

Netanel Wiederblank

**ILLUMINATING JEWISH THOUGHT**

Faith, Philosophy, and Knowledge of God

The RIETS Hashkafah Series  
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman, Series Editor

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Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank, a rising star on the faculty of our yeshiva, has authored an outstanding hashkafic work, "Illuminating Jewish Thought." It is a masterful presentation of the fundamentals of faith, written clearly and annotated thoroughly. The halachic and philosophical works of the Rambam are carefully analyzed. Complementary or opposing views of classical exponents of Jewish thought, such as R. Yehuda Halevi, Ramban, R. Yosef Albo and Abarbanel, are included as well. More recent scholars are also quoted.

The present volume focuses on Redemption. Two others, on belief in Hashem and in Torah, will hopefully follow soon. Rav Wiederblank's comprehensive contribution is invaluable for sincere students of Ipari Emuna.

Mordechai Willig



YGW

## RABBI AHRON LOPIANSKY

Rosh HaYeshiva

21 Sivan 5776

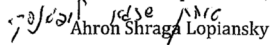
If the world of halacha is a vast forest, then the world of emunos vedeos can only be described as an unending ocean. In the world of halacha, one at least has the Rambam, Tur and Shulchan Aruch, who define the debate, and the key players thereof. One can describe the parameters of the debate, even if the details are unclear to us. But in the world of emunos vedeos, we do not even have a good definition of the issues, and many times the various opinions seem to occupy different dimensions, talking an entirely different language. This has discouraged many a student from learning these topics; while feeling frustrated that they may be well versed in the minutae of the law, but ignorant about the foundations of Judaism; the very Yesodei Hatorah. Others have taken to cherry picking points to their liking and presenting it as the entirety of Judaism.

Hagaon Rav Nesanel Wiederblank has done an incredible job, creating a full outline of the major points of Emunos Vedeos. I have known him since his youth and I can testify that he has the qualities needed to establish a work such as this. He is a major talmid chacham in shas and poskim, and yet has spent much time delving into these areas. He has a dispassionate analytical mind, yet a heart that is 'yareh vchared' of the dvar Hashem. He constantly bears in mind that the very ground in which he is forging a path, is 'admas kodesh', sacred soil. And above all, he is a true anav, who does not allow arrogance or smugness into the sefer that he has so painstakingly and masterfully put together.

The sefer is an outline, though it is voluminous. Its purpose is to structure the issues and opinions; the seeming internal inconsistencies, and the problems vis a vis the sources; the possible resolution of those questions, and the strengths and weakness of the proffered explanations. He tries to stick to the major opinions, but has included opinions that have become contemporarily popular and/ or controversial.

It is a tremendous zikui harabim, and may Hkb"h grant him the strength and wisdom to enlighten the tzibbur in many areas of Torah, and to reach many talmidim both in person and through his seforim.

With great admiration and deep affection,

  
Ahron Shraga Lopiansky

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הרה"צ' שטר  
ראש ישיבה וראש כולל  
ישיבת רבינו יצחק אלחנן

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העולמי הגדול של אהרן קין הלכה להן אגדה,  
והיה זה הגילוי של אהרן כבדו, שהיה  
הוא אביהם איצ' עולמי אהרן, איזה מחולקת,  
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הוא אביהם איצ' השקפה מחולקת, לויזה  
אהרן, לויזה מחולקת, אויבוי וקרו הרב  
ה' נעלה ה"ו, מצויי הרמ"ם שקייסיה,  
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חוצר המקלות כל נשא, מוציא בעת שם  
עם צניח השקפה - והוא עם מקלות  
טאמני, וזכרנו שיתן ספא חן עליו  
עליו העליונה אומצ' חנן ונחמה הצלחה  
צ"ה שטר  
נשי תשלוח

