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IN HIS
IMAGE

THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN

Maggid Books

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Chapter One

The Image of God in Man: Conquest

*Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who made humanity in His image, the image of His likeness, and out of His very self formed a building for eternity. Blessed are You, Lord, Creator of mankind.*¹

Sheva Berakhot, the seven marriage blessings, describe the progression of events in the formation of a newlywed couple. These benedictions open with God as the Creator, “Who has created all for His glory”; continue with the creation of Man, “Creator of mankind”; allude to the redemption of Jerusalem and the gladdening of the bride and groom; and close with gratitude to God for creating the joy of the bride and groom. This final blessing culminates with a prayer that the sounds of joy and happiness will once again echo in Jerusalem’s public squares.

1. All translations from the Hebrew siddur are taken from Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren-Sacks Siddur* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2009).

Connecting a private affair such as marriage to a far broader and more universal process is quite typical of halakha's approach. In fact, halakha connects even the simplest meal to an expanse far greater than gratitude for the food God provides. *Birkat HaMazon* does indeed begin with the blessing of *HaZan Et HaKol* (Who feeds all), which refers to the abundance that God gives us. However, it does not suffice with this – it moves on to a broader statement of giving thanks for the Land of Israel and the Torah, concluding with a blessing for the land and food. *Birkat HaMazon* then ascends even higher, closing with a request for the restoration of Jerusalem and the return of the Davidic monarchy. Thus, the act of giving thanks for a simple sandwich becomes a complex prayer touching on many subjects.

The marriage ceremony is no different from the meal: its blessings do not focus solely on the lives of the new couple, but rather constitute a basis for connecting with God as He appears in the world – from the time of Creation to the restoration of Jerusalem.

The *Sheva Berakhot* also include the blessing quoted at the opening of this chapter. This blessing focuses on Man's essence and on the essence of the shared life established by the new couple. It is among the most daring of prayers.

Before studying this particular blessing, let us first note that the very idea that a human is capable of blessing God is a daring notion. Many *Rishonim* (eleventh to fifteenth centuries) attempted to decipher the meaning of the concept of blessings, explaining it in various ways. All of their attempts recognize the extraordinary circumstances: Man stands before God and utters a blessing unto Him. Some see blessings as an expression of desire to perpetuate the Divine abundance given to man, which also contains the audacious notion of standing before God. Others go to the opposite extreme, teaching that Man's special status is manifest in his ability to bless God. Various *aggadot* even relate stories of people asking to bless Heaven's representatives. All interpretations of blessings, however, share the idea of Man's unique status.

However, even in the realm of blessings, the marriage blessing quoted above stands out in its bold formulation. We recite a blessing

for Man having been created in the image of God, going so far as to use language that ostensibly states that God has a form and shape. This formulation is so theologically daring that there are those who articulate and punctuate the blessing in a different manner: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who created Man in His image, and in the image of the form of His likeness, and established for him from it a building for eternity.” In this formulation the image of the form is that of Man, rather than God, and the eternal building is created in the image of Man, rather than the likeness of God.

This formulation somewhat limits the impression that the blessing personifies God; however, it does not diminish this blessing’s great innovation, which draws directly from the story of Creation. Throughout history, considerable efforts were made to clear the Torah of anthropomorphism, first by Onkelos and later by Spanish *Rishonim*. In this context, all Torah passages which seemed to anthropomorphize the Divine were explained in a non-literal sense, as metaphorical expressions. Much of the *Rishonim’s* writings dealt with this, clearing away any vestige of the personification of God.

Every great light casts a shadow and the important work of the *Rishonim* is no exception. On the one hand, they brought Jewish doctrine to light, elevating it from a primitive understanding of the Divine. At the same time, they created an almost unbridgeable gap between Man and God. God was elevated to the highest of heights, to a place in which, in the words of the Kabbalists, *leit mahshava tfisa bei klal* (no thought can grasp). Thus, Jewish faith was indeed cleared of the remains of paganism, but at a heavy price: a gaping abyss came in its wake. The Divine was ostensibly removed from the world.

Into this void entered Jewish mysticism. Its main focus was on building a bridge between the Infinite and reality. It revealed that different worlds exist (emanation, creation, formation, and action) and decoded the different spheres – from the lowliest of realms to the sphere of *malkhut* (kingship), from which God acts in our world. It is thus a continuous and systematic chain that reconnects the Absolute Infinite with our real world’s sphere of kingship.

The intensive preoccupation with these matters focused primarily on the theological realm. The definition of Man as having

been created in the image of God was examined in light of what this meant vis-à-vis God and whether one could speak of God in terms of an image. This was the primary motivation of the *Rishonim* in their persistent efforts to explain the expression “image of God.” Rabbi Avraham Ibn Daud (also known as Raavad, 1110–1180)² wrote the following in his book *HaEmuna HaRama*:

But [in this case] the image falls upon [what does] not [have] a body, that is, upon imagination. The poet says, “At night I did not see [any] of the figures of your image that appear in dreams.” The word “image” is what refers to a body only by imitation. The angels are imitated by man by being rational. Similarly, existence in general is imitated by [man]. It is as if he is a resume or a composite of all existence. (*HaEmuna HaRama* 2, principle 6)³

Maimonides writes in the first chapter of the *Guide of the Perplexed*:

Now I say that in the Hebrew language the proper term designating the form that is well known among the multitude, namely, that form which is the shape and configuration of a thing, is *to'ar*. Thus Scripture says: “beautiful in form [*to'ar*] and beautiful in appearance” (Gen. 39:6); “What form [*to'aro*] is he of?” (1 Sam. 28:14); “As the form [*to'ar*] of the children of a king” (Judges 8:18). This term is also applied to an artificial form; thus: “He marketh its form [*yetaarehu*] with a line, and he marketh its form [*yetaarehu*] with a compass” (Is. 44:13). Those terms are never applied to the Deity, may He be exalted; far and remote may this thought be from us. The term image [*tzelem*], on the other hand, is applied to the natural form, I mean to the notion in virtue of which a

2. Ibn Daud, or the first Raavad, was a historian, philosopher, and astronomer. He should not be confused with the third Raavad (1120–1198), the commentator on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*.

3. Translation taken from N. Samuelson, trans., *The Exalted Faith* (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson, 1986).

thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is. It is the true reality of the thing insofar as the latter is that particular being. In man that notion is that from which human apprehension derives. (*Guide of the Perplexed* 1.1)⁴

The *Rishonim's* focus on raising God to the heights of religious purity limited their study of the second aspect of the expression "image of God," which is the essence of Man.

The deeper meaning of the verse which describes the creation of Man "in image of God" (Gen. 1:17) concerns Man more than it does God. The Torah's daring declaration, expressed in the blessing with which we opened, is that Man's self-concept must revolve around the notion that he was created in God's own image. The hand trembles in writing such an expression and the heart is struck with fear reading this phrase in its literal sense.

The scant attention which the *Rishonim* paid this unique expression focused primarily on its magnitude. In the book *Magen Avot*, Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemaḥ Duran (also known as Rashbatz, 1361–1444) writes: "and because of this he is called the 'image of God' for he is the choicest and finest of all the images, like the man who has a beautiful vessel, he will say, 'This is my vessel,' the most beautiful of all he possesses" (*Magen Avot* III). The Mishna in *Avot* determines that Man is beloved because he was created in the image of God. Interpreters of the Mishna follow a line of thought similar to the *Magen Avot*, explaining the immense love God has for Man, as he was created in His Divine image. From their writing, we learn a great deal about Man's supreme importance to God. We do not, however, learn about Man's self-concept. In their eyes, God created Man in His image because of Man's great importance – but we do not learn much of the deep existential significance of this notion *for Man*.

Yet, is there anything more fundamental than a being's self-concept? What and who Man is must have far-reaching consequences on the way he acts and the place he creates for himself in the world.

