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DUTIES OF THE HEART:
A GATEWAY TO SPIRITUAL AWARENESS, ETHICAL TRANSFORMATION AND
HIGH HOLY DAY PREPARATION

by

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Advisor:

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for Rabbinic Ordination at
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Part I

Introduction

In recent years, the self-help section of the bookstore has become a popular place for soul searching customers. Titles such as The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey, The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren, and Who Moved My Cheese? by Spencer Johnson are examples of popular books that have responded to the desire in scores of people to seek improvement in all aspects of their lives. This desire and inspiration is not new to humanity; authors and theologians have been writing so-called "self-help" books for centuries. Bahya ben Joseph ibn Pakuda, or Bahya ibn Pakuda (he will be referred to in this thesis mostly by his first name, Bahya) had this market for self-help books cornered in medieval times. Bahya's major life work was entitled Hovot Halelvavot, The Duties of the Heart. This work is a comprehensive ethical treatise that guides a person to build a relationship with God, learn how to serve God and then ultimately love God.

Trying to construct a time frame for Bahya's life can be difficult since the facts about him are filled with uncertainty.¹ The text of The Duties of the Heart was originally written in Arabic and later translated to Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon. In the introduction to the work Bahya quotes the *Sefer Hamitzvot* of Rabbi Chefetz ben Yatzliach, who lived in the tenth century.² The first part of The Duties of the Heart was translated by ibn Tibbon at the request of Rabbi Meshulam ben Jacob of Lunel who died in 1170.

¹ Mansoor, Menachem. The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart, Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1973, p. 1

² Hyamson, Moses. Duties of the Heart: Volume I, Bloch Publishing Co: New York, 1925, p. 1

According to David Gans, the entire translation was completed in 1160. From this Data we can infer that Bahya lived either in the 11th century or in the early half of the 12th century.³ From ibn Tibbon's translation we also learn that Bahya was a judge of a rabbinical court in Spain.

According to Hyamson, Bahya's work does not belong to the domain of philosophical or apologetic literature. It is an ethical text and it follows the likes of ethical writings such as the *Pirke Avot* in the Mishnah and the *Massechet Derech Eretz Rabba* and *Derech Eretz Zuta*, the later minor treatises on good manners incorporated into editions of the Babylonian Talmud. What makes Bahya's work unique in comparison to this earlier Rabbinic literature, is that its is a comprehensive plan with logical and ordered steps designed to lead to the love of God.⁴

Bahya's ethics focus on the inner duties, which he calls the "duties of the heart." Mansoor explains that, "external duties are impossible without the duties of the heart, which are duties of reason. This is so, because of the intimate relation between body and soul. It is impossible to perform even one external duty unless the mind consents."⁵ In this theory the motive behind the deed is more important than the deed itself.

The structure of The Duties of the Heart contains an introduction that helps to give an overview of the themes with which Bahya will grapple in this book. The remainder of the book focuses on ten themes, which are divided into ten distinct chapters, called gates. The order of the gates is important as each one provides a foundation for the next gate. In addition, the order of the gates is designed to help further one's ethical

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Mansoor, p. 5

development. Each gate opens the path to new possibilities of spiritual and ethical transformation.

In this thesis you will find a chapter devoted to each of Bahya's gates. Analysis of selected texts will attempt to uncover some of the themes and will try to help guide people to attain a certain level of spiritual and ethical awareness. Throughout the thesis I will attempt to make comparisons between Bahya's chapters and related themes from the High Holy Day liturgy. The overarching goal is to provide people with an approach to prepare for the High Holy Days that is grounded in Jewish ethical tradition. At the conclusion of this book you will find a guide based on the themes of each gate. There are four activities provided for each gate that can help one's ethical transformation in preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. (For further explanation see Appendix A.)

One assumption that I take in the thesis is that there is a God and that one needs to believe in God to do this kind of work. These assumptions grow out of the medieval philosophical tradition in which so many writers sought to prove God's existence. While a belief in God is helpful to fully understand the intentions of The Duties of the Heart, one does not need to maintain a belief in God to embark on an ethical journey. Many of these texts can be examined from a lens that focuses on moral conduct between people.

The motivation for this work grew out of a love for the High Holy Day themes, liturgy and melodies. After studying the introduction to The Duties of the Heart, I came to realize that the intention behind our actions is an important component of ethical activity. It is not just the action that counts, but also the thoughts that inspire us to act. Understanding Bahya's new theory of ethical activity inspired a connection between the

themes of The Duties of the Heart and the High Holy Days. Therefore, the use of this text to guide one's preparation for the High Holy Days would be appropriate.

This thesis also grew out of the idea that we spend much of our lives in preparation for different activities. Teachers prepare to teach lessons, lawyers prepare for the courtroom, and doctors prepare for surgery. Not only do we prepare for our professional lives, but we prepare for recreational activities as well. When we exercise, we spend time stretching our muscles before hand so that we do not risk injury. If we wish to go out for an evening with a significant other or our friends, we get ready to go out by getting dressed up in a certain way.

Since we prepare for so many different aspects of our lives, it seems appropriate that we add a level of preparation to our Jewish lives as well. The music heard in the synagogue on the High Holy Days conveys the powerful and awe inspiring themes presented in the liturgy. Preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur can help us understand the themes of these holidays better. It can also help us to understand the ways in which we wish to improve ourselves. As you read these chapters, spend some time reflecting on how you see Bahya's themes of moral improvement affecting your life and your thinking about the High Holy Days. You can allow yourself to open gates of further growth and understanding that can lead to moral improvement.

Chapter 1: Elul and Bahya Ibn Pakuda

Ethical transformation is a process that takes center stage during the month leading up to the High Holy Days. The month of Elul is the sixth month of the Jewish year. It is the month that immediately precedes the High Holy Days. Even though this month has no special significance in the bible or in early rabbinic writings, certain customs arose sometime during the first millennium that designated Elul as the time to prepare for the High Holy Days. Because of the seriousness with which we must approach Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the month of Elul calls us to be ready for these days of introspection. We are encouraged to prepare for these holidays and enter them thoughtfully after considering their meaning.⁶ In this section we will examine the symbols of Elul and how they encourage us to examine our actions and our principles. We will also consider how Bahya Ibn Pakuda's ethical treatise, The Duties of the Heart, is an ideal text to guide us in our personal preparations.

Elul as an entrée for personal ethics

Two of the most powerful symbols of the High Holy Day season are the Shofar and the color white. The sounding of the Shofar inspires awe throughout the month of Elul. That awe continues through the blasts of Tekiah Gedolah at the conclusion of Yom Kippur during the Ne'ilah service. For the *Selichot* prayers the Torah covers are changed to white and remain white through the celebration of Yom Kippur. Some clergy in the Reform movement wear white robes during worship. These robes and the white kittel, traditionally worn on Yom Kippur, yield a certain level of purity and cleanliness of the

⁶ Hammer, Reuven. Entering the High Holy Days. Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 1998, p. 37

soul that enriches the High Holy Day season. It is through these two ritual symbols that Elul and the High Holy Days become an entrée for personal ethics.

Tradition teaches us that there are two reasons for wearing the color white on the High Holy Days. White garments symbolize purity and by wearing white we also appear to be like the angels.

For the ceremony of expiation, the Priest wears simple, white linen garments as opposed to his usual rich gold, bejeweled garments (Lev 8.7). The garments themselves represent the purity that [Yom Kippur] is intended to produce. The wearing of a simple white garment (a kittel) to services is a long standing practice for the Days of Awe, as is the use of white coverings for the Torah scrolls and the ark.⁷ (Lev 16:4)

The white garment also reflects the equality of all people as each person stands before God in judgment. No person is better than another especially at the season of the High Holy Days.

During the month of Elul it is customary to sound the shofar following the morning service. Three sounds – Tekiah, Shevarim, and Teruah – are sounded during the entire month of Elul to warn the people of the approaching Day of Judgment and also to arouse them to repent. The sounding of the Shofar during Elul is not a law of the Torah but originates in Jewish Custom.⁸ On Rosh Hashanah, however, the sounding of the shofar is a written decree. Regarding the Shofar, Rambam states the following in the Laws of Repentance, chapter 3:4:

Even though the sounding of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a written decree, it contains an allusion. As if it is saying: Arise, you slumberers from your sleep. Inspect your deeds, return in repentance and remember your creator.⁹

⁷ Hammer, Reuven. Entering the High Holy Days, JPS: Philadelphia, 1998, p.191-192

⁸ Kitov, Eliyahu. The Book of Our Heritage: Volume 3, Feldheim Publishers: New York, 1999, p. 1039.

⁹ Maimonides. Hilchot Teshuvah 4:3.

Rambam is providing an ethical meaning to the sound of the shofar. Hearing the shofar can inspire us to act in a moral and ethical manner. There is more to the sounding of the Shofar than the sense of awe we feel when we hear it sounded. According to Rambam, the shofar should inspire a person to inspect his deeds. This inspection is an ethical evaluation of the self.

Upon hearing the Shofar one should react by looking at who he is, what he believes in and how he acts in the world. While the inspection of our deeds requires us to look at how we behave, it also requires us to examine our thoughts and our core belief system. When we engaged in this introspection we truly look at our entire personal ethical system. By investigating our thoughts we look at our inner selves and examine whether our thoughts are straight and upright. When we examine our deeds, we look to see if we have done all that we can to uphold the requirements of the mitzvot in our lives. This inspection is truly ethical in nature.

The Maharal, whose name was Yehuda Leow, was one of the popular minds of the sixteenth century. The Maharal wrote numerous books on Jewish law and philosophy. Much like the Rambam, he teaches a similar theory about the searching of one's soul during the month of Elul.

All the month of Elul before eating and sleeping let every man sit and look into his soul, and search his deeds that he may make confession.¹⁰

The Maharal seeks to provide a process for experiencing the soul searching required by the month of Elul. He suggests that a person examine himself on a regular basis. This repeated action is combined with eating and sleeping which are two activities that a person engages in on a constantly. The regularity of soul searching can lead to a more

¹⁰ Agnon, S.Y. Days of Awe, Schocken Books: New York, 1948, p. 25.

meaningful and profound self-examination. Like Rambam, the Maharal encourages an ethical search. When a person commits to a process of soul searching, that person is lead to understand his faults and transgressions. The act of confessing to those transgressions promotes moral conduct in which the person seeks to improve his or her actions. After one confesses to a wrongdoing, one can continue on the path of repentance.

The second aspect of Rambam's allusion of the Shofar calls upon us to return in repentance after we have inspected our deeds and we discover where we have strayed in the past. Repentance calls upon us to find out where we have erred and where we have left the proper path. Returning to the path of righteousness results from repenting. Repentance is part of our ethical journey that helps us act in a way that is guided by our ethics.

It is by reason of God's great love for the people Israel, that the Holy One, favored us and commanded us to turn to God whenever we sin. Although teshuvah, is good at all times, the month of Elul is choicest for teshuvah, which is more acceptable during the month of Elul than the rest of the year, that month having been a month of God's good will in which we were chosen as God's people.¹¹

Abraham Danzig, a *dayan* (Jewish judge) In Poland in the 18th and 19th century also teaches us that the month of the Elul is the ideal time for repentance.¹² We are commanded to return to God after we sin. While *Teshuvah* is always necessary, Elul provides an excellent season for the process of repentance because of its ethical nature. Repentance is also appropriate during this month because according to the bible, the

¹¹ Agnon, S.Y. Days of Awe, Schocken Books: New York, 1948, p. 16. This text from Hayye Adam was written by Abraham Danzig of Vilna in the 18th and 19th century. The text of Hayye Adam deals with laws of daily conduct, prayer, Shabbat and holiday observance.

¹² It is a belief that Moses ascended Sinai during the month of Elul. The connection to God choosing us as God's people helps to understand that God is close to us during this month. This is also the time in which tradition believes that God forgave the sin of building the Golden Calf.

Israelites received the Ten Commandments during the month of Elul and as a result entered into a covenant with God.

Lastly, Rambam requires a person to remember her creator upon hearing the shofar. A Jew must think of God when she hears the sound of the shofar. When a person remembers her God, she is called upon to find one of the sources of her ethical beliefs. God is part of the religious background that influences a person. God inspires us to act in holy ways because we are created in God's image and we are called upon to be holy because God is holy (Lev. 19:1). Therefore when a person remembers God she remembers everything that accompanies God in the world including the Torah, which instructs in the mitzvot, our ethical guide.

The shofar and the white garments reflect the ethical search that we experience during the High Holy Days. Listening to the sounds of the shofar inspires us to review our ethics. This ethical review helps us to become better people. The white garments symbolize our aspiration for purity as we strive to begin the year with a clean slate. We seek forgiveness for the wrongdoings in our actions and our thoughts and we repent again in an ethical way to find the path of righteousness.

Using Bahya to Prepare for the High Holy Days

Now that we have looked at some of the traditions of Elul, it is important for us to look to Bahya Ibn Pakuda's ethical treatise, The Duties of the Heart, to understand how we can use it to prepare for the High Holy Days. Bahya's treatise is an ideal source for High Holy Day preparation because it takes the reader on the proper journey of ethical transformation that reflects the essence of the High Holy Days. Throughout this season

we are encouraged to practice self-introspection and analysis that promotes a change in the way we think and practice.

Isaac Unterman, a modern scholar on Medieval Jewish Philosophy explains that, "The Duties of the Heart was very popular among all sections of the populace. The major part of his book is studied throughout the year by Jews in their houses of worship and particularly during the month of Elul and the Penitential Days. The popularity of Bahya Ibn Pakuda's book stems from the fact that most of its contents touch upon a profoundly religio-ethical theme, teaching as it does human conduct."¹³ The ethical nature of this document is precisely the reason why it can be used to guide us through our High Holy Day preparations.

The central focus of Bahya's work is the creation of an ethical doctrine that promotes a harmony of the functions of the limbs, which he calls the external duties, and the function of the heart, which he calls the internal duties. For Bahya, the marriage of these two separate components is essential to understanding the ethical nature of a human being. In Duties of the Heart, Bahya aims to help the religious Jew find moral improvement through serious soul searching. The goal is to find an improved union with God's teachings.

To Bahya, the commandments of the Torah constitute the duties of the body. However, these in themselves without their inner meaning are like a body without a soul. The observance of Torah's commandments is highly important, but their importance is not in themselves but in their design and objective. Bahya noticed that his contemporaries were bent upon the duties of the body at the expense of the duties of the

¹³ Unterman, Isaac. A Light Amid the Darkness, Twayne publishers: New York, 1959, p.65

soul; and for this he reprimanded them.¹⁴ Bahya takes a different approach to the notion of the "Religious Jew." To his contemporaries and to many that preceded Bahya, the focus of the religious life was in the performance of Mitzvot. For Bahya, however, the "Religious Jew" becomes one who ultimately reflects on the performance of those mitzvot and looks at the reasons for doing them and the intention of the individual who does them. For Bahya this is the true ethical nature of being a "Religious Jew." It is not just enough to perform the mitzvot, we have to contemplate the reasons for their performance and have the appropriate intentions when performing the mitzvot. Bahya's teachings can also resonate with non-halakhic Jews due to the ethical nature of this text. By understanding the intention of one's actions and by reflecting on the performance of certain actions, one can learn that it is not the body of actions performed by the limbs that is important, rather the mental processing and internal actions performed by the heart or the mind is important.

Bahya explains this concept in his introduction to the entire work:

I said to myself, that I would write a book on this matter, divided into the roots of the duties of the heart and the mitzvot of conscience, I was determined to add enough on this matter, and teach the way of goodness and righteousness, and the guide in the way of our ancestors and the ethics of the righteous, awaken the foolish, I wanted to deepen the fine points of the wisdom on this matter, and remind others of the knowledge of God and God's Torah.¹⁵

As we can see, Bahya explains that his central goal was to write a book on ethics that considers the duties of the heart and the mitzvot of conscience. It is through this division that Bahya sees a way to instruct others in the way of goodness and righteousness. There

¹⁴ Unterman, p. 66

¹⁵ Ibn Tibbon Hebrew edition with *Lev Tov* p. 52-53 The texts of Duties of the Heart are translated by Rick Kellner, using the Menachem Mansoor Translation and Yaakov Feldman translation, unless otherwise noted.

is a deep historical connection for Bahya, in that he seeks to explain the authorities of the Jewish tradition.¹⁶

The nuance in Bahya's work is the division between the duties of the inward members and the outward members. Bahya explains that both of these duties comprise the duties of the heart. Bahya would argue that the mitzvah is incomplete without full intention of the mind.¹⁷ Therefore Bahya's ethics promote full contemplation and action. This thinking allows the person preparing for the High Holy Days to undergo a complete *Heshbon Hanefesh*.

As I have said, it has already been explained to us that a person is made up of soul and body. Both come from the goodness of the creator. The first is visible [external], the second is internal. We are obligated to serve God in both outward and inward observance. Outward observance is the obligation of the limbs: prayer, fasting, charity, Torah study, teaching, building a *sukkah*, *lulav*, *tzitzit*, *mezuzah*, guardrails on our roofs, all of which can be performed by a person's physical body. But the inward obedience is the Duties of the Heart, these include: the unity of God in our hearts, believing in God and God's Torah, taking responsibility for God's service, being in awe of God, being humble in God's presence, relying upon God, loving God, trusting in God, submitting our souls to God, separating from what is hateful to God, dedicating our works to God, meditating on God's goodness, all of these are accomplished internally without the outward action of the body.¹⁸

There is a significant difference between internal and external obligations. When we perform actions such as prayer or Torah study, we do so through words and the use of our intellect. When we give *tzedakah*, we do it with a physical action. Prayer and Torah

¹⁶ One critique of Bahya's work is that he draws so much from Kalam, Islamic philosophy, that he takes away from true Jewish ethical teachings. However, the explanation here justifies the notion that Bahya's work is deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition while being influenced by contemporary thinkers. By reminding others of the knowledge of God and God's Torah, Bahya seeks to focus his text solely on Jewish writings. Through these writings, Bahya will be able to focus on moral improvement by guiding others in the way of righteousness.

¹⁷ This concept is not new to Judaism. The mishnah contains laws governing the priestly intentions as they made sacrifices. For example, if a priest had been thinking about chatat offering while performing an olah offering, the offering would be considered invalid. See Mishnah Zevachim. It is also important to look at the extensive rabbinic discourse called *Mitzvot tsrichot kavanah*, in which the rabbis examine the intentions of one's actions.

¹⁸ Introduction to Duties of the Heart, p. 30

study, even though done with the mind are also done visually. Others can see us in prayer and engaging in study. When we perform these mitzvot there is a possibility that we do not fully focus our thoughts or our hearts on the performance of these mitzvot. The key for Bahya is the emotional thought and intention that accompanies the action. Therefore, Bahya teaches that it is not enough just to engage in Torah study but we have to focus wholeheartedly on what we are studying. We must be humble in God's presence so that we do not merely boast that we are performing the various mitzvot. God desires performance of correct actions, but performance is not enough, we must eliminate any thoughts that are hateful to God. When we dedicate our actions to God, we do so with no other motive in mind. Through these internal actions, Bahya seeks to provide a guide for full moral improvement that includes both external actions and internal actions.

Bahya concludes his introduction with a parable of a king and his servants:

A King divided some raw silk among his servants in order to test their knowledge. The wisest of them, chose to divide it into three parts:...good, middle and worst. He used each separately and made the most appropriate garment possible, employing various artisans to sew for him silken garments, each different in color and style. These he wore while serving the king, each according to the time and place appropriate to it. But the foolish servant went out and made his whole lot of silk into worthless garments. Then he sold them for the little money he could get for them and hastened to spend it on good food and delicious drink. The King heard of this and was satisfied with what his clever servant had done. He drew him nearer, made him his favorite and gave him a rank equal to that of special officers. As for the foolish servant, the king found his deed abominable and exiled him to the most deserted place in his kingdom, where he stayed with others who aroused the anger of the king.¹⁹

We learn from this parable that the process of dividing the silk and the use of each part in its appropriate time and place directly correlates to the way in which we divide God's Torah. As Bahya explains, the silk is comparable to the Torah and the divisions are the three ways of understanding the Torah. For Bahya, the best part pertains to the internal

¹⁹ Introduction to Duties of the Heart, p.66; Mansoor p.106.

obligations, the middle part pertains to the external obligations, the least important part pertains to the way these laws and commandments have been understood in history.

The test that the king ordered his servants to do is much like the test we go through during the season of the High Holy Days. When we take our tests and prepare for the High Holy Days, we must pay careful attention to the different aspects of our lives. We can picture ourselves as the skein of silk given to the servants. Do we choose to divide the silk carefully into the significant pieces of our lives? Or, do we move carelessly through the season taking each day as if it were unimportant? Bahya would want us to take the silk of our lives and divide it into our internal and external obligations and way in which we have viewed ourselves over the course of our lives. We would therefore use each piece to carefully prepare ourselves for this season. Once we have prepared ourselves and divided our lives into these three components, we can begin to transform ourselves and serve God in a better way.

We will now turn to the themes presented in Bahya's gates so that we can begin our journey of moral improvement.

Part II

Chapter 1: Gate One – God's Oneness

The Shema is one of the first prayers children learn to recite. From the time we are young we are taught that "Adonai is our God and Adonai is one." Abraham's initial step in becoming the founding father of Judaism was the acceptance of the concept of monotheism. We find a story in the midrashic text *Ma-aseh Avraham Avinu* that explains Abraham's search for monotheism and his quest to understand God's oneness in the world. In the midrash Abraham learns of God's existence through rising and setting of the sun, the moon and the stars. Abraham experiences a process of trial and error. He realizes that God is not the sun, the moon or the stars because each disappears during the night and the day respectively. It is the realization that there is a deeper force to the world that must have created those heavenly objects. He became aware of God's presence in a spring of water which is eternal and renews itself constantly. Benjamin Levy comments that water, in rabbinic literature, indicates God's life-giving beneficence. Water also symbolizes purity and rebirth. The searching and reasoning that Abraham models can be an example for our own personal searching for God in the world.²⁰

Understanding the existence of one God is the fundamental goal of the above midrash. This is also the goal of Bahya's first Gate. In this Gate, we are presented with an example of one of the many medieval proofs for the existence of the Oneness of the creator. This is the first step on the journey of ethical transformation because the power

²⁰ *Ma-aseh Avraham Avinu* Chapter 2 as studied by Levy, Benjamin. A Faithful Heart. UAH Press: New York, 2001, p. 15-21

of understanding God's oneness inspires us to serve God and love God and a deeper and more meaningful way.²¹

What is the way in which a person investigates the truth of God's oneness? And what is it that I need to know about this task before we investigate God's oneness? I say: that every object that seeks to know God, when we are doubtful about God's existence, one needs to first ask whether God exists or does not exist. When a person verifies the truth of God's existence, one needs to investigate it, what is God's existence? How is God's existence? Why is God's existence? About the creator, one should only ask if God exists. And when we verify God's existence by analysis, we investigate if God is one or more than one. When it becomes clear to us that God is one, we investigate the matter of this oneness, and how many aspects are there of this oneness. Through this, God's oneness is established for us, as it is written, Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One. (Deut. 6:4) Therefore, we are obligated to investigate first, does the world have a creator or not? When it is clear to us that the world does have a creator, who created it and renewed it, we must investigate whether God is one or more than one. When it becomes clear to us that God is one, we must investigate the matter of the one, the true one, and what is appropriate to say about the creator. And then, the matter of god's oneness is complete in our hearts and it is fixed in our thoughts, with the help of God.²²

The process of searching for and understanding God can be a difficult one.

