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The Role of Consciousness in Jewish Learning

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**Rabbi Moses ben Nahman on Torah Study:  
The Role of Consciousness in Jewish Learning**

**Mark B. Wieder**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Graduate Rabbinical Program  
New York, New York**

**2006**

**Advisor: Dr. Michael Chernick**

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## Summary Page

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Advisor: Dr. Michael Chernick

Number of Chapters: 9

The contribution of this thesis: This thesis provides a translation into English of the *Ma'amar 'al Pnimit haTorah*, an essay purported to have been written by Nahmanides (Rabbi Moses ben Nahman). The foreword to *Ma'amar 'al Pnimit haTorah* in Dr. Charles Chavel's collection *Kitvei Ramban* has also been translated, and his assertions regarding the authorship analyzed. Also to this end, Nahmanides is discussed in a biographical sketch which sets him into the context of his contemporaries and successors. The major themes of the *Ma'amar* are discussed, along with implications drawn from the text regarding Jewish education, particularly in the non-day school environment.

The goal of the thesis was to investigate how a medieval, mystical text could speak to a twenty-first century sensibility regarding finding joy in Jewish study.

How it is divided:

#### Acknowledgements

- I. Introduction
- II. Rabbi Moses ben Nahman:  
Biography, Influences, Contemporaries and Successors
- III. *Ma'amar 'al Pnimit haTorah* (Essay on the Internality of the Torah)
- IV. The Authorship of "Essay on the Internality of the Torah"
- V. Major Themes in "Essay on the Internality of the Torah"
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- VII. Implications of "Essay on the Internality of the Torah" for Today
- VIII. Appendices: Hebrew Texts
- IX. Bibliography

Material used: Primary texts in the Hebrew published by Dr. Charles Chavel; biblical and talmudic texts; background materials on Nahmanides, Jewish philosophy, the Zohar and other medieval kabbalistic works; and reference works such as encyclopedias and Bible commentaries.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to those who contributed to the preparation of this thesis. The willingness of several people to clarify ideas for me and assist in fine-tuning the translations is very much appreciated, however any errors or omissions are entirely my own.

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Second, I would like to thank Rabbi Leonard Kravitz, both for his help with the textual work during Dr. Chernick's sojourn in Israel during the fall of 2005, and for his complete delight in the texts. Would that I come to know that joy of deep and repeated immersions.

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my mother, whose fondest desire is that I move back to Cleveland, I offer thanks for moving from surprise over my decision to pursue the rabbinate to total support and encouragement. And last and most important, to my partner Jonathan, without whose love, support, encouragement, and patience none of this would have been possible.

Mark Wieder  
February, 2006  
Shevat 5766

## Chapter I

### Introduction

When I began to consider possible themes for my thesis with my advisor, I requested that it have "something to do with consciousness." I naïvely asserted that I didn't want anything "too kabbalistic," thinking only in terms of the Lurianic variety, and with a mental sneer. When *Ma'amar 'al Pnimit haTorah* was suggested, an essay sometimes attributed to Nahmanides, which had never been translated into English, I was intrigued. I had read selections from Nahmanides' Commentary to the Torah, especially the introduction, but did not, at that point, remember the hints at mystical meanings.

Instead I remembered the poetry of the introduction, the self-effacement ("As is my little wisdom / And brief knowledge..."), the awe of God, the many imbedded references to biblical verses, the respect for earlier commentators (especially Rashi)—and most of all his willingness to engage them (especially ibn Ezra) on the page.

It has been a joy to dwell with the texts these many months, sometimes doing battle, and sometimes taking pleasure in the organization of the words; sometimes catching glimpses of insights, and sometimes feeling incapable of such. (I have addressed the notion of individual limits and abilities in Chapter V.)

I am indebted to the many scholars who went before me, whose works I read in the preparation of this thesis. I stand in awe of their erudition; it strikes me again and again how broad a person's basis in text must be in order to really comprehend what is

being said in a given selection, and establishing conceptually where it is positioned in terms of historical development.

I hope that my explorations and conclusions are of value to future readers. I know that this is only the beginning of my studies. The essay states, "when you believe that the Torah is very deep...you will forever be longing, yearning, and craving after it." It would be my supreme pleasure in the rabbinate to continue to act on my increased desire to penetrate the texts, and to pass this love and desire on to students to come.



## Chapter II

### Rabbi Moses ben Nahman:

#### Biography, Influences, Contemporaries and Successors

Rabbi Moses ben Nahman<sup>1</sup> (Nahmanides) was born in Gerona, Spain in 1194.<sup>2</sup> He was something of a prodigy, known by the age of sixteen as a Talmudic authority. In that year he published a work in the style of Isaac Alfasi (1013-1103) which addressed the tractates of *Nedarim* (vows), and *Bechorot* (firstborns) which were missing from Alfasi's work *Halachot* or *Hilchot ha-Rif*, a shortened, concise version of the Talmud.<sup>3</sup> In defending Alfasi rigorously, he was in good standing. "Rambam<sup>4</sup> in his *Mishneh Torah* ("Repetition of the Law") followed the decisions of Alfasi faithfully."<sup>5</sup>

In his work *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, Nahmanides tells of this defense: "Now while I was yet in my younger years I heard one holy man (Rabbeynu Yitzchak Alfasi) speaking, pearls of wisdom coming from his mouth; but then I saw an eminent lord (Rabbeynu

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Moses ben Nahman is variously known as Nahmanides, Ramban (an acronym of Rabbi Moses ben Nahmanides), Moses ben Nahman Gerondi, and Bonastrug da Porta (his Spanish name according to *Encyclopedia Judaica*).

<sup>2</sup> Some references say 1195.

<sup>3</sup> Chavel, Charles B., *Ramban: His Life and Teachings*, Philipp Feldheim, Inc., New York 1960, p.18.

<sup>4</sup> Maimonides.

<sup>5</sup> Chavel, op. cit., p.19.

Zerachyah Halevi) assailing him, uprooting and crushing his words. Thereupon I became zealous for the Lord of Hosts, and I examined the books they wrote, and with the loving care a kind Providence bestowed upon me I restored the crown of the Torah to its former position."<sup>6,7</sup>

In the same work, he explains that while he is a defender of his predecessors, he maintains independence of thought: "...notwithstanding my desire to follow the earlier authorities and to assert and defend their views, I do not consider myself 'a donkey carrying books.' I will explain their methods and appraise their value, but when their views cannot be supported by me, I will defend, though in all modesty, my right to judge according to the light of my eyes."<sup>8</sup>

This adherence to and support of the words of earlier sources did not extend to the inroads Greco-Arabic philosophy had made "among Jews of Spain and Provence after the appearance of the "Moreh Nebukim" gave rise to a tendency to allegorize Biblical narratives and to refuse credit to the miraculous element in the Talmud."<sup>9</sup> Although Nahmanides did not share the views of Maimonides<sup>10</sup> on these issues, he did not join forces with the anti-Maimonists, and attempted to reconcile the sides during the infamous Maimonidean Controversy (c.1232):

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<sup>6</sup> As quoted in Chavel, *ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>7</sup> This was in a work entitled *Milhamot Adonai*.

<sup>8</sup> Chavel, *op. cit.*, p.24.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobs, Joseph, Wilhelm Bacher, and Isaac Broydé, "Moses Ben Nahman Gerondi," *Jewish Encyclopedia.com*.

<sup>10</sup> 1135–1204.

In a letter addressed to the French rabbis he draws attention to the virtues of Maimonides and points out that the "Yad"<sup>11</sup> not only shows no leniency in interpreting the prohibitions, but even betrays, in many cases, a positive stringency. As to the "Guide," it was intended not for those of unshaken belief, but for those who had been led astray by the works of Aristotle and Galen... To conciliate both parties Moses proposed that the ban against the philosophical portion of the "Yad" should be revoked, but that the ban against the study of the "Guide" and against those who rejected Talmudical interpretation of the Bible should be maintained and even strengthened. This compromise, which would have ended the struggle, was rejected by both parties in spite of Moses' great authority.<sup>12</sup>

While Nahmanides refuted the approach of Maimonides in stripping the Bible and Talmud of the miraculous, he was not against scientific knowledge. As was the case with Maimonides, he trained as a physician, and he made his living practicing medicine. The Ribash,<sup>13</sup> in a responsum, states:

It was well-known that Nachmanides had profound talmudical knowledge and incisive reasoning, and everybody in the province of Katalonia continues to depend on his fiery words, as if they emanated directly from Moses and God. He also possessed broad knowledge of philosophy and the natural sciences of his era, as is evidenced by his frequent discussions [of] issues in his great commentary to the Torah, which relate to these parts of Jewish knowledge...<sup>14</sup>

While Maimonides proposed that Hebrew could be seen as a holy language because it did not have words for the sex organs,<sup>15</sup> Nahmanides found all the functions of

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<sup>11</sup> *Yad ha-Hazakah*.

<sup>12</sup> Jacobs, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Isaac ben Sheshet Perfet (1326-1408).

<sup>14</sup> Henoch Chayim J., *Ramban: Philosopher and Kabbalist*, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, NJ 1998, p.13.

<sup>15</sup> *Guide*, III:8. "The Hebrew language has no special name for the organ of generation in females or in males, nor for the act of generation itself, nor for semen, nor for secretion. The Hebrew has no expressions for these things, and only describes them in figurative language and by way of hints, as if to indicate thereby that these things should not be mentioned, and should therefore have no names..." (Translation by M. Friedländer, p.264)

the body to be the work of God, and therefore not objectionable. He had other reasons besides delicacy, as shall be seen, for finding the language of the Torah holy.

### A Mixture of Traditions

Prior to the time of Nahmanides, the great centers of learning, Spain, Provence and northern France were isolated from each other. Charles Chavel pointed out, "For many centuries the Spanish and French-German schools existed side by side without any contact. Rabbeynu Yitzchak Alfasi of northern Africa and Spain, and Rashi of France—two contemporaries—never knew of one another."<sup>16</sup> Yaacov Shulman describes the geography: "Gerona was in Aragon, the northeastern kingdom of Spain. To the north lay the Pyrenees Mountains. Beyond that lay Provence, with its sophisticated school of rabbis, and above that, northern France, where the school of the *Baalei Tosafos* thrived."<sup>17</sup>

Charles Chavel sought to explain the distinctions among the three communities before the time of Nahmanides: "In Spain where Jews enjoyed political and civil liberties, and shared in the prosperity and culture of the land, philosophy (p.33) had of course been known for a long time. ... Much of the same condition also prevailed in Provence—in the communities of southeastern France.

"However, in northern France the outlook was more confined. There Jewish studies centered around the Talmud and Bible only, and the introduction of philosophical views into the sphere of Torah and Mitzvoth was regarded as a step fraught with

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<sup>16</sup> Chavel, op. cit., p.16.

<sup>17</sup> Shulman, Yaacov Dovid, *The Ramban: The Story of Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman*, C.I.S. Publishers, New York 1993, p.18.

danger."<sup>18</sup> This explains, in part, the move in northern France to ban the works of Maimonides to stem the tide of his influence.

Nahmanides was a major force in the integration of the traditions. "...Ramban's role in irreversibly integrating the far-reaching achievements of the Tosafists into Spanish Talmudism as well as showering them with honorific epithets and accolades is crucial. This marriage of French and Spanish Talmudism would last."<sup>19</sup>

He is also credited with shaping how the entire Jewish world views Torah, through his initial choice of commentators in his Torah commentary:

Nahmanides' role was catalytic; by singling out the French Rashi and the Spanish R. Abraham ibn Ezra as the two weighty predecessors whose totally divergent commentaries engaged his attention and whose wide-ranging exegetical attitudes and insights his own commentary related in a special way, Nahmanides set the stage for the emergence of the triumvirate which still casts its shadow over all Bible study. Rashi, ibn Ezra, and Ramban are the pivot, the point and counterpoint of Scriptural exegesis...Just as Ramban significantly and creatively relates to the previous two, so subsequent commentators and super-commentators interact with all three.<sup>20</sup>

Nahmanides was a community leader, and he served as spokesman to the king of Aragon. This put him in the uncomfortable position of dealing with escalations in the Church's attack on Jewish autonomy. In 1263, King James I coerced Nahmanides into a public disputation with Pablo Cristiani, an apostate. Nahmanides sought permission from the king to express himself freely, and won the dispute. He also embarrassed Cristiani by asking him to read from the original text, which he could not do well, showing his ignorance to the assembly.

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<sup>18</sup> Chavel, op. cit., pp.32-33.

<sup>19</sup> Isadore Twersky, ed., *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1983, p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.4.

Nahmanides published his views in *Sefer ha-Vikku'ah* (Book of the Disputation), which is still extant.<sup>21</sup> The Dominicans, who had forced the debate sought to punish him for his supposed anti-Christian sentiment by bringing him to trial, but King James postponed the trial based on the promised freedom of speech. "Dissatisfied, the Dominicans sought the aid of Pope Clement IV, who sent a letter to the king of Aragon requesting him to penalize Nahmanides for writing the above work. Nahmanides barely succeeded in escaping from Spain and during the same year emigrated to Erez Israel."<sup>22</sup>

He found Jerusalem in ruins, with few Jews remaining, including two brothers who were dyers by trade, who held services in their home on Shabbat.<sup>23</sup> He established a synagogue there in an abandoned house, and Chavel asserts that the Jewish community has had an uninterrupted existence (in Jerusalem) since then.<sup>24</sup> It "appears that he also founded a yeshivah. Reports of his activities circulated rapidly; many Jews streamed into Jerusalem."<sup>25</sup> Nahmanides did not remain in Jerusalem, but moved to Acre.

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<sup>21</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD-ROM Version 1.0, "Nahmanides," text copyright Keter Publishing House Ltd.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The holding of Shabbat services attended by up to ten Jews is noted in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* account.

<sup>24</sup> While there may have been Jews present throughout, Chavel writes in a footnote to his Preface to the Commentary: "In our own times, the sacred city of Jerusalem did "sit solitary" for nineteen years (5708-5727; 1948-1967 C.E.) while the Jordanians not only refused access to Jews, who wished to pray at the Western Wall of the ancient Temple, but, like the barbarian Vandals of old, destroyed every Jewish house of worship, including the synagogue founded by Ramban. The day of Iyar 28, 5727, when the Jews recaptured the old city of Jerusalem from the hands of the enemy will thus forever live in the annals of our history. [Ramban's synagogue, incidentally, has already been cleared and restored.]" p.vi.

<sup>25</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, op. cit.

In Erez Israel he completed work on his Torah commentary. In it are many kabbalistic references which form a backdrop to the main work of this paper, and an introduction which tells us much of his thinking and approach to text study.

There is a mystical legend associated with Nahmanides' passing:

According to this tradition, on the day of Ramban's departure from Spain his pupils asked him how they would know the time of his decease. Ramban answered: "On the day of my decease a crack will appear in the stone over the grave of my mother, of blessed memory. This will be the sign that I have passed away."

"About four years after Ramban's departure a pupil of his found that the stone had cracked.

"Thereupon, Gedalyah ibn Yachyah concludes, the whole house of Israel mourned the loss of their beloved teacher."<sup>26</sup>

### **Predecessors and Colleagues**

There are many claims and suppositions as to those who trained Nahmanides. Chavel asserts the cross-fertilization of traditions mentioning R. Yonah I (Nahmanides' cousin, Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi) who studied in French schools, R. Nathan ben R. Meir of Provence, and R. Yehudah (a pupil of R. Yitzchak ben Avraham), a master of the Tosafist (French-German) school.<sup>27</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica* also mentions "Judah b. Yakar, a disciple of Isaac b. Abraham of Dampierre, who established his yeshivah in Barcelona, and Meir b. Isaac of Trinquetaille."<sup>28</sup> Several sources list R. Azriel of Gerona as the teacher or "conjectured teacher" of Nahmanides in *Kabbalah*.

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<sup>26</sup> Legend from "Gedalyah ibn Yachyah's (1515-1587) *Shalsheth Hakabalah*. Cited in Chavel, op. cit., p.66.

<sup>27</sup> Chavel, op. cit., p.15.

<sup>28</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, op. cit.

Nahmanides maintained an active circle of correspondence. "He maintained close contact with Meir b. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia of Toledo<sup>29</sup> who replied to his queries, and even more so with his cousin, Jonah b. Abraham of Gerona. His colleagues also included Samuel b. Isaac Sardi,<sup>30</sup> to whom he sent the largest number of his responsa, as well as Isaac b. Abraham of Narbonne."<sup>31,32</sup>

### Disciples and Successors

Rashba (R. Solomon ben Abraham Adret),<sup>33</sup> Ritba (R. Yom Tov ben Abraham),<sup>34</sup> and Ran (R. Nissim ben Reuben Gerondi)<sup>35</sup> all considered themselves disciples of Ramban.<sup>36</sup> Rabbi Yonah II, a pupil of Nahmanides, was also a commentator on the laws of Alfasi.<sup>37</sup> Nahmanides' son Nahman was "a scholar of great repute and author of a commentary on a book of Talmud..."<sup>38</sup> His grandson "Levi, was the famous philosopher and Bible commentator known widely as Rabbag or Gersonides."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> (c.1170-1244)

<sup>30</sup> (c.1185-1256)

<sup>31</sup> Some sources mention Isaac b. Abraham as a disciple, others as a colleague.

