



Maimonides' Introduction to Perek Helek  
Introduction to Chapter ten of Mishna Sanhedrin

THE MISHNAH

*All Jews have a share in the world to come, as it is said, "Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of My planting, the work of My hands wherein I glory" (Is. 60:21). But these have no share in the world to come: one who says that the resurrection of the dead is not taught in the Torah; one who says that the Torah is not from heaven; and the atheist. Rabbi Akiva adds: one who reads the apocryphal books or who utters charms over a wound saying, "I will put none of the diseases upon you which I have put upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord that heals you" (Ex. 15:26). Abba Saul adds: the one who pronounces the letters of the Tetragrammaton.*

I must speak now of the great fundamental principles of our faith. Know that the masters of Torah hold differing opinions concerning the good which will come to a person as a result of fulfilling the commandments which God commanded us through Moses our Teacher. As a consequence of their different understanding of the problem, they also hold widely different opinions concerning the evil which the transgressor suffers. So much confusion has invaded their opinions that it is almost impossible to find anyone whose opinion is uncontaminated by error.

One group thinks that the expected good is the Garden of Eden, a place in which one eats and drinks without any physical work or effort. They also believe that there houses are made of precious stones, beds of silk, rivers flow with wine and fragrant oils, and many other things of that sort. This group believes that the evil is Gehennam, a place of raging fire, in which bodies are burned and agonies of all sorts are inflicted upon men. Their descriptions of these afflictions are told at a great length. This group adduces proof for their opinions from the words of our sages and from passages in the Scripture whose literal meaning seems either wholly or largely compatible with what they say.

A second group asserts that the good for which we hope is the Days of the Messiah, in whose time all men will be angels, and all of them will live forever. They will be giants in stature and will grow in number and strength until they have occupied the entire world forever. The Messiah will, with the help of God, live forever. They also believe that in those days the earth will bring forth garments woven, bread baked, and many other impossible things. In this view, the evil is that a man may not be alive in those days and may not merit the privilege of seeing them. This group also adduces proof from many statements found in the writings of our sages and from Biblical verses whose literal meaning seems to agree either wholly or partly with what they say.

A third group holds that the good for which we hope is the resurrection of the dead. By this they mean that a man will live after his death and return to his family and dear ones to eat and drink and never die again. According to this opinion the evil is that a man may not live after his death among those who are resurrected. Here, too, proof is adduced from many sayings that are found in the words of the sages and from Biblical verses whose literal meaning seem to teach this, wholly or in part.

A fourth view holds that the goal of fulfilling the commandments is the achievement of bodily peace and mundane success like fertile lands, extensive possessions, many children, health, peace, and security. They also believe that there will be a Jewish king who will rule over those who oppressed us. The evil that will overtake us if we deny the Torah is the opposite of these, as in our present exile. Those who hold this opinion likewise find support for their views in verses of Torah, particularly the curses, and from other passages in Scripture.

A fifth group-and a large one-combines the opinion of all the others. They assert that the ultimate hope is that the Messiah will come, that he will resurrect the dead, who will enter the Garden of Eden where they will eat and drink in perfect health forever.

However, concerning this strange world to come, you will rarely find anyone to whom it occurs to think about it seriously or to adopt it as a fundamental doctrine of our faith, or to inquire what it really means, whether the

world to come is the ultimate good or whether some other possibility is. Nor does one often find persons who distinguish between the ultimate good itself and the means which lead to the ultimate good. What everybody always wants to know, both the masses and the learned, is how the dead will arise. They want to know whether they will be naked or clothed, whether they will rise in the same shrouds with which they were buried, with the same embroidery, style, and beauty of sewing, or in a plain garment which covers their bodies. Or they ask whether, when the Messiah comes, there will still be rich men and poor men, weak men and strong men, and other similar questions.

You, however, who read this book thoughtfully, must understand the analogy which I am about to draw for you. Prepare your mind to understand what I tell you about all this. Imagine a small child who has been brought to his teacher so that he may be taught the Torah, which is his ultimate good because it will bring him to perfection. However, because he is only a child and because his understanding is deficient, he does not grasp the true value of that good, nor does he understand the perfection which he can achieve by means of Torah. Of necessity, therefore, his teacher, who has acquired greater perfection than the child loves in childish way. Thus, the teacher may say, "Read and I will give you some nuts or figs; I will give you a bit of honey." With this stimulation the child tries to read. He does not work hard for the sake of reading itself, since he does not understand its value. He reads in order to obtain the food. Eating these delicacies is far more important to him than reading, and a greater good to him. Therefore, although he thinks of study as work and effort, he is willing to do it in order to get what he wants, a nut or a piece of candy. As the child grows and his mind improves, what was formerly important to him loses its importance, while other things become precious. The teacher will stimulate his desire for whatever he wants then. The teacher may say to the child. "Read and I will give you beautiful shoes or nice clothes." Now the child will apply himself to reading for the sake of new clothes and not for the sake of study itself. He wants the garments more than the Torah. This coat will be the end which he hopes to achieve by reading. As his intelligence improves still more and these things, too, become

unimportant to him, he will set his desire upon something of greater value. Then his teacher may say to him: Learn this passage or this chapter, and I will give you a denar or two.” Again he will try to read in order to receive the money, since money is more important to him than study. The end which he seeks to achieve through his study is to acquire the money which has been promised him.

