

PINNOT HATORAH:
THE HIDDEN DOGMA OF LEVI BEN GERSHOM (1288-1344)

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Levi Ben Gershom (Gersonides, Ralbag; 1288-1344) is known as Judaism's most outspoken Aristotelian. Starting from the premise that the Torah does not contradict reason, he was the most successful of all Jewish Medieval philosophers who attempted to reconcile Jewish theology and Greek philosophy.

For Gersonides, the highest human achievement is intellectual perfection which can be attained through the study of mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. These subjects can potentially be known by all people, regardless of class, race, or religion, and in this sense, he was a universalist, though Judaism was his particularity.

One contribution to Jewish thought that emerged out of the Medieval Ages is the concept of the dogma. Maimonides "Thirteen Articles of Faith" are the most popular, but certainly not the only Jewish formulation of a dogma. Throughout his biblical commentaries and The Wars of the Lords, Gersonides identifies nineteen ideas introduced by the code word, *pinnot hatorah*. This paper argues that this list of nineteen *pinnot* is Gersonides philosophical dogma.

Gersonides *pinnot hatorah* work in a similar manner to Maimonides' idea of "necessary truths." Necessary truths are only true in terms of religious faith and belief. They are true to the extent that the faithful believe in their "truth," but they do not stand up to reason or philosophic truth. Therefore, by this definition, a religious idea is false in terms of philosophical truth. The argument put forth in this thesis holds that the very philosophical truths that disprove religious "truths," are in fact, the foundation truths that lead to the highest human achievement, intellectual perfection.

The thesis is divided into six chapters: Introduction; a definition of *pinnot hatorah*; explication of the nineteen *pinnot*; explaining how the *pinnot hatorah* serve as Gersonides' philosophical dogma; and conclusion. Please refer to the bibliography for a complete list of materials, research tools, articles, texts, and other books used to prepare this thesis.

To My Parents with love

I. PREFACE

"ויאמר אל'הים יהי אור ויהי-אור."
- בראשית א:ג

"God said: 'Let there be light;' and there was light."

- Genesis 1:3

I am grateful to my family, my friends and my teachers for guiding me to this point in my life. To my classmates at Hebrew Union College, thank you for sharing your lives, your learning, and your passions with me. To the faculty, especially Dr. Martin Cohen, Dr. Eugene Borowitz, and Dr. Larry Hoffman for helping me develop my methods for processing and integrating idea in terms of religion, philosophy, history, and political theory.

Dr. Leonard Kravitz, thank you for training me to think like a philosopher, giving me the language and skills to understand how to interpret the above to quotations from scripture like a Litvak, and for your encouragement and support throughout this writing process.

To my fiancée Julia, thank you for helping me to understand why I was attracted to this thesis topic. You prompted me to realize that like Gersonides, my life is an attempt to synthesize Judaism and Universalism, religion and modernity, survival and justice. Gersonides lived as a Jew but thought like a Greek. He appeared to the world as a religionist, but thought like a philosopher. I have often wondered if I am the same.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Preface	2
II.	Introduction	4
	Thesis Statement	
	Medieval Jewish Philosophy	
	Levi Ben Gershom: Life and Times	
	Gersonides: Composition and Style	
	Religious Dogma and Fundamental Principles	
III.	Pinnot HaTorah: A Definition	19
IV.	Gersonides' Nineteen Pinnot HaTorah	22
V.	Pinnot HaTorah as a Dogma of Philosophic Truth	73
	Chart: Philosophical Truths Represented by Pinnah	
VI.	Conclusion	77
VII.	Bibliography	79

And to my Parents and Robin. You gave me life and continue to nourish me with unconditional love, challenging support, and constant presence. Thank you.

May our actions lead us and all humanity to walk in the light of the Eternal One.
That is, the light of enlightenment.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. THESIS STATEMENT

Levi Ben Gershom (Gersonides, Ralbag; 1288-1344) is known as Judaism's most outspoken Aristotelian.¹ Starting from the premise that the Torah does not contradict reason, he was the most successful of all Jewish Medieval philosophers who attempted to reconcile Jewish theology and Greek philosophy.

For Gersonides, the highest human achievement is intellectual perfection which can be attained through the study of mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. These subjects can potentially be known by all people, regardless of class, race, or religion, and in this sense, he was a Universalist, though Judaism was his particularity.

The idea that the highest human achievement came from knowledge of the sciences was a major departure from the commonly accepted religious notion that the highest human achievement was either strict legal observance (Jewish/Islam) or pure belief and faith in God (Christian). But all this changed in the middle ages. That intellectual perfection was the highest human goal threatened the validity of the religious institution.

In response to this, Islamic, Christian, and Jewish writers began to develop and define specific religious dogmas. Moses Maimonides' "Thirteen Articles of Faith" are the most popular, but other Jewish philosophers in that era also had their systems:

¹ See Kellner, M. *Gersonides, Providence, and the Rabbinic Tradition*.

Saadia,² Duran,³ Crescas,⁴ HaLevi,⁵ Albo,⁶ just to name a few. Such dogmas were used to help define a set of core religious beliefs which served to counter the emerging ideas that truth came only from math, physics, and metaphysics. Dogmas provided a structured set of beliefs that were presented as religious truths and which satisfied the emerging need to have a set of truths in which to believe.

Marc Kellner's Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought⁷ provides a survey of medievalist religious dogmas. He discusses eighteen different philosophers and how their dogmas interface with Maimonides' *Articles of Faith*. Yet Gersonides was suspiciously absent. Is this to mean that Gersonides did not develop his own dogma? Or, as this paper argues, did Gersonides have a hidden dogma?

In Gersonides on Providence, Covenant, and the Chosen People,⁸ Robert Eisen identifies twenty-three concepts in Gersonides' biblical commentaries and Milchamot Hashem (The Wars of the Lord) which are termed *pinnot hatorah*, principles of the Torah. Though Eisen does not explain how these principles work within the overall structure of Gersonides thought, this study will explore the possibility that these *pinnot hatorah* are the heart of his religious/philosophical dogma. Moreover, though Eisen presents twenty-three *pinnot*, this paper will only address nineteen. The argument put

² Proof is in the title of his book, The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.

³ In Ohev Mishpat, Duran refers to foundations, pillars, and pedestals.

⁴ In Or Adonai, Crescas divides his book into four treaties structured along his dogmatic system: Roots (*shoreshim*), Cornerstones (*pinnot*), True Beliefs (*de'ot v'emunot*), Views and Theories (*de'ot u'sevarot*). Gersonides also refers to his dogmatic statements as *pinnot* and *shoreshim*.

⁵ At the end of the Kuzari, HaLevi lists six presuppositions (*al-maqaddima*) upon which Judaism is based.

⁶ Albo states three principles (*ikkarim*) for the Torah and titles his book, Sefer Ikkarim, Book of Principles.

⁷ see bibliography

⁸ see bibliography

forth in this paper is that there are actually only nineteen unique and independent concepts that Gersonides terms, *pinnot hatorah*.⁹

Gersonides' *pinnot hatorah* can be best understood with the help of Maimonides' idea of "necessary truths."¹⁰ Necessary truths are not scientifically or philosophically true but are only true in terms of religious faith and belief. They are true to the extent that the faithful believe in their "truth," but they do not stand up to reason or philosophic truth.

By this definition, certain religious ideas are false in terms of philosophical truth. But the philosophic truth that disproves the religious idea is itself true. In other words, certain necessary truths are religiously true on their own terms, but philosophically false. At the same time, the very philosophic truths that disprove such religious truths are true in terms of philosophy. This is a case of "double truth."¹¹ The argument of "double truth" arose in the thirteenth century and holds that a proposition can be true in philosophy but contradict a true proposition in religion and conversely.

The thesis of this paper is that the very philosophical truths that disprove Gersonides' *pinnot hatorah* in terms of religious truth, are in fact the foundation truths that lead to what he considers the highest goal, intellectual perfection.

For example, one of Gersonides' nineteen *pinnot* is that "all good comes from God." The religious interpretation of this idea is the belief that the All Powerful

⁹ The four concepts and the reasons why I have omitted them from Eisen's list are: 1) Through the observance of commandments, the Jews are worthy of inheriting the land of Israel in the Messianic period. Gersonides refers to this concept as a *yesod hatorah* and not a *Pinnah hatorah*. 2) The appointment of judges to educate matters regarding the laws of Torah. This is a particular statement and is not consistent with his universal approach. 3) The resurrection of the dead. Gersonides refers to this concept as a *pinnah haEmunah* and not a *pinnah hatorah*. 4) I have combined two *pinnot* which Eisen noted separately because the philosophical truth that lies behind them are the same: The torah is immutable and everlasting. These changes reduces Eisen's list from 23 to 19 *pinnot hatorah*.

¹⁰ Maimonides, *The Guide* 3:27,28

¹¹ See "Averroism" in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp 223-5.

provides everything that human beings could ever desire and even in poverty.

Moreover, even the impoverished should be thankful to God since there is divine meaning in their suffering. The philosophical interpretation is very different. The idea that "all good comes from God" is understood that human beings have the ability to acquire knowledge through their intellectual capacity.

As the above example shows, perspective is the key to understanding how to interpret Gersonides' list of *pinnot hatorah*. From the religious lens, the pinnot could be seen as a religious dogma which demands faithful observance. But from the philosophic perspective, one can see a list of ideas that encourage a more scientific/philosophical understanding to genuinely appreciate their universal nature. For this reason, this paper argues that Gersonides' list of *pinnot hatorah* is his philosophical dogma. Though in order to see it, each *pinnah* must be analyzed according to its philosophical perspective, not its religious one. We know that Gersonides fervently believed that Jewish religious scripture was consistent with reason, but this is only valid when the perspective is philosophical in nature.

Therefore, culling a specific set of ideas from the bible may be his subtle attempt to reveal a philosophical code. Not a code that can be understood from its religious point of view, but from the complete opposite perspective. In other words, when the *pinnot hatorah* are understood along philosophic lines, one not only knows philosophic truth, but one has attained intellectual perfection, the greatest human achievement.

B. MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

The starting point of the medieval philosophical debate begins with the desire to reconcile two apparently independent sources of truth. Some have described this dualism as the reconciliation between revelation and reason, religion and philosophy, faith and knowledge.¹² Medieval Jewish thinkers were posed to show that the truths in their sacred texts did not contradict accepted scientific truths, based on the Greek thought of Aristotle and Plato.

Medieval Jewish philosophy arose in the cultural world of Islam and was strongly influenced by Islamic philosophy.¹³ Its beginnings were deeply influenced by the ideas of Islamic Kalam and Jewish philosophers drew heavily upon the Arabic translations of Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic source texts, especially the work of Al Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes. The resultant Judeo-Arabic culture infused by Greek thought produced some of the most influential ideas and thought systems in the history of Judaism.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) was one of the most central and illustrious Jewish figures in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ He authored the *Mishnah Torah*, his legal code, and *The Guide to the Perplexed*, his philosophical magnum opus. His was one of the first attempts to synthesize Aristotelianism with Judaism, though not without great public outcry, resulting in the Maimonist Anti-Maimonist controversy. Mainstream religious leaders were not equally sympathetic to the philosophical advances that

¹² Husik, pp xiii-xlvii

¹³ Guttman, pp. 54-55

¹⁴ Encyclopedia Judaica: "Maimonides, Moses."

Maimonides was trying to incorporate into Jewish thought. This forced Maimonides to write in a coded system of allegory, parable, and metaphor.

Maimonides served as the standard bearer of future Jewish philosophers who took it upon themselves to disprove or defend him. The decisive element of all their theories revolved around the issue of creation. If the world was created by God *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), then miracles, prophecy, and providence are possible because creation *ex nihilo* proves that God can create out of nothing.

