

YESODE HA-TORAH

An Analysis of Its Ideas and Terminology,
and a Comparison of Its Content with Moreh
Nebuchim.

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To My Teachers

in Israel

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PREFACE

Our task is to analyze the ideas and terminology of Yesode Ha-torah and to compare its contents with those of Moreh Nebuchim to ascertain if Maimonides' ideas changed in any important respect in the twenty year interval between the writing of the Mishneh Torah and Moreh Nebuchim. We attempt to perform our task by means of a commentary to the text of Yesode Ha-torah, utilizing parallel passages from the fuller text of Moreh Nebuchim and from other works of Maimonides to explain the usually laconic remarks of Yesode Ha-torah, explaining the meaning of Jewish traditional and Greek philosophical terms and ideas, noting Maimonides' frequent amalgamation of these terms and ideas, and pointing out the logical place of and historical setting for much of the contents.

It is our hope that what we do will make the way easier for those who begin their study of Yesode Ha-torah as we began - with a very meagre knowledge, indeed.

May we say here that we would never have started, and certainly never have completed our task without the encouragement and indefatigable assistance of Dr. Abraham Heschel. We are deeply indebted, too, to the late Professor Michael Friedlander of whose English translation of Moreh Nebuchim with its helpful footnotes we have made constant use. We are grateful, also, to Dr. Moses Hyamson for his edition of Book 1 of the Mishneh Torah edited according to an unique manuscript from the Bodleian (Oxford) Library with Biblical and Talmudical references and an English translation.

Herbert Droz.

INTRODUCTION

Maimonides' monumental codification of the Jewish Law called The Mishneh Torah (or the Yad Ha-hazakah) is not presented to Israel as an ordinary code of political law. For Maimonides is very much aware that he is dealing with the Divine Torah, and the first ten chapters of his code are a kind of introduction, having for their major purpose, in our opinion, the establishment of the divinity of the Torah on as scientific foundations as the times afforded - the philosophy of Aristotle. These opening ten chapters of the Mishneh Torah are known as Yesode Ha-torah, the fundamentals of the Torah.

Maimonides had an Islamic precedent, though no Jewish one, for thus introducing his code with a theological prolegomenon. For the Hadith, the code of Islamic traditional law analogous to our Talmud, perhaps suggested such a preface to him. Muslim, a ninth century author prefaced his reception with a complete survey of the early theology of Islam (See Boaz Cohen, The Classification of the Law in the Mishneh Torah, Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. 25, New Series, April 1935, p. 530).

Maimonides employs a notable technique. Utilizing ten mitzvot selected from his listing of the 613 mitzvot which precedes Yesode Ha-torah, he expands each one in his own fashion, e.g., the mitzvot to love and to fear God create a problem in that love or fear cannot be evoked by direct command; and thus Maimonides wins an opportunity to discuss the Universe and its creatures, the contemplation of which, he argues, excites love and fear of God in the heart of man (cf. Chapters II-IV).

By this and similar devices, Maimonides gains cause to cover the following subjects in Yesode Ha-torah (listed by chapter number):

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- I. Existence, unity, and incorporeality of God.
- II. Angels
- III. Heavenly bodies
- IV. The four elements, their properties and combinations, the forms of their combinations, the soul
- V. Sanctification of the Divine Name and its profanation
- VI. The treatment to be accorded objects inscribed with the names of God
- VII. The nature of prophecy and Moses' preeminence among prophets
- VIII. Moses and Israel and the uniqueness of the Sinaitic Revelation
- IX. Immutability of the Torah
- X. The testing of prophets

Deftly reconciling Jewish tradition and Greek philosophy and substantiating his arguments by both, Maimonides swiftly builds up the foundations of his main thesis, that the law he is codifying is of divine origin, constructing layer upon layer of proof:

1. The ultimate bedrock is the proved knowledge that God exists (Chapter I).
2. Next comes belief in angels, which are, in fact, the Intelligences of the Spheres of Greek philosophy; and the belief in which he declares "is in importance next to the belief in God's existence; for it leads us to believe in Prophecy and in the Law" (M. N., III, 45, p. 230). (Chapter II).

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3. The belief in angels, as we see above, leads directly to belief in prophecy, for according to Maimonides prophecy is a form of communication from God through an angel (the Active Intellect or tenth Intelligence of the Greeks). Maimonides explains the character of the prophet and the nature of prophecy. (Chapter VII).
4. Belief in prophecy brings us to belief in the preeminent prophet, Moses, the truth of whose mission has been witnessed by the eyes and ears of all Israel at Sinai. Thus we arrive at our belief in the divine origin of the Torah. And having laid the foundations securely, Maimonides is ready to build "the Temple of the Law."
(Chapters VII - IX).

The idea-development of these basic concepts are given to us by Maimonides himself in M. N., III, 43, p. 219 f.

But as brief as Yesode Ha-torah is, there is far more subject matter in it than would have been necessary to establish philosophical foundations for the divine origin of the Torah. We believe that Maimonides had several reasons for developing these chapters as he did. We shall demonstrate these other objectives which, in our opinion, Maimonides tried to attain in Yesode Ha-torah:

1. To give all Israelites at least a minimum of knowledge of metaphysics and physics with the primary purpose of assisting them to gain eternal life, in accordance with his conception of eternal life.

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2. To give special emphasis to certain pressing problems, both practical and intellectual, of his times.
3. To provide a proper place wherein certain subjects possessing an underlying connection might be logically grouped together.

Our first point, that Maimonides desired to provide all Israelites with at least a minimum of metaphysical and physical knowledge so that they might secure immortality, is certainly a strange idea to anyone unacquainted with Maimonides' concept of immortality. But once the crucial importance of this "knowledge" to Maimonides' theory of immortality is made clear, the place of *Yesode Ha-torah* in providing this "knowledge" becomes apparent. In our commentary to IV, 8 and 9 we explain that the soul of man which is immortal, according to the author, is the acquired knowledge of God, of the angels, and of the structure of the universe which a man has stored up through study and contemplation (cf. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchoth Teshubah*, VIII, 3). Thus, to Maimonides, the soul becomes immortal through correct thinking rather than through righteous living - righteous living receiving a subordinate place in providing an environment conducive to correct thinking (cf. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchoth Teshubah*, IX). A passage from Maimonides' Commentary to Perek Helek from the *Mishneh Tractate Sanhedrin* illustrates his conception of righteous living as merely the setting for correct thinking, which alone leads to immortal life: "Rather must he serve God in the way that I shall prescribe. This is as follows: when he firmly believes that the Torah contains knowledge which reached the prophets from before God, who through it taught them that virtuous deeds are of such and such a kind and ignoble deeds of such and such a kind, it is obligatory for him, insofar as he is a man of

well-balanced temperament, to bring forth meritorious deeds and shun vice. When he acts like this, the significance of man has in him reached the point of perfection and he is divided off from the brute. And when a man arrives at the point of being perfect he belongs to that order of man whom no obstacle hinders from making the intellectual element in his soul live on after death.

This is "the world to come"....." (J. Abelson, Maimonides on the Jewish Creed, The Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. XIX, Old Series, 1907, p.46).

Let us remember, too, that Yesode Ha-torah occupies the most prominent position in the Mishneh Torah, a work which Maimonides believed would eliminate the Talmud as the text book of Israel, and which would rank next to the Holy Scriptures. He himself states: "Hence, I have entitled this work Mishneh Torah, because a person who reads the Written Torah and reads this will know the entire Oral Law without finding it necessary to have recourse to another book" (Maimonides' Introduction to the Mishneh Torah, end). Thus these chapters, standing as they do in the very beginning of a work which Maimonides doubtlessly thought destined to be thoroughly studied and pondered over by every man of Israel, ensures all at least a minimum acquisition of the knowledge which affords immortality for man's soul. And, hence, we are of the opinion that at least part of the motive which prompted Maimonides to devote the contents of Chapters I-IV to metaphysics and physics - correct notions of God, of the angels, and of the structure of the universe - was this one of which we have been speaking. In addition to these chapters we have Chapter VI which takes up the subject of Divine Names and the proper regard to be shown them. Since Maimonides believed that the names of God teach us correct metaphysical ideas, too, about God (See our commentary to Chapter VI), this chapter, perhaps, should be grouped with Chapters I-IV as among the chapters which provide the kind of knowledge which must become part of one in order to secure immortality.

In regard to the second point mentioned above there can be no doubt that Maimonides has placed special emphasis in *Yesode Ha-torah* upon certain intellectual and practical problems that confronted Israel in his times. His notably fuller consideration of the problem of anthropomorphism in Chapter I is an example of Maimonides dealing with one of the acutest intellectual conflicts of his age - a conflict which the Almohades, an Islamic sect championing the strict unity and incorporeality of God, attempted to settle on the battlefield during Maimonides' lifetime.

Chapter V concerning martyrdom is another excellent illustration of the part practical considerations had in the organization of *Yesode Ha-torah*. In our discussion of this chapter we describe some of the religious and political conditions of the times which warranted the inclusion of this chapter in *Yesode Ha-torah* (not forgetting that there is a logical reason for its inclusion, too). The polemical nature of much of what Maimonides has to say on prophecy in Chapters VII - X is noted in our commentary. The claims put forward for the supremacy of Mohammed and for the mission of Jesus of Nazareth by their followers and for the new revelations of other prophetic pretenders are met with vigor by Maimonides. His emphasis upon the morality and learning of true prophets (Ch. VII), the preeminence of Moses in prophetic perception (Ch. VII) and in the divine manifestation at and public witnessing to the truth of his mission (Ch. VIII), the immutability of the Torah (Ch. IX), and the proper testing of prophets to distinguish the true from the false (Ch. X) is polemical in nature if not in purpose.

Our third point among the subordinate objectives of *Yesode Ha-torah* is that it provides a proper place where certain materials possessing an underlying connection are grouped together.

In our commentary we suggest that Chapter V on martyrdom was placed in Yesode Ha-torah because in certain circumstances one should die rather than violate a single mitzvah, and thus this Chapter has a fundamental relationship to the entire Torah and belongs in Yesode Ha-torah. However, we find another kind of logical relationship which embraces a great part of the contents of Yesode Ha-torah.

There is a kind of three-fold relationship from God (through the medium of the angel, the Active Intellect) to the prophets to man. In Yesode Ha-torah we find those principles which man must believe concerning God, e.g., His existence, unity, incorporeality, etc.; and concerning the prophets, e.g., that prophecy is an authentic experience, that Moses is the greatest of prophets, the divinity of the Torah revealed to Moses, etc. But in Yesode Ha-torah we find nothing of God's relationship to man, e.g., there is nothing of God's mindfulness of man, reward and punishment, the Messiah, resurrection etc. It is interesting to compare, on this score, the thirteen Articles of the Creed of Maimonides and the contents of Yesode Ha-torah. Stated directly or clearly implied, the first nine Articles of the Creed are to be found in Yesode Ha-torah:

1. Existence of God, cf. Chapter I of Yesode Ha-torah.
2. Unity of God, " " " "
3. Incorporeality of God, " " "
4. The Priority of God, " " "
5. Prohibition of Idolatry, " " "
6. Authenticity of Prophecy, Chapter VII, " "
7. Moses Greatest of Prophets, Chapter VII, " "
8. Divine Origin of Torah, Chapter VIII, " "

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- 9. Immutability of the Torah, cf. Chapter IX of Yesode Ha-torah
- 10. God's Mindfulness of Man)
- 11. Reward and Punishment) Not found in Yesode
- 12. The Coming of the Messiah) Ha-torah
- 13. Resurrection)

The subjects appearing in Yesode Ha-torah, but not in the thirteen articles of Maimonides' creed are as follows:

- 1. The Structure of the Universe (Chapters III and IV), - but this is nonetheless a part of abstract knowledge, though of a lower order than the knowledge of God and the angels.
- 2. Martyrdom(Chapter V), - but this is also concerned with an attitude of man toward God and the Torah, but since the Creed is concerned with beliefs rather than actions it is left out of the Creed.
- 3. Treatment of objects bearing the Divine Name (Chapter VI), - this too is a part of man's knowledge of God, but is left out of the Creed because it is concerned with actions rather than beliefs.
- 4. The testing of prophets (Chapter X), - this chapter is part of the discussion on prophecy, but, although prophecy has an important part in the Creed, it is left out probably for the same reason that appears above: because it deals with actions rather than beliefs.

We have tried to show above that Maimonides limits himself in Yesode Ha-torah to a specific theme, namely, the minimum of what a man should know of God, of His prophets, of revelation, and of man's proper basic attitude towards these. But he has clearly omitted discussing themes in Yesode Ha-torah which deal with God's relationship to man, differing in this regard from his listing of the fundamental principles of the Torah as they appear in his commentary to Perek Helek.

With the exception of Chapter V on martyrdom, every subject of Yesode Ha-torah is dealt with in Moreh Nebuchim. Indeed, as we point out in our commentary to Chapter II, 11, a large proportion of Moreh Nebuchim is devoted to the matters discussed in Yesode Ha-torah in short form.

NOTES FOR THE USE OF THIS COMMENTARY

The sections of this commentary are numbered according to the paragraph numbering of the common printed editions.

Many sections contain a b part. The b part contains explanations of difficult words or phrases found in the paragraph under discussion which we felt should be dealt with separately from the analysis of the meaning of the paragraph and its comparison with Moreh Nebuchim.

We have incorporated all references into our text in order to eliminate footnotes. Moreh Nebuchim is abbreviated M. N., followed by Roman numerals designating which of its three divisions is referred to, followed by the Chapter number in Arabic numerals, followed by a page number. The page number is according to the pagination of Michael Friedlander's three volume translation, London, 1885.

All references in our commentary to another paragraph of Yesode Ha-torah refer both to the text and to our notes on that paragraph of the text. The commentary is designed to be read together with the text, and cannot be understood of itself.

Though we have been greatly benefited by Moses Hyamson's English translation of Book I of the Mishneh Torah, we have rendered our translations in accordance with our understanding.