Beginning with the Tanach, we find many different ways that God appears. God appears standing over Jacob in his dream (Genesis 28), God appears to Moses from a burning Bush (Exodus 3), God appears to Isaiah in the Temple (Isaiah 6). Every prophet and every biblical figure experience God in a different way. Therefore, if we attempt to understand God's oneness solely from the perspective of the Tanach, we can become confused by the multiplicity of God's revelations. In the first gate, Bahya lays out the proper steps for investigating God's oneness. The steps are as follows: 1) Does God exist or not exist? 2) The investigation of the nature of God's existence. 3) Is God one or more than one? 4) What is the nature of God's oneness? We can experience the process of

²¹ Feldman, Yaakov. The Duties of the Heart, Aronson Inc.: Northvale, NJ, 1996, p. 6

²² Translation of Gate One, chapter 4, Hebrew edition volume 1, p. 101-102

moving through the aforementioned steps when we look at “the creator” and the creation of the world. This is a logical comparison because when we go to the root of the Torah, we read in the first verse: “When God began to create the heavens and the earth.”

(Genesis 1:1) Torah wants us to discover God’s existence from the beginning. Probing God’s existence from the perspective of creation is logical because the Torah encourages us to ponder God’s role in the creation of the world. Consequently, Bahya claims:

There are three premises, from them it is clear that this world has a creator and it was created from nothing: The first, that something cannot make itself, the second, beginnings have an end and are numbered, and they are finite, there is a beginning that had no other beginning before it, the third, everything that is composite is created.²³

If something cannot make itself, then something had to create it. Bahya’s premise shows that God must be that source of creation. Bahya claims that new beginnings are finite and that nothing existed before the first beginning. This helps to prove that God exists because it shows that there is a prime mover and that prime mover set everything in motion. The final piece of Bahya’s proof is that everything that exists must have been created. This connects to his first premise in which he claims nothing can create itself. If nothing can create itself, then God creates everything else and sets everything into motion.

Bahya claims that there are seven aspects of God’s unity that are important for us to know and understand. Three will be examined here. By understanding each of these aspects we can become closer to God. The relationship with God that grows from understanding these aspects of creation can help to make the other steps of ethical transformation prescribed in Bahya’s guide easier to accomplish. During the season of the High Holy Days, it is important to have a strong relationship with God because it is

²³ Translation Gate One – Chapter 5, Hebrew Edition Volume 1 p. 102

God who inspires our ethics and our moral decision making. The relationship we build with God is critical to the process of moral assessment.

One aspect [of God's unity] is the meditation upon the causes of creation, when we examine the causes, we find that they are less than the effects. When we search the causes of these causes we find that they are fewer.²⁴

This can be understood by looking at the seed of a tree. The roots of a tree, the trunk, the branches and the leaves all emanate from this primal point. As roots go deeper and deeper into the ground, they spread out and divide. As the trunk grows, branches sprout from the trunk and spread out and divide. Roots and branches all stem from the trunk of the tree, which is the central highway for moving nutrients upward towards the branches and leaves. The concept of the seed is similar to what Bahya is trying to teach here. We learn from these examples that everything goes back to one primal cause in the universe, God.

[In the second aspect of the unity of God] the signs of wisdom are seen in all the world, above and below, [these are] its minerals, animals and vegetation. When we look at it, we learn that all of the plans come from one maker, and the creations are from one creator. Even though we find differences in the roots and the foundations of the creations, we find parts of creations are similar to one another and we find that the wisdom of God's creations appears in both the smallest and the largest of God's creations. They are witnesses to the Creator, the one and the wise. If there had been more than one creator, the forms of wisdom would be vary in distinct parts of the world, the universal principles and parts would be different.²⁵

The world works in so many mysterious ways that flow out of the intricate designs of the creations. Human beings are created with valves, veins and organs. When the body parts function properly, we are blessed because every intricate aspect functions to make us live our lives each day. However, if one valve fails to pump, or one artery or

²⁴ Translation Gate One – Chapter 7, Hebrew Edition Volume 1 p. 106

²⁵ Translation Gate One – Chapter 7, Hebrew edition, volume 1 p. 106-107

vein gets clogged, the whole system fails. Our veins and arteries are similar to the xylem and the phloem of the plants. The xylem carry water and nutrients to the top of the flower while the phloem carries the waste down. Our arteries carry the blood all over our body and the veins bring the de-oxygenated blood back to the heart and lungs. The passageways are very different, yet in many ways are similar because the veins, arteries, xylem and phloem all help to make life function properly. The words of the morning prayer, "who creates humanity with wisdom" (*asher yatzar et ha-adam b'chochma*) urge the supplicant to understand the working parts of the body.

[Another aspect of God's unity is] if there was more than one creator, each one of them could have create the world only with the help of another. If each of them could do it, another creator would be extra, because the one can do it alone. If he cannot complete the matter without help, he does not have complete power, because each one of them is finite, each one of them is weak, each weak one has a limit to his own strength. Each one of [the weak] has a limit and a boundary, everything that works together is created, everything that is formed has its own beginning. If this is so, it is impossible for the weak to be the first to exist, because the first to exist is not weak, and does not need any help, if this is so the creator cannot be more than one.²⁶

We learn then that God is unique because God does not need any help creating the world. Bahya places emphasis on the intricate details of the world. Though immensely complicated, the world is nevertheless harmoniously put together, which points to a detailed plan purposefully worked out by a creator. The earlier Jewish philosophers did not draw upon this argument. It was Bahya Ibn Pakuda who first adduced and placed emphasis on it.²⁷ When we understand the nature of the world and God's role in creating it we can truly understand how important God is to everything that exists. Through this understanding our relationship with God can begin.

²⁶ Translation Gate One – Chapter 7, Hebrew edition, volume 1 p. 109-110

²⁷ Unterman, p.68

Bahya concludes the first gate by devoting a discussion to the divine attributes that are ascribed to the creator. These categories are divided into two parts: those pertaining to God's essence and those pertaining to God's actions. Bahya teaches that it is necessary to explain these attributes so that we can express God's meaning and the truth of God's existence. By mentioning these attributes God's creations will be inspired to worship God and obey their creator.

We are obligated to tell of God's existence, because God's impact teaches of God's existence as a witness to the signs of God's creations in the world. As it is written: "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who created these? The one who sends out their host by count, who calls them each by name: because of God's great might and vast power, not one fails to appear." (Isaiah 40:26). Therefore, we are obligated to tell of God's greatness, because it is established in our minds that a nonbeing will not act before us and will not do anything. Therefore God's works and creations affirm God's existence in our minds.²⁸

God's work in creation establishes a vision of God's handiwork in the world. There is something beautiful about witnessing the various creations we have in our world.

Visitors to the National Parks in the United States have the unique opportunities to see the magnificent works in the world. The phenomenal expanse of The Grand Canyon inspires awe inside all of us. Bahya reminds us all that Isaiah taught us to look up on high when we see beautiful creations and praise God for creating this natural beauty.

God's creations do not stop in the United States or on Israel, they are all over this world and every time we see the beauty of the world we are witness to the essence of God in the world.

The second aspect of the divine attributes relate to God's actions in the world. Through understanding how God acts in the world, a person can be inspired to imitate God's actions. These divine attributes lead a person to the future steps that must be taken

²⁸ Translation Gate One – Chapter 10, Hebrew Edition Volume 1, p.114

to lead a holy life in which a person serves God out of love. The divine attributes of God's actions are:

The attributes that are used to describe the creator and the creator's deeds. It is possible that God may share their description with some of God's creations. We are permitted to describe God using them, because of our need to know God and to establish God's existence in order that we receive the duty of our service to God. We have already found, that those who use those types of attributes of the creator in the Torah and the Prophets are great in number in addition to the praises of the Prophets and the righteous.²⁹

Any religious person seeks to know God more deeply. Since God is so great and so powerful it can be difficult or impossible to fully know God. Bahya teaches that if a person understands that God does holy actions in the world, that person will seek to imitate and serve God in the same manner that God acts in the world. If we wish to know God and understand God's existence, we can use God's deeds in the world to inspire our service to God. This service can come in the form of prayer and mitzvot.

The purpose of exploring the attributes of God's essence and God's actions according to Bahya, is to praise, glorify and purify the essence of the Creator. These praises of the glory of the essence of the Creator, demonstrates one's relationship with God. Words of praise inspire a person to act in the world because the words enrich that person's understanding of the fundamental nature of God. Psalms of the *psukei d'zimra*³⁰ help a person to understand her need and obligation to praise God. We read about various forms of praise in psalms 145-150 which are some of the psalms that appear in the *p'sukei d'zimra*. This praise takes the form of awareness of God and the world. A

²⁹ Translation Gate One -- Chapter 10, Hebrew Edition Volume I, p.115-116

³⁰ The *p'sukei d'zimra*, verses of song, is a liturgical unit recited during the morning service. It is comprised mostly of Psalms and other biblical citations that encourage us to praise God. For a further understanding of this liturgical unit see: My People's Prayer Book: Volume 3 P'sukei D'zimra. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman ed. Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, VT, 1999.

person's awareness can lead to understanding how God acts in the world, which leads to our own acts of imitating God.

The traditional High Holy Day Machzor includes a prayer entitled "שיר היחוד," or "The Song of Unity." This song is intended to be recited in full on the evening of Yom Kippur and is divided into seven parts corresponding to each day of the week. Two of the seven parts are recited on each morning of Rosh Hashanah. The Art Scroll Machzor gives the following commentary on this piyyut:

While the authorship of Shir HaYichud is not absolutely certain, the general consensus is that it was composed by R. Shmuel bar Klonymos, who lived in Speyer, Germany, from approximately 1120 to 1175. R. Yaakov Emden writes that its beauty and holiness are of such a great degree that it should be recited only when one has the time and concentration to do so slowly and intently. He recommended that it be recited in its entirety only on the night of Yom Kippur. Most Ashekenaz communities recite part of it on Rosh Hashanah, as well. Since the song is divided into seven parts, according to the days of the week, one recites the portion corresponding to the respective day. On Rosh Hashanah this is done early before the regular service begins. The song is devoted exclusively to lyrical, poetic praises of God and expressions of faith.³¹

The words of this *piyyut* help to inspire one to act in accordance with the concepts established by Bahya. Understanding the unity of God is something that is very personal. Recitation of the "song of unity" is done privately because of the intimate nature of building a relationship with God. Without communal recitation of the prayer, one has the opportunity to concentrate on the words of the *piyyut* and internalize the words. We will now take a closer look at some of the words of this liturgical poem in order to see how they relate to Bahya's concept of unity.

In order to understand God's essence in the world, the song states:

"I shall relate to my brethren but a bit of God's ways, and to Israel, what God has done, as it is written: Say unto God, 'How awesome are your works, O God.'

³¹ Art Scroll Machzor: Rosh Hashanah. Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz and Rabbi Avie Gold, eds. Mesorah Publications: NY, 1985, p.141-147.

(Psalm 66:3) You said, 'I molded this people for my sake, they relate My Name and My praise. In Egypt I placed My acts, so that you should relate My signs.'³²

These words presented here show examples of god's essence in the work of creations in the world. By using the verse from Psalm 66 to acknowledge the awesome aspects of God's deeds a person would acknowledge God's role in creation. This represents what Bahya teaches us when he explains how we are to investigate God's existence in the world. When Bahya discusses the signs of wisdom in the world, he establishes that the details are important. Looking at the wonder of God's creations can inspire a person to see and understand the intricate detail used to create the world. The miracles of the world, including God's actions in Egypt reflect the dual nature of the essence of God in the world and God's actions in the world. The natural wonders established in the miracles of the Exodus of Egypt, for example, were amazing to the Israelites. The miracles showed the Israelites and the Egyptians the fullness of God's power in the world. They also showed the way in which God can act in the world. Through these actions, Israel was redeemed and was able to become a people governed by the choice to engage in mitzvot rather than follow the commands of Pharaoh. These divine wonders inspire Jews in every generation to serve God, because God redeemed the ancient Israelites and saw their afflictions. Jews in every generation must be obligated to worship God through mitzvot because of the wondrous acts that occurred when Israel was in Egypt.

Certainly, I knew that You, the God of Jacob, fashioned everything. You create, but you were not created; You fashion, but you were not fashioned.³³

³² Artscroll Machzor: Rosh Hashanah, p. 145

³³ Art Scroll Machzor: Rosh Hashanah, p. 147

These words, taken from the opening of the third part of the Shir HaYichud demonstrate the premises which Bahya uses to establish his proof of God's existence in the world. The recitation of these words on Rosh Hashanah can help us to reflect on the presupposition of God's existence in the world. This reflection may be difficult for someone who questions God's existence or has difficulty understanding God's existence. When a person affirms that God creates, she understands that God acts in the world and establishes the mold for creation. Recitation of this *piyyut* on Rosh Hashanah and perhaps even in quiet reflection before Rosh Hashanah can lead us to better understand Bahya's first Gate.

In this first Gate, Bahya has established for us the proof of God's existence and has given us ways to understand God's essence in the world. As a result of this understanding we may be inspired to act and serve God in a way that is holy.

Chapter 2: Gate Two – Meditation on creation

In Gate two, Bahya builds upon the ideas taught in Gate 1. Here, we will focus on the meditation on creation. The process of meditation can help to expand the knowledge of God's unity as we explored in the first Gate. Meditation provides a person with an opportunity to engage in deep and serious reflection. Through the process of meditation a person can think about God and how God functions in the world. Contemplating God's beauty is more significant than simply recognizing God's beauty. When one meditates on God's splendor one can think about the implications that God's splendor has in the world. As a person reflects on God's beauty, the possibility for building a more meaningful relationship with God grows.

Bahya opens the discussion about our obligation to meditate on creation with the following:

Reason, scripture and tradition make meditation upon creation and proving God's wisdom obligatory upon us.³⁴

The idea of reason is central to Bahya's treatise. This concept will be further explained in Gate three. We are introduced to it here to show that learning about one's surroundings is enough to inspire us to meditate on creation. Bahya also speaks of scripture and rabbinic tradition as sources for our obligation. These sources explain to us the requirements of our reflection and also provide a Jewish foundation for the reflection. Through the combination of these three sources we can come to realize the importance of our reflection and how we can continue down Bahya's prescribed path with the goal of serving God out of love,

³⁴ Hebrew Translation, Gate Two – Chapter two, Hebrew Volume I, p. 139

What does it mean to reflect on creation? Bahya answers this question in the first chapter of this gate. He discusses the methods of reflection and the results of this reflection. One might argue that this is the same process that Bahya discussed and prescribed in the first gate. However, the first Gate was strictly about observing and witnessing the creations of the world. In this chapter he instructs us to go deeper in our reflection and to contemplate the connections and the meanings of what we previously observed.

What is this reflection? It is the understanding of the signs of wisdom of the Creator in the creations and in its gates of the soul according to the strength of one's reflection. If the signs of wisdom are divided amongst the creations, its foundation and essence are one like the sun which is one in essence, although it is divided and its rays vary when it passes through glass discs of different colors...Therefore you should think about the creations both small and large and understand what is hidden from you, and with the help of God you will find them to be as I have described to you.³⁵

Yaakov Feldman, who has written a commentary and a translation of The Duties of the Heart, comments that a person needs to be in a constant state of meditation and reflection. We must pick up one thing, contemplate it and then move on to the next thing. We must always maintain that state of curiosity, wonder and absorption.³⁶ A constant state of reflection and meditation is difficult to maintain. Despite the fact that this is the case, the more we practice reflecting, the easier it will be for us to be in a continuous state of mediation.

I once witnessed a third grade lesson on God in which the teacher took his students on a scavenger hunt. The students collected items from around the temple and returned to the class in order to examine their findings with a microscope. They were looking closely at every aspect of the leaves, the bugs and the flowers that they found on

³⁵ Hebrew Translation, Gate Two – Chapter One, Hebrew Volume I, p. 136-137

³⁶ Feldman, p. 73

their walk. Each student had a sense of amazement upon discovering a new or interesting thing. Try to re-imagine the sense of amazement you felt when you learned new things as a child. As we get older, it may be more and more difficult to maintain that sense of awe, but we have to find the strength in ourselves to do so. As the third grade students shared the hidden dimensions of their findings, which could only be witnessed with the microscope, they reflected upon the meanings and the different insights they could learn about God. So, too, we may find different discoveries if we have a desire to reflect and investigate the hidden and underlying nature of the world.

Bahya establishes seven pillars of wisdom that guide a person's reflection on God's creation. The introduction of these pillars provides the reader with an apparatus for engaging in this reflection. Consequently the use of these pillars in reflecting upon the beauty of God's creations can help us build a deeper relationship with God.

Enhancing our relationship with God can move us towards a path of righteousness.

The first [pillar], is a sign of the wisdom that appears in the roots of the world and in its foundation...The second pillar, is the sign of wisdom in the human species...The third, is the sign of wisdom in the composition of human beings, the construction of body and the strengths of the soul, and the light of the intelligence that makes humans unique...The fourth, is the sign of wisdom that appears in other living things, from small to large...The fifth, is the sign of wisdom that appears in the plants and minerals that are ready to be used by human beings, that depend on their nature, composition, and abilities...The sixth, is the sign of wisdom, that appears in the sciences, arts, and professions, that the Creator prepared for humans in order to complete their interests, earn a living and attain all other benefits...The seventh, is the sign of wisdom that appears fixed in the Torah and the laws, and to use them to serve the Creator above.³⁷

The pillars demonstrate the aspects of wisdom that are manifest in the world. We are told in the Gate's introduction that this gate follows the previous Gate because reflection on God's wisdom in the world brings us to the wholehearted acceptance of

³⁷ Hebrew Translation, Gate Two – Chapter 4, Hebrew volume I, selections from p.148-162

God's oneness.³⁸ These pillars follow a logical wisdom that develops in the story of creation in Genesis 1. If the first pillar is seen in the roots and foundations of all creation, then we can understand that there are universal elements to all of creation. These can be certain components such as molecules and atoms that are found in everything. While these elements may be different in every living creature, all creatures consist of cells that provide for all life. Mansoor comments:

The microcosm, like the macrocosm, reveals a duality of spirit and matter. The soul in man finds its parallel in motion, inherent in every composite thing in the universe. Both can be inferred only by reason. The understanding is a bridge between the material and the spiritual.³⁹

Mansoor, like Bahya, argues that the methods of reflection on creation include an understanding of the small features of creation in addition to large features of creation. The spiritual aspects of the soul are congruent to the material aspects of nature. One can discover these congruencies through meditations on creation.

Bahya then moves from the roots of all creation to the human species, created on the sixth day of creation (Genesis 1:28). The human species was given dominion over the fish, the birds and every living creature. Human beings are the highest forms of intelligence found on earth. Bahya's pillars are beginning to move in reverse order of creation from the most dominant creations to that which has a lower level of dominance. Therefore the second and third pillars involve the human species and the unique levels of intelligence that pertain to human beings.

Working in reverse order on the sixth and fifth days, God created the land animals and the creatures of the sea and air. Bahya is concerned with their various forms and shapes, their varying behaviors, uses and advantages to the world. Reflection on the

³⁸ Feldman, p.63

³⁹ Mansoor, Translator's introduction, p. 44

fourth pillar allows a person to move from the self to the other. Establishing this order not only uses creation in reverse, it also requires a person to understand more than just the self. One can begin by understanding oneself and one's role in the world, but when one seeks to understand more than just the self and considers other living creatures one can gain further knowledge of God's wisdom in the world.

We recall the Tsunami of Southeast Asia in December of 2004. The tragedy of human loss was devastating. Many estimated the death toll to be approaching and perhaps even crossing the 200,000 mark. Humans were caught on the beaches and in low elevation areas that were inundated by enormous levels of water. Animals, on the other hand, had a keen sense to the fact that this disaster was approaching. As a result, many animals were able to escape to higher elevations and were spared a loss of life.

Bahya continues to examine creation in reverse order, when he considers the third day in which the dry land containing minerals, and the plant life were created. The next pillar emphasizes the understanding of the uses of the natural world. People all over the world use plants for their daily benefit. Meditation on the uses of plants and minerals can help us understand their importance in the world. We can also meditate on them to understand the basic pieces that comprise them. Dr. Gabe Goldman, director of environmental education at Brandeis Bardine Institute in Simi Valley, CA offers a variety of uses for the different plants we find in nature. When he takes a group on a nature walk, he points out various plants and explains how he has used their leaves or juices for his benefit. His belief is that every plant in nature was put here for some purpose. We have to be curious and try different things for different reasons. He teaches that juices from a particular cactus are good for sunburn, while other juices sting the skin when

applied to it. His philosophy is that a person will never learn unless he or she tries something new. When we use aloe to heal sunburn or take medicine for a cold, we can find a new appreciation of the fact that they come from the natural world.

In the final two pillars Bahya transitions from reflection on the "other" to contemplation on the forces that guide the world. The first level of these forces is an understanding of the sciences, arts and professions that are used for a person's interests and that help a person make a living. The sixth pillar of reflection encourages us to take a different look at how the natural world affects our livelihood. The sets of wisdom - the sciences, the arts, and our professions - must stem from God if they are pillars for reflection. What does it mean to understand our professions and the sciences in this light? Beginning with the sciences, we understand that the world has a natural order and math and science are used to help us understand and analyze that order. These are advanced forms of reflection that lead a person to a different understanding of the world. If we think that our professions have divine roots, we learn that there is always a higher purpose to what we are doing with our lives. We must search out the ways that God's wisdom manifests itself in our professions and using this wisdom, we must reflect on how God influences us to act in the world.

The final pillar is a more specific pillar which directs us to consider Torah and God's laws. The mitzvot and the laws of the Torah provide us with the proper path to God's service. Through this seventh pillar of meditation, we find the proper path towards serving God. The pillars move from an understanding of the self, to the animals, to the plants, to natural forces and conclude with a Jewish way of understanding the world. The layers are more complex for the human mind as reflection moves from pillar to pillar.

These layers are ultimately enriched with more meaning and a deeper understanding of God's wisdom in the world.⁴⁰

The first two gates encourage us to build a relationship with God. The relationship that we build with can make our preparations for the High Holy Days more meaningful. The reflection upon the aspects of creation and the pillars of wisdom presented by Bahya in this Gate mirror our prayers on the High Holy Days. These prayers and reflections, in which we take part, echo our relationship with God.

Perhaps there is no better prayer that explores our relationship with God than *Avinu Malkeinu*. The words of *Avinu Malkeinu* inform us that God relates to us in two ways. God both cares for us like a parent and rules over and judges us like a monarch would. The Talmud ascribes the efficacy of the prayer to the forgiving nature of Rabbi Akiba. The formula is unique, because it combines what is seen as two contradictory features, that of a parent who is loving and accepting, and that of a sovereign who is usually seen as stern and demanding. God is both loving and demanding. Therefore, we can appeal to God for love, understanding and forgiveness. The specific list of statements in *Avinu Malkeinu* that now appears in the High Holy Day Machzor has undergone many changes over the centuries, but it retains the core, the beautiful formula devised by Akiba for addressing God.⁴¹

Reflection upon creation can allow God's dual role of parent and ruler to impact the way we view God's wisdom in the world. Certain aspects of creation provide evidence for God's sovereignty. The natural order of the sciences demonstrates how

⁴⁰ In chapter 5 of Gate Two, Bahya describes the methods of meditation upon creation. The theory behind this thinking presented above is in line with Bahya's methodology of Chapter 5. These methods are a critical part of the guide pages that appear at the conclusion of this section.

⁴¹ Hammer, p.68

rules are not broken in nature. This is evidence of a stern and sovereign God in which the world is established in a set way. God can also be seen as a ruler through the technical ways in which the world was created. Kings and queens want things to be in a certain order. Kings and queens give an order and their servants comply with those orders speak and something happens. God spoke the world into being and created order. This order leads a person to understand the intricate details of the world. God can be seen as a parent when we compare God's nature to the care a parent gives a child. We can also see the innate love that a mother gives her offspring in both human beings and animals. Certain aspects of the way human beings operate in the world are reflected in the way parents teach their children to live in the world. The seventh pillar speaks of the Torah and the laws of the world. A parent teaches a child to carry on the traditions that are presented in the Torah. God is the loving parent that models a caring approach to teaching children.