4. Translations of *Guide of the Perplexed* are taken from Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

His creation in God's image must have great significance for the way Man looks upon his surroundings, human society, the cosmos, and his place within them. Can there be any more meaningful principle in determining Man's purpose and ambitions than the definition of Man? How can Man's foremost preoccupation not be the existential significance of the Divine image which he possesses?

It is with good reason that the Torah opens with Man being created in the image of God. The Torah does not open with divine revelation to Man. Nor does it open with the monumental events at Mount Sinai, a description of God's charity and justice, tales of the Garden of Eden, or a description of the creation and character of Man. The Torah begins with a two-part story of Creation – the six days of activity and the seventh day of rest. The description of the six days of activity lies between two focal points: the supreme and absolute God creating light on the first day and the creation of the preeminent being, Man, on the sixth day.

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE WORLD

Man's self-concept that he is created in God's image affects many aspects of his life. Thus, the Torah first describes the practical meanings of Man's status. God's first statement expresses the purpose of Man having been created in His Divine image: "And God said, Let Us make mankind in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen. 1:26).⁵ This statement becomes a reality: "And God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful, and multiply, replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

And thus, in the first chapter of Genesis, God appoints Man, making him responsible for the world. God has completed His work in the world and after creating Man, He sees that the world is good and

5. All biblical translations are taken from Harold Fisch, trans., *The Holy Scriptures* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1989).

sanctifies the seventh day. From then on, the world is entrusted to its various components and systems – different elements of creation are charged with different tasks, and above all of these stands Man. It is not just Man who is assigned responsibility in the world, and God does give other beings various roles. To the creatures of the sea, God says: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply in the earth” (Gen. 1:22). The earth, embedded with the capacity to grow, automatically brings forth trees. The celestial lights also have their own mission. However, none of these has a station comparable to that of Man. Man is the only one who possesses the image of God, and he rules and fills the land.

The first chapter of Genesis also indicates that God leaves the world’s administration to Man. It is worth noting that at this point God does not command Man to do anything, nor does He forbid him anything. He blesses him “be fruitful, and multiply” (which, in its simplest sense, is not a mitzva but a blessing) and places him in charge of the entire world. Henceforth, it seems, there is no need for a God who attends to the world, rewarding the charitable person for his work and punishing the evildoer for his deeds. The world is given to Man and he shall determine its fate. If he chooses wisely, the world will advance and produce all that can be derived from it; if he chooses poorly, the world will destroy itself.

Indeed, in Jewish mysticism, the name *Elokim* expresses the attribute of justice and God’s concealment from the world, establishing the fact that the world is ostensibly left in the hands of nature. As Man is foremost of nature’s creatures, he rules the earth.

However, to prevent any misunderstanding, we must note that the second chapter of Genesis paints an entirely different picture: God instructs Man on several matters pertaining to the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. The significance of this command does not concern Man alone; it also determines the place of Divine revelation. Once a command is given, its fulfillment must be verified, so that a reward may be granted or a consequence meted out. Therefore, in the second chapter, the special divine providence which accompanies the world is also established. This doctrine of reward and punishment is a major principle of faith; even those who restrict

the Jewish principles of faith to only three articles include the belief in reward and punishment.

Let us return to the first chapter of Creation. The world's existence depends on Man, possessor of God's image. This statement has many layers. First and foremost, there is the natural realm – Man is the one who has the ability to exhaust the world's resources and lead it to destruction. He is the one who can cause environmental damage, bring about the melting of the ice caps, and flood the earth. He can pollute the water, turning parts of the world into a wilderness. He can invent vaccines and save the world from disease or develop new virus strains that are resistant to those same vaccines. Man's inventions allow him to shape an ideal society with a just distribution of resources; at the same time, his cruelty can bring about a holocaust. He has the power to develop nuclear energy as a clean alternative to other energy sources and he can make use of this energy to destroy the world in the plainest sense. Man can eradicate different species with unregulated hunting and he can also develop new species by way of hybridization or scientific developments. All of the above pertain to the vital meaning of Man's responsibility to the world.

However, the question of the world's existence does not relate solely to survival and development. The world is not limited merely to the physical; it is also manifest in the realization of all dimensions of existence.

The world does not exist in the fullest sense if Man's abilities are not completely realized. What is the world's purpose if Man's artistic talents are not expressed, adding layers of significance to life? Can there be a world without culture, without moral rules, without philosophical capability, without athletic talent realized to the fullest? How could the world exist without music surging and making the soul tremble? A world without the spiritual and psychological, without aesthetics and beauty, without humor and drama, is a world that does not "exist."

The world's existence, then, can mean two things. The first meaning relates to physical existence. Man cannot find meaning in his existence when he has no pleasure in realizing his inner world, and when he lives a life similar to that of an animal whose sole purpose is to survive, it is uncertain that he will find the motivation to carry on.

The second meaning redefines the term “world existence,” as the world does not exist only in its physical dimension but also in the levels built above that plane.

The Divine image which God granted Man therefore includes the responsibility to develop all of these. It places Man at the center of creation, with the rest of creation revolving around him. The relationship between Man and creation thus includes qualities with different trajectories. Man is not just responsible for ensuring creation’s existence. He is also permitted to harness it for his needs; because of this, he was initially permitted to eat vegetation and later (after the Flood) permitted to eat from the living.

The relationship between Man and creation is thus double sided – it involves both Man’s activity to preserve creation and his utilization of creation to bring himself to his deserved heights. Moreover, it is essential to keep in mind that Man himself is also a part of creation. He plays a paradoxical role – on the one hand, he is an element of creation; on the other hand, he is responsible for it. As a result, part of his task is to bring his inner world to full realization. The world of pleasure and the senses, the world of enjoyment and emotion, the world of confronting internal cruelty and halting the forces of pride – all of these are an inseparable part of Man’s purpose and mission.

As a result of this understanding, the sages stress that the permission given to Man to exploit creation is conditional:

R. Simeon b. Elazar said: Have you ever seen a wild beast or a bird with a craft? Yet they are sustained without anxiety. Now, they were created only to serve me, while I was created to serve my Master: surely then I should make a living without anxiety! But because I have acted evilly and destroyed my livelihood. (Mishna Kiddushin 4:14)⁶

Man’s exploitation of creation is conditional on his fulfilling his own purpose.

6. All translations of the Mishna and Babylonian Talmud are taken from www.halakhah.com.

REASON

Man's responsibility to creation cannot be realized without the necessary abilities. Indeed, when the *Rishonim* explain the essence of the Divine image in Man and the ways in which it is expressed in his life, they focus primarily on two areas – his intellectual ability and his free will. Maimonides determines that Man's cognitive ability is his essential purpose in life. He even defines it as the purpose of Man's creation:

And it was found that only one activity is his purpose in life For man, before he acquires knowledge, is no better than an animal for he is not different from other types of animals except in his reason. He is a rational living being. The word rational means the attainment of rational concepts. The greatest of these rational concepts is the understanding of the Oneness of the Creator, Blessed and Praised be He, and all that pertains to that divine matter. Other rational concepts serve only to exercise one toward the attainment of divine knowledge. A complete discussion of this point would be extremely lengthy. (Introduction to the Commentary on the Mishna)⁷

The fact that the significance of having been created in God's image lies in Man's ability to engage with wisdom has profound meaning, both theologically and practically. Indeed, halakha is based on the understanding that Man is a rational being. This is expressed in the fact that one of the primary tools – and, in some periods, the only tool – for shaping halakha is Man's rational ability.

For centuries, a spirited debate has taken place about the use of irrational elements in halakhic rulings. There are those who turn the biblical phrase "it is not in heaven" into a principle of faith, demanding that in making halakhic decisions only rational elements be taken into consideration. In contrast, there are those who recognize that other legitimate sources of ruling exist, such as a *bat kol* (heavenly voice), questions from

7. Translations of "Introduction to the Commentary on the Mishna" are taken from Fred Rosner, trans., *Maimonides' Introduction to His Commentary on the Mishnah* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995).

