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Weekly Parsha

Kitavo

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Species of Fruit Brought as Bikurim

And you shall take from the first of all the fruits of the land that you shall bring forth from the land that Hashem your G-d gave to you. And you shall place it in a basket. And

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Reason

PART II Is God Running My Life, or am I?

Introduction

We must note that just as God's created world exists and operates through many complex laws, where we grasp but a fraction, God's relationship with man in no way functions on a lesser plane: His providence over us also operates by a precise system. Perhaps this explains why God included in His Torah so many accounts of His relationship with man and the Prophets. The Torah is not a history book, but a guide for our religious lives. God illustrated numerous cases of His providence so we might increase our appreciation for His ways. Case-by-case, our understanding of God's providence grows. There are many factors that determine who, when and where God intervenes. And focus on that word, "intervene". This means God suspends natural law for man's good.

But many people feel "intervention" is a falsehood, as they assume God is literally willing each activity everywhere, at all times. But I have yet to see a Torah source, or proof for this theory.

Furthermore, does God wish to fool man? For example, when one ignites a pile of wood in a fireplace with a match, each time he does so the wood eventually ignites. Now, proponents of the view

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you shall go to the place that Hashem your G-d will choose to associate with His name. (Devarim 26:2)

This pasuk discusses the commandment of Bikurim. This mitzvah requires that the first fruits of each year be brought to the Bait HaMikdash – the Holy Temple. The Bikurim are brought only from the seven special species. These species are wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. These species are identified with the Land of Israel. The Land is considered blessed with these fruits and grains.

The Torah does not explicitly state that Bikurim are only brought from these fruits and grains. This law is derived from the Torah SheBeAl Peh – the Oral Law. Rashi explains that the source for this law is the word “land” used in the expression, “fruits of the land.”[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno disputes this derivation. He explains that the law is derived from the word “first” in the phrase, “first fruits.” He explains that the term “first” does not indicate that the Bikurim are brought from those fruits first to appear. Instead, the term refers to the significance of the fruits. Bikurim are brought from those species of the first or greatest significance. These are the special fruits and grains with which the Land is blessed – the seven species.[2]

This dispute provides an important insight into the mitzvah of Bikurim. The mitzvah of Bikurim is designed to demonstrate appreciation for the Land of Israel and its abundance. Rashi maintains that the seven species are central to the mitzvah because they are closely associated with the Land. Other fruits grow in the Land of Israel. However, they are not regarded as the species associated with the Land of Israel. In showing gratitude for the Land, it is appropriate to represent the Land through the fruits with which it is most closely associated. These are the fruits of the seven species.

Sforno maintains that the seven species are not chosen because of this association. The offering of Bikurim is an expression of gratitude. The quality of the offering is determined, in part, by the value of the object offered. Sforno maintains that since these are the best fruits that the Land produces, they are most appropriate for the offering.

In short, we are thanking Hashem for the Land. According to Rashi, the seven species are chosen

because of their association with the Land. According to Sforno, they are chosen because their eminence makes them the ideal offering.

The Confessional Element of Veydoi Maasrot

And you should say before Hashem your G-d, I have removed the sacred from the house. And also I have given from it to the Leyve and the convert, to the orphan and to the widow, as required by your commandments that you have commanded me. I have not violated your commandments and I have not forgotten. (Devarim 26:13)

At the end of a three-year cycle, a declaration is required regarding the giving of tithes. In this declaration, the person confirms that the annual tithes have been removed from the home and properly distributed. The tithe due to the Leyve has been given to him. The tithe required for the support of the poor has been distributed.



This declaration is referred to as Veydoi Maasrot. This can be translated as “confession over the tithes.” Why is this declaration described as a confession? A confession, in halachah, is made in order to repent from a sin. This person is declaring that the laws have been properly performed!

There are a number of answers offered to this question. Many involve providing an alternative translation for Veydoi Maasrot that does not include the element of confession. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, however, offers a very simple explanation that preserves the straightforward translation.

Originally, the institution of the priesthood was awarded to the firstborn. Every tribe was to be represented in this honored group. At Sinai, the nation sinned through association with the Egel HaZahav – the Golden Calf. The only group that opposed the creation and worship of this idol was the tribe of Leyve. As a result, Hashem removed the priesthood from the nation's firstborn and awarded it to Shevet Leyve – the tribe of Leyve. This meant that the other tribes would not be represented within the priesthood through their firstborn.