*I dedicate this book to my parents, Mr. Jonathan  
Blank and Dr. Serena Wieder, who have  
dedicated so much of their lives to me.  
אמא and אבא, you have no idea how much you have  
taught me. At every turn in my life I seek to emulate  
your wisdom, kindness, generosity, and decency.  
Words cannot describe how much I love you.*

*Netanel*

*In loving admiration of our dear friends  
Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank's parents  
who have nurtured and encouraged him*

*מעוררו עד היום הזה*

*Dr. Serena Wieder  
world-renowned pioneer in developmental psychology  
whose insights and therapeutic innovations  
have uplifted thousands of children*

*and*

*Jonathan Blank, Esq.  
distinguished lawyer, whose pro bono work  
on behalf of the Seattle Jewish community  
planted the seeds of Torah and Wisdom*

*Together they have guided Rav Netanel's  
critical study of Hashkafa for our times*

*B'Ahava  
Miriam and Allen Schick*

וראה בנים לבניך

*In gratitude to HaShem,  
dedicated with love  
to our children's children*

*Chava Bracha*

*Moshe Chaim*

*Golda Chana*

*Dovid Yisroel*

*Nesanel Eliyahu*

*Chana Malka*

*Shmuel Dovid*

*Barry & Marcia Wagner Levinson*



ברכה והצלחה

*Daniel & Raquel Betch*  
*Abraham & Reyna Dayan*  
*Pepe & Margie Cattan*  
*and families*

לע"נ

הרב צבי ב"ר שמואל יוסף זצ"ל  
נלב"ע כ"א ניסן, שביעי של פסח תשע"ה

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אסתר צירל ב"ר יונה ע"ה  
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ריעדער

אודים מוצלים מאש  
הנאהבים והנעימים בחייהם ובמותם לא נפרדו

מאת

אפרים בן ישראל חיים וחיה בת הרב צבי פינשאוווער

*Kenneth Ephraim and Julie Pinczower*

לע"נ

ישראל חיים בן אפרים

פינשאוווער ז"ל

*Joachim Pinczower*

"הולך תמים ופעל צדק ודבר אמת בלבבו"

נולד בגרמניה ד' אדר תרפ"ח

וברח לאנגליה בתקופת השואה

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נפטר כ"ז ניסן תשע"ז

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

מאת

אפרים בן ישראל חיים ואשתו חיה פינשאוווער

*Kenneth Ephraim and Julie Pinczower*

*Dedicated by Yehoshua and Miriam Grossman*

*In loving memory of their parents*

ר' יצחק ב"ר שמואל גרוסמן ע"ה  
מרת לאה עטיל בת קלמן קלונימוס ע"ה

ר' פנחס אלימלך בן אשר ישעי' הלוי גאלדנער ע"ה  
מרת בלומא רויזא בת אברהם שלמה ע"ה

*Sponsored by*  
*Mrs. Leah Reichmann*



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## Foreword

**W**e are excited to publish this groundbreaking volume (Volume 1 in this series) in Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank's trilogy series, *Illuminating Jewish Thought*. The previous volume (Volume 2 in this series), which explored notions of free will, the afterlife, and the messianic era, has been enthusiastically received by our readers.

The present volume, which deals with faith, philosophy, and knowledge of God, moves from the realm of eschatology to epistemology. Rabbi Joseph Albo divided the fundamentals of Jewish faith into three categories: (1) the existence of God, (2) revelation, and (3) reward and punishment. The previous volume concentrated upon the final category, while the present volume delves into the first and foremost arena of basic belief.

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 31b) records that fear of God is comparable to the key to the outer gate that leads to the inner gates of the Divine palace. While the magnificent majesty of the palace provides the greatest attraction, it is inaccessible to those who do not have the key to open the gate to come inside. This book provides the reader with the keys to enter the inner chambers of religious experience and enlightenment.

