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TITLE Study and Mitzvah : THE MAHARAL'S
Views Reflected in His Commentary to Pirkei Avot

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Study and Mitzvot:

The Maharal's Views Reflected in His Commentary
to *PIRKEI AVOT*

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Digest:

History is built upon the exploits of great individuals, and Jewish history is no exception. Many accomplished teachers, scholars, thinkers, and scientists have been adherents of the Jewish faith. In the case of Judah Loew ben Bezalel we find many of these same vocations exemplified by a single outstanding personality.

Rabbi Loew of Prague is best known by the acronym made of his name, Moreinu Ha-Rav Loew, or Maharal. He lived in the 16th Century and has been remembered by posterity as the man who “created” the Golem of Prague. In reality, however, it is probable that the legends about the Golem were first told about another rabbi, and were only later attributed to Loew. He did produce many important works of his own right, however; most notably, a super-commentary on the Torah Commentary of Rashi, several significant responsa, and a series of far-reaching educational reforms. In addition to these works, Rabbi Loew wrote a commentary on *PIRKEI AVOT*, a classic rabbinic text on theology and practical wisdom, which is part of the Mishnah. This thesis is a study of Rabbi Loew and *DEREKH HAYYIM*, the commentary which he wrote on *PIRKEI AVOT*. Specifically, how the Maharal understands the virtues of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot.

The Introduction, Chapter One, and Chapter Two of the following study contain the information needed to begin this discussion. The Introduction sets out the project at hand and the methods we have followed to complete it. Chapter One contains a brief history of the life

of the Maharal as well as an introductory discussion of the history and development of *PIRKEI AVOT*. Chapter Two offers an analysis of what other scholars have written about the thought of Rabbi Loew and how those ideas fit into this study.

Inasmuch as Rabbi Loew's writings are rather copious, this study focuses on what Judah Loew had to say about the importance of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot specifically. Thus, in Chapter Three the reader will find a selection of passages from *PIRKEI AVOT*, which discuss the study of Torah or observance of mitzvot, and also a translation of Rabbi Loew's comments as they appear in *DEREKH HAYYIM*. Chapter Three will also present some aspects of the Maharal's style and suggest useful translations for recurring words and phrases.

Chapter Four will contain a brief analysis of the translated sections of *DEREKH HAYYIM* as well as suggestions on how this text can be used today. Chapter Five will be the conclusion of this discussion.

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There are two other less tangible groups whom I would like to offer thanks and praise. To all of those people, some I have known well and others only briefly met, who encouraged me to become a rabbi, this thesis is a culmination of all of your hopes, dreams, and encouragement. To all of those people who have been my teachers, both in classrooms and out, thank you for helping to make me who I am today.

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Introduction:

A First Look

It is not uncommon for a Jewish citizen of Prague to stand in front of the Altneushul (the Old-New Synagogue) in the traditional Jewish Quarter of that city, and be asked an uncommon question by a non-Jewish passerby— “Is the Golem still in the attic?” The Golem. Perhaps more than any other symbol this legendary figure has become the enduring image of the Prague Jewish community, a once vibrant center of Jewish life, scholarship, culture, and legend. Certainly there have been other Golems in history,¹ however, none of these has had the lasting hold on the imagination as the Golem of Prague. This fascination has helped make famous the Golem’s supposed creator, the great Rabbi Loew (1525?-1609).

In reality, however, the Golem legend as we know it today most likely originated with Rabbi Elijah of Chelm (d. 1583) and was only gradually shifted onto the more well known Rabbi Loew.² Proof that the story only gradually shifted to Rabbi Loew in a later generation is evidenced by the fact that the *MEGILLAT YUKHASIN*, written by Meir Perles in the 1720s (though not published until the 1740s), a history of the family of Rabbi Loew and his descendants, does not mention the Golem at all.³ However, by the 19th Century, the stories of the Golem and Rabbi Loew were well known and in wide circulation.

Despite the fact that the specifics of the story vary, its general content is the same: In the face of repeated blood libel accusations Rabbi Loew, using secret knowledge, brought to life a large man he

fashioned from a lump of earth, which then roamed the streets of the ghetto protecting the Jewish citizenry. Many of the peculiar customs of the Prague Jewish community— such as a double recitation of Psalm 92 at the beginning of Shabbat evening worship, whose true origin has been forgotten— have been brought into the story of the Golem, as have some of the genuine and documented events of the life of Rabbi Loew— such as his meeting with Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II in 1594.⁴ Frederic Thieberger sums up the enduring fascination with this legend when he writes, “These historical considerations clearly show how far removed are the legends from the actual personality of the man.... Nevertheless we continue to feel something of the magic charm cast by the later legends on the reality of long ago.”⁵

We must pause, however, and ask ourselves why this should be the case? Why are people so fascinated by this story even to this day, so much so that a children’s book based on the legend has won the coveted ‘Caldecott Medal?’⁶ I would suggest that it is not so much the story that has taken hold of the collective imagination, but rather the man behind the myth. Human beings are drawn to legends of miracles and miracle workers only insofar as they reflect something truly special about the character behind those myths. This is certainly true of Rabbi Loew, about whom it has been written, “Though there have been rabbis *in* Prague, only he was and is *rabbi of* Prague.”⁷ That attitude of reverence is clearly demonstrated in the outside world as well.

However, aside from the myth and legend which eventually came to be associated with him, Rabbi Loew stands out from among his contemporaries. Unique for his time, he had a foot in both the traditional Jewish world as well as within the world of secular learning.

He is known for being a great talmudic scholar, a *darshan*, a teacher, and a commentator, as well as being a scientist, astronomer, and mathematician who counted Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler among his associates. His enduring gift to posterity, as with all great minds, is to be found in his thought and discourse, which he bequeathed through a large body of texts and treatises, some of which are only now being recognized and fully appreciated. Given his true gifts to posterity, it is ironic that he is best remembered for the Golem, certainly a work of 'dubious' historicity.

This thesis will attempt to discuss the Great Rabbi Loew not from the legend that has grown around him, but from the written work which he left behind. This is, arguably, a true measure of his greatness as a scholar, as a rabbi, and as a leader of the Jewish people. To accomplish this goal, we will examine *DEREKH HAYYIM* Rabbi Loew's commentary on *PIRKEI AVOT*. Inasmuch as this text is very extensive, a complete analysis of the work is outside the scope of this project. Therefore, we will only be considering his attitude towards the subject of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot, topics on which *PIRKEI AVOT* repeatedly comments.

To gain an understanding of how Loew views these matters, we will translate selected passages of *PIRKEI AVOT*, and his commentary on them. By briefly considering what other scholars have said about these passages, and by considering Rabbi Loew's commentary in-depth, I hope to be able to arrive at a clear understanding of just how he read these texts, and how his thought affects our own understanding of *PIRKEI AVOT*. Ultimately, we will come to know Rabbi Loew's thoughts on these

subjects, and the characteristic ways in which he expresses them, as completely as possible.

To fully realize this objective, several other matters will have to be addressed. We will need to consider Rabbi Loew's life and times; in what ways was he influenced by his generation and milieu, and in what ways have those whom he has influenced subsequently altered how he is perceived. In line with that objective, we must address what other scholars have said about Loew's writing and philosophy, and whether or not those views are supported or rejected by what he says in *DEREKH HAYYIM*. Moreover, an important point which must be considered is how to categorize Rabbi Loew; does he fit best within the world of the Kabbalah, so that he was essentially a Jewish mystic? Or was he closer in thought and temperament to Jewish philosophers? Or is it the case, as some have suggested, that Rabbi Loew was a proto-humanist, so that he is best understood not as a 'Jewish thinker' *per se*, but as a thinker for all mankind.

As we delve into these questions, we must also consider *PIRKEI AVOT* itself. How did this text come to be written, and what were its authors intentions for its use? How have those goals been subsequently obscured or altered by time and tradition? Did this blurring of the lines effect Rabbi Loew's understanding of the text in any way? Ultimately, does Judah Loew's commentary add to or detract from this text's meaning and value?

Chapter One of this study will be devoted to a discussion of the life of Rabbi Loew. It will introduce some of the main features of his career and thought, and will broadly consider the works he authored. Chapter One will also contain a general discussion of *PIRKEI AVOT*, its

place within the body of Jewish literature, and how its structure and use have evolved over time. Chapter Two will attempt to clarify Rabbi Loew's thought as elucidated by other scholars, as well as the question of in what category of Jewish thought does he belong. Chapter Three will consist of a review of *DEREKH HAYYIM* as a whole, including issues of content, structure, and language. Following this overview will be the translated selections of *PIRKEI AVOT* together with the *DEREKH HAYYIM* commentary that elucidates them, as well as introductory comments and annotated notes where necessary. These notes will serve to orient the reader to the topic being addressed. Chapter Four will contain a synthesis of Rabbi Loew's thought on the subjects of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot as suggested by the passages that have been translated. In Chapter Four we will also consider how Rabbi Loew's thought adds to our own understanding of *PIRKEI AVOT*. Chapter Five will summarize the main conclusions of our discussion.

Introduction

1. For examples of other Golems in Jewish literature, see Byron Sherwin, *MYSTICAL THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL DISSENT: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JUDAH LOEW OF PRAGUE* (East Brunswick, NJ.: Associated University Press, 1982), p. 17.
2. See *IBID.*, and Ben Zion Bokser, *THE MAHARAL: THE MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF RABBI JUDAH LOEW OF PRAGUE* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson Publishers, 1994), p. 57.
3. Frederic Thieberger, *THE GREAT RABBI LOEW OF PRAGUE* (London, England: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1955), p. 8.
4. According to legend Psalm 92 is repeated because on one particular Shabbat Rabbi Loew forgot to disable the Golem before sundown, which he had to do to ensure that the Golem would not unwittingly violate the prohibition against work. As sundown approached the rabbi tracked down the Golem and finally removed God's name from his forehead (or out of his mouth depending on who is telling the story) and the Golem again became a lump of earth. In order to permit the rabbi enough time to be able to accomplish this task, as the legend goes, the sun failed to set for an extra period of time. Thus, it is the custom in Prague to repeat Psalm 92, which is said at sundown on Friday, to commemorate that event.
History has recorded that Rabbi Loew met with Emperor Rudolph II in 1594, however the context and content of that meeting are not known for certain, as will be discussed in Chapter One. Legend states that this meeting also concerned the Golem, and at that time Rudolph promised there would be no more blood libel accusations provided that the rabbi destroyed the Golem. See Thieberger, pp. 95-96.
5. *IBID.*
6. *GOLEM*, David Wisniewski (New York, NY.: Clarion Books, 1996).

7. Sherwin, p. 13.

Chapter One:

The Life of Judah Loew and PIRKEI AVOT

As the 16th Century dawned over Europe the new ideas and openness of the Renaissance were still in the process of taking form. Before the century was over those ideas would spread from Italy and Germany across the entire face of the continent. This new rebirth of learning and knowledge caused an upheaval in feudal society and in many ways thrust aside old notions of power and authority. Even religion was to be caught up in the wake of the new spirit gripping Europe. In fact, no single group within society was left untouched or unchanged by the Renaissance; from science to faith, from gentile to Jew.

Ever since the beginning of their sojourn in Europe, Jews had faced a variety of difficulties. They were separated first from their spiritual center, Palestine, later from their scholastic center, Babylon, and in the end, their communities were themselves often separated from one another. As Christianity assumed its status as the official religion of the western world the Jew's political and social situation become even more tenuous. Over the centuries various accusations against the Jews forced them more than once from their homes. Jews were expelled from numerous countries, such as England and France, often only to be readmitted and expelled again and again.

During Rabbi Loew's lifetime, the Jews were still smarting from the most recent round of expulsions, those from the Iberian Peninsula, Spain in 1492, and Portugal in 1497. Many of the displaced Spanish

Jews fled to Amsterdam, others to Turkey or Italy, some even managed to migrate to the newly discovered continent of America, while still others gradually made their way east and began to settle in central Europe. The Jewish residents of established communities in the various city states and feudal territories of Germany, as well as Bohemia and Moravia, now found their populations swelled by their newly homeless co-religionists. This is where the story of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel begins.

Although a Jewish community had existed in Bohemia since the 10th Century, the first large influx of Jews dated to the 1400s, when the area which would become the ghetto of Prague was settled.¹ The population of the ghetto began in earnest with the breakdown of the old feudal system. As they moved to Prague, the Jews "[w]ere mainly playing out their old role in the pre-capitalistic scheme as money-lenders and petty merchants."² Thus, they began to fill an important role within commerce and trade, and began to make up part of the rich tableau of Prague's society. However, as the community grew, it eventually got caught up in the political and religious turmoil of the time.

In the early 15th Century a Catholic theologian named John Huss, anticipating Martin Luther, agitated for reform within the orthodox church. Although he was ultimately apprehended and burned for heresy, his followers helped plunge Bohemia into a civil war. On the one hand the Jews were accused of giving John Huss some of his 'heretical' ideas, and on the other, they were suspected of disloyalty by the strongly nationalistic Hussites.³ Therefore, the Jews were expelled from Prague and then readmitted numerous times thereafter, and the

Talmud was seized and burned on six separate occasions.⁴ These events created a very precarious atmosphere for the Jewish residents of Prague.

In 1526, Bohemia became part of the Holy Roman Empire, and thus, Prague came under the official control of the Emperor. According to Frederic Thieberger, the Jews flourished under their new ruler Ferdinand I, and even more so under his son and successor, Maximillian I, whose "humanitarianism" was even more pronounced than that of his father.⁵ Maximillian I, it seems, took a great deal of interest in his Jewish subjects, so much so that in 1571 he and his wife visited the ghetto. The Jewish community was so touched by this event that the Klaus synagogue was constructed upon the site where the Emperor and his wife were received by the delegates of the community.⁶

Maximillian's son Rudolph II, came to power following his father's death in 1576. Rudolph moved his capital to Prague which brought to that city a new wave of thought and enlightenment. "The Imperial court attracted officials, diplomats and businessmen from many countries, and Rudolph's scientific and artistic inclinations, as well as his preoccupation with collecting exotic objects, opened the palace gates to scholars, writers and artists.... The city acquired a cosmopolitan character."⁷ The new Emperor reinvented Prague as a seat of learning and intellect, and attracted a great number of scholars to settle there. This vibrant revitalized atmosphere also benefited the residents of the ghetto in that it allowed them a modicum of freedom and peace that they had hitherto not known. It was into this city that Judah Loew ben Bezalel would be born, and in the dynamic times of Rudolph II that he would make his mark.

No one is certain about the year in which Rabbi Judah Loew, also known as the Maharal,⁸ was born. After exhaustive research into the available source material and evidence, Byron Sherwin writes, "It can be established with some certainty that he was born no earlier than 1512 and no later than 1526." There is also some question as to where the Maharal was born. Posen (Poznan), Poland, seems to have been his birth place, but other scholars suggest he was born in Worms.⁹ Vladimír Sadek agrees that Posen is his probable birth place, but sides with the earlier date, 1512, for his birth.¹⁰ Our difficulty lies in the fact that the Maharal was terse and cryptic with any autobiographical information in his writings. To complicate the matter further, works from a contemporary period which might shed some light on his life—such as *TZEMAKH DAVID*, by David Ganz, published in 1592, and the aforementioned *MEGILLAT YUKHASIN*, by Meir Perles—are encrusted with myth and legend which tend to mingle both fact and fiction.

Not much is known about the origin of the Maharal's family. It is probable that the family was native to Worms, and settled in Posen after fleeing persecution in the German lands to the west. His grandfather, Judah the Elder, lived in Prague and was known to be an expert in matters of Torah as well as matters of "secret lore."¹¹ Judah the Elder was buried in Prague's Jewish cemetery in 1440. The Maharal's father, Bezalel was the brother of Jacob of Worms, and his maternal uncle was the grandfather of Solomon Luria.¹² Judah Loew was thus born into a family which was well known in Jewish scholarly circles.

Scholars are further frustrated in reconstructing the life history of Judah Loew in that he never directly mentions from whom he learned

and with whom he studied, neither in praise nor in blame.¹³ "This whole matter is difficult, for Maharal does not mention in any place in his books his teachers, nor his rabbis by name. Therefore, we are only able to accept the ideas of those who have spoken of the Maharal, that he did not learn in a *yeshiva* (per se) but in another educational context."¹⁴ A. Gottesdiener contends that the Maharal's style of writing, with frequent repetition and self referencing, suggests that he was an autodidact and thus, we do not know the names of his teachers because his teachers were books.¹⁵ Gottesdiener even provides a list of books and scholars which he conjectures may have influenced the thought of Rabbi Loew. This list includes many Jewish philosophers, such as Gersonides, Ibn Ezra, Albo, and Maimonides, a fact which we will see is significant.¹⁶

Regardless of who educated the Maharal in traditional Jewish subjects, however, he also demonstrates a fine knowledge of secular subjects as well. "Unlike many of his Central and Eastern European Jewish contemporaries, Rabbi Loew insisted that mathematics and the natural sciences merited study. His positive attitude toward the natural sciences, particularly astronomy, led a number of nineteenth-century scholars to portray him as a 'modern.'"¹⁷ Had Rabbi Loew received only a traditional religious education, as did his contemporaries, it is safe to argue that his interests probably would not have wandered as far afield.

Contrary to popular belief Rabbi Loew did not immediately become the Chief Rabbi of Prague, or even a rabbi in Prague for that matter. In point of fact, his ultimate tenure in the Bohemian capital was short lived. When we consider the Maharal's life, we see a peripatetic

existence which took him from place to place. He began his public life in Nikolsburg in 1553, and remained there until leaving for Prague in 1573. Sherwin writes, "Judah Loew left his position as Chief Rabbi of Moravia to assume residence at Prague as a private citizen. Why he did so is unclear and is therefore open to conjecture and speculation."¹⁸ One possible reason he left was to engage in a new occupation, that of educator, for when he arrived in Prague he took up the job of *Rosh Yeshiva* of the school connected to the Klaus Synagogue.¹⁹

In 1583 with the death of Isaac Melnik, the Chief Rabbi of Prague, Rabbi Loew (then between the ages of 57 and 71) was invited to preach a sermon in the Altneushul on the Sabbath of Repentance. It is suggested that this honor was usually reserved for the Chief Rabbi of Prague, however, for one reason or another, Rabbi Loew was not appointed to that position at that time.²⁰ There is some discrepancy as to the Maharal's whereabouts between this apparent snub in 1583, however, it appears that he was not in Prague. According to most authorities he was back in Prague by 1587 to reassume his role as head of the Klaus School.²¹ At this time he faced another opportunity to be named Chief Rabbi, in that his brother-in-law, Isaac Hayot, had resigned that post. Rabbi Loew preached the sermon on the Sabbath before Passover in 1587, but as before, he was passed over for the position of Chief Rabbi. For the time being Rabbi Loew was content with remaining in his position at the Klaus School.

The historical event which more than any other helped give rise to the legend of the Maharal was his 1592 meeting with Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II.²² Varying accounts exist as to precisely when this meeting took place. David Ganz writes that it was the 3rd of Adar

(February 13) 1592, whereas Rabbi Loew's son-in-law, Isaac Katz, who also attended the meeting, records that it took place one week later.²³ Katz promised to reveal the subject of the meeting, but failed to do so; thus, no one is certain what the nature of the meeting was. However, most scholars agree that the emperor summoned the rabbi to discuss a matter of secret lore.

One may only speculate as to the subject of the conversation between Rabbi Loew and the emperor. Though Katz never fulfilled his promise to reveal the subject of the discussion at a future time, he does mention that it was *nistarot*—i.e., secrets, mysteries. It may well be assumed that the subject of conversation was mysticism or the occult. This assumption is strengthened by consideration of the following data. First of all, Rudolph's interest in the mystical and the magical is well known. Indeed, it was by 1592 that Rudolph had become most unapproachable and most preoccupied with alchemy and mysticism. His specific interest in Jewish mysticism may have been considerable.²⁴

Two months after this meeting, Rabbi Loew left Prague for the second time. The destination was his presumed birth place, Posen. Again, there is no compelling evidence one way or another to suggest why the Maharal came and went as abruptly as he did. Vladimír Sadek poses several options: either he had an intense love of both cities and split his time between them both to help them prosper; or perhaps, antagonism and disfavor in one city or the other forced him to leave time and time again.²⁵ Suffice it to say, however, by 1597 the Maharal had returned to Prague, and this time he would stay.

We know for certain from the Maharal's tombstone that he was Chief Rabbi of Prague for a period of ten years ending with his death in 1609. Therefore, he must have finally assumed his long sought goal by 1599. By this time, taking into account the varying estimations for the

year of his birth, Rabbi Loew is likely to have been in his 70s. Several personal losses affected the great rabbi during this period. His son, Bezalel, died as did his long time benefactor and close friend, Mordechai Meisels, in 1600 and 1601 respectively.²⁶ By 1604 after requesting an assistant for his office of Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Lenczycz (1550-1619) was appointed to that post. Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel died on August 12 (Elul 18) 1609.²⁷

As a leader the Maharal accomplished many things. He issued a variety of decrees during his tenure in Moravia that touched upon issues ranging from the fees paid a matchmaker to the use of gentile wine in services.²⁸ While in Prague for his first years of service at the Klaus School, he established the statutes of the *Hevra Kadisha* (the Jewish burial society), in gratitude for, and in commemoration of which, at their annual meeting the members still offer a discourse based on his book *DEREKH HAYYIM*.²⁹ The main legacy of his life, however, remains the books which he wrote and his educational reforms.

The Maharal was a prolific writer. His first work was the *GUR ARYEH*, a multi volume super-commentary on the Torah Commentary of Rashi.³⁰ He then wrote and published *GEVUROT HA-SHEM*, *TIFERET YISRAEL*, and *NETZAKH YISRAEL*, which were works discussing the holidays of Passover, Shavuot, and Tisha B'Av respectively. These latter books were intended to form the basis of a six-part work that he apparently never finished. He did write two other minor works about the holidays however, *OR HADASH* about Purim and *NER MITZVAH* about Hanukkah. Rabbi Loew wrote *DEREKH HAYYIM* as a commentary on the rabbinic ethical text *PIRKEI AVOT*, as well as *NETIVOT OLAM*, a treatise on ethics in general. He wrote a multi-volume work about the *aggadic* sections of

the Talmud entitled *HIDDUSHEI AGGADOT*, as well as *BEER HA-GOLAH*, which was intended to be a defense of rabbinic literature. In addition to these major works several of his sermons and responsa were published posthumously as well.³¹

The works of the Maharal have proved challenging to readers over the years. "The books of the Maharal are deep in thought and structure, and are therefore difficult to study."³² Thieberger has suggested that his works lack a central idea from which everything radiated and are only held loosely together by an external bond.³³ The subject matter of his works certainly varies from strict questions of Jewish custom and observance to ideas of science and mathematics. Still, whatever the 'outside' subject matter he touched upon or was influenced by, he remained a 'Jewish' writer. "Even a superficial acquaintance with his writings reveals a man of wide knowledge of the intellectual currents of his time, though he lived and worked chiefly within the Jewish community."³⁴

Much has been written of what have been categorically called 'The Maharal's Educational Reforms.' "Unlike most of his contemporaries, Rabbi Judah Loew preferred *aggadah* (the legends and homiletic parts of the Talmud) to *halakhah* (the dry legal matter in Talmudic law)."³⁵ In addition to Maharal's preference of legend over law, he also was a staunch critic of casuistry, or the Talmudic dialectical concept of *pilpul*. The goal of *pilpul* is to draw out convoluted connections between differing issues and create arguments which twist and turn like a pepper (Hebrew: *pilpul*, hence the term). *Pilpul* was considered a useful tool to sharpen a student's mind and demonstrated the logical acuity of a talmudic scholar. As Sadek writes, "Rabbi Judah Loew considered the

pilpul method dangerous since he felt it would cause its followers to lose sight of the true intent of the Word of God and become hopelessly entangled in oversophisticated casuistry.”³⁶ Sherwin argues that the Maharal saw the method of *pilpul* and its overuse as nothing less than “a threat to the essence and future of Judaism itself.”³⁷ He also contends that, “Judah Loew wanted nothing less than a reformation of Judaism, a return by Judaism to its authentic roots. He was consequently a threat to a variety of establishments within Jewish community life.” This, Sherwin suggests, might explain both why Judah Loew never mentioned his teachers directly by name, and failed for so long to be elevated to the position of Chief Rabbi of Prague.³⁸

As an alternative, or an antidote to the ‘dangers’ posed by *pilpul*, Rabbi Loew emphasized the study of the Mishnah first and foremost. “Judah Löw (*sic*) ben Bezalel made the study of the Mishnah a pivotal point in his pedagogic reforms. Aside from the fact that every rabbi is expected to study the Mishnah as part of his talmudic learning, Rabbi Löw considered the Mishnah as a link between the wisdom of Torah and the wisdom of man. He saw the Mishnah as a halfway point between the Torah and the Gemarrah, requiring the utmost attention.”³⁹ Rabbi Loew argued that a student’s education should be complete and firmly built upon true study and not mental gymnastics. The Mishnah, for him, represented this type of order, and thus, its study was essential. He preferred that students and teachers should follow the methodology and curriculum outlined in Avot 5:21. That is to say, one should begin to learn Bible at age 5, Mishnah at age 10, and Talmud at age 15, and not instead be rushed into studies too advanced for their young minds.⁴⁰ Loew encouraged students to study aloud and in pairs, but contrary to

some of his contemporaries he emphasized that students should learn the Bible in its entirety before matriculating to rabbinic texts. To Loew, an in-depth study of grammar was essential to the task of mastering the Bible.⁴¹ A more detailed study of the context of his thought will make up the bulk of the following chapter.

The Maharal's legacy can be seen in his students and followers. "A strong intellectual impulse came from the writings and personality of R. Loew, the MaHaRaL, who was considered *spiritus rector* by all members of the Prague intelligentsia, including those who had not studied in his *yeshiva*."⁴² His students included, among others, Rabbi Ephraim Lenczytz, who served as his assistant in Prague, and David Ganz (1541-1613), who chronicled his life.⁴³ Ganz was a scholar and astronomer in his own right, as well as an associate of Kepler and Brahe, and followed after his master's teachings.⁴⁴ The Maharal's devotion to the study of Mishnah also had a profound impact on his student Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, who wrote a commentary to the Mishnah, which is still found today in almost every bound Hebrew edition of that text.⁴⁵ Shlomo Mallin has gone so far as to suggest that through one of his students, Joseph Shlomo Delmedico, the Maharal even influenced Galileo Galilei.⁴⁶

The Maharal was unique in that he tried to erect a bridge between the esoteric and the mundane, and as such, he influenced two major trends in Jewish thought which arose after his time: Sabbateanism and Hasidism.⁴⁷ Although Sabbateanism has gradually faded from the Jewish consciousness, Hasidism was, and continues to be, a major force in Jewish thought. Inasmuch as the early Hasidim focused much attention on the miraculous feats of their 'Tzaddikim,' it was perhaps

natural for the Maharal, who was understood to be a miracle worker as well as a mystic, to fit into that mold.⁴⁸ Bezalel Safran endeavors to prove that the Maharal had a direct influence on Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, who was one of the early fathers of Hasidic thought.⁴⁹

Thus, we can understand that the Maharal's influence continues to be dynamic to this day. Given that Rabbi Loew's commitment to the study of the Mishnah was so well demonstrated by, among other things, the accomplishment of his student Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, it is very fitting that our current discussion should focus on the Maharal's commentary on *PIRKEI AVOT*, a tractate of the Mishnah. It is with Loew's devotion to the Mishnah in mind then that we turn our attention to the subject of the Mishnah itself.

The Mishnah is second only to the Torah in terms of its importance to the Jewish people. The name, Mishnah (משנה) may indicate its intended purpose of teaching, taking as the root of the word 'Mishnah' (שנה) to teach. In his dictionary, Marcus Jastrow points out that this word has the meaning of "repetition." That is to say, one repeats the subject over and over until they have learned it.⁵⁰ The Mishnah in turn serves as the core of the Talmud, upon which the entire later corpus of Jewish law (*halakhah*) is based. The Mishnah contains an explication of many of the laws laid out in the Torah and helps to make clear the general rules of practice. Its structure, for the most part, consists of sayings by rabbis touching on a wide variety of subjects.

The Mishnah is one discrete part of the body of literature collectively known under the general rubric of 'Oral Torah.' According

to the rabbinic tradition, all of the teaching in the Mishnah and Talmud (as well as all later texts) was also taught to Moses on Mount Sinai, in addition to the written Torah, and was then transmitted orally from teacher to student down through the ages. This theory is subject to much disagreement and speculation on behalf of scholars, however, taken as it is with the layers of legend and tradition, no one is certain what the true origins of the Mishnah are.

Although the rabbinic system of Judaism is normative today, this was not always the case. It was only after the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and the destruction of the priesthood, which had theretofore been the principle influence upon Jewish practice, that rabbinic Judaism stood a chance of coming to the fore. In 140 CE, when the rabbinic centers of Northern Palestine were created, Judaism as understood by the rabbis became firmly established. It is probable that the history of the Mishnah and its teachings were retrojected to the time of the men of the Great Assembly in order to give the rabbis a more firm claim to legitimacy.⁵¹ However, it is not known for certain exactly when the body of material of what became the Mishnah began to be circulate orally.

What tradition would have us believe about the origins of the Mishnah is based almost entirely upon a letter written by Rav Sherira, the Gaon of the academy at Pumbeditha, to the community at Kairouan in the 10th Century. Sherira was writing to answer a question posed to him by that community as to how the Mishnah and Talmud— the Oral tradition— came to be written down. He coaxed his answer out of the available history recorded in rabbinic literature. Sherira wrote that prior to the time of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi (henceforth known as

Rabbi) the Oral Torah did not exist in written form. Rabbi's concern, we are told, grew at this time due to the proliferation of students of Rabbis Hillel and Shammai, and since these students (as well as their teachers) often disagreed in significant ways as to what the law stated, a codified text had to be created, so Rabbi redacted a codified form of the Mishnah.⁵² As H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger write about Sherira's views, "He (Rabbi) did not proceed at his own discretion, but examined the tradition all the way back to the men of the Great Synagogue, in order to adopt verified sentences verbatim."⁵³ The labor of Rabbi resulted in the authoritative Mishnah that we have today, and a collection of unused *mishnayot* (pl. of mishnah) known as *baraitaot*.⁵⁴ This redaction is assumed to have been completed by about 220 CE.

Thus, by the 3rd Century CE there was a written codified text that was available for study and reference. Though the Mishnah was supposedly only written down as a hedge against the Oral Torah being forgotten, it soon became a self referencing source of Jewish law. "Beginning no later than the 3rd generation (late 3rd and early 4th centuries) the Amoraim did indeed regard M (Mishnah) as a legal code and as an internally altogether consistent system."⁵⁵ Although we understand and can trace the development of the Mishnah, its original intent is a matter of debate. "Given today's knowledge, it is no longer possible unequivocally to determine whether M was originally conceived as a collection, a teaching manual or a law code."⁵⁶

Structurally, the Mishnah is divided into six groups known as Orders or *Sedarim*. The Orders are as follows: *ZERAIM* (Seeds), *MOED* (Festivals), *NASHIM* (Women), *NEZIKIN* (Damages), *KODASHIM* (Holy Things), and *TAHAROT* (Purifications). Each of these Orders are further divided

into a total of 63 separate *massekhtot* or tractates (sing. *massekhet*). Each individual *massekhet* is concerned with a specific topic, and that topic constitutes the majority of the material contained within that *massekhet*. However, the logic used to organize the various *mishnayot* which make up a *massekhet* is largely associative in nature. Most of the following discussion however, will be centered on the ninth tractate of *SEDER NEZIKIN*, *Avot*.

Tractate *Avot*, or *PIRKEI AVOT* as it has come to be known⁵⁷ is unique among the tractates of the Mishnah in that it contains no *halakhic* material, but is instead made up of *aggadic* comments alone.⁵⁸ The work contains mainly ethical maxims, and what teachings one rabbi or another deemed as essential. It is generally assumed that just as the Mishnah as a whole was the product of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi, so too did he author *Avot*. Whether Rabbi was the actual writer or not “[f]or all intents and purposes, *Avot* is a product of the mishnaic sages and written in the Hebrew of that period.”⁵⁹ Thus, even though Rabbi may not be the actual author, the work as we have it is certainly a product of his time and place.

Structurally, *Avot* is made up of six *perakim* (sing. *perek*) or chapters, which, except in certain instances, do not follow a set order.⁶⁰ The first chapter of *Avot* attempts to trace the lineage of the transmission of the Oral Torah from Moses down to Rabban Gamliel, a follower of Hillel and Shammai. The beginning of Chapter Two contains a variety of sayings attributed to Rabban Gamliel and Hillel, as well as others, whereas the remainder of the chapter consists of the line of tradition extending from Rabbi Yokhanan ben Zakkai— whose flight from Jerusalem to Yavneh enabled rabbinic Judaism to survive the fall

of the Second Temple⁶¹— to his students. Chapter Five consists for the most part of various sayings based on numerical permutations, “Seven kinds of punishment are upon the world corresponding to seven categories of transgressions,” and, “There are four types of people,” and the like.⁶² The remainder of the text is a collection of sayings and aphorisms.

Some scholars, primarily those who attribute the authorship of the Mishnah to Yehudah Ha-Nasi, would like to suggest that this work was his attempt to instill his views and example of ethics upon all Jews.⁶³ R. Travers Herford writes, “The sayings were intended to be examples of the wisdom and piety of some of the older teachers of Israel, gathered together in the hope that the study of them and meditation upon them would foster the like piety and wisdom in the student.”⁶⁴ In any case, most scholars would agree that the work, while not exactly parallel in style or content to Proverbs or Ben Sira, should be categorized as belonging to the body of wisdom literature.⁶⁵

Over the centuries Jewish scholars have debated the purpose and significance of *PIRKEI AVOT*. In discussing its title, ‘Avot,’ the Meiri (1249-1316) writes that this tractate deals with “[t]hings which are fundamental principles (*Avot*), essentials and roots and sources for all Tora (*sic*) wisdom and precepts, and [are] a pathway to all perfection.”⁶⁶ Maimonides writing in the 12th Century suggested that *Avot* was to be understood as a handbook for judges. He based this opinion on the tractate’s location within *SEDER NEZIKIN*, which discusses most issues of jurisprudence.⁶⁷

Modern scholarship, following ancient antecedents, has also debated the purpose of this text. M. B. Lerner wrote, “Taken as a whole,

it maybe said that the teachings of *Avot* provide the student with an appreciation of the essence of Oral Tora (*sic*), and a proper orientation towards study and fulfillment of the Tora."⁶⁸ Other writers, while contemplating the chain of tradition set forth in the first chapter, suggest that *Avot* is rabbinic Judaism's attempt to establish a claim of authenticity. Ben Zion Dinur writes, "The essential purpose of the *massekhet* is to establish the correct order of received tradition from generation to generation."⁶⁹ And, Herford suggests, "The intention was to prove the claim of the Pharisees (the rabbis) to stand forth as the rightful heirs of Moses and the prophets."⁷⁰ Thus, based on the chain of tradition described in the first mishnah of *Avot*, the rabbis could claim that their teaching and their authority extended to Moses himself. Dinur however, raises a key question, if establishing the chain of authority is the intent of *Avot*, why is it placed where it is, namely as the ninth tractate of the fourth Order, or roughly in the middle of the Mishnah?⁷¹

There is evidence to suggest that either *Avot* was at one point not placed where it appears today, or perhaps as Dinur suggests, originally only three Orders, *MOED*, *NASHIM*, and *NEZIKIN* were studied, and thus *Avot* provided a conclusion to such labor.⁷² Thus, as Herford contends, it is possible that *Avot* was originally intended to be an appendix to the Mishnah, and its contents were collected together for that purpose.⁷³

More important, perhaps, than questions about whether or not *Avot* has been moved to a different position or rearranged over time, is the question of how it has been viewed and used by subsequent Jewish tradition. At a very early date, its importance as a work of piety and moral instruction was evident and appreciated. The Talmud states, "One

who wants to be pious should fulfill all the words of Tractate Avot,"⁷⁴ and that attitude has been upheld through the ages. *Avot's* value and importance is most easily seen in the fact that it came to be used as a synagogue text. According to tradition, the regular study of *Avot* in synagogues began in Geonic times (7th-11th Centuries), and Rav Amram Gaon says that during this period a sixth chapter was added to the text.⁷⁵ Prior to this time, therefore, *Avot* consisted of only five chapters, but when its regular study was introduced to help fill the time between the *Mincha* and *Ma'ariv* services on Shabbat afternoons, the sixth chapter was added. This addition enabled one chapter to be studied on each of the six Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuot. This chapter, known as *Perek Kinyan Torah* (The Chapter of the Acquisition of Torah), is also found in two other rabbinic works, *KALLAH RABBATI* and *TANNA DE BE ELIAHU ZUTA*. These versions vary slightly, and it is difficult to determine which is the original.⁷⁶ The use of *Avot* as a study text, led to the adaptation of the name *PIRKEI AVOT*, or 'The Chapters of *Avot*.'

The ongoing importance of this text is seen in the numerous editions of *Avot* that have been printed over the centuries. In addition, since Geonic times, as we have said, *Avot* has been studied in synagogues and was therefore published in countless prayerbooks as well. A plethora of scholars have written commentaries on *Avot*. This list includes, but is not limited to: Rashi, Rambam, Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartinura, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, Sforino, Abravanel, and of course Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel.

With this then, we conclude our discussion of the life and times of the Maharal, as well as the history, evolution, and structure of the Mishnah and *PIRKEI AVOT* in particular. We move now to a more detailed

discussion of Judah Loew's thought and how his beliefs regarding the purpose and importance of Torah study and mitzvot are spelled out in his commentary on *PIRKEI AVOT*.

