

The Steinsaltz Mishne Torah  

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SEFER HAMADDA • SEFER AHAVA



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# משנה תורה לרמב"ם שטיינזלץ

THE STEINSALTZ MISHNE TORAH

ספר המדע . ספר אהבה

SEFER HAMADDA . SEFER AHAVA

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*The Steinsaltz Mishne Torah*

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## Preface to This Edition of the *Mishne Torah*

The *Mishne Torah* is the most all-encompassing work of Jewish law ever written. It benefits from a clear style, and is arranged in an impressively orderly and logical manner. This enables the students of the book, whether or not they have a Torah background, to gain a distinct and comprehensive picture of the halakha on any given topic.

With that said, the contemporary reader may still find it somewhat difficult to study this work, due to changes in language and culture since the Rambam's time, which necessitate clarifications of many words and terms. Furthermore, although the Rambam provided the reasoning for a large number of his rulings, there are still numerous laws that lack explanations, with regard to both their rationales and their underlying principles.

From the perspective of the practical halakha, many important factors are absent from the *Mishne Torah*, such as dissenting opinions that have been accepted as halakha by a majority of Jews (or in specific communities), certain halakhic topics that are not addressed by the Rambam at all, customs and enactments that are omitted, and areas of concern that did not exist in the Rambam's day. Consequently, although the *Mishne Torah* was initially designed to serve as a work of practical halakha, and despite the fact that the vast majority of the Rambam's rulings have indeed been accepted as halakha, one who studies the book nowadays cannot rely on it to such an extent that he will know, in every situation, how to act in practice.

The aim of this edition of the *Mishne Torah* is to bridge these gaps. It renders the book accessible to everyone with the addition of study tools which allow readers to use the book as a means of understanding the halakha in practice. The different sections of this edition have been specifically adapted for this purpose, and were prepared with great care, in order that the book would be elegant, professional, useful, and accessible to all.

Many thanks to the team at Koren Publishers, Jerusalem, who worked hard on the design and preparation of the edition.

## Some Observations on this Edition

### The text of the *Mishne Torah*

Due to the importance of the *Mishne Torah* to the Torah world, it has been copied, printed, and edited many times, in many different generations and, as a result, the text has fallen prey to numerous changes and corruptions, unconsciously or otherwise. This edition is based on the precise text edited by Rabbi Yitzḥak Sheilat, the *Rambam HaMeduyak* [*The Precise Rambam*], which he prepared through consultation with Mizrahi and Yemenei manuscripts of the *Mishne Torah*, considered the most reliable. Foremost among these is the manuscript approved with the signature of the Rambam himself for *Sefer HaMadda* and *Sefer Ahava* (see Rabbi Sheilat's introduction to his text, where his method of establishing the most accurate version is clarified in detail). The sketches and diagrams that appear in the *Mishne Torah* itself have been precisely arranged, based on the images that appear in the manuscripts of the *Mishne Torah*, as in Rabbi Sheilat's edition.

### The division into Halakhot

The Rambam divides every chapter of the *Mishne Torah* into Halakhot. In the manuscripts of the *Mishne Torah*, including those with Rambam's own handwriting, in his drafts of the work, the Halakhot were not numbered. The numbering of the Halakhot was added in the printed editions, but these divisions are often corrupt and do not correspond to the original division of the Rambam. In certain cases, the alternative division stemmed from publishers' errors of comprehension; there are even instances where a Halakha is interrupted in the middle of a sentence. In this edition, the paragraphs have been separated in accordance with the Rambam's original division of the Halakhot, but the standard numbering of the Halakhot of the printed editions was preserved, as an aid to the reader.

### Vowels and punctuation

The vowels and punctuation in this edition have been prepared in a meticulous, precise manner. The spelling has been adjusted so that the word is fully spelled out when that is required by the rules of grammar, while the spelling of the biblical verses quoted by the Rambam follows the Masoretic tradition. Aside from this, the verses are presented as they were written in the manuscripts, and it is noted when they deviate from the Masoretic text. Where there is a gap in a quotation, and the manuscripts read 'וכו', "etc.," the Hebrew text states likewise, and where such an indication is missing, an ellipsis [ ... ] has been added instead. In the translation, there

is either an ellipsis replacing the “etc.” or the verse has been completed. As for the vowels, there are many cases where the vowels were likely added by the Rambam himself in his *Commentary on the Mishna*. In most instances, these vowels are accepted, even if they reflect a tradition of pronunciation that differs slightly from the one in use today, but the vowels of several words have been adjusted to follow the customary contemporary pronunciation. Since the vowels accord with the spelling that appears in the manuscripts, certain words might sometimes appear unusual to the eye.

### The glosses of the Raavad

The Raavad was a contemporary of the Rambam, and is considered his greatest critic. Throughout the *Mishne Torah* the Raavad comments on the Rambam’s statements. Sometimes he disagrees with the Rambam outright, while on other occasions he clarifies his meaning or provides a source. Over the generations, the glosses of the Raavad have been studied together with the text of the Rambam itself, and many of the ruling authorities have assumed that if the Raavad does not take issue with the Rambam on a particular matter, this can be taken as a sign of his agreement with the Rambam’s rulings. The text of the Raavad’s glosses on *Sefer Zemanim* are based on the text of the Raavad’s glosses on *Sefer Zemanim* in this edition is based on *Yad Peshuta* by Rabbi Naḥum Eliezer Rabinovitch. We thank him for granting us permission to use his edition.<sup>1</sup>

### From the Lubavitcher Rebbe

This section features commentaries on the *Mishne Torah* by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who instituted a program for the daily study of the *Mishne Torah* and devoted much attention to Rambam’s teachings. The Rebbe’s commentaries address both the plain meanings of the laws and their spiritual, esoteric message. The commentaries presented here have been gathered from across the Rebbe’s extensive teachings. From among the Rebbe’s numerous observations on the *Mishne Torah*, those cited here illuminate the Rambam’s distinctive approach and the unique wording of his formulations.

### Daily study schedule

The *Mishne Torah* is studied by many as part of a regular daily learning schedule. The daily study of the Rambam was proposed by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in the year 5744 (1984). The Rebbe explained that because the *Mishne*

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<sup>1</sup> Sadly, Rabbi Rabinovitch passed away before the publication of this volume.

unit is organized as a whole. The titles are presented again at the start of each chapter, to help the reader understand its structure and development.

### The commentary

The commentary is presented in a concise form. It explains difficult words and halakhic terms, as well as the principles and rationales that underlie the Rambam's decisions. The commentary is based on an in-depth study of the relevant passages in the rabbinic sources and their commentaries, comparisons with other sections of the *Mishne Torah* and different works of the Rambam, the opinions of the early authorities on the work, as well as newer commentaries from recent generations, up to and including our own. This is all part of an effort to establish the true meaning of the Rambam's words. Special note should be made of Rabbi Yosef Kapaḥ's translation of the Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishna*, and his commentary to the *Mishne Torah*, as well as the *Yad Peshuta* commentary by Rabbi Naḥum Eliezer Rabinovitch, of which we have made extensive use. The commentary also provides images and diagrams that clarify and illustrate the Rambam's statements.

### Halakhic discussion

This edition notes the opinions of the *Shulḥan Arukh* and the Rema, when they refer to the rulings of the Rambam. It also cites the views of authorities who disagree with the Rambam, or who add details to the halakha, beginning with the *Shulḥan Arukh* and its commentaries, through the later authorities, down to contemporary rabbis. This tells the reader when the Rambam's opinion has been accepted as law, and in which instances the halakha has been decided differently. In those Halakhot that are not discussed in the *Shulḥan Arukh*, such as laws that are not practiced in this age, the main opinions of the early and later authorities over the generations have been referenced, where they take issue with or add to the Rambam's statements.

### The appendices

The appendices, which form an independent unit at the end of each book, offer analyses of halakhically complex topics. They present a comprehensive overview of the subject matter, from the sources of the halakha to rulings by contemporary authorities, while referencing the historical, social, and technological changes that have occurred over the generations, as well as the degree of their influence on the halakhic reality as practiced today. This section thus complements the "Halakhic Discussion" notes on subject matters that include, among other issues, various topical questions that arise in the modern world.