Rabbi Wiederblank has a rare gift for elucidating the esoteric and illuminating the incomprehensible. He combines an unshakeable belief in God and Torah with a profound appreciation for philosophical

conundrums. His ability to navigate treacherous terrain and extract pearls of perspicacity to inform a religiously resplendent worldview is breathtaking.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously declared that “there is nothing to fear but fear itself.” In the Jewish tradition, it is fair to state that “there is nothing to fear but God Himself.” Our Sages teach us (*Berachot* 33b) that “all is in the hands of God except for the fear of God.” In this volume, Rabbi Wiederblank both teaches about the fear of God and demonstrates through his humble and reverential style what it means to be a quintessentially God-fearing personality.

We thank Rabbi Daniel Feldman, the executive editor of the RIETS Press, for providing his trademark standard of excellence in overseeing the publication of this volume. We are also indebted to President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman for supporting the RIETS Press enterprise, and Rabbi Menachem Penner, Dean of RIETS, for painstakingly ensuring that this magnificent volume would see the light of day. Rosh HaYeshiva Emeritus Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm ob”m, ybl”c President Emeritus Richard M. Joel, and Dean Emeritus Rabbi Zevulun Charlop have also facilitated every volume published by the RIETS Press.

We hope that Rabbi Wiederblank will have the wherewithal to complete the remainder of this series and to continue to inspire his legions of students and readers with his insight, intelligence, and illumination.

Rabbi Yona Reiss  
Director, RIETS Press  
Tishrei 5781

## Preface

נִפְתְּחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וַאֲרָאָה מִרְאוֹת אֱלֹהִים: (יחזקאל א:א)

The Heavens opened and I saw visions of God.

The opening verse of the book of *Yechezkeil* introduces the prophet's glorious vision. Rambam (*Moreh ha-Nevuchim* 2:47) admonishes us not to read this verse literally: "One should not think that there are gates and doors to the heavens." Rather, there are figurative doors which we must open if we hope to know our Creator.<sup>1</sup> We must learn how to open these doors because the task of knowing God is considered of paramount importance by Rambam and so many of our greatest thinkers. As King David instructs his son Shlomo: רַע אֵת אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ "Know the God of your father" (*I Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:9). Indeed, Yirmiyahu stresses that only in this accomplishment may a person rightfully take pride: כִּי אִם- בְּזֹאת יִתְהַלֵּל הַמְתַּהַלֵּל, הַשִּׁכַּל וַיִּרְעֵ אוֹתִי "Rather, let he that prides himself do so only in this: that he understands and knows Me" (*Yirmiyahu* 9:23).

- 
1. As I explain in the preface to Volume Two, the word "we" here refers to members of the Jewish faith community. Of course, I hope that non-Jews who read this book will find it to be a valuable resource as well. In addition, although male pronouns are generally used, they should not be understood as excluding women, but should be seen as generic.

For those who feel unworthy or unqualified to engage in this noble task, remember Rambam's closing words:

God is very near to everyone who calls,  
If he calls truly and has no distractions;  
He is found by every seeker who searches for Him,  
If he marchers toward Him and goes not astray.<sup>2</sup>

However, knowing God is more than intellectual knowledge. R. Moshe Chaim Luzatto (Ramchal) powerfully expresses how the study of Torah, and specifically *machshava* (Jewish thought), ignites our soul, allowing us to connect meaningfully to our Creator.

### ספר דרך עץ חיים

וזה תראה, כי שנים הם בתבונה אחת נבראו: שכל האדם, והתורה המשכלת אותו. על התורה נאמר (ירמיה כג כט): "הלוא כה דברי כאש נאם ה'". והודיענו בזה, כי אמת הדבר, שהתורה היא ממש אור אחד ניתן לישראל לאור בו, כי לא כחכמות הנכריות וידיעות החול, שאינן אלא ידיעת דבר מה אשר ישיג השכל בטרחו - אך התורה הנה קודש ה', אשר לה מציאות גבוהה בגבהי מרומים. וכאשר יעסוק בה האדם למטה - אור היא אשר תאיר בנשמתו להגיע אותו אל גנוי מרומים, גנזי הבורא יתברך שמו, בדרך הארה ופעולה חזקה. אשר היא פועלת בה.

