for many people. The explicit curses must convey to the masses that they would suffer if they violate the Torah. [To be an effective deterrent, "suffering" must be expressed in the terms understood by the masses. Functioning illogically would not be understood as a curse for many people.] But, one who lives without wisdom is the

source of all the curses. Thus, our metaphor of the storekeeper exacting payment does not refer to the overt curse alone. The metaphor also refers to the covert curse. In his *Guide*, Maimonides says that most suffering is from the covert curse, which means that people are responsible for their own undoing; they deny wisdom and follow their narcissistic emotions. Denying the storekeeper [one's debt to him] denies reality.

The sufferings that stem from one's own errors have a causal chain that can be traced, if one uses wisdom and can identify the causes of his sufferings. The worst sin is when one does not recognize that causal chain between his errors and his sufferings. The prophets always criticized the Jews for being a foolish nation. But the person who uses wisdom removes the curses. Judaism's message is that one must recognize reality.

The last part of our mishnah reads as follows:

... AND THE JUDGEMENT IS TRUE JUDGEMENT,
AND EVERYTHING IS PREPARED FOR THE FEAST.

Rashi comments that everyone has a share in the after-life. Maimonides says, "The purpose of all this is the after-life." The purpose of the system in which we live—reward and punishment—is the afterlife. Through wisdom one overcomes his narcissism and perceives reality. He then

lives with wisdom and finally lives in an eternal state of bliss, which is the afterlife. Maimonides [and others] describe the afterlife as follows:

The righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Divine Presence.

There's one point not taken up in the previous mishnah:

THE WORLD IS JUDGED FAVORABLY.

Maimonides comments:

The judgment that God has with man is with kindness and goodness and not according to the strict justice man truly deserves. "Slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6). [This is the major concept of the Thirteen Principles.]

If God renders a kind judgment, not in accord with reality (what man really deserves) how can we say that God is just? Either God is just, or He operates with kindness—it can't be both. However, we do say that God is just and that He is also merciful. How is it possible for both to be true?

When Maimonides says that God does not treat man as he truly deserves, he means that which man deserves in hu-

man terms: according to how we would judge fairness. If we were to judge ourselves, we would never respond with the kindness with which God responds. It is an amazing concept, for most people feel the exact opposite, because they have no wisdom.

When Moshe learned God's attributes, he responded, "The Lord, the Lord, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness." God is merciful compared to man. For if man were to give himself what he deserves, he would be more vicious in his judgment of himself, as compared to God, because man's justice is limited: he only sees himself from the perspective of a created being, and he assesses justice within that limited framework. But God's kindness is different because it is the kindness of the creator.

Justice means how things really should be. Man sees things on only one plane. God alone sees all of reality and man's place in reality. Moshe possessed greater knowledge of God than we have. He was able to grasp that God offers man unlimited kindness. If one thinks about it, God's kindness is all around. The greatest kindness God showed man is by giving us the Torah: a system through which man can improve his life and enjoy a beneficial life. There is no comparison between the Torah life and a life without Torah. Without Torah, one is misguided and ultimately lives

a harmful existence. This is the meaning of “God judging the world favorably.” Even though some of the rabbis had physical problems, their inner view of reality gave them tranquility and happiness. The life of wisdom afforded to man, with this great kindness through Torah, offers man a blissful existence.

At the Seder we say, “At first, our forefathers served idols, but now God has brought us near to His service,” and also, “Every person is obligated to view himself as if he left Egypt. For not only did God redeem our forefathers from Egypt, but He redeemed us as well.” Freedom means that one is released from a restricted state. Redemption means that the bad state is exchanged for an improved state. God redeemed the Jews; He did not just free us. This explains why we say, “Blessed are you God, the Redeemer of Israel.” Once one recognizes God’s kindness, he recites Hallel, which is a natural emotional response to God’s kindness. If there is no feeling when reciting Hallel, one has not performed the mitzvah. One should feel a happiness and an appreciation. Then he is not in conflict as his emotions follow his intellect. King David was able to be in this state at all times, as we see from Psalm 139. Most others can’t, but the Torah sought to arrange set times, like holidays and Shabbos, to reach that state of appreciation and happiness temporarily. This too is a high level of perfection.

EVERYTHING IS SEEN, AND PERMISSION HAS
BEEN GIVEN.

God is omniscient, everything works according to God's system. "Permission has been given" means that man is a free agent and he can do whatever he desires. Chazal phrased this precisely because—on an emotional level—people feel that these two are contradictory. Some very religious people feel firm about the fact that God sees everything, but they feel inhibited regarding their free will. They don't truly feel a sense of freedom. The contradiction of God seeing everything and man having complete freedom is only on an emotional level. God's seeing everything impinges on their freedom, as if some tragedy would happen if they were to sin. There is a story of an eleven-year-old whose parents warned him that something bad would happen if he were to ride the train on Shabbos. He experimented and rode the train, and nothing happened. He was also told that he would go blind if he looked at the Kohanim during Birchas Kohanim. So, he experimented and left one eye open! He felt it was worth the loss of one eye to learn the truth. Again, nothing happened to him. He soon left religious life. Later, he started to discover the Torah's wisdom and that is when he discovered God. People have an emotional recognition of God that is on a child's level.

Unfortunately, this young boy's parents were not wise, and their Judaism was superstitious. The essence of Judaism is not based on false mystical beliefs. This superstitious outlook removes one's freedom.