## Introduction to the *Mishne Torah*

The purpose of the book: To provide a comprehensive summary of the Oral Torah

The *Mishne Torah*, by Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides, or the Rambam), is his greatest work and one of the most important books in all of Jewish history. The grand plan of the book, as the Rambam outlined in his introduction, was for it to serve as a compilation of the entire Oral Torah, so much so that one who is well-versed in the Bible and this book of the Rambam would have the entire Torah in his grasp and would not require any other book. For this reason, he called his book *Mishne Torah* (“restatement of the Torah,” or “second to the Torah”). Although the book was ultimately not accepted as an exclusive authority, it has been one of the foundational texts of the Torah from the time it was written until this day, and a pillar of halakha for the entire Jewish people.

The work provides a distillation of the entire Oral Torah. Accordingly, it incorporates areas of law that other halakhic works do not address. The Rambam does not distinguish, in the manner of the great Sages who preceded him, between halakhot that apply in the present time and those that can be fulfilled only when the people of Israel are residing in their land in full strength. He even deals with matters that pertain solely to the days of the Messiah. Although the Talmud did not rule on such laws, and some have contended that these “halakhot for the messianic period” should perhaps be left for future generations to adjudicate, the Rambam did not shy away from them. He thus issues rulings in all realms of halakha, both practical and otherwise, those which are relevant today together with mitzvot that have no current application. This is a clear expression of his comprehensive vision, for he views the Oral Torah as a unified whole, all of whose parts are interconnected organically.

In addition, unlike other halakhic works, the Rambam does not deal exclusively with “halakha” in the narrow sense of the term. Rather, he addresses everything that, in his view, is binding upon every Jew, whether

between the original texts and the Rambam's individual style. Nevertheless, the elegance of the Rambam's language, and his exceptional ability to clarify complex ideas, render the *Mishne Torah* a literary masterpiece as well, and one of the greatest achievements in Hebrew in all generations.

There are several other important characteristics of the *Mishne Torah* which the Rambam touches upon in his introduction to *Sefer HaMitzvot*, and which are foundational to his work. The most prominent feature, one that in many ways makes the book exceptional, perhaps in all of Jewish literature, is the extraordinary degree of order it exhibits. First and foremost, there is the new organizational structure that the Rambam creates in his book. Unlike the traditional division of the Mishnah and Talmud into six Orders, which some earlier halakhic works, such as that of the Rif, also followed, the Rambam introduces a new thematic division. The work is divided into fourteen books, each of which is further subdivided into sections called *Hilkhot*, which focus on more specific topics.

Beyond this broad restructuring, the internal organization of the book is also highly methodical. The Rambam provides an introduction for each subject, both for broader topics that span entire books or sets of *Hilkhot*, and for more minor and specific issues. These introductions provide a general definition of the subject, and sometimes also definitions of key terms and relevant concepts. After these definitions, the Rambam proceeds to the specific laws, all of which are likewise presented in a consistent order: Each subject appears in its proper place, is explained in detail, and is logically connected to the ensuing topic.

Despite the exceptional organization of this work, there are certain subjects that do not fit neatly into the framework of main and secondary topics. As a result, their placement is somewhat forced. From a different perspective, the very logical order that characterizes the book can at times make it difficult to locate a specific topic and can even appear counterintuitive. For example, in the *Arbaa Turim* (the "Four Columns," a halakhic work that gained prominence after the Rambam's time and which served as the basis for the *Shulhan Arukh*), the first section, *Orah Hayyim*, follows the chronological flow of a person's daily life. For the laws of festivals, for instance, all the unique halakhot of the various festivals are collected in one volume, including the order of prayer on that day, its Torah reading, and so on. By contrast, in the *Mishne Torah*, the mitzvot of the festivals appear in one place (*Sefer Zemanim*), while the special prayers and Torah readings are found elsewhere (*Hilkhot Tefilla* in *Sefer Ahava*).

Another characteristic of this work is the relative scarcity of justifications for its legal rulings, as well as the fact that there are no references or citations to the Talmud or other rabbinic literature. The halakhic rulings that the Rambam records in his book are, in effect, summaries of decisions between divergent opinions of the Sages, without any explicit acknowledgment of these disputes. In his introductions to both *Sefer HaMitzvot* and the *Mishne Torah*, the Rambam explains that this is due to his pursuit of brevity and his desire not to overburden or confuse the reader with detailed halakhic debates. Presenting arguments and proofs invites discussion and lengthy elaboration, whereas the Rambam sought to present what he called the “clean, fine flour,” i.e., the distilled halakhic conclusions as determined by the final redactors of the Talmud and the Sages who followed them. The absence of sources can be explained in a similar vein: Since some rulings are based on a combination of two or three different sources, quoting or detailing them could open the door to debate that would certainly disrupt the flow of the text and make it more difficult to understand.

Since the sources of the Rambam, and at times his reasoning for certain halakhic rulings, are not always entirely clear, many important commentaries on the book have sought to identify his sources and methods of halakhic decision-making. Over the generations, the consensus has emerged that in general the Rambam indeed uses clearly identifiable consistent methodologies for issuing his halakhic rulings. These are based on halakhic principles delineated in the Talmud or received from the geonim, which the Rambam uses far more frequently than other halakhic authorities. Principles such as “the halakha is in accordance with an unattributed mishna,” or “the halakha is in accordance with the second version” (when the Gemara offers “another version” of a discussion) are frequently used in this work, as are other halakhic rules of a similar nature, such as those regarding the halakhic status of various rabbinic sources (the Babylonian Talmud, Jerusalem Talmud, *Tosefta*, and the halakhic midrashim) and the relationships between them. The systematic use of these rules is yet another example of the meticulous order of the *Mishne Torah*.

### The Importance of the Book Across the Generations

Due to the vast scope of the *Mishne Torah*, notwithstanding the areas it does not include, it has a central place of importance, beyond its significance as a foundational text of halakha. In fact, no other book, from those written before or after the *Mishne Torah*, offers such a broad and comprehensive

overview of “the entire Torah.” Accordingly, there is no doubt that anyone who wishes to understand the Torah of God, not merely some of its isolated details, but as a large and complete world, has no better resource than this book. It presents the Torah in its broadest scope, encompassing all areas of Jewish law as they developed over generations.

### This Edition of the *Mishne Torah*

The purpose of this edition of the *Mishne Torah* is to assist the reader, especially those who learn it on a regular basis. This refers not only to understanding the content itself, but also in terms of situating it within the broader framework of the Torah. For despite the centrality and importance of the *Mishne Torah* in the world of Jewish law, historically speaking the mainstream halakhic development did not continue directly through the Rambam’s work. Although the Rambam was, and continues to be, one of the great pillars of halakhic authority, in terms of practical halakhic rulings there are other major sources that are considered equally important, namely the rulings of the Rif and the Rosh. In addition, the rulings of many other Sages are also used as sources of halakha, along with various customs that became widespread in different Jewish communities. The halakha, as it exists and is binding today, largely followed the approach of the *Arbaa Turim* and its commentaries, and the *Shulḥan Arukh* and its commentaries in its wake, and the Jewish people conduct themselves mostly in accordance with their conclusions.

For this reason, alongside the rulings of the Rambam, this edition includes a section entitled “Halakhic Discussion,” which provides references to other halakhic works, particularly the *Shulḥan Arukh* and the glosses of the Rema, which relate to the Rambam’s rulings. In cases where the *Shulḥan Arukh* and later halakhic authorities followed the opinion of the Rambam (sometimes to the extent that they even copied his wording verbatim), only a reference is provided. However, whenever the halakhic tradition did not follow the Rambam’s position, a more detailed explanation is given. This way, in addition to learning the Rambam’s view on a particular issue, the reader will also learn about the practical halakhic ruling accepted in our times.