<sup>32</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> (c.1235-c.1310)

<sup>34</sup> (c.1250-1330)

<sup>35</sup> (1310-c.1375)

<sup>36</sup> Chavel, op. cit., p.30.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.17.



But the influence of Nahmanides went beyond his immediate circle. As is often the way with Jewish commentators, there were critics and supercommentators. Chavel wrote, "It is worthy of note that a scholar of a later generation, Yitzchak Leon ibn Tzur, an Italian Rabbi who lived in the first half of the sixteenth century, set out to defend the position of Rambam on every point raised by Ramban. His notes he collected in a work called *Megillath Esther* ("The Scroll of Esther"—"Esther," in honor of his mother by that name)."<sup>40</sup> He continues elsewhere:

...many of the great scholars found it necessary to defend the teachings of Rashi in his Commentary to the Torah from the critical notes of Ramban. This was one of the main motives of Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (1455-1526), chief Rabbi of Turkey, in writing his commentary upon Rashi, called *Mizrachi*. The famous Maharal of Prague in his work *Gur Aryeh* also devoted a large part of his studies of Rashi's Commentary to that end. This spurred on other scholars to come to the defense of Ramban.<sup>41</sup>

Chavel traces the influence of Nahmanides on Jewish law from his work *Torat Ha-Adam*<sup>42</sup> through the Rosh (R. Asher ben Yechiel), R. Jacob ben Asher (his son, author of the *Arbah Turim*), and R. Joseph Caro in the *Shulchan Aruch*.<sup>43</sup>

More importantly for our work here, scholars such as R. Meir ben Shlomo Abusaula,<sup>44</sup> R. Shem Tov ben Gaon,<sup>45</sup> and R. Menachem Tziyoni<sup>46</sup> "all attempted to unfold the vast mysteries of the Cabbala contained in the brief remarks of Ramban."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>42</sup> According to *Encyclopedia Judaica*, "a comprehensive and unique monograph on all the laws concerning death, starting with what is prohibited and permitted and what is a mitzvah as regards the sick and dying, and concluding with the laws of mourning."

<sup>43</sup> Chavel, op. cit., p.28.

<sup>44</sup> Chayim Henoch quotes R. Abusaula frequently in *Ramban: Philosopher and Kabbalist*, op. cit. His basic work, apparently, is *Exegesis on the Kabbalah of Ramban*.

Some would seek to minimize the impact of Nahmanides on the development of Kabbala. For instance, Isadore Twersky claims, "Almost all of the kabbalistic works once attributed to him have proved to have been authored by others. What remains of his own kabbalistic writings is only a few pages published by Gershom Scholem, comprising three short treatises: Nahmanides' authentic *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah*, an exposition on *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, and a short passage on the kabbalistic meaning of the forbidden sexual alliances; in his other works, one can find only a few dozen short kabbalistic statements and hints."<sup>45</sup> Yet those brief statements and hints have sustained the life and work of many others, including, apparently, Twersky himself.

It is true that Nahmanides did not pass on a fully-developed system of thought as did Maimonides:

...while Rambam writes his ideas in an organized fashion in books and well-defined scholarly treatises, Ramban expresses them in a rather scattered and seemingly offhand manner; see, for example, part of his commentary to the Pentateuch, in which he wrote: "To calm the minds of the [Torah] students, who suffer the pain of the *Galuth* [exile], who read the Torah portions on the Sabbaths and Holidays; to "attract their hearts with plain exegesis [*peshat*], and a few pleasant interpretations for those who have an ear for and mind for the [Divine mystical] Grace [end of introduction to his Torah exegesis]." Even in his sermons, such as "The Torah of the Lord is Perfect" (*Torath Ha-Shem Temimah*), et cetera,

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<sup>45</sup> In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, under "Ibn Gaon, Shem Tov Ben Abraham" we read, "He was primarily influenced by the writings of Nahmanides, in which he saw the synthesis of the rational and the mystical (*halakhah*, Kabbalah, and scriptural commentary).

<sup>46</sup> In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, under "Menahem Ziyoni" we read, "his work demonstrates that he was heir to two different esoteric traditions: the Spanish kabbalah, including the Zohar, the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, and the exegetical works of Nahmanides; and the esoteric theology of the 12th-13th-century movement of the Hasidei Ashkenaz.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>48</sup> Twersky, op. cit., pp.51-52.

Ramban's style is essentially exegetical and lacks the systematic development from the general to the particular that distinguishes the writing of Rambam.<sup>49</sup>

This lack of systematic development, where Nahmanides wanders only to return to his theme is clearly seen in *Ma'amar 'al Pnimit haTorah*: Essay on the Internality of the Torah. His loving encouragement to a young initiate to value and seek out the inner meanings of Torah is firmly grounded in the wisdom of the past, enlarged by the kabbalistic focus that he served to legitimate for a larger public. Perhaps it is not systematic, but it is pastorally profound and caring.

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<sup>49</sup> Henoch, op. cit., pp.ix-x.

### Chapter III

#### *Ma'amar 'al Pnimiut haTorah*

#### Essay on the Internality of the Torah

#### In the language of the Ramban, z"l, in response to a question

May the Eternal One bless you and keep you, and may the Eternal cause His countenance to shine upon you with the light of the comprehension<sup>1</sup> of Him. And may He open for you the gates of righteousness, that through them you may enter His holy sanctuary. And may you merit and live and inherit His goodness and blessing.

Behold, you have requested me to transmit to you the way of comprehension that you act wisely in all that you do. Now I have acted according to your words and received this matter with favor. The beginning of the fear<sup>2</sup> (of God) and the foundation of the love (of God), and the path of the true understanding (of God) is to know the rudiments of the foundation upon which one builds one's building; (for) according to the measure one sees in the foundation, one builds the building upon it. As the Sage,<sup>3</sup> may peace be upon him,

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<sup>1</sup> השגתו The root, ש-ג-ח, means to grow or increase. השגה means reaching or attaining, or perception.

<sup>2</sup> יראת is customarily translated as 'fear,' but is often used in the sense of awe or reverence.

<sup>3</sup> I.e., Solomon, "the wisest of all men."

said in allegorical form, "if she is a wall, we will build upon her (a turret of silver)" (Song of Songs, 8:9).

Therefore it is appropriate for us to make known to you the foundation upon which the Torah is built, and according to the foundation that you see it built upon (i.e., upon which the Torah rests), so shall you build your belief and depend upon it.

So we will begin and say that the foundation of all foundations<sup>4</sup> (i.e., the most significant principle) is to know that just as God, blessed be He, has no beginning, end, or any borders, so His flawless Torah, that has been transmitted to us, has no end or limit for us. As David said, "I have seen that all (earthly) perfection has a limit, but Your commandment is very broad (i.e., limitless, and therefore perfect)" (Ps. 119:96). And what you need (to know) is there is no fixity in its language (i.e., it is not a conventional language), as a few of the great ones<sup>5</sup> of the past generations have thought. For if you say that the language of the Torah is fixed, like every other (conventional human) language, we would be found to be deniers of the giving of Torah, which (the verse in question) was given in its entirety from the mouth of God (*haGevurah*). You already know that, "for he has denied the word of God (and violated His commandment)" (Num. 15:31) refers to one who denies that Torah is from the Heavens (i.e., revealed by God).

And if you say that the Torah is fixed in its language even in one word and the rest is from the heavens, save for that one word, behold, our wise ones of blessed memory said, 'anyone who says that all the Torah is from the heavens save for one word,

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<sup>4</sup> Note that *Sefer haMadda* (the Book of Knowledge), the first book of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* begins with the words *yesod ha-yesodim*, the foundation of all foundations.

<sup>5</sup> Literally, Geonim.

that one is a denier of God's word.' And were the Torah fixed as are the rest of the tongues, as it is said about them, "for there God confused the speech of all the earth" (Gen. 11:9), then it would be (completely) like the rest of the languages; (in that case) the letters would turn out to be "hallowed stones poured out at the head of every street" (based on Lam. 4:1), given like "bright spots, bright spots of a dull white"<sup>6</sup> (Lev. 13:38<sup>7</sup>). Thus, we would find the Torah is acquired without a soul (i.e., that it is just a book). Then we would not need full and deficient word forms in the Torah, or certainly no open and closed paragraphs, and all the more so looped, distorted, lowered or separated letters [e.g., backwards nun], and even jots on the letters and their crowns, for all this would be "vain and empty" (Is. 30:7).

And (furthermore) what will they say about the traditional law regarding a Torah scroll that lacks even one letter—that it is unfit? If the letters were given to us only for the subject matter and the essence, and not for the (specific) number of its arrangement, why do we have "generations of the heavens (and earth)" (Gen. 2:4) written out completely in full<sup>8</sup>, while "generations of Ishmael" (Gen. 25:12) is written in its deficient form.<sup>9</sup> "The generations of Isaac" (Gen. 25:19) is written full and deficient,<sup>10</sup> while "the

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<sup>6</sup> The author here is suggesting that not only would the words be trampled upon as mere paving stones following the destruction of holiness—Lamentations is referring to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem—but with the Leviticus quote, to a spiritual uncleanness manifest in skin disease. The spots may have a brightness about them, but they are not wholesome.

<sup>7</sup> The text quote is not exact, partially taking usage from the following verse.

<sup>8</sup> *Toldot* is written out in full twice (i.e., with two vavs), once here and once in Ruth 4:18, the generations of Peretz.

<sup>9</sup> With no vavs. This is the only occurrence of this.

generations of Esau" (Gen. 36:1) is written deficient then full.<sup>11</sup> And also (in the case of the word shofar), "the voice of the shofar went forth and was increasingly strong"<sup>12</sup> (Exod. 19:19). Yet the word "shofar" when used at Mount Sinai is written in deficient form<sup>13</sup>. And the remaining uses of "shofar" are generally written out, as in "you shall sound a loud blast on the shofar" (Lev. 25:9) and the like<sup>14</sup>. And if there is no point in full or deficient lettering, why does one declare a Torah scroll unfit if "*toldot shamayim*" is written deficient, as is the case when "*toldot Ishmael*" is written?

But know, understand, and believe that with each and every letter in the Torah, many mounds and mounds (of *mitzvot*) are "hanging from its curls" (i.e., from the oddly formed words and letters in the Torah), as they (the Sages), of blessed memory, explained in the passage, "his locks of hair are curly" (Song of Songs, 5:11)<sup>15</sup>. And as David said,

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<sup>10</sup> I.e., with the first vav and not the second.

<sup>11</sup> I.e., with no first vav but with the vav between the dalet and tav.

<sup>12</sup> I.e., spelled out in full.

<sup>13</sup> In Exod. 19:16, just three verses before the previously mentioned verse.

<sup>14</sup> The deficient form is also found in Exod. 20:18, Job 39:25, Hos. 8:1, and three places in 2 Sam.

<sup>15</sup> Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah to verse 5:11 ("His head is the finest gold, his locks are curly and black as a raven."): **His head**—this is the Torah, as is written, "The Eternal made me at the beginning of His way" (Prov. 8:22). (This plays on 'rosh' and 'reishit' both being spelled resh-aleph-shin.) R. Hunia said in the name of Resh Lakish, "The Torah preceded creation by two thousand years." What is the sense (scriptural basis) of this? "I was with Him as a confidant (this word is from the JPS translation, coming from *ā'mūn* as opposed to *a'mon*. Other translations use 'master workman' which might work well with the midrash about the Torah being a master plan from which the world was created—Bereshit Rabbah 1:1), a source of delight every day (*yom yom*), rejoicing before Him at all times" (Prov. 8:30). And a day of the Holy One, Blessed be He is a thousand years, as it is written, "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past" (Ps. 90:4). (Every day, or '*yom yom*' would thus be two thousand years.) **Finest gold**—these

"Open (uncover) my eyes, that I may see the wonders of Your law (Torah)." (Ps. 119:18)

And if for David there were secrets hidden in it, and he would plead to have them revealed to him, all the more so for us who are lesser and inferior.

So here is the principle I am transmitting to you that is the basis for belief and wisdom. Know that if you believe about one pearl that it has a special ability to perform a wondrous activity with its nature and its strength, but you do not know the essence of the action (i.e., how the action is accomplished), you would always worry and sigh until you comprehended the essence of the action. But if you don't believe that within that pearl is strength and ability to perform an action small or large, you wouldn't be concerned about it, nor would you seek after it, nor set your heart on it. And this is exactly the case with Torah: If you believe that it is not (to be understood merely) according to its literal meaning alone, but there are in it, in addition to the literal meanings, awesome, elevated (and) wondrous paths, you will always pursue after it, and worry about what you don't understand, and be happy about what you do comprehend. And so says (God) blessed be He, "for this is not a futile thing for you" (Deut. 32:47). That is to say, there is no empty Torah, according to its simple meaning alone; rather it has a soul that I Myself breathed into it<sup>16</sup>—and that is its (i.e., the Torah's) essence. And if you find it empty, the matter is

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are the words of Torah, as it is written, "more desirable than gold, than much fine gold" (Ps. 19:11). (This verse refers to both the fear of The Eternal and the law (*mishpat*) of The Eternal.) **His locks are curly**—these are the ruled lines (of the Torah scroll). **Black as a raven**—these are the letters. Another explanation of **His locks are curly**—it means heaps upon heaps. (The word *taltalim* can be divided into *tilei tilim*.) Another explanation: R. Azaria says, "Even things that you see as mere jots in the Torah are thorns upon thorns." (I.e., they raise serious issues. *Kevutzotav* is being vocalized here as *kūtzotav*.) R. Eliezer and R. Joshua say, "heaps upon heaps." Another interpretation: R. Azaria says, "Even things you see as clearly defined (*kitzim*) are heaps upon heaps."

<sup>16</sup> Literally, "into the Torah."



only from a blemish within yourselves. And this is as was said, "for this is not a futile thing for you," as was midrashically explained by them (i.e., the Sages), of blessed memory, "and if it is empty, it is because of you." And thus Solomon would say, "If you seek it as you would silver,<sup>17</sup> and search for it as you would treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Eternal." (Prov. 2:4-5). And following on that verse (it says), "and you will find knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:5).

Do you not see how he (i.e., Solomon) revealed a great secret in this place, when he said at the beginning that you should understand the path of fear? That is, via the path of emanation and the secret of the fear of God. There is, in this place, a (mystical) hint to those who know (i.e., those who are initiated, enlightened). Afterwards (i.e., after achieving the fear of God), at the end of the path, from its ascent, you will understand the secret of the hidden and mystical matters which are known to all who are fit to be called God, as it is said, "and you will find the knowledge of God."

You already know that all who merit to go up on the ladder of the messengers (or angels) of God, are called God (*Midrash Sekhel Tov* (Buber), Gen. 32:31). This is (also) so of Moses, of whom it is said, "and you will be to him (Aaron) as a God" (Exod. 4:16). And as Solomon said, "but where can wisdom be found?, etc." (Job 28:12). The deep says, "It is not within me, etc." (Job 28:14). "God understands the way to it, etc."<sup>18</sup> (Job 28:23a), then immediately following (these aforementioned verses, Scripture says), "and He knows its source" (Job 28:23b). Understand this grand vision.

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<sup>17</sup> Also quoted in the *Guide*, III:54 in defining the word *hokmah* (wisdom).

<sup>18</sup> While humans are able to mine the world for its material goods, wisdom can only be pursued through its divine source.

Solomon also said, "a garden locked"<sup>19</sup> (Song of Songs 4:12). According to its simple meaning, it is a command, like, "Open my eyes, that I may see..." (Ps. 119:18). And according to its completely internal (i.e., mystical) meaning, it is the secret of (the verse), "You rule the majesty of the sea; you still the billowing waves" (Ps. 89:10). For there is a sea above, and "all the streams flow to it" (Eccl. 1:7), and waves move in it, according to the mystical notion of "coming and going" (Ezek. 1:14).

Let us return to our main thoughts. And we say that when you believe that the Torah is very deep, and mystical in its 'locked rooms,'<sup>20</sup> you will forever be longing, yearning, and craving after it. Your soul will always desire and be drawn after it in order to reveal its mysteries and to comprehend its hidden aspects. And about this it is said, "If you will surely listen (to the voice of God)..." (Deut. 28:1).<sup>21</sup> That is to say, if you hear and believe that there are in it (i.e., the Torah) great secrets and hidden matters that are suitable for every perfect individual to hear, you shall merit to hear (understand). If (however) your heart is turned (away) and you do not hear, that is to say, if you believe in your heart that the Torah is empty, and there is no internal (i.e., mystical) soul within it, you will never concern (yourself about) it,<sup>22</sup> and you will never merit to hear or to comprehend its mystical matters. And this is the secret meaning (of the verse), "and He

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<sup>19</sup> But reading the verse here as, "open the locked garden."

