

PIRKEI AVOS



ETHICS *of the* FATHERS

CHAPTER 4

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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3rd EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

In these lectures, the reader will find great appreciation for the Torah's depth and design, and wisdom of psycholo-

gy, philosophy, morality, human character and human perfection, thereby growing in his and her love for the Creator. The reader will admire Chazal's ability to write concisely, yet encapsulate voluminous concepts and ideals.

Rabbi Chait gave 130 lectures: each one was 1.5 hours. The lectures were recently transcribed verbatim from the original audio and edited. Thus, the style of this book is a record of live classes. If certain topics were reintroduced or elaborated in later lectures, liberty has been taken to join those ideas with their original mention. As live lectures address students' questions and digress to various topics, themes within one lecture switch accordingly. Additionally, Rabbi Chait's treatment of a single mishna 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 mishna 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.

4:1 WISDOM, STRENGTH, RICHES, AND HONOR

In his introduction to *Mesilas Yesharim*, Moshe Chaim Luzzatto says, “What I have to say is nothing new. But it is important for one to review true ideas in his mind and follow them [in action].” On Isaiah 28:10, he says, “...a command for a command, a line for a line...” Maimonides says similarly, “If you show a person a straight line once, show it to him again. If you give a person a command once, tell him again.” Repetition is necessary as it is difficult to penetrate man’s soul. Therefore, review is helpful so that true ideas stand before one’s eyes and one can thereby improve. Plato did the same when discussing the reality of the soul regarding the afterlife: The soul does not die with the body. Socrates presented his proofs before he died. His students asked him, “After you are gone, and we have no one to review these proofs, what shall we do?” Socrates replied, “Let the charmer charm you.” Meaning, one should review the ideas himself, for by doing so, the ideas become real to a person. Fully grasping the reality of the ideas, one can then adjust his emotions to follow the proper life.

Maimonides does not comment on chapter 4:1 of *Pirkei Avos* because previous chapters of his *Guide* already address the topics in this mishna. But Rashi and Rebbeinu

Yona do comment. So, we may be reviewing previous ideas, but Rashi's words and Rebbeinu Yona's words are a worthwhile and beneficial review. And whenever one reviews an idea there are always new insights: "There is no study hall without innovation, Ain beis medrash b'li chid-dush."

BEN ZOMA SAYS, "WHO IS THE WISE ONE? HE WHO LEARNS FROM ALL MEN, AS IT SAYS, 'I HAVE ACQUIRED UNDERSTANDING FROM ALL MY TEACHERS' (PSALMS 119:99). WHO IS THE MIGHTY ONE? HE WHO CONQUERS HIS IMPULSE, AS IT SAYS, 'SLOWNESS TO ANGER IS BETTER THAN A MIGHTY PERSON AND THE RULER OF HIS SPIRIT THAN THE CONQUEROR OF A CITY.' (PROVERBS 16:32). WHO IS THE RICH ONE? HE WHO IS HAPPY WITH HIS LOT, AS IT SAYS, 'WHEN YOU EAT [FROM] THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS, YOU WILL BE HAPPY, AND IT WILL BE WELL WITH YOU' (PSALMS 128:2). YOU WILL BE HAPPY IN THIS WORLD, AND IT WILL BE WELL WITH YOU IN THE WORLD TO COME. WHO IS HONORED? HE WHO HONORS THE CREATED BEINGS, AS IT SAYS, 'FOR THOSE WHO HONOR ME, I WILL HONOR; AND THOSE WHO DESPISE ME WILL BE HELD IN LITTLE ESTEEM'" (I SAMUEL 2:30).

Psalm 119 is a beautiful chapter. King David repeats many times the enjoyment he derived from wisdom. The essence of this chapter is praise of the Torah. The heretics say that the Talmud was not invented until after the Greek

period. But chapter 119 refutes this for it describes God's wisdom found in His statutes [referring to the Oral Law/Talmud]:

*Blessed are You, Oh Lord; train me in
Your laws (119:12).
I rejoice in the way of Your decrees over
all riches (119:14).
I study Your precepts; I regard Your
ways (119:15).
I take delight in Your laws; I will not
neglect Your word (119:16).*

The word “delight” in verse 16 means that King David played with God's statutes: The Torah was his plaything, his joy.

*Open my eyes, that I may perceive the
wonders of Your teaching (119:18).
For Your decrees are my delight, the men
of my counsel (119:24).*

Who are the “men” from whom King David sought advice? They are God's statutes; King David refers to God's Torah as if it is a person. King David consulted with the Torah.

Give me understanding, that I may observe Your teaching and keep it wholeheartedly (119:34).

All verses reveal the tremendous wisdom that King David found in Torah study.

*I will delight in Your commandments, which I love.
I reach out for Your commandments, which I love; I study Your laws (119:47, 48).*

King David played with God's mitzvos, something that he enjoyed and loved. Only a lamdan can understand what King David describes. It makes no sense to understand this as King David merely reading the Bible [without the Oral Law]. A lamdan understands that the depth of the Torah is impossible without the Oral Law.

King David also mentions that throughout all of his troubles, the only place he could turn to was the Torah: wisdom. He then says:

I have acquired understanding from all my teachers, for Your statutes were my everyday speech (119:99).

All of King David's conversations were about Torah. This was his natural conversation. Average people get together as they desire to converse, but all they talk about is nonsense—that is their idea of a good time. But King David's idea of common speech was discussing the Torah's ideas. He did not do so out of a sense of obligation—that is not a high-level—rather the true [perfected] level is when the Torah is one's entertainment.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

The wise men of the nations of the world have said, "One who knows all the wisdoms [yet] does not love wisdom is not a wise man but a fool, as he does not love knowledge, which is intelligence. However, one who loves and desires it—even though he does not know anything—behold, this one is called a wise man." In any event, he will reach true wisdom and find knowledge of God. And about this, Ben Zoma said, "Who is the wise one? He who learns from all men"—he loves wisdom to the degree that he asks [it] from every person.

Rabbeinu Yona's idea of a wise man regards his relationship to the ideas. A chocham is one whose wisdom affects his inner personality. He is not one who simply has knowledge.

And even from the one who only knows one thing does he learn; and then his path becomes successful and he will become enlightened. And because of this he is called a wise one, as it says, "I have acquired understanding from all my teachers" (Psalms 119:99).

Although one possesses much knowledge, unless his soul has a desire for the world of ideas, he is not considered a wise man. In Judaism, "chocham" refers to one who loves wisdom and not to one who possesses a lot of knowledge, which is worthless. The latter does not have wisdom as part of his essence. The true chocham's nature is such that all parts of his personality crave the discovery of greater wisdom.

And so did David, peace be upon him, say that he learned from every person; and he did not say, "This one is not as knowledgeable as I am." Rather, he learned from them all and became enlightened. There is a metaphor [relevant to this] about a man who lost a small vessel—would he not seek [wisdom] from every man?

Rabbeinu Yona says that knowledge of God is impossible without this desire for wisdom: "And even from the one who only knows one thing does he learn; and then his path

becomes successful and he will become enlightened.” Knowledge of metaphysics is attained only when man searches earnestly according to a divine intuition, and that road is only accessible by one who has no emotional barriers: a total chocham. If one is not guided by a search for truth, then his modus operandi must be guided by something else and not by wisdom. He is guided by his emotions and [therefore] his picture of reality [his sense of value and purpose]—which everyone must have—must be a distorted view, thereby distorting his perception of God. The only person with a true picture of reality is one who follows his intellect and foregoes all emotional values.

Separating oneself from one’s emotional attractions is a battle; it is a process most people never identify or undergo. For most people feel that whatever they feel about reality is correct. One’s innate feelings of justice, politics, morality, etc., must be abandoned and replaced with following one’s mind alone. One must accept that the part of his nature dictating all these emotional values is not based on reality. He must abandon this part of himself if he is to become a chocham and follow what is real. People say, “What feels good is good”—they follow whatever they feel. People spend their lives repeating this flawed process of chasing their emotional fantasies of pleasure, and when they constantly find that their values do not provide happi-

ness, they continue this same pattern all their lives, instead of questioning their false premises and using wisdom [instead of feelings] to choose a new path. This is the way most people live, but the chocham is the individual who can turn his mind against his feelings [intellectually evaluating them] and create a rift between the two parts of his soul, selecting to follow wisdom and not his feelings. One who cannot follow his mind cannot enter the path toward becoming a talmid chocham.

Moshe did not go out to his brothers and engage in politics until he spent many years in wisdom to perfect his political knowledge: "...He went out to his brothers and witnessed their labors..." (Exod. 2:11). Moshe did not function based on feelings. He first studied justice in abstract thought. Once he understood the principles of justice, only then did he go out to his brothers to apply his knowledge.

King David requested knowledge from anyone he came across. [He did not feel he possessed a monopoly on wisdom.] Rav Moshe Feinstein said that no chocham believes that everyone will follow all his ideas. A great rabbi once gave a lecture where a youngster showed that the rabbi's premise was false. Even the greatest chocham can make an error, one that even a youngster can see. The Rash said that if proof can expose a rishon's ideas as incorrect, we should not rule like him. Rashi admits openly to his mistake ; he

writes “To’eh hayissi, I made an error” (Chullin 116b). Maimonides conceded to Raavad on a law concerning tzitzis. No man is infallible. Other religions seek absolute security [explaining their fabrication of saints: infallible men] but Judaism has no such value; we follow wisdom and human wisdom is fallible. We have no absolute security.

FROM ALL MY TEACHERS I BECAME WISE.

King David called Achitophel “rebbe,” even though he learned only one thing from him. King David’s love of knowledge was so great that he would praise someone if he learned just one idea from that person.

THE RULER OF HIS SPIRIT [IS BETTER] THAN
THE CONQUEROR OF A CITY.

According to Rashi, this refers to one who does not follow his instincts. But is this not obvious?

As it is impossible for man to remove his instinctual component, Rashi says [that the most one can do is] to not follow his instincts. One recognizes where his drives pull him, and he refrains from following those drives. It says in Genesis 2:7, “God formed man...” but the Hebrew word יצר is written with an unnecessary second י. Chazal say this alludes to two meanings of the word יצר, commencing with a י: “[Man says] Woe to my Creator (יוצר); woe to my

instincts (יצרֵי).” Man suffers in two ways: By following his Creator, his instincts are frustrated [he feels pain]; and if man follows his instincts, he rejects his Creator. Man is a conflicted being. In our mishna, the strong man who rules his spirit is also in conflict, but he favors God and does not follow his instincts. However, the higher level is when man emerges from the conflict, for even though on the whole one on this level is happy, this does not preclude the possibility of the return of conflict. But all men must experience a state of conflict.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Just as the power of the body is its virtue and its distinction, so too is the power of the soul its virtue. And regarding the power of the body in man, it is also in animals—as they all have the power to lift weights, and some more than others —[such that] Ben Zoma did not speak about it, as it is not called might. Rather [he spoke] about the might of the heart, which has two powers: to be mighty in war and to never be afraid; and it also has the power to subdue the impulse. And this is dissimilar for man and beast, as animals do not have might of the heart. And about this, Ben Zoma said that the braver and stronger power of the heart is that which overcomes the impulse. As might in war is not such a great thing and “Like you, like them, in the description of men”—if they have power, this one also has strength, if

“They prepared their hands for battle, their fingers for war.” But to overcome the impulse—the enemy of a person in his face [man’s instincts]—and to destroy it, is an elevated and strong might.

What is the connection between a strong man and one who conquers his instincts? A person conquers a city for he assumes this will provide happiness. He attempts to change his external reality to achieve happiness. Chazal disagree and say that happiness is achieved only by changing one’s internal reality: conquering one’s instincts. What does this have to do with courage?

On Koheles 7:3, Ibn Ezra divides man’s mind into three parts: nefesh refers to human desires, ruach refers to rulership and ego, and neshama refers to intellect. Courage appears to be part of ruach. Why then, if one does not follow his desires, is he considered a strong person? Why not refer to him as one who conquers his instincts?

A strong person—gibor—appears to be related to one who is in danger; he overcomes his fear of death. [But our mishna says, “Slowness to anger is better than a strong person and the ruler of his spirit than the conqueror of a city.”]

Rabbeinu Yona praises one who conquers the part of himself that “wants to destroy him” [his instincts]. How-

ever, courage must be understood. We typically view it as a character of fearlessness. But this stems from the feeling of invincibility, which is not based on reality [as everybody is vulnerable]. This explains philosophers who say, “Bravery borders on foolishness.” For the brave person makes assumptions that are not based on reality, but merely based on his subjective feelings. This cannot be defined as courage. Courage that is based on baseless feelings of invincibility is nonsense. The only proper definition of courage would be possessing wisdom relating to an area of danger. At a certain time when a person is at risk, wisdom will demand certain steps be taken. The alternative of remaining in one’s present situation of danger is unacceptable. This is the only courageous person: one with wisdom and knowledge concerning danger.

But one who conquers the instinctual drive that tries to destroy himself is the true strong person. Rabbeinu Yona says that there is a real constant danger in life: Man’s instincts are the source of this real danger. Using wisdom to escape a physical danger does not address man’s essence, his soul. “Who is strong? One who conquers his drives” regards the essence of man. This is the most vital area where strength is required. The true strong person is the one who applies wisdom to his highest element: his soul.

Maimonides classifies four areas of perfection in ascend-

ing order: financial, physical, psychological, and intellectual perfection. The first three types are perfections only inasmuch as they contribute to man's highest element: his soul. By itself, a financial, physical, or psychological perfection is worthless. But if these perfections assist man to live a life of Torah, then they are worthwhile. The order of these perfections also relates to their degree of affecting the soul. Finances are less removed from man than his physical health, but psychological health surpasses physical health in terms of ensuring intellectual perfection.

It is more difficult to apply courage to one's inner world of perfection than to apply courage to external situations. As Ibn Ezra says, *ruach* is the ego, and when one engages in military battle he can make full use of that emotion. But regarding the conquering of one's instincts—perfection of character—matters are different. Man cannot make use of that ego emotion in this area because many times [*viz.*, if one is arrogant] that precise emotion is the one man must fight to subdue, and engaging it would conflict with the goal of that person's perfection. Thus, in one's internal battle over his character, he does not have his ego as an ally as he does when battling a physical enemy. Thereby, one is more crippled when battling his internal make up. Such a person only has courage that stems from wisdom itself.

Thus, the battle to conquer one's character has a limited

arsenal, making the battle more difficult than fighting a physical enemy. The one who fights his internal world is the true strong person. The courage harnessed here is drawn from one's attachment to reality.

Additionally, insofar as one battles on the external front, there is no risk of losing the "self." The self is complete, and one seeks to preserve it through military battle. In contrast, one who seeks to conquer his personality places the very self in danger. Maimonides says that part of the process of teshuvah is changing one's name: "I am not that man" (*Mishna Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah 2:4*) [is what the penitent person states to divorce himself from his former identity in order to stray from continued sin]. He does not look at himself as the same person who sinned. When conquering one's drives, one faces a tremendous fear: the loss of his identity as he attempts to alter his very identity, which is defined by his emotions and values. The prospect of change brings with it the demand to lose the self: a far more fearful challenge than an external confrontation where the self is not at risk.

Man cannot love anything external more than he loves himself. The danger of losing the self is the most fearful confrontation. Be it his clothing or his personal likes, man gains tremendous pride in all that differentiates himself from others. The danger of losing the self as one recog-

nizes his values are nonsensical, is a different type of loss.

Reviewing the three points: The first is that one who conquers his instinctual nature is the true strong person because the battlefield is the real one and it concerns the inner life. The second point is that a brave person can cover up his fears, but to face the self, one must uncover the source of all his fears, and this requires great strength. And the third point is that the danger of losing the self is far greater than the danger of a military conflict.

Rabbeinu Yona then discusses revenge:

Slowness to anger [describes] the one who holds his anger and his will; he does not take revenge immediately, but waits for the [right] time and place for his vengeance. But the angry person who takes revenge immediately, confounds his actions and acts without intelligence. And about this, King Solomon, peace be upon him, stated, "Slowness to anger is better than a mighty person." The one who holds his anger—even though he does not forgive during his anger—since he leaves the matter of revenge until later, [shows] more might of the heart than the strong man in war, who, without intelligence, can be mighty in fighting.

Rabbeinu Yona says that in order to properly take vengeance, one must wait for the most opportune moment.

Then he says [discussed later] that the one who forgives is greater. What is the comparison, and how is this second person [who forgives] superior than the strong man?

Revenge demands a certain amount of force that comes from a particular part of the mind. “Slowness to anger is better than a mighty person and the ruler of his spirit than the conqueror of a city” means that in terms of ratio, no matter how great the strong man is, regardless of the greatness of applied force against an individual, he will never come close to the success of one who uses intelligence. If the strong man acts instinctively without wisdom, the person using wisdom will see far greater success in his plans. This is the meaning of “Slowness to anger is better than a mighty person.” This was displayed in the face-off between David and Goliath. Goliath said to David, “I will give your flesh to the beasts of the field and to the birds of heaven.” David then said, “Now I have him because beasts do not eat flesh,” meaning that Goliath was so angry, his tremendous force would be set in motion without intelligence. That is why David said, “Now he is mine” [Goliath revealed that he was not acting with intelligence]. Since this is the case, we must always attach ourselves to the reality that is effective [we must use wisdom].

...AND THE RULER OF HIS SPIRIT THAN THE
CONQUEROR OF A CITY.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

But “the ruler of his spirit” is greater than one who is slow to anger, since he forgives during his anger, as he fears the word of God. He is mightier “than the conqueror of a city” for he has two things: might of the heart and wisdom, as it is stated (Proverbs 21:22), “A wise man climbed to a city of warriors, and brought down its mighty stronghold.” As it is with might of the heart, wisdom, and correct counsel that they conquer cities. And about this it is stated (II Kings 18:20), “counsel and might for war.” And the ruler of his spirit is greater and more significant than all of this and he comes out overcoming his impulse from all bad things.

Knowledge plays a role in two ways. First, Rabbeinu Yona displays the benefits of knowledge. Even in a base instinctual act of revenge, knowledge [waiting for the opportune time to be vengeful] surpasses brute strength. But in the person who conquers his spirit, knowledge plays an even greater role, as it helps one change his very framework. From here we certainly see knowledge is far superior. In the person who is slow to anger, even the Mafia says knowledge surpasses brute force; strategic planning yields

greater success. One who conquers his spirit no longer remains in his former instinctual framework of taking revenge; he conquers it and transcends his framework to operate according to reality and not according to his emotions. Here, certainly, one realizes far superior success than the instinctual man who utilizes wisdom for base emotional objectives. One who conquers his spirit operates according to reason not only in his plans embodied by the Mafia, but in his objectives as well [for he lives not instinctually but according to reality. The Mafia used intelligence to achieve base goals; the one who conquers his spirit does not seek to satisfy his emotions but to follow a rational life]. When one's mind tells him there is no reason for revenge, he is now more in line with reality.

“WHO IS THE RICH ONE? HE WHO IS HAPPY WITH HIS LOT, AS IT SAYS, ‘WHEN YOU EAT [FROM] THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS, YOU WILL BE HAPPY, AND IT WILL BE WELL WITH YOU’ (PSALMS 128:2). YOU WILL BE HAPPY IN THIS WORLD, AND IT WILL BE WELL WITH YOU IN THE WORLD TO COME.”

At the end of *Orech Chaim*, the Rama cites Proverbs, “... One with a good heart has a constant feast” (15:15). The *Orech Chaim* defines the proper way of life—all the halachos contained there should lead a person to this state that

Proverbs describes. Judaism prescribes the exact opposite of what people think it does. People think that Judaism wants man to live a painful existence, but this is merely their corrupt view of halacha. Judaism's objective is to provide man with a true sense of happiness and satisfaction. If a person fails to attain this state, there is something wrong with his way of life.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

[This is] the one who says, "I have enough with my lot: Since I am able to support myself and my household and to engage in Torah [study], what is there [for] me with [any] other money? It is only for me to have what I need and to uphold the word of God." One who is not happy with his lot and is not satisfied with what God, may He be blessed, gave him, is a poor person, as it is explained in the verse (Proverbs 15:15), "All the days of a poor man are bad, but one with a good [satisfied] heart has a constant feast." He wanted to say [in this verse] that all the days of a "poor man" that desires money are bad—"A lover of money never has his fill of money," but all the days of the one with a good heart, who is happy with his lot, are as good as one who makes a constant feast. Hence, it is an extremely good trait to be happy with one's lot. And he is called rich, since God, may He be blessed, gave him what with which to support himself and engage in Torah

and in the commandments. As “What is the advantage to man in all of his toil?” except to fulfill the Torah and the commandments.

The Torah analogizes man’s true good to a state of ego satisfaction. The satiated ego is the good state. Impoverishment of the ego is considered the evil state.

Rabbeinu Yona says that after one has his needs covered to provide time to learn Torah, “What is the advantage to man in all of his toil?” (Koheles 1:3). Why does Rabbeinu Yona quote this verse? “Advantage” refers to the illusion of some fantastic good that lies out there somewhere. Every person imagines there is some fantastic thing that is going to occur to him, providing extreme happiness. This sense is the true source of the ego’s depletion. The ego is depleted insofar as it desires something unattainable. This sense resides in the back of everyone’s mind. The world thinks this is a healthy state—“Follow your dreams.” Judaism says that this is a negative state, for by maintaining this dream, one is always in a state of impoverishment. A man with a dream is a very sad man in the eyes of Judaism.

The real feast is where one’s satisfaction and energies are directed toward the true good:

Since I am able to support myself and my household and to engage in Torah [study], what is there [for] me with [any] other money?

If one feels toward Torah and mitzvos as he feels toward his dream, then he is in a good state. Such a person is not impoverished as he has arrived at his desired destination; he is not waiting to attain something, for he already has it. He is always involved in the activity that he loves most. This is true wealth. The person who anticipates that he is about to engage in Torah study and that he will find a complete uplifting of his self is the true “wealthy person.” He finds nothing that he would rather do. This state fulfills his ego.

“And Abraham died, at a good ripe age, old and contented” (Gen. 25:8) embodies this satisfaction. Ramban says, “He wasn’t waiting anymore for something new to occur.” The happy man in Judaism is one who has nothing to look forward to [for he is living his greatest desire of engaging in Torah wisdom].

Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles pose no question. Maimonides says that these principles are an enunciation of one’s belief in matters that will occur, but not that one is personally missing something in his life. But does not our anticipation for Moshiach represent some lack? We also

break a glass at a wedding as a sign that we lack the Beis Hamikdash.

We must distinguish between two types of needs. One has needs as a person, and needs as part of his essence, his state of mind. Lacking Moshiach and the Beis Hamikdash do not impoverish one's ego or one's essence. His mind is not lacking; he has the Torah and mitzvos. This is what Ramban told Ferdinand, and also what the Rav said: "I do not have to worry about the destruction of the Temple, for I have Talmud Zevachim. As far as I am concerned, the Temple is alive and well." As it says in Psalms 119:162, "I rejoice over Your words as one who obtains great spoil."

"WHEN YOU EAT [FROM] THE WORK OF YOUR
HANDS, YOU WILL BE HAPPY, AND IT WILL BE
WELL WITH YOU" (PSALMS 128:2).

How does this verse qualify Ben Zoma's statement, "Who is the rich one? He who is happy with his lot"? "You will be happy, and it will be well with you" does not appear to address one who is happy with his lot. Rabbeinu Yona comments:

This verse is not a proof about the matter that one who is happy with his lot is called rich. Rather, [it shows] that a person is happy with this good trait: When he does not desire to gather money and he bates

gifts. [Instead,] he eats from the work of his hands and it suffices for him, like the one who is happy with his lot—as his want is only to support himself.

Rabbeinu Yona says that this verse is not a proof that one who is happy with his lot is called wealthy. “When you eat [from] the work of your hands” implies that one does not seek anything extra. He is satiated, and his objective is to earn only what he needs in order to live.

“The hater of gifts lives” (Proverbs 15:27). Behind every gift is the fantasy that “One day someone will bestow on me everything I want, and this will give me ultimate happiness.” The hater of gifts is the man who lives. Man becomes happy—wealthy—when he abandons the wish for gifts and is satisfied with the labor of his own hands. This is the definition of wealth and satisfaction.

If one does not value wisdom as his primary enjoyment, the labor of his hands will not make him happy. If one does not have some source of pleasure, his ego will be depleted. [Without Torah as one’s value, a livelihood will not provide happiness as his sight is focused on the physical, which by itself does not provide happiness. But if one yearns to learn, once he has sufficient means, he engages in learning and realizes a life of bliss.]

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

And Ben Zoma arranged these three traits like the order of Jeremiah the prophet, peace be upon him: wisdom, might, and wealth, as it is stated (Jeremiah 9:22), "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; let not the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his wealth." He had wisdom precede might because it is a true virtue and it is in the intellect of the soul and sits in the body, not like might, which is only in the body [not in the soul]. Still, [might] is more elevated than wealth, since might is in his body—something that exists all the days that he is still alive—whereas wealth is outside of his body. And it is something transient, as he can make his wealth, and others take it [after only] half of his days.

And even though the prophet stated that a man should not glory in these three traits, Ben Zoma made a distinction and said that there is a side of these traits that is without [physical] exertion and toil and that he can glory in: With wisdom, one should learn from every man. As such, he will understand fear of God; and there is no exertion in it, as it is wisdom and not work. With might, it is to overcome his impulse and to forgive during his anger. In this too he can glory, since he is doing it from his fear [of God]. And this is what King Solomon, peace be upon him, stated

(Proverbs 19:11), "It is the intellect of a man that is slow to anger; it is his glory when he overlooks an offense." And since the desire of the one who is happy with his lot is only to learn and to keep the commandments, and when he has enough for his livelihood and support he is happy and recognizes that the rest is vanity, he is the "rich" man who can glory in his wealth. As [in] all these things, there is knowledge of the Creator, may He be blessed. [It is], as it is stated (Jeremiah 9:23), "But only in this should the one who glories glory, in his using his intellect and knowing Me, that I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and equity in the world, for in these I delight, declares the Lord."

By adding a fourth item, is Ben Zoma arguing with Jeremiah? On those matters in which Jeremiah said one must not pride himself, Ben Zoma says there is a way in which one can take pride without violating Jeremiah. This is achieved if it includes no toil. Work refers to setting a goal and striving to achieve it. But if one applies a goal even in his Torah study, it includes toil, and Jeremiah identifies such wisdom as undeserving of pride. As long as one engages in any activity that is goal-oriented, it is toil. Ben Zoma says without toil, one does not violate Jeremiah. As long as one looks at knowledge, strength, and wealth as acquisition [toil], it is nonsense.

“But only in this should the one who glories glory, in his using his intellect and knowing Me, that I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and equity in the world, for in these I delight, declares the Lord.”

There are two types of pride: relative pride and objective pride.

“... In his using his intellect and knowing Me....”

Love of wisdom is not acquisition and is proper. But relative pride refers to one whose credo is “Who has more?” [acquisition/goal-orientation] and this is improper.

SLOWNESS TO ANGER IS BETTER THAN A MIGHTY PERSON AND THE RULER OF HIS SPIRIT THAN THE CONQUEROR OF A CITY.

A person who is rational about his anger is on a higher level than one who seeks revenge without intelligence. But the highest level is the one who rules his spirit; he lives in reality and therefore sees that there is no need for revenge.

The story of Lavan and Jacob depicts both personalities. Lavan embodies slowness to anger; he is cunning about his objectives, but the objectives themselves are not rational. Jacob is completely rational in his methods and in his ob-

jectives. He prevails in his dealings with Lavan. But the Torah says his success stemmed from one thing—God’s providence—without which, Jacob, smart as he was, would have failed. Jacob too was cunning, as the verse says, “for I am your father’s brother” (Gen. 29:12). Chazal say that he meant, “I am Lavan’s brother in shrewdness.”

God’s providence is a natural part of the universe; we do not refer to providence as a miracle. A person like Jacob, who follows rationality, is in line with the totality of the universe’s natural operation and benefits from providence. Jacob’s perfection related him to God—the source of reality—and because of this, providence helped him to succeed.

Judaism deals with the philosophy of ethics. This is one level, where a person’s life improves because of his perfected character. A person living in a rational framework must—of necessity—enjoy a far superior life.

Judaism operates on a second level of providence; this is a metaphysical level. Platonism is purely ethical. In the introduction to Aristotle’s ethics, the Pri Megadim writes of the importance of studying Aristotle’s ethics. But this is all on the ethical level; Socrates cannot work out metaphysics, which is known only through prophecy.

Rabbi Akiva once saw a rasha receiving a reward and he rejoiced. He said, “If violators of God’s word receive such

a reward, how much more of a reward will those who follow God's word receive?"

Returning to the topic of one who is wealthy, behind the desire for wealth lies a fantasy of grandeur, that one will be converted to a special status, a certain greatness. A person laboring under this illusion can never achieve happiness because his desire for wealth and grandeur stems from a depleted ego emotion. Thus, he labors to compensate for his depleted ego by achieving wealth. And of course, his wealth never satisfies him as his drive is a psychological one, from which he cannot overcome.

“WHO IS HONORED? HE WHO HONORS THE CREATED BEINGS, AS IT SAYS, ‘FOR THOSE WHO HONOR ME, I WILL HONOR; AND THOSE WHO DESPISE ME WILL BE HELD IN LITTLE ESTEEM’”
(I SAMUEL 2:30).

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

One who honors his fellow, honors himself, not his fellow. [As] what benefit is there to a man if they [give] him honor? If he is honored, the honor that they gave to him does not add to his status and his honor. And if he is lowly, for [others] to honor him will not make him honored again. And all honor for the lowly is a loss for those that honor him, as his status is not increased. [It is] like King Solomon, peace

be upon him, stated (Proverbs 26:8), "Like binding a stone in a beautiful wrapper (Ibn Ezra), so is paying honor to a fool." As one who binds a stone in a beautiful wrapper is doing something nonsensical, and there is no honor given to the stone, as it was not elevated by this. And so [too] is it nonsense to give honor to a fool. It comes out that you will say that [with] all the honor that a person performs for the created beings, he is honoring himself. [This is] because he causes them perforce to honor him and [it will be considered] a debt, which is true honor. And about this it is said, "Who is honored? He who honors the created beings."

Jeremiah mentioned only three matters, while Ben Zoma adds a fourth. If Jeremiah didn't see fit to add this fourth matter, why did Ben Zoma add it? Moreover, Jeremiah's three matters seem complete: Unlike the masses, one's energies are directed toward wisdom, providing an outlet for his immense energies, thereby overcoming his desire for grandeur through strength and wealth. What more is there to add to wisdom, strength, and wealth?

First, Rabbeinu Yona says that one should not hesitate to honor someone, because in doing so one honors himself. But then Rabbeinu Yona says that honor is not an objective [real/worthwhile] matter, it is worthless. Therefore, why

should one honor someone else? This appears as an inherent contradiction—one’s objective is to receive honor, which itself is worthless. Rabbeinu Yona adds that honoring others is as nonsensical as placing a stone in a beautiful wrapper.

It would appear that “honor” is being used in two different senses. In one sense, honor refers to dignity. In another sense, it refers to elevating a particular individual [over others]. Rabbeinu Yona says that people are not respectful toward others, while in truth, people should respect others. Every person wants to be respected. Rabbeinu Yona says that this emotion is proper as people need respect to maintain good feelings about themselves. Chazal talk about matters that offer a person a sense of well-being, such as nice possessions, a nice home, and a nice wife. It is not that these form the essence of one’s happiness, but they play a role, provided they remain in the proper perspective and that one does not invest too much energy into them.

The same applies to honor. This matter too has safe limits but is susceptible to a negative extreme. Chazal were strict about man honoring his fellow. This was the matter of Rabbi Akiva’s students [who were killed because of their failure to honor one another]. Even God lied to Abraham to respect Abraham’s dignity when his wife Sarah said, “Abraham is old” (Gen. 18:12) God changed Sarah’s

words [when addressing Abraham] saying that “Sarah said that *she* is old,” in order not to insult Abraham. Honor is important, and if one fails to respect others he is a rasha.

But there is a second type of honor that represents a certain illness in human nature, where a person’s drives become totally tied up with gaining honor for himself. This is the second sense of Rabbeinu Yona’s use of the word “honor.” When a person chases honor, where he must have that honor, he lives in a reality determined by other peoples’ opinions. This person is elated when honored and depressed when he is not. His self-worth is determined by others. His sense of self becomes his reality. Rabbeinu Yona says that this type of honor is false because reality is an objective matter, while peoples’ opinions have no effect on one’s real state.

People refrain from giving honor to others because they fall prey to this misguided notion that giving honor is a “reality.” People think, “Others don’t deserve my honor. If I honor him, I am giving him something real.” Therefore, people do not honor others as they feel they’re giving others something undeserving. People are under the illusion that giving honor truly elevates others. People also feel that they (and not others) should be the recipients of honor, adding to the difficulty in giving honor.

Rabbeinu Yona makes a very sharp psychological point:

“Who is honored? He who honors the created beings” means that one who satisfies peoples’ need for respect, honors himself and “causes others to honor him against their will, and that is the true honor.” Rabbeinu Yona says that the character traits are geared toward one purpose: that one experiences the best existence. Rabbeinu Yona says that one who gives respect to others—out of necessity—must know that honor is meaningless. He knows the secret: Honor is a fallacy. This person operates on a high level as his own self-worth is not contingent upon peoples’ opinions. Since he has no need for honor, he can honor others.

Pirkei Avos teaches a person how to live the best life in all respects. Here, Ben Zoma teaches that the person who honors others benefits from the true value of honor. For he understands the proper place of honor—to give dignity to others. And as he relates to honor properly, what comes back to him is the proper value of honor. [Those who relate to honor as a reality have a misconception, as they deem honor a real thing, when in fact it is not real. But one who knows this secret can show honor to others, as he understands peoples’ need for dignity. By relating to honor in a proper manner, his respect fosters good relations toward him in return, and this is the true value of honoring others. The one who honors others does not seek reciprocation as he does not value honor. Rabbeinu Yona teaches that the

reality is that those whom he honors will be “forced to honor him,” meaning that doing this good engenders more good.]

Regarding Ben Zoma adding a fourth element to Jeremiah’s three, Ben Zoma does not argue with Jeremiah, but adds another expression of grandeur sought by people seeking wealth. Honor is an additional attempt to secure grandeur. Thus, Ben Zoma merely expands that category by adding a second method through which people seek grandeur, and that is honor.

Rabbeinu Yona made an a fortiori argument (a kal v’chomer): “If man, who was created to honor God and is obligated to do so, honors another, and God repays that honor...how much more so will one who honors others be honored, if he has no such obligation?” What is the meaning of his argument? Rabbeinu Yona teaches that people err in underestimating the gratitude others have. People think of others as ingrates. But this idea does not stem from reality because people do have tremendous appreciation. The cause for this error is one’s feeling that much is due to himself for his kindness. Rabbeinu Yona teaches that the good that one performs for others will generate an appreciation, expressed in honor. Because of that honor he receives, he will achieve stature, which is important practically.

“FOR THOSE WHO HONOR ME, I WILL HONOR;
AND THOSE WHO DESPISE ME WILL BE HELD IN
LITTLE ESTEEM” (I SAMUEL 2:30).

What is the a fortiori argument? Man was created to honor God—not that God needs honor—but that man should perceive God’s wisdom as far as humanly possible, resulting in man’s awe of God, “that we were created to honor Him” (Uva L’Tzion). God responding by bestowing honor on man means that God will place man in a position where he enjoys a certain psychological benefit from honor, because man requires a degree of self-esteem. God need not return the honor to man, but He does so because of man’s need. Thus, if one addresses the need for respect in others, he will certainly feel a sense of appreciation since one is not obligated to address their needs. This is the a fortiori argument.

When man respects others by honoring them, it strips others of their emotional reluctance to reciprocate such honor. Thereby, one receives honor in return. And this has value, as one’s stature in society is elevated and this has practical benefits. Rabbeinu Yona calls this the “true honor,” because honoring others allows people to recognize your true virtue, and the public then honors you in a true and accurate fashion.

[Rabbi Chait now skips to mishna 4:4 as it relates to the current topic.]

RABBI LEVITAS, A MAN OF YAVNEH, SAYS, “BE VERY, VERY HUMBLE IN SPIRIT, FOR THE HOPE OF MAN IS WORMS.” RABBI YOCHANAN BEN BEROKA SAYS, “ANYONE WHO DESECRATES THE NAME OF HEAVEN SECRETLY, THEY PUNISH HIM PUBLICLY. THERE IS NO DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN UNINTENTIONAL AND INTENTIONAL WHEN IT COMES TO DESECRATION OF THE NAME.”

At the end of Divrei Hayamim, in King David’s prayer, he prays to God to help Israel because “There is no hope for man.” King David uses the same word as the mishna. No hope for man means that man ultimately dies. This acceptance of death subdues man’s fantasy of immortality. This is Rabbi Levitas’ message to be humble.

The Rav once mentioned that he held one of Judaism’s fundamentals to be man’s inability to extend his lifespan.

A humble spirit refers to low self-esteem, while high self-esteem is considered arrogance (gaiva) or haughtiness. Maimonides says that humility (anava) is the midpoint between low and high self-esteem. He comments as follows:

We have already elucidated and mentioned in the earlier chapters that humility is among the highest of traits. And it is the mean between pride and lowliness of spirit and it has no other name, just humility. But there are many names for pride: In the Hebrew language, high heart, elevated

eyes, proud, and high. And from the names of the sages, may their memory be blessed, [are] a high spirit, coarse-spirited, and up-pity. And across from them is lowliness of spirit. We have already explained in the fourth chapter (Eight Chapters 4:7) that a person needs to incline a little to one of the extremes until he establishes himself in the middle, as a [type of] fence. But only in this trait from [all] the other traits—meaning to say with pride—because of the great deficiency of this trait for the pious ones and their knowledge of its damage, they distanced themselves to the other extreme and completely inclined [themselves] toward lowliness of spirit, until there was no room for pride in their souls at all. And behold, I saw in a book from the books on characteristics that one of the important pious men was asked, “Which day is the one upon which you rejoiced more than any of your days?” He [answered], “The day that I was on a boat and my place was in the lowest places of the boat, among the packages of clothing, and there were traders and men of means on the boat [as well]. And I was lying in my place and one of the men on the boat got up to urinate and I was insignificant in his eyes and lowly—as I was very low in his eyes—to the point that he revealed his nakedness and urinated on me. And I was astonished by the intensification of the trait of brazenness in his soul. But, as God lives, my soul was not pained by his act at all and

my strength was not aroused. And I rejoiced with a great joy that I reached the extreme that the disgrace of this empty one did not pain me and [that] my soul did not feel [anything] toward him."

And it is without a doubt that this is the extreme of low spiritedness, to the point of being distanced from pride. And I will now mention a little of what the sages mentioned in praise of humility and [in] disgrace of pride. And it is because of this that this one commanded to come close to lowliness and said, "Be very, very lowly in spirit"—out of his fear that a person remain only in humility, all the more so that there be a trace of pride in him. As it is close to it, since modesty is the mean, as we mentioned. And they said (Talmud Yerushalmi, Shabbos 1:3) in praise of humility, that which wisdom made a crown for its head, humility made a sole for its heel—the explanation of which is its shoe—as it is written (Psalms III:10), "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God." This is a proof that fear of God is greater than wisdom, as it is a cause for its existence. And it is stated (Proverbs 22:4), "[At the] heel of humility is the fear of sin," which is to say that you will find the fear of God at the heels of humility. If so, humility is much greater than wisdom. And they said (Talmud Megillah 31a), "This thing is written in the Torah and repeated in the Prophets and tripled in the Writings; every

place that you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, you find His modesty: It is written in the Torah (Deut. 10:17), "the great God, etc." And it is written after it (Deut. 10:18), "Who does the judgment of the orphan and the widow." And it is repeated in the Prophets, as it is written (Isaiah 57:15), "So speaks He who high aloft forever dwells, whose name is holy, "I dwell on high, in holiness." And adjacent to it is "with the contrite and the lowly in spirit." And it is tripled in the Writings, as it is written (Psalms 68:5), "Extol Him who rides the clouds; the Lord is His name." And it is written after it (Psalms 68:6), "the Father of orphans and the Judge of widows."

And you should learn from our teacher, Moshe, peace be upon him, in whom the intellectual virtues and the dispositional virtues were perfected—all of them directed to the level of prophecy—the master of Torah, the master of wisdom. And [yet] God, may He be blessed, praised him over every man with the trait of humility and stated (Num. 12:3), "And Moshe the man is very humble, more so than any person." And His stating, "very" is a sign of his great modesty and he is inclined toward the side of the far extreme. And so, you will find him state (Exod. 16:7) "And what are we?" And so [too] with David, "the anointed of the God of Jacob, the pleasant singer of the praises of Israel." And he was

an honored king, whose kingdom grew great and [whose] sword grew strong and who God, may He be blessed, designated through our teacher Moshe, peace be upon him, since he is the star that proceeded from Jacob (Num. 24:17), as the sages, may their memory be blessed, elucidated. And he was a prophet and the greatest of the seventy elders [of his time], as he stated (II Samuel 23:8), "who sat in the sitting of the wise." And with all of this, he stated [about himself] (Psalms 51:19), "And a heart broken and crushed, God will not disgrace." And he increased in these virtues that indicate extreme modesty. And [the following is from] what the rabbis, may their memory be blessed, said about pride. They said (Talmud Sota 4b), "Any man that is coarse-spirited is as if he worshiped idolatry. Here it is written (Proverbs 16:5), 'An abomination of the Lord is anyone with a high heart'; and there it is written (Deut. 7:26), 'And do not bring an abomination into your house.'" And they said, "It is like he denied a fundamental [of faith], as it is stated (Deut. 8:14), 'And your heart grow high and you forget the Lord.'" And they said that the sin of pride is like one who has forbidden sexual relations: It states [about the latter] (Lev. 18:27), "As they performed all these abominations." And they said (Talmud Sota 4b) that one who becomes uppity is he, himself—for God—like idolatry itself. And they brought a proof from the statement

(Isaiah 2:22), "Cease from man, whose soul is in his nose"—meaning to say, of a high (haughty) spirit—"for by what (bameh) is he estimated?"—do not read it as bameh, but rather bammah (an idolatrous altar)." And they said [about] one that becomes uppity that it is fitting to kill him. And they said (Talmud Sota 5a) that anyone who has a coarse spirit in him is fitting to be cut down like a tree-god. It is written here (Isaiah 10:33), "The ones of high stature cut down"; and there it is written (Deut. 7:5), "And their tree-gods shall you cut down." And they said that God, may He be blessed, will not revive during the revival of the dead those that became uppity. [This was] their saying, "Any man that has coarse spirit in him, his dust will not be aroused; as it is stated (Isaiah 27:19), 'Awake and shout for joy, you who dwell in the dust': He who was made into dust in his life—meaning to say the humble ones—they are the ones that will be revived." And they emphasized this and said that any man that has a coarse spirit in him, the Divine Presence cries out about him; as it is stated (Psalms 138:6), "And the high ones from afar, He makes known." And they elaborated with their words. They said that tzaraas (a Biblical form of leprosy) is a punishment for the haughty ones, "for a swelling (seiat), for a rash, or for a discoloration" (Lev. 14:56), and a swelling is only height (haughtiness), as it is stated (Isaiah 2:14),

“the elevated (nisaot) hills.” It is as if it said that the one who becomes uppity is a swelling [of tzaraas]. And in the end what they said is (Talmud Sota 5a), “In excommunication is the one that has it and in excommunication is the one that does not have it at all.” [This] means to say that a person should not be humble in spirit to the final extreme, as it is not from the virtues. And they quantified it metaphorically—one in sixty-four parts, meaning to say if we place pride in one corner and lowliness of spirit in another corner, there would be sixty-four parts along the spectrum. And he should stand in the sixty-third section. He does not only want the mean with this trait, so as to escape from pride. As if he were to be missing [just] one section and [proportionately] come closer to pride, he would be put in excommunication. And that is the opinion of Rava about humility. But Rav Nachman decided and said that it is not fitting for a man to have from it—meaning to say from pride—not a large section and not a small section, as its sin is not small. That which makes man into an abomination is not fitting to [even] approach. They said about this matter, “Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said, “Not from it and not from part of it. And is it a small thing that which is written, ‘An abomination of the Lord is anyone of a high heart.’” And to strengthen [precaution] from this cursed sin, [Rabbi Levitas] said, “Be very, very lowly in spirit for the

hope of man is worms," meaning to say that you need to force yourself until you have distanced yourself from pride, by your thinking of the end of the body, and that is its return to worms.

One should not be a hedonist or an ascetic. Maimonides teaches that moderation is the proper state for all emotional spectrums. But haughtiness is considered a terrible trait and in this trait alone one should go to the opposite extreme. Chazal strived to be in a state of low esteem. They sought to ensure that no trace of haughtiness remained in their personalities.

If humility is the midpoint between haughtiness and low esteem, would not this humility remove any haughtiness? Why then did Chazal go to the extreme of low esteem?

Regarding the important pious man who was urinated upon, note that he did not say that he was happy during the occurrence, but only afterward. He said that he was astonished by the level of his assailant's brazenness. Maimonides provides the key to true humility. The victim was so detached from his self that he was engaged only in observation, as if this event had happened to another person. He possessed no sense of hostility, rather an astonishment that another person could be so brazen. Maimonides says this is the most extreme level of low esteem.

But again, as humility [the midpoint between haughtiness and low esteem] is the preferred state, why was this pious man so happy to have reached this level of low esteem? In addition, why did he view this as the happiest day of his life? Isn't the highest level the enjoyment of wisdom, and not the attainment of low esteem? If so, why should this event render this day as the happiest day of his life?

Happiness must be defined and it does not equate with the most pleasurable experience. Happiness is a pleasurable feeling about oneself. The question "What was your happiest day?" means to ask, "What day did you feel best about yourself?" Happiness is when one feels good about himself. In contrast, "blessedness" is the experience of the greatest level of energy expenditure and this is [experienced in] the activity of engaging in God's wisdom. There is no greater state for man. But happiness is a different phenomenon that relates to one's feelings about himself. This was not the greatest day in this pious man's life, but it was the happiest day.

Maimonides quotes the verse "And Moshe the man is very humble, more so than any person...." This [the word "very"] indicates that in this area, the opposite extreme is the preferred state. Maimonides says that we are to learn from Moshe—the greatest prophet possessing the greatest wisdom—who is praised because of his trait of humility,

and not his other great traits. The word in this verse “very” (me’od) implies Moshe’s degree of humility; he leaned toward the opposite extreme and did not remain at the midpoint between haughtiness and low esteem. Moshe also said, “And what are we?” (Exod. 16:7), meaning, “We are nothing.” King David said, “I am a worm and not a man” (Psalms 22:7). And Abraham said, “I am dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). These individuals reached the highest level of perfection as they viewed themselves as devoid of both animate nature’s and substance. Of the three, King David was on the lowest level, for although he did not view himself as a man, he viewed himself as an animate thing, a worm. Abraham was on a higher level and did not view himself as something animate, but still as a substance—dust and ashes. And Moshe, who was on the highest level, viewed himself as nothing.

However, self-abnegation does not refer to an inferiority complex. The story of the pious man on the ship shows that the man was happy with himself and therefore had no inferiority complex. This wise man had little or no energy flowing toward his self-image. Maimonides describes a state where one’s esteem is of no concern. “Low” self-esteem indicates a psychological problem; “no” self-esteem means that one is not engaged in the category [the latter is perfected while the former is not].

How do we answer the contradiction? Man must be analyzed in psychological and philosophical frameworks. Maimonides teaches that one's psyche has a certain structure. To live happily, one's psyche must be healthy, and this health is expressed in moderation. Someone with extreme emotional states displays an unhealthy psyche: Extremism is indicative of compulsion and other problems of the mind. Today's psychologists say that all man possesses is a psyche. But Judaism says that's not all there is. The mind that enables man to analyze the psyche [is separate from the psyche and] conveys that man also has a metaphysical element in his nature.

Maimonides' statement in *Hilchos Dayos*, 1:4, that one in the middle of two extremes is a wise man, means that man's natural design dictates that self-esteem is a psychological phenomenon. Therefore, to attain a healthy psyche, it would be natural for a person to partake of esteem in moderation. This would be psychological perfection. But this conflicts with a man as a philosophical being, for man cannot perfect himself unless he removes all energy flowing toward the self, as perfection is defined as a person whose total energies flow toward appreciating God and His wisdom. Therefore, in the area of ego, all energies must be redirected from the self toward God. This is done so the psychologically perfect man does not conflict with the

philosophically perfect man. In the area of ego, the middle road is not proper for some energies still flow toward itself. This engagement in the self must detract from one's objectivity [thus, one's pursuit of wisdom will be skewed or biased and he will not perceive reality].

Is it proper to give honor to others, as this feeds their self-esteem? Kindness toward others is never an attempt to perfect the other person. Penina had good intentions in helping Chana pray for children, but Penina was wrong, as we see she lost her children and is described as evil. One has no right to engage in another person's perfection. We are only allowed to deal with others on a psychological level, supplying all they need for their psychological well-being. Other people's perfection is not our concern. Therefore, we cater to others through bolstering their self-esteem.

Joseph was different. When his brothers first descended to Egypt because of the famine, the Torah says, "Joseph remembered his dreams." God gave Joseph license to perfect his brothers. This was the sense of his two dreams. The brothers bowed [were subservient] to Joseph vis-à-vis grain in the first dream. The second dream of their metaphysical subservience [the stars bowing to Joseph] was divine permission that Joseph could use their dependence on grain and exert influence upon the brothers to perfect them

metaphysically. Thus, the two dreams were related. This is why the Torah says that Joseph remembered dreams; he was about to act upon his divine license to use their physical subservience to perfect them metaphysically. But without such license, one has no right to interfere with someone else's perfection.

Summarizing mishna 4:1, one must attain the perfection of the value of wisdom and then mechanistically, he must direct all his energies to wisdom, which is the meaning of, "Who is strong? One who conquers his nature." Judaism has little to say to a person seeking a life of leisure and relaxation. Judaism views this kind of life as not only wasteful, but as one of unhappiness. Happiness is achieved only through activity. Aristotle agrees and talks about this idea as well. Thus, one who seeks to avoid all of life's pains and instead relax, will find that his energies flow toward fantasy, which is a bottomless pit. Happiness requires a person to have an outlet for his energies, and there is only one outlet providing satisfaction, and that is wisdom.

"Man was created to work" (Job 5:7) means that man was created as a being where his happiness requires an intense activity in which he can expend his energies. The chocham is the only one who can enjoy relaxation as his mind still works. But for others, they will be drawn to fantasy and they will experience frustration.