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Sforno explains that we are required to acknowledge our involvement in the sin of the Egel. This is done through the tithes. Through these tithes we acknowledge and support the selection of Shevet Leyve for the priesthood. Through this acknowledgement, we demonstrate that we accept our responsibility for the sin of the Egel and its consequences. Veydoi Maasrot is an affirmation of fulfilling our obligations of tithing. Therefore, it does have an element of confession. We are implicitly confessing the sin of the Egel.[3]

The Table as an Altar

And you shall build there an altar to Hashem your G-d. It shall be an altar of stone. Do not lift up any iron to it. (Devarim 27:5)

Moshe tells the nation that after crossing the Jordan they will arrive at Har Eval. The nation is to erect an altar on this mountain. Our pasuk explains that the stones must not be fashioned with metal implements. Instead, whole stones must be used.[4] This law is previously taught in Sefer Shemot.[5] The Torah explains that the altar of the Temple must be constructed of whole stones. They may not be shaped with metal implements. Our pasuk applies this law to the altar constructed on Har Eval.

Shulchan Aruch explains when reciting Birkat HaMazon, it is customary to cover the knife used to slice the bread.[6] Bait Yosef mentions a number of reasons for this custom. One is that the table is symbolic of the altar of the Temple. Covering the knife helps establish this symbolic relationship. The stones may not be fashioned with metal implements. Covering the knife recalls this halachah. It creates an analogy between the table and the altar.[7]

The symbolic relationship between the table and the altar is represented in another manner. Bait Yosef explains that salt should be placed on the table before the bread is sliced. He explains that the reason for this custom. All sacrifices are first salted and then placed upon the altar.[8] Bait Yosef explains that the salt on the table creates a further analogy between the table and the altar. Salt is present on both.[9]

The covering of the knife and the salt on the table both draw our attention to the table's representation of the altar. Why were the Sages determined to create this association?

One of the sacrifices offered in the Bait HaMikdash is the Shelamim. A portion of this sacrifice

is given to the kohen. Part is burned on the altar. However, the majority is eaten by the owners. This sacrifice was also offered in the wilderness. In fact, all meat consumed in the wilderness was derived from the Shelamim offering. Rav Moshe Sternbach explains that the Shelamim has a unique function. Eating is a physical need and the expression of a material desire. The Shelamim sacrifice provides the opportunity to introduce a spiritual element into this material activity. In the wilderness, a person was only permitted to satisfy the material desire for meat by engaging in the spiritual process of offering a sacrifice. After entering Israel, meat could be eaten without offering a sacrifice. Nonetheless, the opportunity still existed to offer a Shelamim, and through the offering introduce a spiritual aspect into the meal. This combination of material and spiritual activities helps us maintain a balance between the material and spiritual elements of our personality.[10]

With the destruction of the Temple, we were deprived of the opportunity to offer the Shelamim sacrifice. Yet, we still can introduce into our meals the balance between the material and spiritual elements. How is this done? We make blessings before and after eating, and observe the other guidelines of halachah during the meal.

We can now more fully understand the relationship between the altar and the table. We observe various laws during the meal. For example, the meal is preceded and followed by blessings. These practices provide a spiritual element. Through observing these laws, we transform the table into a version of the altar upon which the Shelamim was offered. The customs of covering the knife and placing salt on the table remind us of the table's similarity to the altar and the role of halachah in introducing a spiritual element into the material act of eating.

"And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground which you, Hashem, have given to me." Then, you shall lay it before Hashem, your God, and prostrate yourself before Hashem, your God. (Devarim 26:10)

Many of us are familiar with the folk story of the ignorant shepherd boy that entered the synagogue eager to pray to Hashem, but did not know any of the prayers. The boy wished to reach out to Hashem but lacked the skills and knowledge to pray in the conventional manner. The kind rabbi of the congregation was moved by the earnestness of the young shepherd and

advised him that despite his ignorance, he can effectively pray to Hashem. He need merely to recite the alef bet – the Hebrew alphabet. Hashem will form the proper words. In another version of the folk story, the rabbi tells the boy to whistle and Hashem will convert his whistles into beautiful prayers.

I am not sure of the true intent or meaning of this well-known story. However, it is often interpreted to mean that we need not be overly concerned with the details and nuances of the laws regarding tefilah – prayer. Much more important than our concern with this multitude of details, is our sincerity. If we are sincere, our prayers are appropriate. Some even assert that excessive attention to detail – to the extent that this attention distracts us from expressing our feelings – is counter-productive. This focus on the minutia of halachah may even undermine the effectiveness of our prayer and the meaningfulness of the tefilah experience.