And this you will see, that there are two things that were created with one likeness (both function together) – man's intellect and the Torah that gives him the intelligence. Of the Torah it is written, "Is not My word like fire?" says God" (*Yirmiyahu* 23:29). With these words, God informed us that the Torah is literally a light that was given to enlighten the Jewish people. For it is not like the wisdom of the nations and secular knowledge, which are nothing more than knowledge that the intellect reaches after toiling to understand it. However, the Torah is the holiness of God; it has a supernal existence in the loftiest heights, and when

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2. Pines translation, p. 638.



a man toils in it below, it is a light that illuminates in his soul to elevate him to the treasures on high, the treasures of the Creator, may His Name be blessed.

Torah is more than wisdom – it is light. *Machshava*, learned properly, “illuminates” our lives. Without it, we grope in darkness – not only the darkness of ignorance, but utter darkness in which we are blinded from living a meaningful religious life, and worse, darkness from loving encounters with our Creator (see Rambam, *Hilchot Shechita* 14:16). With Torah, however, Rambam notes in his closing of *Moreh ha-Nevuchim*, those who walk in darkness will see a great light.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Shlomo, וְתוֹרָה אֹרֶךְ, “And Torah is light” (*Mishlei* 6:23). Hence the title: *Illuminating Jewish Thought*.

Rambam writes at the end of his Introduction to *Moreh ha-Nevuchim* that his work “is a key permitting one to enter places the gates to which were locked.” Likewise, in a much much smaller sense, the goal of this volume is to help any individual unlock the gates to knowledge of God by presenting the paths of some of our greatest teachers and addressing some of the most vexing questions a contemporary Jew faces.

We begin with an introduction where we consider whether these matters should be studied in the first place. In subsequent chapters we consider methodology – how should one go about studying the divine, what sort of sources should we turn to, and how should we interpret them? Later, we consider what a person must believe, and what the implications of false beliefs are. Along the way, we explore the various modes used to arrive at faith, and grapple with challenges to faith, such as those stemming from science.

If this work helps readers acquire a broad and sophisticated knowledge of Jewish thought but leaves them unchanged as people, then the book is an utter failure. Studying *machshava* is not about the acquisition of knowledge. Throughout our journey, we will (hopefully) be inspired by what we, as human beings created in the image of God, can achieve. At the same time, if we are successful, our newfound proximity to God will constantly remind us of our smallness and distance.

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3. See *Yeshayahu* 9:1.

## Preface

However, before we begin, I must confess that I should feel petrified writing a book of this nature. The task before me is daunting. As I write in the Preface to Volume Two, I am wholly unqualified to write this book. I have not sufficiently studied the matters I discuss, and, more importantly, I lack the requisite fear of Heaven to teach these topics. That I pontificate upon the most grandiose of levels of knowledge and love of God when I have failed to achieve even the minutest success is the height of hypocrisy. Furthermore, I have no doubt that this work contains numerous errors. Moreover, even if the information presented is accurate, what if it is misunderstood. Rambam in his introduction to *Perek Chelek* records a story that illustrates that, to some degree, it is a teacher's responsibility to teach in a way that will not be misunderstood. There was once a great scholar, the *Tanna* Antigonus of Socho, who taught a very important principle – one should not serve God merely to receive reward, but rather one should serve Him out of love (*Avot* 1:3). Among his pupils were two intelligent people who were troubled by this message. They felt that it only made sense to work hard if one can expect to achieve reward. Their names were Tzadok and Baitus. They misunderstood their teacher. Of course, there will be reward, unimaginable in its greatness. However, ideally one should not be motivated by remuneration. Sadly, their misunderstanding led them to form deviant sects of Judaism that ultimately caused great harm.