Chazal desired to teach that man's freedom of choice does not contradict God's omniscience. One should not manufacture tragedies for one's violations. [For some people who do that and then don't suffer from their imagined harm, ultimately leave religion.] But if this mishnah removes such fears and can lead people to leave Jewish life, why was it stated? Chazal always teach the truth. One who grasps this mishnah will not be religious based on infantile, imagined fears. He will operate on a high-level. He can then willfully do what is correct because he sees the truth. Maimonides says that serving God out of fear is not fitting (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 10:1). One who chooses either path alone, i.e., feeling complete freedom and rejecting God's omniscience, or following the latter and rejecting the former, lives a corrupt life. Modern Zionists follow the lifestyle of complete freedom but they abandon God's omniscience. This was the thrust of the Haskalah movement.

3:17 TORAH AND CHARACTER

RABBI ELAZAR BEN AZARIAH SAYS, "IF THERE IS NO TORAH, THERE IS NO PERFECTED CHARACTER; IF THERE IS NO PERFECTED CHARACTER, THERE IS NO TORAH. IF THERE IS NO WISDOM, THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD; IF THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD, THERE IS NO WISDOM. IF THERE IS NO UNDERSTANDING, THERE IS NO KNOWLEDGE, IF THERE IS NO KNOWLEDGE, THERE IS NO UNDERSTANDING. IF THERE IS NO FLOUR, THERE IS NO TORAH; IF THERE IS NO TORAH, THERE IS NO FLOUR." HE WOULD SAY, "ANYONE WHOSE WISDOM EXCEEDS HIS DEEDS, TO WHAT IS HE COMPARED? TO A TREE WHOSE BRANCHES ARE MANY BUT WHOSE ROOTS ARE FEW; AND THE WIND COMES AND UPROOTS IT AND TURNS IT UPSIDE DOWN ONTO ITS FACE; AS IT IS SAID, 'AND HE SHALL BE LIKE A LONELY JUNIPER TREE IN THE WASTELAND AND SHALL NOT SEE WHEN GOOD COMES, BUT SHALL INHABIT THE PARCHED PLACES OF THE WILDERNESS, A SALTY LAND THAT IS UNINHABITABLE' (JEREMIAH 17:6). BUT ONE WHOSE DEEDS EXCEED HIS WISDOM, WHAT IS HE LIKE? LIKE A TREE WHOSE BRANCHES ARE FEW BUT WHOSE ROOTS ARE MANY; AND EVEN IF ALL THE WINDS OF THE WORLD COME AND BLOW UPON IT, THEY DO NOT MOVE IT FROM ITS PLACE, AS IT IS SAID, 'HE SHALL BE LIKE A TREE THAT IS PLANTED BY THE WATERS, AND SPREADS OUT ITS ROOTS BY THE RIVER, AND SHALL NOT PERCEIVE WHEN HEAT COMES, BUT ITS LEAVES SHALL REMAIN FRESH; AND IT WILL NOT BE TROUBLED IN THE YEAR OF DROUGHT, NOR WILL IT CEASE TO BEAR FRUIT'" (JEREMIAH 17:8).

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

One who does not know Torah is not complete in the traits of derech eretz, as most of the good traits that exist in the ways of the world are in the Torah, like “Surely lend him” (Deuteronomy 15:8), “Surely award him” (Deuteronomy 15:14), “Just scales, just weights” (Leviticus 19:36), and many, many more like these. If so, without Torah, his dispositions in derech eretz will not be complete.

IF THERE IS NO PERFECTED CHARACTER,
THERE IS NO TORAH:

He wants to say that he first has to perfect himself in [his traits]. And through this, the Torah will rest upon him, as it never rests upon a body that is not in possession of good traits. [And] he should not learn Torah and afterward take the commandments for himself, as this is impossible. And this is like the matter that is stated (Exodus 24:7), “We will do, and we will understand,” and like we have written [about it].

Rabbeinu Yona says that one must subjugate his knowledge to the talmidei chochamim. The Jews’ words, “We

will do, and we will understand,” spoken on Mount Sinai, expressed their belief that the Torah is the best formula for life. They accepted to immediately follow the Torah and perfect themselves on a functional level, followed by their sustained study of Torah to perfect themselves on an intellectual level. [The same applies to following Chazal. Although one may not grasp the reasons and benefits of their words at first, the perfection of one’s character (i.e., following Chazal) must precede one’s Torah study. For by following Chazal, one will increase in his Torah study.] It would seem an illogical impossibility: Torah is the cause, and perfected character is the effect. But then our mishnah says that perfected character is the cause, and Torah knowledge is the effect!

Perfected character/derech eretz is the behavior of congeniality toward others. One who acts based on intelligence is able to produce this behavior. He subordinates all of his emotions to what the Shulchan Aruch says. He follows all that Choshen Mishpat directs man to do. This is the idea of “If there is no Torah, there is no perfected character.”

The Torah is God’s ingenious formula for human relationships. When one studies Choshen Mishpat and perceives that abstract system of justice, and he is enthralled by its beauty, his actions follow suit. The appreciation of the wisdom in abstract is the cause for his actions. Thus,

without *Choshen Mishpat*, there cannot exist proper character. The proper character referred to here is functional—practical relationships with others. The *Shulchan Aruch* addresses questions regarding one who gave his word to sell someone X at a certain price, but then X increased in value. As there was yet no legal acquisition (*kinyan*), is one bound by his word to sell at the lower price? All such issues are required study if one is to conduct himself with proper character. Thereby, we see that the *Shulchan Aruch* goes beyond financial and ownership issues by addressing even one’s word. Similarly, it is prohibited to inquire from someone about his merchandise if one has no intention to make a purchase, for this misleads the seller.