CHAPTER I

1. We may first note that Maimonides has made it the ultimate basis of the Torah and of the sciences to know that there is a First Being. Secondly, he, speaking as a philosopher, makes the knowledge of a First Being rather than faith in God the basic principle. In contrast to this, for example, Saadia makes the fear of God the first mitzvah. (See Siddur R. Saadia Gaon, p. 157 a, ed. I. Davidson, S. Assaf, E. I. Joel, Jerusalem, 1941). While Maimonides makes the first mitzvah to know that there is a God.

Maimonides' four proofs for the existence of God, as found in M. N., are based upon first, the principle of causality, "the assertion that nothing can change or come into existence without a cause." Second, the principle that infinite regress is impossible. These arguments are embodied in the phrases "First Being" (= impossibility of infinite regress) "and He brings into being all existing things..." (= causality). "...everything occurring in the Universe, although directly produced by certain nearer causes, is ascribed to the Creator.... He is the agens, and He is therefore the ultimate cause." (M.N. I, 69, p. 262).

The last concept is that all existing things in the Universe exist only through God's essential existence (cf. II, 9). All things are dependent for their existence upon Him. The whole Universe would perish just as would a man whose heart had ceased to beat, were the spheres to stop moving says Maimonides. Since the motion of the spheres depends upon God unceasingly, the contents of the Universe depend upon Him. (See below, I, 5).

1. ב. **שיר השירים** - a phrase like **יסוד היסודות**

It means the most basic principle. Since it is the very first phrase of the ten chapters termed **יסודי התורה**; it is reasonable to interpret it to mean the most basic principle of the Torah. The next phrase,

ועמוד החכמות, stands in some contrast to it, for it refers to the Greek sciences rather than to the Torah of revelation. Here we see Maimonides as the reconciler of the Torah and Greek philosophy. The basic principle of one and the pillar of the other is the same: to know that there is a First Being.

The initial letters of the first four words spell **יהוה**; a common pietistic flourish of the Middle Ages, e.g., **יסוד האמונות** **אור ה'שם** in **ושרש הדתחלות** by Chasdei Kreskas.

מצוי ראשון - Note that Maimonides speaks of the First Being rather than of God. He is a philosopher. It is a **ל"ה** form of a **ל"א** verb. *f. I, 4, 5.*

ממציא - If Maimonides were writing as a theologian, he would have used the verb **בורא**. Perhaps he is skirting the problem of creatio ex nihilo ^{and creation in time} by using a term that has only a slight implication of will. However, the whole matter may be a stylistic one since there are six plays on the verb **מצא** in the single sentence.

מאמיתת המצא - This difficult phrase means God's essence, God's reality, He Himself. In I, 10 it is identified with a certain interpretation of God's glory. And in M.N., I, 64, p 242 this interpretation of God's glory is given: "Sometimes the essence, the reality of God is meant by that expression, as in the words of Moses, "Show Me Thy Glory"...."

2. All things are contingent upon the existence of the First Being. He is the "Necessary of Existence." "They belong to a class of Being which is termed "possible of existence.... The relations between these two kinds of Being is that of cause and effect." (Wolfson, N. A., The Philosophy of Spinoza, I, p. 67).

3. A continuation of the argument of paragraph 2. The First Being is completely independent of the Universe. His existence would be unaffected by the non-existence of the Universe.

"Hence, His essence is not like the essence of any one of them" means that the First Being is completely "other" from His creations. All other existing things are dependent, but the First Being is unique in being absolutely independent. Maimonides maintained that the essence of God was an impenetrable mystery. "In the contemplation of His essence, our comprehension and knowledge prove insufficient," and again "What, then, can be the result of our efforts, when we try to obtain a knowledge of a Being that is free from substance, that is most simple, whose existence is absolute, and not due to any cause... All we understand, is the fact that He exists, that He is a Being to whom none of His creatures is similar, who has nothing in common with them...." (M.H., I, 58, p. 212).

The argument of this statement can be summarized as follows:

God, from the point of view of causality is unlike any object in the Universe, for

1. He is necessary, they are contingent.
2. He can exist without them, they cannot exist without Him.

3.b **אֱמִיתוּתוֹ** - Maimonides uses this word here in the meaning of true, i.e., necessary existence; while in paragraph 1 above he uses it in the meaning of essence.

4. This paragraph is a further exposition of the previous one. Maimonides collates his argument for the difference between the existence of the First Being and the existence of all created things by quoting Scripture.

He interprets the Scriptural passage:

כִּי יְהוָה הוּא אֱלֹהִים אֵין עוֹד מַלְבָּדוּ (Deut.4:35)
וְיְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶחָד... (Jer.10:10)

by means of an analogy of expressions to prove exegetically that **אֱלֹהִים אֶחָד** (the true God) has the same force as **אֵין עוֹד מַלְבָּדוּ** (there is none else beside Him). This, we believe, is the explanation of Maimonides' use of **אֱמִיתוּתוֹ** to express the uniqueness of God's existence.

This doctrine of the uniqueness of God's essence as compared with that of all other beings is of critical importance in Maimonides' conception of the divine attributes. All of the attributes are in a humanly incomprehensible manner united into one in the divine Essence. For example, in maintaining that God's Omniscience may well be reconciled with the belief in His Unity and Immutability, Maimonides argued that God's ways of knowing should not be thought of as bearing any resemblance to our own ways of knowing. Says he "How then can they imagine that they comprehend His knowledge, which is identical with His essence; seeing that our incapacity to comprehend His essence prevents us from understanding the way He knows objects; for His knowledge is not of the same kind as ours, but totally different from it and admitting of no analogy. And as there is an Essence

of independent existence, which is, as the philosophers call it, the cause of the existence of all things, or, as we say, the Creator of everything that exists beside Him, so we also assume that this Essence knows everything, that nothing whatever of all that exists is hidden from it, and that the knowledge attributed to this essence has nothing in common with our knowledge, just as that essence is in no way like our essence." (M., N., III, 20, p. 88).

5. a. The First Being is for the first time ^{in Yecode Ha-trach} definitely made identical to the God of revelation, the "God of the Universe" and the "Lord of all the earth."

The First Being, God, is now proved to exist by the classic proof of Jewish philosophy, the cosmological proof of the unending motion of the Sphere. In Moreh Nebuchim (I, 70, p. 272) Maimonides calls his student's attention to the importance of this proof: "Let their subject constantly remain in your memory when you study what I am going to say; for it, e.g., the motion of the uppermost sphere - is the greatest proof for the existence of God...."

Let us briefly describe the course of this proof.

Accepting Aristotle's proposition that matter does not move of its own accord (M. N., II, Introduction), Maimonides states that "a moving agent must exist which has moved all the existing transient things and enabled them to receive Form." (Form is the "essence of a thing, that which gives being to a thing and its essential attributes." Rfros, Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebuchim, p. 102). The cause of the motion of that agent is found in the existence of another motor of

the same or of a different class, the term "motion", in a general sense, being common to four categories((1) changes which affect the substance of a thing are called genesis and destruction; (2) changes in reference to quantity are increase and decrease;(3) changes in the qualities of things are transformations; (4) change of place is called motion). This series of motion is not infinite; we find that it can only be continued till the motion of the fifth element (The substance of the sublunar world consists of the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth. The substance of the spheres was called the fifth element, or quintessence) is arrived at, and then it ends. "The motion of the fifth element is the source of every force that moves and prepares any substance on earth for its combination with a certain force, and is connected with that force by a chain of intermediate motions.... But the motion of the sphere must likewise have been effected by an agent residing either without the sphere or within it." (e.g., the way the brain may cause a human being to move).

Maimonides then proceeds to describe all of the possibilities as to the nature of the agent that moves the sphere:

1. If the motor is outside of the sphere it must be either corporeal or incorporeal.
 - a. If incorporeal, it cannot be said that the agent is outside of the sphere; it can only be described as separate from it; because an incorporeal object can only be said metaphorically to reside outside a certain corporeal object.
2. If the agent resides within the sphere, it must be either a force distributed throughout the whole sphere as is the case with the heat of fire; or it is an indivisible force, e.g., the soul and the intellect.

Consequently, the agent which sets the sphere in motion must be one of the following four things:

- a. A corporeal object outside of the sphere
- b. An incorporeal object separate from the sphere
- c. A force spread throughout the whole of the sphere
- d. Or an indivisible force within the sphere.

One by one Maimonides eliminates the possibilities. Cases (a), (c), and (d) are proved impossible on grounds which we need not expound here; therefore, the agent must be an incorporeal being not residing within the spheres. And Maimonides concludes: "It may thus be considered as proved that the efficient cause of the motion of the sphere, if that motion is eternal, is neither itself corporeal nor does it reside in a corporeal object; it must move neither of its own accord nor accidentally (the motion of a thing moved along with a moving object); it must be indivisible and unchangeable. (Divisibility and unchangeability may be described as follows: Every change takes place gradually; there must consequently be a moment when the changing object is partly changed, partly unchanged; the object must therefore be divisible. Footnote in Friedlander's Guide of the Perplexed, II, Introduction, p. 3). This Prime Motor of the Sphere is God, praised be His Name! "

In the above conclusion of the cosmological proof through the unceasing motion of the sphere, we can see Maimonides' proof not only for the existence of God, but for the Unity and Incorporeality of Him, too.

The closing remarks of paragraph 5, that God causes the sphere to revolve without hand or body is a precautionary remark. Maimonides is afraid that he has suggested a human attribute of strength to God, so he qualifies his statement. God moves the Universe without

applying force in the manner of man. The mysterious force which God employs in moving the universe is explained as follows: "When we say that God moves the spheres, we mean it in the following sense: the spheres (which have a certain kind of intellect and a desire for the ideal which they comprehend, as we shall see below in our discussion of the heavenly spheres) have a desire to become similar to the ideal comprehended by them. This ideal, however, is simple in the strictest sense of the word, and not subject to any change or alteration, but constant in producing everything good, whilst the spheres are corporeal; the latter can therefore not be like this idea in any other way, except in the production of circular motion; for this is the only action of corporeal beings that can be perpetual; (since Maimonides believed in a finite Universe), it is the most simple motion of a body; there is no change in the essence of the sphere, nor in the beneficial results of its motion. (M. N., II, 4, p. 30).

Thus we may understand that God moves the universe by permeating it with the desire for imitatio Dei.

ב.ב. אלוה העולם - Maimonides does not say אלוה, but God of the Universe. We can only know God in relation to us, not per se.

אלוה כל הארץ - This is a more concrete, more personal term. It is a religious rather than philosophical phrase.

גלגל - In the time of Maimonides astronomers thought that the spheres were nine in number: Seven carrying the planets, including the sun and the moon, one containing the fixed stars and the all-embracing sphere called גלגל המקיף (cf. below Chapter III).

6. Having presented the major argument for God's existence in P. 5, Maimonides has prepared the way for the first affirmative command, to know that there is a God. This he states here, and then he immediately proceeds to state the negative command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," (Ex. 20:3), which is a negative way of stating God's Unity.

He who denies the Unity of God is termed a **כופר בעיקר** - a denier of the "great principle" (of Judaism) upon which everything else depends. In Maimonides' thinking the unity of God is the great principle. In Moreh Nebuchim Maimonides even places his discussion of the nature of the divine essence, based as it is upon his conception of God's Unity, before his discussion of the existence of God; the former occupies most of volume I, and the latter the first part of volume II.

d h. **מצות עשה** - Maimonides is writing a code of law as well as a theology. The commandments as well as philosophical doctrines are in place in **יסודי התורה**.

עיקר - a dogma is a doctrine upon which other principles depend, as Maimonides clearly suggests here when he terms Unity the great dogma upon which everything depends. As will be seen immediately below, the doctrine of incorporeality of God depends upon God's Unity, as understood by Maimonides.

7. Maimonides has frankly called the subject of God's Unity, which he introduces here, ".....almost too subtle for our understanding." (M. N., I, 57, p. 205). ~~Harry A. Wolfson has given us an insight into the~~ ~~two-fold sense in which~~ Maimonides, along with other mediaeval philosophers, employed the expression unity of God. "In the first place, it was used in the

sense of numerical unity, as an assertion of monatheism and a denial of the existence of more than one God." (Wolfson, H. A., The Philosophy of Spinoza, I, p. 113, Cambridge, Mass., 1934).

We might take this to be the meaning of the opening phrase
of paragraph 7, אין אלוהים אחד

"In the second, it (the unity of God) was used in the sense of essential unity, or simplicity, as a denial of any kind of inner plurality in the divine nature." (ibid). This denial of inner plurality refers to physical and to logical plurality. Unity in this second sense is implied in what is said in the remainder of P. 7.

First Maimonides denies generally that God's unity can be like the unity of anything existing in the universe, and then he defines this general statement by pointing out the two kinds of unity with which we are familiar and denying their validity when defining God's Unity. The familiar types of unity are, first, logical unity such as the unity of a species, e.g., the species "man" is a unity; and second, physical unity such as the unity of any material body which is a thing by itself and possessing parts and dimensions. The unity of species was important to differentiate from God's Unity because these were pantheists who looked upon the universe as a kind of specie and said this was God. Maimonides, himself, believed that the universe was an organic unity (cf. M., N., I, 72, p 268). But Maimonides argued that God and the universe could not be identical, for God's unity was different, there being many sub-units in the organic unity of the universe. Neither, says Maimonides, is the unity of God to be compared with the unity of a material body which is composed of parts and dimensions. This is an argument for the incorporeality of God, for God cannot possess true unity if He is a material body that can be apportioned into parts with dimensions.

The problem of incorporeality demands a special discussion. As can readily be discovered by a glance at the remaining paragraphs of Chapter One, Maimonides laid great emphasis upon the incorporeality of God. He believed that "without incorporeality there is no unity." (M.N., I, 35, p. 128). And he held all those, whether of the scholars or of the masses, to be infidels who did not believe in ^{the} incorporeality ^{of God.} (M. N., I, 36, p. 134). However, the belief in the incorporeality of God is not a commandment of the Torah. It grows out of logical deduction, not from revelation, though Maimonides attempts to give it Scriptural support in the next paragraph (I, 8). In Maimonides' pattern of thought God's Unity and incorporeality are inextricably interwoven. One ^{is not valid} ~~cannot exist~~ without the other, as we shall see, and both are interrelated to the cosmological proof of God's existence, as we have seen above in the discussion of I, 5.