Heaven, the Jewish mystical teachings, and so on. However, no one has ever questioned reason as one of the primary tools in halakhic methodology.

Throughout the Oral Torah's documented history, human reason has been central to halakhic discussion and rulings. The world of halakha was conducted by employing methods of logic, careful judgment, the formulation of arguments and guidelines for halakhic rulings – and not mystical experiences, hearing the voice of God, or listening to spirits and other forces or dreams. In *Aggada* we find expressions that dramatize reason's powerful status. At times, God even ostensibly “surrenders” to human reason, or “consults” with, and gives decisional weight to, a human ruling. The surrender appears in the phrase “My sons have defeated Me,” appearing in the story of Akhnai's oven (*Tanuro shel Akhnai*, Bava Metzia 59b); the act of consulting is seen in the debate on the issue of whether *baheret* (an affliction which makes skin unnaturally lighter) appeared before or after the hair that grows within it (Bava Metzia 86a).

Employing reason in halakhic ruling affects negotiations. Indeed, approaches to the reasons behind the mitzvot are a matter of debate and opinions exist on both ends of the spectrum. One extreme mandates studying the reasons for which each mitzva was given: “It is appropriate for a person to meditate on the judgments of the holy Torah and know their ultimate purpose according to his capacity” (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Misappropriation of Consecrated Property* 8:8).⁸ Or, in other words:

And it says, “Which shall hear all these statutes [*hukkim*] and say: Surely this great community is a wise and understanding people.” Thus it states explicitly that even all the statutes will show to all the nations that they have been given with “wisdom and understanding.” Now if there is a thing for which no reason is known and that does not either procure something useful or ward off something harmful, why should one say of one who believes in it or practices it that he is “wise and understanding” and of great worth? And why should the religious communities think it a wonder? (*Guide of the Perplexed* III:31)

8. All translations of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* are taken from Eliyahu Touger, trans., *Mishneh Torah* (Jerusalem and New York: Moznaim, 1986–98).

The opposite extreme is the view which states as follows:

From the words of the sages it would appear that one should not say that the mitzvot given by God are for the [benefit of the] recipient which is Man, rather they are decrees by God who decrees on His people like a king who makes a decree on his people. Even though the truth derived from this is that as [Man] carries out the decree placed on him good and success [will follow]. In any event, the initial cause of the decree is not the good it provides for the recipient. (Rabbi Judah Loew b. Betzalel [also known as Maharal, c. 1520–1690], *Tiferet Israel* 6)

However, in practice, halakhic ruling requires rational engagement with the word of God and an attempt to understand Jewish law at its core. Although many do not examine the reason for a mitzva and the rationale behind it, halakhic rulings cannot be made without employing human intellect in order to understand the essence of a mitzva. One cannot, for instance, rule on the mitzva of honoring one's parents without asking whether or not:

- the commandment is tied to the question of reciprocity (and then one may ask whether the obligation exists even in the case of an abusive father or a deliberately neglectful mother);
- the directive is related to the transmission of heritage (in which case one can question whether the mitzva applies in the case of converts or apostate parents);
- God's glory is enhanced by the duty to honor one's parents (in which case one may debate whether an adopted child is similarly obligated towards his adoptive family).

These issues can be clarified in a rational manner when Man employs his intellect and the powerful Divine image within him.

The validity God confers upon Man's reason in the realm of Torah interpretation is also the basis for the religious Jew's grappling with constant doubt about halakha's authenticity and fidelity to God's original intent. The multiplicity of debates, the various disruptions that occurred along the

chain of transmission, and the concrete dilemmas, cause us, at times, to wonder whether it is possible that we are not truly fulfilling a mitzva as it was intended by God. This nagging doubt – have we strayed from the original meaning? Are we headed down the wrong path? – is experienced by all seekers of God who are exposed to the whirlwind of debates in the world of halakha. One crucial answer to this question is given by Maimonides:

And we should also not be too critical of what they argue just because they are not as capable as Shammai and Hillel or like one who is greater in knowledge than they. The Holy One, Blessed be He, did not command us to do so; rather, He instructed us to listen to the sages of our generation as it is stated: “To the judge who shall be in those days.” (Introduction to the Commentary on the Mishna)

In other words, God did not command us to understand His original intent where we cannot do so, but rather to rely on the reasoning of the ruling sages of our time.

The fact that human reason is the basis of halakha affects not only the way in which halakha is formed but also its content. The world of halakha appeals to reason and bases the worship of God on human rationality. The atmosphere of halakha and the ethos of fulfilling mitzvot constitute a rational existence. Let us stress that not all of halakha rests on rational foundations, nor does all of halakha create a rational atmosphere. Some elements of halakha, the sages determined, constitute *hok* (decree). The most obvious case is the mitzva of purifying oneself from *tumat met* (impurity from physical contact with the dead) with the ashes of the red heifer. The sages expounded on the non-rational dimension of this mitzva. In fact, even prayer does not stand up to the test of reason; many questions arise regarding its very existence and theological significance. Nevertheless, in the day-to-day, halakha relates to Man’s mind.

Halakha expects a person to arrive at decisions by virtue of reason rather than divinations, necromancers, wizards, or other powers; it distances him from death, and views graves and death as things that defile a person and which should be avoided. In contrast with other religions which view the dead as a link between heaven and earth and relate to the dead person as a mediator between worlds, the Torah is conspicuous in

its command that those who are most holy – the Priests – avoid death. The Torah also forbids attempting to contact the dead or referring to any element which is not in the world of the living, claiming that halakha is not based on miracles. Nahmanides stresses this in his interpretation, “Now there is nothing amongst all the ordinances of the Torah which depends upon a miracle, except for this matter, which is a permanent wonder and miracle that will happen in Israel, when the majority of the people live in accordance with the will of God” (commentary on Num. 5:20).⁹ The Torah makes Man responsible for his actions, and determines that in civil law he is always criminally liable – with the exception of a case with circumstances completely beyond his control which he could not have prevented. The Torah refers differently to a person who sins intentionally and to one who errs, demonstrating that it gives great weight to thought and reason. This tenet was discussed by Bahya ibn Pakuda in *Duties of the Heart* (*Hovot HaLevavot*):

I have found further in Scripture that “he who kills a person accidentally” (Num. 35:11) is not liable to the death penalty; that he who inadvertently violates one of the negative commandments is liable only to a sin-offering or a guilt-offering, even where its intentional violation would have made him liable to premature death, or to one of the four types of execution which the court passes sentence on. What we see from this is that there are major grounds for punishment only when both body and heart participate in the [forbidden] act – the heart with its intent, and the body with its activity. (From the author’s introduction)¹⁰

Thus, there are many aspects of halakha that draw from the belief that Man possesses reason, which is the essence of his being as one created in the image of God.

9. All translations of Nahmanides’ commentary on the Torah are taken from Charles B. Chavel, trans., *Ramban: Commentary on the Torah* (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1971).

10. Translation taken from Bahya ibn Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. Daniel Haberman (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim, 1996).

REASON IN NATURE

Reason is not connected solely to halakha. Reason is central in shaping Man's behavior in all realms. Reasonable behavior also means acting within the forces of nature. Halakha does not allow Man to employ powers that contradict reason, nor does it allow him to shed his responsibility and cast it instead on irrational matters. Halakha expects a person to make correct and intelligent decisions, to act within nature, and to deal realistically with the forces of nature. Halakha does not permit a person to rely on miracles; one of its principles is that one must confront the world in its current state.