Judaism does not leave any area unaddressed. Society cannot live harmoniously without a *Shulchan Aruch*. This is the meaning of “If there is no Torah, there is no proper character.” Without wisdom, a society will not function in harmony. King Solomon depicted the perfect society:

All of the days of Solomon, Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, dwelt in safety, each man under his own vine and under his own fig tree (I Kings 5:5).

People were happy, satisfied, and prosperous. The implication of “each man” means that every individual was

happy. It does not mean that certain strata in society were happy at the expense of others. This relates to society's harmonious function.

However, if Torah study must precede proper character, how do we understand the statement, "If there is no proper character, there is no Torah?" Man has an inherent raw, congenial nature that fosters pleasant relationships. The world refers to such people as the "nice guy." He is a person without rampant emotions or obsessional compulsions. He has an even-keeled character. This type of character is a necessary prerequisite for the study of Torah. [This is not the "proper character" referred to in the first statement, which is the functional effect of Torah, but this refers to a different type of proper character: decent personalities that are a precursor to Torah study.]

This proper character functions on two levels: man's inherent congenial traits and the abstract system that fosters harmony, i.e., *Choshen Mishpat*. The former proper character only goes so far—it cannot resolve disputes. That is where the Shulchan Aruch comes in. Without the scientific justice of *Choshen Mishpat*, there can never be harmony. Despite the presence of the nice guy, there must be an objective framework that guides human relations. This is the lesson of the first statement. This resolves the illogical problem we originally suggested.

IF THERE IS NO WISDOM, THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD. IF THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD, THERE IS NO WISDOM.

Although fear of God includes an emotional element, true fear of God stems from a prior recognition of God. Thus, fear of God is not essentially emotional, although emotions are part of it. Wisdom is mentioned first as it is the essence of this phenomenon. One whose essence is fear alone is nothing. Fear—or better, awe—must be tied to wisdom. Nonetheless, fear is not altogether dispensable. For one who is not on an intellectual level, without fear, operates with untamed emotions. Without fear first, it is impossible for one to advance to a state of wisdom and true fear, which is awe of God.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

There are three minds divided into three parts: chochma (wisdom), tivunah (understanding), and daas (knowledge). Wisdom refers to what a person learns from others. Understanding refers to ideas derived through analogy. Knowledge refers to that which one perceives himself."

Rashi says that knowledge refers to one who explains a theory. Understanding refers to grasping an idea, but without the capacity to offer an explanation. Rashi comments

in Talmud Brachos that one doesn't learn something if he cannot repeat the lecture that he heard. And he says that understanding is knowledge without definition.

Rabbeinu Yona breaks it down in terms of creativity. Wisdom is acquired facts. Understanding refers to one who can apply what he has learned to new situations and problems; it is a separate art. Creativity is understanding one matter from another, *mavin davar mitoch davar*. Wisdom refers to knowledge but without the ability to apply it to different cases. Some people are limited to wisdom alone, while others are adept in application. Then there is one with knowledge, which refers to a person with inductive skills: one who innovates ideas.

Rabbeinu Yona differentiates understanding as the theoretician and knowledge as the innovator. Yet, are these two types of people qualitatively distinct from each other, or is knowledge a quantitative extension of understanding? The mind has two ways to perceive: a lower level—understanding—requiring external stimuli, but knowledge refers to one who is stimulated by the observed phenomenon alone. Independently, this personality is driven into theoretical thought [based on his studies alone]. But in both people, the perception of theories is one function of the mind and is activated in these two ways. The more sensitive mind requires no external stimuli [such as a teacher's stimulus]

to actively theorize and innovate.

Therefore, “If there is no knowledge, there is no understanding” means that without the part of the mind that can perceive theory, there cannot be understanding, even if others explain an idea. Such a person will not appreciate the theory. When one understands another person’s theoretical explanation, it is not a parroting of his theory, for that is worthless. A person can arouse in another the creative part of the mind. This is a passive type of creativity. When the Rav presented the teachings of Rav Chaim, he did not parrot the teaching but learned and understood it just as Rav Chaim did.

IF THERE IS NO UNDERSTANDING, THERE IS NO KNOWLEDGE.

If one cannot be externally stimulated, certainly he cannot do so himself.

IF THERE IS NO KNOWLEDGE, THERE IS NO UNDERSTANDING.

If a person can parrot another person’s theory, but he does not grasp the theory per se, then he cannot be one who understands, for he cannot compare phenomena [analogy is necessary for inductive reasoning]. One who has no knowledge is bereft of the faculty with which to perceive.

Therefore, he cannot have understanding.

Of the three parts of the mind cited previously, wisdom is omitted in this discussion because Chazal wished to focus on the two “active” parts of the intellect, and wisdom is the mere acquisition of facts and does not relate to the perception of theories.

Rav Pappa said he could not recall if an idea was his own or his rebbe’s, for, as his perception of the idea was so clear to him, the originator of the idea became vague. The clarity with which he understood his rebbe’s ideas was no less clear than ideas he originated himself. Understanding refers to one who perceives a theory as well as the innovator. However, the facts themselves did not serve as a sufficient stimulus to awaken the theory in his own mind.

*To the end that all the peoples of the earth
may know that the Lord alone is God,
there is no other (I Kings 8:60).*

The sole purpose of Judaism is to increase one’s knowledge. Therefore, the highest ethic in Judaism is knowledge. Whenever one strays it is because he lacks knowledge about ethics or about himself. Judaism is the only religion that maintains that ignorance is evil.