However, if God cannot create *ex nihilo*, then the world was not created by God *ex nihilo*. Thus, the literal description of creation in the book of Genesis which states that God created the universe out of a void would be false. Therefore, the description of creation in Genesis must have another, non-literal interpretation. It also follows that miracles, prophecy, and providence must also have a non-literal understanding since in their literal sense, these ideas demand a creator god, a god that can create *ex nihilo*.

While Maimonides may have been one of the first to attempt a synthesis of Aristotelian thought with Judaism, it was not until Gersonides that the task was accomplished in full. In part, this was a result of the fact that Gersonides lived in Southern France and his cultural surroundings were more open and socially advanced than Maimonides. This open social atmosphere gave him greater permission to write and publicly discuss his strictly Aristotelian infused Jewish philosophy, which makes him the premier Jewish rationalist of the Middle Ages.

C. LEVI BEN GERSHOM (1288-1344)

As was the custom of most Jewish writers in the medieval period, Gersonides had several names and titles corresponding to the communities in which he circulated. His fellow biblical commentators referred to him as Levi Ben Gershon. In the introduction to his philosophical doctrine, *Milchamot HaShem (The Wars of the Lord)*, he refers to himself as Levi Ben Gershom. In rabbinical literature, he is known as Gershuni or by his initials R'L'B'G, the Ralbag. He was nicknamed *Ari*, meaning lion, in reference to his great mental ability. In Medieval Latin works he is known as Gersonides. And in his native France, he was known as Leo Habraeus or Maestro Leon de Bagnols, based on his hometown, Bagnols, France.

It is believed that Gersonides was born in Bagnols in 1288, lived his life in Orange and later Avignon, and died in Perpignan in 1344. He was a physician by profession, was married, and came from a learned family. His literary activity covers a period of twenty three years beginning approximately in the year 1317.¹⁵ He distinguished himself not only in philosophy but also in astronomy.

Gersonides was fluent in Talmud-Torah, Greek thought, and Islamic philosophy. He was a student of Aristotle and Averroes which suggests that the different cultural groups in Southern France interacted peacefully with one another. This relative freedom of thought and study allowed him to avoid the very controversy that Maimonides and later Spinoza experienced as a result of their writings.

Though his ideas emerged relatively un-criticized during his lifetime, he did have a few critics. His greatest opponent was Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410) who's chief

¹⁵ Alderblum, pp 30-32

aim of Or Adonai (Light of the Lord), was written to refute the teachings of Gersonides and Maimonides.¹⁶ The great Talmudist, Isaac Ben Shesheth of Saragosa wrote: "Although Gersonides followed in the path of Maimonides, the many sciences turned him away from the true path. He contradicted the opinions of our venerated Moses in certain subjects, such as God's knowledge as related to future possibilities. About the miracle of Joshua he wrote things which are forbidden to be heard. In the same vein he wrote about immortality, providence and theodicy."¹⁷ It is clear that Gersonides was not immune to criticism.

D. GERSONIDES: COMPOSITION AND STYLE

In his introduction to The Wars of the Lord (The Wars), Gersonides sets out six guiding questions. Mentioning theme here will identify his major interests, and later, it will be shown how the *pinnot hatorah* help to answer these questions. Gersonides first asks, is the rational soul immortal when it has achieved some perfection? If it is immortal, are there different types of human immortality? Second, when a man is informed by dreams or divination or prophecy of future events, is he informed of them essentially or accidentally? If there is here an efficient cause, what is its nature and how is this communication accomplished?

Third, does God know existent things? If God does, how does God know them? Fourth, is there divine providence over existing things? If so, in which way, and does it extend over the human species and its individual members? Fifth, how do the movers

¹⁶ Kellner, M. *Gersonides and His Cultured Despisers: Arama and Abravanel*, pp 269-277

¹⁷ Alderblum, A Study of Gersonides in his Proper Perspective pp 53.

of the heavenly bodies move these bodies, and how many movers are there, as far as human beings can know? Sixth, is the universe eternal or created? And if created, in what way has it been created?¹⁸

Before he attempts to answer these questions, Gersonides remarks that he desires to do so with precision language. The aim is to express answers to these questions with a simple and efficient communication. Gersonides takes issue with authors who try to obscure their ideas and thoughts with poor organization or opacity of language that defeat the purpose for which books should be written. He argues that such authors have actually increased the perplexity of their readers as well as not having given them anything worthwhile; unless it was the intention of the author to conceal their ideas from the masses so that only a few could understand them. This is not Gersonides' approach. His intention is to use definitive language to make his message clear and explicit.¹⁹

Gersonides' task is to show that the stories and fables in the biblical account are consistent with philosophical truth. This is no easy task, especially with regards to miracles: Moses' staff turning into a snake; Isaiah's causing the shadow on Hezekiah's sundial to move back ten degrees;²⁰ and, among others, Joshua's stopping the sun at Gibeon.²¹ Gersonides can explain away these apparent contradictions to truth, but the obvious question remains: if Scripture is always interpreted to conform to religious truths arrived at by philosophy, is there any need for Scripture?

¹⁸ WL I, pp 91

¹⁹ WL I, pp 100-1

²⁰ II Kings 20

²¹ Joshua 10

Maimonides provides the first answer to this question. The objective of Scripture is two-fold: the well-being of the soul, and the well-being of the body. The well being of the body is to live with a contented ease, even if one maintains false ideas of truth. Or for that matter, the body politic should live with contented ease, even if they maintain similar false ideas. The well-being of the soul is promoted by correct opinions communicated to the people according to their capacity to understand. Some of these opinions are imparted in explicit form, others allegorically because certain opinions in their plain form are too strong for the capacity of the common people.²² In other words, the masses need to believe in "necessary truths," even if they are false.

In the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs, Gersonides discusses the same body-soul dichotomy raised by Maimonides but takes it one step farther.²³ He notes that the Torah transmits philosophical truth, not only to the elite, but also the masses. Unlike Maimonides who argues that Scripture deliberately conceals it's most important philosophical teachings from the uneducated masses of the body-politic, Gersonides views the Torah as a pedagogic tool, providing instruction in the major areas of philosophy and true ideas.

Nowhere does Gersonides elaborate on how the Torah accomplishes this task, but he does argue that for the elite, the Torah makes known that the true aim of the commandments is to prepare one for conjunction with God (i.e., intellectual perfection). However, since the masses do not have the background in philosophical training nor the capacity for intellectual perfection, the Torah provides them with avenues that they can relate to more easily. Simply put, they are the promises of

²² Maimonides, The Guide, 3:28

²³ Kellner, *Introduction to the Commentary on Song of Songs*, pp 194-7

material reward for the observance of commandments. Of course, it is Gersonides belief that through the observance of commandments, one can eventually learn the true reward of Torah, intellectual perfection. In this way, the Torah serves as a pedagogic guide to philosophical truth.²⁴

He repeatedly argues that if the literal sense of the Torah differs from reason, it is necessary to interpret those passages in accordance with the demands of reason.²⁵ In other words, when the literal reading of scripture appears to be irrational or false, it must be understood as a metaphor or simile for something else.

There is a further reason why scripture is necessary in the pursuit of philosophic truth. Gersonides argues that the Torah is not a law that forces us people to believe false ideas; rather it leads people to truth to the extent that a person has the capacity to learn true ideas of the intellect. With respect to some problems that appear to be false, the Torah itself has, in its marvelous way, directed us towards the truth. Indeed, this should be the case argues Gersonides, that the Torah is intended to guide its adherents to human perfection as far as it is attainable.²⁶ Scripture therefore, serves as the guide to solving philosophy's most difficult problems.

Gersonides follows Maimonides in dividing the commandments proscribed in the Torah into two categories: moral instruction and intellectual belief. The sacrificial rites are one example of how through the observance of a commandment, a person can be lead to true intellectual knowledge. For example, animal sacrifice as "punishment" for sin accomplishes two things. First, a sinner would not believe that repentance could

²⁴ A full discussion on this topic can be found in Eisen, Gersonides on Providence, Covenant, and the Chosen People, chapter six, *The Torah and Esoteric Discourse*, pp 99-113

²⁵ Maimonides, *The Guide*, 2:25

²⁶ WL I, pp 98

come through inward reflection. Therefore, the sinner should witness a holy priest transfer the person's sin onto an animal prior to killing it. In the animal's death, the sinner would be "freed" from their sin and be able to return to the masses.

Witnessing the death of an animal also exposes the person to death and to the scientific and philosophical idea of the corruptibility of all matter. This death ritual increases their intellectual knowledge of the physical reality of life and death by exposing the person towards the knowledge of true science and to the very understanding that animal sacrifice for sins is futile. Genuine repentance must come from within.²⁷

It would appear that for Gersonides, the religious punishment serves to free the sinner from guilt, but through two possible avenues. First, for the masses that do not have the potential to know philosophic truth, the sacrificial rite serves to make the person feel that they have been freed from sin, allowing them to return to living a full and productive life. This is a "necessary" practice but it is not philosophically true. The sinner did not truly repent for the sin, because true repentance can only come from within the person's soul and intellect.

Yet, in the process of witnessing the sacrificial rite, a person is exposed to scientific truth at work. As they watch the animal burn, they witness the corruptibility of all matter. If they have the intellectual potential to make the jump from realizing that not only is the animal corruptible and finite, but so are human beings, then the person has the chance to learn the second and more valuable lesson of the ritual sacrifice: the corruptibility of all matter. Therefore, since everything but ideas are corruptible, true repentance must come from inside the person's intellect. If a person can realize this

²⁷ Gersonides, Commentary on Torah, 122b

fact, they are on their way to realizing that true repentance does not happen in the sacrifice of an animal, but in the growth of the intellect.

Gersonides repeatedly argues that religious scripture can serve as a guidebook to philosophical truths and is a necessary element in the pursuit of intellectual perfection as the example of ritual sacrifice shows. As will be discussed later, the *pinnot hatorah* serve an active role in this pursuit of truth. Gersonides writes that when the Torah is interpreted literally and seems to contradict reason, it is proper to interpret these passages according to a philosophical understanding, as long as none of the *pinnot hatorah* are destroyed.²⁸ Having established that the *pinnot hatorah* serve an essential role in guiding a way to the truth of Scripture, the next task is to uncover the precise role that they serve in his overall thought.

²⁸ WL II, pp 136

E. RELIGIOUS DOGMA AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Every religious system has basic dogmas and foundational principles that organize its central beliefs. In response to a changing social and political climate in the Medieval Period, there was an attempt to dogmatize systematic religions like Judaism and Islam.²⁹ In the tenth century, Saadia Gaon was the first Jew to propose a systematic theology of Judaism, but it was not until Maimonides in the twelfth century that the first comprehensive dogma of Judaism was defined. This study is interested in the social factors that led to the need to systematize religious thought and their evolution, ultimately working to discover why Gersonides may have developed his own dogma.

Kellner suggests that there are four reasons why a religion may need to expound its beliefs.³⁰ First, adherence to such beliefs may be a criterion for acceptance into a group. Second, abiding by such beliefs were criterion for salvation, however that specific religion understood the term. Three, as a way to attract outsiders and newcomers to the fold. And four, in defense of a theological attack.

It is clear that Islam was on the rise and therefore Jews were presented with a need to defend the truths of their religious beliefs. With Islam and Judaism, there co-existed two systematic, legally based, and monotheistic religions, and Islam adherents were actively claiming that Islam superseded the Law of Moses. Thus, set dogmas were one way to differentiate and distinguish the two systems. This is especially so

²⁹ Kellner, M. Dogma's in Medieval Jewish Thought

³⁰ *ibid*, pp. 2-24

when the issue of creed entered the Islamic discourse in response to the need to address the questions: who is a Muslim and who will achieve salvation and enter paradise?