By comparing the Rambam’s rulings with contemporary halakhic practice on the same subjects, his words are presented not merely as an ancient text that was preeminent in its time, but as a work that can also serve as a guide for practical halakha today. From these comparisons, one can discern those points at which later authorities disagreed with, modified, or developed

the Rambam's opinion, thereby giving his statements ongoing practical significance, rather than merely historical value.

Even in those areas of halakha that are not addressed by the *Shulhan Arukh*, such as laws that are currently inapplicable, this edition includes the major views of the early and later authorities over the generations on those topics. Although these may not constitute halakhic rulings in the practical, everyday sense, there is certainly value in becoming familiar with the central approaches taken by other great Torah scholars, alongside those of the Rambam.

More than eight hundred years have passed since the composition of the *Mishne Torah*, and throughout these centuries the Torah of Israel has never ceased to grow, as it responds to both fresh Torah ideas and new realities of the world. The profound changes that continue to occur in our own time, both in ways of life and in the technological reality of the modern world, have created the need to update halakhic rulings beyond the decisions of the classical halakhic authorities. This includes taking into account halakhic opinions that address present-day concerns, even if they have not yet been codified in the form of binding halakhic literature in recent generations.

For this purpose, this edition includes a section of appendices, which broadens the scope and discussion of topics that have undergone changes due to social, historical, technological, and other developments. Although this section is not intended to provide practical halakhic rulings on these matters, it does attempt to review and summarize the relevant sources and halakhic approaches. This overview includes both subjects on which there is a relatively clear halakhic consensus, as well as issues regarding which there is as yet no full agreement. In such cases, the ideas are presented in a manner that signals to the reader that, should a practical ruling be needed, one must consult a knowledgeable rabbi in the field.

A different kind of problem that might arise for the modern learner involves comprehending the words of the Rambam themselves. For despite the clarity of his language, the words and terms he uses are not always familiar or commonly used by the reader of today. This is the case for native Hebrew speakers, and all the more so for those who wish to learn the Rambam through the medium of a translation. Additionally, while the Rambam often provides explanations for his rulings, certain details sometimes require further clarification. For this reason, a brief commentary has been added to this edition. This commentary does not engage in in-depth analysis of

the Rambam's statements, in the manner of the classical commentaries, but rather offers concise explanations of his language, while supplementing it with clarifications and elucidations when necessary.

An additional section has been added to the English edition, titled "From the Lubavitcher Rebbe." This material is a collection of commentaries by the Lubavitcher Rebbe that shed additional light on the teachings of the Rambam, revealing their spiritual depth and profundity.

”מִשְׁךָ חֶסֶדְךָ לְיֹדְעֶיךָ וְצְדִקְתְּךָ לְיֹשְׁרֵי לֵב” (תהלים לו, יא)

“Extend Your kindness\* to those who know You,  
and Your righteousness to the upright of heart” (Psalms 36:11)

סֵפֶר רֵאשׁוֹן וְהוּא  
סֵפֶר הַמַּדָּע

The first book is *Sefer HaMadda*

INSIGHTS OF THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

\*Extend Your kindness – מִשְׁךָ חֶסֶדְךָ: Since the *Mishne Torah* is designed as a kind of alternative to the Babylonian Talmud, there are certain similarities between the two works: 1) They both start with the letter *mem* and end with a final *mem*; b) In both, the beginning

of the book and its end are linked, in terms of their content; the theme of peace in the case of the Talmud, and the knowledge of God in the *Mishne Torah* (*Torat Menahem, Hitvaaduyot, Parashat [Ki] Tavo* 5744; *Motzai Zot Hanuka* 5746).



## Introduction to *Sefer HaMadda*

*Sefer HaMadda* includes both halakhot that are technical down to their finest details (such as the laws pertaining to idolatry), as well as far more abstract halakhot, whose philosophical content predominates over their practical laws. Most of the halakhot in *Sefer HaMadda* cannot be found, at least not in this form, in other works of halakha, both those that preceded the Rambam and also those that were written afterward.

In other words, this is a group of very basic topics, comprising the majority of *Sefer HaMadda*, which do not involve much in the way of practical halakha. This is one of the unique features of the *Mishne Torah* – not only does it present laws that have not been in effect since the destruction of the Temple, but it also engages with halakhot that do not offer concrete and immediately applicable rules of conduct.

It is possible that in *Sefer HaMadda* the Rambam brings together all the topics that in his opinion come under the rubric of the first of the Ten Commandments, which he himself defines as “to know that there is a God.” Perhaps this is why he calls it *Sefer HaMadda*, “the Book of Knowledge,” because while the other nine commandments involve practical instructions that subsequently devolve into the minutiae of halakhic cases, the first commandment presents an overall conception of the relationship between God and man.

In *Sefer HaMadda*, the Rambam analyses the specifics of this first commandment, with each of the *Hilkhot* sections of this book focusing on a particular aspect of this fundamental relationship between mankind and the Lord.

Accordingly, although each of the *Hilkhot* sections in *Sefer HaMadda* relates to different mitzvot, they all broadly deal with how a Jew must stand before God, in terms of his ways of thinking, moral behavior, Torah study, and mode of repentance. These halakhot thus address the Jew in the entirety of his being, in a manner that reflects King David’s final instructions to his son Solomon:

“Know the God of your father and serve Him with a whole heart” (I Chronicles 28:9)

For this reason, all the *Hilkhot* sections in *Sefer HaMadda* share another common feature: They all include an introduction, as well as abstract philosophical ideas woven into their laws. Typically, the Rambam does not provide in the *Mishne Torah* any prefaces that stray beyond the basic halakhic realm. While there are introductory paragraphs to all books of the *Mishne Torah*, these serve to present general rules and guidelines for understanding the details of the ensuing laws. In *Sefer HaMadda*, by contrast, the introductions and reflective passages can be found not only in those *Hilkhot* that are more abstract in their nature (such as *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah*), but also in cases where the philosophical discussions complement their halakhot (*Hilkhot Teshuva*). Even in very detailed *Hilkhot*, as *Hilkhot Avoda Zara*, the Rambam starts with a background explanation of how there came to be idolatry in the world. In sum, the collection of *Hilkhot* in *Sefer HaMadda* are unique in that their philosophical analyses, “knowledge” itself, are important components of the laws. They are not merely decorative addendums but keys for comprehending all the halakhic particulars themselves. Accordingly, the Rambam formed a book from this collection of special *halakhot*, a large proportion of which are indeed unique to the Rambam. From this perspective, the book can be viewed as an introduction to the entire *Mishne Torah*.

# הלכות יסודי התורה

## The Halakhot (Laws) of the Foundations of the Torah

א- יש בכללן עשר מצוות, שיש מצוות עשה וארבע מצוות לא תעשה, וזה הוא פרטן:  
א) לידע שיש שם אלוה. ב) שלא יעלה במחשבה שיש שם אלוה זולתי יי. ג) ליחדו.  
ד) לאהבו. ה) ליראה ממנו. ו) לקדש שמו. ז) שלא לחלל את שמו. ח) שלא לאבד דברים שנקרא שמו עליהן.  
ט) לשמע מן הנביא המדבר בשמו. י) שלא לנסותו.  
ויאור כל המצוות האלו בפרקים אלו.

These halakhot include ten mitzvot:  
six positive mitzvot and four negative mitzvot.

Their enumeration follows:

- 1) To know that there is a God
- 2) Not to contemplate that there is another god apart from Him
- 3) To acknowledge His unity
- 4) To love Him
- 5) To fear Him
- 6) To sanctify His name
- 7) Not to desecrate His name
- 8) Not to eradicate items that have His name upon them
- 9) To listen to the prophet who speaks in His name
- 10) Not to test Him

All these mitzvot will be explained in the following chapters.

