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ח"א ח"ב ח"ג ח"ד ח"ה ח"ו ח"ז ח"ח ח"ט

ל"ד ח"א ח"ב

MAIMONIDES

ON

Human Perfection

אזכרה ח"א ח"ב

אזכרה ח"א ח"ב ח"ג ח"ד

Presented by Rabbi Jeffrey Katz

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אזכרה ח"א ח"ב ח"ג ח"ד ח"ה ח"ו ח"ז ח"ח ח"ט

emerods" (1 Sam. vi. 5), for the chief object was the removal of the injury caused by the emerods, not a change of their shape. As, however, it must be admitted that the term *zelem* is employed in these two cases, viz. "the images of the emerods" and "the idols" on account of the external shape, the term *zelem* is either a homonym or a hybrid term, and would denote both the specific form and the outward shape, and similar properties relating to the dimensions and the shape of material bodies; and in the phrase "Let us make man in our *zelem*" (Gen. i. 26), the term signifies "the specific form" of man, viz., his intellectual perception, and does not refer to his "figure" or "shape." Thus we have shown the difference between *zelem* and *toär*, and explained the meaning of *zelem*.

Demut is derived from the verb *damab*, "he is like." This term likewise denotes agreement with regard to some abstract relation: comp. "I am like a pelican of the wilderness" (Ps. cii. 7); the author does not compare himself to the pelican in point of wings and feathers, but in point of sadness. "Nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in beauty" (Ezek. xxxi. 8); the comparison refers to the idea of beauty. "Their poison is like the poison of a serpent" (Ps. lviii. 5); "He is like unto a lion" (Ps. xvii. 12); the resemblance indicated in these passages does not refer to the figure and shape, but to some abstract idea. In the same manner is used "the likeness of the throne" (Ezek. i. 26); the comparison is made with regard to greatness and glory, not, as many believe, with regard to its square form, its breadth, or the length of its legs: this explanation applies also to the phrase "the likeness of the *hayyot*" ("living creatures," Ezek. i. 13).

As man's distinction consists in a property which no other creature on earth possesses, viz., intellectual perception, in the exercise of which he does not employ his senses, nor move his hand or his foot, this perception has been compared—though only apparently, not in truth—to the Divine perception, which requires no corporeal organ. On this account, i.e., on account of the Divine intellect with which man has been endowed, he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form.

intellect = man's unique/Divine endowment
CHAPTER II

SOME years ago a learned man asked me a question of great importance; the problem and the solution which we gave in our reply deserve the closest attention. Before, however, entering upon this problem and its solution I must premise that every Hebrew knows that the term *Elohim* is a homonym, and denotes God, angels, judges, and the rulers of countries, and that Onkelos the proselyte explained it in the true and correct manner by taking *Elohim* in the sentence, "and ye shall be like *Elohim*" (Gen. iii. 5) in the last-mentioned meaning, and rendering the sentence "and ye shall be like princes." Having pointed out the homonymity of the term "*Elohim*" we return to the question under consideration. "It would at first sight," said the objector, "appear from Scripture that man was originally intended to be perfectly equal to the rest of the animal creation, which is not endowed with intellect, reason, or power of distinguishing between good and evil: but that Adam's disobedience to the command of God procured him that great per-

sense the term is used in the following passages: "And fetched thence a wise woman" (2 Sam. xiv. 2); "They are wise to do evil" (Jer. iv. 22). It is possible that the Hebrew *hokmah* ("wisdom") expresses the idea of cunning and planning, which may serve in one case as a means of acquiring intellectual perfection, or good moral principles; but may in another case produce skill in workmanship, or even be employed in establishing bad opinions and principles. The attribute *hakam* ("wise") is therefore given to a person that possesses great intellectual faculties, or good moral principles, or skill in art; but also to persons cunning in evil deeds and principles.