In his commentary on the Torah, Nahmanides repeatedly stresses that "the Torah will not rely in all its ways on the miracle." He demonstrates this in various ways and interprets different events in the Torah in light of this principle. For instance, in regard to the census described at the beginning of the Book of Numbers, Nahmanides points out that it was with good reason that the Torah ordered the counting of those who were twenty years old and above, since the purpose of the census was to establish a military force. The census was conducted prior to the journey from Mount Sinai to the Land of Israel and the Torah instructed Moses and Aaron to begin building an army. The Land of Israel would not be conquered miraculously, but rather naturally, in the way of the world:

Therefore Moses and the princes [of the tribes] had to know the number of those armed for war, and also the numbers of each and every tribe, [in order to decide] what to command each of them in the plains of Moab [when drawing up] the battle-lines, for the Torah does not rely on the miracle of one chasing a thousand. This is the purport of the expression, "all that go forth to the host in Israel," namely that the census was for the purpose of [determining the number of] men that will go forth to war; and also so that he should distribute the Land to them according to their numbers, and should know how many parts will be allotted to them of the Land that they capture, since if not for the affair of the spies, they would have entered the Land immediately. (Commentary on Num. 1:45)

Nahmanides explains the reason for sending the spies in the same fashion:

But the explanation of this subject is as follows: The Israelites wanted [to act] in the way that all those who come to wage war in a foreign country do, namely to send out men to become acquainted with the roads and entrances to the cities; so that when they return [from their mission], the scouts will go at the head of the army, to show them the way, in a similar manner to that which it says, Show us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city. Thus [the Israelites wanted the reconnaissance party] to advise them which city they should attack first, and from which direction it would be easy to capture the Land. (Commentary on Num. 13:2)

It is true that in relation to medicine, Nahmanides states that “when a person’s ways find favor in God’s eyes, he has no business with doctors” (on Lev. 26:11) – and this requires deeper study. However, his fundamental vision draws upon the Written Torah in its entirety, and it is a vision that stresses the principle of acting according to the laws of nature and human reason.

The world that halakha refers to is not miraculous or mystical; it is a concrete world in which one must grow a crop and cultivate it in order to eat, in which clothing is made after the shearing and weaving of wool. The Torah does not expect people to act differently. There is no known prayer to God, nor appeal to Him, asking that He release Man from his responsibilities or allow him to live life in a different manner. All of the mitzvot, the blessings, and the appreciation for the fruits of Man’s labor come only after he has acted, created, and accomplished something using the world’s natural means. After this, Man is required to thank God for His part in the great abundance that Man created.

FREE WILL

Alongside relating to Man as a possessor of God’s image in terms of his rational ability, the *Rishonim* stressed that Man possesses free will. Important distinctions exist between their different philosophies. For

instance, Maimonides situates free will as an absolute fundamental in the world of Torah:

Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his. This is [the intent of] the Torah's statement [Gen. 3:22]: "Behold, man has become unique as ourselves, knowing good and evil," i.e., the human species became singular in the world with no other species resembling it in the following quality: that man can, on his own initiative, with his knowledge and thought, know good and evil, and do what he desires. There is no one who can prevent him from doing good or bad. Accordingly, [there was a need to drive him from the Garden of Eden] "lest he stretch out his hand [and take from the Tree of Life]." This principle is a fundamental concept and a pillar [on which rests the totality] of the Torah and mitzvot as [Deut. 30:15] states: "Behold, I have set before you today life [and good, death and evil]." Similarly, [Deut. 11:26] states, "Behold, I have set before you today [the blessing and the curse]," implying that the choice is in your hands. (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance* 5:1)

Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410), on the other hand, was more restrictive:

And we will say that there are here arguments which affirm the existence of possible nature, and those which affirm its nonexistence, here [the only possible resolution] is that the nature of the possible will be on one side and that which is not on one side. And what are these sides? Would that I knew. (*Or Hashem*, book 2, part 5, chapter 3)

The world of Jewish mysticism restricts free will more broadly, to the extent that reality is not viewed as subject to free will at all.

The issue of free will is a complex one. One must first define what choice is and what conditions are necessary for it to exist. One

must define the word “free.” One must ask why the question of whether to put a hand in the fire constitutes free will. If we know that once the hand is placed in the fire it will be burned, and if it is not it will remain healthy, where is the freedom?

The *Rishonim* were occupied primarily with the question of how free will can exist if we believe that God knows everything before it occurs. These are weighty questions which attempt to understand free will and its essence. However, even here we may say that ultimately, the central concept of Man’s having been created in the image of God infuses Jewish life with the sense of free will.

The Torah does not speak of Original Sin. Man is not created with Original Sin and sin is not an integral part of his being. Adam transgressed and was punished – but his sin was not driven into the image of those who came after him. All individuals have their own free will; their positions in the world are a result of their own character. Thus, the Torah’s approach to people is not a hostile one. The Written Torah does not even speak of an evil inclination. It does not deal with primal urges within Man. It describes Man as a unified body and demands of him to choose good and detest evil. This is the simplest form of the Torah’s approach to the Divine image possessed by Man.

This is an extension of the question of human reason. Maimonides himself bases his free will doctrine on a system of reward and punishment:

Were God to decree that an individual would be righteous or wicked or that there would be a quality which draws a person by his essential nature to any particular path [of behavior], way of thinking, attributes, or deeds, as imagined by many of the fools [who believe] in astrology – how could He command us through [the words of] the prophets: “Do this,” “Do not do this,” “Improve your behavior,” or “Do not follow after your wickedness?”

[According to their mistaken conception,] from the beginning of man’s creation, it would be decreed upon him, or his nature would draw him, to a particular quality and he could not depart from it.

What place would there be for the entire Torah? According to which judgment or sense of justice would retribution be administered to the wicked or reward to the righteous? Shall the whole world's Judge not act justly? (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance* 5:4)

Free will is also expressed in rejecting a worldview that gives weight to things outside of creation. Halakha does not deal with reincarnation; it is not a fundamental principle of Judaism and the mystery of how it crept into the belief of some Jewish mystics remains unsolved. However, even those who believe in reincarnation may not pin Man's responsibility on something outside of himself and even they are forced to admit that the responsibility is Man's alone. Furthermore, all of the prophets appealed to Man's free will. When they called for change and reform, they demanded that people alter their behavior and follow the true path rather than worship forces of darkness and attempt to appease them through magic.

When a Jew is at a crossroads and must make a decision, he is responsible for his own choices; he is under no obligation to transfer his free will to someone else. No law encourages a person to shift his practical matters to another person. Some were quite critical of a transfer of this sort. For instance, the *Tanya* (the eighteenth-century book of hasidic philosophy composed by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi) states:

My beloved, my brethren and friends, an open rebuke out of a love concealed: come now and let us adjudge, remember the days of old, consider the years of every generation. Has such ever happened since the days of the world, and where, oh, where have you found such a custom in any one of the books of the early and latter sages of Israel, that it should be usage and regulation to ask for advice in mundane matters – what one is to do in matters pertaining to the physical world? (Epistle 22)¹¹

11. Translation of the *Tanya* taken from Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, trans. Nissan Mindel, Nissan Mangel, Zalman Posner, and Jacob Immanuel Schochet (Brooklyn: Kehot Publishing Society, 1984).

FREE WILL AND THE WAY OF THE WORLD

Man's greatest creativity is his ability to create himself. *Aggada* recognizes that a person operates in an environment that entails a degree of coercion. He is not the one who determines his environment nor does he choose the family into which he is born. The *Aggada* stresses that "everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven," which is explained thus: Heaven may dictate the conditions and the framework in which a person lives, and this constitutes his life's challenge. His choice is therefore not in the realm of "everything" but rather in "fear of Heaven." In other words, he may choose a unique and worthy response to the challenges set before him.

It seems that there is no more fitting a source for studying *Aggada's* attitude towards the powers of choice than the *aggadot* which deal with the question of "There is no [astrological] influence for Israel." Among these we find the fascinating story of R. Akiva's daughter's wedding day, which teaches this lesson better than any other:

For R. Akiva had a daughter. Now, astrologers told him, "On the day she enters the bridal chamber a snake will bite her and she will die."

He was very worried about this.

On that day [of her marriage] she took a brooch [and] stuck it into the wall and by chance it penetrated [sank] into the eye of a serpent. The following morning, when she took it out, the snake came trailing after it.