Now, all this is deplorable. However, it is unavoidable because of man’s limited insight, as a result of which he makes the goal of wisdom something other than wisdom itself, and assumes that the purpose of study is the acquisition of honor, which makes a mockery of truth. Our sages called this learning not for its own sake. They had in mind the kind of person who performs the commandments and energetically studies Torah not for their own intrinsic worth but with some other purpose in view. Our sages warned against this and said, “Do not make the Torah a crown for self-glorification or a spade with which to dig” (Ethics of the Fathers 4”7). They hinted at what I have just explained to you, that the end of wisdom is neither to acquire honor from other men nor to earn more money. One ought not to busy oneself with God’s Torah in order to earn one’s living by it; nor should the end of studying wisdom be anything but knowing it. The truth has no other purpose than knowing that it is truth. Since the Torah is truth, the purpose of knowing it is to do it. A good man must not wonder, “If I perform these commandments, which are virtues, and if I refrain from these transgressions, which are vices which God commanded us not to do, what will I get out of it?” This is precisely what the child does when he asks, “If I read, what will you give me?” The child is answered in some such way because, when we know his limited understanding and his desire for something other than a real goal, we answer him on the level of his folly, as it is said in Proverbs 26:5: “Answer the fool according to his folly.”

Our sages have already warned us about this. They said that one should not make the goal of one’s service of God or of doing the commandments anything in the world of things. Antigonus of Sokho- a man who had achieved perfection and grasped the truth of things-meant precisely this when he said: “Do not be like the servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward,

but be like servants who serve their master without expecting a reward” (Ethics of the Fathers 1:3). He meant by this that one should believe the truth for the sake of the truth. We say of such a man that he serves out of love. To him the sages have applied the verse: “His profound desire is in God’s commandments” (Ps. 112:1). Rabbi Eliezer added: “. . . in His commandments, but not in the reward of His commandments” (Avodah Zarah 19a).\*

All of this is clear proof of what we have said. A passage from the Sifre makes the point even better. “Should you be tempted to say, ‘I will study Torah in order to become rich, or in order to be called Rabbi, or in order to receive a reward in the world to come,’ Scripture says (Deut. 11:13): ‘To love the Lord your God’-whatever you do, do it only out of love.” It has now been made quite clear to you that this is what the Torah means and our sages make fundamental. Only a disturbed fool whose mind is deranged by folly and by fantasy will refuse to recognize this truth.

Abraham our Father achieved this level; he served God out of love. We, too, must be aroused to move in this direction. However, our sages knew that this is a very difficult goal to achieve and that not every man could achieve it. One may understand the goal and still reject it, failing to apprehend that it is a principle of faith. Men do not do anything except to achieve profit or to avoid loss. Most men would regard any other action as useless and meaningless.

Under these circumstances it is hard to say to one who is studying Torah, “Do certain things and refrain from doing certain other things but not out of fear of divine punishment and not in order to acquire a reward.” This is an exceedingly difficult thing to do because most men have not achieved such truth that they are able to be like Abraham our Father. Therefore, in order that the masses stay faithful and do the commandments, it was permitted to tell them that they might hope for a reward and to warn them against transgressions out of fear of punishment. It was hoped that they might be urged to strengthen their intentions so that they would ultimately grasp the truth and the way toward perfection, just like the child in the analogy which I cited above. It was for this reason that the sages charged Antigonos of Sokho with indiscretion. They had him in mind when

they said, “O wise ones, be careful with your words” (Ethics of the Fathers 1:11). The masses, after all, lose nothing when they do the commandments out of fear of punishment and out of hope for reward, since they are not perfect. It is good for them insofar as it strengthens and habituates them in loyalty to what the Torah requires. Out of this effort they may be awakened to the knowledge of the truth and serve God out of love. This is what the sages meant when they said, “A man ought always to labor in the Torah, even if not for its own sake! For doing it not for its own sake, he may come to do it for its own sake” (Pesachim 50b).

You must know that the words of the sages are differently interpreted by three groups of people.

The first group is the largest one. I have observed them, read their books, and heard about them. They accept the teachings of the sages in their simple literal sense and do not think that these teachings contain any hidden meaning at all. They believe that all sorts of impossible things must be. They hold such opinions because they have not understood science and are far from having acquired knowledge. They possess no perfection which would rouse them to insight from within, nor have they found anyone else to stimulate them to profounder understanding. They, therefore, believe that the sages intended no more in their carefully emphatic and straightforward utterances than they themselves are able to understand with inadequate knowledge. They understand the teachings of the sages only in their literal sense, in spite of the fact that some of their teachings when taken literally, seem so fantastic and irrational that if one were to repeat them literally, even to the uneducated, let alone sophisticated scholars, their amazement would prompt them to ask how anyone in the world could believe such things true, much less edifying.