Maimonides' proof for God's unity and incorporeality may be outlined as follows on the basis of our present paragraph:

- A. If God is more than one, He must be a material body because only material bodies can be distinguished from one another.
- B. If the Creator was such a physical body, He must necessarily be finite for it is impossible for a physical body to be without dimensions.
- C. If God is thus finite in size, He must also be finite in energy.
- D. However, this is impossible, because the Sphere of the Universe is unceasingly revolving, which can only happen if moved by infinite force.
- E. Therefore God cannot be corporeal.

F. Hence He must be incorporeal.

G. Since He is not a physical body, He must be a unity, for only physical bodies can be distinguished from one another, so that he may say there are two or more of them.

This foregoing argument may be briefly summed up by saying that the infinitely revolving universe must be moved by an infinite force, which can only be incorporeal and hence a unity.

7 b. **מאורעים** - Accidents mean features peculiar to an individual distinguishing him from other individuals.

8. Maimonides produces three Scriptural texts to give the support of revelation to his philosophical proof of God's incorporeality. They require no comment.

8 b. **אלהים** - Evidently Maimonides misquoted this passage from Deut. 4:39 or a scribe made an error in inserting **אלהים**. However, it is forbidden to erase God's name and the mistake was allowed to remain in the text, our attention being called to it only by dots above the letters. (cf. below, Chapter 6).

9. The two preceding paragraphs have proved that God is incorporeal. The inquiring religious mind is immediately troubled by numerous Scriptural passages which speak of God as if He possessed anthropomorphic qualities, making Him appear as if He were corporeal. The problem of anthropomorphism was of major concern to Maimonides. The opening seventy

chapters of Moreh Nebuchim are almost entirely devoted to its solution. Indeed, Maimonides solves the problem of anthropomorphic references to God in M. N. even before he gives his attention to what we would consider the more basic problems of the existence and unity of God. And so we should not be surprised when he gives more discussion to this problem in the Mishneh Torah, also, than he does to the problems of existence and unity of God. Isaac Husik points out that the Jews of Maimonides' time did not doubt the existence of God, and we might add, His unity either, but that many of them had an inadequate idea of His spiritual nature. (Medieval Jewish Philosophy, p. 241). Since the Bible countenanced the people's anthropomorphic conceptions, it was urgent that he deal in some detail with this problem.

Maimonides' method is very simple. He points out in this paragraph that the mental capacity of men is such that they can only conceive of physical bodies. This being true, the Torah, which speaks in the language of men, according to Talmudic Dictum (*Baba Metzia 51b*), must necessarily speak of God in anthropomorphic terms. "For", states Maimonides (M. N., I, 46, p. 153) "it was found necessary to teach all of them that God exists... and possesses life, wisdom, power, activity, and all other properties which our belief in His existence must include.... That God exists was then shown to ordinary men by means of similes taken from physical bodies; that He is living by a simile taken from motion, because ordinary men consider only the body as fully, truly, and undoubtedly existing.... In the same manner motion is considered by the ordinary man as identical with life; what cannot move voluntarily from place to place has no life.... The perception by the senses, especially by hearing and seeing, is best known to us; we have no idea or notion of any other mode of communication between the soul of one man and that of another than by means of speaking.... When, therefore, we are to be

informed that God has a knowledge of things, and that communication is made by Him to the Prophets who convey it to us, they represent Him to us as seeing and hearing.... They represent Him to us as speaking.... God is described as active because we do not know any other mode of producing a thing except by direct action. He is said to have a soul in the sense that He is living, because all living beings are generally supposed to have a soul..... Again, since we perform all these actions only by means of corporeal organs, we figuratively ascribe to God the organs of locomotion, as feet, and their soles....."

This lengthy passage has been quoted to make clear Maimonides' attitude toward anthropomorphisms. They are simply necessary evils, to be condoned because of the inadequacies of the human mind.

Paragraph nine closes with some interesting comments. Since God is unchanging, how could the prophets see Him garbed differently on various occasions is the implication of Maimonides' proof that God is not really seen by the prophets but that He only appears in this manner in prophetic visions (cf. below ch. VII).

We have discussed Maimonides' conception of the complete "otherness" of God above in Ch. I, 3. His essence cannot be comprehended by man.

10. Since God's essence cannot be known, as we have seen immediately above, just what was it that Moses sought to comprehend when he said, "Show me, I beseech Thee, Thy Glory," asks Maimonides. Moses actually did seek to know God's essence in the same manner as a man can distinguish a man whose face he has seen and whose image is impressed on the mind. But God answered Moses that man composed of body and soul could not obtain to

this knowledge. Maimonides is pointing out that "the wisest of men", Moses, could not comprehend God's essence, so how much the more the common lot of men! However, Maimonides does maintain that Moses had a clearer idea of God's essence than any other human ever had before or since. He says that this is suggested by Scripture in the text "Thou shalt see My back but My face shall not be seen." (Ex 33:23) (cf. Ch 7, 6).

10 b.

כבוד

- In M. N., I, 65, p. 242 Maimonides explains this to mean "God Thyself" (His essence) and that כבוד was substituted as a tribute of homage. This interpretation is based on God's answer to Moses: "For no man shall see Me and live" (Ex 33:20). Me is taken to mean God's essence.

11.

Maimonides, having demonstrated that God is not a material body, now continues his argument against any reference to God which might suggest that the accidents of matter can be attributed to Him. Maimonides lists the "accidents" which can be attributed to inorganic matter (e.g., composition, position, dimension, movement, relation to time -- time, Maimonides believed, ^{with Aristotle} was "an accident to motion which again is connected with a body." (M.N., I, 57, p. 206); and the additional accidents which can be attributed to organic matter (e.g., changeability, death or life such as pertains to animal bodies, intellectual qualities of man, sleeping or waking, emotion, silence or speech like man's). By this enumeration Maimonides includes in summary form all possible corporeal or anthropomorphic references that might be made in Scripture to God. He concludes the list with an obscure Talmudic reference from Hagigah 13 a. (The English translation of Hagigah by the Soncino Press, London, 1938, has footnotes to this passage

alluding to different versions and possible meanings of phrases). Maimonides takes **השמים** to refer to God rather than to Heaven in general, and he employs this text to support his view that God cannot have attributed to Him the accidents of matter such as standing or sitting, etc. (cf. M. N., I, 12, p. 62).

12. Maimonides concludes with a quod erat demonstrandum: all the corporeal and anthropomorphic statements in the Pentateuch and Prophets are metaphorical; and to them applies the saying "The Torah speaks in the language of men." For some reason, not apparent to this writer, Maimonides adds a scriptural proof after his Q.E.D. He shows how Scriptures would be contradicting itself if taken literally rather than figuratively in certain passages.

Chapter One comes to an end with Maimonides extolling the transcendence of God.

CHAPTER II

1. The love and fear of God are divine commands. This paragraph simply states the basic mitzvot to be discussed and their Scriptural source.

2. The duty to love and to fear God raises a difficult problem. Now it is possible to fulfill ordinary commands such as keeping the Sabbath, to redeem the first-born male, etc., but it is quite another matter to be commanded to love or fear something. Love and fear are commitments of the emotions and would seem to be beyond "coercion," even if the individual were willing to be "coerced." Maimonides cannot be said to have solved the logical problem involved here, but he does give a kind of solution.

When a man contemplates and understands God's works and creatures he obtains insight into some of God's incomparable and infinite wisdom, he is immediately filled with love and longing for God. Man is brought to love of God by knowledge of God. In *Mishneh Torah, Hilchoth Teshuvah*, X, 6, Maimonides says that "One only loves God with the knowledge with which one knows Him.... A person ought therefore to devote himself to the understanding and comprehension of those sciences and studies which will inform him concerning his Master." (cf. M. N., III, 28, p. 132).

Likewise, the fear of God is a concomitant of the study of God's work and creatures. Man will not only love God through appreciation of His wonders, but will feel his own insignificance before God's transcendent greatness.

It might be added here that Maimonides was one of the few philosophers who was opposed to anthropocentrism in the Middle Ages. To him man is tiny and of small consequence in the vast universe. He avers, "It is of great advantage that man should know his station, and not erroneously

believe that the whole universe exists only for him." (M. N., III, 12, p.38). He says again, "In order to obtain a correct estimate of ourselves, we must reflect on the results of the investigations which have been made into the dimensions and the distances of the spheres and stars.... If the whole earth is infinitely small in comparison with the sphere of the stars, what is man compared with all these created beings! How, then, could anyone of us imagine that these things exist for his sake and benefit, and that they are his tools!" (M. N., III, 14, p. 55-57).

Maimonides, desiring to open the door to the love of God for intelligent readers, devotes chapters II, III, and IV to a broad outline of God's creations, demonstrating the Divine Wisdom manifested in all of them. Chapter I might be added to this group, too, for God's works serve the purpose of telling us about God's Wisdom, and Chapter I simply tells us in a more direct way about God's Nature. In M. N., he states "For the truths which the Law teaches us - the knowledge of God's Existence and Unity - create in us love of God." (M. N., III, 52 p. 296). Thus, we might say that the first four chapters of Yesode Ha-torah have for part of their subject the communication of truths which will lead to the love and fear of God. (cf. Yesode Ha-torah, IV, 11, 12, 13). To know God is to love Him and to fear Him.

It might be asked if the "fear" spoken of in this paragraph is really fear. And Maimonides, apparently, was not so certain himself. In M. N. he assigns the fear of God to a source different from knowledge. Says he "The two objects, love and fear of God, are acquired by two different means. The love is the result of truths taught in the Law, including the true knowledge of the Existence of God; whilst fear of God is produced ^{by the practice prescribed} in the Law." (M. N., III, 52, p. 296). The fulfillment of the Mitzvot result in the fear of God. Knowledge only induces love.

3. This paragraph indicates the subjects to be discussed through Chapter IV. Maimonides here divides everything God has created into three distinct categories:

1. Bodies composed of matter and form and subject to constant change. (In M. N. he refers to these as the materia prima, or the bodies below the spheres. (M. N. II, 10, p. 53).
2. Bodies composed of matter and form, but not subject to change, e.g., the spheres and the stars place in them.
3. The angels, which are pure form without matter.

Maimonides discusses each of these, but in reverse order in the following chapters through Chapter IV.

4. Maimonides' description of angels as forms without matter in the preceding paragraph is in conflict with the literal meaning of Scriptural verses, which speak of angels of fire and possessing wings. But, says Maimonides, they were ³⁰seen in a prophetic vision (cf. below Ch VII) and are spoken of allegorically. To say that they were fiery means that they were incorporeal, and to say they possessed wings signifies that they had no weight. In support of this figurative interpretation, Maimonides offers Scriptural proofs. God is called a devouring fire in Deut. 4:24, and God is incorporeal. Similarly, the angels are called fiery, yet they too are incorporeal and the term is a figure of speech. The Scriptural text ^(Ps. 104:4) to prove that the term wings as applied to angels is metaphorical is a bit obscure. Does **רוחות** mean spirits or winds? Does the text get some of its meaning from the previous verse (Psalms 104:3) which speaks of **כנפי** or is **רוחות** related to the last half of its own verse **רוח**

where it is in parallel construction with $\omega\pi\varsigma \psi\chi$?

5. Maimonides has posed a difficult problem for himself. At the very end of II, 3 he states that the angels are only forms distinguished from each other. But how can incorporeal forms be distinguished from each other? He solves this problem by stating in this paragraph that the angels are distinguished from each other in causality. Each one depends for its existence upon the energy of the one immediately superior to it, and all of them exist dependent upon God. In II, 8, another distinction is mentioned. This causality is related to their rank in knowledge of God.

6. Since angels are incorporeal, they can have no position in space. Maimonides, fearing that his use of "above" and "below" in reference to the angels in the preceding paragraph might be misinterpreted, explains what he means by these terms. His examples are in terms of knowledge and causality, which we have pointed out already in II, 5 were the two ways in which angels were distinguished from one another.

7. Apparently Maimonides is attempting to synthesize the angels of revelation and the Intelligences of the Spheres of Greek philosophy. He actually makes them identical in M. N. saying, "..... there is only this difference in the names employed - - he (Aristotle) uses the term "Intelligences," and we say "angels"." (M. N., II, 6, p. 37). The ten ranks of angels are comparable to the ten Intelligences of Mediaeval Aristotelism. (E. A. Wolfson explains the Intelligences as vividly as possible as follows: "God is pure thought, and His only activity is thinking. But His thinking is a creative power, it becomes objectified in a thought, known as Intelli-

gence, which while immaterial like God himself.... is of a less perfect order, inasmuch as by its nature it is on a possible being, having a cause for its existence. The thought of this Intelligence, which is said to possess a dual nature, objectifies itself in another Intelligence and a sphere. So the process goes on until at a certain stage crass matter appears which is the basis of the sublunar world." (Wolfson, H. A., The Philosophy of Spinoza, I, p. 96 f.) These Intelligences preside over the spheres. The lowest rank, **אֲשֵׁרָא**, which commune with the prophets is identical to the Tenth Intelligence or Active Intellect of Aristotle. In Yesode Ha-torah, IV, 6, the **אֲשֵׁרָא** perform precisely the function of the Active Intellect which is to give form to the matter below the spheres (cf. Wolfson, H. A., The Philosophy of Spinoza, I, p. 219). Also, in M. N. Maimonides says that prophecy arises through an emanation from the Active Intellect (M. N., II, 36, p. 173). Evidently, as we see, Maimonides' list of names of angels' ranks is only a Judaizing of Aristotle's Intelligences. Wolfson supports this conclusion: "Among Jewish and Arabic philosophers, the Aristotelian and Plotinian Intelligences....were identified with the angels of the Bible and functioned as the cause of the motion of the celestial spheres. (op. cit., I, p. 381).

We may note that Hayoth, Ophanim, Hashmalim, and Seraphim - all figures from the mystical vision of Ezekiel (Ez. 1) called the Maaseh Merkabah (the Divine Chariot) -- are concerned in Maimonides' synthesis of Jewish angelology and Greek philosophy. In M. N. he states that one of his principal objects is to expound the Divine Chariot (Ez. 1) (See M. N., II, 2, p. 27), and he devotes several chapters to this end (M. N., III, 1 - 7). However, in this exposition the Hayoth and Ophanim are interpreted in a much different fashion from their interpretation as Intelligences of the

spheres which is implied here in paragraph 7. In M. N. the Hayoth represent four spheres and the element of their existence (cf. M. N., III, 2, p. 5 f.). The four Ophanim represent the four elements out of which all sub-lunar matter is composed, fire, air, water, and earth. (ibid., p. 12).