Chapter One

1. Bokser, *THE MAHARAL*, p. 28.
2. Daniel Litt, "Towards an Understanding of the Philosophy of History of the Maharal of Prague" (Rabbinic Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1959), p. 15.
3. On the difficulties the Jews faced with regards to the Hussites, see Bokser, pp. 28-29, and Litt, pp. 15-16.
4. Litt, *IBID.*
5. Thieberger, *THE GREAT RABBI LOEW OF PRAGUE*, p. 2.
6. *IBID.*
7. Mordechai Breuer, "Modernism and Traditionalism in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Historiography," In *JEWISH THOUGHT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 50-51.
8. From here on. Maharal, *Moreinu Ha-Rav Loew* (Our Teacher the Rabbi Loew).
9. Sherwin, *MYSTICAL THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL DISSENT*, p. 25.
10. Vladimír Sadek, "The Spiritual World of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel," *REVIEW OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF CZECHOSLOVAKIAN JEWRY* 4 (1991-92): p. 101.
11. A. Gottesdiener, *HA MAHARAL MI-PRAG* (London, England: L. Honig and Sons, 1976), p. 16.
12. Luria created a system of Jewish Mysticism in Safed during the 16th Century, the influences of which are still felt to this day.
13. Bokser, p. 20.
14. Gottesdiener, p. 21.
15. *IBID.*
16. *IBID.*, pp. 22-23.
17. Sherwin, p. 180.
18. *IBID.*, pp. 28.
19. That he accepted this position proves significant given his ideas on educational reform, which will be outlined further in this chapter
20. *IBID.*, pp. 31.
21. For a discussion of the Maharal's whereabouts during this period, see, *IBID.*, pp. 32 ff.
22. Vladimír Sadek, "Stories of the Golem and Their Relation to the Work of Rabbi Loew of Prague," *JUDAICA BOHEMIAE* 23 (Number 1, 1987): p. 85.
23. Sherwin, p. 15.
24. *IBID.*
25. Sadek, "The Spiritual World of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel," pp. 104-05.
26. Sherwin, p. 36.
27. *IBID.*
28. *IBID.*, p. 27 ff.
29. Nathan Kaber, "The Social Cultural and Ethical Ideals of the Maharal of Prague as Reflected in his Netivot Olam" (Rabbinic Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1942), p. 2. See also Thieberger, pp. 24-25.
30. Rashi, *Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak*, 1040-1105. He wrote commentaries to the Tanakh and the Talmud, both of which are still widely used today.
31. For a thorough discussion of the Maharal's works and their themes, see Sherwin, pp. 38-50.
32. Abraham Kariv, *KITVEI MAHARAL MI-PRAG* (Jerusalem, Israel: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1960), Volume I, Introduction, p. ii.

33. Thieberger, p. 30.
34. Litt, p. 22.
35. Sadek, *IBID.*, p. 108.
36. *IBID.*
37. Sherwin, p. 31.
38. *IBID.*, pp. 34-35.
39. Vladimír Sadek, "The Kabbalists in Prague During the Renaissance," *REVIEW OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF CZECHOSLOVAKIAN JEWRY* 6 (1993-94): p. 30.
40. Sadek, "The Spiritual World of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel," p. 106.
41. *IBID.*, p. 108.
42. Breuer, p. 53.
43. Abner Weiss, "Rabbi Loew of Prague: Theory of Human Nature and Morality" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yeshiva University, 1969), p. 21.
44. On Gañz's association with Kepler and Brahe, see *IBID.* On his views regarding secular learning and his objection to *pilpul* see Breuer, p. 69.
45. Sherwin, p. 177.
46. Shlomo Mallin, trans., *THE HAGGADAH OF THE MAHARAL*, by Judah Loew Ben Bezalel (Jerusalem, Israel: Horev Publishers, 1993). Introduction, pp. xii-xiv.
47. Sherwin, p. 52.
48. Gottesdiener, p. 54. For a discussion of the 'Tzaddik' or pious saint in Hasidism, see Gershom Scholem, *MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM* (Jerusalem, Israel: Schocken Publishing House, 1941), p. 339. Sadek quotes Scholem as saying that Loew was the first Hasidic writer, see Vladimír Sadek, "Social Aspects in the Work of Prague Rabbi Löw," *JUDAICA BOHEMIAE* 19 (Number 1, 1983): p. 3.
49. Bezalel Safran, "Maharal and Early Hasidism," In *HASIDISM: CONTINUITY OR INNOVATION*, edited by Bezalel Safran (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 74.
50. Marcus Jastrow, *A DICTIONARY OF THE TARGUMIM, THE TALMUD BABLI AND YERUSHALMI, AND THE MIDRASHIC LITERATURE* (Jerusalem, Israel: Horev Publishers), p. 857.
51. For a full discussion of the evolution and ascendancy of Rabbinic Judaism, see Ellis Rivkin, *A HIDDEN REVOLUTION* (Nashville, IN.: Parthenon Press, 1978), pp. 209-311. Avot 1:1-3 speak of the transmission of authority from Moses, down through the Men of the Great Assembly, and ultimately to the rabbis.
52. Rav Sherira Gaon, *THE IGGERES OF RAV SHERIRA GAON*, translated by Rabbi Nosson Dovid Rabinowich (Jerusalem, Israel: Moznaim, 1988), pp. 1-33.
53. H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *INTRODUCTION TO THE TALMUD AND MIDRASH* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 124.
54. The *baraitaot* were subsequently codified in a text known as the *TOSEFTA*, which is organized along the same lines as the Mishnah itself. The *baraitaot* are occasionally quoted in the Talmud.
55. *IBID.*, p. 136.
56. *IBID.*, pp. 136-38.
57. See further on for a discussion of the origin of this name.
58. Many scholars contend that *Avot* was originally intended as an appendix to the Mishnah as a whole. See the discussion below.
59. M. B. Lerner, "The Tractate Avot," In *THE LITERATURE OF THE SAGES*, edited by S. Safrai (Philadelphia, PA.: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 270.
60. The Sixth Perek has a different origin than the other five. See below.
61. On Yokhanan ben Zakkai's flight from Jerusalem, see Gittin 56b.
62. See Avot 5:8 and 5:10 respectively.
63. Shlomo Toporoff, *AVOT: A COMPREHENSIVE COMMENTARY TO THE ETHICS OF THE FATHERS* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson Publishers, 1997), p. 8.
64. R. Travers Herford, *PIRKE ABOOTH* (New York, NY.: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1930), p. 11.
65. Lerner, p. 268.

66. *IBID.*, p. 264.
67. *IBID.*, p. 273. See also Maimonides' Introduction to *Zeraim*.
68. Lerner, *IBID.*
69. Ben Zion Dinur, *MASSEKHET AVOT* (Jerusalem, Israel: Bialik Institute, 1972), p. 16.
70. Herford, p. 6.
71. Dinur, p. 16.
72. *IBID.*, p. 18. Presumably *Horayot*, the tractate which follows *Avot* in *SEDER NEZIKIN*, was also added later as well. In the same vein Dinur also postulates that *Berakhot*, which now begins the Mishnah, was at one point in *SEDER MOED*, but later moved to provide an introduction to the Mishnah as a whole.
73. Herford, p. 8.
74. Babba Kamma 30a.
75. Dinur, p. 11.
76. Herford, pp. 13-14.

Chapter Two:

The Maharal's Thought

Before we can begin to look at how the Maharal understood the importance of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot we must first grapple with his thought in general. Only after we understand and gain an insight into his entire system of thought will we then realize the significance that the study of Torah and mitzvot have within that system. Therefore, this chapter will attempt to present an in-depth discussion of the Maharal's thought, as well as how he might best be understood.

As with any great mind, Rabbi Loew's thought neither developed in, nor emerged from, a vacuum. He was influenced by his own inherited religious tradition, and by the beliefs of scholars who preceded him in the Jewish world. As such, his work bears signs of these influences. Though the Maharal was a critic of *pilpul* and the way Talmud was taught in his time, he cannot be construed as having strayed from his traditional milieu. Herbert Davidson described a composite Jewish philosopher of the medieval period as follows:

He is someone who is sincerely religious, a sincere adherent of the religion of his fathers. He is, however, interested in ideas, and open-minded; he is willing, even eager to examine theoretical problems in an analytic, naturalist manner. Further he is possessed of the medieval mentality in the following important sense: he has a completely static view of history. He cannot even imagine that people in biblical times and rabbinic times had looked at the universe differently from the way he looks at the universe.¹

Though this scholar was not speaking of the Maharal *per se*, given the historical figure of Judah Loew which we have already considered, he does seem to fit into the model presented by Davidson. As suggested by Davidson's comments, we are able to surmise that the Maharal had to reconcile a large measure of revealed religious tradition with his commitment to scientific thought, which taught things contrary to that tradition. It is in this context that he developed his ideas.

We might identify three discrete sources that had a profound influence upon the Maharal and his thought. The first of which is the traditional Jewish system of belief within which he was thoroughly at home. The second is the philosophical ideas which were translated, embellished upon, and subsequently brought into the Jewish idiom during the Second Millennium. And lastly, the Maharal was influenced by medieval science and its devotion to the Aristotelian model of the universe. Together, these three elements coalesced into the complex of ideas from which Rabbi Loew's thought emerged. However, inasmuch as it is impossible to determine who Judah Loew's teachers were, it is also difficult to determine with precision what schools influenced his thought and to state conclusively in what intellectual thought tradition he belongs. This is due to the fact that "in every epoch different (of his, the Maharal's) topical ideas were chosen and stressed."² Over the years that Rabbi Loew and his thought have been a topic of discussion he has been variously categorized as a philosopher, a mystic, a humanist, and even as an orthodox thinker who neither said nor did anything outside of the normative Judaism of his day.

As a Jew, Judah Loew's thinking began in earnest with his acceptance of the divine. God has always been at the root of Judaism, and the Maharal, was no exception in this regard.

The religious life, as Rabbi Judah saw it, is an autonomous enterprise of the human spirit. It rests on... articles of faith.... [One is belief in] God's omnipresence, that "all things are in the hands of God and there is nothing outside Him. This is the real significance of believing in the existence of God. For surely every one believes that there is a God, but it is important to renounce the notion that God is not in everything, and that it is impossible to withdraw from His jurisdiction."³

Thus, the Maharal founded his thought on this tenet of Judaism, and conceived of the world through its lens. By extension he also accepted the Bible as the word of God. Therefore, the stories and legends written therein were the literal truth, and left no room for negotiation.

As a beneficiary of the centuries of tradition built upon the origins of Judaism, Judah Loew was also the heir of the Talmud and the attendant rabbinic system. "His sources are in the classical Jewish works and, in considerable measure, in some of the main trends of medieval Jewish philosophy.... As we shall see, some of his doctrines which appear to be kabbalistic may well have their origins in standard rabbinic sources."⁴ In terms of the Jewish people, Loew follows the biblical notion that the Jews are the chosen people of God, and the rabbinic conception that their place in the world is necessary vis-à-vis creation. In fact, some regard much of his work as an attempt to "[parry] the anti-Talmudic thrust of the philosophers."⁵ He defends his talmudic forebears against the accusations that they were ignorant of science, which is significant given Loew's propensity for scientific thought. Instead, he claims that the rabbis were not ignorant, but

rather they sought recourse to the ultimate source of all.⁶ Moreover, regarding the rabbis' explanation of various scientific phenomena and their relative lack of sophisticated scientific thought, Maharal claimed that they merely looked at the natural world opposite them only to understand the cause producing that order, and not the order itself.⁷

Thus, many scholars see the Maharal within the context of his contemporaries. Jacob Elbaum writes that Loew's outlook, at least in regard to rabbinic material, "[C]learly reflects the traditional attitude of the German rabbis of his generation."⁸ And, in spite of his views regarding the need for pedagogic reform and his rejection of *pilpul*, Isadore Twersky paints him as a "defender of talmudism."⁹ In consideration of all the possible traditions into which Rabbi Loew could be placed, Marvin Fox writes, "He is primarily a Jewish thinker standing fully inside the classical Jewish tradition, one who at the same time reflects in his ideas and terminology the effects of his studies in both philosophy and Kabbalah." Furthermore, Fox argues that his use of philosophic and kabbalistic terminology was more for "atmosphere" than doctrine.¹⁰ Rivka Schatz strongly opposes the view that Maharal be considered as anything other than an orthodox Jew. She writes, "The thinking of the Maharal is without historical interest, he is an orthodox thinker of his time and not a revolutionary."¹¹ Thus, these latter two scholars see Judah Loew fully as a contemporary orthodox thinker.

It is true, however, that some of Judah Loew's thought can be seen as originating in Jewish philosophy. Medieval Jewish philosophy had its roots in the thought of Aristotle, which was passed down from ancient Greece to Muslim centers of learning. Aristotle's work was translated into Arabic from which the school of Jewish philosophy eventually

emerged. Thinkers such as Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) and Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides) did much to expand upon and disseminate philosophical ideas in the Jewish sphere.

The philosophers wanted to determine the attributes of God, and prove His existence, without recourse to faith alone. Instead, they sought to arrive at a demonstrative knowledge of God solely through the exercise of their intellect and reason. Thus, the philosophers developed various arguments to rationally prove the existence of God, or to show that the existence of God was a rational necessity. Their labors gave rise to a new wealth of vocabulary and thought which permeated the Jewish consciousness. However, Judaism had traditionally accepted the existence of God as a matter of faith that required no proof outside of the revealed tradition, and therefore, the project which the philosophers set out on, i.e. that of rationally proving God's existence, lead to many philosophers being labeled as heretics.

The Maharal accepted and embraced some of the ideas put forth by the philosophers. Some scholars point out that Loew agreed with aspects of the ideas put forward by Maimonides, as others suggest that the Maharal's understanding and use of the concept of *devekut* had its origin in Maimonidean thought.¹² Therefore, some scholars place Maharal firmly in the school of the philosophers. Vladimír Sadek views Judah Loew as a representative of Renaissance philosophy, and deems aspects of his thought on a par with that of individuals such as Thomas Hobbes.¹³ Jacob Katz wrote, "The Maharal used the vocabulary and the concepts of medieval philosophy."¹⁴ Herbert Davidson, in his essay "The Study of Philosophy as a Religious Obligation," again while not discussing the Rabbi Loew *per se*, does describe a mode of thought

among the Jewish intelligentsia of Loew's day; he clearly refers to these individuals as philosophers. They blended science and religion, physics and metaphysics, in an attempt to arrive at the full knowledge of God, and Maharal certainly fits this description. At the end of his essay Davidson writes, "Given medieval Jewish thinkers who were faithful adherents of the religion of their fathers and yet of a rationalist temperament— to these men religious obligations could make sense only when analyzed and understood in a rational manner. For them, only a rationalized religion was a satisfactory religion, and thus the study of philosophy became necessary on religious grounds."¹⁵ Thus, it is suggested that the Maharal ought to be considered a philosopher.

There are problems with this hypothesis, however, in that Rabbi Loew objected to many of the philosopher's ideas regarding the use of human reason— such as the Aristotelian notion that God's essence is the eternal activity of theoretical reflection, and that man might fully know God by exercising his rational faculties alone. Given these objections, it could be said that Loew found more in common with Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides) and his anti-rationalistic attitude.¹⁶ Instead, according to Rabbi Loew, reason should not be the ultimate goal, but knowledge and wisdom must go hand in hand with action.¹⁷ Loew also objected to a philosophical tenet put forward by Eliezer Ashkenazi that God cannot do the impossible.¹⁸ "Loew denies the validity of Ashkenazi's premises. To say there are things God cannot do is to limit Him. Limiting God to the *logically* possible is limiting God to the laws of logic."¹⁹

Loew counters the philosophical idea that as the body is inherently evil which must be vigorously controlled by reason. Rather,

Loew advocated finding a way to reconcile the body and the soul, and have the two coexist in peace.²⁰ In addition to these things, Maharal also objected to the Maimonidean assertion that all the mitzvot must have rational reasons behind them, and sides with Hasdai Crescas in opposing the Maimonidean conception of the negative attributes of God.²¹ Therefore, we see that even though the Maharal did not accept all of what the Jewish philosophers had to say, his thought was influenced by their arguments. As much as Rabbi Loew may have absorbed from the philosophers, he gains as much if not more by using their thought as a foil.

In light of his many objections to the notions presented by philosophy, many scholars vehemently argue that Rabbi Loew was not a philosopher. Byron Sherwin suggests that Maharal wrote his works to refute Maimonides and Gersonides and their ideas about rationalism. Instead, his attitude was one that Jewish tradition was mystical and could not be reconciled with rational and philosophical systems.²² In the same vein, it has been suggested that Judah Loew proposed one study philosophy only if they intended to use that knowledge to refute the philosophers.²³ Ultimately Loew assumed the posture that in questions of metaphysics, one should not follow the philosophers.²⁴ In discussing Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem writes, "The Kabbalah certainly did not *arise* as a reaction against philosophical 'enlightenment,' but once it was there it is true that its function was that of an opposition to it."²⁵ Then it may be that Loew's 'mystical' thought was in fact polemic against the philosophers.

Scholem strives to prove in his writings that mysticism had been an ongoing enterprise within Judaism from the time of Rabbi Akiva to

that of Rav Kook (d. 1935).²⁶ However, medieval Jewish mysticism, or the Kabbalah as we know it today, most likely developed in Spain during the 12th and 13th Centuries. There is some discussion of to what degree Judah Loew accepted kabbalistic teachings. As we have already discussed, though mysticism was largely ignored by many European rabbis of the medieval period, others used its language and ideas to enhance their own writings. Marvin Fox puts Rabbi Loew in this category and contends that he used mystical ideas in his work as "atmosphere."²⁷ From another point of view, however, Abner Weiss writes, "Although Rabbi Loew makes little use of Cabbalistic (*sic*) terminology, his writings abound in Cabbalistic concepts."²⁸ Thus, other scholars feel that Loew's kabbalistic language was more than just a matter of flavor, as Sherwin writes, "It would appear that Loew's direct source was the Spanish Kabbalists."²⁹

Many scholars therefore, place Loew firmly in the category of mystic. Scholem wrote, "A mystic's understanding and interpretation of his own experience may even lead him to question the religious authority he had hitherto supported."³⁰ And, "The mystic strives to assure himself of the living presence of God... the God who is good, wise, just and merciful, and the embodiment of all other positive attributes."³¹ Scholem understands Maharal's pedagogical reforms and iconoclastic actions, as well as his thought on the order and organization of the world, in this light. He goes so far as to assert outright that Loew was a kabbalist, yet argues that Loew disguised that fact so effectively, that many think he was not.³² Sherwin, while perhaps not prepared to argue that Maharal was a kabbalist *per se*, does endeavor to prove that he was at the very least a "master of speculative mysticism."³³

As we saw in Chapter One, however, Judah Loew was also a devotee of secular knowledge. Though he may have objected to Aristotelian thought as a philosophical system, he believed, as did his contemporaries, in the correctness of the Aristotelian system of science. The medieval conception held that Aristotle discovered all of the laws of nature during the classical period. Therefore, men of science simply had to begin from where the Greeks had left off. Despite the fact that Renaissance learning would eventually disprove much of what Aristotle taught, for Rabbi Loew it remained established truth. Maharal believed that by studying the natural world, or by contemplating its order, humanity might gain greater knowledge of God.³⁴ In this vein, the Maharal also advocated study of the wisdom of the nations, for in as much as their wisdom taught true things about the nature of the world, those truths had their ultimate source in God.³⁵

Astronomy was apparently one way in which Judah Loew ben Bezalel reveled in the power of God as it was manifested in nature. According to his biographer David Ganz, Maharal was an astronomer,³⁶ although Andre Neher contends that in the Maharal's day there was not a definitive difference between astronomy and astrology. While it is relatively clear that Maharal forbade his students from attempting to predict the future based on the movement of the stars, he did teach that "knowledge of the paths of the stars and planets he (a student) is certainly expected to study."³⁷ Moreover, Neher states that Loew's methodology of astronomic study was similar to that of Johannes Kepler, and it is impossible to see a difference in the work of Kepler, Loew, and Tycho Brahe.³⁸ Thus, there is evidence that at least in terms of science,

Loew was a careful scientist, and may even have shared ideas on methodology and technique with his non-Jewish contemporaries.

While willing to accept what some secular scientists taught, Judah Loew did not automatically accept all of their teachings as true. One alleged truth that the Maharal rejected was that published by Copernicus (1473-1543). Copernicus discovered, or came to realize, that the earth revolves around the sun, and not *vice versa*, an idea which overturned the age-old belief in geo-centricism.³⁹ Although Judah Loew was dedicated to the pursuit of scientific fact, on the significant question of helio-centricism, he chose to remain steadfastly opposed. "Although he alludes to Copernicus' new system, he maintains the centrality of the earth. Moreover, he accepts the Aristotelian view of nature, rather than the theories which were being developed in his era."⁴⁰

When considering his thought, there are those scholars who perceive elements of humanist thought in Rabbi Loew's work. Alan Kimche sees Maharal's attitude on the perfection of man as "valuable on a humanist moral level."⁴¹ Moreover, Weiss writes, "His pedagogy is comparable to that of Comenius, and, as such, is deserving of a place among the classical references of 16th Century humanist thought."⁴² Andre Neher goes so far as to assert outright that Judah Loew was an humanist.⁴³

It is probably impossible to ever state definitively with whom the Maharal's thought most likely originates, or in what category he belongs. Weiss writes, "Some of his conceptual foundations... are taken from Cabbalah (*sic*); others... are quite new in the history of Jewish thought."⁴⁴ As we noted in Chapter One, the fact that he never informed his readers who his teachers were, means that we can only conjecture

about his basic commitments based on analysis and critique. Although he obviously took some ideas from philosophy and science, his commitment to his own tradition shows through clearly. More will be said about the Maharal's place in the spectrum of Jewish thought in Chapter Four of this study.

As we begin our discussion of the Maharal's thought itself, we are faced with another dilemma. This is summed up by Marvin Fox, for in regards to the Maharal's writing he suggests that "[n]o single subject is fully developed in one place, nor is there an explicit set of connections between the subjects which forms them into a coherent and comprehensive theory. The MaHaRaL did not produce a great systematic treatise on ethics on the order of the major works of Greek antiquity or of modern philosophy."⁴⁵ Although this author speaks here of Rabbi Loew's writings on ethics, the same description applies to his writings on most other subjects in general. It has been left to later scholarship, therefore, to attempt a systemization of Maharal's thought.

There are several identifiable key elements in Maharal's religious thinking. Specifically these include: a hierarchical dichotomous conception of reality; the idea of potential within the universe; the concepts of suffering and chastisements of love; providence; *derekh eretz*; *devekut*; this world and the world to come; and Israel's natural place in the world. In order to fully understand Rabbi Loew's ideas on Torah study and the observance of mitzvot, we must first examine these key ideas.

Loew's thought begins with the presupposition that reality is hierarchical. That is to say, there are higher and lower realms which are separated by a degree of corporeality. This is a legacy of Aristotle's

conception of how the universe was structured. Aristotle taught that the world consisted of three levels: the first contained purely intellectual beings, these separate substances or intelligences, existed without any material attributes at all; the second level was made up of the celestial spheres, which endlessly revolved around the earth, which is at the center of the universe; and, the third level, which was identical with the very material earth, and was fixed at the center of the universe.⁴⁶ Maharal, utilizing this division of the universe, refers to a lower world (העולם התחתון), a middle world (העולם האמצעי), and, an upper world (העולם העליון).⁴⁷ These worlds coexist and influence one another, yet they remain separate.

In line with this view, the Maharal taught that the highest world does not behave according to the laws which are in effect in the lower world. Occasionally, the order of the upper world effects that of the lower, and to Rabbi Loew this is what accounts for miracles. "In the upper world there is a different order, "the discrete." Miracles have their source in this upper world; they occur when this upper world temporarily penetrates and intrudes into this world."⁴⁸ With this understanding, Loew succeeds in at least partially answering the quandary facing medieval Jewish philosophers, namely, how can God who is by His nature also bound to the laws of logic, perform miracles, or that which is by definition illogical?⁴⁹

In Loew's day science taught that the earth is made up of four constituent elements, namely: earth, water, fire, and air. In this world alone the possibility for change and conflict exists.⁵⁰ According to this understanding of the elements, all matter intrinsically clings to, and seeks out, its like kind. Therefore, a clump of earth or a rock falls

downward (read earthward) in order to fulfill its inherent desire to rejoin the ground. In the same way, fire rises upwards in an attempt to return to its own natural place on the periphery of the material world.⁵¹ We find in this system that a distinct dichotomy between matter and spirit exists.

Sherwin suggests that Loew identified two kinds of dichotomy, or two types of opposites: complimentary opposites, and contradictory ones. Complimentary opposites may exist together in the same time and place. Contradictory opposites however, are such that the existence of one necessitates the existence of the other, but the presence of one obviates the presence of the other.⁵² The hierarchy of nature represents one example of a complimentary pair, in as much as we can see the material earth, and the celestial spheres at the same time, and thus exist together.

The dichotomy between spirit and matter is an example of a contradictory pair. In the mix of spirit and matter Maharal finds two contradictory opposites whose mutual presence is untenable. In addition, these two differ in kind, in as much as that which is spiritual is eternal, while the material is subject to decay. As for proof of this dichotomy, "Scripture itself testifies to the composite character of the existent, matter predominating in some and form in others, while in still others the form, although it predominates, is stamped in matter."⁵³ However, as we can see from this statement, there is a third option as well.

In the case of contradictory pairs, the third possibility is the middle path, the golden mean, or as Loew terms it, the *emtzai'i* (האמצאי, the middle). This middle represents a perfect fusion between two

contradictory pairs, such as form and matter, or right and left, so that the two do not utterly destroy one another, but rather by virtue of their union transcend any such conflict by rising to an higher level.

The centre (*sic*) is the focus of being, unity, truth and holiness. Anything which deviates from the centre, is, as such, excluded from these attributes.... The Maharal sees an indication of this in the very name for truth, *Emet* (אמת). The *aleph* (א) and the *tav* (ת), the two extremes of the alphabet, share in *Emet* only in as much as they stand in relation to the *mem* (מ), the middle letter of the alphabet. Truth is focused at the centre.⁵⁴

Thus, Rabbi Loew believed that the right and left, the thesis and the antithesis must be brought into line by a synthesis.⁵⁵

This dichotomy of the universe leads into Rabbi Loew's understanding of potentiality. Potentiality is the cause of the multiplicity that we find in the world, which for some thinkers proves to be a problematic fact. Alan Sinyor writes, "Creation was a casual interaction between two objects; God, on the one hand, and the world on the other.... God is one; He contains no multiplicity. The world, which is His effect, is manifold; it contains many distinct objects. But where did the multiplicity in the world originate?"⁵⁶ Loew's solution to this problem is to suggest that God created the world in such a way that it might unfold in any potential direction, and that this provides for the multiplicity which we perceive.⁵⁷ Sinyor draws out of Maharal's thought two types of potential: internal and external. Internal potential we see in a child, who will grow into an adult based on the inborn forces which cause a human to grow. External potential we see in the example of a tree; the wood of the tree may be made into a chair, but only after it is acted upon by an external force.⁵⁸ According to the Maharal we see

an example of internal potential in the earth, that it is unfolding and growing to some as of yet unrealized maturity.⁵⁹

Man is caught up in this dichotomy. On the one hand, he exists on three levels corresponding to the structure of the universe. Those three levels are: the body (גוף), corresponding to the natural world; the soul (נפש), corresponding to the in between world; and lastly, the intellect (שכל), corresponding to the higher spiritual world.⁶⁰ However, man also has an element emblematic of the contradictory pairs as well, in as much as he is made up of both matter and spirit.

Man represents the potentiality that these two opposing elements might exist together; after all, man is a synthesis of animal (material) and angel (spiritual).⁶¹ Given their wholly spiritual nature, one might think that the angels have a higher purpose in the universe than man, however, the Maharal's opinion is that this is not the case.

It is impossible to say that the angels that are in the higher world are the essence (עקר), for all of their elements are fulfilled, as such they do not require fulfillment as do other beings in the created world. As well, their names testify to this, for they are called messengers (שליחים) and were not created to follow their own desires.... It is only man who dwells in the lower world, all his signs testify on his behalf that he is the sought after essence of creation.⁶²

Therefore, man is the most potential of all beings since he possesses both body and intellect. Inasmuch as man has a body, like the animals, and an intellect, like the angels, he represents the *emtza'i* itself.⁶³ "Man is distinguished by his ability to actualize his potential, and this ability is, in turn, predicated upon his unique ability to function on the *Emtza*, without inclining to extremes."⁶⁴ Man's ultimate goal, therefore, is to bring his warring elements, his form and his matter, into line, so that

they might exist in peace. Though man may be physically living in the lowest world his responsibility is to the highest.⁶⁵

Man's enslavement to this dichotomy is not his original state. This situation was brought on by sin. Man was created perfect and whole, in the guise of Adam, in the Garden of Eden. When Adam sinned however, he became deficient (חסר), and though he gained free will, he lost his element of perfection. Through this experience, man became bound up with the material matter of this world and thereby lost his innate connection with the *emtzai'i* level. "(Maharal) regards man as existentially deficient and subject to privation. The source of deficiency and privation, the human body, is the seat of the Evil Inclination, and serves... as a veil separating man from God."⁶⁶ Maharal wants man to understand that the material things of this world have no lasting meaning or worth; as man has become more corporeal, his intellectual abilities have been conversely weakened, and he is more and more enslaved to his material desires dictated by the Evil Inclination.⁶⁷

The Evil Inclination is not to be understood as entirely 'evil,' however. We are reminded by what it says in rabbinic literature "that were it not for the impulse to evil, a man would not build a house, take a wife, beget children, or engage in commerce."⁶⁸ It is only if man should give in to this drive, and become more concerned with material things, and by extension more corporeal, that the Evil Inclination has a negative effect upon his life. However, "If man controls his evil impulse, that is, his animal and biological aggressivity, he enters into the sphere of the middle world, which is his natural domain."⁶⁹ Weiss sums up Maharal's outlook on free will and the Evil Inclination writing, "Free will and autonomy are functions of the Evil Inclination.... By

renouncing his independence, he (man) re-establishes his original relationship with God."⁷⁰

When man lost his stature and perfection, he inclined fully toward the material; at the same time however, his inborn desire to reunite these two elements was also created. Thus, man has the inborn desire to realize his potential and maintains the ability to grow, although, as he has free choice, he may also stunt that growth or pervert the direction in which it unfolds. "Since the first sin, man is free, but this freedom consists less in the possibility of choosing between good and evil than in the power to create them.... Adam did not simply acquire the possibility of choosing between a good and an evil which were presented to him by God; he acquired the much headier power of himself creating good and evil, and of giving himself the choice between them."⁷¹ Man, who was at one point whole and capable of living eternally upon the earth, through sin, acquired the responsibility of perfecting himself. "One can say that man is by definition... a creature with utopian possibilities. His potentialities aspire to the spiritual plain in order to be released from the chains of nature."⁷² Because only man sinned and lost his original stature, only he has the ability or need to perfect himself.⁷³

According to scholars, Rabbi Loew teaches that man must strive to become complete (שלם), and in doing so he conquers the corporeality associated with his earthly existence. Like the Evil Inclination, the body itself is not necessarily evil; it can either be a blessing or a curse depending on what the individual does with it. Should he succeed in unifying his material and spiritual sides, he shall gain the level of the *emtzai'i* and break free of his material tendency.⁷⁴ Judah Loew does not advocate excessive asceticism to achieve this goal, but does teach that

one strive to perfect the soul, which is the idealized form of the body.⁷⁵ This human perfection must be accomplished on three levels: in one's private life, in one's life with others, and in one's relationship with God.⁷⁶

Maharal also wants to answer questions about providence, for example, why the good suffer and the evil seem to prosper. Given his understanding of reality and how the universe operates, it should be the reverse, namely, the good should prosper and the wicked should suffer. From empirical evidence however, Loew knows that this is not the case. When evil befalls an individual it may be because he strayed from the correct path by given too much attention to one side or another, the physical or the spiritual. Maharal also suggests that such sufferings may be chastisements of love; i.e. that the righteous only seem to suffer unfairly, but in reality God is making an effort to correct those whom he loves above all others. Such suffering is then in reality a means of instruction. According to Loew, "Suffering in this world is not caused by the body as such, as if it were something evil and deplorable, but by the fact that all of us are spiritually imperfect. Sufferings are the result of evil inclinations which our intellect cannot master. They remind us of our imperfections and of our duty to improve ourselves, i.e. to cling to God."⁷⁷ In addition, such chastisements purify the soul. "Chastisements of love remove and scrub the soul, which has an attachment to the body."⁷⁸ Moreover, "Maharal sees suffering as a stop gap against destruction, purifying Israel and absorbing their sin."⁷⁹ Through these types of experiences, man himself is purified and made whole.

The way for man to achieve wholeness with the rest of humanity is through adhering to the moral law, or *derekh eretz*.⁸⁰ For the

Maharal "[d]erekh erez refers to that whole body of practice which is required for human life to be sustained and for man to be able to function within society."⁸¹ *Derekh erez* was built into the very fabric of the universe, and as such aspects of it may be discovered purely by exercise of the human intellect.⁸² Anything which could impinge upon man's freedom and autonomy, and thus hamper the individual's search for wholeness, is to be understood as contrary to *derekh erez*, and by extention, violates the will of God.⁸³ People must strive to view one another as being created in the image of God (בצלם אלהים), and therefore, treat one another as works of God. When they accomplish this, they may have better prospects for achieving *devekut*.⁸⁴

It is through *devekut* that a person repairs the breach between himself and God. By performing the will of God, an individual shows his desire to be whole. "The Holy One, blessed be He, is the paradigm of wholeness, His will is wholeness— that is to say, the negation of deficiencies, and that all men remove deficiencies from themselves—one who does this does the will of God."⁸⁵ God is the creator and sustainer (קיים) of all.⁸⁶ When we tap into that reserve, we completely move away from our inclination toward one side or the other and achieve wholeness with God. For Rabbi Loew, this cleaving to God, or *devekut*, was not of the rapturous variety as in other mystical systems described by Scholem,⁸⁷ but instead was a very real day to day existential way of life. One was supposed to live one's life hand in hand with the will of God, and such union is the ultimate goal of human existence.

Because man has the ability to perfect himself, his actions can have a profound effect upon the world. One might think that human

activity does not matter; but for the Maharal the ethical principles under which man lives his life have a cosmic impact and significance.⁸⁸ Given man's dichotomous nature, he is simultaneously pulled in many directions— between good and evil, up and down, right and left— and in turn a great deal depends upon him. According to Maharal, "Every thought and action of man has a cosmic impact on the entire universe. Human justice, love and mercy sustain the universe, while sin acts to destroy it. The sinners destroy the world, not only this world but all three worlds of creation— the uppermost, the middle and the nethermost. Thus, he who sins destroys everything."⁸⁹ Therefore, man has a prominent role to play in perfecting the world (*tikkun olam*). "[Maharal's] analysis of the virtues of love of God, fear of God, innocence, faith, trust and prayer, in particular, reflect the unity and originality of his ethical thought, developing the mechanical Aristotelian conception of the cause-effect relationship into the fundamental thesis of his religious ethic of *Hashlamah*, the mutual fulfillment of man and God."⁹⁰ As we alluded to above, God created the world in such a way that it could potentially unfold in any number of directions. As such, the world could also return to a state of chaos, and man's role is to keep this from occurring.⁹¹

Scholars say that according to Rabbi Loew "that which is not whole cannot endure.... That which is whole is abiding."⁹² If the point of human existence is to achieve perfection and transcend the world to a higher realm, that higher realm must exist. In the understanding of Judah Loew the world to come is necessary and not based on contingency. Aaron Mauskopf writes, "Rabbi Loewe (*sic*) offers the argument that God who is the essence of perfection and goodness

necessarily must have fashioned a creation that reflects perfection and goodness and this could not be in this world which manifests evil and decay everywhere."⁹³ Thus, Maharal sees resurrection in the world to come (עולם הבא) as the reward for those who have attained perfection.⁹⁴ According to Loew the measure of man's life "is judged not by the quantity of laws observed, but by the general direction of his life. He has met his responsibility if his conduct reveals a preponderance of good over evil, a preponderance of actions which conform to God's will rather than those which deviate from it."⁹⁵ An individual who lives up to the will of God will inherit life in the world to come.