Sefer HaChinuch makes an interesting comment on this week's parasha that should cause us to reconsider this folk story and its popular interpretation. One of the mitzvot discussed in our parasha is the Mikre Bikurim – the recitation accompanying the bringing of the first fruit. In order to discuss the mitzvah of Mikre Bikurim, we must first review the mitzvah of Bikurim – the first fruit. This mitzvah only applies in the Land of Israel. We are required to bring the first fruit – the Bikurim – of each year's crop to the Bait HaMikdash. The Bikurim are then given to the kohanim for their consumption. The mitzvah of Bikurim does not apply to all crops. We are only required to give Bikurim from the seven species that are associated with the Land of Israel.

When the farmer brings the fruits, he is required to fulfill the mitzvah of Mikre Bikurim. He recites a specific portion of the Torah that is included in this week's parasha. In this recitation, he describes the tribulations experienced by our forefather Yaakov. He recounts his descent to Egypt. He describes the suffering and persecution our ancestors experienced in Egypt. Then, he briefly recounts our redemption by Hashem from bondage. He acknowledges that Hashem has given us the Land of Israel and that the produce that he is presenting is the product of that Land. In short, the farmer describes the fruit he is presenting as a manifestation of Hashem's redemption of Bnai Yisrael and an expression of His providential relationship with the Jewish people.

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One of the interesting laws concerning Mikre Bikurim is that not every farmer who presents Bikurim is required or qualified to recite Mikre Bikurim. For example, Mikre Bikurim is only performed by males.[11] Why is the mitzvah limited to males? This limitation is based upon the above passage. The farmer states that the Bikurim are the product of the land that Hashem has given to me – to the farmer. The Torah provides instructions for the distribution of the Land of Israel among its inhabitants. When the Land of Israel was captured, it was divided among the male members of the nation. In subsequent generations, the Land was subdivided among the male descendants of these original land-holders. Land may be sold and purchased among these owners, or even to others who are not among these owners. However, with each Jubilee year – Yovel, the Land is redistributed to the male descendants of the original land-holders. In short, only the male descendants of the original land-holders can attain a permanent ownership right that is transmitted to their heirs.

How does this law regarding ownership impact the mitzvah of Mikre Bikurim? The passage above is taken from the text recited by the farmer. The farmer refers to the fruit as the product of the Land that Hashem has “given to me”. This statement assumes that the farmer is a person qualified to receive the Land in a permanent manner. As explained above, only the male descendants of the original land-holders can attain permanent possession.[12]

Sefer HaChinuch makes an interesting comment regarding this law. He explains that this law provides evidence of the importance of the manner and precision with which we formulate our prayers.[13] How is this law indicative of the importance of precision in our prayers?

As we have explained, only males may recite Mikre Bikurim. This law is derived from the above passage. But let us more carefully consider how this law is derived from this passage. Many laws are derived from allusions and hints provided by the text of the Chumash. A nuance in the manner in which the Torah expresses itself – the choice of wording, a seemingly superfluous phrase, word, or even letter – can be the source of a law. A superficial consideration of the derivation of the limitation of Mikre Bikurim to males would indicate that this law is derived from such a nuance in our passage.

However, Sefer HaChinuch apparently maintains that the law is not derived from a nuance or superfluity in the passage. Instead, Mikre Bikurim can only be recited by a male, because the content of the recitation must be

accurate. The person reciting Mikre Bikurim refers to the fruit as the product of the Land given to him by Hashem. If he is not a male, the statement is not true and accurate.

We can now understand Sefer HaChinuch's comment. Mikre Bikurim – and all prayers – must be accurate and precise. In the case of Mikre Bikurim, this requirement can only be realized when the recitation is given by a farmer who is male. Sefer HaChinuch admonishes us to require of ourselves the same precision in every prayer we recite. We must choose our text carefully and read or recite it precisely. Without this precision, a fundamental element of prayer is sacrificed.

What is this fundamental element that is only achieved through precision? In order to appreciate Sefer HaChinuch's response, another law regarding Mikre bikurim must be considered.

And you shall call out and say before Hahsem, your God: An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there, he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation. (Devarim 26:5)

One of the requirements of Mikre Bikurim is that the passages must be recited in the Bait HaMikdash. This requirement is derived from the above passage. The pasuk tells us that the passages must be recited before Hashem. Our Sages interpret this phrase to require that the recitation of the passages take place in the Bait HaMikdash.[14]

Minchat Chinuch notes that this interpretation of the phrase “before Hashem” does not seem completely reasonable. The Torah requires that we give a number of tithes from our crops. These tithes are not identical from year to year. However, they do have a fixed three-year cycle. At the end of each three-year cycle, one is required to declare that the tithes have been given properly. The Torah tells us that this declaration must be made “before Hashem.” Indeed, it is preferable to make the declaration in the Bait HaMikdash. However, if one did not make the declaration in the Bait HaMikdash, it is nonetheless valid.[15]

Minchat Chinuch argues that it would seem reasonable that the phrase “before Hashem” used in reference to Mikre Bikurim should be interpreted in the same manner. It should indicate the preference for performance of the

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mitzvah in the Bait HaMikdash. But it should not suggest that recitation in the Bait HaMikdash is an absolute requirement.