7 b. **סדן** - God's Throne of Glory (Ez. 1:26 f.). In M. N., I, 9, p. 53 f. Maimonides attempts to give a rational interpretation of the Throne of Glory: "... the word **סדן** denotes God's Greatness and Omnipotence, which are identical with His essence." Thus, to say that the Hayoth are closest to the Throne implies that angels of this rank are closest in terms of causality and in knowledge of God to God. However, the concept of the Throne of Glory has played a major role in Jewish mysticism. The Jewish mystic of ancient times had as the essence of their experience "the ascent of soul to the Celestial Throne where it obtains an ecstatic view of the majesty of God and the secrets of His Realm." (Sholem, G. G., Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 5., cf. also p. 42 f.).

8. Maimonides maintains here that the pure forms, angels or Intelligences, as you will, are living and recognize God and know more about Him than does man, who consists of matter and form. However, even the topmost rank, which knows most about God, has insufficient capacity to apprehend God as He really is.

Maimonides is suggesting here as he declares openly in M. N. that "The corporeal element in man is a large screen and partition that prevents him from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals..... However great the exertion of our mind may be to comprehend the Divine Being or any of the ideals, we find a screen and partition between Him and ourselves." (M. N., III, 9, p. 31).

B. This paragraph reasserts the dependence of everything upon God. (See ch. I, 1 above). Consult M. N., II, 12 and M. N., I, 69 for a discussion on how the Divine influence or emanation is imparted to the universe, so that God is the eventual Author of all, the **חַי הַעוֹלָמִים**, "the life of the Universe."

Not only does all depend upon God, but God possesses self-knowledge, and because He knows Himself He knows all things.

"He (God) fully knows His unchangeable essence, and has thus a knowledge of all that results from any of His acts." (M. N., III, 21, p. 92). Maimonides attempts to make God's omniscience clearer by an analogy. He points out that the producer of a thing knows it in a different manner from those who examine the thing. The machine operates in accordance with the knowledge of the man who made it, the machine submits to the knowledge of the man. But the knowledge of observers of the machine is obtained from watching the movements of the machine itself, each moment of watching adds something to their knowledge of its workings. If an infinite number of movements were assured of this machine, the observers would never be able to complete their knowledge. Besides, they cannot know any of the movements before they actually take place, since they know them only for their actual occurrence. The same is the case with every object, and its relation to our knowledge and God's knowledge of it. His knowledge of things is not derived from the things themselves, but through His knowledge of His own thoughts which produced everything. (See M. N., III, 21). Maimonides points out that there is actually no comparison possible between God's knowledge and ours. If we were to try to understand in what manner God understands "it would be the same as if we tried to be the same as God....Such intellect does not exist except in God, and is at the same time His essence." (Ibid. p. 92 f.)

10. This paragraph is precautionary. It wishes to make clear to the reader that God is one, despite the fact that in the preceding two paragraphs (8 and 9) he was speaking as if He, His existence, and His knowledge were separate elements, as, for example, says Maimonides here, we and our knowledge are separate.

In order to understand what Maimonides means when he says we and our knowledge are separate, we must understand his peculiar theory of knowledge. For his theory of knowledge we may turn to M. N., I, 68. The ideas of this chapter may be summarized as follows:

Before comprehension there are three things:

- (a) the man who possesses the power and is capable of comprehending (the mind is passive, a tabula rasa)
- (b) the power of comprehension itself
- (c) the object which is capable of being comprehended

They become one and the same when the intellect is in action.

Then the potential (his capacity of thinking) is replaced by the actual and the form of the object which has been comprehended is the actual intellect, since that which comprehends is identical with the form comprehended, e.g., when man comprehends the form of a certain tree, when he abstracts its form from its matter and reproduces the abstract form, he comprehends actively and his intellect is the abstract form of the tree in his mind. In such a case the intellect is not distinct from what is comprehended. The very essence of the actual intellect is its comprehension.

- (a) The intellect by which the tree has been converted into an abstract idea or the act of thinking,
- (b) that which actually comprehends the abstract form, and
- (c) that which is comprehended are the same whenever real comprehension takes place.

Now, since God is an intellect which is always in action, and as there is in Him at no time a mere potentiality, that He does not comprehend at one time, and is without comprehension at another time, but He comprehends constantly; consequently, He and the thing comprehended are one and the same thing, that is to say, His essence; and the act of comprehending is the intellect itself, which is likewise His essence, God therefore is always the thinker, the thought, and that which is comprehended.

Thus we can see the difference between thought in God and thought in man. In man thought from time to time passes over from mere potentiality to reality, and sometimes there are obstacles in the way of the active intellect. But God alone, and none beside Him, is an intellect constantly in action, and there is, neither in Himself nor in anything beside Him any obstacle whereby His comprehension would be hindered.

Maimonides employs the Scriptural phrase "As God liveth" to bolster his concept of God's Unity. The Bible does not say "By the life of God" as it says "By the life of Pharoah" because this would suggest a distinction between God's essence and His life (cf. above, I, 7 f.).

For a discussion of the concluding thought of this paragraph, that God, knowing Himself, knows everything, see above, II, 9.

11. The Maaseh Merkabah is defined here as the subject matter of these first two chapters. Thus, Maimonides is transmuting an ancient Jewish mystical term, Maaseh Merkabah (See Hagigah 11 b, 14 b, Sabbath 80 b, Megillah 25 b, Tosefta Megillah ch. IV), derived from the vision of Ezekiel (Ez. 1) into Greek metaphysics. For these opening chapters are concerned with God and the angels (i.e., the Intelligences), metaphysics dealing with incorporeal beings (cf. Wolfson, E. A., The Philosophy of Spinoza, II, p. 3).

For many centuries the term Maaseh Merkabah was used for certain mystical doctrines. Maimonides' usage of this term is obviously divergent from the traditional meaning. This can be explained in at least two ways. Either Maimonides was not acquainted with the mystical traditions current under this term; or he deliberately refused to accept these traditions as authentic.

Maimonides himself states: "I have not received my belief in this respect (i.e., explanations of mystic passages in Scripture) from any teacher, but it has been formed by what I learnt from Scripture and the utterances of our Sages, and by the philosophical principles which I have adopted." (M. N., III, Introduction, p. 2). Again, he explains that Israel has lost its knowledge of "the secrets of the Law" because these mysteries were entrusted to very few men, and he concludes: "The natural effect of this practice was that our nation lost the knowledge of these important disciplines. Nothing but a few remarks and allusions are to be found in the Talmud and the Midrashim...." (M. N., I, 71, p. 274). From this it might perhaps be inferred that Maimonides had no teacher of the mystic tradition outside of the few written references in Jewish literature and the Scriptures. And so, starting almost from "scratch" he built up his own interpretation of the Maaseh Merkabah and the Maaseh Bereshith (the cosmogony which with the Maaseh Merkabah was a chief topic of mystic speculation). This interpretation rationalizes the Maaseh Merkabah to be metaphysics, and, as we shall see below in the two succeeding chapters, the Maaseh Bereshith to be physics, in the Greek philosophical manner. For a discussion as to the real meaning of these terms in Jewish mysticism please see Sholem, G.G., Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, pp. 20, 41, 54, 72, 74, 140. Also see 3 Enoch (Ed. by Udersen, Hago), Cambridge, 1938, Index under Merkabah.

As may be discovered by referring to Yesode Ha-torah, IV, 10, the first four chapters of Yesode Ha-torah are devoted to a brief exposition of metaphysics, i.e., Maaseh Merkabah, and physics, i.e., Maaseh Bereishith. We may note that these two subjects are identical with the two principal objects of exposition in M. N. Maimonides states: "From the Introduction to this treatise you may learn that its principal object is to expound, as far as can be done, the account of the Creation (Gen., I, III) and of the Divine Chariot (Ez. I)....." (M. N., II, 2, p. 27). He goes on to say: "and to answer questions raised in respect to Prophecy and to the knowledge of God." (ibid). Since the topic of prophecy is discussed in chapters VII - X of Yesode Ha-torah, it is true that Yesode Ha-torah is concerned in four-fifths of its chapters with those very matters which are the prime concerns of M. N.

12. Maimonides cites Talmudic authority for the limiting of the teaching of Maaseh Merkabah to the individual instruction of students capable of independent reasoning. This limitation explains, perhaps, why Maimonides has stated in the preceding paragraph that what he has explained of Maaseh Merkabah is, but a drop from the sea compared with what has to be elucidated on this subject.

As we have stated above, these chapters on Maaseh Merkabah are much more completely elucidated in M. N. A question might be raised over Maimonides' apparent violation of the Talmudic dictum that Maaseh Merkabah should not be taught publicly (Hagigah 11 b). He justifies this violation by citing two Mishnaic maxims: "It is time to do something in honor of the Lord" (Perechath IX, 5) and "Let all thy acts be guided by pure intentions" (Aboth II, 17) (See M. N., I, Introduction, p. 22).

Maimonides further guarded himself against criticism for having expounded Maaseh Merkabah illegally by stating that his exposition of this subject and of Maaseh Bereshith is not intended to be explicit. For example, he states in regard to Maaseh Merkabah: "The subject will be explained, though by mere hints, as far as necessary for directing your attention to the true interpretation." (M. N., I, 49, p. 170). Again he says: "In treating of these mysteries, as a rule, I quote as much as contains the principal idea, and leave the rest for those who are worthy of it." (M. N., II, 29, p. 142). His treatment of Maaseh Bereshith concludes with: "This, together with those explanations which we have given, and which we intend to give, in reference to this subject, must suffice, considering the object of this treatise and the capacity of the reader." (M. N., II, 30, p. 159). This last quotation is misprinted with "may suffice" rather than "must suffice" in the text. Similarly, he concludes after his exposition of Ezekiel 1, the Maaseh Merkabah, "Do not expect or hope to hear from me after this chapter a word on this subject, either explicitly or implicitly, for all that could be said on it has been said, though with great difficulty and struggle." (M. N., III, 7, p. 23).

12 v. קְרָשִׁים - This word, of course, means "lambs", but by punning upon it קְרָשִׁים or "secrets" is derived. The Scriptural text is not clear.

CHAPTER III

Before beginning this chapter we should like to say that from this point on the discussion will be much briefer, by and large, than hitherto. The radical change in the nature of the material under consideration prompts us to shorter analysis. Much of what follows needs scant comment, and much of it is of less importance than what has gone before from the point of view of a modern student.

1. This paragraph begins Maimonides' outline of the Maaseh Bereshith, the Work of Creation. But rather than being an exposition of the drama of creation as found in Genesis 1, it is a cosmology, a description of the order of the Universe as it exists.

The Talmudic reference which gives the names of the seven raqim (firmaments or heavens, which Maimonides interprets as meaning spheres, cf., M. N. I, 70, p. 266) is given incompletely in our text. The reference from the Babyl. Talm. Hagigah 12 b. is by Resh hakish, who gives seven names for the seven heavens

וילון, רקיע, שחקים,
זבול, מעון, מכון, ערבות.

One might ask why Maimonides gives seven heavens or spheres on the basis of Jewish teaching and then states that there are nine spheres. He explains this difficulty away in M. N. by stating: "Do not object to the number seven given by them (the rabbis), although there are more raqim, for there are spheres which contain several circles (gilgallim), and are counted as one." (M. N., I, 70, p. 266, cf. also, M. N., II, 24).

Let us summarize briefly the picture of the universe presented by Maimonides. The universe is divided into nine spheres (gilgallim),

into nine concentric or eccentric revolving spherical shells in which stars, sun, planets and moon are supposed to be set, and by which they are carried, in such manner as to produce their apparent motions. In the midst of the nine spheres (seven carrying the planets including the sun and the moon, one containing the fixed stars and one surrounding all other spheres) is located the sublunar world. Each of the spheres, according to Maimonides, is endowed with a soul, a transcendent (and from the sphere itself "separate") cosmic Intelligence (also called "angel" and "pure form" by Maimonides) by which it was caused and by which it is moved. Each of these Intelligences has been caused by the next higher Intelligence, the highest one by the First Cause or God. The tenth and lowermost Intelligence (the rank of angel called "Ishim") is the guide of the sublunar world, the world of change and decay, and it is called the Active Intellect.

The Active Intellect bestows forms upon the sublunar matter and conceptions upon the potential intellect. In receiving the knowledge always radiating from the Active Intellect, the potential intellect of man becomes actual (this summary is from classroom notes of A. Hirschel, Hebrew Union College, 1941-'42, and from M. N., I, 72). For a further discussion of the part the Active Intellect plays in human thinking please see our discussion of IV, 6.

2. No commentary is necessary.

3. The spheres are composed of matter, but this matter differs from sublunar matter (cf. above, II, 3). Maimonides wishes to distinguish the spheres from the matter with which we are familiar.

4. We might add in comment to this paragraph that Maimonides was perfectly familiar with the fact that the earth, too, is a globe. "It has, however, already been proved that the earth has the form of a globe, that it is inhabited on both extremities of a certain diameter, that both the inhabitants have their heads towards the heaven, and their legs toward each other, and yet neither of them falls...." (M. N., I, 73, p. 336).

5. The term **מִשְׁלָשָׁה**, is used loosely by Maimonides to refer to the nine spheres or to their lesser divisions (cf. above, III, 2).

6. This paragraph is concerned with the Zodiac. ~~of course.~~

7. Since the outermost sphere is considered by Maimonides to be closest in the rank of causality and of comprehension to God (see below III, 9), it was looked upon as being more pure than the other spheres. Thus no stars were thought to be set in it, and it was not divided into lesser spheres as were the other eight spheres (cf. III, 2).

8. We leave to astronomers the task of commenting upon Maimonides' concept of the celestial bodies.

9. This paragraph is startling to us who consider the matter of the stars and of outer space to be soulless and dead. But when we refer

to M. N. to learn what Maimonides means when he states that the stars and spheres have souls, we discover that means something far different from what is first apparent.