"What did you do?" her father asked her.

"A poor man came to our door in the evening," she replied, "and everybody was busy at the banquet, and there was none to attend to him. So I took the portion which was given to me and gave it to him."

"You have done a good deed," said he to her. Thereupon R. Akiva went out and lectured: "But charity delivers from death": and not [merely] from an unnatural death, but from death itself. (Shabbat 156b)

The careful reader will notice that the story does not exude contempt or apathy toward astrologers. On the contrary, the narrative

teaches that astrologers do indeed have the power to foresee many things in a person's future. Two elements of the story demonstrate this: First, R. Akiva did not ignore the words of the astrologers but instead grew concerned. Second, there was, in fact, a snake in the wall which threatened his daughter's life.

This story portrays the world in which R. Akiva's daughter lived – including the fact that danger did indeed hover over her. However, alongside the natural course of life, a person is also given free will. He can choose good, changing that which is decreed for him. Because R. Akiva's daughter was sensitive to the poor man's distress and did not send him away empty-handed, she changed the path of the stars and thwarted the serious tragedy which threatened her. These principles are related in this and other stories in the same section of the Babylonian Talmud. All of them express the significance that *Aggada* attributes to astrology, and all of them stress the fact that free will can overcome the stars.

But these stories can also be given a more modern meaning. Today, too, our worldview asserts that certain forces determine the course of a person's life. However, these are not the stars in the *Aggadic* sense. The science of genetics has taken the place of astrology.

Genetics instills the same feeling in Man – the sense that his fate is ostensibly determined before his birth, that certain genes determine his future and free will. Scientific discoveries in the field of genetics seem to indicate that many matters are not a result of Man's choice; they merely submit to the character that was embedded in him at the moment of conception. The spirit of R. Akiva and the talmudic stories relating to astrology, apply to genetics as well. One cannot deny that genetic makeup has significant weight in shaping Man's life. Every day we are exposed to new discoveries, and genes responsible for many psychological aspects of Man have been identified. R. Akiva's concern for his daughter's expected fate also permeates the world we live in, creating real concerns whenever we identify certain genes within ourselves.

However, just as it was possible to contend with the threat of the stars in R. Akiva's time, we are capable of confronting our own genetic makeups. The science of genetics itself teaches that genes are not indifferent to influences – environmental effects, choice, and the social milieu in which one lives. Often, it is not a single gene but rather a sequence of

genes, and the broader the sequence characterizing a specific attribute is, the greater the influence of circumstances grows. Moreover, Man can harness the skills embedded within him by genetics in different ways; it is up to him to choose how to use them. This position is also part of the doctrine of stargazers as described in Tractate Shabbat. Returning to the “astrological” version of this approach, we read:

He who is born under Mars will be a shedder of blood.

R. Ashi observed: Either a surgeon, a thief, a slaughterer, or a circumciser.

Rabba said: I was born under Mars.

Abaye retorted: You too inflict punishment and kill.
(Shabbat 156a)

Here, too, we find that the stars dictate reality. What shapes Man is the fact that he was born under the sign of Mars. R. Ashi even outlines career possibilities aligning with the characteristics of one born under that sign. Furthermore, Abaye attributes Rabba’s career as a judge to the sign under which he was born, connecting judgeship to a predisposition to work in those fields dictated by being born under the sign of Mars.

This story once again highlights both sides of the phenomenon. On the one hand, the sign under which one is born holds great influence. On the other hand, one can choose whether to lead those forces into destruction or into repairing the world, healing, and, in the case of this passage, upholding the covenant of circumcision. The power of free will is what determines this. Here, too, we can emulate the spirit of R. Akiva and replace the stars with Man’s genetic foundations. A higher teaching is therefore unraveled before us, one occupied with Man’s ability to choose freely without denying the foundations embedded within him from the dawn of his creation.

REPENTANCE

One ramification of free will is the Torah’s approach to repentance. The Torah calls for repentance, praises it, regards it as entirely possible, and positions it as a core value. The most esteemed figures are those who have repented. The origin of the Messiah is in repentance and repair, be it

Judah the father of Peretz, who succeeds in renouncing the sin of selling Joseph and rises to the level of favored son, or King David, whose sin is described by the prophet with the words, “But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord” (II Sam. 11:27). In characterizing the Messiah as one who repents, the Torah accords special status to repentance. This is similar to the famous words of the sages: “The place occupied by repentant sinners cannot be attained even by the completely righteous” (Sanhedrin 99a).

The Torah’s position has practical significance. This is illustrated in a contemptible and misguided approach that is sometimes taken regarding those who have repented: certain communities avoid marrying *baalei teshuva*, Jews who have repented from living a non-religious life. And yet, the call for repentance is known. In fact, outreach activities are planned for those who are not devoted to Torah and its mitzvot in order to encourage them to repent and commit to a religious life. Seminars stoke the fires of faith for those who are distant from it; certain yeshivas and women’s institutions of learning are designated for *baalei teshuva*. However, when these same people are ready to get married they are exposed to the bitter truth that they are considered unsuitable for marriage among certain families; in most cases they are told to marry other *baalei teshuva*. The justification for this is the desire not to marry a *ben nidda* – in other words, because of the high probability that the parents of the *baal teshuva* did not observe Jewish family purity laws, people find a spiritual flaw in the child. This makes him less desirable for marriage. They prioritize someone who is “not flawed” over the *baal teshuva*, even though this latter person’s free will probably never stood so serious a test.

This reality raises many questions of integrity and morality. At times, it even leads to disgust and rejection of the Torah. However, for our purposes, the essential question deals with the heart of the matter: Is this decision correct? Is the calculation acceptable according to the Torah? Even if we assume that the soul of one born to a *nidda* is flawed, may we ignore the difficult choice this person has made in order to effect a crucial change in his life? Is free will not significantly superior in this context to a specific flaw? Is it right to reject a person because of a blemish in his origins? This practice, dismissing the *baal teshuva* for

the purposes of marriage, is entirely contrary to the principle of free will and its great power in the world of Torah.

MAN'S CREATIVE POWER

The creation of rational Man and his free will therefore constitute Torah's basic elements and provide deep insight into Man himself. These two principles can be treated as *avot*, or primary categories. In other words, this is the starting point for Man and his character; from here different doctrines which shape Man's behavior in this world can be developed.

One fundamental ethos which draws from this is Man's creative power. The religious view that does not see Man as possessing God's image, calls on Man to accept the world as it is, navigating his way without changing its essence. Some of the doctrines in the East do indeed see Man as such and therefore expect him not to act in an aberrant manner. Any such act would, in their opinion, push God out from His place in the world, and signal detestable pride on Man's part.

The Torah speaks in an entirely different language. Because Man possesses the Divine image, he is called upon to act in the world. His action does not push God out; rather, it realizes the purpose and mission bestowed upon him by God. The fundamental ethos is creativity. The contrast between these two views is evident in the famous meeting between Turnus Rufus and R. Akiva, in which R. Akiva teaches the primary tenet of the principle of creative Man:

Turnus Rufus the wicked once asked R. Akiva, "Whose deeds are greater, man's or God's?"

R. Akiva answered: "Man's acts are greater."

Turnus Rufus said: "Can man make things like the heavens and the earth?"

R. Akiva said to him: "You cannot say [a proof from] something that is above creatures, that cannot be controlled. Rather, speak of things found in man[*'s* realm]."

He [Turnus Rufus] said to him [R. Akiva]: "Why do you circumcise?"

He [R. Akiva] said: "I knew that you would ask me about this, and that was why I preempted you and said that people's

deeds were better than God's." R. Akiva brought sheaves of wheat and cakes. He [R. Akiva] said to him [Turnus Rufus]: "These [sheaves] were made by God, while these [cakes] were produced by man.... Are these [cakes] not greater than these [sheaves]?"

Turnus Rufus said to him: "If God wants children to be circumcised, why does the child not leave the womb circumcised?"