The lesson of this mishnah is that there is a certain mechanistic attitude toward knowledge and this goes against the

Torah. Knowledge does not remain purely in the abstract, but Judaism ties it to ethics; it is a metaphysical phenomenon via participation in a different world. Something in man is sensitive to the world of wisdom; that element is the tzelem Elohim: intellect.

Bereishis discusses man's creation twice. The first depiction of creation pertains to his physical element. The second instance is described as, "Let us make man in our form and in our image" (Gen. 1:26). This verse refers to the faculty of perception. There is no analogy between human knowledge and animal knowledge. Such a view of man violates the essence of Judaism. (Animals possess a mechanistic faculty.) If one does not understand that human knowledge is a divine phenomenon, he misses the essence of the entire Torah. This concept is an ethic. Our mishnah defines human knowledge and removes it from the mechanistic view, thereby conveying the highest ethic [and, therefore, appropriately included in Avos]. Without viewing knowledge in this manner, one is a heathen. This point affects man's complete essence, and it's a Torah fundamental, which, if denied, is a denial of prophecy. Prophecy is where one can perceive God's wisdom in a more direct fashion.

The gemara says that the Second Temple was destroyed because people did not make the blessing before Torah

study. Why is this so tragic, as people still studied Torah? This blessing is a recognition of the metaphysical relationship between God and man. Without making this blessing, one's learning is like any other activity. This displays that our recognition of knowledge is an ethic.

Maimonides says that when man perceives knowledge, a metaphysical phenomenon takes place. Once one is in the metaphysical realm, he is within the realm of perception. But how does he enter that realm? One can't enter the realm of perception without already being there! For if one is not there, there is no perception. The solution to this question of how man is converted into a metaphysical being is very difficult to understand. Maimonides does not provide a solution, but he says it is an abstract idea.

When a person perceives a concept, he is not like an eye perceiving an extraneous phenomenon, but man is one with the concept itself. When we say that knowledge is not mechanistic, we mean that no machine can be produced that will replicate man's experience of perception and his formulation of theories. That is impossible. Human perception of ideas cannot be reduced to a mechanical phenomenon.

IF THERE IS NO FLOUR, THERE IS NO TORAH. IF
THERE IS NO TORAH, THERE IS NO FLOUR.

In simple terms, this means that one cannot learn without finances for he will need to spend his time earning and not learning. But cannot man learn and earn? Isn't that the ultimate situation? Maimonides formulates one's day as three hours of work and the rest of the time spent learning.

If a person has the burden of earning a livelihood on his mind, it is impossible for him to become a great talmid chocham. Becoming a talmid chocham requires a certain state of mind, it does not simply require hours of study. That state of mind is where man's psychic energy is free from any type of burden. It is interesting that our mishnah does not mention other burdens, but identifies earning a livelihood alone.

Why is earning a livelihood singled out? Apparently, it assumes a unique position. Chazal discuss earning a livelihood many times, such as "The combination of Torah study and a livelihood is pleasant" (Avos 2:2). One's livelihood has a strong psychological significance. In childhood, one's parents sustain him and later in life one undergoes a tremendous psychological change [he is now independent]. One's anxiety about a livelihood is unlike other worries; his independence and his self-image are destroyed without it. Chazal never viewed one without a livelihood as just another worry—it strikes at a person's core.

Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous man collapse (Psalms 55:23).

One's livelihood is intimately tied to one's relationship to God, for one's livelihood comes from God (Beitza 16a). If one does not relate to his livelihood properly, he misses out on perfection. A livelihood carries with it a deep psychological impact and is also a philosophical matter. The gemara says, "Three people do not live," and one is a person who anticipates partaking of his friends table (Beitza 32b) [meaning that his own table is empty]. In Birchas Hamazon, we pray to not rely on man's gifts or his loans, but on God's kindness. Another source is taken from the story of Noah, where metaphorically, the bird said the following about the olive branch in its beak, "Better is bitterness from God than sweetness from man" [since olive branches are bitter]. The way one relates to his livelihood expresses his relationship to reality itself.

Regarding Korach's death, the Torah says, "They went down alive into Sheol with their possessions; the earth closed over them, and they vanished from the midst of the congregation" (Num. 16:33). Chazal ask, "What is 'yakum' (possessions)? This refers to man's wealth that stands [yakum] him on his feet [provides him with a sense of being]."

Livelihood gives man a sense of independence. Without that sense, one cannot have the freedom of mind necessary to become a talmid chocham. We also learn that the highest level of tzedakah is to help a person gain a livelihood.

Albert Einstein was once asked, "What should one do to make a living?" He replied, "A person should do something that he is very confident in accomplishing." This was a very intelligent answer, for if one is not confident in his career, he will constantly worry that his livelihood is at stake. In that state of mind, it is impossible for one to advance in any kind of knowledge.

The halacha that one does his Torah reading in the succah but his theoretical learning outside the succah [in his home] also supports this idea that when one's mind is confined [either by monetary concerns or by the confinement of a succah] his learning suffers.

IF THERE IS NO TORAH, THERE IS NO FLOUR.

Flour [finances] refers first to material goods, but it also refers to the objective of the flour, which is to provide one with a happy life. One without Torah is one with no objective in life. Thus, without Torah, one's flour has no objective. Man is constructed in such a way that one without the other is an empty existence. One with flour and no Torah has nothing to do with his money; a

life chasing the physical is insatiable. He chases fantasies that reality fails to satisfy; each physical search ends in dissatisfaction. It is a painful life. Alternatively, one who strives for Torah and wisdom without finances has no life either. One should be motivated to learn, not because he sacrifices anything, but because he fully agrees that the life of chasing the physical is a painful and frustrating life from which he wishes to distance himself.