In response to this event, Rambam suggests *Avot* (1:11) teaches, “Scholars, be careful with your words lest you incur the penalty of exile.” Rambam writes that Antigonus attempted to teach the people an important lesson. One should seek the truth simply because it is true (see *Hilchot Teshuva*, Chapter 10). But this sophisticated and complex lesson was above the comprehension of some. They would have been better off serving God faithfully, even if they were motivated by the incentives of reward and punishment. True, this is not ideal service, but it is far better than no service at all. Moreover, it does inspire growth, and eventually these people may have reached the goal of service of God out of love. Thus, I wonder, what if instead of bringing the reader close to God I lead him astray? Consideration of the gravity of the topics discussed in this volume should stir within me intense anxiety, and I fear that it does not

sufficiently do so. Thus, it is with trepidation that I conclude this small preface with a prayer taken from King David's immortal words:

תהלים קמג:ח  
הוֹדִיעֵנִי דְרֹךְ זֶה אֱלֹהִים כִּי אֶלֶיךָ נִשְׁאַתִּי נַפְשִׁי:

Let me know the path I should walk, for to You I have lifted up my soul.

תהלים קיט:יח-כב  
גַּל עֵינַי וְאֲבִיטָה נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרַתְךָ... גַּל מֵעַלֵי חֶרְפָּה וְכוּז...

Open my eyes so that I may see wondrous things in Your Torah...  
Save me from disgrace and contempt...

*I owe much gratitude to many people for their contributions to this work. The reader is encouraged to consult the Preface to Volume Two where I acknowledge many of those who brought me to this day and partially attribute the various translations used in this text. Here I wish only to once again thank Rabbis Lopiansky, Willig, Feldman, and Reiss who carefully reviewed and commented on this entire book, and to acknowledge the incredible editing of R. Eliron Levinson, R. Aviyam Levinson, Matt Lubin, and Yoni Rabinovitch. Each of them contributed profoundly to this volume in innumerable ways. Their extraordinary humility and kindness combined with their striking scholarship has taught and inspired me throughout this process. Additionally, I would like to express my appreciation for the Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash. I have learned a great deal from their many courses and utilized many of their translations in this volume. Finally, I wish to thank R. Reuven Ziegler, Shira Finson, and Caryn Meltz of Maggid Books for their extraordinary work, as well as the talmidim who generously and adroitly helped finish the job, including, but not limited to, R. Yitzchok Radner, David Tanner, Yonatan Abrams, and Menachem Gans. May God bless them with opportunities to illuminate the world with the light of His ways.*



# Unit One

## Introducing *Machshava*

**T**his book seeks to elucidate certain topics in Jewish thought, or *machshava*, such as *emuna* (faith) and Kabbala (Jewish mysticism). In the preface to Volume Two of this series, we offer a working definition of the term *machshava*. In the opening chapters of this volume, we will elaborate on the meaning of this ambiguous term. Specifically, in this unit we will introduce the field of philosophy, and in Unit Two we will analyze the world of Aggada, the non-halachic components of rabbinic literature.

First, however, we must consider whether we should be studying these sorts of topics in the first place. Thus, in Chapter 1, we will explore why we should study *machshava*. In so doing, we will begin to refine our understanding of the term *machshava*. We will examine the value placed upon the study of the non-halachic aspects of Torah by the classical Jewish tradition, and we will discuss the various attitudes towards the study of philosophy. Because this chapter is an introduction, the topics will be dealt with more cursorily, while those later in the book will be dealt with more comprehensively.

In Chapter 2, we will consider whether and under what circumstances a Jew should study philosophy. We do this through introducing Rambam's *Guide to the Perplexed* or *Moreh ha-Nevuchim*. We will define the meaning of philosophy in the Jewish tradition and explore the goals

## *Introducing Machshava*

and purposes of such study. Defining “philosophy” is particularly challenging, since the term is used differently in different time periods. Even nowadays, there is no consensus on this topic. In the appendices to Chapter 2, we will examine Rambam’s perspective on mysticism and the perception that mystics had on Rambam’s philosophy.