R. Akiva responded: "And why does his umbilical cord come out with him, with the child hanging by his stomach until the mother cuts it? Regarding your question as to why the child is not born circumcised, this is because God gave the mitzvot to the Jewish people for them to refine, which is why David said, 'God's word is refined' (Ps. 18:31)." (Tanḥuma, *Tazria* 5)

This midrash is a key source in any discussion regarding the boundaries of science and Judaism's position on questions of ethics. The Torah's basic attitude is that God created a world in which He left a wide berth for Man. We do not accept the world as it is; we are called upon to shape, change, and take responsibility for what takes place within the world. As a matter of principle, Man's creativity is not subject to boundaries. Halakha does not prevent Man from preparing a series of cells or cloning humans, studying faraway galaxies or dealing in nanotechnology, decoding the human genome or developing neuroscience. All fields of science are open to Man.

Let us stress here, that opposite the fundamental ethos of creativity stands the parallel obligation to retreat before God. Because of this we find the prohibition of *kilayim* (which we shall discuss below), limits on study, and the need for Man's acceptance of the world's confines. Man's Divine image is not made up of boundless breakthroughs. It is not the only term which defines Man; Man is made up of a variety of components. Though stressing the dimension of the Divine image in Man, we do not claim it is the sole dimension, something we shall see later on.

This creativity is not only related to the natural sciences. Halakha does not preclude the development of the humanities and social sciences. It does not evade difficult questions, nor does it exempt itself from seeing things as they are. Man develops the means to direct

the economy, and halakha recognizes this in various ways. Community regulations allow society to establish general principles regarding the many social questions on the agenda. In the opinion of some of the *Aḥaronim* (mid-sixteenth century to the present), halakha does not mandate a desired form of government, but rather leaves it to Man's creativity – although it leans towards a monarchic regime. Halakha does not stifle human curiosity and although it places this curiosity within a defined religious-ethical framework, it does not limit questions or doubt.

Halakha itself is highly creative. Rabbi Soloveitchik's philosophy explains this in detail, and his words demonstrate the great creative power of the halakhic authority, the *posek*. As the scientist gathers information from the world and acts creatively with that information, so does the *posek* gather information from the Torah and halakha, and within the world of halakha he is empowered to bring his creative forces to the highest of heights. He serves as an interpreter who, at times, even "defeats" God with his creative interpretation.

Maimonides stresses that one who is loyal to the mitzvot need not fear if a court rules incorrectly and determines that he is not observing halakha properly. We observed above that Maimonides asks how one can see halakha as the authentic realization of the word of God if errors have occurred in the tradition's transmission from generation to generation. The sages even attested: "Now once the disciples of Shammai and Hillel who did not adequately serve their master had become many, contentions multiplied in Israel, and they became two Torahs" (*Tosefta Ḥagiga* 2:9).¹² Maimonides' response is divided into two parts: First, he minimizes the extent of the problem, saying that in Torah's most fundamental matters no debate exists. Therefore, doubt does not relate to the Torah's transmission but rather to fields that rely on conclusions drawn. Second, he states that those areas that employ Man's reason were also subject to Man's creative development, and the creations themselves became foundations of halakha. Halakha was handed to human beings and they are the ones who shape it.

12. Translations of the *Tosefta* are taken from Jacob Neusner, *The Tosefta* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002).

RESPONSIBILITY

Man – created in God’s image – is not permitted to place responsibility on another agent; he is responsible for his actions. Halakha in its entirety speaks in the language of responsibility. It recognizes human frailties – indeed, many halakhic tenets refer to these frailties: “the Torah was not given to the ministering angels” (Berakhot 25b), “it is better that they should err in ignorance than presumptuously” (Beitza 30a), “the All-merciful absolves anyone who acts under pressure” (Avoda Zara 54a), “the Torah only provided for human passions” (Kiddushin 21b), and so on and so forth. The prevalence of these expressions highlights the great axiom at the basis of halakha, for which these rules are the exception: Halakha directs each person to be responsible for his own actions. When he conducts himself well, he is entitled to look around with a certain degree of satisfaction, to thank God, and to be pleased with his achievements. Some *Rishonim* explained that “and thou say in thy heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth’” does not mean “lest you say in your heart” but rather refers to the right to say it:

What Scripture wished to say was that although it is true that there are people with unique qualities in certain matters, like those who are willing to accept wisdom, and others who are willing to take the advice to heart to collect and consolidate [assets], and from this there would be a degree of truth for the rich man to say “my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.”

With all that, with the fact that the power is embedded in you, remember who gave you that power and where it comes from. As it says: “But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He who gives thee power to get wealth”; it did not say “and thou shalt remember that the Lord your God gave you wealth,” for if so it would go further, that the strength embedded in man is an intermediate reason for his collecting wealth, and this is not so, and therefore it said that as your strength achieves this success, remember the one who granted that strength, may He be blessed. (*Derashot HaRan* 10)

The words of Rabbi Nissim b. Reuben of Gerona (also known as Ran, 1320–1376) are further reinforced in the Torah, which states, “and [thou] shalt say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are about me” (Deut. 17:14). In practice, it was ruled that this is a positive mitzva, “and [thou] shalt say”; thus, Ran’s words accord with the understanding that Man should say “my power and the might of my hand.”

When a person reaps the fruits of his labor, the Torah directs him to carry out three simultaneous missions. The first of these is to thank God for giving him the power to accomplish what he has accomplished. This is a profound expression of gratitude, one which acknowledges the fact that God is the source of the abundance from which a person benefits. Like all of the mitzvot, it is also expressed in practical instruction – in giving the first fruits to God, in the gifts God granted the Priests in the wake of the Korah incident, and in the obligation to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem after separating the second tithe to be eaten in Jerusalem (see Deut. 14:22–29).

The second mission is between Man and his fellow Man. When a person celebrates his accomplishments he must not forget the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. The Torah makes this clear on several occasions. Even in the midst of the section on the holidays the Torah reminds us that: “And when you reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not altogether remove the corners of thy field when thou reapest, nor shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them to the poor, and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 23:22). A person’s gratitude to God must include stepping outside his own world and uniting in his joy with those less fortunate. Man cannot be happy unless he includes those on the economic margins and invites them to his table. Maimonides’ marvelous statement, depicting a person who celebrates a holiday without inviting the poor, is the most profound expression of this concept:

When a person eats and drinks [in celebration of a holiday], he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard and eats and drinks with his children and

his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is [not indulging in] rejoicing associated with a [commandment], but rather the rejoicing of his belly. (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of Resting on Holidays* 6:18)

The third mission relates to a person's happiness. The Torah does not withhold the simple joy that Man has in his achievements. On the contrary, the Torah directs him to enjoy his achievements and, after he has attributed his abundance to God and set aside some of his fruits, he is permitted a true celebration. The Torah discusses the land's wealth at length many times. The most prominent place is in the verses of *Parashat Ekev*:

For the Lord thy God brings thee into a good land, a land of water courses, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil, and honey; a land in which thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land the stones of which are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayst dig brass. When thou hast eaten and are replete, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which He has given thee. (Deut. 8:7–10)

We find nothing in the Torah that directs Man to abstain from plenty, eschew it, or not rejoice in it. Furthermore, the Torah describes the patriarchs as those who lived in a rich world and took full advantage of it.

This positive approach to abundance does not prevent the Torah from also warning Man about it, arousing in him a sense of responsibility and apprising him of the slippery slope he faces. The Torah does not turn a blind eye to the great dangers which this bounty contains. Alongside the fact that the Torah praises abundance and gives Man permission to enjoy it, the Torah also portrays the potential hazards of abundance and warns against them. Immediately following the verses brought above, which praise the land and give permission to eat and be sated from its fruits, the Torah speaks in admiration of prudence:

Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art replete, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt in them; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold are multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Mizrayim, from the house of bondage. (Deut. 8:11–14)

The Torah's approach to danger is remarkable. Man is not meant to surrender to danger. On the contrary, danger must be faced and overcome. The Written Torah, we know, contains no commandment to build high walls and erect barriers to prevent deterioration. That is the guidance of the sages, and it is they who teach us that despite the Torah's principles, we must avoid living exactly according to them, because of our crafty nature. The sages therefore erected barriers for the Torah. However, the Torah itself is not usually occupied with distancing measures. Instead, the Torah projects the responsibility onto Man and his ability to differentiate between permitted and forbidden, and to distinguish between sacred and profane.

