

אֱלֹהִים אֵלֶּיךָ

אֵלֶּיךָ

---

אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ  
אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ

Speaking the Unspeakable:  
The Maimonidean Conception of God

presented by  
Jeff Katz

absolutely not by virtue of a superadded notion. It makes no difference whether these diverse attributes correspond to His actions or to diverse relations between Him and the things produced by the actions, in conformity with what we have likewise explained<sup>8</sup> regarding the truth of relation and its being merely something that is in thought.<sup>9</sup> This is what ought | to be believed with regard to the attributes mentioned in the books of the prophets; or, as we shall make clear,<sup>10</sup> it may be believed with regard to some of them that they are attributes indicative of a perfection likened to our perfections, which are understood by us.

## CHAPTER 54

**K**now that the master of those who know, *Moses our Master*, peace be on him, made two requests and received an answer to both of them. One request consisted in his asking Him, may He be exalted, to let him know His essence and true reality. The second request, which he put first, was that He should let him know His attributes. The answer to the two requests that He, may He be exalted, gave him consisted in His promising him to let him know all His attributes, making it known to him that they are His actions, and teaching him that His essence cannot be grasped as it really is. Yet He drew his attention to a subject of speculation through which he can apprehend to the furthest extent that is possible for man. For what has been apprehended by [Moses], peace be on him, has not been apprehended by anyone before him nor will it be apprehended by anyone after him.

His request regarding the knowledge of [God's] attributes is conveyed in his saying: *Show me now Thy ways, that I may know Thee, and so on.*<sup>1</sup> Consider the wondrous notions contained in this dictum. For his saying, *Show me now Thy ways, that I may know Thee*, indicates that God, may He be exalted, is known through His attributive qualifications; for when he would know the *ways*, he would know Him. Furthermore his saying, *That I may find grace in Thy sight*,<sup>2</sup> indicates that he who knows God finds grace in His sight and not he who merely fasts and prays, but everyone who has knowledge of Him. Accordingly those who know Him are those who are favored by Him and permitted to come near Him, whereas those who do not know Him are objects of His wrath and are kept far away from Him. For His favor and wrath, His nearness and remoteness, correspond to | the extent of a man's knowledge or ignorance. However, we have gone beyond the limits of the subject of this chapter. I shall accordingly return to the subject.

When [Moses] asked for knowledge of the attributes and asked for forgiveness for the nation, he was given a [favorable] answer with regard to their being forgiven. Then he asked for the apprehension of His essence, may He be exalted. This is what he means when he says, *Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory*;<sup>3</sup> whereupon he received a [favorable] answer with regard to what he had asked for at first — namely, *Show me Thy ways*. For he was told: *I will make all My goodness pass before thee.*<sup>4</sup> In answer to his second demand, he was told: *Thou canst not see My face, and so on.*<sup>5</sup> This dictum —

והיה כד' מבקש יהוה יצא אל-אהל  
 מועד אשר מחוץ למחנה: " והיה  
 בצאת משה אל-האהל יקומו כל-העם  
 ונצבו איש פתח אהלו והביטו אחרי  
 משה עד-באו האהלה: " והיה כבא  
 משה האהלה ירד עמוד הענן ועמד  
 פתח האהל ודבר עם-משה: " וראה  
 כל-העם את-עמוד הענן עמד פתח  
 האהל וקם כל-העם והשתחוו איש  
 פתח אהלו: " ודבר יהוה אל-משה  
 פנים אל-פנים כאשר ידבר איש אל-  
 רעהו ושב אל-המחנה ומשרתו  
 ודיושע בן-נון נער לא ימיש מתוך  
 האהל: פ

י ויאמר משה אל-יהוה ראה אתה  
 אמר אלי העל את-העם הזה ואתה  
 לא הודעתני את אשר-תשלח עמי  
 ואתה אמרת ידעתך בשם וגם-מצאת  
 בעיניך הודעני נא את-דרךך ואדעך

ויהי כל דחבק אולסן מן קדם יי נסק למשבן בית אולסנא  
 דמבדא למשריתא: ח ויהוה בד נסק משה למשבנא קמיין  
 כל עמא ומתעהדין גבר בתרע מ'שבנא ומסתכלין אחורי  
 משה עד דעלל למשבנא: ט והוה בד עלל משה למשבנא  
 נחית עבודא דעננא וקאם בתרע מ'שבנא ומסתלל עם  
 משה: י וחון כל עמא ית עמודא דעננא קאם בתרע  
 מ'שבנא וקמיין כל עמא וסגדין גבר בתרע מ'שבנא:  
 יא ומסתלל יי עם משה מסלל עם מסלל כמא דמסתלל  
 גבר עם חברה וחאב למשריתא ומשומשונה דיושע בר  
 נון עילימא לא עדי טנו מ'שבנא: יב ואמר משה קדם יי  
 חיי דאת אמר לי אסיק ית-עמא דדין ואת לא הודעתני  
 ית די תשלח עמי ואת אמרת רביתך בשום ואף אשבהתא  
 רהטין קדטי: יג ודען אם כען אשבהת רהטין קדטיך  
 הודעני כען ית אורח מוכך ואדע רחמך בדיל דאשבח  
 רהטין.

מסורה ה נלחת ג' יקחון ג' מלא נחובה והניסון ג' לח אשר דקר  
 (זכריה י"ג י') האהלה ח' ט כנח ו' חסר גלישנא [כנח וכנח]  
 [ל' ז' ס' מנוחה שלמה נסס ח'ס'] י עמד פתח [כולהון חסר נח'ח  
 (שמות ג' ה')] ויהשתחוו ז' יא ודבר ה' ל' פנים אל פנים ה' ימיש ז'  
 יב ויאמר משה חל'ה' ה' העל כולם מלעיל ג'ח ג' נסקה (מלכים ג' י"ח כ"ז)  
 כנגלע (נחמיה ג' י"ט) מסס ה"ח שמוט למלח על] הודעתני ג' די בשנא  
 (דניאל ג' כ"ג) ידעתך ל' נשס [הנ"ח רשי שלא כדין חמי מרחוק וכן  
 וקראתי נסס] יג הודעני ח"י ותיין דכך ג' חסר [גלישנא] חל'ך  
 וחלטי ל'