<sup>20</sup> A reference back to the "locked garden" above, perhaps.

<sup>21</sup> The Hebrew has the phrase "*shamoa' tishma'*". In English this repetition of the Hebrew verb stem *sh-m-a'* is translated as "certainly, surely." Literally, it would mean, "to hear, you will hear."

<sup>22</sup> Or, be sensitive to it.

gives wisdom to the wise" (Dan. 2:21), "and in the heart of all who are skillful I have given wisdom" (Ex. 31:6).

And now, my son, listen, for here at the outset I have transmitted to your hand first this introduction, because this is the root and essence of faith; for the one who doesn't know and recognize the essence of a matter will never be concerned (i.e., attentive) about it. And the one who doesn't know the greatness of the Torah or its depths will never be anxious to seek savor from it. For the one who excavates a place to find treasure in it according to guesswork is not equal to the one who excavates knowing certainly that there is treasure in that place. And behold, (regarding) our perfect Torah, we know that it is completely full of treasures, as he (i.e., Solomon) said, "you should seek it as (you would seek) hidden treasures" (Prov. 2:4). There is not a place in the entire Torah that is lacking treasures for you according to the essence of that particular section. Even if in a place where according to its simple meaning it appears that there is nothing, as in the case of, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon" (Num. 32:3), according to which it appears from the plain meaning that it has nothing within it—no secret and no hidden thing—that it does not teach a thing, except for names of well-known places,<sup>23</sup> and not any different matter, about this they

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<sup>23</sup> According to BDB (abbreviated), Ataroth was located E. of Jordan, c. 8 miles NNW. from Dibon (or W. of Jordan on the border between Ephraim and Benjamin). Dibon was city in Moab (built up or at by Gad). Jazer and Nimrah were E. of Jordan. Heshbon was the city of Sihon, king of the Amorites; captured by Israel, rebuilt by Reuben, Moabites gained possession of it and subsequently the Ammonites. Elealeh and Sebam were villages in the tribe of Reuben, near Heshbon. Nebo was a city in Moab probably on or near Mt. Nebo. Beon is listed as a shorted form of *בֵּית בְּעַל מְעוֹן*, a city assigned to Reuben, possessed by Moab. (Brown, F., S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA (reprint of 1906 edition), 2001.)

(the sages) warned when they said, "A person should always complete his portion with the public, (reading) the Hebrew text twice and the (Aramaic) translation (*targum*) once, (including) even, "Ataroth, Dibon, etc." (Talmud Bavli, Berachot 8a)

And understand the great and powerful marvel which the Sages hinted at according to their wondrous ways. For they would disguise and teach their sharp teachings<sup>24</sup> in those places in order that people of truth will understand.

And the principle, I say to you, is all the text, "Ataroth, Dibon, etc." is the secret order of the supernal chariot, and therefore Onkelos needed to translate it<sup>25</sup> and say, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon" are translated, "crowns<sup>26</sup> and clothing<sup>27</sup> [of] the idolatrous-priest (*komer* or *kumar*)<sup>28,29</sup> of

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Regarding Ataroth Baruch Levine notes: The inscription of Mesha, the Moabite king (lines 10-11), relates that the Gadites had been living in Ataroth from time immemorial..." Dibon is, "referred to as Mesha's own town in his inscription (line 1). (Levine, Baruch A., *Numbers 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, NY 2000, p.484.)

<sup>24</sup> Lit., "shoot their sharp arrows."

<sup>25</sup> In fact, there are many manuscript versions of Onkelos for this passage. Some reprint the Hebrew and do not, in fact, attempt to interpret the verse. Apparently Rashi had such a manuscript, for he explains that one reads the Onkelos despite the fact that it has no Aramaic. Nahmanides, in his Commentary on the Torah to Numbers 32:38 discusses Rashi's claim that some of the names had been changed because the cities were named after idols (e.g., Nebo), but says the explanation makes no sense in that scripture does not give the new names the Reubenites gave them.

<sup>26</sup> A literal translation of 'crowns,' as opposed to a place name.

<sup>27</sup> The reason for the interpretation of Dibon as 'clothing' is unclear. Perhaps 'crowns and clothing' is a reference to how the sages would disguise their mystical teachings. See also note 29 below.

<sup>28</sup> However, one version of *Mikra'ot Gedollot* gives this as *khumrin*, which is attested to in B.T. *Avodah Zarah* 51b as payment made to heathen priests.

Beit Nimrin<sup>30</sup> and Beit Hushbani and their enemy and the treasure house that is the hiding place of Moses<sup>31</sup> and Be'on." Another version<sup>32</sup> (of Onkelos) reads "The perfection and

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<sup>29</sup> On the website <http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/vedibarta-bam/042.htm>, we find a question and answer regarding this passage by Onkelos, which suggests a differing view of the first three names, as being place names as opposed to crowns, etc.:

Q: Why here does Onkelos give the Aramaic versions of the names, (Machelta, Malbeshta, and Kumrin) while later on (32:34) he just writes the names as they are written in the text?

A: The cities Atarot, Dibon, and Yazer were on the east bank of the Jordan and part of the land of Sichon and Og. At the time when the people of Reuven and Gad requested to remain on the east bank of the Jordan, these cities were called by other names: Machelta, Malbeshta, and Kumrin. The cities were in a state of destruction and were rebuilt when the Jews settled on the east bank of the Jordan. Since originally some of the cities were named after idols, they gave them other names (see 32:34, 38).

When the Torah records that the people of Reuven and Gad asked for Atarot, Dibon, and Yazer, they did not really ask for them by these names, but rather by their old names. The Torah records it with these names because in later years these were the Hebrew names given to these cities by the Jewish people. Therefore, Onkelos writes the names of the cities by which they were known at the time the request was made to indicate that the people of Reuven and Gad did not actually refer to them by their later names. Afterwards, however, those names no longer existed, and Onkelos therefore writes the current Hebrew names.

<sup>30</sup> *Beit Nimrah* is identified in Num. 32:36. Levine tells us, "The prophetic oracles against Moab (Isa 15:6, Jer 48:34) mention "the waters of Nimrim" (ibid.). Jastrow places Nimrin in Syria.

<sup>31</sup> Mt. Nebo is the lookout point from where Moses looked out over the land in Deut. 34:1ff. The relationship of Moses' "hiding place/grave," of which no one knows the location and the secrets of *Ma'aseh ha-Merkavah* is not clear, although the mystical experience Moses shared with God could be discussed in terms of Ezekiel's vision of the chariot, e.g., Ezekiel talking face-to-face with "semblance of the Presence of the Eternal" (Ezek. 1:28) vs. Moses getting to see God's "backside" (Exod. 33:23); the intimate death scene (Deut. 34:5-6, and midrashic commentary on it); the nature of prophecy for Ezekiel vs. that described following Moses' confrontation with Miriam and Aaron (Num. 12:7ff), etc.

Given Nahmanides' stance on a single missing or additional letterstroke making a Torah unfit, the following commentary on Deut. 34:6 is interesting:

**He buried him.** This is usually understood to mean that God buries Moses. We should note that Qumran, Septuagint, and some manuscripts of the Samaritan tradition read "they buried him." This presumably means that the people bury him. That would

clothing, *shofan*<sup>33</sup> of the house of Nimrin and the house of Hushbani to the enemy and the treasure (*si-a'n*) of the grave of Moses and (Be'on).” In this place Moses our teacher, may he rest in peace, was buried, as the translation<sup>34</sup> proved. Also, this verse demonstrates the (spiritual) achievement<sup>35</sup> of Moses our Teacher in this world and his place of rest in the world to come. This is similar to (the verse), “He chose for himself the best, for there the portion of the revered chieftain is hidden” (Deut. 33:21).<sup>36</sup> Understand this if you possess a soul.

Now that we have made this known to you, we will begin by saying that when your soul is sure that our perfect Torah is at this (high) level (i.e., that it has more than its outward meaning) then you will be drawn after it always, and you will find enjoyment in it, and you will not separate your mind from it, as is the case of the desirous soul that is (completely) attached to its desires. And thus said Solomon in a poetical way, “For love

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imply a completely different picture of Moses' death. He does not die alone on the mountain. After he sees the land from the top of the mountain he goes down to a lower part of the mountain, where he dies with others around him, and then his people bury him. It is remarkable that a scribal difference of a single letter (a *waw* at the end of the word ויקבר, making it plural: “they buried”) leaves open such a significant point: Does Moses end his life with God or with his fellow human beings? (Friedman, Richard Elliott, *Commentary on the Torah*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, CA 2001, p.678.)

<sup>32</sup> I.e., manuscript.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Atroth-shofan is attested to Num. 32:35.

<sup>34</sup> I.e., Onkelos commentary.

<sup>35</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>36</sup> The verse is understood by the author differently here, to mean Moses was shown (can we make a case for *v'yureh* here?), when he looked out over the land before his death, the very beginning of creation (does this tie back to the first emanations?), for there was his chiefly (or law-giver's) portion set aside.

is as fierce as death, etc.” (Song of Songs 8:6), and he said, “If a man would give all his wealth (for love), etc.” (*ibid.*, 8:7). Although the (entire) Song of Songs is built on the foundation of the heavenly chariot (i.e., informed by the idea of the Supernal Chariot), and on the source of the emanations and the connections of the divine characteristics, and the secret of the two desires known to masters of the Kabbalah, there are also hints about orders of desire that are felt and intellectually grasped, “and their rings were full of eyes all around.” (Ezek. 1:18).

The beginning of what is proper for us to transmit to you is that the vowels are similar to form and the letters similar to matter. And behold, the form moves the matter. Further, so long as the vocalization has not been placed on the word, it is like matter that form has not reached. Behold, you, O Man, may write, and all of them (your writings) are clay-like statements so long as the vocalization has not be placed on them. The vocalization will move them to the side that it wishes. At one time it will make of them “color,” (*siv'on*) and at another time it will make of them the form (of the word) “poison” (*sif'on*). Everything is dependent on the form of the vocalization, not on the form of letters (i.e., the vocalization is key).

The secret of the letters of the Name is the secret of the vowels according to the path of truth (i.e., kabbalistic interpretation), which is in the possession of masters of the kabbalah, and they (i.e., the letters of the Divine Name) are the soul of the vowels. Therefore, may He be blessed is called, “The Life of the Universe,” as the verse says, “he swore by the Everliving One” (Daniel 12:7), that is to say, “by the life of the world.” And it also says, “You sustain everything” (Nehemiah 9:6).

The one who knows this bold and mighty mystery will know the mystery of the three books opened on Rosh Hashanah, that heaven forbid that before Him are actual physical books. Rather, the books that He has are books which encompass all that exists in three divisions, each according to its level—righteous ones, evil ones, and middling ones. And these things are the great mysteries of the world.

It is known that on Rosh Hashanah itself the books are opened, and there is among them a book of life and a book of death, everything in the power of His name, may He be blessed, who is the book of life to those who cleave (to Him). About this it was said to Moses, "The one who sins (against) Me I will blot out from my book" (Ex. 32:33). Understand this well if you have comprehended it. If you have not comprehended it, you should worry about your lack of your comprehension.

We will return to that which we are dealing with, and we will say: Know that because the vowels are the form and soul of the letters, therefore we do not make a Torah scroll with vowels so that it contains all the facets and its deep and external implications. All of them are interpreted from each of the letters, facets within facets, and mysteries within mysteries. It (the Torah) has no known boundary according to us, as Scripture says, "The depths say, 'It (wisdom and discernment, i.e., Torah knowledge) is not within me....'" (cf. Job 28:12-14, op. cit.). If one would vocalize a Torah scroll, it (the Torah) would have a limit and defined measure, as matter that a known form has touched, and it would not be possible for it to be interpreted except according to the specific vocalization in that word. But because a Torah scroll is encompassing (in its meaning) and complete in its perfection, and each word has masses upon masses (of meanings), we do not punctuate it in order that it be expounded in all its perfection. Therefore (we possess a



hermeneutic method called), "Don't read *thus*, but rather *thus*." If, however, it (the Torah scroll) was defined by vocalization, we would not be able to say this. Behold, in several places our rabbis made us aware of (lit., stirred us up about) this, as they said, " 'With your gear you shall have a shovel' (Deut. 23:14). Don't read 'gear' (*a'zeinekha*), rather read 'ear' (*o'znekha*). From this one may deduce that when a person hears an unseemly matter, he should stick a finger in his ear" (Talmud Bavli, *Ketubot* 5a)

Behold, in this place our rabbis of blessed memory awakened us to a secret reason for the Torah scroll to be without vowels. In this *midrash* of the verse they have given the foolish tasteless victuals (lit., bran bread), but through this *midrash* they gave to the wise strong sustenance (lit., the bread of the mighty). All of this is from the (possible) plain meanings of the text, and all of the Torah operates according to this kind of plain meaning. Therefore, said those (our wise ones) of blessed memory, "There are seventy facets to the Torah" (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:16<sup>37</sup>). Understand this. Now that we have stimulated you (to think) in this way, enter my friend, and be delighted in this preface always, "for from it comes life" (Prov. 4:23).

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<sup>37</sup> "As the numerical value of *yayin* (wine) is seventy, so there are seventy modes of expounding the Torah."

## Chapter IV

### The Authorship of "Essay on the Internality of the Torah"

Dr. Charles Chavel wrote a foreword to *Ma'amar 'al Pnimiut haTorah* in his collection *Kitvei Ramban*. The following translation forms the basis of discussion for the essay's authorship:

This essay was made known by Rabbi Yaakov Moses Toledano<sup>1</sup> in a collection entitled, *The Ramban and Jerusalem* (in Hebrew) in which Rabbi P. Greievski contributed a manuscript entitled, "Commentary on the Passage 'Let Him Not Boast,' etc.<sup>2</sup> by One of the Early Commentators," that he had in his possession in the city of Meknés in Morocco in a copy by R. Shmuel Halevi ben Yuli.<sup>3</sup> Also, Professor G. Scholem published it in *Kiryat Sefer* (Year 6, Tishrei 5690,<sup>4</sup> Jerusalem, pp. 410-414).

In the opinion of the scholar Scholem, "from the point of view of the contents of the document itself, it is actually possible that it came from the hand of the Ramban. It is only a long and accurate paraphrase of the concept of the inner meaning of the Torah that he expressed in his Introduction to his major commentary (on the Torah). All that is

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<sup>1</sup> 1880-1960.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 9:22.

<sup>3</sup> Died after 1740.

<sup>4</sup> 1929.

found in the document shows a recognizable similarity to that Introduction... There does not appear any specific reason to forge something that does not contain anything novel beyond the words of Ramban himself. A forger would (likely) add onto the opinion of the Ramban other opinions distant from his own, in order to benefit from his famous name and to obtain assistance therefrom. It is true also that the language of this letter is rather obscure... but I am not able to find in it anything that might not have been said or written in the days of the Ramban. The idea of "the soul of the Torah" was already clearly expressed in the aggadic commentary of R. Ezra<sup>5</sup> on tractate *Ta'anit*... and since the Ramban composed his commentary only at the end of his days, it is not at all impossible that he had already been asked earlier and expressed in writing his fundamental views on the essential nature of the Torah" (*Kiryat Sefer*, p. 397)

In my opinion, the close reader of this letter will arrive at the conclusion that it is marked with the characteristics of a forgery, and that it is impossible in any way that strange ideas like these could find shelter in the Ramban's shadow (i.e., be included in his works).

The Sages stated an important principle: "Any false matter that does not contain within it a little truth at its beginning, will not survive in the end." Generally this was well-known to counterfeiters. Therefore it is not for us to draw conclusions from isolated statements or general ideas which may accurately be attributed to Ramban, because the real question is given the general direction of the essay; whether it came from the pen of the Ramban. In my opinion, this assumption is flawed from its inception because of the following reasons:

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<sup>5</sup> Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, d. 1238 or 1245.

A. Indeed, the basis of the letter (rests) on this: that there is reason to believe, "that the Torah is not according to its simple meaning alone, but it has, in addition to the simple meanings, ways that are awesome and lofty wonders." Certainly, the Ramban also would have acknowledged this, and who could dispute it? However, it is written there, "And so says (God) blessed be He, 'for this is not a futile thing for you' (Deut. 32:47). That is to say, there is no empty Torah, according to its simple meaning alone; rather it has a soul..." Whoever recognizes the spirit of the Ramban from other of his works would immediately sense that words like these—which contain denigration aimed at the plain meaning of the Torah—are sufficient to prove that a forger attached himself to a great authority (lit., great tree). One cannot possibly entertain the thought that it is possible to ascribe to the Ramban, the author of the "Commentary on the Torah," who seeks in each and every verse to elucidate it "via the simple meaning," that the essential plain meaning of the Torah is "empty Torah." This matter is refuted at its very root, and it is a serious error to ascribe this to Ramban.