The Torah rarely gives a mitzva which is distancing in nature. This occurs primarily in the case of two principal categories of sins: sexual sins and lies. The Torah does not command one to focus solely on sexual prohibitions, but rather requires that “none of you shall approach... to uncover her nakedness” (Lev. 18:6). The Torah does not merely prevent a person from lying but rather distances him entirely from lying: “keep thee far from a false matter” (Ex. 23:7). Ran, at the beginning of Tractate Pesahim, states that the prohibition that *ḥametz*, or leavened bread, should neither be seen nor found (*bal yira'e* and *bal yimatze*) is the Torah's way of distancing one from eating *ḥametz*. However, these exceptions do not teach of a larger rule; rather, they underscore the severity of these specific cases.

This view of responsibility is most strongly expressed in the Torah's approach to the Land of Israel. The Book of Deuteronomy seems to indicate that Moses believes nothing is more spiritually dangerous for the Israelites than entering the land. Each mention of the Land of

Israel describes it as the gravest spiritual danger. A prime example is found in the last verses quoted above. The Torah warns of the dangers that the land's material plenty can bring in its wake. In other places in the Book of Deuteronomy, the Torah emphasizes that the Land of Israel is a spiritual danger – not just because of its natural attributes but also because of the nations and tribes that live within it. It is there that the Nation of Israel will meet a very sophisticated Canaanite culture, presenting enormous temptation to leave God and turn to idolatry. Imagine for a moment how a nation of slaves fleeing from their masters, a nation that has wandered in the desert for forty years, feels about the fortified walls, sexual promiscuity, material strength, weapons, armaments, and economic triumphs of the nations residing in Canaan. Thus, in his speech in Deuteronomy, Moses does not hide his deep concern about entering the land.

Moreover, God's revelation to Moses at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy presents this state of affairs not only as a possibility but as an inevitability. God does not tell Moses that the Israelite nation may not be loyal to its God; rather, He states it with complete certainty:

And the Lord said to Moses: Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go astray after the gods of the strangers of the land, into which they go to be among them, and will forsake Me, and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger will burn against them on that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say on that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? (Deut. 31:16–17)

Nevertheless, the Torah does not appear to arrive at the conclusion so often heard in today's religious language, commanding the nation to continue wandering in the desert until the anticipated future becomes brighter. The Torah orders the Israelites to enter the land, places responsibility on the nation, determines that free will exists and that the Israelites have no obligation to stray towards the foreign gods. In light of these facts, a future punishment is placed on the nation if it sins. Here the

Torah teaches a great principle: Dangers and difficulties should not provoke surrender but rather inspire caution. The fact that a descent is possible should not prevent one from acting with propriety. It should merely enhance a person's obligation to chart a course which allows him to follow the truth, with barriers and gates to prevent him from slipping into the abyss of sin. This is the language of responsibility whose source is in the Divine image.

REPAIR

This responsibility is not measured only at times of success, and it is not a language reserved for a religious life prior to a fall. It is a language that also serves Man when he falters and when he fails. Rabbi Kook taught in his *Iggerot* that: "Man was not created in such a way that he would never sin at all. Rather, he was called upon to avoid sin, and if he did sin, to repent" (*Iggerot HaRaaya* 1, letter 79). Sin is an inseparable part of Man's world – not because it is embedded in him from the outset, but because life offers innumerable trials and the Torah was not given to the angels.

The measure of a person is not only in his successes, but also in what he does when he falters and when he falls. Man, possessing the image of God, must not shift responsibility for his failure to others and must not seek reasons outside of himself. He must take responsibility, and, moreover, outline the road to repair (*tikkun*). The halakhot of repentance were not meant only to appease God for the sin committed against Him; they were not created only to repent for Man's actions. The halakhot of repentance are the repair of Man and the world. When Man speaks in the language of repentance, he speaks the language of taking responsibility for repairing that which he has distorted and destroyed.

What is the basis of the language of repair? The supreme abundance of the words of repentance teaches us that there are unique paths of repentance which direct Man. First and foremost, it is a profound mental process. This process contains within it the initial phase of acute inner resolution. It is the basis for the talmudic *sugya* which determines that a woman who was engaged to a man on the condition that he was completely righteous is considered engaged (or at least possibly so, *safek mekudeshet*). The reason for this ruling is that he has the option

to repent and become completely righteous, even if he is only contemplating repentance. Repair is a profound cognitive willingness to begin a process that is long and torturous, one which at the same time elevates the general repair which takes place in Man. Accepting responsibility for failure in the unique form of repentance, requires admission of failure – sometimes intimately, before God, in confession (“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” [Ps. 32:1]) and sometimes publicly, before the people who were sinned against. Repentance’s singular repair requires a complete abandonment of the spheres of failure; only that can faithfully attest to an inner commitment to avoid falling again. We learn this principle from the laws of witnesses who are disqualified because of their crimes. The witnesses are required to break the tools with which they have sinned to underscore that they are of an entirely different status.

One who accepts the task of repair does not rush to enjoy his new status. All of the biblical stories regarding repentance contain a lengthy process, a willingness to pay the price of sin; only afterwards is the perpetrator able to return to his previous state. This is discernible in the story of the Spies. The People of Israel were unable to return to their journey to the Land of Israel immediately. Instead, they were forced to wander in the desert for forty years. They could not advance until they were commanded by God to do so. Even King David did not instantly earn his new status following his journey of repair; his return to the monarchy came only after he was willing to pay the price.

Repair through repentance demands that Man resolve not to descend to the same place again. One of repair’s crucial principles is the willingness to take responsibility for the harm that was caused. Torah’s repair requires renewed systems to prevent future falling. Making an internal resolution is insufficient, one must build refurbished walls to prevent another slide down the slippery slope. This repair is called “the repentance of the fence” in the language of the Hasidim of Ashkenaz, after the renewed fence which stands and prevents a collapse. Different teachings about repentance contain additional tools, all of which revolve around the same core ideas: accepting responsibility for failure and the road to return.

JUDGMENT

Man – created in God’s image – also creates a judicial language. The expression *Elokim* in Scripture is not solely designated for God. There are times when it appears in the world of men and the sages of the Oral Torah teach us that in those cases it refers to a judge, or *dayan*: “Thou shalt not revile God, nor curse the ruler of thy people” (Ex. 22:27) is rendered in the Targum, “You should not revile a judge, nor put a curse upon a ruler among your people.”¹³ “Whom God shall condemn, he shall pay double to his neighbor” (Ex. 22:8) is translated by the Targum as “He whom the judges declare guilty should pay two for one to his neighbor.” Thus, one of the meanings of the word *Elokim* is “judge.” This terminology indicates that judgment is an inseparable part of Man’s world.

Employing judgment, Man distinguishes between good and evil, between beautiful and ugly, between justice and injustice. The Torah and halakha assume that Man possesses the ability to judge, and because of this they require that he do so. Halakha requires that a Jew recite the blessing of *Hatov VeHaMeitiv* (the Good and the Beneficent) when he feels that something good has happened and the blessing of *Dayan HaEmet* (the true Judge) when the situation is grave. The Torah instructs Man to establish a system of justice and to judge justly. Halakha determines that *keshet resha'im to'eva* (a connection with the wicked is an abomination) and therefore forbids associating with evil people. It also requires that Man define who is poor and who is not, guiding him in judgment.