Minchat Chinuch's question can be extended. The term "before Hashem" is used with some frequency by the Torah and our Sages. For example, when we recite the Amidah prayer, we are required to regard ourselves as standing before Hashem. When we confess our sins, we are required to regard ourselves as standing "before Hashem." In neither of these instances are we required to make a pilgrimage to the Bait HaMikdash. Clearly, in these instances the phrase "before Hashem" represents a state of mind. Why in the instance of Mikre Bikurim is the phrase interpreted more literally?

It seems that the term "before Hashem" can have two meanings. It can refer to a mental state – the person regards himself as standing before Hashem. The phrase can also represent a geographical or positional requirement – presence in the Bait HaMikdash. The Bait HaMikdash is a location in which Hashem's influence is uniquely represented and expressed. In instances in which the requirement is positional, it is fulfilled through standing in the Bait HaMikdash.

The proper interpretation of the phrase "before Hashem" is determined by the context. In the case of Mikre Bikurim, the recitation must accompany the offering of the Bikurim. The Bikurim must be presented in the Bait HaMikdash. Therefore, the phrase "before Hashem" is to be understood to include an absolute positional element. The recitation must take place in the Bait HaMikdash. In contrast, there is no particular relationship between the declaration regarding the tithes and the Bait HaMikdash. Therefore, the phrase is not interpreted to imply an absolute positional requirement. However, this answer suggests a new question. If the declaration concerning the tithes is unrelated to the Bait HaMikdash, why is it preferable for it to be recited at this location?

As explained, the phrase "before Hashem" sometimes implies an absolute positional element – as in the instance of Mikre Bikurim. In other instances, the phrase refers to a state of mind. In the instance of the declaration regarding the tithes, the requirement can be fulfilled anywhere. This indicates that "before Hashem" is essentially a mental state. However, the unique element of this declaration is that we are encouraged to reinforce the state of mind through a positional expression – through actually standing in the Bait HaMikdash. In other words, in making the declaration regarding the tithes, we are admonished to reinforce our state of mind through action – standing in the Bait HaMikdash.

Let us now return to our original question: Why is precision an essential element of prayer? Sefer

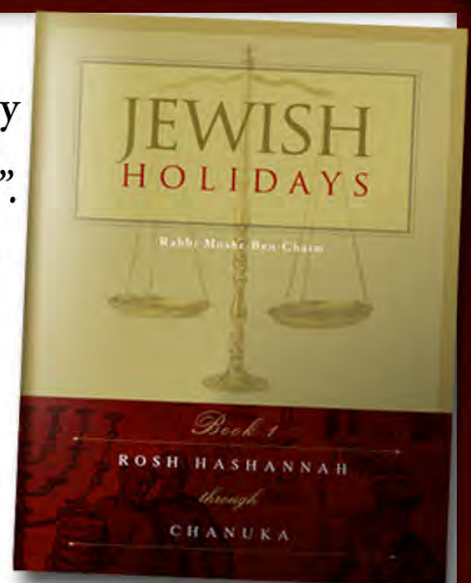
HaChinuch explains that when we pray, we stand before Hashem. We address our thoughts and words to Him. We are expected to reinforce our sense of standing before Hashem through action. If we are to fully appreciate and recognize the significance of addressing Hashem, we must choose our words with extreme care and attention. This precision and attention to detail reflects and expresses an experience of awe. It communicates a cognizance of the significance – the gravity – of the experience. Through stating our prayers with precision and care, we reinforce the sense of standing before Hashem.

- 1 Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 26:2.
- 2 Rabbaynu Ovadia Sfomo, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 26:2.
- 3 Rabbaynu Ovadia Sfomo, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 26:13.
- 4 Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bait HaBeChirah 1:14-15.
- 5 Sefer Shemot 20:22.
- 6 Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 180:5.
- 7 Rav Yosef Karo, Bait Yosef Commentary on Tur, Orech Chayim 180.
- 8 Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Esurai Mizbeyach 5:11.
- 9 Rav Yosef Karo, Orech Chayim 167:5.
- 10 Rav Moshe Sternbach, Ta'am VeDa'at Al HaTorah, Sefer VaYikra 3:6.
- 11 Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bikkurim 4:2.