The members of this group are poor in knowledge. One can only regret their folly. Their very effort to honor and to exalt the sage in accordance with their own meager understanding actually humiliates them. As God lives, this group destroys the glory of the Torah of God say the opposite of what it intended. For He said in His perfect Torah, “The nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deut. 4:6). But this group expounds the laws and the teachings of our sages in

such a way that when the other peoples hear them they say that this little people is foolish and ignoble.

The worst offenders are preachers who preach and expound to the masses what they themselves do not understand. Would that they keep silent about what they do not know, as it is written: "If only they would be utterly silent, it would be accounted to them as wisdom" (Job 13:5). Or they might at least say, "We do not understand what our sages intended in this statement, and we do not know how to explain it." But they believe they do understand, and they vigorously expound to the people what they think rather than what the sages really said. They, therefore, give lectures to the people on the tractate Berakhot and on this present chapter, and other texts, expounding them word-for-word according to their literal meaning.

The second group is also a numerous one. It, too, consist of persons who, having read or heard the words of the sages, understand them according to their simple literal sense and believe that the sages, understand them according to their simple literal sense and believe that the sages intended nothing else than what may be learned from their literal interpretation. Inevitably, they ultimately declare the sages to be fools, hold them up to contempt, and slander what does not deserve to be slandered. They imagine that their own intelligence is of a higher order than that of the sages, and that the sages were simpletons who suffered from inferior intelligence. The members of this group are so pretentiously stupid that they can never attain genuine wisdom. Most of these who have stumbled into this error are involved with medicine or astrology. They regard themselves as cultivated men, scientist, critics, and philosophers. How remote they are from true humanity compared to real philosophers! They are more stupid than the first group; many of them are simply fools.

This is an accursed group, because they attempt to refute men of established greatness whose wisdom has been demonstrated to competent men of science. If these fools had worked at science hard enough to know how to write accurately about theology and similar subjects both for the masses and for the educated, and if they understood the relevance of philosophy, then they would be

in a position to understand whether the sages were in fact wise or not, and the real meaning of their teachings would be clear to them.

There is a third group. Its members are so few in number that it is hardly appropriate to call them a group, except in the sense in which one speaks of the sun as a group (or species) of which it is the only member. This group consists of men whom the greatness of our sages is clear. They recognize the superiority of their intelligence from their words which point to exceedingly profound truths. Even though this third group is few and scattered, their books teach the perfection which was achieved by the authors and the high level of truth which they had attained. The members of this group understand that the sages knew as clearly as we do the difference between the impossibility of the impossible and the existence of that which must exist. They know that the sages did not speak nonsense, and it is clear to them that the words of the sages contain both an obvious and a hidden meaning. Thus, whenever the sages spoke of things that seem impossible, they were employing the style of riddle and parable which is the method of truly great thinkers. For example, the greatest of our wise men (Solomon) began his book by saying: "To understand an analogy and a metaphor, the words of the wise and their riddles" (Prov. 1:6).

All students of rhetoric know the real concern of a riddle is with its hidden meaning and not with its obvious meaning, as: "Let me now put forth a riddle to you" (Judges 14:12). Since the words of the sages all deal with supernatural matters which are ultimate, they must be expressed in riddles and analogies. How can we complain if they formulate their wisdom in analogies and employ such figures of speech as are easily understood by the masses, especially when we note that the wisest of all men did precisely that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? I have in mind Solomon in Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and parts of Ecclesiastes.\*

It is often difficult for us to interpret words and to educe their true meaning from the form in which they are contained so that their real inner meaning conforms to reason and corresponds with truth. This is the case even with Holy Scriptures. The sages themselves interpreted Scriptural passages in



such a way as to educe their inner meaning from literal sense, correctly considering these passages to be figures of speech, just as we do. Examples are their explanations of the following passages: “he smote the two altar-hearths of Moab; he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit” (II Sam. 23:20); “Oh, that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem” (ibid. 23:15). The entire narrative of which these passages are a part was interpreted metaphorically. Similarly, the whole Book of Job was considered by many of the sages to be properly understood only in metaphoric terms. The dead bones of Ezekiel (Ezek. 37) were also considered by one of the rabbis to make sense only in metamorphic terms. Similar treatment was given to other passages of this sort.

Now if you, reader, belong to either of the first two groups, pay no attention to my words nor to anything else in this section. You will not like it. On the contrary, it will irritate you, and you will hate it. How could a person who is accustomed to eating large amounts of harmful food find simple food in small quantities appealing, even though they are good for him? On the contrary, he will actually find them irritating and he will hate them. Do you not recall the reaction of the people who were accustomed to eating onions, garlic, fish, and the like? They said: “Now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all; we have naught save this manna to look to” (Num. 11:6).