In Chapter 3, we will continue our discussion of philosophy by considering the interaction between the text of the Torah and philosophy. Specifically, we will examine how we know when to interpret Scripture allegorically. This question relates to apparent contradictions between Torah and philosophy as well as Torah and science.

Finally, in Chapter 4, we will consider a question that relates to the debates that we will study throughout this book: In every disagreement, does one opinion reflect the truth while the other does not, or are both views somehow correct? We will discuss this question by considering the Talmudic principle of “These and these are the words of the living God.”

## Chapter One

# Why Learn *Machshava*?

**B**efore we can address why one should or should not learn *machshava*, we must define the term. For now, let us define *machshava* as the non-halachic parts of the oral law (i.e., excluding Scripture and Halacha<sup>1</sup> and including Aggada, philosophy, and Kabbala). The importance of studying Tanach is obvious – it is the word of God.<sup>2</sup> The importance of studying Halacha is obvious – we must know what to do.<sup>3</sup> However, it is not at all obvious why one should study *machshava*. Hopefully, as we consider why one should or should not learn *machshava*, we will develop a better sense of what this ambiguous term means.

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1. While a positive definition would have been preferable, there is strong precedent for this type of formulation. Almost all of the Geonim and Rishonim, starting with R. Sherira Gaon and R. Shmuel b. Chofni, defined Aggada in the negative, by what it is not. Perhaps they are following in the footsteps of the Yerushalmi *Horiyot* 3:5, זה בעל אגדה שאינו לא אוסר ולא מתיר לא מטמא ולא מטהר.
  2. There is a difference in this regard between Torah, which is the direct word of God, and Prophets and Writings, which are somewhat less direct. However, this distinction need not concern us at present.
  3. There is much more to the world of Talmud and Halacha than the practical law. This too need not concern us at present.

## 1.1 REASONS TO STUDY MACHSHAVA

After digressing to discuss matters of divine reward and punishment and comparing the views of the rabbis with those of the philosophers,<sup>4</sup> Rambam (1135–1204) concludes his commentary on *Mishnayot Berachot* with the following apology:

ואין מקום זה מתאים לדבר בו על הענין הזה, אלא שדרכי תמיד בכל מקום שיש איזה רמז בעניני אמונה אבאר משהו, כי חשוב אצלי להסביר יסוד מהיסודות יותר מכל דבר אחר שאני מלמד.

Even though this is not the appropriate place to discuss this matter, [I have chosen to discuss it] since any time there is an allusion to matters of faith [such as the nature of providence], I always elucidate, **for it is more important to me to explain one of the principles than any other thing that I teach.**

Rambam justifies his digression by emphasizing the importance of understanding the basic principles of our faith. Likewise, in explaining his organization of *Mishneh Torah*, he writes why he began his halachic work with philosophical matters:

מנין המצוות לרמב"ם  
ספר ראשון: אכלול בו כל המצוות שהן עיקר דת משה רבינו וצריך אדם לידע אותן תחלת הכל כגון ייחוד שמו ברוך הוא ואיסור עבודה זרה. וקראתי שם ספר זה ספר המדע.

Book 1: I will include in it all the commandments that are the basic principles of the religion of Moshe, our teacher, **which one needs to know at the outset.** They include recognizing the unity of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the prohibition of idolatry. I have called this book The Book of Knowledge (*Madda*).

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4. Rambam adds that, for the most part, there is confluence between the rabbis and philosophers:

ועוד נדבר על משהו מענין זה במסכת אבות, ונראה לך מקצת התאמת דברי גדולי הפילוסופים לדברי חכמים בכל הענינים.