- 12 Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bikkurim 4:2.
- 13 Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 606.
- 14 Rav Yosef Babad, Minchat Chinuch, Mitzvah 606, note 1.
- 15 Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Ma'aser Sheyne 11:6.
- 1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 26:2.
- [2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sfomo, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 26:2.
- [3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sfomo, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 26:13.
- [4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bait HaBeChirah 1:14-15.
- [5] Sefer Shemot 20:22.
- [6] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 180:5.
- [7] Rav Yosef Karo, Bait Yosef Commentary on Tur, Orech Chayim 180.
- [8] Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Esurai Mizbeyach 5:11.
- [9] Rav Yosef Karo, Orech Chayim 167:5.
- [10] Rav Moshe Sternbach, Ta'am VeDa'at Al HaTorah, Sefer VaYikra 3:6.
- [11] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bikkurim 4:2.
- [12] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bikkurim 4:2.
- [13] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 606.
- [14] Rav Yosef Babad, Minchat Chinuch, Mitzvah 606, note 1.
- [15] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Ma'aser Sheyne 11:6.

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that "God wills each action everywhere" must contend that ignition is a lie, since without God willing a specific act of ignition, the wood would not ignite despite the presence of a flame. If that were the case, one should be able to ignite the wood using sand, since all depends on God's will, not natural law, since nature is a lie. I believe this response might help such proponents see the light.

God does not wish to fool man. As He created a world where fire – not sand – ignites wood, He did so in order that man become convinced of the reality of unique, constant "laws" that govern the universe's operation at all times. Man can then harness these steady laws for his benefit. Knowing laws are constant, man will attempt each day to cook food with fire, not sand. God knew that the intelligence He created in all men and women would accept the truth of "laws". God wants man to accept only truth.

So we conclude that laws do exist. It is not God that causes the fireplace to ignite, but the flame of my match as I draw it close. Now, since God knows we accept the truth about laws, if He in fact "wills each action everywhere", He would be lying to mankind as He allows us to assume that laws exist. That is impossible. Therefore, we are convinced that God is not creating all actions, everywhere, at all times.

Of course, God is the ultimate cause for everything. But as Maimonides teaches, God is not willing each leaf to fall from each tree at every moment, everywhere. What type of impression would be made on man, if his god was concerned with such inconsequential activities? Does God also will each falling drop of rain? Or that each drop should have a certain volume of water, a certain shape, color, speed, and land precisely on a certain parcel of earth? Does God desire a specific number of drops to fall, where one extra drop is of importance?

With this knowledge, we can abandon the approach many take, where they imagine every act in their lives is by "Divine design", "There's a reason for everything", we hear all too often. However, this belief runs contrary to reason.

What increases and decreases God's relationship with us depends first on our level of perfection in thought and deed; whether the masses are affected; reward and punishment; and many other factors. This is a tremendous study, and man can not obtain but a small fraction of answers. Nonetheless, the patriarchs and matriarchs studied God's ways. The Yeshiva of Shame (Noah's son) and Ever had no Torah scrolls, for Torah was not yet given. They studied God's ways and communications with the Prophets, and pondered His 7 Noahide Laws. We too must study, and we are fortunate to have the words of one of the most brilliant Jewish thinkers, namely Maimonides.

As a final thought, when Noah left the ark and sacrificed animals to God as thanks for his rescue, we read God's response, (Gen. 8:21-22): "And God smelled the pleasant scent, and God said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the earth for man's sake, for man's inclination is evil from youth, and I will never again smite all life as I have done. Furthermore, all the days of earth, planting and reaping, cold and hot, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.'"

Here, we find God referring to "summer and winter", i.e., "seasons". If God wills everything constantly, as is falsely assumed, what need is there for seasons? It is thereby evident that God Himself testifies to natural laws.

We now reprint Maimonides' words on this subject. —*Moshe Ben-Chaim*

Maimonides' Eight Chapters

CHAPTER VIII: CONCERNING THE NATURAL DISPOSITION OF MAN

*Translation by,
Rabbi Dr. Isadore Twersky*

It is impossible for man to be born endowed by nature from his very birth with either virtue or vice, just as it is impossible that he should be born skilled by nature in any particular art. It is possible, however, that through natural causes he may from birth be so constituted as to have a predilection for a particular virtue or vice, so that he will more readily practice it than any other. For instance, a man whose natural constitution inclines toward dryness, whose brain matter is clear and not overloaded with fluids, finds it much easier to learn, remember, and understand constitutionally toward a certain excellence is left entirely without instruction, and if his faculties are not stimulated, he will undoubtedly remain ignorant. On the other hand, if one by nature dull and phlegmatic, possessing an abundance of humidity, is instructed and enlightened, he will though with difficulty, it is true, gradually succeed in acquiring knowledge and understanding. In exactly the same way, he whose blood is somewhat warmer than is necessary has the requisite quality to make of him a brave man. Another, however, the temperament of whose heart is colder than it should be, is naturally inclined toward cowardice and fear, so that if he should be taught and trained to be a coward, he

would easily become one. If, however, it be desired to make a brave man of him, he can without doubt become one, provided he receive the proper training which would require, of course, great exertion.