Furthermore, Aristotelian philosophy defined belief in terms of belief *that*, as opposed to belief *in*, and this forced a language change. It was no longer, belief *in* God and belief *in* the creation of the world. Now it was, belief *that* God exists and belief *that* the world was created. In these terms, specific religions needed a systematic explanation because they begged the question: what do we believe *that* God is and how do we belief *that* the world was created.

All of these social conditions led to the need to develop a Jewish dogma and Maimonides' *Articles of Faith* fulfilled this role. It is known that Maimonides hoped that the masses do not persist in false opinions of God but rather hold correct opinions, since such correct opinions lead to intellectual perfection. In other words, the correct understanding of his *Articles of Faith* lead to intellectual perfection, the highest achievement of man, and to immortality, the Jewish conception of salvation.³¹

Though Maimonides' articles may have been the most well known, they were not the last and final word on Jewish dogmatic systems. Though Gersonides never explicitly states his fundamental principles in one list, he refers to a number of ideas through out his commentaries and philosophical works as *pinnot hatorah*. The purpose of this paper is to investigate these nineteen *pinnot hatorah*, and to show that by understanding them in their philosophic context, they serve as Gersonides' hidden philosophical dogma.

³¹ *The Guide* III:51

III. PINNOT HATORAH: A DEFINITION

Before commencing a full discussion of Gersonides' *pinnot hatorah*, it should be understood how the term *pinnah hatorah* evolved and developed over time. The commonly held English translation of *pinnah* is fundament, principle, or cornerstone. The medieval philosophers often used this word to describe one of the major principles or axioms of their religious belief system. Nowhere does Maimonides define what a principle of Torah is,³² but Crescas uses the term *pinnah* to define the essential beliefs that a Jew must accept which makes revelation possible.³³ Denying any one of these principle beliefs would render the Torah obsolete and place the individual outside of what would be considered acceptable to Jewish belief.

Abraham Bibago (d. 1489) adds to the definition of *pinnot hatorah* and principles of the torah in general in his *Derekkh Emuna (Path of Faith)*. He posits three different definitions of a principle.³⁴ First, principles are defined as those characteristics of an entity which are of its essence and without which its existence cannot be conceived. Second, principles are characterized as those beliefs, the holding of which, define their holders as members. And third, principles are defined as those beliefs upon which the religion rests, they being the roots such that if they fall the whole religion will fall.

³² Kellner, *Dogma's in Medieval Jewish Thought*, p 17

³³ Crescas defines these six cornerstones as: God's knowledge of existents; God's providence over them; God's power; prophecy; choice; and purpose. See EJ, "Crescas, H."

³⁴ see the discussion in Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp 165-77

These broad definitions of principles helps us to understand why in his introduction to The Wars, Gersonides notes that the true understanding *pinnot* are exceedingly valuable, since it leads to a true understanding of those ideas that come after these principles; just as an error in principles is serious because it gives rise to errors in those beliefs which are based on the principles, especially when these beliefs are ideas that guide us toward intellectual and political happiness.³⁵

In his discussion on divine knowledge in The Wars, Gersonides notes: "there is nothing in the words of the Prophets that imply anything incomparable with the theory that has been developed by means of philosophy. Hence, it is incumbent upon us to follow philosophy, for when the Torah, interpreted literally, seems to conflict with doctrines that have been proven by reason, it is proper to interpret these passages according to philosophical understanding, so long as none of the fundamental principles of the Torah are destroyed."³⁶ This suggests that philosophy and the fundamental principles must be compatible, therefore, consistent with philosophical truth.

The goal of this paper is to show that Gersonides' fundamental principles, *pinnot hatorah*, are parallel to Maimonides notion of "necessary truths" They are "true" religious ideas but are not philosophically true. On the one hand, they are nineteen necessary beliefs that he considers vital for the masses of Jewish believers. However, our task is to look at this list of *pinnot hatorah* from the perspective of philosophical truth in order to see this list not only as a religious dogma, but as the basis of philosophical truth. In order to understand this process, the scientific and

³⁵ WL I pp 91-2

³⁶ WL II pp 135-137

philosophic truths that underlie Gersonides' philosophy must be discussed, and the majority of this paper is dedicated to this task.

The following are Gersonides' nineteen *pinnot hatorah*³⁷

1. God's Existence
2. God's Oneness
3. Creation
4. Shabbat
5. Events in the sub-lunar realm are controlled by movement in the spheres
6. Human actions are contingent, man has free will
7. General providence
8. Individual providence
9. All good comes from God
10. God judges man according to his deeds
11. Miracles
12. Prophecy
13. God's promises are fulfilled
14. God emanates goodness into the world by virtue of kindness and mercy, not by virtue of necessity
15. Ultimate joy is being close to God
16. The commandment to love God
17. The Torah is immutable and everlasting
18. The reasons for the commandments are fully known only to God
19. All nations will eventually worship the true God in the messianic period

³⁷ As compiled by Eisen and Touti, See Eisen appendix 1

IV. GERSONIDES' NINETEEN PINNOT HaTORAH

1. GOD'S EXISTENCE

התועלת השני הוא להעיר שפינות התורה הוא להאמין בשם יתעלה ולהרחיק עבודה זרה. ולזה הזהיר משה על שתי אלו המיצוות, במה שקדם מזאת הפרשה, שנכלל בה הצווי על האמונה שהי יתעלה הוא אלהי השמים ואלהי הארץ.

-דברים, פרשה ואתחנן, 211ב

The second benefit³⁸ is to note a fundamental principle of the Torah, which is to believe in God and to repeal idolatry. Moses warned against this in two commandments, the first of which is mentioned in this sedra: the commandment to believe that The Eternal One is the God of the sky and the earth.

- Deuteronomy, *Etchanan*, 211 b

³⁸ In his introduction to his commentary on Torah, Gersonides explains that there are three types of "benefits" mentioned in the Torah: Actions, commandments, and ideas. Many of the following nineteen pinnot begin with the word "benefit" and are taken out of their context which may explain the confusion of inconsistent numbering. For example, the pinnah of God's existence comes from a list of "benefits" that Gersonides mentions in response to verse in parashat etchanan, where the idea of God's Existence comes second on the list.

The first of Gersonides nineteen pinnot hatorah is the idea that God exists. From the perspective of the religious faithful, belief in God's existence is the most fundamental issue. Without God there would be no source of divine inspiration, no commander of divine law, and no provider of divine protection. But from the perspective of medieval philosophy, God is an idea which is best expressed by the Agent Intellect.

The Agent Intellect (AI) is the sum total of all universal ideas and is the blueprint behind the universal truths in nature. The AI has two chief functions. It energizes the material intellect in human cognition, and secondly, it is the agent of generation of all phenomenons on earth.³⁹ It is incorporeal and has no material substance which makes it incorruptible. It is this incorruptible form that lies behind all matter, which is by definition corruptible. Therefore, the AI exists, but only as a substantive idea. Since it is the form that makes a thing exist in the way that it exists, and since God is the form of all things from which all forms emanate, it is clear that God and the AI are one, making all things in such a way that they are describable by the term existent.⁴⁰

Gersonides provides the example of a chair to elucidate this point and to show that all existent things emanate from the AI. He argues that a particular crafted chair has a specific shape for the purpose of sitting and that the maker made the chair for the purpose of sitting. Though the maker crafted the substance of the chair, the form of that

³⁹ WL I p 75

⁴⁰ WL III p175

chair lies in the universal set of ideas, which will continue to exist even in the absence of any physical chair.⁴¹ The AI is the idea that provides the chair its form.

It is the AI in action when the chair is moved from one place to another.

Aristotle argues that it is necessary that there exists something that moves something else without itself moving, since that which is itself moved exists and that which moves something else also exists, which is intermediary. Hence, that which moves something but is not itself moved also exists, though incorruptible.⁴² XXXX calls this the unmoved mover.

For Gersonides, the AI is the unmoved mover and the foundation cause that allows the object to move. It follows that since the AI is an emanation of God, and since the AI exists, God therefore exists. Later, the idea of the AI will be developed further and will show how the AI is manifest in providence, prophecy, and miracles. For now, it is important to know that Gersonides limits God to an idea and nothing more.

A God which is only an idea cannot hear, speak, or act in specific ways in the world, and can have no human attributes. Gersonides' God is the God of philosophy, not the God of religion. Yet Gersonides must account for the biblical source that states that the Eternal One is the God of the sky and the earth.⁴³ He accomplishes this by arguing that God provided, provides, and will continue to provide the eternal form and motion that allows the earth and sky to exist.

Now that Gersonides has accomplished this first task in showing that God exists, the next stage is to define God's characteristics, which are unified and one.

⁴¹ WL III p 138

⁴² *Metaphysics*, Book 12, as referenced in WL III pp 150-1

⁴³ Gen 1

2. GOD'S ONENESS

התועלת השני הוא במיצות. וחוא מה שצונו להאמין כי יי אחד אחדות
יתי. . . וחוא מה שצונו ללמד [לבנינו] אלו הדברים שהם פינות התורה.

אמ

-דברים, פרשה ואתחנן, 213 דב

The second benefit is a commandment: that we are commanded to believe that God is One, Unified, and True, and we are commanded to understand that these are principles of the Torah.

- Deuteronomy, *V'etchanan*, 213b/d

Gersonides writes that God is more truly expressed as "one" than anything else, for it is the form that makes a thing "one," since unity accrues to things from heaven. Hence, the Torah describes God by two attributes: existence and oneness; as it is said, Hear O Israel, the Eternal One is our God and is One.⁴⁴

Believers in religious monotheism base their faith in the notion of a single and unified God that has anthropomorphic capabilities. The idea of unity for philosophers is different and Gersonides shows that God is one and unified by linking the

⁴⁴ WL III p 175

explanation to his definition of God's existence. It is based on Aristotle's treaty called "Gamma" in Book IV of the *Metaphysics*, which states: Since unity and existence are one thing and both have one nature, each follows the other as beginning and cause do, but not as having the same definition.⁴⁵

Gersonides appropriates this definition in his Supercommentary on Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and writes: "nature (the universal pattern) is one. Existence and unity are thus predicated on one and the same subject though they are not synonymous. If this were the case, the expression 'the existent one' would be equivalent to 'the existent exists.' Therefore, they describe one and the same essence but in different ways."⁴⁶

Gersonides' definition that God is one can be easily understood with an example from nature. The idea of rock is one, though rocks come in many shapes, sizes, and molecular structures. At any one moment, these rocks play a certain role in the universe which holds the earth in balance. In this way, the rocks are interconnected with each other which provide for a specific unity. Therefore, while each individual rock exists as unique and independent from the other, they are unified by the universal form of a rock.

The same can be said about God. Since God is the one AI, and since the AI is the collective set of all universal ideas, God both exists and is one. Gersonides further develops this theory in *The Wars*, Book 4, on the Creation of the Universe. He writes that the hypothesis of a plurality of universes is false. Different worlds would have to agree in name and definition to our universe, which would therefore require the same

⁴⁵ Feldman quotes this passage in WL III pp176-7. The original can be found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IV, chapter 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

in species, making the "universes" the same. This follows because separate forms that agree in species cannot be numerically many; for diversity accrues only to a material form by virtue of the matter to which it is attached.⁴⁷

Gersonides uses the example of the human species to clarify this point. There is only one type of human species, though there are many different individuals within that species. There is only one type of the human being (form) though each individual person (matter) within the human race is different. The same is true for universes. A plurality of universes cannot be proven, as will be explained by the next *pinnah hatorah*.