He states: "The enunciation that the heavenly sphere is endowed with a soul will appear reasonable to all who sufficiently reflect upon it; but at first thought they may find it unintelligible or even objectionable; because they wrongly assume that when we ascribe a soul to the heavenly spheres we mean something like the soul of a man, or that of an ass or ox. We merely intend to say that the locomotion of the sphere undoubtedly leads us to assume some inherent principle by which it moves; and this principle is certainly a soul.... The heavenly sphere does not move for the purpose of withdrawing from what is bad or approaching what is good. For in the first instance it moves toward the same point from which it has moved away, and vice versa it moves away from the same point towards which it has moved. Secondly, if this were the object of the motion, we should expect that the sphere would move towards a certain point, and would then rest.... The circular motion of the sphere is consequently due to the action of some idea which produces this particular kind of motion; but as ideas are only possible to intellectual beings, the heavenly sphere is an intellectual being. But even a being that is endowed with the faculty of forming an idea, and possesses a soul with the faculty of moving, does not change its place on each occasion that it forms an idea; for an idea alone does not produce motion.... We can easily understand this, when we consider how often we form ideas of certain things, yet do not move towards them, though we are able to do so; it is only when a desire arises for the thing imagined, that we move in order to obtain it.... It follows that the heavenly sphere must have a

desire for the ideal which it has comprehended, and that ideal, for which it has a desire, is God, exalted be His name! When we say that God moves the spheres, we mean it in the following sense: the spheres have a desire to become similar to the ideal comprehended by them. This ideal, however, is simple in the strictest sense of the world, and not subject to any change or alteration, but constant in producing everything good, whilst the spheres are corporeal; the latter can therefore not be like this ideal in any other way, except in the production of circular motion; for this is the only action of corporeal beings that can be perpetual; it is the most simple motion of a body; there is no change in the essence of the sphere, nor in the beneficial results of its motion (M. N., II, 4, p. 28 f.).

All the above discussion has concerned the spheres, but what further elucidation does Maimonides make concerning the souls of the stars? This question is most difficult to answer. M. Friedlander has a footnote to an ambiguous phrase, "the spherical bodies," in which he interprets this phrase to include the stars as well as the spheres. (M. N., I, 72, p. 293, footnote 6). If his interpretation is correct, then what we have quoted concerning the spheres may be taken to include the stars which are fixed in the spheres.

In our definition of Intelligences quoted from H. A. Wolfson (see above, II, 7), we showed how the pure thought of God yielded an Intelligence which in turn yielded a lower Intelligence and a sphere. This process was repeated until there were ten Intelligences and nine spheres and the sublunar world - that is the entire Universe. The spheres take their rank just as did the angels. (See above, II, 5 f.). Since the spheres and stars are dependent upon the Intelligences and are composed of matter, albeit unchanging in form (See above, II, 3), their knowledge

of God is less than that of the angels, but superior to man's.

Maimonides holds that Scripture, as well as philosophy, supports the theory that the spheres are animate and capable of comprehending things, and that they are endowed with life and glorify God. In support of this contention he quotes Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God..." Here he insists that "It is a great error to think this is a mere figure of speech; for the verbs "to declare" and "to relate," when joined together, are, in Hebrew, only used of intellectual beings." (M. N., II, 5, p. 34 f.)

10. Below the sphere of the moon is the world of change and decay. Maimonides holds that there is one basic matter from which everything is made. But this matter is given four different forms, the form of fire, of air, of water, or of earth. And he looked upon these basic forms of sublunar matter as if they formed four spheres, as it were, of their own. The outermost is fire, next comes air, next water which covers earth, and last of all earth.

11. The four elements, fire, air, water and earth, differ radically from the spherical bodies. They have no knowledge or will of their own. These are like dead bodies. The movement they do make is through their "property of moving back to their place in a straight line, but they have no properties which would cause them to remain where they are, or to move otherwise than in a straight line." (M. N., I, 72, p. 293). This means that fire rises to the highest position, air to the next highest, etc.

Maimonides quotes Psalm 146:7-8 in connection with this paragraph because it creates a problem for him which he must interpret

away. The first part of Psalm 148 deals with the angels, the hosts, sun, moon, stars, and heavens praising God. This, as we have seen above in III, 9, is fully in accord with Maimonides' conceptions of the consciousness of the angels, stars, spheres, and of their knowledge of God. But the call of the psalmist to the depths, fire, hail, snow, and vapors to praise God is in conflict with Maimonides' belief that the elements are dead and incapable of direct praise of God. Therefore, he is obligated to explain away this apparent paradox of the psalmist by interpreting the verse to mean that these dead elements should inspire man to praise God.

CHAPTER IV

1. All things of the sublunar world are composed of matter and form. And the matter of which they are composed, apart from the four elements, is made up of combinations of the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth. The four elements themselves are composed of the pure basic substance of the sublunar world, plus the pure form either of fire, of air, of water, or of earth.

2. See III, 10, 11, for the involuntary movement of the four elements. Some additional qualities of the four elements are given here, e.g., fire is hot and dry, air hot and moist, etc.

According to the natural science of Maimonides, man, beast, bird, fish, plant, and mineral are made up of varying quantities of the four elements in combination. When combined, the resulting body is transformed into something different from fire alone, or air alone, or water alone, or earth alone. It possesses all the qualities of these elements at the same time, though one element may be predominant, e.g., earth is predominant element of a stone. The elements assert their qualities in an object in proportion to their quantity in combination in that object.

3. **רקיע** - This word ordinarily means firmament, or heavenly sphere. "The center of the firmament is the lowest point beyond which there is no lower" evidently signifies the center of the earth. Why Maimonides chose to express himself with the difficult term is not clear to us.

4. All matter in the sublunar world changes and decays and returns eventually to the four elements.

4. The Scriptural passage "And unto dust shall thou (Adam) return" (Gen. 3:19) conflicts with what Maimonides has said in the previous paragraph. According to his conceptions the passage should read: "And unto fire, air, water, and earth thou shalt return." Therefore, he has to explain that the human structure consists, in greater part, of dust and that this passage expresses this notion. Perhaps **עפר**, dust, is interpreted to mean the element of earth. However, from the context "dust" appears to mean an intermediate stage of decomposition, for he states that matter does not immediately revert to its original four elements.

5. The four elements themselves are in constant transformation into each other in a perpetual cycle.

6. The changes in the sublunar world, the combinations of the four elements into human beings, animals, vegetables, rock, and metals, are due to the movement of the sphere. Except for the natural property of the four elements to ascend or descend to their proper position (See above, IV, 3), all their activity in regard to combination, decay, etc., stems from the activity of the perpetually rotating spheres, which impart motion to the sublunar world.

The proper form is given to each of the substances of the sublunar world through the agency of the angel of the tenth degree called Ishim. We have seen above in our discussion of II, 7 that this angel is identical with the Active Intellect of philosophy, which is also known as the tenth Intelligence.

In M. N. Maimonides summarizes the function of the tenth Intelligence as follows: "...nine Intelligences correspond to the nine

spheres; the tenth Intelligence is the Active Intellect. The existence of the latter is proved by the transition of our intellect from a state of potentiality to that of actuality, and by the same transition in the case of the forms of all transient beings. For whatever passes from potentiality into actuality, requires for that transition an external agent of the same kind as itself. Thus the builder does not build the storehouse in the capacity of workman, but in that of a person that has the plan of the storehouse in his mind; and that form of the building which exists in the mind of the builder caused the transition of that form into actuality, and its combination with the material of the building. As that which gives form to matter must itself be pure form, so the source of intellect must itself be pure intellect, and this source is the Active Intellect. The relation of the latter to the elements and their compounds is the same as that of the Intelligences to their respective spheres; and our intellect in action, which originates in the Active Intellect, and enables us to comprehend that intellect finds a parallel in the intellect of each of the spheres which originates in the Intelligence corresponding to that sphere, and enables the sphere to comprehend that Intelligence, to form an idea of it, and to move in seeking to become similar to it." (M. N., II, 4, p. 32 f.).

In a footnote to the above passage M. Friedlander defines the relation between the function of the Active Intellect and that of the spheres thus: "The spheres give man the capacity of receiving intellect, to other beings that of receiving form; the Active Intellect transforms the potentiality into actuality." (M. N., II, 4, p. 32, footnote 2).

Since Maimonides holds, as we shall see later on (See IV, 6) that the specific form of man is his acquired knowledge, the function of

the Active Intellect, the tenth Intelligence, which is the agent which makes this acquired knowledge possible, is of crucial importance. Man does not produce ideas of himself. There is a permanent flow of spirit emanating from the Active Intellect, and it is only up to man whether the spiritual influence will enter his intellect or not. All human comprehension is not spontaneous from within, but receptive from without. When man thinks, he is communing with God, since the Active Intellect stands in direct line to the emanation from the thinking activity of God. This conception of the thinking process is of vital importance both to Maimonides' concept of the soul and to his interpretation of prophecy, as we shall see in Chapter VII. And by means of it the "God of the Bible," who is close to man, is not entirely forsaken by Maimonides' utterly transcendent philosophical God-concept. For as remote from man as Maimonides' God is, yet through the angel known as "Ishim" (or as the "Active Intellect" or as the "tenth Intelligence"), man has a direct connection with the Master of the Universe.

7. This paragraph is without difficulties. We should like to point out that Maimonides here answers the philosophical problem: Do we know God through reason? He answers in the affirmative. We know God not through physical sight, but through the mind's eye just as we recognize that there is a difference between matter and form, though we cannot with our physical sight ever see matter devoid of form or form devoid of matter.

8. The form common to all creatures is the soul (or better, vital principle). However, though man possesses this soul, yet this is not the specific form of the man who has a perfect intellect. Man's

specific form is the extra acquired knowledge which comes from outside of man (i.e., from God through the Active Intellect, See below IV, 9), and lives within his "animal soul."

Thus man has two souls, an animal "nephesh" or "ruach" and a specifically human "nephesh" or "ruach." And at the end of paragraph 8, Maimonides cautions us to read the context of the Bible carefully whenever these words occur in order to be able to distinguish which soul the Bible is referring to.

The form of man's animal soul, then, is his intellect, i.e., man's acquired knowledge of pure forms as, for example, his knowledge of God or of the angels. In Hilchoth Teshubah VIII, 3 Maimonides clearly explains: "The soul, whenever mentioned in this connection (immortal life), is not the vital principle requisite for bodily existence, but that form of soul which is identical with the intellect which apprehends the Creator, as far as it is able, and apprehends the Intelligences (angels, pure forms)."

The Scriptural passage cited and interpreted in this paragraph by Maimonides: "Let us make man in our form, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26), is one of the most perplexing to anyone attempting to avoid anthropomorphism. Indeed, this verse is the very first to be discussed in M. N. (M. N., I, 1, p. 28 f.). In M. N. he states: "I hold that the Hebrew equivalent of "form" in the ordinary acceptation of the word, viz., the figure and shape of a thing is **תצו** This term is not at all applicable to God. The term **מסג**, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, viz., that which constitutes the essence of a thing insofar as it is that particular being. In man the "form" is that constituent which gives him human perception: and on account of this intellectual perception the term **מסג** is employed in the phrase "In the form of God he created him" (Gen. 1:27)." (Ibid.)

Thus, there is no anthropomorphism actually in this Scriptural passage. Man is like God or the angels only in that man's intellect (his form) can know the pure forms, which his animal soul, his senses, can never see, hear, feel, smell, or taste.

We might add that in M. N. Maimonides reveals his embarrassment lest he too closely compare man with God even in the matter of the acquired intellect: "As man's distinction consists in a property which no other creature on earth possesses, viz., intellectual perception, in the exercise of which he does not employ his senses, nor move his hand or his foot, it has been compared - though only apparently, not in truth - to the Divine excellency, which requires no instrument whatever" (M. N., I, 1, p. 32. Underlining is ours).

Maimonides subtly reveals a similar embarrassment here in Yesode Ha-torah in his interpretation of Gen. 1:26. Now he evidently accepted the interpretation of some of the sages that God took counsel with the angels when He created man (cf., Genesis Rabbah VIII). For this is what he assumes when he states in this paragraph: ".....so that man might possess a form which knows and comprehends the Intelligences which are devoid of matter, so that man (intellectually) should become like them (i.e., the Intelligences or pure forms or angels). Maimonides to all effects tries to eliminate the fact that God is the speaker in Gen. 1:26. In his interpretation of this verse man is hardly compared to man at all, but with the Intelligences (i.e. angels) below God with whom God consulted when He said: "Let us make man in our form...."

Behind all of Maimonides' differentiation between the soul of man and the soul of all creatures is this idea: all creatures have a soul which perceives corporeal bodies, but for man to know incorporeal

beings, spiritual beings, there must be a corresponding soul in him, and this soul must be incorporeal, spiritual, in order to enable him to understand the incorporeal or spiritual.

ב. ^{השכל} ^{הנצחי} ^{האמיתי} - This word means "perfect," as generally opposed to the ignorant and uneducated. Only the human being who has an "acquired knowledge" possesses the specific form of the human soul. The ignorant and uneducated are thus placed with the other animals and are not destined for immortality, apparently. Let us look at Maimonides' aristocratic point of view: "The multitude must be considered according to their true worth; some of them are undoubtedly like domestic cattle, and others like wild beasts, and these only engage the mind of the perfect and distinguished man insofar as he desires to guard himself from injury, in case of contact with them, and to derive some benefit from them when necessary" (M. M., II, 36, p. 176). J. Abelson in introduction to his translation of *Fereh Halek* states: "According to him (Maimonides), it is only the intellectual element of the soul that can secure immortality. It follows from this that the simple-minded man, be he ever so virtuous, is excluded from future existence, which can only be the lot of thinkers whose acquired intelligence, according to Aristotelians, becomes part of the "active divine intelligence" and thus attains perfection and permanence. (J. Abelson, *Maimonides on the Jewish Creed*, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Old Series, Vol. XIX, 1907, p. 27).

השכל הנצחי - A hithpael form with a dagesh replacing the assimilated נ.