The first to be judged is the judge himself. He constantly assesses himself, examining whether he is carrying out the will of God or whether perhaps he is neglecting it. Man also looks at the world around him and judges whether it is advancing correctly or traversing twisted paths. Judging is part of Man’s essence, certainly from the time he ate from the Tree of Knowledge and received the ability to know things and distinguish between good and evil.

Judgment is not at all simple. Many barriers stand in its way. First, one must have the right to be a judge: “trim yourselves and then

13. Translations of the Targum are taken from Israel Drazin and Stanley Wagner, *Onkelos on the Torah: Understanding the Bible Text* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2012).

trim others” (Bava Batra 60b). Second, just as in a legal system one may not be biased – the magistrate is warned not to sway towards the wicked wealthy person due to a bribe, and not in favor of the poor and pitiable out of mercy – so judging Man will not go astray and arrive at irrelevant conclusions. Moreover, a legal system can only render an opinion on actions. The legal system avoids examining intent, as the magistrate cannot penetrate a person’s heart and inner world. Even if he could do so, we recall the rule that “a mental stipulation ... is not recognized” (Kiddushin 49b), which is the prevailing rule in halakha (in spite of the existence of a parallel rule “until his heart and mind are at one” [Terumot 3:8]). However, in relationships between people, Man’s inner world is an inseparable element that must be examined when judging. Man’s capacity to judge is then significantly constrained. He must examine the world according to internal dispositions as well, even though his ability to penetrate others people’s hearts is limited.

This is, in fact, the origin of *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers). *Pirkei Avot* closes the Order of *Nezikin*; it is a collection of all Torah rules on morality, ethics, virtue, and duties. However, at its core, it is a set of instructions to magistrates on how to act while sitting in judgment. These rules of behavior were expanded to all human beings, since we experience judging processes twenty-four hours a day. The sages overcome the limitation of judgment in different ways: they instruct to “be patient in [the administration of] judgment” (Avot 1:1) and determine that one must constantly re-examine a case before determining fates. They assert that the judge must fundamentally view things positively – “judge all men in the scale of merit” (Avot 1:6). This favorable judgment is essential for the process of adjudication but does not inhibit one’s ability to arbitrate. The sages determine that one who judges must enter the world of the person before him; he may not judge another person until he has stood in his place. All of these instructions hope to overcome Man’s handicap in judgment, helping him realize the Divine image within himself, although he does not possess the power that God has: “for a man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). These constraints do not impede Man’s obligation to arbitrate but rather pave the way for him to judge in a manner that is as close to the truth as possible.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE
DIVINE IMAGE**

This unique concept of Man's Divine image influences many broader dimensions in Judaism's *weltanschauung* and in Man's encounter with God. It is to this concept that my work is dedicated. My thoughts on the subject have been heavily influenced by the philosophies of Rabbi Kook and Rabbi Soloveitchik. The notion of the dual faces of Man's Divine image, which stands at the heart of this book, is essentially an elaboration of Rabbi Soloveitchik's thought, as set forth in a number of his works – primarily in *The Lonely Man of Faith*. Similarly, it is from Rabbi Kook that I first learned of the potential of religious life to ennoble and empower. These are the two luminous sources of inspiration for the way I read the Torah. I would never have discovered these giants of thought were it not for my teachers and rabbis, my friends and students, and everyone with whom I have had the privilege of studying. May God bless and reward them all.

Restoring the recognition that Man possesses God's image is one of the most vital missions for the Torah's honor. The Torah, as it is understood today, is moving in directions which minimize that image. This is manifest in all the fields it discusses. The term "image of God" and its halakhic significance are seldom expressed. In their place comes a view of faith which argues that belief should minimize Man's stature, perceiving him as "a worm and not a man." This self-reference permeates faith from its peak down to its foundations. It does not recognize the term "human rights" – not between Man and his fellow Man, and not even between Man and God. It glorifies the world of miracles and mystical powers rather than glorifying the world's reparation. It directs Man to constant self-negation rather than reinforcing his power. It paints faith in colors that are cold and dark. Thus, God finds those loyal to Him and His Torah weaker, alienated, and shallow.

This is especially evident in the dramatic change which has taken place in the status of graves of the righteous, or *kivrei tzaddikim* (visited more frequently in recent years by believers who wish to pray at their gravesides). The entire Torah distances from death and instructs us to cling to life. The closer a person is to holiness – and the High

Priest who is closest of all – the more he is obligated to distance himself from the impurity of the dead. In general, halakha grants a much higher status to the living, basing this on the verse “for a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Eccl. 9:4). In other words, when faced with the choice between dealing with life and with turning to those who are no longer among the living, it is better to engage with those who are “dogs” but are still alive rather than to be tied to those who were “lions” but are now dead.

From the graves of *tzaddikim* we transition to the *tzaddikim* themselves. The concept of the *tzaddik* who makes spiritual demands of his audience, serves as a moral guide, and empowers those who are attached to him, has given way to the *tzaddik* who performs wonders and miracles. This new type of *tzaddik* measures his followers’ piety in the degree of their self-negation toward him. All of this wholly contradicts halakha.

Restoring Man’s self-conception as a Divine image would unleash a revolution in Man’s attitude towards himself as well. The body would cease to be an enemy. Faith and inner emotions would not be an obstacle but rather a profound resource, a foundation for the world of the living. This world would no longer be perceived as a cursed place which requires a life of alienation. Rather, it would engender a powerful experience of existence on the great continuum between pre-Creation and the World to Come. Puritanism would give way to giving enjoyment its due place. Judaism would establish a healthy relationship between aesthetics and ethics, rather than in destroying the former. All of these would have a substantial effect on Judaism’s greater image – from halakhic rulings to artistic creation.

Man’s Divine image refers to all those who receive it – all humans. Thus, this self-concept would also cause Man to alter his attitude towards mankind. The entirety of human creation is an inseparable part of the religious Man’s identity. He is exposed to it, he is blessed because of it, he makes his contribution to creation, and part of his personality is universal. The special emphasis on that which distinguishes Israel from the rest of the nations need not require detachment and separation. It need not require contempt and derision towards general human creation. Most importantly, it need not veto a positive approach to different religious

beliefs around the world. As long as it does not negate one's identity and as long as it does not refute the uniqueness of the Jewish people, a multicultural understanding only enriches the world of Judaism. This is how the sages of Spain acted; we would do well to continue their work.

This is also the *sine qua non* of Torah's influence on reality. The vision that "for out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord from Yerushalayim" (Is. 2:3) cannot be unilateral. Man cannot be open to influence if his very essence is negated. Therefore, a religious approach is only possible when it connects to the identity of the person who is meant to accept it. The dialogue between the Torah and different strata of human society, carried out by Jews of courage and halakhic loyalty, is a precondition for the realization of the Jewish vision. When it does not exist, not only does the ability to change reality dissipate, it also leaves a vacuum from which emanate distorted religious approaches. These approaches derive from a conviction that it is impossible to forge a real link between the world of Jewish halakha and life. As a result, one must create new religious doctrines that are far removed from the Jewish worldview. These doctrines do not speak in terms of obligations and loyalties, but instead use the vocabulary of emotions and transcendence, and they cannot serve as a foundation for the building of a nation.

But when we are loyal to the great vision of Man's Divine image, when we speak the language of responsibility, right, freedom, commitment, loyalty, and morality – then a true spiritual alternative to the secularization and religious superficiality prevalent in our world emerges. It is at this point that Judaism is revealed to be a truly radical movement which struggles with foreign cultures and stakes out a path for itself, separated to a substantial degree from the rest of the world but also maintaining an extensive dialogue – influencing and being influenced – and bearing an ideology for the rest of the world.

This ideology is this book's vision. It is an ideology that does not violate Israel's covenant with God, but rather the opposite: it is loyal to the covenant as it is expressed in the Torah. This book therefore constitutes an intra-religious discussion. However, it will appeal to all those who wish to see in Judaism a radical alternative to the world's culture, an alternative that stems from profound partnership and involvement in all cultural expressions of the bearers of God's image.