Our mishna first offers a dynamic breakdown. The person who is happy with his lot is not involved in the fantasies of the masses and in endless materialism. Then, the mishna expresses one's relations with others as not being competitive; he does not gauge reality based on others. This person is capable of honoring others.

The mishna cites the verse "For those who honor Me, I will honor; and those who despise Me will be held in little esteem" (I Samuel 2:30). But as this verse refers to God, how does this relate to a person honoring people? The phrase "Who is honored" does not refer to one who is honored among the people. It refers to why one seeks honor. People seek honor because they suffer from ego depletion. One seeks honor as it provides a great sense of satisfaction; it fills a void. An elderly gentleman was once being honored at a dinner. While sitting at the dais, he looked as though he was about to expire. But when they called his name to stand up and receive the award, he suddenly looked twenty years younger. This shows how much a person needs ego satisfaction.

One who seeks honor cannot honor others, for this means he must give to others what he desires himself. But a perfected person, who does not live based on what others think, but finds inner peace as he knows what reality is [that God created man to gain the greatest satisfaction

through pursuing wisdom], does not suffer from a depleted ego and feels very good toward others. This person honors others easily. Furthermore, since he is not in competition with anyone, nor is he petty, he has a feeling of pity for others and therefore he caters to their needs for personal recognition.

The perfected man is truly the one who is honored in a realistic sense. Honored means perfected. As he can honor others he demonstrates that he does not operate with the need for recognition or honor, but his life is one where he embraces reality and engages in wisdom. [These are his sole values.] As he is not competitive, he gives others honor as he loses nothing in doing so. “He is honored” means he lives the best life. He is the real honored individual because he achieves the goal others seek in their strivings for relative human honor. [He achieves a healthy ego as his pursuit of wisdom fully satisfies him. The perfected man’s ability to honor others displays that he does not compete for honor, as others do. His ability to give others honor means that he has no desire for honor. His enjoyment in life is not due to what others think or say about him, but it comes from pursuing God’s wisdom.]

We can now understand why the rabbis said that Rabbi Akiva’s students died because they did not behave honorably toward one another. They did not fully achieve that level of perfection.

“For those who honor Me, I will honor; and those who despise Me will be held in little esteem.” How does this statement apply to man giving honor to his friend, since this verse refers to honoring God? Why should God honor man? God gives man honor because He is completely removed from the human framework of honor. God honors man purely out of His goodness. “Just as God acts man must act; מִה הוּא אֵף אַתָּה” teaches that man should emulate this character of giving man honor. Therefore, this verse is most fitting. Emulating God means that man should strive to reach that level where his relationships with others mirror God’s relationships with man: simply acting with kindness removed from human pettiness. As God freely honors man, man should follow suit.

Why did Rabbi Akiva’s 24,000 students die? If we argue that we live in a world that makes sense, this tragedy and others raise a question. But if the world does not make sense, one can answer this question of tragedies by denying the [existence of a] Creator, and then there would be no sense to human life and we would have to adopt a different life. But if one says the world makes sense to God but not to man, life would be meaningless. That the world operates sensibly to God but not to man is irrelevant: What type of life could one lead if to him, all is without purpose or design?

[Rabbi Chait now digresses to parshas Va’era.]

GOD'S PROVIDENCE

“I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as אֱלֹהֵי שְׂדֵי but My name יְהוָה was not known to them” (Exod. 6:3). From this verse itself one can see that there is some deeper understanding necessary to explain these names.

There is a specific concept that this verse points to, as Torah verses always do. Ibn Ezra comments on this verse, which corroborates Maimonides' words on God's providence and how it operates. But in studying God's providence, we are at a loss. We realize that we cannot understand it, so we might say it's fruitless to exert the effort.

Ibn Ezra writes (Ibid.):

And now I will reveal to you a little bit of a principle of אֱלֹהֵי שְׂדֵי... If man's soul is wise and recognizes that God's actions are without any intermediary, and he leaves the desires of this physical world and he secludes himself to attach himself to God, if in the arrangement of the stars (natural order) at the time of his birth it was determined [i.e., physical causes and effects dictated] that this person would experience certain negative occurrences on a certain day, God, Who cleaves to this man, creates causes to save him from that evil. And similarly, if according to the arrangement of the stars, somebody was barren, God would fix the natural law and she would

then bear a child. Therefore, the rabbis said that God said to Abraham, "Leave your astrology." Similar to this is the idea behind "There are no constellations for Israel." Therefore, God said to Abraham before He told him that He would increase his seed, that He is יְשׁוּעָה. The explanation being that He can save a person from the natural order. This does not mean the natural order is destroyed, rather that it is known that one who cleaves to God benefits from God's goodness, thereby removing him from the natural order. Therefore, Jacob said, "the angel that saved me from all evil"—evil that I should have experienced naturally. And this is the principle of the entire Torah, but the Patriarchs did not reach the level of Moshe, who knew God face-to-face. Therefore, Moshe was able to change the nature of the world and create miracles and wonders, which the Patriarchs could not do.

Ibn Ezra explains our attitude toward God's providence, which is not a magical phenomenon, as people in a childish sense think: "If I do good I will magically be rewarded or saved." If God's providence were so simple, it would not be such an elaborate system because God works according to a system of wisdom, as anyone who studies the universe admits. The universe displays an inherent logical order. Ibn Ezra says there is a system of the order of the heavens.

There are natural laws that dictate details and the details man experiences are the results of fixed laws. This order stems from the world that God created, and this is all dictated by wisdom. Thus, each particular result that man experiences can be traced to a source of wisdom [natural causes and effects. For example, the heat generated by the sun on a specific location on Earth can cause atmospheric changes that result in a land slide that wipes out a city where a certain individual lives. His tragedy is the result of natural causes.] Judaism maintains that this wisdom governs the universe and stems from God. Since the particulars of the universe, i.e., individual events, are governed by wisdom, when man partakes of wisdom he moves into a new metaphysical realm. Man then makes contact, so to speak, with the source [God] of the particulars. The fool thinks that particulars, such as the physical pleasures, are the real world, as he gains satisfaction from them. He does not realize, as does the chocham, that the world of wisdom [laws] is what governs all particulars [physical creations and events], and that wisdom is more real than the physical expressions of wisdom. Even our sense perceptions are a result of intricate wisdom. The world of wisdom is responsible for the particulars we experience. A person involved in the desires is metaphysically corrupt for he ascribes reality to the physical world, feeling that it is the essence of

life. But pleasure itself depends on a complex system of wisdom: how the nervous system operates, etc. But the chocham turns away from the physical [pleasure seeking] lifestyle as he views it as a mere expression of the world of wisdom that drives the physical world. The chocham is attracted to the greater world.

Ibn Ezra says that if man engages in the world of wisdom, he takes a step from the physical world to the metaphysical world, the latter being the ultimate reality that dictates the existence and behavior of the physical world. Once man takes that step and lives in the world of ideas and wisdom, his relationship with God changes. He is moved out of the world of the natural law [the order of the heavens]—the world of particulars—into a different and metaphysical relationship with God, the Source of all that exists.

Thus, through his mind, man determines in which world he operates. If he lives a sensual life, he is subject to particulars, meaning the natural chain of cause and effect. But if, with his intelligence, man lives a metaphysical lifestyle, his relationship with God changes and he now lives in the world that is responsible for the particulars. Thereby, he is no longer subject to the influence of natural law. [This explains why Abraham and Sarah could have children in old age, and literally every other supernatural occurrence ex-

perienced by the prophets.]

Such perfected individuals are no longer subject to chance, the meaning of “There is no constellation [governing] Israel.” Since the Jews are metaphysically different as we believe in a reality beyond the physical, which is responsible for the physical world, the Jews stand in a different relationship to the Source of Reality. Thus, the Jews are not subject to natural law but are directly influenced by the Creator.

This is Ibn Ezra’s outline. He says it is not that natural law is destroyed, but that man can leave the world of particulars and come under the direct influence of the Source of natural law, and no longer be subjected to natural law. Ibn Ezra says this is the fundamental principle of the Torah.

This was the level of the Patriarchs, but not of Moshe. The Patriarchs rose above the particulars and were in line with the world of wisdom and therefore experienced God’s providence. This is the fundamental principle of the Torah because this is the metaphysics of Judaism. To suggest that thought is merely a tool, one misses this Torah fundamental. Thought is not merely a tool, but the uncovering of the Source of reality. In doing so, man relates to God. This refers to the lives of the Patriarchs.

Moshe was different; he knew God through his name

יהיה. “This explains why Moshe could perform the miracles, unlike the Patriarchs.” Maimonides states (*Hilchos Chametz Umatza* 7:2), “The miracles that were performed through Moshe our teacher,” meaning that only Moshe was able to perform these miracles. Of course, this is difficult to understand, for if we understood this concept, we would be on Moshe’s level.

The Patriarchs partook of God’s wisdom, and in doing so, they benefited from God’s providence. But Moshe partook of God’s wisdom to the level where he could manipulate natural law.

We commenced by asking whether or not the world makes sense. The answer is that the world makes sense to man in a strange way. It simultaneously does and does not make sense. But that is descriptive ; we must find a better answer than that:

*For My plans are not your plans, nor are
My ways your ways—declares the Lord.
But as the heavens are high above the
Earth, so are My ways high above your
ways And My plans above your plans
(Isaiah 55:8,9).*

There is a qualitative difference between God’s thoughts and man’s thoughts. Even the most brilliant man is nothing in comparison to God. Nonetheless, somewhere in human knowl-

edge is a reflection of God's knowledge. Where precisely that is we do not know. But the greater the chocham, the closer he can approach it. The fundamentals of Judaism are that the world makes sense to us, we know there is a divine order, and we know that with wisdom we partake of it. So, it is not that the world makes sense to God and not to man, because if it made no sense to us, we would have no relationship with the world. But to say that the world does make sense to man is equally false because then we would understand everything, and that is not true. Our mind tells us there is a sense to the world, which we partake of by employing our intelligence.

*As one blesses God for goodness one must
also bless God for evil (Sefer HaIkkarim,
Ma'amar 2 26:7).*

Maimonides says that this should be stated with “happiness and a good heart” in the “same” way one blesses God for the good. But how can one be happy in the face of tragedy? This is because one knows that in the real world this tragedy is a positive thing, even though it does not make sense to him in his emotional framework. [As God designed the world where there is mishap, this must have a positive purpose. An example is that through eating spoiled food, one gets sick. The benefit is that his illness stands as an eternal warning to never repeat that mistake.]

Judaism obligates us to attach our emotional life to reality. Albert Einstein once said, “We know enough to know that there exists a system of order beyond what we see.” Judaism maintains the same, but it takes this premise and attaches it to our daily lives, as expressed in this principle of blessing God equally for good and bad. We know enough to know that there is a divine order behind all that we see, even though we encounter tremendous problems.

Ramban says (Exod. 13:16) that the purpose of the miracles in Egypt was for man to know that God exists:

And now I will tell you a general rule about the explanation of many commandments. Behold, from the time that there has been idolatry in the world—from the days of Enosh—the opinions about faith started to blur. Some of them deny the fundamental principle and say that the world is from before [God’s creation] and “They rejected God and say, ‘He is not.’” And some reject His knowledge of particulars, “And they say, ‘How can He know, and is there knowledge to the Most High?’” And some of them concede His knowledge but reject His oversight, and “They make man to be like the fish of the sea,” that God not supervise them and there not be punishments and reward with them at all—they say, “The Lord has abandoned the Earth.”

And when God favors a certain community or individual and does a wonder for him by changing the custom of the world and its nature, the nullification of these opinions becomes clear to everyone. As the amazing wonder teaches that there is a God in the world who innovated it, and knows and supervises and is able [to do whatever He wants].

And when this wonder is forecasted by the mouth of a prophet, the truth of prophecy also becomes clear from it—that God speaks with man and reveals His secret to His servants, the prophets. And with this, all of the Torah is established. And therefore, the verse states about the wonders (Exod. 8:18), “so that you will know that I am the Lord in the midst of the Earth,” to teach about [His] supervision, that He did not leave it to happenstance, as per their opinion. And it is stated (Exod. 9:29), “so that you will know that to the Lord is the Earth,” to teach about [His] innovation [of the Earth]—since they are His, as He created them from nothing. And it is stated (Exod. 9:14), “in order for you to know that there is none like Me on the whole Earth,” to teach about His ability, that He determines everything—there is no one that stops Him. As the Egyptians rejected or were in doubt about all of this. If so, the great signs and wonders were trustworthy witnesses about faith in the Creator and about the entire Torah.

And since the Holy One, blessed be He, will not make a sign and wonder for each generation in front of the eyes of each evildoer or heretic, He commanded us to always make a memorial and a sign to that which our eyes saw. And we should copy this thing for our children, and their children for their children, and their children for the last generation. And [the Torah] was very strict about this, such that it made one liable for excision [kares], for eating of chametz (Exod. 12:15), and for leaving the Pesach sacrifice (Num. 9:13). And it required that we write all that was shown to us of signs and wonders upon our arms and upon our eyes, and also to write them at the entrances to our houses in mezuzos. And [it required] that we mention it with our mouths, in the morning and in the evening, as the sages said (Talmud Berachos 21a), “[The blessing that mentions the leaving of Egypt and begins,] “true and enduring” is [an obligation from] the Torah,” from that which is written (Deut. 16:3), “in order that you remember the day of your leaving the land of Egypt all the days of your life.” And [it required] that we make a succah every year. And so [too], many commandments in memory of the leaving of Egypt are similar to these.

And all of it is to be a testimony for us for all of the generations about the wonders, that they not be forgotten, and that there not be an opening for the heretic to speak

and reject faith in God. As one who buys a mezuzah for one zuz and affixes it to his entrance and has intent for its matter, has already conceded to [God's] innovation [of the Earth] and to the knowledge of the Creator and His supervision, and also to prophecy. And [such a person] believes in all of the outlines of the Torah, besides conceding that the kindness of the Creator, to those who do His will, is very great, as He took us out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom and great honor, in the merit of the forefathers that desired to fear His name.

And therefore, they said (Avot 2:1), "Be careful with a light commandment as with a weighty one," since they are all very desirable and beloved, as through them a person concedes to his God all the time.

And the intention of all the commandments is that we believe in our God and concede to Him that He is our Creator. And that is the intention of creation, as we have no other explanation for the first creation, and the highest God only desires the lower beings, so that man knows and concedes to his God that He created him. And the intention of raising the voice in prayer and the intention of synagogues and the merit of communal prayer is that there be a place for people to gather and concede to God that He created them and makes them exist, and to publicize this and to say in front of Him, "We are Your creatures."

And this is the intention of what they said, may their memory be blessed (Yerushalmi Taanis 2:5), "And they called to God with strength" (Jonah 3:8). From here you learn that prayer requires [an audible] voice; the brazen is victorious over the timid.

And from the great public miracles, a person can [also] concede to hidden miracles, which constitute the foundation of the entire Torah. As a person does not have a share in the Torah of Moshe, our teacher, until he believes that all of the things and events we [encounter] are all miracles [and] there is no nature or custom of the world with them [nothing operates outside God's will], whether with regard to the many or to the individual. But rather, if one fulfills the commandments, his reward will bring him success, and if he transgresses them, his punishment will cut him off—everything is the decree of the Most High, as I have already mentioned (Ramban on Genesis 17:1, and Exod. 6:2). And hidden miracles regarding the many become publicized when they come from the objectives of the Torah in [the form] of the blessings and the curses, as the verse states (Deut. 29:23-24), "All the nations will say, 'Why did the Lord do this to this land?' They will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, God of their fathers,' such that it will be publicized to all of the nations that it is from the Lord, as their punishment. And regarding the fulfill-

ment [of the commandments], it states (Deut. 28:10), "And all of the peoples of the land will see that the name of the Lord is called upon you and they will fear you." And I will explain this more, with God's help (Ramban on Leviticus 26:11).

This Ramban appears to contradict another Ramban in Genesis where he says man is not always under divine providence. He quotes the verse "God's eye is toward those who fear Him" (Psalms 33:16)—man is under God's providence, but only if he fears God. But the previous Ramban says:

As a person does not have a share in the Torah of Moshe, our teacher, until he believes that all of the things and events we [encounter] are all miracles [and] there is no nature or custom of the world with them, whether with regard to the many or to the individual.

On the High Holidays, we recite in our prayers, "He who suspends Earth on nothingness" (Job 26:7). Maimonides says that we originally possessed an astronomy from Sinai together with the Torah's wisdom, but it was lost, and all the astronomy we possess, including the calculation of the months, is based on the Greeks. Maimonides says that where the truth comes from is irrelevant.

The ancient astronomers did not know Job's idea of God

suspending the Earth on nothingness, that the Earth is suspended in empty space. They thought the Earth was built upon solid matter all the way down. But this concept of the Earth suspended by nothing is precisely what is stated in Job. Why does the Torah teach us this fact?

People find satisfying that knowledge to which they are accustomed. But the Earth's suspension by nothingness conflicts with what we were raised to believe: Things are not suspended in midair. This verse teaches that God's knowledge is of a different kind, not the kind with which we feel emotionally comfortable. That which we call "sensible" stems from matters we are used to. That inherent belief that God's knowledge is of a different nature is not sensible to man emotionally, but it is the fundamental principle of the entire Torah.

When Ramban says, "There is no nature, and everything is miracle," he does not deny the laws of nature, for he said so himself and it is an obvious fact. Furthermore, it is a verse in the Torah, "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). Ramban says that unless a man fears God, he is subject to natural law. What he means by "There is no nature and everything is miracle," is that there exists no "power of nature" [an autonomous and random force operating without God's direction]. This refers

to a certain “power of nature” that people [erroneously] attribute to nature. Nature seems to make sense to people. But Ramban says that this notion is false. In truth, nothing really “makes sense”—a phrase referring to matters that are emotionally satisfying [and not that such matters have passed a rigorous analysis and are proven rationally, or are understood].

When Ramban says “there is no nature and everything is miracle,” he means that since everything operates according to God’s wisdom, this is [far] removed from human understanding and therefore, everything is “miracle”—everything is unfathomable [as must be so, as we are addressing God’s wisdom]. All that we experience reflects God’s tremendous wisdom—from the growth of a tree to the rising and setting of the sun. But as we have grown accustomed to these phenomena, we accept their existence and behavior. In truth, though, if we thought about any phenomenon, everything is “suspended in midair” so to speak; everything is unfathomable [miracle]. Every manifestation man experiences expresses God’s wisdom and everything is truly astonishing.

Yet, there is something in man that partakes of that ultimate wisdom...to a degree. This is why one must bless God equally concerning pleasant news and tragedies, as man knows enough to know that there is a divine order to

the universe. [Despite bad emotional feelings evoked by tragedy, man must recognize all that exists—be it good or bad—forms part of God’s world, which was designed with perfect knowledge and wisdom.] One who denies this principle that everything operates according to a divine and wise order, has no share in Moshe’s Torah.

This explains the repetition in so many mitzvos to remember the Egyptian exodus, because that event and all the plagues demonstrated God’s control of [every region of] the universe. This repetition also serves to remind every generation of this principle, as God does not perform wonders in each generation.

Man does not want to live in a world without order [without meaning]. People who search for that order and cannot find it give up and become heretics, feeling that God abandoned the Earth. Judaism does not satisfy a person by providing a feeling that the world makes sense emotionally. But it does provide the comfort that there is a sense to the world’s operation.

The obligation—philosophically and even according to halacha—is that a person should summon all his energies behind this concept through his dimension that perceives reality. That is, through the Torah’s wisdom, man obtains knowledge of the system of divine providence. And this knowledge tells him that God relates to man in the system.

Thus, the system must be rational [explaining the blessing over good and bad tidings equally].

Returning to Maimonides' comments on humility (mishna 4:4), he says that humility is the midpoint between haughtiness and low esteem. Maimonides explains in the fourth chapter of his Eight Chapters that a person must pursue the opposite character trait in a certain character spectrum to finally arrive at the midpoint. [For example, a miserly person must express extreme charity in order to decrease his miserliness and arrive at an equidistant point between miserliness and extreme charity. An important side note, Rabbi Chait once explained the objective of maintaining this midpoint: By eliminating any emotional pull whatsoever on oneself, as one is equally distant from both extremes of every character trait spectrum, he is free from any emotional influence and is thereby free to follow intelligence alone. In our case above, once the person is at the midpoint between miserliness and extreme charity, neither emotion will have any pull on him. Thereby, his future financial decisions will be free from any influence from these two extreme poles.]

However, Maimonides says the exception to this rule is haughtiness, because of its terrible nature. Maimonides quotes Chazal's praise of humility and how they deprecate-

ed haughtiness. But Chazal feared to remain within the boundary of humility, which is midpoint between haughtiness and low esteem. Chazal frowned upon haughtiness and went to the opposite extreme of low esteem so that no trace of haughtiness would exist in their personalities. They did not remain within the boundary of humility, at the midpoint between haughtiness and low esteem, which is a sense of lowliness or inferiority. [For this midpoint of humility retains some trace of haughtiness, as that is what a midpoint means—equal proximity between two extremes—and Chazal viewed any proximity to haughtiness as dangerous.]

However, this appears contradictory. For if the objective [of human perfection] is humility, which Chazal praised, how can Chazal then say that by remaining within the boundary of humility, one is susceptible to haughtiness? Leaving this boundary of humility and going to the extreme of low esteem should be an imperfect state.

Maimonides says that Chazal say, as far as praising humility, “What wisdom took as a crown, humility took as a footstool” [i.e., humility is highly praised, as is wisdom.] It is written, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God” (Psalms 111:10). Here we find support that fear of God is better than wisdom, and it is the cause of its existence and it is also the cause of humility. Maimonides says that hu-

mility is far greater than wisdom. Rabbeinu Yona states that a person can be a chocham without knowing anything—what Judaism respects as wisdom is an attitude, not the amount of knowledge one knows. Raw intellectual ability does not represent man’s greatness. It can also be true that people with tremendous minds might accomplish very little, while people with lower intelligence have made great discoveries. In order to discover phenomena, the mind is simply a tool. But man possesses another part of his nature that is responsible for his becoming a chocham; that part is tied to fear of God and humility.

Discoveries are not necessarily made from raw intellect, but stem from one’s attitude. It is a certain part of the human mind, an undefinable part. This part of the mind can best be described as “an attitude toward reality.” Sigmund Freud once said, “I am not a great person, but people will say I made a great discovery. Christopher Columbus discovered America and he wasn’t a great person either.” He mentioned that the discovery is not always commensurate with the discoverer. Freud felt that he possessed an attitude toward psychology that permitted him to probe psychology, and it is this probing that enables one to uncover wisdom.

Raw intellect and memory can enable one to accumulate a tremendous amount of knowledge. But making a break-

through requires this attitude of the soul. Judaism has pinpointed the nature of that attitude: humility. Such a person has no concern for the self and is completely absorbed in studying wisdom, like a child is absorbed in understanding that which perplexes him. This attitude represents humility.

How is humility tied to the fear of God? There cannot be any humility unless one is awed by the Source of wisdom. This is what Rabbeinu Yona means when he says that a person can be a great mind and not know anything.

We asked previously, if humility is the objective, why did Chazal go to the extreme pole of low esteem? Furthermore, does this not violate Maimonides' principle to remain at the midpoint on all character spectrums?

What does Maimonides mean by, "The midpoint between haughtiness and low esteem is called humility and it has no other name?" Midpoint can mean that one compromises opposing forces, or it can refer to a state where one directs no energy to either extreme. Humility is dead center between haughtiness and low esteem. But this dead center partakes of both haughtiness and low esteem. Chazal deprecated haughtiness and felt any measure of it is damaging. Therefore, at the midpoint of humility there is still some haughtiness, and this was unacceptable to Chazal, explaining why they moved to the opposite extreme of low

esteem. This avoided any measure of haughtiness. Chazal remained in the extreme of low esteem until they naturally arrived at humility. They did so by first draining off all energies that might flow to the self by remaining in a state of low esteem. Once they removed all energies toward the self, they naturally were midpoint at humility, but not because they managed to balance equal measures of haughtiness and low esteem, for this would partake of a certain measure of haughtiness. In truth, what they did to arrive at the optimal state of humility was not to balance equal energies toward haughtiness and low esteem, but they drained all egotistical emotions through complete immersion in low esteem. At that point, Chazal had no energies left flowing toward haughtiness, which resulted in being midpoint at humility. Being midpoint can be achieved either by balancing the pull of opposing forces, or by eliminating one force (haughtiness) completely, thereby freeing the person to arrive at humility.

Two types of humility exist: a psychological humility and a philosophical humility. Psychological humility is where one is not haughty but doesn't have low esteem—he is midpoint. The person is psychologically sound. Philosophical humility is where all of one's energies are directed outwardly toward God's wisdom. This is attainable only by a chocham.

*And the man Moses was very humble,
more so than any other man on Earth
(Num. 12:3).*

Moshe did not possess even a miniscule amount of haughtiness. He was fully absorbed in God's wisdom. He had no psychological energy directed toward himself at all. The pursuit of God's wisdom is the only activity where one's energies are directed away from the self. In all other pursuits, energies flow back toward the ego. If one becomes a stamp collector, the "collector" is the focus, or even when one performs acts of kindness, a self-image is pursued. A famous good-doer was once interviewed and said that she directed her life toward kindness due to her self-realization of certain violent emotions that she said were similar to Nazism. This woman's kindness was for herself and not for others.

Fear of God is the recognition of God. Humility is the effect in the person. Man reaches the highest level when that effect takes place. Fear of God reaches its highest level in humility. Maimonides refers to this humility as follows:

*But how may one discover the way to love
and fear Him? When man reflects con-
cerning His works, and His great and
wonderful creatures, and will behold*

through them His wonderful, matchless, and infinite wisdom, he will spontaneously be filled with love, praise, and exaltation and become possessed of a great longing to know the Great Name, even as David said: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God," (Psalms 42,2). And when he thinks of all these matters, he will be taken aback in a moment and stricken with awe, and realize that he is an infinitesimal creature, humble and dark, standing with an insignificant and slight knowledge in the presence of the All Wise, as David said: "When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, what is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him? (Psalms 8:4, 5). (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 2:2)

Apparently, humility is no simple matter.

Maimonides continues (Avos 4:4):

They said, "Every place we find that God's greatness is mentioned in the Torah, Neviim, and Kesuvim, we find His humility mentioned alongside it: "For the Lord your God is God of judges and master of masters, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God...." (Deut. 10:17), and following this it is written, "He performs justice for the convert, the orphan, and the widow" (Ibid. 10:19).

God is the creator of the universe, yet He concerns Himself with the unfortunate individuals. This would seem inappropriate for a great being to associate with the lowly. Thus, we learn from the Torah that God is humble.

It is written in Neviim, "For thus said He who high aloft forever dwells, whose name is holy, 'I dwell on high, in holiness'" (Isaiah 57:15). And following this in the same verse, it is written, "Yet with the contrite and the lowly in spirit—reviving the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the contrite." And in Kesuvim it is written, "... Extol He who rides the clouds, the Lord is His name" (Psalms 68:5). And it is written afterward, "... the father of orphans, the champion of widows" (Ibid. 68:6).

These verses mean to teach that the concept of propriety that is ingrained in our nature, as strong as it is, is not a reality. A person assumes that it is inappropriate for a great individual to associate with an unfortunate individual; people feel a person's importance should preclude him from associating with those who are unimportant. But this sensibility has no place in reality. As human beings, we sense validity for this assumption, but the Torah teaches that this conventional value is baseless. Thus, God concerns himself with unfortunate people. [The juxtaposition

of God's greatness to His attention to unfortunate people dispels the value of propriety. And the repetition in Torah, Neviim, and Kesuvim teaches that this is a fundamental.] Man thinks that God's attention to unfortunate people is a contradiction only because man is impressed by the emotion of propriety.

When we refer to God as humble, we do not refer to a positive matter but to the absence of something else. For it is impossible to say that God acts with humility—before whom is God being humble?

True humility is not when one fights and overcomes his haughtiness, but when one is bereft of haughtiness and does not sense any self-worth.

On the one hand, Judaism values wisdom over everything else, and perfection revolves around it. But here, Maimonides says that the essence of knowledge is fear of God, that fear of God is greater than wisdom, and that the essence of the fear of God is humility. But Maimonides also says that fear of God and humility stem from knowledge. We question which is greater and which stems from which.

The answer is that order or priority can be understood in two ways. "Prior" can refer to time or to importance. Without wisdom, there cannot be fear of God. Maimonides says, "In accordance with one's knowledge will be his love of God" (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 10:6). Maimonides holds that one's

love and fear of God are one and the same. Therefore, fear of God requires prior knowledge. In Pirkei Avos, Chazal refer to the soul's perfection. In terms of the attitude of the soul, its perfection is found in the expression of humility, the sense of worthlessness. To attain this level, wisdom must precede humility in time. Once one appreciates the universe and God's wisdom, one feels very insignificant:

When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, what is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him? (Psalms 8:4, 5).

But if we speak not in terms of time, but in terms of what is prior in importance, the priority is humility. Humility is the ultimate perfection of the soul. The Torah says, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God" (Psalms 111:10), and "The effect of humility is fear of the Lord" (Prov. 22:4). Wisdom has a basis, which is fear of God, and the basis of fear of God is humility. The ultimate perfection resides in that state of humility; however, wisdom is essential to attain that humility. Wisdom must precede humility in time, but humility is prior to wisdom in importance. [How does kingship affect this discussion about humility?] Kingship was introduced to Judaism with mixed feelings. The Rav said many times that kingship is a compromised institution:

Samuel was displeased that the Jews said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the Lord. The Lord replied to Samuel saying, "Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected, it is Me that they have rejected as their king" (I Sam. 8:6, 7).

We see that kingship required God's permission, but it is not the ultimate institution—the talmid chocham and the rebbe represent the ultimate institution. Kingship is necessary for society. The king Moshiach joins these two institutions of king and rebbe as close as possible.

Maimonides continues, "The praise given to Moshe, despite his wisdom and other traits, was humility."

The anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the songs of Israel (II Samuel 23:1).

Rashi says that in the Beis Hamikdash, the only songs we recite are those of King David. It is prohibited to recite anyone else's songs because songs in the Beis Hamikdash must reflect a certain personality. King David's songs were recited through the perfection of his soul:

The spirit of the Lord has spoken through me, His message is on my tongue (Ibid. 23:2).

Rashi comments on this verse, “His holy spirit ruled over me...The spirit enters the prophet and speaks through him.” The person is on such a high level of perfection that his perception of reality in formulating his songs is only through perception of God’s knowledge and nothing else, no side emotional forces. Ruach hakodesh refers to a state where one is devoid of all instinctual motivation and is on a level of perception through his intelligence; he perceives only truths. This is the first level of prophecy, and King David’s prophecy was on this level, as stated in the previous verse. King David’s songs were known through ruach hakodesh. Therefore, we recite only his songs as they reflect the perfection of the composer. Nevuchadnezzar wanted to recite praises to God, which Chazal said would have surpassed the praises of King David, but God did not permit him to do so because praises must reflect the perfection of the composer. Songs represent philosophical ideas in terms of the proper emotional framework.

This is the reason Maimonides cites only Moshe Rabbeinu and King David. In connection with Moshe, there is no personality—all his energies were consumed by studying God’s wisdom:

Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom the Lord knew face to face (Deut. 34:10).

A regular person cannot do what Moshe did.

King David represents the perfection of the emotions; he was a different personality. Unlike Moshe, King David's energies flowed to the emotions, but in the most perfected way possible. Therefore, he wrote songs that reflect how one's emotions should be perfected, how one should appreciate God. King David was a master in terms of what is appropriate for the perfection of our emotions.

In Tehillim [Psalms], King David incorporated ideas from others. Sometimes it is not authorship that is important, but it is the framework the arranger makes. For example, Rashi's commentary is not comprised exclusively of his own words, but is a collection of selected midrashim. But Rashi's mark is the line that he followed in selecting specific midrashim. And if you observe Rashi carefully, you will understand the approach he developed. Originality is not only expressed in innovating ideas, it is also expressed through incorporating selected ideas into a new framework. While it is true that Tehillim are not exclusively King David's songs, he framed a theme of Tehillim. That framework is the proper manner of songs and praises to God. If a song or praise does not fall within this framework, it is invalid. King David had the proper perception of what should be used to move human emotions toward God in the proper way. The Rav said that sometimes Rav Chaim

did not originate an idea but underlined the points of a rishon. That in itself is creativity. Highlighting a rishon's essential point is just as creative as innovating a new idea.

HAUGHTINESS AND IDOLATRY

One who is haughty is more subject to idolatry than others. Maimonides says, "The sin of haughtiness is akin to one who violated all sexual prohibitions." In connection with sexual prohibitions, it is written, "... For all those abhorrent things were done by the people" (Lev. 18:27). This stems from haughtiness. And Maimonides says that the haughty man himself is equated to an idol.

The purpose of the idolater is to have nature conform to his will. The idolatry creates [imaginary] powers that come from his insecurities. His idols placate his worries and protect and cater to him. His existence is self-centered. Thus, the haughty person is prone to idolatry: His preoccupation is to benefit the self.

But then Maimonides equates haughtiness to sexual prohibitions. What is the connection? Behind the involvement

in self-satisfaction [sexual pleasures] is a certain egoistic drive. When one is overcome by his own importance, he feels he must partake of every worldly enjoyment. He cannot accept that he will pass up any pleasure. Maimonides says the haughty man is viewed as though he violated all sexual prohibitions; his desire is to satisfy all his sexual pleasures. He feels that he is so deserving and important that every pleasure must be his.

The ultimate idolatry is the self. Idolatry has two expressions: One is external, and the other is internal, where the self becomes the center of the universe.

Oh, cease to glorify man, who has only a breath in his nostrils! For for what is he considered? (Isaiah 2:22).

[As previously stated, the rabbis said, “Do not read ‘for what’ (bameh) is man considered, but read ‘an altar’ (bam-mah) is man considered.” Man is viewed as an idol, a bamma.]

Maimonides continues, saying that humility is required for one to merit resurrection. “Shochnei apha, those who sleep in the dust” refers to one who has conquered the trait of humility and feels close to dust, he feels like nothing:

*Oh, let your dead revive! Let corpses arise!
Awake and shout for joy, you who dwell
in the dust! (Isaiah 26:19).*

Of course, a haughty person will not be resurrected. But even one who is not haughty and is a good person with good qualities, he too will not be resurrected unless he acquires humility. Resurrection of a humble person signifies that his very existence is due to God's will; he realizes that he exists only because of God's will during resurrection. This concept is impossible for a haughty person, for he does not view himself as God's creation, but as a subject [a being of great importance]. Haughtiness prevents one from viewing himself as a mere object, but demands that one view himself as significant.

Resurrection is one of Judaism's fundamentals. Why does one deny resurrection, and why does he have no part in the Torah? He does not feel that everyone's existence is determined by God. He feels that existence is generated by certain processes that are not God's will. Therefore, he rejects resurrection as this demonstrates that one's existence is dependent on God's will.

Haughtiness is inescapable and lies at the essence of man's defects. Chazal spoke at length against it. Tzaraas (negah) is the only illness caused by a spiritual defect, namely the de-

fect of haughtiness. Almost every sin can be traced to egocentricity, such as the aforementioned sexual prohibitions and idolatry. Haughtiness is not a small imperfection but a central one. So prevalent is haughtiness that Chazal said that a person should be excommunicated whether or not he is haughty [as if to say that no one escapes haughtiness].

The rabbis gave the following illustration: If the spectrum from haughtiness to low esteem is divided into 64 parts—1 being haughtiness and 64 being low esteem—Rava said a person should place himself at position 63 (allowing a minute amount of ego, for more than 1/64 of ego would endanger the person with haughtiness). Rav Nachman said he should not involve himself in any haughtiness whatsoever and should strive for position 64, the state of low esteem, completely devoid of haughtiness. This argument centers on the difference between psychological and philosophical perfection. We strive at all times to perfect ourselves psychologically and then philosophically. But psychological perfection here, allowing for some sense of ego (Rava), endangers one philosophically. Rava maintained that from a psychological standpoint, man must partake somewhat of ego; he says there is a safe level, and psychologically it is difficult for a person to have no ego satisfaction. Rav Nachman held that any degree of ego is dangerous.

“BE OF EXTREMELY LOW ESTEEM”
[CONCLUSION]

Man’s ego is bound up in his immortality fantasy. Ego-centricity generates this fantasy. Therefore, Chazal said that one must reflect on the fact that he is mortal and that his life ends in a matter of time. Through this reflection, one can remove his egocentricity. Recognizing one’s mortality is the strongest weapon against haughtiness.

However, one cannot simply reflect on his mortality and thereby become perfected. This reality can also result in depression. Rav Moshe Feinstein did not include mussar in his yeshiva curriculum for this reason. If so, our mishna presents the poor prospect of readers becoming depressed.

There are two ways of approaching the mishna’s warning that “man’s hope is worms.” As one increases his knowledge and gains maturity, the idea of his death should not carry a sadness. One’s philosophical perfection should substitute for his psychological deficiency. “Man’s hope is worms” is not to be understood as an emotional attack; that is a dangerous method. Chazal mean these words as a process of growth. One should view death as part of a system and as a good thing. One should come to accept his existence as temporary and this should not make him sad. As strange as it sounds, one’s acceptance of the reality of death enables him

to increase his enjoyment of life, since he now views life realistically. With greater knowledge of reality comes a greater enjoyment of life. By truly understanding life, which includes mortality, one can live more realistically and act more properly.

With greater philosophical perfection, we increase our humility and our acceptance of reality. Thereby we increase the enjoyment we obtain from life to a very great degree.

LOVE OF GOD: AMALEK AND MEGILLAH

After reciting the Shema's first verse, "Listen Israel, God is our God, God is one", we state, "And it shall be that these matters that I command you today will be placed on your heart" (Deut. 6:6). This is the only method to attain love of God [i.e., Torah study]. All other methods are idolatry. Rashi says, "Through this you will recognize Who spoke and brought the world into existence."

Muslims might not be idolaters in a halachic sense, but they certainly are idolaters philosophically, as they do not

recognize the “One Who spoke and brought the world into existence.” One who is haughty before God is like idolatry itself—“man is considered an altar.”

Judaism is in direct opposition to the deification of man, which can take place on different levels. Adolf Hitler, may his name be erased, believed he was divinely ordained. Accepting a higher power does not necessarily preclude haughtiness. Such personalities identify with a super force, but what they seek is their own omnipotence. The greatest evil doers, for example, the church, accepted a higher force, but were the most evil of people and were egomaniacs as well. They identified with a higher force and thereby deified themselves, as Maimonides says, “He himself is an idol.”

Judaism holds that we have no concept of God and we can approach Him only through wisdom and the Torah, which lead to humility. But the forces other religions believe to be under is nothing other than a projection of their own haughtiness. This is pure idolatry and is in direct opposition to Judaism.

Amalek is this expression of the deification of man. Amalek expresses man’s inability to accept his insignificant status in reality—ultimately in terms of God. Amalek is self-deification and is against Maimonides’ description of a “lowly and dark creation” (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2). Haman embodies the Amalekite philosophy:

And Haman saw that Mordechai would not kneel or bow low to him, and Haman was filled with rage (Megillat Esther 3:5).

Haman saw that the Jews' philosophy rejects the deification of man, and that is what destroyed him. The mark of the Jew is that regardless of what man views as important, it is all nonsense. Amalek is the exact opposite. "For the hand upon the throne of the Lord: the Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages" (Exod. 17:16). Chazal say that God's throne [reign] is not complete until Amalek is annihilated—deification of man obscures the recognition of God.

The Megillah has some difficult verses. When Mordechai learned of Haman's plot against the Jews, he wore sackcloth and ashes. Why did Esther send Mordechai a change of garments? Afterward, Esther inquired as to why Mordechai wore sackcloth and what had transpired. The order appears wrong: Esther should have first inquired about the events before sending Mordechai the change of garments. The verse says, "And Mordecai told Hasach all that had happened to him" (Esther 4:7). The word for "happened" is karahu. Chazal comment on the verse:

*Mordechai said to Esther (via Hasach),
"The son of karahu is causing the problem."*

Karahu is a reference to Amalek, who the Torah says “karcha baderech; approached you on the way ” (Deut. 25:18). Mordechai was conveying to Esther that Haman the Amalekite was at the root of the Jews’ tragic situation.

We can then interpret events as follows: Esther saw Mordechai wearing sackcloth and ashes and thereby understood there to be a political difficulty. Her sending the change of clothing meant to say, “I have political power, but you, Mordechai, cease from making a public demonstration and I will take care of the problem.” Mordechai replied, “This is the son of karahu,” meaning, some political difficulties can be worked out, but not those regarding Amalek. Amalek does not tolerate the Jews’ philosophy, that being, what we know of God is very limited and unclear, and man is insignificant. Amalek deifies man and hates the Jew. Therefore, Esther understood that diplomacy would not work with Amalek, whose energies are intent on destroying Israel. The only salvation is through God’s providence.

Even though the lot was cast to annihilate the Jews twelve months later, Mordechai urged Esther to go before the king the very next day. Esther wanted to wait as she felt she had time, but Mordechai said, “If you wait, you will imply that you can live with this tragic fate and the king will destroy the Jews and then appease you later. Esther,

you must show you cannot live with the situation for even one moment, and that you would risk your life by entering the inner courtyard without being summoned (Esther 4:11) in order to avert this fate.” This would convey to the king that there was no way to appease Esther. This situation of Amalek (Haman) demanded desperate measures.

King Achashverosh made an elaborate one hundred eighty-day feast; he was quite ostentatious. But his ego was different from Haman’s, a man who was an inherent egomaniac. But since King Achashverosh had wealth and power, he derived no satisfaction from either without showing it off to others. Wealth and power are not inherent human needs. King Achashverosh’s haughtiness was relative to others. But that was not an inherent religion of human deification, which Haman embodied.

*And who knows if such a time as this you
attained royal status (Esther 4:14).*

Chazal say that Mordechai recognized that this might be divine providence. Rashi says it is audacious to suggest that something might or might not be divine providence. Therefore, Rashi goes out of his way to interpret this verse differently, “And who knows if you will have this opportunity again.”

We must appreciate Esther's sacrifice. While she was coerced to be Achashverosh's wife, "She rose from his bosom (from sleeping with the king) and went back to the bosom of Mordechai," who was her husband. But once she willfully took it upon herself to approach the king without coercion to reverse the decree, her willful intimacy with the king now sacrificed her relationship with Mordecai, "And what I have lost, is lost" (Esther 14:16).

4:2 THE VALUE OF MITZVAH

BEN AZZAI SAYS, "RUN TO FULFILL A LIGHT COMMANDMENT AS [YOU RUN TO FULFILL] A VITAL ONE, AND FLEE FROM SIN; SINCE A COMMANDMENT LEADS TO ANOTHER COMMANDMENT, AND A SIN LEADS TO ANOTHER SIN; SINCE THE REWARD FOR A COMMANDMENT IS ANOTHER COMMANDMENT, AND THE REWARD FOR A SIN IS ANOTHER SIN."

Why shouldn't a person run to a greater mitzvah more than he would run to a less important mitzvah? How can one run toward a light commandment with the same inten-

sity as he runs toward a weightier commandment?

Rashi comments:

By running to a light mitzvah, a weightier mitzvah will come to one's hands because one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah.

[An alternative version of Rashi reads] A light mitzvah is that which appears light to your eyes; you should run to fulfill it, and similarly you should flee from a light sin.

Apparently, Rashi agrees that it is impossible to run to a light mitzvah as one runs to a weightier mitzvah. But Rashi says that if one does not run to a light mitzvah, he will miss the weightier mitzvah.

Maimonides comments:

We have already elucidated the explanation of this statement in chapter 10 of Sanhedrin. And the sages, peace be upon them, have already brought attention to a wonderful innovation in the Torah in which there is inducement to the performance of the commandments. And it is stated (Deut. 4:41), "Then Moshe separated three cities in Transjordan, etc." while knowing that they would not be effective, as they would not have the [status] of cities of refuge until the three others in the Land of Israel were to be separated. They said (Makkos 10a), "Our teacher Moshe, peace be upon

him, knew that these three cities in Trans-jordan would not shelter until the three cities in the Land of Israel were to be separated, as it is stated (Num. 35:13), "They shall be six cities of refuge." And he separated these nonetheless, since he said, "Since a commandment has come to my hand, I will perform it." And if our teacher Moshe, peace be upon him—the fathomer of the truths, the [most] complete of the complete—was eager to add half of a positive commandment upon all his rank and wholeness in this way, there is no need to say that those whose souls are leprous, and their leprosy is strong and gaining, should do [so].

Maimonides says that Chazal cited a wondrous innovation in the Torah. Why did Moshe set aside the three cities? It wasn't even a mitzvah until the other three cities in Israel were set aside. Therefore, Moshe's case isn't really analogous to what our mishna discusses, that being "mitzvah." What Moshe did was similar to waving three of the four species on Succos—it's worthless. How can Maimonides or Chazal make the statement, "Since a 'commandment' has come to my hand, I will perform it"?

Maimonides says what we refer to here is a "wondrous, innovative idea regarding zealotness in mitzvah." There is something special about a halachic action. It moves a

person toward God and perfection because of its nature. Halacha registers on the soul in a special manner; one performs a rational action that God dictated. Here, one follows God's will, not in an emotional way, but through wisdom.

Exodus 12:21 reads, “Withdraw your hands and take for yourself a sheep,” referring to the Paschal Lamb. Chazal comment, “Withdraw your hands from idolatry and take for yourself a sheep of mitzvah (Rashi, Exod. 12:6).” The Jews were to paint the sheep's blood on their doorposts, and in doing so, God would pass over their homes and not smite their firstborns. [Killing the sheep, which was Egypt's god, demonstrated their withdrawal from idolatry.] God would pass over the Jews because they were involved in mitzvah. The act of mitzvah is structured in such a way for human nature that it is the ultimate means of human perfection. This explains why Moshe performed the act of separating the three cities. It is the act and not the fulfillment of mitzvah that perfects man. And Maimonides refers to the “act” of mitzvah. Even a person whose primary occupation is Torah study—תורתו אומנתו—and who is exempt from other mitzvos, and even the greatest prophet, Moshe, can benefit from the act of mitzvah. Certainly we—who Maimonides says suffer from diseases of the soul—will benefit from the performance of mitzvah.

RUN TO FULFILL A LIGHT COMMANDMENT AS
 [YOU RUN TO FULFILL] A VITAL ONE

This means that one should recognize that every halachic activity—small or great—offers human perfection. One whose primary occupation is Torah study is exempt from certain mitzvos because Torah study overrides them [Torah study is the greatest mitzvah (Moed Kattan 9b)]. But this doesn't mean that a person will attain a level where the performance of mitzvah will not perfect him. Of course, a person must understand halacha for mitzvah to perfect him.

In general, one [Moshe] whose primary occupation is Torah study is exempt from other mitzvos. But as the mitzvah of setting up the cities of refuge related to the entrance to Israel from which Moshe was barred, this related directly to Moshe's perfection and overrode that exemption of his preoccupation with Torah. [Moshe was barred from entering Israel because of a flaw and therefore wished to perfect that part of his nature through this performance, which related to his flaw.]

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Ben Azzai says, "run to fulfill a light commandment..." They already gave a reason

for this: "For you do not know the reward given [for the fulfillment] of [the respective] commandments" (Avos 2:1). And now Ben Azzai added another reason and said, "Run to fulfill a light commandment and flee from sin; since a commandment leads to another commandment," as this is a natural propensity. As when a man fulfills a small commandment once, he draws closer to God and accustoms his spirit to His service, and it becomes easier in his eyes to fulfill another commandment that [requires] the same effort as the first one or a little more [effort]; as he is already accustomed to the performance of a commandment. And when he fulfills a second [and a third commandment], even if it [requires] much more effort than the first ones, he will do it quickly, since the habit already steers him greatly. [This occurs] until it steers him very much and he completely fulfills all of the commandments.

And a sin leads to another sin: This too is natural. Since he has done one sin and distanced himself from the service of God, may He be blessed, when another sin comes to his hand—even if the impulse does not have a desire for it like for the first—he will do it, as his spirit is accessible to his impulse and it pushes upon it. And even if his desire is not great in the matter, he will do all the sins, as his nature is used to "doing every abomination toward God that He hates."

Our actions affect our natures. The question of free will concerns what is the good for man. When one chooses pleasure, he values it as a “good.” But when animals seek pleasure, such as food, there is no accompanying value. When man performs that which is evil, it is not only that he damages himself with his action, but he corrupts his value system by attributing a good value to that which is evil. The satisfaction and enjoyment in the sin [convinces] the person that this is the good. This is also called justification. One philosopher said, “Every person is a metaphysician.” Every person must maintain that his actions are of value and are a good. [Valuing what is evil corrupts the person’s judgment, explaining the idea that one sin leads to another.] This person is now subject to committing graver sins after having committed this first small sin.

The ancient philosophers debated why man sins: Is it out of the ignorance of the evil in a given act, or even with complete knowledge of the evil? Perhaps it is because “emotions override all knowledge like a drunkard” (Aristotle). Modern psychology would side with Aristotle but with one difference, and that is the answer that Judaism gives:

I created the evil inclination, and I created the Torah as the medicine (Talmud Kiddushin 30b).

The Torah includes Proverbs, Koheles, and Avos [great works addressing philosophical, psychological, moral, and character perfection]. Learning Torah taps the bulk of human energy, leaving no energy available to direct toward physical pleasures. But also, a large part of the Torah addresses perfecting one's nature. One gains understanding of himself and he must apply it. It would seem from this gemara that the only medicine for evil is the Torah, and the Torah refers to knowledge.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter started a mussar [character perfection] movement since one could be fluent in all of Talmud and yet possess the worst character. He said it was easier to learn all of Talmud than to change one character trait.

Man must have knowledge, but abstract knowledge alone is insufficient. Man must also have knowledge of himself and apply it to himself. This is the solution to the ancient philosophers' debate. Proverbs, Koheles, and Avos are not new ideas as everything is found in the Torah. Like King Solomon, Ben Azzai saw that in his generation the value of lighter mitzvos was not respected, and therefore he stated this mishna. That is the role of a Torah transmitter, a ba'al hamesorah: to inform his generation where they are failing and to formulate ideas that his generation needs.