⁴⁷ WL III p 349

3. CREATION

התועלת השלישי הוא להודיע איך התזכרם הי יתעלה תכלית
ההתחכמות שיאמינו ישראל במיצות השבת, כדי שיוכנו יותר לקיבול
התורה. שמצות שבת היא פינה התוריית עצומה כי היא מורה על
חידוש העולם.

- שמות, פרשת שמות, 71 ד

The third benefit is to make known how, in great cleverness and
wisdom, God began to show what will be known to Israel through the
Sabbath observance, in order to better prepare them to receive and
accept the Torah. The Sabbath observance is a great principle of the
Torah for it teaches the creation of the world and this is also a
principle of our Torah.

- Exodus, *Shemot*, 71a

The idea of creation is the fundamental issue of religion and philosophy and therefore,
Gersonides dedicates an entire book in The Wars to his doctrine on creation.⁴⁸ For the
religious faithful, God must have necessarily created the world *ex nihilo* since

⁴⁸ WL III, Book 6, 29 chapters

prophecy, providence, and miracles depend on this notion. However, from the philosophers' perspective, there are two major schools of thought with regards to creation, Aristotle and Plato. Platonists believe in creation out of primordial matter which supports the biblical notion that God created the world out of *tohu u'vohu*. This further supports the notion that God can act in specific instances, can perform miracles, can know particulars, and can create out of nothing.⁴⁹

Aristotle argues for the eternity of the universe and claims that it has no beginning and no end. His theory disproves creation *ex nihilo*, and therefore the biblical account of creation and everything that flows from it is false.

Before we explain Gersonides theory of creation and how he interprets the biblical account of creation in terms of this philosophy, it is important to note that he took issue with both Maimonides and Aristotle. Though Maimonides⁵⁰ does argue that the theory of Aristotle is in accordance with logical inference, he concludes that neither the eternity of the universe nor creation is a provable hypothesis. After all, if Aristotle had a proof for his theory, the whole teaching of Scripture, which rests on the theory of creation, would be rejected. This would show that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were false. Therefore, in the absence of proof, says Maimonides, the acceptance of religious tradition (creation *ex nihilo*) is appropriate, though false.⁵¹

But Gersonides claims that creation *ex nihilo* is false on two accounts: empirical evidence and philosophical proof. First, on the basis of personal experience, people would form the judgment that things are made from other things. Creation *ex*

⁴⁹ including human beings, Adam and Eve for instance. The argument for eternal species would yield Darwinism.

⁵⁰ The Guide 2: 24,25

⁵¹ This is the conclusion that Maimonides wants his reader believe, whether or not Maimonides believed it. See The Guide, 2:23

nihilo departs from human experience and therefore does not stand up to empirical evidence.

Secondly, Gersonides shows that creation *ex nihilo* does not stand up to the nature of time nor the potentiality of a vacuum. He argues that past time is finite and therefore, the universe had a temporal beginning. Time was created along with the creation of the universe, which emerged out of primordial matter. By this argument, God is the first cause that rests within the convergence of primordial matter from its own state, to the state of the matter of the universe. This argument also shows that God is separate and independent of this primordial matter, thus extending proof that God is one, and that there are no others.⁵²

Gersonides uses the example of the vacuum to support his theory of creation.⁵³ Supporting creation *ex nihilo* necessarily implies the existence of a vacuum, for out of nothing the world was created. Gersonides states: *ex nihilo* creation implies a vacuum. Prior to the creation of the world it was either possible, necessary, or impossible for a body to exist in the dimensions in which the world does in fact exist. If a body necessarily existed in these dimensions, then it did not cease existing. If it was impossible for a body to exist in these dimensions, then/than it would be impossible for a world to be actualized at all. And if it were possible, then this place would constitute a vacuum. But a vacuum is defined as a place devoid of body but capable of having a body in it. Thus, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* implies a pre-existent vacuum, which is impossible, like the *ex nihilo* theory of creation.⁵⁴

⁵² WL III, p 205

⁵³ WL III, Book V, chapter 17

⁵⁴ WL III, p 323

Gersonides disproves the eternal theory of time and the potential idea of a vacuum to disprove creation ex nihilo and to set the stage for his own doctrine of creation. His own theory can be best understood in terms of a philosophical reading of the biblical account of creation on the very levels we have presented thus far: time and creation out of a primordial shapeless body.

Gersonides argues that creation did not take time, especially not six days, and any argument that creation required six temporally distinct events is false.⁵⁵ In order to prove this, Gersonides builds his argument on the ambiguity of the first word in the Torah, "In the beginning" (*bereshit*). The term "beginning" (*reshit*) means in Hebrew, "that part of a thing which is prior to all its other parts, no matter what kind of priority."⁵⁶ Thus, the term "*reshit*" signifies a causal relationship between the agents in question, with the first agent having priority over the second. Thus, if X is causally prior to Y, then Y depends upon X for its existence.

Armed with his theory, we can now apply it to his understanding of Genesis 1, which reads: "¹In the beginning (*bereshit*), God created heaven and earth - ²the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water - ³God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day. ⁶God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water"⁵⁷

⁵⁵ WL III, p 208

⁵⁶ WL III, p 430

⁵⁷ JPS translation, Genesis 1:1-4

Gersonides reads the first three phrases as one sentence whose main clause is "let there be light." "Light" is a metaphor for the Agent Intellect, i.e., separate intelligences. "Heaven" is a metaphor for the incorporeal primordial matter, and "earth" is a metaphor for the sub-lunar world of the physical universe. Notice that heaven proceeds earth because of the causal priority relationship between the two, where earth depends on heaven for its existence.

With respect to time, remember that for Gersonides, the creation of the world did not take a specific amount of time, especially not six days, and any argument that creation required six temporally distinct events is false. Rather, Gersonides argues that creation is one distinct dimension of one creative act that occurred, occurs, and will continue to occur.

Gersonides did not believe in creation ex nihilo (Plato), but rather he argued for eternity (Aristotle). The implications of this philosophical stance are grand: no prophecy, no miracles, and no providence. Moreover, since Gersonides does not believe in creation which is reinforced by the observance of Shabbat, he provides a philosophical argument for observing Shabbat, as we will now see.

4. SHABBAT

התועלת השלישי הוא להודיע איך התחכם הי יתעלה תכלית
ההיתחכמות שיאמינו ישראל במיצות השבת, כדי שיוכנו יותר לקיבול
התורה. עם שמצות שבת היא פינה התוריית עצומה.
-שמות, פרשת שמות, 71 ד

The third benefit is to make known how, in great cleverness, God
began in wisdom, to show what will be known to Israel through the
Sabbath observance, in order to better prepare them to receive and
accept the Torah. The Sabbath observance is a great principle of the
Torah.

- Exodus, *Shemot*, 71a

As was mentioned in the Introduction, Gersonides divides Torahitic commandments
into those which provide moral instruction and those which are concerned with correct
intellectual belief. He mentions that even though people may not be able to understand
each and every commandment, people can be confident that they do have reasons
behind them; otherwise, they would not be divine laws.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ WL I, p 240

Before we discuss the reason why Gersonides considers Shabbat a *pinnah hatorah*, it is important to understand his attitude towards astrology and the influence that stars and planets have in the universe. He believes that the attainment of human perfection consists in the examination of astrology, as far as it is possible for man and in so far as the nature of the phenomenon can be known to man. He notes that in general, if the heavenly bodies were not effects of some greater cause, it would be impossible to undertake this inquiry. But celestial bodies are effects, and since it is the nature of effects and whatever is in them to exhibit some purpose, it can be concluded that the gates of inquiry on this topic are opened.⁵⁹

He argues that it is evident in a general way that the determinate order obtaining amongst generated things in the sub-lunar world derives from the heavenly bodies. Since this order is constant and regular, and from it different things follow others at different times, it follows that the cause of this order must be continuous and that it is operative in different things at different times. Gersonides quotes scripture to emphasize his point: "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by discernment He established the heavens."⁶⁰

Having now established that Gersonides, like most medievalists, believed that astrology influenced the sub-lunar realm, it should be no surprise to note that Gersonides explains the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest because the seventh day is under the influence of Saturn, which he considers to be potentially harmful.⁶¹ It is therefore advisable to refrain from work on that day.⁶²

⁵⁹ WL III, p 29-35

⁶⁰ Proverbs 3:19

⁶¹ CT p 80a

⁶² Eisen, p 87

Though this may be true, it may not completely satisfy the philosophical reasons of why Shabbat observance is one of Gersonides' *pinnot hatorah*. In fact, his cosmological justification may be esoteric in nature and designed to encourage the masses to observe Shabbat for moral and/or political reasons. But we can be sure that Gersonides would agree that a day of rest would allow everybody, especially the elite, the necessary time to develop their intellectual capacity and knowledge base. Therefore, the observance of Shabbat serves Gersonides' highest goals, as it leads the elite to obtain perfect intellectual development.

5. EVENTS IN THE SUBLUNAR REALM ARE CONTROLLED BY MOVEMENTS IN THE SPHERES

להורות על ענין נפלא הוא מהגדולות שבפינות העיוניות התוריות. והוא
שזה המציאות השפל ישפיע לו מעולם הגלגלם מה שיעמיד הנימצאים.

- שמות, פרשת תרומה, 104 ד

This is to teach on the marvelous issue which is one of the great philosophical principles of the Torah, that existence on earth is controlled by emanations in the universal realm through the movement of the spheres.

- Exodus, *Trumah*, 104d

As was mentioned in the previous section on Shabbat, Gersonides argued that one reason for observing the commandment of Shabbat is to ward off the potentially negative influence of Saturn. In this section, we will briefly explore Gersonides approach to astrology in order to understand his fifth *pinnah*, that events in the sub-lunar realm are controlled by movement in the heavenly spheres.

To understand the basics of this *pinnah*, three aspects of Gersonides philosophy must be understood: his definition of the sub-lunar realm; his idea of the heavenly spheres; and, his doctrine of motion which allows for movement to take place in the heavenly spheres?

Gersonides dedicates Book 5 of The Wars to astrological issues and considers such questions as the movers and the movements of the heavenly bodies, their interrelationships, God's attributes, God's relationship to the movers of the heavenly bodies; and, the role of the Agent Intellect and its relationship to the other movers of the heavenly bodies and to God.⁶³ His answers were heavily influenced by Aristotle's notion that all heavenly bodies are fixed together in spheres which, in turn, are nested concentrically with one another. Gersonides writes that the exact number of these movers can be established because their number necessarily corresponds to the number of spheres.⁶⁴

Seymour Feldman provides a good description of this idea of concentricity. He states, "Gersonides viewed all existence as a unity having a definite tier-structured

⁶³ WL III, p 14

⁶⁴ see WL III p144 for a complete breakdown of the spherical divisions.

order, in which each level of being is a step toward a higher level, which in turn, includes all the perfection of each lower level. The universe was regarded as a ladder whose rungs were different kinds of beings, hierarchically arranged such that each rung was considered a more perfect kind of being than its immediate lower one. Of course, the highest rung was God. In a sense, such a view was anticipated by the bible with its conception of God, the angels, the heavenly bodies, man and the lower animate creatures.

“When the Aristotelian astrology was grafted onto this biblical scheme, the angels were identified with Aristotle’s unmoved movers, or Separate Intelligences, of the heavenly spheres. However, this created problems for Gersonides who tried to reason the following questions: How do we get a plurality of entities from one united God? How do the Separate Intelligences, Angels, derive from God? How are the separate intelligences mutually diversified and related? And finally, is God a mover of the heavenly sphere?”⁶⁵

One important fact is that Gersonides’ astrology was teleological for him. In other words, there are inherent natural goals and end purposes that govern the behavior of natural phenomena and processes. The movement of the heavenly bodies occurs for the purpose of serving nature, and thus, humanity. They do not act for themselves alone. This will be further explained below in the discussion of the ninth *pinnah*, “that all good comes from God.” For now, it must be clear that for Gersonides, everything has purpose within the unified system.