B. It is again written in this letter, "Behold, in several places our rabbis made us aware of this (that therefore a sefer Torah is not produced with vowels, in order that it include all facets and all deep ways), as they interpreted, 'With your gear you shall have a shovel' (Deut. 23:14). Don't read 'gear' (*a'zeinekha*), rather read 'ear' (*o'znekha*). From this one may deduce that when a person hears an unseemly matter, he should stick a finger in his ear (Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 5a)...Behold, in this place our rabbis of blessed memory awakened us to a secret reason for the Torah scroll to be without vowels. In this midrash of the verse they have given the foolish tasteless victuals (lit., bran bread)..."

It is impossible that the holy mouth of the Ramban would, with such light-minded

contempt, express such negation of the plain meaning of the words of our Sages, of blessed memory, in this important matter of ethics. It is clear that the Ramban would excommunicate one who would proclaim this.

C. Also, the very use of the terminology—"The Internality of the Torah"—I doubt is possible to attribute to the Ramban. In all the places that the Ramban writes of secrets of the Torah, not only in his Commentary to the Torah, but in his other writing, we have never found this terminology. The secrets of the Torah were for him the "path of truth," which is impossible to know other than by Kabbalah. But that it (the kabbalistic meaning of the Torah) is considered (by Ramban) "The Internality of the Torah"—this we have not found. For also the plain meaning and the *halakhah* were in his eyes like the inner sanctum of the Holy Temple (in sanctity).

D. The scholar Scholem writes, "All that is found in the essay appears to bear a certain closeness also to that which is in his Introduction (to his commentary on the Torah)." I do not find it to be so. In this letter the writer (whoever it is) establishes the law that a Torah scroll missing even one letter is unfit, because each and every letter in the Torah has many mounds and mounds of its concealed mysteries hanging from its curls. In his introduction to the Torah, however, the Ramban explains the reason for this law on (the idea that) all of the Torah in its entirety is the names of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Because of this, a Torah scroll that has an error in it of one letter in excess or lack is unfit, because it is a despoliation of the Eternal's name. Behold, it seems to us that this explanation is stronger (than that in the essay), and why does (the author) not mention it (this argument) in the essay?

The end of the matter is that according to all the evidence we have amassed, it

seems that the essay is not from the Ramban. I have only included it in this volume in order that it may serve us a criterion for the recognition of the real creations of our Rabbi (the Ramban).

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Gershom Scholem, a scholar who discovered many unknown manuscripts and texts is someone Charles Chavel cannot dismiss out of hand, although it is obvious from his foreword to the *Ma'amar* that he doesn't give credence to the claim that it could have been authored by Nahmanides. Let us first look at Scholem's statement that the essay is a, "long and accurate paraphrase of the concept of the inner meaning of the Torah that he expressed in his Introduction to his major commentary (on the Torah)."

Nahmanides, shortly into his poetic introduction, introduces the subject of the hidden matters of the Torah (*sitrei Torah*). The essay, too, discusses these hidden matters, most especially in terms of King David desiring to learn these secrets:

"And as David said, 'Open my eyes, that I may see the wonders of Your law (Torah).' (Ps. 119:18) And if for David there were secrets hidden (*stareha ne'lamim*) in it, and he would plead to have them revealed to him, all the more so for us who are lesser and inferior." Later the *Ma'amar* again talks about how one who understands the depth of the Torah will constantly desire such a revelation: "Your soul will always desire and be drawn after it in order to reveal its mysteries and to comprehend its hidden aspects."

This desire, which the author of the essay seeks to pass on to the questioner, is reflected also in the Introduction: "...my soul craves for Torah, and she is in my heart as a consuming, burning fire."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to Jeremiah 20:9.

Both the essay and the foreword make use of the verse, "I have seen that all (earthly) perfection has a limit, but Your commandment is very broad" (Ps. 119:96).

These likenesses notwithstanding, Scholem does not claim that Nahmanides necessarily wrote the *Ma'amar* himself. He says, "I am not able to find in it anything that might not have been said or written in the days of the Ramban." Indeed it would not have been unusual for one of the master's students to answer enquiries in the name of the master, drawing upon his learning. But Scholem raises the possibility that Nahmanides may have written the essay earlier in his career than the Commentary to the Torah, which he finished in *Erez Yisrael* at the end of his lifetime. This may well help us answer at least one of Chavel's objections below.

Chavel takes exception with Scholem's analysis, noting ways that the essay departs from the tone and tenor of Nahmanides' writings. Merely quoting isolated lines that contain a flavor of the works more definitely attributable to Nahmanides is not a proof of anything in his eyes. If there is a core of truth which kept the essay alive to be passed down to us by Rabbis Toledano, Greievski, and Scholem, it was not apparently sufficient for Chavel to translate it into English and incorporate it into his two volume *Ramban (Nachmanides): Writings & Discourses*.

To begin with, Chavel takes exception to what he sees as denigration of the simple meaning of the Torah. Although Nahmanides (again in the Introduction) says he will make use of the commentaries of Rashi—"an illumination before me..."—and Abraham ibn Ezra—toward whom he has "open rebuke and hidden love," he does not limit their contribution—nor his—to the simple meanings of verses. He speaks of Midrashic interpretations and *Agadah* (homilies). In the second line he promises novel

interpretations of the Torah (*hiddushim*).

It seems that Nahmanides felt constrained in his master commentary to pay honor to tradition (Rashi) and/or challenge it (ibn Ezra), and only hint at higher, kabbalistic meanings. Chayim Henoch tells us, "we have an interesting testimony by disciples of the Rashbah (the major disciple of Nachmanides), stating that initially Nachmanides intended to write his exegesis on the Torah and *mitzvot* with a full explanation of his kabbalistic hints. However, because of a dream he abandoned his plan."<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps more to the point, a letter written to an individual is hardly in the same category as a multi-volume published commentary to Torah. Things that can be said on a private, individual basis could conceivably be more open and direct.

Chavel's assertion that the text equates the *peshat* with emptiness seems overstated. To say, "there is no empty Torah, according to its simple meaning alone..." means that Torah is suffused with the soul the text attributes to it. In such a letter Nahmanides could feel free to share his path of truth with an initiate who had asked about the "way of comprehension" not attainable through the simple meaning alone.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, one who seeks to be initiated into the world of *kabbalah* needs to be grounded in the basic texts. The warning in Nahmanides' introduction to the book of Genesis<sup>9</sup> is not for this essay: "Into that which is beyond you, do not seek; into that which

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<sup>7</sup> Henoch Chayim J., *Ramban: Philosopher and Kabbalist*, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, NJ 1998, p.22.

<sup>8</sup> However, Twersky (op. cit.) does maintain: "The immense energy that Nahmanides devoted to uncovering the plain sense of Scripture—sometimes even engaging in lengthy linguistic discussions...shows him entirely free of the frequent kabbalistic tendency to devalue *peshat*." p.18.

<sup>9</sup> *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:2.



is more powerful than you, do not inquire; about that which is concealed from you, do not desire to know; about that which is hidden from you, do not ask. Contemplate that which is permitted to you, and engage not yourself in hidden things."<sup>10</sup>

According to Chavel, the *Ma'amar* also denigrates midrashic interpretation, saying that the rabbis teaching an ethical lesson were serving up dross. Rather, the essay points out that the *midrash* can be a poor man's (bran) bread or a feast depending on what one brings to the interpretation. All through the essay we have reference to the "one who knows," who may get the fullest value out of all levels of interpretation.

It seems that this assertion regarding denigration of *midrash* is disingenuous on Chavel's part. As his discussion of this matter in his Preface to the Commentaries shows, there were areas in which Nahmanides differed from Rashi, the first of which directly establishes his outlook on *midrash* which is seemingly carried into the essay:

The first was their respective attitudes towards the Agadic material of the Sages of the Talmud and Midrash. Rashi, a native of France and a product of its schools of learning selected Agadic material illuminating the ethical stance implicit in the Scriptural texts and used it as a source of moral inspiration. Ramban, a product of Spanish Jewry, approached the same homiletic material in a more analytic and intellectual manner.<sup>11</sup>

It seems odd that Chavel pointed out this tendency of Nahmanides not to value *midrash* used for the sake of creating an ethical stance in reference to the Commentary but then questioned this selfsame view expressed in the essay toward the *midrash* of sticking one's finger in one's ear to avoid hearing something unseemly. Perhaps the essay is more open in what it says than the Commentary, but one might expect this in a private

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<sup>10</sup> Chavel, Charles, annotator and translator, *Ramban (Nachmanides): Commentary on the Torah, Genesis*, Shilo Publishing House, Inc., Brooklyn, NY 1999, p.16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.viii.

letter more than in a work meant to have wide circulation.

The tone of "bran bread" for the masses with a feast for the few seems to be a perfect mirroring of Maimonides' *Guide*, where there is a distinction between what is necessary for the masses in order to maintain society and what an evolved person would attain through self development. The paths of attainment of enlightenment (i.e., philosophy vs. *kabbalah*) may be different, but the essential elitism is the same.

It is true that the terminology "The Internality of the Torah" (*pnimut haTorah*) is not found in the Introduction. While variations of the word *pnima* (*pnima*, *pnimit*) are in the essay, the phrase *pnimut haTorah* occurs only in the title. It is extremely unlikely that the author of the essay affixed a title to it; rather this was more likely appended by a scribe, editor or publisher.

Another argument, more convincing on the surface, is the difference in arguments surrounding why a Torah scroll with an error in it is unfit for use. Chavel points out, "In his introduction to the Torah...the Ramban explains the reason for this law on (the basis of the idea that) all of the Torah in its entirety is the names of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Because of this, a Torah scroll that has an error in it of one letter in excess or lack is unfit, because it is a despoliation of the Eternal's name." According to Chavel, this explanation is stronger than that of the "many mounds and mounds of its (i.e., the Torah's) concealed mysteries" in the letters.

In response, firstly, the Commentary on the Torah was completed very late in Nahmanides' life. One would assume that over the course of his years, he would have developed new ideas, new *hiddushim*. To expect all works of a given author to be internally consistent is unreasonable. In addition, to say that the argument about the

mounds of interpretation is weak would seem to denigrate the source of argument from *Shir haShirim Rabbah*.<sup>12</sup>

It also seems that Nahmanides would have been familiar with the idea of building a case using differing arguments to bolster one's case. His beloved Rashi was known to give multiple explanations, and incidentally only relying on *midrashim* rarely. In the case of his young initiate, the "mounds" argument would seem to be more precisely called for since the attempt was to instill a desire to probe even the littlest detail of the text, as opposed to a more overarching concern.

In the end, we have no way of determining with certainty who the author of the *Ma'amar* is. Attributions change over time depending on scholarly findings, and this has both added to and subtracted from the canon of Nahmanides' works over time. For example, his comments on *Ketubot* were later incorrectly attributed to the Rashba.<sup>13</sup> Also, as we quoted earlier in our biographical sketch of Nahmanides, Isadore Twersky notes many works once attributed to Nahmanides have proved to have been authored by others.

In the balance between these positions, one can say that if the "Essay on the Internality of the Torah" is not directly from the pen of Nahmanides, it contains ideas from the time periods of his contemporaries and immediate students. If it can serve as a source of thought and inspiration for others, it deserves to be brought to light. It seems more useful to search out the value of the piece than to worry about the likelihood that Nahmanides would have excommunicated the author.

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<sup>12</sup> See notes in the translation of the *Ma'amar*.

<sup>13</sup> Shulman, Yaacov Dovid, *The Ramban: The Story of Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman*, C.I.S. Publishers, New York 1993, p.34.

## Chapter V

### Major Themes in "Essay on the Internality of the Torah"

#### The Comprehension of God

Nahmanides' time has often been represented as a departure from that of the philosophical school, which identified God as an idea, the "Active Intellect," and the way to God through knowledge, i.e., mathematics, physics, and metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> Yet this is a vast oversimplification. Knowledge for the philosophers was not an end to itself. Judah Halevy (c.1075-1141) suggested that the goal (of life) is the union of man with the Active Intellect; by this unity he would attain perfection of action. The aspiring student would have to purify his soul, and grasp "the inward truths of all branches of science, and thus become equal to an angel."<sup>2</sup> And as we see in our essay, "You already know that all who merit to go up on the ladder of the messengers (or angels) of God, are called God."

Maimonides' push toward ultimate truth was not a simple straightforward journey. He was well aware that not everyone had the capacity to understand: "While one man can discover a certain thing by himself, another is never able to understand it, even if taught by means of all possible expressions and metaphors, and during a long period; his

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<sup>1</sup> *Guide*, III:34 "...he who wishes to attain to human perfection, must therefore first study Logic, next the various branches of Mathematics, in their proper order, then Physics, and lastly Metaphysics." (Translation by M. Friedländer, p.46.)

<sup>2</sup> *Kuzari*, Part I, #1.

mind can in no way grasp it, his capacity is insufficient for it. This distinction is not unlimited. A boundary is undoubtedly set to the human mind which it cannot pass."<sup>3</sup>

Yet there are things that man can understand by rigorous thinking and debate, and for Maimonides this is the focus of desire:

There are things, however, which man very much desires to know, and strenuous efforts to examine and to investigate them have been made by thinkers of all classes, and at all times. They differ and disagree, and constantly raise new doubts with regard to them, because their minds are bent on comprehending such things, that is to say, they are moved by desire; and every one of them believes that he has discovered the way leading to a true knowledge of the thing, although human reason is entirely unable to demonstrate the fact by convincing evidence.—For a proposition which can be proved by evidence is not subject to dispute, denial, or rejection; none but the ignorant would contradict it..."<sup>4</sup>

Although he was interested in science, this was a discipline; an undergirding of achievement necessary for further, deeper inquiry. And yet this preparation was a long and arduous path. He concedes, "that many who have advanced to a certain point in the study of these disciplines become weary, and stop; that others, who are endowed with sufficient capacity, are interrupted in their studies by death, which surprises them while still engaged with the preliminary course."<sup>5</sup> This is where the Jewish tradition and its texts come in, to give a person knowledge of God's existence.

Maimonides' descriptions of approaching the study of metaphysics sounds very much like the admonitions of the kabbalists: "The subject itself is difficult, subtle and profound...Instruction should not begin with abstruse and difficult subjects. In one of the similes contained in the Bible, wisdom is compared to water, and amongst other

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<sup>3</sup> *Guide*, p.41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

interpretations given by our Sages of this simile, occurs the following: He who can swim may bring up pearls from the depth of the sea, he who is unable to swim will be drowned, therefore only such persons as have had proper instruction should expose themselves to the risk."<sup>6</sup>

He continues, "He who approaches metaphysical problems without proper preparation is like a person who journeys toward a certain place, and on the road falls into a deep pit, out of which he cannot rise, and he must perish there; if he had not gone forth, but had remained at home, it would have been better for him."<sup>7</sup>

And what is metaphysics? In his introduction to the *Guide*<sup>8</sup>, Maimonides equates metaphysics to *Ma'aseh Mercabah* (the description of the chariot in Ezekiel 1), the same source of study material for advanced students of kabbalah. He even saw the study of *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, the natural sciences, as containing materials that shouldn't be fully explained. And these mysteries are the source for the allegorical language of the prophets. He says:

Just as a golden apple overlaid with a network of silver, when seen at a distance, or looked at superficially, is mistaken for a silver apple, but when a keen-sighted person looks at the object well, he will find what is within, and see that the apple is gold. The same is the case with the figures employed by prophets. Taken literally such expressions contain wisdom useful for many purposes, among others, for the amelioration of the conditions of society; e.g., the Proverbs (of Solomon), and similar sayings in their literal sense. Their hidden meaning, however, is profound wisdom, conducive to the recognition of real truth.<sup>9</sup>

Thus that there are hidden meanings in the text is an assumption that is shared by

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.46-47.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.2. This is a restatement of his writings in *Mishneh Torah*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.7.

philosopher and kabbalist alike. "Parallel to Maimonides' value distinction between silver and gold as criterion for the distinction between revealed and hidden Torah, the kabbalists utilized the model of body and soul as a paradigm for revealed and hidden Torah."<sup>10</sup>

Nahmanides does not see the path outlined by Maimonides (to achieve perfect truth) as providing answers, but rather as leaving the student with doubt (emphasis added):