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

Since the reward for a commandment is another commandment: This is a reason other than nature. And so, he wants to say that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not [force] good or evil into the hand of a person, rather only free choice, as it is stated (Deut. 30:19), "And you shall choose life." And since he has chosen a path, if he is going in the good, God is with him. And [so] if he fulfills one commandment, [divine providence] helps him to fulfill another commandment, as on his own, he doesn't even have the ability to do good. And about this it says, "Since the reward for a commandment is another commandment, and the reward for a sin is another sin." And not, God forbid, that this is his reward. As if so, what reward does he [actually] have? And the thing is not like this, as his reward exists for the World to Come. But, rather, he wants to say that the fruit of [fulfilling] a commandment is [fulfilling another] commandment; and he eats its fruits in this world, which is that it helps him to fulfill other commandments. And it comes out that the principle expands, and it exists in the World to Come. And this is what is stated (Isaiah 3:10), "Hail the just man, for he is good; they shall eat the fruit of their works."

As Maimonides says in his *Mishneh Torah*, free will means that all man's actions are not preordained from the beginning of creation. Every book, every idea, and every deed that man developed were not direct results of the elements and causes from creation. Judaism maintains that man is a creative being.

And Rabbi Shimon ben Levi says, "A person's inclination overpowers him every day, and seeks to kill him, as it is stated: 'The wicked (rasha) watches the righteous and seeks to slay him' (Psalms 37:32). And if not for the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, assists each person in battling his evil inclination, he could not overcome it, as it is stated: 'The Lord will not leave him in his hand'" (Psalms 37:33). (Talmud Kiddushin 30b)

The gemara asks which "wicked individual" (rasha) Psalms refers to, and it answers, "the evil inclination." Rabbeinu Yona says that man's nature is overpowering. And if it weren't for God's providence, for one who chooses the good, man would not succeed. Man's instincts are more powerful than imagined. The gemara says that in the future, God will show man the truth of the instincts. This means that we do not know how deep and powerful those forces are.

When man chooses the good, he partakes of God's providence. This is Maimonides' concept of providence in his *Guide*. Providence is not a supernatural phenomenon like the miracles in Egypt. Providence is the way God relates to man. When man approaches God [by choosing to do good], moving toward God's wisdom, he relates to God in a special way, wherein providence is a natural result. Providence is a constant relationship between God and man.

And if not for the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, assists each person in battling his evil inclination, he could not overcome it.

Man's success is due to God, as his instincts are too powerful.

Thus, one "mitzvah leads to another mitzvah" refers to a natural psychological phenomenon. But the "reward for one mitzvah is another mitzvah and the reward for a sin is another sin" is a metaphysical phenomenon. This is Rabbeinu Yona.

Judaism maintains that there exists an unconscious part of the mind that propels man toward evil. This explains the blessing we recite, "It should be God's will that we are saved from the evil inclination and from the destructive

Satan.” Chazal’s prayer was that man shouldn’t fall prey to the unconscious, over which he has no control, and which leads man to evil.

BECHIRA: FREE WILL

Free will is a philosophical issue and should not be addressed publicly. Talmud Chagiga 11b says:

One may not expound upon the act of Creation before two, nor upon the Chariot by oneself, unless he is wise and understands on his own.

The study of metaphysics and Creation have limitations. People can misinterpret such areas. Therefore, Chazal were careful not to discuss certain topics unless they were sure that those with whom they discussed these matters attained a certain level of intellect and would not come to false conclusions. The area of free will is one of these sensitive topics.

An important principle in Judaism is that a person should

not venture into an area that is beyond his comprehension. One must have a barometer of how far he can investigate an area and not exceed his abilities. It is difficult to determine because usually the person who is not capable of restricting his investigations is not mature enough to recognize his limits. Overstepping one's bounds is extremely dangerous, as Maimonides discusses in his introduction to his *Guide* and in the *Guide* itself.

This is one of the fundamentals of Judaism. Maimonides discusses the verse “And you should not stray after your hearts and after your eyes” (Num. 15:39). One should not delve into an area where he is liable to come to emotional conclusions, since he is not capable of handling the area intellectually. The phrase “your hearts” refers to the emotions. “Your eyes” refers to what one sees—he is attached to the physical.

During the Revelation at Sinai, there were different groups of people, each with unique limits as to how close they could approach the mountain. Moshe, of course, was the closest, and the groups descended to the lowest level, which was the general nation. Anyone who violated and overstepped his limit was punished with death. This limitation applied not only to Sinai, but it also applies to the “constant state of Sinai.” There is a constant state of attempting to penetrate and understand the essence of God's

knowledge. Therefore, how one approaches knowledge is extremely important.

Regarding free will, Rabbeinu Yona quotes the verse “And choose life” (Deut. 30:19). A few verses earlier, God tells man that he should make a choice between life [truth] and his desires:

*See [understand] I place before you today
life and the good, and death and evil (Ibid.
30:15).*

We must have a basic idea of what free will is. Many philosophers gave examples of their understanding, which are not in line with the Torah’s concept. The philosophers cited examples of people deciding whether or not to eat something. They asked if man has free will in this decision. According to Judaism, free will is not involved in every choice. “And choose life” indicates [the precise matter] wherein free will lies. The free will choice lies in the case where man has before his soul a choice between true life or physicality—this is the only case where free will exists. If one is confronted with conflicting desires, such as abstaining from food in order to be thin and healthy, or eating and enjoying the pleasure, it is not a free will decision, it is merely one emotion vying against another. There is no reason to suggest that free will operates in this case. Here,

there is no choice between what is life and what is evil. The determinists might very well be correct in this case—it is a question of which emotion is stronger. Maimonides says that even the desire for good health is no different from any other physical desire. To be healthy, i.e., to extend one's life, is merely a physical desire. The only case where good health is a case of “choosing life” is when the desire for health is to enable involvement in God's wisdom and Torah.

The Torah's concept of free will refers to a choice between two worlds: the world that man's mind depicts, and the world depicted by man's emotions. Here, the soul comes into the picture; it is presented with a choice and it is free to choose the world of wisdom. That is the description of free will. As the soul perceives the option of choosing wisdom, it participates in that world, and to follow that world, it is unimpeded [this is the free will choice, and nothing but man's will selects wisdom over following his desires].

The philosophers do not define to what free will refers; it is not simply man choosing. But Judaism has a precise definition specified by the verse cited previously. When man chooses a life of wisdom, he does not relate to the world of causality as the soul is not physical [and as he is removed from causality, he is engaged in a free will decision. Here, the decision is not based on emotional desires, which might

very well be predetermined, as previously stated.]

*See [understand] I place before you today
life and the good, and death and evil...and
choose life.*

Man was given free will only after receiving the Torah. Thus, without the Torah, many people would spend their lives with no free will.

Our society values fame, wealth, and success. Therefore, anything that comes after [one selects these values, is thereby dictated by] such poor values, and therefore must be false. Judaism does not share anything in common with society since society's values directly oppose Judaism. All of society's moral terms and ethics are worthless and empty [as they are built upon a false foundation]. Judaism stands apart.

The fact that a child is exempt from Torah [infractions] until the age of thirteen shows that all his choices are not in the sphere of free will. Thus, a person—even an adult—makes choices that are not free will choices.

The existence of Abraham shows that man has the inherent capacity to unravel wisdom. Thus, free will exists at every stage [not only after Sinai] but not to the same degree as after Sinai.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter said that a wicked person is cul-

pable on every evil he perpetrates, even though he may now have no choice, as he charted [determined] his path long ago. For example, an evil dictator chose his past decades ago, which does not allow him to refrain from killing a disturbing subordinate. No person can tell this dictator not to use his power to eliminate this person. Murdering this person is not a free will choice, but a natural decision that “follows” from his evil nature. Regardless, he is responsible for that person’s murder as it is based on his choice made decades earlier. If the soul chooses the world that the mind describes, then it is not simply a matter of choice in terms of the “following,” but it actually partakes of that world of mind, and it becomes likened to that of which it partakes. Thus, the soul, in choosing the world of ideas, changes its nature. Free choice is not just a matter of acting a certain way, i.e., choosing good or evil actions, but the nature of the soul is determined by the world that it follows and its whole nature is changed. That is why Rashi says, on Bechukosai, that a person deteriorates step-by-step (Lev. 26:15):

Thus, you have here seven sins, the first of which brings the second in its train, and so on to the seventh. And these are: He has not studied and therefore has not practiced the commandments; consequently, he scorns others who do practice them, he hates the sages, prevents others from prac-

ting, denies the divine origin of the commandments, and, finally, denies the existence of God.

Rashi teaches that one sin generates the next. The evil inclination functions in a manner where one cannot say, “I will do one sin and no more.” For once a person sins, he has changed his nature and he is no longer the person who said, “I will stop at one sin.” [This is the phenomenon we speak of, that in selecting either good or evil, the soul is thereby changed.] If the soul rejects following the mind, as it follows the emotions, the soul partakes of that world. This is the deterioration of the soul.

Rashi’s seven steps of deterioration should really be four steps: He does not learn, he does not act, he denies the mitzvos, and he denies God. Why does this person care to prevent others from performing mitzvos?

In Megillat Esther there is a strange phenomenon: When King Achashverosh brought out the vessels of the Beis Hamikdash, he said:

Seventy years has transpired and God has not fulfilled His promise to redeem the Jews. Now there won't be any repercussions if I use the vessels of the Beis Hamikdash.

King Achashverosh also wore the high priest's garments. The reason he did these things was because he was obsessed with the Jew. Haman too was obsessed with the Jew, as we see he was elated that the lot [to annihilate the Jews] fell during the month of Adar. Haman said, "The lottery fell during the month of Moshe's death!" [He felt that this was a fortuitous sign.] And when Haman's plot failed, his wife and family said to Haman, "If Mordechai is from Jewish lineage, you will surely fail." The verses reveal that both King Achashverosh and Haman were obsessed with the Jew and with the Torah's ideas. The same is true of the person who deteriorates—he is bothered by the system of Judaism. But why does it bother him?

Even though the soul can make a choice and reject the world of ideas, it cannot remove itself completely from that world. The soul always retains a recognition of the world of wisdom and it is disturbed by it [when it's not following it]. The evil person then attempts to overcome that disturbance: [King Achashverosh used the vessels of the Beis Hamikdash and the high priest's garments, and Haman's wife told him that Mordechai's Jewish lineage forecasts failure. And Rashi says the evil person will prevent others from performing mitzvos and he will despise the sages.] King Achashverosh, Haman, and the evil person all recognized that there is truth to the world of wisdom. [Thus,

these acts were attempts to deny what they sensed was true.]

King Achashverosh had great respect for the wise men of Israel. For when Queen Vashti sinned against King Achashverosh, he called the Jewish sages for advice. The gemara says (Megillah 12b) that these were the Sanhedrin. King Achashverosh asked them, “What shall I do about Vashti?” The Jewish sages discussed among themselves as follows:

“This is a bad predicament. If we tell the king to kill his wife, tomorrow his wine will wear off and he will be angry with us. But if we tell him to leave her alone, he will hate us because we would not be acting in the king’s honor.” The sages gave a political answer: “Good wine is preserved well in its own cask for many years. But if you pour the wine from cask to cask, it loses its flavor. We are a nation that was poured from one place to another. We are not the right ones to ask. Ask Ammon and Moab, for they have been in the same place all these years.”

Thus, King Achashverosh recognized the Jewish sages. The obsession with the Jew is an attempt to overcome the conflict he created by his free choice. The choice to follow the emotions is only one part of man; the soul remains disturbed and unhappy and the person tries to wipe out that

other part that recognizes the truth.

Although those like King Achashverosh and Haman do not follow the world of wisdom, their souls cannot become completely involved in their selfish and physical lifestyles. [The soul remains tied to wisdom and is not converted to a physical and emotional condition. Therefore, these personalities needed to respond to the vessels of the Beis Hamikdash, to the high priest's garments and to Mordechai's lineage.] These were attempts at denying the reality of the Jewish nation. Using these sacred objects in mundane ways would reject their significance.

When one chooses the world of wisdom, the soul is being true to its nature. And when one chooses the physical lifestyle the soul violates its nature. Thus, part of the soul will always fight against itself. "The wicked are as turbulent as the sea" (Isaiah 57:20). This represents the conflict of the evil person. He is turbulent because there is a part of himself—the soul, which knows that the world of ideas is the real world—that he cannot appease. This also explains Rashi on Bechukosai, on why the evil person must hate those who represent the Torah: The righteous person creates conflict within the evil person and the evil person must reject the righteous person.

If one makes the wrong first step, it is the essence of his error. If he fails to learn and pursue wisdom, he then dete-

riorates and all the following stages [as Rashi states] depict his attempt to overcome His conflicts that stem from an underlying recognition of the truth.

4:3 REALISM AND SUCCESS

HE [BEN AZZAI] WOULD SAY, “DO NOT DISPAR-
AGE ANYONE, AND DO NOT SHUN ANYTHING.
FOR THERE IS NO MAN WHO DOES NOT HAVE
HIS HOUR, AND THERE IS NO THING THAT DOES
NOT HAVE ITS PLACE.”

People don't give much credence to the fact that they will need help from others in life. While they recognize this need might be true, they don't feel it's worth it to extend cordiality to everybody, for the chances are slim of needing some random person. People feel that if they live that way they must be subservient to everyone—and there's no freedom in that type of life. They prefer the luxury of independence and the ability to be aggressive without worrying about the repercussions [losing a favor from those whom they previously disregarded].

Why should one be concerned about every individual? The pain isn't worth it. And why is this topic included in Avos?

In analyzing psychological pain, one must know from which part of the psyche the pain emanates. Oftentimes it is disguised, probably because most people fail to understand themselves or to act rationally about themselves because they cannot isolate and identify which part of their nature generates certain emotions.

If we give this advice to someone, he may feel that he doesn't have time to be concerned about everyone else. This sounds practical, but this excuse is just a disguise—when a person does not have a realistic reason, he will choose that which appears realistic, such as time. He will convince himself and others that this is the reason. In reality, the person is not making such good use of his time, but he lacks the emotional ability to follow this advice. He can't tolerate conceding to others: "Why should I treat one hundred other people as if they are on my level?" The truth is that the person senses emotional stress to treat so many people this way, but he uses time as his rationale. The stress of contending with others equally and denying his feeling of superiority over them is the obstacle in following this mishna.

Chazal teach that one who is free from these emotions and lives according to wisdom must realize that people's natures vary. He realizes that he is not in competition with them. Rather, he must act with others in accordance with their natures, to his own advantage and to their advantage. The chocham does not view other people as affecting his reality. [He has no aversion to treating others equally, as the chocham does not live competitively. He loses nothing by showing respect to everyone he meets.]

By not taking seriously the value system of others, the chocham's emotions are not in play and he feels no anguish by according equal respect and treatment to everyone. He also finds that he has plenty of time to treat others with respect, even the least significant person. Furthermore, this is a worthwhile activity, "For there is no man who does not have his hour." Why should a person lose out?

The idea that "There is no man who does not have his hour" might seem far-fetched but this is because man's emotions belittle the reality that he will need someone, although statistically he is wrong. The chocham will not allow his emotions to deny this probability as it is worthwhile to follow this advice. The chocham does not feel that following this advice makes him a slave to others. He views others as part of his reality with whom he deals rationally, like he would with any other action.

DO NOT SHUN ANYTHING.

Rejecting the occurrence of a certain event stems from one's narcissism; one's ego twists prospects. But the chocham's analysis of possibilities is rational as he lives with the expectation of what reality dictates—possible and probable phenomena are real to him. A person should maximize every factor that can benefit his life. Be it a person or an event, the chocham anticipates how proper actions, the treatment of others, and the consideration of all possibilities will impact him, and he acts favorably to invite the best reaction.

Man's ego and selfish plans convince him that nothing will impede him. But that is baseless and will hurt a person as he avoids certain people and rejects certain events [which could be instrumental to his success]. The chocham works with reality and acts favorably to all possibilities. Thereby, he does not lose opportunities.

4:4 THE WORST SIN

RABBI LEVITAS, A MAN OF YAVNEH, SAYS, “BE VERY, VERY HUMBLE IN SPIRIT, FOR THE HOPE OF MAN IS WORMS.” RABBI YOCHANAN BEN BEROKA SAYS, “ANYONE WHO DESECRATES THE NAME OF HEAVEN SECRETLY, THEY PUNISH HIM PUBLICLY. THERE IS NO DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN UNINTENTIONAL AND INTENTIONAL WHEN IT COMES TO DESECRATION OF THE NAME.”

Rabbeinu Yona says that one should be excommunicated whether he indulges his ego or completely suppresses his ego to the point that he allows others to humiliate him. A person must have some dignity. Rabbeinu Yona then quotes others who say the proper approach is to not indulge in any part of ego whatsoever. One should have no concerns for self-importance at all, as Rabbi Levitas says, “Be very, very humble in spirit.” Rabbeinu Yona says that this is the halacha. But how can Rabbeinu Yona say that this is a halachic matter? Maimonides says that there is psak [ruling] only in halacha and not regarding philosophy, which is what is discussed here. Halacha concerns which actions a person should perform. But perfection concerns how a person thinks about reality. One cannot rule that reality is A or B. Reality itself determines this, not human psak. Mai-

monides agrees with Rabbeinu Yona that this is the halacha (Hilchos Dayos 2:3).

One should be excommunicated if he shows no dignity because this will—on occasion—degrade kavod ha'adam, the dignity of the human species. This now enters the sphere of halacha, for even though this matter concerns human perfection—a philosophical matter—degradation of human dignity is a halachic matter. Others say that a person has a right to go to the extreme and need not concern himself with the question of degrading human dignity. The dispute centers on whether one must concern himself with human dignity or personal perfection. The psak was that one need not concern himself with human dignity. [The institution regarding respect for man may be bypassed for the self in favor of overcoming one's egotistical emotions.]

Thus, the dispute does not regard perfection, for there is no psak in philosophical matters, but it's about kavod ha'adam and that is a halachic matter. The psak, as Rabbeinu Yona says, is like Rabbi Levitas, and Maimonides agrees.

FOR THE HOPE OF MAN IS WORMS.

A person who is not of low esteem denies his ultimate

fate of becoming a decaying body. One rabbi (a rishon or an acharon) said that man is strange—he looks five years ahead to see to where he will advance, but then he has lost five years of life. But man does not look at that aspect. “The hope of man is worms” means that man is such an unrealistic creature, for he looks forward to something that carries the greatest loss possible. Man looks forward to a fantasy more than he anticipates the reality of being closer to death. The phrase means “Man’s hopes themselves contain worms!”

Immanuel Kant said that man’s desire for immortality must have a real source, and he posited that from here we prove the existence of the soul. But Judaism disagrees and says that the immortality fantasy is generated by the instincts. The prayers on the High Holidays, such as “Man’s foundation is from dust and his end is dust” and all similar phrases, do not attempt to justify immortality, but on the contrary, they seek to break down the emotion. Kant’s drawback was his inability to differentiate from where certain notions emanated. Kant could not differentiate whether his thought emanated from his mind or from his emotions. He thought that certain strong feelings emanate from a realistic part of man, his soul. But they do not, and are mere fantasies, regardless of their intensity.

[RABBI] YOCHANAN BEN BEROKA SAYS, “ANY-ONE WHO DESECRATES THE NAME OF HEAVEN SECRETLY, THEY PUNISH HIM PUBLICLY. THERE IS NO DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN UNINTENTIONAL AND INTENTIONAL WHEN IT COMES TO DESECRATION OF THE NAME.”

We cannot say that this means that one who sins carelessly is equal to one who sins with premeditation. These are two divergent types of sins. Carelessness is not akin to purposeful actions. God will not treat a careless person [as severely] as He treats one who sins with full intent. That would be unjust. Maimonides says that the equation is that both sinners are punished publicly when it comes to desecrating God’s name, but not that the punishments are equal.

However, we must ask where the desecration of God’s name is when the sin is performed secretly. Desecration of God’s name is always a public matter, so this statement does not make sense.

Rabbeinu Yona commences his comments by stating that the desecration of God’s name is public. He quotes the following:

Go serve your idols but not in a way that creates a desecration of God’s name (Ezekiel 20:39).

A desecration of God's name refers to treating God's name without importance. Thus, even secretly one can commit this sin:

You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord (Lev. 19:12).

Swearing falsely by God's name profanes God's name. [We refer to "God's name" and not to God himself, because we do not know what God is. By "God's name" we refer to whatever God is.] Serving idols privately is also a profanation of God's name for one admits to a power other than God, thereby reducing God's significance to nothing.

Even though a typical sin is not a desecration of God's name, if one performs this sin in spite, to show the Torah as worthless, this too is a desecration of God's name. [This is a conditional desecration, but an example of a sin with inherent desecration is idolatry, where the very act profanes God's name.] Desecrating God's name is the worst sin, as Ezekiel teaches.

In terms of how a public desecration of God's name comes into the picture, the person did not take into consideration God's objective that His Torah system should be known, practiced, and respected throughout the world. [This corruption is compounded upon the attitude of

worthlessness that the sinner has toward God.]

Ezekiel says it would be better if one served idols privately as this would not destroy God's objective for mankind. All God's miracles intended to educate the world. But one who desecrates God's name publicly is diametrically opposed to God's plan for mankind. This is the greatest desecration of God's name.

Therefore, profaning God's name can be accomplished through a sin that inherently degrades God, like idol worship [even privately], or it can be through a rejection of God's plan for mankind where one sins [with any sin] publicly to spite the Torah. The latter—disregard for God's will—is worse. The Rav says that Rabbi Akiva's students all died because of a profanation of God's name; one cannot be forgiven by doing teshuvah for such a sin.

Conversely, sanctification of God's name is the greatest mitzvah one can perform, as he promotes the system for which God broke His natural order to gift to mankind. This act of sanctifying God's name shows the greatest relationship between man and God. This person displays what is important to him. On this topic of sanctifying God's name, Maimonides says that if one refrains from sin for no other reason than to follow God's command, like Joseph the Righteous, he sanctifies God's name. In Joseph's case, it was a private matter of not sleeping with Potiphar's wife.

As disregard for God's will is the worst sin, a person—certainly a Torah student—must be on strict guard not to profane God's name, for the profanation is measured in relationship to the sinner. [A Torah student represents God and the Torah. Therefore, his poor actions profane God's name to a higher degree than do others.] Chazal say that in this matter one should assume the status of an important person [a Torah student] in order that he be on high guard against committing a profanation of God's name.

Chazal say that Moshe's prayer to God was the most powerful prayer:

Let not the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth." Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people (Exod. 32:12).

Why was this the most powerful prayer? The purpose of Judaism is for the entire world. Moshe was speaking in terms of God's will, the most important matter.

THERE IS NO DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN UN-INTENTIONAL AND INTENTIONAL WHEN IT COMES TO DESECRATION OF THE NAME.

As Maimonides says, this does not mean that God punishes unintentional sins as He would intentional sins—that would be unjust—rather, the punishments for both are performed publicly.

Generally, unintentional sins are culpable because of negligence. If one mistakes pig meat as kosher, his negligence is an act of sin. But this is not true regarding profaning God's name. Here, the negligence carries with it the element [status] of profaning God's name. This type of negligence relates to God's will. In other sins, the negligence does not carry with it the nature of the sin: One is merely negligent regarding "sin," and not regarding pig meat. There is no difference whether one is careless regarding pig meat or charging interest—his negligence concerns "sin." But regarding profaning God's name, one who does so even unintentionally partakes of the very nature of the sin. [Here, we cannot say he was careless about "sin" because of the severity of the matter, the greatest sin. Just as we refer to carelessness with animal life as "inhumane" but call that same carelessness "manslaughter" in connection with man, carelessness in sin is called just that, while carelessness about desecrating God's name is identified as "profaning God's name," and not merely "unintentional sin." Therefore, both unintentional and intentional profaners are punished publicly.]

ANYONE WHO DESECRATES THE NAME OF
HEAVEN SECRETLY....

This refers specifically to one who profanes God in private. This person is afraid to commit this sin publicly because his framework of reality is public opinion, what we refer to as a “psychological reality.” Therefore, the sinner is revealed in order to break his emotion of preserving public approval. He is punished measure for measure.

Why does this apply only to one who profanes God’s name in private, and not to one who privately sins in any other matter? The private profaner sets up a reality that excludes God. This is the most severe degree of valuing public opinion, where one places public opinion over God. [Other sins performed privately place regard for the public over only that specific sin. For example, if one eats non-kosher privately, he values public opinion more than he does the command of keeping kosher. But one who serves idols privately raises man to a higher status than God. He abandons the reality of God as opposed to the reality of a specific mitzvah.]

4:5 ATTITUDE TOWARD TORAH

RAV YISHMAEL HIS SON SAYS, "ONE WHO STUDIES TORAH SO THAT HE CAN TEACH WILL BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO BOTH STUDY AND TEACH. ONE WHO STUDIES TO PRACTICE WILL BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO STUDY, TO TEACH, TO OBSERVE, AND TO PRACTICE." RABBI TZADOK SAYS, "DO NOT MAKE [THE TORAH] INTO A CROWN WITH WHICH TO AGGRANDIZE YOURSELF, AND [DO NOT MAKE IT] INTO A SPADE WITH WHICH TO DIG INTO THEM." AND THUS, HILLEL USED TO SAY, "AND ONE WHO MAKES USE OF THE CROWN [OF LEARNING] PASSES AWAY." FROM HERE YOU LEARN THAT ANYONE WHO BENEFITS FROM THE WORDS OF THE TORAH REMOVES HIS LIFE FROM THE WORLD.

Rashi comments on "One who studies [Torah] so that he can teach" by saying that the person does so in order for people to call him "Rabbi" and give him honor. This is a classic case of learning lo lishma. But Chazal say:

Rav Yebuda said that Rav said, "A person should always engage in Torah study and the performance of mitzvos, even if he does so not for their own sake, as through the performance of mitzvos not for their own sake one comes to perform them for their own sake" (Talmud Pesachim 50b).

This would endorse a person who learns and performs mitzvos, even for ulterior goals like being called “Rabbi” and to receive honor, as Rashi states. It is strange, but there appears to be a positive element to this behavior, as our mishna says that this person receives divine providence to study and to teach. Apparently, there is some measure of value in this behavior. Ramban cites a verse that corroborates this:

Long life is in her right hand, and in her left hand are riches and honor (Proverbs 3:16).

Chazal comment:

“Do not read, in her left hand (b’smolab), but read, left-handedly (b’masmeilim bah): those who follow the Torah not for the proper purpose.” (“Left” always refers to improper acts.)

Thus, people who learn Torah even for improper reasons still enjoy wealth and honor. It would seem from this statement that there is a level of engagement in Torah and mitzvos that, although not performed for its true goal, contains some value. The implication is that the greatness of Torah benefits even those who follow it left-handedly. Rashi agrees. But what demands this benefit for such “left-handed” followers?

This wealth and honor only regards Torah study, not the performance of mitzvos. If one performed a mitzvah not for the true objective it would have no value as the mind is disengaged. But Torah study is different. Even if one learns for honor, it is impossible for him not to appreciate God's wisdom. Even if one is primarily motivated by honor, once he engages in learning Torah he must appreciate its brilliance.

“Listen: All who are thirsty, go to the water” (Isaiah 55:1). And words of Torah are compared to water because the Torah only endures in a man who is crushed and lowly, but not in a man who is proud; [just] like water also does not stand on mountains, but rather in [lowly] valleys (Talmud Taanis 7a) (Sefer HaChinuch 419).

One who is completely given over to arrogance cannot become a talmid chocham for his ego distorts his thinking. But one who learns for ulterior motivation, as discussed in our mishna, must be on a high enough level to learn. Thus, he has a different personality type than the arrogant man. A person who learns so that he can break down others (lomeid l'kantare) is a third type of personality, one who gains nothing. But a person who learns for the sake of gaining honor is not precluded from simultaneously appreciating God's wisdom.

There is another version of Rashi that reads that one who learns to gain honor is not given the ability to learn and to teach. This view holds that this poor motivation provides no benefits to this person. But if honor is only one element of a person's motivation to learn, this would equate to those practicing in a left-handed manner and therefore there is some benefit. Rabbeinu Yona comments:

“One who studies Torah so that he can teach.” The explanation is not, God forbid, about studying so that one can teach and not to do, since such a one is given into his hand neither to learn nor to teach. Rather it is to do [according to] that which is forbidden and that which is permissible, and not to toil and look into it much; (rather) he will find something forbidden in the permissible things. Instead, he takes things according to their simple meaning. Because of that, he will only “be given the opportunity” according to his thought, [which is] to study and to teach.

“One who studies so that he can practice will be given the opportunity to study, to teach, and to practice.”

He wants to say that his intention is to analyze his learning so as to know the truth of the matters, and his will is to toil several days and [even] years to fathom [even] a small thing and to conduct him-

self according to the truth; behold, this is one who studied in order to practice—as the whole thrust of his intent is only that his action be truthful. Therefore, he “will be given the opportunity to study, to teach, and to practice,” as it is all included in action.

Rabbeinu Yona delineates different levels of talmidim. There are two attitudes toward halacha. One person simply desires knowledge of how to act. His concern is to feel that he is in line with halacha, and nothing more. This person functions on a positive level as he values halacha. His sense of self needs to feel that he operates properly.

But the highest level is the person who would spend years to understand one point. He is plagued by the desire for truth. What he seeks in his learning is to follow the truth. He does not seek to simply know the halacha; he desires to know the reality behind it. He is a different type of individual who is driven [by a love to see the reality of the halachic system that God created].

“One who learns so that he can act” does not refer to a personality type seeking only to know what actions to follow. This refers to a person who desires to learn so that every aspect of his existence is in line with reality. This person views the Torah as the blueprint of reality and truth.

Regarding learning for its own sake or not, Talmud Pesachim 50b compares two verses:

On the topic of reward for a mitzvah fulfilled without intent, Rava raised a contradiction: It is written, “For Your mercy is great until the heavens, and Your truth reaches the skies” (Psalms 57:11); and it is written elsewhere, “For Your mercy is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches the skies” (Psalms 108:5). How so? How can these verses be reconciled? The gemara explains that the verse saying that God’s mercy is “above” the heavens refers to a case where one performs a mitzvah for its own sake, and the verse saying that God’s mercy reaches “until” the heavens refers to a case where one performs a mitzvah not for its own sake.

The gemara then explains the [reason one benefits in the] latter case:

Even a mitzvah performed with ulterior motives garners reward, as Rav Yehuda said that Rav said, “A person should always engage in Torah study and the performance of mitzvos, even if he does so not for their own sake, as through the performance of mitzvos not for their own sake one gains understanding and comes to perform them for their own sake.”

“Until” the heavens means that one’s providence is limited to natural law. This refers to the person who learns

Torah and performs mitzvos not for their own sake. But when one learns and performs mitzvos properly—lishma—he enjoys God’s providence, which is unlimited and unrestricted by natural law [above the heavens].

The Rash asks how we can say that one should learn not for its own sake but to be called “Rabbi.” For in Brachos 17a it is written that one who does not learn for its own sake is better off not having been born! The Rash answers that Brachos 17a refers to a person who learns for honor and pride or to break down others, and that he does not learn to act on what he learns. But there is yet another case of learning not for its own sake....

Pesachim 50b says that some are diligent/zealous and they gain, and some are diligent and they lose :

There is one who is diligent and rewarded for his diligence; and there is one who is diligent and penalized because of his diligence; there is one who is lazy and rewarded; and there is one who is lazy and penalized. How so?

Diligent and rewarded refers to one who works the entire week but does not work on Friday. Diligent and penalized is one who works all week [including] Friday. Lazy and rewarded is one who does not work the entire week [including] Friday. Lazy and penalized is one who does not work the entire week but works on Friday

to complete the work he neglected to perform during the week. Rava says, "With regard to those women of Maboza, even though they do not perform labor on erev Shabbos, it is because of excessive pampering, as they don't work on any other day. Even so, we call them lazy and rewarded. Despite the fact that their laziness is not motivated by piety, their inactivity has a positive aspect to it."

Shabbos reflects the perfect existence and therefore one should look forward to it. The person who does not work on Fridays anticipates Shabbos and frees himself from work on Friday to prepare for Shabbos. Shabbos is a day to engage God's wisdom and abandon human technology.

The diligent person who is penalized works all week, including Friday. He is very productive, but his productivity is an end and not a means for pursuing God's wisdom. Thus, he loses out. Friday is the barometer that measures who values Shabbos, and this diligent person does not use Friday to prepare for Shabbos.

The lazy person who is penalized does not work all week, but he does work on Friday. The lazy person who is rewarded does not work all week including Friday. What is his reward? The Rash refers to this person as one who does a proper act but not for its own sake, lo lishma, for he performs a mitzvah without the proper intent. [The mitzvah

being abstention from working on Friday.]

To suggest that a person who stays in bed all week, including Friday, should receive a reward for not working on Friday is nonsensical. The gemara says that peoples' actions are multi-determined. The lazy person who is rewarded is not so lazy that he cannot contemplate work. It's merely one motivating factor. But on Friday there is a certain additional factor for his laziness and that stems from another source: his recognition of Shabbos, for which he prepares. Therefore, he is rewarded for that element.

This gemara points to two types of perfection: the perfection of the psyche and the perfection of the soul. The perfection of the soul must also include the psyche's perfection. Thus, if one loves wisdom (soul) but he is lazy about learning (psyche), his soul is not truly perfected. Nevertheless, there is a dichotomy in his personality. The gemara says that a person might know the correct ideas but a part of his nature does not follow through with them. The lazy person is superior to the diligent person, who most people praise more highly. People gauge productivity as praiseworthy, but they fail to investigate the realm of that person's productivity. The diligent person who is penalized, in fact, is not productive in terms of the true values, i.e., Shabbos. [He values his work on Friday more than he values preparing for Shabbos.] And then there is the lazy

person, who, although emotionally weak and unproductive, will reap more reward than the diligent person because he recognizes Shabbos as the ultimate aim in life. On Fridays, this lazy person appreciates that it is the eve of Shabbos and therefore abstains from working.

The lazy person who is penalized proves the point. This person does not work all week, but he does work on Friday. But he does so because basically he is lazy, and at times he is motivated to work, and if this occurs on Friday, he will work then. This shows that the philosophical concept of preparing for Shabbos is alien to him. But the lazy person who never works, even on Friday, possesses the concept of Shabbos. Therefore, he is more perfected than the diligent person who works six days a week. This lazy person is rewarded for not working on Fridays.

A person should always engage in Torah study and in the performance of mitzvos, even if he does so not for their own sake, as through the performance of mitzvos not for their own sake one gains understanding and comes to perform them for their own sake.

The Rash says that this principle refers to the lazy person who does not work all week including Friday. Although the Torah and mitzvos are not his sole motivation, it is pos-

sible that once he gets involved in both activities they will awaken his nature to appreciate them. But the Rash says that if one's motivation in Torah is solely to gain honor and create a name for himself, then it is worthless, and he fits the personality described in Berachos, "[He would have been] better off if he was never born."

It is interesting that the Rash distinguished between a person who is multi-determined and a person who has a singular objective. The former is in a good state and his actions—although not performed for their own sake—are acceptable. The lo lishma personality type refers to a person who learns for the wrong reason—so that he can be called a rabbi. But that is not the essence of his learning and he is aware of that. If, however, his sole motivation is honor, he should not have been born.

In the next part of the gemara, Rava asks:

It is written, "For Your mercy is great until the heavens, and Your truth reaches the skies" (Psalms 57:11); and it is written elsewhere: "For Your mercy is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches the skies" (Psalms 108:5). How so? How can these verses be reconciled? The gemara explains that the verse saying that God's mercy is "above" the heavens refers to a case where one performs a mitzvah for its own sake, and the verse saying that God's mer-

cy reaches "until" the heavens refers to a case where one performs a mitzvah not for its own sake.

Apparently, if performing an act (Torah study or a mitzvah) not for its own sake—lo lishma—would not ultimately lead the person to perform that act for its own sake—lishma—it would be worthless. In the end, there are three levels: The lowest level is if one's sole motivation is not for the sake of Torah and mitzvos, he is better off not having been born. At the other extreme is the highest level, the person whose sole motivation is for the sake of Torah and mitzvos. Then there is the middle level, one who does not act for the sake of Torah or mitzvos, but who can eventually arrive at that highest level. But if he could never arrive at that level, he is wasting his time. In terms of performance per se—assiyas hamitzvah—one who remains on the lo lishma level has no perfection.

God did not give man mitzvos for him to perform them not for their own sake. This is not an acceptable level of human function. There is a minimal measure of activity and intent required for an action to register as "performance of a mitzvah, assiyas hamitzvah." Nevertheless, one who is not on the level to act for the sake of the action should still learn Torah and perform mitzvos. He should do

so not because this renders him a gavra [man] involved in mitzvah, but because it would permit him to become one. For one's actions to be considered valuable, the whole person must be involved. There is another level:

Long life is in her right hand, and in her left hand are riches and honor (Proverbs 3:16).

Even one who acts left-handedly enjoys some benefit, but this does not refer to one who does things lo lishma. Unlike the lo lishma personality type, the person described in Proverbs has wisdom as his objective, but he is a tzaddik she'aino gamur, an incomplete righteous person. The tzaddik she'aino gamur has a defect; he has proper primary motivation but he is drawn aside by his emotions. However, he does not have “long life” because that quality implies the perfect state of existence. But the tzaddik gamur—the truly perfected man—lives in the perfect state every day and partakes to the highest degree of human existence, happiness, and all aspects of life. “Long life” in the previous verse does not refer to longevity, but to the quality of each day. But the person who does things lo lishma would not have wealth and honor [and certainly not length of days].

RABBI TZADOK SAYS, “DO NOT MAKE [THE TORAH] INTO A CROWN WITH WHICH TO AGGRANDIZE YOURSELF, AND NOT INTO A SPADE WITH WHICH TO DIG INTO THEM.” AND THUS, HILLEL USED TO SAY, “AND ONE WHO MAKES USE OF THE CROWN [OF LEARNING] PASSES AWAY.” FROM HERE YOU LEARN THAT ANYONE WHO BENEFITS FROM THE WORDS OF THE TORAH REMOVES HIS LIFE FROM THE WORLD.

The Torah cannot be utilized for any gain whatsoever. To do so renders Torah a means, and it cannot be a means because it is the ultimate end, which is why Chazal opposed the acceptance of a wage to learn—this renders the Torah subservient to something else. The only condition in which one may accept a wage for learning Torah is when one would thereby suffer the loss of work while learning [viz., by teaching or providing a ruling on a law. This is referred to as *schar batalla*. Rabbi Chait elaborated on this matter at length in “Pirkei Avos: Chapter 1” page 153.]

4:6 HONORING THE TORAH AND PROVIDENCE

RABBI YOSI SAYS, “ANYONE WHO HONORS THE TORAH WILL BE HONORED BY OTHERS. ANYONE WHO DESECRATES THE TORAH WILL BE DESECRATED BY OTHERS.”

The sefer Torah has an entity of kedusha unlike a gemara, which has no kedusha. A gemara is Torah She-ba'al Peh and was originally not meant to be committed to writing. Therefore, why can't one place a gemara on the floor or sit on a bench while a gemara rests there? According to Rabbeinu Yona, it is prohibited to sit at the same level at which a gemara rests, even if on a non-adjointing bench. [Perhaps when at the same level as one's seat, the gemara is equated to, and degraded to that which is merely used to sit on.]

The nature of this prohibition is a degradation to those who learn and teach Torah [those who wrote the gemara or are mentioned in it]. Sitting on the seat upon which a gemara rests expresses disrespect for Abaye and Rava. And the problem is not with degrading the abstract Torah, since Torah She-ba'al Peh was not supposed to be written. Therefore, the gemara is not an entity. And if a person commits

those ideas to writing, it is not possible to degrade the ideas as the writing is merely a medium, but the ideas themselves cannot be embodied. From this mishna, it would seem that it is not the ideas that one degrades, rather one degrades the Torah's students and authors. When one has no respect for a gemara he degraded Ravina and Rav Ashi, as they wrote the Talmud.

Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the Lord alien fire, which He had not commanded upon them (Lev. 10:1).

What was the sin of Aaron's sons? Rav Yisrael says that they drank wine and were drunk when they entered the Beis Hamikdash. Rabbi Eliezer says that they gave a halachic ruling in front of their teacher Moshe. This latter position is understandable as it relates to the Beis Hamikdash, which is where rulings were given. According to a midrash, Aaron's sons said, while looking at Moshe and Aaron, "When will these two old men die so that we can become the leaders?" This midrash is in line with what Rabbi Eliezer says: They sought leadership. Thus, the act of leadership is just like the Beis Hamikdash—that is the relationship to which this midrash points. If one has improper motivation regarding leadership this is akin to improper Beis

Hamikdash—service, he is culpable with his life. Leadership of the Jewish nation is equated to Beis Hamikdash—service in a sanctified location. This explains why Aaron’s sons were killed:

And fire came forth from the Lord and consumed them; thus, they died before the Lord (Ibid. 10:2).

Moshe then comforts his brother, Aaron:

Then Moshe said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord meant when He said, “Through those near to Me I will show Myself holy and gain glory before all the people.” And Aaron was silent (Ibid. 10:3).

Chazal state that Moshe said the following to Aaron:

My brother Aaron, I knew the Beis Hamikdash would be sanctified by those who are close to God, and I thought that referred to either myself or to you. Now I see that your sons are greater than both of us.

This is difficult, for Aaron’s sons died because of an alien fire and not because they were holy people. [Yet Moshe praises them.] Maimonides cites (on mishna 4:5) that Rebbe did not wish to give his wealth to a person who

was not a talmid chocham. Rebbe's student Rav Yonasan ben Amram was impoverished but did not want to use his Torah reputation for any benefit, as the mishna warns against such practice. Therefore, Yonasan ben Amram came to Rebbe [somehow unrecognizable] and asked him for food. Rebbe asked him to recite his learnings, to which Yonasan ben Amram denied having any knowledge, so Rebbe did not wish to give him food. Yonasan ben Amram replied to Rebbe, "Feed me like a dog and a raven, like a God feeds these impure species." Rebbe then had no choice, but later regretted that his money was used to support an ignoramus. Afterward, it was found out that this was in fact his student Yonasan ben Amram. Rebbe was then relieved and said, "Let everyone come and I will feed them all." Initially Rebbe regretted that his money was used to benefit an ignoramus. Why then did he now invite all people [which would clearly include many ignoramuses]?

Rebbe felt that if by offering his possessions to everyone he would come to feed a talmid chocham [who must be among the masses], then this would not be a loss, and this is how he must help the talmid chocham [who did not wish to use his reputation for benefit]. Rebbe only regretted supporting an ignoramus exclusively. But the case of Yonasan ben Amram showed Rebbe that he could support a talmid chocham by supporting everyone.

Although Rebbe had to respond to Yonasan ben Amram, his regret was not because he did something wrong but because he became an object through which something undesirable occurred, that his funds were to be used by an ignoramus, indicating that God's providence was not with him.

Moshe told Aaron that if anyone other than his sons were to have entered the Beis Hamikdash even in a drunken state, they would not have died, for they would not have been on a sufficient level of perfection through which God could use them to make an example of: "Through those near to Me I will make Myself holy." A typical person's actions are not significant enough nor worthy of the punishment. But a perfected person, whose actions are important, is worthy of God demonstrating through him the sanctity of the Beis Hamikdash: "Through those close to Me, will I be sanctified."

A person comes under two frameworks: He is viewed in terms of his actions and also in terms of himself as an object. Moshe didn't speak in terms of the act of sin, which of course existed. Moshe spoke of Aaron's sons in terms of their person, their status. He told Aaron that in order for sanctification to take place it must be through men of stature.

Rabbeinu Yona says that we can determine if a person is evil or righteous by whom he defends and supports. If a

person degrades Maimonides, we know he is an evil person. The question is, why did the verse say that only God knows man's heart?

When they arrived and he saw Eliav, he thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands before Him." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Pay no attention to his appearance or to his stature, for I have rejected him. For not as man sees [does the Lord see]; man sees only what is visible, but the Lord sees into the heart" (I Samuel 16:6, 7).

How then can man know the heart of another person?

Rabbeinu Yona says that man's inability to know his friend's heart regards matters of apostasy:

Because a person cannot distinguish if his friend is an apostate because this matter is hidden in the heart of apostates. But in their words, they appear as though they believe.

When Samuel spoke to Eliav, he must have spoken with him [at length] and did not assume he was God's messiah based merely on surface information. That would be nonsensical. Samuel must have assessed Eliav as a wise individual with good character. But Samuel was wrong, for even a prophet cannot know a man's heart: "Man sees only

what is visible, but the Lord sees into the heart.” Man can see only the superficial personality, and no further.

God did not tell Samuel from the outset which of Jesse’s sons was to become king, as God wanted Samuel to experience making a false evaluation to teach him the lesson that man cannot know the heart of another man.

Perfection refers to one whose ideas of God are on the highest level. Human perfection always traces back to one thing: knowledge of God. A righteous man’s knowledge of God is different from that of others. By mentioning apostasy, Rabbeinu Yona refers to a lack of knowledge of God. He says that a person can’t assess another person’s perfection by his words alone. People know what to say. They speak in a manner not necessarily to deceive others, but in a manner that they feel is proper, like one who says, “Baruch Hashem” a number of times in a single conversation. This does not necessarily stem from an inner understanding. Such a person does not express knowledge of, or agreement with, the Baruch Hashem principle, “Just as one blesses good [occurrences], he must also bless evil [occurrences].” People say, “Baruch Hashem” as they feel this is accepted practice and behavior. Thus, one’s words do not necessarily stem from an inner understanding and perception, where he is in line with the Creator at every moment.

However, when it comes to a character trait that is ex-

pressed from a person's nature and his level, that can be assessed. Thus, when one identifies with a wicked person or a righteous person, this represents the true self. One's identification with others is a true barometer of his values, providing the context is not subject to motives to contrive or deceive. But Rabbeinu Yona qualifies the knowledge one can possess of others regarding their psychological orientation. Even when one defends a wicked person, Rabbeinu Yona says he has a "trace" of evil—shemetz rishuss—but not that he is an evil person. Only God can know a person fully. In terms of one's perfection, his intellectual level, and his movement toward God, we have no idea of peoples' energies and strivings in these areas.

ANYONE WHO HONORS THE TORAH WILL BE
HONORED BY OTHERS.

What is the relationship between honoring the Torah and receiving honor from people? Is this causal? And what determines that this relationship should be so? The assumption would have to be that everyone respects the Torah, and we know this is not so.

Maimonides doesn't comment here on Pirkei Avos, but he mentions this mishna in the last halacha of *Hilchos Sefer Torah*:

Anyone sitting before a scroll of the law should be inspired with a sense of earnestness, awe, and reverence, for it is a faithful witness concerning all who come into the world, as it says, "It shall be therefore a witness against you" (Deut. 31:26). All possible honor should be shown it. The ancient sages said, "Whomever honors the Torah will receive honor from his fellow creatures. Whomever disgraces the Torah will be disgraced by his fellow creatures" (Pirkei Avos 4:6).

Before we approach the cause and effect relationship between one honoring the Torah and his receipt of honor from others, there is another interesting principle to be derived from this statement of Chazal, and it is one that many people misunderstand.

When one is young, as Maimonides says, he serves God from fear. This refers to serving God emotionally and not intellectually. During his school years he follows his rebbe based on fear. This is a low level and is the level of people who are bereft of chochmas haTorah, knowledge of the Torah. A higher level is attained once a person gains knowledge and enters the circle of the chochamim. This level cannot be equated to serving God from fear. In chapter 10 of *Hilchos Teshuvah*, Maimonides says as follows:

If one follows the Torah or its wisdom to obtain the Torah blessings or the afterlife

and he veers from sin to be saved from the Torah's curses and not forfeit the afterlife, it is not fitting to serve God in this manner. For one who serves God this way serves Him from fear and this is not the high level of the prophets or the sages. We only allow ignoramuses to continue on this path until they gain knowledge and then they change their path and come to serve God on a different level (Hilchos Tesbuvah 10:1).

There are many difficulties in understanding this transition from emotional religiosity to the level of the prophets and the chochamim. One is that when a person realizes that his emotional approach is wrong, he feels that all emotions are evil, and he completely abandons all emotions. This can be dangerous. For example, one may rethink the honor he gives to God. He might think his previous honor was based on an infantile idea, "Just as I respect my father, I respect God in order that He too will not get upset." When this person advances in his knowledge of God, he realizes this is false as he learns that God does not get upset [He has no emotions]. This can lead one to abandon the act of honoring God, such as dressing nicely for Shabbos. He will feel there is no need to do so.

Judaism does not take this approach. According to Judaism, emotions are worthless [but only] in their original

form and expression. But Judaism does not abandon the emotions for they are a part of a person's make up. Judaism demands that emotions be directed toward the source of wisdom: God. Maimonides mentions that on Fridays the chochamim would dress up, cover their heads, go out the door, and say, "Let us go out to greet the King Shabbos." Thus, the emotions of respect should be engaged but should be directed toward the ultimate reality. Teshuvah too displays the endorsement of the emotions as one should feel embarrassed and poorly about himself [when he sins and requires teshuvah]. Judaism demands that the emotions are directed toward the Torah's objectives.

Maimonides says that one who sits before a sefer Torah should sense awe and reverence. Human emotions are to be applied to life and not abandoned.

We now understand how Maimonides explains this mishna. One applies his emotions to Torah objectives and gaining God's wisdom; he recognizes that God communicated with mankind and gave us His Torah. This is the reality that demands awe and reverence. If one grasps this reality, his emotions must be aroused, and they must permeate him. This applies equally to prayer. If a person were to realize that he stands before the Creator of the universe and that He listens to his prayer, it would be impossible not to sense awe and reverence. When King David danced be-

fore the ark with all his might, his wife Michal ridiculed him because he looked like a peasant. King David replied that she was wrong to think that a person should refrain from expressing his emotions. One should engage his emotions and direct them toward God. King David said, “The greatest honor for me is that I am completely involved and that I dance with all my might before God.” The Gra was strict about dancing in front of the Torah on Simchas Torah. He went out himself and danced in front of the Torah.

Therefore, our mishna demands that man apply his emotions to honoring the Torah. This halacha does not merely address action but requires an emotional element as well.

Regarding the cause and effect relationship, the mishna says that if one has this reverence for the Torah, people will honor him. This obviously applies to all people, even to those who are not on his level. This is an important principle and appears in many places. Judaism maintains that man possesses a type of unconscious, a different unconscious than that described by the psychological world. It is a “rational unconscious.” This element in man recognizes truth. Rashi identifies it:

When the Ark was to set out, Moshe would say: “Rise, Oh Lord! May Your enemies be scattered, and may Your foes flee before You!” (Num. 10:35).