His thesis on spherical motion will explain how motion plays a significant role in the process of transforming an idea into a physical reality (non-matter to matter).

⁶⁵ *ibid*, “Synopsis of Book Five”

First, the separate movers of the spheres are all created simultaneously by God; they do not emanate from God and from each other. Second, these separate intelligences are not causally related, and only God knows their relationships to each other. Therefore, these movers are the individual intelligences, the spheres that cause events to occur on earth, all concentrically unified by the First Mover, God.⁶⁶

This idea of motion proves that the events on earth are subject to movements in the heavenly spheres. This is commonly misunderstood that human beings have no free will, but this is far from what Gersonides intends. As will be explained by the next *pinnah*, humans have free will.

Having mentioned all this, it is now possible to understand the three aspects of the ideas that events in the sub-lunar realm are controlled by movements in the spheres. First, the sub-lunar realm is what happens in the material world. Second, the heavenly sphere is where the Agent Intellect resides. And third, the movement in the heavenly bodies that control events on earth can be understood as the continual emanation of the order of nature and universal ideas towards the material receptors on earth. We can think in terms of many individual intellects, each with their own specific task, all adding up to the collective Agent Intellect, which is one and unified. Angels are the biblical metaphor for these individual intellects or Separate Intelligences, the third aspect to this *pinnah*.

The idea that events on earth are controlled by heavenly bodies might lead someone to incorrectly believe that God determines everything and that man has no free will. But remember that Gersonides' idea of God is the Agent Intellect. The AI does not control human action but rather the AI enables human beings to make free

⁶⁶ WL III p 24

will decisions in relation to their intellectual proficiency, as the following *pinnah* expresses.

6. HUMAN ACTIONS ARE CONTINGENT: MAN HAS FREE WILL

ובבבלל הנה המאמר כשיעד הנביא שידטא פלוני ויענש עליו עונש כך
הוא תורה הגדולה שבפיות התוריות והעיוניות.

- דבר' הימים ב, כא:12

All this here tells that when the prophet promises that a man will sin,
the man will be punished. This teaching is one of the great Torahitic
and philosophical principles in the Torah.

- II Chronicles 21:12

The religious faithful demand that God is all-powerful for many reasons. Among other things, it justifies suffering and satisfies unanswerable questions. In this system, there is only the appearance of free will. But from the perspective of the philosopher, humans can choose, by their own free will, to study the philosopher's regimen: math, physics, and metaphysics.

Through the philosophical process, people align their own human intellect with the emanations of the Agent Intellect. Since the Agent Intellect is the sum total of all

ideas in the universe, certain human beings with the ability to tap into these emanations, will know how and why events on earth occur. Armed with the knowledge of how the universe operates, a person will use their intellect to choose under their own free will, the best possible choice, notwithstanding accidents.

Prior to the discussion of why this sixth *pinnah* is essential to Gersonides' overall philosophical dogma, three related concepts that he regularly utilizes must be briefly introduced: divination, dreams, and prophecy. These various types of mental cognition are extraordinary and are only available to certain human beings.

Gersonides writes that diviners are those people that can predict future events. The same is true in prophecy in that the images of a person's dreams appear to correspond completely with future events.⁶⁷ The ability to know future events are reserved for affairs among individual men to the extent that they do in fact occur, and not with respect to necessary matters. The phrase, "that occur among individual men" is used to note that dreams, divination, and prophecy communicate information only about human circumstances and chance events.⁶⁸

Gersonides provides a biblical example from I Samuel 9. Here, Samuel the Prophet tells King Saul that he will meet three men on his journey and that they will give him two loaves of bread and that he will take them. This example qualifies as justified divination because the information regarding the future event was not necessarily determined and ordered, and could have not occurred if the events leading up to the chance meeting were somehow changed.

⁶⁷ WL II p 27

⁶⁸ WL II pp 29-32

For example, if an unforeseeable necessary event occurred that prevented King Saul's trip from taking place, like a rain storm, he would not have met the three men. However, because no astrological and necessary event occurred to negate the prophetic image, the events played out just like the prophet suggested they would.

Therefore, some events are determined and others occur by chance.⁶⁹ Prophecy, divination, and dreams only occur with respect to chance events which are contingent on human intellect and choice, for these have the power to move human beings contrary to that which is determined.

Thus, human actions are contingent to the extent that man has developed his intellectual capacity, and in this respect, man has free will. In the following two *pinnot*, we will understand how intellectual capacity is directly related to providence.

⁶⁹ WL II p 34

7. GENERAL PROVIDENCE

התועלת החמישים ואחד הוא במיצות אשר הם מדבריהם ז"ל. הנה מה שתקנו מורדכי ואסתר, וקבלו עליהם כל הדור ההוא, עליהם ועל זרעם, ועל כל הנלזים עליהם, לקיים את ימי הפורים האלא בזמניהם, לפי הדינים הנזכרים בהם, כי בפרסום הנסים תתקיים פנת ההשגחה האלהית באישי האדם, אשר היא מהגדולות שבפינות התוריות.

-מגילת אסתר, 49א

This fifty-first benefit is in the commandment that we remember their words as a blessing. Here, we are reminded of Mordechai and Esther, who ordained that every one of their generation will receive the impact of the words, as will forthcoming generations and all who accompany them. They will fulfill the days and times of Purim and those who will be judged and remembered by them. For publicizing the miracles will establish the principle of providence, one of the great principles of Torah.

- Esther, 49a

Gersonides argues that there are two levels of divine providence exhibited in the universe. First, general providence (*hasgachat kellalit*), is the rational plan imminent in nature. Second, individual providence (*hashgachat pratit*), is the providence that individuals merit by virtue of their moral and intellectual achievements.

General providence is imbedded in the basic concept that God is the order of nature which consistently and continually acts to preserve the various species in the sub-lunar realm as best as possible.⁷⁰ General providence confers protection on the human species as a whole by means of the influences of the celestial system that creates the best of all possible worlds.

The biblical "covenant" is the best way to understand general providence. For Gersonides, the notion of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity is a metaphor for a deeper philosophical truth. It is a symbol representing God's static, non-creative posture towards the natural order of the world."⁷¹

In other words, God has a "covenant" with creation in that God sustains the world by perpetually implementing the fixed laws which control all natural processes. The biblical account expresses this fixed posture as a covenant between God and Noah and later between God and Abraham.

In his commentary to Genesis 2:1-3, Gersonides writes, ". . .this covenant which is referred to here is that which God made on the seventh day to sustain the world in such a way that there would not be any more need for the kind of creative activity with which God created the world in six days. . . This covenant with creation was fulfilled with Noah in God's commanding him to make the ark according to the

⁷⁰ Eisen, pp 15-16

⁷¹ Eisen, pp 42-58

reported description and that he should enter the ark with his sons and their wives.”

This covenant serves as the metaphoric promise that the order of God’s nature will support the highest specie form, humanity.

The same is true with the symbolic metaphor of “covenant” in Genesis 15:18. Here, the biblical text reads “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham . . .” In response to this statement, Gersonides remarks: “God informed Abraham that he will with certainty, cause Abraham’s descendants to be worthy of divine protection in the form of providence.”

General providence represents the idea that barring any interference with this system, human beings can rely on the constancy of the natural cosmos. However, general providence does not safeguard human beings from all forms of harm. Even with the protection afforded by general providence, man is still subject to harmful chance events- which are unavoidable by-products of the divine plan. To be protected from these chance events, man must acquire individual providence, which only operates in those individuals who have achieved a degree of intellectual perfection. The more perfect a man’s intellect, the greater his individual providence, as will be addressed by the following *pinnah*.⁷²

⁷² Eisen p 16

8. INDIVIDUAL PROVIDENCE

התועלת השישי הוא להודיע מה שצוו להשאר מלא העומר מן
למשמרת, להודיע לדורות הבאים זה הפלא העצום, כי ההאמונה
בנפלאות היא מהגדולות שבפינות התורות.

-שמות, פרשת בשלח, 69 א

The third benefit is to proclaim that they were commanded to
preserve a full measure of manna, and to inform the generations to
come of this magnificent wonder, because belief in miracles is a great
principle of Torah.

- Exodus, *B'shallach*, 69a

As in all of Gersonides pinnot hatorah, there are two sides to the coin. The same is true
for individual providence. On one side, the religious faithful demand that God knows
them as individuals. In this way, God can love them as they love God. God can speak
to them as they speak to God. And God can call them to act like they call upon God to
act.

The philosopher's side of the coin reinforces the idea that the greater a person's intellect, the greater their individual providence. Gersonides develops his argument from the Aristotelian idea that God cannot know particulars as particulars. Rather, divine emanations are constant and can reach anybody who is prepared to receive their activity, which depends on a person's ability to reason, and their intellect.⁷³ In other words, it is evident that what is more noble and closer to the perfection of the Agent Intellect receives divine providence to a greater degree and is given by God the proper means for its preservation.⁷⁴

He develops this idea in Book IV in The Wars, where he states, "It is obvious that God by his very nature knows all the objects of knowledge and that man possesses a great capacity to receive these objects of knowledge, so that he is in a way potentially a knower of all of them. Hence, since God possesses all these objects of knowledge actually and man possesses all of them potentially, it is evident, since that which is in act brings forth what is in potentiality, that God will bring forth what is potentially in man. Since, in the process of actualizing knowledge, the agent and the recipient are in some sense one, it is evident that there is in this sense some kind of unity and conjunction with God. Whoever reaches this state is obviously worthy of receiving a providence that is extraordinary by virtue of this union and conjunction. Since this union results from man's actual acquisition of knowledge, not from his capacity for knowledge, it is evident that it is proper that divine providence should extend over those men who have reached intellectual perfection as individuals."⁷⁵

⁷³ WL II p 181

⁷⁴ WL II p 174-9

⁷⁵ WL II p 174

Intellectual perfection nearly guarantees individual providence, though it cannot prevent chance occurrences. Such occurrences are neither a sign of evil nor a moral defect in God. Rather, the cosmos are ordered and are not inherently evil which enables human reason serves to insure a person's survival. Therefore, human beings can protect themselves from natural "evils" by using their reason. Conversely, anyone who does not endeavor to perfect their intellect according to its proper potential, should not complain if evils fall upon him, for it is his fault that it occurred.

For example, if a person got frostbite on their toes as a result of walking barefoot in the snow, it would be clear that they did not think reasonably, and therefore should not complain when they learn that their toes must be amputated. God did not cause the person to walk barefoot in the snow. Rather, the person did so under their own free will and as a result of their unreasonable actions, they suffered.

One may ask, why did God create a world where toes have the potential to get frostbite? Or, why did God create a world with snow that might have the potential to cause such harm? Does this not signify an evil God? Gersonides would argue that nothing could be further from the truth. Any thinking person would not have walked barefoot in the snow. This person suffered because he severed his connection with the AI. God is never evil, and as will be discussed in the following *pinnah hatorah*, God's nature is beneficent and gracious, and all good comes from God.

9. ALL GOOD COMES FROM GOD

התועלת העשירי הוא במצוות. . . וישירנו זה גם כן אל האמונה שכל
הטובה הם שופעות מאתו יתעלה, שהוא מהגדולות שבפינות התורות
והעיוניות.

-דברים, פרשת ואתחנן, 213 ג

The tenth benefit is a commandment. . . .To know who directs us to
the belief that all good emanates from God and this is one of the great
Torahitic and philosophical principles off the Torah.