Scholars have also suggested that the Maharal thought that each and every nation on earth has specific characteristics and inborn qualities.⁹⁶ In addition, each nation had a unique purpose on earth, though Israel, the Jewish people, has a truly special status.⁹⁷ "Maharal exalts the wonder of Israel's elevation that it does not depend on the prophets, or on the ancestors, not on the giving of Torah, and not on the land of Israel, rather they bring about their own elevation. It was because of Israel's elevation that Torah was given to them, not the opposite. However, by receiving the Torah they acquired still another higher level."⁹⁸ Israel then has a unique relationship with God; according to Rabbi Loew, that relationship is at the very foundation of the universe. Since Israel is written of in the Torah, and the Torah is the focal point of creation, Israel was selected by God, and as such their elect status cannot be abrogated.⁹⁹

In Rabbi Loew's day many opponents of Judaism suggested that the dispersion of the Jewish people was tangible proof that God had rejected them. However, according to his thought, nothing could be

further from the truth. That Israel was ejected from its ancestral home should not be seen as a sign of disfavor; rather, there was only a dispute about a "private matter" between God and His people.¹⁰⁰ Instead, one should see Israel's continued existence in the Diaspora as an ongoing sign of divine favor, the argument being that they could not long survive in such condition unless God was their support (קיום).¹⁰¹ At any rate, according to Loew, the Jews' dispersion will not last forever. The fact of the matter is that each nation is out of its natural place, and in keeping with the Aristotelian counterpart to our theory of gravity, each nation will ultimately return to its natural place, just as a lump of earth returns to the ground.¹⁰² Therefore, even though Israel may be in exile for the time being, both the hidden structure of the universe and its attendant laws of nature, necessitate Israel's return to its ancestral home.¹⁰³ That it is Israel which maintains the Torah is significant, for this fact testifies again to Israel's elect status, for as we shall see they alone possess the tools for attaining wholeness.¹⁰⁴

We have considered what categories scholars place the Maharal's thought, and we have laid out aspects of that thought for consideration. We now turn to an examination of what scholars have said regarding Loew's thoughts on Torah study and the observance of mitzvot. Judah Loew accepted the idea that the Torah is the blueprint of the universe.¹⁰⁵ As such, the Torah is eternal and is not subject to decay or abrogation.¹⁰⁶ The Torah teaches humanity what God's desires are, and it also informs man what his responsibility is in the world.¹⁰⁷ According to Loew "man is created to serve his Creator, and the Torah is the wisdom through which man can learn how the Creator is to be served."¹⁰⁸ Therefore, Maharal teaches that the Torah is the tool which

man should use in uniting the spiritual and material aspects of his life. The Torah is the means by which man might perfect himself.¹⁰⁹ Thus, he may achieve wholeness with himself, with others, and achieve *devekut* with God Himself. The Torah serves as the intermediary between God and man, and as such it is not an accident that it was also given by an intermediary, or *emtza'i*, Moses.¹¹⁰ "The text of the Torah... conveys to man everything he needs to know in order to find his way both in thought and action through the perplexities of life, without being obsessed by the fear of getting lost in the universe."¹¹¹

Study is an essential element in this equation. According to the Maharal, in some ways study even outweighs practice. "All matters which are connected with action, they are defined by time.... However, Torah study does not depend on material, but rather on intellect alone. Thus, time has no effect on it. Thus, such study is connected directly to man without the mediation (אמצעות) of time."¹¹² That is because study serves to perfect the intellect and leads to perfection of the mind. Insofar as man possesses this intellectual element deriving from God Himself, perfecting that element within himself is a matter paramount importance.¹¹³ If man accesses the eternal wisdom of God, he may himself merit eternal life. However, study also leads to practice, and in the oddest of paradoxes it is precisely through the body (גוף) that the intellectual Torah finds its ideal realization.¹¹⁴ Torah study therefore, is not enough, but it must also be linked to action.¹¹⁵

By performing the mitzvot, which are an aspect of the intelligible Torah, man fixes himself to the "rational order" from which he stems, and through corporeal acts, he actualizes his spiritual potential.¹¹⁶ The Torah helps man overcome the Evil Inclination "by teaching him, by

educating him, by habituating him to the complete opposite of that evil."¹¹⁷ Thus, by means of the Torah's commandments man is able to overcome his duality and surmount the material side of his nature to reach his intended spiritual level. Therefore, the Torah is superior to all human thought which can never discover this level on its own.¹¹⁸ Even though secular science and philosophy might stumble upon aspects of these truths, only the Torah is able to help man achieve his ultimate perfection in a deliberate way.¹¹⁹

The mitzvot thus provide a path for man to observe throughout his entire life. "The negative mitzvot sustain man that he not sink from his height, while the positive mitzvot elevate him to a still higher level."¹²⁰ Thus, while the negative mitzvot help man retain the level which he has reached, the positive mitzvot earn him even more merit. The mitzvot bring man closer to God, and thus help man fulfill his role in creation, whereas sin draws him further away. Although sin brings no life in the world to come, observance of the mitzvot prolongs one's days.¹²¹ While observance of Torah brings one fulfillment and wholeness, and man himself has the responsibility to perfect himself, naturally doing so is a matter of free choice. "Now we are able to understand, for the wisdom of Torah as well as the mitzvot of Torah change man himself. By way of the wisdom of Torah man is bound to God's intellect, and by way of the mitzvot of Torah, he is bound to God's order.... Thus man acquires the highest level."¹²²

The commandments are in and of themselves good. They may contain added benefits which assist for the smooth functioning of society— such as the prohibition against murder— however, this added benefit is of an ancillary nature to the value of the mitzvot

themselves.¹²³ Thus, Maharal opposed the attempts of Maimonides and others who suggested that each mitzvah has rational intention behind it. Though he did believe that the mitzvot themselves, as well as their specific precepts are significant, he differed in the opinion that man could rationally understand them. The mitzvot are good, therefore, not because we understand them, or because of what their observance might physically entail, but simply because they are given by God.¹²⁴ As such, the fulfillment of the precepts of the Torah serves to perfect man and bind him to the will of God.¹²⁵ Thus, performance of the mitzvot brings "transcendence of the natural order and *Devekut* with God. On this level man achieves spiritual perfection by performing the mitzvot even without understanding their rationale."¹²⁶

Man's goal is to leave behind the material which is subject to corruption and the privations associated with time, and bind himself to the eternal wisdom of God. Thus, man is able to perfect each and every element of his being through observing the mitzvot and by studying Torah. "The Torah is the perfection of all elements of man; body, soul and intellect. Or it can be said, emotion, intellect and will. It is not the perfection of the individual alone, rather the perfection of the individual and the community. The people and peoples. The world and all that is in it."¹²⁷ There are specific mitzvot— such as the fasting and self-affliction observed on Yom Kippur, prayer, visiting the sick, giving of charity, and loving one's neighbor— which specifically help in this regard.¹²⁸ All of these perfect the individual in regard to himself, in regard to his community, and in regard to God. When this has been done, the individual achieves the eternality of spirit that such wisdom engenders.

As was demonstrated in this chapter, the question of what tradition Judah Loew belongs, is a difficult one. Elements of many different streams of thought are represented in his writings, and his ideas appear to be more a blend of concepts rather than a recognizable conceptual whole. The significance of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot can readably be identified, however, as being very important in the Maharal's thinking. We now turn our attention to *DEREKH HAYYIM* Judah Loew's commentary on *PIRKEI AVOT*.

Chapter Two

1. Herbert A. Davidson, "The Study of Philosophy as a Religious Obligation," In *RELIGION IN A RELIGIOUS AGE*, edited by S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, MA.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), p. 55.
2. Sadek, "Social Aspects in the Work of Prague Rabbi Löw," p. 21.
3. Bokser, *THE MAHARAL*, p. 115.
4. Marvin Fox, "The Moral Philosophy of MaHaRaL," In *JEWISH THOUGHT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 168. Further questions regarding the influence that philosophy and Kabbalah had upon Rabbi Loew will be discussed below.
5. Isadore Twersky, "Talmudists, Philosophers, Kabbalists: The Quest for Spirituality in the Sixteenth Century," In *JEWISH THOUGHT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 446.
6. Bokser, pp. 181-82.
7. Jacob Elbaum, "Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague and His Attitude to the Aggadah," *SCRIPTA HIEROSOLYMITANA* 22 (1971): p. 40.
8. Elbaum, p. 47.
9. Twersky, p. 447.
10. Fox, *IBID*.
11. Schatz, "Maharal's Conception of Law— Antithesis to Natural Law Theory," *JEWISH LAW ANNUAL* 6 (1987): pp. 110, 124.
12. Fox suggests that Maharal followed some Maimonidean concepts, see, p. 171. Sherwin discusses the origins of *devekut*, though he and others trace the idea not to Loew, but earlier to the Bible or other mystic writings, see *MYSTICAL THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL DISSENT*, p. 125. Maharal's understanding of the concept of *devekut* will be explained below.
13. Sadek, pp. 4-6.
14. Katz, *EXCLUSIVENESS AND TOLERANCE* (New York, NY.: Schocken Books, 1962), p. 140.
15. Davidson, p. 64.
16. Thieberger, *THE GREAT RABBI LOEW OF PRAGUE*, p. 35.
17. Fox, p. 173.
18. Eliezer Ashkenazi (1513-1586) was a well traveled contemporary of Loew. His most well known work is *MA'ASEI ADONAI*, a commentary he wrote to the Torah, in which he suggests any irrational elements in Jewish tradition or thought are the result of scribal error, misunderstandings, or even specific malicious intent. In other words he claimed that the core of Judaism was ultimately logical and rational, and anything which appeared contrary to this was inauthentic.

19. Sherwin, p. 59. The notion that even God must obey the rules of logic was one which the Medieval Jewish philosophers took a keen interest in. Judah Ha-levi suggests that from time to time God may seem to break the rules of logic to work miracles or create new things. However, this is not to be understood as a departure from the laws of nature which are immutable, even by God. See *THE KUZARI* 1:67.
20. Fox, p. 172. Maimonides discusses the use of the intellect to control the impulses of the body. See *THE GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED* 1:17, 3:8. The reconciliation of the body and the spirit is an essential element of Loew's thought as we will see below.
21. Sherwin, pp. 64-65.
22. *IBID.*, p. 60.
23. Aaron Mauskopf, *THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF THE MAHARAL OF PRAGUE* (Bernard Morganstern Publishers, 1966), p. 8.
24. Weiss, "Rabbi Loew of Prague: Theory of Human Nature and Morality," p. 25.
25. Scholem, *MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM*, p. 24.
26. *IBID.*, pp. 18-19.
27. Fox, p. 168.
28. Weiss, p. 4.
29. Sherwin, p. 137.
30. Gershom Scholem, *ON THE KABBALAH AND ITS SYMBOLISM* (London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul Publishers, 1965), p. 9.
31. Scholem, *MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM*, p. 13.
32. *IBID.*, p. 334.
33. Sherwin, p. 24.
34. Bokser, p. 103-04.
35. Mauskopf, *IBID.* The Medieval Philosopher Averroes discusses this idea as well. See *ON THE HARMONY OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY*, translated by George F. Hourani (London, England: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1976), Chapter Two.
36. Andre Neher, "T'vunah v'Mystica b'Tfisah Ha-Astronomit shel Maharal Mi-Prag," *DA'AT* (Number 2/3, 1978-79): p. 141.
37. *IBID.*, p. 142.
38. *IBID.* See Chapter One of this thesis for a discussion of the relationship between Judah Loew and these scientists.
39. This was contrary to what had been accepted truth from ancient times. Jewish belief, based upon the Bible, understood that when text said, "The sun rose," it was quite literally assumed that it was the sun that was in motion and not the earth.
40. Weiss, p. 22.
41. Alan Kimche, "Spiritual Growth in an Imperfect World: Advice From the Maharal of Prague," *L'EYLAH* 38 (September 1994): p. 30.
42. Weiss, pp. 21-22. The Czech born John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) is sometimes referred to as the grandfather of modern education. Comenius sought to quantify knowledge in such a way that it could be taught equally to all people, and thus eradicate any distinctions between the learned and unlearned.
43. Andre Neher, "The Humanism of the Maharal of Prague," *JUDAISM* 14 (1965).
44. Weiss, p. 463. See also Kaber, "The Social Cultural and Ethical Ideals of the Maharal of Prague as Reflected in his Netivot Olam," p. 5.
45. Fox, p. 167.
46. Alan Sinyor, "The Maharal on Creation," *L'EYLAH* 28 (September 1989): p. 34.
47. In turn, each of these levels has its own particular characteristics. See Kariv, *KITVEI MAHARAL MI-PRAG*, p. 17-23.
48. Sadek, "The Spiritual World of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel," p. 111. See also Moshe Kasher, "Mavo La-Torat Maharal," *NOAM* 25 (1983-84): p. 264, Sadek, "Stories of the Golem and Their Relation to the Work of Rabbi Loew of Prague," p. 91, and Thieberger, p. 49.

49. Shlomo Mallin, trans., *THE BOOK OF DIVINE POWER* (Introductions), by Judah Loew ben Bezalel (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 1975), pp. 13, 39.
50. Sinyor, *IBID.*
51. *IBID.* This idea will prove significant when we consider the Maharal's opinion on the place of Israel in the world. See below.
52. Sherwin, p. 71.
53. Weiss, p. 115.
54. Sinyor, p. 36. The Hebrew Alphabet consists of 23 letters, the first being *aleph*, and the last being *tav*. *Mem*, is the eleventh letter, and thus occupies the middle.
55. Sherwin, p. 73.
56. Sinyor, p. 34.
57. *IBID.*, p. 35.
58. *IBID.*, pp. 35-36.
59. *IBID.*
60. Weiss, pp. 129-150. See also Sherwin, pp. 112-13, and Kariv, p. 23.
61. Sherwin, p. 74.
62. Kariv, p. 29.
63. Sinyor, *IBID.*
64. Weiss, p. 47.
65. Sadek, p. 88. See also Mauskopf, p. 12.
66. Weiss, p. 116.
67. On man's intellectual ability becoming more weak in proportion to his increasing corporeality, see Elbaum, p. 30. On the origin of the Evil Inclination see Berakhot 61a.
68. *GENESIS RABBAH* 9:7.
69. Sadek, "The Spiritual World of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel," p. 114.
70. Weiss, p. 229.
71. Neher, pp. 291-92.
72. Schatz, p. 120.
73. Kariv, p. 26.
74. Safran, "Maharal and Early Hasidism," p. 51.
75. Sherwin, p. 113. See also Bokser, p. 74.
76. Bokser, p. 73.
77. Thieberger, p. 56.
78. Kasher, p. 280.
79. Rivka Schatz, "Existence and Eschatology in the Teachings of the Maharal," *IMMANUEL* 14 (Winter, 1982): p. 62.
80. *Derekh erez* as understood by the Maharal. See Bokser, p. 118.
81. Fox, p. 181.
82. Weiss, pp. 272-73. See also Gottesdiener, *HAMAARAL MI-PRAG: HAYAV, T'KUFOTO, V'TOROTO*, p. 134.
83. Bokser, p. 86.
84. Safran, pp. 51-53. See Schatz, "Maharal's Conception of Law— Antithesis of Natural Law Theory," for a lengthy discussion of natural law theory, and how Judah Loew's thought fits into it.
85. Kasher, p. 285.
86. Safran, p. 51.
87. Scholem, p. 121.
88. Sadek, "Social Aspects in the Work of Prague Rabbi Löw," p. 16.
89. Sadek, "The Spiritual World of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, p. 115. See also Fox, pp. 168-69.
90. Weiss, p. 390. See also Kimche, *IBID.*
91. Bokser, pp. 90-91.
92. Weiss, p. 399.

93. Mauskopf, p. 78. Sherwin writes that Judah Loew considered that this world and the world to come were contradictory pairs, and thus, the existence of one mandated the existence of the other, p. 72. According to Maharal the prophets do not speak of the world to come since their vision is restricted to this world. See Mallin, pp. 3-4, and also Bokser, p. 160
94. Mauskopf, *IBID.*
95. Bokser, p. 164. This is akin to how Maimonides defines a 'Tzaddik.' The measure is if his merits outweigh his iniquities, for if so, he is a righteous person and he and his work will be sustained. See Hilkhot Teshuvah 3:1-2, 8.
96. Katz, pp. 147-48. See also Schatz, "Existence and Eschatology in the Teachings of the Maharal," p. 86.
97. Litt, "Towards an Understanding of the Philosophy of History of the Maharal of Prague," p. 24.
98. Kariv, p. 34.
99. Melvin Granatstein, "Torah From God: Perspectives From the Maharal of Prague," *TRADITION* 18 (Fall 1980): p. 279. See also Sherwin, p. 85.
100. Litt, p. 26. See also Schatz, p. 88.
101. Schatz, p. 90. See also Bokser, p. 167.
102. Schatz, pp. 87-88. See also Sadek, *IBID.*
103. Mauskopf, p. 87. See also Bokser, p. 172.
104. Schatz, p. 95. See also Granatstein, p. 277.
105. *GENESIS RABBAH* 1:1. See also Mauskopf, pp. 11-12, and Gottesdiener, p. 123. As such it is believed that the Torah preceded the creation of the world by 26 generations. See *LEVITICUS RABBAH* 9:3.
106. Mauskopf, p. 40.
107. Granatstein, p. 274. See also Thieberger, p. 45.
108. Granatstein, p. 273.
109. Bokser, p. 117.
110. Moses was an *emtzai'i* in that he served as a midway point between God and man. See Sherwin, p. 82.
111. Thieberger, p. 46.
112. Kasher, p. 258.
113. Mauskopf, p. 19.
114. Sherwin, p. 78.
115. Sadek, pp. 111-12
116. Weiss, p. 275. See also Schatz, "Maharal's Conception of Law— Antithesis of Natural Law Theory," p. 117.
117. Gottesdiener, 126.
118. Sadek, p. 110.
119. Mauskopf, pp. 31-32.
120. Kariv, p. 45. See also Weiss, *IBID.*
121. Mallin, p. 6.
122. Kariv, pp. 45-46.
123. Fox, p. 175.
124. Mauskopf, p. 25. See also Sherwin, p. 79.
125. Schatz, p. 116. See also Gottesdiener, p. 133.
126. Weiss, p. 271.
127. Gottesdiener, pp. 125-26.
128. Sherwin, p. 133. See also Kaber, pp. 16-17, 36, and 59, and Weiss, p. 414.

Chapter Three:

The Derekh HAYYIM Translations

As we shall see in Judah Loew's Introduction to his commentary, the name of his work, *DEREKH HAYYIM*, is derived from the following verse found in the book of Proverbs:

כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹר וְדֶרֶךְ חַיִּים תּוֹכָחוֹת מוֹסֵר:

"For the mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." (Proverbs 6:23)

Apparently, Maharal understands the 'reproofs of instruction' to be the words of *PIRKEI AVOT*, and together they provide the 'way of life' (Hebrew: *derekh hayyim*). Therefore, together with the lamp of each mitzvah, which reflects the light of Torah, the words of *PIRKEI AVOT* serve to teach man all of what he must do to live.

Regarding *DEREKH HAYYIM*, Thieberger wrote that it was "a practical treatise on ethics which often refers to the tractate Avot, giving glimpses of their metaphysical basis."¹ While *Avot* may not have been written by the rabbis with metaphysics in mind, Rabbi Loew sees evidence of this in all of the text's elements. He suggests that given its style and what he detects as 'secret' contents, the words of *PIRKEI AVOT* are not fully intelligible to the untrained. With his commentary therefore, the Maharal attempts to make the advice given in *PIRKEI AVOT* available to the layman. Thus, *DEREKH HAYYIM* is an explication of the words of *Avot* with an eye to what Rabbi Loew sees as their metaphysical content and concerns.

It has been noted by many scholars that Judah Loew's style of writing was distinct from the format used by other commentators. In most traditional commentaries the author explains difficult passages or terms using either midrash, or grammar, or both, so that a reader might arrive at a better understanding of the text. Rabbi Loew however, often used the text as a point of departure to launch into a discussion of whatever ideas were of interest to him. He might loosely relate those ideas to the discussion taking place in the text, yet for the most part, he veered away from the text towards his own thought. "The attentive reader cannot help but conclude that MaHaRaL had important ideas to share with his readers and that he frequently used whatever text was before him as an opportunity to express himself on a subject of general importance."² Therefore, we understand that in many instances, the text served as a pretext for what Rabbi Loew wanted to discuss.

In terms of structure, Rabbi Loew wrote comments on almost every mishnah in *PIRKEI AVOT*, and his comments extend from one or two short paragraphs to page long discussions. In several instances, even though he might be commenting upon some specific section of the text, he will make reference to prior comments he has made and expect that his reader will be able to follow his references. In other areas, he alludes to insights he will provide in passages yet to come. Loew wrote mainly in Hebrew, but also makes use of Aramaic terms, especially in discussing a citation he has brought in from the Aramaic sections of the Talmud.

Although Rabbi Loew hoped to make the meaning of *PIRKEI AVOT* more accessible to scholars by means of his commentary, the work itself is very difficult. Scholars have noted that *DEREKH HAYYIM*, as well as

many other works of his, are filled with repetitions and what appear to be unfinished thoughts. Bezalel Safran writes, "A major problem in understanding Maharal's writing is accounting for what frequently appears as vagueness of formulation, fragmented presentation and repetition. The reader is tantalized by the suggestive hints but often finds it difficult to grasp the core."³ Much has been made of this point regarding the repetition and difficulty in the way Maharal's thought is presented. On the one hand, recall that Gottesdiener suggested that such repetition was the tell-tale sign of an autodidact.⁴ However, on the other hand, Moshe Tzuriel sees this as an indication of Loew's esoteric inclinations. Therefore, according to the argument of Tzuriel, wherever Rabbi Loew is cryptic or whenever the plain meaning of a phrase is elusive, Maharal is merely seeking to limit his communication to those who share his secret knowledge. This contention suggests that the initiated will know how to unlock the meaning of what appears to the uninitiated as merely confusion.⁵ Despite the original intent of his writings, the Maharal's style leaves us with the challenge of deciphering what he said.

As we have previously stated, for this study we chose to focus on the topic of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot. These topics seemed likely to bear fruit given the fact that they are clearly ones which *PIRKEI AVOT* itself focuses in upon. It was reasonable to infer that as such Rabbi Loew would also focus his attention on these topics. Because this study could not hope to provide a translation of the entire commentary, we chose those *mishnayot* which mentioned Torah study or the observance of mitzvot specifically, and directed our translation efforts towards those passages. However, in spite of the fact that we

have not translated every single passage from *Avot* and *DEREKH HAYYIM* which touched upon the topics of Torah study and observance, enough material has been treated to complete our discussion.

We should also note that there is no uniformity among printed editions of *Avot* in how the *mishnayot* are divided. The editions consulted for this study vary to a certain degree, mainly in that some editions divided longer passages of *Avot* into several discrete sayings. It will be noted where this phenomenon is relevant.

A few preliminary points on translation should be noted, before the translations themselves are presented. Wherever Maharal used the term מדריגה (*madregah*) we have chosen to render this as 'level.' The words שלימות (*shlemut*) and שלמה (*shlemah*) have been variably translated as 'wholeness' or 'perfection.' The chapter notes will assist in helping the reader understand both the meaning of the translation and how the Hebrew text itself appears. Each of the sections to follow will be preceded by an introductory paragraph which will indicate to the reader which section of the *Avot* text Rabbi Loew is commenting upon, what may or may not be relevant about that section, and what extra information is needed to understand the discussion. This will be followed by a translation of the *PIRKEI AVOT* passage (in bold) and then the translation of the *DEREKH HAYYIM* commentary.

Derekh Hayyim: Introduction.

The first part of the work presented here is the Maharal's Introduction. In this section he explains the derivation of the title of his work, and he sets out what his project hopes to accomplish. In addition, in this section he introduces many of the key elements of his thought, as

well as how they will fit into his conception of reality. Loew draws upon traditional commentary and midrash in this section, and he illustrates to a certain degree how much he was indebted to the ideas of his forebears.

"For the mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." (Proverbs 6:23) Man, whom God created upon the ground, [it is that] his shelter is cloud and fog, to such an extent that he dwells in darkness without light. This is the turbid body, and the darkness which covers it, and he wearies of finding the open doorway of the east, which will be his way to God. And even if he has a brilliant intellect, and spark in his eyes, to show him the way he should go, it is only appropriate for man make use of [this] insofar as he is a man to whom God has given the intellect, which is a shining light. By the radiance of intellect upon his head, he knows what he should do, insofar as he is a man, not insofar that God has chosen him, just as Israel whom God chose from all peoples, and this matter is above human intellect. And thus, on reference to this matter, that he [must] follow after his Creator so that he might cleave to God,⁶ as it is written, "You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and you shall serve him, and hold fast to Him." (Deuteronomy 13:5) There is no power within this light, which is the intellect, to light the way on which he is going, which he possesses to follow after his Creator. How is this possible, that this light which is the intellect of man which chooses the things for man, insofar as he is man, that which is desirous to God, and not what keeps man far from God who chose him. Until by this, man might be able to reach the final eternity, and be bound to God. This matter is above the intellect. Therefore, the light that lifts up the darkness of man within which he dwells, is the Torah and the mitzvot. That is what is meant by, "The mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light."

These things alone are what illuminate the darkness for man until the night shines like the day (cf. Ps. 139). The explanation of the verse, "The mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light." That is that the mitzvah is like a lamp whose light is not fully light without a body,

rather the light depends on [something] material, that is upon the wick, the oil, and the vessel containing the light. There is no light that is separate from a body, that is a bright light. Rather it stands and depends on something material, on account of this it is not bright light.⁷ Thus, the mitzvot are the deeds that man does through the vessel of his body. And through the deeds that he performs by way of his body, the divine light adheres to him. Insofar as his act is a divine intellectual act, the commandment of his Creator, the will of the [Ineffable] name, who is to be blessed. Thus, the mitzvot are called a lamp. But the Torah is called a light because the light does not depend upon anything but is entirely separate the body [material things], and therefore the Torah is like bright light.

In Tractate *Sotah* we read, "The following did Rabbi Menachem bar Yose explain, 'For the mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light.' The verse identifies the commandment with a lamp and Torah with light, the commandment with a lamp to show that as a lamp only protects temporarily, so [the fulfillment of] a commandment only protects temporarily, and Torah with light to show that as light protects permanently so Torah protects permanently." (Sotah 21a) And the explanation of this is that the mitzvot are the deeds of man, and there are no deeds that are done except through the vessel of the body. All that is bodily (material) is subject to time, as is known that all that is body is subject to time. Therefore, the mitzvot which are performed by the body of man, offer protection in time only. And that is what is meant [by saying] that the mitzvah protects only temporarily. However, the Torah which is without a body, that is a matter of the intellectual apprehension, [and thus] the body has no connection with it, and anything that is not body [material] is not subject to time. Therefore, the Torah offers protection permanently, when man binds himself to the Torah⁸ he does not rely upon time at all. Thus, it is said, "The mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah a light," as they provide for man, to bring him to his ultimate end, the highest level, which is the desire and the quest all life upon the earth.

The text continues and says, "reproofs of instruction are the way of life." The text wants to say, in any case, that reproofs of instruction are the things which are not [properly

speaking] commandments of the Torah. Only that which gives man's intellect instruction, by doing which man will live, [that] is called 'the way of life.' "R. Samuel b. Nahman said, '[The duty of] *derekh erez* preceded the Torah by 26 generations. That is what the text meant when it said, 'To keep the way of the tree of life.' First it mentions the way, meaning *derekh erez*, then it mentioned the tree of life, this is the Torah.'" (LEVITICUS RABBAH 9:3) Why is the Torah called a tree and *derekh erez*⁹ a way? It wants to say that the Torah is a strong shoot, like a tree that is firmly planted and has large roots. If all of the winds of the world came to blow upon it, they would not move the tree from its place. Thus, is the Torah a strong shoot. And the shoot of Torah is [planted] with God, from whom the Torah went forth in its ordered form; this is made clear in other places further on. How does this shoot grow forth from God? Like a tree that grows forth from the place of its planting, the ground. If all the ways of the world came to uproot the Torah they would not be able to move one thing. As it says in the Midrash, "The Book of Deuteronomy ascended and prostrated itself before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying to him, 'Solomon has uprooted me and made of me an invalid document,' since a document out of which two or three points are void is entirely void, and 'King Solomon sought to uproot the letter *yod* out of me. It is written he shall not multiply, but he has multiplied.' The Holy One, blessed be He, answered, 'Go! Solomon will be eliminated and a hundred like him, but not even a single *yod* that is in you shall ever be eliminated.'" (IBID. 19:2)¹⁰ Thus, if even all four kingdoms which correspond to the four directions of the world came to uproot the Torah from Israel by way of decrees, as they usually do, they would not be able to do so. It is called a tree of life to allude to the eternality of the Torah itself, so as not to say that the Torah, God forbid, is subject to time and has a time limit established by the Torah itself. Therefore, the Torah is called a tree of life, for that which is called 'life' has no time limit. This is to be understood like the eternal spring of life which is an unlimited source.

This is not like man who is called 'alive,' for this is life according to the language of man, or so it seems to me. Man who has life — it is written he has a living soul — if so, man

receives life and it is possible to remove the life which he received. But the tree of life, which is life itself, has no time limit. Therefore, the Ineffable name, who is to be Blessed, is called 'Elohim Hayyim' (the Living God), since he is eternal life Himself. And, in places [in the text where] it says 'as the Lord lives' as if 'living' was written, as shown by the [vowel] *patakh*. Now with man it is written 'as pharaoh lives' with a *tzereh*, like other examples of *smikhut*,¹¹ because this is not life itself, rather he received life and it is capable of being taken away. And in the two words by which the Torah is called a tree of life, it hints to you that the Torah does not have any cessation deriving either from external fracture or itself. The Torah too is a tree of life in that it gives life to those who cling to it, namely those who study it, as it says in the text, "It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it." (Proverbs 3:18) It is called a tree for by the Torah man has *devekut*, and he is planted in God. For the shoot of the Torah comes forth from God, and therefore it is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it. Those who have explained [the phrase] 'Tree of Life' by way of midrash [say]: this is the Torah.

But *derekh erez*, is called 'a way' because it is the straight path, and it does not deviate to the right or to the left, but only continues in a straight [just] path. For every path that is walked straight is called a 'way to life,' since *derekh erez* is the 'reproofs of instruction.'¹² All words of instruction are [given] so that man might not follow after the desires of his body and [in general] his material being, through which he clings to death. This matter is hinted at by the Sages, of blessed memory, who wrote, "When woman was created, Satan was created with her, since the [letter] *samakh* does not appear in the Torah until the creation of woman about which it is said, 'And he closed (ויסגר) the flesh in its place.' (Genesis 2:21) As soon as Eve was created, Satan was created with her. While one might cite, 'That it is which encompasses (הסבב),' (Genesis 2:11) you should say, 'There the text refers to rivers.'" (GENESIS RABBAH 17:6)¹³ The reason for this is because the woman is likened to matter, to which privation and death, namely Satan, clings.¹⁴ This matter is explained further on, and there is not [enough] room for it here, but this is something quite clear. Therefore, the 'reproofs of instruction' are the things that admonish material man not to follow after his

desires, insofar as he is endowed with a material foundation made up of earth, to which privation, that is, Satan, clings. That this removes him from death, which is a crooked path to the way of life; and that this is the way of life [itself], the 'reproofs of instruction.'

When the text says, "For the mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life," this corresponds to what is written everywhere, "That things might be well with you and that you lengthen your days," (Deuteronomy 22:7) that is to say, that which is completely good, and that this good might also be eternal. For the light is that which is completely good, as it is written, "Man should always leave a town in good light." (Pesachim 2a) The words of instruction give man life, namely length of days insofar as he is kept far from death by means of the instruction, as has been made clear. It has been said, "For by way of the lamp of mitzvah and the light of Torah, he shall arrive at the good." This [light] is the light which was hidden away for the righteous. The lamp illuminates the mitzvah, and, even more than this, the Torah, which is completely good, because the Torah is light itself and length of days, for it is the eternal [good achieved] by instruction. It keeps man far from death by way of 'reproofs of instruction.' The explanation of the verse, "For the mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life," has been made clear to you.

Likewise [the] explanation of the verse becomes clear through the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, in the first chapter of *Berakhot*, "R. Shimon ben Yochai says, 'Three things the Holy one, blessed be He, gave to Israel, and all of them were given only by way of suffering. They are: The Torah, the land of Israel, and the world to come.' From where do we know this about the Torah? Since the text says, 'Happy is the man who in the land reproves.' (Psalm 94:12) From where do we know this about the land of Israel? It is written, 'As a man reproves his son, so does God reproof Israel,' (Deuteronomy 8:5) afterward it says, 'Rejoice for the Lord your God is bringing you to a good land.' (*IBID.* 8:7) From where do we know this about the world to come? The text says, 'For the mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.' (Proverbs 6:23)" (5a) The explanation

of this matter is the fact that these three things were given by way of suffering, because all three of these things are holy things. For the land of Israel is the holy land, which means that that land is set apart; there is a greater intelligence there than in other lands. If it were not so that the land of Israel had the [higher] rank, then the land of Israel would not have an atmosphere capable of making one wise more than other lands, and there would especially not be prophecy in the Land of Israel. This matter we have made clear in many places. The Torah, that is, the wisdom of God, has no material nature to it. And more than this, the world to come where there is no eating or drinking, is completely removed from the material world. On account of this are these three things called gifts, for a gift is something that a man does not give to himself, but it is given to him for his benefit. Man is endowed with a material body, and has no element of these things which are separate [from matter] and divine. Therefore, they were given to him only by way of reproofs, for they diminish the material body of man, and remove the deficiencies within man, until man is fit for divine things. Therefore, these three things were not given to man except by way of reproof, for these diminish the material composition of man. Only then is man fit for these holy and immaterial things. There is not [enough] room here to explain this statement; it will be explained at greater length elsewhere. However, from this it is proved that our rabbis, of blessed memory, explained the verse, "Reproofs of instruction are the way of life." For on account of this, man becomes fit for life when he diminishes the material element [of his composition] to which privations clings, that is death. For this reason he merits eternal life.

The simple meaning of the phrase, "Reproofs of instruction," is not [based] on the measure of [one's] suffering. For if it were, the text would not have been connection [in its two parts so as] to say, "For the mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." This is because the notion of suffering has no relation to mitzvot and to the Torah. There is nothing meant by 'way,' except *derekh erez*, for that is called 'a way.' But, the opinion of our Sages, of blessed memory, is certainly as we have explained, because the 'reproofs of instruction,' which is mentioned in Scripture, namely, the

words of instruction which afflict man so that he might not go after bodily and material things, [but] only [that] he get rid of those things that make man follow after the desires of his body, and these things are the sufferings of his body. Since man is of a material nature, he pursues after these things. Therefore, good moral qualities are called the words of instruction, since they chastise man from following after the desires of his body. On account of this they are the way to life, as we have made clear, for whoever chastises and diminishes the body, for this purpose will attain [eternal life]. For death and privation attach to material [things] as we have said. And from this itself they (the Sages) deduced and learned that it is impossible for man to merit the world to come, which is eternal life, except by way of sufferings, which diminish his material nature, to which death is attached. Thus, he merits the world to come by virtue of suffering, and in any case the explanation of the verse is as we have made clear, that one who speaks of the words of instruction as the reproofs of man, this is the way to life for man.

The following tractate, Tractate *Avot*, is the most important tractate since it has within it all of the words of instruction, for though it is small in quantity it is great in quality. Thus, it is said in *Perek Ha-Meniakh*, "R. Yehudah said, 'One who wants to be pious (*hasid*) should fulfill all the words of [Tractate] *Nezikin*.' Rabbah said, 'The words of [Tractate] *Avot*.' And, there are those who said he said, '[Tractate] *Berakhot*.'" (Baba Kamma 30a) Why did Rabbi Yehudah reason that piety depends upon fulfilling the words of *Nezikin*, when Rabbah reasoned that piety depends upon the words of *Avot*, and some say he meant *Berakhot*? The explanation is that man's perfection has three aspects and no one is like the other two. Man needs to be perfect with other men, he needs to be perfect with himself until he is a perfect creature, and he needs to be perfect with his Creator, that is, regarding whatever pertains to his Creator. These three elements of perfection are all explained in *Perek Moshe Kibel Torah* (Chapter 1 of *PIRKEI AVOT*) at length, and therefore we will not go through them here. The reasoning of Rabbi Yehudah that piety depends upon upholding the words of *Nezikin*,¹⁵ is that [so] one will not do harm to his fellow man. This is the essential element of piety, that others find no harm coming from him. If one does not uphold this and causes harm, it would not be

fitting for him to be called a pious person! Therefore, one who wants to be seen as pious should fulfill all the words of [Tractate] *Nezikin*. He did not say that one should perform *gimilut hasidim*, and give Tzedakah, for surely it is fitting to do good to one's fellow man, and this does not indicate any extraordinary degree of piety. But when they are mindful of the words of *Nezikin*, even if they do not do anything at all, only they are careful that they don't cause harm or evil to their fellow man in his deeds, that he be careful, then he is considered a totally pious person.

When Rabbah said, "To uphold the words of *Avot*," it was as if to say, the most important element of piety is to be perfect in himself. The good moral qualities are those that perfect his essence. Rabbah explained that it is better to be called a *hasid*, when he is perfect in himself, which is something he has coming to him, and this is even more the essence of piety [than the preceding]. And, for those who say that he said this (i.e. that piety) depends upon upholding the words of *Berakhot*, these are aspects of the third type of perfection, and that is being perfect in relation to one's Creator, to bless His blessed name, for everything. Thus, the name of heaven is never removed from him. They [therefore] reason that it is more fitting for piety to depend on this, that is, that he be perfect with his Creator. It is possible that there is no disagreement here at all, this one said this and this one said that, and they do not disagree. For man is not perfect until he is a totally pious person in regard to these three things, namely: that he be perfect in relation to his Creator, that he be perfect in relation to other people, and that he be perfect in relation to himself. When this is achieved, he will be wholly perfect.¹⁶

Even if there is something more in this that is remote with regard to wisdom, it is proven on the basis of explanation that we have [just] stated. For man has three parts, the body, the soul, and the intellect. To Rabbi Yehudah, piety is to be perfect in relation to the soul. And this consists in observing the laws of harm [to others], so that he does not do anything evil, for the various sorts of damages are evil entirely, they have nothing good or beneficial at all. They are not like the other sins that man might commit, which may have some benefit associated with them. However, the various categories of doing harm [are such that]

there is nothing in them which is good or beneficial for man. One who is not careful about the various damages at all, and does harm with his hands to his neighbor, this is an evil person. As it is written, "The soul of the wicked desires evil, his neighbor finds no favor in his eyes." (Proverbs 21:10) I mean to say that he who is evil in himself, his soul desires that which is evil in itself, even though there is nothing beneficial in this. It is only because he is evil that he is drawn to the evil that is in nature. Only he who keeps himself far away from the various damages shows that his soul is far removed from evil altogether, until he is fully protected from [doing] damage [to others]. Moreover, whoever keeps himself far from evil things that have no benefit or advantage, demonstrates by the perfection of his soul that he is not an evil person. That is what is meant by, "He should be careful [to uphold] what is written in [Tractate] *Nezikin*." But things that have benefit associated with them, certainly this kind of thing is due to his Evil Inclination which is in his body, that he follows after his desires and whatever causes him enjoyment on account of his evil matter. In this category are all the good moral qualities and the bad moral qualities that man has to derive benefit from, and all of this is related to the body. But, something which does not have any benefit associated with it, such as the various categories of damages, that do not have any benefits at all, only those with an evil soul lust after these, as when one [deliberately] does harm to his neighbor. Therefore, the text says, "He should be careful [to uphold] what is written in [Tractate] *Nezikin*." This we have clearly explained.¹⁷

To Rabbah [is ascribed the saying that, "One must fulfill] the words of *Avot*," which are the words of instruction that chastise the body of man, as we have already explained above, for this is the meaning of instruction. He also reasons that piety depends on when no defects may be found in the body. As for those who say, "[One must fulfill] the words of [Tractate] *Berakhot*," this arises from man's intellect, by which he longs after and cleaves to God, who is to be blessed, who gives Him blessings for everything, and that is what is meant to be attached to God, who is to be blessed. This is [what is meant by] attachment with God, who is to be blessed, and this is what the intellect seeks, as we shall explain at length. Now, when

man gives a blessing for everything, his intellect seeks attachment to God thereby, and thus he gives a blessing to Him always. These are very deep matters, and there is not room enough here to go into them [fully].

Behold, he (Rabbi) set out the orders of the Mishnah in which the Sages spoke about the *halakhot* which pertain to the mitzvot of the Torah, and nothing else. However, this tractate as a whole speaks [only] about the kinds of instruction that are appropriate for man to do and what he should not do.¹⁸ This is as the whole verse [c.f. Proverbs 6:23] is taken together, "For the mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life," as we have made clear. This is like what is said, "Keep the way of the tree of life, this way is *derekh erez*." The 'tree of life,' this is the Torah. Now, [we see that though] *derekh erez* precedes the Torah, the two are actually two ways, with this one depending on that, the one upon the other, as we shall explain further on, with the help of God, in connection to the passage, "If there is no *derekh erez*, there is no Torah,"¹⁹ Therefore, the words of instruction belong to the *halakhah*.