According to this explanation, a person that has a true knowledge of the whole Law is called wise in a double sense; he is wise because the Law instructs him in the highest truths, and secondly, because it teaches him good morals. But as the truths contained in the Law are taught by way of tradition, not by a philosophical method, the knowledge of the Law, and the acquisition of true wisdom, are treated in the books of the Prophets and in the words of our Sages as two different things; real wisdom demonstrates by proof those truths which Scripture teaches us by way of tradition. It is to this kind of wisdom, which proves the truth of the Law, that Scripture refers when it extols wisdom, and speaks of the high value of this perfection, and of the consequent paucity of men capable of acquiring it, in sayings like these: "Not many are wise" (Job xxxii. 9); "But where shall wisdom be found" (*ibid.* xxviii. 12)? In the writings of our Sages we notice likewise many passages in which distinction is made between knowledge of the Law and wisdom. They say of Moses, our Teacher, that he was Father in the knowledge of the Law, in wisdom and in prophecy. When Scripture says of Solomon, "And he was wiser than all men" (1 Kings v. 11), our Sages add, "but not greater than Moses"; and the phrase, "than all men," is explained to mean, "than all men of his generation"; for this reason [only] "Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol," the renowned wise men of that time, are named. Our Sages further say, that man has first to render account concerning his knowledge of the Law, then concerning the acquisition of wisdom, and at last concerning the lessons derived by logical conclusions from the Law, i.e., the lessons concerning his actions. This is also the right order: we must first learn the truths by tradition, after this we must be taught how to prove them, and then investigate the actions that help to improve man's ways. The idea that man will have to render account concerning these three things in the order described, is expressed by our Sages in the following passage: "When man comes to the trial, he is first asked, 'Hast thou fixed certain seasons for the study of the Law? Hast thou been engaged in the acquisition of wisdom? Hast thou derived from one thing another thing?'" This proves that our Sages distinguished between the knowledge of the Law on the one hand, and wisdom on the other, as the means of proving the lessons taught in the Law by correct reasoning.

Hear now what I have to say after having given the above explanation. The ancient and the modern philosophers have shown that man can acquire four kinds of perfection. The first kind, the lowest, in the acquisition of which people spend their days, is perfection as regards property; the possession of money, garments, furniture, servants, land, and the like; the

★ is the perfection truly yours?
★ is it an end in itself?

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possession of the title of a great king belongs to this class. There is no close connexion between this possession and its possessor; it is a perfectly imaginary relation when on account of the great advantage a person derives from these possessions, he says, This is my house, this is my servant, this is my money, and these are my hosts and armies. For when he examines himself he will find that all these things are external, and their qualities are entirely independent of the possessor. When, therefore, that relation ceases, he that has been a great king may one morning find that there is no difference between him and the lowest person, and yet no change has taken place in the things which were ascribed to him. The philosophers have shown that he whose sole aim in all his exertions and endeavours is the possession of this kind of perfection, only seeks perfectly imaginary and transient things; and even if these remain his property all his lifetime, they do not give him any perfection.

Property

The second kind is more closely related to man's body than the first. It includes the perfection of the shape, constitution, and form of man's body; the utmost evenness of temperaments, and the proper order and strength of his limbs. This kind of perfection must likewise be excluded from forming our chief aim; because it is a perfection of the body, and man does not possess it as man, but as a living being; he has this property besides in common with the lowest animal; and even if a person possesses the greatest possible strength, he could not be as strong as a mule, much less can he be as strong as a lion or an elephant; he, therefore, can at the utmost have strength that might enable him to carry a heavy burden, or break a thick substance, or do similar things, in which there is no great profit for the body. The soul derives no profit whatever from this kind of perfection.

bodily

The third kind of perfection is more closely connected with man himself than the second perfection. It includes moral perfection, the highest degree of excellency in man's character. Most of the precepts aim at producing this perfection; but even this kind is only a preparation for another perfection, and is not sought for its own sake. For all moral principles concern the relation of man to his neighbour; the perfection of man's moral principles is, as it were, given to man for the benefit of mankind. Imagine a person being alone, and having no connexion whatever with any other person, all his good moral principles are at rest, they are not required, and give man no perfection whatever. These principles are only necessary and useful when man comes in contact with others.

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The fourth kind of perfection is the true perfection of man; the possession of the highest intellectual faculties; the possession of such notions which lead to true metaphysical opinions as regards God. With this perfection man has obtained his final object; it gives him true human perfection; it remains to him alone; it gives him immortality, and on its account he is called man. Examine the first three kinds of perfection, you will find that, if you possess them, they are not your property, but the property of others; according to the ordinary view, however, they belong to you and to others. But the last kind of perfection is exclusively yours; no one else owns any part of it, "They shall be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee" (Prov. v. 17). Your aim must therefore be to attain this [fourth] perfection that is exclusively yours, and you ought not to continue to work and weary

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see that all this necessarily includes some [other] idea [besides the literal meaning of the words]. This is now clear.