I have entered into this subject so you may not believe the absurd ideas of astrologers, who falsely assert that the constellation at the time of one's birth determines whether one is to be virtuous or vicious, the individual being thus necessarily compelled to follow out a certain line of conduct. We, on the contrary, are convinced that our Law agrees with Greek philosophy which substantiates with convincing proofs the contention that man's conduct is entirely in his own hands. No compulsion is exerted upon man, and no external influence is brought to bear that would constrain him to be either virtuous or vicious. Of course, as we have said above, a man may be by nature so constituted as to find it easy or hard, as the case may be, to do a certain thing; but that he must necessarily do, or refrain from doing, a certain thing is absolutely untrue.

Were a man compelled to act according to the dictates of predestination, then the commands and prohibitions of the Law would become null and void and the Law would be completely false, since man would have no freedom of choice in what he does. Moreover, it would be useless, in fact absolutely in vain, for man to study, to instruct, or attempt to learn an art, as it would be entirely impossible for him, on account of the external force compelling him, according to the opinion of those who hold this view, to keep from doing a certain act, from gaining certain knowledge, or from acquiring a certain characteristic.

Reward and punishment, too, would be pure injustice, both as regards man towards man, and as between God and man. Suppose, under such conditions, that Simeon should kill Reuben. Why should the former be punished, seeing that he was constrained to do the killing, and Reuben was predestined to be slain? How could the Almighty, who is just and righteous, chastise Simeon for a deed which it was impossible for him to leave undone, and which, though he strove with all his might, he would be unable to avoid? If such were the true state of affairs, all precautionary measures, such as building houses, providing means of subsistence, fleeing when one fears danger, and so forth, would be absolutely useless, for that which is decreed beforehand must necessarily happen. This theory is, therefore, positively unsound, contrary to reason and common sense, and, by attributing injustice to God (far be it from Him!), subversive of the fundamental principles of religion.

In reality, the undoubted truth of the matter is that man has full sway over all his actions. If he wishes to do a thing, he does it; if he does not wish to do it,

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he need not, without any external compulsion controlling him. Therefore, God commanded man, saying, "See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil...therefore choose life" (Deut. 30:15), giving us, as regards these, freedom of choice. Consequently, punishment is inflicted upon those who disobey, and reward granted to the obedient, as it is said, "If you will hearken," and "If you will not hearken" (Deut. 11:27-28). Learning and teaching are also necessary, according to the commands, "You shall teach them to your children" (ibid. 11:19), "and you shall learn them and observe to do them" (ibid. 5:1), and, similarly, all the other passages referring to the study of the commandments. It is also necessary to take all the precautionary measures laid down in the Law; such as "You shall make a battlement for your roof, that you bring not blood upon your house" (ibid. 22:8), "lest he die in the battle" (ibid. 20:5,7), "wherein shall he sleep?" (Ex. 22:26), and "no man shall take to pledge the lower or the upper millstone" (Deut. 24:6), and many other passages in regard to precautions found in the Torah and the Prophets.

The statement found in the sayings of the rabbis, "All is in the power of God except the fear of God" is, nevertheless, true, and in accord with what we have laid down here. Men are, however, very often prone to err in supposing that many of their actions, in reality the result of their own free will, are forced upon them, as, for instance, marrying a certain woman, or acquiring a certain amount of money. Such a supposition is untrue. If a man espouses and marries a woman legally, then she becomes his lawful wife, and by his marrying her he has fulfilled the divine command to increase and multiply. God, however, does not decree the fulfillment of a commandment. If, on the other hand, a man has commuted with a woman an unlawful marriage, he has committed a transgression. But God does not decree that a man shall sin. Again, suppose a man robs another of money, steals from him, or cheats him, and then uttering a false oath, denies it; if we should say that God had destined that this sum should pass into the hands of the one and out of the possession of the other, God would be preordaining an act of iniquity. Such, however, is not the case. Rather, all of man's actions are subject to his free will and undoubtedly comply with or transgress God's commands; for, as has been explained in Chapter II, the commands and prohibitions of the Law refer only to those actions which man has absolute free choice to perform or not to perform. Moreover, to this faculty of the soul (i.e., the freedom of the will) "the fear of God" is subservient, and is, in consequence, not predestined by God but, as we have explained, is entirely in the power of the human

free will. By the word "all," the rabbis meant to designate only natural phenomena which are not influenced by the will of man, as whether a person is tall or short, whether it is rainy or dry, whether the air is pure or impure, and all other such things that happen in the world which have no connection with man's conduct.