The order [of tractates places] this tractate between Tractate *Eduyot* and Tractate *Avodah Zarah*. Also, a reason must be given why it was arranged [in the Mishnaic] Order *NEZIKIN* and not in another. On this matter, all the words of instruction that chastise someone by law, to the effect that one should do such and such and one should not do such and such, all matters that are [thus] like law belong in *SEDER NEZIKIN*, for therein are all things that depend upon law organized. And [therefore] instruction also [being] a matter of law, [is included there as well]. There is no doubt that matters of reproof are matters of law. Moreover, all words of instruction, which are [matters of] *derekh erez*, are given by the intellect and are required by the mind, since this is in accordance with a legal standard. And thus, it is said, "*Derekh erez* preceded the Torah by 26 generations." (*LEVITICUS RABBAH* 9:3) For the world behaves naturally by *derekh erez* since this is in accordance with man's intellect, which precedes the Torah, which is from God. Thus, Tractate *Eduyot* is in its present order, because all matters of testimony are like law. And afterward [comes Tractate] *Avot*, since all of the words of the

fathers are needed by the intellect and the mind, and this is like law. Perhaps someone will raise this objection: If so, why did he say, '[One who wants to be seen as pious should] fulfill all the words of [Tractate] *Avot*,' when obviously the pious would keep the law. If so, why is he pious [just] because he upholds the words of the fathers? This is not an objection, for in the end it is not a positive mitzvah and not a negative mitzvah. From this perspective, it is not a matter subject to legal judgment, [rather] it is only something that the intellect requires, resembling the various categories of doing harm. Afterward they put Tractate *Avodah Zarah* [in its present place], for the one who engages in *avodah zarah*²⁰ departs from the rule of law to worship other gods, who are nothing and who cannot help him.

This is also known to discerning individuals, that [one who performs] idolatry departs from the rule of law, and thus the Israelites made the calf out of gold, not out of silver, also they made the calf which was really a bull, for [that was] the name of the place of judgment that they departed out from.²¹ In that tractate [*Baba Kamma*] the Sages included certain fundamental rules about the ways of instruction, until they said, "One who wants to be pious should fulfill all the words of [Tractate] *Avot*." On account of this it was the custom to discuss these chapters in our lands from after Pesach until just before Rosh Hashanah. And in some places it is the custom to discuss these chapters from Pesach until [Shemini] Atzeret. That this is customary in our lands during the summer has two reasons. The first is that the days are long. If one begins to speak [about these chapters] after *Mincha*,²² even if he becomes sleepy and does not speak their explanations, there is no [reason to] concern he will draw out his study and set aside the third meal of Shabbat, since the day is so long he still has time [to complete his study and observe the Sabbath rituals].²³ The second reason is that rainy days are not so well suited for the study of Torah, as is already set out in Tractate *Ta'anit*, "A rainy day is as troublesome as a court day." (8a). [On rainy days] man's mind is not [sufficiently] clear, and Torah [study] requires clarity. All the more so with men who do not make their Torah study regular, because it is hard for them, and harder still on Shabbat, since one is idle due to the celebration of Shabbat.

[We find that] even great Sages, like Rabbi Yokhanan and Resh Lekish, used to study a book of *aggadah* on Shabbat, "Why did they [study] a book of *aggadah* on Shabbat and not on the other days? Rather this is the explanation, 'They did this on account of the celebration of Shabbat, and the *aggadah* [serves] to stir up the heart of man.'" (Temurah 14b) It is not correct to explain this saying so as to say, 'One is permitted to carry a book of *aggadah* on Shabbat.' Therefore, on rainy days it is not fitting to study the words of the Sages, and on Shabbat it is fitting due to the celebration of Shabbat. And also for them [these] were cold days, and they were idle and lazy in the celebration of Shabbat and would not do this. For that reason there is a custom in many places to say aloud these chapters from Pesach until [Shemini] Atzeret, for this is the time when cold and warm mix together, as we know. For this reason it says in Tractate Pesachim, "All lamentations occur between Pesach and Atzeret for this is the time of the mixing of the weather, and warm weather begins. Warm days are not so good for study." (42b) However, in our lands we are not so strict about this, except on rainy days and warm days, this kind of thing [study on these days] sets aside the joy of Shabbat. It is possible that this is a concern for us, but that was a concern for them [the Sages], since in truth the heat in the summer is not so great [in our lands], thus it is our custom to say these [chapters] all the days of the summer. Moreover, that the custom was not to say them except from Pesach until [Shemini] Atzeret, is because it was enough for them [to study this] section [of text] one time during the year. In all places in this tractate we have seen that the early rabbis wanted to affix their words upon the hearts of men, and thus did Rashi, of blessed memory, explain below in Chapter 2. These chapters were arranged thus to be read in synagogue. We have seen fit to interpret this tractate, for when one understands the profundity of her words, there is no doubt that he will engrave the words upon his heart, and he will not stray to the right or the left.

Even though the explanations [of this text] have multiplied, there are those who make shorter and those who make longer. There are also authors of [such] commentaries who attest to the truth of the explanation, and in fact there is no doubt that the explanation which gives

testimony about itself does likewise. That is the [kind] of commentary that is clear, for words of truth are [self] evident. This is the test which man should apply to an explanation. It comes [down to] whether the explanation is [able] to be distinguished from others in terms of truth, [if so, then] it is the one that ought to be accepted. We have not cited in our commentary the comments [of others] that have been put forth to explain this tractate. This is because they have already been published and made known to all. He who seeks out their words [can easily find them], are they not laid out before him? As far as responding to their words is concerned, one does not reply to the 'Lions of Torah' nor to [their] wisdom after their death[[but only] strengthen their words like Yehudah and also like the verse [there]].²⁴ It is for the reader to select whatever he selects from someone else, but only through [careful] reflection, not just its the first they have come across. There is no doubt that the words of the Sages are very deep, moreover the words of the Sages are not uttered on the basis of conjecture and [mere] opinion as some people think and interpret their words. Rather, every single word expresses very deep wisdom. Therefore, the explanation of their words also requires understanding and much study, and not just the first idea that comes to his mind. Then he must judge the explanation and see if the Sages intended it or not. If the reader should say that the ideas which he has found in this explanation do not come close to the idea that all people would have regarding this [subject], then he must reply, 'Are these not the words of great Sages whose every conversation requires [close] study? How [are we to understand] their words of wisdom?' But, in fact, the truth will show the way for him. If these words which came with this explanation have not [proved] to be so clear that the interpretation of the words of the Sages is one which attests to itself, [then] we do not enter into it. But, for the reflective reader, the words are very clear. We have called this collection by the name of *DEREKH HAYYIM*, after the verse, "Reproofs of instruction are the way of life (*derekh hayyim*)," and the reflective reader shall say, 'This is the road to walk by, it is the way of truth, [which has] with it [the way of] life.'

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 1:3

In this section, Maharal considers the words of Antigonos of Sokho. He was next in line after the Shimon the Just, and served as a bridge between the generations who came before, including the Men of the Great Assembly, and the Pairs who came afterward. Rabbi Loew picks up upon this theme and mentions it specifically in his commentary. He also wants to address the confusion that arises from the words of Antigonos, "Do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward," inasmuch as this seems to run contrary to normal human motivation.

Antigonos of Sokho received Torah from Shimon the Just. He used to say, "Do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward, but be like servants serving the master not in order to receive a reward. And let the fear of Heaven be upon you."

Antigonos: We have already explained in what way these men were the '*avot*' of the world, and there were none like them in their own time. They taught moral instruction to the [whole] world, and according to the value [inherent] in their level [of knowledge],²⁵ by which they ascended to their level of moral instruction. The instruction which Shimon the Just communicated, included the entire world, as was already stated in, "Upon three things does the world depend." (Avot 1:2) So too is the instruction of Antigonos of Sokho. His words are [said] in the service of God, and it is obvious that the service of God is the entirety of man's deeds. Every one of man's deeds must be seen as pleasing with respect to the service of God. And therefore he said, "Do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward... and let the fear of Heaven be upon you." This order was made more clear by Antigonos after Shimon the Just.

There are those who ask about the matter, "Do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward," is not the whole Torah filled with this idea, '[Observe God's law] that it may be well with you and so that you shall lengthen your days,' thus [it is said] in many places.²⁶ It is also said in the opening section from *Baba Batra*, "One who says, 'I will give Tzedakah on condition that my son live,' is a fully righteous person." (10b) So, how can the text say, "Be like servants serving the master not in order to receive a reward?" Another difficulty arises when the text says, "Be like servants serving the master not in order to receive a reward." Now, [really] who are servants who serve their master not in order to receive a reward? Shouldn't the text say, 'Only do not serve to receive a reward,' and not, "Not in order to receive a reward?" And, another difficulty [arises] when the text says, "Let the fear of Heaven be upon you." Why does it not say, 'Let the fear of God be upon you,' or [even, 'Let] the fear of the Holy One, blessed be He, be upon you?'

The explanation of this statement [is as follows]: Obviously the most important thing in service is that you should serve God out of love. If you do this for the sake of a reward, this is not the true meaning of service. In any case, however, even if one serves for the sake of a reward, it is said that he is a complete *tzaddik*. What is good for Israel is [fulfilling] the will of God, and if so then in this passage it should say, 'That he should merit the world to come, this is the will of God.' It is not the meaning of being a 'complete *tzaddik*' that he be great, rather its definition is: A *tzaddik* is without defects and without the addition of piety, but the highest standard is that he be called a servant out of complete love. This is not true if he serves [just] to receive a reward. Thus, it is said in Tractate *Avodah Zarah*, "He delights greatly in the mitzvot," (Psalm 112:1) Rabbi Eleazar said, 'In His mitzvot he delights, and not in the reward for [doing] His mitzvot.' As it is taught, 'He said, 'Do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward.'"' (Avodah Zarah 19a) Thus, it is made clear for you that the central element of the mitzvah is to delight in His mitzvot. On this matter David said, "Happy is the man...(but his delight is in the Torah of God, and in it he meditates day and

night)"(Psalms 1:1-2) This is as if to say, 'This is the man who is happy in all [things], when he delights greatly in His mitzvot, and not after the reward [earned] for [obeying] His mitzvot.'

However, in any case he is a *tzaddik*, even if he is a servant, since he will merit the world to come. The Torah speaks of this *tzaddik* when it says, "That it may be well with you." But, it is possible to interpret [the passage] so that the text is not saying that he should make the goal of his intention the [promised] good that is the reward. The text says that things are such that the good follows from God [as a matter of course], but he should [still] serve the Holy One, blessed be He. Rather, the essence of service is that he be a servant to God on account of love, and not at all make his ultimate goal the reward [which] he merits [for his service]. Only the reward comes from God on its own.

The interpretation of, "That it will be well with you," is not that you should do the mitzvah for the sake of this. Since, it is also written, "[When he hears the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart,] to add drunkenness to thirst.'"(Deuteronomy 29:18) This is similar to how Ramban, of blessed memory, explained [the verse] in his commentary on the Torah.²⁷ Only it seems to me that this verse intends to say that this matter, [namely, the reward] comes forth from God, and thus, "That it may be well with you." The meaning is not that you serve God for the sake of the good [the reward for obedience], but rather the good flows from this [service]. A clear and complete explanation would be that it is not fitting that the essence of man's service is for the sake of this [reward].

As for why the text did not say, 'You should serve out of love,' the meaning is that he should love God inherently, and not on account of the good God had done him, or that He might do for him. The meaning is that all for whom God has done good, they need to love Him and serve Him. For this too is love, that he loves God on account of the good He has done him. And therefore does it say, "Be like servants serving the master not in order to receive a reward," for this [receiving a reward] is not the essence of service. It is obvious and clear that one is a total *tzaddik* when he serves God on account of the good He has done him,

or out of the good that He will do for him. However the essence of service is that he love God, and delight in doing His mitzvot, and by this he has the means whereby he may be bound to God by his very nature. There are those who go on at length in explaining this, [however] they diverge from the words of the Sages and from the way of truth, for these things are clear, and how could they not be more simple! The essence of love is when one loves God by his very nature, when he recognizes God's glory and greatness, that He is the truth, that His words and mitzvot are true, and on account of this he loves to perform His mitzvot. One who does this is certainly greater than the one who serves God [only] on account of the good that he has done him or will do for him. Therefore, these very words proceed from the wisdom of the Sages, of blessed memory.

As for why the text does not say, 'Be like servants serving the master not to receive a reward,' and instead we find, "Servants that serve in order that they do not receive a reward," should not the text say, 'Only do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward?' Because one could learn from this that it [serving for a reward] is totally forbidden, and that if he did this, he is evil, this is the meaning of, "Be like servants serving the master not in order to receive a reward." Thus, the text says, "Do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward," and it means not that this is bad, since it is obvious that even one who serves God to receive a reward is also a *tzaddik*, rather, that it is better to serve God not out of the desire to receive a reward. And thus it says, "Rather be like servants serving the master not in order to receive a reward." The Sage [Antigonos] does not come to teach just the essence of service, that one should serve the master not to receive a reward; and for this reason he needed to [also] say, "Be like servants serving the master not in order to receive a reward," [in as much] as it is not enough to say 'do not be like servants,' as we have already stated. As for why the text did not say 'Serve the master not receive a reward,' since it is obvious that we do not find servants who serve the master who do not receive a reward, the point is that we learn the service of God from this. Therefore, the text does not say, 'Do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward,' so one would [incorrectly] think that this is the

whole point of service, for the one who serves the master to receive a reward, does not love the master. Therefore, do not be like this yourselves, for if so you do not have love for God. 'Only be like servants [who serve not for the sake of receiving a reward].' Incidentally, we have not found much [other discussion] on this matter.

The text continues and states, "Let the fear of heaven be upon you." After he (Antigonos) has warned them about love, he warns them about fear as well. This is based on the way in which one loves another, his heart is bound up with him, and this nullifies fear. An example of this: if one mentions the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, someone who loves God, when he hears someone speak the name of their beloved, there is no doubt [that] he becomes happy. This annuls fear. Man has to be afraid and alarmed when he hears the Name [of God] mentioned, because of fear. And therefore it says that even though I have warned you about love, God should not be thought of like a loved one, like one you are [entirely] familiar with. Rather God should be thought of as being in the heavens and you are down on earth. And thus, you should think of the Holy One, blessed be He, as being in the heavens while you are on earth, and that is why the text says, "Let the fear of heaven be upon you." It should not be the case that love may annul fear. Thus, the text says, "Let the fear of heaven be upon you." The text does not say, 'Let the fear of God be upon you,' for in all places in the case of fear, it is said 'the fear of heaven,' and it does not say 'the love of heaven.' For in terms of fear, he needs to think of God as being totally separate. However, in terms of love, he needs to think of God as being bound close. As it is written, "That you may love the Lord your God, and cleave to Him." (Deuteronomy 19:9) We have made clear the words of Antigonos without straying from the proper path at all.

We already said that it is fitting [for] this statement to belong to Antigonos, for he organized the service of God if full, [both with respect] to love and [with respect] to fear as is appropriate. And, his statement followed after that of Shimon the Just who indicated the pillars upon which the world stands. This [moral instruction] comes now to give man, who is in the world, [knowledge of] how he can be with his Creator by way of love and fear. For the world

was created for man that he might serve his Creator, and such service is rendered by way of love and fear. It is certain that this statement is fitting for Antigonos for he was one in place of two.²⁸ For the essence of love and fear has one root. Man needs to be a lover of God and also to be afraid before Him, and that is what is fitting for man. It is not fitting that there should be fear without love, nor love without fear. There are deeds that have only love in them alone, and there are [also] deeds that have only fear in them alone, but for man it is fitting that there be both love and fear in him. Thus, Antigonos comes to caution man about love and about fear, and it is fitting that there should not be a counterpart with him. However, the Pairs that came after him (beginning with Yose ben Yoezer of Tzerediah and Yose ben Yokhanan of Jerusalem Avot 1:4), one of the pair [the *Nasi* (head of the *Beit Din*)] came to warn about deeds that have only love in them, and the second [of the pair, the *Av Beit Din* (the next ranking member of the *Beit Din*)], came to warn about deeds that have only fear in them, as we have made clear.²⁹ [In the instance of such pairs,] one would always warn about the deeds of love, and the second about the deeds which have fear [bound up] in it. This interpretation is correct, and will be made more clear.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 1:6

We see in the Mishnah, that following the time of Antigonos, the tradition was transmitted to a pair of scholars.³⁰ In this section, Judah Loew begins his discussion of the teachings made by the second set of these Pairs, Yehoshua ben Perakhya and Nittai the Arbelite. They followed immediately after the first set of Pairs mentioned in Avot 1:4, Yose ben Yoezer of Tzerediah and Yose ben Yokhanan of Jerusalem. Maharal begins his discussion with the logical question of why these three pieces of information, with seemingly disparate objectives, are linked together as they are in this statement.

Yehoshua ben Perakhya and Nittai the Arbelite received [Torah] from them. Yehoshua ben Perakhya said, "Make yourself a teacher and acquire a study partner, and judge all people by the scale of merit."

Yehoshua ben Perakhya etc. One has to ask about the words of Yehoshua ben Perakhya, why did he say, "Make yourself a teacher," and not, 'Acquire (lit. take) a teacher?' And, why does the language change so that regarding a teacher it says 'make' and regarding a study partner it says 'acquire?' Why are these three things put together, "Make yourself a teacher and acquire a study partner, and judge all people by the scale of merit?" Moreover, why does it not also say 'acquire a student,' as it says in the Talmud, "[Rabbi Hanina said, 'I have learned much from my teachers, and from my colleagues more than from my teachers, but] from my students [I have learned] more than all of them.'" (Ta'anit 7a)

This is the interpretation of the matter: The first Pair [of scholars] before them (i.e. this Pair of scholars) established an ordinance with regard to the affairs of his home, since his home is near [and dear] to man, we also made clear to you before this [that] conducting the affairs of his household is similar and related to conducting the affairs of man, as we have said. The Pair [of scholars] that followed after them—and they were their students—came to establish an ordinance for man as to how he should behave with the rest of creation. This matter pertains to those outside of his home, though [in truth] this [category of relationship] is also near [and dear] to him. Although the teacher and the study partner are outside of his home, they are closest to him, and afterward is the rest of humanity; since first man finds himself with his teacher, then with his study partner, and then with humanity. Thus, the text reads, "Make yourself a teacher." When the text states 'make yourself' it does not mean a teacher who is a recognized teacher, for regarding such a person one does not say, 'Make yourself a teacher.' Instead the proper interpretation of the matter is that he shall make him a teacher even if [that person] is not suited to be a teacher for him. And that is [the meaning of] 'make yourself,' since in any case it is quite impossible that he will not learn something from

him. It is enough for him to make him a teacher because of that one thing that he learned. So too with, "Acquire a study partner." In regard to a study partner it is proper to say 'acquire for yourself,' for a study partner is his possession. It is not the same with a teacher, for a teacher is not the property of a student, and thus he said, "Make yourself a teacher." However, a study partner, sometimes he fulfills his needs, as is the way of friends, to do things for one another, and each one is the property of his friend. Therefore, does it say, "Acquire a study partner." In both cases even though the teacher is not entirely on the level that is fitting for him to be a teacher, and even though the study partner is not entirely on the level that is fitting for him to be the other's study partner, in any case [the text says], "Two are better than one," (Ecclesiastes 4:9) and he takes him as a study partner. The text also says, "Judge all people by the scale of merit," for if he sees something in man whoever he may be, he must judge him by the scale of merit, and not keep him far away saying, 'He is evil.'

These three things are the [proper forms of] behavior for man towards other people that are outside his home. This [teaching] comes to say, 'He shall make for himself a teacher, even if it is not totally fitting for him to be his teacher;' and, 'He shall acquire a study partner, even if it is not totally fitting for him [to be his study partner];' and, 'The rest of humanity, even if they are not on his level, he shall not keep them far at least as long as it is possible to judge them on the scale of merit.' It did not say, 'Acquire for yourself a student,' for it is not fitting to do this, for a man to make himself [to be] a teacher, and to take for himself an important title and say, 'You shall learn from me,' as is done in these lands.³¹

These three things correspond to the three aspects of man. The first aspect corresponds to those who are considered as people of high standing in relation to him, like a teacher. The second corresponds to those who are like him, people who are his contemporaries, like a study partner. And the third aspect corresponds to the rest of humanity, even those who might be on a lower level than he. That is what is meant by, "Judge all people by the scale of merit," [this means,] 'Even if he is less than you, you shall not judge him by the scale of demerit.'

Summing up the matter in this regard, he (Yehoshua ben Perakhya) has taught man the proper

model of conduct [to follow in his relations] with other creatures. Since it is impossible for man to exist by himself. Rather, he has a social connection to all of creation as is fitting for him. Whether to a teacher, whether to a study partner, [or] whether to the rest of creation. This is the standard moral quality found in man because he draws other creatures near and loves them. On account of this he should make for himself a teacher, even if he (the teacher) is not suitable [for him], and he should judge all humanity with the scale of merit. This is similar to what is written before this [in that] Yose ben Yoezer said that one should be a lover of the Sages,³² these are the great Sages. He also warns man not to say, 'What have I to do with so-and-so? He is not worthy of being my teacher; and, so-and-so is not worthy of being my study partner; and, so-and-so committed a sin, he is evil.' This he shall not do. Rather, he should draw people close and not keep [them] away. This standard is also a ramification of the love of God. This is the level below the love of the Sages. He who loves God, also loves the other creations, since they are God's creatures. He who loves God, also loves all that is ascribed to Him and is attached to Him.

There is also more to say connected to these words, because the statement, "Make yourself a teacher and acquire a study partner," intends to say, 'Make yourself a teacher so that the act [of learning] will be complete [and] endure,' and also, 'Acquire a study partner so that one may keep him as a friend, so that the friendship will never depart.' For that is what constitutes a consummate teacher, and what constitutes a consummate study partner; when he is a friend for all of his days, as it is written, "Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend." (Proverbs 27:10) For when you do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, this is a true friend—but this [interpretation] is nothing new.

Therefore, it says, "Judge all people by the scale of merit," for the teacher and the study partner are [very] familiar to a man (i.e. they spend a lot of time together). It is impossible for him not to think in his mind that he has sinned against him [at one time or another], for all of his activities are done with him,³³ and he would thereby come to be separated [either from his teacher or from his study partner]. Therefore, does the text say, "Judge all people by the scale

of merit.” For when you judge him by the scale of merit, you will not come to be separated from your teacher or from your study partner. Instead, you judge him by the scale of merit when you think he did something against you, and this matter is [now] clear.

Nittai the Arbelite came to improve human conduct in relation to other creatures that are outside of the home, like Yehoshua ben Perakhaya, except that Nittai the Arbelite improves people by means of moral instruction, which is the same as fear of heaven.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 1:15

Shammai is a member of the fifth Pair to receive the oral tradition. He and his counterpart Hillel account for many of the most well known disputes in rabbinic tradition. We need only recall what was said in Chapter One of this study, in the section introducing the Mishnah itself, that some scholars suggest it was the proliferation of students of Hillel and Shammai itself that necessitated the redaction of the Mishnah into an authoritative form. Rabbi Loew takes up the discussion of who the various Pairs were, and how their respective teachings relate to one another. In this section, we discover that the sayings of the various Pairs are in fact related, and moreover, it is all part and parcel of the same tradition of moral instruction. Each Pair in its own way helps humanity survive and adjust to a world in which the Temple has been destroyed.

Shammai used to say, “Make your Torah [study] a fixed habit. Speak little, but do a lot, and receive everyone with a cheerful countenance.”

Thus, Shammai also gave us his instruction according to his principle. We have already explained that the second of a Pair [of Sages]³⁴ always warns [that one should] fear

what one should not do. "Make your Torah [study] a fixed habit," so that he will not transgress the fixed requirements of the Torah. He said, "Speak little, but do a lot," for if he speaks a great deal perhaps he will not uphold [what he is speaking about] and will transgress it. "And receive everyone with a cheerful countenance," for if one does not do so, he will be like one who despises his friend. All of this springs from the fear [of God], since one should not despise man who was created in the image of God. It is certain that Hillel put forth [the policy], "Love peace and pursue peace," (Avot 1:12) and it is certain that one who does not insist on his own standards, is not strict, for if he were, how would he pursue peace? For in all matters one who pursues peace says to his friend that he will forego what his friend did to him, and will not be strict [in applying his own standards]. This was certainly the principle of Hillel, who was not strict with them, but rather his standard [of behavior] was to forego.³⁵

Therefore, Shammai came forward and said that, 'It is true that this teaching, [i.e.] that one should not insist on applying his own principles, is a good teaching. [However,] this matter pertains [only] to matters of this world; thus it is not good for a man to be entirely inclined to this principle, so that he does not hold to his own principles at all, and wants to conduct everything in such a way as not to insist on holding to his principles. This is not a good thing, for in regard to matters of heaven it is fitting that his Torah [study] be fixed conduct. If every principle of man is such that he not have to be strict, his behavior would be like this as well with regards to matters of heaven, and man would not be constant in his Torah [study].' This [application of Hillel's policy, therefore,] is not proper, [in the same way that] its application is proper for man in the matters of the world, [i.e.] that he should forego and not be strict. This is because it is fitting for man, on account of his being a man who is subject to change, who is material which can be changed, and does not stay the same regardless, not to be strict. This is particularly fitting for man in regards to the matters of the world, for in the matters of the world, man is a material being, and thus will behave according to his custom. However, with regard to matters of Heaven—like the mitzvot and the [rational teaching of] Torah—that do not depend upon the body, which is material and wherein there is change, it is

fitting that his Torah be a fixed matter, and not be foregone at all. He shall not transgress his fixed [Torah] except when it is rationally appropriate, and he will establish the principle so that it does not change. Thus, the text says, "Speak little, but do a lot." That is because if he speaks and does not do anything, this is not fitting to be in the Torah, for there is no change in matters of the intellect, rather only in material things. Since the Torah itself does not change, likewise it is not fitting that there should be change in the study of Torah at all. [It is expected that this be Shammai's statement] because his principle was to be strict, and every strict person is exacting and insists on his standards so that there should be no change. From the point of view of matters of heaven, like the Torah, it is certainly good that man should be strict and should make his Torah [study] a fixed thing and he should not change anything. If he is not strict, he does not make his Torah [study] fixed, and all of his deeds are not fixed and enduring.

Shammai said, "And receive everyone with a cheerful countenance." Also, in this Shammai connects through his principle with the principle of Hillel, whose principle was that one should not be exacting or strict in anything. Therefore, there is no strict sense about this, if he does not receive one with a 'cheerful countenance,' for one ought not to be strict about this. This is not a good standard, even if from the perspective of the recipient it is very good that he is not strict about this, in any event from the point of view of the agent, it is fitting that he be exacting to the fullest extent possible, until he is able to receive everyone with a cheerful countenance. He should not say there is no strictness in this regard, and he will not be strict with him if he does not receive him with a cheerful countenance. In this, Shammai completes Hillel's moral instruction with his own moral instruction, so that the two of them [taken] together, are certainly good. Between man and his fellow, a man should not be strict, however in regard to matters of Heaven, he needs to be strict. Even in the matters of the world, one who receives certainly should not be strict if his friend does not receive him with a cheerful countenance, he should not be strict. However, with the agent, he should be strict [i.e. with himself]. It is known that the principle of Shammai was to be strict, and thus the moral

instruction of Shammai, that he should make his [study of] Torah fixed, that he should be strict so he will not change, and he should receive everyone with a cheerful countenance. Even if he does not do this, it is not fitting for the recipient to be strict [with the agent about the matter]. In any case, man needs to be strict [with himself] and he should receive everyone with a cheerful countenance. Each [element] of his moral instruction is in accord with his standard [his idea of strictness], and by this is the moral instruction of the fifth Pair of recipients [of the Torah] complete.

It has already been made clear to you that [regarding] each piece of moral instruction [taught by] a Pair [of Sages], it adds to what proceeded it, and thus too with the fourth Pair as well.³⁶ Because the moral instruction of the fourth Pair [which] preceded them [Hillel and Shammai, was the kind of] moral instruction that pertained to a ruler. Since man has a social connection to those over whom he is a ruler by virtue of the fact he is a ruler over them and leads them as we have explained; Hillel presented his moral instruction to give guidance on how a ruler should behave with all people, "That he should love peace and seek after peace between beings, and he should bring them nearer to the Torah." (Avot 1:13) He should strive not to remove the connection of peace which extends to all beings, since they are together according to how God created them. Therefore, he said, "He should love peace and seek after peace." So too Shammai said, "And receive everyone with a cheerful countenance," for all of this behavior is [mandated] so that there should not be separation between people, but rather a connection, and this moral instruction is [given so] that there should not be separation between people. Do not raise the objection that it was already Yehoshua ben Perakhya of the second Pair [who offered this] since he also said, "Judge all people by the scale of merit." (Avot 1:6) It is not like this, [since] it was not mentioned there except that one might not judge his neighbor by a scale of demerit, lest all creatures appear bad in his eyes. This is similar to what he said, "Make for yourself a teacher, and acquire a study partner," and do not say, 'He is not fit for this.' There is no example of bringing people together until there be no separation between

them. Also, this matter is not the central point of the instruction, instead it is mentioned in passing as we have made clear.

It has been made clear to you that [the words of] all five Pairs [of Sages], as well as the words of Antigonos, who was mentioned first, are such that they began with how man himself should behave, and then go on to add [the wider ramifications] constantly. The first Pair ordained [what constitutes] proper behavior with the members of one's household, since they are the closest to man except for himself. Afterwards, the second Pair ordained [what constitutes proper behavior] with one's master, his study partners, and his neighbors, who are further removed from him, [though] nevertheless, they are [still] close to him. Afterwards, the third Pair ordained [what constitutes] proper behavior with those whom he judges and leads, since this is even more remote. Afterwards, the fourth Pair spoke about the proper behavior of a ruler, which is still further removed, [insofar as] how he should rule over them, since he is distinguished from them [by rank], but in any case there is also a certain connection, since he is their ruler. Afterwards, the fifth Pair ordained [what constitutes] proper behavior for all men so that he should not sever the connection of peace, and there is no other ordinance to be made regarding the order of the world. All of them [i.e. the five Pairs] ordained [what constitutes proper behavior] for man through love and through fear, and this is clear. From here on there were no special recipients [of the Torah], since they did not serve all of their master's needs.

You should see that these Pairs numbered five up to the end of the Second Temple. Shimon the Just, who was the last remnant of the Men of the Great Assembly, is put into a category by himself, as we have made clear above. So, too, was Antigonos of Sokho by himself and not considered part of a Pair [of scholars], in which one was *Nasi* and the second *Av Beit Din*. There were five Pairs according to the first five recipients [of Torah]³⁷, and Antigonos of Sokho was only meant to differentiate between the first five recipients and the last five recipients. For insofar as Antigonos did not have a partner, such that one was *Nasi* and one *Av Beit Din*, he was like the first [five recipients]. For Moses, Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets, and the Members of the Great Assembly [also] did not each have partners—for they

[each] had one name [only]— the Elders, Prophets, and Members of the Great Assembly, [that is to say, they were only called by one name]. In so far as Antigonos was only one alone, he was [also] like the Pairs. For even though Moses and Joshua were [each] only one, they were thought of as being many— since Moses was king, he was thought of as being like the whole, and so too with Joshua.

So, Antigonos was the one to distinguish between the first recipients and the later recipients. This is because it would not have been fitting for the Pairs to receive [Torah] from the Men of the Great Assembly, who did not have partners. For the Pairs were [literally] two individuals; they were not equal to the Men of the Great Assembly, but Antigonos had a certain similarity to the first five, insofar as the received [tradition] was not divided [between two people]. He was also like the later five, insofar as they were individuals, as was explained above, and in this way all who received [the tradition] were connected together. This is explained above, see [the discussion] there.

Why was it that the recipients were always in fives? This matter does not occur by chance, for [we find that] there are five to receive in the beginning— namely, Moses, Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets, and the Men of the Great Assembly— and five others to receive— the [five] Pairs. But, Antigonos was not regarded as belonging to the first [set of] recipients, nor was he regarded as belonging to the second [set of] recipients, for he is not completely like the first ones nor [completely like] the second ones, as we have explained. [It was] from these [groups] that the Torah spread forth into the world. Thus, you will find from the beginning, when the Torah was given to Israel, it was given in five voices, for it was by five voices that Torah spread throughout the world. This is similar to what they said in the Midrash on the verse, “[Come near to me, hear this,] I have not spoken in secret from the beginning, [from the time that it was, there have I been, and now the Lord God, and his spirit, has sent me.]” (Isaiah 48:16)³⁸ There were five voices, and [one] voice went forth to each of the four directions, and the fifth voice was [heard] in the middle. Therefore, the Torah was given in five voices, for by means of them [i.e. the five voices] the Torah spread forth into all the world. Because of this,

the recipients, through whom the Torah was spread throughout all the world, were [reckoned as] five recipients in the beginning, and five recipients at the end. For it was not appropriate that the Torah be spread throughout all the world by means of one [recipient], but rather by the means of five, as it was when the Torah was first spread forth into the world, by means of five [voices]. Thus, it is fitting that the first recipients would be five, and that the later recipients would [also be] five. From here on out the Torah was diminished.³⁹ However, until the [second] five, it was not diminished, and every single [Sage] had a helper in receiving the Torah. For the [experience of] receiving [the Torah] by the Pairs was not as it had been for the first five [recipients]. For the Prophets received [Torah] from Joshua, that is to say each one received [the Torah alone] and had no helper, as was the case with the Pairs. Therefore, from the beginning, before the Second Temple, the strength of Torah was [sufficient] to spread forth until the [last of the] five. With regard to the Pairs, who constituted a new stage in which there is an helper present, the strength of Torah was also [sufficient] in this new stage to spread forth until the [last of the] five [had passed on]. Indeed, as we find in ancient books, they received that version from them.

By this it means that the first Pair received Torah from Antigonus and from Shimon the Just, and all matters were very well organized, because the remnants of the Men of the Great Assembly [were such that] it would not have been fitting for there to be more than one, and this was Shimon the Just. Antigonus received [Torah] from him since it was fitting that one should receive moral instruction from one. The first Pair [in a sense] also received from two, that is to say, Shimon the Just and likewise from Antigonus, for it is proper that two should receive from two. Antigonus was simply like a helper in connection with Shimon the Just, [they were in a separate category] and there were only five [before them]: Moses, Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets, and the Men of the Great Assembly, and [subsequently] the five Pairs. It was fitting that by this [method was the] Torah spread throughout the world by five, and you must understand these things very much!⁴⁰

From here, let it be clear to you that this entire matter—that of receiving [the tradition]—was in complete order. When you understand these things, for it is not a vain thing which we have explained to you, we have caused you to understand them. All five of the first [recipients of Torah] came before the [period of the] Second Temple, when the Torah was in the world to a greater degree, and the five Pairs existed during the [period of the] Second Temple, when wisdom had already begun to be lacking in mankind. Therefore they received the Torah in Pairs. Even though Shimon the Just lived at the beginning of the Second Temple [period], he also lived before the Second Temple existed, since he was one of the Men of the Great Assembly. For all the recipients [of Torah] in the Second Temple were Pairs, for the reasons which we have given. For the [fact that each recipient of the tradition was in a] Pair indicates a deficiency in the strength of Torah that existed during the Second Temple [period]. The Pairs [of scholars] were also appropriate for the Second Temple [period] since one [served as] *Nasi* and the other [served as] *Av Beit Din*, together [making] a Pair.

This matter is known to those with understanding, for the Temple, and in particular the Second Temple, about which is said, “‘The glory of this latter house [shall be greater than that of the former,’ says the Lord of Hosts,]” (Haggai 2:8) and the reason is known to the wise. Behold the Temple was created by two hands, as it is written, “Let your hands establish the Temple of God,” as we see in Tractate *Ketuvot* (5a). It was perfect because of this, [that is to say it was perfect] from two sides, namely the right and left hands, and they were the power of the *Nasi* and the *Av Beit Din*.⁴¹ For that reason in particular the Pairs [existed during the period of] the Second Temple, and both the love [of God] and the fear [of God] were greater [during the period of] the Second Temple. Therefore, the first was Antigonus, and it was he who warned about love [of God] and about fear [of God], and that is the foundation [of all that followed]. Afterwards, [in the instance of each of] the Pairs, one would warn about love, and the second about fear, and this is according to the level of the Second Temple [period], for it was completed out of love and out of fear. These things you must understand very [clearly], for they are clear words.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 2:2

Maharal now moves into the second chapter of *Avot* with a discussion of the dictum of Rabban Gamliel III. Gamliel was one of the most well known Tannaim of the age of the Mishnah. He was the son of Yehudah Ha-Nasi under whose direction the Mishnah as a whole was redacted. His comments touch upon the importance of Torah study and exertion in pursuing its dictates. Judah Loew takes this theme and expounds upon it. We are told that precisely because the Torah itself is spiritual/intellectual, and thus not material, exertion in it helps one avoid, and be cleansed from, the material sins of the body.

Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi said, "It is good to study Torah together with *derekh erez*,⁴² for exertion in both, causes sin to be forgotten. All study of Torah without work done together with it, will come to nothing and brings one to sin. All those who busy themselves with the community, may they busy themselves for the sake of heaven. The merit of their fathers helps them, and their righteousness stands forever. And as for you all, I credit to you a reward, as if you had done it."

Rabban Gamliel and etc.: There are questions to be asked about this saying; by the look of things, he should have said, 'It is good to study Torah *when* it is [done] with *derekh erez*,' and not, "study Torah with *derekh erez*," because action is the essence of *derekh erez*. Also, "For exertion in both, causes sin to be forgotten," [is true only] if the matter [is one that] depends upon exertion. If so, then let him exert himself in study of Torah alone, and not with [manual] labor [as well]. Then, his sin will be forgotten on account of the exertion, if [it is true that] exertion causes sin to be forgotten. Furthermore the text says, "And all study of Torah without work done together with it, will come to nothing," how many Torah scholars were there that were not workers [of some sort as well]? Moreover, why does this bring one

to sin? [In light of these questions,] what is the good then of what is said above, "For exertion in both, causes sin to be forgotten?" We know that this keeps one far from sin; for example, when one has work he does not need to steal. However, what is said above, "It brings one to sin," it sounds as if it brings one to sin even if he does not have reason to steal. If that is the case, then the text should say, 'It causes one to sin,' and not, "It brings one to sin." Also, when it says, "All those who busy themselves with public affairs," what does this matter have to do with the others [mentioned here]? He should also have said, 'He (Rabban Gamliel) used to say,' for the meaning is: a moral teaching all by itself. What is the meaning of, "The merit of their fathers helps them?" They must make clear with permission what is the moral instruction that is before him. Moreover, [when the text says,] "And as for you all, I credit to you a reward, as if you had done it." If these are the words of Rabban Gamliel, he should have not said [this, but] rather, 'I credit to you a reward, as if you had done it,' why [then does the text say,] "As for you all, I credit to you a reward, as if you had done it?"