This refers to the Jews' travels through dangerous regions. But the verse should have read, "May the Jews' enemies be scattered," and not God's enemies. Rashi explains:

This refers to those who hate the Jews. For whomever hates the Jews, hates the One who spoke and [caused] the world to come into existence.

This shows that there is an unconscious in man that recognizes God. And this recognition of God—by evil people—[creates great conflict] and must be fought and suppressed. But the recognition is there. This is the key to anti-Semitism. Anyone who hates the Jew wishes to deny the reality of the "One who spoke and [caused] the world to come into existence." From the Torah itself, despite its very abbreviated information on the surface, man recognizes the truth [embodied by the Jews' representation of the Torah] and then man hates the Jew [as a rejection of God and His system, which oppose the evil person]. The verse Maimonides quotes teaches that the Torah is that testimony: "It shall be therefore a witness against you" (Deut. 31:26).

Anti-Semitism is a universal obsession because it strikes at an unconscious part of man that tries to deny the truth

that he senses. Man must hate those who represent the truth of God and His opposition to wicked individuals. That being the case, people will sense that one who honors the Torah operates on an objective plane [the plane of truth] and this strikes at the core of others, who thereby recognize that this person is on a different level. [Thus, our mishna can be explained by saying that there is a metaphysical unconsciousness in man that recognizes the reality of the Torah, and this occurs when a person sees someone respecting the Torah—the Jew—which is the source of the testimony to God’s reality. Thus, one who honors the Torah is honored by man, that honor being the recognition that the Jew represents truth. Despite anti-Semitism, the recognition, i.e., the honor, is present.]

They shall serve as signs and wonders for you and your offspring for all time (Deut. 28:46).

When the curses befell the Jews, the verse says these curses would serve as “signs and wonders for other nations.” How does this work? The nations reject the Torah! But, as the nations view our punishment as signs and wonders, they view it as divine punishment for our abandonment of the Torah.

And later generations will ask—the children who succeed you, and foreigners who come from distant lands and see the plagues and diseases that the Lord has inflicted upon that land, all its soil devastated by sulfur and salt, beyond sowing and producing, no grass growing in it, just like the upheaval of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in His fierce anger—all the nations will ask, “Why did the Lord do this to this land [of Israel]? Why such an awful wrath?” They will say, “Because [the Jews] forsook the covenant that the Lord, God of their fathers, made with them when He freed them from the land of Egypt (Deut. 29:21, 24).

This proves that there is an unconscious part of man that recognizes the truth. [Other nations might verbally reject the Torah, but they will blame our punishments on the truth of the Torah’s curses.]

Maimonides says one is honored by others through divine assistance, since the person honored the Torah.

Pirkei Avos 4:9 states a similar idea:

RABBI YONATAN SAYS, “ANYONE WHO IMPLEMENTS THE TORAH IN POVERTY, WILL IN THE END IMPLEMENT IT IN WEALTH. AND ANYONE WHO DISREGARDS THE TORAH IN WEALTH, WILL IN THE END DISREGARD IT IN POVERTY.”

Maimonides comments:

He said that anyone that is occupied with Torah and is poor and needy and - with all of this - pains himself to be occupied with it; in the end he will be occupied with it in wealth, such that there not be anything to disturb him from the reading. And one who is not occupied with Torah because of his multitude of money [so that] his involvement is in eating and in drinking and in rest; in the end he will become impoverished and time will be tight for him - until the reason for his neglect of the reading will be his preoccupation with bread for him to eat.

Rabbeinu Yona quotes Koheles 7:12:

For to be in the shelter of wisdom is to also be in the shelter of money, and the advantage of intelligence is that wisdom preserves the life of he who possesses it.

Rabbeinu Yona learns this as a natural phenomenon. A wise man will apply his wisdom to every area. Judaism views wisdom where every aspect of one's soul is permeated by knowledge; one's entire personality is [driven by] wisdom. When this is so enacted by a chocham, he will earn money easily.

There is an important idea here regarding providence.

Other religions view providence in line with their wish fulfillment, but Judaism maintains that we don't understand [the nature of] God's providence. For that would mean we comprehend God. Regardless of this ignorance, we know providence to be true.

In the ninth chapter of *Hilchos Teshuvah*, Maimonides writes as follows:

God gave us the Torah, a tree of life. One who fulfills what is written in it and understands it soundly merits Olam Haba. And the Torah promised us that if one pursues the Torah all matters that might prevent our following the Torah will be removed—like illness, war, and hunger—and God will give us all the good—satiation, peace, and wealth—so we won't need to spend time in matters that the body needs, but we will be free to learn Torah and engage wisdom and fulfill mitzvah so we might merit Olam Haba (Ibid. 9:1).

We learn from here that this is a promise of providence. Moshe obtained a concept of providence through prophecy, but we do not understand it. As we said, we do not understand God, but there are elements of providence we can understand. These two statements [Pirkei Avos 4:6 and 4:9] provide principles.

We see people who learned Torah but live in poverty and never became rich. How can this be [in light of Pirkei Avos' two statements promising honor and wealth]? Maimonides even says that one will encounter an overabundance of wealth. He won't need to think about his finances at all. That is the blessing. According to Rabbeinu Yona, the Torah transforms the person naturally into someone who becomes wise at earning a living. But he also knows how to handle himself personally regarding his expenditures. As the chocham pursues wisdom as his focus, his expenditures are all for this goal [and therefore he has far fewer needs and spends far less]. But this wealth depends on the particular situation. One living in a poverty-stricken society will not have it so easy.

If one who follows the Torah benefits not naturally but from providence, how is it possible that one who learns in poverty does not receive the blessing of learning in a state of wealth? [As stated, we see people who live a Torah lifestyle but remain in poverty.]

It is a natural process for a chocham to become a prophet. But in certain cases, prophecy can be withheld from him. Thus, we have general natural laws, but there may arise situations of which we are ignorant and that override the natural course. Our two statements are universals regarding providence. Mishnas 4:6 and 4:9, that respectively

promise honor and wealth to those who honor the Torah and study it even when poor, are universals regarding providence.

We must live according to these universals, which are as follows: Honor provides man with emotional satisfaction, which is no doubt the most powerful human emotion. But this emotion for recognition has only one purpose: to satisfy a person's need for recognition. It is an emotional objective that is worthless. But there is a purpose for honor: to bring man to recognize God:

"God you shall fear," including talmidei chochamim.

"Honor your father and mother"; the Torah equated their honor to God's honor.

Honor to one's rabbi is honor to God.

We see there is a realm of reality where [human] honor plays a role. In accordance with what we said, one should direct one's emotions to reality. Here too there is a situation of honor that benefits mankind. But that honor is not for the person. For example, Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi was world renowned, but he said that he did not partake in or sense even a pinky's worth of all the honor bestowed upon him, as the honor was truly for God. The gemara says that

ever since Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, there was never such Torah, fame, and wealth found in one person. Thus, fame and wealth are not contradictory to Torah as, in Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi's case, they were used to honor God.

The same applies to wealth. Some people engage in the fantasy of wealth, so they are involved in pleasure in their fantasy life, but in reality, they are in pain. One might accumulate massive wealth but then he realizes his life is coming to an end and he questions what he can possibly buy. Wealth is wasteful in this manner. But there is a true place for wealth, as Maimonides says, and this is when it enables man the freedom to pursue God's wisdom.

The two statements teach that although we don't understand God's providence in particular, we can understand the general trend of providence, which is that it follows the world of reality [when man follows God and the Torah—reality—providence steps in to assist one's life]. There exists a providence for the type of honor that benefits mankind [and this is the honor that is ultimately directed toward] God's wisdom and the world of ideas. Thus, if one follows the Torah even though he is impoverished, he will eventually follow a Torah lifestyle when he becomes wealthy. Just as in business one is successful when following universal principles [like investing in a rising stock and not in a falling stock] so too, one who follows the uni-

versal principles of providence will realize success. Just as there exist universals in physical reality [business], there are universals in metaphysical reality regarding providence. One should live according to these metaphysical universals just as he lives according to physical universals. Both are equally real.

Pirkei Avos teaches that there exist universal laws that one who honors the Torah will himself be honored, and one who engages in God's wisdom will be freed from his burdens and be enabled to continue his Torah studies with even less need to care for his financial situation.

These are general principles, but in certain cases there may be considerations of which we are unaware, known only by God, that a person may remain poor. Similarly, in business we cannot be 100 percent certain that one who makes proper decisions will be guaranteed success, as certain particulars exist in business too. But a wise person follows the universal principles.

One who seeks emotional and infantile religious security [a 100 percent guarantee of wealth and honor] cannot benefit from Pirkei Avos as Pirkei Avos demonstrates the world of wisdom concerning universals. It does not offer 100 percent security, but rather the universal principles of life and providence.

ANYONE WHO DESECRATES THE TORAH WILL
BE DESECRATED BY OTHERS.

Rabbeinu Yona says that this refers to the statement by the rabbis : “One who is derogatory [megaleh panim] regarding the Torah has no share in the afterlife.”

The sages taught in a baraisa that with regard to the verse, “But the person who acts high-handedly, whether he is born in the land, or a stranger, blasphemes the Lord” (Num. 15:30). This is a reference to Mennashe ben Chizkiyah, the king of Israel, who would sit and teach flawed interpretations of Torah narratives.

The implication of one who acts with a high hand is something ostentatious, open, and derogatory. But what precisely it is, the verse does not say. Some say this refers to cursing God. Chazal say it refers to Mennashe ben Chizkiyah, who would interpret Torah stories as nonsensical, as the gemara cites:

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); or “And Reuben went in the days of the wheat harvest and found duda’im in the field” (Gen. 30:14)?

Rashi says that Mennashe meant to ridicule what Moshe wrote as inconsequential matters. Thus, a megaleh panim b'Torah refers to a person who brazenly mocks another (Mennashe mocking Moshe) through Torah means.

The gemara continues:

A divine voice emerged and said to him, "You sit and speak against your brother, you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done, and should I have kept silent you would imagine that I was like you, but I will reprove you, and set the matter before your eyes" (Psalms 50:20-21).

Another verse in Isaiah says:

Woe unto them who draw iniquity with worthless cords, and sin as with a cart rope (Isaiah 5:18).

The phrase "worthless cords" means that Mennashe sinned without any enjoyment, without any benefit. Rashi says "pulling sin with worthless ropes" refers to one who entices his evil connection. There are two types of sinners: one who is overcome by a strong impulse, and one who seeks to arouse his instincts. The gemara continues:

Rabbi Asi says, "This is a reference to the evil inclination. Initially, it seems like a flimsy thread and ultimately it seems like a sturdy cart rope."

Psychologically, the instincts seem weak at first. That is, in the moment when one is not overpowered by his instincts, the instincts appear innocuous. But when overpowered by his instincts, that same person views his instincts as invincible.

The gemara teaches that man never has a realistic evaluation of his instincts. One moment they appear weak and at other times they appear powerful. The inability to properly evaluate one's emotions is because a person assesses them while he is not under their sway. The gemara continues:

With regard to that verse that we came to discuss, in any event, what is the significance of the phrase in the verse, "And Lotan's sister was Timna"? Timna was the daughter of kings, as it is written, "The chief of Lotan" (Gen. 36:29), and "The chief of Timna" (Gen. 36:40), and each chief is a member of a monarchy, albeit without a crown. That is why they are called chief and not king.

Timna sought to convert. She came before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and they did not accept her. She became a concubine of

Eliphaz, son of Esau, and said, "It is preferable that I become a maidservant for this nation, and I will not be a noblewoman for another nation." Ultimately, Amalek, son of Eliphaz, emerged from her, and that tribe afflicted the Jewish people. What is the reason that the Jewish people were punished by suffering at the hand of Amalek? It is because they should not have rejected her when she sought to convert.

Chazal say that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob failed to properly investigate Timna and therefore were punished through Amalek.

Returning to the main part of the gemara, Mennashe said that Moshe should not have written "And Lotan's sister was Timna." What was Mennashe's error? The gemara itself says it is a good question, and yet the gemara says this questioning is called megaleh panim b'Torah.

Chazal teach that one has the right to investigate the intent of a verse. But one can never be critical of the Torah like Mennashe demonstrated, and ask, "Why did the author write this?" or "How did he choose to write it?" Mennashe portrayed the behavior of a Bible critic. He denied God's authorship by asking, "Why did Moshe write...?" One cannot treat the Torah like any other book and critique it—that is heresy. Bible criticism can be likened to questioning the design of the universe. To say, "Why were atoms created

this way, I would have created them differently” is clearly nonsensical and is in the same vein as Mennashe’s questions. [The universe is brilliant, and man cannot perform such an act of creation.] To critique creation is to place oneself on the same plane as God, and this applies equally to critiquing God’s Torah.

Chazal cite a verse in Psalms in connection with Mennashe:

And to the wicked, God said, “Who are you to recite My laws, and mouth the terms of My covenant, seeing that you spurn My discipline and brush My words aside? When you see a thief, you fall in with him and throw in your lot with adulterers; you devote your mouth to evil and yoke your tongue to deceit; you are busy maligning your brother, defaming the son of your mother” (Psalms 50:16-20).

What is the meaning of the verse “Who are you to recite My laws?” Does this mean that King David saw wicked people sitting and learning? It sounds absurd that a rasha would be studying Torah.

The gemara says that this is the same case as Mennashe and applies this verse to him. The gemara clinches it with the verse from Isaiah, “Woe unto them who draw iniquity with worthless cords, and sin as with a cart rope.” A Bible

critic is odd—if he does not believe in the Bible, it's strange that he spends time studying it. That is why the verse says, “Who are you to recite My laws?” Why then did Mennashe spend time ridiculing the Torah? He was disturbed by the Torah and needed to critique it to justify his evil life. That explains why the gemara quotes Isaiah, as this refers to the person attempting to remove what annoys him instead of spending his life in search of something positive. Mennashe spent his life trying to remove the Torah's significance instead of following a positive pursuit.

ANYONE WHO HONORS THE TORAH WILL BE
HONORED BY OTHERS.

Talmud Berachos relates a story:

King Yannai and the queen ate bread together. And since Yannai executed the sages, there was no one to recite Birchas Hamazon on their behalf. He said to his wife, “Who will provide us with a man to recite the blessing on our behalf?” She said to him, “Swear to me that if I bring you such a man, you will not harass him.” He swore, and she brought her brother, Shimon ben Shetach. She sat him between the King's throne and hers. The King said to him, “Do you see how much honor I am according you?” He responded, “It is not you who honors me, rather

*the Torah honors me, as it is written, 'Ex-
tol her and she will exalt you; she will
bring you to honor when you embrace
her' (Proverbs 4:8)." Yannai said to his
wife, "You see that he does not accept au-
thority."*

The Torah cannot be critiqued. As the Torah is from God's mouth, critique is absurd. A person who is part of that [Torah] system also partakes of that respect. That is what Shimon ben Shetach told Yannai, "Human honor only goes so far, but the Torah places me above critique."

ANYONE WHO DESECRATES THE TORAH WILL
BE DESECRATED BY OTHERS.

One is now subject to critique as he is not respected as is the one who honors the Torah. As the desecrator of the Torah speaks his own mind, he reflects no absolute truth like the one who honors the Torah. Furthermore, those discerning people will sense an instinctual motivation driving the desecrator of the Torah, and they in turn will ridicule this person.

Regardless of the numbers of people who are anti-Semitic, just as discerning people recognize the Torah desecrator and ridicule him, discerning people also recognize the one who honors the Torah. Such a person makes an impres-

sion and evokes the admiration of others. This is the honor received by the one who honors the Torah. Regardless of the few who pay this admiration, the mishna speaks of the reality of the phenomenon of honor, not the quantity of those paying the honor.

4:7 JUDGES AND JUDGEMENT

RABBI YISHMAEL, HIS SON, SAYS, “ONE WHO WITHHOLDS HIMSELF FROM JUDGING REMOVES FROM HIMSELF ENMITY, THEFT, AND THE FALSE OATH. ONE WHO IS OF HAUGHTY HEART ABOUT GIVING LEGAL DECISIONS IS AN IMBECILE, IS WICKED, AND IS ARROGANT IN SPIRIT.”

Although the Torah commands the following: “Judges and officers you should place in all your gates [cities]” (Deut. 16:18), Rabbeinu Yona says that one should opt out of being a judge. One should only accept the role of a judge where there are no others [who can judge]. Rabbeinu Yona says that one should throw this burden upon others when possible. This will help one avoid many doubts for he re-

moves from himself the hate from those whom he finds guilty. He also removes robbery from himself when he judges incorrectly and fines an innocent person, thereby robbing him unjustly. And he further removes the prospect of a vain swear when he improperly enforced that swear. Thus, one benefits by refraining from judging. However, what right does a person have to place this obligation on others by refraining from judging himself? Why impose these ill effects of judging on other people? That is the opposite of acting kindly toward others.

The reason why Rabbi Yisrael Salanter created the *shit-tas haMussar* (his position on character perfection) is due to this mishna. For he saw great scholars who were of despicable character; they possessed these three poor qualities, evil towards others and haughtiness.

Without Torah, perfection is impossible. With Torah, it could be that one is still not perfected. Torah study must lure the individual. It is a process which Ibn Ezra explains in Proverbs. The Torah's wisdom must seduce the person. When this seduction takes place, one attains perfection. And I use the word seduction as King Solomon used it, "For I am love sick" (Song of Songs 2:5). But if the seduction does not take place, all that one does targets instinctual satisfaction. One can be a tremendous *talmid chocham* and still be a fool, evil, and haughty. Perfection without

Torah is impossible. But the perfected person is where all his emotions are overtaken by his appreciation of Torah's wisdom. One who does not reach this level is subject to being a fool, evil, and haughty.

I would like to elaborate more on this imperfection. Rabbeinu Yona describes it very nicely:

*Since one desires power and recognition,
he is arrogant in judging in order that the
world should see that he gives rulings very
quickly.*

If one needs time to think of an answer, it is not as impressive as being able to answer instantly. Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*And to show to others that he is a chocham
and that they should appoint him a judge
and a master over themselves.*

What is this individual's mistake? The main flaw is that he is foolish; he is not operating in reality. That is one flaw. Haughtiness is the drive; his underlying motivation is to obtain recognition. But the person's error is one thing: his reality is what people think, explaining his drive to show others his wisdom and that they should elevate him over themselves.

It comes out that there is a certain tragic case of a talmid

chocham, where, regardless of the amount he has learned, he cannot break from valuing public opinion.

It is a very lonely type of move one must make to achieve perfection, requiring one to abandon the need for public acclaim. One must recognize another reality aside from the social context: God's reality, which is completely devoid of public recognition. This is why all Chazal agreed on his-bodidus: the institution of isolating oneself from others. In his Guide, Maimonides too mentions this value of isolation. Most people cannot tolerate being alone, as their idea of a good time is with others. Why is this so? It is because for most people, the social context is their reality. There are very few pleasures a person would seek if there were no others around. But isolation refers to the state where one functions in a different realm of reality that is unrelated to people. Here, one recognizes that his perfection does not require the recognition [and certainly not the approval] of others. In isolation, one recognizes he can live the greatest possible life in God's reality, and not in human social reality or psychological reality. This is the highest level of perfection.

The great talmid chocham must make this difficult break and no longer seek public acclaim. [His values must transition from the relative social barometer to the absolute realm of wisdom which is devoid of egotistical objectives

and seek the enjoyment of God's wisdom alone. This break touches upon "courage."]

The philosophers debated what courage is. Upon analysis, most courage turns out to be cowardice. For example, one can be in the situation of war where he can save his life by fleeing the battlefield. But he does not flee. Why? What stops him from fleeing is either to get honored for fighting; a foolish potential sacrifice of life for a medal, or he fears social disapproval as a coward. But in fact, fearing society is cowardice. His bravery is in fact the fear of facing society. However, the true definition of courage is the ability to abandon the need for public acclaim and live in reality without any concern for the opinions of others. Only one person can attain this courage: the great talmid chocham.

ONE WHO IS OF HAUGHTY HEART ABOUT GIVING LEGAL DECISIONS IS AN IMBECILE, IS WICKED, AND IS ARROGANT IN SPIRIT.

A person who has confidence in judgments and who enjoys being a judge has three defects: he is foolish, evil and haughty. He is foolish because he lives outside of reality. He is evil because he is no concern for the litigants whom he judges [since his desire is to rule over others and not find the true verdict]. And he is haughty as his motivation

is ego. Why do we accuse this person of all three defects instead of suggesting only a single one? The answer is that here Chazal anticipated a modern psychological concept: multi-determination. A person is not usually a sinner due to a single weakness, but due to several simultaneous weaknesses. Thus, one who is of haughty heart about giving legal decisions is multi-determined. He is not entirely evil, nor is he entirely foolish, nor is he entirely haughty-hearted: his egomania is not [necessarily] psychotic in the nature. Sin occurs only when one translates his tendencies into action. But if one's tendencies are kept at bay and in check, he is not culpable in any way for possessing those tendencies.

4:8 JUDGES AND JUDGEMENT II

HE WOULD SAY, "DO NOT JUDGE ALONE, FOR THERE IS NO LONE JUDGE ASIDE FROM ONE [GOD]. AND DO NOT SAY, 'ACCEPT MY OPINION,' FOR THEY ARE PERMITTED AND NOT YOU."

Rashi says:

Even though an expert judge's rulings are fully valid and stand as law, don't judge alone, for no one is fit to judge alone except God, for He is one.

How then can halacha say that an expert can judge alone? Maimonides says that judging alone refers to halacha, but this mishna warns a bit on the side of moral advice—mus-sar—but not regarding prohibition, issur. It is odd that the Torah's halacha and ethics are in contradiction.

The institution of judgments—din—is not something that the Torah created for its own sake per se. The Torah was forced to create this institution of din. Writing a Torah, wearing tefillin, and learning Torah are laws inherently required for perfection. But din would not have been created were it not that the alternative is worse. Din is not inherently justifiable.

Thus, judging another person is inherently a bad thing; it is fraught with many dangers and it is wrong. But without din, society would be destroyed. The institution of din is fine as it retains a societal order. But it is the judging of others that is evil.

Does not the Torah command us to “Rebuke your fellow” (Lev. 19:17)? Here, one merely offers advice to an-

other. But in din, one exercises control over another (the judges' rulings control a person's money or other matters). But it is more complicated than that. When people come before a judge, it is not like asking a rabbi to paskin a shaila, viz., "Is this piece of meat kosher or not?" Coming before a judge creates a psychological interplay. When a judge must determine if Reuven should pay Shimon \$100, and he exercises control over Reuven, he places himself in a superior position. When people come before a judge, it is not just that they come for advice. The dynamic renders the judge superior to others. The world respects the institution of the judge. Of necessity, he must be in a mentally superior status vis-à-vis the people who stand before him. And if the judge does not maintain that level of superiority, he cannot make a ruling on the case or even sit in a court session. [Feelings of inferiority or equality can cripple a judge from confidently rendering a ruling over others.] A judge who sits in session before litigants must be superior to those whom he judges. That is the nature of din.

Why isn't the institution of rav and talmid also viewed as bad, as the rav too is in a superior position? Not only is this institution sanctioned by halacha, but it is the highest institution. Furthermore, "All the activities that a servant performs for his master, the talmid must perform for his rav" (Talmud Kesubos 96a, *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 5:8). [This is

true, but] the role of the talmid is accepted voluntarily. It is not a coercion that must be followed, like the ruling of a judge. The rav exercises no superiority over the talmid, as the talmid willingly accepts this relationship. The gemara criticizes Chizkiyahu for forcing people into the study halls, as they didn't go willingly.

ONE WHO IS OF HAUGHTY HEART ABOUT GIVING LEGAL DECISIONS IS AN IMBECILE, IS WICKED, AND IS ARROGANT IN SPIRIT.

Rabbeinu Yona says that this second statement follows the first statement about refraining from judging, as this is the opposite. Thus, understanding the first part of the mishna requires an understanding of this second part. Rabbeinu Yona writes:

He put this thing adjacent to the one who withholds himself from judging because he needs to decide upon it with deliberation and much analysis and [so] the matter is a burden to him; but [in contrast], the one who is arrogant about giving legal decisions thinks that he knows to give the correct legal decisions and he will not err.

He is an imbecile: He is called an imbecile because he is wise in his [own] eyes, and there is no greater imbecility than this, as "There is more hope for a fool than for

him.” Because when the fool sins, he himself knows and recognizes that he is not walking on the good path, and he does not think that he is not erring. And [so] there is hope for his betterment, as he may repent to God. But with the wise one in his [own] eyes, who is arrogant about giving legal decisions, what hope is there? Since he thinks that he is wise, how will he [change], as it would appear to him like leaving wisdom and intelligence.

Rashi comments:

He is called an imbecile because he arrogantly takes credit for matters that are not his, because the Torah is not his, and he is wicked because he makes it appear that he did not learn for the sake of learning, but rather to acquire a reputation, and he is of arrogant spirit because he runs after rulership.

Talmud Kiddushin says that one’s Torah is in fact his, but Rashi says that he arrogantly takes credit for that which is not his, and we paskin that the Torah is his.

This relates to an interesting statement by Chazal:

Why was Adam created alone and not as a species, like the animals? This was done so that he would say, “For me was the world created.”

[Man could not say this if he were created as a species, as he would have to say, for “us.”]

Quoting Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, the Rav said:

Why does a person have two pockets? The answer is so that in one pocket he retains the sentiment “For me was the world created,” and in the other pocket he retains the sentiment “I am but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27).

In Genesis, Chazal say, “Why was man the last creation? For if man grows arrogant, he should contemplate that even a fly was created before him.”

How do we harmonize Rabbi Yisroel Salanter’s two contradictory sentiments? The question boils down to: What is the worth of an individual human being? Every person naturally feels the sentiment of “For me was the world created.” One feels that all of creation up to his birth came about just for him. He feels that the human species exists for the purpose of the individuals, but reality tells him otherwise. For a person ages and dies, and in the end, all his passions served one purpose: to perpetuate the species. Schopenhauer discussed this at length and said that mankind is fooled by this. He follows his passions and falls for romance and children, but in the end, he is gone. Nature laughs at man as it fooled him into propagating the species.

Schopenhauer says a rational person should abandon the system.

But Judaism recognizes this truth and Maimonides mentions it. Insofar as sexual passion is concerned, Maimonides said that a rational person recognizes the purpose of sexual passion, which is to reproduce. The greatest force in nature is reproduction. One serves as a vehicle of the force.

Judaism recognizes this but has an interesting formula. Yes, the individual exists for the species, but the species exists for the individual; they are not mutually exclusive. Insofar as the biological organism is concerned, there is no question that the individual exists for the species. But insofar as human intelligence (tzelem Elohim) is concerned, the species exists for the individual. Maimonides states this in his introduction to his Commentary on the Mishna: “The entire species exists for that person who reaches a level of wisdom.”

This answers our question regarding one who is arrogant in giving rulings. As long as one acts in the capacity of a biological instinctual being, he is totally off course, because as a biological instinctual being, he exists only for the species. [Therefore, following one’s instincts of arrogance to give rulings is improper.] But as one acts in the capacity of a creature who perceives [values and pursues]

God's wisdom, on the contrary, the self is lost, and one is then justified to say, "For me was the world created."

What Rashi means by one who is arrogant in giving rulings is that one is wrong to focus on the self while functioning instinctually with arrogance. In this wrongful capacity, the Torah is not his as he uses it for instinctual objectives. The Torah is his only when he functions to perceive God's wisdom. And when he does function that way we say that the Torah is his and the following principle applies: "If a rabbi forgoes his honor, his honor is relinquished [others are not required to give him honor." His Torah, which is his honor, is under his jurisdiction.]

His desire is in the Torah of the Lord, and in his Torah, he meditates day and night (Psalms 1:2). And Rava also says, with regard to this verse, "Initially the Torah is called by the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, but ultimately it is called by the name of the one who studies it. As it is first stated, 'His desire is in the Torah of the Lord,' and in the continuation of the verse it states, 'And in his Torah, he meditates day and night'" (Talmud Avodah Zarah 19a).

At first the verse calls it God's Torah, but at the end it is considered the person's Torah. As one starts off as an instinctual creature, he views the Torah as God's. But after

one studies and becomes lured by the Torah, he can't keep his mind off it day and night. At that point, it becomes his Torah.

The interesting concept of this statement by Chazal is that it deals with the imperfection of a talmid chocham. Ordinarily, Chazal address the imperfections of the ignominious. But here we discuss a person who is fit to give rulings in court. Rabbeinu Yona says that this person is wise and sharp, but he is also arrogant. Rabbeinu Yona says, "He is called an imbecile because he is wise in his [own] eyes, and there is no greater imbecility than this." Why is this so? For he follows the emotional satisfaction of being a chocham. The [true] chocham never has that satisfaction. [He pursues wisdom to learn more about God and not as a means to reflect proudly on himself. The chocham's self is lost in his preoccupation with the beauty of the world of ideas.]

Rabbeinu Yona adds, "There is more hope for the fool than for him." The fool does not have the egotistic satisfaction, so there is hope for him to recognize his sin. "But [what hope is there for] one who views himself as wise and arrogant in rulings? Since he considers himself wise, how can he repent if he never recognizes that he wasn't wise?" According to Rabbeinu Yona, the imbecile refers to one who doesn't function in reality, as he considers wisdom a

personal acquisition, and it is not.

Rabbeinu Yona says that he is also evil:

He is wicked: Even though he [already] said that he is an imbecile, that expression does not include his not being a fearer of sin. Because of this, he needed to say that he is [also] wicked. For if he had fear of Heaven, he would not have been so quick with his words, since he knows (that comprehension) [that error] is found among people and it is easy for any person to sin—and even for the greatest and most analytical sage.

One who has an arrogant heart when it comes to court rulings must have no consideration for the litigants. For if he was considerate, it would be impossible for him to err [he would make sound decisions based on wisdom alone and devoid of any arrogant desire to show his wisdom and speed in deciding a verdict]. Therefore, he is a rasha in respect to the litigants [as he prioritizes his arrogance and ignorance of his errors over seeking a truthful outcome].

As this evil imbecile also wants power over others, Rabbeinu Yona adds:

And is arrogant in spirit: Even though he [already] said that he is an imbecile and does not fear sin, now he adds that it is from haughtiness and arrogance of spirit,

and from wanting to lord over others that he is arrogant about making legal decisions—[it is] so that the world sees that he decides legal cases quickly, and to show others that he is wise, so they will appoint him to be a judge and master over them. And that is his evil thought. Behold, these three traits are in the one who is arrogant about giving legal decisions, and who renders [these] decisions without trepidation and fear—may the Omnipresent, in His mercy, save us from them.

Chazal refer to the imperfection of one who is capable of being a great talmid chocham. It is amazing, but with all the Torah and knowledge this person possesses, he can still be an imbecile, arrogant, and an evil person. These are three traits that are quite bad. And yet he is called a wise man, great, and good at argumentation.

There is a story about Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, who was a great genius. Three great rabbis came to visit him to discuss Torah. He tore them to pieces [dismantled their positions] in a very short time and then they left. He felt great, but then he went outside and dug a pit [to correct his arrogance]. He said to himself, “Be very haughty Rabbi Yisroel, for this is where you’re going to lie.” Even with greatness and Torah, a person can fall prey [to arrogance].

DO NOT JUDGE ALONE.

Rabbeinu Yona says that even though one is an expert judge and is capable of judging alone, one should not do so. First of all, a person should try to avoid judging altogether. If he cannot, he should not judge alone as judgment is the lesser of two evils, for in this capacity one raises himself over others [he places himself in a superior status which feeds the ego].

FOR THERE IS NO LONE JUDGE ASIDE FROM
ONE [GOD].

One opinion is that “lone judge” refers to an expert judge. However, one has no right to assume that he is an expert. But why should one with expertise and knowledge not view himself as an expert? This is similar to “and the man Moshe was exceedingly more humble than any man on the face of the Earth” (Num. 12:3). If on the one hand, Moshe did not know that he attained this level of humility, then he is lacking knowledge. And if he did know, then he is not that humble [knowing one’s superiority feeds the ego]. Of course, Moshe knew who he was, but his humility was that he derived no enjoyment from his superiority. That was not the area of his emotional satisfaction. Moshe’s knowledge of man and God always placed God’s greatness

[in sharp relief] as the essence of his life. There was no room for anything else. What then would be wrong with such a person judging others?

While one may be an expert and has the right to judge, human nature is such that the moment a person sees any bit of reality that can cater to his egotistic trend, he is in danger of following his egotistic emotions. Man's greatest danger is his ego and Chazal perceived this. Therefore, we also read, "Very very much be of low esteem" (Avos 4:4). Maimonides writes regarding the sickness of man (machla ha'anushis) that once one is an expert in one area, he feels he is an expert in all areas. Once the ego gains ground, man is in danger. Therefore, even though in reality one is an expert judge, he should not credit himself thus and exercise his capacity to judge for this will lead to a dangerous psychological state. Therefore, by judging with others and not alone he diminishes the danger.

The gemara applies this principle not only to judging, but to leadership in general. Hillel the elder said:

If the leaders are not teaching Torah, you should teach. But if they are teaching, you should not teach and do not assume leadership over others. (Berachos 63a)

In other words, one should not have a desire to spread

Torah. If he does, there is something wrong. Maimonides says as follows:

A student who did not attain judicial rank but renders decisions behold, he is a wicked, arrogant fool, of whom it is said: "For she hath cast down many wounded" (Prov. 7.26). Likewise, a sage who attained judicial rank but does not render decisions, behold, he is withholding the Torah, and distributes obstacles in the path of the blind, concerning whom it is said: "Yea, many strong men have been slain by her" (Ibid.). Those petty students who have not increased their knowledge of the Torah as they should and yet are seeking to appear great before the ignorant, and among their towns-people, jumping forward to occupy a front seat to judge and instruct among Israel, are the ones who multiply strife, and are the ones who destroy the world, who extinguish the light of the Torah, and despoil the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, concerning whom Solomon in his wisdom said: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards" (Song of Songs, 2.15). (Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:4)

AND DO NOT SAY, "ACCEPT MY OPINION," FOR THEY ARE PERMITTED AND NOT YOU.

Maimonides explains that one judge sitting among others should not use psychological coercion to convince the other judges that he is correct. However, if he is in fact correct, why shouldn't he press his point?

A person's convictions stem from two sources. One source is the ideational [perceiving truths]. The other source is the self [one's emotions]. Simply because one originates an idea, one becomes convinced that he is correct. Such a person fools himself into thinking that his idea is great because of the idea [and not because he authored it]. This is what Maimonides means by saying this is a dangerous area. A person should be careful to [accurately] identify the source of his convictions: Does it stem from the idea or from the self? One's opinions and feelings of correctness [conveniently] express themselves in areas that cannot be proven. These areas include politics and religion. Unlike science and medicine that are based on proof, politics and religion are based on personal feelings and beliefs. And since they are not empirical topics, one finds a room to express his subjective views for which he feels emotionally convinced, primarily because he feels his ideas are correct. [People express their opinions in politics and religion precisely to vent their egotistical emotions. In these areas, one finds that one is safe from being accused of error (and thus satisfies his egotistical emotions) since it

is not empirical.] But one cannot behave this way in empirical areas as subjective views are nullified by the facts.

One's attitude about his svaros (theories/definitions) as Maimonides says, should be healthy, where he has the right to follow his intuition, but he must know that he can be wrong and therefore he must not coerce the other judges to accept his svara. Regarding intuition, the chances of one being correct are not as great as one feels. One should let the view speak for itself. Bertrand Russell said a perfection of the philosophers is not to be so sure of one's philosophical convictions.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

And do not say, "Accept my opinion": Also when you take a group to judge the legal case and they disagree with you, do not say, "I am the expert and they are not experts. [Hence] they should accept my opinion and nullify their opinions in my [favor]. As if it were not for my humility, I would have judged the case alone; [so] now too, [decide according to] my argument." You should not think this.

Rabbeinu Yona is saying an interesting idea: the ego is the one thing that you cannot subdue because it has a way of coming back to life, precisely because you attempt to

subdue it. Rabbeinu Yona is saying that it is an impossibility to subdue the ego because the moment you do so—as here when one says he’s a great humble person—he ipso facto elevates the ego. What coerces man to act is his ego.

When people acquire fame, they wish to display their wisdom. Their egos know that wisdom is the greatest value. Ego can coerce one to spend time in wisdom. But there is only one thing that ego cannot do and that is to coerce man to abandon his ego. That is an impossibility; it is circular. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter said the ego is the one drive that cannot be conquered. It is like a demon where you cut off one head and two heads grow back.

Why is it impossible to rid oneself of the ego? It is because one is using his ego to remove the ego. [One engages the ego to battle it and thereby one never disengages from his ego. To defeat the ego, man unconsciously views such a battle—and certainly the success—with anticipated pride or satisfaction; both are ego emotions.]

Rabbeinu Yona says that the case is not hopeless. He provides a first step, that being not judging alone. Doing so saves one from the danger of his egomania. However, the avoidance of judging alone itself can create a problem: one gains egotistical satisfaction for having avoided the situation! With ethics alone, there is no escaping the ego, for all moves provide man with satisfaction with himself for his

progress. Even the Baalei Mussar (leaders of the movement towards character perfection) were accused of haughtiness.

The only recourse [for man to save himself from succumbing to egotistical emotions] is an appeal to reality. One must not only learn, but he must experience knowledge [become impressed by wisdom]. This is the only phenomenon that humbles a person. When one sees the scope, breadth and depth of wisdom, he is humbled. No other force can battle man's ego.

This is Rabbeinu Yona's position. He warns against believing there is an ethical tool that can safeguard one from egotistical emotions. Therefore, he says, "do not think this way." The reason why the greatest chochamim were the humblest people was because they recognized the world of wisdom. Newton said that he felt like a child playing by the sand and the whole ocean of truth rolled on before him. He can say that because he knows what knowledge is and he knows how little he knows. But this humility is found only with true theoreticians. However, people with much factual knowledge are very arrogant because they feel they can accomplish X, Y and Z. They feel that they are mastering the world, but in fact, they do not know what they are doing. There is a large gap between human technology and understanding the theories behind it. In summary, the only

avoidance of ego is through knowledge.

We originally asked how one can reject judging others, if by doing so, one throws upon others the obligation to judge and its damaging side effects of ego. How can we harm others? Apparently, the answer is that when confronted with damaging one's soul, one is not obligated to evaluate [the effects on] others. One is not permitted to risk himself to save someone else. One can only risk himself when there is no alternative [there are no others who can judge]. Otherwise one must avoid judging as it will cause him harm.

4:9 SUCCESS: PROVIDENCE VERSUS NATURE

RABBI YONATAN SAYS, "ANYONE WHO IMPLEMENTS THE TORAH IN POVERTY, IN THE END WILL IMPLEMENT IT IN WEALTH. AND ANYONE WHO DISREGARDS THE TORAH IN WEALTH, WILL IN THE END DISREGARD IT IN POVERTY."

Mishna 4:9 was previously addressed when discussing mishna 4:6. Rabbeinu Yona comments, quoting King Solo-

mon's words from Proverbs in his prayer to God:

Two things I ask of You, do not withhold them from me before I die. Keep vanity and lies distant from me. Give me neither poverty nor wealth; provide me with my daily bread, lest I become full and I renounce, saying, "Who is God?"; lest I become poor and steal and profane God's name (Proverbs 30:7-9).

There are two dangers. A person can be overcome by the world of fantasy, "Lest I become full and renounce." The desire for wealth is truly a desire to increase one's self-esteem. That self-importance cannot coexist with the recognition of God. This explains why questioning "Who is God?" follows from becoming wealthy. That is one danger.

The second danger is when one finds himself in tremendous need. A person does not realize what he could do [to what extremes he might succumb] if subjected to abject poverty. It is a very dangerous state where one becomes desperate, and desperation can cause one to lose his mental equilibrium. That is why the gemara says, "The sages taught: 'Three matters cause a person to act against his own will and the will of his Maker, and they are, idolaters, an evil spirit, and the depths of extreme poverty'" (Talmud Eruvin 41b).

This is what King Solomon meant by “two things I ask.” He possessed wealth, so what he meant by “Give me neither poverty nor wealth” refers to his mental state. In other words, King Solomon meant, “Don’t allow me to be overcome by a power of importance [wealth] or by a state of need [poverty].”

Rabbeinu Yona says that King Solomon’s words “Give me my daily bread” refer to our mishna. And these words don’t mean that King Solomon asked for wealth, but that he asked to relate mentally to wealth as nothing more than a means for sustenance, in contrast with others who seek wealth to feel great self-esteem. King Solomon asked God to ensure that he would not succumb to such fantasies, but to relate to wealth simply as sufficient sustenance. So how does this refer to our mishna, according to Rabbeinu Yona?

Rabbeinu Yona provides a metaphor:

A king asks his servant, “Ask what shall I give to you?” The servant thinks, “If I ask for silver or gold, the king will give it to me. If I ask for possessions or land, he will give it to me. I will ask for the king’s daughter and all will be included.”

So too did King Solomon ask. He asked for wisdom, knowing that all would be included. “For in the shelter of wisdom is the shelter of money...” (Koheles 7:12). A cho-

cham knows how to earn a living. This teaches that it is a practical matter, unlike Maimonides, who says it is providential. Rabbeinu Yona says that wisdom helps one more easily obtain his monetary needs. If so, how does this relate to King Solomon's words "Give me my daily bread?"

King Solomon's request makes no sense, unless he was truly requesting wisdom because no one in his right mind would make a request not to be [poor or] rich. Why would a person reject wealth? Is there some virtue to merely having daily bread and nothing more? King Solomon's request was not for the overt state [a degree of financial stability]. His request was not to be overcome by the fantasy of wealth or overwhelmed by impoverishment and the dire need for bare necessities. A person should request this because there is only one perfection that this request targets: the life of wisdom. In order to gain wisdom, one requires a certain state: freedom from the emotional part of man and freedom from physical necessities. Either state prevents the involvement in wisdom. One who engages in the pleasures is not free in his mind to engage in wisdom. On the other hand, if one constantly needs to address his basic physical needs, his mind isn't free.

Thus, King Solomon's request not to be poor or rich targeted this objective of engaging in wisdom. This can be the only objective. Therefore, one should strive for this

state of freedom from the emotions and freedom from chasing the physical. It is not so bad that one engages in a pleasure. But the harm is that not only is energy wasted on pleasure, but it pulls one away from the equilibrium necessary for thought and chochma.

ANYONE WHO IMPLEMENTS THE TORAH IN
POVERTY, IN THE END WILL IMPLEMENT IT IN
WEALTH.

Such a person doesn't suffer from the fear of being deprived. If one's emotional needs prevent him from occupying himself with learning, he will never attain perfection. Thus, if one follows the way of the world in terms of the steps he takes in education, career, etc., [before ever committing to learning], he will not become perfected. This does not mean that such a person is not worthwhile or even a tzaddik, but he won't reach the level of perfection and wisdom. This individual is able to walk away from how others live [education, career, buying a home] and values the Torah's wisdom as his main interest and occupation and never gives up on it, even if he is impoverished, and even if it means forfeiting his "future," in society's terms.

One would think such a person would have very sorry results [as he abandoned the pursuit of success in place of dedication to the Torah's wisdom]. But just the opposite is

true. Because this person walks away from the security that society's way of life offers, and because he involves himself in Torah, on the contrary, he will, in the end, be wealthy and able to learn without pursuing his daily needs. Whereas others who follow the ways of the world will never be able to escape that lifestyle, which is addressed by the second part of the mishna.

This requires a certain personality and not everyone can follow this life. Neither does the mishna say that everyone can live this way. This lifestyle requires great courage. But one who does follow the advice of this mishna will, in the end, experience true success. The other person will be successful in the ways the world gauges success, but not as Rabbeinu Yona describes the inner success: "For he will eat and learn in happiness and with a glad heart, for with wisdom it will be completely good." While the other person will have what he bargained for, as he will follow the ways of society and be secure, he will never have the life that Rabbeinu Yona describes, and which the mishna states.

Maimonides refers to this perfect person:

Not only the tribe of Levi, but every man who enters the world, whose spirit moves him and understands from his knowledge to separate himself to stand before God,

and to minister before Him, and to serve Him to know God, and he walks upright as God created him, and breaks off from his neck the financial considerations of the masses that people seek, this person is sanctified as holy of holies, and God will be his portion and his inheritance forever and ever and he will merit in this world sufficient sustenance just like the priests and the Levites. Behold David, peace be upon him, declared, “The Lord is my allotted portion and my cup; You support my lot” (Psalm 16:5) (Hilchos Shmitta v’Yovel 13:13).

Pirkei Avos addresses human perfection, and there is much advice from which everyone can learn. But there are certain areas that are not so easy, and this is one of those areas. The mishna says, “Anyone who implements the Torah in poverty....” It does not say that everyone should follow this advice, but that the one who does will be successful. I would say the person who acts in accordance with this mishna does so not because of this advice, but because he cannot operate otherwise. To follow society would mean giving up a life of wisdom [and he will not sacrifice his Torah—what he knows to be the greatest good and the greatest life—even for better prospects of financial security]. This mishna describes a truth that is applicable today and is an expression of divine providence.

The other side is one who has wealth but does not learn. Maimonides says that in the end God will give him troubles so he won't be able to involve himself in learning nor will he be able to perfect himself. But why would God do that? Punishment is for one's benefit, but this seems like an impossibility—that God would take away one's ability to attain perfection. According to Maimonides, this is a strange phenomenon. Rabbeinu Yona agrees:

He won't have time to involve himself in Torah even if he wants to, measure for measure, and he will end up leaving the world without Torah.

How can this be, as the verse says, “As I live—declares the Lord God—it is not My desire that the wicked shall die, but that the wicked turn from his [evil] ways and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

The meaning behind the concept that one who does not follow the Torah while he is wealthy will be forced not to follow it in poverty, is that there is a general principle in providence. One who does not use his wealth to learn Torah will lose his wealth. The ninth chapter of *Hilchos Tes-huvah* says that the worst curse is when one has no time to learn. Man has the choice to guide his life as he desires. This applies to choosing a profession, studying Torah, and

all other areas. The essence of free will is that man carves out the type of life he desires. If one misuses what was appropriated to him and, despite his wealth, does not make time to learn, God will take that wealth from him, and then he won't have time to learn as he must toil for a living. But this does not remove from him the recognition that the justice in the punishment was measure for measure. Teshuvah on this point is possible. Had God not taken his wealth, he would not recognize that he forfeited his opportunity to learn. He would not see God's justice.

*What is crooked cannot be straightened
(Kohel 1:15).*

A person likes to feel that he can always remedy a situation, that "it's never too late." But in fact, it is too late.

*Some acquire their [eternal] world in a
single moment (Talmud Avodah Zarah
17a).*

Chazal say that one can have a thought of teshuvah on the last day of his life, through which he acquires Olam Haba. But such a person cannot possibly be on the same level [in the afterlife] as one who spent his whole life learning Torah. Had he repented years earlier, his Olam Haba would be that much greater, but now it is too late—he will

never be a talmid chocham.

Therefore, the punishment one receives for wasting his time is irreversible, for God gave him the ability [which he abused]. This person cannot make up lost time and he will not attain the greater portion or greater level in Olam Haba previously available to him before he wasted his time. This is what both Maimonides and Rabbeinu Yona mean, that one will leave the world without Torah. [The person's loss is self-inflicted and not a question on God's justice, as previously asked.]

The Gra cried when facing death because he grasped the finality of his learning, which is upsetting; he was not afraid of death but looked forward to Olam Haba. But the finality of learning, which enhances one's Olam Haba, was upsetting to him.

RALBAG ON AVOS 4:9

Two things I ask of You, do not withhold them from me before I die. Keep vanity and lies distant from me. Give me neither

poverty nor wealth; provide me with my daily bread, lest I become full and I renounce, saying, "Who is God?"; lest I become poor and steal and profane God's name (Proverbs 30:7-9).

Ralbag has an interesting and metaphoric take on King Solomon's words:

After a person dies there is no further chance for perfection.

"Before I die" refers to the finality of death, but also to the finality of every moment of life. Every day that one wastes his time, that time is gone. "Man worries about the loss of his blood, but he does not worry about the loss of his years" (*Orech Chaim* 6:18).

Ralbag continues his comments on King Solomon's words:

"Vanity and lies keep far from me": This refers to one who does not know how to investigate [when studying Torah].

King Solomon asked God for the ability to understand. "Therefore, God, prevent me from two things." Sometimes a person errs in his investigation and other times one investigates areas that are a waste of time.

King Solomon's second request was for God to not impoverish him, referring to a poverty of knowledge: "I should not be unable to understand that which man can comprehend." This is the meaning of poverty: "I should not be short-minded and assume that I can't approach an area of wisdom that is truly within my reach."

[Certain people have a false sense of inadequacy, or they lack the fortitude to exert themselves in studying—although they possess the adequate capacity—and hide behind the excuse that the matter is above their heads.]

Ralbag continues:

"Don't give me wealth": This refers to attempting to understand areas beyond man's capabilities.

King Solomon meant, "Allow me to have exactly that which is necessary in the wavelength of human knowledge." The desire to learn can propel one into areas beyond his capacity. This too is a danger. "Give me my daily bread" means "Give me exactly what I need to learn."

This is a great request; very few people will ever achieve this.

"Lest I become impoverished": If I delve into areas of which I am not ready to learn, I will say, "Who is God?"

One will come to the wrong ideas about God. It will come out that the god he believes in is not the true God. He will become a heretic.

One who feels incapable of studying is the true pauper. For he will not permit himself to understand what he truly can concerning God, generating an ignorance of God's existence. He is the source of all that exists.

“Stealing” refers to robbing God of His creation; of His role as the sole cause of all existences. “And I will never be able to gain knowledge of God's existence.”

This would be worse than exploring matters beyond one's capabilities. For one who explores matters beyond his capabilities attributes to God matters that are false, for example, “And they saw the God of Israel: Under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire” (Exod. 24:10). But the “pauper” is one who doesn't even enter an area to investigate it. This person has no knowledge of God. He has no idea of the necessary existence of God, and he is worse off than one who went too far. Thus, King Solomon asked God to prevent him from investigating knowledge on the improper path. Feeling incapable or feeling too certain are two emotions that drive a person away from his capabilities and will cause him to err in both.

*The wealthy man answers brazenly
(Proverbs 18:23).*

One's self-evaluation as a wealthy person makes him feel overconfident and arrogant. King Solomon compares this trait to one flaw from which he asked God to shield him. On the contrary, one who is impoverished is of low esteem and King Solomon compares this trait to one who is overcome with inadequacy. Maimonides says that much wisdom was lost because of our exile. When the Jews were broken down emotionally it affected their quest for knowledge. They lost their strength and courage, which is required to think properly. Great discoveries require courage. And the arrogant person will not become a talmid chocham because he believes he is always correct. It is impossible for him to be a true investigator.