But if you belong to the third group, when you encounter a word of the sages which seems to conflict with reason, you will pause, consider it, and realize that this utterance must be a riddle or a parable. You will sleep on it, trying anxiously to grasp its logic and its expression, so that you may find its genuine intellectual intention and lay hold of a direct faith, as Scripture says: “To find out words of delight, and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth” (Eccles. 12:10). If you consider my book in this spirit, with the help of God, it may be useful to you.

Now I can begin to discuss the matter with which I am really concerned. Know that just as the blind man cannot image color, as the deaf person cannot experience sounds, and as the eunuch cannot feel sexual desire, so bodies cannot attain spiritual delights. Like fish, who do not know what the element of water, so

are the delights of the spiritual world unknown in this material world. Spiritual delight does not come within our experience at all. We enjoy only bodily pleasures which come to us through our physical senses, such as the pleasures of eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse. Other levels of delight are not present to our experience. We neither recognize nor grasp them at first thought. They come to us only after great searching.

It could hardly be otherwise, since we live in a material world and are, therefore, able to achieve only inferior and discontinuous delights. Spiritual delights are eternal. They last forever; they never break off. Between these two kinds of delight there is no similarity of any sort. It is, therefore, inappropriate for us who are masters of Torah or theologians to say that the angels, stars, and spheres experience no delight. On the contrary, they really experience great delight in that they know by experience the true being of God the Creator. With this knowledge they enjoy delight which is both perpetual and uninterrupted. They have no bodily delight, nor could they, since they have no physical senses, as we do, through which they could get our kind of gratification.

We will be like them after death. These men who choose to purify themselves will reach this spiritual height. They will neither experience bodily pleasures, nor will they want them. They will resemble a powerful king. He would hardly want to go back to playing ball with children as he did before he became king. Such games attracted him when he was a child and was unable to understand the real difference between ball playing and royal power. Like children we now praise and glorify the delights of the body and do not understand the delights of the soul.

If you consider carefully the nature of these two kinds of delight, you will perceive the inferiority of the first and the superiority of the second; even in this world. Thus, you find that most men will exert extraordinary amounts of intellectual and physical energy laboring at ordinary tasks in order to acquire honor and be exalted by their fellowmen. The pleasure which honor brings is not of the same sort as the pleasure derived from eating and drinking. Similarly, many men pursue vengeance over their enemies more intensely than they pursue any

bodily pleasures. Many others deny themselves the keenest of bodily delights because they fear shame and public disgrace or because they seek to acquire a reputation for virtue. If this is the case even in this material world, how much more must it be so in the spiritual world! That world is the world to come.

In the world to come our souls will become wise out of the knowledge of God the Creator, as the higher physical bodies do, or even wiser. This spiritual delight is not divisible into parts, nor can it be described, nor can any analogy explain it. It is the prophet said when he was awe-stricken at the lofty magnificence of that good: “How great is Your goodness which You have hidden away for them and fear You” (Ps. 31:30). Our sages also wrote: “In the world to come there is no eating, drinking, washing, anointing, or sexual intercourse; but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence” (Berakhot 17a). In this passage the expression “with their crowns on their heads” signifies the immortality of the soul being in firm possession of the Idea which is God the Creator. The “crown” is precisely the Idea which great philosophers have explicated at length. The expression, “they delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence” means that souls enjoy blissful delight in their attainment of knowledge of the truly essential nature of God the Creator, a delight which is like that experienced by the holy angels who know His existence first-hand.

The ultimate good, the final end is to achieve this supernal fellowship, to participate in this high glory in which the soul is forever involved with the existence of God the Creator, who is the cause and source of its existence and its goal. This has already been explained by the earlier philosophers.

This is comparably good, for how could that which is eternal and endless be compared with anything transient and terminable? That is the meaning of the Biblical statement: “That it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days” (Deut. 22:7) –in the world that is infinitely long, add the rabbis (Kiddushin 39b, Hullin 142a).\*

Utterly evil punishment consists in the cutting off of the soul so that it perishes and does not live eternally. This is the penalty of *karet* to which the

Torah refers, as in the phrase: “That soul shall utterly be cut off” (Num. 15:31). Interpreting this phrase, our sages said: “The word *hikkaret* (utterly cut off) refers to the world to come” (Sanhedrin 64b, 90a). On the other hand, Scripture also says: “The soul of my master shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord your God” (I Sam. 25:29).

It follows that if a person has deliberately and regularly chosen physical delights, has despised the truth and loved falsehood, he will be cut off from that high level of being and remain disconnected matter. The prophet has already explained that the world to come cannot be apprehended by the bodily senses, in the verse: “The eye has not seen it, O Lord, except You” (Is. 64:3). The sages taught emphatically that the prophets prophesied only about the days of the Messiah, but that concerning the world to come, “eye has not seen it, O Lord, only You” (Berakhot 34b, Shabbat 63a, Sanhedrin 99a).