Maimonides here suggests his concept of the immortality of the soul of man. That part of man which lives forever in the form of man's

soul, the knowledge he has acquired of God and the Intelligences. Since this knowledge is acquired through the activity of the Active Intellect (See above, IV, 6), and is not obligated to the animal soul or to the body for its existence, it does not perish with the body. It lives forever in the realm of pure form where it attains "to a knowledge and realization of the truth concerning God to which it had not attained while in the murky and lowly body" (Hilchoth Teshubah, VIII, 2).

Apparently, if we press Maimonides' concept closely, only men of intellectual attainments are destined to enjoy immortality, for only they will have acquired the knowledge of pure forms which can live on after the body has perished and disintegrated into its original elements. (Cf. above IV, 8 b, our note to **אשר**).

10. Cf. above II, 11.

11. Cf. above, II, 12.

12. After having devoted four chapters to Masseh Merkabah and Masseh Bereshith, Maimonides reiterates that the contemplation of these subjects will induce:

1. A yearning and increased love for God.
2. Awe and fear, and a feeling of God's transcendence will fill the individual.

Man, by studying metaphysics and physics will be enabled to fulfill the mitzvah to love and to fear God. (Cf. above, II, 2).

18. Maimonides concludes his discussion of metaphysics and physics (Maaseh Merkabah and Maaseh Bereshith together make up Pardes or esoteric philosophy, cf., M. Jastrow, Talmud Dictionary, under **פַּרְדֵּס**) with a warning to those who might abandon the study of halakah for these philosophical studies.

There can be no doubt that Maimonides evaluates philosophy above traditional learning. In M. N. III, 51, he grades five types of people according to their religious concepts:

1. Those who have no religion. These are sub-human.
2. Those who possess false doctrines. These are worse than the first group.
3. Those who observe the divine commandments, but are ignorant.
4. Those who are students of the practical law exclusively. These believe in the true principles of faith by tradition and learn the practical worship of God, but are untrained in the philosophical principles of the Law and do not endeavor to establish the truth of their faith by proof.
5. Those who have succeeded in finding a proof for everything that can be proved, who have a true knowledge of God, so far as true knowledge can be attained, and are near the truth, wherever an approach to the truth is possible, they have reached the goal. These are the masters of physics and metaphysics.

Because Maimonides ranked the study of philosophy above the study of Torah in the traditional manner many Jewish scholars went so

far as to condemn M. N., III, 51, which we have quoted above, as spurious. (Cf. A. Friedlander's footnote 2, M. N., III, 51, p. 281).

In this present paragraph of Yesode Ha-torah Maimonides quotes Talmudic authority which agrees with him that Messah Merkabah (which he interprets to mean metaphysics) is "a great thing" and the discussion of Abaye and Raba (the subject matter of traditional learning) is "a small thing" (Succah 28 a).

However, despite this higher opinion of speculative knowledge, a man should, according to Maimonides, give precedence to traditional learning because:

1. It gives composure to the mind.
2. It stabilized society so that man may obtain immortality.
(For if there is constant turbulence a man cannot devote his intellect to those subjects which will give him eternal life. Cf. Maimonides on the Jewish Creed, translated by J. Abelson, Jewish Quarterly Review, Old Series, vol. XIX, 1907, pp. 43-45).
3. It is within the power of all types of people to achieve a knowledge of it.

17 b. **פרדס** - Hagigah 14 b is devoted to the subject of contemporary mysticism. It relates the story: "Four entered Paradise (**פרדס**): Ben Anai, Ben Zoma, Aher and Rabbi Akiba." G. Scholem agrees with Emanuel Joel that **פרדס** "could well be a Talmudical metaphor for Gnosis" (See Scholem, G., Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 357, Note 45 to notes to Lecture II). Scholem complains that the rationalistic interpretations of **פרדס** are extremely far-fetched in their determination to

identify **פירדס** (as does Maimonides in our paragraph) with cosmological speculations about the materia prima (cf. opus cit., p. 51). And so Maimonides is not the only "culprit" who rationalizes **פירדס** to be physics and metaphysics as he does in our paragraph, though he might have been the first to have done so.

CHAPTER V

This chapter is devoted to a halakic discussion of the "Sanctification of God's Name" and of its profanation. It is law rather than philosophy, and therefore lies outside of the scope of this paper. However, we may raise one question which is very much in order: "Why was this chapter included among the fundamental principles of the Torah?" To this question a double answer may be given. In the first place the sanctification of the Name and the command not to profane the Name are mitzvot of a basic nature, since they involve all the mitzvot. As, for example, we may see in V, 3, which states that in time of religious persecution it is the Israelite's duty to suffer death rather than to violate any one of the mitzvot.

Secondly, there is an historic reason for including this chapter among the fundamental principles of the Torah. Maimonides lived in turbulent times. He himself had to flee his native Cordova because of religious fanaticism. The Crusades were under way with their Jewish massacres. Islam went into anti-Jewish persecutions spasmodically. When the Jewish community of South Arabia wrote to him of its difficulties, he wrote: "The news that the government, under which you live, ordered all Jews in South Arabia to apostasize, in the same manner as the ruling powers in Western countries, have acted towards us, blanched our faces with terror.... Our minds are bewildered; we feel unable to think calmly, so terrible is the alternative in which Israel has been placed on all sides, from the East and from the West." (A letter by Maimonides to the Jews of South Arabia entitled "The Inspired Hope," translated by Sabato Morais, Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. 25, April, 1935, p. 332). Thus, we see that to Maimonides and to his times martyrdom was a living issue of gravest import, and this fact probably contributed to the inclusion of this chapter among the fundamental principles of the Torah.

CHAPTER VI

Like the preceding chapter, this one is halakic, with only a most general philosophical importance.

A discussion of the proper care of inscriptions of the divine names would hardly be included among fundamental principles of the Torah by a modern. But in ancient and mediaeval times names, and particularly divine names, were believed to bear within themselves tremendous significance. Maimonides attacks vigorously those who attempted, as was common, to employ divine names for magical purposes. "You must beware," he says, "of shering the error of those who write amulets (kameoth). Whatever you hear of them, or read in their works, especially in reference to the names which they form by combination, is utterly senseless; they call these combinations shemoth (names), and believe that their pronunciation demands sanctification and purification, and that by using them they are enabled to work miracles. Rational persons ought not to listen to such men, nor in any way believe their assertions" (M. M., I, 61, p. 230).

To understand why this chapter is included among the fundamental principles of the Torah, however, we must consider several factors:

1. Though the simple respect we today show for revered symbols such as our flag, which has, itself a manual of display, plays a part, no doubt, yet this is of slight importance.
2. A more basic reason is probably that this chapter is concerned with an aspect of a certain type of relationship of man to God which Maimonides considers fundamental. This relationship is man's obligation to God as God, and it is found elsewhere, for example, in the

commands to know that God exists, to acknowledge His unity, to love Him, to revere Him, etc. God's Name and His holy objects (See VI, 7) symbolize Him so closely that the man who deals with them has an obligation of peculiar cogency.

3. Perhaps more important than the above reasons is the fact that God's Name is one of the very few things that man knows absolutely about God. This name is the Tetragrammaton, the proper name of God made up of the letters yod, he, vay, and he. (Cf. Exodus 3:13-16 for the revelation of the Name to Moses, and also Exodus 6:2,3). Of this name Maimonides says "....the majesty of the name and the great dread of uttering it, are connected with the fact that it denotes God Himself, without including in its meaning any names of the things created by Him." (M. N., I, 61, p. 228). Maimonides holds the opinion that the Tetragrammaton is not only the proper name of God, but that its meaning includes metaphysical knowledge. (Cf., M. N., I, 62, p. 231, and also M. Friedlander's footnote 1 to M. N., I, 63, p. 236). The question might be raised: Why does Maimonides include six other divine names other than the Tetragrammaton and its substitute Adonai among divine names that must be treated with extreme care? It is our opinion that he was constrained to do this because the Talmud laid down a clear ruling. In M. N., I, 61, p. 227 f., he groups Elohim, ^{and} Shaddai, ~~and Elohim~~ with the appellatives

and epithets of God such as Gracious, Merciful, and Righteous which can be erased (See VI, 5). We believe that Maimonides was compromising with tradition when he ruled in VI, 2, that Elohim, Shaddai, Zebaoth, etc. were to be included with the Tetragrammaton.

CHAPTER VII

1. This important paragraph describes the requirements for prophecy, the way of prophecy, and the experience of prophecy.

The requirements for prophecy are three-fold:

1. Mental - e.g., "a wise man distinguished by great wisdom," "possessor of a broad and firm knowledge."
2. Moral - e.g., "strong moral character," "his rational faculty always has his passions under control."
3. Physical - e.g., "physically sound."

If a man abundantly satisfies the above requirements, he then may enter upon the way of prophecy:

1. He must study Pades (physics and metaphysics, See above IV, 13), concentrating continually upon its lofty themes with a mind capable of grasping them, so as to comprehend the pure and holy forms (Intelligences, angels) and to contemplate the wisdom of God as displayed through all the universe from the first form (the Intelligence of the outermost sphere) to the center of the earth.
2. And not only must he concentrate on the lofty themes of metaphysics and physics, but he must zealously train himself to avoid giving even a single thought to the vanities and devices of the age with which the multitude concerns itself. His intellect must always be free and disengaged from common thoughts, directed upwards and bound beneath the Celestial Throne.

The experience of prophecy will come to him satisfies the mental, moral and physical conditions of prophecy and who follows the way of prophecy. This experience is described as follows:

1. The Holy Spirit descends upon him.
2. His soul will be knit with the degree of angels known as Ishim (i.e., the Active Intellect or Tenth Intelligence, cf. above, IV, 6, and also 8 and 9).
3. He will be conscious of the fact that he is not as he was, and that he has achieved a state (of knowledge) above that which can be attained by ordinary wise men.

Now that we have given a brief outline of the crowded contents of paragraph one, let us examine each section in the light of the fuller discussion of prophecy as found in M. N., II, Chapters 32-48. In M. N., II, 36, pp. 175 - 177 there is a passage which is very close to our Yesode Ha-torah passage, VII, 1, except that it is more philosophical than VII, 1 and more explicit: "....a person must satisfy the following conditions before he can become a prophet: The substance of the brain must from the very beginning be in the most perfect condition as regards purity of matter, composition of its different parts, size and position; no part of his body must suffer from ill-health; he must in addition have studied and acquired wisdom, so that his rational faculty passes from a state of potentiality to that of actuality; his intellect must be as developed and perfect as human intellect can be; his passions pure and equally balanced; all his desires must aim at obtaining a knowledge of the hidden laws and the causes that are in force in the Universe; his thoughts must be engaged in lofty matters; his attention directed to the knowledge of God, the consideration of his Works, and such other things our belief ascribes to Him. There must

be an absence of the lower desires and appetites, of the seeking after pleasure in eating, drinking, and cohabitation; and, in short, every pleasure connected with the sense of touch... It is further necessary to suppress every thought or desire for unreal power and dominion (Abarbanel says in regard to this passage that Maimonides was hinting at Mohammed); that is to say, for victory, increase of followers, acquisition of honour, and service from the people without any ulterior object.... A man who satisfies these conditions, whilst his fully developed imagination is in action, influenced by the Active Intellect according to his mental training, -- such a person will undoubtedly perceive nothing but things very extraordinary and divine, and see nothing but God and His angels. His knowledge will only include that which is real knowledge and his thought will only be directed to such general principles as would tend to improve the social relations between man and man."

From the preceding quotation we may get a clear insight into the difference of approach between Yesode Ha-torah, which, after all, is an introduction to and part of a code of the traditional Law, and Moreh Nebuchim, which is a book for advanced students of philosophy. Phrases like "Pardes," "Celestial Throne," "the Holy Spirit," and "his soul will mingle with the angels called Ishim" give way to phrases like "he must have studied and acquired wisdom so that his rational faculty passes, etc.," "his attention directed to the knowledge of God, etc.", and "whilst his fully developed imagination is in action, influenced by the Active Intellect according to his mental training." However, despite these differences in style, the contents of both lists of conditions for prophecy are alike, and our only real necessity is to interpret certain of Maimonides' underlying psychological theories to give us a clearer picture of what he meant by prophecy.

He brings together these theories in M. N: "Prophecy is, in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man's rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty; it is the highest degree and greatest perfection man can attain (cf., "...and he is exalted above the rank of the rest of the wise men," Yesode Ha-torah, VII, 1); it consists in the most perfect development of the imaginative faculty....This must be the best possible as regards its temperament and its size, and also as regards its purity of substance. Any defect in this respect cannot in any way be supplied or remedied by training.... Part of the functions of the imaginative faculty isto retain impressions by the senses, to combine them, and chiefly to form images. The principal and highest function is performed when the senses are at rest and pause in their action (cf. below, VII, 2), for then it receives, to some extent, divine inspiration in the measure as it is predisposed for this influence. This is the nature of dreams which prove true, and also of prophecy, the difference being one of quantity, not of quality....the imaginative faculty acquires such an efficiency in its action that it sees the things as if it came from without, and perceives it as if through the medium of bodily senses...It is a well-known fact that the thing which engages greatly and earnestly man's attention whilst he is awake and in full possession of his senses forms during his sleep the object of the action of his imaginative faculty. (Evidently, this is the reason why the aspirant to prophecy must concentrate his attention constantly upon high and lofty themes). Imagination is then only influenced by the intellect insofar as it is predisposed for such influence." (M. N., II, 36, pp. 173-175).

In a latter passage in M. N., Maimonides makes it clear that the Active Intellect (described in Yesode Ha-torah VII, 1 by the process of the Holy Spirit descending upon a man so that his soul becomes knit with the rank of angels called Ishim) gives the rational faculty as well as the imaginative faculty of prophets an extra influx not vouchsafed to ordinary wise and good men. He says: "The true prophets undoubtedly conceive ideas that result from premises which human reason could not comprehend by itself; thus they tell us things which men could not tell by reason and ordinary imagination alone; for (the action of the prophets' mental capacities is influenced by) the same agent (i.e., The Active Intellect) that causes the perfection of the imaginative faculty, and that enables the prophet thereby to foretell a future event with such clearness as if it was a thing already perceived with the senses, and only through them conveyed to his imagination. This agent (i.e., the Active Intellect) perfects the prophet's mind, and influences it in such a manner that he conceives ideas which are confirmed by reality, and are so clear to him as if he deduced them by means of syllogisms." (M. N., II, 38, p. 183). Maimonides argues in this same chapter: "But (what we said of the extraordinary powers of our imaginative faculty) applies with special force to our intellect, which is directly influenced by the Active Intellect, and caused by it to pass from potentiality to actuality. It is through the intellect that the influence reaches the imaginative faculty. How then could the latter be so perfect as to be able to represent things not previously perceived by the senses, if the same degree of perfection were withheld from the intellect, and the latter could not comprehend things otherwise than in the usual manner, namely, by means of premise, conclusion and influence?" (M. N. II, 38, p. 184, underlining ours).