Reflection upon the seven pillars of God's wisdom in the world can lead to a deeper understanding of how God works in the world. A more meaningful relationship with God results from this reflection and this deeper relationship leads to the next Gate, entitled "service to God".

Chapter 3: Gate Three – Serving God

The text of The Duties of the Heart transitions from Gate two, when Bahya explained the importance of understanding God's role in the world through reflection on God's creations, to Gate three which highlights the ways in which Jews are obligated to serve God. Bahya moves in this direction in order to show that human beings must reciprocate God's gracious actions. After a person has reflected on the greatest aspects of creation and has arrived at an understanding of God's hand in creation, he must return the favor that God bestowed on all of humankind. The placement of this third Gate, after the opening Gates on creation, informs the reader that service to God is a way to show gratitude for God's creations.⁴²

Bahya begins to undertake the problem of evil in this chapter as well. Mansoor explains, as we will see later in a close analysis of the text that "evil exists to activate man's potential. Bahya is not interested in the philosophical aspect of the problem of evil, but only in those aspects which are pertinent to ethics. The question of morals is a fundamental one for him, and it dominates all aspects of his discussion."⁴³ The focus of our text study will look at the service of God out of gratitude, the motivation behind serving God, and the concepts of good and evil.

Bahya compares the idea of serving God out of gratitude to the ways humans do favors for one another. Performing favors for other people is a wonderful way to show gratitude. This demonstration of appreciation should not be reserved for people alone, one can be grateful to God as well. According to Bahya there are five ways in which human beings do favors for one another: 1) favors done by a parent for a child; 2) those

⁴² Feldman p. 103

⁴³ Mansoor, p. 49

done by a master for a slave; 3) those done by the wealthy for the poor; 4) favors done by one person for another for the sake of praise; 5) the favors done by the powerful for the sake of the weak, out of pity and compassion. Bahya examines these actions and then shifts to explain the necessity for service to God.

In the first chapter of this Gate Bahya explains that there are two aspects of service to God. The first is:

A person is obligated to serve Adonai by way of reason and discernment, there is a long time between the bestowing of God's goodness on a person and when that person understands and discerns what is obligated upon him for God's service. There must be encouragement to show a person his obligations and his faith in order to complete the obligation of service to God, so that one will not be left without direction until that person comes to understand this service on his own. This encouragement is of two kinds, the first comes from the mind, and is rooted in discernment, and is formed for a person from his creation at birth. The second is acquired by way of tradition, this tradition is Torah, that the Prophet brought to humankind to teach them the way of this service that is obligatory upon them.⁴⁴

Bahya lays out in this text the reason for encouraging someone to serve God. While it is preferable for a person to understand the need for serving God on her own, Bahya realizes that a person may need the encouragement of others. As indicated by Bahya, there is a long time between the bestowal of God's goodness on a person at birth and the time when someone is cognitively ready to understand the need for serving God. Therefore, people are obligated to arouse those who do not yet understand to serve God.

The process of understanding occurs through education. Parents educate their children to live in the world. Parental guidance to a child is crucial to the way a child sees the world. Children begin to develop a conscience and hear their parents' voices persuading and guiding them to act in certain ways. Jewish education is different than secular education, however. When parents teach their children aspects of their religion,

⁴⁴ Hebrew Translation – Gate Three, Chapter 1, Hebrew volume I, p. 203

they are teaching about ways to serve God. Children serve God when they bring bring *tzedakah* money to religious school. A child would not necessarily come to practice giving *tzedakah* through her own discovery, she is taught to bring *tzedakah* money by her teacher and her parents. After years of making the giving of *tzedakah* a habit, the child can investigate the moral reasons behind it and the scriptural references supporting her obligation to do it.

Bahya recognizes that there are two ways in which a person can be encouraged to serve God. The first happens by way of birth. Feldman comments that the concept of serving God only forms at birth if the person is lucky enough to be born with it.⁴⁵ If this is not the case then the instructions laid out in Torah and Jewish tradition are enough to encourage God's service.

Bahya also teaches that a person is obligated to serve God by way of reason and discernment. This concept fits into the broader scale of ethical development because it requires the use of knowledge when deciding to serve God. Serving God can be considered moral behavior. As mentioned earlier, moral behavior is grounded in a chosen set of values. Each individual uses reason and discernment to decide those values. A person also examines his core set of values and uses reason to determine what should be his proper conduct. Maimonides, like Bahya, encouraged people to serve God out of love rather than fear. However, both agree that service to God out of fear is a universal starting point. Rambam states:

When one teaches children...and common people, one only teaches them to serve out of fear in order to receive a reward. As their knowledge grows and they become wise [teachers] reveal for them the secret slowly that one should study Torah even though that study may not be for the sake of God, because out of this

⁴⁵ Feldman, p. 115

study comes service to God. They should become accustomed to this concept gradually until they grasp it and know it and begin serving God out of love.⁴⁶

Rambam supports Bahya's claim that one must be taught at first to serve God out of fear. When a person's knowledge increases she can learn to serve God out of love. Therefore both Rambam and Bahya would agree that education is essential for the ideal service of God.

According to Bahya there are two types of persuasion that cause people to serve God. The first is persuasion of the mind, which results in coming to serve God after serious reflection on one's worldly experiences. The second type of persuasion grows out of Torah study, which is the education mentioned earlier. What follows in the third chapter of this Gate, is a discussion comparing the advantages of persuasion to serve God by the mind and the factors that necessitate the persuasion to serve God because Torah study. Both are required and Bahya justifies why persuasion of the mind is better. The following are three of the seven reasons that Bahya gives for the benefits of serving God based on the mind.

[One reason is that] when service comes from Torah alone, that which will be visible as a result of good works done by the body may become greater than the belief in the service of God, which is hidden in the heart. The service that comes from the mind, which is hidden inside, is many times greater than that which is shown by the body.⁴⁷

In this explanation Bahya draws on the key aspect of his work. As Bahya established in his introduction to The Duties of the Heart, there is a significant difference between internal and external obligations. As we can see in this text, Bahya explains that service of God is better when it develops from one's mind. This is an example of

⁴⁶ Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 10:5

⁴⁷ Hebrew Translation, Gate Three – Chapter three, p. 210

Bahya's preference to the internal obligations. While still recognizing the importance of the duties of the body, namely actions that are prescribed in Torah, he explains that it is critical to come to serve God through the desire to do so based on one's own inclination. While service to God based on Torah study, is acceptable, it is not optimal.

Bahya further explains the advantages of the persuasions of the mind by discussing the limitations of the Torah:

[A second reason is that] the mitzvot of the Torah are finite in number, there are 613, but mitzvot imposed by the mind are limitless, because everyday a person comes to know more of them, the more one adds discernment and understands God's goodness, power and sovereignty, the more that person becomes humble before God.⁴⁸

Bahya's reasoning here is based on the fact that the mitzvot mentioned in the Torah can be counted. One can only perform these mitzvot if one sits and learns them and then acts to do them. It is interesting that Bahya critiques the mitzvot in this way. He realizes that a person can only come to practice a finite number of mitzvot after learning them from scripture. Bahya favors a path that allows a person to discover what the proper course of action should be. One should not understand this to mean that Bahya is dismissing the importance of the commandments.⁴⁹ However, one should understand that Bahya is focusing on the importance of personal reflections in serving God. These reflections should be based on encounters with people. When we give *tzedakah*, do we do it because we are commanded to do so in the Torah, or do we reflect on another person's suffering and as a result choose to help that person? Bahya's view of Torah would seem to support the idea that all the mitzvot serve the good of humanity. The realization of the obligations of Torah can come from one's own reflection on the world. The ideal way to

⁴⁸ Hebrew Translation, Gate Three – Chapter three, p. 212

⁴⁹ This will be apparent when we examine the text supporting the importance of the service of God based on the reasoning of the Torah.

serve God occurs when this reflection is combined with an understanding of the Torah. It is both important to give *tzedakah* because of the Torah's command to give *tzedakah*, and because humanity needs us to do it.⁵⁰

Bahya returns to the central concept of the ethical treatise, internal versus external actions.

[A third reason is that] when serving God comes from Torah alone, a person cannot be sure that he will not slip, the strength of desire is always on the lookout, looking for moments of neglect. But the service based on the discernment of the mind, is safe from all slips and errors, because the soul only comes to this service after the destruction of bodily desires, and after the mind is victorious over them and uses them according to its will. Therefore, service based on the mind is protected from error, as it is written: all sins shall not befall the righteous.⁵¹

The key point here is that a person may miss the mark when the exhortation to act comes solely from the Torah. The *yetzer hara* can be a strong opposing force when a person chooses to do something based on textual prescription. It is important for the mind to overcome the negative forces that lead to neglect of these prescriptions. The conscious thoughts of the mind produce a powerful force that causes a person to remain upright. As a result of the use of the mind, a person's desires to detract from proper actions will cease. Inclination to act is therefore better developed from a cognitive and reflective process in which the mind is accustomed to weigh a person's outcomes.

Coming to serve God through mental persuasion may seem like a difficult process. It is important to keep in mind that Bahya is not eliminating Torah and the written law from guiding one's approach to conduct. The fact that the support for this

⁵⁰ It is possible to criticize Bahya's methodology as being universal rather than particular to Judaism. However Bahya's support for this concept comes from Psalm 119:18, 33, 96 "Open your eyes that I may glean wondrous things from your Torah...Give me understanding that I may keep the Torah with my heart." The support from the Tanakh demonstrates how Bahya's teaching is Jewish. It also demonstrates that Bahya is concerned with Torah and one's own understanding of Torah.

⁵¹ Hebrew Translation, Gate Three – Chapter three, p. 214

thinking comes from written scripture demonstrates Bahya's strong commitment to the scripture. Bahya wants a person to develop his own moral conduct by understanding what is written in Torah, reflecting on it and deciding how to act on it. It is possible for a person to read what the Torah teaches and act in accordance with it.

After Bahya has explained the different advantages to serving God out of one's own persuasion, Bahya explains the various advantages of serving God using Torah as a motivation. Bahya realizes the importance of the influence of Torah when serving God and now transitions to explain the benefits of Torah study.

The inclination of the mind does not define the obligations of acts of service to God such as prayer, fasting, *tzedakah*, acts of loving kindness. A person cannot come to know the terms of punishment due to him from [failing to serve God], one learns this through Torah study and the teachings of the Prophets.⁵²

Here, Bahya establishes a critical reason for the importance of Torah. Torah defines for us the proper actions that a Jew needs to perform. These actions include prayer, fasting, giving *tzedakah* and performing acts of loving kindness. Bahya explains that a person would not necessarily come to the knowledge of the importance of these actions on his own. Through the study of Torah a person arrives at a certain, minimal level of knowledge.

The use of the Torah also serves as an introduction for someone to be inspired to serve God by persuasion of the mind. A Jew studies Torah and learns to practice its teachings from the time she is very little. Study represents the initial step of service to God. Persuasion of the mind follows persuasion by Torah, as Bahya explains in the following text:

Exhortation by Torah is an introduction to exhortation by the mind, and it is a source for reproof of the mind. A person needs it in his youth for education and

⁵² Hebrew Translation, Gate Three – Chapter three, p. 217

customs to overcome his desires until his mind strengthens. The same is true for women and weak-minded among men that do not hear the customs of the mind, because the connection between them and the mind is simple. They need a moderate rule, one that is not too difficult to grasp. This is the reason for the establishment of Torah on two levels: fear of punishment and wish for reward.⁵³

Torah is the initial source of all education. As a youth, a person needs to focus on learning in order to fully understand the essential principles of living. Torah provides a road map to the proper path of living. The mitzvot, prayer, and acts of loving kindness are all included in this road map.

Bahya explains that a person is not expected to immediately know the proper way for acting in the world at birth. A person is expected to learn and mature. Once a person has reached maturity, she can reflect on the various ways to act in the world. This process is similar to the understanding of creation and the reflection on creation mentioned in Gates One and Two. Here, the use of the mind allows a person to reflect on the essential aspects of Torah. When a person reflects on her own actions she can explain how her actions are connected to a specific mitzvah. As a result, the body of actions that are considered mitzvot in the Torah are expanded by reflection and contemplation of them.

In addition to the concerns mentioned by Bahya regarding the source of the exhortation to act by influence of Torah or by coercion of the mind, Bahya is also concerned with the concept of good and evil. Actions are distinguished as commandments or prohibitions.

Therefore humankind's actions are divided into good and evil. And the intelligent person, is one that reflects on his actions before doing them, examining them in his thoughts and his discernment, and choosing the good ones and leaving the rest aside, as David said: I considered my ways, and returned my feet to your

⁵³ Hebrew Translation, Gate Three – Chapter three, p. 219-220

testimonies. I hurried, and did not delay to observe your commandments. (Psalm 119:59-60)⁵⁴

The prooftext used here reminds us of Bahya's main point. The internal process helps to determine a person's actions. The heart and the mind affect the way a person acts in the world. The psalmist⁵⁵ states here that reflection on a person's actions encourages a return to proper actions as prescribed by God. This reflection matches the entire process of *teshuvah* that a person must undertake during the month of Elul. Reflective practices allow a person to weigh his actions. Deciding between good and evil persuades a person to act in the proper way.

I have heard parents say to their children, "think before you act." The lesson that parents are trying to teach their children matches Bahya's lesson here. The importance of a thought process before acting allows a person to fully think out what he will do and what the consequences of his actions will be. A person can also reflect on the moral and ethical implications of his actions. Parents would want to teach their children the importance of thinking before acting in order to ensure that their children will think carefully before they act. Without this upbringing, it is likely that a person will react using mental reflexes. When the body moves because of a reflex action, a person does not have control over that limb. A person would have to take responsibility for that involuntary action even though he did not have control over it. However, when a person acts using the reflective process, she considers the mitzvot of the Torah and the moral

⁵⁴ Hebrew Translation, Gate Three – Chapter three, p. 233

⁵⁵ Bahya attributes authorship of the psalm cited here to David. Traditionally, King David is said to have written many of the psalms because of the pre-script of many psalms that say "A psalm of David." Using the term, "the psalmist" reflects modern biblical scholarship which reflects the idea that another author most likely crafted the poetry of the Psalms.

implications of those mitzvot. Therefore the reflective process inclines a person to act in a good way rather than an evil way.

In this Gate we looked critically at the way a person serves God. During the month of Elul and on Rosh Hashanah we find a similar call to the reflective process prescribed by this Gate when we hear the sound of the shofar. Each time the Shofar is sounded, the congregation is filled with a sense of awe as the person blowing that Shofar creates a divinely inspired sound. As Rambam explains in the Laws of Repentance:

Even though blowing Shofar is a decree of Torah, there is a hint in it saying: Awake you slumberers from your sleep. Inspect your deeds, return in repentance and remember your creator.⁵⁶

Maimonides reminds us that the sound of the Shofar calls upon us to reflect on our actions and remember God.⁵⁷ The shofar reminds that it is once again time to get in the habit of considering our actions and the affect that our actions have on other people. When a person is awake, according to Maimonides, he is carefully reflecting on his actions. As mentioned in Psalm 119, a person must inspect and reflect in his actions and return to God's ways.

Malchuyot, Zichronot and Shofarot (sovereignty, remembrance and revelation) are the three themes of the shofar service on Rosh Hashanah morning.⁵⁸ The readings that are used to introduce the sounding of the Shofar in the Shofarot section refer to the giving of Torah at Sinai. As we can see, the recollection of Sinai here provides a framework for the sounding of the shofar:

You were revealed in a cloud of Your glory to Your Holy people to speak with them. From the heavens they heard Your voice, and revealed Yourself to them in

⁵⁶ Hilchot Teshuvah, Rambam, 3:4

⁵⁷ This text was analyzed more critically in the opening chapter.

⁵⁸ For a further explanation of each of these themes, see Entering the High Holy Days by Reuven Hammer p. I NEED TO INSERT THE PAGE NUMBERS

thick clouds of purity. Also all the world trembled before You, during Your revelation on Mount Sinai to teach your people Torah and commandments. You made them hear the majesty of Your voice and Your holy utterances from fiery flames.⁵⁹

The liturgy reflected in the shofarot section teaches us the importance of Torah. Through the giving of Torah at Sinai, the Israelites were able to stand and witness God teaching the proper way to act. The liturgy also illustrates that God wanted the people to hear God's voice and God's holy utterances. This entire process of revelation occurs to us each time we reflect on our actions. Inspiration by Torah and inspiration by reflection on God's holy voice persuade a person to serve God. As a person listens to the Shofar, the sounds of *tekia*, *shevarim* and *teruah* inspire a person to remember how important it is to reflect on his actions. Each time a person reflects on his actions he is capable of recalling the teachings of Torah and consequently can remember the revelation of Torah. As a person decides the implications of his actions he hears God's voice. God's voice is heard when he decides if his actions are good or evil.

A person's service to God is a critical piece of the preparation for the High Holy Days. It involves a deep reflective process that requires every person to consider the reasons for serving God. The ultimate purpose of this process is to examine whether a person has served God or not. As a person thinks about her actions, she becomes more aware of the effects of those actions. Self-awareness of one's actions can help a person to be inspired to serve God. Such awareness is not limited to the month of Elul. One should continue to be in the habit of reflecting throughout the year. As the calendar cycles through each year, she can think more and more critically about how she acts in

⁵⁹ Art Scroll Machzor: Rosh Hashanah p. 516-517

the world. As her reflections become deeper year after year, she can grow to serve God in the way that Bahya prescribes.

Chapter 4: Gate Four – Trust in God

The process of gaining trust in another person is a significant piece of any relationship. In Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey explains the process of building trust through the metaphor of the “Emotional Bank Account.”

An Emotional Bank Account is a metaphor that describes the amount of trust that’s been built up in a relationship. It’s the feeling of safeness you have with another human being. If I make deposits into an Emotional Bank Account with you through courtesy, kindness honesty, and keeping my commitment to you I build up my reserve. Your trust in me becomes higher, and I can call upon that trust many times if I need to. I can even make mistakes and that trust level, that emotional reserve will compensate for it.⁶⁰

Gaining trust in another person is a two way street. There is a bit of give and take from both parties involved. As we examined the previous three Gates, we looked into building this trust. Now we look forward into Bahya’s fourth Gate, we see how the concept of trust is essential to building a relationship with God.

In the first two Gates Bahya focused on the way in which God continually demonstrates divine graces to humankind. Each act of human meditation on creation reveals deeper secrets of God’s involvement in the world. Every time we reflect on God’s role in the world we see how God makes deposits in our “emotional bank accounts.” Gate three focused on us making deposits in our bank accounts with God. We learned of the importance of serving God and how we show our faith in God. Any time we err we can use the reserves to seek forgiveness. The concept of trust is a key piece to our relationship with God. There is a congruency between the concepts of trust, forgiveness and moral improvement. If we feel that we can trust God, it is possible to feel that God will be more willing to grant us forgiveness when we make mistakes.

⁶⁰ Covey, Stephen R. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Free Press: NY, 1989, p.188.

God's willingness to forgive directly affects our moral and ethical improvement because we will be more willing to seek forgiveness and to work at changing our actions. If we thought that God was not willing to pardon us, then we might never ask for forgiveness and nor try to improve our actions. Improving our actions is based on the guidance of Torah and reflections on our own actions.

The method that Bahya takes in this chapter is one that is evident throughout rabbinic tradition. This method is known as *kal v'chomer*. In the comparison of two cases – a lenient case and a strict case – when we apply a concept to the lenient case, the concept must also apply to the strict case. In our case here, the lenient case refers to a human being while the strict case refers to God. Bahya explains that if a person has trusting qualities, then all the more so, God must have trusting qualities. There are seven reasons that Bahya offers to show why a person can trust another person. They are:

1. Mercy, compassion, and love. Because when a person knows that his friend has mercy and compassion for him, he trusts him and relies on him for all of his affairs.
2. A person will know that because of his love for [you], he will not desert you and will not be lazy in addressing your needs. But he knows that he is determined and consistent to help you. If all this is not clear to him, you will not have full trust in him, because you know of his neglect and delay in caring for your needs. When he is committed to trust and these two qualities, great compassion and attention to your matters, your trust him endlessly.
3. This person is strong, and it is impossible for him to be overcome by your needs. No one can prevent him from fulfilling the requests of those who trust him. Even if he were weak, one would not trust in him, even though it is clear that he has mercy and interest, because he would be prevented from carrying out certain things, if he is a combination of the three matters, trust in him is more appropriate.
4. He knows which matters are good for you, both inwardly and outwardly. If he does not know all of this, you should not trust him, when the three matters above are combined and he knows what is good for you he is able to do it, and if he does it while having compassion for you, trust in him is strengthened.
5. You must be under his care from birth, through childhood, youth, maturity and old age to the end of days. When all this is clear to him, you may trust him...all of this strengthens your trust in him.
6. He gives everything to your hand, so that alone no one is able to harm him or benefit him, neither do good to him or guard him from evil, this like a slave in captivity, when he is in the authority of his master.

When a person is under the rule of the one whom he trusts, it is more fitting to trust him. 7. You trust him because of his endless giving and compassion, and this giving and compassion continues, is not cut off and does not end, whether you deserve the giving or not. When all this is present in one person, it is appropriate to trust in him.⁶¹

Bahya notes that a person could trust another person who has demonstrated any of these qualities. As we reflect on the idea of the "Emotional Bank Account," we observe how such a person would be trusted. However, Bahya adds a second layer to his thinking.

Bahya notes that it is impossible for a person to possess these seven qualities at the same time. In his justification for the necessity to trust God, Bahya states the following:

When we look for these seven conditions, we do not find them all fulfilled in God's creations, we find all of them fulfilled in the Creator. God is merciful towards his creatures as it is said: "Adonai is full of compassion, and gracious, slow to anger, and great in compassion" (Ps 103:8); "And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!" (Jonah 4:11); "See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!" (Ps 121:4); "Wise of heart and mighty in power— Who ever challenged Him and came out whole?" (Job 9:4); "Yours, Adonai, are greatness, might, splendor, triumph, and majesty—yes, all that is in heaven and on earth; to You, Adonai, belong kingship and preeminence above all." (I Chron. 29:11); "Your God Adonai is in your midst, A warrior who brings triumph. He will rejoice over you and be glad, He will shout over you with jubilation. He will soothe with His love." (Zeph 3:17); "While yet unborn, I depended on You; in the womb of my mother, You were my support; I sing Your praises always." (Ps. 71:6).⁶²

It is critical for Bahya to prove that we can find all of these attributes in God at the same time. The attributes presented here reflect the strength of the support for trusting in God. God does all of these things and therefore we should keep our faith and our trust in God. This trust must be stronger than any trust given to a human being.

As we look towards the concept of moral improvement and the process of preparation for the High Holy Days we should become more aware of that we can indeed

⁶¹ Hebrew Translation – Gate Four, Chapter 2, Hebrew Volume I, p. 320-322

⁶² Hebrew Translation – Gate Four, Chapter 2, Hebrew Volume I, p. 322-323

trust God. When we engage in the process of introspection to prepare for the High Holy Days and we examine our actions, we will find times when we missed the mark. If we know that we can trust God because of God's great compassion for us, then it will be easier for us to acknowledge our wrongdoing, and then we might be more inclined to correct it. Believing that God loves us is an essential requirement because we can be confident that God will not abandon us.⁶³

As we look towards improving ourselves, we know that God will be with us and support us in our journey. Deep trust in another person requires strong and intimate knowledge of the other person. Spending time reflecting on God's graces in the world can enable us to know God and help us to build a better relationship with God. This will strengthen our relationship and as a result, we will be more inclined to be critical of our own actions. If we trust that God will support us, it will be easier to change. The process of our moral improvement is only benefited by our trust in God. It is easier to change our ethics, our values and our actions when we feel that God will support us.