ת"א והביטו אחרי קומין לו ודבר ה' אל נכוח פג פקרי' מן פיה ס' הוצר  
 ס' וחחוקן ושב אל נכוח סס' ושרתו נכוח סס' פהמיס קיס סנמוח לע  
 חתיבה י' הודעני נא נכוח ז' עקיד' סזר ס עקריס מן סכנ'

חן בעיני: י ועתה אבינא מצאתי חן  
 למען אמצא-חן בעיניך וראה כי עמך

רשיי  
 כל מבקש ה'. תכלן למבקש פני זקן כחקבל פני שכניה: יצא אל אהל  
 סוער. כמו יולא ד"ח וכו' כל מבקש ה' אפילו תלמידי ספרה כשהיו שואלים  
 מקום שכניה סניריים אומרים להם ארי הוא נחליו של נקס: (ח) והיה  
 לשון הווי: כצאת משה סן השתנה. ללכת אל האהל: יקישו כל  
 העם. עומדים מפניו ואין יושבין עד כחכסכה מהם: והביטו אחרי משה  
 לשנח אחרי ילוד אשה סך מונטס שהשכינה חננס אחרי לשח חלבו:  
 (ט) ודבר עם משה. כמו ומדבר עם משה. חרוננו ונחמלל עם משה  
 שהוא כבוד שכניה כמו: (במדבר ז) וישמע חח בקול פניו חליו וחינו קורח  
 פניו חליו כשהוא קורח פניו פחרונו בקול מדבר צינו לצין עלמו וסכדיוט  
 שומע חליו וכשהוא קורח פניו ישנוע שחולך ונדבר עם הכדיוט:  
 (י) והשתחוו לשכניה: (יא) ודבר ה' אל משה פנים אל פנים. ונחמלל  
 עם משה: ושב אל השתנה. לאחר שנדבר עמו היה שנ ושה חל  
 המחנה ונלמד לוקמים מה שלמד ודבר כזה כגו ושה מיום הכשורים  
 עד שחוקס כושכן ולא יומר סכרי כשעפה עשר נחוויו נשחנרו כלוחח  
 (חעניח כח) וני"ח סרף חח בענל ודן חח כחויאס וני"ט עלה שנחמר  
 (שמיח לג) ויכי מתחרח ויאמר משה אל הצט וני' עשה סס חרנעיס יוס  
 ונקס כחויס שנחמר (דברים ט) וחחנפל לפני ה' וני' ונכחש סדס חליל  
 נחונר לו ועליח כנקר חל כר סיני לקבל לוחח בחחרונח ועשה סס מ'  
 יוס שנא' כסס (י) חלכני עמדתי ככר כיויס כרשחויס וני' מה

הראשונים נכלון חף החכונים נכלון חמור ונחה חילוציים היו כנעס.  
 ג' נחשני נחלס הקנ"ה לישראל נשוחה ונלג שלס וחמר לו למשה סלחתי  
 ונכר לו לוחח חחרונח ויכר ונחחיל לניומו על מלכח חמשכן ועשאוהו  
 עד חמר נניסן ומשהוקס לא נדבר עמו עוד חלח מחכל מועד: וישב  
 אל השחנה. חרונמו וחחיג לנשריתח לפי שהוא לשון הווי וכן כל בענין  
 ורחה כל בעס וחון. ונלנו וקיימין. והנישו ונסחכלין. והשחחו וסגדין.  
 ונדרשו דבר ה' חל ושה שיסוי חל כונחה חמר לו חני כנעס וחחה  
 כנעס ח"כ מי יקרינב: (יג) ראה אתה אשר אלי. רחה חן עיניך  
 וליך על דנרך חחה חומר חלי ונו' וחחה לא הודעתי ונו' וחחר חמחה  
 לי (שמות כג) ככה חלכני שולח מללך חין זו הודעה שחין חני סחץ כב:  
 ואתה אשרת ידעתך בשס. ככחך משהר בני חדס נשס חשינח  
 סכרי חמחה לי (שמות יט) ככה חלכני נח חליך כענ כען ונו' ונס כן  
 יחוינו לעולס: (יג) ויהה. חס חוח שמלחתי חן כעניך הודיעני נח  
 חח דרכך ויה סכר חחה נוחן למולחי חן כעניך: ואדעך לכען אשצא  
 חן כעניך. וחדע כוו נדח חחמולך ויה חיה חליח חן שמלחתי כעניך  
 ופחרין למען חחלח חן למען חכיר כונה סכר חליח חן: וראה כי עמך  
 רחיי הוה. שלא חחונר וחעשה חוחך לניו גדול וחח חלה חעונו דחה  
 כי עונך כס ווקדס וחס ככס חחחק חני סוונך על כיולחיס וחללי  
 שחיקיימו וחח חחלום חסכר שלי כעס כוה חידיעני ורנחוינו דרכוהו  
 נחקכח

רמבין  
 שיכיו חוקעין נשופר כרחש חדש חלול ככל סנה ושנה ע"כ דברי חנדה זו  
 וחחר כן יי"ס ונשה יקח חח כחכל וכל כפרשה וי"ח נחוויו עד סוף  
 חרנעיס. וניוס ככפוריס עד חחר כניסן. חלל לא יחז זכ ככנין ונחה  
 שחמר ככחונ וחחנפל לפני יי ככרשוכה חרנעיס יוס וחרנעיס חליה  
 להם לא חלחתי ונו' וכחינ וחחנפל לפני יי חח חרנעיס חיוס וחח

"Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in."—(Isa. xxvi. 2.)