Behold, according to what we shall explain in what follows above in [Tractate] *Avodah Zarah*, these sayings are connected to the generations of the Sages, just as these [Sages] came after those [Sages]. All the more so, then, they did not need to give a reason why made the words of the son are mentioned after the father [as is the case here], and just as it has mentioned the other *Nasi'im* (pl. *Nasi*) as well. In any case, we made clear to you above at the end of the chapter that preceded this one, that it was the words of Rabbi [Yehudah Ha-Nasi that made clear] the deeds of man, that is to say, the divine mitzvot and the moral qualities that bring man to eternal life in the world to come. Therefore, the son [Rabban Gamliel] came after him to give moral instruction to man in *derekh erez*, which is about conducting [the affairs] of the world, for they [namely, the mitzvot and *derekh erez* taken together,] constitute preparation for success. As it says above, "It is good to study Torah together with *derekh erez*." This matter is known, for *derekh erez* is that which is needed for conducting [the affairs] of the world, and they come before the mitzvot a certain respect. That is, man first needed *derekh erez*, and afterward the Torah as will be made clear here. However, the level

of *derekh erez* is below [that of] the performance of mitzvot, for they (i.e. the mitzvot) are the deeds of the Holy One, which are [inherently] above *derekh erez*, which are for the purpose of conducting worldly affairs. Thus, is it fitting that the words of Rabban Gamliel, who spoke of *derekh erez*, follow after [those of] Rabbi [Yehudah Ha-Nasi], as we made clear in the chapter before this.

The explanation of this saying is that Rabban Gamliel comes to say, that even [regarding] things that are matters of heaven, like the Torah, man should not say, 'It is enough for me to do them and keep the mitzvot, and not [come to] know evil,' [in such a case it might] occur to him to not turn toward conducting the affairs of the world to do work. However, it is necessary that man perform the words of heaven according to the order that befits them. Therefore, does the text say, "It is good to study Torah together with *derekh erez*," [since this insures] that he not change the proper order, but rather *derekh erez* will [be accomplished] first, and afterward the Torah. That is what is meant by, "It is good to study Torah together with *derekh erez*," for *derekh erez* comes first. This is just like what we explained in the Introduction (see above), that *derekh erez* preceded the Torah. This matter is apparent given the nature of man, for it is always the case that wisdom and intellectual things come after matters which are not entirely intellectual. Thus, it is fitting that this is the way man behaves as well, [that is to say] first he learns *derekh erez* which is not a matter of intellect, and then after he comes near to the intellectual Torah. That is what is meant by, "It is good to study Torah together with *derekh erez*."

About what is said, "Exertion in both, causes sin to be forgotten," this has already been explained at the end of the chapter before this one. That is to say, when man is perfect and without deficiency, he is kept far from sin; for sin is a deficiency in man. Thus, [the obverse is also true, and] it is not fitting for sin to be found in a man who is perfect. When man is perfect with [regard] to *derekh erez* and also with [regard] to Torah, he is not lacking anything, and he is kept away from sin which [represents] imperfection. However, if he is not [perfect] with regard to *derekh erez*, or [if] he is not [perfect] with regard to Torah, then he is lacking

Torah, or he is lacking *derekh erez*, and deficiency follows after deficiency.⁴³ This is not the case when he is perfect in all things, [for then] he does not depart from his perfection.

What about when the text says, "For exertion in both (Torah and *derekh erez*), causes sin to be forgotten?" It sounds as if it (sin) depends upon exertion, and to the extent that he toils and becomes weary, [that causes sin to be forgotten]. It seems to me that [he means to say that] it is fitting for a man to toil by measure of these two parts that are in man, in as much as man has [both] a body and a soul. The Torah is for making the soul perfect, and *derekh erez* is what man needs for the requirements of his body, [for example] sustenance and other things. [This text] says that when man toils by means of the two elements which we have—[that is to say, with] *derekh erez*, that man behaves according to the requirements of his body, [i.e. giving it] what it needs, and also that man toils for the perfection of his soul [by means of] the Torah, in the same way he toiled in *derekh erez* to make his body perfect—he will not find sin. Thus, toil in these two [areas] makes him whole, while sin leaves him lacking. Therefore, exertion in the two, particularly when man busies himself in something which will make him completely whole, [it is the case that] this makes sin forgotten, which is an imperfection in himself. However, [sin] is not forgotten [just] from performance of a mitzvah, since the mitzvot are also for making himself whole. This is the explanation, and it is correct.

However, this saying may not be explained as it sounds, that is to say because he exerted [himself] in these two areas his sin is forgotten. If so, even if one exerts [themselves] in matters of *derekh erez* alone, or in Torah alone, this also will cause sin to be forgotten like we said. Furthermore, since it is impossible for man to toil endlessly, and it is impossible that he not rest for a moment in either of these two areas, and [on account of this that] he come to sin. But, according to the explanation which we said was entirely correct, it is not considered necessary that he toil to perfect himself [alone], rather [that he try to perfect himself] by way of the two [paths], that is *derekh erez* and Torah, for these two things make man whole. When man toils in these two things, he toils and exerts to complete himself and keep sin far from

him, [this occurs] even in the hour when he does not toil in the two things. In any case, it is man that toils to make himself whole that does not come to sin and wrong doing, since this is damage itself. However, if he busies himself in Torah alone, and later does not busy himself to make himself perfect in regards to his bodily needs as well, it is possible that he will find sin and wrong doing. He needs to busy himself in the perfection of man, which [consists of two areas] both the body and the soul. The man who [wants to be] total in body and soul, if he makes his soul complete [only] with Torah, in the end he will be an unfinished man⁴⁴ in that he lacks what he needs to make his body complete, and after that which is lacking follows imperfection. Moreover, if he does not toil in Torah which makes his soul complete, he would certainly be called an unfinished man. But, if he toils in that which makes him completely whole until he is whole in both his halves, then he will be keep far from sin and wrong doing, that which makes man imperfect. Even if he has a great deal of money and lacks nothing [material], if he does not work to make himself whole his sin will not be forgotten, and that is what depends on exertions in the two areas.

You also need to know that when the text says, "Exertion in both, causes sin to be forgotten," this depends on toil and exertion. This is because sin and wrong doing are found when there is rest and not when there is toil. The Sages hinted at this matter in *Perek Ha-Helekh*, "Rabbi Yokhanan said, 'Wherever [the text] says 'And he rest there,' it denotes trouble.' Thus, 'And Israel rested⁴⁵ in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab.' (Numbers 25:1) 'And Jacob rested in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.' (Genesis 37:1) 'And Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.' (*IBID.* vs. 2) 'And Israel rested in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen.' (*IBID.* 47:27) 'And the time drew near for Israel to die.' (*IBID.* vs. 29) 'And Judah and Israel rested safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree.' (I Kings 5:5) 'And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite, he was the king's seed in Edom.' (*IBID.* 11:14)" (Sanhedrin 106b) And it also says in the Midrash, "Israel rested in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab.' There is no 'rest' in any place

[that is nothing other than] corruption. As it is said, '[And they rose up in the morning, and offered burnt offerings (to the golden calf), and brought peace offerings] and the people rested to eat and drink, and rose up to make sport.' (Ex. 32:3)" (*GENESIS RABBAH* 51:10, 53:11) In this midrash they explained the essence of rest, that it causes the corruption of man. That is because the man who toils, even if he is not found laboring for wholeness [in one area, but is laboring in the other], from the aspect of the labor [it is as if he is whole]. One who is not whole in respect to labor, [since he does in fact labor at times] he stands for wholeness, and imperfection does not follow after him. However, when he sits and rests [completely], even though he already exerted himself toward perfection, deficiency and imperfection follow after this. For there is no perfect thing in the world to which imperfection does not cling, therefore does deficiency and imperfection proceed after this. This is not like when man is in toil, and [still] lacks perfection, he [still] stands for perfection, since even after he stands for perfection, and imperfection is not bound to him. This matter is hinted at in *Perek Ha-Helekh*, "They asked him there, 'The Evil Inclination, from what point does it have power over man?' He said, 'It has power over him from the moment that he comes forth from his mother's womb. As it is written, 'An evil heart is found in man from his youth.' (Genesis 8:21) There is a missing letter here. From when he is a youth. From when he comes forth from his mother's belly he has the Evil Inclination.'" (Sanhedrin 99b)

Now, do not raise an objection [and say] certainly this [evil Inclination] is due to [man's] entry into the air of the world. Instead, you must know that this matter is like we have explained; the Evil Inclination is Satan, he is the Angel of Death, like what is said in the Talmud, "The Evil Inclination that is found in man, it is *Ha-satan* himself, and the Angel of Death, that brings man to deficiency and to death, and all of this is one matter." (Baba Batra 16a) Therefore, any time that man does not come into the air of the world, he is not whole, and he [cannot] gravitate towards wholeness, and deficiency [therefore] is not bound to him, for it is the opposite of being, and the two opposites are not found together. However, when a youth goes forth from the belly of his mother, he must then work toward wholeness, and does

not stand for any other being, thus is deficiency bound to this, and that is the Evil Inclination, that is Satan the Angel of Death, that is bound in all things.

In all of these cases it is that the Evil Inclination and *Ha-satan* does not have power over matters that stand for life. And, as the Sages said, all places where 'rest' is mentioned its [meaning] is nothing other than corruption. When man labors for his own sake, and all who labor show that they are not in [a state of] wholeness with regard to labor, then all those who are not whole, are ready and stand for life and for perfection. Deficiency, which is *Ha-satan*, is not bound to this, however, when man rests, and rest is to man as if he has [finished] laboring for his wholeness, he rests and does not stand for wholeness, then the deficiency which is bound to all created things, follows after. Therefore, all 'rest' is nothing other than corruption. Thus, [we find] what is said in the midrash, that rest is nothing other than corruption, and the Evil Inclination follows after this. We have already made clear that this [corruption] is the Evil Inclination, it is *Ha-satan*, and it follows after all created things when they are not [striving for] wholeness, and that is when they sit and they rest. The Evil Inclination has power over man when he works, and thus when he is in wholeness of being, and he is thus called resting. Thus, it is said that all rest is nothing other than corruption, as we have already said. In any case it has been made clear to you what was said [in the text], "Exertion in both, causes sin to be forgotten." When man labors in his two aspects, sin is kept far from him, for the Evil Inclination is not found in man when neither of his parts are found [lacking] in the work toward wholeness. He is [thus] kept far from sin since the Evil Inclination cannot challenge him. This explanation is clear to those who understand knowledge, for the worker is kept away from sin for it is work which brings him to the labor for perfection. He needs to labor in both of these tasks, for if he does labor in both of them—that is to say to go to work from the aspect of his body, like when he labors to perfect his body with *derekh eretz*, and to perfect his soul with the Torah of the Intellect—then his body and his soul will be kept away from sin and kept away from the Evil Inclination, and he will not come to wrong doing. But, if he does not labor in both of them, in the end the Evil Inclination

will be found in one of his two aspects, and it will not be said of this person that he is kept away from sin.

You must understand with wisdom that these two elements which are mentioned—toil in *derekh erez* and in Torah—are opposed to the two Evil Inclinations that the Holy One, blessed be He, created, the inclination toward unchastity and the inclination toward *avodah zarah*. By way of toiling in *derekh erez* for the needs of his body, man keeps away the inclination toward unchastity. [In the same way] the toil of man [to perfect] his soul in Torah keeps away the inclination towards *avodah zarah*. These matters are very deep in wisdom, and there is not [enough room] here to explain them further, for they will be made clear in another place. However, we hint at them to understand a little of their essence and that they all relate to one subject.

When text says, “All study of Torah without work done together with it, will come to nothing,” it wants to say ‘Because he is an unfinished man, since he has no work [with which] to make himself complete.’ If there is no work with the Torah, then man is lacking something which is appropriate for him, and [according to] all that which he is lacking in himself, he will not be sustained. The text also says, “[And all study of Torah without work done together with it, will come to nothing] and brings one to sin,” and that is because of the lack of what [man] needs, other imperfections follow after this, that is sin, for there is no greater imperfection than this. In the case of Torah, where work is included with it, the text says, “It causes sin to be forgotten,” it seems to me that even sin he causes will be forgotten from him. If there is no work with the Torah, even sin that he does not cause, will come from another place, and therefore does the text say at the end [of the passage], “[And all study of Torah without work done together with it] will come to nothing and brings one to sin,” this is according to that which he is lacking. If there were many scholars that did not perform work, but had business dealings which are like work, or [if] their soul’s desired the Torah all that much more, [it was the case] that their Torah was sustained. There is no other way to explain

this verse, except in as much as the words of the scholars are built upon wisdom, when man makes his wisdom deep, there is no doubt [that his wisdom will be sustained].⁴⁶

The text [then] states, "All those who busy themselves with public affairs etc." These two things, that is to say Torah study and working for the community, are [contextually] connected together, because they are similar and mutually related. That is because the Torah is not like one [particular] mitzvah. Since when one performs a mitzvah, one does not busy himself with something that is all encompassing, [for] when he performs the mitzvah, the totality does not pertain to this. When he busies himself with the Torah [however], he acquires a universal notion, since every intellectual notion is universal, and not something particular, as has been made clear. This is just like what the Sages, of blessed memory, said, "[Each thing derived] from the Torah is counted as equal to the whole world, just as it is written, 'All things desirable, they are not equal to it (i.e. the Torah).' (Proverbs 3:15)"⁴⁷ Indeed, every individual word from among the words of Torah, is considered universal. This is also the explanation of the verse, "For the mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah a light." (Proverbs 6:23) For the mitzvah that man performs is like a lamp, that is one simple small lamp. But the Torah, it is a light, for there is nothing small in the subject of light, for it has no equal. This matter is explained above, this I made clear to you in the Introduction, that you shall understand, and there is not [enough room to go] on at length about it here.

Also, like [the Sages] said, "Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it." (Avot 5:22) Therefore, it is connected to this passage, "All those who busy themselves with public affairs," that is to say, '[He who busies himself with] the universal, he is not like one who busies himself with a small matter, instead he busies himself with a universal matter.' Therefore, does it say that his intention should be the will of Heaven, for when his intention is the will of Heaven, it will certainly be said about him that he busies himself in a universal matter. However, if his intention is not the will of Heaven, then he departs from the affairs of the community, which are the affair of the many, whose reward is great. When his intention is to make himself important and to be boastful, he does not busy himself in the name of the

community, which is the universal. Even if it was his intention that he act in the name of certain people, [and suggests] that they are the community, he does not [really] act for the community, what he does [is only] for the sake of certain people. Only if he acts according to the will of Heaven, the text wants to say, 'On behalf of [wanting] to do good with the community,' for they are the universal, and it is fitting to do good with the community for they are the universal. This is what is meant by 'for the will of Heaven,' so that the Blessed Name is with the community. Therefore, does it say in Tractate *Shabbat*, "[Rabbi Jacob ben Idi said in the name of Rabbi Yokhanan,] 'One may supervise [matters of life and death, and] matters of communal urgency on Shabbat, [and one may go to the synagogues to attend to communal affairs on Shabbat.]"[Shabbat 140a] That is to say, the affairs of the community are thought of as the affairs of heaven, and that is the universal, the desires of heaven, and they are permitted. That is what is meant by 'his intention should be to the will of Heaven,' for the good of the community, those are the affairs of Heaven.

The text says, "The merit of their fathers helps them, and their righteousness stands forever." The explanation is the fathers, they are: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their merit helps them when one busies himself with the needs of the community. For the fathers are the fathers of the community at large, and they are not [intended to be] called the fathers of a particular group. Since in a particular group, each and every member has his own father, but the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they are the fathers of the community at large. The merit of these fathers stands and helps all of those for whom they are the fathers (i.e. the Jewish people), when they need it. Therefore, [does it say], "The merit of their fathers helps them, and their righteousness stands forever," like the community at large which stands forever. It is not the case that the community at large, which is the community, is thought of like a particular group, for a particular group breaks apart and changes [over time], but the community at large stands forever. Even if the particular community that one was involved with also fades away and breaks up, in any case the name 'community' is upon it for it is [a particular subset of] the community at large, and its [essence] is sustained and stands because it

is the community at large. Therefore, when the text says, "Their righteousness stands forever," it is as if to say they earn great merit when they do good by the community, which is the community at large, and it will endure forever. This merit began with the fathers, for the fathers were in the beginning of the world and they stand forever. That is what is meant by, "The merit of their fathers helps them, and their righteousness stands forever." It seems to me that many times that this great merit is performed, for the merit of the fathers helps them, and it is as if they earned the merit from the beginning of the father's [time], that they were at the beginning of the world, and that merit endures forever. Thus, this is a universal matter that endures forever, and therefore, those who busy themselves with the needs of the community, their merit begins with the fathers and proceeds to the end of all the generations. Those that perform the needs of the community [their] merit [extends] from the beginning of the world to its end. If they understand the customs of Israel and these words with all of their might, they would busy themselves with the needs of the community, for the sake of Heaven, and not for the sake of their own well being.

The text says that the merit of the fathers will help them when they busy themselves with the needs of the community. In any case, "To you all, I credit to you a reward, as if you had done them," and not because of the merit of the fathers. The text did not say, 'I credit to you as if they did them,' for this would sound as if God returned [merit] to the fathers, who are mentioned before this, [rather, than] that the merit of the fathers helps them, 'And I credit it to them as if the fathers did this thing,' but their merit is already complete. However, when it says, "To you all," it speaks of those who busy themselves with the community, and it is accounted to them as if they had done great merit, this is even though the merit of the fathers is complete. In this is the proper reading, "To you all I will account a great reward."

The explanation for why they will have an exceedingly great reward? For when you busy yourself with the needs of the community, who are numerous, then on account that they are great [in number] so shall your reward be great as if you did a great deal. This is even if you do not do a great deal, that is because in the end, for the many you did [things], and thus

the merit [for performing on behalf of] the many is great. The text says, "To you all, I credit to you a reward, as if you had done them," even though the merit of the fathers helps you in this, and a great reward you have on their behalf. Moreover, there are those who say that since the text says, "And as for you all," this is on account of the strength of [your] trust. For when one comes to trust man, he trusts him face to face, this is fitting for strong trust. That is what is meant by, "To you all, I credit to you a great reward, as if you had done a great deal." That is to say, 'I trust you on this matter.' The text says, "The merit of the fathers helps them," as if they were the fathers of a particular group, like when they say, 'Our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' on behalf of all Israel. They are called the fathers of this [particular] individual when he is busy with the needs of the many. For when he is busy in the needs of the many, he is thought of like the many. This matter you will find, for when the Holy One, blessed be He, was revealed to Moses at Sinai, he said, "I am the God of your fathers; the God of Abraham, [the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob]" (Exodus 3:6), this was [meant] as if they were the fathers of Moses in the particular. Thus, did Moses understand it, for the God of his father, that is to say, was the God of Amram, [and thus carried by extension through the generations] until He said, "the God of Abraham," etc. If this is so, why did God say, "I am the God of your fathers?" This is only because it was revealed and known to the Holy One, blessed be He, that Moses our teacher would refuse to go in the service of the Holy One, blessed be He, as he said [further on], "What am I that I should go to pharaoh?" (Exodus 3:11 paraphrase) He said, 'Behold, you are [to] busy yourself in the needs of the many, and your fathers, they are the fathers of one who is busy with the needs of the many, as they are the fathers of the many. The merit of the fathers will be your help, like it is said here, "The merit of their fathers helps them." Therefore, does the verse say, "I am the God of your fathers etc." This help was: Abraham, who supported his (i.e. Moses') right hand and helped him thus in word and in deed of busying himself with the needs of the many; Isaac, who pushed and destroyed all of his adversaries, those [sent] from *Sama'el*, and those who opposed him in his task; and Jacob, who showed him the road upon which he would go, and the deeds which he would perform,

as it is written, "If God will be with me and guard me on the way upon which I am going... [then the Lord shall be my God]"(Genesis 28:20-21) And this was upheld for good. You must also understand that connected to this [the text states], "All who busy themselves with the community," it seems to me that this is nothing other than *derekh erez*, which is busying oneself in fulfilling the needs of the many, and this is thought of as *derekh erez*. If so, his reward is that much greater. That is because it is stated before this, "It is good to study Torah together with *derekh erez*," that the praises of *derekh erez* are said, and if the business of the community is *derekh erez*, then one who is busy with this, that is to say [he is busy] with the needs of the many, according to what their lives require, his reward is that much greater.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 2:7⁴⁸

Maharal continues his commentary with the sayings of Hillel. Hillel's maxims were concerned largely with gluttony of any sort and provided a long list of the ills which such behavior would bring. This fits quite naturally into Loew's ideas of how man should behave. It was not difficult for Loew to suggest that Hillel was making reference to man's idle pursuit of material things, i.e. sustenance, possessions, etc. According to the Maharal such a pursuit, since it is inherently subject to privation, would only bring more evil. However, were one to pursue more intellectual things, for example more Torah and more Tzedakah, he will only gain. As Hillel tells us, such things merit the world to come.

He⁴⁹ used to say, "The more flesh the more worms, the more possessions the more worry, the more women the more witchcraft, the more female slaves the more unchastity, the more male slaves the more theft. The more Torah the more life, the more study the more wisdom, the more counsel the more understanding, the more Tzedakah⁵⁰ the more peace. He who acquires a good name, acquires it for himself. He

who acquires for himself words of Torah, acquires for himself the world to come."

"He used to say," one has reason to ask about these things, why did he group these particular things [together], were there not many others which he (Hillel) could have said about them [that] the more of them the more damage they will do to man? There are many other things [as well such that] the more of them, one [thus] acquires for himself something great, however, he also did not mention these. This is the explanation [of why he did] this, that is he comes to say that man is made up of a body and a soul, and the body is from the earth [it is material] and the soul is from the heavens [it is spiritual]. From the earth to the heavens it is thought that there are 10 [handbreadths]. This [the Sages] said in Tractate *Sukkah*, "The *Shekhinah* has never come down to below [less than ten handbreadths]. Moses and Eliahu never went up above [more than ten handbreadths]. For it is written, 'The heavens belong to God, but the earth he gave to man.' (Ps. 115:16)" (Sukkah 5a, although in a slightly different form) We find that from the earth to the heavens it is thought that there are ten [spans]. Man who was created from the earth and from the heavens, he has opposite to these ten things [ten] parts. Five of these are near to the earth, and five of these are near to heaven, for behold he was created from the earth and from the heavens. Of these five [parts] that are near to the earth, all of them are material and belong to the body, which is from the earth. Those [parts] that are near to the heavens, they are things which belong to the soul, they are spiritual things near the spiritual soul. Over and against this man has in him five spiritual parts which are near to the soul, they are: two eyes, two ears, and the tongue. Man also has five parts near to the body, they are: two legs, two arms, and the penis. These are the ten [parts] of the body. You should know [innately] that the eyes which have the power to see, and the ears which have the power to hear, and the tongue which has the power to speak, [that] they are near to the soul. The other five parts [of man], all of them are near to the body, which is from the ground. It says in *Perek Arba'a Nedarim*, "Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten mighty ones

which are in the city.' (Ecclesiastes 7:19) ['More than ten mighty ones,' refers to] the two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet, the penis, and the mouth." (Nedarim 32b) Behold, there are ten parts in man, you will find five of those near to the soul, and five of those near to the body. The two ears, the two eyes, and the mouth, these five are spiritual, because all parts that perform their function without being felt in a concrete form, they are spiritual. [This is] like the ears which hear from a distance, and the eye which sees from even farther, and thus too the power of speech which is [a power of the] intellect. It has been made clear that five of these [ten things] are spiritual and five of them are of the body (material). Therefore, you find that God gave man the Ten Commandments, five of them are near to God, that is they are matters which are related to God who is in the heavens, for [contrary to what you might otherwise think, you must consider] "Honor your father and mother," as pertaining to God, may He be blessed. This [point] is according to what the Sages, of blessed memory, said, "For honoring them (one's father and mother) is like honoring God," (Kiddushin 30b), and they [also] said, "For when man honors his father and his mother, I (God) credit to them as if I dwelt among them and they honored me." (*IBID.*) The remaining five [of the Ten Commandments] they relate to matters between men, who are of the earth. For this is man whose soul is from the heavens and whose body is from the land, and from the heavens to the earth it is thought that there are ten [spans], as we explained, there are ten measures [handbreadths, and] authority [always flows from] one to the next. Therefore, five of them belong to the realm above, and five of them to the realm below. Thus, did God give us the Ten Commandments, five of which are near to heaven, and five of which are near to the earth. That is what is meant by what is said that man has a soul from heaven, and a body from the earth. He (man) has five possessions from the earth, they are material possessions from the land, and [he has] five spiritual possessions which belong to the soul.

It has been said that these five things which belong to the body are subject to loss and damage, for that which overflows outside of the [proper] measure is certainly [subject] to imperfection. However, the five which are not material, but are of the soul, that which spills

over of them [will lead] to a higher level. This is what is meant by, "The more flesh the more worms." The explanation of flesh, this is the body of man itself. The more flesh, which is the body itself, the more worms. The explanation of worms, this is deficiency, for the worm will consume the flesh until there is none left. It seems to me that deficiency is bound to the material of man, and therefore, "The more flesh the more worms," that is deficiency. We find several times [in this text, the phrase] 'the more,' because in the material of man is deficiency bound. There is no intention that this apply only to the multiplying of flesh alone nor is there any intention that the [multiplying apply only] to worms. Rather, when man pursues after the stuff of the material body, that which spills over is nothing other than more deficiency, that is [what is meant by] the worms. Like what is said, "Sins remove man from the world," (Avot 4:21) as we will explain with the help of God.

Here is the first mention that the material of man is the body of man. After this it says, "The more possessions the more worry." This is because the first matter which is near [and dear] to man after his body, are [his] possessions, that which man acquires which belong to him alone, and he requires [them] to gain sustenance from, before he marries a woman [the next in order of importance to man]. The text says, "The more possessions the more worry," as if to say that this multiplying also [leads to] imperfection. For [it is the nature of] possessions that man must busy himself on their behalf so that they do not spoil, and multiplying them does not deliver from their [tendency] to spoil, [and thus] the worry is multiplied [as well]. All of this is because the things that pertain to the body do not deliver from imperfection, and further overflow from them [merely] brings greater imperfection. After [the text] mentions possessions which are near [and dear] to man, it then says, "The more women the more witchcraft." This is because women are in order after possessions in nearness to man, for man needs a woman to establish his home. And it says that [multiplying] them [brings] 'more witchcraft.' Even if he marries Abigail [herself],⁵¹ and all the women [that he should marry] were very fitting, [it is not the case] that they would not do witchcraft, since in all places she (a woman) is inclined toward the level of witchcraft [which is] a lesser level.

[Why should] witchcraft be found more often in women than anyone else? [It is] because the level of witchcraft is lower and lesser, thus it is found in women since women are lesser and lower on the level [of reality]. Moreover since witchcraft needs little [physical] strength [to perform], it is found in women [as they possess little physical strength]. Thus, witchcraft has no power unless the witch stands upon the earth, as Rashi explains in *Perek Nigmor Ha-Din* (Sanhedrin 44b). Therefore, by way of multiplying women man is brought near to the level of witchcraft, even if she does not [actually] perform witchcraft, rather in all places he declines from the higher [level] to the lower [level] and imperfection by the act of multiplying women. [This is because] by such multiplying he inclines toward the lesser level of witchcraft. After the text mentions women, it mentions the [category of] female slave, since man needs a female slave to see to the needs of his house more than a male slave who does the work of the field. The text says, "The more female slaves," and what is [meant by the term] 'female slave?' These are the daughters of Ham, and because of this they are flooded with unchastity.⁵² For following after their origins we find [the reason why] multiplying [them] makes more unchastity.⁵³ Even if they are fitting female slaves, in any case, merely by multiplying female slaves, he inclines by that multiplying to unchastity. Even if there is nothing in deed of action [by the slaves] that there be unchastity in such a case, the text says that he is inclined to a measure of unchastity [regardless]. After this the text mentions male slaves, which are fifth [in the rank of nearness to man], for all five of these are attached to man's bodily aspect. It says, "The more male slaves the more theft." This matter is clear, for male slaves steal, as we see in *Perek Ha-Sokhei Et Ha-Poalim*, "Thus, they say that slaves are not to be trusted." (Baba Metziah 6b) Why are they not to be trusted? Because they are thieves. For man's trust depends upon theft. When slaves perform the work of their master, and from time to time he beats them to [make them] work [harder], then they steal. [This is] like the herdsmen of Lot did when they grazed [their cattle] in other fields to lighten their toil that they need not herd [their cattle] in the wilderness, in an ownerless place.⁵⁴ Also, male slaves are automatic in their theft, like the female slaves in their unchastity. For the female slaves in their evil material, in that they are

the children of Ham, they are outside of [natural] order, and on account of this they are involved in unchastity. The male slaves go out from their lesser level, outside of [the natural] order, and on account of this they steal. You must understand this very much, for it is wise. And therefore, does the text say, "The more male slaves the more theft." We have already said that the explanation of this is that he is inclined to the lesser things, and these are material things. For all five of these things which are subject to the body of man, they have imperfection in them, and therefore their overflow is spoilage and imperfection.

After this [the text] begins with the five latter [elements of its discussion] which pertain to the soul. It says that these five things all belong to the soul and that they [point to] a much higher level. The text begins, "The more Torah the more life," for the Torah is the first [in relation] to the soul because it gives life to the soul, as it says, "For it is by way of the Torah that one becomes intimately attached to God, blessed be He," as we have made clear many times.⁵⁵ Therefore, the more Torah the more life. Afterward the text says, "The more study," it seems to me that this 'more' is meant with regards to study with study partners to increase wisdom. For after the text mentions the Torah it mentions wisdom, for when the text mentions Torah, that is to say that he will know its rules and mitzvot by way of study. However, wisdom, understanding the [minute] points of Torah and the reasons for mitzvot, these matters are wisdom; and wisdom is a different matter, it is of an higher level, and this level is also for the soul. After this the text says, "The more counsel the more understanding." The explanation of this is, the more he delves deep in Torah, to come to understand the words of Torah, matters within matters, and this is what is called knowledge. That is what is meant by what is said, "The more counsel the more understanding," and this is a still higher level as well. The text mentions three things opposite knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, and opposite this it says in the *aggadah*, "All are wise, all understand, and all know the Torah," (Maimonides Hilkhos Hametz u'Matzah 9:3) like the three which were mentioned here. We explained that the Torah is called knowledge, as it is said, "Know the Torah." (Ibid.) These three things, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, they pertain to the soul as is

know. In all of these, the overflow acquires a still higher level, not like the first five, wherein [the overflow] has imperfection in it.

The text said further, "The more Tzedakah the more peace." The explanation is that man needs [to pursue] peace until he has no enemies. For if there is no peace there is nothing, therefore man needs peace. If man has no peace he is kept from his Torah and from all matters. The text says, "The more Tzedakah," for Tzedakah is nothing other than peace. When man acts contrary to the law, in that he does not comport with others according to the law, in this he causes new problems. The opposite of this is when his deeds are [in accord with] Tzedakah (that is to say his deeds are just) and to others he acts according to the law, but Tzedakah is not [a matter of] law entirely. Therefore, Tzedakah brings peace, like what is written, "And the deeds of Tzedakah are peace." (Isaiah 32:17)⁵⁶ However, in the following section from Tractate *Baba Batra* [we read], "They said, 'One who causes [others to do good] is greater than the doer, as it is written, 'And he who causes [others to do] righteousness is peace.' (Isaiah 32:17)' ... Rabbah said to the people of Mahuza, 'I beg of you, hasten [to the assistance of] one another, so that you may be on good terms with the government.'" (Baba Batra 9a)

It would seem to me that the giving of Tzedakah does not [actually] cause peace, for [in the example of] giving Tzedakah, it is from kindness that man donates to Tzedakah. However, this does not clear up the discrepancy, since [arguing] that this is from the kindness of man does not alleviate the discrepancy.⁵⁷ For a donation is given out of kindness and that is done without compulsion. [In the case of Tzedakah, it seems that] it is sought and desired that it be done out of kindness, and [in the case of] the giving of Tzedakah, it is not sought that it be done from compulsion. All sides in a disagreement want to compel those against them to act according to their point of view, even if that which they oppose is kindness and the desire to liberate [oneself] from self knowledge. However, to act out of compulsion, [that is] to compel someone [to act a certain way], this is not the desire to act, and therefore, [in this case] even one who donates [Tzedakah freely] enters into this disagreement, since he does not want to act

out of compulsion. Therefore, [one might consider] Tzedakah, which is not compelled [upon people] does not nullify the argument. Though [in such a case one might consider] the one who compels another about [the giving of] Tzedakah, that this is not Tzedakah [in its true sense, since real Tzedakah is given solely out of] kindness. Rather, [it is the case] that one who compels another about [the giving of] Tzedakah [does so] because one is liable for giving Tzedakah, and a liable person is one who does not uphold the law with his actions. Therefore, he compels another about [the giving of] Tzedakah, even though in this case it is not [given out of] kindness, rather that he is compelled to give Tzedakah. Certainly from this point of view he is at peace in the world when Tzedakah is compelled, for by this measure, even if his friend who is against him wants to compel him on this matter, he alleviates [the disagreement] and acts according to his will, for Tzedakah is a matter that is compelled and is not given [merely] out of kindness. What is said in the text, "The more Tzedakah the more peace," 'the more Tzedakah' [means] to compel others about [the giving of] Tzedakah, and this brings peace. Therefore, what is said here, "The more Tzedakah the more peace," it is as if to say that when he busies himself more with the matter of Tzedakah, he should compel others about [the giving of] Tzedakah, then the more peace [there will be]. There is more about this matter, "The more Tzedakah the more peace," [however] they are deep things, and there is not enough room to list them, that they may be clear, nor will there ever be [enough room to do so].

The text states, "He who acquires a good name, acquires it for himself." It seems to me that he acquired something that is subject to himself, for by it man recognizes himself. What we read here, that he acquires it for himself, is on a very high level, for of all the other levels he does not [acquire them] for himself, as is the case with good name, since a name is subject to itself, for behold all names are at the root of the matter. Therefore, when man has a good name, he acquires a level for himself, [that level] of man, he is called 'a good name' a level to himself, higher than all the other levels.

Afterwards the text says, "He who acquires for himself words of Torah, acquires for himself the world to come." This matter is not dependent upon itself [to be evident], for the

text already said, "The more Torah the more life." Instead this comes to teach that when the text said 'more life' it did not mean more life in this world alone, rather it meant more life in the world to come. Therefore, this is connected to the last part, for the world to come rests upon everything, and this matter is not dependent upon itself. You do not find [any other teachings of this sort] except these ten things; five of them material for the body, and five of them spiritual for the soul, and the last one is, "He who acquires a good name, acquires it for himself." These are opposite the 9 things that are not subject to the tenth, it is subject to itself, it is connected to the 9 others as you know. You also find in the 10 commandments that the first, "I am the Lord your God," as if to say, 'I am the first of all.' The remaining nine commandments are not like this, [rather] they are opposite to the root, and nine others. There is no doubt in this explanation, for all who understand wisdom and knowledge, and there is no [need] to go on at length about this here. Therefore, I finish [the discussion] on, "He who acquires a good name, acquires it for himself." The whole meaning of this section is [about] the multiplying of material matters, and [that] the overflow of them causes imperfection. The essential teaching is that the things which are bound to imperfection, like material things, the overflow from them is nothing other than imperfection. The things which are spiritual, their overflow only [serves to] raise [one to a higher] level. This matter has still much more depth to it, but [there is not enough space] to go on at length [about it here].

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 2:12⁵⁸

In Avot 2:8 we are told that Rabban Yokhanan ben Zakkai received the tradition from Hillel and Shammai, and in turn transmitted it to five disciples. Those disciples are: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya, Rabbi Yose Ha-cohen, Rabbi Shimon ben Natanel, and Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh. This section of text, Avot 2:12, contains the advice given by Rabbi Yose, the third of Rabban Yokhanan ben Zakkai's disciples. His comments give important advice on how one

should regard the Torah and how one should behave. Rabbi Loew suggests that the three pieces of instruction given in this statement pertain to the three elements with which man must make himself perfect; i.e. with himself, with others, and with God.

Rabbi Yose said, "Let the property of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own. Dispose yourself to study Torah, for it is not your inheritance. Let all of your deeds be for the sake of heaven."

"Rabbi Yose said, 'Let the property of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own. Dispose yourself to study Torah, for it is not your inheritance. Let all of your deeds be for the sake of heaven.'" We have already explained that [it was] the way of these Sages to give complete instruction to perfect man in all things. We also explained to you that the entire wholeness of man is when he is whole with regards to three things; that he be whole in regards to his fellow men, that he be whole in himself, and that he should be whole with his Creator. These are the three things in which [man] is entirely whole, and it is fitting that man be whole in them. Therefore, Rabbi Yose also came to complete man in these three. He said, "Let the property of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own," for in this he will be whole with his fellow man. And he chose this measure (that is to say property) over what he [could have] chosen, i.e. the honor of his neighbor, for if even the property of his neighbor is dear to him, how much the more so that his neighbor [himself] is dear to him, and this is very great instruction.

Opposite to man being whole with regards to himself, we already made clear above in *Perek Moshe Kibel* (Avot Chapter One), that there is no perfection of man greater than when by way of Torah man extricates himself from the baseness of matter to possess the intellect. The text says, "Dispose yourself to study Torah, for it is not your inheritance," as if to say, 'You should habituate yourself to the Torah, for the Torah is not the [automatic] inheritance of

man.' Therefore, he needs to fix and establish himself to the Torah, since it is not the [automatic] inheritance of man. This point is about [man] being whole with regards to himself. The text says, "Let all your deeds be for the sake of heaven," this is the third type of wholeness, that man be whole with God, may He be blessed, [that is to say] until all of his deeds be for the sake of heaven. Behold that this instruction was given to man to complete him in all things until he is whole.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 2:14⁵⁹

In the sections of *Avot* following the list of Rabban Yokhanan ben Zakkai's students, each student offered his most fundamental teaching. In this section of *DEREKH HAYYIM*, Maharal concludes his discussion of these five disciples and their views with the teaching of Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh. However, in this section Loew has also seen fit to systematically proceed through each of the teachings of the five disciples and prove to his reader how they are all interrelated. Once he has concluded his discussion of the meaning and import of the teachings given by the previous four disciples, Maharal then turns his attention to that of Rabbi Eleazar. Rabbi Eleazar's teaching focuses in on the importance of Torah study and the need to defend Jewish thought against the *Apikoros*.⁶⁰ In addition, Rabbi Eleazar adds an important theological point, that is to say contrary to the claims of an *Apikoros*, there is in fact a reward for those who labor in the Torah. In the end Judah Loew links all of these pertinent pieces of instruction together.