In making this assertion that obedience or disobedience to the Law of God does not depend upon the power or will of God, but solely upon that of man himself, the sages followed the dictum of Jeremiah, who said, "Out of the mouth of God there comes neither the bad nor the good" (Lam. 3:38). By the words "the bad" he meant vice, and by "the good," virtue; and, accordingly, he maintains that God does not preordain that any man should be vicious or virtuous. Since this is so, it behooves man to mourn and weep over the sins and the transgressions he has committed, as he has sinned of his own free will in accordance with what the prophet says, "Wherefore should a living man mourn? Let every man mourn because of his sins" (ibid. 3:39). He continues, then, to tell us that the remedy for this disease is in our own hands, for, as our misdeeds were the result of our own free will, we have, likewise, the power to repent of our evil deeds, and so he goes on to say, "Let us search through and investigate our ways, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in the heavens" (ibid. 3:40-41).

The theory generally accepted by people and found in rabbinical and prophetic writings, that man's sitting and rising, and all of his movements are governed by the will and desire of God, is true only in one respect. For instance, when a stone is thrown into the air and falls to the ground, it is correct to say that the stone fell in accordance with the will of God, for it is true that God decreed that the earth and all its elements should be the center of attraction, so that when any part of it is, is thrown into the air, it is attracted back to the center. Similarly, all particles of fire ascend according to God's will, which preordained that fire should go upward. But it is wrong to suppose that when a certain part of the earth is thrown upward God wills at that very moment that it should fall. The Mutakallimun are, however, of a different opinion in this regard, for I have heard them say that the Divine Will is constantly at work, decreeing everything from time to time.* We do not agree with them, but believe that the Divine Will ordained everything at creation and that all things, at all times, are regulated by the laws of nature and run their natural course in accordance with what Solomon said, "As it was so it will ever be, as it was made so it continues, and there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9). This occasioned the sages to say that all miracles which deviate from

the natural course of events; whether they have already occurred or, according to promise, are to take place in the future, were foreordained by the Divine Will during the six days of creation, nature being then so constituted that those miracles which were to happen really did afterward take place. Then, when such an occurrence happens at its proper time, it may have been regarded as an absolute innovation, whereas in reality it was not.

The rabbis expatiate upon this subject in Midrash Kohelet and in other writings, one of their statements in reference to this matter being, "Everything follows its natural course." In everything that they said, you will always find that the rabbis (peace be unto them!) avoided referring to the Divine Will as 'determining a particular event at a particular time: When, therefore, they said that man rises and sits down in accordance with the will of God, their meaning was that, when man was first, created, his nature was so determined that rising up and sitting down were to be optional to him; but they did not mean that God wills at any special Moment that man should or should not get up, as He determines at any given time that a certain stone should or should not fall to the ground. The sum and substance of the matter is, then, that you should believe that just as God willed that man should be upright in stature, broadchested, and have fingers, likewise did He will that man should move or rest of his own accord, and that his actions should lie such as his own free will dictates to him without any outside influence or restraint, which fact God clearly states in the truthful Law; which elucidates this problem when it says, "Behold, the man is become as one of us to know good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). The Targum, in paraphrasing this passage, explains the meaning of the words *mimmermu ladaat tov vara*. Man has become the only being in the world who possesses a characteristic which no other being has in common with him. What is this characteristic? It is that by and of himself man can distinguish between good and evil and do that which he pleases with absolutely no restraint. Since this is so, it would have even been possible for him to have stretched out his hand and, taking of the tree of life, to have eaten of its fruit, and thus live forever.

Since it is an essential characteristic of man's makeup that he should of his own free will act morally or immorally, doing just as he chooses, it becomes necessary to teach him the ways of righteousness, to command and exhort him, to punish and reward him according to his deserts. It behooves, man also to accustom himself to the practice of good deeds until he acquires the virtues corresponding to those good deeds; and, furthermore, to, abstain from evil deeds so that he may

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eradicate the vices that may have taken root in him. Let him not suppose that his characteristics have reached such a state that they are no longer subject to change, for any one of them may be altered from the good to the bad and vice versa; and, moreover, all in accordance with his own free will. To confirm this theory, we have mentioned all these facts concerning the observances and the transgressions of the Law...