## CHAPTER I

SOME have been of opinion that by the Hebrew *zelem*, the shape and figure of a thing is to be understood, and this explanation led men to believe in the corporeality [of the Divine Being]: for they thought that the words "Let us make man in our *zelem*" (Gen. i. 26), implied that God had the form of a human being, i. e., that He had figure and shape, and that, consequently, He was corporeal. They adhered faithfully to this view, and thought that if they were to relinquish it they would *eo ipso* reject the truth of the Bible: and further, if they did not conceive God as having a body possessed of face and limbs, similar to their own in appearance, they would have to deny even the existence of God. The sole difference which they admitted, was that He excelled in greatness and splendour, and that His substance was not flesh and blood. Thus far went their conception of the greatness and glory of God. The incorporeality of the Divine Being, and His unity, in the true sense of the word—for there is no real unity without incorporeality—will be fully proved in the course of the present treatise. (Part II., ch. i.) In this chapter it is our sole intention to explain the meaning of the words *zelem* and *demut*. I hold that the Hebrew equivalent of "form" in the ordinary acceptation of the word, viz., the figure and shape of a thing, is *toär*. Thus we find " [And Joseph was] beautiful in *toär* ('form'), and beautiful in appearance" (Gen. xxxix. 6): "What form (*toär*) is he of?" (1 Sam. xxviii. 14): "As the form (*toär*) of the children of a king" (Judges viii. 18). It is also applied to form produced by human labour, as "He marketh its form (*toär*) with a line," "and he marketh its form (*toär*) with the compass" (Isa. xlv. 13). This term is not at all applicable to God. The term *zelem*, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, viz., that which constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is; the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being. In man the "form" is that constituent which gives him human perception: and on account of this intellectual perception the term *zelem* is employed in the sentences "In the *zelem* of God he created him" (Gen. i. 27). It is therefore rightly said, "Thou despisest their *zelem*" (Ps. lxxiii. 20); the "contempt" can only concern the soul—the specific form of man, not the properties and shape of his body. I am also of opinion that the reason why this term is used for "idols" may be found in the circumstance that they are worshipped on account of some idea represented by them, not on account of their figure and shape. For the same reason the term is used in the expression, "the forms (*zalme*) of your

The verb, when employed of God, is frequently complemented by "the Heavens," inasmuch as the heavens are without change or mutation, that is to say, they do not individually change, as the individual beings on earth, by transition from existence into non-existence.

The verb is also employed in descriptions of God's relation (the term "relation" is here used as a homonym) to existing *species* of evanescent things; for those species are as constant, well organized, and unvarying as the individuals of the heavenly hosts. Thus we find, "Who sitteth over the circle of the earth" (Isa. xl. 22), Who remains constantly and unremittingly over the sphere of the earth; that is to say, over the things that come into existence within that sphere.

Again, "The Lord sitteth upon the flood" (Ps. xxix. 10), i.e., despite the change and variation of earthly objects, no change takes place with respect to God's relation (to the earth): His relation to each of the things which come into existence and perish again is stable and constant, for it concerns only the existing species and not the individuals. It should therefore be borne in mind, that whenever the term "sitting" is applied to God, it is used in this sense.

## CHAPTER XII

THE term *kam* (he rose) is a homonym. In one of its significations it is the opposite of "to sit," as "He did not rise (*kam*) nor move for him" (Esth. v. 9). It further denotes the confirmation and verification of a thing, e.g.: "The Lord will verify (*yakem*) His promise" (1 Sam. i. 23); "The field of Ephron was made sure (*va-yakom*) as the property of Abraham" (Gen. xxiii. 17). "The house that is in the walled city shall be established (*ve-kam*)" (Lev. xxv. 30); "And the kingdom of Israel shall be firmly established (*ve-kamah*) in thy hand" (1 Sam. xxiv. 20). It is always in this sense that the verb is employed with reference to the Almighty; as "Now shall I rise (*akum*), saith the Lord" (Ps. xii. 7), which is the same as saying, "Now shall I verify my word and my dispensation for good or evil." "Thou shalt arise (*takum*) and have mercy upon Zion" (Ps. cii. 13), which means: Thou wilt establish what thou hast promised, viz., that thou wouldst pity Zion.

Generally a person who resolves to set about a matter, accompanies his resolve by rising, hence the verb is employed to express "to resolve" to do a certain thing; as, "That my son hath stirred up my servant against me" (1 Sam. xxii. 8). The word is figuratively used to signify the execution of a divine decree against a people sentenced to extermination, as "And I will rise against the house of Jeroboam" (Amos vii. 9); "but he will arise against the house of the evildoers" (Isa. xxxi. 2). Possibly in Psalm xii. 7 the verb has this latter sense, as also in Psalm cii. 13, namely: Thou wilt rise up against her enemies.

There are many passages to be interpreted in this manner, but in no way should it be understood that He rises or sits—far be such a notion! Our Sages expressed this idea in the formula, "In the world above there is neither sitting nor standing (*amidah*)"; for the two verbs *amad* and *kam* are synonyms [and what is said about the former is also applicable to the latter].

## CHAPTER XIII

THE term *amad* (he stood) is a homonym signifying in the first instance "to stand upright," as "When he stood (*be-omdo*) before Pharaoh" (Gen. xli. 46); "Though Moses and Samuel stood (*ya'amod*)" (Jer. xv. 1); "He stood by them" (Gen. xviii. 8). It further denotes "cessation and interruption," as "but they stood still (*'amedu*) and answered no more" (Job xxxii. 16); "and she ceased (*va-ta'amod*) to bear" (Gen. xxix. 35). Next it signifies "to be enduring and lasting," as, "that they may continue (*yo-'amedu*) many days" (Jer. xxxii. 14); "Then shalt thou be able to endure (*'amad*)" (Exod. xviii. 23); "His taste remained (*'amad*) in him" (Jer. xlvi. 11), i.e., it has continued and remained in existence without any change; "His righteousness standeth for ever" (Ps. cxi. 3), i.e., it is permanent and everlasting. The verb applied to God must be understood in this latter sense, as in Zechariah xiv. 4, "And his feet shall stand (*ve-'amedu*) in that day upon the Mount of Olives" (Zech. xiv. 4), "His causes, i.e., the events of which He is the cause, will remain efficient," etc. This will be further elucidated when we speak of the meaning of *regel* (foot). (Vide *infra*, chap. xxviii.) In the same sense is this verb employed in Deuteronomy v. 28, "But as for thee, stand thou here by me," and Deuteronomy v. 5, "I stood between the Lord and you."