4:10 PRIORITIZING THE TORAH

RABBI MEIR SAYS, “MINIMIZE BUSINESS AND ENGAGE IN TORAH. BE HUMBLE OF SPIRIT BEFORE EVERYONE. IF YOU NEGLECT THE TORAH, MANY REASONS FOR NEGLECTING IT WILL BE PRESENTED TO YOU. AND IF YOU LABOR IN TORAH, THERE IS ABUNDANT REWARD TO GRANT YOU.”

Rabbeinu Yona says that one’s business life should be a side activity and learning should be one’s main preoccupation. One should arrange his life where he need not spend most of his day securing his financial needs. This mishna addresses how one should prepare for life.

Most of the world views man’s profession as his essence. When people meet one another they ask, “What do you do?” The response “I am learning gemara Menachos” is not what the person asking had in mind. People are preoccupied with the way others make a living; this is the world’s primary involvement and what many view as the essence of life.

Our mishna teaches that man’s essence is his learning. And it is not about how much time one devotes to his learning, but about one’s outlook—what a person views as the primary element in life and how he self-identifies. One’s

identity must be his pursuit of knowledge. It also appears that one's quantitative involvement defines his essence. If one works most of the day, then he is a businessman. And if one's day is spent mostly studying Torah and his work is addressed on the side, he is a talmid chocham. Although rare, one can be a talmid chocham insofar as he values Torah study more than work, despite the long hours he must engage in work. Thus, a talmid chocham does not select a life where most of his time is spent earning a living. It is a total distortion of the definition of man. Earning a living is just a means, while all his energies pursue wisdom.

BE HUMBLE OF SPIRIT BEFORE EVERYONE.

Maimonides comments:

Do not be humble before great people alone, but before everyone, to the point that whenever you sit and communicate with any person your speech is as if he is greater than you insofar as your personal esteem. And the purpose is to flee from haughtiness.

A talmid chocham who talks with an ignoramus should speak as though the ignoramus is greater than he is. But as Judaism is a religion of reality, one cannot distort reality. Therefore, we must also understand what this has to do

with the previous statement.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

This thing is also from the topic of Torah, and so it was said in the midst of his words that were words [about] Torah, and he did not [put] it earlier nor later. And he wanted to say [that] even if you are successful in Torah [study]—which is the true advantage—do not become haughty; and it is not necessary to say that it is not fit to become haughty for all of the other foreign, physical advantages.

This advice is based on psychology and it defines humility. A person can use anything as a means for egotistical satisfaction, even the Torah. Chazal say that a great talmid chocham's life can be worthless if everything he does stems from his ego. A person, by nature, has a strong narcissistic drive that seeks to satisfy the need to feel great importance. This importance that one feels expresses itself not in absolute terms, strangely enough, but in relative terms.

For example, one can be on the highest level of social standing, and yet, when he plays tennis the only thing that is important to him is being a good player. He feels horrible when he loses the game, or even when he loses a point during the game. This displays human insanity. He is the

most important person in society, but at this moment his ego is so reduced because he cannot make that one shot on the tennis court. The nature of one's ego and narcissism is that one's reality becomes relative—how one relates to another person [now in the framework of tennis] becomes the barometer to assess one's self-esteem. A great individual might also be disturbed by a fool who doesn't accord him the respect he feels he deserves. But why should such an important figure be concerned about a nobody? It is because psychological dynamics operate on a one-on-one relationship. And the converse is also true: An important person receives a compliment from a nobody and this makes him feel the highest degree of self-satisfaction. A highly successful man once said that his greatest satisfaction came when his auto mechanic complimented him on understanding how his car operates. It seems absurd that such a highly respected member of society derives such satisfaction from a simple mechanic. But psychologically, it is true because man does not seek that which is of objective value. For when seeking anything besides wisdom, one seeks something in his unconscious that he wishes to satisfy [which is significant to the person and insignificant to others].

When a child is praised by his parents, he feels very good. When the child grows older, the parental figure loses

its significance as the child realizes that his parents are regular people. But this older child now substitutes members of society for his [psychological] parental figures. Therefore, when someone compliments this grown child, he does not seek that person's compliment. But that person reflects something from another source, of which this grown child is unaware. This insignificant stranger's praise now represents a fulfillment of his unconscious desire for parental approval. Thus, the fantasy of approval of a significant figure does not need to be produced by someone significant, although significant or important people serve the purpose to a much greater degree. And as a person always seeks this approval, any individual who can portray that significant figure from his past suffices to offer that sought-after satisfaction and approval. The framework can be changed from a tennis match to the praise of a mechanic, and to a stranger on the street. Plato made this observation: "There is no amount of honor that is worthless." Any person can offer one a feeling of satisfaction.

What people seek is a fantasy that is unachievable and unattainable, for what a person seeks in reality is not what he seeks in his fantasy. [A replacement can never be the original. The person truly seeks his parent's approval, which cannot be provided through other people.] The fantasy needs only a bit of reality to get it going, and the most

insignificant person can represent what the person needs.

Who is the truly humble person, the anav? He is one who has overcome his narcissism. He has conquered this mechanism. But until one comes to grips with how far from reality his fantasies are, he can never be an anav. To attain perfection, one requires practical applications of truths and values. To be humble before everyone is the practical method for countering haughtiness and searching for this fantasy, which seeks satisfaction at every moment and from any person. By talking to even the lowliest person as if he is superior to you, one counters haughtiness.

Society tells every child that he is special. The problem of course is that if all children are special, then no one is special. But society recognizes this fantasy of every person to feel special, different, and important. [Parents pass this idea on to their children.]

Therefore, Chazal teach that all people—no matter how insignificant—awaken in us the desire to satisfy this fantasy of self-greatness. They advise us to counter this fantasy by treating everyone as greater than ourselves. If one cannot treat everyone else as a superior, one will then use others to satisfy his own [ego] fantasy. The depth of Chazal's advice is that man does not operate rationally and can satisfy his fantasy from the most insignificant person. A minute reflection of self-importance is welcomed. There-

fore, Chazal warn man not to satisfy this fantasy even from the lowest person. Thus, one must treat literally everyone as a superior.

Because of his ego, man seeks an identity that secures self-respect. Therefore, he becomes a lawyer, a doctor, or a businessman, as society respects such individuals. This explains why when a person is asked, “What do you do?” he does not respond by saying, “I am learning gemara Menachos,” but he says, “I am a doctor.” Following this lifestyle of filling such roles and professions is the reason one cannot minimize his work. He does not work for the money, as Maimonides explains that one can live quite happily with little. But the indulgence in work as opposed to the indulgence in learning Torah is to secure the identity one seeks to project in order to gain respect and importance. Man’s egotistical drives lead him toward physical wealth and self-esteem, thereby preventing him from minimizing his hours at work. Man seeks luxurious homes, cars, etc., over simpler ones, not because luxurious homes and cars are more comfortable or provide any qualitatively greater benefit, but because they offer man a sense of greater self-esteem. [Thus, man exerts tremendous time and energy to satisfy his ego.] But to identify oneself as a Ben Torah is a tremendously difficult blow to the ego. People look down on a Ben Torah as someone who couldn’t

make it in the real world. Societal approval is such a powerful need that most people cannot choose the life of a Ben Torah. In the Messianic Era, matters will be different, but not until then, as people need self-importance and cannot escape their instinctual natures. Therefore, Chazal's advice applies to every generation. [Apparently the second statement in our mishna, "Be of low esteem before everyone," follows the theme of not seeking ego satisfaction.]

IF YOU NEGLECT THE TORAH, MANY REASONS
FOR NEGLECTING IT WILL BE PRESENTED TO
YOU.

Maimonides comments:

There are many distractions from Torah. They will become necessary for anyone who engages in them. If one does not engage in Torah study, he will consume his time with one of these distractions.

This seems obvious: One neglects the Torah precisely because he chases after other matters. What does Maimonides' comment add to the discussion?

Rashi comments, but with no symmetry:

Many matters will come to you that will waste your time. And if you labor in Torah, much reward will be given to you.

Chazal teach that a person is under the illusion that if he did not have the burden to learn Torah he would be able to involve himself in more preferable endeavors. This is probably the greatest fantasy preventing one from learning Torah. But Chazal teach that this is not true—a person who is disengaged from the Torah won't just relax, because the nature of a person's psyche is such that his ego will always find something with which he must burden himself. I have seen people who—when on vacation—bring a long list of things to do. They do not enjoy their vacation and then return home exhausted. They only rest once they return to their eight-hour workday.

People must engage in some action to which they ascribe great importance. A person can be involved in stamp collecting not because he enjoys it, but because he has set up an institution that he views as important. This is Maimonides' meaning. If one does not spend time in wisdom (which is the true important activity) thinking he will relax instead [doing something else], he is wrong. He will be burdened with nonsensical drives because of the ego need described in the beginning of this mishna. And even relaxation itself is not a positive pleasure, rather it is the absence of activity.

AND IF YOU LABOR IN TORAH, THERE IS ABUNDANT REWARD [SCHAR HARBEH] TO GRANT YOU.

If one overcomes the initial barrier and difficulty of sitting down to learn gemara and becomes involved in its thoughts and ideas, the world of enjoyment that opens up is a world of pure, positive enjoyment. Schar (reward) refers to a positive quality and harbeh (abundant) refers to the great quantity.

The error that people make is their conviction in their feelings. At first, one's feelings are attached to the instinctual drives [he thinks he is right to follow them]. But if one can break from his physical desires and involve himself in wisdom, he will experience a pleasure that he never imagined. The greatness of the enjoyment comes from the unexpected quality and quantity of pleasure that wisdom provides. Conversely, physical pleasures are few since people imagine that they are great, but discover they were wrong. "Few" is the reaction to disappointment. Furthermore, all other pleasures exist only as long as the pain exists: One enjoys eating only as long as he is hungry, and if he continues to eat, he will feel pain. But learning is not based on pain.

A person who is involved in wisdom is free from nonsensical matters and the self-inflicted slavery [of much la-

bor] that afflicts others. For the Ben Torah views wisdom as the only real value. Therefore, he is not under the compulsion of working for other objectives, as he sees their worthless natures. He is a free individual. Furthermore, one's psychological equilibrium is balanced only when one is engaged in wisdom. But without wisdom, one is a distorted being: His surplus of psychic energy will be drawn into other areas that will bend him out of shape.

Extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations (Exod. 34:7).

Rashi comments:

It follows, therefore, that the measure of good (reward) is greater than the measure of punishment in the proportion of one to five hundred, for in respect to the measure of good it says, "Keeping mercy for thousands" (two thousand at least).

Reward is five hundred times greater than punishment. Rabbeinu Yona says something similar. But this reward of five hundred times greater sounds odd and unjust. Justice

would demand equality between reward and punishment.

God created man with both a physical element and a metaphysical element—the body and soul. The physical element, by definition, is limited. Part of punishment is the physical suffering. The reward one receives is incomparable to the evil of punishment. Even the worst possible evil is limited, since it is in physical terms, and the physical is inherently limited [the body is finite and physical life ends], whereas the good, which is metaphysical, is eternal in nature. Five hundred times good is not an exact measure, but it means it is far greater than evil.

Maimonides writes as follows:

The good in store for the righteous is life in the World to Come, which is a life connected with no death and a kind of good connected with no evil, such as is described in the Torah, “That it may be well with you, and you may prolong your days” (Deut. 22:7), which was traditionally deducted to mean, “That it may be well with you” in a world that is entirely good; “And that you may prolong your days”—in a world existing forever; and this is the World to Come. The reward of the just is that they will acquire the sweetness thereof, to be in such goodness; and the punishment of the wicked is that they will not

share in such life but will suffer excision and eternal death. And, whosoever does not earn such life is to be dead, without coming to life forever; for he is severed from life by his iniquity and goes to oblivion like cattle. This is the meaning of excision described in the Torah, saying, "That soul shall utterly be cut off" (Num. 15:31), which was traditionally deducted to mean, "utterly cut off," both in this world and in the World to Come as if saying, "That soul, which was separated from the body in this world, shares not in the life of the World to Come, for even from the World to Come is it cut off" (Hilchos Teshuvah 8:1).

Thus, punishment is limited to physical expression and limited life span. But reward is of the greatest nature: Wisdom satisfies the soul to the greatest degree [even on Earth] and it also endures eternally [the afterlife].

Previously, we asked, where is the justice? [Punishment and reward are incommensurate measures.] The answer is that God's kindness is expressed not in the way He metes out reward and punishment, but in how He created the human species. God created man to be capable of an unbelievably great degree of good and a limited degree of evil.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

The Holy One, blessed be He, Himself in His [full] glory gives the reward for those who are occupied with His Torah, “not through an angel and not through a messenger.” And with this He assures all of those that come to the world that He sends the punishments through His messengers to lighten the matter, “as not like our Rock is their rock.” But “great peace is there to those who love His Torah,” and “goodly reward to those that fear Him”—He pays them by His hand and not through others, in order to increase their reward. There is a parable [relevant to this] about a king for whom a craftsman made a fine vessel. The king commanded his servants to take money from his treasury and pay [the craftsman] handsomely. And would they not give him less had the king himself paid him? Their hearts are not broad like the heart of the king, because of his great wealth and honor, and their nature toward generosity is not like his nature. Even if they give the king’s money, their present will be smaller than the king’s present. So [too] is the blessed Holy One, blessed be He, in the trait of goodness—He wants to give with His hand “to enlarge the reward and elevate it.”

Rabbeinu Yona says that when it comes to a punishment for neglecting Torah study (that being the worst sin in

terms of losing the greatest good, since Torah study is the greatest mitzvah) the punishment comes through God's "messengers," referring to the physical means. But if one learns Torah, his reward comes directly from God. What does this mean?

In studying Torah, one relates to God metaphysically. Torah study isn't just a mitzvah, it is *avodah she'balev* (a service of the soul). One actually relates to the Creator. The Rav referred to Torah study as a "rendezvous with God" (*Lonely Man of Faith*, 7:2, 1965). Thus, Rabbeinu Yona says that God himself gives the reward, because when one learns, he is with the King. But punishment is not from God as there is no relationship to God when one sins.

When a person relates to God, he is rewarded on several levels. One benefits from providence because of his perfection, and he is protected from harm. This is not a miracle; the universe is designed in a way that one who relates to God is not subject to natural law. He is beyond the physical causes [providence overrides nature since the metaphysical world is what controls nature]. This is one benefit. But the state of relating to God is the highest good physically, psychologically, and metaphysically—the latter being a good beyond physical description. Thus, the reward for Torah study is a different type a reward; it is the greatest

good man can experience.

According to Ramban, there is a separate category of evildoers who suffer an eternal torment, and Maimonides refers to it as well:

And, the following are they who have no share in the World to Come but suffer excision and destruction, and are damned for ever and ever for their exceeding wickedness and sinfulness: atheists, infidels, traducers of the Torah, dissenters of resurrection and the coming of Moshiach, apostates, enticers of many to sin, seceders from the congregation, a public perpetrator of sins emulating Jehoiakim, informers, leaders who cast fear upon the congregation not for the sake of God, shedders of blood, evil-tongued people (ba'alei lashon hara), and he who abolishes circumcision (Hilchos Teshuvah 3:6).

There is a difference between those who speak lashon hara [on occasion] and “ba’alei lashon hara”—those who thrive on it and whose evil speech makes up their essence. But we see that Maimonides has this idea of eternal judgment for evildoers.

4:11 (MISHNA NOT RECORDED)

4:12 HONOR AND CROWNS

RABBI ELAZAR BEN SHAMUA SAYS, “LET THE HONOR OF YOUR STUDENT BE DEAR TO YOU AS YOUR OWN, AND THE HONOR OF YOUR FELLOW BE LIKE THE REVERENCE OF YOUR TEACHER, AND THE REVERENCE OF YOUR TEACHER BE LIKE THE REVERENCE OF HEAVEN.” RABBI YEHUDA SAYS, “BE CAREFUL IN STUDY, FOR AN ERROR IN STUDY IS CONSIDERED AN INTENTIONAL TRANSGRESSION.” RABBI SHIMON SAYS, “THERE ARE THREE CROWNS: THE CROWN OF TORAH, THE CROWN OF PRIESTHOOD, AND THE CROWN OF KINGSHIP, BUT THE CROWN OF A GOOD NAME OUTWEIGHS THEM ALL.”

Rabbeinu Yona had a different version:

Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as the honor of your friend, and the honor of your friend should be as dear to you as the honor of your teacher, and the honor of your teachers should be as dear to you as the honor of God.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

This does not mean to give the same honor to a student as one gives to his friend, or to

treat one's friend as one treats one's teacher, or to treat one's teacher as one treats God. Rather, treat each person in his proper measure. But just as you cannot diminish your friend's honor, so also do not diminish the honor due to your student. Thus, the mishna means that one must be as cautious with his students as he is with his friends, and as cautious with his friend's honor as he is with his fear for his teacher, and the fear/awe he shows his teacher should equate to that which he shows to God. One should take seriously those of lesser status. We learn that since one's teacher represents Torah, one should treat him with the same awe as he treats God. The teacher teaches a person to fear God [and therefore one must relate to his teacher with that awe].

Awe is reserved for God and for a teacher who teaches one to fear God. But honor is applied to a friend or to a student. Rabbeinu Yona continues:

As one is to relate to students as he does to his friend, and he must relate to his friend as he does to his teacher, and to his teacher as he relates to God, it ends up that one must relate to students as he relates to God.

Why is the mishna written in a step-by-step format? It should just say that all four parties should be treated equal-

ly, as Rabbeinu Yona says that all four are on one level.

Rabbeinu Yona says that there are two ways one acts regarding interpersonal relationships. Typically, one relates to his friend emotionally. One also relates to his students emotionally, but of course not as he relates to his friend. There is a certain natural emotional relationship with a student, and the same applies to how one relates to his teacher. One has different social relationships with different people.

Chazal teach that one should not act typically and carry out his various relationships based on his natural psychological expressions. Because when one functions in relationships psychologically, it is not just that the student is accorded less honor, but honor for the student becomes less important than honor for one's friend. And honor for one's friend becomes less important than honor for his teacher. Chazal say this is wrong. In truth, all people should be equated and treated with the honor one gives to God; when relating to any person, one is not to relate to him based on his role or his personality, but one should relate to him as God's creation. The importance of the honor accorded to any person must be equal, as everyone is an expression of God's will. We are not to relate to others psychologically. One who functions properly must maintain his relationships on a metaphysical level. The equality of relationships

with every person is derived from halacha. The same Torah that demands honor for students also demands honor for God. The one source of halacha thereby equates all acts of relating to others. Thus, when one relates to another, he should do so based on halacha and not based on his psychological feelings. This explains Rabbeinu Yona's summation that all are [to be treated] equal.

One's friend deserves honor as one shares the precious entity of Torah with him, and the same applies to a student:

Just as the students are obliged to honor the rebbe, so is the rebbe obliged to honor his disciples with deference and to draw them near. Thus, said the sages, "Let the honor of your disciple be dear to you even as your own" (Avos 4:12).

Maimonides says, "just as" (ki'shem), but this does not refer to the amount or the quality of honor, as one's teacher deserves awe, unlike students. Maimonides says that just as one has an obligation to honor one party, so too he has an obligation to honor the other party. Maimonides continues:

And it is essential for a man to care for his disciples and to love them, for they are the sons who make life enjoyable, both in this world and in the World to Come (Hilchos

Talmud Torah 5:12).

Thus, honor to others is to be expressed on an objective plane. Maimonides continues:

The students increase the master's wisdom and broaden his heart. The sages said, "Much wisdom have I learned from my masters, more than that from my colleagues, but from my disciples more than from all of them combined" (Ta'anit, 7a). Even as a small branch kindles the big one, so too a small disciple sharpens the mind of the master to the end that he brings forth from him, by his questions, a beautified wisdom.

The rebbe should appreciate his students, because, as Maimonides says, they increase his Torah.

Why doesn't the mishna simply say, "Treat all people equally, as one treats God" instead of using this progressive format [i.e., student, friend, teacher, God]?

The progressive format provides a means of teaching us how to act. By saying that one should treat a student like his friend, the mishna offers a reasonable comparison: "Should I treat my students as students, or should I treat them as I treat my friend?" The leap is a small one and one that a person can entertain within reason. But had the

mishna said, “Treat everyone as one treats God,” the leap from student to God would be too great to entertain. Thus, the mishna provides an acceptable step to attain the goal of treating the lowest like the highest, but in a gradual fashion. Thereby, one can realize and entertain the principle. The mishna teaches the idea and offers a method of application.

Once a person stops treating his student with less honor than he does his friend, he releases himself from that emotional niche. Thereby, one removes himself from relating to his student emotionally, allowing him to relate to the student as halacha demands: on a rational and halachic plane.

Maimonides possessed a different version of the text: “The honor of your student should be like your own honor.” When it comes to a student, one should introduce the concept of treating him as you do yourself. Regarding the treatment of a friend, fear is introduced [as opposed to honor]. And in one’s relationship to his teacher, the fear of Heaven is introduced. Fear expressed toward a teacher is one matter, but the fear of Heaven is a metaphysical fear/awe. In each relationship, one introduces a [new and] different aspect. In each relationship, one removes himself from the emotional plane by introducing a new element.

Having fear for one’s friend does not mean one must be

in awe of his friend, but that his treatment of his friend equates to his treatment of his teacher. Treating a friend with awe removes the natural expression of a psychological relationship. One elevates himself in this manner.

The world feels if anything except emotions are involved in relationships, the relationship is deficient. With this mishna, Judaism revises human relationships. Judaism says that the emotional relationship alone is weak, empty, unstable, and is not an expression of the higher form of man. Judaism differs not only from the world but also from the philosophers, for no philosopher could ever work out such a system. Without God providing a halachic system, it would be nonsensical to make up arbitrary values.

Saadia Gaon asked why it was necessary to have Mattan Torah, the giving of the Torah at Sinai, [for even] without Mattan Torah we agree that the Torah's ideas are true. Thus, a great intellect could arrive at the Torah's conclusions on his own, just like Abraham did. Maimonides cites certain Greek philosophers who arrived at the same ideas that the Torah expresses, but one could not arrive at halachos as stated in our mishna without the Torah. One could never assume that he should treat his teacher the same way he treats God. Judaism maintains that all relationships must be of an objective halachic quality. That is the true relationship, unlike what the world seeks in its purely emo-

tional relationships. Judaism frowns upon such relationships. This applies to spouses as well—a marriage must be based on objective halachic concepts. If the halachic element is lacking in any relationship, one fails to act as an adam [an intellectual being].

Parshas Vayechi provides an example. As Jacob was approaching death, he called his son Joseph to ensure that he would not be interned in Egypt. Typically, a father in this situation would tell his son, “I am your father, this is what I want you to do.” But Jacob did not operate this way:

And when the time approached for Yisrael (Jacob) to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, “Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: Please do not bury me in Egypt. When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place.” Joseph replied, “I will do as you have spoken.” And Jacob said, “Swear to me.” And Joseph swore to him. Then Yisrael bowed at the head of the bed (Gen. 47:29-31).

Jacob expressed the perfection that the honor for one’s student [son] should be just like one’s own honor. Jacob spoke to Joseph with great respect; they did not have a typical father/son relationship. We are to always recognize that we are relating to a tzelem Elohim [an intelligent crea-

ture], which is an objective entity, and therefore the relationship must operate on that basis.

Rashi says that Jacob bowed to Joseph even though Jacob was greater than Joseph. But Joseph was a king and Jacob showed him honor. Later we read, “Yisrael (Jacob) strengthened himself and sat on the bed (Ibid. 48:2).” Chazal say:

“Even though he is my son, he is a king and I will give him honor.” From here we learn that one must give honor to kingship.

First, Jacob made a political gesture, “Then Yisrael bowed at the head of the bed.” But when Jacob “strengthened himself and sat on the bed” it is referred to as giving honor to kingship. What is the difference? It is also interesting as this is his own son. But even so, Jacob did not simply relate to Joseph in an emotional framework, as a father to a son, rather he conducted all his relationships using wisdom.

In the first case, Jacob offered a political gesture. One must be aware that a king (Joseph) is in a different mental framework; one must be aware of such a person’s emotions. And just because Jacob was related to Joseph, this did not give him the right to relate to Joseph differently from any other king, whose mentality must be treated ac-

cordingly.

In the first case, Jacob bowed to Joseph after he promised Jacob that he would do as he had asked. Jacob's bow was a political gesture. In the second case, why did Jacob "strengthen himself [to sit up] on the bed?" He did so before Joseph entered the room. Jacob was ill and could have remained in a reclining position, but by strengthening himself before Joseph came into the room, he showed that it was not a political gesture. Here, Jacob carried out an objective action; as Chazal said, he gave honor to kingship. This was a halachic act; the first case was political. Even Moshe showed honor to Pharaoh.

In the span of a few verses we see the perfect person's relationships. First, Jacob honored his son, which is in line with "Let the honor of your students be dear to you as your own...." Second, Jacob also respected Joseph as a great political figure and bowed to him. Third, Jacob acted halachically and sat up on the bed before Joseph entered the room.

This is Judaism: a completely different approach in relationships. No relationship is exempt from being raised to an objective plane, especially the relationship between husband and wife. Problems arise in relationships because spouses desire to benefit emotionally from the union without any wisdom applied. But as long as one functions on an

infantile plane, he cannot be successful, because one partner's infantile needs, which are endless, face off against the other partner, whose own infantile needs are endless. Such a relationship is impossible to succeed.

A psychologist once said that when analyzing a person, all parts of the personality must be scrutinized. He gave the following analogy: If the police said they would patrol all places except for one town, surely all the criminals would relocate to that unpatrolled town. The same is true with the human personality. If all but one part of the psyche is scrutinized, that one area is where one will vent all his emotions. Therefore, halacha governs all relationships, demanding an objective treatment of all people.

The Rav once said, "At the Passover Seder we serve God through our stomachs." Every step of the Seder is guided by halacha. So too in human relationships. Judaism tells a person to enjoy his relationships, but he must also guide them using his intellect, his tzelem Elohim. The personal satisfaction received by one who follows the Torah is a greater psychological satisfaction than one who fully immerses himself in pleasures. Judaism does not want a person to forfeit this world's pleasures, but requires that these pleasures be enjoyed within a framework as a means. As an end, following pleasures drives one crazy. Even a person on the level of a prophet should enjoy a walk and ap-

preciate nature. Physical enjoyments provide a person with a pleasant state of mind, but one's primary focus must be to engage his intellect. The distorted man plunges all his energies into earthly pleasures. [Man cannot satisfy his energies in the physical or else his end will be frustration.]

The perfected person derives greater satisfaction from personal relationships since he relates to others as he was designed to do, and in the proper perspective. Therefore, his relationships are purely pleasurable and without pain. But one who seeks to derive all his satisfaction from personal relationships will meet with impossible results.

This is one of the most important concepts in Pirkei Avos, for one must revise his whole way of living. Not only is this important for relationships, but [more] for one's philosophical perfection, shleimus ha'adam. A person who lives this way must live on a different plane. The emotions that seek satisfaction are usually the unbridled social emotions, which are the most devastating emotions. As a point of mussar, this is the essence of Pirkei Avos: Halomeid v'aino oseh (one who learns but does not put into practice) has a serious defect. One should therefore practice what he learns.

RABBI SHIMON SAYS, "THERE ARE THREE

CROWNS: THE CROWN OF TORAH, THE CROWN OF PRIESTHOOD, AND THE CROWN OF KINGSHIP, BUT THE CROWN OF A GOOD NAME OUTWEIGHS THEM ALL.”

Maimonides comments:

These three good ranks were given to this nation at the beginning of the giving of the Torah. And they are priesthood, monarchy, and Torah. Aaron merited [to take] priesthood, David merited [to take] monarchy, but the crown of Torah remains for anyone who wants to be crowned with it. And the rabbis, may their memory be blessed, said (Talmud Yoma 72b), “And lest you say that this crown is less than the other two, it is not like that. Rather it is greater than both of them. And the two are in it, as it states (Proverbs 8:15), ‘Through me kings reign and rulers decree just laws’; and it states (Proverbs 8:16), ‘Through me ministers administer, etc.’” But the crown of a good name comes from the Torah [as well], meaning to say its knowledge and its practice—as through them does a truly good name come.

In his *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides also writes:

The people of Israel were crowned with three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of sovereignty. The crown of priesthood was ac-

quired by Aaron, even as it says, "And it should be to him, and to his children after him, the covenant of everlasting priesthood" (Num. 25.13); the crown of sovereignty was acquired by David, even as it says, "His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me" (Psalms 89.37); but the crown of Torah, behold it, there it lies ready within the grasp of all of Israel, even as it says, "Moshe commanded us a law, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33.4). Whosoever wants it may come and take it. Perhaps you will say that those other two crowns are greater than the crown of Torah; behold, it says, "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice; by me princes rule" (Prov. 8. 13-14); from here be instructed that the crown of Torah is greater than both of the others (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:1).

The sages said, "One born out of wedlock (mamzer), if he be a Torah scholar, takes precedence over an ignorant high priest" (Talmud Horayot, 13b); even as it says, "She [Torah] is more precious than rubies" (Prov. 3.15), meaning, more precious [is the mamzer talmid chocham] than a high priest who enters the innermost place of the Beis Hamikdash (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:2).

As comparison is a purely human equation [it doesn't exist in reality, outside the mind], and as everyone must

live in reality, if one is not a king or a priest, it is irrelevant. Therefore, what is the point of this [part of the] mishna?

Maimonides says that the crown of a good name is derived from the knowledge of the Torah and the actions resulting from that knowledge, “as through them does a truly good name come.”

The people of Israel were crowned with three crowns.

One thing is clear: These three crowns would have been impossible without Mattan Torah.

Insofar as one’s perfection is concerned, people function on two planes: 1. A personal plane, and 2. The plane of humanity. To function on the personal plane is insufficient, for if one is concerned with his own perfection [and is removed from the community as a *poresh min hatzibur*] he forfeits *Olam Haba*:

And the following are they who have no share in the World to Come but suffer excision and loss of identity, and are damned for ever and ever for their exceeding wickedness and sinfulness: atheists, infidels, traducers of the Torah, dissenters of resurrection and the coming of a Redeemer, apostates, enticers of many to sin, seceders from the congregation [poresh min hatzibur], a public perpetrator of sins emulating Je-

hoiakim, informers, leaders who cast fear upon the congregation not for the sake of God, shedders of blood by defaming people in public, evil-tongued people, he who abolishes circumcision (Hilchos Teshuvah 3:6).

This is a serious matter. A poresh min hatzibur is one who does not care for others and lives only for himself. However, a person must approach perfection on the personal level, and he must also be committed to a second perfection, which is the reality of Sinai. One who loves God, which naturally results from studying Torah, must adhere to God's plan:

And you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:6).

[A holy nation exists in the context of other nations. A poresh min hatzibur does not work with the Jewish nation to reach the objective of this verse, to make Israel respected in order that other nations identify Israel and recognize God.]

The Jewish nation has a specific function in the framework of humanity. It is impossible to love God and turn one's back on His plan, which was given at Sinai. One must engage in actions that promote the objective of Sinai.

Our mishna does not speak about perfection in personal terms, as does Talmud Peah 1:1:

These are the things that have no measure: peah [the corner of the field which, while harvesting, must be left for the poor], bikurim [the first fruits that must be brought to the Beis Hamikdash and given to the kohen], the appearance sacrifice [brought to the Beis Hamikdash on the Shalosh Regalim], acts of kindness, and the study of the Torah. These are things the fruits of which a man enjoys in this world, while the principle remains for him in the World to Come: Honoring one's father and mother, acts of kindness, and bringing peace between a man and his fellow. But the study of Torah is equal to them all.

We are not merely individuals, but we are part of a system that God brought forth at Sinai. We have a responsibility to that system. This is where the crowns come in.

A crown projects a certain kind of perfection. The kohen does not work in the Beis Hamikdash for his personal perfection, but for the perfection of the nation. The halachic system of avodah (Temple service) perfects everyone who comes in contact with it. When the Beis Hamikdash existed and people saw the kohanim worshipping and sensed God's presence, it perfected them. The purpose of the priesthood is the perfection of the nation. This is the mean-

ing of the crown of priesthood. A crown is seen by everyone and perfects everyone as they recognize God. [Priesthood is service to God] and it taught man perfection as it demonstrated the sublimation of man's energies and instincts, using them in the worship of God. A priest is a person in a special position who brings about love of God. He is akin to Abraham, who taught monotheism to the masses. When one loves God, he is overjoyed to bring others to recognize God.

THE CROWN OF KINGSHIP

True kingship is the greatest sanctification of God. When one sees the Jewish king involved in halacha, ideas, and true justice without any corruption, it is the greatest sanctification of God's name. This was exemplified by King Solomon when the Queen of Sheba visited him and he answered her questions:

The Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, through the name of the Lord, and she came to test him with hard questions. She arrived in Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels bearing spices, a great quantity of gold, and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she asked him all that she had in mind. Solomon had answers for all her questions; there

was nothing that the king did not know, [nothing] to which he could not answer. When the Queen of Sheba observed all of Solomon's wisdom, the palace he had built, the fare of his table, the seating of his courtiers, the service and attire of his attendants, his wine service, and the burnt offerings that he offered at the House of the Lord, she was left breathless. She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own land about you and your wisdom was true. But I did not believe the reports until I came and saw with my own eyes that not even half had been told to me; your wisdom and wealth surpass the reports that I've heard. How fortunate are your men and how fortunate are these your courtiers, who are always in attendance to you and can hear your wisdom! Praised be the Lord your God, who delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel. It is because of the Lord's everlasting love for Israel that He made you king to administer justice and righteousness." She presented the king with one hundred and twenty talents of gold, a large quantity of spices, and precious stones. Never again did such a vast quantity of spices arrive as that which the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon (I Kings 10:1-10).

The person who brings about justice and righteousness creates the greatest sanctification of God's name. This is the crown of kingship. One who loves God would jump at

the chance to be the ultimate king, the just king. But this is not available to everyone—it is an impossibility [reserved only for David’s lineage]. The reason that the crowns of priesthood and kingship must be transmitted from father to son is to retain their esteem.

But there is another crown: The crown of Torah, which gives the talmid chocham certain prominence and position regarding demonstrating the ultimate honor for God. As we said above, the mamzer talmid chocham takes precedence over even the High Priest. We know that nothing surpasses Torah study, so there is no comparison between a mamzer talmid chocham and an ignorant high priest. This statement would not be necessary had God not given a talmid chocham the distinction of a “crown.” The Torah is not just a personal matter, but it gave the talmid chocham an institution of crown, the kesser Torah. [Thus, on a personal level, a talmid chocham certainly overrides an ignorant high priest. And on the national level the talmid chocham receives greater communal honor (Maimonides’ previous comment) to instill proper values in the people through the Torah giving a crown—a mark of superiority—to the talmid chocham.] This principle operates not on the personal plane, but in the [communal] framework in which God sought to establish the demonstration of Torah principles within a system. (There is no crown of prophecy

as it is a natural result of one's perfection, as Maimonides states. It is not a separate institution.)

*For me [Torah] kings reign, and princes
decree justice. For me princes (priests)
rule... (Prov. 8:15, 16).*

If Maimonides discusses learning on a personal level, there is no reason for him to cite these verses, as Peah 1:1 says, "But the study of Torah is equal to them all." Therefore, what do these verses mean to say? A verse is needed to demonstrate the halachic system that God established. [These verses teach that the crown of Torah is superior.] But how do we see this principle from these verses? The crowns of priesthood and kingship are both directed toward one thing: the crown of Torah. The crowns of priesthood and kingship are incomplete; they point their fingers at another crown. The word "me" in these verses refers to the crown of Torah.

**BUT THE CROWN OF A GOOD NAME OUTWEIGHS
THEM ALL.**

The crown of Torah searches for one more thing: the crown of a good name. The crown of Torah is the crown of the talmid chocham. But for a person who is a great Torah scholar, the crown of Torah alone is insufficient...he must

attain the crown of a good name. On this topic, Talmud Yoma 72b states as follows:

Rabbi Yochanan said, "There are three crowns: One is on the altar, one is on the ark, and one is on the table. The crown of the altar Aaron merited and took it, the crown of the table David merited and took it, and the crown on the ark still is available, anyone who desires can come and take it. Perhaps one will say that this last crown is of lesser importance than the others. Therefore, it is written, 'Through me do kings reign.'

Rabbi Yochanan raised a contradiction: "Crown is written as 'zar' (stranger) but it is read 'zare' (crown). If one merits it, his Torah study becomes a crown to him, but if he is not meritorious his Torah will be a stranger to him."

"From within and from without you shall cover it (the ark) with gold" (Exod. 25:11). Rava said, "This alludes to the idea that any Torah scholar whose inside is not like his outside, i.e., whose outward expression of righteousness is insincere, is not to be considered a Torah scholar." Abaye said, and some say it was Rabbah bar Ulla who said, "Not only is such a person not to be considered a Torah scholar, but he is called loathsome, as it is stated, 'What then of one loathsome and foul, man who drinks iniq-

uity like water.' (Job 15:16). Although he drinks the Torah like water, since he sins, his Torah is considered iniquitous and this makes him loathsome and foul."

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said, "What is the meaning of that which is written: 'Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, as he has no heart?' (Proverbs 17:16) This expresses the following sentiment: Woe to them, haters of Torah scholars, [a euphemism for the Torah scholars themselves] who immerse themselves in Torah and have no fear of Heaven. They are fools; they try to acquire the wisdom of Torah, but since they have no fear of Heaven in their hearts they lack the ability to do so."

Rabbi Yannai declared that the situation may be expressed by the following sentiment: Pity him who has no courtyard but senselessly makes a gate for his courtyard. Fear of Heaven is like the courtyard, and the study of Torah is the gate that provides entrance to the courtyard. The study of Torah is purposeful only if it leads to fear of Heaven.

Rashi comments:

The Torah is only a gate to enter into [to enable one's] fear of God. Therefore, what must come first is the fear of God.

[The obvious question is that] Rashi just said fear of God is the goal, so how can it come first? This idea is circular.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin said there are two concepts of the fear of God. On a basic level, one's purposes are for Torah [one fears God's commands and therefore follows them]. The second fear of God is what Maimonides describes in the beginning of his *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*: that which results from grasping God's wisdom. Here, one's state is different; his relationship with God has changed. The first fear of God is an imposed state; the second is a natural state. Thus, Rashi refers to the second fear of God—an awe of God—which is where Torah leads a person. Therefore, the first fear of God must come before the second, because at first, one needs the proper motivation. For if his motivations are corrupt, he will never attain wisdom and the second fear of God. The Talmud continues:

Rava said to the sages in the study hall, "I beg of you, do not inherit Gebenam twice. By studying Torah without the ac-

companying fear of Heaven, not only are you undeserving of the World to Come, but even in this world you experience Gehenam, as you spend all your time in study and fail to benefit from worldly pleasure.”

Why did the sages lose both worlds if they learned in this world and enjoyed their learning? Fulfilling the Torah is a natural result of one whose mind is open to the appreciation of the Torah’s wisdom. Only in a corrupt person are one’s studies not for the sake of enjoyment, lishma. It is impossible for one to learn for the sake of the pleasure of learning itself and then not fulfill the mitzvos. There’s no such phenomenon. When we say the enjoyment of wisdom is greater than material pleasures, we refer to the appreciation of the beauty of wisdom. Without this appreciation, one finds learning burdensome. Such a person does not learn in order to see the beauty of the wisdom, but to obtain some answer or some ulterior motive. In this case, learning is then a racking of one’s brain and not a pleasurable experience.

This explains the two Gehenams: In this world, he found no pleasure in his learning, and he loses the next world. The Talmud continues:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "What is the meaning of that which is written: 'And this is the Torah that Moshe put [sam] before the children of Israel' (Deut. 4:44)? The word sam is written with the letter sin and it means put; it is phonetically similar to the word sam, written with the letter samech, meaning a drug. This use of this word therefore alludes to the following: If one is deserving, the Torah becomes a potion [sam] of life for him. If one is not deserving, the Torah becomes a potion of death for him." And this idea is as Rava said, "If one is skillful in his study of Torah and immerses himself in it with love, it is a potion of life; but for one who is not skillful in his studies, it is a potion of death."

The Torah becomes a potion of death for two reasons: One does not gain the benefit of the enjoyment, and one who knows that the Torah is true but does not practice it is destroyed by the conflict. The Rav once visited one of his professors who was an apostate, but he found him sitting and learning Torah. This professor was Einstein's right-hand man, a great mathematician. The Rav asked him why he was learning, and he replied, "It is all your grandfather's fault; he destroyed me! I learned Torah with him and I never saw such wisdom. I do not live according to the Torah and every night I must sit down and learn and review

the concepts.” This embodies “If one is not deserving, the Torah becomes a potion of death for him.” It killed him, as he saw the beauty of the Torah, but he lived an opposing lifestyle. [This is not a contradiction to what was stated above, “It is impossible for one to learn for the sake of the pleasure of learning itself and then not fulfill the mitzvos.” For in this case, the professor harbored conflicting emotions, while in the case above we refer to one with no conflicting emotions.]

The Talmud continues:

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said that Rabbi Yonatan raised a contradiction. “It was written, ‘The precepts of the Lord are upright, gladdening the heart’ (Psalms 19:9), but it is also written, ‘The word of the Lord is refining’ (Psalms 18:31), which implies that the study of Torah can be a distressing process by which a person is refined, like metal smelted in a smith’s fire.” He reconciles these verses as follows: “For one who is deserving, the Torah gladdens him; for one who is not deserving, it refines him.” Reish Lakish said, “This lesson emerges from that second verse itself: For one who is deserving, the Torah refines him for life; for one who is not deserving, it refines him for death.”

The gemara commenced with three crowns and then reviews all these cases. What do these cases have to do with three crowns?

What do Chazal mean by the “crown of Torah?” They refer to the knowledge of Torah. But it is not the end of the line, for “The crown of a good name outweighs them all,” which refers to the truly perfected person who has taken the Torah and has incorporated it into himself so that he becomes perfected. He obtains a “good name” because the truly perfected individual has overcome all the base emotions that cause struggles between people. People conflict with others only because of nonsensical reasons. Even great governments debate over nonsense; petty emotions are involved at even the highest political levels. Thus, the Torah says, “Talmidei chochamim increase peace in the world” (Talmud Berachos 64a) because the talmid chocham is removed from all pettiness. He has a good name because people recognize his true perfection, which is not a façade. This person brings about the purpose of Sinai to the highest degree.

4:13 ATTITUDE TOWARD STUDY

RABBI NEHORAI SAYS, “EXILE YOURSELF TO A PLACE OF TORAH, AND DO NOT SAY THAT IT WILL FOLLOW YOU, THAT YOUR COLLEAGUES WILL SUSTAIN IT IN YOUR HANDS. DO NOT RELY ON YOUR UNDERSTANDING.”

Torah study has two levels: 1). The ma’aseh (act) of the mitzvah, and 2). A nisiyas ha’lev (the lifting of the heart), where one is moved to study [out of a love of wisdom], a different level of perfection. This mishna identifies the character traits necessary for this second level. One must travel to live in a place of chochamim. Rashi comments:

One should exile himself to a place of Torah, to the place where his teacher is. And one should not say that it should follow him, that his teacher should come here, and he will learn before him [here].

Rashi’s statement is odd because he says one should live where his rebbe lives and he should not say, “My rebbe should come to me and I will learn before him here.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

That you should live in a place that has much Torah and many sages in it. Do not

rely upon your colleagues, who went to study, that they will come and teach you. As you, yourself, need to exile yourself with them and to pursue the Torah if you want to know it. Even when you do study and exile yourself to a place of Torah and become wise, "Do not rely on your understanding," that you not depend upon your rationale; but rather you should do all the deeds according to the counsel of the sages.

Rabbeinu Yona says one must not inquire from friends who attended the rebbe's shiur and learn from them, rather one should go to the place of the rebbe himself and chase after Torah. Rabbeinu Yona does not discuss the question of whether one can gain from his friend by hearing the shiur secondhand.

There is no question that one cannot learn by himself. Rashi addresses a certain narcissistic desire: People want to be self-contained [self-sufficient]. A person does not want to feel that he lacks anything. He searches for the ultimate narcissistic state where he needs no one else. Even the desire for wisdom carries with it the greatest narcissistic desire: to be the great chocham and not need anyone else [as such a person would have ultimate knowledge]. However, without the rebbe, one cannot become a talmid chocham.

The essence of this mishna is directed against this nar-

cissistic tendency. Rashi's words—"My rebbe should come to me and I will learn before him here"—express the person's desire not to uproot himself; he does not want to breach his narcissistic state; which expresses the inability to admit dependency.

Rabbeinu Yona says these words are all one thought: "And one should not say that it should follow him, that his teacher should come here, and he will learn before him [here]." One should not think that he will gain what his friends gained from the rebbe in person. Rabbeinu Yona does not reject that assumption, but he says that becoming a talmid chocham requires a certain attitude: One must run after wisdom. Any calculation one makes in terms of how much he will gain from learning by making a plan—like learning a shiur from his friends instead of following after his rebbe—will destroy his learning. One who loves knowledge is drawn to his rebbe's location. He knows that sitting before his rebbe is the situation [convening] of chochamim.

[Rabbi Chait made the following remarks about Kobeles: The word kobeles refers to kehila, a congregation. King Solomon always spoke in front of large gatherings comprised of wise men, the Chochmei Yisrael. Thereby, his conclusions benefited from other wise men, to whose scrutiny he subjected his thoughts. A person who learns alone tends to think that his ideas

are correct. Having contrasted his ideas with men of wisdom, King Solomon eliminated personal error.]

One who makes calculations about how much he will gain in learning violates what is necessary to bring him to the heights of Torah study. One who calculates an alternative plan for learning and does not chase after his rebbe, displays something lacking in his attraction to the Torah. This explains why Rabbeinu Yona writes, “You must personally exile yourself with your friends and chase Torah if you desire to know it.”

The narcissistic element has another expression: a desire to master the methodology [of talmud/Torah thought and analysis]. This desire stands in opposition to the proper desire to understand the subject matter. One who desires to master the methodology must lose out because he is not attracted by a love of the subject matter itself. He can never reach certain heights in learning, which depend solely on the love of the subject itself and for which no amount of methodology can compensate. This narcissistic desire stands in opposition to the natural appreciation of wisdom. It is the natural love of chochma that propels a person forward.

What then is this mishna’s advice? If someone is pulled

by the desire to perfect his methodology, what does he do to battle that desire? Judaism says that one should never cater to an emotion, no matter how powerful it is, and no matter how painful it is to frustrate that emotion. For if one follows that path and satisfies his emotion, he is doomed.

A real chocham always makes a cheshbon (calculation) about the degree of his involvement in material pleasures. For if he indulges more than he needs to, he cheats himself regarding the amount of remaining energy that he can apply to his Torah learning. Insofar as one indulges in the material pleasures in excess of his needs, he loses Olam Haba, the essence of life.

Talmud Baba Basra 78b states as follows:

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "What is meant by the verse "Therefore the proverbists (moslim) say, "They came to Cheshbon?" This refers to those who rule (moshel) over their instinctual drive and consider the calculation (cheshbon) of the world: weighing the loss (restraint of pleasure) of a mitzvah against its gain, and the reward (pleasure) of a sin against its loss."

Before a chocham engages in any type of earthly pleasure, he makes a calculation where the gain is measured against the loss. This requires a tremendous ability to rule

over one's instincts.

One must analyze his motivation in refraining from exiling himself to the place of Torah. That realization can open many doors to specific knowledge of one's own nature, which only then enables him to uproot that emotion. Aristotle said pain is a wonderful thing, as it alerts a person to a problem. This is one of the benefits of the halachic system: It is an unbelievable barometer. People notice that certain halachos are difficult, and that is the first sign that there is something [in their personalities] that demands an investigation.

If this advice of exiling oneself to a place of Torah conflicts with one's desires, one must be alerted to a problem and must examine his nature to understand why he has this aversion. He must uproot the emotion that rejects this advice.

Maimonides comments:

He said [to] seek a [proper] place for reading and study, as the reading will become firm and [will] be established [when you are] with another [person]. And do not rely upon your [own] understanding and say that you do not need colleagues and students who will stimulate you.

Maimonides' comments seem similar to Rashi's: One

must abandon narcissism. Rabbeinu Yona's position is that to gain in learning, one must work with the natural desire for knowledge of the subject matter.

DO NOT RELY ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING.

According to Maimonides, this mishna is one exhortation. Even if one does exile himself to a place of Torah, he must not rely on his own understanding, even in that location. [Narcissism can express itself even when one is in front of his rebbe.] One must realize the vital role of friends and students, who contribute to greater wisdom. There is no such thing as self-sufficient learning. One always requires the intellectual arousal afforded by friends and students. The greatest talmid chocham can miss a point.

Rabbeinu Yona said,

[Do] not depend upon your rationale; but rather you should do all the deeds according to the counsel of the sages.

One should not conclude that he need not ask a question if there is a reason to discuss the matter. One should not feel self-sustained. Rather, he should listen to everything a chocham tells him, and afterward understand his reply.

Many times, one cannot plunge to the depths of what his rebbe means. One cannot expect the rebbe to explain every

single point. One must listen to his words and let them revolve in his mind, and one day they will become clear.

Keep silent and afterward analyze (Talmud Berachos 63b).

This silence is applied when one does not fully grasp all of which his teacher spoke. This occurs since the student's intuition does not parallel that of his rebbe. The student cannot grasp why his rebbe spoke about one pshat as opposed to another. Rebbe and talmid do not follow the same path of investigation or exploration. The decision of which course to explore cannot be explained logically. The experienced "guide" (rebbe) has a certain intuition for selecting which matters to probe, based on his total knowledge [explaining why rebbe and talmid do not explore on parallel paths].

4:14 THE RIGHTEOUS VERSUS OTHERS

RABBI YANAI SAYS, “WE DO NOT HAVE [THE ABILITY TO EXPLAIN] THE TRANQUILITY OF THE WICKED OR EVEN THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS.” RABBI MASIA BEN CHARASH SAYS, “BE THE FIRST TO GREET EVERY PERSON, AND BE A TAIL TO LIONS, AND DO NOT BE A HEAD TO FOXES.”

Jeremiah 12:1, 2 states as follows:

God, You are perfectly righteous, yet I will argue on You, even statutes of justice I will speak upon You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease? You have planted them, and they have taken root, they spread, they even bear fruit. You are close to their words, but far from their thoughts.