Now let me explain the meaning of the promises of good and the threats of evil punishment which are contained in the Torah. What these promises and punishments mean is that God says to you, “If you do these commandments, I will help you in your effort to do them and to achieve perfection in them. I will remove all the obstacles and difficulties which stand in your way.” For it is impossible for a man to perform the commandments when he is sick or hungry or thirsty or when he lives in a time of war and siege. God, therefore, says that he will remove all these obstacles to fulfillment, so that men who strive too do the commandments will be healthy and safe until they attain the degree of knowing through which they will merit the life of the world to come. However, he must understand that ultimate reward of doing the commandments of the Torah is not in any of these things themselves. And if one violates the commandments of the Torah, punishments ensue. All kinds of hindrances will come into being, so that the transgressor will no longer be able to perform the commandments. It is precisely as Scripture states it: “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things; therefore, you shall serve your enemy whom the Lord shall send against you, in hunger and in thirst and in nakedness, and in want of all things; and he

shall put a yoke of iron upon your neck, until he has destroyed you (Deut. 28:47 ff.).

If consider these things carefully and fully, you will understand that it is as though He were saying to you, “If you do some of these commandments out of love and with genuine effort, I will help you to do all of them, and I will remove the oppressive obstacles that prevent you from doing them. But if you refuse to attempt to perform any of them out of disdain for the commandment, then I will bring upon you the very obstacles that prevent you from doing all of them, so that you cannot achieve perfect existence in the world to come.” This is the meaning of the statement of the sages: “The reward of a commandment is the commandment itself, and the reward of a sin is sin” (Ethics of the Fathers 4:2). The Garden of Eden is a fertile place containing the choicest of the earth’s resources, numerous rivers, and fruit-bearing trees. God will disclose it to man some day. He will teach man the way to it, and men will be happy there. It is possible that many exceedingly wonderful plants will be found there, plants which are far pleasanter and sweeter than those which we now know. None of this is impossible or improbable. On the contrary, paradise would be possible even if it were not written of in the Torah. How much more sure then is it since the Torah specifically promises it!

Gehennam is a name for the pain and the punishment which will come upon the wicked. No specific description of this punishment is contained in the Talmud. One teacher says that the sun will come so close to the wicked that it will burn them. He finds proofs for this belief in the verse: “For behold, the day comes, it burns as a furnace; and all the proud and all that work wickedness shall be stubble; and the day that comes shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” (mal. 3:19). Others say that a strange heat will be produced within their own bodies to incinerate them. They find support for this position in the Scriptural words: “Your own spirit is a fire which will consume you” (Is. 33:11).

The resurrection of the dead is one of the cardinal principles established by Moses our teacher. A person who does not believe in this principle has no real

religion, certainly not Judaism. However, resurrection is only for the righteous. This is the meaning of the statements in *Bereshit Rabbah* (ch. 13) which declares: “The creative power of rain is for both the righteous and the wicked, but the resurrection of the dead is only for the righteous.” How, after all, could the wicked come back to life, since they are dead even in their lifetimes? Our sages taught: “The wicked are called dead even while they are still alive; the righteous are alive even when they are dead” (Berakhot 18b). All men must die and their bodies decompose.

The “days of the Messiah” refers to a time in which sovereignty will revert to Israel and the Jewish people will return to the land of Israel. Their king will be a very great one, with his royal place in Zion. His name and his reputation will extend throughout all the nations and even greater measure than did King Solomon’s. All nations will make peace with him, and all countries will serve him out of respect for his great righteousness and the wonders which occur through him. All those who rise against him will be destroyed and delivered into his hands by God. All the verses of the Bible testify to his triumph and our triumph with him. However, except for the fact that sovereignty will revert to Israel, nothing will be essentially different from what it is now. This is what the sages taught: “The only difference between this world and the days of the Messiah is that oppression by other kingdoms will be abolished” (Berakhot 34b; Shabbat 63a, 151b; Pesachim 68a; Sanhedrin 91b, 99a). In the days of the Messiah there will still be rich and poor, strong and weak. However in those days it will be very easy for men to make a living. A minimum of labor will produce great benefits. This is what the sages meant when they said: “In the future, the land of Israel will bring forth ready baked rolls and fine woolen garments” (Shabbat 30b). This is rather like what people say when someone finds something ready for use. They say, “So-and-So has found his bread already baked and his meal already cooked.” The Scriptural support for all of this in the expression, “and aliens shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers” (Is. 61:5). This verse suggests that there will be sowing and reaping even in the Messianic time. The Talmud (Shabbat 30b) records the irritation of one of the sages with a student whose objection to this

passage showed that he did not understand his teaching on it because he understood the verse literally. The sage replied to him incorrectly, in accordance with the student's inadequate understanding of the matter. The reason for the sage's refusal to give a true answer is found in the verse: "Answer not a fool according to his folly" (Prov. 26:4).

The great benefits which will occur in those days include our release from oppression by other kingdoms which prevents us from fulfilling all the commandments—a widespread increase of wisdom, in accordance with the Scriptural promise: "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Is. 11:9)—and the end of the wars, again in accordance with the Scriptural statement: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:3). In those days perfection will be widespread, with the result that men will merit the life of the world to come.