Bahya's use of the proof text from Jonah here is critical for our understanding of this Gate's implications for the High Holy Days. The book of Jonah is the *haftarah* reading on Yom Kippur afternoon. One of its key instructions is that we should never run away from God. Another lesson is that God accepts those who repent. Since Jonah went and taught the people of Nineveh to repent for their sins, they were not destroyed. By using Jonah as a proof text here, we learn that God is a compassionate God who is supportive at all times. This attribute represents a God that we know we can trust. Even during Nineveh's great evil, God monitored them and as a result, sent a prophet to correct

⁶³ Feldman, p. 182

their ways. The people of Nineveh are God's creations and therefore, we learn that God will always care for God's creations.

In order to show the importance of trust in God, Bahya examines the differences between a person who trusts in God and a person who does not.

The one who trusts in God accepts God's judgment in all matters and thanks God for the good and the bad, as it is written: "Adonai has given and Adonai has taken away, blessed be the name of God." (Job 1:21) As it is also written: I will sing of God's compassion and God's judgment (Ps. 101:1), our sages taught that this meant, "If I sing of God's kindness and if I sing of God's judgment, they said, a person is obligated to bless the bad in the same way he blesses the good." (Brachot 54a, 60b) And if a person does not trust in God, he praises himself for the good as it is written, "The wicked one boasts about the desires of his soul; the grasping man reviles and scorns Adonai." (Ps. 10:3) and blames God for the bad as it is written, "And he shall go about in it wretched and hungry; and when he is hungry, he shall rage and revolt against his king and his divine beings. He may turn his face upward." (Isa. 8:21)⁶⁴

There is a clear difference between the one who only praises what is good and someone who takes in both good and bad. Bahya demonstrates that Job is an example of a person who accepts what happens to him, whether it is good or bad. Job's statement in Job 1:21 is the major statement of theology for Job in the entire book. Job understands that God is a powerful God who both gives and takes away. Through this statement Job maintains his faith with God. He has experienced great loss after the death of his family and the destruction of his possessions. However, Job blesses and praises God during both good times and evil times. Through Job's trust, we learn how important it is for us to trust God. Job is the quintessential biblical figure who has experienced great loss. Through this example a person can realize how important it is to maintain trust in God during both good times and bad times.

The one who trusts in God has a restful soul and a peaceful heart in terms of God's judgments, knowing that [the judgments] are given by the Creator for his,

⁶⁴ Hebrew Translation – Gate Four, Chapter 5, Hebrew Volume I, p. 392

[the one who trusts in God], good in this world and the next, as David said: Wait for God oh my soul, because my hope comes from God. (Ps. 62:6). The one who does not trust in God is in constant sadness and long worry and mourning and sadness, concerning whether things are good or bad. When things are good, he is not satisfied with his situation, wanting more and desiring to increase and augment. When things are bad, he wants an end to it, which is against his desires and his nature and his traits. Thus said the wise: "All the days of the poor are evil; but he that is of a good heart has a continual feast." (Prov. 15:15)⁶⁵

This is reminiscent of the saying in Pirke Avot 4:1, "Who is rich? The one who is happy with what he has." This statement seems to parallel what Bahya is teaching here. It is important for a person to be contented in his situation and not become bogged down with desires. This can only happen if trust in God becomes the focal point of internal thought. Trusting God is a key component to living life ethically, according to Bahya.

People may find themselves in situations when they can get caught up in material desires. As Bahya points out people can want more when times are good and want an end to a situation when it is going bad. This focus on the materialistic aspect of the situation can blind an individual. When a person thinks about the causes of that situation, it is possible for him to become blind to what is actually happening. Bahya wants every person to maintain a point of focus here, that focus should be on God, because God is the ultimate cause of everything.

For the one who trusts God, when there is something left of his sustenance, and he spends it on what would satisfy God with a generous soul and a good heart...However, the one who does not trust in God, does not see the world and all that is in it as enough to sustain him and support his needs, he saves money, and does not pay his obligation to the Creator, and the his obligations to his fellow man, he does not feel it until his money is lost or passes to others.⁶⁶

The difference here lies in the way a person thinks and practices. We again return to this critical and recurring theme presented in Bahya's work. The idea that one should

⁶⁵ Hebrew Translation – Gate Four, Chapter 5, Hebrew Volume 1, p. 392-393

⁶⁶ Hebrew Translation – Gate Four, Chapter 2, Hebrew Volume 1, p. 394-395

contemplate the importance of God and give the remainder of his daily sustenance to God shows that the person is thinking unselfishly. The person does not want to focus on solely on his own possessions or needs. The one who does not trust in God saves money for the sole purpose of spending it. This person would then exclude the importance of the community or anything that is beyond his self-concern. This person ignores every external obligation.

When we apply these aspects to the season of preparation and transformation during the month of Elul we see the importance of focusing on external concerns. These concerns center on God. When we enter the 10 days of awe, we seek a favorable judgment. However the person who trusts in God is confident in his actions and in his moral processing.

Part of the process of the month of Elul is to embark on a reflective journey that builds trust in God. While this process of building trust is not easy, we are reminded of the conclusion of Psalm 27. The last verse of the psalm tells us to hope in Adonai. This hope should take place regardless of trepidation or nerves in the face of judgment. The one who trusts Adonai is at peace while the one who does not is in constant worry over every situation. The third difference mentioned here focuses on the external aspects of this trust and requires us to think about the way we act in the world. Bahya wants every person to know that trust in God is an important part of the journey towards moral improvement. It provides a person with direction and the trust that God will support him throughout this journey.

As we keep this idea of trust in mind, we look now towards the liturgy of the High Holy Day season and we see great similarities in the Bahya's writing to the statement of

the Thirteen Attributes⁶⁷. This statement is the central part of the *Selichot* service with different *piyyutim* constructed around the themes of this statement. This statement is also uttered before the open ark during the Torah service on Rosh Hashanah.

The verses that comprise this statement are found in the book of Exodus. They appear at a pivotal point in the history of the Jewish people, after the people built the Golden Calf. The people had not trusted God's existence and as a result built themselves a Golden Calf to be their God. Moses had thrown the two tablets of God's law in anger, shattering them. After Moses had carved the second set of tablets God instructed Moses about God's attributes. These attributes teach Moses that God can always be trusted.

Adonai, Adonai El rachum v'chanun, erech apayim v'rav chesed v'emet, notzeir chesed l'alafim nosei avon v'fesha, v'chata-ah v'nakeh.

Adonai, Adonai, God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth, extending kindness to the thousandth generation forgiving, iniquity, transgression and sin. (Ex: 34:6-7)

The Thirteen attributes refer to words or phrases in the above text. 1) Adonai: Adonai is merciful before one sins, 2) Adonai: God is merciful after the sinner has sinned. 3) El: The name denotes power. 4) Rahum: God is compassionate. 5) v'chanun: God is gracious. 6) Erech apayim: God is slow to anger. 7) v'rav chesed: God is abundant in kindness. 8) v'emet: God never goes back on God's word. 9) Notzeir chesed l'alafim: God maintains kindness to the thousandth generation. 10) Nosei avon: God forgives premeditated sins. 11) vafesha: Sins committed in rebellion. 12) v'chata-ah: God

⁶⁷ The thirteen attributes refer to the thirteen attributes of mercy, the prayer that God taught Moses after Israel worshipped the Golden Calf. Through the utterance of these thirteen attributes, God showed Moses that it is never too late for prayer and repentance. God made a divine covenant with him that the prayerful, repentant recitation of the thirteen attributes of mercy would never be turned back unanswered. Art Scroll Machzor: Rosh Hashanah, p. 392.

forgives sins committed carelessly. 13) v'nakeh: God wipes away the sins of those who repent.⁶⁸ We see how these words parallel Bahya's words.

Bahya speaks of mercy and compassion, and love for another. In the context of the High Holy Days, the Talmud teaches us that God will always be open to the process of repentance. (Rosh Hashanah 17b)⁶⁹ Hammer also explains that the person who sins is compared to the people of Israel at the time of the Golden Calf. Just as the incident concluded with God's forgiveness, so, too, the individual who confesses can expect God's forgiveness.⁷⁰ As we compare the use of the Thirteen Attributes on the High Holy Days to trusting God we find that the concept of trust is critical to the process of repentance. The people of Israel can trust that God will forgive. Individuals must also trust that God will be with them and support them throughout their lives.

The process of preparation and transformation leading up to the High Holy Days requires us to make deposits in God's "emotional bank account." Throughout the year we drain the reserves of that bank account when we go astray. It is during this season, when we are reminded to trust God in our path towards complete repentance and ethical transformation that we deposit what we withdrew during the year. When we trust God during the process of reflection on our actions and our values, and when we make changes to those values, we build a deep trusting relationship. This process is a sign of trusting God because it demonstrates our faith in God and the importance of God's values in our lives.

⁶⁸ Arzt, Maz. Justice and Mercy. Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York, 1963, p. 127.
Art Scroll Machzor Rosh Hashanah, p. 393

⁶⁹ Hammer, p. 127

⁷⁰ Hammer p. 127

Chapter 5: Gate Five – Devotion to God

Much of the journey through the first four gates focuses on how God is the inspiration and direction of our actions. In the opening Gates we learned about God's way in the world and how we can detect God's presence in our midst. We have learned the importance of being grateful to God and we have also learned the importance of trusting God.⁷¹ We have learned that what happens in the world, both good and bad, depends ultimately on the Creator. Now, in this fifth Gate, Bahya builds on the previous Gates and demonstrates that we must consecrate our deeds to God alone.⁷² This Gate focuses on our inner consciousness as it discusses our intentions and God as the object of the devotion of all of our actions. If this inner consciousness is the focus of this Gate, then our mental conversations and internal struggles over good and evil certainly will also be a key focal point of the Gate.

A major theme in Jewish philosophy is the nature of the *yetzer hara* (the so-called evil inclination) which is discussed in the fifth chapter of our Gate...It seems somewhat illogical to refer to it as "evil inclination" when few of us are actually inclined toward outright evil, though we all have a *yetzer hara*. We find ourselves acting badly or mistakenly often enough to actually be more wrong than right...In our discussions, however, we must remember that we are referring to a *yetzer* meaning a "creative, formative urge" that is *ra* (i.e. harmful or to our detriment). Put simply, and in material, experiential terms, the phrase could be understood to mean "a very bad idea."⁷³

Feldman's explanation of the *yetzer hara* is helpful for setting up the framework for our study of this Gate. The decision making process that leads to every action usually involves a multitude of possibilities. We narrow down the possible outcomes in our mind and then ultimately choose to act on one of them. This decision making process usually

⁷¹ Feldman, p. 229

⁷² Mansoor, p. 53

⁷³ Feldman, p. 230-231

involves a battle between the *yetzer hatov* and *yetzer hara*. One force urges us to act in a good way, while the other urges us to act in a bad way.

Every action has a different intention, some are for the benefit of another human being, some are for the benefit of the self, and some are for the benefit of humanity. We should not remove these intentions from our minds when we act. However actions directed towards others should not be the objective of our actions. If one is motivated to act because of the influence of another person, that person's *yetzer hara* has the potential to be a strong influential force as well. As a result Bahya is teaching us in this Gate that we should direct our actions towards God alone and that God alone should influence us.⁷⁴

In the first chapter of this Gate, Bahya explains what it means to dedicate one's actions to God.

What does dedicating one's actions to God mean? It is the intention, outwardly and inwardly, of acts of service to God for God's sake, to act according to God's will alone, not according to the will of God's creations.⁷⁵

Bahya establishes two possibilities for acting in the world, we can act according to God's will and we can act according to the will of God's creations. The former builds on the concept of trust that was established in the preceding Gate. As we discussed in the previous chapter, it is impossible for a human being to fulfill every aspect of trustworthiness at the same time. God, however, fulfills each of these traits all at once. Therefore, it is God alone whom we should trust and to God alone we should devote all of our actions. It may be very difficult for us to understand such a concept because it would seem that Bahya is teaching us to abandon the needs of our fellow human beings.

⁷⁴ The premise of directing one's actions towards God will be explained throughout the chapter.

⁷⁵ Hebrew Translation, Gate Five – Chapter 1, Volume II, p. 8

This, however, is not the case. When we look at Genesis 1:27,⁷⁶ we learn the Jewish value that we are all created in the image of God (*b'tzelem Elohim*). This value reminds us that when we interact with other human beings, we need to act with a certain level of holiness because every human was made in the divine image and therefore is holy. It is important for us to consider how our actions towards others are in a sense actions towards God. The idea of *b'tzelem Elohim* reminds us of God's presence in every human being. Applying this core Jewish value to the intentions of our actions teaches us that we should never abandon the needs of other people. We also learn from Bahya that we should not solely rely on the needs of others for the basis of our actions, because other people are capable of negatively influencing the way we act. Bahya writes this caveat in order to demonstrate that human beings do not always act with good intentions in mind. Our own moral editing that comes from our own mental reflection is critical here. If someone wanted another person to destroy a factory because that factory was dumping waste in a neighborhood's drinking water, that person would be faced with a tough moral decision. On the one hand, that person could set fire to the factory to protect the drinking water by listening to the urges of one individual. On the other hand, that person would be destroying a place that offers jobs to many people and consequently many more lives could be ruined. The legal route that is established by society to help fight illegal actions should also be considered as an option. There are many more possible outcomes. By reflecting on the proper way to act, one becomes accustomed to devoting one's actions to God.

⁷⁶ Gen 1:27: And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Perhaps the most important word in the text quoted above is *kavanah*, intention. This word speaks to the heart of Bahya's message. It is the intention behind everything that we do that is most important. Both our outward and inward intentions are critical because they define the basis for Bahya's lessons of moral improvement. Often, when we study about prayer, we speak about the importance of *keva and kavanah*. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman explains that *kavanah* refers to the inner intentionality by which we pay attention to our prayers rather than let them become rote.⁷⁷ Bahya's application of this concept to our actions creates the underlying principle of his ethical treatise. An action cannot be performed wholeheartedly if it lacks the appropriate intention. Adding *kavanah* to the performance of a mitzvah can generate a more meaningful experience of that action. When a certain level of intention guides our actions, we act according to Bahya's teaching.

Bahya shifts to explain the details of this intention and how one should go about devoting one's actions to God. Learning how to add *kavanah* to our actions is critical to our preparation for the High Holy Days, because it creates a paradigm shift. This change in thinking helps us to purify our actions and our thoughts so that we are inspired by the ethical values taught by God in Torah and realized through reflection on one's actions.

What does the devotion of our acts to God consist of? It consists of ten matters, that will be established in a person's heart, and when it will become clear to him that they are the base of his service and the roots of his actions, he will devote his acts to God, by not turning to anyone else, never hoping in another, not to intend these matters to anyone but God. They are: 1. Accepting wholeheartedly the unity of God, as I have already explained at the beginning of this book. 2. Reflection upon the goodness of God's graces to a person, as we have already explained. 3. That he will accept the idea of serving God, as I have already mentioned. 4. He vows to trust God, over the creations. 5. Neither support nor harm can come from anyone without the consent of the Creator. 6. Acceptance of

⁷⁷ Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Way into Jewish Prayer*. Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock Vermont, 2000, p. 33. For a further discussion of *Keva* and *Kavanah* see pages 33-36 of this book,

blame and praise equally. 7. Abandoning self-adornment for the sake of humankind. 8. The clearing of heart of worldly engagements when one is doing for the sake of the world to come. 9. Fear and shame before God. 10. One consults his mind on all thoughts of evil inclination in his heart, and to receive his advice of the mind rather than that of his instinct.⁷⁸

What makes devoting our actions to God unique is the final issue mentioned here. Bahya is again encouraging a mental process that guides our actions in the world. In order to prepare for the High Holy Days, we must have these internal conversations in which our consciousness overtakes the evil inclination. It is important for a person to always contemplate the motivation of her actions. During the month of Elul a person has the opportunity to reflect fully on intentions. Reflection on intentions is deeper and more scrutinizing than only reflecting on actions. When a person looks at the intentions of her actions she is attempting to examine the process that leads to action. This rumination has the capacity to promote change.

In the introduction to this Gate Feldman reminds us of Bahya's introduction, in which Bahya teaches that the greatest advantage to be discovered from the duties of the heart is the alignment of the inner with outer self when serving of God.⁷⁹ Therefore, we are not only encouraged to move away from a selfish nature, we are pushed to find a path that helps us achieve pure devotion of our actions to God.

As we mentioned earlier, Bahya examines the nature of the *yetzer hara*. He also teaches us how we can overcome its influence on our actions and the intention of our actions. This analysis occurs in chapter five of this Gate.

It is appropriate for you to know, that your greatest enemy in this world is your evil inclination⁸⁰, which is woven into the power of your soul, passing into the

⁷⁸ Hebrew Translation, Gate Five – Chapter 2, Volume II, p. 8-9

⁷⁹ Feldman, p. 240

⁸⁰ The Hebrew word used for evil inclination here is "*yetzer*". While it does not specifically say "*yetzer hara*," it can be understood from the context that Bahya is indicating the evil inclination. Feldman also

nature of your spirit, and sharing with you the rule of your body and your spirit, it rules over the secrets of your soul and the hidden nature of your mind, it is the master of your counsel in all matters both secret and open, it lies in wait over your every step, you may be unaware of it, but it will be aware of you.⁸¹ You may hide from it, but it never hides from you. It wears clothing of friendliness, and adorns itself in love for you. It enters into your faithfulness, the people who advise you, and the treasures of your love. It runs to do your will with gestures and signs. It shoots deathly arrows at you to uproot you from the land of the living, as it says: "Like a madman scattering deadly firebrands, arrows, is one who cheats his fellow and says, 'I was only joking'." (Prov. 26:18-19) Its greatest danger to you is when it teaches you to fight your mind on these matters, and when it strives to prevent you from your truths.⁸²

Bahya describes what seems like an all-powerful force. The *yetzer hara* is always working against us. The influence of this force comes internally from our own conscience and it also comes externally from the *yetzer hara* of others. It would seem as though this force of influence that knows your every way would be an ally to you. However, its nature towards acting in an evil way helps us to learn that it is necessary to overcome it.

The Talmud explains in tractate *Kiddushin*, "R. Isaac said: A person's evil inclination renews itself daily against him, as it is said 'Adonai saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time.' (Gen 6:5) And R. Simeon b. Levi said: a person's evil inclination gathers strength against him daily and seeks to slay him, as it is said: 'the wicked watches for the righteous seeking to put him to death.' (Ps. 37:32), if God did not help a person, he would not be able to prevail against it."⁸³ Bahya's vision of the evil inclination parallels that of the Talmud. Both the Talmud and later Bahya explain that the *yetzer hara* is an eternal

translates the term in this way. Mansoor uses a more generic term "instinct," while this term may be more true to the translation, it is not true to the context.

⁸¹ literally: asleep to it and it will be awake to you.

⁸² Hebrew Translation, Gate Five – Chapter 5, Volume II, p. 14-15

⁸³ Kiddushin 30b

force that seeks to inspire all humankind to do evil. This force can be hard to overcome because of its persistence. The Talmud also explains that every person must look to God to overcome its power.

Now that we have seen the powerful nature of the *yetzer hara*, we have to find ways to overcome the way it influences us. This seems like a daunting and difficult task. Bahya, however provides us with some methods to overcome the *yetzer hara* which would allow us to devote our acts to God. Bahya encourages us to use the methods and ideas described in the previous Gates to overcome this evil inclination. These methods helped us to build our faith and trust in God and Bahya tells us that we must call upon them when we need to overcome our *yetzer hara*. We will look at some examples here:

The evil inclination will strive to make you doubt your Creator, and it will say to you that this world is not new and it was not created...when it comes to you in this way, return to your wisdom, and you will know the falseness of this, citing God's unity from this book...It will strive to deceive you regarding the obligation to serve your Creator, it will say to you that the service from one who serves his master, is at the time that the master needs it...if you return to your wisdom of what we mentioned previously in the "Gate of Reflection of God's goodness to us", and the "Gate of the obligation to serve God"⁸⁴, the doubt will turn from you and you will be obligated to serve your creator...It will make you doubt tradition, and it will say to you that what is learned and what is written in scripture is true, but what our sages said is not essential and we did not receive any obligations from them...But if you examine this matter with your mind, you will see that what is learned and what is written in scripture are in great need of tradition, not one of them can be completed without it...when you learn this, all doubt will leave you, and the knowledge that comes from the mind, scripture and tradition.⁸⁵

The use of the previous chapters to confront the evil inclination is of secondary importance for these chapters. While each of these chapters was important for its own sake, the tools we learned from them can help us overcome our *yetzer hara*. It is important for each of us to engage rigorously with the concepts of understanding God's

⁸⁴ These Gates refer to Gates two and three as discussed previously.

⁸⁵ Hebrew Translation, Gate Five – Chapter 2, Volume II, passim p. 20-25

unity, meditating on God's goodness in the world and our service to God because they are all critical factors in the way in which we overcome the evil forced upon us by the *yetzer hara*.

Above, we saw that the Talmud taught every person to look to God to overcome the evil urge. We turn again to the Talmud to see some other insights that can help combat the evil urge. In *Brachot* 5a we learn: "R. Levi bar Hama said in the name of R. Simeon bar Lakish: A person should always incite the good impulse to fight against the evil impulse, as it is written: 'Tremble and sin no more.' (Ps. 4:5) If he subdues it well and good, if not let him study Torah, for it is written: say it on your heart." (ibid.). The Talmud also explains in *Kiddushin* 30b: "I created the evil inclination, but I also created Torah as its antidote, if you study Torah you will not be delivered into its hand." Both Bahya and the sages of the Talmud encourage us to look to God and to use our understanding of Torah to fight the evil inclinations we all carry with us each day. God and Torah are the purest and truest aspects of the mind and as a result they will only incline us to do good.

The theme of holiness seems to appear throughout this Gate. Any actions that are devoted to God must be sacred in nature. If God is holy and God desires us to be holy, then devoting our actions to God would be influenced by a sense of sanctity.

The third blessing of the *Amidah* is always devoted to *kedushat hashem*, the sanctification of God's name. In the *Ma'ariv* service, we read, "*Atah kadosh, v'shimcha kadosh, uk'doshim b'chol yom y'halelucha selah*" (You are holy, your name is holy, holy ones praise you daily). It is possible to read this prayer through its connections to the fifth Gate of Bahya's treatise. Devoting our actions to God is one way in which we can

praise God daily. If God is holy, and we are holy, then when we praise God we demonstrate our holiness through our devotion to God.

A key difference in the *kedushat hashem* on High Holy Days is the addition of three paragraphs entitled "*Uv'chen*" (and therefore). These three paragraphs are among the most ancient of the High Holy Day liturgy.⁸⁶ These words are attributed to Rabbi Johanan ben Nuri who lived during the Hadrianic persecutions, about six decades after the destruction of the Second Temple. "These words link divine sovereignty, holiness and unity with awareness of divine power. They then express the hope that awareness of God will bring us to a general reverence and awe."⁸⁷ As we will see when we look closer at the words of these three paragraphs, they have the power to inspire us to act in a way that requires devotion to God.