Another noteworthy Midrashic remark of our Sages is the following: "The serpent had a rider, the rider was as big as a camel, and it was the rider that enticed Eve; this rider was Samaël." Samaël is the name generally applied by our Sages to Satan. Thus they say in several places that Satan desired to entice Abraham to sin, and to abstain from binding Isaac, and he desired also to persuade Isaac not to obey his father. At the same time they also say, in reference to the same subject, viz., the *Akedah* ("the binding of Isaac"), that *Samaël* came to Abraham and said to him, "What! hast thou, being an old man, lost thy senses?" etc. This shows that Samaël and Satan are identical. There is a meaning in this name [Samaël], as there is also in the name *nāḥash* ("serpent"). In describing how the serpent came to entice Eve, our Sages say: "Samaël was riding on it, and God was laughing at both the camel and its rider." It is especially of importance to notice that the serpent did not approach or address Adam, but all his attempts were directed against Eve, and it was through her that the serpent caused injury and death to Adam. The greatest hatred exists between the serpent and Eve, and between his seed and her seed; her seed being undoubtedly also the seed of man. More remarkable still is the way in which the serpent is joined to Eve, or rather his seed to her seed; the head of the one touches the heel of the other. Eve defeats the serpent by crushing its head, whilst the serpent defeats her by wounding her heel. This is likewise clear.

The following is also a remarkable passage, most absurd in its literal sense; but as an allegory it contains wonderful wisdom, and fully agrees with real facts, as will be found by those who understand all the chapters of this treatise. When the serpent came to Eve he infected her with poison; the Israelites, who stood at Mount Sinai, removed that poison; idolaters, who did not stand at Mount Sinai, have not got rid of it. Note this likewise. Again they said: "The tree of life extends over an area of five hundred years' journey, and it is from beneath it that all the waters of the creation sprang forth"; and they added the explanation that this measure referred to the thickness of its body, and not to the extent of its branches, for they continue thus: "Not the extent of the branches thereof, but the stem thereof [*korato*, lit., 'its beam,' signifying here 'its stem'] has a thickness of five hundred years' journey." This is now sufficiently clear. Again: "God has never shown the tree of knowledge [of good and evil] to man, nor will He ever show it." This is correct, for it must be so according to the nature of the Universe. Another noteworthy saying is this: "And the Lord God took the man, i.e., raised him, and placed him in the Garden of Eden," i.e., He gave him rest. The words "He took him," "He gave him," have no reference to position in space, but they indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence. Remarkable and noteworthy is the great wisdom contained in the names of Adam, Cain, and Abel, and in the fact that it was Cain who slew Abel in the field, that both of them perished, although the murderer had some respite, and that the existence of mankind is due to Seth alone. Comp. "For God has appointed me another seed" (iv. 25). This has proved true.

It is also necessary to understand and consider the words, "And Adam

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tension between G-d's unchangeability THE SPHERES AND THE INTELLIGENCES 167

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sions, he believes that the form and the number of the spheres are facts established by proof. But this is not the case; for the science of astronomy does not aim at demonstrating them, although it includes subjects that can be proved; e.g., it has been proved that the path of the sun is inclined against the equator; this cannot be doubted. But it has not yet been decided whether the sphere of the sun is excentric or contains a revolving epicycle, and the astronomer does not take notice of this uncertainty, for his object is simply to find an hypothesis that would lead to a uniform and circular motion of the stars without acceleration, retardation, or change, and which is in its effects in accordance with observation. He will, besides, endeavour to find such an hypothesis which would require the least complicated motion and the least number of spheres; he will therefore prefer an hypothesis which would explain all the phenomena of the stars by means of three spheres to an hypothesis which would require four spheres. From this reason we adopt, in reference to the circuit of the sun, the theory of excentricity, and reject the epicyclic revolution assumed by Ptolemy. When we therefore perceive that all fixed stars move in the same way uniformly, without the least difference, we conclude that they are all in one sphere. It is, however, not impossible that the stars should have each its own sphere, with a separate centre, and yet move in the same way. If this theory be accepted, a number of Intelligences must be assumed, equal to that of the stars, and therefore Scripture says in reference to them, "Is there any number of his armies?" (Job xxv. 3); for the Intelligences, the heavenly bodies, and the natural forces, are called the armies of God. Nevertheless the species of the stars can be numbered, and therefore we would still be justified in counting the spheres of the fixed stars collectively as one, just as the five spheres of the planets, together with the numerous spheres they contain, are regarded by us as one. Our object in adopting this number is, as you have noticed, to divide the influences which we can trace in the Universe according to their general character, without desiring to fix the number of the Intelligences and the spheres. All we wish to point out is this: in the first place, that the whole Creation is divided into three parts, viz. (1) the pure Intelligences; (2) the bodies of the spheres endowed with permanent forms—(the forms of these bodies do not pass from one substratum to another, nor do their substrata undergo any change whatever); and (3) the transient earthly beings, all of which consist of the same substance. Furthermore, we desire to show that the ruling power emanates from the Creator, and is received by the Intelligences according to their order; from the Intelligences part of the good and the light bestowed upon them is communicated to the spheres, and the latter, being in possession of the abundance obtained of the Intelligences, transmit forces and properties unto the beings of this transient world. We must, however, add that the part which benefits the part below it in the order described does not exist for the sole purpose of producing that benefit. For if this were the case it would lead to the paradox that the higher, better, and nobler beings existed for the sake of beings lower in rank, whilst in reality the object should be of greater importance than the means applied for attaining it. No intelligent person will admit that this is possible. The nature of the influence which one part of the Creation exercises upon another must be explained as follows: A thing perfect in a certain way is either per-