But the Messiah will die, and his son and his grandson will reign in his stead. The prophet has already predicted his death in the verse: "He shall not fail nor be crushed till he has set the right in the earth" (Is. 42:2). However, his reign will be a very long one. All human life will be longer. There is no reason for surprise that the Messiah's reign will extend for thousands of years. As our sages have put it: "When good is gathered together it cannot speedily be dissipated."

We do not long and hope for the days of the Messiah because of an increase of productivity and wealth which may occur then, or that we may ride on horses and drink wine to the accompaniment of song, as some confused people think. The prophets and the saints looked forward to the days of the Messiah and yearned for them because then the righteous will be gathered together in fellowship, and because goodness and wisdom will prevail. They desired it also because of the righteousness and the abundant justice of the Messianic king, because of the salutary influence of his unprecedented wisdom, and because of his nearness to God, as described: "The Lord said to me: "You are my son: this day have I begotten you"" (Ps. 2:7). They also anticipate the performance of all of the commandments of the Torah of Moses our Teacher, with neither inertia on the one hand nor compulsion on the other, in fulfillment of the Scriptural promise:

“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying: “Know the Lord’: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity and their sin will I remember no more” (Jer. 31:34). Similarly, it is written: “I will put My Torah in their inward parts , and I will write it in their heart” (Jer. 31:33). Scripture also says: “And I will take away the stony heart of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). There are many other verses with the same promise.

Thus, men will achieve the world to come. The world to come is the ultimate end toward which all our effort ought to be devoted. Therefore, the sage who firmly grasped the knowledge of the truth and who envisioned the final end, forsaking everything else, taught: “All Jews have a share in the world to come” (Sanhedrin 10:1).

Nevertheless, even though this is the end we seek, he who wishes to serve God out of love should not serve Him to attain the world to come. He should rather believe that wisdom exists, that this wisdom is the Torah; that the Torah was given the prophets by God the Creator; that in the Torah He taught us virtues which are the commandments and vices that are sins. In so doing, he will perfect the specifically human which resides in him and will be genuinely different from the animals. When one becomes fully human, he acquires the nature of the perfect human being; there is no external power to deny his soul eternal life. His soul thus attains the eternal life it has come to know which is the world to come, as we have explained. This is the meaning of the verse: “Be not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle” (Ps. 32:9). Restraints which prevent animals from acting in accordance with their nature are external ones, like the bit and the bridle. With man, the influences which restrain him are his control of self. When a man achieves human perfection it restrains him from doing those things which are called vices and which withhold perfection from him; it urges and impels him toward those things which are called virtues and which bring him to full perfection. This is what all the teaching of the sages have made clear to me about this most important matter.



I hope to write a book collecting all the sages' teachings on this subject from the Talmud and other works. I shall interpret them systematically, showing which must be understood literally and which metaphorically, and which are dreams to be interpreted by a wakeful mind. There I shall explain the many principles of our faith of which I have discussed a few here. You must make your own comparisons. Let no one blame me for the freedom with which I have used certain expressions or made certain statements in this book, though they may irritate some scholars. For I have expatiated on these points precisely in order to teach those with no training in theology, a subject which not every man can understand . . .

We must remember in connection with this subject, and indeed with all others, that our religion is based on the following thirteen principles.

**The First Fundamental Principle:** To believe in the existence of the Creator; that there is an Existent complete in all the senses of the word "existence." He is the cause of all existence. In Him all else subsists and from Him derives. It is conceivable that He not exist, for should He not exist the existence of all else would be extinguished, and nothing could persist. If we imagine the absence of any other existent thing, however, God's existence would not thereby be extinguished or diminished. For unity and mastery are only God's, since He is sufficient to Himself. All else, whether angels or celestials and whatever is in them or below them, needs Him to exist. This first fundamental principle is taught in the Biblical verse: "I am the Lord your God" (Ex. 20:2).

**The Second Fundamental Principle:** We are told to believe that God is one, the cause of all oneness. He is not like a member of a pair, nor a species of a genus, nor a person divided into many discrete elements. Nor is He one in the sense that a simple body is, numerically one but still infinitely divisible. God, rather, is uniquely one. This second fundamental principle is taught in the Biblical verse: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4).

**The Third Fundamental principle:** We are to believe that he is incorporeal, that His unity is physical neither potentially nor actually. None of the attributes of matter can be predicated of Him, neither motion, nor rest for example. They cannot refer to Him accidentally or essentially. That is why our sages denied Him composition and separation, and said : “On high there is neither sitting nor standing, neither want nor weariness” (Hagigah 15a), i.e., neither composition nor separation, and said: “On High there is neither sitting nor standing, neither want nor weariness” (Hagigah 15a), i.e., neither composition nor separation, as the Biblical usage of these words attests. The prophet asked: “To whom can you compare God, whom might he resemble?” (Is. 40:18). If He were a body, He would be like other bodies. Whenever Scripture describes Him in corporeal terms like walking, standing, sitting, speaking, and the like, it speaks metaphorically. Thus our sages said: “The Torah speaks in human language” (Berakhot 31b). This third fundamental principle is taught in the Biblical verse: “You have seen no image” (Deut. 4:15). This verse means to say, one cannot conceive of Him as one would a Baal image, since, as we have shown, He has no body at all, actually or potentially.