Rabbi Eleazar said, "Be diligent in the study of Torah, and know how to respond to an *Apikoros*. Know before whom you labor, and that your employer may be relied upon to pay you the wages of your work."

“Rabbi Eleazar said, ‘Be diligent in the study of Torah, and know how to respond to an *Apikoros*.’” Rabbi Eleazar gave moral instruction about the Torah, [because the study of the Torah] is man’s purpose, inasmuch as man, for his part, was not created except to toil in Torah. [This is] like what is written, “Man is born unto toil.”(Job 5:7) This is also like we made clear above at length, for the creation of man is [dependent] upon toil in Torah. Therefore, he (Rabbi Eleazar) said, “Be diligent in the study of Torah,” for if he is not diligent in the study of Torah, it will not be said of him that he toiled in Torah, rather that he learned Torah only in his spare time. After this he said that his Torah [study] should be in order to respond to an *Apikoros*, as if to say that just as man has a commandment to study and acquire [knowledge of] Torah, which is a Torah of truth, so too it is fitting that he obliterate false wisdom in the world, so that the truth might be magnified in the world. For if he countenances lies in the world, in the end the lies, God forbid, will destroy the truth, and God will destroy the world when lies triumph. Therefore, he (Rabbi Eleazar) warns to not give a place to lies, rather know how to respond to an *Apikoros*.

After this he said, “[Know] before whom you labor,” *in Torah*, this corresponds to the great burden which is cast upon him, for he said, “Be diligent in the study of Torah,” and he (Rabbi Eleazar) also strives to know how to respond to an *Apikoros*. On account of this he said, “[Know] before whom you labor, and that your employer may be relied upon to pay you the wages of your work.” ‘[That is to say,] if you labor in Torah a great deal, God will give you a great reward.’ If this [point] is not [always] before him, it is possible that laziness will overtake such a man. Even though he has already been warned, “Do not serve the master in order to receive a reward,”(Avot 1:3) [however] he (Antigonus of Sokho) says this [only in] the case when the essential point of his service is for the sake of this, namely that he serves God in order to receive a reward. However, this [reward does] serve to arouse man, since man, who possesses a body and matter, he does not pay so much attention to the service of God, and he needs awakening. This is like a child who needs [to be] aroused to study, and they (his teachers) give him things so that he study. Thus, man needs awakening. If he

should arouse himself, in that he thinks of the great reward that man receives [for study], it is not considered as though he served to receive a reward, for this is not so. Rather this was an arousal that he not refrain from the work.

Therefore, this is [only] said in relation to the Evil Inclination, for when [it acts] it wants to mislead man, so that he will not labor in Torah, and that he not come [even] lazy to this work. Even though he [should] act out of love, and not out of desire for a reward, he must be concerned that perhaps he will become lazy and he will not trust in his soul. On account of this he (Rabbi Eleazar) said, "[Know] before whom you labor, and [your employer may be relied upon to pay you the wages of your work,]" and due to this he will not become lazy in his service. However, it is certain that the ultimate goal of his study is not to receive a reward at all, rather this [serves] to strengthen his hand so that he will not become lazy, for there is [reason] to be concerned about this.

You should know furthermore that each one of these five Sages said three things,⁶¹ which are connected to one another. There is more for you to know; for every one of them said precisely three things, and this Tanna [Rabbi Eleazar] was precise about what he said. They [each] said three things, for these Sages were perfect, and therefore, they [could] perfect man [as well], each and every one, by three moral teachings.⁶² In man there are different aspects, for man is not [made up of] one thing, but rather he has in him several aspects. Therefore, [with regard to] the words of instruction that are given to perfect man, there needs to be more than one, since that which is a teaching on one matter, it is not a teaching on a second matter, and that which is a teaching on the second matter, it is not a teaching on the first. Also, since man requires several things, these are the words of instruction for him. [But] in any case, [together] they are total, complete, and all encompassing.

Man has in him three aspects: the first aspect corresponds to his mental faculties; the second aspect to his physical faculties; and the third aspect to man himself (i.e. the unity of both). These [taken by themselves] are only parts. Therefore, the third aspect, insofar as he is a [whole] man, encompasses [both] the body and the soul that a man possesses. In sum, man

needs moral instruction from the standpoint of his physical faculties, and he needs moral instruction from the standpoint of his mental faculties, and from the standpoint of being a man, embracing his [constituent] parts. Therefore, these Sages came with their words of moral instruction to perfect man in everything, for each and every one [of his parts] needs special instruction. Each and every Sage added to [the teaching of] his predecessor to entirely repair man in three ways, until the last [Sage] entirely repairs him in what pertains to man from the standpoint of the individual [constituent] parts of man, which we have mentioned. [This is certainly the case] even if [this instruction] is not as easy as what came before it, as will be made clear. You really must understand this, that the three things that [each Sage] said, is such that each one of them repairs man, who encompasses what comes from the right, the left, and the middle. Everything is based on this; understand it!

You should know that when Rabbi Eliezer said, "Let the honor of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own," (Avot 2:10) [he did so] because this is a very great matter which [serves] to bring man to the world to come. In *Perek Tefilat Ha-Shakhar* [we read], "When Rabbi Eliezer was sick, his students came in to see him, and they said, 'Rabbi, teach us the way of life that we may merit the world to come.' He said to them, 'Be careful about the honor of your neighbors etc.'"(Berakhot 28b) Behold, it was Rabbi Eliezer who said here, "Let the honor of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own." (Avot. 2:10) It seems to me that this matter brings man to life in the world to come.

Do not raise the objection [by asking], 'Why does this [sort of] thing bring man to the life of the world to come?' One should understand this from what the Sages said, "All those who cause their neighbor's face to blanch [through public embarrassment] do not have a portion in the world to come." (Baba Metzia 59b) From this [injunction] you should understand that the opposite, [i.e.] being careful about the honor of your neighbor, is the path to life in the world to come, as will be clearly explained. When one behaves honorably with man, who was created in the image of God, for man was created in the image of God, on account of this he merits the world to come. For man only merits the world to come because of

the image of God, which belonged to man from the very beginning, as it is written in the text, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness," (Genesis 1:26) [Only] on account of this does man merit life in the world to come. Therefore, he (Rabbi Eliezer) said, 'When you are careful about the honor of your neighbors you shall have the world to come, and you shall not, God forbid, despise the image [of God found in man], upon which the world to come depends.' And thus it says in the Midrash, "'Do not go up by steps to my altar [that your nakedness not be exposed upon it.]" (Exodus 20:23) R. Ishmael said, 'Behold this matter is known *a fortiori*. Just as stones, which have no knowledge either to do evil or to do good, if God says do not behave in a shameful manner [with them by uncovering one's nakedness before them], so too [with regard to] your neighbor, who was made in the image of Him who spoke and the world came to be. The law is that you shall not behave [with them] in a shameful manner.'" (*Mekhilta de Rebbe Ishmael* "Parshat Yitro" 11) Thus, the warning about one's neighbor is due to the fact that he was created in the image of God; this is the highest level that man has, and it is on account of this degree that man also merits a higher level, i.e. life in the world to come. This is why he said that this was the way of life [leading] to the world to come, for it brings man from this world, which is a material world, to the world separate [from matter], which is the world to come. Rabbi Eliezer also said there, "Let the honor of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own," to teach man the way of life by which he may arrive at the world to come.

He says after this, "Do not be easily angered." (Avot 2:10) for just as this way (i.e. the preceding statement) is the way of life to which he turns to bring himself into the world to come, [so too] he warns man that he should be on guard against the way that can destroy the world to come for him. That is [why] he said, "Do not be easily angered," for anger brings man to sin until it destroys man as far as the world to come is concerned, just as has been made clear. For an 'angry person' is a 'sinful person.' Therefore, anger is the foundation which brings man to sin, and to be lost from the world to come. Thus, he said first, 'Let your neighbor's honor be more dear to you than your own,' for this is the path to bring man to the

world to come, as Rabbi Eliezer said [also] in Tractate *Berakhot*. Afterward he warned man about that which causes him to lose the world to come. Thus, he said, "Do not be easily angered." (Avot 2:10) You have nothing that causes and accounts for sin greater than anger does. After this he said, "Repent one day before your death." (Avot 2:10) It seems to me that if you have sinned, and "there is no one so righteous on earth that he does good and never sins," (Ecclesiastes 7:20) one will be warned to do *Teshuvah* each and every day, and for this reason he will have life in the world to come. Rabbi Eliezer did not conclude [all of the passage], "These are the things [without measure,]" in the section [of the prayerbook] *Tefilat Ha-Shakhar*; rather [he mentioned] only one of them, that is to say, he warned about [respecting] the honor of your neighbors.⁶³ They (his students) asked him only about the way of life alone, and this is the way of life, which brings [one] to life in the world to come. Here, he explained [how] to perfect every man by way of three things, so that he should possess the world to come, and so that he should not come to the point of losing the world to come, and this explanation is clear.

We already said that three things perfect man in all respects. For what he (Rabbi Eliezer) said, "May your neighbor's honor be as dear to you as your own," this instruction pertains to man, for man has to honor the image of man on account of his being man. It is as if he said, 'You must honor your neighbor on account of his being man who was created in the image of God.' If man does not do this and does not care for his neighbor, who is a man created in the image of God, he demonstrates his own worthlessness and privation, insofar as he is a man; for if he were a man of moral worth, by virtue of this same divine image he would honor his neighbor who was created in the image of God. Therefore, he instituted this to repair man insofar as he is a man. He said after this, "Do not be easily angered." This matter corresponds to his psychic powers, since anger derives from the soul [mental, intellectual]⁶⁴ So, corresponding to this he said, 'One should not be an angry person, for if he is, the soul will not attain its highest level.' With regard to the body he said, "Repent one day before you die." For insofar as man is a bodily being, he is subject to *Teshuvah*, for if man was not a

bodily being, *Teshuvah* would not be part of his world. Therefore, the Sages, of blessed memory, said, "Better is one hour of *Teshuvah* and good deeds in this world [than eternal life in the world to come,]" (Avot 4:17) as will be explained with the help of God. With regard to this he said, "Repent one day before you die." Understand these words that we have hinted at here, for they are truly and undoubtedly wise, not by virtue of [mere] reasoning and guesswork, but only [by virtue of the] truth. Yet, it is impossible to explain these words as they really are. Rather, let a wise man listen, and he will add [to] wisdom and knowledge. Behold, Rabbi Eliezer melded the three things which perfect man together, as we have said.

Likewise, Rabbi Yehoshua also spoke words of moral instruction to perfect man, for we have already said that man has within him three aspects.⁶⁵ The first is his body, the second his soul, and they are his [constituent] parts. The third [aspect] is man, man himself, that is the entirety of the two [together] as we have said. Therefore, the evil eye drives man from the world; for when evil is bound to the mental faculty, there is no doubt that this brings corruption to man, because of the evil, which is the very imperfection that is bound to his soul, which is [also] the evil eye. Thus, the evil eye drives man from the world. He said after this 'the Evil Inclination' which is an evil that is bound to the power of the body, since the Evil Inclination is bound to the body. The reason for this is that even animals likewise have the inclination, as we see in the first chapter of *Baba Kamma*, that animals also have an Evil Inclination.⁶⁶ However, animals do not have the evil eye, for animals do not have a separate mental faculty; only man has [this], as the soul that belongs to animals is only thought of as bodily. The essence of the Evil Inclination rests in sexual matters, which pertain to the body, and this matter is clear.

Now, since the Evil Inclination, which is evil bound to the body of man, drives man out of the world in as much as privation, which is evil, is bound to this part [of man, i.e. the body],⁶⁷ thus too with 'unwarranted hatred,'⁶⁸ for the creatures [signify] man, and if he hates man on account of his being man, [then he has] defects and deficiencies insofar as he is a man. For if he were a whole man, he would not hate creatures, for they are [also] men. In this

[then] are deficiencies on account of his being man, and this therefore, drives man out of the world. So that you should not depart from this [text] until you understand this essential point, when he (Rabbi Yehoshua) said, "The evil eye, the Evil Inclination, and the hatred of creatures, drive man out of the world," you must know that death comes to man when he turns from the middle [path] upon which mankind was created, and inclines toward the extremes, for in [doing] so, death comes to man. This matter is clear, every instance of death is an extreme, but the evenly balanced and middle [path] is life, as we [said] at length above in the Introduction.

You must know that this world which God, may He be blessed, created, was created in [a state of] equilibrium. Moreover, it has not departed from the middle [course], as we made clear, so that it might be sustained, for the middle [path] has the greatest [degree of] stability. This is indicated by the fact that [the world] was created in six days, since the letter *vav* signifies equilibrium. You must understand this from its [very] form, its physical presence, for it stands like an upright staff in equal parts (i.e. does not incline to one side or another), with only a little curve at its head. In any case you do not find this [feature] in [any of] the other letters. Likewise, [the spelling of] its name, the *vav* is balanced even in this regard as well.⁶⁹ Also in terms of its numerical value it is the most equal. Thus, did Ibn Ezra, of blessed memory, write in his explanation to Exodus about the *vav*, that it is an equal number in the system of integers.⁷⁰ There is no number in mathematics which is as evenly balanced as the number six. That is because six can be divided three ways. They are: six that is divided in half, [and thus] three [and three]; or a third of six, which is two; and a sixth of six [which is] one. All of these [dividends when added together] are then [equal to the original number,] six. Behold, the parts into which six can be divided are then equal to the whole.⁷¹ This [phenomenon] is not found in other numbers: since four divided in half is two, and a fourth [of four] is one, and they are [equal] to three [when added] together, and not four.⁷² [Another example is] the number eight, [which] divided into halves is four [and four], and a quarter of eight is two, and an eighth of eight is one. Behold [when added together they are equal to]

seven.⁷³ Thus, no number is found in mathematics that is balanced as the number six.

Because the world was created in [a state of] equilibrium, it [had to be] created in six days, [since] the number six demonstrates the equilibrium of the world.

There is no creature from among all that is created that is more balanced than man. For this reason man was created on the sixth day, which signifies the balance that exists within man. This balance, namely, that man is composed of both body and soul, is [such that] he needs to be in balance, and that he not incline toward one side, lest he be an entirely material man, and that he not incline toward mental faculties as if he were entirely spiritual. Rather, he needs to be in equilibrium [of body and spirit], thus, it is not fitting that man should oppose himself, for in doing so man inclines toward complete privation.⁷⁴ That is what is meant by, "The evil eye, the Evil Inclination, and the hatred of creatures drive man out of the world." For the [kind of] man who possesses the evil eye, operates most of all through the power of the soul until he destroys everything in his sight. This is a psychic reaction that exceeds what is appropriate, and by this he goes over to one of the two extremes. However, [remember that] man was only created in a state of equilibrium between body and soul; insofar as one inclines to one extreme, privation clings to him, as has been explained. Thus, man is driven out of the world. So, too, if man inclines towards the material physical faculties, through the [influence of] the Evil Inclination he cleaves to the body as if he were entirely body. This person favors one extreme, and the extreme is where privation resides, [precisely] because it is extreme, and this very thing drives him out of the world. It is fitting that man stand without inclining to one extreme [or another]. Understand what [the Tanna] has said, that [such activity] drives man out of the world, for this world is a balanced world that God created in equilibrium. One who inclines from that balance entirely towards one extreme, he departs from God's world, and complete privation clings to him.

These are the two possibilities that exist for man, from the aspect that he may depart toward one extreme [over another]. For by this means, privation clings to him and it drives him out of this world. They (the Sages) [also] spoke of a third thing, that is hatred of

creatures. For hatred of creatures drives a man from this world because he opposes himself. Behold the creatures are man himself, whom God created in the world. When he hates other creatures he opposes man himself by way of hatred of creatures, and in this he inclines toward complete privation. For hatred of creatures, [such] that he hates them (humans) to the point that man cannot [even] exist, this is complete privation. How is it possible that he can be sustained in the world when he opposes himself and he inclines toward privation? When he hates the creatures, behold he is against himself, for the creatures are man [himself]. [It is likewise], if creatures hate him. For what is written, "Hatred of creatures," can be understood in two ways: if he hates creatures, or if he causes [other] creatures to hate him. This is because there is [in this description] both opposition and self negation, and in this [way] he inclines toward privation completely. For self-negation is removal [of man from the world, and this is] privation itself.

Now, what he (Rabbi Yehoshua) said here has been explained to you, namely that, "The evil eye, the Evil Inclination, and hatred of creation drives man from the world;" that such removal from the world [occurs when] man favors one extreme [over another], for by this [behavior] privation adheres to him, and this matter drives him from the world. Also, when man opposes himself he inclines to deficiency. You should understand how the evil eye proceeds from the left side, and the Evil Inclination proceeds from the right side, and the hatred of creatures proceeds from man himself, since he is upright as has been made clear. Understand these things, for they are deep and wise. You yourself should understand that Rabbi Yehoshua gave moral instruction [for the benefit of] all of man's elements. That is, for he began with the soul and its faculties, and from which the evil eye arises. Afterwards, he gave moral instruction to the body, in which the Evil Inclination [may be found], as was explained above. And after that, he gave moral instruction to man insofar as he is a man, namely, that he should not hate creatures, nor cause them to hate him. For when man hates creatures, or cause them to hate him, he is not thought of as a man; for if he were a man he would not oppose himself. But, in fact [by virtue of this], he inclines toward privation. In this

[teaching, Rabbi Yehoshua] gave moral instruction to all aspects and elements [of man] as we have said. Great things and true things have been made clear to you, and there is no doubt in all that we have said. We have explained the matter [at hand] by means of perspectives that differ from one another in order to help you understand it correctly. For even if there are different perspectives, every thing has one true root; there is no doubt about this at all to one who understands.

So it is with the words of Rabbi Yose, who said, "Let the possessions of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own." (Avot 2:12) He came to give moral instruction in that he said, "Let the possessions of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own." This is [said] for the sake of man's highest [aspirations], for [if] even his [neighbor's] possessions will be as important in his eyes as his own how much the more so will his neighbor himself [be as important in his eyes as himself], as was made clear above [while considering] the words of Rabbi Eliezer. Corresponding to this [earlier point] he (Rabbi Yose) said, "Let the possessions of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own," this [serves] to perfect man insofar as he has a body, and thus he is not [initially] prepared for the Torah. [As] he subsequently said, "You should be prepared and dispose yourself to [receive] the Torah, for the Torah is not your inheritance," (paraphrase of Avot 2:12) as if to say, 'He possesses a body,' as has been made clear, 'and therefore, he needs to prepare himself with all his strength to learn Torah.'

When he said, "All your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven," (Avot 2:12) this constitutes moral instruction for the soul, for all the actions and deeds of man originate in the soul. This is because the soul is the seat of [the] intellect. Accordingly, man's actions originate in his soul, and correspondingly he said, "All your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven." Rabbi Yose came to give moral instruction to man from the perspective of all of his divided parts, and this matter is clear. However, the words of Rabbi Yose are more remote than [the words of] Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Eliezer said, "May the honor of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own," and Rabbi Yose added, "Let your neighbor's possessions be as dear to you as your own."

Similarly, Rabbi Yehoshua gave moral instruction to the body—to keep itself far away from the Evil Inclination, which [dwells] within the body—but Rabbi Yose came to add something more, i.e. that one should be disposed towards the words of Torah—that is to say, he should not follow after the desires of his body and turn to [the way of] destruction. That is what is meant by, “Dispose yourself to the Torah, for it is not your inheritance.” For man, on account of his being man, is bodily in nature, [and therefore] the Torah does not [automatically] belong to him, not as [it would be] if he were lacking a body, [in which case] the Torah would be his automatically. Thus, [Rabbi Yose] added [moral instruction] to repair the soul, so that a man might perform all of his deeds for the sake of Heaven, and so that he might not do anything that was not for the sake of Heaven.

Rabbi Shimon came and added even more to dispose man [to conform to the rule of the Torah] completely, inasmuch as that is what is meant by his saying, “Be careful in reciting the *Shema* and the prayers.” (Avot 2:13) First, be careful in reciting the *Shema* and the prayers—this is in respect to man himself, on account of his being man—so that he might be fit to accept upon himself the rule of Heaven, and to serve God, since man was created for this purpose. Behold, man was not created except to serve God, as it is written, “Fear God, and keep His commandments, for that is the whole duty of man.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13) The Sages, of blessed memory, wrote, “Every man was created for this purpose,” (Berakhot 6b)⁷⁵ for man, because of his body, is not [inherently] with God, thus when he enters before God in prayer he needs to dismiss all bodily aspects, [and exist] as if he were entirely spiritual. Therefore, he said corresponding to this, “Do not make your prayer a fixed thing,” (Avot 2:13) [in effect causing] prayer be like a burden upon man given his body. Thus, is it written in the *TUR*, “The pious men of deeds would seclude themselves in prayer until they achieved spiritual elevation and conquered their intellectual spirit; until they arrived near the level of prophecy.” (Orakh Hayyim, Siman 98) This matter is clear, that is, [it refers to] when man exerts himself in prayers of supplication, [to the extent that] he cleaves to the blessed One, for by doing so he

dismisses materiality which is the barrier between God and man. Therefore, he said, from the standpoint of man's being a bodily being, man has to be careful to not make his prayer fixed.

He (Rabbi Shimon) said after this, "Do not be evil to yourself," (Avot 2:13) namely, in direct relation to [one's own] soul. For evil is in the soul, and thus Scripture says in all places, "The soul of the wicked desires evil." (Proverbs 21:10), and [this is] also as we said above. Evil pertains to nothing other than the soul, owing to the power of evil and its high handedness, which operates through the power of the soul, and not because of the physical faculties at all, this matter is made clear above in the discussion on the evil eye. Thus, Rabbi Shimon also perfects man from the standpoint of that which is appropriate to man, giving moral instruction to all of man's aspects, and this is clear. We already explained above what he said, "Do not be evil to yourself," this means that even though the principle part of evil belongs to man, let him not be evil to himself in regards to any sin, even though it does not pertain to man. It is also possible to give this [alternative] explanation for, "Do not be evil to yourself," that is to say, 'Do not be evil *even* to yourself,' [for] one to afflict their body until he [should] do some evil to himself. For just as someone who does good to his soul is called pious, as it is written, "The *hasid* does good to his soul," (Proverbs 11:17) so, too, someone who does evil to himself is called wicked. Even in *Ta'anit* they said, "One who does not save his [own] soul is called a sinner." (Ta'anit 11b) Why did it not [simply] say, 'Do not be evil to yourself?' Because, evil is what is seen by another, as we have said. Therefore, he (Rabbi Shimon) said, "Do not be evil to yourself," as if to say, 'You are evil when [you] oppose yourself.'⁷⁶

Thus, what Rabbi Eleazar⁷⁷ said, "Be diligent in the study of Torah," (Avot 2:14) gives moral instruction to man in regard to all of his constituent parts. For what he said, "Be diligent in the study of Torah," this pertains to man's entire being, since man, insofar as he is man, was created to labor in the Torah, as was made clear above. It was precisely in respect to this that he said, "Be diligent in the study of Torah." He also said, "Know how to respond to the *Apikoros*," (Avot 2:14) this is [said] in regard to thoughts of heresy that rise in man's soul. This is similar to what is written, "And that you seek not after your own heart and your own

eyes, [after which you go astray.]"(Numbers 15:39) The Sages said in *Perek Haya Koreh*, "‘After your own heart,’ this refers to heresy. Thus, it is written, ‘The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”(Psalm 14:1) ‘And after your own eyes,’ this refers to thoughts of transgression. Thus, it is written, ‘And Samson said to his father, ‘Get her for me, for she is pleasing in my eyes.’”(Judges 14:3) ‘After which you go astray,’ this refers to lusting after idolatry. Thus, it is written, ‘And they went astray after the Ba’alim.’”(Judges 8:33)"(Berakhot 12b) With regard to this he said, "Know how to respond to the *Apikoros*," for if he learns how to respond to an *Apikoros*, how much the more [will it follow] that no evil thought will arise in his heart and mind. Because the soul thinks of heretical things, he said, "Be diligent [in your Torah study],"(Avot 2:14) to prevent this from occurring at the outset.

Indeed, this [instruction] put the soul [in good order] more than any of [the sayings of] the first [writers in this group of *mishnayot*]. With regard to the standpoint of the body which holds [man] back from his labor [in Torah], he said, "Know before whom you labor that he will give you a great reward according to your labor,"(paraphrase of Avot 2:14) for by this man might be aroused [to work] so that he will not be kept back by his material aspect. This matter was made clear above, for all that he said, i.e. that he should think of the reward, is said with respect to the Evil Inclination which [dwells] in his body, and which entices man so that he does not labor in the Torah. With respect to this he said, 'That he shall think of the reward that he will have for his labor in Torah, in this way he shall subdue his [Evil] Inclination to [refrain from] labor in Torah.' Not that he wanted to say, 'That he shall learn [only] on account of the reward that he will have.' Rather, he said this only in respect to the Evil Inclination, as we said above in the explanation, and this is the final level.

Each one [of these Sages] added an ordinance for man, for all of his aspects, until these things afflict man completely in the three aspects [which comprise him] as we have said. You must understand these things, for they are very clear. The words of these Sages have been made clear to you, [to the effect] that each gave three pieces of moral instruction to make man upright in regard to all his parts. All three of the pieces of moral instruction that each and

every one gave came to include a great deal, as was made clear, and there is [still] even greater profundity in their words on these three subjects, which they gave as moral instruction to man to perfect him, as we hinted at above.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 2:16⁷⁸

In this section Maharal takes up the words of Rabbi Tarfon. This is one of the most well known passages in *PIRKEI AVOT*, but it also proves to be difficult to understand. For example, why should a reward be given for a great amount of study when that work itself must not actually be completed? Loew's words succeed in making clear many of the obscure elements of this statement.

He⁷⁹ used to said, "It is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it. If you have learned much Torah, a great reward will be given to you. For your employer is faithful, he shall pay to you the wages for your labor. And know, that the reward for the Righteous is in the future to come."

"He (Rabbi Tarfon) used to say, 'It is not upon you to finish the work.'" There is [reason] to ask a great question [regarding this statement]. It sounds from this that everything depends on the quantity of Torah that one learns, for he said, "If you have learned much Torah, a great reward will be given to you." We find this in the following passage from *Berakhot*, "Rabbi Eleazar fell ill and Rabbi Yokhanan went to visit him.... He noticed that Rabbi Eleazar was weeping, and he said to him, 'Why do you weep? Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Did we not learn, 'The one who offers a large sacrifice and the one who offers a small sacrifice have the same merit, provided that their heart is directed toward heaven.' (Menahot 110b) Thus, we learn that those [who do] much and [those who do] little are equal.'" (Berakhot 5b) But, here he [also] said, "If you have learned much Torah, a great

reward will be given to you.” It is possible to say then [with regard] to the matter of labor [that is] mentioned in this context, ‘If you have learned Torah, and you endure a great deal of hardship on account of it, a great reward will be given to you, [both] for the labor as well as for the hardship.’ This is like what we explained above at the beginning of that chapter.

Certainly however, if one learns much Torah in one year by way of one year’s effort, and if one learns less Torah [by way of] one year’s effort, the two are equal. Thus, he (Rabbi Yokhanan) explained the mishnah in *Menahot*, “‘It is said of a burnt offering of cattle, ‘An offering made by fire of a sweet savor,’ (Leviticus 1:9) and of a burnt offering of birds, ‘An offering made by fire of a sweet savor,’ (*IBID.* 1:17) and of the meal offering, ‘An offering made by fire of a sweet savor,’ (*IBID.* 2:2) to teach you that it is the same whether a man offers a large or a small sacrifice, provided he directs his heart to heaven.’” (Menahot 110a)

However, it is not the intention that all [offerings] be [regarded as] alike, for if so why does man bring an ox offering?⁸⁰ Rather, this is the explanation: One should not say, that since the very rich may [afford] large offerings and thus [are able to] bring an ox, while the poor bring a bird or a tenth of an *ephah* of grain, that the rich [person receives] more of a reward than the poor. This is not the intention of the matter, [but rather] that a poor person is [monetarily] troubled by the tenth of an *ephah* of grain, just as a rich person [is monetarily troubled] over an ox, and thus, the two [offerings] are equivalent. Since, if a poor person were to bring an ox, he would certainly be even more [monetarily] troubled by that amount.⁸¹ Thus, a rich person with an ox and a poor person with a bird or with [a tenth of an *ephah* of] grain, are equal. By comparison, if a man did not learn much Torah, but in any case went through the effort for that small amount [which he did learn], just as that same man who learned a great deal [of Torah], “A great reward will be given to him,” just as one who learned much Torah. What he said here, “If you have learned much Torah,” is that he learned and busied himself in Torah to a great extent, even if he did not [necessarily] learn [that] much Torah.

In any case, do not take from this that he should have said, ‘If you labored in Torah a great deal,’ and further, that the meaning of what he said, i.e., “It is not upon you to finish the

work," is, 'That you are not required to finish the work.' For on this [issue] he said, 'If you labor in Torah a great reward He will give to you, but you are not required *to finish* the work.' In any case, one needs to explain the difficulty of what he said, namely, "If you have learned much Torah, a great reward will be given to you." That is to say, on account of the toil, for it is not the way of man to busy himself in Torah, and to toil in it simply to learn a great deal. According to what we explained above, the reward is in two guises, one is according to the great trouble [brought on by the toil], and one is according to the mitzvah [of study] itself. There [in *Berakhot*] Rabbi Yokhanan said, "Is it because you did not study [enough] Torah? Did we not learn, 'The one who sacrifices much and the one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that their heart is directed to heaven.' (Menahot 110b)" (Berakhot 5b) If so, you have a great reward in the Torah according to the labor and the trouble, and this is correct.

Now, [this statement is made] because man might think that there is no reward, God forbid, for the [study of] Torah itself, just as no householder pays wages to someone whom he hires to build a house if he does not [actually] build anything. The [paying of such a wage] is [only] appropriate for the householder to do when there is no other worker that would finish the job. Thus, man would [naturally] presume that he would not have a reward for Torah [study], since he cannot complete the [study of] Torah. To this line of thought he (Tarfon) said, "It is not upon you to finish the work," for the Torah was not given except that man might labor in it. However, that he should finish the Torah, man cannot attain this, as we made clear above.

However, in regard to [the statement], "If you have learned much Torah," since man cannot come to finish the task and [thus by extention not come to a state of] perfection—as man was not created in such a way—it is for that reason that he said, 'It is not upon you to finish the work, and [therefore] be perfected—for man was not created in such a way.' And, also so that he not think the only reward for studying Torah is the same as when one takes up the *Lulav*,⁸² for if he takes it up once [during the entire festival], he has fulfilled [the commandment] for all of the festival's days. Thus, [he would think] it is [the same] with the

study of Torah, so that if he studied just one time, then he is exempt [from all further study]. Therefore, he (Rabbi Tarfon) said, "You are not exempt from it." This too is within the totality of the first answer. If this matter were to apply to man, that he should study one time and then be exempt from it, man would [supposedly already] have finished [the task]. However, [with regard to Torah study,] man cannot finish it, therefore it is not fitting for him to be exempt from it. Rather, he should labor in Torah, and not break off from [studying] the Torah, for in regard to [study] man does not [ever] finish, as is fitting [given his stature as a] man.

Also, [this statement is made] so that man should not think, 'If [man is not required to finish the work] there is no reason for man to receive a great reward for a great [amount of] Torah [study].' This is because [man might logically suppose] the great reward which God, may He be blessed, gives is like the wages that a householder pays, and all such wages are given only at the end, for as the Sages, of blessed memory, said, "Wages are paid out only at the end. That is to say that when he completes his work, it follows that he then be paid the wage." (Baba Metzia 65a) This is the reason for what is said in *Kiddushin*, "The reward for the mitzvot is in the world to come." (Kiddushin 39a) Since it is fitting for all wages to be [paid] at the end, it is not fitting that he should be paid his reward in this world. That [erroneous conclusion] stems [from the line of thought] that a householder pays only with the completion of the work. However, there is no end to Torah [study] nor is there an ultimate limit to it. Accordingly, there is no reward [in this world] for much [study of] Torah, that is to say, all that he learned [whatever that amount is], is called 'completed.' Because, before this [study] man does not know Torah, but now [after study] he knows Torah, and he is therefore, called 'complete,' for he has acquired [some] Torah, and on account of this he receives a reward. However, with regard to [the phrase] 'much Torah,' there [exists] no [true or total] 'completion,' and it is impossible to say that [God] will pay him when he finishes the work, similar to when a householder pays when the work is completed. For, as to the great quantity of Torah, one cannot finish it, and if that is the case, then there is no reward for the fact that he studied a great deal. To this matter he (Rabbi Tarfon) said, "If you have learned much Torah, a

great reward will be given to you.” This matter is as we said above, in regard to man, all who labor in Torah, have a reward for that labor. This matter is not similar to [the example of] a house where the completion [of the labor] only occurs at the end (i.e. when the house is built. However, with regard to labor in the Torah, all are considered complete according to [the work] they themselves [accomplished].⁸³ This is similar to [the example of] one who sows seeds; for all that he sows is complete, and he shall reap for it. There is compensation for this, and there is also in this example [both] completion and an end, [that is to say, the process of sowing does come to a conclusion] and therefore, there is a reward when one has studied Torah.

On this matter there are those who raise difficulties, namely, he should have said, ‘You shall be paid a great reward.’ However, this matter is certainly not a difficulty, for in the place of the word ‘pay,’ he did not need to say ‘much,’ because in the category of ‘payment,’ such payment is only [according] to what is fitting to be paid, and not ‘much’ [*per se*]. Thus, he (Rabbi Tarfon) said, “A great reward will be given to you,” that is to say, ‘He will pay you according to your labor, and it [the labor] is great.’ One must nevertheless wonder why his reward will not be immediately disbursed, as he says, “A great reward will be given to you.” This matter [should be according to] the law of payments, that immediately when the worker has finished his job, he (the master) needs to pay. This is based on the Torah [itself], as it says, “That one should pay the worker on the day he works, and his wages shall not remain with you,”⁸⁴ and also in that day you shall pay his wages, and there is no difference between a poor person and a rich one [in this regard]. One who ordains a time to pay his neighbor, should he go over this time, is this not a forbidden thing? With regard to the matter of payment, since it follows after work, work defined as labor and movement, and all labor and movement comes to rest, thus completion is [defined as] the end of the labor. The payment and the disbursement [should occur at the time of] rest and completion when he (the worker) finishes [his labors], since it is for the sake of this that he labors and moves, [that is] for the sake of the wage. Therefore, if he (the master) does not pay [the worker], he transgresses

against him. What is not [an example] this, is if one sells him his house and does not give him the money, this is not connected to our discussion, for there is no labor [involved] in this [example]. Rather, only in the case of a worker, where there is labor [involved], is it fitting to pay him when he has finished his work; therefore, it is fitting for man to be paid immediately. With respect to this notion, he (Rabbi Tarfon) said, "Your employer is trustworthy," as if to say, 'Even though he does not pay you immediately, your employer may be relied upon to pay you for your work in the world to come.' What of [the fact] that the worker's wage is not paid immediately [and therefore this seems to be contradictory to the Torah]? There is no problem in this, for it is similar to [the case of] a worker who will labor for a householder on the condition that he pay him such and such [an amount stemming] from a new crop. For [in such a case,] the householder pays him only [if and] when the new [crop] comes into the world. [In this example of] work and labor of man, the reward for it is sometimes immediate, and sometimes it does not come [at all]. Still, this very thing has not come, namely the reward, and even if he leaves the world without any reward at all, it is for this kind of case that he (Rabbi Tarfon) said, "Know that the reward for the Righteous is in the future to come," for the reward is [reserved] for the world to come and not for this world. Therefore, it is as if he starts the labor which he undertakes [only] on account of the payment for the future to come, not in this world at all. Therefore, there is no difficulty if an evil person is not immediately paid for his sins, and so too if a righteous individual is not [immediately] paid for his good deeds, inasmuch as the essence of payment is in the world to come. This matter is clear.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 3:5⁸⁵

We have moved now to the Maharal's commentary on Chapter Three of *PIRKEI AVOT*. We begin with the advice of Rabbi Nekhunya ben Ha-kanah who spoke about Torah and *derekh erez*. His attitude reflects the belief that if one shrugs off his responsibility to labor in Torah, his exertions in other areas will become that much more onerous.

Loew's commentary reflects his understanding that if one gives the necessary devotion to laboring in Torah study, all will go well for him; both his material and spiritual needs will be fulfilled.

Rabbi Nekhunya ben Ha-kanah said, "Anyone who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, from him are removed the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*. All who throw off the yoke of Torah, put upon him are the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*."

"Anyone who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah," this saying is meant to encourage [him], that is to say, 'By way of Torah he is bound to God, may He be blessed.' On account of this he (Rabbi Nekhunya) said, "Anyone who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, from him are removed the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*." You must know that in the world there are three modes of conduct.⁸⁶ These modes of conduct are: that man needs to behave according to the customs of the world, i.e. to plow, and to plant, and to [attend to] his other [physical] needs—which he requires according to the customary order of the world and its nature—[since] man [qua man] is enslaved to the ways of nature. Secondly, there is a mode of conduct which is not natural, i.e. a human mode of conduct, which was created by free choice; by way of this is the custom of law,⁸⁷ which is enacted by a government, what it desires, and what it does not desire, and it issues decrees upon man, and that is the custom of law. Man is also enslaved to this mode of conduct, that he is enslaved to a king, for from his hand emanates this mode of conduct. The third mode of conduct is that of God, that God, may He be blessed, ordered in the world [to proscribe for man] how he should behave by way of the Torah that God, may He be blessed, gave. In this [we perceive] that the world is run upon three things: the first mode of conduct is what man needs according to nature; the second mode of conduct is not natural, but based on what the king decrees, and that is law; and the third mode of conduct is the custom of God, may He be blessed. The order of

God is higher than that of nature and higher than that of free choice. These are the three customs, the custom of nature, the custom of law, and the custom of God aside from nature.