Who is a wise man? One who is satisfied with his lot (Avos 4:1).

There is no such thing in existence outside the realm of a talmid chocham. Chazal say, “Whomever has \$100 dollars desires \$200.” King Solomon said, “One who loves money is not satisfied with money” (Koheles 5:9). “Who is a wise man? One who is satisfied with his lot” refers to a talmid chocham. Maimonides teaches that a prophet must be wealthy, and he quotes this statement. Maimonides does not go off into far-fetched metaphors. He means literally that a prophet’s requirement is satisfaction, not monetary wealth. The prophet has attained total satisfaction and does not think about his monetary needs because he is engaged in God’s wisdom.

The blessing of “to engage in words of Torah” (la’asoke b’divre Torah) is said in the morning, even though people work in the morning [and do not immediately engage in Torah, which could be viewed as a breach (hefsek) between the blessing and

the act of Torah study, thereby rendering the blessing invalid]. But, in fact, there is no breach because their work was for the purpose of Torah study. It is not simply philosophy, but halacha recognizes this as well. Such people's preoccupation is thought and wisdom.

MESIRAS NEFESH: SACRIFICE

A person has an obligation to the klal; Maimonides sacrificed his final years. One might even need to forfeit his livelihood to save lives.

Sacrifice is a proper action. As an act is proper, there should not be any sense of sacrifice. If one feels he sacrificed, he is not functioning on the highest level.

Love of God means that one should not learn just for himself, but he should bring others to love God as well. Abraham, our forefather, portrayed this ethic. In the heat of the day, he waited for travelers so that he might teach them about God. Why did he do so? He was motivated by his love of God. Thus, there was no sacrifice. A person should perform mitzvos based on love, for he views the mitzvah as

the proper act and not as though he is sacrificing anything. [Viewing mitzvos as a sacrifice indicates that one's view of the mitzvos is incorrect.] There is no such phenomenon as sacrificing for the Torah. The highest level of reward for a mitzvah is not when it is painful, but when one is naturally attracted to a mitzvah as he views it as the proper act. The Torah does not advocate a painful existence. This is the misconception of all the other nations: Their idea of religion praises sacrificing and suffering. They gain some psychological satisfaction, but this idea is not found in Judaism.

This is the way [to toil in] Torah: Eat bread with salt, and drink a small amount of water, and sleep on the ground, and live a life of pain, and in Torah you toil; if you do so (Psalms 128: 2), "Happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you." Happy shall you be in this world, and it shall be well with you in the world to come (Avos 6:4).

The Gra says that this applies only when one commences the life of Torah. Once a person reaches a certain level, he no longer needs this restrictive state. One's initial commitment to Torah must be with such full dedication, to the point that he would endure even a life of bread and salt alone. Maimonides says that for one to reach the highest level in Torah, he must not have any other objective. One

must be committed to perfection and knowledge. Without this focus, one cannot obtain the crown of Torah. But this is only to begin with, for we do not find that Chazal ate only bread and salt. While it is true that some rabbis were poor, many were wealthy and enjoyed life's pleasures. "Bread and salt" means that if one lacks the true value of the Torah, he would not endure such an austere existence to continue following the Torah. [Thus, the prescription of "bread and salt" is not to deprive oneself, rather it is the barometer of one's attachment to Torah: Would one remain dedicated to a Torah lifestyle, even at the cost of living on bread and salt?]

"Happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you": The Torah praises a good life, and one who follows the Torah—even living on bread and salt—has a more enjoyable existence through his inner world that is fully satisfied and happy with God's wisdom. "Happy shall you be, and it shall be with you" teaches that one is not suffering.

Maimonides' words that one should follow a lifestyle of bread and salt does not mean that one should suffer, but he describes the perfected person who has this attitude toward the physical world. His energies are attached to wisdom and not to physical enjoyments. He writes in his Eight Chapters that one should worship God from love, which means that he acts in a natural manner [and not one of

deprivation].

Chazal did not promote a life of pain; in fact, just the opposite is true. One gemara says that a person who cannot enjoy the simple pleasures of life is a sick person. Another gemara says that God punishes one for every fruit that he did not enjoy. God created such enjoyments precisely so that man partakes of them. All enjoyments should be engaged on one's path of following the Torah. But one is ridiculed if he seeks to enjoy the physical as an end, and not as a means to contribute to one's life of Torah. All the Torah's verses endorse an enjoyable life: "Her paths are paths of peace" (Proverbs 3:17). At one bar mitzvah, all of the rabbis present told the bar mitzvah boy he must now endure the tremendous yoke of Torah, and that it is difficult. Rav Moshe Feinstein responded to them: "You are wrong to upset the boy, and in fact, 'Her paths are paths of peace'—all the mitzvos are beautiful and enjoyable." The reason the other rabbis felt this way was because of alien religious influences from our culture.