It is an established fact that much of the benefit of the other studies is only that [they provide] a means of ascent to this [level of] wisdom which they call theology. After they spend their days in the study of logic in order to avoid error in the reasoning process, they then enter into a study of mathematics. From there, they proceed to the studies of numbers and measures, the benefit from these [disciplines] being that they have the ability to judge the height of a wall or the depth of a pit. From these studies, they move on to the science of the spheres, which is most beneficial, for [they learn] to know the movement of the spheres, [the laws of] composition and decomposition [of the four elements], the earth and its inhabited parts, and the eclipses of the luminaries. **Yet the benefit [of this study of the spheres] is not great enough to compensate for the effort expended.** When they proceed from this study to the science of music, the effort will be even greater and the benefits of an [even] lesser degree. [The philosophers] themselves agree that the great benefit of all of these studies is that as a result of their pursuits, they will reach that branch of wisdom which they call metaphysics (The literal meaning of the Hebrew word for metaphysics is "that which is after nature.") —the study pertaining to [the essence of] G-d—and they will examine and come to admit [the existence of] the Separate Intelligences which are the angels, ("For the angels are not material bodies but only forms distinguished from each other...all these forms live and acknowledge the Creator, and their knowledge of Him is exceedingly great" (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchoth Yesodei Hatorah*, 2:3-8)) there being gradations of reality among them, until they reach the Cause of all causes, praised and exalted be His Kingdom. When they come to inquire how all created things came into existence through Him and they explain—or they think to explain—the other matters [involved in Creation], **they are faced with doubts and divisions of opinions**, which they themselves [readily] confess, to such an extent that their famous leading [thinker, Aristotle], could not bring [conclusive] proof whether the universe is eternal or

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<sup>10</sup> Henoch, op cit., p.17.

created.<sup>11</sup>

Chayim Henoch notes that there are three systems of Jewish thought, "the talmudical, the philosophical and the kabbalistic-mystical."<sup>12</sup> He maintains that the differences among these systems has nothing to do with law, rather only with aggadic material: "...it must be stressed that the difference between [*sic*] these three expository positions pertain primarily to the realm of the *Aggadah*, the homiletical interpretation of the Bible, regarding which it is said that its teachings are "optional." Regarding the *halakhah*, the corpus of traditional laws that are expressed and discussed in the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud, no such differences exist. All three factions unconditionally accept the supreme authority of the Divinely revealed Torah law, as expressed and formulated by the Sages throughout the generations."<sup>13</sup>

The kabbalist, he posits, maintains the basic faith of the Talmudist (certainly true of Nahmanides and his writings), as well as the intellectual pursuits of the philosopher (Nahmanides did not deny the importance of the sciences). The distinction, then, is the emphasis of the kabbalist on "the contemplative-mystical attachment to the Divine, called *Devekuth*."<sup>14</sup>

The *Ma'amar* states that the questioner wants to know how to "act wisely" in all

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<sup>11</sup> Chavel, Charles B., translator and annotator, *Ramban (Nachmanides): Writings & Discourses*, Vol. 1, "Discourse on The Law of the Eternal is Perfect," Shilo Publishing House, Inc., New York 1978, p.76. Hereinafter called "*Writings*."

<sup>12</sup> Henoch, op cit., p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.5. He goes on to say, "Actually, this experience of *Devekuth* is a *mitzvah* of the Torah, and all three factions of Jewish thinkers naturally accept it. However, each faction interprets this *mitzvah* differently." This appears to be simple apologetics.



that he does, with the understanding that this is dependent on a way of comprehension. How then does this wisdom differ from the perfection of action attained by the union of a man with the Active Intellect? To begin with, *Devekut* is not the first step in the journey; one must master fear and love (of God) as a basis for one's practice. In Ecclesiastes we read, "And God so made it that [humans] should revere Him."<sup>15</sup> Here we are presented with the idea that God created the capacity, or perhaps the propensity, in humans to fear Him. Even if we posit that the potential for *yirah* is inborn, it is not an automatic occurrence. We are taught in Berachot 33b (and Megilah 25a), "Rabbi Hanina said, 'Everything is in the hands of heaven (*shamayim*), except for *yirat shamayim*.'" That is, the quality must be freely chosen. There is the question of how to inculcate this quality in people, especially if it does not express itself automatically. There is a supposition among the rabbis that *yirat shamayim* can be taught, as we read in Ketubot 96a: "R. Hiyya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yohanan, one who deprives his student of serving him, it is as if he deprived him of kindness. As it is written (in Job 6:14), to him who deprives his friend of kindness. R. Nahman bar Yitzhak said, he even dispels (breaks off) from him the fear of heaven, as it is written (ibid.), and fear of God he forsakes." Thus we learn that a teacher can pass on the quality of *yirat shamayim*. This may explain, in part, why Nahmanides "received this matter with favor."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Eccl. 3:14.

<sup>16</sup> While on the subject of teachers, we should mention the idea in Pesachim 108a that the fear of one's teacher should be as the fear of heaven. This comparison with a human relationship allows us to move away from a strict translation of *yirah* as fear, as might be construed from a man/God relationship, to one implying reverence or awe, but on a human scale.

We know, from a variety of *sugyot*, quite a bit about the person who has *yirah* (*yirat shamayim* or *yirat haShem*). This is a person who won't envy sinners nor be like them (i.e., sin) (Berachot 7b). He or she prays, and trembles (Berachot 30b), hates evil (Pesachim 113b), and his or her qualities are congruent inside and out (Yoma 72b). We read there: "Woe unto the enemies of the scholars, who occupy themselves with Torah, but there is among them no *yirat shamayim*." Thus we see that *yirah* is a necessary precursor to the study of Torah, whether in the *peshat* or mystical senses.

In a letter to his son Nahman (*Iggteret Hamussar*), Nahmanides writes, "As a result of humility, you will acquire the fear of G-d. You will always meditate on where you came from and to where you are going—that you are a worm while alive, and certainly in your death. You will consider before Whom you must one day answer in judgment—before the King of glory."<sup>17</sup>

The necessary quality of love is discussed in Sotah 31a, where we have a teaching about whether *yirah* or *ahava* (love) is the proper motivation for action:

It has been taught that R. Meir says, it is said of Job that he was one who feared God (*yire Elohim*), and it is said of Abraham that he feared God (*yire Elohim*). What is the *yirah Elohim* spoken of regarding Abraham other than love?<sup>18</sup> Even so, the *yirah Elohim* spoken of regarding Job is also love. From where do we know this about Abraham? It is written (Isaiah 41:8) 'the seed of Abraham who loved Me.' What is the difference between one who acts out of love and one who acts out of fear? The difference is taught in this teaching: R. Shimon ben Eliezar says, the one who acts from love is greater than the one who acts from fear. For with the latter (his merit) lasts 1,000 generations, but the former, it lasts 2,000

<sup>17</sup> Shulman, op. cit., p.230.

<sup>18</sup> Gershom Scholem notes that Abraham actually represents the quality of love in the *Bahir*, a book of midrashic expositions of biblical verses: "The three Patriarchs: Abraham representing Love or Grace, *hesed*; Isaac, representing Stern Judgment or Fear, *paḥad*; Jacob, representing Truth and Peace..." Scholem, Gershom, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, The Jewish Publication Society (English translation copyright 1987) and Princeton University Press, 1990, p.144.

generations. Here it is written (Exod. 20:6) 'for thousands who love Me and keep My commandments.'<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere it is written (Deut. 7:9) 'and for those who guard my commandments for a thousand generations.'

We read in Berachot 16b, "Rav, on concluding his prayer, added the following:

'May it be Your will, O Lord our God, to grant us long life, a life of peace, a life of good, a life of blessing, a life of sustenance, a life of bodily vigor, a life in which there is fear of sin (*yirat heit*), a life free from shame and confusion, a life of riches and honor, a life in which we may be filled with the love of Torah and the fear of heaven (*ahavat Torah v'yirat shamayim*), a life in which You will fulfill all the desires of our heart for good.'<sup>20</sup>

Possessing, then, the proper qualities of fear and love of God, one may develop a deep experience of Torah. As we see in the *Ma'amar*, Torah is much more than a scroll; it represents the limitless qualities of God: "...just as God, blessed be He, has no beginning, end, or any borders, so His flawless Torah, that has been transmitted to us, has no end or limit for us."

### **God Has No Beginning or End**

Gershom Scholem writes, "In order to express this unknowable aspect of the Divine, the early kabbalists of Provence and Spain coined the term *Ein-Sof* ("Infinite"). This expression cannot be traced to a translation of a Latin or Arabic philosophical term. Rather it is a hypostatization<sup>21</sup> which, in contexts dealing with the infinity of God or with His thought that "extends without end" (*le-ein sof* or *ad le-ein sof*), treats the adverbial

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<sup>19</sup> Soncino explains that 'thousands' is interpreted as generations, and the plural indicates at least two thousand.

<sup>20</sup> This prayer is maintained with minor modifications in the prayer for announcing a new month on Shabbat morning.

<sup>21</sup> Attributing a real identity to a concept.

relation as if it were a noun and uses this as a technical term. *Ein-Sof* first appears in this sense in the writings of Isaac the Blind<sup>22</sup> and his disciples, particularly in the works of Azriel of Gerona<sup>23</sup>...<sup>24</sup>

Thus the term *Ein Sof*, God or His thought being described as infinite was known in Gerona, and by Nahmanides. In the *Ma'amar* we read, "...God, blessed be He, has no beginning, end, or any borders (*ein lo rosh v'sof u'gevul klal*).” The idea of God not having any beginning (i.e., being eternal) carries with it the notion that creation occurred *ex nihilo*. For if the world itself is eternal, one does not need to posit God as creator. Nahmanides states in his Commentary on 1:1 of Genesis, that one who “thinks the world was eternal denies the essential principle of the [Judaic] religion and has no Torah at all.”<sup>25</sup> The principle is that if God did not create the world, He cannot interfere with its functioning (i.e., cause miracles): “Nachmanides’ argument against the Aristotelians was quite explicit: “To him who believes in the eternity of matter God is powerless even if He should want to shorten the wing of a fly, or to extend the foot of an ant” (*Torat ha-Shem Temimah*).”<sup>26</sup>

The major point of disagreement between Nahmanides and Maimonides is

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<sup>22</sup> Isaac the Blind (c.1160–1235), was a central figure among early *kabbalists*.

<sup>23</sup> The teacher or “conjectured teacher” of Nahmanides in *Kabbalah*.

<sup>24</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Kabbalah*, Meridian (the Penguin Group), New York, 1978 (Copyright 1974 by Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem), p.88.

<sup>25</sup> Chavel, Charles B., translator and annotator, *Ramban (Nachmanides): Commentary on the Torah, Genesis*, Vol. 1, Shilo Publishing House, Inc., New York 1999, p.17. Hereinafter called “*Commentary*.”

<sup>26</sup> Silver, Daniel Jeremy, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1965, pp.169-70.

Maimonides' willingness to entertain the views of Aristotle, who believed the world is eternal and denied the idea of creation (although Maimonides does not consider Aristotle's proofs of the world's eternity conclusive, merely as showing plausibility):

Aristotle maintains...that a corporeal object cannot be produced without a corporeal substance. He goes, however, farther, and contends that the heavens are indestructible. For he holds that the Universe in its totality has never been different, nor will it ever change: the heavens, which form the permanent element in the Universe, and are not subject to genesis and destruction, have always been so; time and motion are eternal, permanent, and have neither beginning nor end; the sublunary world, which includes the transient elements, has always been then same, because the *materia prima* is itself eternal, and merely combines successively with different forms; when one form is removed, another is assumed. This whole arrangement, therefore, both above and here below, is never disturbed or interrupted, and nothing is produced contrary to the laws or the ordinary course of Nature. He further says—though not in the same terms—that he considers it impossible for God to change His will or conceive a new desire; that God produced this Universe in its totality by His will, but not from nothing. Aristotle finds it as impossible to assume that God changes His will or conceives a new desire, as to believe that He is non-existing, or that His essence is changeable. Hence it follows that this Universe has always been the same in the past, and will be the same eternally.<sup>27</sup>

Maimonides states (emphasis added), "We do *not* reject the Eternity of the Universe, because certain passages in Scripture confirm the Creation; for such passages are not more numerous than those in which God is represented as a corporeal being..."<sup>28</sup> Rather, the eternity of the universe is rejected because of Aristotle's lack of conclusive proof. However, if Aristotle had proffered such proof, Maimonides would have felt constrained to accept it.<sup>29</sup>

Nahmanides concludes, "...one is to believe that G-d is One, active, (His role in

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<sup>27</sup> *Guide*, II:13, p.173.

<sup>28</sup> *Guide*, II:25, p.199.

<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding his thirteen articles of faith in which he posits (only) God's eternity (#4), and the existence of God which is perfect and sufficient unto itself and *which is the cause of the existence of all other beings*. (#1, emphasis added.)

the creation of the world was an active one and did not involve—as Aristotle suggested—merely a process of inevitable emanation from G-d.) omnipotent, omniscient [*sic*], and providential.”<sup>30</sup>

### The Flawless Torah

Nahmanides is well-known for his extended discourse “The Law of the Eternal is Perfect (*Torat Adonai Temimah*).” This discourse supports the attitudes toward Torah contained in the *Ma’amar*, from its perfection to its hidden messages. We read, “King David, peace be upon him, has furthermore said, *Open Thou my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law*, (Psalms 119:18) and he also stated, *I have seen an end to every purpose; but Thy commandment is exceedingly broad*. (Ibid., verse 96) There are many other verses on this topic in [the books of] the Prophets and Writings, all of which affirm that the Torah is the most precious and honored object of all things extant in the world and that it is **hidden from all wise men** (See Job 28:21. That is, the absolute wisdom of Torah eludes their search.) **and all the prophets**.<sup>31</sup> [Emphasis added.]

He continues, “...you must agree that there is no [source of true] wisdom other than [the Torah]; there is no [book of] knowledge and understanding worthy of comparison with it! *And all the things that thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her*. (Proverbs 3:15)”<sup>32</sup> Later, in explaining the subject of the discourse, he says, “*The law of the Eternal is ‘t’mimah*,’ [a word which, besides meaning “perfect,” also means “complete”]. That is, the Torah is complete in everything—in [hidden] wisdom, and in all

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<sup>30</sup> Chavel, *Writings*, op. cit., p.66.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.33.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.38.

matters; nothing is lacking in it, as the verse states [concerning the Land of Israel], *thou shalt not lack anything in it*. (Deuteronomy 9:8)<sup>33</sup>

All this, however, does not explain Nahmanides' assertions regarding the perfection of the Torah in general, and Torah scrolls in particular. His assertions are:

1) "[T]here is no fixity in its language...if you say that the Torah is fixed in its language even in one word and the rest is from the heavens...[you are] a denier of God's word." (Part of this fixity would include applying *nekudot* (vowels) to the text.)

2) Torah verses contain soul (*neshamah*). We learn meanings from, "full and deficient word forms...open and closed paragraphs, and all the more so looped, distorted, lowered or separated letters [e.g., backwards nun], and even jots on the letters and their crowns."

3) "...the letters were [not] given to us only for the subject matter and the essence, ...[but] for the (specific) number of its arrangement..."

Without getting into questions of textual criticism (e.g., who wrote the Torah and when), there is still much to discuss regarding the print in a Torah scroll. Notwithstanding Maimonides' assertion (in his Articles of Faith) that the entire Torah was given to Moses (#8), Nahmanides does not seem to allow for the possibility of scribal errors over time (much the same way he quotes two variant manuscripts of Onkelos), or the timeline of the development of Hebrew script (*Encyclopedia Judaica* notes that the earliest surviving example of the square script used in writing Torah scrolls dates to 515 B.C.E.<sup>34</sup>).

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>34</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, op.cit., "Alphabet, Hebrew."

The question of multiple manuscripts comes up extensively in studying *Sefer Yešira* on which Nahmanides wrote a commentary. (At minimum he knew that there was a short and a long version of the work.) A. Peter Hayman writes, "The predominant image in SY of God as creator is that of the artist working on pre-existent materials... We know that this was a problem for its early interpreters. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that a layer of glosses can be detected that attempt to correct SY's view of the creative process in the direction of *creation ex nihilo*. This is directly observable in the text of §20 where we will see that many scribes have had a hand in rewriting the text."<sup>35</sup>

In short, Nahmanides closes the possibility that textual variations can be simply that—the product of various writers, redactors and scribes. It is more difficult to say, however, what the precise meaning of the variants may have to tell us. It is more important to know that there is a 'magic,' if you will, about these focal points.

We read in the *Ma'amar*, "Know that if you believe about one pearl that it has a special ability to perform a wondrous activity with its nature and its strength, but you do not know the essence of the action (i.e., how the action is accomplished), you would always worry and sigh until you comprehended the essence of the action. But if you don't believe that within that pearl is strength and ability to perform an action small or large, you wouldn't be concerned about it, nor would you seek after it, nor set your heart on it."

If one believes that a textual variant, or scribal flourish, or odd letterform, is simply that, then one would miss any hidden meanings. Such a case would perhaps be studied as a point of interest, but there would be no burning desire to continue pursuing

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<sup>35</sup> Hayman, A. Peter, *Sefer Yešira*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 104, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, Germany, 2004, p.35.



knowledge of it. Seeking after such knowledge leads to fear of the Eternal and then knowledge of the Eternal (*az tavin yirat Adonay v'da-at Elohim timsha*) (Prov. 2:5).