He (Rabbi Nekhunya) said, 'The man who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, then he is with God, may He be blessed, then he has removed from him the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*.' This third mode of conduct is the custom of God. If man can [attain the level of being] with God, may He be blessed, then he is taken out from [under] the yoke of government and from [under] the yoke of *derekh erez*, for both of these are from the point of view of this world, and he who is enslaved to God cannot be enslaved to a government or to nature. They (the Sages) also said this in the following section of *Avodah Zarah*, "Rabbi Yose said, 'Israel did not accept the Torah except [on the condition that] the Angel of Death and other nations should not have dominion over them. As it is written, 'I said you are gods, and all of you children of the Most High. Nevertheless you shall die, and like one of the princes you shall fall.' (Psalm 82:6-7)'" (Avodah Zarah 5a) About what is said, 'That the Angel of Death shall not rule over them,' this refers to the custom of nature, that they not suffer under nature, since the Angel of Death rules over the children of man according to [the laws of] nature. Other nations, this refers to a human mode of conduct [i.e. government] which is not [according to] natural [law]. All that they accepted upon themselves was the yoke of Torah which belongs to God, and it brings [man] out from [under] the decrees of nature and from [under] the decrees which are not natural, that is that they are human [in their origin]. As they (the Sages) said in the [following] chapter [regarding] the two tablets [upon which were written the Ten Commandments], "[And the tablets were the work of God, and the writing] was the writing of God, engraved [upon the tablets]" (Exodus 32:16) Do not read engraved [*kharut*] but rather freedom [*kheirut*], for there is no free person except one who busies himself in Torah, for behold he is raised up." (Avot 6:2) Behold, they made clear that one who busies himself [in Torah] is raised up. Because of this, he is raised up to a higher level than the level of nature—which is the mode of conduct [characteristic] of the world—and thus

[also higher than] the human mode of conduct— which is not natural— until he becomes a free man, [free] from these two governances, as we have said.

You must understand, what is said, “There is no free person but one who busies himself in Torah,” that is, since he busies himself in the Torah he is raised up from the material world, for the intellect is raised higher than the material world. On account of this he is a free man, [free] from the mode of conduct of the natural world, and from the government. For all of those levels come from the vantage point of this world, and one who busies himself in the Torah, he is brought out from the level of this world. Therefore, does it say here, “From him are removed the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*.” Even though it is impossible for man [to exist] without sustenance, and he needs work in order that he busy himself in the Torah,⁸⁸ in any case he is not [saddled with] the yoke of *derekh erez* (i.e. it is not oppressive upon him). Instead, his support comes easily to him when he accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, for then he belongs entirely to God, and he is raised up from this world. However, if he throws off from himself the yoke of Torah, he inclines himself toward the material world when he lifts up from himself the yoke of Torah, which [would otherwise] raise him up from this world. Thus, “Put upon him are the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*,” which are ruling powers from the vantage point of this world. All others who remove themselves from the level which is higher than nature, and incline toward the material world, these two things [come to] rule over him, [namely] the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*, since they exist from the point of view of this world, and this matter is clear.

When you fully understand words of wisdom, you will know how one accepts upon themselves the yoke of Torah, [and how] “From him are removed the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*.” For in the Temple [there was] a northern table, and this table was the table of government, it was representative of the way of government. The Menorah in the south that had seven lights, they were representative of the seven days of creation, which were [representative of] the days of nature, and this matter was known to the Sages. The Torah

[however], was on an higher level. For the [first] two [of these things] were in the *Heikhal*, which was representative of this world, but the Torah was in the ark, which was in the Holy of Holies, which was representative of the level of the higher world. These words are clear to one who understands deep words of wisdom. You should know that the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*, they are two divided things, over and against one another, as we have made clear, since [*derekh erez*] is the custom of the natural world. However, the yoke of government is a custom that is not according to nature, rather [it is a] human mode of conduct alone. The Torah is higher than both of them, and man goes forth to freedom from rule and from [both of] these levels by means of the Torah, and this is enough [of an explanation for] those who understand.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 3:8⁸⁹

Loew turns his attention to the words of Rabbi Dostai in this passage. Rabbi Dostai was concerned with a situation in which a student might not be able to handle the actual effort involved in Torah study. Should he be punished on this account? His answer is that he should not. The Maharal is attentive to this topic and discusses the implications of this teaching. In the end, we are reminded that, just as in the case of someone who is not able to finish the work of Torah, so too, in terms of Torah study and observance, the key elements are one's intentions.

Rabbi Dostai son of Yannai said in the name of Rabbi Meir, "All who forget one word from their studies, Scripture accounts it to him as if he is liable for his soul, as it is said, "Only take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen." (Deuteronomy 4:9) Is this possible even if his studies were too difficult for him? The text says, "And lest they depart

from your heart all the days of your life.”(IBID.) Thus, he is not liable unless he turns and removes them from his heart.”

“All who forget one word,” this matter has already been made clear to you. [In the case of] one who flees from something, he shows by his flight that he is the opposite of that which he flees from. This [matter] is comparable to fire that flees and departs from water, since fire is the opposite of water. Because the Torah is a matter of the intellect, and intellectual [things] have reality and are more established, it is not like matter, that does not have a complete reality, and imperfection is bound to material stuff as we have made very clear. [Given what was said above] that one flees from that which is his opposite, then one who flees from the Torah, he is the opposite of reality, since there is nothing more real than the Torah. Therefore, “All who forget one word from their studies are liable for their soul.”

There is a problem [with this conclusion however], for he (Rabbi Dostai) says in the beginning, “Is this possible even though his studies are too difficult for him?” This verse is not intended to lessen [one’s studies] except [in the case of when] his studies were too difficult for him. However, if his studies were not too difficult for him, is he not warned to return to his studies? The [answer] is simple, since the general case is, “All who forget one word from their studies,” and what is said at the end, “He is not liable [for his soul] unless he turns and removes them from his heart.” Thus, he (the recalcitrant student) needs to say, ‘I am able,’ even then they are not removed from his heart. In any case this is not a difficulty, for here is the explanation of [the statement] “Is this possible even though his studies are too difficult for him,” that is to say, we need to say that the verse is applied in all matters [thus], ‘All who forget one word from their studies *it is as if* he were liable for his soul.’ Therefore, the verse asks, “Is this possible even if his studies were too difficult for him,” the verse is applied in all matters. It does not follow to say [however,] that the verse is applied when he removes the words, for certainly it is applied in all matters, but he should not lessen the application of the verse, thus, “Even if his studies are too difficult for him,” [though] ‘laziness’ is not written.

In the end [the text] says, "Thus, he is not liable unless he [turns and] removes them from his heart," as if to say, 'directly,' for it is written, "Less they depart." However, you do not need to phrase this [in this fashion,] rather, 'Less you forget.' Rather, the text seeks to teach that he is not liable unless he [actively] removes them from his heart. Even though the phrase 'they depart' [is used here], one should not learn [from this] that man [physically] removes them, rather, individuals remove themselves, for the text doesn't say, 'Less you remove them.' In any case they explained, "Less you be removed," by way of a 'remover,' that is to say an individual. However, it was not written, 'Less you remove them,' for already we learned that he removes them purposefully, but this is not the case. Rather, if he sits and turns his heart to annihilation, he is liable for death, even if he does not directly remove them.⁹⁰ Thus, they said (Rabbi Dostai and Rabbi Meir), "Until he turns and removes them from his heart," and did not say, 'Until he removes them from his heart,' that is to say that he turns toward annihilation alone, and does not need to directly remove them.

Derekh Hayyim: Avot 4:5⁹¹

The following saying attributed to Rabbi Ishmael's is very strange. Why should one's ability depend upon the frame of mind with which he approach his labor? Maharal sets out to try to resolve this difficulty. At the same time, problems are raised in terms of the saying attributed here to Rabbi Tzadok. How can one ensure that they will not make their crown into a mere shovel? In this final section of *DEREKH HAYYIM* translations, Rabbi Loew certainly puts his stamp upon the importance of Torah study.

Rabbi Ishmael, his⁹² son, said, "He who learns in order to teach, he is enabled to learn and to teach. He who learns in order to do, he is enabled to learn and to teach, to observe and to do."

Rabbi Tzadok said, "Do not make them (the words of Torah) a crown, by which to magnify yourself, nor make them a shovel to dig with them."

Thus, Hillel used to say, "He who makes use of his crown shall perish." From this you learn that one who make worldly use of the words of Torah, removes himself from the world to come.⁹³

"He who learns in order to teach," there are questions to ask about what he said [when he said], "He who learns in order to teach, he is enabled to learn and to teach," [specifically] whether the same rule also applies with regard to every [other] mitzvah, so that if he wrote a *Sefer Torah*, [only then] is he enabled to study from it, and if he builds a *Beit Kenneset* for prayer, [only then] is he enabled to pray there, and so on with the remainder of the mitzvot as well. Why then was this said in regard to the study of Torah?⁹⁴ But, if it is not thus with regard to the remainder of the mitzvot, what is the reason why it should be thus with regard to the study of Torah? Another question: from this, it [appears] that his intention is only to study, but he does not seek to perform the mitzvah. It would be fitting to compare him to one whose wisdom is greater than his deeds, for his wisdom does not endure. So here the text says, "He is enabled to learn and to teach." Moreover, what is the reason why one who studies in order to do is enabled to learn and to do as well, whereas one who learns in order to teach is not enabled to do? Another difficulty, why did he not say, 'One who learns is enabled to learn,' for if he wanted to study one tractate, he is enabled to learn the very tractate that he wished to study. It has already been made clear to you that the order of these sayings is according to the Sages who lived at one [specific] time, or who lived at almost the same time, and no more than this is needed. But, if you say, 'It seems to me, that the order of the verses is according to their substance, and not according to who spoke them,' you should say that because he mentioned before this the great punishment for profaning the divine Name, he mentioned here the reward which his deeds for God, may he be blessed, and for his honor [merited].

Therefore, he began to say, 'One who learned in order to teach, or one who learned in order to do, the intention [motivating] both of them was [that they be done] for the sake of heaven.'

It is not so with one who learned in order to acquire fame, for this one does not demonstrate that he acts for the sake of heaven to honor God. For all men [inherently] want to understand and know because of their desire for wisdom about all things, and not for the sake of the honor of the Holy One, blessed be He. And [this is true] moreover if he learns [just] in order to be called Rabbi.⁹⁵ However, one who studied in order to teach others, or to do, his intention is certainly for the sake of heaven, and not for knowledge alone. Therefore, "He is enabled," according to what his intention was, since his intention was for the sake of heaven, he is helped from above, this is the explanation.

There is another reason [for the above statements], the Torah in and of itself is more fitting to exist in the world than the material things which exist, [since] it is not so fitting for them [to exist in the world]. Intellectual matters like the Torah are fitting to exist. This is because the Torah is in and of itself good, as it is said, "For a good doctrine has been given to you," (Proverbs 4:2) the good [thing] is fitting to exist in every case. For thus it is said in all the acts of creation, "It is good" (כִּי טוֹב) to indicate to you, 'The good is fitting to exist.' Moreover, [with regards to] intellectual things, it is even more fitting for them to exist, and this matter we have made clear in many places. This is because deficiency is not bound to intellectual things, and it is written in the Torah, "For it is your life and the length of your days," (Deuteronomy 30:20) If so, its [very] existence is appropriate for the Torah, since it [itself] provides existence.

However, from the point of view of this world, which is material— and this world is far from the intellectual [world]— for this reason it would be [more correct] for the intellectual Torah not to exist in this material world. However, immediately before we read and the lower regions awaken to the intellectual Torah, and it responds to say, "Here am I." For existence befits intellectual things. This does not contradict what the Sages said, "For the words of Torah are as difficult to acquire as gold and fine gold." (Hagigah 16a) This likewise is [said]

from the point of view of man, who is a bodily being. However, existence is certainly most fitting to the Torah in and of itself. Therefore, he said, "He who learns in order to teach, he is enabled to learn and to teach." For inasmuch as his intention was that the Torah be in the world, he is enabled to learn and to teach, in keeping with his intention and will. We already made this clear in the chapter before this one that the intellectual thought is active. This is not [to be understood as] similar to what the Sages said, "[Ulla said], 'Thoughts [about ones things adversely] affects [one's] learning. [For it is written, 'He abolishes the thoughts of the skilled, lest their hands perform nothing substantial.' (Job 5:12)]'" (Sanhedrin 26b)⁹⁶ Thought benefits even words of the Torah, that is, since he did not [just] begin learning, but he began [learning] in order to teach others, it is certain that this brings about its realization. See above at "Beloved is Israel, to whom [God] gave a precious instrument."

He said, "He is enabled to learn," for he needs to teach others. [This is] especially [intended] for the man that will come to teach the Torah, in order to know [how] to answer what is asked of him by his students, that is what he meant when he said, "He will be enabled to learn and to teach." It seems to me that the phrase 'he is enabled to learn' [means] until he is able to teach others. However, if he wants to learn [just] one entire tractate, he is not enabled to learn all the tractate. For is one called learned in Torah if he just [learned] one letter alone? However, to teach others he needs to know a lot, as we have said. Also men do not come to him to learn if he does not know a lot of Torah. Therefore, 'He who learns in order to teach others he is enabled to learn a lot until he is able to teach others.' However, he is not [automatically] enabled to do, since the action which is performed [by study] does not [automatically] lead to the action [itself], like the teaching of others is action, rather it is nothing other than study alone. However, the action which is done, this matter is more distant, therefore he did not say that he merits to act. However, if he learned in order to do, the Torah [study] leads to the performance since it leads to action in any case, certainly before this 'study for leading out into action,' that is to say to teach others, since this is not an action as such.

Therefore, "He who learns in order to do, he is enabled to learn and to teach, to observe and to do."

Moreover, another certainty, if he wants to teach others, and to become a rabbi, certainly before this he needs [to complete] his own study. Therefore, if he wants to teach others, before [hand] he must study himself until he is a great scholar. Therefore, "He is enabled to learn and to teach." However, if he wants to learn [just] one tractate for the sake of teaching, he is not enabled to [even] learn the whole tractate, for when he learns one chapter behold he already learned it. Thus, is the case with one who learns to do, even to teach others before, since by learning he comes to action, and in the end learning is first. If he learned in order to act, before this [it is written], "to learn and to teach." About what he (Rabbi Ishmael) said, "He who learns in order to teach," it should not be understood [to mean] that he studied in order to teach but *not* to do. God forbid that one such as this should be [found] in Israel, that his study should be for this purpose, [i.e.] to teach, alone. Thus, there is no study for the [sole] sake of acting. However, certainly his actions repair himself only that his study is not in order to do, but certainly he performs all that he knows and does not transgress it. It has been made clear to you in this that the Torah is fitting to exist in the world only on account of the exaltedness of Torah. [Given] the lowliness of this world the Torah [should be] far from it. In any case when man begins to make Torah present in his actions in this world, he makes it fitting for the Torah to exist [in this world]. Therefore, he is enabled according to his intentions.

"Do not make them (the words of Torah) a crown." Because it is mentioned before this, "He who learns in order to teach," or, "He who learns in order to do," afterward he (Rabbi Tzadok) made this statement, that one should not learn Torah to be magnified by it, for if one does this he removes his life from the world. One must be precise [to notice] a repetition in the language used here, for it says, "Do not make them (the words of Torah) a crown, by which to magnify yourself, nor are they a shovel to be fed by." It seems to say that if he said only, 'Do not make them (the words of Torah) a crown, by which to magnify yourself,' the

meaning would be that this thing [i.e. this kind of behavior] certainly does not belong to Torah (i.e. it has nothing to do with it). However [we also have in our text], "Nor are they a shovel to be fed by." But, do we not already know, "If there is no Torah there is no flour?" (Avot 3:17) If this is true, then the Torah [does in fact] bring about man's sustenance. Since the Torah brings man's sustenance he must [at least in some way] use the Torah as a shovel to be fed by. But, isn't this absolutely forbidden? Rather, [it is the case] from what is written, "If there is no Torah there is no flour," that is to say, God summons relief until there be flour.⁹⁷ If we understand [from this] that the Torah was a shovel to be fed by (i.e. a means of providing a livelihood), I would believe [that this is] actually a shovel to be fed by, which amounts to baseness and something despicable with respect to the Torah. But [if it is understood as] a crown with which to become great, such that this indicates [its] importance, I believe that he [the Tanna] comes to teach us that it is permitted.

When the text says, "Thus, did Hillel used to say," we explained this above where we discussed, "He who makes use of his crown shall perish." It seems to me that the Torah is a separate intellectual identity from the matter of this material world, it is divine wisdom. Thus, the Torah is called a 'crown,' for the crown is a sign of rule, and the king is separate⁹⁸ from the people and is not involved with the rest of men. Thus, the Torah is separate from the matters of this world. When he makes use in a worldly manner of a thing which is separate from this world, behold he causes spoilage since he derived enjoyment from a holy thing, and he is liable for death. This is because holy things are separate from this world, and if he makes use of, and gains enjoyment in this world from a thing which is separate from this world, he is liable for death. For this world has no association at all with the level [of existence] which is separate from this world. Therefore, if one associates themselves with the level of holiness, he brings deficiency from another [place], since [he is] between this world and the level of holiness. We go on at length about this in the above [section].

Let this not be difficult for you [by asking] how is something separate from matter connected to material man? This matter is not so difficult, since there is no mixing here at all, it

is nothing other than the connection of existence alone, and not mixing *per se*. However, [in the case of] one who uses the Torah for his own needs and his material desires, certainly as the Torah is given from holiness, if he connects a material thing to a holy separate thing, about this person is it said, "He who makes use of his crown shall perish." Why did he (Hillel) say 'perish (חלף)' and not 'slain (קטל)' or [even] 'he forfeits his life (שנוטל חייו)'? Because the phrase 'perish' is said about quick events, like we see in Scripture, "The short lived grass of the morning it flourishes and perishes (חלף)." (Psalm 90:4-5) It would seem as if that which perishes [does so] in one instant, that is what is meant by the phrase 'perish' in all places. Thus, it is with one who uses a thing which is separate from the material, as are all matters which are holy, they are separate from the material and thus they are not subject to time [bound restrictions]. For time is connected to one moment after another, however, it is not thus with separate things. Therefore, one [who makes use of Torah in an improper way] perishes in an instant.

In the *TOSEFOT* in *Perek Haya Koreh* [we read], "Aha said, 'All who busy themselves in the Torah not for its own sake, it would be better had they never been created.'" (Tos. Berakhot 17a) The *TOSEFOT* raises a problem [however,] when it [continues and] says, "Resh Lekish⁹⁹ in *Perek Makom Shenehagu* [said], 'Always man busies himself in the Torah and in the mitzvot even if it is not for its own sake. [Because] even though he may not do it for its own sake, he will come to do it for its own sake.' (Pesachim 50b)" (Tos. Berakhot 17a) The *TOSEFOT* wants to argue there [that], "One should not learn just to chide his friend," and here it argues, "He learns in order to honor himself." (*IBID.*) However, the problem in that argument is that he still does this in order to honor himself, and even there it says, "He who makes use of his crown shall perish."¹⁰⁰ However, in *Perek Makom Shenehagu*, you want to apply an interpretation about one issue to another, thus in *Perek Hayah Koreh* it is the case that the individual learns just to be haughty about his scholarship and to be provocative. However, in *Perek Makom Shenehagu*, it is clear that the individual does not learn for any evil intent, but rather it is connected to what is said before this that one should do no work on the holidays,

that one should not avoid work for the sake of laziness, and that is what the intent is in that context. It seems to me that the point is: one should study in order to know a matter of Torah, as all men desire to know things. In this it follows to say, "Always he will learn Torah even if not for its own sake." Here is the essence of the problem, for it is possible to say, 'If he learns in order to honor himself,' this is also thought of as an evil thing, [i.e.] when he seeks after honor. It does not follow to say, 'Always he will learn Torah but not for its own sake, rather, he only learned to acquire knowledge,' [since] this is not an evil thing. However, I do not know what the difficulty is. Since he said, "Always man busies himself in the Torah not for its own sake... he will come to do it for its own sake," that is to say that, 'Certainly if he *does* not learn not for its own sake, then he will never learn *for* its own sake.' Thus, it is certainly better that he learn not for its own sake, since otherwise he does not learn at all. [In such an instance] he will certainly never come to study for his own sake. If therefore, he does not study [at all, then] how much the more so it would have been better [for him] if he had not been created and never existed at all. [And, remember the hyperbolic statement of the Sages, that,] "It is permitted to slaughter an ignoramus on Yom Kippur by running him through!" (Pesachim 49b)

When he (Hillel) says, "He who makes use of his crown shall perish," certainly it is not good for the one who studies not for its own sake, that it is better that he was not created. In any case, this [type of learner] is preferred over one who does not learn at all. This [statement is only] on account of what is said here, "He who makes use of his crown shall perish." Regardless, one who does not learn forfeits his life, as is said in *Perek Moshe Kibel Torah*, "One who does not study forfeits his life." (Avot 1:13) If so, then this is not a difficulty at all, for there it [distinctly] says [that he will perish] if he does not study even for its own sake. Thus, he needs to study, for even if it is not for its own sake, it will come to be for its own sake, and thus this is not a difficulty.

About the comment made above, "All who gain benefit from the words of Torah forfeit their lives from the world," this comment is correct, for it certainly [applies to] all who gain benefit from the Torah [in ways] that are not [appropriate] to do so. Thus, this comment

[which we are considering] 'the one who consumes,' and 'the one who derives enjoyment,' I do not know what to say about the [difference in] language. Rather, this is what the comment [means] by 'the one who consumes,' and 'the one who derives enjoyment:' when the text says 'the one who consumes,' that is to say, 'that are sustained by;' [and when the text says,] 'the one who derives enjoyment,' that is to say, 'he honors himself [inappropriately] by [means of] the Torah.' You must know that these words do not apply except when he learns [solely] to magnify himself, or if he learns for the [sole] sake of being given a reward, or that he derive [inappropriate] enjoyment from the Torah, similar to the parable of Rabbi Tarfon in Tractate *Nedarim* as we explained above in *Perek Moshe Kibel Torah*. However, if people bring him [the scholar] food or sustain him, this is not in the category of, "He who makes use of his crown shall perish," or, "[Do not make] them a shovel to gain sustenance thereby." For if so, then the great reward which the Sages mentioned in *Perek Ha-Helekh*, and in other places, "To benefit a scholar on account of his possessions," (Sanhedrin 99a) from where will this [benefit] come? Rather, it is not at all that he uses his crown [inappropriately], but he has restitution and enjoyment for the sake of the Torah, like the parable of Rabbi Tarfon. For he said, "Woe unto Tarfon that this man is going to kill." It was his intention to let that man know that he was Rabbi Tarfon [so that] he would let him go free. Thus, he [later] said, 'Woe is me for I used the crown of Torah [in an improper manner].' However, if it was so that the man would let him go that he (Tarfon) mentioned his name, this cannot be the explanation. Rather, that he said it for the sake of the man letting him go.' (Sanhedrin 62b) Thus, did the Sages say in Tractate *Baba Batra*, "A parable. Once Rabbi opened his store house in a year of scarcity [saying, 'Let those enter who have studied the Scripture, the Mishnah, the *Gemarah*, the *halakhah*, or the *aggadah*. There is no admission however, for the ignorant.'] Rabbi Yonatan ben Amram came and said to him, 'Rabbi, feed me.' He said to him, 'Have you learned the Torah or Mishnah?' He said, 'No.' He said, 'If not, how can I feed you?' He said to him, 'Feed me as the dog and the raven [are fed].' He gave him some food. Later Rabbi said, 'Woe is me for I fed a man without learning (lit. Am Ha'aretz).' His students said

to him, 'Perhaps it was Yonatan ben Amram who never wanted to derive enjoyment from the honor of the Torah.'" (Baba Batra 8a) In this case, for the sake of [his hunger], if he (Rabbi Yonatan) said, 'I have studied Torah and Mishnah, therefore you must feed me,' he would certainly have derived enjoyment from the Torah. However, if he (Rabbi) fed him or gave him gifts for the sake of the honor of his Torah study, it does not fall under this category [of deriving benefit from one's Torah study], rather it is fitting that he be thrust away for the sake of what is written, "He that hates gifts shall live." (Proverbs 5:21)

The pension that is given to a rabbi or what he receives from [officiating at a] wedding, it is permissible [to accept this] for it is as a compensatory salary, for on account of [his learning] he is obliged to teach others and cannot engage in other work. This is not forbidden, for what is free for me is free for you. The salary is not paid for the sake of the Torah, rather only for the sake of his [necessary] absence from his [other] work. It is not the intention here [to suggest] that this absence is forced, for though it certainly follows that if he is absent one hour, that it is impossible for him to do any work [in that hour], however, if he is always absent it is certainly not possible for him to make any sort of profit. This man is not forced to do this. The Rambam, of blessed, memory goes on at length [on this subject] in this chapter [of his commentary], and is very stringent indeed. It seems to be apparent that if he (the rabbi) is to be supported, it falls upon the community to be permitted in this regard, that is to say it is a communal function [to pay the rabbi's wages]. They say that the responsibility for support falls upon the community since he is forbidden to do work before three [in the afternoon] and it is impossible for him to do work always in secret. Rather, certainly when this responsibility was given to him [to teach], the community as well [assumed the responsibility] to sustain him for the honor in which he is seen.

In this generation, how I wish they would not be stringent about the matter [of supporting the rabbi], and not too stingy. Until the key members of the community realize that it is essential for students to support [the teacher] in other ways, they must ask [themselves], 'Do we not decrease and bring down the honor of the Torah to the ground?' Thus, there is no

whispering [among the people indicating the presence of a Sage] in this generation, for due to our sins no great scholar has been identified.¹⁰¹

Chapter Three

1. Thieberger, *THE GREAT RABBI LOEW OF PRAGUE*, p. 34.
2. Fox, "The Moral Philosophy of MaHaRaL," p. 168.
3. Safran, "Maharal and Early Hasidism," p. 48.
4. Gottesdiener, *HA MAHARAL MI-PRAG*, p. 21.
5. Moshe Tzuriel, "Misparim— Mashmautam v'Simliotam l'fi Maharal," *HAMA'YAN 18* (Number 3, 1978): pp. 14-15.

DEREKH HAYYIM Introduction

6. The Hebrew used here is דבק, from which the term *devekut* is derived. See Chapter Two for a discussion on how the Maharal understands this term.
7. Ha-levi writes that God will shine forth divine light or wisdom and knowledge. See *The Kuzari*, 2:26.
8. The Hebrew in this section is difficult to render into a clear English style. The Maharal does not mean a 'Torah' *per se*, but rather what the Torah is in his mind set; that is, an intellectually existent collection of wisdom to which man has access through the written material.
9. *Derekh eretz* literally means 'The way of the earth.' However, it can also mean 'morals' or 'customs' or just 'proper etiquette.'
10. According to Deuteronomy 17:16, a king should not multiply for himself wives or horses. Yet we know from the book of Kings, that Solomon does do this forbidden thing. The *yod* alluded by the *LEVITICUS RABBAH* text is the first letter of the word ירבה (*yirbeh*), which means to multiply.
11. *Smikhut* is a Hebrew grammatical structure which signifies possession. In this case it is significant for it shows a difference in how God is referred to as 'living' and how man is referred to as 'living.'
12. This is from the Biblical Verse, Proverbs 6:23.
13. In other words, the letter *samakh* does not appear in the Torah until the creation of woman with the word 'closed.' Since the name 'Satan' starts with the same letter— in this case 'Satan' spelled with a *samakh* instead of a *sin*— this is a clue to us that Satan was created at the same time. The second part of this text answers the objection that one is sure to raise, that is that we actually see the letter *samakh* for the first time in Genesis 2:11, in the context cited there. The answer is that in that case it refers to a river, where here the text is referring to man.
14. Maimonides is of the same opinion that God also created evil as well as good. However, such evil is not created directly, but rather God created the matter of this world in such a way that despite its inherent goodness, privations can occur. See *THE GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED*, 3:10, 23.
15. *Nezikin* is the tractate of Talmud which deals with the laws of damages. Thus, one who fulfills all the words of *Nezikin* is careful to not do damage to his neighbor.
16. The entire above discussion is a word play in the Hebrew on the word שלם. In various forms this can mean 'perfect' as well as 'at peace.'
17. There is a subtle difference at work here. Loew makes reference to damages which one might do to his neighbor, and which have no possible redeeming qualities. However, the types of evil represented by the Evil Inclination— sexual immorality, etc.— are dependent to a degree on one's overindulgence. Therefore, such evil is subjective in its nature. See *DEREKH HAYYIM*, 2:14.
18. Recall that *Avot* contains only *aggadic* material. See Chapter One.
19. Though the Maharal indicates that he will discuss this passage below, he gives an incorrect citation. The correct citation is *Avot* 3:17.

20. The Hebrew phrase עבודה זרה, is being rendered in its anglicized form. The phrase is literally translated as 'strange work,' and is commonly understood to refer to idol worship.
21. Meaning unclear. It may be a word play on the Hebrew word פֶּר, which may be a reference to פרעה, or Pharaoh, and thus to the Exodus out from under Pharaoh's power.
22. *Mincha* is the afternoon service.
23. In this section the Maharal is alluding to the idea that one should not set aside observance of *seudah shlishi*, the third Sabbath meal, for any reason.
24. Genesis 48:9.

DEREKH HAYYIM to Avot 1:3

25. The Hebrew is מְדִיגָה, and it might also be translated as 'degree.'
26. See Deuteronomy 5:16, 26, 6:18, 12:25, 28, 22:7, and etc.
27. Ramban says that when one actively pursues after what he wants, though he might eat and drink of that which he desires, he will not satisfy that desire. See his commentary to Deuteronomy 29:18.
28. Antigonus was the last single individual mentioned in *Avot* to receive the Torah and the chain of tradition associated with it. At least two people receive the Torah and the tradition in every following instance.
29. Kariv has, "Even though the text does not speak of the *Nasi* completely representing love, nor the *Av Beit Din* completely representing fear, in all places they split off and continue from love and fear respectively." See *KITVEI MAHARAL MI-PRAG*, Vol. II, p. 23.

DEREKH HAYYIM to Avot 1:6

30. In regards to the sets of Pairs that are mentioned here, the first of each was *Nasi*, and the second was *Av Beit Din*, *IBID*. Dinur mentions this as well, writing that Yehoshua ben Perakhya was *Nasi* and Nittai the Arbelite was *Av Beit Din*. See *MASSEKHET AVOT*, p. 44.
31. This could be a veiled reference to Loew's homeland, or also polemic on behalf of his educational reforms. See Chapter One.
32. This is a paraphrase of Yose ben Yoezer's comment in Avot 1:4.
33. That is to say, since all of the student's activities are done with the teacher or the study partner, it is impossible for him to not accidentally sin against one or the other at some point.

DEREKH HAYYIM to Avot 1:15

34. Specifically, the five pairs who are mentioned in the first chapter of *Avot* as having received the Oral Torah, and thus continued the chain of tradition. The five pairs are: Yose ben Yoezer of Tzerediah and Yose ben Yokhanan of Jerusalem (Avot 1:4); Yehoshua ben Perakhya and Nittai the Arbelite (Avot 1:6); Yehudah ben Tabbai and Shimon ben Shetakh (Avot 1:8); Shemayah and Avtalyon (Avot 1:10); and Hillel and Shammai (Avot 1:12).
35. This is certainly a reference to the rabbinic dictum that Shammai, and the school of thought which developed after him, was more stringent in regards to practice than that of Hillel. According to the Talmud there are only 6 places where the school of Hillel adopts a more restrictive posture than the school of Shammai. See Hullin 104b. This policy of not being stringent is passed into the *halakhah*, as according to the Talmud, the law is always decided according to the teachings of Hillel. See Eruvin 13b. For more on the difference between Hillel and Shammai, see Rabbi Benjamin Morganstern, *A COMPANION TO PIRKEI AVOT* (Jerusalem, Israel: Gefen Publishers, 1983), pp. 69-95.
36. Namely, Shemayah and Avtalyon (Avot 1:10).
37. The first five recipients of Torah according to Avot 1:1 were; Moses, Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets, and the Men of the Great Assembly.
38. Though Maharal suggests that this is from *EXODUS RABBAH*, the citation does not match. He may have been using a different text. The closest match is *EXODUS RABBAH* 28:6.

39. The text is not clear here, nor does the Maharal provide elucidation in the following passage. If I had to venture a guess, it would be that the Torah no longer was spread throughout the world by mighty hands, as it had been in the first instances.

40. It is not clear here why the Maharal exhorts us to understand the imagery of the number five to such a degree. It may be in connection to the five books of the Torah, or perhaps the five directions with which the Torah was first thrust into the world. For commentary on this latter idea, see above in this section.

41. Herein the Maharal is attempting to solve a dialectical problem. He has already stated that the power of Torah had been diminished in the period of the Second Temple, such that the Torah had to be spread into the world by pairs. At the same time however, he is faced with the verse from Haggai that states, "The glory of this latter house (shall be greater than that of the former, says the Lord of Hosts.)" The Maharal solves the apparent incongruity by applying the passage from *Ketuvot*. That is to say, while it may be true that the power of Torah has been made less in the world, as evidenced by the fact that the tradition must be received and spread forth by a pair, as opposed to single people or entities, the two who do the actual work of spreading Torah into the world (i.e. the *Nasi* and the *Av Beit Din*) work together as a team, and are more powerful together than their single predecessors. This latter point is shown to be true by reading the verse from Haggai, "The glory of this latter house," along with the Talmud passage, which then proves that the house (i.e. the Temple) was stronger because of the two hands which established it together.

DEREKH HAYYIM TO AVOT 2:2

42. In this case, Judah Loew understands *derekh erez* as corresponding to 'the needs of worldly existence.'

43. We are dealing here with the word חסר which is being translated as a 'lacking.' This should be seen as being equal to, or in the same category as חסרון which we are translating as 'imperfection.'

44. The Hebrew is אדם חסר.

45. The Hebrew word in the verse is ישב, which is most commonly translated as 'dwelled.' However, for the purpose of the Talmud and the Maharal's exegetical use of these verses, every time the word ישב, or its variations show up, we have translated the word as 'rest.'

46. In this the Maharal is trying to head off an objection which may be raised. That is to say, what about all of the scholars mentioned in the Talmud who had no other occupation? How is it that their Torah has been sustained? The answer, is that they actually had business dealings, which were like work, or, since they loved the Torah such a degree, it was impossible that their Torah would not be sustained, and that they would come to sin.

47. The closest citation of this which we have found in rabbinic literature is *LEVITICUS RABBAH* 2:1.

DEREKH HAYYIM TO AVOT 2:7

48. Some *PIRKEI AVOT* texts split 2:4 into two separate sayings. Therefore, in other texts this is Avot 2:8.

49. The unidentified speaker here is probably Hillel, since he was the last Sage specifically mentioned by the Mishnah. See Avot 2:4.

50. Generally this word is translated as 'charity.' However, in this case, the Maharal's point is that one should strive to create צדק (*tzedeq*, justice), and that this will bring peace.

51. Abigail was the wife of Naval the Carmelite and later of King David. She prevented a bloody struggle between the two, one her former, and the other her future, husband. See I Samuel 25. In rabbinic literature, Abigail is viewed as a woman of beauty, wisdom, and power, and thus the archetypal woman.

52. The daughters of Ham are known to be unchaste, as they follow after their father, Ham, who was cursed by his father, Noah, for mocking him in his drunken/naked state. See Genesis 9:22, 25.

53. There is a footnote in the Maharal text as follows: "This is because female slaves are more 'donkey-like.' This is because it is written about slaves, "Wait here 'donkey people'" (Genesis 22:5) That is, people who are like a donkey. The female slave, since she is more material she is more 'donkey like.' Therefore, we read in our text, "The more unchastity," since she is completely 'donkey-like.'"

The variant reading of the Genesis verse is based on a word play. Instead of reading the phrase עַם הַחֲמֹר as 'with the donkey' it is being read as 'donkey-people.' This interpretation is common in rabbinic literature, an example of which can be seen in *TANHUMA* Leviticus Ch. 20 Siman 2, and also Tractate Yebamot 62a.

54. See Rashi to Genesis 13:7.

55. The origin of this quote is not certain.

56. The Maharal reads this verse slightly out of its literal context. In a literal state it would normally read in translation, "The deeds of a righteous person (צִדִּיק) are peace."

57. In this, the Maharal is outlining a textual difficulty. On the one hand the text says that one who gives Tzedakah causes peace, and on the other it says that the one who compels others to give Tzedakah causes peace.

DEREKH HAYYIM TO AVOT 2:12

58. Some *PIRKEI AVOT* texts split section 2:9 (2:8 in our edition) into three or four separate sayings. Therefore, in other texts this is Avot 2:16, or 2:17.

Derekh Hayyim to Avot 2:14

59. Other texts this is Avot 2:18, or 2:19.

60. I have left this word in the original to convey the flavor of the language. The word is derived from the Greek Philosopher of the same name, Epicurus. In Rabbinic usage, the word developed a connotation meaning 'heretic,' or a practical atheist, that is, someone who does not believe that God or the gods are aware of, concerned with, or disposed to reward or punish human behavior. The criteria of who constitutes an *Apikoros* is found in the Talmud, see Sanhedrin 99b.

61. See Avot 2:10 we are told that each of the five disciples of Rabban Yokhanan ben Zakkai said three things.

62. Maimonides mentions the idea that the laws contain the perfect amount of information to fulfill man's needs. In addition, he divides law into three elements, as has the Maharal. The first are social laws, which exist between people; the second are other social laws which serve to perfect people's material well-being; and the third, are divine laws that teach man how to serve God. See *GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED*, 2:39,40.

63. This is a reference to *Eilu Devarim*, a section of the Morning worship service. In regards to the advice of Rabbi Eliezer, "Let the honor of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own," Maharal might be alluding to the sections of this prayer which read, "Show hospitality to guests," and also one should "Bring peace between man and his fellow." For the full text of this prayer see Shabbat 127a.

64. I have translated נַפֶּשׁ כּוּחַ, both here and above as mental faculties, in line with Alcalay's rendering of the term. In a strict sense however, as well as in other places, נַפֶּשׁ, is translated as soul.

65. Following the words of Rabbi Eliezer in Avot 2:10, Maharal begins an analysis of the words of Rabbi Yehoshua found in Avot 2:11.