Metzudas Dovid says that the evil person never appears evil, as he cloaks himself in righteousness. This is the meaning of words “You are close to their words” [i.e., their words are close to God, or, they are ostensibly righteous]. But God acts toward them as if they are truly righteous [they are successful, and this success is what Jeremiah questions]. No rasha will ever say he is wicked. He con-

ceals his wickedness with his “righteous” cause.

Shmuel ibn Tibbon asks, “Why do the prophets always ask the question about the rasha’s success, but they do not ask about the suffering of the tzaddik?” He answers, “There is no way to determine whether one is a tzaddik, for there can always be an ulterior motivation for one’s righteous deeds.” When the woman from Shunam said that Elisha was a tzaddik, the gemara (Talmud Berachos 10b) asks how she knew that. The gemara then answers that it was based on providence: There was never a fly on his plate and there was never a nocturnal emission in his bed (Berachos 10b). [The gemara’s question is based on the principle that one cannot determine another person’s righteousness without evidence of providence.] Therefore, the prophets never asked the question about the suffering of righteous people [for they could not determine who was righteous and, therefore, who did not deserve to suffer]. This idea is in line with Maimonides who says that we listen to a prophet based on the command “... To him shall you listen” (Deut. 18:15). This is a halacha and we do not know that this man is truly a prophet [but we are commanded to follow him].

A person’s actions can be generated from many sources—there are many psychological factors. Thus, we cannot know who is righteous, but we can determine who is wicked because it is impossible for a righteous person to perpe-

trate evil. This is why the prophet only asks about the success of the rasha and not about the suffering of the tzaddik.

There is something interesting in Jeremiah's words and from the well-known Chazal: "Why does God give the rasha goodness in this world? To remove him from the next world" [where he would have received a reward for any good he performed]. But we must ask, in general, why God would harm the rasha [by eliminating his afterlife through paying his reward on Earth].

Jeremiah should have asked the following: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?" But he continues:

You have planted them, and they have taken root, they spread, they even bear fruit. You are close to their words, but far from their thoughts.

If Jeremiah had stopped after the first verse, the question could be understood as follows: "Why does the rasha succeed, and why does God permit this?" It's a question as to why God allows the rasha's schemes to succeed. King David knew Achitophel's advice would be successful and therefore he prayed to God to confound that natural success. Therefore, if Jeremiah said just the first verse and not the second, he would be saying the same thing as King

David. But Jeremiah adds, “You have planted them, and they have taken root....” With these words, Jeremiah identifies a phenomenon: There is a special providence that ensures the success of the rasha, which is expressed in the words, “You have planted [the rasha]....”

“You are close to their words” means that God answered them and gave the wicked people what they desired. “They spread, they even bear fruit” [referring to their success] is not a success from their natural abilities and strategies [like Achitophel, but because God ensured success for the rasha when naturally he would have failed].

Judaism maintains that there exists a special providence for the rasha’s success. In the case of Hitler, may his name be wiped out, he escaped unscathed from many attempts on his life. The rasha has a providence on two levels. As Rabbeinu Yona said in mishna 4:10, “If you neglect the Torah, there are many distractions.” Sometimes God decrees a punishment on the Jews, which is brought about through the rasha [i.e., the rasha succeeds]. Here, the rasha becomes God’s shaivet mochiyach, (His staff of rebuke). But Jeremiah’s question concerns why the rasha is entitled to this providence that ensures his success. Rashi comments on the mishna as follows:

God brings tranquility to the rasha in this

*world so that he can take his portion and
the portion of the righteous in hell.*

As Rashi says in many places, this is done to “remove him from the [next] world.” What exactly does that mean?

Sometimes a person falls under God’s providence in such a manner that he is never removed from his evil [rather he continues on his evil path], for nothing propels a person to continue on his path more than success. As Maimonides says, a person [Pharaoh] can sin so grievously that his teshuvah is removed [justice demands his destruction without teshuvah] and this is achieved by giving success to that rasha. [He will not repent because he is so successful.] Thus, success can be the worst thing.

God gives success to a rasha in order to destroy him [as Maimonides says, he should receive the proper punishment]. This conforms with the rabbis’ statement, “On the path that man wishes to travel, he is led” (Talmud Makkos 10b).

Why was Jeremiah so baffled by this aspect of God’s providence? And why does God wish to harm a person as he could have repented? After all, the Torah says, “God does not desire the death of the wicked, but in his return from his way and that he lives” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Jeremiah was concerned that the rasha’s success would

cause others to turn away from righteousness and justice, which is the worst thing for the world. This was Jeremiah's question expressed in his words, "Even statutes of justice I will speak upon you." Jeremiah did not understand the rasha's success vis-à-vis the overall plan for the world. His question was: "Why is it more important to destroy the rasha than to save society?"

The prophet is the person who partakes of God's wisdom regarding justice on a societal scale. A typical person who claims to be concerned about the world is arrogant. Who is he to be concerned about everyone?! This explains why Jonah could not go on his mission, for it conflicted with his concern for society. He could not understand God's pity on mankind, which prevented him from acting, as the prophet's values and actions showed no discrepancy. Abraham also asked, "Will the judge of earth not perform justice!?" (Gen. 18:25). Again, we see that the prophet is concerned with the world.

What we learn from Jeremiah is that he was a person on a high level who asked this question. We are troubled by this question as it is a paradox. But this question cannot bother us as we are not on Jeremiah's level.

And Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of

Rav Shimon bar Yochai, "One is permitted to provoke the wicked in this world, as it is stated, "Those who abandon the Torah will praise wickedness, and the keepers of the Torah will fight them" (Proverbs 28:4) (Talmud Berachos 7b).

The gemara shows there is providence for the rasha.

RABBI MASIA BEN CHARASH SAYS, "BE THE FIRST TO GREET EVERY PERSON."

Always be the first one to say hello. Rashi says this applies even to an idolater in the marketplace. This is performed as darchei shalom (ways of peace).

Darchei shalom functions for practical purposes: to be protective of Klal Yisrael. According to Maimonides, darchei shalom falls under the category of emulating God—God's manner is peaceful.

Even idolaters have our sages commanded us to visit their sick and bury their dead along with the Jewish dead, and sustain their poor along with the poor of Israel, for the "sake of peace," since it says, "God is good to all, and His mercies extend upon all his works" (Psalms 145:9), and it says, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:17). (Hilchos Malachim 10:12).

Darchei shalom means that one acts as God acts.

Rabbeinu Yona says offering first hellos stems from the ways of moral discipline, *derech ha'mussar*.

For a person who is concerned with his social status, the worst thing is for his ego to be lowered and defeated. It is very degrading for such a person to extend a hello and receive no response; this makes people hesitant to offer first hellos. The meaning of offering a first hello is to overcome that ego emotion and to greet people (even an idolater) first. This is the moral discipline. It is only the person who values the social as reality who has an issue with offering a first hello. The lesson is that a person should recognize in practice that the social reality is not the ultimate reality. One should offer a first hello even to an idolater in the marketplace, as this lowering of one's self to such a tremendous degree perfects oneself.

But it would be strange to say that Chazal would offer first hellos as a mere exercise, in order to improve oneself emotionally, but with no other purpose. There must be something in the very act itself that is valuable. Chazal don't tell us to do things just to improve our emotions, as there are many things we can do to achieve this.

Chazal's intent is for a person to have a natural appreciation for and identify with another *tzelem Elohim*, even if that person is not perfected, such as an idolater. Haughti-

ness prevents a person from identifying with others. Such a person wants to feel different and elevated. However, there should be an identification with and a love for others. Very few people have this love because they are haughty.

People desire to feel special. Children today are raised with this sense, which is the very opposite of perfection, and which demands one to view himself as part of the species [not as better than it]. We see that great people had a love for the species: Moshe prayed for Israel; the Torah itself is for every nation; and the prophet talks about the ultimate redemption where everyone will come to recognize God. The midrash tells us that the angels wanted to sing while the Egyptians were drowning in the Yam Suf, but God responded, “The works of my hands are drowning, and you wish to sing?!” God wanted the Egyptians to embrace the Torah.

Therefore, one must offer first hellos to address the love for the species and not allow a break in his identification with mankind. Abraham didn’t break his identification with anyone. He even took Arab wayfarers into his home and taught them the idea of God. Abraham had a love for his fellow human beings. Man is the highest level being that exists in this world. God created this intelligent being and, therefore, he deserves respect and identification.

... BE A TAIL TO LIONS, AND DO NOT BE A HEAD TO FOXES.

Maimonides comments:

It is preferable to be a student to one who is wiser than yourself and it is more fitting than being a teacher to one [who is] lower than yourself. Because in the first situation, one will increase his knowledge, and in the second, he will lose. In the Sanhedrin, they would take the head judge in a court of twenty-three and make him the lowest rank in the court of seventy-one.

Rabbeinu Yona says the same thing as Maimonides, that being a student to one who is greater than yourself increases one's wisdom, and being a teacher to a lower person decreases one's wisdom. The question is why one's wisdom would decrease when he is a teacher of someone who is lower than himself. On the contrary, we learned the following:

And this is what Rabbi Chanina said, "I have learned much from my teachers and even more from my friends, but from my students I have learned more than from all of them" (Talmud Taanis 7a).

The answer is that what we refer to is a person's outlook

toward wisdom. If one views wisdom as that which gives him superiority over others, his wisdom will decrease. But if one is attached to the idea of being a student, which means he wishes to learn, and he accepts a rebbe over himself, he becomes attached to the ideas and his wisdom will increase. And a rebbe too can be a tale to lions, a talmid, as he looks to Chazal to continue his learning. His attitude is that he is always a student.

What does the term talmid chocham mean? Does it refer to a student who is wise, or to a student of the wise? It means the latter. The proof is that if it were the former, the plural form would be talmidim chochamim, and not talmidei chochamim. But talmidei chochamim is the true term and it means students of the wise: students of the ba'alei hamesorah, authors of the transmission.

Therefore, if one is interested in knowledge only to be a leader, his knowledge will decrease out of necessity, for he is not interested in knowledge for the ideas, but to achieve status. Once in a leadership role, there is no incentive to learn further, so he stagnates.

4:15 (NOT FOUND IN THE TALMUD)

4:16 THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT

RABBI YAAKOV SAYS, "THIS WORLD IS LIKE A HALLWAY (PROZDOR) BEFORE THE WORLD TO COME. FIX YOURSELF IN THE HALLWAY SO YOU MAY ENTER THE DRAWING ROOM (TRAKLIN)."

Maimonides writes:

A traklin is a chamber and a prozdor is a gatehouse. And the metaphor is clear and the intention is known. As it is in this world that man acquires the virtues through which he merits the World to Come. As this world is indeed a path and a passageway to the World to Come.

Rashi writes:

Every man must fix himself in this world with repentance and good deeds, for one who toils on Friday will eat on Shabbos (one who toils in this world will enjoy the next world).

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

*And he wants to say that this world is only
so that one merits the World to Come.*

The next mishna continues this theme...

4:17 THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT II

HE WOULD SAY, "ONE HOUR OF REPENTANCE
AND GOOD DEEDS IN THIS WORLD IS BETTER
THAN ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD TO COME.
AND ONE HOUR OF PLEASURE IN THE WORLD
TO COME IS BETTER THAN ALL THE TIME IN
THIS WORLD."

Maimonides comments:

*We have already elucidated in the tenth
chapter of Sanhedrin that there is no com-
pletion or addition after death. Instead, a
person increases and completes his virtue
in this world. And about this, [King] Sol-
omon hinted when he stated (Kobeles
9:10), "For there is no action, no reasoning,*

no knowledge, no wisdom in the grave to where you are going.” But this matter is that [the situation/nature of existence] to which a person goes will remain [the same] forever. And because of this, a man should make efforts during this short time and not waste his time, but only [spend it] on the acquisition of virtues—as his loss would [otherwise] be great, since he has no replacement [for it] and he cannot acquire [it later]. And since the pious ones knew this, they only saw [fit] to finish their time with wisdom and by increasing their virtues; and they benefited from all their time in the true way. And they frittered very little time on physical matters and on things that are necessary and impossible to do without it. But others spent all their time in physicality and they left [the world] like they came [to it]—“All corresponding to how it came, so will it go”—and they lost an eternal loss. And the masses all switched the truth about this question and said that the first group [the wise men] lost the world and that the last group profited [from] the world. And the matter is the opposite, as we have recounted. And they make darkness into light and light into darkness. And woe is it to those who destroy the truth. And [King] Solomon, peace be upon him, made this matter a fundamental in Koteles in his praising the profit of the world and in his disgracing its loss. And its elucidation is that there is after death neither gain nor [any] other ac-

quisition of that which he refrained from here. And this is all true. And when you examine that book from this perspective, the truth will be clear.

What is meant by “One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the time in the World to Come?”

If one does not repent and perform good deeds, he will have a lower level in Olam Haba and all of Olam Haba cannot compensate for the [higher] level he might have achieved had he repented and performed good deeds. The quality of Olam Haba for the one who repented and performed good deeds is of a far greater quality. No quantity of a lower level of Olam Haba, no matter how long it is extended, could compensate for the loss of one who failed to perform even a moment of repentance and good deeds.

AND ONE HOUR OF PLEASURE IN THE WORLD
TO COME IS BETTER THAN ALL THE TIME IN
THIS WORLD.

All the greatest satisfactions of this world are qualitatively differentiated from the satisfaction of Olam Haba. Rashi says that this life pales in comparison to Olam Haba because of the pains and evils that we endure, and because of the fear of death. Ibn Ezra says this as well in Koheles,

“Death is always between man’s eyes.” Man always has the specter of death before his eyes and he can never really enjoy life. Why does Rashi discuss pains and evils? The mishna says that all of this world does not measure up to a moment of pleasure in Olam Haba. To make a stronger point, shouldn’t Rashi have said that even a blissful earthly life does not compare to Olam Haba?

There is a certain amount of dissatisfaction that is naturally inescapable, even in a good life. This dissatisfaction exists in two areas: the externals—physical frustration—and even more so in terms of the internal world—the psyche. The nature of satisfaction that the psyche desires does not conform to what exists in reality. That is what Rashi means by the “pains and evils.” The psyche does not wish to experience any frustrations, rather it desires total pleasure. The world the psyche desires is not the physical existence in which we live. The psyche’s desires are desires of fantasy, and as reality does not offer fantasy, people experience frustration when seeking physical pleasures. This describes the pains and evils. And even enjoyments themselves contain moments of frustration. For when one is hungry, he is in pain, and he can only enjoy food as long as he has that pain of hunger. And when he removes that pain and is full, he can no longer eat, as this becomes painful. Man can only enjoy the desire when he has pain, and once he removes the pain he

can no longer enjoy the desire.

A chocham who studies human nature will conclude that there is no way a human being can enjoy a life of total physical pleasure. Even the desires one searches for have their roots in childhood fantasy, to which reality does not conform. Thus, the satisfaction is only a substitute for what a person searches for in his fantasy, and therefore one becomes frustrated. Additionally, all pleasures are short-lived, driving people to seek subsequent pleasures. A philosopher said that every enjoyment is followed either by depression or by another desire.

The second pain Rashi mentions is the fear of death. However, this fear is irrational as one no longer exists here once he dies. The error is that people feel they will still be here, but under the ground, and that is false. This is based on the immortality fantasy driving one to deny that he departs Earth, rather he feels he will experience “death underground.” This false view is represented in the language we use: “He is dead.” But this is a total contradiction. The word “is” represents the fallacy that one is still here. People falsely believe the dead person still “is.” However, one should accurately say, “He is not.” The immortality fantasy cannot accept that one is not, forcing people to say, “He is dead.”

Therefore, Rashi says that earthly life can be summed up as this: “All satisfactions are not real, but the frustrations are

real, and the fear of death looms over all of man's accomplishments and satisfactions." Man is inherently caught up in conflict and can never achieve satisfaction. That is the earthly existence.

Man seeks satisfaction by attempting to capture a fantasy, but reality simply does not conform to fantasy. Man's disappointment comes from a failed attempt to control reality, which is impossible. Man fails to realize that the nature of his ultimate desires is a fantasy. [What is "fantasy?" It is an imaginary, perfect, purely pleasurable, and endless experience, which does not exist.] Man refuses to recognize one most painful idea: At the core of his most desired and cherished dreams, lies a great fantasy. Man always blames reality, saying, "If I could only make certain changes I would achieve genuine happiness." But if man were to truly understand his desire he would acknowledge that reality does not conform to it. However, man refuses to turn his mind's eye on his underlying desire, explaining his constant depression and desperation.

If this is the case, it would appear that man is doomed to an unhappy life. Either man experiences depression when he cannot attain his fantasies, or he gives up the search and experiences no satisfaction.

The enjoyment of Olam Haba is infinitely greater than earthly satisfaction because life is full of "pains and evils."

There is no way to derive satisfaction from the physical world. In his *Commentary on the Mishna*, Maimonides offers another important reason for man's frustrations: Everything in nature has its own type of quality. For example, the quality of animal life differs from the quality of human life. The quality of the object's enjoyment cannot be greater than the object itself. Therefore, even if the psyche's satisfaction were achievable, that satisfaction would never compare to the satisfaction of Olam Haba. This is because the psyche [man's emotional make up] is part of the physical world, while the soul is of a different nature altogether. That is why the soul exists eternally while the psyche is temporal. Chazal's main concept regarding Olam Haba is stated in Berachos 34b:

All the prophets prophesied only regarding the Messianic Era, but regarding Olam Haba, "No eye has seen it except for You, God" (Isaiah 64:3).

This verse has a secondary meaning: No one knows the nature of the enjoyment of Olam Haba. Maimonides explains this to mean that every particular thing has an attending enjoyment. For example, an animal eats grass and this function is endowed with a certain pleasure. When the psyche obtains its desire, there is an attending enjoyment.

The only enjoyment we do not experience in this world is the soul's enjoyment. Maimonides states this in his *Commentary on the Mishna* in Sanhedrin. In earthly life, there is no such thing as a spiritual enjoyment. Due to the nature of the merger between the soul and the psyche in the body, our enjoyments are purely psychological. Chazal agree with this view of Maimonides as well. It is a fundamental belief; we are prevented from enjoying spiritual pleasure on Earth. This means that our enjoyment of ideas and wisdom is only a psychological pleasure. But the soul has no enjoyment here.

What is *Olam Haba*? It is the situation where the soul will have an enjoyment: a natural enjoyment that results from its activity. But the ultimate enjoyment of the soul is known only by God: "No eye has seen it except for You, God" (Isaiah 64:3).

God created man in a way that our greatest psychological enjoyment is derived from pursuing wisdom. This is so that the soul functions and achieves happiness in this physical existence. But that is not the real enjoyment. Furthermore, wisdom is always available—it is very intense and attracts our energies. A person can labor physically all day, but if he does not pursue wisdom he has not tapped his great reservoir of energy. God designed man such that we derive our greatest satisfaction through our involvement in

wisdom. Even when he is ill, a person can apply his energies to wisdom. Einstein said, “I was happy when I was ill, for I was able to think, as I was undisturbed.” A person’s nature is created in such a way that he can practically always think [and enjoy wisdom]. Man always achieves the greatest satisfaction when he perceives the world of wisdom. So, in earthly life, a life of wisdom is the most pleasurable one. But this great enjoyment is not on par in any way with Olam Haba.

The reason Chazal say that enjoyment in Olam Haba is infinitely greater than earthly pleasure is for another reason. Since the soul is of a different quality, its enjoyments must be of a different quality. The enjoyment that the eternal entity—the soul—has must, by definition, be superior to physical/psychological enjoyments.

Furthermore, as all knowledge is filtered through the senses, the soul does not operate here in its fullest form. That is why it cannot achieve its ultimate function in this world. Even the soul of Moshe, the most perfect man, did not achieve its highest level of functioning until his death. And at that point and forward the attending enjoyment must increase, for that is when the soul functions in its fullest form.

In Sanhedrin—in one breath—Maimonides discusses our inability to know what Olam Haba is, yet he also says

that perfected people have a much better idea of Olam Haba. Maimonides discusses the Messianic Era [a utopian earthy existence] and says that its primary characteristic is that people will, with little effort, attain their needs. The advantage is that a person will not worry as he does today. The natural result of the removal of these worries and stress is that one's life is extended. Maimonides says that during that era, Olam Haba will be understood in a very strong way. However, this contradicts Maimonides' statement that Olam Haba is known only by God.

Mishna 4:17 says that the premise of this world is a pathway to the next world. That being the case, one should spend his life pursuing wisdom to prepare for the next world. However, this contradicts another principle: One should learn Torah for its own sake, lishma:

Do not be as servants who serve the master to receive a reward (Avos 1:3).

Reward refers to Olam Haba, as Maimonides says:

The good in store for the righteous is life in the World to Come, which is a life connected with no death and a kind of good connected with no evil, such as is described in the Torah: "That it may be well with you, and you may prolong your days" (Deut. 22:7), which was traditionally de-

ducted to mean, "That it may be well with you" in a world that is entirely good"; and that you may prolong your days"—in a world existing forever, and this is the World to Come (Hilchos Teshuvah 8:1).

Maimonides also says:

The one who worships based on love, engages himself in the study of the Torah and the observance of precepts, and follows the paths of wisdom for no other motive, neither for fear of evil nor to inherit the "good," but he does the true thing because it is true (Hilchos Teshuvah 10:2).

That "good," Maimonides says, is Olam Haba. Lishma refers to the good here on Earth; it does not concern itself with any future benefit. The Torah does not openly say that one should perform the mitzvos to earn Olam Haba. Learning lishma is the best life here, as the Maariv prayer states, "For [mitzvos] are your life and your length of days." Torah and mitzvos are what give man enjoyment and satisfaction; this makes his life. And while it is true that Olam Haba will eventually come, that is not the motivation of one who worships God out of love.

The fault in serving God for a reward is that the person seeks an exchange. Such a person performs mitzvos and

studies Torah to attain Olam Haba. This reflects a mindset under the influence of psychological fantasy—desiring the unknown object of the afterlife—which the person believes to be very good. This person read mishna 4:17, which says that Olam Haba is very enjoyable, and his fantasy for enjoyment has gone unchanged. Chazal say that this person operates on a low level.

In his commentary on mishna 4:17, Maimonides stated that Chazal partook of the physical world only in a measure that was indispensable to live. Otherwise, they reserved all their time and energies for the pursuit of wisdom. This approach to the physical differentiates Chazal and other perfected people from pleasure seekers. Chazal indulged only in what they needed and in nothing more. They lived with “fixed needs.” In contrast, a pleasure seeker might attain his needs [and then some] but envies a better physical object. For example, he might buy a home and then regret not having purchased a more luxurious home like the one his friend just purchased. Chazal didn’t think this way. Once they had food and shelter, their needs were addressed, and no further energies were invested in pursuit of physical concerns. This sense of fixed needs is the mark of a perfected person.

Regarding our contradiction, in so far as one does not remove himself from fantasies, his fantasy of “ultimate

satisfaction” is merely converted into an Olam Haba fantasy. He is far from the truth.

Another possible life is where one perceives the world of wisdom and he understands that wisdom [universal principles and brilliant laws] is what guides the universe. He views this wisdom as the world of reality and he becomes attracted to it. This attraction to wisdom removes such a person from the desire to satisfy his psychological satisfactions, which then become insignificant to him. Wisdom becomes a lure and his mind turns solely toward seeking greater wisdom. When this person understands that the world of wisdom can be perceived to a far greater degree in Olam Haba, he is naturally attracted to the afterlife, as Maimonides says, “so that he merits eternal life”:

The sages and the Prophets did not long for the days of Moshiach because they wanted to rule the world or because they wanted to have dominion over the non-Jews or because they wanted the nations to exalt them or because they wanted to eat, drink, and be merry. Rather, they desired [the days of Moshiach] so that they would have time for Torah and its wisdom. And there would be no one who would oppress them or force them to be idle (from Torah). This, so that they would merit the World to Come, as we have explained regarding the laws of repentance (Hilchos Malachim 12:4).

This is the proper attitude and is not considered “learning with an ulterior motivation” for a fantasy afterlife. In this case, one loves wisdom and views Olam Haba as being a state of the same pleasure of wisdom. [Such a person does not pursue an ulterior fantasy but only the very wisdom that he values.] This person learns lishma.

Olam Haba is the existence where ultimate knowledge is possible. The more one partakes of wisdom, the more his appreciation of Olam Haba is realized. This desire to unveil the true reality that is behind everything is shared by all people, not just by Chazal. The desire to perceive the ultimate wisdom is perceived by all intelligent people. And this is the desire for Olam Haba.

One who learns Torah out of an enjoyment for that activity is on a high level. But that is not the ultimate level. This was expressed by the Epicureans, who sought pleasure and found wisdom to be the highest pleasure. However, they were still bound to seek personal satisfaction. The highest level is to seek an understanding of wisdom, not as an enjoyable thought problem [but as a curiosity for how halacha is designed, or to understand God’s justice, His nature, or His intended perfections for the mitzvos. In this capacity, one does not seek a psychological pleasure of a mind game or a thought problem, but the self is lost, and one is absorbed in pondering and thinking about the world of wisdom].

A distinction can be seen between one who seeks knowledge for psychological pleasure and the perfected person who wishes to uncover truth. The former will not pain himself in his studies, as this detracts from his desired psychological pleasures. [When the going gets tough, he abandons his studies for relaxation and ease.] But the latter will endure stress [if he must conduct lengthy research and memorize a lot of information] and pain, for he is drawn to understand, even if it causes him stress. His appreciation for wisdom makes him ignore the psychological pain. This is the soul at work.

Bechira exists only so far as engaging the soul [over the emotions] to function. But the soul's function [itself] does not involve bechira. Therefore, whatever that function is of the soul, it cannot change, which is why there is no way to change when in Olam Haba. Bechira refers to selecting where to disperse psychological energy, which is only a function on Earth. But there is no psychological energy in Olam Haba, which is an existence where the soul follows that which captivated it. That is why Olam Haba is devoid of bechira—it is impossible to have bechira in Olam Haba.

Maimonides concludes his comments on mishna 4:17 by saying that in studying Koheles, one discovers the most prevalent idea in the book. The ultimate fantasy is that of immortality. This fantasy is not what the soul seeks, but it

is what the physical/psychological man seeks. Whether one desires to be a billionaire or wishes for fame, one's ultimate fantasy is immortality, which is unattainable. That is why people are so attracted to Olam Haba. [It appeals as if it is the promise of the immortality that everyone seeks, but Olam Haba is not what people think it is.]

Many times, one idea or phenomenon can have two very disparate understandings. Primitive man understood the idea of contagion quite differently from modern doctors. [The former attributed mystical properties to it.] Primitive man believed the sun to be the source of all life on Earth and therefore he worshipped it. It is scientifically true that the sun's energy is what feeds the planet, but it is a completely different idea from primitive man's idea. The same applies to Olam Haba. Man's primitive element finds the idea of an afterlife attractive, but the true Olam Haba is a totally different phenomenon from what primitive man thinks it is. However, people cannot distinguish between their primitive desire and reality. Judaism says that Olam Haba is different from what people think because the fantasy of immortality, which is based on earthly existence, is unrelated to Olam Haba, a metaphysical existence. In Sanhedrin, Maimonides distinguishes the primitive notion from reality.

One must know that it is prohibited to argue against a

person who assumes Olam Haba to be physical. Such a person follows the mitzvos to attain his false belief in Olam Haba. But although this is not the appropriate way to worship God, we actually encourage this person to remain on this path because of the following principle: “From performing the mitzvos for the wrong reasons, one will eventually perform them for the right reasons,” (mitoch shelo lishma, ba lishma). To dissuade such an erring person would destroy him, and it is prohibited to dissuade him. Judaism espouses love for mankind and allows man’s fantasies if it takes him along the correct path. Ultimately of course, one must open his mind and accept the truth.

Maimonides describes people as having the wrong view, exchanging light for darkness. They value earthly pleasure, falsely believing that those pursuing wisdom are losing the true good. People pride themselves on how much physicality they amass, when in truth, one should feel shame in valuing the physical, which requires more energy in the pursuit of that which is only temporary. A person should partake of the physical only insofar as he needs to live a life of wisdom. And the greater the person, the less he needs of the physical. That is why Maimonides cites Chazal as partaking in the physical minimally, only as much as they could not live without. But involvement in physical pursuits should not be a source of pride, as it rep-

resents man's weakness. One should take pride in living according to a life of wisdom, but not in that which represents a corruption of the soul.

4:18 EFFECTIVENESS

RABBI SHIMON BEN ELAZAR SAYS, "DO NOT ASSUAGE THE ANGER OF YOUR FRIEND AT THE TIME OF HIS ANGER; DO NOT CONSOLE HIM AT THE TIME WHEN HIS DECEASED LIES BEFORE HIM; DO NOT QUESTION HIM AT THE TIME OF HIS VOW; AND DO NOT SEEK TO SEE HIM AT THE TIME OF HIS HUMILIATION."

This mishna discusses one's effectiveness; one must act only at the appropriate moment, which will yield the best results and success. When one is angry, he is not subject to appeasement. When one's deceased relative lies before him—especially in a tragic circumstance—it is not an opportune time to console that person. [In such moments, one's emotions are too intense and raw for anything to dull their intensity.] If one losses a million dollars, it is not the

time to tell him that money is not everything.

This mishna also discusses vows. Typically, one makes a vow when he is angry. For example, one might vow to not overeat right after an eating binge. At that moment of anger with oneself for overeating, it is unwise to engage your friend and inquire about the details of his vow. By doing so, you might bring attention to additional foods that your friend did not yet forbid, and he might also include those in his vow. Thereby, you cause him to be sworn by a vow he cannot break, which can harm him. For without those additions, your friend has an opening through which he can find grounds to nullify the vow.

The last case is the idea that one should avoid his friend at the time of his humiliation. When one loses his rationality and his self-control [which is a state of humiliation] the very presence of his friend embarrasses him, for later he will remember that you were there when he acted improperly.

Maimonides says that this mishna deals with acting at the proper moment. Why would a person not act at the proper moment? It seems like a logical matter that one would wait until the right time. There are two possibilities as to why people fail to wait for the appropriate moment to act. One is because of a base motive, i.e., one is vicious and enjoys seeing another person's weakness. [The second rea-

son was not recorded. Rabbi Chait now commences the next mishna, 4:19. He then goes on to 4:21, as 4:20 is not printed in our gemaras, although the commentaries break up 4:19 into 4:19 and 4:20.]

4:19 RESPONDING TO AN ENEMY'S CALAMITY

SHMUEL HAKATTAN SAYS, "WHEN YOUR ENEMY FALLS, DO NOT BE HAPPY, AND WHEN HE STUMBLES, LET YOUR HEART NOT REJOICE" (PROVERBS 24:17-18) LEST GOD SEE, AND IT BE BAD IN HIS EYES AND HE TURN FROM [THE ENEMY] HIS ANGER."

And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them ; and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots, and his horsemen (Exod. 14:17).

Rashi explains:

When God executes judgment on the wicked people, His name is sanctified.

Shiras Hayam (Song at the Reed Sea) is the sanctification of God's name. As such, why weren't the angels also permitted to sing praises to God [along with the Jews] when God drowned the Egyptian army? Speaking on an objective plane—i.e., one is not permitted to hate the Egyptians because of personal reasons but because of the Egyptians' distorted ideas of God and their failure to live proper lives—why can't the angels sing this song too? [When speaking objectively about the Egyptians' negative state, there should be no difference between man and angel, who equally possess an accurate assessment.]

Man must praise God in song. Song is when man takes the awe he would place on another man and transfers it to God. [The Jews praised God as a "Man of war" (Exod. 15:3).] When man witnesses God exposing His greatness through expressed actions, which momentarily break through all of man's false emotions, man must sing a song to God, for man has undergone an experience through which he recognizes God. That is the meaning of God's name being sanctified. People break out of their false views and recognize that the only source of power is God. How-

ever, an angel is not misguided by the fallacies in which man believes. For angels, song is appropriate only when there is an objective gain. But on an objective plane, there was no gain at the Yam Suf.

The works of My hands are drowning in the sea, and you wish to sing praises?

Chazal say that this was God's [metaphoric] address to the angels when they wished to sing like the Jews did after God drowned the Egyptian army. However, as man witnessed God's greatness [anew, which the angels knew all along], man alone reacted with song, but the angels did not [for the loss of the Egyptians' lives compromised the objective gain].

During chol hamoed and the concluding days of Pesach, we recite half Hallel because of the loss of the Egyptians. On the one hand, we were obligated to sing to God for the destruction of our enemies. But, on the other hand, we must also appreciate the loss of human life. Therefore, our praises are mitigated by this loss and we gain the additional perspective of an objective plane of reality outside the sphere of human affairs. Every Egyptian who died is part of the creation that is lost.

Man's greatest difficulty is removing himself from the social and psychological realities [worlds] and operating on

an objective philosophical plane. That is man's battleground. Shmuel HaKattan says that we can sum up the entire battle for human perfection in one verse: "When your enemy falls, do not be happy, and when he stumbles, let your heart not rejoice."

A person should remove himself from the social situation [mindset] where he is in constant competition with others. [Following this lifestyle], one's entire world is based on subjective emotions. If one can remove himself from this world he can attain perfection. That is why Shmuel HaKattan quoted that verse. But one who rejoices over his enemy's downfall operates on a subjective personal plane.

Rashi says that this statement was the "pearl in Shmuel's mouth," a precious statement [regularly iterated] for this is the milchemes hachaim that one undergoes in this world. That verse crystallizes everything.

[Additionally], when one's enemy fails, he feels that God is working for him. Ralbag says that one must not think this, for what happened was not performed for this person, but God simply removed Himself from that person [and he was left exposed to harm]. Ralbag says that the suffering of enemies plays on peoples' egocentricity, and he warns against endorsing that emotion of "God is siding with me."

But after this verse, King Solomon continues:

Do not be vexed by evildoers; do not be incensed by the wicked (Ibid. 24:19).

One should be involved only in objective reality.

ONE HOUR OF REPENTANCE AND GOOD DEEDS
IN THIS WORLD IS BETTER THAN ALL THE TIME
IN THE WORLD TO COME. AND ONE HOUR OF
PLEASURE IN THE WORLD TO COME IS BETTER
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Rabbeinu Yona cites the story of Yose ben Yoezer, who was being taken to his death by the Romans:

Yokin ish Tzraros [a rasha] was riding his horse and met Yose ben Yoezer at this moment and said to him, "Look at what you are riding on [the beam upon which you are about to be hanged], and look at what I am riding upon [a prestigious horse]. Where is the justice?" Yose ben Yoezer replied, "If [riding a prestigious horse] is how God rewards those who violate His will, those who follow His will certainly will receive a far greater reward." Yokin ish Tzraros replied, "Is there anyone who follows God's will more than you do? And look at your fate!" Yose ben Yoezer replied, "If people who follow God still receive a punishment as I am receiving, will not those who violate God's will receive a far

worse punishment?" Yokin ish Tzraros understood the message of Yose ben Yoezer, and then performed upon himself the four deaths of the court [out of guilt for his sins]. Yose ben Yoezer said, "In a brief moment he [acquired] the afterlife ahead of me." And this is the meaning of "One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the time in the World to Come."

How did Yose ben Yoezer convince Yokin? Judaism has a different outlook. The source of conviction for the average person is based on his senses and events, while Judaism makes conclusions based on ideas. Yose ben Yoezer said to Yokin, in other words:

You bring me a proof from an event (i.e., you ride a prestigious horse) and I carry a beam upon which I will be hanged. But the idea is impossible. Anyone who grasps the [ideas of the] Torah and God's knowledge knows there is one principle: The tzaddik must enjoy the good and the rasha must receive the evil. There is no other possibility. Therefore, Yokin, what you were giving as an example [which you feel endorses your philosophy] must be the opposite of what you think. You see that even with violations of God's word, the rasha is entitled to some pleasure in this world. How much more so will be the pleasure of

those who follow God? And the inverse regarding punishment is also true: If I receive punishment, how much more punishment will the rasha receive?

Yose ben Yoezer's point was that Yokin based his conclusions upon events, but Yose ben Yoezer's conclusions were based on ideas. And according to the idea, we must reinterpret the events to mean just the opposite of Yokin's understanding. When Yokin realized that Yose ben Yoezer was correct, he killed himself and merited Olam Haba.

They once wished to convince Einstein of the existence of the occult. They said to him, "What if we have evidence to corroborate it?" Einstein replied, "I would still not believe it." The reason Einstein refused to accept the idea of the occult is because he knew that the universe operates according to wisdom. Thus, any case that the occultists might bring would, at best, be a question, but it could not be a reality. The chocham is convinced based on ideas.

This idea from the preceding mishna ties into mishna 4:19 regarding Shmuel HaKattan, "When your enemy falls do not rejoice..." One should not be convinced based on events that are congruous with his subjective emotions [i.e., feeling that God is fighting for him]. But one should follow the ideas and wisdom and live in the objective world. The principle of reward and punishment is based on ideas and not on events. Therefore,

an event that poses a question about reward and punishment must be interpreted in accordance with the ideas and not be viewed as a contradiction to reward and punishment. A second understanding of Yose ben Yoezer's argument:

Yokin, you see that your success is not random, but comes from a planned strategy. This means that the world operates from wisdom. If you gained some good by accidentally harnessing a little wisdom for your schemes, how much more good will a person like myself receive if his entire life is engaged in wisdom?

KABBALISTS AND RAMBAN

Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:4).

It does not say, "Do not worship," but, "Do not turn to idols." Ramban says this indicates that there is something in one's make up that leans toward this sin:

You shall not turn your heart to idols: to believe there is any truth or benefit in them, or that the future is predicted by them.

One should not believe there exists some mysterious power.

But they and their practices should be in your eyes as nothingness and void. And the future occurs only through God's decree.

We see clearly from Ramban that belief in superstitions violates the Torah. One must know that superstitions are complete nonsense, regardless of the masses who believe in them, and regardless of the strength in people's convictions and passions to corroborate their nonsense.

Even though there were kabbalists who believed in astrology, their belief was not emotional—they thought there was a basis for it. But today's kabbalists, who believe in powers or forces besides God, follow an emotional mysticism that violates “Do not turn to idols....”

However, if one feels that Ramban had an idea or a valid source, and one wishes to follow him in this manner, one does not violate “turn[ing] to idols” [since one is not following his emotions but rather his trust in the wise sages]. But if one follows the primitive part of his nature that has

been aroused by baseless assumed powers, he violates this prohibition.

Is it acceptable to follow a written statement claiming that our senses are inaccurate and that there exist powers that we do not perceive? If one denies [or rejects] his senses, he must then also deny having seen that author's words. Maimonides addresses this in his "Letter to the Community of Marseille," where some of Chazal endorsed astrology. Maimonides says that astrology has been rejected [proven] as false. If we know something to be true through our wisdom or our senses [astrology's claims are not evidenced], no opposing statement from the rabbis is followed. But if one does not follow his senses, he also cannot follow any written opinions [his vision must be equally rejected]. One who rejects his senses in favor of what a rabbi says rejects revelation at Sinai and Moshe's words, "Your eyes have beheld [this]," (Deut. 11:7) and "You have been shown to know" (Deut. 4:35). We never find any ris-hon saying anything that conflicts with knowledge. We don't follow a false prophet, even though he produces signs, because a sign is a mere indication, whereas Sinai was a conclusive proof, and not a sign or a wonder. This proves that the Torah doesn't follow signs.

Ramban (Exod. 20:3) describes a third type of idolatry:

The third type of idolatry appeared when people started worshiping [imagined] demons and spirits. Some are appointed over people to be masters in their lands. It is in reference to this that scripture says, "They sacrificed to demons—false gods—gods that they knew not; new gods that arose of late that your fathers did not dread." Scripture ridicules them by saying, "They sacrificed to demons and false gods." That is to say that they are not like the angels that are called "eloha." Instead, they are gods that they knew not, i.e., they found in them no trace of might, power, or rulership. Furthermore, they are new to them, having learned of them lately from the Egyptian sorcerers. And even their wicked forefathers Terach and Nimrod did not dread them at all. Of this type of idolatry scripture warns, "They shall no longer sacrifice to the demons after whom they go astray."

Ramban also writes at the end of Leviticus 16 as follows:

Unless you pursue a further investigation into the subject, to that of the separate intelligences and how the spirits are affected by the offerings, the influence upon the spirits—being known through the study of necromancy—while that of the separate intelligences is known by means of certain

Torah allusions to those who understand the secrets, I cannot explain more or I would have to close the mouths of those who claim to be wise in the study of nature, following after that Greek philosopher Aristotle, who denied everything except for that which could be perceived by the senses. And he and his wicked disciples are so proud as to suspect that whatever he could not conceive of through his reasoning is not true.

Of course, Maimonides has a different opinion from Ramban on Aristotle. There is one interesting common denominator in both views. In a certain sense, from what we see now, both positions corroborate. Of course, only one position can be correct. When Ramban called Aristotle arrogant, he was correct, for Aristotle assumed nature to be simpler than it truly is. Therefore, he did not involve himself in sufficient experimentation. Whether at that time in history Aristotle was arrogant, or based on the knowledge of that time, he operated properly—not suspecting there was more to nature [than he assumed]—was the dispute between Maimonides and Ramban. Maimonides maintained that Aristotle embodied paramount human intelligence and that he could not be blamed for failing to experiment because given the knowledge he had, there was no reason to suspect that there was anything more. But

from reading Aristotle, Ramban felt that he failed to subordinate himself to nature in the sense that nature might be far deeper than he thought. Although Ramban was correct factually, it is difficult for us to decide if Aristotle deserves his criticism.

Today's scientists are more in step with Ramban, for they criticize Aristotle's position. But it is clear from Ramban that he differentiates between science—which he felt existed based on kabbalistic sources to which he subscribed—and demons that are not gods, i.e., nonsense, which he criticizes in the same breath. He felt that there is some rational system [that precludes demons, which are of an irrational kind]. Ramban had some kabbalistic beliefs, but nonetheless, he felt that giving in to one's emotions is pure idolatry, as he differentiated between demons that are not gods and kabbalistic notions that are based on reasoning and intellectual investigation. Ramban felt that the kabbalistic sources that he followed were not nonsensical but followed a logical system. He says that if one does not view the emotionally-accepted demons as false and void, he violates the Torah prohibition of "Do not turn to idols." The great dispute among the rishonim concerns what the real system consists of. It is a dispute that is difficult to decide.

Regarding amulets (kamiyos), Sigmund Freud showed that there exists a psychosomatic reality where the mind can affect the body, and that a strong belief in something can kill a person. [This is unlike demons, for an amulet is a real and proven natural phenomenon.]

Man should accept what is purely scientific, but many of the sciences, for example, anthropology, are not strictly scientific. The sciences question the age of the Earth and the age of the universe, which are problems insofar as the Torah is concerned. But in truth, there aren't any problems because [although] we believe everything the Torah says, we have a mesora that we do not understand the first part of the Torah [Genesis], and this mesora existed in Moshe's days, long before scientific advances. This is found in the mishna in Chagiga 11b. We understand all the other parshios, but no one understands the Torah's first parsha [concerning creation], which is not literal. If something is scientifically proven regarding history, we certainly accept it. But simultaneously we don't subscribe to peoples' fantasies, which follow their emotions and construe historic fantasies that are emotionally pleasing.

4:19 THE BETTER TEACHER

ELISHA BEN AVUYA SAYS, "ONE WHO LEARNS AS A CHILD IS COMPARED TO WHAT? TO INK WRITTEN ON NEW PARCHMENT. AND ONE WHO LEARNS AS AN ELDER IS COMPARED TO WHAT? TO INK WRITTEN ON SCRAPED PARCHMENT." RABBI YOSI BAR YEHUDA, MAN OF KFAR HABAVLI, SAYS, "ONE WHO LEARNS FROM YOUNG ONES IS COMPARED TO WHAT? TO ONE WHO EATS UNRIPE GRAPES AND DRINKS WINE FROM ITS PRESS. AND ONE WHO LEARNS FROM ELDERS IS COMPARED TO WHAT? TO ONE WHO EATS RIPE GRAPES AND DRINKS AGED WINE." REBBE [YEHUDA] SAYS, "DO NOT LOOK AT THE JUG BUT RATHER AT WHAT IS IN IT. FOR THERE ARE NEW JUGS FULL OF OLD [WINE], AND OLD [JUGS] THAT DO NOT HAVE EVEN NEW [WINE] WITHIN THEM."

We must take advantage of those parts of our natures that lend themselves toward perfection and the apprehension of ideas. Therefore, one should commit to learn and study [a lot] when he is young because in youth one has that additional dimension where he can remember more.

Rabbeinu Yona says as follows:

The elder should not say, "I am a dry tree as I will not retain what I learn, and why should I read and toil for nothing?"

Plato said that one who cannot remember should not

learn because he will become depressed. Rabbeinu Yona disagrees. He continues:

Nonetheless, the elder should learn and will receive a reward. And what is the difference if he does not remember? Whether one remembers or not, he will be given a reward. This is analogous to one who hired a person to draw water from a well. He gave the worker a pail with a hole in it and [the worker] drew water all day. The fool says, "Of what use is the work?" The wise man says, "Who cares if the pail leaks, I am getting paid!" So too is the elder. What does he care if he forgets...he receives a reward, as it is stated, "Whether one learns a lot or a little, provided he learns for the sake of Heaven" (Talmud Berachos 17a).

It seems that Rabbeinu Yona undid what Elisha ben Avuya said, that there is a world of difference between learning during youth versus learning during old age. Rabbeinu Yona says that the elder will receive a reward regardless. Additionally, Rabbeinu Yona's analogy does not seem congruous: He discusses reward, while learning is to be for its own sake and not for a reward.

[Rabbi Chait now addresses a side topic.]

SUICIDE

This temporary life is not where we should seek accomplishments. Olam Haba is where one eternally perceives God's wisdom. Suicide is committed out of a frustration with this temporary life; a person turns his anger inward and destroys himself. Thus, the distortion expressed in suicide is an overestimation of this earthly existence. Suicide is worse than murder because this person distorts what is of true value. [One does not murder another person out of an overestimation of this existence but because of a social matter.] Suicide is also worse than being a hedonist—a *ba'al taivah*—because there is a finality in suicide, and one defines conclusively that his value is this temporary world. But the true value is Olam Haba. Some suicides that are executed by very distraught people with emotional stress are more forgivable. Pirkei Avos 4:16 states that this world is merely a vestibule before Olam Haba. [This world is not the goal.]

The concept of learning *lo lishma* is when one learns for ulterior motives. He does not demean the Torah's value, but renders it utilitarian. He derives honor from Torah study. It is honor—not the Torah's importance—that motivates his learning.

But in the case of one who uses the Torah as a spade with

which to dig (Pirkei Avos 4:5), one subordinates the Torah to something else; he renders the Torah inferior. His ultimate gain—not the Torah—is his own value. In this case, we do not say, “mitoch shelo lishma, ba lishma.” This case is the worst level; one exchanges the higher good for the lower good, demeaning the Torah’s value.

[Rabbi Chait now returns to the current mishna.]

Should one learn from an elder or from a younger person who is wise? No one suggests that one should learn from an ignorant elder. Thus, there should not be any dispute: One should learn from a wise person [age should be irrelevant]. But Rabbeinu Yona teaches that there is a machlokes tannaim, a dispute among mishnaic authors.

Elders possess two advantages over younger people: 1. They’ve had sufficient time to perfect and rarefy their thought process and remove dross from their thinking. Thus, we see very few doubts among the rishonim, but we see many doubts among the acharonim, as the latter did not attain as perfect a level of thought as the former. 2. Elders are more removed from emotional involvements.

Age forty for understanding, age fifty to give advice (Pirkei Avos 5:24).

At forty years old, one's depth of understanding reaches its height. At fifty years old, one is mostly removed from emotional involvement, which is required in order to advise others. Thus, a politician cannot be effective if he is young, as his emotions are still too fired up. He is not fit to advise because he is influenced by his emotions. One might have understanding at age forty, but providing advice is different, for it relates to practical matters where one must be completely removed from any kind of emotional attachment. Thus, an elder is more removed from the world of the emotions. That's why Rabbi Yosi said learning from elders is preferable.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Rabbi Yehuda says we should not judge based on the container. If a younger person has greater wisdom than an elder, we must learn from the wiser, younger teacher. And of these two matters, Elihu spoke. Iyov had complaints and he had [three] friends who counseled him [Bildad, Tzofar, and Eliphaz]. His friends wished to defend God, but their defense was weak. Later, God told Iyov's friends that they must ask Iyov to pray for them because of their improper defense, for they condemned Iyov who rejected their condemnation, holding his ground by stating that he did not sin. Meaning, although Iyov's friends had just intentions, since their methods [and conclusions] were not just, they were wrong.

Up to this point, Elihu—Iyov’s wiser fourth friend—waited for the three other friends to speak their minds. He felt this to be the proper approach, for those friends were older than he was. After the friends failed [to offer any wisdom], Elihu said that there is no monopoly over knowledge:

But truly it is the spirit in men, the breath of God, that gives them understanding. It is not many who are wise, [nor] the elders who understand how to judge (Iyov 32:8,9).

Metzudas Dovid comments:

You won't find many wise people in the world. Even though there are many people that work on gaining knowledge, wisdom stems from intelligence [it is not under man's control].

Wisdom stems from God. If one is endowed with this spirit, he will perceive wisdom. But if he is not, even though he toils in learning, he will not become a great wise man, as Elihu stated, “It is not many who are wise, [nor] the elders who understand how to judge.”

Thus, Elihu straddled both opinions: that of Rabbi Yosi, who said one should learn from older people, and that of Rebbe Yehuda, who says one should not judge based on age. Does this mean his actions are contradictory? Rab-

beinu Yona says that sometimes a younger person has greater wisdom than an older person, and one should therefore learn from the younger person.

Wisdom is a God-given spirit. But it is not given in a vacuum. It is based on the involvement in Torah study. Thus, Elihu said in other words:

I let years speak [first], as years of learning is the typical method of gaining wisdom. But once I saw that the elders had no wisdom, I cannot say that because they have no wisdom I [a younger person] too do not have wisdom. That would be illogical.

Ultimately it is a God-given spirit that gives man wisdom, but there still is a process for obtaining wisdom. Therefore, at first, one should seek out elders who have engaged in the proper activities to gain wisdom. The assumption and the probability are that they possess the best wisdom. But if the elders do not have wisdom, one should not say that people without prerequisite training cannot possess wisdom. Since wisdom comes from a spirit of God; it is possible that even those without those signs [age] possess wisdom.