## CHAPTER XIV

THE homonymous term *adam* is in the first place the name of the first man, being, as Scripture indicates, derived from *adamah*, "earth." Next, it means "mankind," as "My spirit shall not strive with man (*adam*)" (Gen. vi. 3). Again "Who knoweth the spirit of the children of man (*adam*)" (Eccles. iii. 21); "so that a man (*adam*) has no pre-eminence above a beast" (Eccles. iii. 19). *Adam* signifies also "the multitude," "the lower classes" as opposed to those distinguished from the rest, as "Both low (*bene adam*) and high (*bene ish*)" (Ps. xlix. 3).

It is in this third signification that it occurs in the verses, "The sons of the higher order (*Elohim*) saw the daughters of the lower order (*adam*)" (Gen. vi. 2); and "Forsooth! as the humble man (*adam*) you shall die" (Ps. lxxxii. 7).

## CHAPTER XV

ALTHOUGH the two roots *nazab* and *yazab* are distinct, yet their meaning is, as you know, identical in all their various forms.

The verb has several meanings: in some instances it signifies "to stand" or "to place oneself," as "And his sister stood (*va-tetzab*) afar off" (Exod. ii. 4); "The kings of the earth set themselves" (*yityazzebu*) (Ps. ii. 2); "They came out and stood" (*nizzabim*) (Num. xvi. 27). In other instances it denotes continuance and permanence, as, "Thy word is established (*nizzab*) in Heaven" (Ps. cxix. 89), i.e., it remains for ever.

Whenever this term is applied to God it must be understood in the latter sense, as, "And, behold, the Lord stood (*nizzab*) upon it" (Gen. xxviii. 13), i.e., appeared as eternal and everlasting "upon it," namely, upon the ladder,

מאבריהם אשר אני עשה: י ואבריהם  
היו יהיה לגוי גדול ועצום ולגברתיבו  
כל גויי הארץ: י כי ידעתיו למען  
אשר יצוה את בגיו ואת ביתו אחריו  
ושמרו דרך יהודה לעשות צדקה  
ומשפט למען הביא יהוה עליהם  
את אשר דבר עליו: י ואמר יהוה  
ועקת קולם ועמיה בירבה ותשאתם  
כי קברה במד: יא ארדה נא ואראה  
הקצקתה הבאה אלי עשו וכלה ואם  
לא ארעה: יב ויפנו משם האנשים

עבר: י ואבריהם סגוה יהו לעם סני ותקוף ויתברכו  
בדילה כל עממי ארעא: יס ארי גליהקטי (גי ימיו ידעתנה)  
בריל די יסקד ותבנוהו ויתאנש ביתה בתרוהו ויטרון  
ארחה דתקנהקדם: יל לסעפד צדקתא ודינא בריל איתו  
י עליאברהם ית דטלל עלוהו: יכ ואמר י קבלת דסדום  
ועמורה ארי סניאת וחוקתרון ארי תקיפת לחרא: יכא אתגלי  
קען וארון רבי קבלתרון דעלת לקדטי עברו אעבר עמרון  
גמירא (אסלא תיבין) ואסתיבין לא אתפרע: יכב ואתפניאו

ססרה יח ואברהם ה' ר'ס. היו בדנא חף שלין גייהס ג' חסווס ג' כמרה  
ס'י ל'יס. ג'נול, ע'ס המסורה מ'ל. י'ס למסן, ו' פסוק למסן למסן. ג'יחו, ו'  
לעסוס, מ'ל. לוקה, ג' דס'. הניס, מ' כ זפקה, ג' רנה, ל' מלשיל. כא חנה,  
הניס נח'ס. ולחלה, ה'. הכלעקה, ל'. הנלה, ג' נטסס מלשיל. עשו, פסק.  
לחנה, ומד חודיעני ולחנה. כב סרמה, ג'. ולחנה, מ' פן י'ח עלין מ'ס.

ת'א ואברהם היו יומא סס. כי ידעתיו יומא סס יבחווס פס כחונס ס סנהרין  
יו וזו מחוס כר עקידה שער יו. ויאמר ה' יומא סס סנהרין קט.

ויקבו סדמרה ואבריהם עורנו עמר לפני

נדולה או גדלה והולכת חלל זה טעמו לנעלה כריש לפי שמתורגם גדלה  
כבר כמו שקיטשי ויכי השמש זאה הכה שנה ימחק: (כח) ארדה נא.  
למד לריינים שלא יסקרו דיני נפשות חלל זכאים הכל כמו שפירשתי  
נפרשת הפלגה. דבר אחר חרדה נא לסקוף מעשיהם: הרבצקתה. של  
חדיכה: הבאה אלי עשו. וכן עומדים נמרס כלס חני עשה נסס.  
וחס לא יעמדו נמרדן חרעה מה אעשה להפרע מתן ניסורין ולא חללה  
חוחן. וכילולו צו חלינו נמקוס חסר (שמות לב) ועשה חורד ערך מעלך  
ולחעה מה אעשה לך. ולסיך יש הפסק נקודות סקין צין עשו לכלה כדי  
להפריד חינה ממנחה ורנחיוני דרשו הכלעקה לעקח רינה חסס שהכנו  
מיחה חשונה על שחנה וחון לפני כמפורס בחלק: (כג) ויפנו משם.