As far as a Torah scroll lacking even one letter being unfit by virtue of its imperfection, is this because somehow it is less magical, or is this a fence built around the Torah in order to enforce consistency? While we would strive to have a perfect Torah, would an 'unfit' scroll not be worthy of study, even if it is the only available text?

### **The Three Books of Rosh Hashanah**

In "The Law of the Eternal is Perfect" we read, "It is true that the Holy One, blessed be He, judges His world on the New Year. This is indeed so, since He established it thus from the very beginning of the Creation. (This is based upon a Midrash which states that Creation commenced on the twenty-fifth day of Ellul, and the sixth day, which marked the formation of Adam, was the first day of the month of Tishri. Adam's sojourn in the Garden of Eden lasted but a few hours. By the tenth hour of that day, he had already transgressed G-d's command. In the eleventh hour, he was judged, and in the twelfth, he was cast out to atone for his sin. Thereupon G-d said to Adam, "You shall be a token for your children. Just as you have been judged and pardoned by Me on this day, so shall your children be judged on this day and they too shall be pardoned.")"<sup>36</sup>

In the *Ma'amar* this judgment depends on one's level of (mystical) attainment; each of us is either righteous, evil, or in between. We read, "It is known that on Rosh Hashanah itself the books are opened, and there is among them a book of life and a book of death, everything in the power of His name, may He be blessed, who is the book of life to those who cleave (to Him). About this it was said to Moses, "The one who sins

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<sup>36</sup> Chavel, *Writings*, p.37.

(against) Me I will blot out from my book" (Ex. 32:33)." The implication is that delving into the mysteries of the Torah leads to greater cleaving to God, who is Life itself. This grants one access to perhaps long life, but surely to meaningful life. The *Ma'amar* itself is given as a stimulus to this higher attainment: "Now that we have stimulated you (to think) in this way, enter my friend, and be delighted..."for from it comes life" (Prov. 4:23).

### Warnings About Study of Mystical Materials

There is a distinction from close to the beginning of the *Ma'amar* as to what can be shared and in what way. We read, "Therefore it is appropriate for us to make known to you the foundation upon which the Torah is built..." And the reader is given to understand what it is possible to understand (e.g., "Understand this if you possess a soul."). We do not get, however, customary warnings about what can only be transmitted discretely and from teacher to student.

In the Commentary we read, "...my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning or contemplation, excepting from the mouth of a wise Cabalist speaking into the ear of an understanding recipient. Reasoning about them is foolishness; any unrelated thought brings much damage and withholds the benefit...*Let them not break through unto the Eternal to gaze,*<sup>37</sup> *For the Eternal our G-d is a devouring fire, even a G-d of jealousies.*<sup>38</sup>...and let them take moral instruction from the mouths of our holy Rabbis<sup>39</sup>: "Into that which is beyond you, do not seek; into that which is more

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<sup>37</sup> Exod. 19:21,24.

<sup>38</sup> Deut. 4:24.

<sup>39</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 8:2.

powerful than you, do not inquire; about that which is concealed from you, do not desire to know; about that which is hidden from you, do not ask. Contemplate that which is permitted to you, and engage not yourself in hidden things.”<sup>40</sup>

The direction of the *Ma'amar*, on the other hand, seems to stoke the desire to know and inquire. The *Ma'amar* tells the questioner and its purported recipient, “If you have not comprehended it, you should worry about your lack of your comprehension.” Perhaps Maimonides was right in his statements that not everyone has the capacity to learn, whether it involves mathematics, science, or metaphysics (see above). Even Nahmanides admits to limitations when he says (in “The Law of the Eternal is Perfect”), “The process of Creation is a concealed matter, and I do not know it. Even if I did know it, I would be prohibited to explain it in public. (Chagigah 11b.)”<sup>41</sup> He continues, further along:

...the secrets of the Torah are communicated only to one in whom they perceive signs of being worthy of them. As our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said, (Chagigah 13a) “Only the headings of the chapters [or subjects] may be imparted to the Chief Judge [of the Sanhedrin], whose heart yearns for such knowledge.” They further said, (Chagigah 13a) “The secrets of the Torah are to be transmitted only to him [of whom it may be said that he is] *a counsellor, expert artificer, and 'navon lachash, ' "* (Isaiah 3:3) [as will be explained]. Regarding the interpretation [of *navon lachash*], the Rabbis said, (Chagigah 14a) “A *navon* [from the root of *binah* (understanding)] is one who, having knowledge of one thing, can derive therefrom knowledge of something else. A *lachash* [which means ‘a whispering’]—is he who merits being imparted with the secrets of the Torah, which should be transmitted in a whisper.”<sup>42</sup>

Luckily Nahmanides and other masters understood, “A time for silence and a time for speaking (Eccl. 3:7),” when they conceded to put their thoughts on paper, albeit in a

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<sup>40</sup> Chavel, *Commentary*, Genesis, pp.15-16.

<sup>41</sup> Chavel, *Writings*, p.83.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.

sometimes obtuse fashion. What seems obvious is that the author of the *Ma'amar* was willing to reach out to the initiate as a teacher, beyond the confines of face-to-face, personal instruction, to bring him along the paths described in the essay.

The paths obviously have obstacles (the "path of fear" does not sound particularly pleasant), but if the student knows that progressing on the "path of the true understanding (of God)" takes him by "awesome, elevated (and) wondrous paths," he will persist in his desire, as described by the author. As we read in the *Ma'amar*, "Afterwards, at the end of the path, from its ascent, you will understand the secret of the hidden and mystical matters which are known to all who are fit to be called God, as it is said, "and you will find the knowledge of God."

This author wonders whether the view at the end of the path will be merely an interior one, or whether it will be as spectacular as Moses' view from Mount Nebo (Deut. 34:1); whether it will radiate outward to others as a beacon for others to follow (i.e., whether there will be outward signs of perfection akin to Moses' radiant face), and whether the attainment will indeed be the cause of spontaneous right action, the request of the initiate.

## Chapter VI

### Similarity with Other Mystical Works

It would have been possible to compare and contrast the *Ma'amar* to any number of kabbalistic works. For example, the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, an early kabbalistic work,<sup>1</sup> whose name was popularized by Nahmanides, has an extensive discussion of *nekudot* (vowel markings).<sup>2</sup> Another possible vehicle of comparison would have been *Sefer Yetzirah*,<sup>3</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> The early dating of the work is disputed by Glotzer: "...it is difficult to believe that all of *Sefer HaBahir* is that ancient [i.e., from the mishnaic period] as vowel points (*nikudot*) are discussed in it. There are strong indications that these vowel points were not invented until the eighth century, when the Massorites decided that vowel points were necessary to preserve the traditional biblical pronunciations." (Glotzer, Leonard R., *The Fundamentals of Jewish Mysticism: The Book of Creation and Its Commentaries*, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, NJ 1992, pp.xiv-xv.)

Gershom Scholem notes, "The book, as it has survived, confirms the tradition of the 13th-century kabbalists that *Sefer ha-Bahir* was handed down to them in extremely mutilated form, as remnants of scrolls, booklets, and traditions. It contains sections which break off in the middle of a sentence and are not connected at all with what follows. There are discussions which are begun and not completed. Additional material interrupting the sequence of the argument is found in greater proportion in those very sections which seem to have an inner consistency."

<sup>2</sup> For example: "What are the things that are circular? They are the vowel points in the Torah of Moses, for these are all round. They are to the letters like the soul, which lives in the body of man. It is impossible for [man] to come [into this world] unless [the soul] endures within him. It is impossible for him to speak anything, great or small, without it. In a similar manner, it is impossible to speak a word, great or small, without the vowel points." (Section 3, #115.) In the case of the *Ma'amar*, whose author agrees as far as, "vowels are the form and soul of the letters," the positive sense is lessened as he continues, "we do not make a Torah scroll with vowels so that it contains all the facets and its deep and external implications."

first chapter for which Nahmanides prepared a commentary.

In the final analysis, it seemed more profitable to compare the *Ma'amar* with the Zohar for two primary reasons: the work came out not long after Nahmanides' death, making the documents fairly contemporaneous, and because of the wide influence of the Zohar on kabbalah since its introduction.<sup>4</sup>

While the author of the Zohar can be said to have been familiar with the works of Nahmanides, the reverse cannot be assumed. Gershom Scholem writes, "...it is possible to show that he also made use of the main writings of Jehudah Halevi and Moses

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<sup>3</sup> This would be more useful in discussing *creatio ex nihilo* in the context of Nahmanides' larger body of work. Glotzer notes, "The book's name, *Sefer Yetzirah*, is somewhat difficult to translate. In Hebrew, there are various synonyms for "creation," and "yetzirah" is one of them. Another one is "briyah." An ancient tradition differentiates between the two synonyms. According to this tradition, which is discussed by Maimonides in his *Guide to the Perplexed* [III:10], "briyah" refers to the creation of being from nonbeing, while "yetzirah" connotes being arising from other being. This has led some to translate "yetzirah" as "formation" rather than "creation." It seems to me, however, that translating "yetzirah" as creation is correct, for the English word "creation" is applied to the creation of things from other things more often than to the creation of "being from nothingness." (Glotzer op. cit., p.xv.)

Peter Hayman writes, "We know that Saadya was unhappy with the view of creation presented in SY, even with his updated version of §20. He offers a translation of §20 which he more or less admits goes beyond what the Hebrew text says, because he thought even the formula *אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ* did not adequately exclude the view that God created the world out of something which already existed. [Footnote: He translates §20: "He created something out of not from something, and made what did not exist exist, and he hewed out great columns from intangible air." (Hayman, A. Peter, *Sefer Yesira*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, Germany 2004, pp.105-6.)

<sup>4</sup> Gershom Scholem, in his quite extensive article in *Encyclopedia Judaica* on Kabbalah writes, "The mingling of...two currents—the Kabbalah of Gerona and the Kabbalah of the "Gnostics" of Castile—became in the mind of Moses de Leon a creative encounter which determined the basic character of the Zohar. Instead of the brief allusions and interpretations of his predecessors he presents a broad canvas of interpretation and homiletics covering the whole world of Judaism as it appeared to him...In a pseudepigraph attributed to Simeon b. Yohai and his friends, Moses de Leon clothed his interpretation of Judaism in an archaic garb—long and short Midrashim on the Torah and the three scrolls the books Song of Songs, Ruth, and Lamentations."

Maimonides, and that his favorite subjects are directly based on the views of Maimonides, such as for instance his frequent references to paganism as a form of astral worship closely linked with magic and idolatry. ... There can be no doubt that the writings of Ezra ben Solomon, Azriel and of Moses ben Nahman, the leading figure of this group, influenced him not only generally but also down to certain peculiar details of his own doctrine."<sup>5</sup> He is able to date the work definitively, noting, "We have seen that the author was familiar with a group of writings of which the latest was written in 1274. This gives us a definite *terminus post quem*..."<sup>6</sup>

The Zohar has multiple words indicating aspects of soul, where the *Ma'amar* uses but one. Gershom Scholem writes:

The psychology of the Zohar shows a peculiar mixture of two doctrines held by certain schools of mediaeval philosophy. The first distinguished between the vegetative, the animal, and the rational soul—three stages which Aristotelian doctrine regarded as different faculties of the one soul, while the mediaeval followers of Plato were inclined to think of them as three different entities. The second, which was generally held by the Arab philosophers and popularized among the Jews by Maimonides, is based on the conception of the "acquired intellect." According to this view, the rational faculty latent in the mind is actualized in the process of cognition, and this realization of the intellect is the sole guide to immortality. [Cf. L. Husik, *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy* (1918) p.XLVII.] To this doctrine, the Zohar now gives a Kabbalistic turn. It retains the distinction between three spiritual agencies: *Nefesh* or life; *Ruah* or spirit; and *Neshamah* or soul proper, but abandons the idea that they represent three different faculties of the soul. Rather all three are already latently present in the first, *Nefesh*, and the higher grades correspond to the new and deeper powers which the soul of the devotee acquires through the study of the Torah and through meritorious actions.<sup>7</sup>

The *Ma'amar* uses the word *neshamah* exclusively. We read, for example, "there

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<sup>5</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, NY 1946, 1954, p.173.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>7</sup> p.240

is no empty Torah, according to its simple meaning alone; rather it has a soul that I Myself breathed into it," and "Your soul will always desire and be drawn after it in order to reveal its mysteries and to comprehend its hidden aspects." So we have soul as the province of the individual, and something manifest by the Torah.

In the Zohar, "*Neshamah*, the "holy soul," can be realized only by the perfect devotee, who, for the author of the Zohar, is identical with the Kabbalist, and it is only by penetrating into the mysteries of the Torah, that is to say, through the mystical realization of his cognitive powers, that he acquires it...*Neshamah* is the deepest intuitive power which leads to the secrets of God and the universe. It is therefore natural that *Neshamah* is also conceived as a spark of *Binah*, the divine intellect itself. By acquiring it, the Kabbalist thus realizes something of the divine in his own nature."<sup>8</sup>

In some ways the Zohar seems to favor Maimonides more than Nahmanides. In Part I of the *Guide* we read, "...there are certain metaphysical truths which have to be communicated to all men, e.g., that God is One, and that He is incorporeal; for to assume that God is corporeal, or that He has any properties, or to ascribe to Him any attributes, is a sin bordering on idolatry." Contrast this with the following from the Zohar:

...woe to the man who should make bold to identify the Lord with any single attribute, even if it be His own, and the less so any human form existent, "whose foundation is in the dust" {Job 4:19}, and whose creatures are frail, soon gone, soon lost to mind. Man dares project one sole conception of the Holy One, be blessed, that of his sovereignty over some one attribute or over the creation in its entirety. But if he be not seen under these manifestations, then there is neither attribute, nor likeness, nor form in him; as the very sea, whose waters lack form and solidity in themselves, having these only when they are spread over the vessel of the earth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.241.

<sup>9</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Zohar: The Book of Splendor*, Schocken Books, New York, 1949, pp. 52-3, Zohar, Exod., Raya Mehemna, II:42b.



As much as the Zohar may sound like Maimonides in this instance, there can be no question about the love and pursuit of Torah. There is a lovely midrash which captures the essence of desire of a man for Torah and her complementary desire to be found out:

She may be compared to a beautiful and stately maiden, who is secluded in an isolated chamber of a palace, and has a lover of whose existence she alone knows. For love of her he passes by her gate unceasingly, and turns his eyes in all directions to discover her. She is aware that he is forever hovering about the palace, and what does she do? She thrusts open a small door in her secret chamber, for a moment reveals her face to her lover, then quickly withdraws it. He alone, none else, notices it; but he is aware it is from love of him that she has revealed herself to him for that moment, and his heart and his soul and everything within him are drawn to her.

So it is with the Torah, which discloses her innermost secrets only to them who love her. She knows that whosoever is wise in heart hovers near the gates of her dwelling place day after day. What does she do? From her palace, she shows her face to him, and gives him a signal of love, and forthwith retreats back to her hiding place. Only he alone catches her message, and he is drawn to her with his whole heart and soul, and with all of his being. In this manner, the Torah, for a moment, discloses herself in love to her lovers, so as to arouse them to renewed love. This then is the way of the Torah. In the beginning, when she first reveals herself to a man, she gives him some sign. If he understands, it is well, but if he fails, then she summons him and calls him "simpleton," and says to her messengers: Go tell that simpleton to come to me, and converse—as it is written: "Whoso is a simpleton, let him turn in hither" {Prov. 9:4}. And when he arrives, she commences to speak with him, at first from behind the veil which she has hung before her words, so that they may suit his manner of understanding, in order that he may progress gradually. This is known as *derashah*. Then she speaks to him behind a filmy veil of finer mesh, she speaks to him in riddles and allegories—and these are called *haggadah*.

When, finally, he is on near terms with her, she stands disclosed face to face with him, and holds converse with him concerning all of her secret mysteries, and all the secret ways which have been hidden in her heart from immemorial time. Then is such a man a true adept in the Torah, a "master of the house," for to him she has uncovered all her mysteries, neither keeping back nor hiding any single one. She says to him: Do you see the sign, the cue, which I gave you in the beginning, how many mysteries it holds? He then comes to the realization that not one thing may be added to the words of the Torah, nor taken from them, not a sign and not a letter.

Hence should men pursue the Torah with all their might, so as to come to be her lovers, as we have shown.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp.63-4, Zohar, Exod. II:94b according to Scholem. In Soncino it is II:99a-b.

We see, of course the connection in the *Ma'amar* in reference to a Torah with one too many or one too few letters being unfit for use. One further selection reinforces an understanding of the one who sees Torah as empty of meaning and without soul:

Rabbi Simeon said: If a man looks upon the Torah as merely a book presenting narratives and everyday matters, alas for him! Such a torah, one treating with everyday concerns, and indeed a more excellent one, we too, even we, could compile. More than that, in the possession of the rulers of the world there are books of even greater merit, and these we could emulate if we wished to compile some such torah. But the Torah, in all of its words, holds supernal truths and sublime secrets...