## *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah: Parallels to the mitzvot*

<b>The mitzva</b>	<b>Sefer HaMitzvot</b>	<b>The mitzva in Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah</b>
To know that there is a God	Positive mitzva 1	1:6
Not to contemplate that there is another god apart from Him	Negative mitzva 1	1:6
To acknowledge His unity	Positive mitzva 2	1:7
To love Him	Positive mitzva 3	2:1
To fear Him	Positive mitzva 4	2:1
To sanctify His name	Positive mitzva 9	5:1
Not to desecrate His name	Negative mitzva 63	5:1
Not to eradicate items that have His name upon them	Negative mitzva 65	6:1, 7
To listen to the prophet who speaks in His name	Positive mitzva 172	7:7
Not to test Him	Negative mitzva 64	10:5

## Introduction to *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah*

These halakhot, like many others in *Sefer HaMadda*, include both abstract, general teachings, as well as practical rulings of halakha that are related to the same topics.

The basic subject matter of *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* is the foundations of the faith of the Torah: the beliefs and recognized facts that form the fundamental basis for the existence of the Torah. All the halakhot of the Torah are in essence grounded in elemental principles. Since these principles are not brought together and presented in an orderly fashion in the Torah or in any other book, the Rambam felt that they must first be arranged systematically before the other mitzvot could be discussed.

From the perspective of the fundamental principles of the Torah, two major topics are clarified here that constitute the foundational basis of the entire Torah. The first section of these Halakhot delineates belief in God, both in general terms, and through more precise definitions that have religious and philosophical significance. This section also includes two halakhic chapters that address the practical ramifications of the proper attitude toward God: the laws of the sanctification of God's name, and the prohibition against eradicating holy writings. The second section deals with the basis of faith in relation to the Torah: the belief that the Torah is from Heaven, which is without doubt the basis for the requirement to observe the mitzvot. Here, too, the issues are presented in both the general and the particular, and they cover all the laws that pertain to the prophets: the distinction between a true and false prophecy, the practical implications of belief in a prophet, and how one is obligated to relate to an established prophet. The main significance of these topics is not in the particular details of their halakhot, but rather their importance as fundamental principles, since it is impossible for the Torah to be adhered to without faith in the Giver of the Torah, and without the belief that the Torah is from Heaven.

There is one more section in *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah*, and that is a description provided by the Rambam, in accordance with the best knowledge available at his time, of the overall structure of the universe. He considers this both an aspect of faith and an important stock of knowledge, for through it one can gain a comprehensive picture not only of the reality above nature, but also of the great panorama of nature itself.

In sum, all these themes provide the theoretical foundation for everything that will be discussed throughout the whole of the *Mishne Torah*. In other words, it presents the fundamentals that every person has to know and believe before they can proceed to the rest of the Torah, with all its myriad details.

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# פרק ראשון

## CHAPTER 1

### The Existence and Unity of God

Halakhot 1–6: The existence of God

Halakhot 7–12: The unity of God, and that He does not have a bodily form

#### Halakha 1

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע  
שיש שם מצוי ראשון, והוא ממציא  
כל הנמצא, וכל הנמצאים מן שמים  
וארץ ומה ביניהם לא נמצאו אלא  
מאמתת המצאו.

**The foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdoms<sup>a</sup> is to know\* that a Primary Being<sup>b</sup> exists\*\* who brought all existence into being. All the beings in heaven and earth, and what is between them, came into existence only through the essential true existence of His being.**

#### FROM THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

**\*To know – לידע:** In his introduction to *Sefer HaMadda*, the Rambam quotes the verse: “Extend Your kindness to those who know You, and Your charity to the upright of heart” (Psalms 36:11). This verse describes the great reward that awaits those who fulfill the obligations presented at both the start and end of this *Sefer*. *Sefer HaMadda* begins with the knowledge of God, “those who know You,” and the verse teaches that those who attain this receive a kindness from God that extends to them directly from Him. The *Sefer* ends with *Hilkhot Teshuva*, whose purpose is to straighten crooked hearts. Thus, “the upright of heart” merit “Your charity,” which is a “tith” or “fifth” of God’s own property.

These two endeavors are mutually reinforcing. One’s knowledge of God helps him repent, which is essentially the act of drawing near to God, a movement that is advanced through one’s increased intellectual understanding of the Divine. The same applies in the

opposite direction: In order to become close to God, one must first be a God-fearing person, which requires active repentance (*Torat Menaḥem, Hitvaaduyot, Parashat Emor 5744*).

**\*\*To know that a Primary Being exists – לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון:** The Rambam maintains that the mitzva of “I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2) is comprised not only of the basic belief in the existence of God, but also of all the details that he clarifies in the first Halakhot of the chapter. His source is likely the *Zohar* (2, 25a), the wording of which even parallels, to a certain extent, the language of the Rambam in Halakha 1, with its emphasis on the obligation to know. Accordingly, understanding and internalizing the Rambam’s lengthy descriptions in his first few chapters is an actual fulfillment of a mitzva (*Torat Menaḥem, Hitvaaduyot*, 11 *Nisan, Aḥaron shel Pesah, Parashat Emor 5744; Parashat Va’era 5745; Likkutei Siḥot 26, p. 114*).

#### NOTES

a. The Rambam is implying here that one cannot even begin to think about or contemplate anything, neither about oneself, nor about the world, without first assuming the existence of God, which precedes everything. When he refers to “the pillar of wisdoms” he means that, regardless of the field of wisdom in question, one who investigates always proceeds from one cause to the next, until ultimately arriving at the Holy One Blessed Be He. If anyone fails to reach this conclusion, it is merely due to intellectual laziness, for whoever understands the matter properly knows that we all begin with “the foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdoms” (from a lecture in honor of the completion of the daily Rambam cycle, *Agudat Hemed*, 2015).

b. God (see Halakha 5), whose existence precedes the existence of all other beings. This precedence is both temporal and causal, as will be explained.

## NOTES

a. This knowledge cannot be merely a matter of thoughts, of words that someone might say. Anyone can speak, but what is required is understanding, for us to live by the ideas. This is also the meaning of “to know,” that is, to know in exactly the same way that I know that my hand is my hand. I do not need proof, evidence, or interpretations: I simply know it to be true. Likewise, with regard to God, the first thing is to know, with an immediate, direct, all-encompassing knowledge.

What does one need to know? “That a Primary Being exists, who brought all existence into being.” Here, the Rambam is not talking about the Holy One Blessed be He as the Creator of the world. He is not addressing all the many complicated topics that he analyzes elsewhere, such as the eternal nature of the Creator, and the like. Rather, he is referring to God as the Primary Being, in the sense that He “brought all existence into being.” Thus, the truth of God’s existence is the background, the foundation, the basis of everything in the world. All living beings are nothing but etchings, so to speak, of God’s image. One must know this at every moment, including during times of trouble and, indeed, at all times: We must all know and believe that God is the foundation of our lives, and we must therefore cleave to and hold fast to Him (from a lecture in honor of the completion of the daily Rambam cycle, *Agudat Hemed*, 2015).

b. That is, the verse is not negating the existence of other beings, but instead it is saying that none of them have the value of absolute truth (in the sense of a continuous existence), for their existence can come to an end; they are not eternal like the Creator.

וְאִם יַעֲלֶה עַל הַדַּעַת שֶׁהוּא אֵינוֹ מְצוּי – אֵין דָּבָר אַחֵר יָכוֹל לְהַמְצִיאָוֹת.

וְאִם יַעֲלֶה עַל הַדַּעַת שֶׁאֵין כָּל הַנִּמְצָאִים מְלַבְּדוּ מְצוּיִים – הוּא לְבַדּוֹ יִהְיֶה מְצוּי וְלֹא יִבְטַל הוּא לְבִטּוֹלָם.

שְׁכָל הַנִּמְצָאִים צְרִיכִין לוֹ, וְהוּא בְרוּךְ הוּא אֵינוֹ צְרִיךְ לָהֶם וְלֹא לְאַחַד מֵהֶם.

לְפִיכֵךְ אֵין אֲמִתּוֹת כְּאֲמִתּוֹת אַחַד מֵהֶם.

הוּא שֶׁנִּבְיָא אָמַר: “וַיִּי אֱלֹהִים אֱמֶת” (ירמיהו י, י) – הוּא לְבַדּוֹ הָאֱמֶת, וְאֵין לְאַחֵר אֱמֶת כְּאֲמֶתוֹ.