- Deuteronomy, *V'etnachtan*, 213c

Gersonides' philosophical reading of Gen 1:3, argues that the light of creation is identical to the Separate Intelligences. The Separate Intelligences emanate forth universal ideas which enable the human intellect to gain knowledge. Since intellectual perfection is the highest of all human achievements, the biblical text reads, "God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light. God saw this light and called it good."⁷⁶ The following causal relationship proves this argument. God created light and since light is good, and since light is a metaphor for the Separate Intelligences, and since the

⁷⁶ Gen 1:3-4

Separate Intelligences combine to make the Agent Intellect, and since the AI is equivalent to God, therefore, all good comes from God.

In his own words, Gersonides states: "the First Cause is continuously active upon all existent things. And since this activity derives from God to the existents, they are directed toward perfection and an end which is good. Therefore, it is proper to describe God as beneficent, gracious, and munificent. And since it is the form that is the end which is good, and since God is the form of all existents - for through God the law of the universe is a unified system - it is proper to describe God as "good."⁷⁷

10. GOD JUDGES MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS

השם יתברך שופט האדם לפי מעשיו, והיא פינה חזקה מפנינות התורה.
- ספר מלכים א, כב

God judges man according to his actions, and this is an important
principle of the Torah.

- I Kings 22

A brief review of some ideas that have been previously introduced will help to better understand why Gersonides has included the idea that "God judges man according to his deeds" as *pinnah hatorah*. It has been shown that individual providence is awarded

⁷⁷ WL III p 182

to people who have achieved certain intellectual abilities. Next, the Agent Intellect constantly emanates the universal ideas which people can tap to increase their knowledge.

From the perspective of Torah and the Rabbinic Literature, Gersonides writes in that "if it is alleged that God judges individual men according to their deeds, it would follow that God would have to know these particular actions as particulars concerning which God either rewards or punishes man. But it has been shown that it is impossible for God to have knowledge of particular actions. From this, it is implied that God's providence cannot reach individual men as individuals." If this were true, God would be unable to judge man according to his deeds. In other words, God has nothing to do with reward or punishment, good or evil, because such elements are beyond the scope of God's powers. Not true according to Gersonides.

Gersonides argues that man's level of reward and his level of punishment is directly related to the level of his acquired intellect. He states, "it is evident that what is more noble and closer to the perfection of the Agent Intellect receives the divine providence to a greater degree and is given by God the proper means for its preservation. . . . For whichever animal is more noble is given more means for its survival. Since man exhibits different levels of proximity to and remoteness from the Agent Intellect by virtue of his individual character, those that are more strongly attached to it receive divine providence individually."⁷⁸

In the example of the person that received frostbite on their toes, the person was "punished" with frostbite for not wearing appropriate shoes. Here, God "judged" him according to his deeds is the religious way of expressing that the person did not have

⁷⁸ WL II p 174

the appropriate degree of intellectual capacity to protect himself from natural phenomenon and as a result, was "punished" with frostbite.

If this approach were always true, then every human ill could be traced back to an individual's intellectual failure. However, there is empirical evidence that show cases where the righteous suffer evil and sinners receive good. Gersonides concedes two ways to approach this line of reasoning. First, righteousness, evil, good, and sin might be the judgments of a limited human intellect and that what we may attribute to something or someone as good or evil, may in fact, not be in the realm of ultimate truth.

Gersonides admits to irregular accidents in the earthly sphere that cause true evil. For example, a righteous man gets hit by a car and suffers a spinal chord injury. The suffering resulting in this accident is proof of the second rationale behind righteous suffering which is the fact of physical existence. Human bodies are composed of matter, and are thus corruptible. In that human beings are corruptible, humans will suffer.

Though accidental suffering is beyond human control, the physical existence exposes human beings to this reality. There is no protection against this type of suffering. The only protection that human beings can develop is to increase their intellectual capabilities and in this way, we will be "judged favorably" in that God judges man according to their deeds.

11. MIRACLES

וכן בעבור שהיה מפנות התורה האמונה במופתים וזיה מבאר שאם
היה העולם קדמון אין דרך למציאת המופתם, חייב בחכרה שתיסד לנו
תחילה אמונת החדוש.

-בראשית, פרשת בראשית, 9 א

Since one of the principles of Torah is to believe that if the world
were eternal there would be now way for the existence of miracles.
Therefore we must from the beginning, establish creation.

-Genesis, *B'reshit*, 9a

It should be remembered that the issue of creation is one of the essential topics that
Gersonides addresses. Can God create out of nothing as the biblical story of creation
implies (Plato), or is creation constant (Aristotle)?

Again, the religious faithful need to believe in miracles that defy science in
order to provide them with hope in times of hopelessness. The dilemma remains: If
God can create out of nothing, than miracles can occur. If God cannot create out of
nothing, then miracles cannot occur. Gersonides asks: how is it possible for God to
perform miracles, if God cannot experience a change of will and cannot directly
intervene in the natural order?

Gersonides defines a miracle as an event that occurs in nature, but that defies the laws of nature, logic, and mathematics. Yet the Torah is filled with miracles: Moses' staff turning into a snake; water turning into blood; manna falling from the sky; the earth swallowing up Korah and his gang; and a planet ceasing to move in Joshua 10. Gersonides dedicates the second half of Book VI of The Wars to explaining the nature of apparent miracles and notes four truisms with respect to miracles.

First, all miracles are described by a prophet. Second, all of the stated miracles are expressions of beneficence, grace, and providence for the purpose of bringing about right belief, material benefits, or salvation from evil for Israel.⁷⁹ Third, it is impossible that a miracle occur with respect to the heavenly bodies. And fourth, miracles cannot contradict the accepted order of nature.

A closer look at Joshua 10 and II Kings 20 will explain Gersonides approach to miracles. The biblical account states that Isaiah caused the shadow on Hezekiah's sundial to move back ten degrees and that Joshua stopped the sun at Gibeon. Gersonides argues that these miracles did not involve the unnatural movement of the sun, but rather a miraculous shifting of clouds which caused the shadow of the sundial to shift back ten degrees.⁸⁰

Though the event was reported by a prophet, the sun could not stop because that would defy the natural and fixed order of the universe. Therefore, Gersonides offers an alternative explanation and argues that it was the shifting of clouds (a natural phenomenon) that only made it appear that Hezekiah's sundial had shifted.

⁷⁹ WL III p 471-2

⁸⁰ WL III p 458-9

Moreover, Gersonides argues that this apparent miracle had no specific benefit for Israel. At that time in history, Israel already believed in miracles and prophecy and since no proof can be found to show that other nations turned to a belief in God as a result of this reported sun cessation, it had no benefit for Israel and was therefore, not a miracle. Though Gersonides disproves this event as an apparent miracle, he does explain the purpose of this biblical account which does hold up to the accepted order of nature.

In his commentary to Joshua 10:13, Gersonides writes: "The miracle of Joshua was that he said that the revenge of the nation upon its enemy would be completed in the short time during which no descent of the sun is noticed since it is the middle of the day, and for this reason, he said, 'and the sun stood still and the moon stayed.'"

Therefore, by Gersonides account, Joshua's miracle did not involve the actual stopping of the sun, but a victory so fast that it seemed that the sun must have stopped.⁸¹

Therefore, the sun did not stop, but rather it only appeared to stop.

The explanation of the sun stopping captures Gersonides approach to explaining away the truth of miracles and shows that he does not believe in them. It also serves a purpose by showing how Gersonides uses philosophic truths to show that the bible is consistent with reason.

⁸¹ Kellner, Arama and Abravamel, p 272-3

12. PROPHECY

התועלת הששי הוא בדעות, והוא לפרסם ענין הנבואה. וזה, שכבר
נתפרסם מזה הסיפור ענין זאת הנבואה. והוא, שקריאת זה המקום 'בית
אל' היזה עדות על אמיתת זה הסיפור. והנה ההאמנה בנבואה היא
מפינות הליתורה.

-בראשית, פרשת ויצא, 37 א

The sixth benefit is an idea which is to publicize the matter of
prophecy. For it has already been publicized from the story on the
matter of prophecy, which is to call the place "House of God," is
testimony to the truth of the story. Here, belief in prophecy is a
principle of Torah.

-Genesis, *V'yetzei*, 37a

Gersonides defines prophecy as an extraordinary kind of cognition in which reason
plays the primary role. Throughout the biblical texts, prophets like Amos, Isaiah,
Joseph, and especially Moses, serve to communicate the divine will. We must recall
that for Gersonides, the divine will is the philosophical truths that are found in the
constant and unchanging order of nature. Therefore, a prophet can be considered the

preeminent philosopher who has perfect intellect. Let us investigate how prophecy works.

The Agent Intellect is constantly emanating true knowledge and serves as the source of prophetic cognition. The receptive faculty of this knowledge is the material intellect that exists in human beings. This process can be thought about like a waterfall in constant flow, where the water is a metaphor for knowledge. The water flows freely and consistently from its source until it finds a pool or river. From here, the new water joins the old to form new water composition.

The same is true with knowledge. The AI is constantly emanating knowledge. This knowledge connects into certain human minds that are developed in ways that enable them to receive such knowledge. The amount of knowledge that one is able to retain determines their intellect and the perfection of this intellect is synonymous with prophetic ability. Accordingly, someone who is ignorant would not be prepared to receive the highest degrees of knowledge, and would therefore be unable to be prophetic.⁸²

Knowledge enters the mind through dreams and divination. While the Agent Intellect is the source of dreams, divination, and prophecy, they differ in their respective roles. It can be thought of that prophecy is transmitted to the prophet via dreams and divination, i.e. emanations from the AI.

According to Gersonides' theory, prophetic communication can occur without any need for a personal God. The prophet taps into emanations and is able to maximize his well-being by knowing future events, as best as possible. It is true that a human being's free will might deter this event from occurring and is a factor in determining a

⁸² WL II p 60

prophet's performance.⁸³ People should not be confused into thinking that a prophet has a crystal ball and can know every future event. Take for example, the work of a meteorologist.

The finest meteorologist can predict the weather. Given the history of a specific region's weather, the knowledge of planetary movement which affects the tides, and the ability to track weather patterns, a meteorologist can well predict the weather. However, if a person dropped a match which ignited an entire forest, the heat from the burning trees would affect the local weather and would cause the meteorologist's prediction to be false. In the absence of disparity, the meteorologists report, like prophecy, would be accurate.

The biblical account states that "never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses. Gersonides notes that Moses is the greatest prophet for two reasons. First, he received his prophecies while awake which ensured that his receptive capacity was completely perfect. Secondly, all of Moses' other cognitive faculties were readily subservient to the receptive faculties."⁸⁴ In other words, he separated himself from matter and was therefore, virtually in pure form. This purity enabled him to "see" the form of God, making him the greatest of all prophets.

⁸³ For a discussion on how prophets are tested, see WL III pp 498-501

⁸⁴ CT 184d

13 GOD'S PROMISES ARE FULFILLED

התועלת הששי הוא להודיע דבר ההודאה הנפלאם שאמרו המשוררים
אשר היא מקפת בפיות עצומות מפינות התורה הפינה השנית היא
להודיע שיעודיו על ידי נביאיו הם קימים ולזה אמר ומשפטי פיהו כמו
שבארנו.
-דברי הימים א כט: ל

The sixth benefit is to proclaim that on the matter of thankfulness and
wonder which the poets have said encompass one of the principles of
the TorahThe point is to proclaim that God's promises via
providence are real, as is the judgment in God's mouth as we have
explained.

- I Chronicles 29:30

. The notion that God's promises are fulfilled satisfies the religious faithful as they need
to believe and trust in God's word. But for Gersonides, the idea that God's promises
are fulfilled takes on an entirely new meaning. He accomplishes this by using the
biblical account of the Flood as proof. The story teaches that Noah was placed in the
ark to protect him and the animals from the flood that would destroy the rest of nature
as a result of moral corruption on earth.