...the tales related in the Torah are simply her outer garments, and woe to the man who regards that outer garb as the Torah itself, for such a man will be deprived of portion in the next world. Thus David said: "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" {Ps. 119:18}, that is to say, the things that are underneath. See now. The most visible part of a man are the clothes that he has on, and they who lack understanding, when they look at the man, are apt not to see more in him than these clothes. In reality, however, it is the body of the man that constitutes the pride of his clothes, and his soul constitutes the pride of his body.

So it is with the Torah. Its narrations which relate to things of the world constitute the garments which clothe the body of the Torah; and that body is composed of the Torah's precepts, *gufey-torah* {bodies, major principles}. People without understanding see only the narrations, the garment; those somewhat more "penetrating see also the body. But the truly wise, those who serve the most high King and stood on mount Sinai, pierce all the way through to the soul, to the true Torah which is the root principle of all. These same will in the future be vouchsafed to penetrate to the very soul of the soul of the Torah.<sup>11</sup>

The Zohar exhibits some of the same fascination with full and deficient letter forms that we see in the *Ma'amar*, however with a spelling out of the mystical reason for such. For example, "R. Simeon discoursed on the verse: 'And I will remember my covenant with Jacob, etc.' (Lev. 26:42). The name Jacob, he said, is here written in full, with the letter vav. For what reason? In the first place as an allusion to the grade of Wisdom, the realm where Jacob dwells. But the chief reason is because the passage

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp.94-5, Zohar, Num. III:152a.

speaks of the exile of Israel, intimating that the redemption of Israel will come about through the mystic force of the letter vav, namely, in the sixth millennium, and, more precisely, after six seconds and a half a time.<sup>12,13</sup>

The Zohar also shares with *Ma'amar* the expressed necessity for the fear of God in attaining spiritual growth: "Happy are those of exalted piety to whom the supernal wisdom has been revealed, and from whom it will not be forgotten for ever, as it says, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and his secret to make them know it" (Ps. 25:14)."<sup>14</sup>

One last section of the Zohar incorporates many of the views of the *Ma'amar* and refers to a verse also in that essay (commonalities highlighted): "...all the words of the Torah are sublime and precious, and of every word it is written: "She is more precious than rubies; and all the things you can desire are not to be compared with her (Prov. 3:15). Woe to all these foolish and senseless people, when the Holy One, blessed be He, will demand an account from them for the insult done to the Torah and they will be punished for having rebelled against their Master. So Scripture says: "For it is no empty thing for you (Deut. 32:47)," implying that if it is an empty thing, its emptiness is from you yourselves, seeing that all the things one can desire are not to be compared with her. How can they say that the Torah is an empty thing seeing that Solomon said: "If you are wise, you are wise for yourself (Prov. 9:12), implying that whoever becomes

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<sup>12</sup> Zohar, Gen. I:119a.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that even where the same verse is quoted in regard to this, the same word may not be addressed, e.g., Gen. 2:4.

<sup>14</sup> Zohar, Gen. I:37b.

wise in the Torah benefits himself thereby. **Thus the Torah is filled with all riches<sup>15</sup> and no one can add thereto even one letter.**"

Whether the Zoharic material reflects all of the influences listed earlier, and in what proportions is beyond the scope of this thesis. But it should be evident that there are many commonalities which put both the Zohar and the *Ma'amar* firmly in the mainstream of medieval kabbalah.

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<sup>15</sup> This is familiar in terms of the example of a pearl with special abilities.

## Chapter VII

### Implications of "Essay on the Internality of the Torah" for Today

Being able to explore higher level implications of Torah and other Jewish texts is dependent on establishing a foundation. As we read in the *Ma'amar*, "The beginning of the fear (of God) and the foundation of the love (of God), and the path of the true understanding (of God) is to know the rudiments of the foundation upon which one builds one's building..." Learning rudiments of text study is a fundamental obstacle for both students and teachers in a non-day-school environment. One is expected to learn or teach a great quantity of material in a small number of hours per week.

The schedule set forth in Pirke Avot 5:21 suggests, "Five years of age for (study of) scripture, ten for Mishnah, thirteen for the commandments (i.e., bar/bat mitzvah), fifteen for Talmud, eighteen for the *huppah* (marriage canopy), twenty for pursuing (a career), thirty for (full) strength, forty for understanding, fifty for (ability to give) advice, sixty for maturity, seventy for a hoary head (i.e., gray or white hair), eighty for power, ninety for being bent over, at a hundred, one is as if he were dead, having passed and departed from the world."

Most (afternoon, supplemental) Hebrew or Sunday schools do not introduce the Hebrew aleph-bet until the third grade (let alone cover a comprehensive study of the Hebrew Bible), instead teaching prayers by rote orally, in addition to other subjects. There is no enforced expectation of attendance at Shabbat services outside of a grade-

level service once or twice a school year, with generally an increased requirement in the year prior to bar or bat mitzvah.

We also live in a society where the synagogue is not treated as the center of one's life—competing demands for time and attention, especially sport teams and secular school obligations can actually pull away from the time Hebrew school students spend in class. The idea of studying *lishmah*, for its own sake (i.e., enjoyment) is rare indeed.

The tendency, especially in but not limited to early years, is to tell "Bible stories," simplified versions of biblical and midrashic texts, often leaving students with an unclear idea of what is actually in the Bible. Unfortunately this unclear sense may well persist into adulthood, especially given that many students discontinue their studies after bar/bat mitzvah. Even where texts are taught more intensively, the time lapse between sessions, often without reinforcement, do not create comprehensive learning.

If all this is the case, how does one create a foundation while still leaving room for joy?

As we know, there are many approaches to text study, and perhaps as the following selection suggests, keeping them logically separated may improve the quality of the learning:

It is important to note that the rabbis...recognized that there are many different levels at which it is proper to interpret Scripture. The most succinct statement of these different approaches was given by Nachmanides. Every rabbinic commentator on the Hebrew Scriptures sought to explain the biblical text in any or all of the following ways. He explained its simple or its hidden meaning. The former deals primarily with linguistic questions: semantics and grammar. The latter is homiletic, philosophical, or mystical. All four kinds of interpretation are important to understand how the rabbis understood Scripture. Often these different approaches produce contrary explanations, and most commentators recognized the contradictions. However, for most rabbis this diversity of meaning was not problematic. God expresses his truth in multiple ways in his written word. While one kind of hidden meaning may not seem to agree with another kind, the

conflict is not real. The difference lies only in the mode of expression. A homiletic and a philosophical statement, for example, may seem from their language to be dealing with the same question and reaching different conclusions, when in fact each kind of statement is dealing with a different question, and for that very reason there need not be any conflict between them. This is not to say that the rabbis advocated any kind of double truth theory. Without exception the rabbis believed that the one God of the universe is the source of only one truth. However, this epistemological unity has diverse expressions. Consequently, within each kind of commentary there is a need to determine coherence and consistency, in keeping with the logical rules of that language. Hence, two philosophical interpretations that violate the law of the excluded middle cannot both be true. However, to give a reason is not the same thing as to give a homily, and what the language of a text explicitly says or what that explicit statement logically entails need not be consistent with what the text alludes to or how the text is used in a homily. Allusions or hints are subject to their own distinct kind of grammar.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, whatever type of lesson is being taught, whether *peshat* (simple meaning, skills-based per the above), homiletic, philosophical, or mystical, there is no problem with understanding if the student is made aware of the content. We do not have to lose the value of sharing midrashim in order to study grammar, as long as we are clear about what is being accomplished. And enjoyment is fundamental to creating a desire for further exploration—witness the large demand for adult education at many synagogues.

If the foundation of one's learning then, is not to be dependent on mastering a discrete skill set (e.g., mastery of the entire *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible), Mishnah, Talmud, etc.) before attempting higher level explanations, what sort of attachment to the texts are we looking for? The *Ma'amar* has already suggested the fear and love of God. Perhaps the foundation should be the core values we seek to instill in our children like goodness, honesty, generosity, love of one's neighbor, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank, Daniel H. and Oliver Leaman, ed., *History of Jewish Philosophy*, Routledge, London and New York 1997, p.238.

But perhaps we can infer another foundation from the beginning of the *Ma'amar*. This is the ritualized blessing with which the essay begins—"May the Eternal One bless you and keep you...(Num. 6:23ff)," the beginning of the priestly benediction. We can bless our children with a love and attachment to our tradition. For as the Numbers selection continues (6:27), "So they will link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them." This can be a continual blessing, not merely at the "consecration" time, which has become a staple event at many temples, alluded to in the following verse.

The blessing in the *Ma'amar* diverges from the biblical version however, and we ask on behalf of our students for the "light of the comprehension of God." We could ask such a blessing for enlightenment for ourselves as well. While the customary blessing for text study, *la'asok b'divrei Torah*, to engage with, or do battle with words of Torah, is intellectually challenging, not everyone is interested in, has the time and energy for, or the talent for pursuing such a challenge. We are reminded here of the four children at the Passover seder, who much each be taught and brought along in a different way. Each student must be offered a blessing on his or her own terms.

Before we can address the differing learning styles and capabilities of our students, we must look at what it is we are teaching. Our feelings about the sanctity of our holy books is something that remains largely unspoken. While many of us venerate the Torah during prayer services, as a symbol, we do not have the same attachment to, and feeling about, the text itself.

Who among us would be willing to venture that the Torah is flawless? Indeed we use the very markers noted by the author of the *Ma'amar*, e.g., the "full and deficient word forms in the Torah" to note the human involvement in the passing down of our



tradition. We note the places where the scribes have made errors, and the "correct" readings for when Torah is to be read or chanted, though we maintain the tradition by not allowing the texts to be changed from their corrupt form. And while we may value the stories in the text, and look for larger meanings, we do not customarily think of the Torah in the sense of having existed before the beginning of time; nor do we see the Torah text in toto as being a name for God. In short, since generally the progressive Jewish tradition does not hold inviolate the written and oral law, where do we attain the sense of holiness that imbues text study with the power of attraction asserted by the *Ma'amar*?

In rabbinical school, Torah text is often studied as having "fixity in its language." We study how the Hebrew language evolved over time, separate the text into component parts, etc. Many of us would, in the author's terms "be found to be deniers of the giving of Torah, which was given in its entirety from the mouth of God." We cannot and should not exclude ourselves from teaching the traditional texts, so the question becomes, how do we pull the text back together and revalue it, so that "Torah is [not] acquired without a soul," as just a book.

We read in the essay that "many mounds and mounds (of *mitzvot*) are "hanging from its curls" (i.e., from the oddly formed words and letters in the Torah). Yet we do not hold ourselves obligated to the mitzvot as do some of our co-religionists, so deriving these mitzvot from the curls may hold some intellectual interest, but not have a deeper meaning in our lives. The question is how we can look with new eyes, and along with David plead, "Open my eyes, that I may see the wonders of Your law (Torah)." (Ps. 119:18) The author of the *Ma'amar* states, "And if for David there were secrets hidden in it, and he would plead to have them revealed to him, all the more so for us who are lesser

and inferior." More than seven hundred years later, this plea has been magnified in scope and content. How are we to go about diving for each magical pearl of wisdom (each of which has "a special ability to perform a wondrous activity with its nature and its strength")? It is up to us to restore the connections, to see the texts differently, to rise above the tendency to do text deconstruction or spend all our time making the texts at their *peshat* value relevant to our daily lives.

"And if you find it empty, the matter is only from a blemish within yourselves." We have our limitations of mind and energy and time. So that while our 'blemishes' may be within ourselves, some are reinforced by peers and our society. But it is within ourselves that we can reaffirm the need to engage with tradition and find meanings that intrigue us and lead us into a more intimate exploration. This can only occur if we see the attainment as a treasure.

The author promises that "at the end of the path, from its ascent, you will understand the secret of the hidden and mystical matters which are known to all who are fit to be called God." The details of the trip are left to us, and as both teachers and students, we must continually expose ourselves to new insights and paths. This is not to say that we need to abandon our synagogues and rush out to join a kabbalah center, but we may need to offer hints and enticements that are more clear than those embedded in some of the classic texts, until we (whether students or teachers) are capable of grasping the hidden meanings intuitively or through the experience of prayer or meditation.

Our text tells us, "If you have not comprehended it, you should worry about your lack of your comprehension." Are worry, regret, upset, judging, frustration and/or anger proper reactions to a lack of comprehension? Our society has become more and more

attached to evaluation. We see this especially in the move toward increased standardized testing in the public-school arena. We would contend that a key learning from the *Ma'amar* is that if there are seventy facets to the Torah, then there are an equal number of approaches. Each of us must find his or her way to passion and enthusiasm.

There is a text which has engaged this author since well before the contemplation of rabbinical school. This is the story of Rabbi Akiva's beginnings as a shepherd.<sup>2</sup> He had not studied at all, in fact he did not even know the aleph-bet. In seeing a hollow in a stone at a well in Lydda, he asked how it had occurred. It was pointed out to him that water had worn away the rock. He asked himself if his head was harder than the rock, and then went and studied, eventually becoming a prodigious scholar.

The essential message to draw from the *Ma'amar* is the importance of kindling the desire to know more, to seek the treasures of our tradition, to achieve closeness to God. The author does not indicate the path is easy, nor indeed give much practical help in starting such a path, but this is where we need to share resources and vision, as we ascend together from the banal toward the divine.

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<sup>2</sup> Avot d'Rabbi Natan, perek 1.

**Appendix 1**

***Ma'amar 'al Pnimit HaTorah***

## מאמר על פנימיות התורה

לשון הרמב"ן ז"ל שהשיב בשאלה אחת.

יברכך ה' וישמרך ויאר ה' פניו אליך באור השגתו, ויסתח לך שערי צדק אשר במ  
תיכנס לדביר הקדש פנימה, ותזכה ותחיה ותירש טובתו וברכתו. הנה בקשת ממני למסור  
לך דרך השגה למען תשכיל בכל אשר תלך. הנה עשיתי דברך ונשאתי פניך לדבר הזה.  
תחלת היראה ומוסד האהבה ודרך ההשגה האמיתית היא לדעת תחלת היסוד שהאדם בונה  
עליו בנינו, וכשיעור שיראה ביסוד ובנה עליו הבנין, כמו שאמר החכם ע"ה על צד הרמז,  
אם חומת היא נבנה עליה וגר, ולכן ראוי לנו להודיעך היסוד שהתורה בנויה עליו, וכפי  
היסוד שתראה שחיה עליו כך תבנה אמונתך ותשען עליה. ונתחיל ונאמר כי יסוד היסודות  
כולם לדעת כי כאשר השיי אין לו ראש וסוף וגבול כלל, כן תורתו התמימה המסורה לנו  
אין לה אצלינו סוף וקץ. וכן אמר דוד לכל תכלה ראיתי קץ רחבה מצותך מאד, ומה  
שתצטרך שאין הסכמית בלשונותיה כאשר חשבו קצת גאוני הדורות העוברים שאילו תאמר  
כי לשון התורה מוסכם כשאר הלשונות נמצינו כופרים במתן תורה, שהרי כולה נתנה מפי  
הגבורה. וכבר ידעת כי דבר ה' בזה, זה האומר אין תורה מן השמים. ואם תאמר שהיא  
הסכמית במלה אחת, וכולה מן השמים חוץ מאותה מלה, הרי אמרו חז"ל כל האומר כל  
התורה כולה מן השמים חוץ ממלה אחת זהו כי דבר ה' בזה, ואם היתה התורה הסכמית  
בלשונותיה כשאר הלשונות שנאמר עליהם כי שם כלל יי שפת כל הארץ, או היתה כשאר  
הלשונות ונמצאו האותיות שהן אבני קדש נשפכות בראש כל חוצות נתונות בהרות בהרות  
כחות לבנות. ונמצאת התורה נקנית מאין נשמה, ואז לא היינו מצטרבים בתורה למלא וחסר  
כל שכן לפרשיות פתוחות וסדורות, וקל וחומר לאותיות לפסוקים עקשיות ועמוקות  
ומנוזרות, ואף כי לתגי האותיות וכתריהן, כי כל זה היה הכל וריק, ומה יאמרו על הקבלה  
שבאה כי ספר תורה שחסר בו אפילו אות אחת פסול, ואם האותיות לא ניתנו אלא לענין  
ולעיקר, ולא לחשבון המערכה, מדוע תולדות השמים מלא בכל, תלדת ישמעאל חסר בכל,  
תולדת יצחק מלא וחסר, תלדות עשיו חסר ומלא, וכן ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק, וכל  
שופר שבוחר סיני חסר, ושאר שופרות דעלמא מלאים כגון והעברת שופר תרועה, וכיוצא  
בו, ואם אינו עיקר באותיות מלאות וחסרות למה יפסל ספר תורה בכתו' אלה תלדת השמים  
חסר, כאשר הוא תלדת ישמעאל חסר, אבל דע ותבן והאמן כי כל אות ואות שבתורה כמה  
תלי תלים תלויים מקווצותיה, כמו שדרשו ז"ל בפסוק קווצותיו תלתלים, וכן אמר דוד  
גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך, ואם לדוד היו סתריה בעלמים והיה מתחנן לגלותם לו  
כל שכן אנו הפחותים הגרועים.