**The Fourth Fundamental Principle:** We are to believe that the One is absolutely eternal, no thing exist before Him, as many Scriptural verses prove. This fourth fundamental principle is taught in the Biblical verse: “A dwelling-place is the Eternal God” (Deut. 33:27).

**The Fifth Fundamental Principle:** Only He, blessed be He, is rightfully worshipped, magnified, and obeyed. One must not pray to anything beneath Him in existence: angels, stars, planets or elements, or anything composed of these. All of them are natural processes without self-determination or free will. Only God is free and puissant. Hence, we must not worship those powers which can serve only as means to bring us nearer to Him. We must think only of Him, leaving to one side all else. The fifth fundamental principle has all Biblical warning against idolatry as its warrant, in other words, the bulk of the Torah.

**The Sixth Fundamental Principle** is Prophecy. One should know that among men are found certain people so gifted and perfected that they can receive pure intellectual form. Their human intellect clings to the Active Intellect, whither it is gloriously raised. These men are the prophets; that is what prophecy is. A full explanation of this root principle would require much more time. We do not wish to cite proof-texts for every principle or to explain each fully. However, I remind you in passing of the many Scriptural passages which testify to the prophecy of many different prophets.

**The Seventh Fundamental Principle** is the prophecy of Moses our Teacher. We are to believe that he was the chief of all other prophets before and after him, all of whom were his inferiors. He was the chosen one of all mankind, superior in attaining the knowledge of God to any other person who ever lived or ever will live. He surpassed the normal human condition and attained the angelic. There remained no veil he did not rend and penetrate behind, nothing physical to hold him back, no deficiency, great or small, to confuse him. All his powers of sense and fantasy were repressed, and pure reason alone remained. This is what is meant by saying that he spoke to God without angelic mediation.

I should have wished to explicate this mystery from Biblical sources, explaining such verses as “God spoke to Moses mouth to mouth” (Num. 12:8), but I see they would require a great many preparatory comments about the remarkable existence of angels, which derives from God, and about the powers of the soul. And the discussion would have to be widened to include the prophetic descriptions of God and angels, including the Divine Dimensions of which even the briefest description would require a hundred pages. I have, therefore, left these matters to my exegetical book, the book on prophecy on which I am working, or to a book I hope some day to write explaining these fundamental issues.

Returning to our seventh fundamental principle: Moses’ prophecy must be distinguished from that of all other prophets in four respects:

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1. All other prophets were addressed by God through intermediaries, only Moses immediately. This is indicated by the phrase, “mouth to mouth I addressed Him.”
2. Prophecy came to all others in sleep (cf. the verses which refer to “a dream of night” [Gen. 20:3]; “a vision of night” [Job. 33:15]), or in daytime when a trance fell on the prophet so that his senses and intellect would be as useless as in a dream. This state is called “vision” or “insight” as in the expression “visions of God.” But the Words came to Moses in broad daylight when he stood by the two cherubs, as God had promised, “I will meet you there” (Ex. 25:22). God said: “Moses, my servant, is not like other prophets; to him alone I speak mouth to mouth.”
3. Even if another prophet should receive a vision of God through an angel, his powers would fail; he would be overcome with dread, and nearly lose his mind. When, for example, Daniel was addressed by Gabriel in a vision, he said: “I had no strength; my vigor turned against me, I retained no power, but fell swooning on my face to the ground, writing in a vision” (Dan. 10:8 ff., 10:16). This never happened to Moses. When the Word came to him he would neither shiver nor tremble. “God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man to his friend” (Ex. 33:11). This means that, since a friendly talk produces no anxiety, Moses had no fear. Face to face with God, he had no terror of the revelation, because he clung to Him in a wholly conscious way, as we have implied.
4. The other prophets could not attain a vision whenever they pleased. All depended on God’s will. A prophet might wait days or years before prophecy would come to him. He would beg God to reveal Himself in prophecy, but he would have to wait for days or months before the prophecy came. Sometimes God would not reveal Himself at all. There were many sects who prepared themselves by purifying their minds as Elisha did-“and now take me a musician that prophecy might reach me” (II Kings 3:15). But prophecy did not necessarily follow their preparation. Moses our Teacher, on the other hand, could say whenever he wished:

“Wait, and I shall hear what the Lord commands you” (Num. 9:8). Scripture says: “Tell Aaron, your brother, not to enter the holy place anytime at all” (Lev. 16:2). Our sages interpret this to mean that Aaron could not come to God whenever he pleased, but Moses might (Midrash to Ahare Mot).