Thus, we can understand that to Maimonides prophecy is an extraordinary knowledge bestowed upon a worthy and prepared candidate by the Active Intellect. This special knowledge raises the rational and imaginative faculties to a stage of perfection beyond the ordinary. He states again: "Those who reach that perfection (i.e., rational and imaginative) may, through the influence of the divine intellect, obtain knowledge independent of that possessed by them when awake." (M. N., II, 38, p. 185, underlining ours). He calls these "true prophets" (Ibid).

We should like to conclude this general study of Maimonides' conception of prophecy by an unusual remark of his which throws revealing light upon his ideas in this regard, and perhaps upon his personal history.

In M. N., II, 32 at the very beginning of his long discussion of prophecy he compares the ideas of the philosophers toward prophecy with the Scriptural revelation of prophecy. He holds that the latter "....coincides with the opinion of the philosophers in all points except one. For we believe that, even if one has the capacity for prophecy, and has duly prepared himself, it may yet happen that he does not actually prophesy. It is in that case the will of God (that withholds from him the use of the faculty). According to my opinion, this fact is as exceptional as any other miracle, and acts in the same way. For the laws of Nature demand that everyone should be a prophet, who has a proper physical constitution, and has been duly prepared as regards education and training" (M. N., II, 32, p. 162 f., underlining ours). These words report Maimonides' wonder that all people are not prophets, and that this fact is a miracle to him! Since what we know of Maimonides' personal life shows him to have lived in the prophetic way and to have been a man of great intellectual achievements, it might have been a personal matter that he is touching upon here. (cf. A. Heschel, Maimonides,

Chapters 3 and 19, Berlin, 1935). Two commentators, Efodi and Shem-tob, attempt to prove that Maimonides was opposed to the Scriptural view and agreed with the philosophers that "It is impossible that a man who has the capacity for prophecy should prepare himself for it without attaining it" (cf. M. Friedlander's footnote 4 to M. N., II, 32, p. 163). If this is a true surmise, then it is highly probable that Maimonides believed that he himself might attain prophecy (cf. A. Heschel, Toward An Understanding of Maimonides' Personality, manuscript of a lecture delivered before the American Academy for Jewish Research, December, 1942).

1 b. **סיפורי הדת** - "One of the basic principles of religion." It is significant that Maimonides used the term **דת** here rather than **תורה** which we should rather expect. Evidently prophecy is a universal rather than an historico-national experience, and which can be attained in any age. This certainly would be in accord with Maimonides' broad conception of prophecy, as seen above in our commentary.

קשורה תחת הכסא - "Bound beneath the Celestial Throne." There can be no doubt that Maimonides is doing again what he has done already to the terms of Jewish mystical tradition such as Maaseh Merkabah, Maaseh Bereshith, Pardes. He is taking this mystical term and making it accord with his Greek philosophical ideas. G. Scholem tells us that the earliest Jewish mystics who formed an organized fraternity in Talmudic times and later, describe their mystical experience in terms of ascent of the soul to the Celestial Throne where it obtains an ecstatic view of the Majesty of God and the secrets of His realm (cf. G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 5). Scholem states in another place: "No doubts are pos-

sible on this point: the earliest Jewish mysticism is throne-mysticism. Its essence is not absorbed contemplation of God's true nature, but perception of His appearance on the throne, as described by Ezekiel, and cognition of the mysteries of the celestial throne-world....God's pre-existing throne, which embodies and exemplifies all forms of creation, is at once the goal and the theme of his mystical vision" (Ibid, p. 42,f.). If we contrast this mystical conception of **כסא** with Maimonides' highly rationalized interpretation that we must interpret it to denote "God's Greatness and Omnipotence, which are identical with His essence" (M. N., I, 9, p. 54) we can understand the revolutionary change that the word has experienced in the hands of Maimonides.

יד - This word means "immediately." We confess that we do not understand its use in our paragraph. How can a long period of concentration be spoken of as ending in "immediately the Holy Spirit rests upon him"? Either Maimonides conceives of the man who strives to attain prophecy as reaching to higher and higher levels until he at last reaches a certain point whereupon the Holy Spirit immediately comes down upon him, or else the term **יד** has the sense of "doubtlessly" or even of "perforce." In the parallel passage we have quoted above from M. N., the phrase **יד**, "undoubtedly" is employed by Maimonides at the parallel point in his discussion. (M. N., II, 36, p. 177). Such a use of **יד**, however, is not countenanced by any dictionary, to our knowledge.

2. There are various degrees of prophecy. This statement, as we shall see, leads directly to the primacy of Moses among the prophets (cf. VII, 6).

The degree of prophecy to which a prophet attains depends upon his mental, moral, and physical perfection according to M. N. "These qualities are, as is well known, possessed by the wise men in different degrees, and the degrees of prophetic faculty vary in accordance with this difference" (M. N., II, 36, p. 177).

Maimonides lays great weight both here and in M. N. upon the Scriptural verse: "I do make Myself known unto him in a vision, I do speak with him in a dream" (Num. 12:6). The prophets (except Moses, cf. VII, 6), according to Maimonides, only experience prophecy through dreams at night, or in the daytime when a deep sleep had fallen upon them. This idea is in accord with Maimonides' theories of psychology which place the center of the prophetic experience in the imaginative faculty which functions best when it is at rest and not recording the sensations registered by the bodily senses (cf. our commentary on VII, 1). And even more important is that it in one bold stroke destroys all anthropomorphic references derived from prophecy. For, according to this theory, all prophecy (except Moses') deals not with the records of the physical senses, but with the messages of a spiritual being, the Active Intellect, affecting the rational and imaginative faculties in a special manner and which, of necessity, must speak in the language of men (cf. I, 9).

We might certainly raise the question: Why does not Scripture always relate that the prophet received his prophecy in a vision or in a dream? The way in which Maimonides solved this problem is explained in M. N., II, 41, p. 194. This passage will solve the problem of those Scriptural prophecies in which the method of divine communication is not clear. "In four different ways Scripture relates the fact that a divine communication was made to the prophet:

1. The prophet relates that he heard the words of an angel in a dream or vision.
2. He reports the words of the angel without mentioning that they were perceived in a dream or vision, assuming that it is well known that prophecy can only originate in one of the two ways, "In a vision I will make myself known unto him, in a dream I will speak unto him." (Num. 12:6).
3. The prophet does not mention the angel at all; he says that God spoke to him, but he states that he received the message in a dream or a vision.
4. He introduces his prophecy by stating that God spoke to him, or told him to do a certain thing, or speak certain words, but he does not explain that he received the message in a dream or vision, because he assumes that it is well known, and has been established as a principle (See Num. 12:6) that no prophecy or revelation originates otherwise than in a dream or vision, and through an angel."

Maimonides has developed in M. N. II, 45, two elaborate systems of classifying the degree of a prophet. We give here the first of these with the hope that it might shed some light upon Maimonides' method of systemizing the prophets:

1. The lowest degree of actual prophets is that in which the prophet sees an allegory in a dream - and in the prophetic dream itself the allegory is interpreted.
2. Prophet hears in a dream clearly, but does not see the speaker.

3. A person addresses the prophet in a dream.
4. An angel speaks to him in a dream.
5. In the prophetic dream it appears to the prophet as if God spoke to him.
6. The prophet sees allegorical figures in a prophetic vision.
7. The prophet hears words in a prophetic vision.
8. The prophet sees a man who speaks to him in a prophetic vision.
9. This is the highest degree outside of Moses'. In this the prophet sees an angel who speaks to him in a vision. Maimonides remarks that only Moses could perceive God in a prophetic vision.

In our paragraph Maimonides describes the physical and mental ordeal experienced during a prophetic experience. We might note that the prophetic experience here stated bears a startling resemblance in certain details to the mystical experience of Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia, who "considered his own mystical theory as the final step forward from the "Guide of the Perplexed" to which he wrote a curious mystical commentary" (G. Sholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 124). Sholem quotes Abulafia's instruction for attaining meditation and ecstasy which, as we have just said, bears striking similarities to Maimonides' concept of prophetic experience. In part he says: "And know, the stronger the intellectual influx within thee, the weaker will become thy outer and thy inner parts. Thy whole body will be seized by an extremely strong trembling, so that thou wilt think that thou are about to die, because thy soul, overjoyed with its knowledge, will leave

thy body"(Ibid., p. 134). Sholem says in another place: "In the opinion of Abulafia, his own doctrine of prophetic ecstasy is in the last resort nothing but the doctrine of prophecy advanced by the Jewish philosophers, more especially by Maimonides, who also defines prophecy as the temporary union of the human and the divine intellect, deliberately brought about by systematic preparation"(Ibid. p. 136). Sholem, however, comments that "These rationalizations cannot, however, obscure the fact that his (Abulafia's) teachings represent but a Judaized version of that ancient spiritual technique which has found its classical expression in the practices of the Indian mystics who follow the system known as Yoga" (Ibid. p. 136).

We have discussed the relationship between Maimonides' concept of prophecy and the mystic experience very sketchily only to suggest that Maimonides is far closer to mysticism than we ordinarily imagine when we picture him as one of the apostles of rationalism. Let us remember that the prophet is to Maimonides "the highest degree and greatest perfection of man" (M. N., II, 36, p. 173 and cf. also M. N., III, 51, p. 281 f., where Maimonides calls upon his student to follow the way of prophecy).

3. There are probably two reasons why Maimonides insists that matters are communicated to the prophet in allegorical form:

1. The first reason is that it helps explain away anthropomorphisms, for if what the prophet sees is only an allegory it cannot possibly be considered as literally true.
2. The more important reason is that in prophecy the imaginative faculty particularly is influenced by the Active

Intellect. Maimonides says: "It is undoubtedly clear and evident that most prophecies are given in images, for this is the characteristic of the imaginative faculty, the organ of prophecy (M. N., II, 47, p. 219). Since the imaginative faculty can only reproduce things as they represent themselves to the senses of men and cannot possibly produce a purely immaterial image of an object, however abstract the form of the image may be (cf. M. N., I, 73, p. 335 f.), the matters communicated in a prophetic dream or vision must be allegorical in nature, e.g., Jacob's vision of a ladder with angels ascending and descending it, the Seething Cauldron of Jeremiah (1:13), the Scroll seen by Ezekiel (2:9), etc. (However, as we shall see in VII, 6, the highest type of prophecy, that of Moses, is the communion of man's rational faculty with the Active Intellect and this excludes anthropomorphism).

Though the communication is always allegorical in form, yet the prophet may not reveal the allegory to the people. He may simply give its interpretation - which is immediately impressed upon his mind at the time of the vision - or he may give both the allegory and its interpretation; or again, he may merely give the allegory without any interpretation. Maimonides gives here a few examples of some of these cases from Scripture.

4. This paragraph is based on a Talmudic source (Shabbath 30 b) to the effect that "Inspiration does not come upon a prophet when he is sad or languid." Maimonides links this statement with his own psychological theories. He argues: "Faculties of the body are, as you know, at one time

weak, wearied, and corrupted, at others in a healthy state. Imagination is certainly one of the faculties of the body. You find, therefore, that prophets are deprived of the faculty of prophesying when they mourn, are angry, or are similarly affected.....The same circumstance, prevalence of sadness and dullness, was undoubtedly the direct cause of the interruption of prophecy during the exile; for can there be any greater misfortune for man than this: to be a slave bought for money in the service of the ignorant and voluptuous masters, and powerless against them...." (M. N., II, 36, p. 177 f.)

5. Maimonides here gives his own interpretation of the Scriptural term "Sons of the prophets." These were the men, according to Maimonides, who sought to prophesy by following the way of prophecy, but who might or might not be favored by the Shekinah (cf. our closing remarks upon VII, 1).

5 b. שכ"ה - It is a problem to us why Maimonides should use the term Shekinah here. In M. N. he agrees with Onkelos the Proselyte that all expressions denoting any mode of motion should be explained to mean the appearance or manifestation of a certain light that has been created for the occasion, i. e., the Shekinah (cf. M. N., I, 27, p. 92 f.). Thus the term is employed to avoid any possible anthropomorphisms in Onkelos' translation of the Bible into Aramaic. But why Maimonides uses it in this paragraph rather than רוח הקודש (VII, 1) or הגבורה חלה (VII, 1) which he uses elsewhere is not known to us. Probably he employs "Shekinah" simply for stylistic reasons and means by it a traditional meaning, Holy Inspiration, the emanation from God imminent in the world and enabling men to prophesy according to the will of God (cf. M. Jastrow, Talmud Dictionary, under שכ"ה).

6. Everything that has been said up to this point on the subject of prophecy applies to prophets other than Moses. Moses is so preeminent among the prophets that it is Maimonides' opinion that "the term prophet is applied to Moses and to other men homonymously" (M. N., II, 35, p. 171).

Basing himself upon the Scriptural verse "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face - as regards all the signs and wonders which God sent him to do in the land of Egypt against Pharoah and all his courtiers and all his land, as well as all the mighty power and all the great wonders which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:10-12), Maimonides holds that Moses is distinguished from all other prophets of all times on two scores. Namely, no prophet will perceive as he perceived, nor do as he did (cf. M. N., II, 35, p. 171 f.). Our present paragraph is concerned with the first of these distinctions, i.e., no prophet will perceive as he perceived. That no prophet will do as he did is the subject of VIII, 1, 2.