וְהוּא שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה אָמְרָת: “אֵין עוֹד מְלַבְּדוֹ” (דברים ד, לה), כְּלוֹמַר: אֵין שֵׁם מְצוּי אֱמֶת מְלַבְּדוֹ כְּמוֹתוֹ.

## Halakha 2

If it were possible to imagine that He does not exist,\* nothing else could possibly exist. Even if one could entertain the thought that the Primary Being does not exist, it would be impossible to think about any other form of existence.

## Halakha 3

By contrast, if one were to imagine that no beings apart from Him exist, He alone would exist, and He would not be nullified by their nullification. The non-existence of all other entities would have no effect at all on the existence of the Primary Being.

For all beings require Him, but He, blessed be He, does not require them, nor even any single one of them.

Therefore, the truth of His existence<sup>a</sup> is not like the truth of the existence of any of them. They all depend on Him and have no independent existence, whereas He alone is the absolute truth.

## Halakha 4

This is the meaning of that which the prophet states: “But the Lord God is truth” (Jeremiah 10:10). He alone is the truth, and no other being has a truth like His truth.

This is the meaning of that which the Torah says: “There is no other besides Him” (Deuteronomy 4:35). In other words, there is no existing true being like Him, apart from Him.<sup>b</sup>

## FROM THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

\*If it were possible to imagine that He does not exist – ואם יעלה על הדעת שהוא אינו מצוי – According to the Rambam, the mitzva of “I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2) involves knowing these details of this fundamental idea that the existence of all created beings stems from the existence of the Creator. Nevertheless, the verse continues with “who took you out of the land of Egypt,” since the aim is for us to understand both that there is a Divine Being who is above creation, and at the same time, that a connection is maintained between that which is above creation and creation itself (as can be learned from the miraculous exodus from Egypt and the ensuing

giving of the Torah). The Rambam alludes to this idea in the first two Halakhot: God is connected to creation, for it is He “who brought all existence into being” (Halakha 1), but He is also above creation, as indicated in Halakha 2, with its emphasis on the existence of God irrespective of any creation. The initials of the Hebrew words of the Rambam’s opening comments to the book: “The foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdoms” form an acronym of the ineffable name of God, the Tetragrammaton, alluding to God Himself, who is beyond any definition and boundary, and thus links what exists above and below (*Torat Menaḥem, Hitvaaduyot, Parashat Yitro 5750*).

## Halakha 5

הַמְצוּי הַזֶּה הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָעוֹלָם, אֲדוֹן  
כָּל הָאָרֶץ, וְהוּא הַמְנַהֵג הַגְּלִגְלָה בְּכַח  
שְׂאֵין לוֹ קֶץ וְתִכְלִית, בְּכַח שְׂאֵין  
לוֹ הַפְּסֵק.

שֶׁהַגְּלִגְלָה סוֹבֵב תָּמִיד, וְאֵי אֶפְשָׁר  
שִׁיִּסֵּב בְּלֹא מְסַבֵּב, וְהוּא בְּרוּךְ הוּא  
הוּא הַמְסַבֵּב אוֹתוֹ בְּלֹא יָד וְלֹא גּוֹף.

**This being is the Lord of the world and the Master of the whole Earth. He controls the sphere with infinite and endless power, with a power that does not cease.** This was the accepted definition (in the terminology of the scientific concepts of the time) of the Primary Force that activates everything.<sup>a</sup>

**For the sphere is constantly revolving, and it is impossible for it to revolve without something causing it to revolve. And it is He, blessed be He, who causes it to revolve, without the use of a hand or any other bodily matter.**

## Halakha 6

וַיְדִיעַת דְּבַר זֶה – מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר:  
”אֲנִי יי אֱלֹהֶיךָ” (שְׁמוֹת כ, ב; דְּבָרִים  
ה, א).

וְכָל הַמַּעֲלָה עַל דְּעִתּוֹ שִׁישׁ שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי  
אֲחֵר חוּץ מִזֶּה – עֵבֶר בְּלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה,  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר: ”לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים  
עַל פְּנֵי” (שִׁם), וְכִפָּר בְּעֶקֶר,

שֶׁזֶה הוּא הָעֶקֶר הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁהִבֵּל תְּלוּי  
בוֹ.

**The knowledge of this concept, the fact that there is a Primary Being, and the relationship between the truth of His existence and the truth of the existence of all other beings, is a positive mitzva,\* as it is stated: “I am the Lord your God”<sup>b</sup> (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6).**

**Anyone who contemplates that another god exists apart from Him has violated a prohibition, as it is stated: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7), and he has denied the fundamental principle of the faith,**

**for this is the great principle upon which the whole religion depends. The belief in the uniqueness of God forms the basis for all the mitzvot of the Torah.**

## Halakha 7

אֱלֹהֵי זֶה – אֶחָד הוּא, אֵינּוּ לֹא שְׁנַיִם  
וְלֹא יֵתֵר עַל שְׁנַיִם, אֲלֵא אֶחָד שְׂאֵין  
בִּיחודוֹ אֶחָד מִן הָאֲחָדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים  
בְּעוֹלָם:

לֹא אֶחָד כְּמִין שֶׁהוּא בּוֹלֵל אֲחָדִים  
הַרְבֵּה, וְלֹא אֶחָד כְּגוֹף שֶׁהוּא נִחְלָק  
לְמַחְלָקוֹת וְלִקְצוּוֹת, אֲלֵא יחוד שְׂאֵין  
יחוד אֲחֵר כְּמִוֹתוֹ בְּעוֹלָם.

**This God is one. He is not two, or more than two, but one, in such a manner that His unity is unlike any one of the unities that are found in the world.** The definition of God as “one” is not the same as the “one” used in any other context.

**He is not one like the type of entity that includes many other unities, a whole comprised of smaller parts, nor one like the body, that divides into its constituent portions and extremities, its limbs. Rather, His unity is of such a kind that there exists no unity like His in the world.**

### NOTES

a. See chap. 3.

b. This verse, which is telling us that the Lord who is addressing Israel is God, is not merely providing information; it is commanding us to know and believe this truth.

### BACKGROUND

For the sphere is constantly revolving – שֶׁהַגְּלִגְלָה  
סוֹבֵב תָּמִיד:



An armillary sphere used to calculate movements of the heavenly bodies

### FROM THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

\*The knowledge of this concept is a positive mitzva – וַיְדִיעַת דְּבַר זֶה מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה – The Rambam considers knowledge of God to be a positive mitzva (see also *Sefer HaMitzvot*, positive mitzva 1). There were other early authorities, such as the Baal Halakhot Gedolot, who argued that this cannot be counted as a mitzva, because there is no significance to the concept of a commandment without presupposing belief in the One who commands, and if one already believes in the One who commands, what need is there for such a mitzva? Rather, belief is the basis of all the mitzvot, but is not a mitzva itself (see Ramban’s commentary to *Sefer HaMitzvot*, positive mitzva 1). The Ramban’s view, however, is that this mitzva is not that of the basic belief in the existence of God. Rather, presupposing that basic level of belief, the mitzva is to know that God is the source of everything that exists, and all the other details the Ramban includes in this chapter. That is why he waits until the sixth Halakha to state that this is a mitzva, rather than beginning the chapter with this statement (*Likkutei Sifhot* 26, p. 133).