מקרים שאברהם ליווס סס: ואברהם עורנו עומר לפני ה'. והלא לא הלך  
לעמוד לפניו חלל הקנ"ה נא חללו וחמר לו זקקת סדום ועמרה כי רנה  
ויהי לו לנחונ וי' עורנו עומר לפני אברהם חלל חיקון סוסריס הוא זה

ועמורה וכו'. קרלחי אחוה אברהם אז המון גוים ואשמיד חס כניס וכל  
חדיס לזכ סהוס חוכני: (יח) ואברהם היו יהוה. מ'ל זכר לדיק לנכרה חוהיל  
והזכירו נכרו. ופשוטו וכי ממנו חני מעלי' וכרי הוא סניב לפני להיות  
לגוי גדול ולהסנכר בו כל גויי הארץ: (יט) כי ידעתיו. לשון חנה כמו  
(רוח ג') מודע לאישה הלא נועז מודעתו (שונוה לג) וחדעך נסס וחמס  
פיקר לשון כלס חינו חלל לשון ידיעה שהמנכנ חס האדם ומקרנו חללו  
ודדשו ומכירו ולחסי ידעתיו למען אשר ילוה לפי שהוא מליח חס נכרו עלי  
לשמור דרכי וחס חפרטהו כחננומו יודע חני בו שילוח חס נכרו וכו' חין  
למען נוסל על הלשון: יצוה. ל' בווס כמו (חיונה) ככה יעשה חיוב (ע"פ ה'  
יחנ): לסען הביא. כך הוא מליח לנכרו שמרו דרך ה' כדי שיהי ה' על אברהם  
ונו' על בית אברהם לא נחמר חלל על אברהם למדנו כל המעמיד צן לדיק חלילו  
חיו עח: (כ) ויאמר ה'. חל אברהם. שעשה כאשר חמר שלא יכסה  
ממנו: בי רבה. כל רנה שמוקרה סססס למטה נני"ח לפי שהן מתורגמין

דוד וכן כל חוירה עם כלב מחשבה: (יח) ואברהם היו יהוה. מדרש אנד

זכר לדיק לנכרה חוהיל והזכירו נכרו ופשוטו של מקרה וכי ממנו חני  
מעליס והלא חניב לפני להיות לגוי עוים לשון רש"י והכנכן כי השס יחנכר  
דבר נכבוד אברהם חוור הכה הוא עמיד להיות לגוי גדול ועלום ויהיה זכרו  
צוכמו ובכל גויי הארץ לנכרה לכן לא חכסה מוננו כי יאמרו הדורות הנאים  
חין כסה מוננו או חין נחאכור הלדיק על שכיניו החוים עליו ולא רחם  
ולא חספלו עליהם כלל והגלוי חליו סוז וישה כי ידעתיו צו שהוא חוכר  
ויודע שחני י"י חוכב לדיקה ומשפט כלומר שחני עושה ומשפט דק נלדיקה  
ולכך ילוה חס נכרו וניחו אחריו לחסוד דרכי והנה חס נדך לדיקה ומשפט  
יעטרו יחפלו לפני להניחם וסוד הדבר וחס חיינין סס לנמרי נסס הוא יחפן  
צונתמסס ולכן רחוי סינול כסוד י"י: (יט) כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה.  
לשון רש"י חרי ידעתייהם כחננוס לשון סנה מודע לאישה חלדעך חונס  
פיקר כלס לשון ידיעה שהמנכנ חס האדם ומקרנו חללו יודע ומכירו וחס  
חפרטהו יודע חני צו שילוח חס נכרו חין למען טפל על הלשון ויחן שיהיה  
ידעתיו גדלתו ורוממותו צעבור אשר ילוה חס נכרו חמרו לעשות חס הישר  
לגיו ולכך חסימו לגוי גדול ועלום שיענדוני וכמוה ידעתיו צסס מה חס  
וחדעהו או יחמר ידעתיו שילוח וכן למען ינוס סורך וחמוך סינוס והכנכן  
צעיני כי היא ידיעה צו מעס ירמוז כי ידיעה ססס שיהי הסנחמו צעולס  
הספל היא לשמור הכללים ונס נמי האדם חונחיס צו למקרים עד נא עח  
סקודחס חלל נחסידיו ישים חליו לנו לדעה אחוה נפרס להיות שמיחהו  
דצקה צו חמיר לא חפרד חדיעה והזכירה חוננו כלל כעסס לא ינרע חלדיק  
עינו ונחו חזס חקוקיס רניס כדכתיב הכה עין י"י חל ירחיו חולת זה:  
(כ) ויאמר י"י ועקת סדום ועמורה. לשון רש"י ויאמר י"י חל אברהם  
שעשה כאשר חמר שלא יכסה מוננו וחמר ר"ל כי ככס סקוק ויפט מנוס

do not convey a true idea of the being to which they refer, all people, both of past and present generations, declared that God cannot be the object of human comprehension, that none but Himself comprehends what He is, and that our knowledge consists in knowing that we are unable truly to comprehend Him. All philosophers say, "He has overpowered us by His grace, and is invisible to us through the intensity of His light," like the sun which cannot be perceived by eyes which are too weak to bear its rays. Much more has been said on this topic, but it is useless to repeat it here. [The idea is best expressed in the book of Psalms, "Silence is praise to Thee" (lxv. 2). It is a very expressive remark on this subject; for whatever we utter with the intention of extolling and of praising Him, contains something that cannot be applied to God, and includes derogatory expressions; it is therefore more becoming to be silent, and to be content with intellectual reflection, as has been recommended by men of the highest culture, in the words "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still" (Ps. iv. 4). You must surely know the following celebrated passage in the Talmud—would that all passages in the Talmud were like that!—although it is known to you, I quote it literally, as I wish to point out to you the ideas contained in it: "A certain person, reading prayers in the presence of Rabbi Haninah, said, 'God, the great, the valiant and the tremendous, the powerful, the strong, and the mighty.'—The rabbi said to him, Have you finished all the praises of your Master? The three epithets, 'God, the great, the valiant and the tremendous,' we should not have applied to God, had Moses not mentioned them in the Law, and had not the men of the Great Synagogue come forward subsequently and established their use in the prayer; and you say all this! Let this be illustrated by a parable. There was once an earthly king, possessing millions of gold coin; he was praised for owning millions of silver coin; was this not really dispraise to him?" Thus far the opinion of the pious rabbi. Consider, first, how repulsive and annoying the accumulation of all these positive attributes was to him; next, how he showed that, if we had only to follow our reason, we should never have composed these prayers, and we should not have uttered any of them. It has, however, become necessary to address men in words that should leave some idea in their minds, and, in accordance with the saying of our Sages, "The Torah speaks in the language of men," the Creator has been described to us in terms of our own perfections; but we should not on that account have uttered any other than the three above-mentioned attributes, and we should not have used them as names of God except when meeting with them in reading the Law. Subsequently, the men of the Great Synagogue, who were prophets, introduced these expressions also into the prayer, but we should not on that account use [in our prayers] any other attributes of God. The principal lesson to be derived from this passage is that there are two reasons for our employing those phrases in our prayers: first, they occur in the Pentateuch; secondly, the Prophets introduced them into the prayer. Were it not for the first reason, we should never have uttered them; and were it not for the second reason, we should not have copied them from the Pentateuch to recite them in our prayers; how then could we approve of the use of those numerous attributes! You also learn from this that we ought not to mention and employ in our prayers all the attributes we find applied

Which the transition has been effected. He who knows these things, but without their proofs, does not know the details which logically result from these general propositions ; and therefore he cannot prove that God exists, or that the [four] things mentioned above are inadmissible in reference to God.