HE [RABBI ELAZAR BEN AZARIAH] WOULD SAY,
 "ANYONE WHOSE WISDOM EXCEEDS HIS DEEDS,
 TO WHAT IS HE COMPARED? TO A TREE WHOSE
 BRANCHES ARE MANY BUT WHOSE ROOTS ARE
 FEW; AND THE WIND COMES AND UPROOTS
 IT AND TURNS IT ON ITS FACE, AS IT IS SAID,
 'AND HE SHALL BE LIKE A LONELY JUNIPER
 TREE IN THE WASTELAND AND SHALL NOT SEE

WHEN GOOD COMES, BUT SHALL INHABIT THE PARCHED PLACES OF THE WILDERNESS, A SALTY LAND THAT IS UNINHABITABLE' (JEREMIAH 17:6). BUT ONE WHOSE DEEDS EXCEED HIS WISDOM, WHAT IS HE LIKE? LIKE A TREE WHOSE BRANCHES ARE FEW BUT WHOSE ROOTS ARE MANY; EVEN IF ALL THE WINDS OF THE WORLD COME AND BLOW UPON IT, THEY DO NOT MOVE IT FROM ITS PLACE, AS IT IS SAID, 'HE SHALL BE LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE WATERS, WITH ITS ROOTS SPREAD OUT BY THE RIVER, AND IT SHALL NOT PERCEIVE WHEN HEAT COMES, BUT ITS LEAVES SHALL REMAIN FRESH; AND IT WILL NOT BE TROUBLED IN THE YEAR OF DROUGHT, NOR WILL IT CEASE TO BEAR FRUIT' (JEREMIAH 17:8)."

The prophet Jeremiah predicts that eventually, the nations will recognize their religions as false:

*Oh Lord, my strength and my stronghold,
my refuge in a day of trouble, to You na-
tions shall come from the ends of the earth
and say, "Our fathers inherited utter delu-
sions, things that are futile and worthless"
(Jer. 16:19).*

The nations do not say that the Jews practice the correct religion and they the false religion, but they recognize their religions as having no value whatsoever.

*Can a man make gods for himself? False
gods are they! (Jer. 16:20).*

The world religions are projections [fantasy], while Judaism recognizes the true God, the source of the universe. We often hear the question, “Did God make man, or did man make God?” Both are true: Judaism says the former, while the world’s religions perpetrate the latter. The prophet then continues and also criticizes the Jews for turning toward idolatry:

Thus said the Lord, “Cursed is he who trusts in man, who makes mere flesh his strength, and turns his thoughts from the Lord. He shall be like a bush in the desert, which does not sense the coming of good: It is set in the scorched places of the wilderness, in a barren land without inhabitants” (Jer. 17:5, 6).

The prophet explains the root of the problem—man searches for the security from his early youth: his parents. He tries to prolong that situation, which eventuates in one of two things: idolatry, or looking to man for security.

If all of Judaism seeks to remove man from idolatry, what would we say about a modern, reformed Jew? He doesn’t practice idolatry; what is his sin? “Cursed is he who trusts in man, who makes mere flesh his strength.” Unless one serves the true God, his emotions will be tied up with man. His security will be either people or a particular person.

One escapes this only by recognizing the ultimate reality [God] outside of his psychological reality [his prolonged infantile need for human security to replace his parents]. This is the prophet's meaning.

What is atheism? It is a denial of the man-made god. Atheism gains its strength from an emotional source—it is an opposite reaction. The atheist seeks his security in man.

The prophet continues with the verse quoted in our mishnah:

Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord [alone]. He shall be like a tree planted by waters, sending forth its roots by a stream: It does not sense the coming of heat, its leaves are ever fresh; it has no care in a year of drought, it does not cease to yield fruit (Jer. 17:7, 8).

What is the meaning of one “whose wisdom exceeds his deeds?” It regards intellectual recognition versus emotional recognition. One can obtain an intellectual recognition of reality, but his emotions might fail to follow suit [explaining why his deeds are few]. One who trusts in man is cursed because his emotional sense of security is derived from man and not from God. Although he intellectually recognizes the true reality of God, his emotions still seek man. Jeremiah does not mean that man fails to recognize

God, for he has a lot of knowledge.

“Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord” refers to a person whose actions surpass his wisdom; his emotions follow his knowledge.

If one is frightened from contact with a wild animal, he operates properly on an emotional level. But if one’s emotions do not properly follow one’s recognition of God, on the surface it would seem that he has an emotional problem that is not his fault. But in fact, it is his fault because he lacks knowledge of himself. He does not attempt to gain knowledge of his inner workings [that could correct his emotions to follow his intellectual realization of God]. The more one gains knowledge of God, the more his emotions will follow his knowledge. But he must operate with normal emotions. One with a serious emotional block must address that block; he must work to better understand himself.

The greatest empiricist scientists were the least scientific, and the greatest rationalist scientists were the most scientific. The rationalist is closer to God as he sees the reality of theory. This changes his entire view, as Maimonides says, “In accordance with one’s knowledge will be his love of God” (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 10:6). Teshuvah is the study of the self [indicating that knowledge alone will not bring one’s emotions in line with reality]. Judaism says that it is

impossible to attain perfection, either through knowledge or teshuvah alone—both are required.

Who is on a higher level: one with a lot of knowledge and few actions, or one whose actions exceed his knowledge? Our mishnah does not answer this question. But it says that one with fewer actions will encounter something that will cause him to leave Judaism; he is subject to imminent failure. Once he leaves a life of wisdom he must deny that wisdom. [As stated in earlier chapters, one cannot tolerate going against the Torah, so he must deny the Torah's value to justify his life without Torah.]

Rabbeinu Yona asks how it is possible for one's actions to exceed his wisdom. If he has no knowledge behind his actions, his actions are worthless. [Furthermore, how can one perform what he does not know?] What this refers to is that although one lacks wisdom, he follows what the rabbis say. Otherwise it is impossible to have actions that exceed one's knowledge. [Thus, he acts based not on his own knowledge, but on the knowledge of those whom he respects.] This is "Naaseh v'nishma."