## NOTES

a. The proof of the unity of God follows from the fact that He does not have a body, for the necessary result of referring to multiple deities is that they are limited bodies, since the difference between entities of the same essence is expressed only through their different bodies and the particular circumstances associated with them.

b. When we speak of God as infinite, we are referring not only to the farthest boundaries of outer space, but also to His relationship with our familiar, supposedly more mundane reality. For these share the same characteristic; they are included in the all-encompassing nature of the Infinite. People have a tendency to feel that God, like a great ruler who has no time to deal with trivial matters, is too lofty to be involved in our concerns, even though this idea is contradicted by many verses in the Torah. They think that if God is dealing with stars and galaxies, He can't possibly care about the minor deeds of humans. However, the concept of infinity encompasses even the smallest things. A human ruler, even the most powerful one, cannot deal with every small matter, because he is limited, and therefore he has to focus only on pressing issues. However, for the Infinite, the distinction between vast and tiny disappears. Thus, the verse states: "Exalted above all nations is the Lord; above the heavens is His glory" (Psalms 113:4), meaning that, for the nations, God's exalted state is why He remains "above the heavens." We, by contrast, declare that He "sits on high" (Psalms 113:5), i.e., He is above the heavens as well, and that He nevertheless "looks down to see what is in heaven and earth" (Psalms 113:6); both of them, together (from the article "On the Foundations of Faith," published in the periodical *Shefa Rav*, 17).

אלו היו האלוהות הרבה – היו גופין וגויות, מפני שאין הנמנין השוין במציאתן נפרדין זה מזה אלא במארגים שיארגו הגופות והגויות.

ואלו היה היוצר גוף וגויה – היה לו קץ ותכלית, שאי אפשר להיות גוף שאין לו קץ.

וכל שיש לו קץ ותכלית – יש לבחור קץ וסוף.

ואלהינו ברוך שמו, הואיל וזכו אין לו קץ ואינו פסק, שהרי הגלגל סובב תמיד – אין זכו בך גוף.

והואיל ואינו גוף – לא יארגו מארעות הגופות כדי שיהא נחלק ונפרד מאחר. לפיכך אי אפשר שיהיה אלא אחד.

ידיעת דבר זה – מצות עשה, שנאמר: "ואלהינו י אחד" (דברים ו, ד).

הרי מפרש בתורה ובנביא שאין הקדוש ברוך הוא גוף וגויה, שנאמר: "כי יי הוא האלהים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת" (דברים ד, לט), והגוף לא יהיה בשני מקומות.

ונאמר: "כי לא ראיתם כל תמונה" (שם ד, טו), ונאמר: "ואל מי תדמיני ואשוה" (ישעיהו מ, כה), ואלו היה גוף – היה דומה לשאר גופים.

If there were many gods, they would have bodies and corporeal forms, because entities that are equal with respect to their existence are separated from each other only through the circumstances involving bodies and corporeal forms.<sup>a</sup>

If the Maker had a body and corporeal form, He would have a limit and an end,<sup>b</sup> because it is impossible for there to be a body that is not limited.

And for any being that has a limit and an end, its power also has a limit and an end. Since God's power is unlimited, it follows that He himself is unlimited, which negates the possibility of multiple deities.

But with regard to our God, blessed be His name, since His power has no limit and does not cease – for the sphere is continuously revolving – His power is not a physical power.

And since He is not a body, the circumstances involving bodies, which would divide and separate Him from any other body, do not affect Him. Therefore, it is impossible for Him to be anything other than one.

The knowledge of this concept, God's unity, is a positive mitzva, as it is stated: "Hear, Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

## Halakha 8

Now, it is explicitly stated in the Torah and in the Prophets that the Holy One blessed be He does not have a body or corporeal form, as it is stated: "That the Lord, He is the God in the heavens above and upon the earth below" (Deuteronomy 4:39), and a body cannot be in two places at the same time.

And it is stated: "As you did not see any image on the day that the Lord your God spoke to you at Horev" (Deuteronomy 4:15), and it is stated: "To whom would you liken Me that I would be equal?" (Isaiah 40:25), since God does not have a physical form. Were He to have a body, with the dimensions of a body, He would resemble other bodies, and could thus be likened to them.

## Halakha 9

אם כן, מה הוא זה שְנֵאָמַר בַּתּוֹרָה:  
 “וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו” (שמות כד, י), “כְּתָבִים  
 בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים” (שם לא, יח; דברים ט,  
 א), “יָד יי” (שמות ט, ג; במדבר יא, כג ועוד),  
 “עֵינַי יי” (דברים יא, יב), “אָזְנַי יי” (במדבר  
 יא, א; יא, יח), וְכִיּוֹצֵא בַּדְּבָרִים הַלְלוּ?

הַכֵּל לְפִי דַעְתָּן שֶׁל בְּנֵי אָדָם הוּא  
 שְׂאִינָן מְבִירִין אֶלָּא הַגִּיפּוֹת, וְדַבְרָה  
 תּוֹרָה כְּלָשׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם, וְהַכֵּל כְּנוּיִים הֵם,  
 כְּמוֹ שְׂנֵאָמַר: “אִם שְׂנוֹתַי בְּרֶק חֲרָבִי”  
 (דברים לב, מא).

וְכִי חֲרָב יֵשׁ לוֹ וּבַחֲרָב הוּא הוֹרֵג? אֶלָּא  
 מִשָּׁל, וְהַכֵּל מִשָּׁל.

רְאִיָּה לְדַבֵּר זֶה, שְׂנֵבִיא אֶחָד אוֹמֵר  
 שְׂרָאָה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא “לְבוּשֵׁה  
 כְּתֹלֵג חוֹר” (דניאל ז, ט), וְאַחַר רְאָהוּ  
 “חֲמוּץ בְּגָדִים מְבַצְרָה” (ישעיהו סג, א),

וּמִשָּׁה רִבְנֵו עֲצָמוּ רְאָהוּ עַל הַיָּם כְּגִבּוֹר  
 עוֹשֶׂה מְלַחְמָה, וּבִסְיֵנִי בְּשִׁלְיַח צְבוֹר  
 עֲטוּף.

לוֹמֵר שְׂאִינָן לוֹ דְמוּת וְצוּרָה, אֶלָּא הַכֵּל  
 בְּמִרְאֵה הַנְּבוּאָה וּבַמַּחְוָה.

וְאִמְתַּת הַדְּבָר – אֵין דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם  
 יְכוּלָה לְהַשְׁיֵגוּ וּלְחַקְרוֹ, וְזֶה הוּא שְׂאָמַר  
 הַכְּתוּב: “הֲחַקֵּר אֱלֹהִים תִּמְצָא אִם עַד  
 תִּכְבְּלִית שְׂדֵי תִמְצָא” (איוב יא, ז).

If this is so, that God has no body, what is the meaning of that which is stated in the Torah, with regard to the revelation at Sinai: “Under His feet was like a configuration of sapphire brick, and like the very heavens in purity” (Exodus 24:10); “the two Tablets of Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10); “the hand of the Lord” (e.g., Exodus 9:3, Numbers 11:23); “the eyes of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 11:12); “the ears of the Lord” (Numbers 11:1, 18), and similar expressions?

This is all in accordance with people’s way of thought,<sup>a</sup> and their manner of grasping concepts, for they are familiar only with bodies, and the Torah spoke in the language of men. They are all parables and metaphors, in the manner that it is stated: “Surely I will hone My flashing sword”<sup>b</sup> (Deuteronomy 32:41).

Now, does God have a sword, and does He kill with a sword? Rather, this is a metaphor, and likewise all such expressions are metaphors of God’s actions and revelation.

A proof of this claim, that all corporeal descriptions of God are only metaphorical, is that one prophet says that he saw the Holy One blessed be He and “His garment was like white snow” (Daniel 7:9), while another saw Him coming “red-clothed from Botzra” (Isaiah 63:1).

Moses, our teacher, himself saw Him at the splitting of the Red Sea as a mighty warrior, waging war,<sup>c</sup> and yet at Mount Sinai, Moses had a vision of God as a prayer leader of a congregation, wrapped in a tallit.<sup>d</sup>

This tells us that He has no image or form, since He reveals Himself in many ways, all of which are metaphors. Rather, it was all experienced through prophetic vision and representation.

But the truth of this concept cannot be grasped or analyzed by human thought, and this is the meaning of the verse: “Can you discover the understanding of God? Can you discover the purpose of the Almighty?” (Job 11:7).