Having premised these remarks, I shall explain in the next chapter the error of those who believe that God has essential attributes ; those who have some knowledge of Logic and Natural Science will understand it.

## CHAPTER LVI

SIMILARITY is based on a certain relation between two things ; if between two things no relation can be found, there can be no similarity between them, and there is no relation between two things that have no similarity to each other ; e.g., we do not say this heat is similar to that colour, or this voice is similar to that sweetness. This is self-evident. Since the existence of a relation between God and man, or between Him and other beings has been denied, similarity must likewise be denied. You must know that two things of the same kind—i.e., whose essential properties are the same, and which are distinguished from each other by greatness and smallness, strength and weakness, etc.—are necessarily similar, though different in this one way ; e.g., a grain of mustard and the sphere of the fixed stars are similar as regards the three dimensions, although the one is exceedingly great, the other exceedingly small, the property of having [three] dimensions is the same in both ; or the heat of wax melted by the sun and the heat of the element of fire, are similar as regards heat ; although the heat is exceedingly great in the one case, and exceedingly small in the other, the existence of that quality (heat) is the same in both. Thus those who believe in the presence of essential attributes in God, viz., Existence, Life, Power, Wisdom, and Will, should know that these attributes, when applied to God, have not the same meaning as when applied to us, and that the difference does not only consist in magnitude, or in the degree of perfection, stability, and durability. It cannot be said, as they practically believe, that His existence is only more stable, His life more permanent, His power greater, His wisdom more perfect, and His will more general than ours, and that the same definition applies to both. This is in no way admissible, for the expression “ more than ” is used in comparing two things as regards a certain attribute predicated of both of them in exactly the same sense, and consequently implies similarity [between God and His creatures]. When they ascribe to God essential attributes, these so-called essential attributes should not have any similarity to the attributes of other things, and should according to their own opinion not be included in one of the same definition, just as there is no similarity between the essence of God and that of other beings. They do not follow this principle, for they hold that one definition may include them, and that, nevertheless, there is no similarity between them. Those who are familiar with the meaning of similarity will certainly understand that the term existence, when applied to God and to other beings, is perfectly homonymous. In like manner, the terms Wisdom, Power, Will, and Life are applied to God and to other beings by way of perfect homonymity, admitting

are the great source of error. It would be extremely difficult for us to find, in any language whatsoever, words adequate to this subject, and we can only employ inadequate language. In our endeavour to show that God does not include a plurality, we can only say "He is one," although "one" and "many" are both terms which serve to distinguish quantity. We therefore make the subject clearer, and show to the understanding the way of truth by saying He is one but does not possess the attribute of unity.

The same is the case when we say God is the First (*Kadmon*), to express that He has not been created; the term "First" is decidedly inaccurate, for it can in its true sense only be applied to a being that is subject to the relation of time; the latter, however, is an accident to motion which again is connected with a body. Besides the attribute "first" is a relative term, being in regard to time the same as the terms "long" and "short" are in regard to a line. Both expressions, "first" and "created," are equally inadmissible in reference to any being to which the attribute of time is not applicable, just as we do not say "crooked" or "straight" in reference to taste, "salted" or "insipid" in reference to the voice. These subjects are not unknown to those who have accustomed themselves to seek a true understanding of the things, and to establish their properties in accordance with the abstract notions which the mind has formed of them, and who are not misled by the inaccuracy of the words employed. All attributes, such as "the First," "the Last," occurring in the Scriptures in reference to God, are as metaphorical as the expressions "ear" and "eye." They simply signify that God is not subject to any change or innovation whatever; they do not imply that God can be described by time, or that there is any comparison between Him and any other being as regards time, and that He is called on that account "the first" and "the last." In short, all similar expressions are borrowed from the language commonly used among the people. In the same way we use "One" in reference to God, to express that there is nothing similar to Him, but we do not mean to say that an attribute of unity is added to His essence.

CHAPTER LVIII

This chapter is even more recondite than the preceding. Know that the negative attributes of God are the true attributes: they do not include any incorrect notions or any deficiency whatever in reference to God, while positive attributes imply polytheism, and are inadequate, as we have already shown. It is now necessary to explain how negative expressions can in a certain sense be employed as attributes, and how they are distinguished from positive attributes. Then I shall show that we cannot describe the Creator by any means except by negative attributes. An attribute does not exclusively belong to the one object to which it is related; while qualifying one thing, it can also be employed to qualify other things, and is in that case not peculiar to that one thing. E.g., if you see an object from a distance, and on enquiring what it is, are told that it is a living being, you have certainly learnt an attribute of the object seen, and although that attribute does not exclusively belong to the object perceived, it expresses that the object is not a plant or a mineral. Again, if a man is in a certain house, and

not weak  
not strong  
etc.

you know that something is in the house, but not exactly what, you ask what is in that house, and you are told, not a plant nor a mineral. You have thereby obtained some special knowledge of the thing; you have learnt that it is a living being, although you do not yet know what kind of a living being it is. The negative attributes have this in common with the positive, that they necessarily circumscribe the object to some extent, although such circumscription consists only in the exclusion of what otherwise would not be excluded. In the following point, however, the negative attributes are distinguished from the positive. The positive attributes, although not peculiar to one thing, describe a portion of what we desire to know, either some part of its essence or some of its accidents; the negative attributes, on the other hand, do not, as regards the essence of the thing which we desire to know, in any way tell us what it is, except it be indirectly, as has been shown in the instance given by us.