והנה כלל אני מוסר לך כי זהו היסוד לאמונה ולחכמה. דע כי אילו תאמין על מרגלית  
אחת שיש לה סגולה לפעול פעולה נפלאה בטבעה ובכחה ואינך יודע מהות אותה הפעולה,  
לעולם תהיה דואג ונאנח עד שתשיג מהות אותה הפעולה, ואם אינך מאמין שיש באותה  
המרגלית כח וסגולה לפעול פעולה גדולה או קטנה, לא תחיה חושש לה ולא תחפש אחריה  
ולא תשיג לבך אליה, וכן הדבר ממש בתורה אם תאמין שאינה כפשוטה לבד אבל יש לה

מלבד הפשטים ודרכים נוראים ומעלות נפלאות תהיה תמיד רודף אחריה ודואג על מה שלא תשיג ושמה במה שתשיג. וכן אמר ית' כי לא דבר רק הוא מכם, כלומר אין תורת ריקנית כפשטה לבד אבל יש לה נשמה שנפחתי אני בתורה והוא העיקר. ואם תמצאוה ריקנית אין הדבר רק ממום שבכם, וזהו שאמ' כי לא דבר רק הוא מכם, וכן דרשו ז"ל ואם רק הוא מכם, וכן שלמה אומר אם תבקשנה ככסף וכמטמונים תחפשנה אז תבין יראת ה' וסמך לו דעת אלהים תמצא. הלא תראה איך גלה סוד גדול במקום זה באומרו בתחלה שתבין דרך היראה שהוא בדרך האצילות ובסוד יראת ה' במקום זה רמז לידועים, ואח"כ תבין בסוף דרך מעלותיה שהם הם סוד הסתרים והתעלומות הנודעים לכל מי שראוי להקרא אלהים ואמ' דעת אלהים תמצא. וכבר ידעת כי כל מי שזכה לעלות בסולם מלאכי אלהים נקרא אלהים, וכן במשה הוא אומר ואתה תהיה לו לאלהים, וכן אמר שלמה והחכמה מאין תמצא וכי' תהום אומר לא בי היא וכי' אלהים הבין דרכה וכי' וסמך לו והוא ידע את מקומה. הבן המראה הגדול הזה, וכן אמר שלמה גן בעול בדרך הפשט הוא ציווי, כמו גל עיני ואביטה, ועל דרך הפנימי לפני לפני הוא סוד אתה מושל בגאות הים בשוא גליו אתה תשבחם, כי יש ים למעלה וכל הנחלים הולכים אליה, ובו גלים הולכים ובאים בסוד רצוא ושוב, ונחזור לכוונתינו ונאמר כי כשתאמין שהתורה צמקה עד מאד ופנימית בחדרי משכיותיה, לעולם תהיה משתוקק וכוסף ותואב אחריה ותהיה נפשך חושקת ונמשכת אחריה תמיד כדי לגלות דבר מסתורי, וכדי להשיג מתעלומותיה, ועל זה נאמר והיה אם שמוע תשמע, כלומר אם אתה שומע ומאמין שיש בה סתרים גדולים ותעלומות שראויים לכל שלם לשמען תזכה ותשמע. אם יפנה לבבך ולא תשמע, כלומר אם תאמין בלבבך שהתורה פנויה וריקנית ואין בה נשמה פנימית לעולם לא תחוש לה ולא תזכה לעד לשמוע להשיג דבר מסתורי, וזהו סוד יתב חכמתא לחכימין, ובלב כל חכם לב נתתי חכמה, ועתה בני שמע הנה מסרתי בידך תחלה הקדמה זו לפי שזהו השרש והעיקר לאמונה, כי מי שאינו יודע ומכיר מהותו של דבר לעולם לא יהיה חושש לו, ומי שלא ידע מעלת התורה ומעמקה, לא יהיה חושש לבקש לה טעם, כי איננו שוה מי שחופר מקום למצוא בו מטמון לפי אומדן הדעת למי שחופר ויודע בדאי שיש מטמון באותו המקום, והנה תורתנו התמימה ידענו כי כולת מלאה מטמונים, כמו שאמ' וכמטמונים תחפשנה, ואין לך מקום בכל התורה שאין לו מטמון מעין אותה הפרשה, ואפילו במקום שנראה מפשטו שאין דבר, כענין עטרות ודיבון ויעזר ונמרה וחשבון ואלעלה ושבם ונבו ובעון, לפי הנראה מן הפשט שאין בו דבר פנימי ולא סוד ולא תעלומה שאינו מורה דבר כי אם כנוי שמות של מקומות ידועים, לא דבר אחר, ועל זה הזהירו ז"ל ואמרו לעולם ישלים אדם פרשיותיו עם הצבור שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום ואפילו עטרות ודיבון וכו', והבן הפלא הגדול העצום שרמזו ז"ל בזה, כי דרכם הנפלא כי הם היו מתחפשים ומורים חצים שנונים במקומות האלה וכדי שיבינו אנשי אמת, וכלל אומר לך כל המקרא הזה שהוא עטרות ודיבון וכי' כולל סוד מערכת המרכבה העליונה, ולסיכך הוצרך אונקלוס לתרגמו ואומר עטרות ודיבון ויעזר ונמרה וחשבון ואלעלה ושבם ונבו ובעון, תרגו' מכלילתא ומלבישתא וכמיר בית גמדין ובית חושבני ובעיל דבון וסימא דמטמרא דמשה ובעון ג"א שכלילתא ומלבישתא שופן בית גמדין ובית חושבני לבעיל דבא וסיען בית קבורתא דמשה ובעון, ובמקום זה נקבר משה רבינו ע"ה כמו שהוכיח התרגום, וגם הפסוק הזה מוכיח על השגתו של משה רבינו בעולם הזה ומקום מנוחתו לעולם הבא, והוא כמו וירא ראשית לו כי שם חלקת מחוקק ססוף, והבן זה אם בעל נפש אמת.

ואחר שהודענוך זה נתחיל ונאמר כי כשתהיה נפשך בטוחה כי תורתינו התמימה היא במעלה הזאת או תמשך אחריה תמיד ותתענג בה ולא תפרד דעתך ממנה, כענין נפש

החושק הנדבק בחשוקתו. וכן אמר שלמה על צד המליצה כי עזה כמות אהבה קשה וגו' ואמר אם יתן איש את כל הון וכו', ואעפ"י ששיר השירים בנוי על יסוד המרכבה העליונה ועל שרשי האצילות וקשרי המעלות וסוד שני החשוקים הנודעים לבעלי הקבלה. הנה גם כן רומזים על סדרי החשק המורגש והמושכל וגבותם מלאות עינים סביב. ותחלת מה שראוי לנו למסור לך כי התנועות הן כדמיון הצורה והאותיות כדמיון החומר. והנה הצורה מניעה את החומר. ובעוד שלא הושם לתיבה ניקוד הוא כדמיון החומר שלא הגיעה לו צורה. והנה תכתוב אדם וכולם אמר חמר כשלא הושם להם ניקוד. והנה הניקוד יניעם אל הצד שהוא רוצה, פעם יעשה מהם צבעון ופעם יעשה צורת צפעון. והכל בצורת הניקוד לא בצורת האותיות. והנה סוד אותיותיו של שם הם סוד הניקוד על דרך האמת אצל בעלי הקבלה. והם נשמה לניקוד, ולפי' נקרא ית' חי העולמים, ואומר וישבע בתי העולם, כל' בתי העולם. וכן הוא אומר ואתה מחיה את כולם. והידוע הסוד הזה הנמרץ והעצום ידע סוד ג' ספרים הנפתחים בראש השנה, כי חלילה חלילה להיות לפנים ספרים מורגשים, אך הספרים אשר לו הם הספרים אשר הם כוללים כל הנמצאים בשלש מחלקות, איש כפי מעלתו צדיקים ורשעים ובינונים, ודברים אלו הם כבשוננו של עולם. וידוע כי בראש השנה ממש נפתחים הספרים, ויש בהם ספר חיים וספר מתים והכל בכח שמו ית' אשר הוא ספר החיים ממש לדבקים. ועל זה נאמר למשה מי אשר חטא לי אמחנו ב'ספרי. והבן זה מאד אם קבלת. ואם לא קבלת הוי דואג על מיעוט השגתך. ובחזור למה שאנו בו ונאמר דע כי מפני שהניקוד הוא צורה ונשמה לאותיות לפי' לא נעשה ספר תורה נקוד לפי שהוא כולל כל הפנים וכל הדרכים העמוקים והחיצוניים, וכולם נדרשים בכל אות ואות פנים לפנים מפנים, ותעלומות לפנים מתעלומות, ואין לה גבול ידוע אצלנו, כאומרו תהום תהום אמר לא בי הוא וכו', ואם נוקד ספר תורה היה לו גבול ושיעור כדמיון החומר שהגיע לו צורה ידועה, ולא היה איפשר לו להיותו נדרש כי אם לפי הניקוד המסויים באותה תיבה, אבל מפני שספר תורה כלול ומושכל בכל מיני שלימות ובכל מלה ומלה כמה חלי תלים לא נעשה מנוקד כדי שיהיה נדרש בכל מיני שלימות, ולפי' אל תקרי כך אלא כך. ואילו היה מסויים בניקוד לא נוכל לומר כך. והנה רבותינו נתעוררו בכמה מקומות לזה כאמרו ויתד תהיה לך על אונך אל תקרי אונך אל אונך מלמד שכשישמע אדם דבר מגונה יתן אצבע בתוך אזנו. והנה רז"ל במקום הזה העירו אותנו על סוד טעם היות ספר תורה בלתי ניקוד ונתנו לפתיים במדרש פסוק זה לחם טובין, ולחכמים נתנו בזה המדרש ממש לחם אבירים, והכל מתוך פשטי המקרא. וכל התורה נוחגת על פשט זה. ולפי' אזיל ע' פנים לתורה, והבן. ואחר שצוררנוך על דרך זה הכנס ידידי והשתעשע בהקדמה זו תמיד כי ממנה תוצאות חיים.

**Appendix 2**

**Introduction by Charles Chavel to**

***Ma'amar 'al Pnimit HaTorah***



## מאמר על פנימיות התורה

מ ו ב א

מאמר זה פורסם ע"י ר"מ טולידאנו בחוברת "הרמב"ן וירושלים", שהוציא ר"פ גראייבסקי, מתוך כת"י "פירוש פסוק אל יתחלל וגו' לחד מן קמייא" שנמצא אצלו בהעתקת ר' שמואל הלוי בן יולי בעיר מכנאס (Meknes) במארוקו. גם פרופ. ג. שלום פרסמו ב"קרית ספר" (שנה ששית, תשרי תר"ץ, ירושלים, עמ' תי—תיד).

דעת החכם שלום: "מצד תוכן האגרת עצמה יתכן שבאמת יצאה מתחת ידי הרמב"ן: הרי אינה אלא פאראפראזה ארוכה ומדויקת של הרעיון על פנימיות התורה אשר הביע אותו בהקדמת פירושו הגדול. כל מה שנמצא באגרת, מראה קירבה ידועה גם להקדמה זו... לא נראה כל טעם מיוחד לזייף דברים שאין בהם חדוש נוסף על דברי הרמב"ן עצמו. הרי מוזיף היה מוסיף על דעת הרמב"ן עוד דעות הרחוקות ממנו כדי להתלות בשמו המפורסם ולהסתייע בו. ואמנם גם לשון האגרת הזאת סתומה היא למדי... אבל לא אוכל למצוא בה דבר שלא יתכן להתאמר או להכתב בימי הרמב"ן. רעיון "נשמת התורה" כבר הובע בבירור בפירוש האגדות לר' עזרא במסכת תענית... ומכיון שהרמב"ן חבר את פירושו רק בסוף ימיו, אינו מן הנמנע כלל שכבר נשאל קודם לכן והביע בכתב את דעותיו העיקריות על מהות התורה" (שם עמ' שצז).

לדעתי, הקורא באגרת בעיון יגיע למסקנה שהיא טבועה בחותם הזיוף, ושאי אפשר בשום אופן שבצל הרמב"ן ז"ל תחסינה דעות זרות כגון אלה.

כלל גדול אמרו: "כל דבר שקר שאין אומרים בו קצת אמת בתחלתו אין מתקיים בסופו". וכלל זה היה ידוע יפה למוציאים. לפיכך אין לנו להסיק מסקנות מתוך איזה מאמרים בודדים או רעיונות כוללים שניתן באמת לייחסם להרמב"ן, שכן השאלה היא לפי כיוונו הכללי של המאמר אם מקולמוסו של הרמב"ן יצא. לדעתי מעורערת היא ההנחה הזאת מיסודה, מן הטעמים דלהלן:

א. אמנם יסודה של האגרת היא בכך שיש להאמין "שהתורה אינה כפשטה לבד אבל יש לה מלבד הפשטים דרכים נוראים ומעלות נפלאות". בודאי שגם הרמב"ן יודה לזה — ומי יחלוק? ברם כתוב שם:

"וכן אמר ית' כי לא דבר רק הוא מכם, כלומר אין תורת ריקנית כפשטה לבד אבל יש לה נשמה...". מי שמכיר ברוחו של הרמב"ן משאר חיבוריו ירגיש מיד שדברים כאלה — שיש בהם משום ביזוי כלפי פשטות התורה — דיים כבר להוכיח שאיזה זיפן חלה עצמו באילן גדול. הרמב"ן, מחברו של "פירוש על התורה", החותר בכל פסוק ופסוק כדי לבאר ב"דרך הפשט", כלום יעלה על הדעת לייחס לו רעיון שעצם פשטות של התורה היא "תורת ריקנית". דבר זה מופרך הוא מעיקרו, ומשגה חמור הוא לייחסו להרמב"ן.

ב. שוב כתוב באגרת זו: "והנה רבותינו נתעוררו בכמה מקומות לזה (שלפיכך לא נעשה ספר תורה נקוד לפי שהוא כולל כל הפנים וכל הדרכים העמוקים) כאמרם על צד

חדרש ויתד תהיה לך על אונך, אל תקרי אונך אלא אונך, מלמד שכשישמע אדם דבר מגונה יתן אצבע בתוך אונו. והנה רז"ל במקום הזה העירו אותנו על סוד טעם היות ספר תורה בלתי ניקד ונתנו לפתיים במדרש פסוק זה לחם טובין ולחכמים נתנו בזה המדרש ממש לחם אכירים...".

בגדר הנמנע הוא שפי קדשו של הרמב"ן תביע בזלזול קלוקל כל כך ביטול פשטותם של דברי חז"ל בענין מוסרי חשוב. ברור שהרמב"ן היה מנדה מי שהיה משמיע כן.

ג. אף עצם הגדרת הנושא — „פנימיות התורה” — אני מסופק בה אם אפשר לייחסה להרמב"ן. בכל המקומות שהרמב"ן כותב בסתרי התורה, לא רק בפירושו על התורה כי גם בכל שאר כתביו, לא מצאנו שישתמש בצירוף מילולי זה. סתרי התורה היו לו ל„דרך האמת” שאי אפשר לדעתה אלא בקבלה, אבל שתהא היא נחשבת לפנימיות התורה — זאת לא מצאנו. כי גם הפשט וההלכה היה בעיניו כדביר הקדש פנימה.

ד. החכם שלום כותב: „כל מה שנמצא באגרת, מראה קירבה ידועה גם להקדמה זר” (לפירושו על התורה). ואני לא כן מצאתי. באגרת זו מיסד הכותב (מי שהוא) את ההלכה שספר תורה שחסר בו אפילו אות אחת פסול, יצן שבכל אות ואות שבתורה כמה תלי תלים של סתריה הנעלמים תלויים מקוצותיה. ובהקדמתו לתורה תלה הרמב"ן את טעם ההלכה חזאת מפני שכל התורה כולה שמותיו של הקב"ה, ומפני זה ספר תורה שטעה בו באות אחת במלא או בחסר פסול יצן שיש קלוקל בשם ה'. והנה נדמה לנו שהטעם הזה הוא חזק יותר, ומדוע לא הזכירו במאמר.

סוף דבר, לפי כל הסימנים שמנינו נראה שלא מן הרמב"ן המאמר, ולא צירפתיו לכרך זה, אלא כדי שישמש לנו הוכחה מעין אבן בוחן להכרת יצירות האמת של רבינו.

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