Rabbi Yosi said one should learn from older people; Rebbe Yehuda said one should not judge based on age. And the choice can only be between two chochamim. Should one

follow a person who possesses all the requirements, one who is intelligent and has learned all his life, with the advantage of age and being removed from emotions? Or, when selecting a teacher, should one choose someone who expresses the highest level of wisdom? Rabbi Yosi said that the elders were preferable because of their additional advantages, whereas Rebbe Yehuda said that one should choose a teacher based on his overt wisdom.

4:20 (NOT FOUND IN TALMUD)

4:21 ENVY, LUST, AND HONOR

RABBI ELAZAR HAKAPOR SAYS, “ENVY, LUST, AND HONOR DRIVE A MAN FROM THE WORLD.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*There are two manners regarding envy;
under these there are two and three subdi-*

visions. One manner is that one hates what is good; this is the vilest expression. Under this evil path where one envies others, one case is where one is disturbed by seeing his friend following the good life. His friend is involved in Torah and mitzvos and follows the proper path and this person envies him. For he hates one who loves God and performs His will. This trait removes him from the world and this is the worst envy.

How is this envy? The person simply hates those who follow God. The answer is that the person first recognizes that his friend is living properly. But since his envy is so intolerable, he distorts what he values to be the true good. He cannot be neutral since he has energies [values] attached to those activities that his friend performs. Therefore, those energies must be converted to a hate [he distorts the good and views it as an evil]. Thus, at first, the person values proper actions. The next step is that he envies his friend. But as the envy is intolerable, his values are ultimately converted into a hatred [toward what he formerly valued as good]. Rather than changing himself, he changes the value system. What he initially valued, he now hates [to justify his failure to fulfill the mitzvos]. In his *Guide*, Maimonides says that this dynamic works on a smaller scale as well, where people who don't possess cer-

tain areas of knowledge will demean that knowledge. People also demean other people's achievements [to defend their egos from the threat of feeling inferior to others].

*The evil person looks at the righteous man
and desires his death. (Psalms 37:32).*

The rasha must hate the tzaddik. This mechanism is man's most destructive element. Anti-Semitism is the same phenomenon. The rabbis teach that Mount Sinai is so called because Sinai shares the root of "sina"—hatred. The nations recognize the Torah as superior and their inadequacy forces them to hate us. What adds to the hatred is that the Jew reminds the Gentile of his superior system. Sigmund Freud said, "Three-thousand years ago the Jews pronounced themselves as the chosen people, and ever since then, the world acts as if they believe the Jew." The Gentile senses a superiority and therefore must convert his envy into hatred, which is the worst expression of envy. If a Gentile converts to Judaism out of envy, that would not be so bad. The evil is that one converts his value system [in this case the distortion is a hate for the Torah] because he is envious, thereby distorting reality in an effort to placate his psychological equilibrium. When one's philosophical outlook is compromised by his psychological world [his emotions] this is man's lowest activity [and lowest level].

Whereas the highest level is the ability to determine truths: both ethical and philosophical. Korach is a good example of this: He introduced a new system out of envy. His view was that halacha is not important; all that matters is the philosophical idea.

Rabbeinu Yona's second case describes a person who is not as bad as the first person, but he too hates God, for he recognizes the good and he is disturbed that others would perform the good, thereby making themselves superior to him. In this case, one does not formulate a new system based on his envy, like Korach did. This person recognizes the good for what it is; he has not distorted the truth. However, he knows he cannot follow the good [he is weak] and his envy drives him to desire that others remain on his level and do not advance ahead of him. This dynamic is common among friends. One wishes to retain his friends and does not want them to advance, which would cause him to lose those friends. The risk of losing a friend is different from the risk of being inferior.

Rabbeinu Yona then says that there is a positive type of envy, even though there exists a better method discussed in Talmud Baba Basra 21a, "The envy of talmidei chochamim increases wisdom." When one sees his friends becoming great chochamim, he desires this for himself too. And this type of envy increases wisdom. He tries to perform the

good and follow the proper path. Here, one operates based on envy and does not attempt to resolve his psychological flaw. He is in conflict as he envies his friend who is superior to him in wisdom. To resolve this conflict, he does not reduce his friend, but raises himself to his friend's level. However, he still operates out of envy. The second person does not perform the good and thereby earns the title of "one who hates God." But the person who raises himself to his friend's level is involved in the good and cannot be called one who hates God. He loves God, but this love is mitigated by his envy, which fuels that love.

There is yet another phenomenon. A person sees his friend learning Torah for five years and becoming a talmid chocham. This person then says to himself, "If he can do this, so can I." This is not envy, as it says in Talmud Yoma (35b):

Three people cause the world to be liable for neglecting the Torah. Hillel caused the poor people to be liable because he was impoverished and yet did not neglect the Torah. Rav Elazar ben Charsum was very wealthy and yet he adhered to the Torah, thereby causing all wealthy people to be liable for their neglect of the Torah. And Joseph caused all handsome people to be liable for their neglect of the Torah because he was very handsome, and he did not suc-

cumb to that sin [Potiphar's wife's sexual advances].

These three people cause all others to be liable for neglecting the Torah because, by example, they demonstrated the possibility for all three personality types to follow the Torah. [These three people removed all the excuses from everybody else.] Thus, when one sees another person succeed in learning and he follows suit, it is not envy, but admiration. Many times, people do not act because they do not believe something is possible [for them to accomplish. Thus, the example of these three personalities empowers others to follow suit.] However, envy is when one wishes another person no longer possesses a certain attribute.

One who envies a tzaddik and tries to emulate him can never truly become a tzaddik because he operates out of a competitive emotion, unlike the tzaddik who operates out of pure love for the Torah. In other words, it is impossible to imitate a great person because the great person does not imitate anyone.

The reason the third type of person misses the mark is because he operates out of envy and not because his soul is attracted to the good. As we are dealing with the soul's perfection, insofar as one is fueled by envy, he does not partake of the good for its own sake, which is the ultimate

good. The nature of the good is not assessed on activity alone [for if it was, one who learns for the sake of learning would be equal to one who learns for ulterior motives]. But the nature of the good is a certain state where the soul enjoys a relationship to the good. Therefore, as long as one is motivated by imitating others and does not learn purely for enjoyment, he cannot have a relationship to the good. Such a person cannot partake of the good.

This explains why Rabbeinu Yona says that this third type is both good and not good. For this person has some energies that are attached to good values. But his envy is a negative element: He is dichotomized. A person who follows the good for its own sake is a “complete heart,” as Rabbeinu Yona states. A complete heart refers to the fact that this person has all his energies attached to good; he is not dichotomized.

Envy per se is not an evil. The flaw is that envy inhibits one from attaining the greatest good. We are not condemning a trait because of some dislike of the trait. But we look at where that trait leads in terms of perfection and evaluate it in this framework. No trait per se is bad.

Rabbeinu Yona then makes an enigmatic statement:

It is best that one seizes the first, but from this, do not rest your hand.

Eliminating envy is not easy as it is a powerful force. Moreover, if one does eliminate envy, he endangers his motivation because we are raised to value our social lives as the ultimate reality. For most people, it is reality [all that one does and values must conform to social acceptance]. Most people live based on what others do; they compare themselves to others. By telling a person to rid himself of any kind of social recognition and any envy would be to create an individual bereft of all motivation. The social emotions are the most powerful forces. This is why Rabbeinu Yona says, “It is best that one seizes the first”: Allow yourself the envy of talmidei chochamim—the first—but “do not rest your hand” [your sights] from ultimate perfection. Envy of wise men can function as a bridge to reach ultimate perfection. But ridding envy altogether can leave one desolate of motivation. Rather, we must not deny our psychological makeup, but harness it to guide us toward the ultimate good.

Rabbeinu Yona’s idea mirrors a verse in Koheles (4:4):

And I’ve seen all the toil and all the upright actions and that is man’s envy of his friend. This too is futility and a vexation of one’s energies.

King Solomon says that even man’s good, his “upright

actions,” are based on envy. This means that human nature comprises a very powerful force of envy. In terms of the ultimate [good] state, envy is futile and it vexes one’s energies. But to deny the force of envy would be to deny psychological reality. This explains why Rabbeinu Yona says that one cannot simply do away with envy. One must be aware of it and deal with it properly.

RABBEINU YONA ON WEALTH

It bothers a person when others have wealth while he does not. But one could also possibly say that wealth is an evil and he could hate the other person, just like one hates others who performs upright actions while he does not. But this does not happen often.

The first level is where one hates the reality of others having the wealth that he does not have. Rabbeinu Yona says there is nothing worse, for this person hates the good that is enjoyed by other people. Furthermore, he does not desire tikkun olam—building the world [through his labor that contributes to society]. The lowest level is when one

wishes for others not to have their wealth.

The second expression of envy regarding wealth is the envy of wealthy friends. Such a person is bothered by friends who are wealthier than he is. But this is not out of hate of those friends or their wealth, rather one desires greater wealth than others so that he attains the greatest honor.

The third level is what Rabbeinu Yona refers to as “the best of the worst.” One loves money and is envious of it; he desires wealth and cares less about what others have. And this is also not a burning envy. But why does Rabbeinu Yona need to apply envy to wealth? He could have stopped after the first application of envy of the good [proper actions, viz., Torah study in following the mitzvos].

Rabbeinu Yona quotes King Solomon:

*Let your heart not be envious of sinners,
but in the fear of God all day (Proverbs
23:17).*

King Solomon included all these matters in one verse. Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*He first explained [that] the evil type of
envy is that one should not envy evil peo-
ple performing sins in order to copy them.
And afterward he stated more generally,
“but only fear of the Lord”; all envies are*

negative except for the envy of fear [of God]. He should be envious of the acts of God, as He is awesome.

Rabbeinu Yona first defines idealistic envy followed by materialistic envy. Idealistic envy exists as people value social status. From sibling [rivalry] at youth, through peers [competition] as adults, social status has been ingrained in us. But idealistic envy is inherently removed from social reality. By definition, what is ideal is unrelated to social matters. Therefore, how the social component inheres in the idealistic envy must be explained. This was Rabbeinu Yona's first breakdown. But in his second breakdown, he discusses envy as a social phenomenon. Thus, Rabbeinu Yona discusses wealth vis-à-vis honor. By nature, wealth is a relative substance. Man doesn't seek great wealth merely to cover his needs, but beyond one's fixed needs, additional acquisition is nonsense. Furthermore, one's dreams are not about satisfying those fixed needs. Jacob asked God for food and clothing and the rest of his energies were spent in recognizing God. He embodied perfection:

If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and [He] gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear... (Gen. 28:21).

The rest of Jacob's energies were directed toward God. But people don't want wealth for [subsistence]. The substance of wealth is inherently a social phenomenon.

In Rabbeinu Yona's last case, the person was unconcerned about what others possessed; he merely desired wealth for himself. If this is so, this does not appear to be envy. It appears he wants wealth for itself. [However] there is no desire for wealth as an end because wealth, by definition as a substance, is a social phenomenon. However, sometimes wealth becomes idealized and is then unrelated to social relationships, not expressing itself in particular terms, i.e., to be wealthier than others.

In the first case, Rabbeinu Yona displays how the social interacts with idealistic values [and the envy that exists]. In the second case, he takes a substance that is social and shows how it interacts with the particularized social [to be wealthier than others]. In this case, the desire for wealth stems from envy, as the substance is inherently a social substance. Then it becomes sublimated or extracted from the social scene and becomes its own value. But this pursuit still engages envy as it is envy that propels one to the value of wealth extracted from the social. This person [embodied in the "businessman"] displays a sublimated form of materialistic envy. Such a person is respected. The level of wanting more than the next guy is frowned upon as a

base desire. But the businessman is out for the success of the corporation and he is respected. Rabbeinu Yona says that this person is more removed from the base level and is better than the base expression. But he is still involved in the social; he is still involved in envy, but it is a sublimated envy.

Again, King Solomon summed it all up in one verse:

*Let your heart not be envious of sinners,
but in the fear of God all day (Proverbs
23:17).*

The only worthwhile envy is that of objective reality—God and his wisdom. But envy in regard to the social is worthless.

Thus, the worst level is one who is disturbed that others are wealthy. He rejects building up the world through labor and he also hates others. His ethics are distorted. The second level did not affect his ethics but the person does not want to be inferior. He is not as bad as the first, but it is still a low level. And the third level contains the least amount of corruption. His ethics are not completely distorted regarding tikkun olam, but he is involved in sublimated envy.

Judaism's purpose is that man obtains a glimpse of reality outside himself and that he uses all his energies to strive toward that end. One must weave through the psychologi-

cal [he must master his emotions] to achieve this objective.

A gemara in Talmud Berachos (28b) fits in well here:

The sages taught: Shimon HaPakuli arranged the eighteen blessings.

As the Anshei Knesses Hagedola (Men of the Great Assembly) formulated the eighteen prayers of the Shmoneh Esray and also ordered them, what need was there for Shimon HaPakuli? The gemara says that the order was forgotten and therefore Shimon HaPakuli rationally worked out the order.

The gemara continues:

Rabban Gamliel said to the sages: "Is there any person who knows [how] to institute the blessing of the heretics, a blessing directed against the Sadducees?" Shmuel HaKattan, who was one of the most pious men of that generation, stood and instituted it. The next year he forgot that blessing, and then scrutinized it for two or three hours in an attempt to remember the blessing.

The gemara says that Shmuel HaKattan forgot the blessing against the heretics and needed to think about it for quite a while (to recall his formulation). What was so difficult about this blessing?

Shmuel HaKattan was the person who said that one of the most important principles of life is to rise above personal hatred:

Shmuel HaKattan says, "When your enemy falls, do not be happy, and when he stumbles, let your heart not rejoice" (Proverbs 24:17-18) lest God see, and it be bad in His eyes and He turn His anger from [the enemy]" (Avos 4:19).

The only hatred one should have, as Rabbeinu Yona says, is hatred toward wicked people. For that is a philosophical hatred, like the hatred against Amalek. When Rabban Gamliel was concerned about formulating the blessing against the heretics, he wanted the individual on the proper [philosophical] level to formulate the blessing so it would be in step with a formula devoid of any personal hatred. The formulator must fully understand philosophical hatred. We see how careful Chazal were in formulating blessings; every word must be aligned with a philosophical principle, otherwise the blessing would not be properly formulated. This explains why Shmuel HaKattan had to spend a few hours thinking about how to reformulate the blessing.

Returning to mishna 4:19, Shmuel HaKattan advises one not to rejoice when his enemy falls because if one rejoices,

God will respond by removing the enemy's suffering. Thus, if one is unhappy when his enemy falls, this will maintain his suffering, which will thereby make one happy. It seems like impossible advice to follow.

If a person lives in a competitive world, he is subject to a different [lesser] type of divine providence. If one rejoices at his enemy's suffering, it shows that he lives in the personal world: the world of emotional reality [personal, subjective feelings] and not objective reality [the world that actually exists and what is to be valued]. Rejoicing over another person's suffering is an infantile emotional satisfaction. This person's mind is corrupted because he lives according to infantile fantasies. Such a person is removed from God's providence. What might then occur is that the punishment for his corruption will be the removal of the suffering of his enemy, who will then be successful, and the enemy will now act as a means of punishment for the one who rejoiced. Whereas one who does not rejoice and does not desire an evil to befall his enemy—because he recognized that there is no true value to this—but lives in reality, indifferent to the enemy, is thereby on a completely different [higher] level and enjoys a different [more beneficial] framework of God's providence.

The verse supports Shmuel HaKattan for he enacted a great principle from the verse. And the verse places a large value on this attitude because it says,

When your enemy falls do not be glad, and when he stumbles let your heart not rejoice. Lest God see and it is evil in His eyes and He removes from him [the enemy] His anger (Proverbs 24:17,18).

The one who rejoices and the one who does not are so completely different that they are subject to two completely different worlds of divine providence. If one rejoices when his enemy suffers a downfall, he lives in the personal world, the lower world of social reality. Thereby, he experiences a different providence, or no providence, where he might—as the verse says—be subject to his enemy’s wrath. [One’s rejoicing can be the very cause of his enemy’s recovery and success.] But one who lives in the world of God’s reality is unconcerned with social reality [and his enemy’s fate]. This rasha, who has been removed from this perfected person, will not rise against him [God’s providence protects him].

In addition, by rejoicing over his enemy’s downfall one feels that God is fighting his battles. It is a distortion of reality—as if God joins the person in destroying this enemy. This is quite infantile; it is an identification with God based on one’s fantasy of omnipotence. The corrupt person is totally different from one who lives in reality. The corrupt person is absorbed in the social world; he feels that his emotions are the source of [dictate] reality. [But in fact] when one’s enemy suffers, it is unre-

lated to that person. One cannot assume to know God's calculations. But because of one's distortion of reality, he misreads events, assuming that God fights his battles. In fact, this distorted person could very well deserve the punishment, and his enemy might deserve success. A person under the influence of such a distortion will misread reality. That is the essence of the verse:

*Lest God see, and it is evil in His eyes, and
He will remove from him [the enemy] His
anger.*

ENVY, LUST, AND HONOR II

RABBI ELAZAR HAKAPOR SAYS, "ENVY, LUST,
AND HONOR DRIVE A MAN FROM THE WORLD."

Maimonides comments:

*Because with one of them he must lose his
belief in Torah; he won't attain intelli-
gence or character perfection.*

Maimonides' idea of the perfection of character traits does not refer to a natural phenomenon. He says that human perfection is an art and not a natural matter. Just as art must be learned, perfection too must be learned. Character traits that we are born with are in themselves not perfection.

According to Maimonides, how do these traits cause one to lose his belief in the Torah? This does not mean that a person with envy does not believe in the Torah. Otherwise, no one would believe in the Torah. What he means is that when a person is entrenched in envy, lust, or love of honor, he is hopeless. Maimonides distinguishes between one who is always engaged in gossip—a ba'al lashon hara—and has no Olam Haba, and one who [occasionally] gossips and enjoys Olam Haba. The ba'al lashon hara's essence is gossip. Here too, one who essentially chases lusts lacks belief. Belief means understanding.

Why is it that only these three entrenchments cause one to lose his knowledge and character perfection?

What is envy? An envious person's reality is based completely on social reality; nothing else is real to him. This person can never attain perfection [which is not a social matter] because he perceives no reality other than his social existence. Without a concept of reality other than the social, it is impossible to attain perfection. For if one is to

do so, he must perceive that there is a reality beyond that which society maintains is true. Even though man partakes somewhat of a social existence, the reality of God must be one's concern. But if one does not perceive God's reality, perfection and the perception of truth is out of his reach.

What is taivah? It refers to one who is overpowered by fulfilling his fantasies. It is a quest to satisfy a fantasy that cannot be satisfied. Thus, if this is one's essential drive, he cannot be concerned with any type of objective reality, for his primary concern is to satisfy his desires. This is mutually exclusive to searching for an objective reality.

What is honor? There are two parts of man. One part is his desire for libidinous satisfaction, and the other part frowns on instinctual desires and instead desires respect and recognition, namely honor. This part of man seeks omnipotence and immortality. This part can also reject and subordinate the lusts in order to attain a sense of self-worth.

The mishna says there are three ways one can lose his perfection. Two ways deal with his drives: libido and honor. Either one blinds man to the reality outside of it. The third way to obscure reality is through the social framework. These three things can cause man to lose his Olam Haba. According to Maimonides, the moment one loses sight of the ultimate reality—God/wisdom—is the end of perfection.

Rabbeinu Yona says there are two emotions that remove

one from reality. One is self-overestimation, where one's self-image is distorted vis-à-vis his position in the universe. This individual desires to change everything to conform to his egocentricity. That is the worst distortion. The second emotion is anger, which is the expression [emotional response] of reality conflicting with one's desires. Anger is an attempt to change reality [to conform to one's emotions]. Both traits—ego and anger—prevent one from accepting an external reality. Therefore, one is not to partake at all of these two traits.

[Rabbi Chait now digressed to the topic of Adam and sin.]

ADAM AFTER THE SIN

After his sin, Adam perceived God differently. Initially, he perceived God through wisdom, through his reality principle. But after he became a sinner, when he thought of God, the effect was guilt, explaining why the verse says, “And he heard the voice of God traveling in the garden at

the wind of day” (Gen. 3:8). This reflects man’s view of God from the perspective of one who committed a horrible crime. Because of his sin, Adam was reduced to a level where his perception of God was of One who inspired fear in man, and this made Adam realize he was empty.

I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked (Ibid. 3:10).

Chazal comment on “I was naked”:

I had one mitzvah and I lost it.

This verse explains why Adam had that perception and why it was anthropomorphic—his nature had changed. While there was literal physical nakedness, Adam felt naked on another level too—he was a sinner. From that point forward, man relates to God with that sense of guilt. But one must realize that this is not the only way that man relates to God.

It is prevalent that most people unfortunately relate to God on this level of guilt. That explains why they don’t wish to think about God, for they view Him only through this guilt just like Adam did. But regarding Moshe, who was greater than Adam, God spoke of a close relationship with him:

Face to face I speak to him (Num. 12:8).

Despite Adam's sin, man can rise to a different level and regain the relationship with God that was originally intended. Moshe could perceive God through his reality principle, through wisdom. Thus, even after Adam's sin, one should strive on his own level to obtain a perception of God that is based on his reality principle and not simply based upon guilt.

Many times, people get stuck in a mode of operation and cannot rise above that level. That becomes their entire relationship to God. It started occurring after the sin. If one remains on this guilt level with God, he forfeits the most essential dimension of his relationship with God. One on this level does not reach man's highest level. Man should draw close to God through knowledge and Torah wisdom and feel a closeness to God.

*In all your ways know Him and He will
straighten your path (Proverbs 3:6).*

One should feel close to God in a positive way.

And go in His ways (Deut. 28:9).

One should emulate God's ways.

Adam's guilt after the sin was emphasized as that was the first moment this state expressed itself. However, love of God and a positive relationship with God represent the essence of the Torah.

[Rabbi Chait now returns to Pirkei Avos 4:21.]

RABBI ELAZAR HAKAPOR SAYS, "ENVY, LUST,
AND HONOR DRIVE A MAN FROM THE WORLD."

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Desire—taivah—is the beginning of every action and human performance and it also precedes thought. For one who has a desire starts to think about performing it. In all desires there is great evil. There is no need to mention the desire for sin, for even the desire for permitted sex with many women is a great evil. On this, King Solomon said, "Do not give your strength to women" (Proverbs 31:3). Similarly, if one is involved excessively in eating and drinking and in luxuries, this too is evil, just as physicians say that even good foods damage a person who eats too many of them. Talmud Pesachim 114a says, "Rabab bar bar Channa said that Rabbi Yochanan said, citing Rabbi Yebuda, son of Rabbi Elai: 'Eat onions [batzal] and sit in the shade [batzel]'; i.e., eat inexpensive foods while sitting in a comfortable

place, 'but do not eat expensive geese and chickens, as your heart will pursue you,' i.e., you will develop a taste for luxuries. 'Devote less to your food and your drink and spend more on your house,' as one's house is a better investment than food.'"

Rashi says that by [catering to one's desires] one will desire to eat at every hour, i.e., at all times.

Chazal's message is that to succeed in life, one must not be under the constant sway of his desires. People are constantly eating and drinking, which explains why food is so important to us—we are constantly catering to our instincts. Chazal say that one who is constantly involved in the instinctual cannot operate on a very high level. Perfection requires a break from the instincts in order to engage wisdom, which demands a freedom of energies directed toward it.

Maimonides replied as follows to a person who inquired from him:

You appear to have studied the matter superficially, and, nevertheless, you imagine that you can understand a book that has been the guide of past and present generations, when you for a moment withdraw from your lusts and appetites, and glance over its contents as if you were reading a

historical work or some poetical composition (Guide, book I, chap. ii).

According to Maimonides, a person can never attain a deep understanding of wisdom if he is constantly preoccupied with satisfying his instincts. To perfect oneself requires large sums of energy, and wisdom requires a break from the instinctual.

Rabbeinu Yona's quote from Talmud Pesachim does not mean that one should improve his house so that others are impressed by its beauty. The gemara says that a nice home relaxes a person:

Three matters give a person comfort, and they are a beautiful abode, a beautiful wife, and beautiful vessels (Talmud Berachos 57b).

These matters set the stage and give one a relaxed state of mind, which is necessary in the pursuit of wisdom. Rabbeinu Yona's view, which is based on the gemara, is that one should stop engaging the instincts through food and drink and spend that money on the external matters that help a person learn better. Additionally, the desire to have a nice home does not cause one's heart to chase after it [like food, drink, and sex]. The secular philosophers arrived at these Torah's ideas as the mind can do so [independ-

dent from Torah study]. But Chazal were remarkable with their insight about how one should direct his psychological energies. The Roman eating orgies displayed the great degree of desire one can reach.

Why is the day of Shabbos—the day of the highest sanctity—the day on which it is a mitzvah to engage in eating and drinking. Yom Kippur has only six aliyos during Torah reading, while Shabbos has seven [indicating that Shabbos is of greater sanctity].

Isaiah 58:13,14 refer to Shabbos as follows:

If you refrain your foot on Shabbos [1] from pursuing your affairs on My holy day, [2], if you call the sabbath “delight,” [3], and call the Lord’s holy day “honored” [4]. And if you honor it and go not your ways, [5] nor look to your affairs[6] nor speak of matters[7] then you will find pleasure[8] in the Lord and I will set you astride the heights of the Earth.

[1] Techum Shabbos, permitted walking distance

[2] Prohibition of labor

[3] Delighting in pleasures

[4] Designation

[5] One should act differently on Shabbos by walking and talking differently.

[6] One must abstain from involvement in one’s desires

and business.

[7] Speech on Shabbos should be different from weekday speech.

[8] Radak explains why on Shabbos—the day of the highest sanctity—one must eat and drink:

It is a positive command to pleasure the body on Shabbos with sweet and good foods. Because through the positive differentiation of Shabbos from the other days, one remembers Creation and that it was created from nothingness and that God rested on the seventh day. And because of this one will praise God and glorify Him with his mouth and with his heart, and he will pleasure his soul with it.

According to Radak, one's enjoyments are not for the purpose of physical pleasure per se, rather, one should notice the difference between Shabbos and the other days. But that is just the first step. Once one realizes this distinction, the ultimate goal is to reflect on God and Creation. Only then does one rejoice in God—"then you will find pleasure in the Lord"—and the pleasure that began with eating and drinking must eventuate in the true pleasure: the appreciation of God's wisdom. Radak says that "pleasure in the Lord" refers to pleasures of the soul, to wisdom.

This is the way of the Torah in general: It takes man's

instinctual drives and does not thwart their satisfaction, but it directs them in a way that satisfies them in a manner leading to the soul's pleasure. Radak continues:

And Saadia Gaon explained, the pleasure of the body is such: Bodily pleasure should be related to God. Not as the fools think, as it is stated about them that pleasure is good for fools. A wise man does not increase his bodily pleasures more than what is sufficient, but with just judgment as he is involved in wisdom, and in wisdom does he find the greatest pleasure. Rather, that the pleasures of the body are carefully weighed, which improves his intelligence and strengthens his three forces: his memory, his ability to differentiate, and his creativity.

Shabbos zmiros also state that one's sleep on Shabbos should be to the extent only to restore one's soul [energies], but one should not sleep away the day.

Returning to Rabbeinu Yona, he states that there are three expressions of desire, just like with envy:

The first expression of seeking one's desires is where one desires wealth and wisdom for himself alone and no one else. That, obviously, is the worst level. The second level is where one desires wealth and wisdom, and if others possess it, that is acceptable

provided he has more so that he is greater than them. And the third level contains some small good, where when one sees others possessing wisdom and wealth, he desires to be like them. And it is very good in his eyes that others have what he has, and God should give them 1,000 times more. But this trait is not completely good, for one should not desire wisdom because others possess it, but because it is the good, and he should desire wealth to perform what is necessary.

King David said, “O, Lord, You are aware of all my desires; my groaning is not hidden from You” (Psalms 38:10). Radak explains that David’s desires were all in accord with God’s will and did not stem from his envy of others.

Rabbeinu Yona describes the third attitude that removes one from the world: honor. This evil of honor is one who acts as though he is above others in order to instill fear in them. This person descends into the depths of Gehenam and can never rise from his downfall. Rabbeinu Yona says that power is the worst drive for honor. It is the most self-destructive activity.

Rabbeinu Yona says there is a second expression of seeking honor, which is one who desires the respect of others for he believes he deserves it, but that is false. Even if this person is a talmid chocham and of fine character, and even

if he desires respect for those qualities, he sins with his soul. However, if his honor is only for the sake of Heaven and he acts purely for the honor of the Torah alone and not for himself, and he does not derive any pleasure from that honor (that being the barometer), then he acts properly for the sake of Heaven. But any other purpose in seeking honor is bad.

Rabbeinu Yona says that even a king whose rule should properly evoke fear in his people (explaining why a king who forgoes his honor, must still have his honor upheld), is more deserving of honor than others, and yet he must not seek honor...all the more so average citizens should not seek honor. Rabbeinu Yona cites the case of the king because he is a real institution in society and he deserves honor. The honor we give the king is not artificial, but Judaism demands one not to make the societal framework the essence. Man's essence is the framework of God, and in this framework, there is no such thing as human honor. This explains why the Torah says the following:

That [the king] will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel (Deut. 17:20).

There is a societal framework in which the king is the

most important person. And he deserves greater honor as he is not an average individual. But this position is relative to others. Although this is so, Judaism demands that man live not in the relative world [of his emotions] but in the absolute world [of reality and Torah values], embracing God's reality. The concept of human honor is absolute nonsense. A king's honor is a real phenomenon. Uriah was punished with death because he rejected King David's command to return to his wife. Uriah said to King David, "How can I return to my wife while everyone else is at war?" His words do not seem bad, but the gemara says he rebelled against the king. Uriah slighted King David, saying [in other words], "By giving me this order, you are not thinking properly." Even by way of implication, Uriah was rebellious and deserved death. Thus, kingship is a real halachic institution. Nevertheless, in the face of the ultimate reality—God—it is nonsensical. Therefore, an average person who is unlike a king is not entitled to honor and certainly should not chase honor.

Parenthetically, even Moshe had to show honor to evil Pharaoh because he represented the institution of kingship. Kingship is where one summons all his energies and functions with independence. Kingship can also be exerted over oneself; this is the highest level. It was because King Solomon had this kingship [control] over himself that he

was king.

Rabbeinu Yona breaks down honor into two areas: power and respect. According to Rabbeinu Yona, power is not a different phenomenon. Psychologically speaking, power is the same phenomenon as honor. However, power is when the drive reaches a point where the person—the gavra—is altered. In the case of honor, the person has not been altered; he is simply looking for recognition and respect. But the power monger's entire personality has changed and is overcome by his importance; he is not a regular person seeking recognition to satisfy self-importance—self-importance is a foregone conclusion.

This explains why Rabbeinu Yona says that one who seeks power will never recover from his downfall. For his state of mind is so far gone that it is impossible to ever come to any realization of truth. He is overcome instinctually. A power monger cannot be corrected. Such people like Stalin are unreachable.

Pharaoh said, “The Nile is mine and I made myself” (Ezekiel 29:3). What does he mean by “I made myself?” He cannot recognize that he is a created existence. If there is one theme that the tefilos of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur try to impress upon man, it is that man is a created existence. This is the greatest blow to one's ego. This humbles man most:

And everything that is formed will know that You formed it; and everything that is made will know that You made it (Tefilos of the High Holidays).

One who recognizes that he is a created existence will not partake of the power monger's egoistic drive.

Rabbeinu Yona continues:

These three traits [envy, desires and chasing honor] remove one from the world; they are terrible character traits.

The simple understanding is that terrible traits remove one from this world and the next world. Rabbeinu Yona comments further:

A calm disposition gives bodily health; envy is rot to the bones (Proverbs 14:30).

What makes the flesh live is one who is forgiving and unaffected by others (says Rashi). But envy rots the bones. From here, Rabbeinu Yona supports the mishna that says that envy removes one from the world. Rabbeinu Yona says that the nature of envy is such that it destroys a person and as such; one cannot enjoy life.

Why does desire—taivah—remove one from the world?

The desires of the lazy one kills him, for it restrains his hands from actions (Proverbs 21:25).

This verse holds the key to the problems we cited earlier. The desire of a lazy man will destroy him because it prevents his hands from working. The problem is that the desire of a lazy person is only one type of desire. [But as the mishna stated, if that desire in general—any desire—removes a person from the world, how will other desires, which do not stop a person from working, remove him from the world?] Rabbeinu Yona attempts to prove from this verse that any desire kills a person. But this is merely one type of desire [how can he apply it to all desires?] There are plenty of hedonists—ba’alei taivah—who are not lazy. How is this verse a proof that “all” desires remove one from the world?

This explains the previous Rabbeinu Yona that we did not understand. Rabbeinu Yona seems to be veering away from desires and instead, addresses envy.

What is meant by, “The desires of the lazy ones kills him?” We always associate “desire” with physical desires, but there is an underlying concept of desire. Maimonides mentions that man’s soul is unlike the soul of an animal. And certainly, human desire is unlike animal desire. De-

sire and lust do not refer simply to “satisfaction” but to a person who wishes to remain in a state where he follows whatever appeals to his natural makeup. A ba’al taivah is one who has never left the state of childhood. Before one is bar mitzvah he has childish instincts. Thus, until then, he is a ba’al taivah, for the child follows whatever naturally appeals to him. One ceases being a ba’al taivah when he gains wisdom. But most of mankind follows the “what-feels good is good” philosophy. Man follows what he desires.

The ba’al taivah does not necessarily desire food, but he wishes to be in a state where anything that feels good should be satisfied. Most people’s life goals are to return to this state. But it is an illusion. One doesn’t wish for the desire per se, but to feel that he is in a state of luxuriating. One searches for a general feeling, not a particular desire. An animal seeks a particular satisfaction [a specific act], while man is more sublimated; he operates in a mental state [not seeking a particular pleasure per se, but seeking an overall sense of luxuriating: a freedom to feel emotionally unrestricted].

Pirkei Avos tells us that one who follows this way of life, recreating a childhood state and refusing to recognize reality—seeking a false sense of satisfaction—is a ba’al taivah. When such a person does not analyze his actions, he

is a ba'al taivah. The childhood state is expressed in three ways: 1. Living comfortably (ba'al taivah), 2. Envy, where one bases his reality on what others possess, and 3. Honor, self-aggrandizement/ego. Pirkei Avos teaches that one who cannot remove himself from these states and overcome these emotions is removed from reality. These satisfactions are inherently insatiable and drive man away from the true good.

Returning to our question of why Rabbeinu Yona subsumes wealth and wisdom under the category of taivah, the answer is now clear. Taivah refers to the natural draw of the emotions. A ba'al taivah cannot overcome or analyze his instincts and inclinations. And one's base desires attach themselves to two areas—wealth and wisdom—for everyone realizes that these are the greatest matters. After all, who wouldn't want to be a great chocham and have an endless amount of money? And even the wealthy person tries to impress others more with his wisdom than with his wealth. Everyone recognizes that wisdom is superior. Again, taivah is not a physical desire, but it is the following of man's natural inclinations.

Rabbeinu Yona explains there are three expressions of one's desire for wealth and wisdom: 1. He feels he alone should possess them, 2. He thinks others too can have both, but that they shouldn't exceed his, 3. He is happy that oth-

ers have wealth and wisdom, but he wants to be part of that group.

Why does Rabbeinu Yona categorize these three expressions? Human desire is related to images. People do not simply desire something, but they seek to satisfy an image. Rabbeinu Yona says that man's natural inclinations set themselves up in terms of three images. The first and most extreme image is where one wishes for wealth and wisdom and he wishes for others to not possess them. This means that man's basic inclination is to be unique [possessing what others do not have offers man this unique self-image]. This is man's most powerful basic desire. The second image man desires is not as radical: Others can enjoy wealth and wisdom but his must exceed theirs. Here, man seeks not a qualitative difference from others, but a quantitative difference. In the third case, the person's self-image is tied to a camaraderie. He does not care to be greater than others; he simply desires to partake of the self-image of one who is wealthy and wise [as opposed to the proper attitude where one seeks wisdom for its own sake and wealth as a means to live].

Rabbeinu Yona breaks these down into three classes, and although one might suggest that they simply vary in degrees, that is not true. These are three different types of images. As we said, it is not the desire per se, but one seeks

the pleasure as a means to provide himself with a state of satisfaction about himself. Man achieves this state by viewing himself in a certain mental way. Although Chazal prayed for wealth, their desire was not based on self-image, rather, the desire for wealth should stem from the recognition of the good per se. This applies to the desire for wealth and wisdom. One should seek both because of their essential nature and not to satisfy a self-image [or other motives].

However, most people cannot reach the ultimate level of lishma—seeking something for its essential good—without first traveling through this third level because people see others with wealth and wisdom and they desire that for themselves. It starts as a desire to belong to that group and to share that self-image that they see others enjoying. But Rabbeinu Yona's point is that the perfected person does not care about the self-image but cares only to pursue wisdom for itself. One cannot remove himself from desires as long as he is attached to the concept of an image. And the reason Rabbeinu Yona breaks this down in these three ways is because, psychologically, man's nature is that he attaches himself to one of these three images.

Unlike Moshe, who constantly reflected on God's wisdom and not upon himself, an average person reflects upon himself to gauge his progress. But a perfect person does

not gauge himself based on images that society reflects; he measures his progress in absolute terms: “Am I in step with reality, with the way I should live life, or am I departing from the perfect life?” That is the only image perfected man possesses. There is a self-reflection, but it is in absolute [reality’s] terms regarding objective truths and not based on people’s projected self-images. According to Rabbeinu Yona, this is the person who has risen above *tai-vah*. While it is a Torah commandment to attach oneself to *talmidei chochamim*, the highest level is one’s attachment to God’s wisdom for its own sake.

Rabbeinu Yona provides the best descriptive concept of wealth. The example he gives is of a king who instructs one to oversee his treasury. He tells the subject to take anything he wants, but he must apportion his wealth according to the king’s plan so that the state’s needs are covered. In the process, the subject can take anything he wants. That is the true concept of wealth: One has no sense of ownership and no obsession with ownership of the wealth. On the contrary, it is a practical situation. That is the true wealthy individual. It is a good example because it is the obsession that is the evil, and not the wealth per se. Such an individual enjoys his wealth to a far greater degree than one who is obsessed with wealth, which strangulates him and creates great worry: “With the increase in wealth, [comes] the

increase in worry” (Pirkei Avos 2:7). Rabbeinu Yona depicts the healthy attitude toward wealth, which is a tremendous blessing from God.

Returning to the point of honor, today’s society creates many drug addicts and alcoholics. Since society promotes the value of superiority [fame and success], and since only a few people can fill the few top positions in a given industry, most people who measure themselves against those in the limelight will experience depression at their failures. They then escape through drugs and alcohol. And Jewish life suffers for it does not escape this value system. Yeshivos push students to become gedolei hador, leaders of the generation. The Jewish world mimics society and causes students to experience the same sense of failure. [When I was younger] my friends were under this illusion and learned Torah with the intent of becoming leaders, but when they realized that they could not attain the level of a gadol, they gave up learning. This approach caused many “sacrifices” [“slaughters”: a metaphor for students who needlessly abandon Torah study, a loss like death]. And now when they see a gemara, they view it as a failure. To them, learning now represents failure, preventing them from ever learning again. This is not a very good form of motivation, and this approach came from society, which infiltrated Judaism to a great degree in a way that people

do not realize. A Jewish leader should not be appreciated for his high stature as compared to others, but for his wisdom and perfected lifestyle. Herein lies the error.

Maimonides comments:

Because by [following] these character traits, and even [following] one of them, one will certainly lose his belief in the Torah and he will not attain intellectual or character perfection.

Maimonides says that possessing even one of these character traits blocks one from attaining perfection. This supports what we have stated previously—for if one cannot raise himself above the infantile, if he is rooted in either envy, ego, or in his desires, perfection is impossible. Maimonides says that due to the abundant energies that are attached to these areas, perfection, which requires a certain type of person, is out of reach.

Chazal differentiated between a talmid chocham and the average person, which upset the average person. Like Rabbi Akiva said when he was still an average person (am haaretz), “Give me a talmid chocham and I will bite him like a donkey.” Rabbi Akiva sensed that the talmid chocham looked down upon the average person [upon himself, which he resented], that they were qualitatively differentiated. But what is the differentiation?

A new area of reality opens up for the talmid chocham because his mind investigates even his most basic desires, while the average person cannot do that because he has never been trained in such a process. The talmid chocham analyzes all his emotions and determines if a desire is within reality or outside of it, and how to cope with it. Therefore, the talmid chocham views the average person as a different type of person.

The average person has not separated his mind from his emotions; his emotions have total control and his mind simply follows. Socrates tried to show people that their opinions and values were based on what was emotionally satisfying, and not based on any analysis. Had people analyzed their views, they would realize that they were wrong. But the talmid chocham subjects all his views to his mind. He possesses a different type of objectivity. Thus, one cannot arrive at any objectivity unless he rises above these three base instinctual drives. But, according to Maimonides, if one is attached to even one of these drives, it will trap his energies to the degree that he can never reach perfection.

4:22 PERSPECTIVE OF REALITY

RABBI ELAZAR HAKAPOR WOULD SAY, “THOSE WHO ARE BORN WILL DIE, AND THOSE WHO ARE DEAD WILL BE REVIVED, AND THE LIVING WILL BE JUDGED. TO KNOW, TO MAKE KNOWN, AND TO BECOME KNOWN THAT HE IS GOD, HE IS THE FORMER, HE IS THE CREATOR, HE IS THE ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, HE IS THE JUDGE, HE IS THE WITNESS, HE IS THE LITIGANT, AND HE IS DESTINED TO JUDGE. BLESSED BE HE, WHO HAS BEFORE HIM NO WRONG, NO FORGETFULNESS, NO RESPECT OF PERSONS, NO TAKING OF BRIBES, FOR ALL IS HIS. AND KNOW THAT EVERYTHING IS ACCORDING TO THE CALCULATION. AND DO NOT LET YOUR [EVIL] IMPULSE ASSURE YOU THAT THE NETHERWORLD IS A PLACE OF REFUGE FOR YOU; BECAUSE AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU WERE CREATED, AND AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU WERE BORN, AND AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU LIVE, AND AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU DIE, AND AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU ARE DESTINED TO GIVE ACCOUNT AND RECKONING BEFORE THE KING OF KINGS, THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE.”

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Since those who are born will eventually die—today they are alive and tomorrow they are in the grave—they should consider their actions and repent.

This is the opposite of the “eat and drink for tomorrow we die” philosophy. Most people feel that by missing an enjoyment they have lost out on life [in some measure]. Thus, reflecting on mortality does not always evoke the response of remorse and repentance.

...AND THAT THE LIVING WILL BE JUDGED.

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Those who are revived in the future will stand in judgement in front of God, may He be blessed, and He will give them according to their activities and according to the actions of their hands.

TO KNOW, TO MAKE KNOWN, AND TO BECOME KNOWN

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

Everyone needs to know this. To know from others who will teach him; and to make known—that he should teach others in this world; and to be conscious in the world to come from himself without a teacher, as it is stated (Jeremiah 31:34), “No longer will they teach a man his neighbor and a man say to his brother, ‘Know the Lord’; for all of them shall know Me, from the young to the old.”

“Former” (yotzer) refers to God creating man, but “creator” (borei) means that God completed man’s creation. Rabbeinu Yona says that the concept of man as a “created being” is unlike a human creation of an object. This is because once a person creates anything, it exists [independently] and no longer requires the person to maintain its existence. But regarding God’s creations, such as man, they require His will at every moment to continue existing. The explanation for this difference is that in the case of man’s creations, he employs natural laws to bring about his crafts. Those laws continue after the person dies. But this cannot apply to God. The laws of nature require a source—namely God—and without His existence, nature cannot exist; nothing can exist. Thus, man cannot continue to exist if it were not for God’s will that His natural laws exist. As Maimonides says in the beginning of Mishneh Torah, God is constantly involved in a person’s existence. By nature, all that God created could not exist without His creation; nothing can exist without His will. Maimonides writes that if one could imagine that God did not exist, nothing would exist because existence is derived from God (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:2).

Maimonides explains the verse “He does not favor people and He does not take bribes” (Deut. 10:17) to mean that whatever good one performs is not canceled by a sin,

and vice versa. Each act—good or bad—receives its just reward. God does not forget [forgive] a sin due to many mitzvos.

People care only to classify others as good or bad; they don't delineate by degree. They classify others with this absolute status because they view others in a utilitarian light. But as God has no need for people, He does not fabricate this good or bad label, rather He judges a person exactly based on his actions. Each action earns a just response.

If this is so, how does Maimonides say that if one has more merits than sins he is sealed for good? It appears from this that God does in fact label a person as “absolutely righteous,” just as people do.

The answer is that Maimonides' statement refers to judgment on Earth. If one were judged on every sin, he would not continue to live because of the punishment he deserves. Thus, people, nations, and the world are judged on the whole, on whether their continued existence is worthwhile. But a tzaddik does not experience this general type of judgment. “God judges the righteous to a hairsbreadth” (Rashbam, Num. 20:10). Tzaddikim are judged here just like they are in Olam Haba, but average people cannot tolerate this exact judgment, and if they were the whole world would be destroyed. Maimonides' words here

in Pirkei Avos regarding God not taking a bribe refer not to an earthly judgment, but to one's ultimate judgment when he dies. At this point, all of his actions are rewarded and/or punished. There are two judgments: one here and one in Olam Haba. So, although one with greater merits than sins earns another year of life, this does not erase his sins.

A bribe is the highest expression of a personal relationship [the relationship is valued as greater than the truth]. God not taking a bribe means that God is removed from a personal assessment of people. [He judges with perfect honesty.] God desires man's perfection, therefore, He addresses all of man's defects. He doesn't take bribes.

Understanding this mishna is difficult. It is not Chazal's philosophy to be morbid, to say that one should sense the fear of death at every moment of his life. Even the gemara in Berachos that advises one on how to avoid sin and offers a few suggestions, only suggests to recall the day of death as a last resort. [This strengthens our question on our mishna.] What are the ideas in our mishna?

This mishna is closely related to the previous one. [Both are authored by Rabbi Elazar HaKapor.] The previous mishna said that one who is tied to infantile emotions functions outside of reality and loses his perfection. Our mishna 4:22 is the conclusion of 4:21. Mishna 4:21 is what removes man from reality, but 4:22 are that matters that

constitute the true world.

Rabbeinu Yona says the statement “those who are born will die,” refers to one’s need to repent. “The dead will be revived” means that in resurrection there is judgment. If that is so, “the living will be judged” is repetitive, as both refer to judgment.

Rabbi Elazar HaKapor describes true reality. A newborn calls to mind the beginning of life and this generates happiness. Seeing an old person evokes the thought of death, something one tries to avoid. A psychologist said that no person can envision his own death as that is too disturbing. But in the Messianic Era, people will say when learning of one’s death, “Blessed is the One who is good and performs good.” They will recognize death as a good. Rabbi Elazar HaKapor’s lesson is that our natural responses to birth and old age are false. On the contrary, one is born to die, and one who died will return. The gemara in Kesuvos refers to someone giving a eulogy, “Many died, and many will die.” The gemara says that one should not say this, as this depresses people. How then can Rabbi Elazar HaKapor say that our responses to newborns are wrong? It is because the mishna discusses a philosophical truth. The mishna is a philosophical setting, but to give people a sudden jolt is psychologically unhealthy.

Rabbi Elazar HaKapor teaches that the way the world

appears to our emotions is not the true world: The newborn will die, and the dead are not in a morbid situation, but will return. Chazal teach that one must view life with his mind's eye and not through his emotions.

What is meant by “the living will be judged?” The essence of life is judgment and not—as most people think—physical pleasure. Judgment means that the essence of life is a decision-making process in terms of one's soul.

The order of the mishna is not chronological; it is an order for uncovering reality. One must not live where he is moved by his emotions, like when seeing a newborn and a dead person. These things impact a person. Had this mishna been ordered chronologically, it would say, “Those who are born will die, the living will be judged, and the dead will be revived.” But the mishna is written to teach one not to be removed from reality because of his emotional reactions [and the fallacies that these emotions evoke].

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

TO KNOW, TO MAKE KNOWN, AND TO BECOME KNOWN

The emphasis is on knowledge. The mishna says that to be in the world of reality, one must be tied to knowledge. As Maimonides says at the end of his Laws on Repentance (Hilchos Teshuvah), “One’s love of God is in direct proportion with his knowledge.”

Rabbeinu Yona quoted Jeremiah 31:34, which refers to the Messianic Era:

No longer will a man [need to] teach his neighbor, and a man [need to] say to his brother, “Know the Lord”; for all of them shall know Me, from the young to the old.

A few verses earlier Jeremiah says as follows:

See, a time is coming—declares the Lord—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah (Ibid. 31:31).

This new covenant is not a new Torah, God forbid. The Torah from Sinai is the only Torah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant that they broke, though I espoused them, declares the Lord. But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days, declares the Lord: I will put My teaching into their innermost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No longer will a man [need to] teach his neighbor, and a man [need to] say to his brother, 'Know the Lord'; for all of them shall know Me, from the young to the old (Ibid. 31:32,34).

This will be a new covenant. The Messianic Era will be a different type of situation.

It is a Torah fundamental that one must have knowledge of God. But how does one attain this knowledge? Will a simple human being understand God when he can't even understand his environment? After thousands of years of the human mind pondering nature, only recently are ideas of ecology being understood. How then can man know God?

The entire Torah is based on knowledge of God: "You have been shown to know" (Deut. 4:35), "And you shall know it today and place it on your heart" (Deut. 4:39).

Everything is knowledge. What does knowledge of God mean? In his introduction to *Pirkei Avos* (chap. 5), Maimonides says that knowledge of God is man's purpose in life and that everything he does should aim toward that goal. He says that whoever lives this way is one level below a prophet—the highest level man can attain, although very few reach this level, and only after much effort. Additionally, Maimonides does not preach asceticism. He even mentions that one should enjoy life and wear nice clothes, provided that everything one does is for his psychological well-being so that he can learn Torah.

Maimonides describes love of God:

But how may one discover the way to love and fear Him? When man reflects concerning His works and His great and wonderful creatures, and he beholds through them His wonderful, matchless, and infinite wisdom, he will spontaneously be filled with love, praise, and exaltation and become possessed with a great longing to know the Great Name, even as David said: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalms 42:2) (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 2:2).