Moses perceived in prophecy differently from all other prophets, past and future, in four different ways:

1. All other prophets experienced prophecy in a dream or vision, but Moses prophesied awake and standing. (cf., Num. 12:6-8).
2. All other prophets saw in terms of riddle and allegory, but Moses saw clearly and lucidly. Maimonides explains what he means by this in M. N., II, 45, p. 214. He states: "...the medium here (the case of other prophets) being the imaginative faculty that hears in a prophetic dream God speaking; but Moses heard the voice addressing him "from above the covering of the ark from between the two Cherubim (Ex. 25:22 - The two cherubim apparently

represent here the Active Intellect and the prophet's intellect, which unite in the case of Moses without the intervention of the imaginative faculty. See M. Friedlander's footnote 1 to this passage), without the medium of the imaginative faculty." This is Maimonides' interpretation of "Mouth to mouth I speak to him." (Num. 12:8).

3. All other prophets are physically enfeebled and mentally terrified by the prophetic experience, but Moses' mind was strong enough to retain its normal composure. In his parallel passage in his commentary to Perek Helek a sentence explaining the reason for Moses' strength is given: ".....this being the case by reason of the strong bond uniting him with the intellect" (J. Abelson, Maimonides on the Jewish Creed, Jewish Quarterly Review, Old Series, Vol. 19, 1907, p. 52).
4. To all other prophets the inspiration came not at their own choice, but by the will of God. But Moses was invested with the prophetic spirit whenever he desired. Maimonides interprets Deut. 5:27 f. here to mean that Moses abstained from sensual delights and bound up his intellect permanently, like the ministering angels', with God. The Divine Glory never left him, the skin of his face shone, and he was sanctified like the angels. In M. N., II, 36, p. 177 f. we find a contradiction to this idea, however, that Moses could obtain prophetic inspiration at all times. He states: "You find, therefore, that prophets are deprived of the faculty of prophesying when they mourn,

are angry, or are similarly affected....The same was the case with Moses, when he was in a state of depression through the multitude of his troubles, which lasted from the murmurings of the Israelites in consequence of the evil report of the spies, till the death of the warriors of that generation. He received no message of God, as he used to do, even though he did not receive prophetic inspiration through the medium of the imaginative faculty, but directly through the intellect." Maimonides evidently had discerned this fact sometime between his writing of the Mishneh Torah and M. N. And although he cannot account for it in his psychological theories, he quotes it nonetheless.

7. Before going on to prove that no prophet will ever "do as Moses did," Maimonides devotes this paragraph to the subject of testing the prophetic character of an individual, for in Chapter VIII he will prove that the truth of Moses' prophetic mission is founded upon proofs completely different from those of ordinary prophets.

To begin with, Maimonides divides prophets into two groups: first, those who receive the gift of prophecy for their own enlightenment; and second, those who are inspired by prophecy to go on a mission to enlighten others. Those who are sent on a mission to others are given a sign or a token so that the people might know that God has in truth sent them (cf. Chapter X for nature of signs and tokens).

However, not everyone showing a sign or token is on that account to be accepted as a prophet. Maimonides, holding to his special con-

ception of prophecy (See above, VII 1), argues that we should only accept as a true prophet him who meets the mental and moral requirements for prophecy, and who has pursued the way of prophecy (See above, VII, 1). If he who claims to be a prophet satisfies these conditions, it is our duty to hearken to him, even though there is still a possibility that he is not in truth a prophet. For, holds Maimonides, if he is in all ways worthy of the prophetic gift, we give him the benefit of the presumption.

Maimonides' rational test for the authenticity of a prophet not only fits logically into his conception of prophecy, but it is suited admirably to the historic situation of his times. For one thing it is a broadside attack on Mohammed, whom no one has ever claimed led a life of moral restraint. For another it was no doubt a useful screen to sift out the many pretenders to Messiahship who abounded in Maimonides' difficult times. Since the Messiah must attain to a degree of prophecy second only to Moses (See, A Letter by Maimonides to the Jews of South Arabia, translated by S. Morais, Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series, Vol. 25, April, 1935, p. 362), the Messiah must meet the tests of prophecy. There are five of these pretenders to Messiahship mentioned by Maimonides in his letter to the Jews of South Arabia (cf. Ibid, p. 367).

CHAPTER VIII

1. Here Maimonides explains the uniqueness of what Moses did (cf. VII, 6). This uniqueness lies in the fact that Israel did not believe in Moses because of the signs and tokens he produced - these he performed not to support his prophetic claims, but because they were needed, - but because all of Israel was witness to the Sinaitic Revelation with its own eyes and ears. Israel and Moses were witnesses to the same revelation (See VIII, 2). All of Israel heard the Divine Voice speaking to Moses, and Israel heard the Voice saying: "Moses, Moses, go, tell them thus and thus."

In M. N. the matter of what the people heard during the Sinaitic Revelation is taken up by Maimonides. In M. N., II, 33 he attempts to reconcile the Scriptural account of the revelation with his own theories. Here in M. N. in attempting this reconciliation he contradicts what he says in Yesode Ha-torah, VIII, 1; for he states explicitly in Yesode Ha-torah that Israel heard the Divine Voice speaking distinct words to Moses. But in M. N. he maintains that Israel actually only heard the sound of the Divine Voice and not distinct words. He says: ".....God spoke to Moses, and the people only heard the mighty sound, not distinct words" (M. N., II, 33, p. 165).

Whether the people heard only the sound of a voice speaking or distinct words is of real significance to Maimonides because if they heard distinct words this would conflict with his theory of prophecy, which calls for the fulfillment of many conditions before one can receive the prophetic gift. It is hardly likely that all of the Israelites standing at Mount Sinai had qualified themselves in the manner described in VII, 1 to receive a divine communication. Yet Jewish tradition (See Midrash Rabbah, Shir Ha-Shirim, 1, 1) claimed that all of Israel heard, in the same way as did

Moses, the Lord proclaiming part or all of the Decalogue. Maimonides makes very apparent in M. N. his own point of view: "It is clear to me that what Moses experienced at the revelation on Mount Sinai was different from that which was experienced by all other Israelites, for Moses alone was addressed by God, and for this reason the second person singular is used in the Ten Commandments; Moses then went down to the foot of the mount and told his fellow-men what he had heard (M. N., II, 33, p. 166). Compare this statement with Yesode Ha-torah, VIII, 2 which speaks of Moses and Israel both together being witnesses to the same matter. Of course, this latter is not a sharp contradiction, for one witness might see far more than another, and yet both are witnesses to the same event. Nevertheless, we believe that these slight contradictions indicate a definite development in Maimonides' interpretation of the Sinaitic Revelation. His interpretation in Yesode Ha-torah is more in keeping with tradition, while in M. N. he presses forward his own theories in full force.

3. We have already discussed part of this paragraph in our commentary to the preceding one.

The concluding portion of this paragraph contains an important idea, namely, that after the revelation of the Torah to Moses the people of Israel accept prophets not because of signs or tokens they may offer in proof of their divine mission, but only because the Torah commands that if a prophet gives a sign "ye shall listen to him." We are to hearken to such a prophet even if we do not know if the sign he shows is genuine or has been performed with the aid of sorcery and by secret arts. In other words, since the revelation of the Torah, we are guided by the Torah in all these matters, because we ourselves are witness to the authenticity of the Torah (cf. VIII, 1).

3. The concluding remarks of the preceding paragraph lead us to the argument of this one: If a prophet arises and performs signs and great miracles and seeks to deny the prophecy of Moses, we are to pay no attention to him. For Moses' prophecy is unique. The Torah is not accepted because of signs or tokens Moses offered, but because all of Israel was witness to the revelation of the Torah. To deny the divinity of the Torah, would be like a man testifying in our presence concerning an incident and denying it took place though we had seen it with our own eyes. As we only accept signs (as a prophet's credentials) because we are so bidden in the Commandment given us by Moses, how shall we, on the strength of such a sign, accept a man as prophet, who seeks to repudiate Moses' prophecy for the truth of which we have the evidence of our own eyes and ears?

Without doubt this paragraph is aimed against the "prophetic" mission of Jesus of Nazareth and of Mohammed, both of whom if not of themselves, at least by their followers are thought to have denied the immutability of the Torah. It also, of course, is directed against lesser figures who from time to time have proclaimed the abrogation of the Torah on the grounds of a new revelation.

CHAPTER IX

1. This paragraph is clear and requires no commentary.
2. Since the Torah of Moses is perpetually complete and immutable (See IX, 1), why have there been prophets since Moses - prophets of whose coming we are told in the Torah? The answer to this problem is simple: all authentic prophets since Moses have come to exhort us to fulfill the Torah, not to found a new religion. This is a further test, of course, for him who lays claim to a prophetic mission. If such a man merely exhorts us to fulfill the mitzvot, or if he gives orders to do things permitted by the Torah, then we are obligated by the Torah to act in accordance with his instructions. This is the ninth mitzvah expounded in Yesode Ha-torah.
3. This paragraph needs little comment. Faced by the fact that on certain occasions prophets acted contrary to the Torah, e.g., Elijah's sacrifice on Mt. Carmel outside of the Temple, the Talmud (Yebamoth 90 b) explains that a prophet may abrogate the Torah if it is only for a special occasion and not a permanent change. Maimonides here cites the halakah on this matter.
4. He is a false prophet who attempts to uproot any part of the Oral tradition or who asserts that he has been given a divine communication instructing him as to what was the decision and that the rule was according to the view of a certain teacher in reference to a moot point. The Scriptural quotation: "For this charge which I am enjoining on you today is not beyond your power, nor is it out of your reach: it is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'O that someone would ascent to the heavens for us, and

get it for us, and then communicate it to us, so that we may observe it!'
(Deut. 30:11 f.) Maimonides interprets here in the Midrashic sense that the Torah has been given to Israel in its entirety, nothing of it has been reserved in heaven for further legislation or for revelation to a prophet (cf. M. Friedlander's footnote 1 to M. N., II, 39, p. 187). In brief, the whole Torah has been given to man and no true revelation will ever be given again by God in regard to its subject matter. Anyone who claims a prophetic mission to do so is ipso facto a false prophet.

5. This paragraph does not require commentary.

CHAPTER X

1. This chapter is devoted to a further discussion of the tests to which a prophet is subjected to prove his genuineness.

If a man worthy of being a prophet professes to be a messenger of God and only exhorts his listeners to fulfill the Torah, we are not to require great miracles of him such as raising the dead, etc., but we say to him: "Foretell coming events." If his predictions come true down to the smallest particular, we accept him as a true prophet.

2. The prophet is to be tested many times. If his words are continually found to be true, he is accepted as a true prophet.

3. The test of foretelling future events presents a serious difficulty: astrologers, diviners, etc., can also, according to beliefs rife in Maimonides' times and earlier, predict the future. We can separate the true prophets from the impostors by a simple test, holds Maimonides basing himself on Scriptural texts: the words of prediction spoken by a prophet always come true in all details (See X, 4), but the imposter's words will only partly come true or possibly will not come true at all.

Maimonides also notes here that the prophets take the place of soothsayers and diviners. And he repeats that the functions of prophecy (after Moses, of course) are to predict coming events, to instruct individuals in regard to their private affairs, etc., but not to found a new religion or to add or subtract mitzvot.

4. Maimonides finds it necessary to make certain exceptions in regard to the forecasts of prophets. The non-fulfillment of prophecies of

divine retribution is not to be taken as a sign that the prophet is an impostor. For God is long-suffering and repents of the evil He threatens, and perhaps, too, those who are threatened have repented and were forgiven.

However, if the prophet promises in God's name that benefits will come, the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of such a promise is a sure indication as to the authenticity of the prophet. For, with but one exception, God has never revoked a blessing He had promised.

5. Yesode Ha-torah comes to its end with a few final remarks on the testing of prophets.

1. A prophet who is attested for by a recognized prophet is to be accepted as genuine without further investigation.
2. A long-recognized prophet or a duly attested prophet who conducts himself consistently with the prophetic calling is not to be made the subject of speculation and misgivings in regard to the character of his prophecy.
3. Accredited prophets are not to be repeatedly subjected to investigations of their claims. Once it is known that a particular individual is a prophet, the people must believe and know that God is in their midst and not harbor suspicion and doubt. This is the meaning of the tenth mitzvah expounded in Yesode Ha-torah, i.e., "Ye shall not tempt the Lord, your God, as you tempted Him a Massah" (Deut. 6:16), where the people asked, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex. 17:7). The people were "tempting" God by doubting His prophet Moses.

CONCLUSION

Maimonides' Mishneh Torah is an attempt to codify the Jewish Law. A legal code ordinarily deals with old materials, its purpose being only to systematize all laws already in force at the time of composition, but Yesode Ha-torah goes far beyond the limits of such a definition. True enough, Maimonides uses the traditional mitzvoth and the old phrases, but his ardent reinterpretation of these by the "new" conceptions of Aristotle makes of Yesode Ha-torah a radical restatement of many of Judaism's fundamental ideas as, for example, of the human soul, the nature of prophecy, angelology, the meaning of important mystical terms like Maaseh Merkabah, Maaseh Bereshith, Pardes, etc.

Our comparison of Yesode Ha-torah with the content of Moreh Nebuchim leads us to the following conclusions:

1. There are no significant and important differences between the underlying ideas of Yesode Ha-torah and Moreh Nebuchim.
2. There are many relatively minor differences between these two books.
 - a. Most apparent are the stylistic changes. Yesode Ha-torah, being part of a popular code of the traditional Law, is constrained to employ the phraseology of Jewish traditional literature, while Moreh Nebuchim, a book addressed to advanced students of philosophy, does not strive to preserve traditional phraseology, but makes a frank use of Greek philo-

sophical terms, e.g., "the rank of angels known as Ishim" in Yesode Ha-torah becomes "the Active Intellect" in Moreh Nebuchim.

b. In regard to changes in ideas we may note:

- 1) The great difference between his interpretation of Hayoth and Ophanim in Yesode Ha-torah from his interpretation of these in Moreh Nebuchim (See our commentary to II, 7).
- 2) His changed estimation as to the holiness of certain of the divine names. (See our commentary to Chapter VI).
- 3) The difference in his interpretation of what Israel was witness to at Mount Sinai (See our commentary to VII, 6).

From our comparison of these two works it is our opinion that Maimonides' philosophical concepts as found in Yesode Ha-torah did not undergo a major change in the score of years between the composition of Yesode Ha-torah and the completion of Moreh Nebuchim.

ברוך רחמנא דס"ע

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