Rambam thus informs us of the mandate to explain matters of faith and philosophy in his halachic work. Why? At the most basic level, Rambam's *Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah* teaches, as its name states, the foundations of the Torah, which are the truths of God and His Torah. If someone fulfills all of the commandments in the Torah to the letter but believes (Heaven forbid) that he is following the commands of the Baal, or if he prays to God but thinks that there are many other such 'gods,' he has completely missed the boat; his observance of *mitzvot* is for naught.<sup>5</sup> But should we really be delving more deeply into these topics, attempting to understand how God runs the world, how He communicates with humanity, etc.? Rambam felt further, lengthy explanation of such principles was valuable. Why might that be? Let us begin with sources in Chazal.

### An Essential Aspect of Torah Study

Chazal do not encourage the study of philosophy *per se* (later we shall consider if they discourage it), but they do insist that one pursue non-halachic matters. In numerous places, Chazal stress the importance of studying Aggada, and of not limiting one's Torah study to Halacha:

#### ספרי עקב פסקא מ"ח

...שלא תאמר למדתי הלכות די לי, תלמוד לומר כי אם שמור תשמרון  
את כל המצוה הזאת, כל המצוה למוד מדרש הלכות ואגדות...

... Lest one say, "It is sufficient that I learned Halachot," the Torah stated, "If you will assiduously keep this *mitzva* completely ..." (*Devarim* 11:22). The phrase "this *mitzva* completely" teaches us that one must learn Midrash, Halacha, and Aggada.

By adding the word "*kol*" (כל המצוה), the verse informs us we should not define the study of Torah narrowly (limited to Halacha). Thus, the

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5. Rambam emphasizes this point in his Introduction to *Perek Cheilek*, Ramban, in his Introduction to his commentary on *Iyov*. In Chapter 10 we consider why this is from a hashkafic perspective. See *Koveitz Shiurim* Vol. 2, 47:14, where R. Elchanan Wasserman explains why this would be true from a halachic perspective. In Chapter 11 we analyze whether this is always true and whether there are those who disagree.

first reason to study *machshava* is that doing so constitutes a fulfillment of the *mitzva* of Torah study. In fact, when rabbinic sources define what the *mitzva* of *talmud Torah* encompasses, they always include Aggada.<sup>6</sup> What exactly does Midrash or Aggada add to Halacha? We will present five overlapping themes that are stressed:

- (a) *Machshava* ignites the emotional component of our relationship with God. Most importantly, when studied properly it instills fear of God.
- (b) *Machshava* facilitates an understanding of God.
- (c) *Machshava* guides our *avodat Hashem*, adding meaning to observance of *mitzvot*.
- (d) *Machshava* teaches us how to understand our world.
- (e) Finally, *machshava* helps us address both internal and external challenges.

## 1. Fear of Sin

אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א פרק כט  
רבי יצחק בן פנחס אומר כל מי שיש בידו מדרש ואין בידו הלכות  
לא טעם טעם של חכמה. כל מי שיש בידו הלכות ואין בידו מדרש  
לא טעם טעם של יראת חטא.

הוא היה אומר כל שיש בידו מדרש ואין בידו הלכות זה גבור ואינו  
מזויין. כל שיש בידו הלכות ואין בידו מדרש חלש וזיין בידו. יש  
בידו זה וזה גבור ומזויין.

R. Yitzchak b. Pinchas says: "Anyone who knows Midrash but does not know Halacha has not tasted the taste of **wisdom**."

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6. For example, *Nedarim* (4:3) includes Mikra, Midrash, Halachot and Aggadot. *Sifrei* (306) includes "Mikra and Mishna, Talmud, Halachot and Haggadot." All agree that the well-rounded scholar excels in both Halacha and Aggada. Interestingly, many people feel an affinity to one over the other. While specialization within Torah is encouraged (אין אדם לומר תורה אלא ממקום שלבו חפץ - עבודה זרה יט א), the *Sifrei Eikev* 48 warns against ignoring any genre entirely.

Anyone who knows Halacha but does not know Midrash has not tasted the taste of **fear of sin**.”