The first paragraph of *Uv'chen* implores the divinity to cause the entire world to revere God.⁸⁸ The themes of awe and fear are present here as God's name inspires awe in God's creations. The first paragraph reads:

And therefore instill fear, Adonai our God, upon all of Your creations, and dread upon everything You created. Let all of Your creations be in awe of You, let all the creations bow before You. Let all of them as one, do Your will, with a perfect heart. As we know, Adonai our God, Your dominion is before You, strength is in Your hand and might is in Your right hand, and your name inspires awe over all of Your creations.⁸⁹

The purpose of this paragraph is to encourage all of God's creations to be in awe of God so that the creations may do God's will with a perfect heart. This idea of wholehearted devotion to God is exactly what we learned from Bahya when he encouraged us to

⁸⁶ *Kol Haneshama: A Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*. Comment by David A. Teutsch, Reconstructionist Press: Elkins Park, PA, 1999, p. 112

⁸⁷ *Kol Haneshama: A Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*. Comment by David A. Teutsch, p. 112

⁸⁸ Hammer, p. 54-55

⁸⁹ This is a translation of the Hebrew text of the first paragraph of the *Uv'chen*. For the Hebrew text see page 64 of the Art Scroll Machzor or page 32 in Gates of Repentance.

respond to the evil inclination by using the concepts taught in the first four Gates. In the context of The Duties of the Heart, we learn that devoting our actions to God with a whole heart means service to God, understanding God's unity, reflecting on God's goodness in the world and trusting God. Awe of God's holiness inspires us to act with a perfect heart and teaches us that devotion to God is a critical piece of our holiness.

The second paragraph discusses not the universal but the particular. It discusses the return of Israel to its homeland, the kingship of David and the Messianic Age.⁹⁰ This paragraph reads:

And therefore instill honor, Adonai, to Your people, praise to those who are in awe of You, hope to those who seek You, eloquent speech to those who hope to You, happiness to Your land and joy to Your city, flourishing pride to David your servant, and preparation of a lamp to the son of Jesse, Your anointed, speedily in our days.⁹¹

Thematic changes that occur in this paragraph might reflect the intention of the words "*v'shimcha kadosh*". God's name is particular to the Jewish people and as a result the Jewish people have a unique relationship with their God. This particularism requires us to act. If God is to instill honor to God's people and bring about a Messianic Age, then each of us must do our part. Bahya's notion of devotion in the fifth Gate is present here. As we change our actions and devote them to God, we can build a special relationship with God that is filled with the sacred. As a result of this devotion, our actions are different because they have an intention and a purpose. As a result, by focusing our intentions on God, we act on behalf of God's holy name.

⁹⁰ Hammer, p. 55

⁹¹ This translation reflects the traditional text which can be found in the Art Scroll Machzor, p. 64-66. An alternative text can be found in Gates of Repentance on p. 32 in which the universal is favored over the particular.

The third paragraph beginning with *Uv'chen* describes the rejoicing that will come to the righteous.⁹² This paragraph picks up the theme of the *yetzer hara* that we discussed throughout the chapter and speaks of the importance of eliminating the evil dominion from the earth.

And therefore the righteous will see and rejoice, the upright will exult, the pious will be joyous in song. Iniquity will close its mouth, and all evil will evaporate like smoke, You will remove evil's reign⁹³ from the earth.⁹⁴

It is important to note here the thematic significance of evil, which is mentioned twice. As we learned in this Gate, the concept of blotting out the evil impulse inside all of us helps us to devote our actions to God. Eliminating the evil impulse can inspire us to act righteously. When more and more individuals work to diminish the evil inclination and devote their actions to God, it is possible to see a reduction in evil in the world. This thought is in accordance with Arzt's comment on this prayer. He explains: "This prayer can serve to remind us that the ennobling of the individual must be the ultimate goal of society. Society must develop the conditions wherein its citizens may become *tzadikim*, socially responsible; *yesharim*, people of integrity; and *hasidim*, spiritually dedicated."⁹⁵

The *yetzer hara* can be a powerful force inside the minds of all humanity. Tools to overcome this force can be learned by following Bahya's path. By finding the proper *kavanah*, we use the tools we learn to blot out evil and do holy work.

⁹² Hammer, p. 55

⁹³ The Hebrew text here reads *mamshélet zadon*, which is translated as evil's dominion. For our purpose here we will read this as a synonym of *yetzer hara*.

⁹⁴ This is a translation of the Hebrew text of the third paragraph of the *Uv'chen*. For the Hebrew text see page 66 of the Art Scroll Machzor or page 33 in Gates of Repentance.

⁹⁵ Arzt, p. 102

Chapter 6: Gate Six – Humility

Humility is an important character trait of a moral person. In the quest for ethics, humility can help a person become more aware of his qualities and increase one's awareness of the nature of God's influence on the world. Gate Six focuses on the various aspects of humility that a person must try to attain. Mansoor states the following regarding the importance of humility:

We saw that pride was the obstacle in the way of the man who desires to purify his deeds, and therefore Bahya finds it appropriate to deal next with humility, its opposite. Humility for him does not signify false modesty, or the lowliness of spirit that is the result of lack of self-esteem, or of weakness... True humility is one which knows pride, because it is only in relation to his superiority that the humility of a humble man has any meaning. Humility is thus a reflective activity; it is the soul reflecting on itself and finding itself low. Once again Bahya is stressing consciousness and self-awareness.⁹⁶

Pride and humility are opposing forces much like the *yetzer hatov* and the *yetzer hara*, as discussed in the previous chapter. The only appropriate way to respond to lofty pride is with humility and submission to another, according to Bahya. Mansoor's claim that humility is the soul reflecting on itself demonstrates an extension of the internal focus that is so critical for Bahya's ethical improvement.

In Feldman's introduction to Bahya's sixth Gate, he discusses the possibility that the way in which Bahya envisions humility would be difficult for a modern person to understand. He questions why anyone among those of us living in modern times would choose to be meek, abase himself to another, to not speak his mind loudly, to not exhibit righteous indignation and to not take revenge on those by whom he had been wronged.⁹⁷ One way to respond to such claims about the modern world would be to find benefits to

⁹⁶ Translator's introduction, Mansoor, p. 56

⁹⁷ Feldman, p. 269

practicing the traits that Bahya describes in his treatise. Some of the advantages of the practice of humility include “peace and serenity that comes with being satisfied with your lot, the ability to accept everything that befalls you with equanimity and the genuine forthcoming love of others.”⁹⁸ Through the exploration of Bahya’s explorations of humility in this Gate we will see the benefits and modern applications of this text. We will also see the ways in which humility can facilitate our preparations for the High Holy Days.

There is only one virtue that the Torah specifically prescribes to Moses.⁹⁹ “Now Moses was a very humble (*anav* in Hebrew) man, more so than any other man on earth.” (Num 12:3) Moses had not sought out his very special status, according to Ibn Ezra. Jacob Milgrom claims that the humility (*anav*) is likened to its synonymous parallel of devout trusting in psalm 22:27 when *anav* parallels “those who seek Adonai”. *Anav* also applies to the weak and exploited (Amos 2:7, Isa. 11:4). However, it never means “meek.”¹⁰⁰ Humility is an honorable quality. We learn through Moses that he never tried to show how special and great he was. Moses’ humility shows us that Korach’s claims of Moses taking advantage of his power were unwarranted.

The prophet Micah also claims that humility (*hatznei-a*) is an essential character trait of any moral person. “He has told you, O man, what is good, and what Adonai requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8) Here, we learn that Adonai requires three things of us: doing justice, loving goodness and walking humbly with God. According to Micah an absence of

⁹⁸ Feldman, p. 269

⁹⁹ Telushkin, Joseph. A Code of Jewish Ethics. Bell Tower: NY, 2006, p. 210.

¹⁰⁰ Milgrom, Jacob. JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers. JPS: Philadelphia, 1990, p. 94.

humility, just like a lack of concern with justice and kindness, is in and of itself proof of a person's lack of religious commitment.¹⁰¹

Through the examples of these two biblical heroes, we learn that humility is an essential character trait of any moral person. Now, as we turn to Bahya, we keep Moses and Micah in mind. Bahya defines humility (*k'ni-a*)¹⁰² in the following way:

Humility is the modesty of the soul, the submissiveness of the soul, and the reducing of one's own pride. It is an inner quality. When established, it becomes visible throughout the body, such as: softening of words, speaking in a low voice, acting humbly even when angered, and not taking revenge even when one is prompted to do so. A king once said to someone who was convicted of a crime, after he brought out the whip to strike him: "As God lives, had I not been so angry with you, I would have taken great revenge on you", and he pardoned the man. It is said that he also used to say: "I do not know of any sin that would outweigh my humility."¹⁰³

Bahya teaches us that humility represents certain internal processes that can also be manifested externally. Modesty is an internal trait in which one must cognitively reflect on the actions of the other. In order to be modest, a person must show respect for other people. The care and concern that exists for other people require a lowering of the self in the face of the other. Even though a person is concerned for himself, he shows more concern for other people. The ideas of the submissiveness of the soul and the reduction of pride remind us that there is a proper and respectful way to relate with others.

"There is no sage...who will not need to learn from the words of his friends, and very often, even from those of his disciples. How then can he pride himself in his

¹⁰¹ Telushkin, p. 210

¹⁰² We have seen three different Hebrew words that can be translated to English. Bahya uses the word *k'ni-a* in Gate Six. This word better translates to surrender. Mansoor chooses to use the term humility, because it is the opposite of pride, which Bahya dealt with in Gate five. Also, the term humility yields a better understanding of Bahya for modern readers. The fact that there are three Hebrew words for humility does not necessarily indicate that there is a difference between the three actions described by each, it does, however, reflect the limits of the English language in translating the Hebrew.

¹⁰³ Hebrew Translation, Gate Six – Chapter 1, volume II p. 73. Mansoor comments that these anecdotes are most probably told of Muawiya, the first Caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty (661-680), who was known for his prudence and self-restraint.

wisdom?" (Mesillat Yescharim, chapter 22)¹⁰⁴ Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto teaches here that one's own wisdom relies on the wisdom of others. Pirke Avot teaches, "Who is wise? The one who learns from all people." (Pirke Avot 4:1) One cannot be proud merely because of one's wisdom, because there is so much that one can learn from others. Therefore, we learn that it is meritorious to learn from others. Humility can manifest itself in the reduction of pride in the face of wisdom. It is possible to claim that the structure of the Talmud is entirely based on humility and the reduction of one's own pride when it uses the formula Rav X taught in the name of Rav Y. Not only do we see a generational link through this formula, but we see how important it was for the Rabbis to give respect to the lessons and the wisdom that their teachers possessed and taught.

Demonstrating humility to others can come through the actions of the body. Bahya explains that these actions take place only after internal reflection of the nature of one's own humility. When the king showed his restraint in the parables mentioned by Bahya, he exhibited qualities that all of us can aspire to emulate. His statement teaches us that there should be nothing that outweighs humility. Humility is such a desired characteristic that one should do everything possible to learn how to be humble in order to show respect for others, like the king did for the criminal.

As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, Feldman mentioned that a person might not want to attain such levels of humility because of the possibility of demonstrating weakness. However, when we speak in a soft voice, act humbly when angered and show restraint, we give reasons for others to respect us. We model exemplary traits for everyone. People will come to respect us more when we hold back our anger and control the emotions that are inside of us. These signs of strength reveal

¹⁰⁴ Telushkin, p. 234

the ways in which we demonstrate our mind's control over our actions. Humility is an indication of the fundamental lesson of The Duties of the Heart, in which Bahya repeatedly teaches that the intentions of the mind are critical for the most proper performance of deeds and mitzvot.

Bahya gives us specific points of reflection which can help us understand how to become humble. He provides us with a detailed approach to develop the necessary internal reflective practices that manifest an external demonstration of humility. There are seven matters that require constant thought and contemplation; we will discuss three of them here:

[The second matter of reflection occurs] when he thinks about the force of what trials come to him in the world, hunger and thirst, heat and cold, sickness, calamity and worries from which he can only find rest through death¹⁰⁵. When he understands all of this in his heart, and he understands his weakness and he does not understand how to distance himself from [life's] trials, and that he realizes that he is like a prisoner, rather, he really is a prisoner. He humbles himself like the prisoner and he realizes he has no power to free himself as it is said: "Let the groans of the prisoners reach You; relieve those condemned to death, as befits Your great strength." (Ps. 79:11) "Free me from prison, that I may praise Your name. The righteous shall glory in me for Your gracious dealings with me." (Ps. 142:8)¹⁰⁶

There are times when we have no control over the world and things beyond our control may happen to us. Bahya tells us to humble ourselves in the face of the external situations that are beyond our control. The acknowledgement of God's presence in the world is an example of humility, according to Bahya. Humility before God can enable us to become free of the things that imprison us. Accepting what happens to us, both good

¹⁰⁵ Bahya presents the idea that death is the only way one can find complete rest from life's trials. While Bahya believes this to be true, he still provides the reader with coping mechanisms. In reading this citation it is important to keep in mind that Bahya would like the reader to learn to live with and confront life's trials by accepting that they exist. He explains to us that we cannot prevent them from happening, but by learning to humble ourselves, we can learn to cope with them.

¹⁰⁶ Hebrew Translation, Gate Six ~ Chapter 5, volume II p. 86

and bad, is an example of what Bahya is discussing here.¹⁰⁷ According to Bahya, our prayers provide us with an opportunity to free our minds from the outside forces that we cannot control.

Bahya continues this discussion of humility before God with the following reasoning:

When a person considers his obligation to serve God because of God's great compassion to him, and God's great goodness to him, together with his neglect and negligence of the mitzvot imposed by the mind and tradition, and when he lacks arguments and excuses for the day of judgment, and repentance at the moment of requital, he becomes humble as it says: "For lo! That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and all the doers of evil shall be straw." (Mal. 3:19) "But who can endure the day of his coming." (Mal. 3:2)¹⁰⁸

According to Bahya, the combination of the reflection on one's responsibility to serve God and the consideration of the reasoning behind the neglect of the commandments leads to humility. These reflections are ideal for High Holy Day preparations because they can lead to significant changes in one's thoughts and actions.

A person should not think that he is always correct in everything that he does. When a person thinks that his actions are pure and perfect, he only shows pride. Even when he thinks that he is fulfilling a mitzvah, the possibility always exists that the act was not done correctly. One's haughtiness cannot serve him well, rather one should turn to God in humility and reflect on the fact that he is not perfect.

The conversation of humility continues when Bahya encourages us to look at the world around us and try to understand our lack of control of worldly events.

When a person sees the changes in the matters of the creations of the world, and how quickly kingdoms and governments change, how people go from one thing to another, the way people harm the welfare of others, and how the end of

¹⁰⁷ This is similar to the discussion in chapter 4 of the Pirke Avot text "Who is rich? The one who is happy with what he has."

¹⁰⁸ Hebrew Translation, Gate Six – Chapter 5, volume II p. 87-88

everything is death, as it is said: "Sheeplike they head for Sheol, with Death as their shepherd. The upright shall rule over them at daybreak, and their form shall waste away in Sheol till its nobility be gone." (Ps. 49:15) And as it is said: "Happy is the man who makes Adonai his trust, who turns not to the arrogant or to followers of falsehood." (Ps. 40:5)¹⁰⁹

Bahya teaches that it is important to remember that human beings have little control over what happens in the world around them. We only have the power to control some of what is within our locus of control.

In response to this idea of control, Stephen Covey explains that there are two circles in which we can endeavor. There is the circle of concern and the circle of influence.

Proactive people focus their efforts in the Circle of Influence. They work on the things they can do something about. The nature of their energy is positive, enlarging and magnifying, causing their Circle of Influence to increase. Reactive people, on the other hand, focus their efforts in the Circle of Concern. They focus on the weakness of other people, the problems in the environment, and circumstances over which they have no control. Their focus results in blaming and accusing attitudes, reactive language, and increased feelings of victimization.¹¹⁰

When we compare the proactive person that Covey describes to The Duties of the Heart we conclude that the humble person is the proactive person, only focusing her energy on things she can impact herself. The one who is not humble spends too much of his time on matters that are in the Circle of Concern. The language, attitudes and feelings of the non-humble and reactive person are something that we should be aware of so that we can learn not to act in this way. It is important for us to learn how to focus on areas that are in our circle of influence.

Bahya concludes that one must always focus on these matters in order to remain a humble person. This focus must occur until humility becomes second nature to that

¹⁰⁹ Hebrew Translation, Gate Six – Chapter 5, volume II p. 91

¹¹⁰ Covey, p. 83

person. When a person practices humility, that person has the ability to reduce the misfortunes and the problems that result from pride, arrogance and haughtiness. The benefits of the awareness that comes from Bahya's directions are beyond our comprehension. It is possible to make changes in the ways that we live our lives. Elul is the prime season for these changes. Understanding that we face trials and tribulations that are beyond our control can help us to concentrate on how to confront them. When we eliminate the question of why they occur, it will be easier for us to put life into perspective.

It is possible to see some of the benefits of humility when we study the sixth chapter of Gate six. This chapter differs from the previous chapter because it teaches specific traits that we should have in order to be humble. There are a number of surrender-related skills in which we can train ourselves. These are the actions result from the reflections that we studied above. Bahya tells us that there are 10 things that we should do:

1. We should know God and his good attributes, as well as the superiority that humans have over all the remaining creations...Once we recognize the greatness of the Creator, His supreme power, and lofty wisdom, we can humble ourselves before God.
2. We should know the obligations of Torah and the mind, we should read the Torah of God and study the written and oral tradition.
3. We should be kind hearted and patient in the face of words or deeds.
4. We should do good for others, speak well of them and judge them favorably. We should not slander them, we should forgive their faults even when they do not deserve it.
5. We should be humble in all worldly affairs, both openly and secretly, in words and actions, when moving or at rest. A person's conscience should be at one with his conduct.
6. We should be noble and lofty concerning the world to come. We should not be satisfied with what we have attained and what we have accomplished. Rather, we should think little of our deeds and service, and we should incline our souls to what is above us all the time.
7. We should show humility to everyone for God's honor. We should abandon loftiness, splendor and self-importance at the time of serving God, whether alone or a part of the community.
8. We should be satisfied with the way we earn a living.
9. We should take action against evil for God's honor, we should not forgive the wrongs

done to God as we would the wrongs done to ourselves. 10. We should speak little and in a soft voice, we should joke less, take fewer oaths, we should not lie, we should not sit in the company of those who joke, and we should not take pleasure in what the ignorant take part in. We should do all of this with humility and modesty rather than for the purpose of self-importance and self-glorification.¹¹¹

These prescriptions vary in their plausibility. When reading Bahya we have to understand that he desires all of us to live in a completely pious state at all times. Regarding the challenging practices mentioned in his text, we have to wonder if there exists some measure of practicality to them, even though they may be difficult to achieve all the time. Bahya describes a humble person as one who embodies each one of these character traits together. For us, in the season of the High Holy Days, developing these qualities is a step toward self-improvement. Each time we train ourselves in a different trait we become more humble than we were previously. Working on a different character trait of humility in each year of preparation for the High Holy Days throughout our lives would be practical and plausible.

It is not necessary to expound further on some of those attributes mentioned by Bahya that seem logical to all of us. The first two qualities have already been explained in previous chapters. Doing good for others, being patient, being kind hearted are all logical actions and prescribed for us in the Torah. The benefit of these traits is that our relationships with others have more meaning and the equity in the emotional bank accounts mentioned in Chapter 4 begins to grow. One challenge that we find here comes in number 8, in which we are instructed to be happy with the way we earn a living. This does not mean that we should ignore the desire to improve ourselves. We need not learn from this that we should not try to change our situation. Rather, we learn that we have to

¹¹¹ Hebrew Translation, Gate Six – Chapter 6, volume II passim p. 92-99

focus on our circle of influence. Trying to work within this circle allows us to make our work relationships better by focusing on our own actions towards others. If our concerns are focused on what others are doing to us, we are not being humble and there is no possibility for changing the relationship. Covey would tell us that we should be concerned with the way others act towards us but we cannot change the actions of others. Bahya and Covey would agree that being humble is a result of personal reflection rather than being concerned with the actions of others. We can change when we make the effort to take a step back and look at who we are and what we have done. Personal reflection allows us to be happy with the way we earn a living because we can become more aware of what we can control and what we can ultimately change.

Bahya's tenth recommendation is also troubling. It is possible to read this in a way that tells us that we should never enjoy ourselves and we should never joke about the world. Making light of a situation is one way that people face the world. A sense of humor allows us to look into our circles of concern and face what we cannot control. Having a sense of humor helps us face situations that are serious and put them in perspective. It is also important to enjoy the world. It is important to put what Bahya says about not taking part in the same things as the ignorant in a modern context. It is difficult to live our lives without the pleasures of recreation, whether it is going to a concert, a sporting event or enjoying a movie. These worldly pleasures give us a respite from the stresses of everyday life. However, it is possible to understand Bahya's lesson in the following way: He is teaching us that we should not focus our lives on these worldly pleasures. It is more important for us to take part in the world of learning and in understanding ourselves so that we can live in an educated way. Educating ourselves and

experiencing culture inclines us toward self-improvement. Feldman comments, citing Bahya's conclusion to this Gate, that the practicing of these ten steps combined with asking God for help draws a person closer to God. It is important for us to avoid arrogance even when no one else around us does, or we will live without ever having acquired the traits we want and can have.¹¹² These traits provide us all with a goal for living. Mastering these attributes helps us to have better relationships with others and helps us to become closer to God. They help us to find the proper direction for our lives, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The theme of humility appears in the High Holy Day liturgy at a most lofty point. The *hineni* prayer, which is recited by the service leader at the beginning of the musaf service in traditional settings, conveys a message that the service leader is humble.

Hammer explains,

The simple, sincere style of *Hineni*, combined with the beautiful melody with which it is chanted, makes this prayer one of the high points of the Rosh Hashanah service. In some communities, it is customary for *hazzan* to begin this plea from the back of the synagogue and gradually come forward to the front of the congregation. This gesture emphasizes the *hazzan's* humility and reluctance to assume the sacred position of leading the congregation.¹¹³

In Reform settings this prayer occurs at the beginning of worship on Erev Rosh Hashanah. The Reform movement wanted to retain the message of this prayer by beginning all of the High Holy Day worship with its words. In a commentary to the Gates of Repentance, the Reform Movement's High Holy Day Machzor, Lawrence Hoffman explains that the placement of the *Hineni* prayer at the beginning of the Rosh Hashanah evening service introduces the Days of Awe with the appropriate mood of awe. The awesome task of representing the community of worshippers is the primary focus

¹¹² Feldman, p. 274

¹¹³ Hammer, p. 76

here. Only through fear and trembling may a cantor or rabbi approach the *bimah*. This is especially true on the High Holy Days.¹¹⁴

Behold me, of little merit, trembling and afraid, of the one enthroned upon the praises of Israel. I have come to stand before you and plead for your people Israel who have sent me, even though I am not worthy and unqualified to do so. Therefore, I beseech you, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God of Sarah, Rebekka, Rachel and Leah,¹¹⁵ Adonai Adonai, You are compassionate and full of grace, God of Israel, frightening and awesome, grant me success so that I may go and stand before you seeking mercy for me and for those that send me. Do not hold them responsible for my sins or guilty for my transgressions, because I have sinned and transgressed. Let them not be ashamed of me and let them not be ashamed of them. Receive my prayers like a prayer of an experienced elder, whose voice is sweet, as though from hearts more worthy than ours. Let love be the banner we raise in Your sight, let that love cover our sins, change our afflictions to joy and gladness, our misdeeds to acts of life. May our love of truth and peace remove all that hinders us from sincere and fruitful prayer. May it be your will Adonai our God, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God of Sarah, Rebekka, Leah and Rachel, great mighty and awesome God, God supreme, *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, let my prayer come before your glorious throne, for the sake of the righteous and the pious, those who are whole and upright, and for the sake of the glory of Your great name, because hear the prayers of the people of Israel with mercy. Blessed are You, the One who hears prayer.¹¹⁶

Through these words of the *Hineni* prayer we see that the intent of the prayer leader is to show reverence for God and the community. When the prayer leader claims that she is not worthy of the position of leading the community, she is showing her humility because there may be others who are better for this task. When the prayer leader asks God not to hold the community accountable for his sins, he is showing his humility by admitting to his imperfections. This public proclamation in the presence of the entire community standing before God on the ultimate day of judgment is one of the clearest

¹¹⁴ Hoffman, Lawrence A. *Gates of Understanding 2: Appreciating the Days of Awe*. CCAR: NY, 1984, p. 15-16.