After this introduction, I would observe that,—as has already been shown—God's existence is absolute, that it includes no composition, as will be proved, and that we comprehend only the fact that He exists, not His essence. Consequently it is a false assumption to hold that He has any positive attribute; for He does not possess existence in addition to His essence; it therefore cannot be said that the one may be described as an attribute [of the other]; much less has He [in addition to His existence] a compound essence, consisting of two constituent elements to which the attribute could refer; still less has He accidents, which could be described by an attribute. Hence it is clear that He has no positive attribute whatever. The negative attributes, however, are those which are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe concerning God; for, on the one hand, they do not imply any plurality, and, on the other, they convey to man the highest possible knowledge of God; e.g., it has been established by proof that some being must exist besides those things which can be perceived by the senses, or apprehended by the mind; when we say of this being, that it exists, we mean that its non-existence is impossible. We then perceive that such a being is not, for instance, like the four elements, which are inanimate, and we therefore say that it is living, expressing thereby that it is not dead. We call such a being incorporeal, because we notice that it is unlike the heavens, which are living, but material. Seeing that it is also different from the intellect, which, though incorporeal and living, owes its existence to some cause, we say it is the first, expressing thereby that its existence is not due to any cause. We further notice, that the existence, that is the essence, of this being is not limited to its own existence; many existences emanate from it, and its influence is not like that of the fire in producing heat, or that of the sun in sending forth light, but consists in constantly giving them stability and order by well-established rule, as we shall show: we say, on that account, it has power, wisdom, and will, i.e., it is not feeble or ignorant, or hasty, and does not abandon its creatures; when we say that it is not feeble, we mean that its existence is capable of producing the existence of many other things; by saying that it is not ignorant, we mean "it perceives" or "it lives,"—for everything that perceives is living—by saying "it is not hasty, and does not abandon its creatures," we mean that all these creatures preserve a certain order and arrangement; they are not left to

themselves; they are not produced aimlessly, but whatever condition they receive from that being is given with design and intention. We thus learn that there is no other being like unto God, and we say that He is One, i.e., there are not more Gods than one.

It has thus been shown that every attribute predicated of God either denotes the quality of an action, or—when the attribute is intended to convey some idea of the Divine Being itself, and not of His actions—the negation of the opposite. Even these negative attributes must not be formed and applied to God, except in the way in which, as you know, sometimes an attribute is negated in reference to a thing, although that attribute can naturally never be applied to it in the same sense, as, e.g., we say, “This wall does not see.” Those who read the present work are aware that, notwithstanding all the efforts of the mind, we can obtain no knowledge of the essence of the heavens—a revolving substance which has been measured by us in spans and cubits, and examined even as regards the proportions of the several spheres to each other and respecting most of their motions—although we know that they must consist of matter and form; but the matter not being the same as sublunary matter, we can only describe the heavens in terms expressing negative properties, but not in terms denoting positive qualities. Thus we say that the heavens are not light, not heavy, not passive and therefore not subject to impressions, and that they do not possess the sensations of taste and smell; or we use similar negative attributes. All this we do, because we do not know their substance. What, then, can be the result of our efforts, when we try to obtain a knowledge of a Being that is free from substance, that is most simple, whose existence is absolute, and not due to any cause, to whose perfect essence nothing can be superadded, and whose perfection consists, as we have shown, in the absence of all defects. All we understand is the fact that He exists, that He is a Being to whom none of His creatures is similar, who has nothing in common with them, who does not include plurality, who is never too feeble to produce other beings, and whose relation to the universe is that of a steersman to a boat; and even this is not a real relation, a real simile, but serves only to convey to us the idea that God rules the universe; that is, that He gives it duration, and preserves its necessary arrangement. This subject will be treated more fully. Praised be He! In the contemplation of His essence, our comprehension and knowledge prove insufficient; in the examination of His works, how they necessarily result from His will, our knowledge proves to be ignorance, and in the endeavour to extol Him in words, all our efforts in speech are mere weakness and failure!

#### CHAPTER LIX

THE following question might perhaps be asked: Since there is no possibility of obtaining a knowledge of the true essence of God, and since it has also been proved that the only thing that man can apprehend of Him is the fact that He exists, and that all positive attributes are inadmissible, as has been shown; what is the difference among those who have obtained a knowledge of God? Must not the knowledge obtained by our teacher Moses, and by Solomon, be the same as that obtained by any one of the lowest class of philosophers, since

there can be no addition to this knowledge? But, on the other hand, it is generally accepted among theologians and also among philosophers, that there can be a great difference between two persons as regards the knowledge of God obtained by them. Know that this is really the case, that those who have obtained a knowledge of God differ greatly from each other; for in the same way as by each additional attribute an object is more specified, and is brought nearer to the true apprehension of the observer, so by each additional negative attribute you advance toward the knowledge of God, and you are nearer to it than he who does not negative, in reference to God, those qualities which you are convinced by proof must be negated. There may thus be a man who after having earnestly devoted many years to the pursuit of one science, and to the true understanding of its principles, till he is fully convinced of its truths, has obtained as the sole result of this study the conviction that a certain quality must be negated in reference to God, and the capacity of demonstrating that it is impossible to apply it to Him. Superficial thinkers will have no proof for this, will doubtfully ask, Is that thing existing in the Creator, or not? And those who are deprived of sight will positively ascribe it to God, although it has been clearly shown that He does not possess it. E.g., while I show that God is incorporeal, another doubts and is not certain whether He is corporeal or incorporeal; others even positively declare that He is corporeal, and appear before the Lord with that belief. Now see how great the difference is between these three men; the first is undoubtedly nearest to the Almighty; the second is remote, and the third still more distant from Him. If there be a fourth person who holds himself convinced by proof that emotions are impossible in God, while the first who rejects the corporeality, is not convinced of that impossibility, that fourth person is undoubtedly nearer the knowledge of God than the first, and so on, so that a person who, convinced by proof, negatives a number of things in reference to God, which according to our belief may possibly be in Him or emanate from Him, is undoubtedly a more perfect man than we are, and would surpass us still more if we positively believed these things to be properties of God. It will now be clear to you, that every time you establish by proof the negation of a thing in reference to God, you become more perfect, while with every additional positive assertion you follow your imagination and recede from the true knowledge of God. Only by such ways must we approach the knowledge of God, and by such researches and studies as would show us the inapplicability of what is inadmissible as regards the Creator, not by such methods as would prove the necessity of ascribing to Him anything extraneous to His essence, or asserting that He has a certain perfection, when we find it to be a perfection in relation to us. The perfections acquired does not exist in everything capable of making such acquisition. You must bear in mind, that by affirming anything of God, you are removed from Him in two respects; first, whatever you affirm, is only a perfection in relation to us; secondly, He does not possess anything superadded to this essence; His essence includes all His perfections, as we have shown. Since it is a well-known fact that even that knowledge of God which is accessible to man cannot be attained except by negations, and that negations