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fect only in itself, without being able to communicate that perfection to another being, or it is so perfect that it is capable of imparting perfection to another being. A person may possess wealth sufficient for his own wants without being able to spare anything for another, or he may have wealth enough to benefit also other people, or even to enrich them to such an extent as would enable them to give part of their property to others. In the same manner the creative act of the Almighty in giving existence to pure Intelligences endows the first of them with the power of giving existence to another, and so on, down to the Active Intellect, the lowest of the purely spiritual beings. Besides producing other Intelligences, each Intelligence gives existence to one of the spheres, from the highest down to the lowest, which is the sphere of the moon. After the latter follows this transient world, i.e., the *materia prima*, and all that has been formed of it. In this manner the elements receive certain properties from each sphere, and a succession of genesis and destruction is produced.

We have already mentioned that these theories are not opposed to anything taught by our Prophets or by our Sages. Our nation is wise and perfect, as has been declared by the Most High, through Moses, who made us perfect: "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. iv. 6). But when wicked barbarians have deprived us of our possessions, put an end to our science and literature, and killed our wise men, we have become ignorant; this has been foretold by the prophets, when they pronounced the punishment for our sins: "The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (Isa. xxix. 14). We are mixed up with other nations; we have learnt their opinions, and followed their ways and acts. The Psalmist, deploring this imitation of the actions of other nations, says, "They were mingled among the nations, and learned their works" (Ps. cvi. 35). Isaiah likewise complains that the Israelites adopted the opinions of their neighbours, and says, "And they please themselves in the children of strangers" (Isa. ii. 6); or, according to the Aramaic version of Jonathan, son of Uzziel, "And they walk in the ways of the nations." Having been brought up among persons untrained in philosophy, we are inclined to consider these philosophical opinions as foreign to our religion, just as uneducated persons find them foreign to their own notions. But, in fact, it is not so.

Since we have repeatedly spoken of the influence emanating from God and the Intelligences, we will now proceed to explain what is the true meaning of this influence, and after that I will discuss the theory of the Creation.

CHAPTER XII

It is clear that whenever a thing is produced, an efficient cause must exist for the production of the thing that has not existed previously. This immediate efficient cause is either corporeal or incorporeal; if corporeal, it is not the efficient cause on account of its corporeality, but on account of its being an individual corporeal object, and therefore by means of its form. I will speak of this subject later on. The immediate efficient cause of a thing may again be the effect of some cause, and so on, but not *ad infinitum*. The series of causes for a certain product must necessarily conclude with a First Cause,