¹¹⁵ The "mothers" are not included in the traditional text of this prayer. I have included them here in accordance with the rest of Reform liturgy.

¹¹⁶ Translation of *Hineni*, Gates of Repentance, p. 18-19, Art Scroll Machzor: Rosh Hashanah, p. 444-446.

demonstrations of humility we can find. Observing this cry of humility can inspire the entire community to be humble. If the leader is humble, the members of the community can be humble as well.

Becoming humble requires a person to reflect internally about everything that happens in the world. The act of humility focuses us only on our Circles of Influence so that we can act on what we have control over. Training ourselves in humility is essential to our preparations for the High Holy Days because it inspires us to examine our ways and change the way we think and act.

Chapter 7: Gate Seven – Repentance

Rabbi Eliezer proclaims in the Talmud in tractate Shabbat, “Repent one day before you die.” His disciple questions his statement by saying, “How will I know when I will die?” Rabbi Eliezer responds to him by informing him that since one never knows the day of his death, it is important to repent every day. While R. Eliezer designates every day of a person’s life for repentance, the entire message of the month of Elul focuses on *t’suvah*, repentance. The title of the Reform movement’s High Holy Day Machzor, Gates of Repentance, emphasizes the significance of repentance in this season. In many cases, repentance is about fixing one’s relationships with God and with others. However, Bahya’s discussion of repentance demonstrates both the internal and external values of atoning.

In earlier chapters we saw how Bahya focused on the ways in which we serve and trust God. Through our study on those texts we learned about the external influences that lead us away from the proper path. Bahya’s concern with the *yetzer hara* and the role of evil in the world reflect the ways in which people deviate from righteousness. Here in this chapter on repentance, we realize the methods in which we can all work to return to God when we are overcome by the influence of the *yetzer hara*. Feldman explains that one message of this Gate is: “Because people do not serve God or are negligent in their service, repentance is the best means of correcting those errors and negligences.”¹¹⁷ Two other lessons that Bahya will emphasize are that repentance is an ongoing battle between reason and instinct and that repentance is the shedding of arrogance and the inclination to

¹¹⁷ Feldman, p. 308

sin.¹¹⁸ We will see how repentance is an important practice of a moral person. For this reason, repentance has become a focal point of High Holy Day preparations.

In the opening chapter of this gate Bahya defines repentance in the following way:

Repentance occurs when a person repairs himself [and returns] to serve The Creator after he has gone astray and sinned, and when he returns what was missing [from sinning], either because of ignorance in serving God or by the evil inclination overcoming reason, or because he hid himself from the ways in which he should serve God, or because his friend seduced him into doing evil, or reasons like these as the wise said [in Proverbs]: "My son, if sinners entice you, do not yield; (Prov. 1:10), "Fear Adonai, my son, and the king, And do not mix with dissenters." (Prov. 24:21)¹¹⁹

According to Bahya repentance is the process that a person takes to return to God which is highlighted by the key word in this paragraph, *takanat*, repair. When something is broken we try to fix it. Taking into consideration the entire realm of possibilities for going astray, the possibility of fixing our mistakes allows us to feel as though we have not made enormous errors. If we can work towards fixing our missteps, then it is possible to become whole once again. The idea of repentance explained here is about staying on the path that God has established for us in the Torah. It is important for all of us to remember that even when we do something wrong, God and others give us the opportunity to do some repair work.

Bahya's examples illustrate this concept of reparation. The only reasons that a person would ever abandon God and stray from the proper path are ignorance, irrationality, indolence, or negative persuasion.¹²⁰ Ignorance can be corrected by learning the proper ways to serve God. One can overcome one's evil inclination by taking the

¹¹⁸ Feldman p. 308

¹¹⁹ Translation Gate Seven – chapter 1, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 125

¹²⁰ Feldman p. 315

appropriate measures to reasoning and by making the proper decisions. Correcting indolence stems from finding the internal motivations toward acting properly. And one can correct negative persuasion from a friend by not associating oneself with that friend. Feldman comments that this process of repair "alludes to the fact that one can amend one's service to God by simply returning to [God's service]. One can restore what was missing from serving God by remembering God's presence and the obligation to serve God. This is a momentary occurrence of carelessness, bad judgment and being overcome by the evil inclination."¹²¹

After defining his vision of repentance, Bahya explains the fundamental elements to the process of repentance. These elements are essential in Bahya's eyes because they speak to the core of the process and promote a method of ethical change, which is the goal of repentance.

The essential elements of repentance are four in number: [The first is] the regret for the transgressions that one has committed in the past, [the second is] abandoning [those sins] and turning from them, [the third is] confessing to them and seeking forgiveness for them, [the fourth is] undertaking in heart and mind never to commit them again.

Regret is a sign that the act is a disgrace in [the sinner's] eyes, as it is written: "Who knows but He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind for meal offering and drink offering to Adonai your God?" (Joel 2:14) It is also said of people who continue to sin, "No one regrets his wickedness and says, 'What have I done!'" (Jer. 8:6) We can see this among people, when a sinner shows his friend that he regrets a sin that he has committed against his friend, this gives a stronger reason for [the friend] to forgive [the sinner].¹²²

Bahya identifies four components that are the foundation of repentance. We will examine each of them independently and we will begin with his first element – regret. This element gets to the center of human emotion. By identifying this element as the

¹²¹ Feldman p. 315

¹²² Translation Gate Seven – chapter 4, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 133-134

beginning of repentance Bahya moves away from reason and understanding and moves to emotion. If we feel bad about our own actions, it is more likely that we will try to repair what we have done wrong. Regret and guilt eats away at a person's conscience and inspires that person to correct his ways. Through the use of the quote from Jeremiah as a proof text, we learn that it is problematic for people to never realize the nature of their own actions. When a person stands up and exclaims, "What have I done!" she realizes and understands her wrongdoing and then will work towards fixing that action. Regret is a sign of one's wrongdoing. Without feeling regret the process of repentance may be more difficult to start.

Abandoning [the sin] is a sign that one believes in the idea of reward and punishment, as it is said, "Let the wicked give up his ways, The sinful man his plans; Let him turn back to Adonai, And He will pardon him; To our God, For he freely forgives." (Is. 55:7) The one who continually sins says, "For their sinful greed I was angry; I struck them and turned away in My wrath. Though stubborn, they follow the way of their hearts." (ibid. 57:17) We can see this among people when one stops sinning against a friend after having expressed regret, it is more appropriate to forgive him and overlook his sins.¹²³

By looking at abandoning the sin as the second element of repentance, we learn that Bahya wants a person who has sinned to completely leave the sin. Part of this abandonment includes an understanding of reward and punishment. Looking at this step of repentance in a modern context, we can come to comprehend reward as a sign of the freedom we can feel when we know we are acting in the right way. If we realize that the punishment mentioned here is the pain that one feels after wronging another, then we will be less likely to act in such a way. This is what Bahya indicates when he states his conclusion to the paragraph. According to Bahya we see one's belief in reward and

¹²³ Translation Gate Seven – chapter 4, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 134-135

punishment after one has expressed regret and is aware that the regret is worthy of the reward of forgiveness.

Requesting forgiveness is a sign of humility and submission to God, confessing one's sin leads to forgiveness, as it is written: "He who confesses and gives them up will find mercy." (Prov. 28:13) "Lo, I will bring you to judgment For saying, 'I have not sinned.'" (Jer. 2:35) "He who covers up his faults will not succeed." (Prov. 28:13) We can witness the same thing between people, when one sins against his friend and turns to him and admits his sin and requests forgiveness, the friend realizes the regret and it is not long before the friend forgives the sinner, and he removes the grudge he holds against him.¹²⁴

Bahya equates repentance with humility and submission to God. As we explored in the previous Gate, humility is the combination of internal and external actions. In this example we see the internal actions of feeling regret combined with the external actions of asking for forgiveness. The actual act of requesting forgiveness reveals the internal process of regret and discomfort the sinner has experienced. Another person cannot see this internal regret without the accompanying action of a request for forgiveness. When another person witnesses a heartfelt appeal for forgiveness, the likelihood of the sinner being forgiven can increase.

Taking upon yourself the never to repeat the sin is a sign of the knowledge of the evil of the act and the greatness of the sin as it is written: "If I have done iniquity, I shall not do so again" (Job 34:32) and it is said: "Assyria shall not save us, No more will we ride on steeds; Nor ever again will we call Our handiwork our god, Since in You alone orphans find pity!" (Hosea 14:4) while it is said of one who acts in the opposite way: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, Or the leopard his spots? Just as much can you do good, Who are practiced in doing evil!" (Jer. 13:23) We can see this between people, when a person who has sinned against his friend, admits his sin, undertakes never to repeat the act, showing repentance and his determined intention to avoid the act again in the future, then he has fulfilled the conditions for pardon and full forgiveness.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Translation Gate Seven – chapter 4, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 135

¹²⁵ Translation Gate Seven – chapter 4, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 135-136

The final step of the process of repentance according to Bahya is the commitment to refrain from repeating the sin ever again. This conscious decision reflects a complete repentance. Once again Bahya focuses us on the internal process. If a person is going to refrain from acting in a sinful manner again, he must consciously decide not to do so. According to Bahya this mental decision yields full pardon and forgiveness by the other person and also by God.

If a person experiences Bahya's four steps, she can fully experience her transgression and she will be able to return to God and walk on the proper path. Acting properly is the goal of repentance and it is possible for a person to become whole again after feeling regret, abandoning the sin, seeking forgiveness, and vowing to never sin again. Each step can be difficult for different reasons. In God's eyes, one has fully repented when one commits to not committing the act again when one has the chance. This is an act of learning and a commitment to acting properly.

After examining the method of repentance, Bahya looks into the methods in which one can be encouraged to atone. Bahya cites four ways to move someone to repentance. We will only look at the first method here because Bahya informs us that this method is the best. The other methods deal with God's punishment and God reproving a person for his misdeeds. One can be moved to repentance in the following way:

By one's strong understanding of God['s presence] and the meditation of the good graces [granted] to him, as well as his obligation to serve God and keep the mitzvot and to cease from doing what one has been warned [against doing]. He would be like a servant who fled his master, when he stops to think of the goodness that he [has received], he returns of his own volition and seeks forgiveness for rebelling and running away from his service. This servant follows

the good way and understands the way to deliverance, he is appropriate to be forgiven and [to come close to him].¹²⁶

One can be moved to repent by understanding God's presence and the ways in which we are able to serve God. Performing mitzvot and pursuing acts of righteousness can help to maintain God's presence. When a person realizes that he has erred in his actions, he can realize the correct action at the same time. The awareness of the correct action leads to the regret one feels in the first step of the process of repentance.

Feldman explains that this motivation teaches us that, "we can be moved to repentance by acknowledging all the good in our lives."¹²⁷ The acknowledgment of the good in our lives reflects what Bahya taught in the first two gates of his ethical treatise. The good bestowed on us by God helps us to become closer with God. Through our relationship with God we come to understand how we should serve God, and when we stray from the proper path we can learn the error of our ways. The gate of repentance builds upon the previous gates and uses their lessons and key points to establish the reasons for repentance and the motivation to repent.

The liturgical comparison for this gate could come from a variety of section in the High Holy Day Machzor. However, due to the course of action that Bahya recommends for repentance we will focus on a piece of the Yom Kippur liturgy that is found in the confessional section called *Vidui*.

We have turned from your righteous mitzvot and your good laws but to no avail. You are just in all that happens to us, you have acted truthfully while we have acted in evil ways. What can we say before you, who dwell on high? How shall we plead before you, enthroned beyond the stars? Are not all things known to you? Forgive us now, as you have had great compassion for your people from the

¹²⁶ Translation Gate Seven – chapter 6, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 143

¹²⁷ Feldman, p. 328

time you led us out of Egypt until today. And God said: "I have pardoned in your response to your plea."¹²⁸

The words from the machzor reflect the ideal motivation for repentance that Bahya explained above. We have a statement that begins with a complete acknowledgement that we wish to turn from the mitzvot and the precepts that can guide our lives. As we just learned, this is the motivation for repentance. When we make this claim on Yom Kippur, we can only imagine the thought process going on in the pray-ers mind includes a realization of God's role in our lives. This perception combined with the understanding that we have sinned against God could motivate us to repent and turn back to God.

The questions that are posed by the liturgist might yield a sense of remorse. How might a person respond if another who had sinned against him approached him asking these questions? These questions demonstrate that there is virtually nothing that a person can say in the face of his sin and the person whom he has sinned against. As a person recites these prayers and utters these questions he is left speechless wondering what the answers might be. The emptiness that can follow is a sign that the person feels remorse. Through these questions we see the emotions that begin the process of repentance.

We can see the other steps of repentance as prescribed by Bahya through God calling us to act in righteousness, which is then followed by a plea for forgiveness. A call to acting justly could include the abandonment of a sin and the commitment to never undertake that sin again. Acts of goodness and the performance of mitzvot are some of the components of morality as defined by the divine influence in the Torah. The plea for pardon that follows the call to righteousness and the questions of regret are signs of the long historical relationship that the Israelites have had with God. According to this

¹²⁸ Gates of Repentance, p. 513-514

statement God has had a history of compassion and patience with the Israelites. If a person works to build up an emotional bank account and trust in other people as described in chapter four, then the likelihood of forgiveness increases.

Repentance is a key component of High Holy Day Preparation. For Bahya's ethical makeover presented in this treatise, however, it is only one of ten components of an ethical person. While many might focus solely on repentance during the month of Elul, if one chooses to prepare for the High Holy Days using Bahya's prescription for preparation, then one would realize that repentance is only one part of Bahya's characterization of an ethical person. If Bahya were here to teach us today, he would say that repentance can be accomplished only after experiencing the previous steps in The Duties of the Heart.

Chapter 8: Gate Eight – Introspection

The Hebrew title for this Gate is *heshbon hanefesh*. Generally when we hear this term associated with the High Holy Days we are immediately drawn to the accounting of the self in terms of the deeds we have committed towards others during the past year. This self-reckoning helps to urge us to repent. The process of examining one's deeds involves aspects of introspection in which we put ourselves under the microscope and examine closely who we are.

For Bahya, introspection was different. It focused on an understanding of one's place in the entire world by examining the circumstances of Torah and how it can apply to life. The similarity between this gate and our general understanding of the term *heshbon hanefesh* is found in the idea that the introspection focuses on a thought process on what one has already done and what one still needs to do.¹²⁹ In the first chapter of this gate Bahya explains what he means by introspection.

Introspection with the soul is the effort of a person [to understand] by the mind matters of Torah (ie. Religion) and [the affairs] of his world so that he understands what he [has already] done and what he has to do in terms of his obligation [to God]. As we have been admonished to do by the prophet:¹³⁰ "Know therefore this day and keep in mind that Adonai alone is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other." (Deut. 4:39), "Taste and see how good Adonai is." (Ps. 34:9)...And it is said of those who do not consider their matters: "They do not give thought, They lack the wit and judgment to say: 'Part of it I burned in a fire; I also baked bread on the coals, I roasted meat and ate it—Should I make the rest an abhorrence? Should I bow to a block of wood?'" (Is. 44:19).¹³¹

We learn here that introspection involves the combination of two tasks. In order to engage in the process of self-introspection according to Bahya one must relate Torah to

¹²⁹ Feldman, p. 345

¹³⁰ The term prophet here indicates Moses since the citation comes from the book of Deuteronomy.

¹³¹ Translation – Gate Eight, chapter I, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 174-175

one's world or environment and also understand his past actions and his future actions regarding Torah and the world. Feldman teaches us that this process means surveying our deeds impartially and dispassionately so that we can take a full objective view of our world. Once we have examined our ways we can then speculate on their consequences and implications.¹³² The justification for this process comes in the proof text from the book of psalms in which we are told to taste and see how good God is. This is a reminder of the first two gates in which we were taught to behold the beauty of God's creations. This verse also is another instance in The Duties of the Heart in which Bahya teaches us to focus on God as the source of correct actions.

It is said of those who do not embark on the practice of introspection that they will lack judgment and wisdom. Understanding the rest of this proof text requires us to look at its context in chapter 44 of Isaiah. Leading up to the verse we have a description of how a craftsman uses the cedar tree for his benefit. Our verse here claims that one who does not understand this context sees the use of the trees as a complete waste.

"Much of the rest of this gate is devoted to the thirty aspects of the examination of the soul, or the self-reckoning, and scattered prominently throughout are references to all the previous chapters (ie. Gates). Close examination shows that there is no apparent reason for the order in which these thirty aspects appear...This repetition of ideas that were mentioned and developed in previous chapters shows that this treatise, the last to deal with the organization of the spiritual life, intends to put into sharp focus the social and religious matters that are relevant for the believer."¹³³ Since we have already examine much of what appears in this gate in previous chapters, the focus here will center

¹³² Feldman p. 353

¹³³ Mansoor, p. 61

on some of the important aspects of internal life that have not been mentioned previously.¹³⁴

The first of the three components of introspection that we will look into here focuses on preparation:

[One should be] introspective concerning the preparations of one's food, when one does not know whether he or she will be alive to enjoy it. [One should also be introspective] when one must take a long journey, and one prepares his matters several days in advance, considering what he should carry to the place that one is traveling, the products to be sold there, the food one will take, where one will stay...because we do not know how long we will live.¹³⁵

This text and this matter of introspection cries of the importance of reflection as one prepares for anything. The two examples that are used here are the preparation of food and the preparation for a journey. However, it is possible to apply this theme of preparation to anything else. Bahya cites our own mortality for this preparation. It might be possible for us to understand all preparation as useless when considering our own mortality. One might say, "Why bother preparing for something if I will not be here to enjoy it?" If we apply Bahya's definition of introspection from the beginning of this Gate, we can begin to understand that he is trying to encourage us to look into the greater

¹³⁴ The following is a list of the thirty points of introspection that is encouraged by Bahya in this Gate. They are taken directly from the Mansoor translation: 1. One's own existence; 2. The graces God bestowed on a person; 3. God's grace in giving a person understanding and discernment; 4. God's gift to a person pertaining to preserving life in this world and the next; 5. Concerning one's delay in understanding of the Torah; 6. When a person feels the inclination to rebel against God; 7. Concerning the condition of worship to God; 8. Concerning one's obligation of devotion to God; 9. Concerning all the different works of obedience; 10. Concerning God's knowledge of a person's most secret and inner thoughts; 11. Concerning one's former period in life; 12. Concerning one's effort in striving after the affairs of this world; 13. Concerning the superiority of a person's knowledge over action; 14. Concerning love for another person; 15. Concerning preparation; 16. Concerning mortality; 17. Concerning the advantages of solitude; 18. Concerning one's place in the world; 19. Concerning the way in which God guards from misfortunes; 20. Concerning wealth; 21. Concerning the ability to serve God; 22. Concerning *tikkun olam*; 23. Concerning all the manifestations of God in this world; 24. Concerning one's soul; 25. Concerning one's love for this world and desire for it over the world to come; 26. Concerning one's obedience to an earthly ruler rather than God; 27. Concerning when something hateful happens to the body; 28. Concerning trust in God; 29. Concerning the superiority of the soul over the body; 30. Concerning one's condition as a sojourner in this world.

¹³⁵ Translation – Gate Eight, chapter 3, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 215

context of what we are doing. The importance of preparation lies with the deeds that we have already done and it also lies with the connection between Torah and the world. If we consider Torah's application to our own situation, then we might be able to apply some important lesson from Torah to our preparation.

The second aspect of introspection picks up on the idea of our own mortality.

Bahya teaches:

[One should be] introspective concerning the length of time one will be in this world. One should reflect upon the haste with which death comes and upon the time in which one sees the remainder of life whenever one sees death of another living creature, without the creature's knowledge of it, without a hint, without any safe period when it is immune from death.¹³⁶

Bahya is teaching us to carefully contemplate every moment we have on earth. It is important for us to consider the value of our lives. We can realize that value when we reflect on our own mortality. We can realize that there are certain things that are out of our control. For the most part, loss of life is out of our control. We do not know when death will befall us.¹³⁷ This kind of introspection can encourage us to change the way we live our lives. It is possible for us to want to add meaning to our lives so that we engage in activities that have a defined purpose. Bahya would want us to focus on the actions in which we serve God. These actions could include a focus on either our ritual life or our ethical life or both. Regardless of the practice, Bahya would want us to find some meaningful routine in which we are continuously engaging in the practice of reflection in order to evaluate the way in which act.

Picking up on this theme of performance of Mitzvot, one of the aspects of introspection deals with working for the welfare of this world.

¹³⁶ Translation – Gate Eight, chapter 3, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 218

¹³⁷ See Chapter 6: Gate 6 for a further discussion of locus of control.

[One should be] introspective as one works with others to heal the world, like plowing and reaping, buying and selling, and all the other things one people do to help each other in settling the world. One should desire for others what one desires for oneself, and what one dislikes for oneself, one should dislike for others. One should be compassionate to others, and one should to prevent anything bad from happening to others as it is said, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." (Lev. 19:18)¹³⁸

We learn here that it is not just important to engage in activities that can heal the world.

It is also important to reflect upon the way in which we act and also upon the actual deeds that we do. Bahya uses the famous line from Leviticus that tells us to love our neighbor.

This phrase seems to be the root of every moral activity that we engage in whether it is the introspection that precedes or accompanies the act, or the act itself. This quote can inspire us to love and care for other people. It can also encourage us to see the world in a way that does not focus on our own lives. It helps us to understand others through the ways in which we understand ourselves. This is similar to the pillars of reflection that Bahya explained in Gate two. Introspection on the way in which we practice *tikkun olam* can also persuade us to act completely unselfishly by focusing solely on what others need and what the world needs. There is always more one can do to help fix a problem in the world and Bahya teaches us that we can realize these other actions by practicing introspection.

The prayer that closely ties in with themes presented in this chapter is the *Unetaneh Tokef*. It is traditionally recited as part of the Chazzan's musaf amidah. The prayer has become a central thematic focus of the entire High Holy Day liturgy. The prayer connects to this section because of its themes and also because of the story that accompanies the origins of this prayer.

¹³⁸ Translation – Gate Eight, chapter 3, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 235

The legend teaches us that Rabbi Amnon of Mainz first recited the *Unetaneh Tokef* in the 11th century. He had failed to reject an order to convert to Christianity immediately and instead asked for three days to consider it. After 3 days of reflection he did not agree to give up his faith and was taken away and tortured. A few days later it was Rosh Hashanah and he asked his disciples to take him to the synagogue, where he interrupted the service and recited the words of the *Unetaneh Tokef* in order to sanctify the name of God. After reciting the words he died. Later, he appeared to Rabbi Kalonymus in a dream and asked that this prayer be recited each year.¹³⁹

We can see the magnitude of Rabbi Amnon's reflection and introspection through this legend. While we do not know if this legend is true, we can find meaning in it.¹⁴⁰ Amnon was given the choice to convert or be put to death, which tells us that he had to die for his religion. He chose to carefully meditate on his situation in the world and the way in which Torah could guide his actions. He gauged the importance of his past actions as a Jew and his future actions either as a Christian or a Jew. He chose to die as a Jew rather than live as a non-Jew, thus demonstrating the powerful nature of self-reflection. Through critical examination of the self, Rabbi Amnon was able to decide that his faith was important.

Bahya's chapter on humility teaches us that it is important to examine our entire relationship with God as well as our entire corpus of actions. These examinations can help us see what possible actions we can take in the future and can reveal to us many different layers of wisdom. As Rabbi Amnon engaged in introspection, we too can take opportunities to reflect on serious decisions that we may confront. We do not know what

¹³⁹ Hammer, p. 89

¹⁴⁰ Hammer, p. 86

these reflections will reveal, but we do know that they can help us be guided in a certain direction.