There is one thing more relating to this problem about which we must say a few words in order to treat in a comprehensive manner the subject matter of this chapter. Although, I had not intended at all to speak of it, necessity forces me to do so. This topic is the prescience of God. It is with an argument based on this notion that our views are opposed by those who believe that man is predestined by God to do good or evil and that man has no choice as to his conduct since his volition is dependent upon God. The reason for their belief they base on the following statement. "Does God know or does He not know that a certain individual will be good or bad? If you say He knows, then it necessarily follows that man is compelled to act as God knew beforehand he would act, otherwise God's knowledge would be imperfect. If you say that God does not know in advance, then great absurdities and destructive religious theories will result." Listen, therefore, to what I shall tell you, reflect well upon it, for it is unquestionably the truth.

It is, indeed, an axiom of the science of the divine, i.e., metaphysics, that God (may He be blessed!) does not know by means of knowledge and does not live by means of life. Therefore He and His knowledge may not be considered two different things in the sense that this proposition is true of man; for man is distinct from knowledge, and knowledge from man, in consequence of which they are two different things. If God knew by means of knowledge, He would necessarily be a plurality and the primal essence would be composite, that is, consisting of God Himself, the knowledge by which He knows, the life by which He lives, the power by which He has strength, and similarly of all His attributes. I shall only mention one argument, simple and easily understood by all, though there are strong and convincing arguments and proofs that solve this difficulty. It is manifest that God is identical with His attributes and His attributes with Him, so that it may be said that He is the knowledge, the knower, and the known, and that; He is the life, the living; and the source of His own life, the same being true of His, other attributes. This conception is very hard to grasp and you should not hope to understand it thoroughly by two or three lines in this treatise. There can only be imparted to you a vague idea of it.

Now, in consequence of this important axiom, the Hebrew language does not allow the expression Chei Adonai (the life of God) as it does Chei Faraoh (the life of Pharaoh, where the, word chei (in the construct state) is related to the following noun, for the thing possessed and the possessor this case) are two different things. Such a construction cannot be, used in regard to the relation of a thing to itself. Since the life of God is His essence, and His essence is His life, not being separate and distinct from each other, the word "life," therefore, cannot be put in the construct state; but the expression Chai Adonai (the living God) is used, the purpose of which is to denote that God and His life are one.

Another accepted axiom of metaphysics is that human reason cannot fully conceive God in His true essence, because of the perfection of God's essence and the imperfection of our own reason, and because His essence is not due to causes through which it may be known. Furthermore, the inability of our reason to comprehend Him may be compared to the inability of our eyes to gaze at the sun, not because of the weakness of the sun's light, but because that light is more powerful than that which seeks to gaze into it. Much that has been said on this subject is self-evident truth.

From what we have said, it has been demonstrated also that we cannot comprehend God's knowledge, that our minds cannot grasp it all, for He is His knowledge, and His knowledge is He. This is an especially striking idea, but those (who raise the question of God's knowledge of the future) fail to grasp it to their dying day. They are, it is true, aware that the divine essence, as it is, is

incomprehensible, yet they strive to comprehend God's knowledge, so that they may know it, but this is, of course, impossible. If the human reason could grasp His knowledge, it would be able also to define His essence, since, both are one and the same, as the perfect knowledge of God is the comprehension of Him as He is in His essence, which consists of His knowledge, His will, His life, and all His other majestic attributes. Thus, we have shown how utterly futile is the pretension to define His knowledge. All that we can comprehend is that just as we know that God exists, so are we cognizant of the fact that He knows. If we are asked, "What is the nature of God's knowledge?" we answer that we do not know any more than we know the nature of His true existence. Scripture finds fault, moreover, with him who tries to grasp the truth of the divine existence, as we see by the words, "Can you by searching find out God? Can you find out the Almighty to perfection?" (Job 11:7). Reflect, then, upon all that we have said; that man has control over his actions, that it is by his own determination that he does either right or wrong without, in either case, being controlled by fate, and that, as a result of this divine commandment, teaching, preparation, reward, and punishment are proper. Of this there is absolutely no doubt. As regards, however, the character of God's knowledge, how He knows everything, this is, as we have explained, beyond the reach of human ken.

This is all that we purposed saying in this chapter, and it is now time to bring our words to an end and begin the interpretation of this treatise to which these eight chapters are an introduction. ■

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