It is now clear that the action of bodies upon each other, according to their forms, prepares the substance for receiving the action of an incorporeal being, or Form. The existence of actions of purely incorporeal beings, in every case of change that does not originate in the mere combination of elements, is now firmly established. These actions do not depend on impact, or on a certain distance. They are termed "influence" (or "emanation"), on account of their similarity to a water-spring. The latter sends forth water in all directions, has no peculiar side for receiving or spending its contents; it springs forth on all sides, and continually waters both neighbouring and distant places. In a similar manner incorporeal beings, in receiving power and imparting it to others, are not limited to a particular side, distance, or time. They act continually; and whenever an object is sufficiently prepared, it receives the effect of that continuous action, called "influence" (or "emanation"). God being incorporeal, and everything being the work of Him as the efficient cause, we say that the Universe has been created by the Divine influence, and that all changes in the Universe emanate from Him. In the same sense we say that He caused wisdom to emanate from Him and to come upon the prophets. In all such cases we merely wish to express that an incorporeal Being, whose action we call "influence," has produced a certain effect. The term "influence" has been considered applicable to the Creator on account of the similarity between His actions and those of a spring. There is no better way of describing the action of an incorporeal being than by this analogy; and no term can be found that would accurately describe it. For it is as difficult to form an idea of that action as to form an idea of the incorporeal being itself. As we imagine only bodies or forces residing in bodies, so we only imagine actions possible when the agent is near, at a certain distance, and on a particular side. There are therefore persons who, on learning that God is incorporeal, or that He does not approach the object of His action, believe that He gives commands to angels, and that the latter carry them out by approach or direct contact, as is the case when we produce something. These persons thus imagine also the angels as bodies. Some of them, further, believe that God commands an action in words consisting, like ours, of letters and sound, and that thereby the action is done. All this is the work of the imagination, which is, in fact, identical with "evil inclination." For all our defects in speech or in character are either the direct or the indirect work of imagination. This is not the subject of the present chapter, in which we only intended to explain the term "influence" in so far as it is applied to incorporeal beings, namely, to God and to the Intelligences or angels. But the term is also applied to the forces of the spheres in their effects upon the earth; and we speak of the "influence" of the spheres, although the spheres are corporeal, and the stars, being corporeal, only act at certain distances, i.e., at a smaller or a greater distance from the centre, or at a definite distance from each other, a circumstance which led to Astrology.

As to our assertion that Scripture applies the notion of "influence" to God, compare "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters" (Jer. ii. 13), i.e., the Divine influence that gives life or existence, for the two are undoubtedly identical. Further, "For with Thee is the fountain of life" (Ps. xxxvi. 10), i.e., the Divine influence that gives existence. The

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direct will of God that a certain fish catches and swallows a certain worm on the surface of the water. In all these cases the action is, according to my opinion, entirely due to chance, as taught by Aristotle. Divine Providence is connected with Divine intellectual influence, and the same beings which are benefited by the latter so as to become intellectual, and to comprehend things comprehensible to rational beings, are also under the control of Divine Providence, which examines all their deeds in order to reward or punish them. It may be by mere chance that a ship goes down with all her contents, as in the above-mentioned instance, or the roof of a house falls upon those within; but it is not due to chance, according to our view, that in the one instance the men went into the ship, or remained in the house in the other instance; it is due to the will of God, and is in accordance with the justice of His judgments, the method of which our mind is incapable of understanding. I have been induced to accept this theory by the circumstance that I have not met in any of the prophetic books with a description of God's Providence otherwise than in relation to human beings. The prophets even express their surprise that God should take notice of man, who is too little and too unimportant to be worthy of the attention of the Creator; how, then, should other living creatures be considered as proper objects for Divine Providence! Comp. "What is man, that thou takest knowledge of him?" (Ps. cxliv. 3); "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (*ibid.* viii. 8). It is clearly expressed in many Scriptural passages that God provides for all men, and controls all their deeds—e.g., "He fashioneth their hearts alike, he considereth all their works" (*ibid.* xxxiii. 15); "For thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways" (Jer. xxxii. 19). Again: "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings" (Job xxxii. 21). In the Law there occur instances of the fact that men are governed by God, and that their actions are examined by him. Comp. "In the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them" (Exod. xxxii. 34); "I will even appoint over you terror" (Lev. xxvi. 16); "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Exod. xxxii. 33); "The same soul will I destroy" (Lev. xxiii. 30); "I will even set my face against that soul" (*ibid.* xx. 6). There are many instances of this kind. All that is mentioned of the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a perfect proof that Divine Providence extends to every man individually. But the condition of the individual beings of other living creatures is undoubtedly the same as has been stated by Aristotle. On that account it is allowed, even commanded, to kill animals; we are permitted to use them according to our pleasure. The view that other living beings are only governed by Divine Providence in the way described by Aristotle, is supported by the words of the Prophet Habakkuk. When he perceived the victories of Nebuchadnezzar, and saw the multitude of those slain by him, he said, "O God, it is as if men were abandoned, neglected, and unprotected like fish and like worms of the earth." He thus shows that these classes are abandoned. This is expressed in the following passage: "And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them. They take up all of them with the angle," etc. (Hab. i. 14, 15). The prophet then declares that such is not the case; for the events referred to are not the result of abandonment, forsaking, and