The words of the prayer can be the most powerful words recited on the High Holy Days.

Let us proclaim the sacred power of this day; it is awesome and full of dread. For on this day Your dominion is exalted, Your throne established in steadfast love; there in truth You reign. In truth you are Judge and Arbiter, Counsel and Witness. You write and You seal, You record and recount. You remember deeds long forgotten. You open the book of our days, and what is written there proclaims itself, for it bears the signature of every human being.

The great shofar is sounded, the still, small voice is heard; the angels gripped by fear and trembling, declare in awe: This is the Day of Judgment! For even the hosts of heaven are judged, as all who dwell on earth stand arrayed before You. As the shepherd seeks out the flock, and makes the sheep pass under the staff, so do You muster and number and consider every soul, setting the bounds of every creature's life, and decreeing its destiny.

On Rosh Hashanah it is written, on Yom Kippur it is seals: How many shall pass on, how many shall come to be, who shall live and who shall die; who shall see ripe age and who shall not, who shall perish by fire and who by water; who by sword and who by beast; who by hunger and who by thirst; who by earthquake and who by plague; who by strangling and who by stoning; who shall be secure and who shall be driven; who shall be tranquil and who shall be troubled; who shall be poor and who shall be rich, who shall be humbled and who exalted.

But repentance, prayer and righteousness temper the sever decree.

This is Your glory: You are slow to anger, ready to forgive. It is not the death of sinners you seek, but that they should turn from their ways and live...¹⁴¹

Each time these words are read or chanted in the synagogue they have the potential to fill the worshippers with awe. They inform us of God holding the power of great judgment. As the prayer teaches us, God plays every role in the courtroom. God judges all living creatures by using both wisdom, and compassion. God's role as judge mirrors the type of

¹⁴¹ Translation of *Unetaneh Tokef* as found in *Gates of Repentance*, p. 107-109

introspection that Bahya encourages. We should strive to uncover every deed of the past and we should weigh our actions carefully.

The words of this prayer put our own mortality right in front of us. The stirring words that describe God's decision to record our destinies are chilling. We learn from this prayer that through repentance, prayer and righteousness the decree is tempered. "This rabbinic teaching (Genesis Rabba 44:12) is not confined to Rosh Hashanah but speaks in general terms of what one must do to avert the consequences of sin."¹⁴² Prayer in this context can be considered the serious introspection in which we can partake. Through prayer we examine our actions and the way we should act. Our prayers can guide us in the words and teachings of Torah. They can promote us to righteousness and they can help to steer us in the direction of repentance when we go astray.

The idea of hope expressed in this poem is also in inspiration. God is described as a merciful judge who looks to forgive sinners who turn from their evil. If we reflect on this matter, it is possible to see a God who loves and who does not want to bring about evil. It is possible to build on that reflection and go to another level which could consist of the proper actions that we should guide our service to God and our actions to God.

This gate on introspection summarizes the previous gates but also provides us with an opportunity to focus on our spiritual lives. The repetition also serves as a reminder for us that reflection for the purpose of improving one's spiritual direction is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing process that builds on previous reflections and encourages us to dig deeper into our souls so that we can continue to find ways to improve ourselves.

¹⁴² Hammer, p. 89

Chapter 9: Gate Nine – On Abstinence

In this gate Bahya begins to focus on the topic of abstinence. The chapter raises significant questions about the specific implications of abstinence. One could read this chapter in such a way that it promotes a complete dismissal of the chapter for any modern purpose. The title of the gate inspires us to question what is actually meant by abstinence and in what ways does it apply to our world today. As we explore Bahya's teachings here, we will try to find ways to apply this text to our lives and our preparations for the High Holy Days.

In his introduction to this gate, Feldman describes Bahya's notion of abstinence in the following way, "The essence of abstinence is that left to our instincts we would never over indulge and could always happily make do with simple necessities. But by virtue of the fact that we develop tastes, predilections, and a keen sense of pleasure and have learned only too well the ways of dissatisfaction and unhappiness, we demand more."¹⁴³ We learn from this definition that we should strive to limit the ways in which we overindulge in the luxuries of life. One could say that Feldman describes Bahya's level of abstinence as "self-control."

Bahya defines abstinence in the following way:

Abstinence is the conquest of the soul's desires and the abstention from something that one is capable of doing because of the obligation [of abstinence], as it is said, the one who abstains has the ability [to act] but does not. The obligation of the conquest of one's desires is divided into two parts. The first part applies to humanity and to many other animals, the second part applies to people who adhere to the Torah. General abstinence [as applied to all of humanity] is enacted for the welfare of our bodies and the ordering of our matters, it is the way of kings [as they administer their laws], it is the way of doctors as they care for the sick, it is the way of all intelligent people [as each administers] control of his own desires for food, drink, sex, clothing, speech and various movements and

¹⁴³ Feldman, p. 395

pleasures. Abstinence taught by Torah and reason is for the well being of the soul in the world to come, as will be explained later.¹⁴⁴

As Bahya has done in the past with other definitions of concepts, he again divides the method of abstinence into two parts. Generally when we see this in The Duties of the Heart, we are reminded that Bahya desires both parts for ethical transformation, but the second one is usually the one that he prefers. This explanation of abstinence teaches us that there is a measure of self-control that each of us can build into our lives. We do not need to eat the best foods nor wear the most expensive clothing. We can use proper language when we speak and we do not need to have uncontrollable sex. It is possible to overindulge in any of these categories but it is important to allow the mind to experience some self-control and limit some of these luxuries. Bahya explains that this abstinence is for the good of the world and that every person should only take what it needs and what is appropriate. Many parents strive to teach this lesson to their children. Parents limit the candies and the sweets because they are luxuries. Even though they taste good, they are detrimental to a child's health. People also limit the quantities of healthy foods so that food does not go to waste.

Regarding everyone's need for abstinence Bahya explains the following:

[Individuals] need to practice this general abstinence so that they can improve themselves by only taking what they need, [there are some people] who practice complete abstinence by separating themselves from all worldly needs. We learn from them each person practices abstinence according to his own need, it is appropriate [for people to practice abstinence] according to their own custom and measure.¹⁴⁵

This piece of Bahya's explanation can help us understand the way in which we may want to apply the practice of abstinence. It is important to remember that Bahya does not want

¹⁴⁴ Translation – Gate Nine, chapter 1, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 260-261

¹⁴⁵ Translation – Gate Nine, chapter 1, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 263

us to be completely void of every worldly desire. Humanity simply would not be able to function if that were the case. The lesson that we learn here can be applied to much of what Bahya is teaching us, we can only act according to our own will. Each person has the ability to choose the degree of his or her limits. What Bahya wants us to remember, is that we all should engage in some level of abstinence because it can lead toward self-improvement.

After the detailed explanation of the meaning of general abstinence, Bahya moves to explain the specific details of abstinence that he thinks those who follow the Torah should practice. The definitions of special abstinence for people who are guided by the Torah reflect various opinions by different sages:

One of them said abstinence is the abandonment of everything that distracts [you] from God. Another said: Abstinence is hating the world and reducing your desires. Another said: Abstinence is achieving an inner calm and the severance of all [the soul's] ties to things that give it only pleasure and rest. Another said: Abstinence is trust in God. Another said: Abstinence is wearing clothing to cover your nakedness, eating enough to avoid hunger and avoiding everything else. Another said: Abstinence is avoiding human love and loving solitude. Another said: Abstinence is gratitude [for God's] goodness and enduring hardship. Another said: Abstinence is the soul's abstention from everything that gives pleasure and bodily comfort except the natural needs which one cannot live without and departing from the rest. This is the definition most appropriate for abstinence for the followers of the Torah [compared] with the rest of the definitions [above]. Also people need to follow this reasoning because it is the intention of the Torah that the mind will rule over the desires of the soul and the body.¹⁴⁶

There are multiple reasons offered to demonstrate the concept of special abstinence for those who are guided by Torah. The question must be asked, why then does Bahya consider the last reason the most appropriate? Many of the other reasons described in the text above have been cited in other instances in The Duties of the Heart as ideal practices for spiritual guidance. Feldman comments that the last reason is most appropriate

¹⁴⁶ Translation – Gate Nine, chapter 2, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 264-265

because it entails avoiding the utmost denial and excess.¹⁴⁷ We can all agree that people have basic needs that should be met. Bahya is teaching us to limit ourselves so that we can stay within a certain boundary.

It seems as though this reasoning is similar to the reasoning Bahya gave for general abstinence. The difference here is that Bahya is concerned that the *yetzer hara* will come and take over the mind and soul to influence people in a negative way. The boundaries to be used for this type of abstinence are those found in the Torah. Therefore, they include the body of principles that Jews can use to set their limits. For example the laws of *kashrut* set a boundary that regulate the food one eats. People who keep kosher can only eat certain foods and may not choose to indulge in anything beyond these limits. Jewish dietary laws do not permit us to mix meat and milk and do not permit us to enjoy a luxury food such as lobster. A Cheeseburger is out of the question, but a good steak does not have to be. When we look at a menu and make a decision to put food into our mouths we can apply Bahya's definition of abstinence. Our bodies and our souls may want to enjoy that cheeseburger but it is the conscious decision of the mind rules over and reigns in our desire.

The concept of abstinence is also applicable to the way in which we make decisions about how to act. The Torah can provide boundaries for our actions. We do not have to look further than the Ten Commandments to find these limits. People who follow these guidelines strive to avoid murder, stealing, adultery and lying. The laws of the Ten Commandments limit our actions and they can also guide our minds to overcome the desire to commit such an act. Abstinence does not have to be the complete abandonment of everything that gives pleasure. According to Bahya abstinence can

¹⁴⁷ Feldman, p. 408

provide us with limits and boundaries so that we are not overcome by our evil inclination and so that we act in ways that are considered good.

In order to see the parallels of the concept of abstinence in the High Holy Day liturgy, we look again at the text of *vidui*. The confessional piece of the Yom Kippur liturgy contains an acrostic listing of sins that either we as individuals or we as a community may have committed during the past year. We think of this particular piece of the liturgy because we can be reminded of the different luxuries and evil actions that we should avoid during the year. During our High Holy Day preparations we can think about of these actions and work on abstaining from them.

The text of the acrostic reads:

We have become guilty, we have betrayed, we have robbed, we have spoken slander, we have caused perversion, we have caused wickedness, we have sinned willfully, we have extorted, we have accused falsely, we have given evil, counsel, we have been deceitful, we have scorned, we have rebelled, we have provoked, we have turned away, we have been perverse, we have acted wantonly, we have persecuted, we have been obstinate, we have been wicked, we have corrupted, we have been abominable, we have strayed, you have let us go astray.¹⁴⁸

The translation does not grasp the magnitude felt by the acrostic prayer because of the limits of the English language.¹⁴⁹ One of the most apparent characteristics of this prayer is that it is written in the first person plural. "In keeping with the Jewish concept of responsibility, we confess to things we not only have done personally but things done by anyone within the community. Each person shares in the responsibility for the society as a whole."¹⁵⁰ This prayer promotes a certain level of awareness of some of the actions committed by others in the community. It can be difficult to work on complete abstention as guided by the Torah on our own. The possibility exists, however, that we

¹⁴⁸ Text of the Ashamnu as translated in the Art Scroll Machzor Yom Kippur, p. 92-93

¹⁴⁹ For an English acrostic of this prayer see Gates of Repentance, p. 269-270

¹⁵⁰ Hammer, p. 140

may be inclined to abstain from certain acts when we know the community around us promotes a similar practice. This system can also encourage a communal response to the influence of the *yetzer hara*. If we are influenced by others to act, then we can all work together to eliminate evil temptations and promote only intentions that benefit society.

Another piece of the confession mentions the sins we have committed against God in a slightly different context. The central phrase that is repeated throughout the prayer is "*Al cheit shechatanu l'fanacha*, the sin we have committed against You..." During this section of the confession we also find the phrase "*V'al kulam Elohah s'lichot, s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, kaper lanu...*, For all these [sins] oh God of mercy, forgive us, pardon us, and grant us atonement." After mentioning our sins we ask God to forgive us and it becomes important for us to try to abstain from these actions again in the future.

The sin we have committed against You under duress or by choice, the sin we have committed against You consciously or unconsciously, and the sin we have committed against You openly or secretly. The sin we have committed against You in our thoughts, the sin we have committed against You by hardening our hearts, the sin we have committed against You by profaning Your name, and the sin we have committed against You by disrespect for parents and teachers. The sin we have committed against You by speaking slander, the sin we have committed against You by dishonesty in our work, and the sin we have committed against You by hurting others in any way. For all these sins O God of mercy, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!¹⁵¹

Hammer comments that this section of the confessional prayer helps us to focus on inner corruption as well as on our relationship with others. "Many [of the sins mentioned] stress the misuse of words to wrong others. The importance of expressing reverence for parents and teachers is mentioned, as are business ethics and the evils of haughtiness or

¹⁵¹ This text was taken from the Gates of Repentance, p. 271-272. The Art Scroll Machzor contains a much more extensive list which also reflects the acrostic nature see Art Scroll Machzor Yom Kippur, p. 94-97. For our purposes here, we can understand the context from the shorter version.

vanity. The emphasis here is clearly on our relationship to others, including those acts which may not be seen outwardly but that lead to inner corruption.”¹⁵² Anyone can find some act described here that has been committed or not committed. It is important for us to understand that we can work on abstaining from these acts in the future. All of these acts can be found in the Torah. By committing ourselves to follow them, we can behave morally and ethically.

The abstention that we have studied here is important because it encourages us to develop a mastery of our mind over our souls. We are encouraged to think about our actions as we do them. Abstention from the acts described in the *vidui* can help us to become more like the person who Bahya describes as the abstainer who follows the Torah. Both general abstention and abstention stemming from the Torah can provide us with appropriate boundaries and limits for many things in our lives.

¹⁵² Hammer, p. 140

Chapter 10: Gate Ten – On Love of God

Back in Gate one Bahya began by teaching the concepts of the unity of God. Here, in Gate ten, Bahya concludes The Duties of the Heart with a discussion of the ultimate union with God – the love of God. Love of God is the ultimate goal of all noble qualities and the highest degree which people serving God can attain. It is important to note that love of God cannot be attained directly, the other stages (ie. Humility, trust in God, introspection etc.) as expressed by Bahya are key components of spiritual guidance that can help bring people to love God. Therefore the previous nine stages are a pathway to get to this ultimate level.¹⁵³

Bahya explains to us in the opening of this chapter that the purpose of the last Gate on abstention was to free the heart so that a person can love God. Love of God is the highest stage for those who wish to serve God.

It is appropriate for you, my brother, to know and understand that everything that we have already mentioned in this book from the duties of the heart and the virtuous traits and noble souls, are levels [leading] to the supreme matter which will be explained in this chapter. It is also appropriate for you to know that all of the obligations and all of the virtues, revealed by reason, scripture or tradition are intended to be steps to bring you up to this matter which is their goal. Beyond this stage there is no further stage and nothing after it. This is why it has been compared by [Moses] in the book of Deuteronomy to the pure assertion of God's unity, as it is said: Hear O Israel Adonai is our God, Adonai is One, and you shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all of your might." (Deut. 6:4-5) And [the assertion of God's unity] is stressed in the Torah as it is said: "By loving Adonai your God, heeding God's commands, and holding fast to God." (Deut. 30:20) The meaning of holding fast to God is the faithful love [of God] with a complete heart, as it is said: "There are companions to keep one company, And there is a friend more devoted than a brother." (Prov. 18:24)¹⁵⁴

It is interesting that we began our study in Gate one by looking at the words of the Shema for the purpose of understanding God's oneness. Now we have come full circle and are

¹⁵³ Mansoor, p. 64

¹⁵⁴ Translation – Gate Ten, Introduction, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 317-318

looking once again at these famous words. The difference this time is that our study can be more advanced. Having examined the intermediate chapters of The Duties of the Heart, we now possess a different knowledge and having experienced different modes of reflection we can understand these words very differently. Now as we study the words of the Shema, we can bring an awareness of the good graces that have been given to us by God. We can think to our own understanding of what it means to trust God and serve God. Our appreciation of the acts of creation can help us to bring new meaning to this phrase. By looking inward at our own humility and the need for repentance, we can realize that there is something internal we have to do in order to love God. These previous chapters are important factors in the search for spiritual improvement. As Bahya reminds here, they are steps to the ultimate goal of loving God.

What is the love of God? This is the question with which Bahya begins the first chapter of this Gate. To answer this question Bahya will examine the nature of the soul and its role as a spiritual entity.

The love of God is the yearning of the soul, the desire of its essence [directed to] the creator, in order to cleave to [God's] supreme light. The soul, itself, is a simple spiritual entity that inclines by its nature similar spiritual beings, and distances itself by its nature from course bodies which are not like it. The Creator has connected it to a course body [such as ours] because [the Creator] wants to see how it manages and controls the body. God wanted to see how it would protect the body and to benefit it, because of the partnership and attachment that were imprinted [on the body and the soul] from the time of creation.¹⁵⁵

We learn here that love is the ultimate yearning of the soul to be at one with God. Bahya defines the soul as a spiritual entity that wishes to cleave to other spiritual entities. It is possible to derive from this definition that God is the spiritual entity that drives the soul in its desire to love God. What is interesting here, is that the soul becomes housed in the

¹⁵⁵ Translation – Gate Ten, Chapter 1, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 320

humanly body which Bahya considers different from the soul. Throughout the entire treatise we have discussed the joining of the body and the soul. The central theme that has returned repeatedly is the idea of internal actions joined with external actions. We find out here that the concern regarding the internal actions was a preliminary stage so that the soul could begin to control the body. If the soul can do that, then the soul will be able to cleave to God. Therefore, the more work we do internally by reflection, the better our likelihood of cleaving to and loving God.

Bahya continues in Chapter 1 of the tenth Gate by exploring the way in which the soul operates within the body.

When the soul feels that there is something that will benefit the body and it benefits the bodies existence, it inclines to it and longs for it, in order to seek rest from the ills and afflictions of the body, just like when a person who is sick longs for a doctor, to take care of him and be concerned with him. When the soul feels [that there is] something that adds light to its essence and strength to itself, it hastens to incline to it and cleave to it in its thoughts, to keep it in mind, longing for it and desiring it, this is the result of pure love.¹⁵⁶

As the soul demonstrates these actions mentioned by Bahya, it becomes more likely that it will demonstrate the actions necessary to love God. Bahya tells us that pure love is the result of continual pursuit of something that can be used to benefit the body or soul. If the soul makes such an object the aim of its yearning and desire, then it is always inclined to get it. So, too, when we think about God as the goal of the soul's desire, we can be inspired to do all of the tasks mentioned in the previous gates to help us love and cleave to God. Feldman concludes that pure love is one that is based on heartfelt yearning to fulfill a native, wholesome and basic need.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Translation -- Gate Ten, Chapter 1, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 320-321

¹⁵⁷ Feldman, p. 441

In the second chapter of this gate Bahya describes that there are three kinds of love of God.

What kinds of love of God are there? As an answer to this question, love of a servant for his master can happen in one of three ways. First, when [a servant] loves [his master] because of [the master's] goodness and compassion to him. Second, [a servant's] love [for his master] because he forgives transgressions, and for his great pardon and atonement of sins. Third, [a servant's] love [for his master] comes from his greatness and superiority, because the servant is in awe of his master's honor, not because of fear or hope. Similarly, our love for God is based on God's great compassion to us and the measure of God's goodness to us, we incline our souls to love God because we hope [for God's continual graces to us]. God's love for us may be based on his disregard for our sins, forgiveness of our transgressions, despite our transgressions against God's mitzvot. Our love of God is for God's honor, for God's greatness and glory. This last kind is pure love of God. Which [Moses taught us] saying: "And you shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all of your might."¹⁵⁸ (Deut. 6:5)

If we love God because God did something for us, then we are returning the favor to us and showing God that we love God. This is a good way to love God because it shows that we can come to understand and reflect on what God has done for us. This reason reflects the first three gates in The Duties of the Heart, and therefore it is a good place to start. The second aspect of love is similar to the first. God can grant us forgiveness, which might be considered an act of goodness bestowed on us by God. This type of love reflects the seventh gate, which discusses the themes of repentance. A love such as this can follow our own actions and thoughts that would incline us to return to the performance of mitzvot. Bahya calls the third way of showing love ideal because one comes to love God in this way out of his or her own volition. There is no favor to return, and one simply would come to love God because of God's honor, greatness and glory. Loving God in this way is the realization that God is the source of everything, from creation to the object of our thoughts and actions. When we love God in this way, we can

¹⁵⁸ Translation – Gate Ten, Chapter 2, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 323-324

find a unique relationship with God.

In the final chapter of this gate Bahya looks into the practices of people who love God.

The customs of the people who love God are too numerous to mention. But I will mention what occurs to me regarding them. People that know God, understand God's purpose with them, God's management of their affairs, those who have observed God's care for them, those who understand God's rule over them in all that they have been permitted to choose from the Torah.¹⁵⁹

Feldman comments on this text that those who know God are aware of God's presence and can sense it. He also explains that an understanding is more than just a belief in God.¹⁶⁰ The one who loves God, shows that love through acts of mitzvot and righteousness. Accompanying the performance of these mitzvot, is the knowledge and awareness that God is the source of the obligation to do them. Others can never witness the internal process that goes along with the performance of mitzvot. Love of God is therefore something private that goes in inside of us.

Having examined the obligations of the member, that obligate an individual all the time and everywhere and in every matter, they found that [they only consist of] the reading of the Torah and the studying of the mitzvot, like it says: "and these words which I command you this day upon your heart, you shall teach them diligently to your children, speak of them when you sit in your house, and when walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up." (Deut 6:6) This is why [Moses] said a second time: "And teach them to your children—reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deut. 11:19) Everything else was reduced in their eyes since they had discovered the greatness of what was revealed to their souls regarding their obligations to serve God in deed, so they served God by the mitzvot of the mind, a special ethic, and good spiritual virtues, and they added them to the customary mitzvot and performed them with a pure heart. They learned the ways of the prophets and the customs of the sages to seeking to please God and [so that God would] receive them. This way of worship is included in the duties of the heart, the principles and different kinds which were explained in this book.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Translation – Gate Ten, Chapter 7, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 348

¹⁶⁰ Feldman, p. 455

¹⁶¹ Translation – Gate Ten, Chapter 7, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 352-353

The source for a true understanding of the duties of the heart goes back to the Torah. Bahya however has added a special ethic, which is this 10 step process to achieving a love of God. The virtues described in his ethical treatise can help deepen the mitzvot as explained in the Torah. Bahya also adds spiritual mitzvot to this process, which are reflected in the intentions of the mind. As Bahya continues to further explain the concept of love of God, he reveals to us that it is important to love God all of the time and teach this love of God to one's children. The practice of loving God and teaching God encourages future generations to embark on the same spiritual journey that we can choose to undertake. Bahya would encourage us to continually work at this process throughout our entire lives so that we can always be trying to perfect the ways in which act.

The concept of loving God appears in the High Holy Day liturgy at the conclusion of the Ne-ilah service. In front of the open ark we recite the words: "Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad," once. We follow that by saying: "Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam vaed (Blessed is God's glorious majesty for ever and ever,)" three times. And then finally we recite the following words seven times: "Adonai hu ha-elohim (Adonai is God.)" Immediately after these words are said the shofar is sounded for a final time with the blast of Tekia G'dolah.

One concludes the day with this ultimate statement of faith, proclaiming 11 statements about God. The words "Adonai hu ha-elohim" are taken from Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Ba'al¹⁶² at Mount Carmel. When Elijah is vindicated and the people are convinced that Adonai is indeed the only God, they shout, "Adonai is

¹⁶² Ba'al is an ancient Middle Eastern God.