As a result of moral degeneration among the human race, people were unable to attain any level of intellectual perfection.⁸⁵ The world was destroyed and then regenerated through Noah and his offspring so that man would eventually be able to achieve a high level of knowledge which was previously impossible.

Prior to placing Noah in the ark and then destroying the world, God states: "I will fulfill my covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark with you sons, your wife, and your sons' wives."⁸⁶ This covenant between God and Noah is a metaphor for saying that God's promises are fulfilled, and in this case, they are fulfilled to all humanity as Gersonides' interpretation on this verse suggests.

Gersonides writes, "the covenant which is referred to here, is according to my opinion, that which God made on the seventh day to sustain the world in such a way that there would not be any more need for the kind of creative activity with which God created the world in six days. The covenant with creation was fulfilled with Noah in God's commanding him to make the ark according to the reported description and that he should enter the ark with his sons and their wives, and that he should also bring in with him at the very least every species of animal that walks and flies, male and female, so that all the species of animals would continue to exist."⁸⁷

Gersonides reads the covenant as a symbol for God's static, non-changing role in the natural order of the universe. The biblical idea of a covenant is another way of saying that God's promises are fulfilled with creation in that God sustains the created world by perpetually implementing the fixed laws which control all natural processes.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Eisen p 39-56

⁸⁶ Genesis 6:18-19

⁸⁷ CT 19c, Eisen p 41

⁸⁸ Eisen, p 42

Such promises are valued in terms of kindness and mercy, as the following *pinnah* addresses.

**14. GOD EMANATES GOODNESS INTO THE WORLD BY VIRTUE OF
KINDNESS AND MERCY, NOT BY VIRTUE OF NECESSITY.**

‘יאר על פניו אליך ויחנך. ר״ל שזאת הברכה שזכרנו הוא מהשם
יתעלה. ואף על פי שכבר נשיג המושכלות באמצעות ההרגיש כאשר
יכפל בדבר. כמו שנבאר בחכמת הטבע. הנה לא יספיק זה לקנות
המושכלות, אם לא נעזר בזה בשפע השפע מהשם יתע' בצמצעות השכל
הפועל. כמו שבארנו בראשון מסר מלחמות השם. וזה השפע בנה אותו
בזה המקום בהארת שם יתע'. 'פניו עליו'. והנה 'פניו' הם השכלים
הנפרדים, כי הם הנמצאות היותר נכבדות אשר השגחת השם יתע' ופניו
ראוי שתהיה בהם. ו'הארת פניו' היא השפע השופע באמצעותם, שיכין
לנו הדרך לשיג המושכלות על אמיתתם. ואמר שזה איננו השם יתע' על
צד החיוב, ר״ל שאינו מחייב כשנכפל לנו ההרגיש בדבר מה שיגיע לנו
המושכל תכף. אבל ישפיע זה מהשם יתעלה על צד החסד והחנינה -
‘יתנך’ וזאת היא פנה גדולה מפנות התורות.

- במדבר, פרשת נשא, 182 א

“And may the face of God will shine upon you and be kind to you.”

We want to say that this blessing comes from God, even though we have already apprehended ideas through sensory experience. Even when it is repeated as it is explained in physics. This is not sufficient to attain those ideas if we are not assisted with the emanation that is emanated from God, through the instrumentality of the AI. As we have explained in Part I of The Wars. And these emanations we call the illumination of God. “God’s face upon you.” Here, “God’s face” are the Separate Intelligences, for they are the most honored of existing things, which is God’s providence, as God’s face is upon them. “The Illumination of God’s face are the emanations emanated through their means and prepare us for to apprehend ideas in a true manner. This is not the God of necessity. We say that when the sensation is repeated for us, then this is the potential intellect. But the influence of God upon us is mercy and loving-kindness which this is “be kind to you” and this is a great principle of the Torah.

- Numbers, *Naso*, 182a

The idea that God emanates goodness into the world by virtue of kindness and mercy, derives from Gersonides’ interpretation of the Priestly Benediction that is found in Sedra Naso. “May God bless you and protect you. May God deal kindly and graciously

with you. May God bestow favor upon you and grant you peace.”⁸⁹ He comments that these blessings of protection and grace derive from the emanations of the Agent Intellect, which we can now understand in the light of what has already been discussed in a number of the proceeding *pinnot*.

It has been explained that the concepts of the separate intelligences, providence, and that all good comes from God. God emanates goodness into the world via the Agent Intellect and this goodness is symbolic of the ability to gain knowledge and wisdom. What is unique to this *pinnah*, is the idea that while God emanates goodness into the world, this goodness should not be taken for granted. God does this by kindness and mercy, not by virtue of necessity.

For Gersonides, the highest achievement is the strength of the intellect, but the ability and capacity to acquire knowledge is not a given. Human beings did not “necessarily” have to be given intellectual potential, for it does not benefit God that man has knowledge. God is constant and unchanging and gains nothing from human action. God does not receive increased benefit from man’s intellect. Only man gains for having an intellect and the ability to reason. Therefore, God is kind and merciful for endowing human beings with the gift of the intellect, which is directly related to man’s level of happiness as the next *pinnah* will demonstrate.

⁸⁹ Numbers 6:22-24

15. ULTIMATE JOY IS BEING CLOSE TO GOD.

התועלת הששי הוא להודיע דבר ההודאה הנפלאם שאמרו המשוררים
אשר היא מקפת בפינות עצומות מפינות התורה והאמונה. האחת היא
שאשר יבקשו פניו והם כדבקים בו יעשה הי' תי' הנפלאות בעבורם
להיטיב להם ולהצילם מסכנע כאמרו דרשו הי' ועוזו בקשו פניו תמיד
וזאת הפינה כוללת גם כן פינה אחרת והיא שהי' תי' משגיח באישי המין
האנושי וכבר זכר זה בבואר שאמרו אשר כרת את אברהם ושבעתו
ליצחק.
-דברי הימים א כט: ל

The sixth benefit is to proclaim that on the matter of thankfulness or wonder that which the poets have said encompass the principles of the Torah and of belief. The first is that for those who seek God's face and who cleave unto God. God will do marvels for them and will deliver them from danger as it is stated, "joy be to those who seek God's face forever." And this principle includes another: that God provides for the individuals of the human species that God had already mentioned in the covenant that God made with Abraham and with Isaac.

- I Chronicles 29:30

The notion that ultimate joy is being close to God is a social political idea to encourage the religious faithful to believe in a personal God. But for Gersonides, ultimate joy has to do with intellectual prowess. He addresses the issue of joy and happiness in his discussion of good and evil and reward and punishment in Book IV of The Wars. His argument focuses on the apparent evil that befalls righteous people and he argues that with inward reflection, people will see that true reward and punishment do not relate to the benefits or evils that people experience. Accidents occur in the world that cause external pain and suffering, but since righteous and evil people suffer alike, joy does not come from external pleasure, but from the development of the intellect.

For example, a disease attacks a person's body. The unwise person may think the disease is a divine punishment in response to a misdeed. However, the wise person knows that disease exists in the world but only affects the physical body, which is matter and therefore corruptible. For this reason, Gersonides writes, "that for the reward and punishment that occur to man insofar as he is a man have to be good and evil. Human good consists of the acquisition of spiritual happiness, for this good concerns man as man, and not the pursuit of good food and sensual objects, for nutrition and sensation are not uniquely human. Moreover, human evil consists of the absence of spiritual happiness."⁹⁰

By contrast, true reward is the fullness of spiritual happiness which is acquired through intellectual perfection, which as we will see later, is identified with human immortality. Human happiness, therefore, is achieved when a man knows reality as

⁹⁰ WL II p 182-3

much as he can, and becomes nobler when he knows the more superior things than when he knows only the things of inferior rank and value.⁹¹

16. THE COMMANDMENT TO LOVE GOD

התועלת השני הוא במצוות. וחוא מה שצונו לאהבה הי יתעלה בזה
באופן הנפלא וחוא מה שצונו ללמד [לבנינו] אלו הדברים שהם
פינות התורה.

-דברים, פרשה ואתחנן, 213 דג

The second benefit is a commandment. We are commanded to love God in this wondrous way. Moreover, we are commanded to teach our children these principles of the Torah.

- Deuteronomy, *V'etchanan*, 213c/d

In the introduction to his commentary on Torah, Gersonides writes that the material in the Torah can be divided into three categories. First, the Torah contains commandments which through their observance, allow people to achieve moral and

⁹¹ WL I p 96

intellectual perfection. Secondly, the stories of the Patriarchs and Israelite history teach political science which includes all matters pertaining to ethical and political philosophy. Finally, the Torah contains instruction about the science of existents, i.e., natural science and metaphysics.⁹²

In Sedra Va'etchanan, the text states, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions which I charge you on this day and impress them upon your children."⁹³ Since Torahitic commandments allow people to achieve moral and intellectual perfection, the commandment to love God must engender this perfection.

Though he never states it explicitly, it can be thought that Gersonides considered that there is a confluent relationship between God and the Agent Intellect. Though they are not quite synonymous, there exists an eternal cause and effect relationship between them. Since the AI is the sum total of all true ideas in the universe, and since commandments lead to intellectual perfection, humans are commanded to love God. In short, loving God can be considered equivalent to the active pursuit of knowledge.

⁹² Eisen p 86

⁹³ Deut 6:5-7

17. THE TORAH IS IMMUTABLE AND EVERLASTING

התועלת הרביעי הוא להודיע שלא נתנה התורה לדור ההוא לבד, אך
לכל הדורות הנמשכים אליהם. . . כי זה כולו יורה שהתורה נתנה
לדורות הנמשכים לאין תכלית. וזאת היא מפנות הגדולות שבינת התורה.
-דברים, פרשה ואתחנן, 211 ג

The fourth benefit is to inform that God did not give the Torah to one
generation exclusively, rather to all the generations and it continues to
be for them . . . for the complete teaching was given to continuous
generations that would proceed forever. This is a principle of the
Torah.

- Deuteronomy, *V'etchanan*, 211c

Gersonides argues that Moses was the greatest prophet of all time. God, after all,
revealed the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai and spoke with him directly. For Gersonides,
this means that Moses was the one who articulated the knowledge of universal truths
and encoded them into the Torah. Since universal truths do not change over time, the
Torah testifies: "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses."⁹⁴

In his commentary on Deuteronomy 30, Gersonides notes that the Torah was
not given to that generation which received it at Mt Sinai alone, but to all generations

⁹⁴ WL II p 58

which are descended from them. For this reason, it is said "it was not only with our fathers that God made this covenant."⁹⁵ For Gersonides, this means that knowledge is transferred from generation to generation. It also said, "May they always be of such mind, to revere Me and to follow all My commandments, that it may go well with them and their children forever."⁹⁶ All of this teaches that the Torah was given to the generations descended from the Israelites for all time, making the Torah immutable and everlasting.⁹⁷

18. THE REASONS WHY THE COMMANDMENTS ARE ONLY FULLY KNOWN TO GOD.

התועלת הרביעי היא מהגדולות שבפנות התורה. הוא שהי יתעלה לא צוה אותנו רק [אלא] לעשות את דברי התורה, לפי הנגלה מהם. וזה צוה שנעשהו לדורותינו כל הימים. אמנם הנסתר בדברי הורה והם הכוונות שכוונה התורה, שיישירו אליהם אלו המצוות, הוא דבר לא תתכן ידיעתו בשלמות כי אם לשם יתי לבדו.