By the mention of this attribute we are, as it were, told that His commandments, undoubtedly in harmony with His acts, include the death even of the little children of idolaters because of the sin of their fathers and grandfathers. This principle we find frequently applied in the Law, as, e.g., we read concerning the city that has been led astray to idolatry, "destroy it utterly, and all that is therein" (Deut. xiii. 15). All this has been ordained in order that every vestige of that which would lead to great injury should be blotted out, as we have explained.

We have gone too far away from the subject of this chapter, but we have shown why it has been considered sufficient to mention only these (thirteen) out of all His acts; namely, because they are required for the good government of a country; for the chief aim of man should be to make himself, as far as possible, similar to God: that is to say, to make his acts similar to the acts of God, or as our Sages expressed it in explaining the verse, "Ye shall be holy" (Lev. xxi. 2): "He is gracious, so be you also gracious; He is merciful, so be you also merciful."

The principal object of this chapter was to show that all attributes ascribed to God are attributes of His acts, and do not imply that God has any qualities.

#### CHAPTER LV

WE have already, on several occasions, shown in this treatise that everything that implies corporeality or passiveness, is to be negated in reference to God, for all passiveness implies change; and the agent producing that state is undoubtedly different from the object affected by it; and if God could be affected in any way whatever, another being beside Him would act on Him and cause change in Him. All kinds of non-existence must likewise be negated in reference to Him; no perfection whatever can therefore be imagined to be at one time absent from Him, and at another present in Him: for if this were the case, He would [at a certain time] only be potentially perfect. Potentiality always implies non-existence, and when anything has to pass from potentiality into reality, another thing that exists in reality is required to effect that transition. Hence it follows that all perfections must really exist in God, and none of them must in any way be a mere potentiality. Another thing likewise to be denied in reference to God, is similarity to any existing being. This has been generally accepted, and is also mentioned in the books of the Prophets; e.g., "To whom, then, will you liken me?" (Isa. xl. 25); "To whom, then, will you liken God?" (*ib.* 18); "There is none like unto Thee" (Jer. x. 6). Instances of this kind are frequent. In short, it is necessary to demonstrate by proof that nothing can be predicated of God that implies any of the following four things (corporeality, emotion or change, non-existence),—e.g., that something would be potential at one time and real at another—and similarity with any of His creatures. In this respect our knowledge of God is aided by the study of Natural Science. For he who is ignorant of the latter cannot understand the defect implied in emotions, the difference between potentiality and reality, the non-existence implied in all potentiality, the inferiority of a thing that exists *in potentiâ* to that which moves in order to cause its transition from potentiality into reality, and the

the verb appears to have the second signification, it implies that God responded to the prayer of man and fulfilled his wish, or did not respond and did not fulfil his wish: "I will surely hear his cry" (Exod. xxii. 23); "I will hear, for I am gracious" (*ib.* 27); "Bow down thine ear, and hear" (2 Kings xix. 16); "But the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you" (Deut. i. 45); "Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isa. i. 15); "For I will not hear thee" (Jer. vii. 16). There are many instances in which *shama* has this sense.

Remarks will now be presented to you on these metaphors and similes, which will quench your thirst, and explain to you all their meanings without leaving a doubt.

## CHAPTER XLVI

WE have already stated, in one of the chapters of this treatise, that there is a great difference between bringing to view the existence of a thing and demonstrating its true essence. We can lead others to notice the existence of an object by pointing to its accidents, actions, or even most remote relations to other objects: e.g., if you wish to describe the king of a country to one of his subjects who does not know him, you can give a description and an account of his existence in many ways. You will either say to him, the tall man with a fair complexion and grey hair is the king, thus describing him by his accidents; or you will say, the king is the person round whom are seen a great multitude of men on horse and on foot, and soldiers with drawn swords, over whose head banners are waving, and before whom trumpets are sounded; or it is the person living in the palace in a particular region of a certain country; or it is the person who ordered the building of that wall, or the construction of that bridge; or by some other similar acts and things relating to him. His existence can be demonstrated in a still more indirect way, e.g., if you are asked whether this land has a king, you will undoubtedly answer in the affirmative. "What proof have you?" "The fact that this banker here, a weak and little person, stands before this large mass of gold pieces, and that poor man, tall and strong, who stands before him asking in vain for alms of the weight of a carob-grain, is rebuked and is compelled to go away by the mere force of words; for had he not feared the king, he would, without hesitation, have killed the banker, or pushed him away and taken as much of the money as he could." Consequently, this is a proof that this country has a ruler and his existence is proved by the well-regulated affairs of the country, on account of which the king is respected and the punishments decreed by him are feared. In this whole example nothing is mentioned that indicated his characteristics, and his essential properties, by virtue of which he is king. The same is the case with the information concerning the Creator given to the ordinary classes of men in all prophetic books and in the Law. For it was found necessary to teach all of them that God exists, and that He is in every respect the most perfect Being, that is to say, He exists not only in the sense in which the earth and the heavens exist, but He exists and possesses life, wisdom, power, activity, and all other properties which our belief in His existence must include, as will be shown below. That God exists was therefore shown to ordi-