God.” (I Kings 18:39)¹⁶³ This prayer is offered at the end of Ne-ilah to reassure us that there is indeed one God who is with us at all times and all places.¹⁶⁴

“Sometime later, the Shema – the most basic Jewish confession of faith – and the line usually recited as a silent response to the shema were added to the ceremony... This pledge is more powerful when made as a collective act by the entire people Israel at the conclusion of the most sacred day of the year.”¹⁶⁵ These three statements are the most powerful way to conclude the experience of the High Holy Days. During the time when we have struggled with God by wrestling with our actions and engaging in repentance, we affirm at the end that despite our struggles with ourselves and with that Adonai is one, and the Adonai is our God.

Just as Bahya ends his ethical guide for spiritual improvement with the concept of love of God, we conclude Yom Kippur and the period of thirty-nine days of self-reflection, beginning with Elul, exploring our relationship with God and the actions that we take to bring us closer to loving God. We are supported by the fact that the entire congregation and the entire community are proclaiming their faith in God as well. The idea of loving God is a central part of the process of spiritual and ethical transformation. Striving to reach this goal can encourage us to work at improving ourselves.

¹⁶³ Hammer, p. 175

¹⁶⁴ Hammer, p. 175

¹⁶⁵ Hammer, p. 175-176

Conclusion

Ethical transformation is an ongoing process. As we spend more time reflecting on our thoughts and our actions, our ethical transformation can have a significant impact on our lives. One of the most appropriate times of the year to undertake this journey happens during the season of the High Holy Days. Milestones such as anniversaries, birthdays, and celebrations of the New Year are suitable to be marked with a contemplative process. This contemplation can help drive a person to think critically about who he is, what he believes in and how he acts. When a person confronts these issues in preparation for the High Holy Days, that person can engage in a suitable method of preparation that is in line with traditional Jewish thinking regarding High Holy Day preparation.

While the aim of this thesis was to develop an approach to Elul based on the themes of Bahya's ethical treatise, I think that it is appropriate for a person to spend other times in the year outside of the month of Elul on improving her ethical decision making. Ethical transformation cannot be complete after one season of preparation. It is important for a person to study Bahya's themes and reflect on them annually. Each year a person can bring more wisdom and experience to the contemplative process and can apply Bahya's path of spiritual and ethical transformation in new ways. Bahya's text can continue to make an impact on our world nearly 1000 years after it was written if we commit ourselves to understanding his emphasis on the internal duties as he guides us through each gate of The Duties of the Heart.

Appendix A: A guide for High Holy Day Preparation inspired by the texts of The Duties of the Heart

The following ten pages are guide pages that can help you put the texts and concepts taught by Bahya into practice. Each page is designed to resemble a page of Talmud. You will find a text from each Gate in The Duties of the Heart. That text will be in the center of the page in bolder text with four activities that relate to the theme of the chapter. The activities are found in italicized text. There are forty activities for you to choose from to help prepare you for the High Holy Days. It is difficult to accomplish all forty activities in the entire month of Elul leading up to Rosh Hashanah. If we are to accomplish what Bahya would like us to accomplish, then it is important for us to engage in at least one activity from each Gate.

Many of the activities found on the following pages include questions or points of reflection. It may be advisable for you to record some of these reflections in a personal journal. This journal can be devoted to your own moral improvement and can be a source for further reflection in subsequent years. It also may be advisable that you find yourself a *chevruta* partner.¹ You and your partner can travel on this journey of moral improvement supporting each other and sharing your experiences with one another.

The activities here also require that you engage yourself in Torah study. This Torah study can help you throughout your journey.

Bahya would not want us to limit ourselves to this course of actions during Elul and the High Holy Day season alone. It may be good to continue these practices and reflections during the rest of the year.

¹ A *chevruta* partner is a traditional term for study partner.

Gate One: God's Oneness

1. Picturing God's Oneness: Close your eyes and breathe deeply, imagine the number 1 out in the distance. Begin to recite "Shema Yisrael Adonai eloheinu Adonai Echad" first in a whisper, gradually increasing your volume and then decreasing back to a whisper. Picture the number 1 getting closer as you get louder and farther away as you get softer. Breathe deeply again. While your eyes are closed think about the following questions: How do you feel God's presence? When are you close to God, when are you distant from God? How do you know God exists?

2. Listening to God: "Shema Yisrael Adonai eloheinu Adonai Echad" The words of the Shema tell us to "Hear" not "see" Judaism is a religion of listening. The Israelites responded to the laws of Torah by saying, "We will do and we will hear." The Jew hears and responds. If the primary sense in Judaism is hearing, we must learn to grow quiet, to shut out noise and busyness, in order to truly hear. In the resulting calm we may discover that God is still speaking in the world – and to us.² Make it your goal to focus on your hearing and your listening. Remember when you hear God. Mark it down and reflect on it.

I say: that every object that seeks to know God, when we are doubtful about God's existence, one needs to first ask whether God exists or does not exist. When a person verifies the truth of God's existence, one needs to investigate it, what is God's existence? How is God's existence? Why is God's existence? About the creator, one should only ask if God exists. And when we verify God's existence by analysis, we investigate if God is one or more than one. When it becomes clear to us that God is one, we investigate the matter of this oneness, and how many aspects are there of this oneness. Through this, God's oneness is established for us, as it is written, "Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One." (Deut. 6:4)³

3. The Process of God's Oneness: Sit in front of a tall tree while holding a seed in your hand. Imagine yourself planting the seed and watching it grow. Imagine the seed growing roots and a trunk. Imagine the roots going deeper into the ground and spreading out. Imagine the tree getting taller and taller as it branches off. Imagine the branches growing leaves and the roots collecting water. What do you think it means that everything comes from one point? What are other things in the world that have a primal point? Engage in a similar practice with them.

4. God works in complex ways: Recite the words of the morning prayer: "asher yatzar et ha-adam b'chochma, God who formed the body with wisdom." They can be found in any siddur in the morning service. Think about the complex way in which your body was created. How does God have a role in that? Think about the mysterious ways in which the human body works. Why is it so special that they work in the way they do?

² Ochs, Carol and Kerry M. Olitzky. Jewish Spiritual Guidance: Finding Our Way to God. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 1997, p. 53

³ Translation of Gate One, chapter 4, Hebrew edition volume 1, p. 101-102

Gate Two: Meditation on Creation

1. God's wisdom can be found through beauty: Spend your day looking for God's beauty in the world. Look for God's beauty in the natural world and in other human beings. What are things that amaze you? What do you find that inspires awe in you?

2. Using your senses:

Each of us has five senses that we use to discover the world, taste, touch, smell, hearing, and seeing. Spend your day using all of your senses to discover the world. You may be reminded of things you already knew or you may learn something entirely new. What have you learned about the world around you? What surprised you? In what ways did you discover God's presence through your searching? Spend some time looking at the animals you may see. How do they discover their world? Do they have senses that we do not? What are similarities or differences? How do you see God through the animals?

Meditation on the pillars of creation: The first [pillar], is a sign of the wisdom that appears in the roots of the world and in its foundation...The second pillar, is the sign of wisdom in the human species...The third, is the sign of wisdom in the composition of human beings, the construction of body and the strengths of the soul, and the light of the intelligence that makes humans unique...The fourth, is the sign of wisdom that appears in other living things, from small to large...The fifth, is the sign of wisdom that appears in the plants and minerals that are ready to be used by human beings, that depend on their nature, composition, and abilities...The sixth, is the sign of wisdom, that appears in the sciences, arts, and professions, that the Creator prepared for humans in order to complete their interests, earn a living and attain all other benefits...The seventh, is the sign of wisdom that appears fixed in the Torah and the laws, and to use them to serve the Creator above.⁴

3. The secrets of nature: Go on a nature walk on Shabbat (with an expert in the environment if you can). Talk about some of the plants that you find on the nature walk. Look out for things that are interesting to you or that do not seem normal (e.g. trees with different types of leaves, what the leaves of trees do when it is about to rain etc.). When you see something incredible say, "Mah rabu ma-asecha Adonai." (How amazing are your works O God!) (Ps. 104:24) Try to eat some of the plants you find if you know they are safe to be eaten. If you find something from a plant that could be used for something try to take and use it for that purpose (e.g. aloe).

4. God in the texts: Read the stories of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Read Psalm 104. Read the Midrash Ma'aseh Avraham Avinu. How do these texts celebrate creation? How do you see the beauty of creation described in the world around you? How do you see God's hand repeated daily in creation?

⁴ Hebrew Translation, Gate Two – Chapter 4, Hebrew volume I, selections from p.148-162

Gate Three: Serving God

1. Choosing your core values: Using a combination of experience and study, it is important for you to think about serving God by choosing the values you wish to live by. First, think about experiences in your life when you have tried to practice righteousness. What were some actions that you took to be righteous? What inspired you to act in those ways? Engage in some Torah study either alone or with a partner. Think about some of the values you discover either in the Torah or in the Rabbinic literature. What did you learn that could help you live your life righteously? After you have thought about all of these values make a list and begin to incorporate them into your daily life.

2. Personal Mission

Statements: The idea of a personal mission statement can bring about personal change for themselves. "The most effective way I know to begin with the end in mind is to create a personal mission statement or philosophy or creed. It focuses on what you want to be (character) and to do (contributions and achievements) and on values or principles upon which being and doing are based."⁵ Using this notion and Bahya's principles of encouragement to serve God. Work on creating a personal mission statement. Share it with a partner. Change it when you think change is necessary.

This encouragement [to serve God] is of two kinds, the first comes from the mind, and is rooted in discernment, and is formed for a person from his creation at birth. The second is acquired by way of tradition, this tradition is Torah, that the Prophet brought to humankind to teach them the way of this service that is obligatory upon them.⁶

3. Aligning our internal obligations with our external obligations:

Aligning internal and external obligations encourages us to experience a complete moral makeover. This process involves two components. Prepare yourself by thinking about how you will act before you act. Use your values and/or your personal mission statement to guide your decisions. Once you have chosen a course of action, reflect on the action. In what ways did you serve God? In what ways did you feel God's presence?

4. The shofar as a call to act: Listen to the sounds of the shofar the month of Elul. Each day pick a new mitzvah to incorporate into your day. As you perform these mitzvot think about how you serve God through these actions. Another approach to hearing the sound of the shofar would be to try to add holiness to your normal daily routine. Say the blessings before and after your meals. Incorporate Torah study into your day.

⁵ Covey, p. 106

⁶ Hebrew Translation – Gate Three, Chapter 1, Hebrew volume I, p. 203

Gate Four: Trust in God

1. Prayer as a sign of trust: Taking time to say the words in our prayer books and exploring our inner thoughts helps us to build trust in God. When we pray we sing praises to God for all of the attributes of trust. Prayer helps us to spend time reflecting on God's graces in the world. When you pray spend time thinking about the words of the P'sukei D'zimra and how these words help to build our trust in God.

2. Trust in the Torah: Study the story in the book of Genesis that tells of Jacob's dream of the ladder. (Gen. 28:10-22) How is this a story of trust? What does Jacob do that demonstrates his trust in God? What can we learn from Jacob that we can do to trust God?⁷

The seven attributes of trust are:

1. Mercy, compassion, and love.
2. A person will know that because of his love for [you], he will not desert you and will not be lazy in addressing your needs.
3. This person is strong, and it is impossible for him to be overcome by your needs.
4. He knows which matters are good for you, both inwardly and outwardly.
5. You must be under his care from birth, through childhood, youth, maturity and old age to the end of days.
6. He gives everything to your hand.
7. You trust him because of his endless giving and compassion.⁸

3. Reading the psalm of Elul: Begin the practice of reciting Psalm 27. How do the words of the psalm inspire you to realize ways in which you can rely on God? Why should you place your hope in Adonai? What challenges might there be for you that prevent this process? How might you overcome these challenges? Discuss this with your partner.

4. The Thirteen Attributes and becoming a trustworthy person: Read the thirteen attributes when you wake up in the morning each day. What lessons do you learn about acting mercifully? How can you fulfill these qualities for others? Why do you think it is important for other people to trust you? Why do you think that if others put their trust in you, that you might be able to trust God more? Practice some of these attributes and make a mental note about how people interact with you.

⁷ Ochs and Olitzky, p. 96-97

⁸ Hebrew Translation – Gate Four, Chapter 2, Hebrew Volume I, p. 320-322

Gate Five: Devotion to God

1. The intentions of our actions: As we discussed earlier *kavanah* is usually associated with prayer. Spend the beginning of your day writing down the different intentions of the things you know you have to do. Try to uncover deeper layers of intention. Try to complete your actions according to your intentions. When something comes your way that is unexpected, think before you act. Think over the reasons behind your possible course of action. What meaning do you find in this process? What connections to God grow out of this process?

2. Giving up one's needs for the sake of human kind:
Make your goal for a week to devote yourself to the needs of others. What are some things that you could do to help the needs of others? How do you feel when you put the needs of others before you? In what ways do you enact the Jewish value "B'tzelem Elohim"? How does serving others emulate devotion to God?

What does dedicating one's actions to God mean? It is the intention, outwardly and inwardly, of acts of service to God for God's sake, to act according to God's will alone, not according to the will of God's creations.⁹

3. Avoiding the "yetzer hara": Bahya explains that evil inclinations can hinder our devotion to God. This activity focuses requires us to begin an editing process for all of the stimuli that provoke us to act. How do you react to other people's ideas and requests? What do other people say to provoke you to act in positive and negative ways? Develop a method to incorporate your values into your responses. Try to remember your own core beliefs when you have been asked to do something. If it is not in your value system try to fight the urge to act on it.

4. Being Holy: "K'doshim t'hiyu...and you shall be holy." Try to focus on the idea of holiness. Holiness can permeate through our actions and our thoughts. Develop a definition of holiness and a holy person. Make it your goal to be a holy person and fulfill your notion of holiness. To help you develop a definition look at Leviticus 19 and try to incorporate some of the actions described. Also, look at the kedushah in the High Holy Day Machzor to help you with your definition. Your holy actions can be threefold, developing an awe of God, trying to be holy within your own community and trying to be holy to the entire world. Record your reflections on the concept of holiness.

⁹ Hebrew Translation, Gate Five – Chapter 1, Volume II, p. 8

Gate Six: Humility

1. The inner quality of humility: Focus on the actions of other people. Reflect on the way they act and think about some of the things other people are good at. Respecting others is also an important aspect of humility. Spend your day concentrating on others. Offer to help them accomplish their goals. Help them to fulfill everything that they wish to do in the world. Listen to others and do not try to speak over them. How do these signs of respect demonstrate humility?

2. Learning from other people: In the Pirke Avot we learn, "Who is wise? The one who learns from all people." Continue focusing on other people, but now think about what you can learn from others. Every person has the potential to teach something to another person. Be open to asking questions of others. Ask them to show you why they do things. Ask them to explain to you their thought process. Think about ways in which you might be able to incorporate what you learn into your own life.¹⁰

Humility is the modesty of the soul, the submissiveness of the soul, and the reducing of one's own pride. It is an inner quality. When established, it becomes visible throughout the body, such as: softening of words, speaking in a low voice, acting humbly even when angered, and not taking revenge even when one is prompted to do so.¹¹

3. Superiority of others: For a few days find an area in which each person we come into contact with is our superior. Perhaps that person is more likely than us to give tzedakah, or visit the sick, be less judgmental etc. Once we have identified the other person's superior trait, let this become our immediate association when that individual's name is mentioned. Then we should remind ourselves to emulate that person.¹²

4. A personal "Hineni" prayer: Read over the words of the Hineni prayer recited by the Rabbi or Chazzan on Rosh Hashanah. Think about the themes. Try to write your own version of that prayer for different aspects of your life (i.e. your family life, your own internal life, and your professional life). You may want to write the Hineni in the form of a letter to the people close to you. Read the letter to them and record how you felt during and after your read the letter? You may also want to discuss ways in which you can improve on the things you talked about.

¹⁰ Telushkin, p. 216

¹¹ Hebrew Translation, Gate Six – Chapter 1, volume II p. 73.

¹² Telushkin, p. 217

Gate Seven: Repentance

1. Understanding the mitzvot: Think about your actions over the past year. (It is difficult to impossible to think of all of them.) Begin by thinking about categories of people who are in your life (family, friends, co-workers). How have your interactions been in accordance with the mitzvot? How have they not been in accordance with the mitzvot? How do your actions make you feel?

2. Acknowledging the wrong we have committed: Try to recognize a few things you have done that you know are wrong. Even if you are not ready to give up these actions, at least recognize that they are wrong. Just reflection on your actions – even without committing yourself to change – will start to change your conduct.¹³ Acknowledging your wrongs may lead you to want to change your actions in the future.

The essential elements of repentance are four in number: [The first is] the regret for the transgressions that one has committed in the past, [the second is] abandoning [those sins] and turning from them, [the third is] confessing to them and seeking forgiveness for them, [the fourth is] undertaking in heart and mind never to commit them again.¹⁴

3. Set a time for Repentance – looking to the future: Find something that is in your daily or weekly routine. If it is something that you do on a consistent basis, try adding something the practice of repentance to it. If you join repentance with your regular habits, it too will become a habit. By making the process of repentance a habit, you will be more inclined to do it regularly. You will also become more of your actions and begin to change your ways.¹⁵

4. Requesting forgiveness: Approach others and ask them to forgive you for the wrongs that you may have done. Bahya tells us that this act is a sign of humility because it shows concern for others. Asking forgiveness can be difficult to do, record your emotions in your journal both before and after you ask for forgiveness. As part of your request for forgiveness, you should discuss with the person you have wronged ways in which you will be try to never commit that act again.

¹³ Telushkin, p. 157-158

¹⁴ Translation Gate Seven – chapter 4, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 133-134

¹⁵ This practice was inspired by Buxbaum, Yitzhak. Jewish Spiritual Practices. Aronson Press: New Jersey and London, 1990, p. 302-303

Gate Eight: Introspection

1. Looking inward: Spend some time in front of a mirror. Try to answer the question, "Who are you?" The purpose of this process of looking inward is to see how matters of Torah can apply to your entire life. Think about your daily routine and think about the ways in which you might be able to apply meaning from the Torah to your life. How does application of Torah to your life help bring you closer to God?

2. Preparations: Try to prepare yourself for different things that may come your way during the day. Go over your calendar each day when you wake up. Look at the things you have to do. Try to imagine yourself doing each one. Preparing yourself can help you anticipate what could go wrong or what could go right. Preparing for your day can also help you think about what important things you might have to do. As you prepare, thank about what Jewish values you might be able to apply to your day.

Introspection with the soul is the effort of a person [to understand] by the mind matters of Torah (i.e. Religion) and [the affairs] of his world so that he understands what he [has already] done and what he has to do in terms of his obligation [to God]. As we have been admonished to do by the prophet (Moses): "Know therefore this day and keep in mind that Adonai alone is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other." (Deut. 4:39), "Taste and see how good Adonai is." (Ps. 34:9)¹⁶

3. Face your own mortality: Spend some time reflecting on your life. Think about the goals you have set for yourself. What can you do to give your life more meaning? What do you realize when you think about the fact that you are mortal? How can this thought process encourage you to act with according to the influence of Torah? After you have reflected in this way, try to live each of your days according to your goals and your values. Perhaps you should try to use your Personal Mission Statement to influence the way you live.

4. Further points for reflection: Read over the list of points of reflection that can be found in the Gate of Introspection. Pick two or three to reflect on over the course of the High Holy Day season. Think about the ways in which your reflections on these points can help you become better people and improve your moral quality.

¹⁶ Translation – Gate Eight, chapter 1, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 174-175

Gate Nine: Abstinence

1. Basic needs: Identify the basic needs in your life. Record them in your journal. Try to put limits on these needs and try to stick to these limits. You may want to record in your journal the challenges you find when you are trying to stay within your limits. How do you feel when you stay within your limit? How do you feel when you go beyond your limit? What can you do to continue to abstain from these types of actions in the future?

2. Worldly desires: Once you have identified your basic needs you can think about the great desires of your life. In the past what has pushed you to chasing after your desires? What were the results of your chasing after your desires? How did your pursuit of your desires affect other aspects of your life? Once you have reflected on these questions and these matters, try to think of reminders that you can look to that will help you abstain from chasing after them in the future.

Abstinence is the conquest of the soul's desires and the abstention from something that one is capable of doing because of the obligation [of abstinence], as it is said, the one who abstains has the ability [to act] but does not. The obligation of the conquest of one's desires is divided into two parts...General abstinence [as applied to all of humanity] is enacted for the welfare of our bodies and the ordering of our matters, it is the way of kings [as they administer their laws], it is the way of doctors as they care for the sick, it is they way of all intelligent people [as each administers] control of his own desires for food, drink, sex, clothing, speech and various movements and pleasures. Abstinence taught by Torah and reason is for the well being of the soul in the world to come, as will be explained later.¹⁷

3. The boundaries of Torah: Reflect on your Torah study. As you study you may come across some things that may provide you with some boundaries (e.g. kashrut). Identify some of the boundaries that you find in the Torah. If you come across something that you might want to incorporate into your daily life try to stay within that boundary. How does it make you feel to use the Torah to provide you with a boundary? How does it help you build a connection with God? How do you think it helps you to become a better person?

4. Prayer for Abstinence: Write a prayer in your journal that you can say each day that will remind you of your commitment to limits and abstinence. You may want to incorporate some ideas that you have studied in The Duties of the Heart such as Serving God, trust, humility, introspection, and reflecting on creation. How does each of Bahya's previous Gates help you to abstain from worldly luxuries and stay within your own personal boundaries?

¹⁷ Translation – Gate Nine, chapter 1, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 260-261

Gate Ten: Love of God

1. Heart, soul and might: We read in the book of Deuteronomy (6:5) "You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." What activities have you begun to practice during your process of moral improvement that you would apply to the idea of the love of God? Think about what actions might pertain to your heart, your soul or your might?

2. Showing gratitude: Take opportunities to show you are grateful for God's compassion and the goodness bestowed on us in the world. You may want to pick a psalm that you can sing to show your gratitude. (The psalms of P'sukei D'zimra psalms 145-150 are and the psalms of Kabbalat Shabbat Psalms 95-99, 93, 92, 29 are appropriate.) Try to say these psalms during the day. How does showing gratitude reflect love for God? You may also want to make an extra effort to show gratitude to people in your life. How do you think being grateful to them demonstrates love of God?

What kinds of love of God are there?...Our love for God is based on God's great compassion to us and the measure of God's goodness to us, we incline our souls to love God because we hope [for God's continual graces to us]. God's love for us may be based on his disregard for our sins, forgiveness of our transgressions, despite our transgressions against God's mitzvot. Our love of God is for God's honor, for God's greatness and glory. This last kind is pure love of God. Which [Moses taught us] saying: "And you shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all of your might." (Deut. 6:5)¹⁸

3. Loving God for God's honor, greatness and glory: Bahya calls this way to love God the purest because a person comes to this love out of his or her own volition. Spend some time reflecting on God's honor and glory. What are signs of God's honor and glory in the world? How do you come to realize these signs? Why do you think they should inspire you to love God? What can you do to show you love God?

4. Coming full circle: We began this process with a personal recitation and reflection on the words of the Shema. We will conclude with a communal recitation of these words. This activity requires you to do some reflection throughout the day on Yom Kippur. Think about how you see the community come together to demonstrate different signs of love for God during the day. As you say, "Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad. Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va-ed. (3x) Adonai hu ha-elohim. (7x)" These statements are affirmations of your love for God and of the journey of moral improvement. How do you feel affirming God this way along with your entire community? How can you carry this love of God into the rest of the year?

¹⁸ Translation – Gate Ten, Chapter 2, Hebrew edition volume II, p. 323-324

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