- דברים, פרשת נצבים, 241 ג

⁹⁵ Deut 5:3

⁹⁶ Deut 5:26

⁹⁷ see Eisen p 82

The fourth benefit is a great principle of the Torah. It is that God does not command us except for the matters of the Torah which are apparent. This decree is in place for the all the generations to come. For that which is concealed in the words of the Torah - that is, the underlying meanings towards which the Torah intended the commandments to guide us - is something which is exclusively known to God alone.

-Deuteronomy, *Nitzavim*, 241c

As was mentioned in the explanation of the *pinnah hatorah* on the commandment to love God, the Torah contains commandments which through their observance, allow people to achieve moral and intellectual perfection. Even in the cases where it would seem improbable that the observance of some commandments would engender intellectual perfection, Gersonides provides the reason and rationale.

Take for example the prohibition against wearing wool and linen together. Gersonides argues that by separating the mixing of vegetable and animal products in the same garment, people are taught to differentiate between the vegetative form and the animal form.⁹⁸

Gersonides also believed that ritual sacrifices taught a philosophical truth and helped a person improve their intellectual capabilities. By witnessing the animal before, during, and after the sacrifice, a person is moved to contemplate the order of the

⁹⁸ CT 162a-c. Also, see Eisen p 88

natural world. The sight of the animal being consumed by fire causes the powers of the sentient soul to be weakened by vividly illustrating the corruptibility of all matter.⁹⁹

Since Gersonides provides the relative philosophical truths to these religious ordinances, the question must be asked: what is the motivation to continue their observance? Armed with the "real truth," why continue to observe religious law? Gersonides suggests that his are only probable explanations, and that human beings can never know for certain what the commandments teach, as the deeper reasons are only known to God. Eisen argues that the implication here is that one can never assume that by knowing the reason for a particular commandment, one can then find another means to accomplish the same goal.¹⁰⁰ In this case, the person would likely mislead themselves and risk idolatrous practices. For this reason, Gersonides includes the idea that the commandments are only known to God.

19. ALL NATIONS WILL EVENTUALLY WORSHIP THE TRUE GOD IN THE MESSIANIC PERIOD

התועלת הששי הוא להודיע דבר ההודאה הנפלאם שאמרו המשוררים
אשר היא מקפת בפיות עצומות מפינות התורה והאמונה . . . והנה
הישיר בזה גם כן לדבר הגלות אשר אנחנו בו כי הוא יהיה הכלי להביא
כל הגוים לאמונה האמתית בצאתנו מהגלות הזה יהיה מה שזכר מענין
מה שיאמר בגוים הי מלך כמו שנתבאר מסי דניאל לפי מה שבארנו שם.
-דברי הימים א כט: ל

⁹⁹ CT 117b. Also, see Eisen p 90

¹⁰⁰ Eisen p 90

The sixth benefit is to proclaim that on the matter of thankfulness and to acknowledge what the poets have said encompass the deep and important principles of the torah and of faith Here he directs you to the matter of exile that we are in so that we will have all the instrumentality to bring all the Nations to pure faith and redeem all those nations that are explained in the book of Daniel.

- I Chronicles 29:30

In many regards, the discussions of the previous eighteen *pinnot* have led to this final point: all nations will eventually worship the true God in the messianic period. The religious faithful believe in a genuine and personal messiah. Gersonides argues not in a personal messiah but in a messianic era.

Gersonides remarks in his Torah commentary, "There has not arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses: it is well known from the Torah itself that no law-giving prophet except Moses will arise for no prophet will be believed if he introduces a new Torah or diminishes from it in such a way that he lays down a new Torah to be observed for future generation. . . . Now, it is clear from what we have said that it is possible for another prophet to arise who would be like Moses but would prophesize to all the nations as well as to Israel. . . . This prophet, who will prophesize to Israel and to the other nations, will be the King Messiah."¹⁰¹

This passage explains that while Moses performed miracles that were unsurpassed by anyone in Israel, the Messiah will surpass Moses in quality and

¹⁰¹ CT 247a

quantity and will reach all the nations of the world. This will happen simultaneously with the messianic era, where peace and happiness for all people will reign. For Gersonides, happiness is dependent on intellectual achievement, so more accurately, the messianic era will arrive when all people have achieved the perfect intellect.

The messianic era is synonymous with the universal achievement of intellectual perfection for all people. This is why Gersonides includes this in his list of *pinnot*. In other terms, in the messianic era, all nations will "worship" the true God, i.e., the Agent Intellect. In other words, all people will know that the literal and biblical understanding of providence, miracles, and prophecy is false. Knowledge of the AI demands that we are all humanly equal and derive from a common source. This recognition should motivate all people to love and support one another which will engender the idea of the messianic period. It follows that since the Agent Intellect is the sum total of everlasting eternal truths, all human beings will be returned to the universal set of ideas upon death, thus achieving the highest goal, immortality.

V. PINNOT HATORAH : A DOGMA OF PHILOSOPHIC TRUTH

In the introduction to this paper, four possible motivations why religious writers might want to define a dogma were mentioned:

1. Criteria for group acceptance
2. Criteria for salvation
3. To attract new members
4. To defend against theological attack

Why did Gersonides term nineteen ideas, *pinnot hatorah*? Though it would appear that he never compiled one list of principle beliefs, he may have. The list may have been lost along the generations, destroyed by his later opponents, or has yet to be found in a *geniza* in Southern France.¹⁰² Nonetheless, based on what remains of Gersonides' writings, there is no list and he never refers to a list. This does not exclude the possibility that a list once existed, even if it only existed in secret, or in this case, hidden within the corpus of his bible commentaries and philosophical writings.

The first question that must be asked is: could Gersonides have had a potential motivation to define a religious dogma? The answer is yes on all four of the above accounts. The second question follows the first: if in fact, Gersonides had the motivation to explicitly define a religious dogma but assuming he did not, what may

¹⁰² Other texts that Gersonides had written were lost. For example, Gersonides makes reference to his "Supercommentary on Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics." This supercommentary has never been found.

have prevented him? Any number of political reasons may have stopped him. Perhaps he did not want to contradict Maimonides. Perhaps he did not want to confuse people into believing that Judaism was the only path to immortal salvation, since any path leading to intellectual perfection would provide immortality, regardless of its particularistic source.

By this account, there are nineteen matters that Gersonides considers worthy of defining as essential principles of the Torah. Now that each has been introduced and discussed, this thesis should be clear. Depending on the reader's perspective (i.e. the religious masses or the scientific philosopher), Gersonides *pinnot* are not only a religious dogma, but a philosophical dogma as well.

PHILOSOPHICAL TRUTHS REPRESENTED BY PINNAH

PINNAH	RELIGIOUS "TRUTH"	PHILOSOPHICAL TRUTH
1. God's Existence	The All Powerful is real	The Agent Intellect is an incorporeal element from which emanates all universal forms.
2. God's Oneness	The All Powerful demands loyalty	The Agent Intellect is unique and nothing compares to it.
3. Creation	The All Powerful creates <i>ex nihilo</i>	The Agent Intellect is eternal
4. Shabbat	The All powerful rested on Shabbat, so should humans	The seventh day is under the influence of Saturn, and it is advisable to refrain from work on that day.
5. Events in the sub-lunar realm are controlled by movement in the spheres	The All Powerful controls everything.	Astrology and celestial movement control events on earth
6. Human actions are contingent, man has free will	The All Powerful gave humans free-will in order to serve the All Powerful.	Man has free will

7. General providence	The All Powerful knows humanity	The human race is the most advanced and is the best equipped to protect itself.
8. Individual providence	The All Powerful knows individuals	Human beings have the potential to attain wisdom and knowledge through the development of the intellect. The greater the intellect, the greater the protection/providence.
9. All good comes from God	The All Powerful provides	The Agent Intellect emanates universal ideas which can be known through intellectual achievement.
10. God judges man according to his deeds	The All Powerful controls the destiny of individuals	Induction: the AI provides for existing things in giving them either bodily organs or instinctual powers, by virtue of which the possessors of these faculties can preserve their individual existence and ward off or avoid harm. ¹⁰³
11. Miracles	The All Powerful controls all existing supernatural elements.	All events occur in nature and adhere to the universal laws of nature, logic, and mathematics.
12. Prophecy	The All Powerful speaks to people	The Agent Intellect emanates knowledge which is received by the material intellect. The greater the capacity to receive knowledge, the greater the intellect. The greatest achievement is intellectual perfection, i.e., the philosopher. A prophet is synonymous with a philosopher.
13. God's promises are fulfilled	The All Powerful is Just	The universal order of nature is fixed and unchanging.
14. God emanates goodness into the world by virtue of kindness and mercy, not by virtue of necessity	The All Powerful is Good	Human beings have the ability and capacity to acquire knowledge and intellect.
15. Ultimate joy is being close to God	The greatest human achievement is communion with The All Powerful	A person's happiness is directly related to their intellectual advance

¹⁰³ WL II p 176

16. The commandment to love God	The All Powerful desires human love	The highest action is the pursuit of knowledge
17. the Torah is immutable and everlasting	The Torah contains the word of the All Powerful	Since the universal order of nature is fixed and unchanging, and since the Torah upholds universal truths, the truths in Torah are also fixed and unchanging.
18. The reasons for the commandments are fully known only to God	The All Powerful is beyond human knowledge. Therefore, serve the All Powerful.	The human intellect can approach the AI, but never conjoin with it.
19. All nations will eventually worship the true God in the messianic period	Worshipping the All Powerful is the ultimate goal.	The messianic era will exist when all humans have perfected their intellect and conjoined with the AI.

VI. CONCLUSION

Gersonides' *pinnot hatorah* are set in the context of Jewish Scripture but depending on the reader's perspective, they can reinforce religious truths or teach the essential medieval philosophical truths. As such, the *pinnot hatorah* can lead a person to lead to pure religious faith, or to the highest human achievement of intellectual perfection. It all depends on the person's approach: religious or philosophical. In this way, the religious person could use Gersonides *pinnot* as their religious dogma. But the reverse perspectives could lead somebody to the basics of philosophical truth. In the same moment, they could both advocate for Jewish faith, and they could also teach philosophical truth.

Though Gersonides synthesized Greek and Jewish thought, he was a member of the Jewish establishment. Unlike his contemporary philosophers, Gersonides never submitted a specific religious dogma. Yet evaluating these *pinnot hatorah* depends on the readers' perspective

This may account for the reason why Gersonides did not classify a set order of principles. His fundamental belief was that intellectual perfection is the highest goal attainable by anyone with the necessary potential, and therefore, any true religion could lead a person to intellectual perfection. He knew that Islam and Judaism were equally true because their respective scriptures could be shown to support scientific truths, and were both legally based and monotheistic.

This is why the philosophical understanding of Gersonides' *pinnot hatorah* are true for all people, not only Jews. Since the *pinnot* lead to universal truths, their origin must also be universal.

This is the reason why Gersonides' *pinnot hatorah* may have not been mentioned by Kellner in his work on Jewish medieval dogma. First, he may never have realized that Gersonides had a hidden philosophical dogma cued by the term *pinnah hatorah* in his biblical commentaries. Secondly, it is possible that he did know of a hidden dogma, but realized what we have concluded in this study: that Gersonides' dogma was not particular to any religion, but was philosophical in nature that led to universal truths. Thus to include Gersonides in a study on Jewish Dogma would be false, since in fact, his was not particularly based, but rather philosophical and therefore universal.

The possibility remains that Gersonides had no purpose behind labeling specific ideas *pinnot hatorah*. Or perhaps he had a different rationale in terming certain ideas *pinnot* and the secret reasons died with him. Nonetheless, the task is to add new and fresh ideas to the study of Gersonides, in hope that one day, somebody else will begin where this study has left off.

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