## NOTES

a. Since infinity goes beyond our existence, it is very difficult to relate to it emotionally. The more we think about it, the further it seems to drift away from us. Accordingly, the Rambam rules that it is permitted, and to a certain extent even appropriate, to relate to God as the prophets speak about Him, in a poetic, rather than philosophically accurate manner. The Biblical phrases discussed here, as well as expressions such as “our Father” and “the King, girded in strength,” which we use in prayer, cannot be understood in a literal manner, but they enable us to move from the cold realm of abstract thought to the realm of experience. Thus, when the average person goes to sleep, he lies down comfortably on his bed not by thinking that he is in the presence of the Infinite, but rather, that he is a subject of the King, or his Father. All of our prophets and Sages affirm that anthropomorphic expressions are a genuine element of our relationship with God. These are all poetic ways of speaking, and poetry lives through images that, while not factual descriptions of reality, as such, are true, in the emotional sense (from the article “On the Foundations of Faith,” published in the periodical Shefa Rav, 17).

b. God says this at the end of the song of *Haazinu*.

c. As it is stated at the end of the Song at the Red Sea: “The Lord is a warrior” (Exodus 15:3).

d. When Moses ascended Mount Sinai alone, after the sin of the Golden Calf, God revealed to him the secret of His thirteen attributes of mercy. The Sages teach that He wrapped Himself in a tallit, a prayer shawl, like a prayer leader, and demonstrated to Moses how the prayer should be performed (see *Rosh HaShana* 17b).

## Halakha 10

מה הוא זה שבקש משה רבינו להשיג  
בשוארו: "הראני נא את כבודך"  
(שמות לג, יח)?

בקש לידע אמתת המצאו של  
הקדוש ברוך הוא עד שיהיה ידוע  
בלבו כמו ידיעת אחד מן האנשים  
שראה פניו ונחקקה צורתו בקרבו,  
שנמצא אותו האיש נפרד בדעתו  
משאר האנשים.

כך בקש משה רבינו להיות מציאת  
הקדוש ברוך הוא נפרדת בלבו  
משאר מציאת הנמצאים, עד שידע  
אמתת המצאו כמה שהיא. והשיבו  
ברוך הוא שאין כח בדעת האדם  
החי, שהוא מחבר מגוף ונפש, להשיג  
אמתת דבר זה על בריו.

והודיעו ברוך הוא מה שלא ידע אדם  
לפניו ולא ידע לאחריו, עד שהשיג  
מאמתת המצאו דבר שנפרד הקדוש  
ברוך הוא בדעתו משאר הנמצאים,  
כמו שיפרד אחד מן האנשים שראה  
אחריו והשיג כל גופו ומלבושו  
בדעתו משאר האנשים. ועל דבר  
זה רמז הכתוב ואמר: "וראית את  
אחרי ופני לא יראו" (שמות לג, כג).

In that case, however, what is that which Moses, our teacher, sought to comprehend, when he said: "Please show me Your glory"? (Exodus 33:18). If God has no form, what did Moses ask to be shown?

He sought to know the truth of the existence of the Holy One blessed be He, until it would be known in his heart like the knowledge of a person whose face he has seen, and whose image has been engraved on his mind, such that the identity of that person is distinguished in his mind from that of other men.<sup>a</sup>

Thus, Moses, our teacher, sought for the existence of the Holy One blessed be He to be distinguished in his heart from the existence of all other beings, to the extent that he would know the truth of His existence as it is. However, God, blessed be He, replied to him that it is not within the power of a living person, who is an amalgamation of body and soul,<sup>b</sup> to fully attain the truth of this matter.<sup>c</sup>

Even so, God, blessed be He, revealed to Moses that which no other man had known before him, and none would know after him, until he grasped in his mind, with regard to the truth of His existence, the fact that the Holy One blessed be He is distinguished from all other beings, just as a certain man is distinguished from all other men in one's mind when he has seen his back and comprehended the shape of his whole body and his clothing.<sup>d</sup> The verse alludes to this idea when it states: "And you will see My back, but My face will not be seen" (Exodus 33:23).

## NOTES

a. In other words, Moses' request is also presented in metaphorical terms. He wished to know the reality of God with the same clarity that the shape and image of another person are clear in the mind of someone who has seen him and has recognized the unique characteristics that differentiate him from others.

b. The Rambam's statement here is based on the verse: "as man shall not see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20). This verse can also be rendered: "as no man [adam] and

living being [hai] may see Me and live." The Rambam interprets the term *adam* as referring to man's physical being and *hai* as referring to man's spiritual side. Man, comprised of a combination of the physical and spiritual, cannot perceive God with absolute clarity (Rabbi Shlomo Eiger).

c. God replied to Moses that anything that a person will ever grasp in his mind is limited by the fact that humans can fully understand only corporeal, physical

things. Therefore, it is impossible for him to comprehend the whole truth of God's nature and existence.

d. Although God did not reveal to Moses a positive recognition of His existence (which is in any case unattainable for humans), Moses nevertheless attained a negative recognition of this truth, which is the essential difference between God's existence and the existence of anything else. Thus, he achieved a very high level of understanding, but only in a negative manner.

## GLOSSES OF THE RAAVAD

“מהו שֶׁבְּקֶשׁ מֹשֶׁה רָבֵנוּ כְּשֶׁאָמַר הֲרָאֵנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ בְּקֶשׁ לִידַע אֱמֶתֶת הַמְצָאוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַד שֶׁיֵּהָא יְדוּעַ בְּלֵב כְּמוֹ יְדִיעַת אֶחָד מִן הָאֲנָשִׁים שֶׁרָאָה.”

“What is it that Moses, our teacher, sought when he said ‘please show me Your glory’? He sought to know the truth of the existence of the Holy One blessed be He, until it would be known in the heart like the knowledge of a person whom he has seen.”

אָמַר אַבְרָהָם: אֵין דַּעְתִּי מִישֻׁבַּת עָלַי דְּבָרָיו, וְהֵלֵא רָאָה עַל הַר סִינַי וּבְאַרְבָּעִים יוֹם שֶׁל לוּחוֹת הָרֵאשׁוֹנוֹת מֵה שְׁלֵא רָאָה נְבִיא וְחוֹזֶה עַד שֶׁקָּנְאוּ בּוֹ מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת וּבְקִשׁוֹ לְדַחְפוֹ, עַד שֶׁאֲחֹז בְּכֶסֶף הַקְּבוֹד (בבלי שבת פח, ב).

Avraham says: My mind is unsettled by the Rambam’s comments. For Moses had already seen on Mount Sinai, and during the forty days of the giving of the first Tablets, that which no prophet or seer had seen before him, to such an extent that the ministering angels were jealous of him and sought to push him away, until he grasped hold of God’s Throne of Glory (*Shabbat* 88b).

וְעוֹד אֵלּוּ הֵיחָדָה זֹאת הַבְּקֶשָׁה, מֵה צִרְךָ בְּתִשׁוּבָה לֹאמֹר: “וְחַנְּנֵנִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲחֹז וְרַחֲמֵנִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם” (שמות לג, יט).

Furthermore, if this was Moses’ request, what is the relevance of the answer that God says: “And I will favor whom I will favor, and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy”? (Exodus 33:19).

אֲבָל לְפִי שֶׁאָמַר לוֹ הַבוֹרָא: “לֹא אֵעֲלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ... פֶּן אֶכְלֶה בְּדַרְךָ” (שם לג, ב), וּבְקֶשׁ מֹשֶׁה שֶׁיָּשׁוּב וְהוּא אוֹמֵר ‘הוֹדִיעֵנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ’, וְאָמַר לוֹ ‘לֵכוּ פָנַי וְהִנִּיחוּתִי לָךְ’.

Rather, the request is in accordance with the development of the entire discussion between God and Moses presented in that chapter. The Creator said to him: “I will not go up in your midst... lest I destroy you on the way” (Exodus 33:2), and Moses, asking God to return to the people, said to Him: “Inform me, please, of Your ways” (Exodus 33:13), to which God responded: “My Presence will go, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14).