66. Though the Mishnah does not agree that animals have the Evil Inclination, since it is associated with animalistic drives— that is to say aggression and sexual activity— the Evil Inclination is considered to have an animalistic component to it.

67. Maimonides teaches that death is an evil to man, since it is his opposite, it is his non-existence. See *IBID.*, 3:10

68. This follows on the theme of "hatred of creatures" found in Avot 2:11.

69. *Vav* is the numeral '6' in Hebrew, and this serves to illustrate Loew's point, for the world was created in exactly six days. The spelling of the letter *vav* (Hebrew וי), is balanced with the same straight letter on either side, and just a simple *yod* in the middle. The Maharal is saying that even the mere appearance of the letter's name suggests stability.

70. See Ibn Ezra on Exodus 3:14.

71. That is to say, $6 \div 2 = 3$. $6 \div 3 = 2$. $6 \div 6 = 1$. Therefore, $1 + 2 + 3 = 6$, and one returns to the original number, six.

72. That is to say, $4 \div 2 = 2$. $4 \div 4 = 1$. Therefore, $1 + 2 = 3$, and one does not return to the original number.

73. That is to say, $8 \div 2 = 4$. $8 \div 4 = 2$. $8 \div 8 = 1$. Therefore, $1 + 2 + 4 = 7$, and one does not return to the original number.

74. That is to say, should man choose to focus on one aspect or another of his dichotomous reality, he in effect opposes that which he ignores. By extension then, he comes to oppose first a part, and then his entire being, and thus inclines toward complete privation.

75. That is to say that man must fear God, and realize also that the whole world was created for his purpose.

76. According to the Maharal, doing evil is a self negating activity. Thus, when you are "evil to yourself," in effect you oppose your own existence.

77. Maharal now concludes his Mishnah by Mishnah discussion by returning to his discussion of Rabbi Eleazar (Avot 2:14).

Derekh Hayyim to Avot 2:16

78. In other texts this is Avot 2:20, or 2:21.

79. This is most likely Rabbi Tarfon, the last speaker identified by the Mishnah. See Avot 2:15.

80. That is to say, why should (or would) someone go to the extra financial expense to offer an ox rather than a bird or grain which are less expensive, if all sacrifices are equal by definition?

81. One could argue than that he should perhaps receive even more of a reward, since by comparison his sacrifice was greater.

82. The *Lulav* is the bundle of the four species of plants taken up and shaken by Jews during the observance of the holiday of Sukkot.

83. By analogy we could say that the master of a house pays his workers only when the work is complete. However, with regard to the study of Torah, such work is by definition never completed. Therefore, one must reason that the employer in this task (i.e. God) will never grant payment (the reward) since the work is never actually finished. Rabbi Tarfon reassures his readers that God will pay, not for a completed task, as in the example of the master of a house, but for the amount of work that was actually done.

84. See Leviticus 19:13.

DEREKH HAYYIM TO AVOT 3:5

85. Some *PIRKEI AVOT* texts split 3:2 into two separate sayings. Therefore, in other texts this is Avot 3:6.

86. The Hebrew word מנהג, is generally translated as 'custom' or 'form of behavior.' We have chosen the following translation, 'mode of conduct,' to fit with what appears to be the Maharal's understanding of the term *derekh eretz* as the natural way of behaving with the world and its inhabitants.

87. We have translated the word דנימוסית, as 'law.' We have made this translation based on Jastrow's translation of the word, see Jastrow p. 905. He bases his understanding of this term on the Greek word νομος.

88. See Avot 2:2 and *DEREKH HAYYIM* there.

DEREKH HAYYIM TO AVOT 3:8

89. Some *PIRKEI AVOT* texts split 3:8 (3:7 in our edition) into two separate sayings. Therefore, in other texts this is Avot 3:10.

90. In this Maharal is trying to answer the rather difficult question posed by the wording of the *Avot* text. Maharal is presented by a proof text which uses the term "Less they depart from your heart," and is endeavoring to show that this means 'Less you forget them purposefully.'

DEREKH HAYYIM TO AVOT 4:5

91. Some *PIRKEI AVOT* texts split 4:4 into two separate sayings. Therefore, in other texts this is Avot 4:6. Some texts further divide this saying between Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Tzadok. Therefore, this text also appears in some editions of *Avot* as 4:6 and 4:7.

92. The son of Rabbi Yokhanan ben Beroka, who is mentioned in Avot 4:4.

93. Interestingly, the quote from the Mishnah ends with 'the world.' However, the Maharal's text adds the phrase **אבא**, which changes the statement to read, 'the world to come.' This feature is not found in the other editions of *Avot* consulted for this study.
94. In other words, why was the study of Torah used as the particular example for the general rule?
95. And thus gain the merit that such a title would bring.
96. Ulla seems to be saying that if one worries about their Torah study, they will actually be unable to study. The Maharal's point is to say the exact opposite. If one worries about their study, they will only be able to study better.
97. That is to say, in the interim, when there are no natural means of support, God somehow provides.
98. Maharal uses the word **נבדל** (*nivdal*).
99. Other editions of the *TOSEFOT* have Rav Yehudah.
100. On the one hand, one section of the *TOSEFOT* teaches that in the case of a person who studies Torah for a reason other than its own sake, it would be better if he had never been created. And, on the other hand, we find another section of the *TOSEFOT* that says man always busies himself in the Torah and the mitzvot not for its own sake. The Maharal is faced with having to reconcile this contradiction. His solution, as we shall see, is to suggest that in one section the text is speaking about one issue, and in the other section of text, it is speaking about another. In any case, however, it is never acceptable for one to study and learn simply to honor themselves.
101. That is to say, no great scholars have come forward as there is too much financial burden to do so.

Chapter Four:

The Contents of DEREKH HAYYIM

Having seen the translated sections of Judah Loew's commentary on *PIRKEI AVOT*, we now turn to a discussion of what *DEREKH HAYYIM* teaches us. How does this text reflect what the Maharal saw as the importance of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot? Here, we shall follow the approach taken in Chapter Two of this study. Our analysis of these ideas will begin by attempting to place them within the context of Loew's thought as a whole, for in order to grasp how the Maharal understands the importance of Torah study and mitzvot, we must consider how his entire system of thought is played out in his commentary.

We begin as we did in Chapter Two, with God. Maharal indicates in *DEREKH HAYYIM* that he sees God's creation of the world as an example of how order overcomes chaos. Thus, in his analysis of Avot 2:14, Loew describes how God created the world in a state of equilibrium. As such, the world is a balanced and ordered place where differing forces generally counter one another. The two manifestations of what is really real in the universe are matter and spirit/intellect.

Although these two extremes were created to balance against one another, they differ in their inherent qualities, and thus often find themselves at odds. The spiritual/intellectual stuff of the universe flows forth from God, while the material matter of this world extends from the realm of the earth. As such, it lacks any permanence and is subject to privation and decay. Maharal writes in the Introduction,

"Therefore, the 'reproofs of instruction' are the things that admonish material man not to follow after his desires, insofar as he is endowed with a material foundation made up of earth, to which privation... clings." Whatever clings to these material things also develops the same tendency toward privation, as we see in section 2:7, "All of this (namely, that following after material things just brings more privation) is because the things which pertain to the body do not deliver from imperfection, and further overflow from them [merely] brings greater imperfection."

Spiritual things however, belong to the soul. Rabbi Loew discusses this in section 2:7 of his commentary. "Wisdom, understanding the [minute] points of Torah and the reasons for mitzvot, these matters are wisdom; and wisdom is a different matter, it is of an higher level, and this level is also for the soul." Contrary to material things, which are demonstratively prone to decay, God is eternal; and, since the intellect and spirit emanate from God, they too possess many of the same qualities. Thus, intellectual things are eternal like God. They exist for all time and are not subject to privations and decay. Things which are bound up with spirit/intellect share in that same eternal existence.

Despite the fact that the main division within the domain of reality is a question of matter or intellect, various gradations do exist. Three distinct levels or elements can exist; two of these make up opposing extremes, and a third makes up the middle, which brings balance to the other two. This third is a blend of the other two, and represents the middle ground or *emtza'i*. There are many examples of this tripartite view of reality in the Maharal's commentary. The most significant of these is in the hierarchy which he finds within reality

itself. That is to say, there are three distinct levels of being: the highest level (spiritual), the lowest level (material), and an *emtzai'i* level (man). This view is clearly laid out in *DEREKH HAYYIM* 2:14, "Man has within him three aspects [דברים]. The first is his body, the second his soul, and they are his [constituent] parts. The third [aspect] is man, man himself, that is the entirety of the two [together] as we have said." The text also says, "Man has in him three aspects : the first aspect corresponds to his mental faculties; the second aspect to his physical faculties; and the third aspect to man himself (i.e. the unity of both). These [taken by themselves] are only parts. Therefore, the third aspect, insofar as he is a [whole] man, encompasses [both] the body and the soul that a man possesses."

This tripartite structure is found in other places as well; the right and left sides, which together form the middle. Again, in *DEREKH HAYYIM* 2:14, we read the following, "You really must understand this, that these three things that [each Sage] said, is such that each one of them repairs man, who encompasses what comes from the right, the left, and the middle. Everything is based on this; understand it!"

This three way division of reality extends to all aspects of life, all of which correspond to one another. There are even three statuses of society which, according to the Maharal the maxim of Yehoshua ben Perakhya (Avot 1:6) teaches us. "The first aspect (of Yehoshua's teaching) corresponds to those who are considered as people of high standing in relation to him, like a teacher. The second corresponds to those who are like him, people who are his contemporaries, like a study partner. And the third element corresponds to the rest of humanity, even those who might be on a lower level than he." Thus, we are taught

by Maharal in *DEREKH HAYYIM* that man must relate to three distinct levels within society: a teacher, who exists on a higher plane than his student; a study partner, who is a contemporary and an equal; and, the rest of humanity, for while they might exist on a lower plane, one should still strive to "[J]udge all people by the scale of merit." (Avot 1:6)

As we suggested above, man represents the *emtzai'i*, the blending of these two disparate extremes of reality, and is therefore caught in the middle. Man is a blend of the two, though he is not perfectly so, as he tends to incline to one extreme or another. One might think that since man is the *emtzai'i*, that the two extremes would cease to exist, however, as God (the spirit) is necessarily existent in Rabbi Loew's thought, and the material world (matter) we know to exist empirically, this is obviously not the case.

Five of these (ten parts which make up man) are near to the earth, and five of these are near to heaven, for behold he was created from the earth and from the heavens. Of these five [parts] that are near to the earth, all of them are material and belong to the body, which is from the earth. Those [parts] that are near to the heavens, they are things which belong to the soul, they are spiritual things near the spiritual soul.... They are: two eyes, two ears, and the tongue. Man also has five parts near to the body, they are: two legs, two arms, and the penis. These are the ten [parts] of the body. You should know [innately] that the eyes that have the power to see, and the ears that have the power to hear, and the tongue that has the power to speak, [that] they are near to the soul. The other five parts [of man], all of them are near to the body, which is from the ground.

Given that man's composite structure inherently causes instability, Maharal teaches that man's goal is to bring his various elements into harmony and to achieve a perfect balance or equilibrium. Should man be able to achieve this goal, he becomes the ideal *emtzai'i*, and can thus

perfectly inhabit the area which exists between the right and left extremes.

This can become complicated, however. Because man must strive to perfect himself as he truly is, he must perfect himself on all levels of his being. Namely, man must achieve perfection with God (wholly spiritual), with other creatures who share his world (material), and with himself (the *emtzai'i*). This necessity is taught in the Introduction to *DEREKH HAYYIM*:

Why did R. Yehudah reason that piety depends upon fulfilling the words of *Nezikin*, when Rabbah reasoned that piety depends upon the words of *Avot*, and some say he meant *Berakhot*? The explanation is that man's perfection has three aspects and no one is like the other two. Man needs to be perfect with other men, he needs to be perfect with himself until he is a perfect creature, and he needs to be perfect with his Creator, that is, regarding whatever pertains to his Creator.

Man can achieve this total perfection by ensuring that he is fulfilled in both extremes; that is to say that he does not corrupt his material side by inclining entirely to the material, and that he does not corrupt his spiritual side by entirely inclining to the spiritual. By precisely fulfilling the dictates of his aspects he becomes perfectly whole. This is spelled out in *DEREKH HAYYIM* 2:14, "You must know that death comes to man when he turns from the middle [path] upon which mankind was created, and inclines toward the extremes, for in [doing] so, death comes to man." Should man fail in this task, or be lazy about undertaking its challenges, he will ultimately be entirely corrupted.

Judah Loew teaches that the project of perfecting himself is a responsibility which falls only upon man. The angels do not need to do this as they were created in an entirely spiritual form and have no need

to balance any disparate elements. Likewise, the animals were created entirely material, and have no intellectual element to bring into harmony with their spirit. Maharal alludes to this in section 2:14 of his work, "Animals do not have the evil eye, for animals do not have a separate mental faculty; only man has [this], as the soul that belongs to animals is only thought of as bodily. The essence of the Evil Inclination rests in sexual matters, which pertain to the body." Further on in that same section, he writes,

This balance (which man needs to maintain), namely, that man is composed of both body and soul, is [such that] he needs to be in balance, so that he not incline toward one side, lest he be an entirely material man, and that he not incline toward mental faculties as if he were entirely spiritual. Rather, he needs to be in equilibrium [of body and spirit], thus, it is not fitting that man should oppose himself, for in doing so man inclines toward complete privation.

Given that man is the only being in creation who must perform this task, he is also the only being in creation to have the power to perfect himself. As such, though he might choose to reject the project, regardless it is his goal to accomplish.

Maharal believes that man was originally created perfect, yet Adam's sin, and the subsequent expulsion from Eden, has rendered man deficient. Since Adam's sin, therefore, man lives in a state where he is neither entirely spiritual like the angels, nor entirely material like the animals of the world. Loew reasons that a means must exist whereby man might re-perfect himself. This fundamental need is fulfilled by the Torah. According to Judah Loew, the Sages whose teachings are recorded in *PIRKEI AVOT*, knew that man had three elements and needed to perfect each and every one of them. In addition, the Sages

understood that the Torah was the key to accomplishing that task. Therefore, their instruction is designed to help make clear the words of Torah and teach man about his goal.

In Rabbi Loew's thought, the Torah, aside from its familiar material form, is the wisdom of God. It is a pure intellectual good which extends from God into the world, and is only barely encapsulated in the scroll which bears the same name. We learn the following from section 3:8, "Because the Torah is a matter of the intellect, and intellectual [things] have reality and are more established, it is not like matter, that does not have a complete reality, and imperfection is bound to material stuff as we have made very clear." The Torah is something of a purely intellectual matter, like God, and as such it too is eternal, as we see in the Introduction. "The Torah, that is, the wisdom of God, has no material nature to it. And more than this, the world to come, where there is no eating or drinking, is completely removed from the material world."

This understanding of the nature of the Torah is taught in *DEREKH HAYYIM* 4:5. "The Torah is in and of itself good, as it is said, 'For a good doctrine has been given to you,' (Proverbs 4:2) the good [thing] is fitting to exist in every case.... However, from the point of view of this world which is material— and this world is far from the intellectual [world]— for this reason it would be [more correct] for the intellectual Torah not to exist in this material world." Given that this world is mostly material, some might argue that it is odd that such a purely intellectual thing would exist in this world at all. However, Judah Loew teaches it has been put into this world merely to give man the opportunity to perfect himself.

There are two bodies of teaching which help to perfect man in his spiritual and material aspects. As Maharal teaches in section 2:2, this perfection comes through mastering *derekh erez*, and the Torah, "But, according to the explanation which we said was entirely correct, it is not considered necessary that he toil to perfect himself [alone], rather [that he try to perfect himself] by way of the two [paths], that is *derekh erez* and Torah, for these two things make man whole. When man toils in these two things, he toils and exerts to complete himself and keep sin far from him."

First, in order to perfect himself vis-à-vis the rest of creation man obeys the dictates of *derekh erez*.¹ As we have seen, according to the rabbinic tradition, *derekh erez* existed prior to the world, and is part and parcel of how the universe operates. Loew subscribes to this notion and mentions it in the Introduction to his work. *Derekh erez* works to keep man to a straight path by adhering to the golden mean, so that he not incline toward one side or another, lest he be destroyed. Maharal teaches this in the Introduction to *DEREKH HAYYIM*.

But *Derekh erez*, is called 'a way' because it is the straight path, and it does not deviate to the right or to the left, but only continues in a straight [just] path. For every path that is walked straight is called a 'way to life,' since *derekh erez* is 'reproofs of instruction.' All words of instruction are [given] so that man might not follow after the desires of his body and [in general] his material being, through which he clings to death.

As we noted above, *derekh erez* is understood to be part of what the Torah teaches, but only part. Man, however, requires the full teaching of the Torah in order to perfect himself totally. Study of the Torah, and observance of the mitzvot in particular, make man *shalem* (total, complete). According to Loew's Introduction, the Torah is a light

that illuminates the dark in which man dwells, "The light that lifts up the darkness of man within which he dwells, is the Torah and the mitzvot. That is what is meant by, 'The mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is a light.' (Proverbs 6:23)" The Torah is superior to *derekh erez*, since *derekh erez* requires specific action, often Torah study alone is sufficient to assist man in his life's work. By means of the Torah man is thoroughly brought out of his material being, and creates a state of harmony between his warring elements, as we see in *DEREKH HAYYIM* 2:12, "There is no perfection of man greater than when by way of Torah man extricates himself from the baseness of matter to possess the intellect." In *DEREKH HAYYIM* 2:2 Maharal teaches us that the Torah fully perfects man's soul, "The Torah is for making the soul perfect."

The Torah makes man free, as we see in *DEREKH HAYYIM* 3:5, in that it raises him up out of the material world, and elevates him to the level of the spirit. "Because of this (the study of Torah), he is raised up to a higher level than the level of nature—which is the mode of conduct [characteristic] of the world—and thus [also higher than] the human mode of conduct—which is not natural—until he becomes a free man, [free] from these two governances (i.e. the yoke of government and the yoke of *derekh erez*)."

If man is to perfect himself vis-à-vis God, he must demonstrate his willingness to be a servant of God and perform God's will. That is done when man fulfills the Torah by studying it, and by obeying the rules, mitzvot, laid out therein. We see this attitude in *DEREKH HAYYIM* 1:3, "His (Antigonos of Sokho's) words are [said] in the service of God, and it is obvious that the service of God is the entirety of man's deeds. Every one of man's deeds must be seen as pleasing with respect to the

service of God. And therefore, he said, 'Do not be like servants serving the master in order to receive a reward... and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.' (Avot 1:3)"

By doing this man can achieve *deveikut*, or cleaving to God. To enter into this relationship, as the Maharal writes in the Introduction, "That he [must] follow after his Creator so that he might cleave to God, as it is written, 'You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and you shall serve him, and hold fast to Him.' (Deuteronomy 13:5)" As Loew writes further on in the Introduction, just through this cleaving to God man acquires some of God's eternal qualities and can thereby hope to achieve eternal existence for himself, "The Torah too is a tree of life in that it gives life to those who cling to it, namely those who study it, as it says in the text, 'It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it.' (Proverbs 3:18) It is called a tree for by the Torah man has *deveikut*, and he is planted in God. For the shoot of the Torah comes forth from God, and therefore, it is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it."

It is important to note that acquiring this perfection does not happen automatically. Man must actively engage in the process of perfecting himself, and make it the focus of his efforts. In *DEREKH HAYYIM* 2:12 we read the following, "The (*Avot*) text says, 'Dispose yourself to study Torah, for it is not your inheritance,' as if to say, 'You should habituate yourself to the Torah, for the Torah is not the [automatic] inheritance of man.' Therefore, he needs to fix and establish himself to the Torah, since it is not the [automatic] inheritance of man." If man takes too much rest, and is negligent in fulfilling his responsibilities of

working toward wholeness and perfection, lassitude and laziness will cling to him until he would be utterly destroyed.

Ultimately, the deciding factor in man's success or failure with regard to his laboring for wholeness with God is not the quantity of study or mitzvot he has fulfilled, but rather the quality. Should one not actually accomplish a great deal, but nonetheless make a concerted effort, God considers it as if he had in fact finished the task. Maharal teaches this in section 2:16 of *DEREKH HAYYIM*.

By comparison, if a man did not learn much Torah, but in any case went through the effort for that small amount [which he did learn], just as that same man who learned a great deal [of Torah], "A great reward will be given to him," just as one who learned much Torah. What he said here, "If you have learned much Torah," is that he learned and busied himself in Torah to a great extent, even if he did not [necessarily] learn [that] much Torah.

However, as we saw in section 2:2, the Maharal views the mitzvot as, quite simply, the will of God. "In any case, we made clear to you above at the end of the chapter that preceded this one, that it was the words of Rabbi [Yehudah Ha-Nasi that made clear] the deeds of man, that is to say, the divine mitzvot and the moral qualities that bring man to eternal life in the world to come." As such, Loew believes that their particulars are not meritorious in and of themselves, but rather they have value solely in that one performs the will of God.² *PIRKEI AVOT* is specifically significant in this regard, since it spells out many of the requirements of observance. In addition, this text puts a premium on study, simple proof of which is the declaration of Rabbi Eleazar at the beginning of his comment, "Be diligent in the study of Torah." (Avot

2:14) Exertion in Torah study helps man cleave to God and also grants that a man's sins be forgotten.

There is a huge obstacle which stands in the way of man's accomplishing his goal of total perfection, however. That obstacle comes in the form of the Evil Inclination. The Evil Inclination manifests all of man's tendencies to lust after material things; whether those things be financial, gastronomic, or sexual in nature. Maharal draws upon rabbinic lore that suggests the Evil Inclination is a necessary evil,³ yet it can develop too powerful of a hold over an individual's life. The Evil Inclination causes man to lose sight of his potential for perfection. Thus, we find in section 2:14 of *DEREKH HAYYIM* the following, "Now, what he (Rabbi Yehoshua) said here has been explained to you, namely that, 'The evil eye, the Evil Inclination, and hatred of creatures drives man from the world;' that such removal from the world [occurs when] man favors one extreme [over another], for by way of this [behavior] privation adheres to him, and this matter drives him from the world."

Study of the Torah, observance of its mitzvot, and attention to the dictates of *derekh erez*, according to Loew in *DEREKH HAYYIM* 2:2, help man overcome the Evil Inclination.

You must understand with wisdom that these two elements which are mentioned— toil in *derekh erez* and in Torah— are opposed to the two Evil Inclinations that the Holy One, blessed be He, created, the inclination toward unchastity and the inclination toward *avodah zarah*. By way of toiling in *derekh erez* for the needs of his body, man keeps away the inclination toward unchastity. [In the same way] the toil of man [to perfect] his soul in Torah keeps away the inclination towards *avodah zarah*.

Therefore, man must arouse himself in order to fight off the Evil Inclination and work toward making himself whole.

Much has been made by scholars of *PIRKEI AVOT*, as well as by Loew, regarding the reward which the rabbis suggest is given to those who study and observe the mitzvot. One must then inquire as to the purpose that Maharal sees in this reward. For the Maharal, the reward which is mentioned specifically for Torah study and the observance of mitzvot, only exists to motivate man for the struggle against his inherent laziness. As we read in section 2:14,

Therefore, this (mention of the reward) is [only] said in relation to the Evil Inclination, for when [it acts] it wants to mislead man, so that he will not labor in Torah, and that he not come [even] lazy to this work. Even though he [should] act out of love, and not out of desire for a reward, he must be concerned that perhaps he will become lazy and he will not trust in his soul.... It is certain that the ultimate goal of his study is not to receive a reward at all, rather this [serves] to strengthen his hand so that he will not become lazy, for there is [reason] to be concerned about this.

As we read in section 2:16, ultimately man is rewarded both for the work he accomplishes as well as for the toil involved.

According to what we explained above, the reward is in two guises, one is according to the great trouble [brought on by the toil], and one is according to the mitzvah itself. There [in *Berakhot*] Rabbi Yokhanan said, "Is it because you did not study [enough] Torah? Did we not learn, 'The one who sacrifices much and the one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that their heart is directed to heaven.' (Menahot 110b)" (Berakhot 5b) If so, you have a great reward in the Torah according to the labor and the trouble, and this is correct.

Moreover, as we are taught by Rabbi Nekhunya ben Ha-kanah in *Avot* 3:5, one who accepts the responsibilities of Torah upon themselves is freed from the other cares and concerns of the world. Ultimately, as the teaching of Rabbi Tarfon shows, the employer (God) is trustworthy to pay the laborer (man) for his efforts, and that reward is life in the

world to come. Thus, man is to see the glory of becoming *shalem*, and then motivate himself to live in pursuit of that goal.

The Maharal's ideas regarding the meaning of passages of *PIRKEI AVOT* are not entirely unique in the realm of Jewish thought. Although an exhaustive survey of extant commentaries on *PIRKEI AVOT* is outside of the scope of this study, an evaluation of even a small sample of this material supports my point. The above contention is valid particularly in places where Judah Loew's understanding of the text does not wander far from the plain moral and ethical principles found in *Avot*. In places where Loew focuses his attention on the more practical, this-worldly values of the ethical maxims of the rabbis, he and the other commentators are in general agreement regarding what the text teaches.

Examples of this can be seen in regard to *Avot* 1:3, in the suggestion that man should serve God out of love, and not out of the desire for reward. Ben Zion Dinur suggests that this means, "You should serve Him (God) out of love, and not on condition of receiving a reward."⁴ R. Travers Herford also upholds this idea writing, "Man's service of God ought to be disinterested, without thought of gain or advantage to accrue from such service. The word used (in the text, פֶּרֶס) is explained to mean a gift or present which a man may make to his servant or any one else although he is not obligated to do so."⁵ Shlomo Toperoff further develops this theme, and also focuses in on the meaning of the word denoting a 'gift.' "We should point out that there is a distinction between *Peras*, which means a gift, and *Sechar* which means a reward, and which one may rightly expect for services rendered. *Peras* here refers to divine approval of man's actions, a prize

which God bestows on man.”⁶ Thus, in this regard the scholars agree with Loew, who focuses his point on the fact that one should not serve God out of the desire for reward, but that such gifts only serve to boost his morale and inclinations to follow God’s law. The reward is not a payment, but rather an incentive for one to get started on the project.

In Avot 1:15, Maharal stresses the opinion expressed by Shammai that one’s Torah study should be fixed, and not be a time-dependent activity. This is also suggested by Dinur. He writes, “The study of Torah needs to be a fixed matter in time and duration every day, and should not be abrogated for any reason.”⁷ Interestingly, in regard to Avot 2:7, Sforno uses the same phrase, *shalem*, suggesting that man must perfect himself to a certain degree. Sforno writes, “The more something is inherently perfect (שלם) the better. In contrast, that which is not inherently perfect— even though it may well be a necessary means by which to attain some type of perfection— is superfluous and harmful, when excessive.”⁸ This is an idea that is certainly part and parcel of Loew’s thought. In addition, Judah Loew teaches that the farther one goes in the pursuit of material gain, that person inclines more and more towards their material aspect, and thus further away from the *emtzai’i*. This idea is also alluded to by Toperoff, “The worldly man who is primarily interested in food, will increase his property and possessions to maintain his high standard of living.”⁹

Much is made among the commentators of the dictum given in the name of Rabbi Tarfon, “It is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it.” (Avot 2:16). Toperoff, Dinur, and Herford all comment upon this idea, and their commentaries agree that one should not be disheartened, nor shirk his responsibility though they

may be aware *a priori* that the task cannot be completed.¹⁰ Judah Loew makes this a central theme of his commentary in that section.

The fundamental difference between the commentary of Rabbi Judah Loew and those written by others, is that he understands the activity of Torah study and mitzvot to be on a different level of importance. That is to say, these activities are not localized just in this world, nor do they possess value simply in being pleasing to God or in earning eternal life for the doer. Rather, Torah study and observance of mitzvot have cosmic significance. It is not that they are merely positive qualities, as any Jew would suggest, and thus represent a proactive stance which a person can take towards their life, but instead such activities are vital to that person's very existence and to the proper functioning of the universe itself. Maharal differs in his commentary from others in that he perceives a subtlety and mystical sophistication in the words of *Avot* which was probably not originally intended. Judah Loew injects new ideas into the words of the rabbis, ideas which they may have scarcely recognized.

This activity is a tradition in Jewish scholarship. Ages of rabbis have read or interpreted varied implications into material which was not inherently part of those texts. As such, those texts maintained a vibrancy and relevance for untold generations. This is where the Maharal's commentary on *PIRKEI AVOT* succeeds. He provides his readers with new insights into sound ancient moral instruction, insights which make those teachings new again. He teaches his reader that a great deal depends upon simple actions, and that even minor activities can have lasting effects. This is an essential lesson to learn when one is faced with his own seemingly insignificant existence, or when one might

question the long term merit which his activities give rise to. "His delight in ordering the practical affairs of life had a metaphysical basis—the belief that the world is the expression of the divine will for order. The way of true conduct lies in keeping order in daily life and recognizing it in the occurrences in the world surrounding us. Sin is disorder. To put order into the world is our messianic task."¹¹

In Chapter Two of this study we considered at length the question of how to categorize Judah Loew's thought, and now that we have completed our examination of his commentary, we must return to that question. Ben Zion Bokser contends that Loew was conscious of the limitations of Aristotle's thought, and that he viewed it as defective. He suggests that Loew sought knowledge of eternal divine truth, the mind of God. However, knowing that human knowledge and reason teach only relative truths, which are by their nature subject to change, he could not hope to succeed using the philosopher's model.¹² Therefore, in light of this author's argument, which suggests Loew's opposition to the validity of using pure reason, as well as the suggestions of others, namely Byron Sherwin who is loathe to see Maharal considered a philosopher, it is impossible to see Judah Loew merely as a philosopher of the Aristotelian school, despite the fact that his writings might be full of their influence.

Moreover, Loew's ideas were too new and radical for him to be categorized simply as an orthodox thinker of his own time, as Rivka Schatz argues. While at the same time, however, the ideas expressed by Neher and Weiss that he reflected elements of humanism in his thought are anachronistic for his time and place.¹³ Although scholars such as Gershom Scholem refer to Loew as a mystic, others, most notably Kariv,

suggest that the influence of Kabbalah upon his thought was "insignificant."¹⁴

However, there is another option in our attempt to categorize Maharal's thought. Isadore Twersky contends that the writings of Loew reflect a common current of his age, in that Loew was part of a group of scholars whose writings represent a "degree of conscious harmonization of philosophy and Kabbalah."¹⁵ Sadek puts this more succinctly. He writes, "We think that Maharal represents the typical Renaissance synthesis trying to combine the traditions of Judaism with elements drawn from medieval Jewish philosophy (from Aristotle and Neoplatonism) and with Renaissance mysticism."¹⁶ This argument is quite plausible, though considering Loew's life history, both what he taught and achieved, we can fairly say that it is impossible to every view him as 'typical.'

I would like to suggest that the latter ideas raised by Twersky and Sadek are the best options for categorizing the thought of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel. His ideas do not reflect one or the other out of a list of possible schools, but rather represents a conscious blending of several streams of thought. In effect, he assembles a new school of thought entirely unique to himself. His system contains a varied selection of ideas which he brought in from those whom he was influenced by, but his thought as a whole is not entirely true to any single one.

The Maharal as an individual, therefore, represented the differing trends of thought in his age. He culled ideas from those who provided him with the proper vocabulary of ideas to express his own thought, or chose elements of their theology/philosophy when the situation

warranted. That which he did not require, use, or agree with, he refuted or discarded as unnecessary to him. In this way we can answer the question of why it is so difficult to categorize the thought of the Maharal, and resolve why he does not neatly fit into one school of Jewish history. Judah Loew was unique for his time, and though others have tried to follow after him, they have lacked one or the other of the essential elements which made up this man, and therefore, none have truly been able..

CHAPTER FOUR

1. As understood by the Maharal, *derekh erez* are the rules of proper conduct by which all men must behave, not just Jews. Though in the following paragraphs *derekh erez* appears to be a separate function from the Torah proper, in Rabbi Loew's mind, since the Torah is the blueprint of the universe, it encapsulates the dictates of *derekh erez* as well.
2. Note, this is not like Maimonides suggested, that the details of the mitzvot are arbitrary. Rather, Maharal feels the mitzvot and what they demand are necessary in and of themselves because it is God who gave them. Any attendant value which such observance brings is to be understood as of an ancillary nature, however.
3. As it says in the Midrash, "Nahman said in Rabbi Samuel's name.... But for the Evil Desire, however, no man would build a house, take a wife and beget children." (*GENESIS RABBAH* 9:7). Therefore, though one might lose their control over the Evil Inclination, it is, in and of itself, necessary.
4. Dinur, *MASSEKHET AVOT*, p. 40.
5. Herford, *PIRKE ABOTH*, p. 23.
6. Toperoff, *AVOT: A COMPREHENSIVE COMMENTARY ON THE ETHICS OF THE FATHERS*, p. 29.
7. Dinur, p. 53.
8. Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno, *COMMENTARY TO PIRKEI AVOS*, translated by Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY.: Mesorah Publications, 1996), pp. 43.
9. Toperoff, p. 97.
10. *IBID.*, p. 132, Dinur, p. 53, Herford, p. 62.
11. Thieberger, *THE GREAT RABBI LOEW OF PRAGUE*, p. 19.
12. Bokser, *THE MAHARAL: THE MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF RABBI JUDAH LOEW OF PRAGUE*, p. 188.
13. The views expressed by Schatz, Neher, and Weiss regarding into what category Maharal should be placed, are spelled out in Chapter Two of this work.
14. Kariv, *KITVEI MAHARAL MI-PRAG*, p. 13.
15. Twersky, "Talmudists, Philosophers, Kabbalists: The Quest for Spirituality in the Sixteenth Century," p. 442.
16. Sadek, "Social Aspects in the Work of Prague Rabbi Löw," p. 6.

Chapter Five:

A Final Look

On August 8 (12 Elul), 1609, Judah Loew ben Bezalel died, and on that day the world lost one of its lights of Torah. On that day in Prague, the Rabbi Loew of history died, and the Maharal of legend was born. It has fallen to later generations to marvel at Maharal the man, and try to come to terms with his thought and ideas.

The initial goals of this study were four-fold. We hoped to gain an awareness of the Maharal as an individual and also to perceive how the circumstances of his time and place have influenced our understanding of him. In other words, how did history shape Rabbi Loew, and how did that history influence how we understand him? We set out to try to grasp elements of Judah Loew's thought as fully as possible, and to determine, where possible, by whom he was influenced. In addition to this, we wanted to know what key elements of his ideas affect our evaluation of *DEREKH HAYYIM*. Moreover, could we determine how Rabbi Loew understood the merits of Torah study and the observance of mitzvot and in what ways those activities affect people's lives. In the end, we wanted to be able to describe what significance those ideas have today.

Along the way, we have had to do some important background work. We were forced to consider the origins of the Mishnah as a whole, and *MASSEKHET AVOT* in particular. We had to define in what ways that text evolved and if that evolution affected how the Maharal viewed its teachings. We had to question how the accretions of myth

and legend altered and obscured our view of Loew himself and what later claims have biased our views in the evaluation of his thought. Finally, we had to consider the language, structure, and intent of *DEREKH HAYYIM* itself in order for us to arrive at our conclusions.

The Maharal was a man of intense history. By that I mean he lived in an age where new ideas and new found intellectual accomplishments were daily occurrences. He lived in a time when the waves of the great political upheavals of the future were just being generated. He was born in an age and in a place where many streams of thought and development—both those within the Jewish world and those without—converged. As such, he was doubly influenced, both by philosophy and by traditional Jewish thought, and his ideas were colored by science and mysticism. As a leader of his people, Rabbi Loew met with both the lowly and the lofty, the learned and the unlettered alike. In that context he had to provide guidance for those elements of society. In the end, he was remembered with fondness and devotion.

The ideas that influenced Loew's thought came from many disparate sources. Reared in a traditional Jewish world he paid his allegiance to the faith of his forefathers. He accepted their revealed tradition and their conclusions without question. In light of that fact, his writings are filled with Jewish terms and terminology. He agrees with the values taught by the rabbinic tradition, and even raised those values to new levels. However, at the same time, he was remarkably open to ideas that were new to Judaism. He embraced some of the philosopher's ideas, especially in regard to the dichotomous hierarchical structure of reality. We have found in essence that Maharal's thought represents differing trends, which he valiantly tried to blend together.

Maharal valued the study of the Torah and the observance of mitzvot above all else. As a Jew, this attitude is perhaps natural and unremarkable. What is unique, however, is the framework within which he understands those activities. Judah Loew saw Torah study and mitzvot as elements essential to the continued existence of the universe. In Loew's understanding, all of reality is divided into matter and spirit/intellect. Man is the *emtza'i'i*; he is a being made up of the different elements of the universe. As such, his ultimate goal in existence is to bring those different elements into a harmonious existence, so that they might be in balance. Torah study and the observance of mitzvot, are the keys to bringing that about. Man is able to satisfy and align his internal warring elements through obeying the dictates of Torah. Thus, man acts out on the microcosmic stage, what occurs on the macrocosm level of the entire cosmos.

PIRKEI AVOT, the text which *DEREKH HAYYIM* expounds upon, has long been a valuable resource for the Jewish people. As we have discovered, it has been understood and used in a variety of ways all of which merely serve to enhance its relevance. The Maharal's commentary on it is no exception. A modern rabbi can use the elements of Judah Loew's wisdom included in this study in dynamic ways. One must merely be creative and ready to express the idea that all of our actions are important.

In a final look, the Rabbi Loew of history is obscured by the Maharal of legend; perhaps the shadow cast by the Golem clouds our view. However, as we said in the Introduction to this work, the true legacy of the Maharal lies in the works that he left behind. Those works

still provide valuable lessons for us today. Their value can best be described by considering the opinion of Abraham Kariv. He maintained that the essence of Maharal's thought amounts to this fact: In an age where Copernicus sought to remove man and his earth from the center of the universe, Maharal placed him back at the center of creation.¹

For our lives today, the teachings found in *DEREKH HAYYIM* are of great value. In our modern world where we tend to lose sight of the value of small deeds, the Maharal teaches us that all of our actions have merit and affect the world in profound ways. Even if these events may not have the same influence that Judah Loew believed or intended, for humanity, when we emphasize the value of our deeds, we reinforce the fact that all of our deeds have value. And, the value of one deed extends far beyond ourselves, or our ability to reckon with its results.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Kariv, *KITVEI MAHARAL MI-PRAG*, p. 55.

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