RABBI TARFON AND THE ELDERS WERE RECLINING IN THE LOFT OF THE HOUSE OF NITZA IN LOD WHEN THIS QUESTION WAS ASKED OF THEM: "IS STUDY GREATER OR IS ACTION GREAT-

ER?" RABBI TARFON ANSWERED AND SAID, "ACTION IS GREATER." RABBI AKIVA ANSWERED AND SAID, "STUDY IS GREATER." EVERYONE ANSWERED AND SAID, "STUDY IS GREATER AS STUDY LEADS TO ACTION" (KIDDUSHIN 40B).

WHEN RABBI ELAZAR BEN PERATA AND RABBI CHANINA BEN TERADYON WERE ARRESTED BY THE ROMANS DURING THE TIME OF THE RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, RABBI ELAZAR BEN PERATA SAID TO RABBI CHANINA BEN TERADYON, "FORTUNATE ARE YOU, AS YOU WERE ARRESTED ON ONLY ONE CHARGE, OF TEACHING TORAH PUBLICLY; WOE IS ME, AS I HAVE BEEN ARRESTED ON FIVE CHARGES." THE GEMARA COMMENTS: AND THIS IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH A STATEMENT OF RAV HUNA, AS RAV HUNA SAYS, "ANYONE WHO OCCUPIES HIMSELF WITH TORAH STUDY ALONE IS CONSIDERED LIKE ONE WHO DOES NOT HAVE A GOD. AS IT IS STATED, 'NOW FOR LONG SEASONS ISRAEL WAS WITHOUT THE TRUE GOD, AND WITHOUT A TEACHING PRIEST, AND WITHOUT THE TORAH' (II CHRONICLES 15:3)." WHAT IS MEANT BY "WITHOUT THE TRUE GOD"? THIS TEACHES THAT ANYONE WHO ENGAGES IN TORAH STUDY ALONE IS CONSIDERED LIKE ONE WHO DOES NOT HAVE A TRUE GOD (AVODAH ZARAH 17B).

Most people feel that if they do a favor for another person that they are losing out. This attitude is a huge mistake. One can measure his advances in learning [and thereby be satisfied with his measure of accomplishment] but he feels that acts of kindness are a total loss. People make this error

because of a subtle unconscious matter: they have not left their egoistic motivations in their search for “accomplishment.” People force the Torah into that same value system of accomplishment, and, as acts of kindness are not measurable [providing no sense of accomplishment], they do not perform them. Rav Huna highlights this egoistical value by saying that one who learns alone without performing acts of kindness is as if he has no God. His learning is for the self.

The gemara in Kiddushin concerning Rabbi Tarfon appears to address a different problem than that of one whose wisdom exceeds his actions. Otherwise, Chazal should have said that this was already discussed in Avos. How do we differentiate between the words in Avos and Kiddushin? Kiddushin concludes that study is greater because it brings one to action. Therefore, Avos should have arrived at the same conclusion, that the tree with more branches (Torah study) than roots should be preferable to the tree with more roots and fewer branches. How do we resolve this conflict?

Baba Kamma 17a says that Chizkiyahu was given a great deal of honor when he died: A yeshiva was erected on his grave and students learned there for a period of time. A Torah scroll was placed on his burial bed [with an inscription] reading, “This one fulfilled that which is

written in this one” [Chizkiyahu fulfilled what is written in the Torah]. The gemara asked, “But we also do this for others [therefore, what is the unique honor given to Chizkiyahu]?” [Copying this practice of placing a Torah on one’s bed before burial, and reciting these words for others—even years later—would impinge on the honor due to Chizkiyahu.] The gemara says that the unique honor given to Chizkiyahu was that although a scroll was placed on the bed of others, and the inscription was also recited for others—“This one fulfilled that which is written in this one”—the unique statement applied only to Chizkiyahu was, “He ‘taught’ what is written in the Torah.”

The gemara says that Rabbah bar bar Channa said:

I WAS FOLLOWING RABBI YOCHANAN ON HIS WAY TO THE BATHROOM TO ASK HIM A QUESTION. HE DID NOT ANSWER US UNTIL HE EXITED THE BATHROOM, WASHED HIS HANDS, AND PUT ON HIS TEFILLIN. WITH REGARD TO THE HONOR GIVEN TO KING CHIZKIYAHU, HE SAID, “NOWADAYS, WE EVEN SAY, ‘THIS ONE FULFILLED THAT WHICH IS WRITTEN IN THIS,’ BUT WE DO NOT SAY, ‘HE TAUGHT THAT WHICH IS WRITTEN IN THIS,’ WHICH WAS A UNIQUE HONOR PERFORMED AT THE BURIAL OF THE RIGHTEOUS KING CHIZKIYAHU.” THE GEMARA ASKS: “BUT DIDN’T THE MASTER SAY, ‘TORAH STUDY IS GREAT BECAUSE THE STUDY OF TORAH LEADS TO ONE’S PERFORMANCE OF THE MITZVOS?’” THIS INDICATES THAT THE PERFORMANCE OF MITZVOS IS CONSIDERED OF

GREATER VALUE THAN TORAH STUDY. (BABA
KAMMA 17A)

When the gemara in Kiddushin says that “everyone” concluded, “Torah study is greater than actions because it leads one to actions,” Rabbi Tarfon did not necessarily change his mind from his position that actions are greater. He agreed that study leads a person to action. The question is how Rabbi Akiva said that study was greater; this conflicts with Avos, which says that one whose actions exceed his Torah is greater.

In his introduction to Zeraim, Maimonides says that a brilliant chocham who chases his desires is not a chocham, for his life is not in order. Thus, the case in Avos of one whose wisdom exceeds his actions refers to a chocham who chases his desires.