וְאָמַר מֹשֶׁה “אִם אֵין פְּנִיָה הַלֵּכִים”, כְּלוֹמֵר אֵל תֹּאמַר כְּשֶׁנִּכְנַס בְּאַרְץ תִּלְךָ עִמָּנוּ כִּי מִכָּאן לֹא נִסַּע עַד שֶׁתָּשׁוּב עִמָּנוּ, וְאָמַר לוֹ הַבוֹרָא “גַּם אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֲעֲשֶׂה”.

Moses then said: “If Your Presence does not go, do not bring us up from here” (Exodus 33:15). In other words, do not say that You will go with us only when we enter the Land, for we will not travel from here unless You return with us. To this, the Creator replied: “This matter that you have spoken, I will do as well” (Exodus 33:17).

“וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרָאֵנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ” כְּלוֹמֵר אֲנִי רוֹצֶה לְרְאוֹת. “וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֲעֲבִיר כָּל טוֹבִי עַל פְּנֵיךָ וְקִרְאֵתִי בְשֵׁם יְיָ”

Then Moses said: “Please show me Your glory” (Exodus 33:18), that is, I wish to see it happen. “He said: I will pass all My goodness before you, and I will call with the name of the Lord before you; and I will favor whom I will favor, and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” (Exodus 33:19).

וְאוֹדִיעָה בְּעִבְרֵי וְהָעַם אֲשֶׁר הִכְעִיסוּנִי יִהְיֶה מִי שֶׁאֲחֹז עָלָיו וְלֹא כָּל כָּלָם. וּפְנִים וְאַחֹר סוּד גְּדוּל וְאֵין רְאוּי לְגִלּוֹתוֹ לְכָל אָדָם. וְאוּלַי בַּעַל הַדְּבָרִים הַזֶּה לֹא יָדָעְהוּ.

This means that God said: I will inform you of My passing before you, and the people who angered Me will be those “I will favor,” but not all of them. As for the mention of God’s “face” and “back” (Exodus 33:20, 23), this is a great secret that should not be revealed to all people, and perhaps this author did not know it.

## NOTES

- a. See *Hagiga* 15a.  
 b. That is, no reverse side, which represents division.  
 c. See the Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishna, Hadkama LePerek Helek*.  
 d. See Halakha 9.  
 e. See e.g., *Berakhot* 31b.

וְכִיּוֹן שְׁנֵי תַבְּרֵי שְׂאִינוּ גּוּף וְגוּיָהּ, יִתְבָּאֵר  
 שֶׁלֹּא יֵאָרְעוּ וְלֹא אֶחָד מִמְאָרְעוֹת הַגּוּף.

לֹא חֲבוּר וְלֹא פְרוּד, וְלֹא מְקוּם וְלֹא  
 מְדָה, וְלֹא עֲלִיָּה וְלֹא יְרִידָה, וְלֹא יְמִין  
 וְלֹא שְׂמָאל, וְלֹא פָּנִים וְלֹא אַחֲוֵר, וְלֹא  
 יְשִׁיבָה וְלֹא עֲמִידָה.

וְאִינוּ מְצוּי בְּזְמַן עַד שִׁיְהִיָּה לּוֹ רֵאשִׁית  
 וְאַחֲרִית וּמְנִין שָׁנִים. וְאִינוּ מִשְׁתַּנָּה,  
 שְׂאִין לּוֹ דְבַר שִׁיֵּגֶרֶם לּוֹ שְׁנוּי.

וְאִין לּוֹ לֹא מוֹת וְלֹא חַיִּים כְּחַיֵּי הַגּוּף  
 הַחַי, וְלֹא סְכָלוּת וְלֹא חֲכָמָה כְּחֲכָמַת  
 הָאִישׁ הַחֲכָם, לֹא שְׁנָה וְלֹא הִקְצָה,  
 וְלֹא בַעַס וְלֹא שְׂחֻק, וְלֹא שְׂמֻחָה וְלֹא  
 עֲצָבוּת, לֹא שְׂתִיקָה וְלֹא דְבוּר כְּדְבוּר  
 אָדָם. כִּךְ אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים: אִין לְמַעְלָה לֹא  
 יְשִׁיבָה וְלֹא עֲמִידָה, לֹא עֲרָף וְלֹא עֲפוּי.

וְהוֹאִיל וְהִדְבֵּר בֵּן הוּא, כָּל הַדְּבָרִים  
 הַלְלוּ וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶן שְׁנֵי אֲמָרוֹ בַּתּוֹרָה  
 וּבְדְבָרֵי נְבִיאִים – הַכֹּל מְשָׁל וּמְלִיצָה  
 הֵם, כְּמוֹ שְׁנֵי אֲמָרוֹ: "יּוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק"  
 (תהלים ב, ד), "בַּעֲסוּנִי בְּהַבְלִיָּהֶם" (דברים  
 לב, כא), "בְּאֲשׁוּר שֵׁשׁ י" (שם כח, סג),  
 וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶן.

עַל הַכֹּל אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים: דְּבָרָה תּוֹרָה  
 כְּלִשׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם. וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר: "הֲאֵתִי  
 הֵם מְכַעֲסִים" (ירמיהו ז, יט).

## Halakha 11

Since it has been established that God does not have a body or corporeal form, it is also clear that none of the circumstances of the body are applicable to Him. The characteristic qualities of physical entities cannot be ascribed to God:

Not the connection to another body, or a division into smaller parts, nor does He occupy any place, or have measurements, or ascend or descend, which are movements in space, nor does He go to the right, left, front, or back, or stand or sit, all of which refer only to bodies.

He is not found in time, that is, the dimension of time does not apply to Him, that He would possess a beginning, an end, or an age in years. He does not change, for there is nothing that can cause Him to change.

God has no death, or life, as these apply to the life of the living body, nor does He have foolishness, or wisdom like the wisdom of a wise man, or sleep or waking, or anger or laughter, or joy or sadness, or silence, or speech like human speech. The Sages said the following:<sup>a</sup> "In the world above there is no sitting; no standing; no back;<sup>b</sup> and no connection to another body."<sup>c</sup>

## Halakha 12

Since this is the case, all these descriptions and the like, which attribute such qualities to God, and which are stated in the Torah and the words of the prophets, are all metaphors and allegories,<sup>d</sup> as, for example, when it states: "He whose seat is in heaven will laugh" (Psalms 2:4); "they angered Me with their futilities" (Deuteronomy 32:21); "as the Lord rejoiced" (Deuteronomy 28:63), and other such expressions.

With regard to all these, the Sages said: "The Torah spoke in the language of men,"<sup>e</sup> and the verse likewise states, attesting that such characteristics do not apply to God: "Is it Me that they anger?" (Jeremiah 7:19). Do the sins of the children of Israel actually make God angry? Certainly not.

הָרִי הוּא אֹמֵר: "אֲנִי יי לֹא שָׁנִיתִי" (מלאכי ג, ו), וְאֵלֹהֵי הַיָּה פְּעָמִים בּוֹעִים וּפְעָמִים שְׂמֵחַ – הָיָה מְשִׁתְּנָה. וְכָל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֹהֵי אֵינָם מְצוּיִים אֶלָּא לְגוֹפִים הָאֶפְלִים הַשְּׁפֵלִים, שׁוֹכְנֵי בְּתֵי הַחֹמֶר אֲשֶׁר בְּעֶפְרָס יְסוּדָם. אֲבָל הוּא בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְרַומֵם עַל כָּל זֶה.

It thus states: "For I, the Lord, did not change" (Malachi 3:6). The entire concept of change is inapplicable to God. Now, were He sometimes angry and at other times joyful, He would change. Thus, all human traits, such as anger and joy, do not apply to God. All these qualities are found only in the dark, lowly bodies who dwell in houses of clay, whose founding is in dust.<sup>a</sup> But He, blessed be He, is exalted and elevated above all this.

#### BACKGROUND



Opening of *Sefer Madda*, illustrated manuscript, thirteenth century

#### NOTES

- a. This is a quote from Job 4:19 which refers to mortals, whose spirits reside within corporeal bodies, fashioned from the dust (see Genesis 2:7).