Many scientists and physicists appreciated God's wisdom. And Judaism maintains that if a person is not emotionally distorted, when he sees the wisdom in creation, he

must immediately see God's hand. Banesh Hoffman—one of Einstein's collaborators—said as follows:

What little we understand of the deeper workings of the world is yet enough to reveal a sublime harmony beneath its turmoil and complexity. Our fragmentary knowledge is not lightly acquired. A meager handful of men is vouchsafed each generation with the precious gift of scientific insight. I will marvel at their powers. How much more then shall we marvel at the wondrous powers of God, who created the heavens and the earth from a primal essence of such exquisite subtlety, that with it, He could fashion brains and minds afire with the divine gift of clairvoyance to penetrate His mysteries? If the mind of a mere Bohr or Einstein astounds us with its power, how may we begin to extol the glory of God who created them?

If a person does not arrive at this sentiment when beholding the universe, there is something psychologically wrong with him. For someone like Banesh Hoffman, God was a reality. God registered on the same part of his mind where his scientific investigations took place. That is the meaning of “knowledge of God”—the same part of the individual that ponders reality also recognizes God. The more one understands God's wisdom, the greater is the level of his love

of God and his knowledge of God. Knowledge of God does not mean knowing God, as that is impossible for a human being. Rather knowledge of God means that the idea of God registers on the reasoning part of one's mind. It is no longer a religious notion that he must believe in God, but a reality. When one studies God's wisdom that was necessary in guiding the primary matter to unravel a whole universe, can he begin to imagine what level of wisdom that is?! [The resulting] galaxies, planets, and stars are filled with great wisdom. It is impossible to comprehend the wisdom of that primary matter [which contained the science that would develop primary substance into enormous and complex galaxies].

The more one sees God's wisdom, the more he appreciates knowledge and increases his love of God, which is why the mishna says, "To know, to make known, and to be known." The emphasis is clearly on knowledge of God. To live in the true world of reality, the idea of God must register on one's knowledge. It is insufficient for one to religiously believe in God.

Halacha is strange in that it's never quite the way it seems, and for good reason—halacha is very deep. For example, the mitzvah of reading the Shema is the acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven, *kabbalas ol malchus shamayim*. "Blessed is the name of the honor of His king-

dom forever.” This is an additional *kiyyum* (fulfillment) in accepting God’s rule. And if one is not focused on the first verse, one does not fulfill his obligation. But if I were to ask someone to devise a formula for accepting God’s kingship, I don’t think anyone would say that one should recite the Shema. One would more likely formulate such an acceptance as, “I accept upon myself all of the matters in the world.” But the Torah says the formula is “Listen Israel, God is our God, God is one.” How is that accepting God’s kingship?

Acceptance lies in the recognition of God. If a person has a true appreciation and recognition of God, that is the acceptance. The first part of the Shema identifies God as the One who exists eternally. “Our God” refers to God’s providence over us, *hashgachah*. “God is one” refers to perceiving wisdom concerning God [the idea of His unity]. The perception of wisdom concerning God is the acceptance of God as our ruler. When God’s reality registers on one’s mind, that is the acceptance. Maimonides says, in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, that even without the Torah, one can attain love of God by studying creation. And even with the Torah, knowledge of God through the study of creation is a necessary level. Chazal say that the acts of creation—*ma’aseh Bereishis*—refer to knowledge of physics.

Judaism maintains that God gave man an intellect—a

tzelem Elohim—that is in line with reality. If one’s emotions are under one’s control, his intelligence will accurately perceive reality and he must conclude that there is a Creator; he perceives wisdom concerning God.

Returning to the mishna, the terms that one should “know” and that one should “make known” are clear, but how do we understand the term “to be known?” Rabbeinu Yona says “to be known” refers to the Messianic Era. On the verses “And God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your offspring to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, in order that you may live” (Deut. 30:6) and “You will return to God” (Ibid. 30:8), which also refer to the Messianic Era, Ramban is bothered that God will circumcise man’s heart [control his emotions], since man is supposed to do this of his own free will. Ramban says this means, “If one comes to purify himself, he is assisted” (Talmud Shabbos 104). If one invests a sincere effort, he thereby becomes worthy of God’s providence, which assists him in his process of investigating God, to gain the knowledge and love of God. Ramban continues:

Ever since creation, a person can choose to be righteous or evil, and this is true through the entire time of the Torah. But in the Messianic Era, one’s free will, by nature, will choose the good. At that time, the heart will not desire that which is not good

for the soul and we won't desire it at all. That is the meaning of God "circumcising the heart." For desire and lust are a fore-skin of the heart. And in the Messianic Era man will return to the state of Adam prior to his sin, when Adam had no conflicting desires. And this is written in Jeremiab:

"See, a time is coming—declares the Lord—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant that they broke, though I espoused them, declares the Lord. But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days, declares the Lord: I will put My Teaching into their innermost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another, 'Heed the Lord,' for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31:31-34).

And this refers to the destruction of the evil inclination.

But, as the Torah says, "The inclination of man is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21), that man starts out as an in-

instinctual being, how can Jeremiah say that [in the future] no one will need to teach others about God, even children [who should require this education, as they are still instinctual]? Ramban says the verse “I will give them a new heart” (Ezek. 36:26) means that there will be a complete change in human nature.

Parshas Nitzavim discusses love of God, but this is also knowledge of God. The Torah itself says so: “And you will place it on your heart” [understand it] (Deut. 30:1). Sforno says, “One should consider contradictory philosophies and ideas to distinguish truth from fallacy, and in this way, one will see that the ideas that conflict with the Torah are far from God.” Vaueschanan has a duplicate verse “And you will place it on your heart” (Deut. 4:39). Here, Sforno elaborates at greater length:

One should know all the contradictory ideas, and after due consideration and contemplation, place on your heart the true component—that Hashem is God. Then you will understand that God’s knowledge is infinite. And when one investigates wisdom concerning God, he sees a design even from the little that he knows. One will see a pattern and it will be clear to you that there exists a being behind this pattern (without a pattern, there is no wisdom). And then you will be certain that there is no other. For this could only exist through

a power distinct in the greatest possible degree from the physical world.

One who witnesses the universe's wisdom draws the conclusion of the impossibility of its existence without a Being [Who created it], Who is completely different and far removed from the entire physical creation. A Being without comparison refers to God's oneness [His uniqueness as the sole cause of everything].

Accepting God as the ruler of the universe is what we mean by knowledge of God. Our concept is different from what anyone else would suggest. Ramban says that in the Messianic Era the evil inclination will no longer exist. That explains the verse in Jeremiah that "All people will know Me, from children to elders." How is this possible? Furthermore, Radak says that this does not mean that everyone will share the same level of wisdom, rather that regarding even a person on the most basic level, the concept of God will register on the rational principle in his mind. That is the meaning of "And God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children." As long as one's emotions distort his character, he is prevented from seeing God as a reality. The truth of God is too difficult to accept while one follows an instinctual life. That is why Ramban says that the moment the instincts are nullified,

there is knowledge and love of God.

Now we understand why Rabbeinu Yona says “to know” and “to make known” refer to two different levels in this world, while “to be known” refers to the Messianic Era, where there will be a different kind of recognition based upon the removal of the evil inclination. The reality principle of the human mind will perceive God just like any other truth. For in that era, nothing will exist that will impede knowledge of God. Maimonides says that in the Messianic Era, man will not undergo any natural change. But both he and Ramban say that this state will come to be. Where they differ is how the Messianic Era and Jeremiah’s prophecy will come into existence. Ramban says it will come to be through a change in human psychology. Maimonides says the change will occur naturally. Mankind will reach a certain level where there won’t be any barrier in recognizing God. It will be an accepted fact.

In Pirkei Avos 4:21, Rabbi Elazar HaKapor explains what removes man from reality. In 4:22, he explains the height of reality. A typical person sees life when he sees an infant. Rabbi Elazar HaKapor sees death; he sees that the infant will eventually die. The typical person sees death and is bothered. Rabbi Elazar HaKapor sees life. He sees the world through the mind’s eye.

HE IS GOD, HE IS THE FORMER, HE IS THE CREATOR, HE IS THE ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, HE IS THE JUDGE, HE IS THE WITNESS, HE IS THE LITIGANT, AND HE IS DESTINED TO JUDGE. BLESSED BE HE, WHO HAS BEFORE HIM NO WRONG, NO FORGETFULNESS, NO RESPECT OF PERSONS, NO TAKING OF BRIBES, FOR ALL IS HIS.

Knowledge of God is the “acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven.” This quote is the conclusion of one who has obtained knowledge of God. Each term has a different impact, but it is all the acceptance of God’s rule.

Why didn’t the scientists say that God is also the judge? It is impossible to view God as “the judge, the witness, and that man eventually is judged,” unless one has a source saying so. The only source is prophecy/Torah. Scientists are enamored with God as Creator, but they don’t see God’s wisdom from the Torah. They are unaware of that which we know from the Torah and not from creation alone: that God is concerned with man. They concluded as did King David: “What is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him?” (Psalms 8:5). When man understands God’s greatness, it is absurd to view man as worthy of God’s attention. Therefore, scientists remain convinced of their conclusion. But Judaism maintains that absurd as it sounds, God is involved in man’s existence and success.

Accepting the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven has two components that parallel the blessings of the Shema, which too is the acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven. The first blessing (Yotzer Or) addresses creation and the second blessing (Ahavas Olam) addresses God's providence. So too in our mishna, Rabbi Elazar HaKapor refers to God as the former and the Creator, and then he refers to God as the judge and the witness [relative to man: i.e., providence]. Our accepting of God's rule encompasses God as Creator, and is completed by accepting God's providence. And the greatest expression of God's providence is His act of giving the Torah to man.

AND KNOW THAT EVERYTHING IS ACCORDING
TO THE CALCULATION.

Chazal say the following on the verse "Therefore the proverbists said, 'Come to Cheshbon; firmly built and well-founded is Sichon's city'" (Num. 21:27):

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani says that Rabbi Yochanan says, "What is the meaning of that which is written: 'Therefore the proverbists [Hamoshlim] said, 'Come to Cheshbon; firmly built and well-founded is Sichon's city?'" The Gemara interprets these verses homiletically. "Hamoshlim"; these are the peo-

ple who rule [moshel] over their evil inclination. They will say: "Come to Cheshbon," meaning, Come and let us calculate the account [cheshbon] of the world, i.e., the financial loss incurred by the fulfillment of a mitzvah in contrast to its reward, and the reward for committing a transgression, i.e., the pleasure and gain received, in contrast to the loss it entails.

"Let it be built and established" means that if you make this calculation, you will be built in this world and you will be established in the World to Come. The phrase "city [ir] of Sichon" means that if a person fashions himself like this young donkey [ayir] that follows after pleasant talk [sicha], i.e., if one is easily tempted to listen to his inclination, what is written after it? "For a fire has gone out of Cheshbon...it has devoured," i.e., a fire will go out from those who calculate the effect of their deeds in the world, and it will consume those who do not calculate and examine their ways but instead do as they please.

Some people would accuse Chazal of saying whatever they wished [twisting words to suit their needs]. This type of gemara dissuades talmidim. This is not the literal meaning of the verses. The verses discuss literal conquest, but Chazal would interject—with similar wording—an idea

they wished to remember. They were not permitted to write down anything of the Oral Law. This is an *asmachta* [associating ideas to the Torah's words] functioning as a memory hook.

What is meant by “the financial loss incurred by the fulfillment of a mitzvah in contrast to its reward, and the reward for committing a transgression, i.e., the pleasure and gain received, in contrast to the loss it entails?” Why is this calculation needed? Apparently, if one does not make a calculation, he will fail:

If you make this calculation, you will be built in this world and you will be established in the World to Come.

If one follows the Torah only out of religious obligation, he will fail. Calculation means that one succeeds only if he understands what the good is; he must understand the value of a mitzvah, and that transgression too has a certain value. One must assess both and rationally determine what is best. A mitzvah must be performed based on wisdom and not performed merely out of religiosity.

What is pleasant speech? As stated in mishna 4:21, three things remove one from the world: envy, desires, and seeking honor. Rabbeinu Yona says that desire is like a softly-spoken, soothing conversation. When one follows his de-

sires, he follows that which soothes his nature. He does not analyze the underlying emotion that feels so comfortable. In contrast, a calculation means that one can make an assessment and not choose what is soothing, like soft speech.

And know that everything is according to the calculation.

Rabbi Elazar HaKapor says that a person's state is completely determined based upon an intricate calculation of one's soul. A typical person who is ruled by his emotions succumbs to its "soothing speech." But one who calculates his actions, stops and analyzes his every move. This is the difference between the talmid chocham and the average person.

And you shall know it today and place on your heart (Deut. 4:39).

This verse is in Va'eschanan. And in Nitzavim, Sforno says as follows:

And after pondering, place on your heart only the true portion of what you ponder, which is that God is the eternal Orchestrator, whose fame is in the Heavens above and on the Earth below. Through the knowledge of the cosmos one recognizes God. And through them it is known that

there is an Existence with purpose that created everything with a purpose. There is no one else. From this it will be known that there is nothing other than God. He is the only one. Because it is a necessary deduction that the universe should exist only through the power of some existing force separated from the physical, a very high existence to the highest degree. And it is impossible for this existence to be more than one force. Because on this high level, a nonphysical entity, the only differentiation is their level, and God is the highest level.

Albert Einstein said the following:

Everyone seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe. A spirit vastly superior to that of man. And one, in the face of which, man, with our modest powers, must feel humble.

Einstein said in different terms the same thing as Sforino. One who has perfected his emotions and investigates nature will come to this conclusion and conviction. On Talmud Berachos 17a, Meharsha comments on “And you should love God your Lord with all your heart...” (Deut. 6:5):

The intent is as the metaphysical philoso-

phers wrote: Every person is obligated to understand the knowledge of God's existence, His oneness, His powers, and the knowledge of His ways, blessed be He, according to each person's capacity of knowledge. Of course, in accordance with the Torah principles that our prophets taught us. And we reject anything that violates the Torah's principles. And if one still has a problem, he should realize it is due to his own intellectual limitations. As Rabbi Meir said, one should gain knowledge of God's existence, His oneness, and His omnipotence. This is definitely a great matter, for Moshe our teacher inquired of this when he said, "Make known to me Your ways" (Exod. 33:13). But he also said one should dwell by the doors of the Torah, meaning one should not budge from there. And any thought you entertain that violates Moshe's Torah is heresy and you must pay no attention to it.

Saadia Gaon said Judaism is a twofold system: It is a system of knowledge [human discovery] and we also have the conclusions [of absolute truths] from the prophets. But even so, the conclusions do not free a person from understanding [investigating] ideas about God. The reality of God must register on a person's reality principle. [He must think about every area and arrive at reasons and proofs as far as it is possible, and not be blindly religious.] This

is the meaning of the phrase “knowledge of God.” It does not mean “knowing God,” because we cannot possess that knowledge [man cannot know what God is]. It means knowledge concerning God, that our relationship to God must be through mind and knowledge. If one fails to reach this level, he fails to fulfill the mitzvah of loving God: “A brutish man cannot know; a fool cannot understand this” (Psalms 92:7).

Werner Heisenberg, author of *Physics and Philosophy*, wrote that the ancients’ problem regarded the eternity of the universe and basic problems in philosophy, the same problems that science grapples with today. It is an amazing phenomenon, but the world was created with a certain order, so that even on a basic level, a person without much experimentation can see great wisdom. The universe is created such that a person at any stage can see God’s wisdom. By definition, science means that there is harmony in creation, evident from the earliest times, which explains why Abraham could perceive God—because the harmony is evident on any level.

If a person sees the wisdom of the Talmud, he sees God’s wisdom. It is impossible for a human mind to have created the Talmud because when studying it, the greatest human minds realize that they’re just scratching the surface. It is an endless science. Anyone who studies the Talmud sees

God's hand.

There is a difference between a contradiction/difficulties that one confronts in a real science, and what a fool says. Regarding the latter, one immediately sees inherent contradictions with no path of resolution. But problems in science and in the gemara are of a different nature; they are not inherently contradictory. You can sense that the problem points to a new concept. This explains why scientists do not abandon their studies, for they sense that even in problems there are principles underlying everything. The same is true in seeming contradictions found in Maimonides, in a Rav Chaim and in the Torah, where the question is a starting point leading toward a new idea. When Rav Chaim asks a question, you can sense there is something behind it. And when he shows the idea, you see clearly how the whole picture emerges. That's what we refer to as the wisdom of the Torah, "Longer than the Earth in measure and wider than the sea" (Job 11:9). In his Laws of Tumma and Tahara, Maimonides says there are areas that even the prophets were not able to fully master. The prophets realized there are matters of infinite depth.

Knowledge of God is not a solution to a problem, for that would mean the impossible: that man knows what God is. Knowledge concerning God is the same kind of sense that the chocham has when he realizes there is something behind a phenomenon. Intellectual intuition is the essence of

science, because without it, one does not know in which direction to proceed [with his search for knowledge]. When approaching a problem, Einstein said, “How would God work?” And when Rav Chaim raised a question, the Rav said that Rav Chaim intuitively knew the place from which the answer would be derived, even before he had that answer. Man’s intellectual intuition gives him a sense of God. This only brings one to recognize that God is behind the Torah and behind the laws of nature. And the more wisdom one sees, the greater is his apprehension of God being behind that system that he sees. Thus, the greater one’s wisdom, the greater is his love of God:

In accordance with one’s knowledge will be his love of God (Hilchos Teshuvah 10:6).

One’s love of God cannot exceed his wisdom because through wisdom love is realized. But if one tries to gain love of God emotionally, without wisdom, there is no such phenomenon. For that would not be love of God. Love of God registers on the reality principle [an intellectual sense], not that there is no place for emotions :

The Torah speaks in man’s language (Talmud Berachos 31b).

The Torah describes God in ways that sound physical:

“the hand of God,” “with an outstretched arm,” et cetera. Only God can determine the right to speak in these limited anthropomorphic phrases. This was done so people not yet on the proper level have a starting point [in learning about God]. “Had the Torah not said it, it would be impossible to enunciate” (Talmud Rosh Hashanah 17b) for only God knows how far such terms can go to keep man within acceptable boundaries and prevent errors about God [such as assuming He is physical].

I feel that Einstein was perfected because he approached every area with wisdom. If one comes to knowledge of God through science, he attains love of God. But he will never know God insofar as how He relates to this world. Either he will deny it, or he will have an infantile idea. The accurate way that God relates to this world is expressed only through the Torah. And the idea is one that we ourselves don't fully comprehend. It's not simply a comfortable feeling that God is watching us—that's a childish notion. Maimonides says in his Guide, “What does God love? He loves the truth and He loves the people who embody truth.” “Love” in these terms is not the way we think of love. But no religion ever came up with such an idea because this is not emotionally satisfying. People like to feel that God loves them because they are good people. But in Judaism it is not so simple. Maimonides says again in his Guide that if one has false

ideas about God, he is worse than the idolaters. Because some of the early idolaters, including the Egyptians, believed in one God that is nonphysical, but they related to sub-deities as they could not escape the infantile [state of mind]. But they are not as bad as one who thinks God possesses emotions like compassion, for example. This person is further from the truth than is the idolater. Maimonides says, “You might say that such a person cannot help himself because of his upbringing, however, the idolaters too were raised as they were.” And yet, the Torah commands us to destroy an idolater.

The concept that God loves the truth and that He loves people who embody the truth is not a concept that man can totally fathom. Judaism gave man the reality of how God relates to the world. But man doesn't feel emotionally comfortable with this reality. Nonetheless, it is how God relates to the world. We must subordinate our emotions to this reality. Moshe asked God to “please show me Your ways” (Exod. 33:13) because he could not perceive how God relates to the world. How is it that such a nice person who serves idols must be killed? We do not know how God works, but we know God relates to the world. We also know that God relates to man through man's perception of the truth. Maimonides says that one should do everything he can with every fiber in his nature to search for the truth.

There is an idea in Judaism that no one can accept : Falsehood is evil, and truth is good. Most people identify evil as meanness or viciousness, and they identify good as kindness. Judaism disagrees. The Torah teaches that the good is knowledge: of truth, of reality, and of God. Religious people are not comfortable with that notion. In the Messianic Era every nation will recognize the Torah and God. The Torah's purpose is to offer man this opportunity to recognize the good.

HAFTORAS LECH LICHA: PROPHETS AND PROVIDENCE

Why do you say, O Jacob, Why declare, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is ignored by my God"? (Isaiah 40:27).

[On this topic] the Jews asked why they have no providence. The Jews said that God isn't just; He doesn't recognize the nation : "Where is our Providence? We are doing

everything right and we don't have providence." What does the prophet answer?

*Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Lord is God from old, Creator of the
Earth from end to end, He never grows
faint or weary, His wisdom cannot be
fathomed (Ibid. 40:28).*

One should investigate and ask questions, but one should also know about whom one inquires. Here, the prophet reprimands the Jews for they were inquiring about God, the creator of the universe, who is beyond comprehension. We don't know why God puts a person through a specific situation, but we do know that God's will is that man obtains true knowledge, and that He loves those who possess that knowledge.

Judaism demands a certain intellectual tolerance. That's the message in Meharsha that was quoted previously: "If you have ideas that violate the Torah, you must abandon them and recognize that your questions arise from a lack of knowledge."

Moshe Rabbeinu inquired about the suffering of the righteous and the success of the evildoers, but this has no impact on the reality of God. We do not believe in God [only] in the event that He is good to us. We believe in God because He exists; His existence is manifest. And that is

why we say, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). Regarding the words “with all your might” Chazal say that no matter what God gives a person, it does not infringe at all on his love of God. Recognizing God is unrelated to man’s happiness or satisfaction. The reason Holocaust survivors abandoned Judaism is because their commitment to Judaism and their understanding of “love of God” was not based on recognition of God but upon other motives.

A chok—statute—is a law that one cannot figure out. But as the law of the red heifer was the only law King Solomon didn’t understand, how can we say that a statute has no reason? [King Solomon knew the reasons for every other statute, thus, reasons for every other statute do exist.] There is a reason for every law. But there is a difference between having an established statute and figuring it out, and first establishing the very formulation of a statute. No one can determine the formulation of any law; [that is God’s knowledge, and what is meant by chok.] Man could never figure out that the right way to recognize God as the Creator is to institute the concept of Shabbos. But to understand Shabbos once it exists is a different matter altogether and is very possible.

Our mishna is not intent on morbidity by saying that “those who are born will die.” As we said, Rabbi Elazar

HaKapor says that one must view reality accurately and not through his emotions. He does not mean that a person should always contemplate death, as this leads to depression and that is not the Torah's philosophy. On the contrary, Proverbs 15:15 says, "...A good heart [satisfied with his wealth] is [like living] an ongoing party."

Rabbi Elazar HaKapor saw the entire cycle of human existence; that's what he saw before his mind's eye. He was not overcome by momentary emotional impact, such as birth and death.

Knowledge registers within a person in small doses; it does not immediately affect man's emotions. Rabbi Elazar HaKapor did not mean for a person not to have a party upon a birth, but simultaneously, he felt that one should not lose sight of the full cycle of human existence. Earthly existence represents only one stage of our existence, a small stage of our existence.

It is interesting to see how the prophets convey the true ideas to the nation. It is a difficult task because the nation is not on the level to perceive the abstract philosophy. Like Maimonides says, the Torah is divided into parts: There is the plain meaning that everyone can read, and then there are the hidden aspects of the Torah—ideas at the heart of the system but accessible only to one who has gained knowledge. But the prophet is caught in between; he does

not compromise the Torah's message in any way. Although he must work with peoples' emotions, he does not feed into them by providing any false satisfaction. For example, if there is some difficult situation, he does not candy-coat it, suggesting there is some imaginary good, or that it forecasts Moshiach, et cetera. The prophet speaks the truth, but in an interesting way.

The haftorah that best expresses this is Haftoras Lech Lecha (Isaiah 40:27–41:16):

Why do you say, O Jacob, Why declare, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is ignored by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is God from of old, Creator of the Earth from end to end, He never grows faint or weary, His wisdom cannot be fathomed. He gives strength to the weary, fresh vigor to the spent. Youths may grow faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but they who trust in the Lord shall renew their strength as eagles grow new plumes: They shall run and not grow weary, they shall march and not grow faint. Stand silent before Me, coastlands, and let nations renew their strength. Let them approach to state their case; let us come forward together for argument. Who has roused a victor from the East, summoned him to His service? Has delivered up nations to him, and trod-

den sovereigns down? Has rendered their swords like dust, their bows like wind-blown straw? He pursues them, he goes on unscathed; no shackle is placed on his feet. Who has wrought and achieved this? He who announced the generations from the start—I, the Lord, who was first and will be with the last as well. The coastlands look on in fear, the ends of the Earth tremble. They draw near and come; each one helps the other, saying to his fellow, "Take courage!" The woodworker encourages the smith; he who flattens with the hammer [encourages] him who pounds the anvil. He says of the riveting, "It is good!" And he fixes it with nails, that it may not topple. But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, seed of Abraham My friend—You whom I drew from the ends of the earth And called from its far corners, to whom I said: "You are My servant; I chose you, I have not rejected you"—Fear not, for I am with you, Be not frightened, for I am your God; I strengthen you and I help you, I uphold you with My victorious right hand. Shamed and chagrined shall be all who contend with you; They who strive with you shall become as naught and shall perish. You may seek [other nations] but shall not find those who struggle with you; less than nothing shall be the men who battle against you. For I the Lord am your God, Who grasped your right hand, Who says to you: "Have no fear; I will be your help." Fear not, O worm Jacob, O men

of Israel: I will help you—declares the Lord—I, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. I will make of you a threshing board, a new thresher, with many spikes; you shall thresh mountains to dust and make hills like chaff. You shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them off; the whirlwind shall scatter them. But you shall rejoice in the Lord, And glory in the Holy One of Israel.

Israel was upset that God did not redeem them. The haftarah opens with the Jews' complaint. They denied God's providence. The prophet replies, "Don't you know that you are speaking about the God of the universe, the one Who created the ends of the Earth, Who does not weary or tire, and there is no apprehension of His understanding?" The prophet's first step is that he throws the people into a different perspective. People are egocentric and feel that they know what should occur. But the prophet says, "Are you saying that God, the Creator, the being whose knowledge is unfathomable, doesn't know the situation like you do?!" This throws the peoples' question into a completely different perspective.

If the prophet had stopped there, he would have left the people hanging. The prophet is correct; man cannot begin to understand the universe; the science baffles him. So how can man understand God's will and His methods? There-

fore, stopping at this point, the prophet leaves man with no hope. So, he continues to share what we do know about God: “Those who trust in God are more powerful than giants. Young and healthy people can stumble and fall, but those who follow God are successful, like David against Goliath.”

One disturbing element is that the Jews were not redeemed. But another disturbing element is the success of other nations and that they malign the Jews’ destiny. God says, “Nations, listen to me, and have enough courage to come forth and argue with Me.”

This haftorah refers to the one who came forth from the East, namely Abraham. How was Abraham successful when warring against the most powerful kings? The prophet tells the Jews to reflect on history. Abraham, Eliezer, and Abraham’s three hundred eighteen men [who supported Abraham in battle] were victorious over those four [powerful] kings. Abraham did not stumble when he chased them. He traveled uncharted paths and nevertheless was successful. The prophet asks, “Who was able to do this?” Abraham succeeded only because of God.

God planned the history of all the generations; He planned for the Jews to come into existence and endure. The gemara says that tzaddikim lived in certain generations [God planned for them to live during specific times].

Abraham was destined to live at the time that he did to establish the Jewish people. This also refers to the Moshiach, who will follow the same path as Abraham.

The other nations saw this and were fearful, and were thus demolished. They joined together to battle the Jews. “Each one helps the other and strengthens his brother.” The prophet describes the process of how the nations formed their idols. Rashi explains that the one who pours the mold helps the metal smith. Malbim says they applied much effort in forming their idols. They followed a process where one who progressed faster than another artisan would get up to help that other person. They said “the glue is good” —the final process in forming idols. When the other nations tremble because of Israel, they respond by first making recourse to their idols so that their gods will help them succeed.

The prophet says, “God chose Jacob, the seed of Abraham, whom I love.” The prophet says that God gives success to Abraham’s seed. Why does God love Abraham? Because he was the one individual who brought forth the true ideas of God. He defied the idolaters and taught monotheism. As Israel is Abraham’s offspring, they assume Abraham’s position in God’s providence. The prophet says that God strengthens Israel because they are the seed of Abraham. “The enemies will be lost, and you will not find

them.”

Don't be afraid, worm of Jacob.

Rashi says, “Jacob is as weak as a worm, for [a worm] has strength only in its mouth.” The strength of the Jewish nation is the mouth [speech/wisdom].

What is the prophet’s response to the Jews, who claim that God is not with them? The prophet first corrects the Jews’ perspective: They are addressing the Creator [and therefore should be fearful not to speak so assuredly]. He continues: “Those with true faith in God enjoy His providence.” He shows historically how God helped Abraham—because he followed the truth about God. The prophet says that insofar as Israel partakes of those true ideas, you must succeed. If the Jews partake of Abraham’s ideas, they can usher in the redemption.

The prophet reprimands the Jews, but not in a manner that would depress them. On the contrary, he does so in a way where he builds them up and shows them a path to success. Therefore, his answer as to why the redemption has not come is because Israel does not follow Abraham’s ideas.

The prophet’s method does not distort reality to cater to peoples’ emotions, yet, he works along with their emotions

to produce a certain effect of confidence and hope. The main theme in the haftorah is to give hope to the Jews.

God's providence is unfathomable. Judaism does not offer an emotionally pleasing answer. But there is a relationship between Israel and God, which is the entire mesora. The nature of this providence is "the seed of Abraham, whom I love." God loves Abraham and the seed who follow his ideas.

Man's psychological search for security [in seeking providence] is represented by the nations. They give each other confidence that is based on building idols; one assists the other in hammering, gold plating, and gluing. Idolatry is their security. The entire thrust behind idolatry is a search for psychological security. But the Jew is to partake of Abraham's truths. The prophet's message is difficult for people to swallow because people naturally search for psychological security, but Judaism prevents a person from satisfying that need.

SARAH'S BURIAL: THE ETERNAL SOUL

Parshas Chayei Sarah commences with Abraham coming to Kiryas Arba, in Hebron, where the Hittites lived:

Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, "I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial inheritance among you, that I may bury my deceased before me." And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, "Hear us, my Lord: You are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead." Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites, and he said to them, "If it is your wish that I bury my deceased from before me, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron, son of Zobar. Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns, at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me at the full price for a burial inheritance in your midst." Ephron was present among the Hittites, so Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of his town, saying, "No, my Lord, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If only you would bear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; ac-

cept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him, “My Lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead.” Abraham accepted Ephron’s terms. Abraham paid out to Ephron the money that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites—four hundred shekels of silver at the going merchants’ rate. So Ephron’s land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, of all whom entered the gate of his town. And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. Thus, the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site (Gen. 23:3-20).

There is an interesting midrash on the Hittites’ response, “Hear us, my Lord: You are a prince of God among us”:

The Hittites said, “You are a prince in our midst and you are a god in our midst.” Abraham replied, “Do not diminish from God’s honor.”

This shows that the Hittites had no recognition of God. In the adjoining Torah section, Abraham tells his servant,

Eliezer, to select a wife for his son Isaac, but not to take a wife from the Hittites for they were on a low primitive level. That is why although Lavan was evil, and his father Besu'el too was evil (he sought to prevent the marriage of Rebecca to Isaac, and therefore died), nonetheless, Abraham wanted a wife from their lineage because the nature of their imperfection was important to consider. Lavan was a very sublimated person, while the Hittites were primitive. Lavan was wise but all his energies were directed toward improper goals. But his heredity was proper. And since the Hittites were primitive, incapable of raising themselves from their instincts and primitivism, Abraham did not want his son to marry any of their daughters. Although the verse sounds like they recognized God—"You are a prince of God among us"—the midrash clarifies what they meant: They believed in divine powers [attributed to Abraham] and did not truly believe in God. Therefore, Abraham replied that they should not diminish their recognition of God [by their attributing divinity to him].

Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead.

The Hittites said, "You are so respected; no one will prevent you from burying your deceased wife. What is your

request? Of course, you can bury your deceased wife.”

Abraham then bowed to them and restated his request:

If it is your wish that I bury my deceased from before me, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron, son of Zohar. Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns, at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial inheritance in your midst.

Abraham used the same term before—“achuzas kev-er”—burial inheritance. Abraham did not answer the Hittites’ point, “None of us will withhold his burial place from you.” If Abraham [merely] wanted to pay for the plot, he should have simply said, “Please allow me to pay for it.” Chazal say that Ephron was put into a leadership position that day in order to honor Abraham, so that Abraham would acquire the plot from a recognized individual. It would be inappropriate for Abraham to purchase a plot from an average person.

Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all of whom entered the gate of his town, saying, “No, my Lord, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.” Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land, and spoke to

Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If only you would bear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him, "My Lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead." Abraham accepted Ephron's terms.

The Hittites first said to Abraham that no one would prevent him from burying Sarah anywhere he wanted to. Abraham's response was this, in other words:

*This is not just a practical burial. Ordinarily, burial is merely the removal of the body. But this is not the removal of Sarah's body, rather the establishing of something positive. This is a burial inheritance—*achuzas kever*. This burial is the continued existence of a person and not her absence.*

What was the importance in Abraham wanting to pay for the plot?

Ephron's land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, all of whom entered the gate of his town.

And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. Thus, the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site.

And again, we read at the end of the parsha:

His sons, Isaac and Yishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there Abraham was buried, and Sarah, his wife (Gen. 25:9, 10).

And again, regarding Jacob, while the Torah saves words elsewhere, here it expresses itself fully subsequent to Jacob's blessings of his sons:

All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him. Then he instructed them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site—there

Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, were buried; and there I buried Leah (Gen. 49:28-31).

The Torah spends a lot of time on the idea that burial is not simply a place where a person's body is removed, but it is the establishment of a positive entity: a place of a burial inheritance. This is why Abraham did not accept permission to use the field, but there must be a status of an acquisition—a *chalos kinyan*. Since Abraham was establishing a positive entity, he felt he must do so through proper means. The act of acquisition demonstrates the positive entity. The midrash says that the field and the burial plot became a new entity. And only once the burial plot became a positive entity does the verse say that Abraham buried his wife.

What is the concept of the *Ma'aras Hamachpelah*? When was this grave used? Talmud Sota 34b says the following [regarding the Spies' expedition]:

“And they went up into the South, and he came to Hebron” (Num. 13:22). Rava said, “[from the change of “they” to “he”] we derive that Caleb separated himself from the counsel of the spies and he went and spread himself out on the gravesite of the Patriarchs. He said to them, “Forefathers, seek mercy upon me that I am saved from the counsel [conspiracy] of the spies.”

This is the first time we find mention of the Patriarchs' gravesite. The Rama says that on Tisha B'Av, after Kinot, one should visit graves. It is preferable that one go to a Jewish cemetery, but one can also go to a Gentile cemetery. This is derived from the following gemara in Taanis 16a:

Why does one go to the cemetery on a public fast? Rabbi Levi, the son of Chama, and Rabbi Chanina argued: One said [to embody the sentiment] "Behold I am before you like a dead person."

When praying during a public fast, any egoistic feelings are a direct contradiction to one's prayers. One should feel that he is worthless as he depends upon God's mercy. [As if to say], "We have no merit and our prayer is just that You help us." The gemara continues with a second opinion:

And the other one said: "[One visits the cemetery on a public fast] so that the dead will seek mercy upon us."

This explains the first choice to visit a Jewish cemetery, which fulfills both views, as the gemara says in the second view that our "forefathers" seek mercy for us, which cannot be fulfilled in a Gentile cemetery. But according to the first view, a Gentile cemetery suffices.

Rabbi Akiva Eger says [in Taanis] that if one wishes to

understand “the dead seeking mercy upon us,” he should read Tosfos “Avosai” (Sota 34b) addressing Caleb spreading himself over the Patriarchs’ graves, requesting that they seek mercy upon him, which says as follows:

And if you will say that the gemara in Berachos says “The dead know nothing,” this implies that even the Patriarchs know nothing. But you can answer: through the prayer that [Caleb] prays, God notifies the Patriarchs of his prayer. [Thus, “the dead know nothing” refers only to man, but God communicates with the dead.]

Of course, you must know that one of the Thirteen Principles [of Maimonides] is that one cannot pray to anyone except God: “To Him alone is it fitting to pray, and it is not fitting to pray to anyone else.”

Therefore, when Caleb said, “Seek mercy upon me,” that does not mean he prayed to the Patriarchs. It simply means he had a request.

The nucleus of the idea is that earthly human existence is only one stage of the soul’s existence:

THOSE WHO ARE BORN WILL DIE; THE DEAD
WILL BE REVIVED; AND THE LIVING WILL BE
JUDGED.

[Living to be judged properly] is the purpose in this world. If one thinks that the totality of existence is limited to one's earthly stay, all his values must be distorted. This is the basis of paganism. Thus, Rabbi Elazar HaKapor says that this idea must be clear to you: Earthly life is only one stage of existence.

The grave of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs—Ma'aras Hamachpelah—is precisely that idea of perfected people who continue to exist. That is why Tosfos does not ask, “How could Caleb pray to the dead?” Caleb was not praying to the Patriarchs; he was talking to them, as their existence continues. It is no different from speaking to a living person.

[Here is the primary point]: Ma'aras Hamachpelah is a site embodying the truth that the souls of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are still in existence. But continued existence applies only to those who live perfected lives. The graves of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs reflect the existence of the soul after death. [Abraham, upon burying Sarah, established the reflection of this idea of the soul's enduring nature. The gravesite reflects the positive existence of the soul and must be acquired to create that status.]

Caleb saw he was going to get caught up in conflicts with the spies. But their corruption was based on a distor-

tion of human existence. That is why Caleb spread himself out over the Patriarchs' graves [to reaffirm his concept of true human existence: Earthly life is only one stage and the perfected soul lives on]. If this is the idea behind visiting a cemetery on a public fast, one cannot fulfill his obligation by visiting a Gentile cemetery, for those dead did not follow the Torah and their lives truly ended with physical death.

Thus, Caleb was able to remain faithful to the truth after he went to the Patriarchs' graves. The Torah always uses tangible objects to teach ideas; that is the nature of halacha. Tefillin are tangible but the ideas are intangible. Ma'aras Hamachpelah is the tangible object that teaches the idea of our mishna—of the immortality of the soul. That is what Abraham told the Hittites.

MASE MITZVAH KONEH MIKOMO

A mase mitzvah is a mitzvah regarding one who died

with no one to bury him. The idea that it acquires its place—*koneh mikomo* [it is buried there]—teaches that we don't simply discard a body, but that it is a tangible reflection of the idea of the immortality of the soul, and that earthly existence is but one stage in the entire existence of the human soul. [The dead person is not passive but decides a halacha; it generates a positive effect.]

Ma'aras Hamachpelah is the burial place of four couples: the three Patriarchs and their wives, plus Adam and Eve. The latter couple embodied man's goal in creation, and the Patriarchs and their wives are those who lived by their model.

The Torah only deals with this world. It defines a lifestyle that is best for earthly existence. But our mishna says that those who are born will die; that one should view the reality of death. How do we make sense of both?

If the soul existed only on Earth, it would be a distortion of the soul's value. It would be an imperfection regarding God's creation, that He creates such a profound entity and limits it to physical existence. Torah does not promote itself [as a means] for the next world, as that would be improper motivation [one would then not learn Torah for the beauty of its wisdom, but for the reward]. It is proven from this world that the Torah is the best life. But simultaneously, the soul's nature to endure in the next world is a

truth that relates to the nature and value of the soul. How then do we straddle the Torah's focus on this life with the mishna's reference to the next life?

If we discuss motivation to observe the Torah, one who understands this life will know that a Torah life offers man the happiest earthly existence, what we refer to as *lishma*. But to say that God created the soul with a nature that exceeds physical existence, and yet limited it to earthly life, is false. The idea that the soul exists beyond earthly existence is necessary in order to have an accurate idea of the soul. But it is wrong to motivate Torah observance with the promise of an afterlife, for then the person will not follow the Torah for its own sake. The proper motivation to observe the Torah is because this lifestyle is the proven [best] way to live. The Torah life that God gives man must be the best earthly existence. Thus, the motivation is only from this world.

In *Hilchos Avel* (mourner's laws) Maimonides says that [the mitzvah of] comforting mourners is superior to visiting the sick because it is a kindness performed with both the living and the dead. We derive that kindness is possible even toward the dead. But this is only possible if a person's existence continues after death. The concept of honoring the dead means there is a person in existence who is higher than the physical.

Mase mitzvah pushes aside even the restrictions of the high priest and the Nazirite [who typically cannot come into contact with the dead]. The concept of mase mitzvah is at the root of the idea of the soul's immortality. That is why it pushes aside those two laws.

The gemara teaches that when Rabbi Akiva was still an ignoramus, when he encountered a corpse with no one to bury it, he carried it two miles for burial. The rabbis told him he was wasting his time doing so because mase mitzvah is *koneh mikomo*—it acquires its location and is buried there. The proper way to demonstrate the soul's immortality [the reality of the soul of the dead person] is through *koneh mikomo*. This is the theme of *Ma'aras Hamachpelah*. But Rabbi Akiva did not know this yet and carried the corpse for miles. By gaining knowledge, Rabbi Akiva was finally able to express the proper way of honoring the dead. Without the correct concept of honoring the dead, carrying the corpse two miles degrades the deceased.

The gemara teaches the principle of acquisition from Abraham's acquisition of the grave. The gemara applies that model of acquisition to a person acquiring a wife. But what type of analogy is there between Abraham's acquisition of the field to man acquiring a wife? The answer is that the analogy is in terms of creating a status in an entity. Abraham's acquisition was necessary to create the entity:

a positive state of Sarah's existence after death. Marriage too creates a status.

As a final note on Tosfos in Sota, where it says, "They tell the Patriarchs about Caleb's prayer," Caleb did not request the Patriarchs' help [Tosfos does not cite a literal event]. "Tell[ing] the Patriarchs" means that the Patriarchs became aware. It means to demonstrate their continued existence after death.

[Rabbi Chait then addressed the current parsha.]

LEAH'S PERFECTION

Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuven came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother, Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." But she said to her, "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, now you are also taking my son's mandrakes?" Rachel replied, "I promise that [Jacob] shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son's mandrakes." When Jacob came home from

the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night. God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore him a fifth son. And Leah said, "God has given me my reward for having given my maid to my husband." So she named him Yissachar (Gen. 30:14-18).

"Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, now you are also taking my son's mandrakes?" Apparently, there is some relationship [between the mandrakes and Rachel's plans with Jacob]—flowers produce a romantic setting in the tent. Rachel replied to Leah, "You will sleep with Jacob in exchange for the mandrakes."

In the last verse (30:18) Leah should have said, "I gave up my mandrakes and therefore I had my husband and I called my son Yissachar," because she hired him—[Yissachar means "schar," to hire]. But that is not what Leah said. She attributed the cause for her new son to giving her maidservant to her husband. But what does that story have to do with this? Furthermore, Leah was upset about that:

When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a concubine. And when Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son, Leah said, "Ba-

gad” (fortune has come), and she named him Gad (Gen. 30:9-11).

Rashi offers a second explanation of this child’s name: The reason for the name of this child is not “ba gad” (בא גד) two words meaning “fortune has come”) but rather “bagad,” (בגד) meaning faithless. At that time, Leah was not happy with Zilpah sleeping with Jacob. But here in the naming of Yissachar, the Torah brings that story back once again.

We know that everything the Patriarchs and Matriarchs did was under a special providence. As Maimonides explains in his Guide, most people are simply subject to the laws of chance, except for the people of the Jewish nation, who, Maimonides says, are under God’s direct providence throughout history. And a certain few righteous people also benefit from this providence. This is the Torah’s purpose in telling us all the accounts of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. But this does not mean that the Patriarchs and Matriarchs also partook of chance events, plus providence. Rather, this providence excluded chance. Everything that occurred to them was a result of their level of perfection, and never due to chance. Therefore, anything fortuitous was also under providence.

The verse says that God listened to Leah. Rashi says that Leah wanted to build the Twelve Tribes, explaining why

she gave away the mandrakes. But that was only the physical circumstance of why she had a fifth child. When Leah thought about why she deserved this additional son, she thought it was not because she gave away the mandrakes, but because she gave her maidservant to Jacob. It was emotionally difficult to see Jacob live with Zilpah. Regardless, Leah did this because of her desire to build the tribes. She felt she deserved the fifth son because she overcame her romantic emotions toward Jacob. That was quite a sacrifice.

This explanation is based on the Torah Temima. The word Yissachar יִשָּׂכָר is a strange formulation, because there is a silent ׀. It really should be pronounced Yisachar, pronouncing both shins, ׀׀. But the tradition is to read it with one silent ׀, “Yisachar.” But the Torah Temima says there was a double reward [a double ׀׀]. One was that Leah hired Jacob with the mandrakes, and the second was that “God gave me my reward for giving my maidservant to my husband.” Therefore, Leah added a second ׀ to indicate the additional reward. But the story of the mandrakes is derogatory, which is why we pronounce only one ׀.

But there may be a different answer. The double reward involves two matters: Leah’s hiring Jacob with the mandrakes, and the real reason she received the reward, i.e.,

giving her maidservant to her husband. As providence was the essential cause [for every event] in the lives of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, the silent ψ referring to the physical cause of the mandrakes is not pronounced. This is done to emphasize that their lives—even fortuitous events—were guided by God’s providence, to the exclusion of chance. The essential cause of having a fifth son was Leah’s perfection in going against her natural inclination [love of Jacob]. The physical circumstance is silenced, and prominence is given to the real reason: Leah’s perfection.

GOD’S PROVIDENCE

As a nation, our understanding of God’s providence is far different from others. Our concept is not emotionally satisfying. The essence of our understanding is what Maimonides states (Guide, book II, chap. xlvii):

When you understand the premises that I have established, then all prophecies will become clear to you; what the concept of prophecy is and how it works. And you

will remain with intellectual ideas of prophecies and the whole organization of prophecies and its process. And this understanding is favorable to God because the only thing God finds favorable is the truth. And the only thing that angers God is falsehood. You should not be confused with false philosophies and ideas, and you should not have in your mind thoughts that are far removed from the truth. And do not think these ideas are Torah, because the Torah is purified, rarified truth, if understood properly.

God loves people with true ideas; that is what He desires. But regarding the world at large, that is not the case. People think that God loves a person who “tries hard.” Judaism is the only religion that came out and stated that falsehood is evil [trying hard doesn’t justify one with falsehoods] and truth is righteousness. The world thinks, “What could be a greater sacrifice than giving one’s children in sacrifice?” But that is hateful in God’s eyes; it is an abomination because it is removed from the truth. The central idea of Judaism is that God loves one who follows the truth. And Maimonides says that the furthest one can be from the truth is if one believes that God has emotions, or any other false notions about God.

When we say that God “loves” those who follow the

truth, this does not attribute emotional love to God. Rather, we mean there is a positive relationship between God and people who follow the truth. Such people benefit from that relationship. That is the meaning of the blessing, “An eternal love, the Lord, our God, has loved us.” Far greater than any gift one can imagine is God’s gift of the Torah to us. That is an expression of God’s love.

WE ARE CREATIONS

AND DO NOT LET YOUR [EVIL] IMPULSE ASSURE
YOU THAT THE NETHERWORLD IS A PLACE OF
REFUGE FOR YOU.

A person feels that the grave is an escape: “There I will finally find the peace for which I’ve been searching my entire life.” This presupposes one’s own existence, that one exists eternally. The person feels that his existence must continue there. To think that one’s existence is necessary is egocentric. But why shouldn’t a person seek respite in the grave?

... BECAUSE AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU WERE CREATED, AND AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU WERE BORN, AND AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU LIVE, AND AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU DIE, AND AGAINST YOUR WILL YOU ARE DESTINED TO GIVE ACCOUNT AND RECKONING BEFORE THE KING OF KINGS, THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE.

One's existence is not necessary. One's existence came about without him! One's existence is not something one can accomplish [create]. Reality dictates that just as one is created by another source, by another Being, so too, one's state after death is subject to how God designed him. Therefore, one must search out the design of man in death [and not project a fantasy of respite]. One must undergo a judgment that demands one live a certain life that yields certain results. The theme of this mishna is that one should assess his life in terms of ultimate reality and not in terms of fantasy. Respite in death is one of the common fantasies.

The Nile is mine and I made myself.

We mentioned the prophet's critique of Pharaoh's words. It is difficult for a person to accept that he is a created being; it diminishes one's feeling of omnipotence. [It is this feeling of necessary existence that fuels the fantasy of the grave offering one his desires.] This reflects what we stated

about desires: It is not a desire for an object per se, but that one can act in any manner that is appealing. Here, death appeals to a person as a place to find peace.

Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi held up his small finger and said, “I didn’t enjoy even this small amount from the world” (Rabbeinu Yona, Pirkei Avos 4:21). But how can he have said that as he always had the finest foods on his table, even foods that were out of season? What he meant was that he didn’t have a distorted value of enjoyments [as do others], that comfort is the essence of life; his concept of life was based on the reality of the true nature of his existence, and not according to the feelings most people follow.

The human mind finds some last-resort satisfaction from life’s difficulties. What is wrong with this idea of the grave being a respite, and what is its connection to the words that follow in the mishna?

There is another patently false but common idea that people accept and live by. A person naturally desires to extend his life, but this is logically absurd because a person can desire an enjoyable life, but he cannot desire life itself. If one exists, he can desire things to enhance his existence, but he cannot desire existence itself. [As if one would say, “I want I.” The absurdity of that statement is that the “I” already exists, and therefore wanting “I” to exist is a redundancy.] When one ceases to exist, the “I” is gone; there

is no “I” to speak of. But people cannot perceive their non-existence, so they fall for this fantasy [respite for the “I”].

Why do people fear death? It is because of the subtle fantasy of immortality taking place “down there” [an existence in the underground grave is disturbing].

Chazal say that one who seeks Olam Haba (as he desires wisdom) and whose mind looks forward to the greater perception of wisdom that will occur there, has the proper attitude because he does not seek the “I”, rather he seeks ideas. That is the true concept. But Chazal say that if one learns because he desires Olam Haba, that is not learning for the sake of learning [one has an ulterior motive]. Torah lishma refers to one who loves ideas and looks forward to a time when those ideas will become clearer and he will have a greater pleasure in wisdom. In this sense, one is correct to anticipate Olam Haba. But if one looks to Olam Haba like the pleasures of this world—merely switching his pleasure from physical to intellectual—it is a mistake. For in this case, the focus is on the self and not on wisdom [as such a person seeks the pleasurable element, not the ideas per se].