What is the dispute in Kiddushin as to whether Torah study is greater or actions are greater? It did not discuss one whose study does not result in actions. This discussion regards perfection, which requires two matters: study and action/knowledge and directing one’s energies. The question is, in which area should one spend more time?

Maimonides says that anyone who says that an ignorant man is pious denies the rabbis, for he says wisdom is not indispensable, and thereby denies those who toil for wisdom. Tosfos Ri haZaken says:

Only a person with wisdom has true fear of sin. Therefore, an ignorant man cannot be pious. The only way for one to perfect his character is through wisdom. He must be able to analyze his character and he must be wise. And one who is simply a nice guy will never attain wisdom, for his acts are not based on a proper path and are not on the true path. And so, the Torah writes, "You shall learn them" and "You shall perform them." Thus, wisdom must precede action (Talmud Kid-dushin 50b).

We do not find Chazal bereft of good actions because the Torah makes a demand on the entire person—wisdom is tied to action. Also, one who cannot act properly cannot learn Torah for his learning would disturb him [from following his desires]. Judaism is the appreciation of wisdom on the proper path.

If one does not agree with God's eternal nature, God is removed from [unrelated to] the world. Aristotle was the foremost proponent of God's eternity. He said God's existence is what caused the existence of the universe.

Our love for man would be in a different light were we to remove God from the picture. But if we include God, we say that God gives man existence, prophecy, and the Torah. With this understanding, our love of God leads to our love for man [for we recognize that it is God's will to

direct man's life with kindness, thereby driving one who loves God to love those whom God loves]. But if one suggests the eternity of the universe, his love for man is of a different nature.

The Torah expresses man's perfection as "walking in His ways" (Deut. 28:9). Therefore, one's entire worship is based on his concept of God's ways. God is directly involved in acts of kindness. This is a different concept from the one that says the universe is merely an accidental offshoot of God's existence, and all that exists is general providence or nature. But Judaism says that God is involved with particulars; He is involved in the lives of individuals. This teaches man a different system of kindness. If one was told to sacrifice his daughter to spare the whole world from nuclear war, he cannot sacrifice her since God relates to the individual and man has no right to enter that area.

Returning to Kiddushin, Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Akiva, and the elders disputed the methods of perfection. This does not regard one whose wisdom exceeds his actions or the inverse. [It refers to one whose wisdom doesn't lead to action, one who has a flaw in his personality. Kiddushin refers to people who in fact perform good actions.] Kiddushin discusses the question of where one should focus his time most—Torah study or action. Here, action refers to directing one's energies toward the good.

Zevulin supported Yissachar, and the gemara says they had equal reward: They equally directed their energies toward the good. Zevulin had a perception of wisdom in order that his support of it in Yissachar's learning was a perfection for him. The gemara's question was, which involvement leads to greater perfection?

A yaish mefarshim in Tosfos asks, "If one has not yet learned, should he learn or engage in performing good actions?" The answer is that he must first learn, since, "An ignorant man cannot be pious." But, for one who has already learned, "Action is greater than study." Tosfos means that before one has learned, his actions are meaningless, for he does not yet know what the good is, that he might choose his actions. But once one has wisdom, if he needs further perfection, he should spend time channeling his energies through good actions.

When Rav Chaim died, his disciples did not know what to write on his kever. They thought for some time, and finally, they selected "abundant kindness" (rav chessed). Considering all the Torah that he learned and taught, they said his greatness was his acts of kindness. Judaism teaches that without wisdom one has nothing, and yet without acts of kindness one has nothing. Wisdom must lead to love of God and love of man. One must follow that order if he is to be in the realm of perfection. Judaism's wisdom is not

technological, but theoretical. Shabbos is for technological man to rest and for the activation of theoretical man.

Returning to Baba Kamma, it was said only regarding Chizkiyahu—and regarding no one else—“This one [Chizkiyahu] fulfilled what is written in this one [Torah].” For saying this about the others would impinge on Chizkiyahu’s honor. The gemara then asks, “Did not Mar say that greater is study, that it brings one to action?” What is the gemara’s question? Rashi says this gemara teaches that actions are greater than study. If so, there would be no detraction of honor to Chizkiyahu for writing about others, “This one learned what is written in this one.” As actions [Chizkiyahu’s uniqueness of teaching others] are in fact the greater value, saying about others that they learned does not detract from Chizkiyahu. The gemara answers that we cannot say about others that they learned “and taught,” that would impinge on the unique praise due to Chizkiyahu, for his teaching others is the highest form of good acts, as it also includes study.

3:18 STUDY: ESSENCE AND ACCIDENTS

RABBI ELIEZER BEN CHISMA SAYS, “[THE LAWS OF] KININ (BIRD OFFERINGS) AND THE BEGINNINGS OF NIDDAH (MENSTRUATION), THESE ARE THE BODY OF THE LAWS. ASTRONOMICAL CALCULATIONS AND GEMATRIA [NUMERICAL CALCULATIONS] ARE THE CONDIMENTS TO WISDOM.”

Astronomical and numerical calculations [mathematics] help one develop his ability for calculation, which is a prerequisite for learning halachos. But these are not on the same level as halacha, which defines and conceptualizes, including deductive and inductive reasoning.

Why were Kinin and Niddah singled out? These areas are unrelated to any emotional satisfaction. There is no attraction to them, explaining why people don't study them. One who studies these two areas studies the beauty of halacha itself. These areas are unlike prayer, Shabbos, or damages, which appeal to one's emotions and to one's practical life. The beauty of the halachic system is the essence of wisdom. True perfection is seen in one who is attracted to that system.