**The Eighth Fundamental Principle** is that the Torah came from God. We are to believe that the whole Torah was given us through Moses our Teacher entirely from God. When we call the Torah “God’s Word” we speak metaphorically. We do not know exactly how it reached us, but only that it came to us through Moses who acted like a secretary taking dictation. He wrote down the events of the time and the commandments, for which reason he is called “Lawgiver.” There is no distinction between a verse of Scripture like “The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim” (Gen. 10:6), or “His wife’s name was Mehetabel and his concubine was Timna” (Gen. 36:39,12), and one like “I am the Lord your God, and all are the Torah of God, perfect, pure, holy and true. Anyone who says Moses wrote some passages on his own is regarded by our sages as an atheist of the worst kind of heretic, because he tries to distinguished essence from accident in Torah. Such a heretic claims that some historical passages or stories are trivial inventions of Moses and not Divine Revelation. But the sage said that if one accepts as revelation the whole Torah with the exception of even one verse, which Moses himself and not God composed, he is referred to in the verse, “he has shamed the Word of the Lord” (Num. 15:31), and is heretical.

Every word of Torah is full of wisdom and wonders for one who understands it. It is beyond human understanding. It is broader than the earth and wider than the sea. Each man must follow David, anointed of the God of Jacob, who prayed: “Open my eyes that I may behold wonders out of Your Torah” (Ps. 119:18).

The authoritative commentary on the Torah is also the Word of God. The *sukkah* we build today, or the *lulav*, *shofar*, *fringes*, *phylacteries*, etc. we use, replicate exactly those God showed Moses which Moses faithfully described for us. This fundamental principle is taught by the verse: “And Moses said, ‘Thus

shall you know that then Lord sent me to do all these things, and that they are not products of my own mind” (Num. 16:28).

**The Ninth Fundamental Principle** is the authenticity of the Torah, i.e., that this Torah was precisely transcribed from God and no one else. To the Torah, oral and written, nothing must be added nor anything taken from it, as is said, “You must neither add nor detract”(Deut. 13:1). We have already sufficiently explained this principle in our introduction to this Commentary on the Mishnah.

**The Tenth Fundamental Principle** is that God knows all that men do and never turns His eyes away from them, as those who say “The Lord has abandoned this earth”(Ezek.8:12, 9:9)claim. Rather, as Scripture has it, “Great in counsel, mighty in insight (is God) whose eyes are open to all the ways of men”(Jer. 32:19), or the Lord saw that great was the evil of man on earth”(Gen.6:5), or the verse, “The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is powerful” (ibid. 18:20). All these citations point to our Tenth Fundamental Principle.

**The Eleventh Fundamental Principle** is that God rewards those who perform the commandments of the Torah and punishes those who transgress its admonitions. The greatest reward is the world to come; the worst punishment is extinction. We have already made this sufficiently clear. The Scripture which teaches this fundamental principle is “If you will not forgive their sin, extinguish me.” To which God replied, “I will expunge from My book only the man who has sinned against Me” (Ex.32:32 ff.). This proves He knows both the obedient and the sinner, and rewards or punishes each.

**The Twelfth Fundamental Principle** refers to the Messianic Era. We are to believe as fact that the messiah will come and not consider him late. If he delays, wait for him (Hab. 2:3); set no time limit for his coming. One must not make conjectures based on Scripture to conclude when Messiah will come. The sages said: “May the Spirit depart from those who calculate the end-time” (Sanhedrin

97b). One must believe that Messiah will have more station and honor than all the kings who ever lived, as all the prophets from Moses to Malachi prophesied: Whoever doubts this or minimizes it denies the passage begins, “You are standing”(Deut.29:9).A corollary of this principle is the assertion that the king of Israel must come only from the house of David and seed of Solomon. Anyone who rejects this family denies God and the words of His prophets.

**The Thirteenth Fundamental Principle** is the Resurrection of the Dead, which we have already explicated.

When a man believes in all these fundamental principles, and his faith is thus clarified, he is then part of that “Israel” whom we are to love, pity and treat as God commanded, with love and fellowship. Even if a Jew should commit every possible sin, out of lust or mastery by his lower nature, he will be punished for his sins but will still have a share in the world to come. He is one of the “sinners in Israel.” But if a man gives up any one of these fundamental principles, he has removed himself from the Jewish community. He is an atheist, a heretic, an unbeliever who “cuts among the plantings.” We are commanded to hate him and to destroy him. Of Him it is said: “Shall I not hate those who hate You, O Lord?” (Ps. 139:21).

I have spent too much time on these matters, leaving the general subject of my book. But I have done so because I saw their fullness for faith. So I have collected a number of scattered but useful statements from our great books. You must know them well. Repeat them frequently. Meditate on them carefully. If your mind seduces you into thinking that you comprehend them after one reading-or then readings-God knows you are deceived! Do not read them hurriedly, for I did not just happen to write them down. Only after careful research and introspection, when I came to see which opinions are clearly true and untrue, did I come to know what to accept, I have proved each point systematically. May God fulfill my wish and lead me on the way of goodness.