He said: “Anyone who knows Midrash but does not know Halacha is like an unarmed warrior. Anyone who knows Halacha but does not know Midrash is like an armed weakling. Anyone who knows both is like an armed warrior.”

This source informs us that Midrash or Aggada teaches fear of sin<sup>7</sup> while Halacha teaches wisdom. Through the metaphor of warrior and weakling, it teaches that Aggada builds strength of character. Aggada transforms a person from a weakling into a driven warrior eager to fight his enemy. Despite his passion, the individual who knows only Aggada lacks a sword with which to fight his enemy. Halacha, notes R. Avraham Yitzchak Bloch (*Shiurei Da'at*, p. 142) in his explanation of this imagery, is precise, like a sharp sword; it informs a person how and when to use the spiritual strength inspired by Aggada.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. An Understanding of God

The above source seems to indicate that Halacha deals with the intellectual aspects of our religion (*chochma*), while Aggada relates to

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7. The term “Midrash” has multiple connotations. The word usually refers to hermeneutic interpretation of Scripture, which can be either halachic (as in *midrashei Halacha*) or aggadic (as in *midrashei Aggada*). Sometimes, the term is used as a synonym for Aggada. In the above source, where it is being contrasted with Halacha, it likely refers to moral or ethical teachings. In the previous source, the terms Midrash, Halacha, and Aggada are used separately, and thus the word Midrash there probably has the first connotation.

8. Many sources stress the value of Aggada in terms of inspiring fear of sin. To cite one example, R. Tzadok writes in *Sichat Malachei ha-Shareit* (p. 8): **ההגרות הם המביאים יראה אל לב האדם**. *Chazon Ish* (oral communication cited in R. Shlomo Brevda’s **ימי רצון עמ' כ** and **קימו וקבלו עמ' לו**) suggests, on a simple level, occasional aggadic digressions in the midst of halachic *sugyot* reflects the Amora'im’s feeling that they needed to boost their fear of heaven at that juncture.

Judaism's non-intellectual components.<sup>9</sup> However, the next source informs us that Aggada also conveys wisdom; specifically, it teaches us about God:

ספרי פרשת עקב מט  
רצונך שתכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם? למוד הגדה, שמתוך כך,  
אתה מכיר את הקדוש ברוך הוא ומדבק בדרכיו.

Do you want to know the Creator? Study Aggada. Through this, you will know God and cling to His ways.<sup>10</sup>

### The Connection Between the Emotional and Intellectual Value of the Study of Machshava

Of course, the intellectual component of our service of God is closely related to the emotional element described earlier, as Rambam powerfully expresses:

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק י הלכה ו  
דבר ידוע וברור שאין אהבת הקב"ה נקשרת בלבו של אדם עד שישגה  
בה תמיד כראוי ויעזוב כל מה שבעולם חוץ ממנה, כמו שצוה ואמר  
בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך, אינו אוהב הקב"ה אלא בדעת שידעהו, ועל  
פי הדעה תהיה האהבה אם מעט מעט ואם הרבה הרבה, לפיכך צריך  
האדם ליחד עצמו להבין ולהשכיל בחכמות ותבונות המודיעים לו  
את קונו כפי כח שיש באדם להבין ולהשיג כמו שבארנו בהלכות  
יסודי התורה.

It is well-known and clear that the love of God will not become affixed to a person's heart until he becomes obsessed with it at all times, abandoning all things in the world except for it. This was

9. Along similar lines, Gra (*Mishlei* 25:21) notes that Aggada contains all aspects of *mus-sar* (it is compared to water, which changes things slowly over time), and in *Mishlei* 8:6 he divides Aggada into two distinct categories: מוסר and סוד (mystical).

10. Later, we shall see numerous sources that stress the inherent value in knowing God. This midrash stresses its value insofar as it facilitates emulating His ways. Gra (*Mishlei* 8:10) implies that this midrash refers specifically to the Aggadot that teach *mussar* (as distinct from those that teach Kabbala; see previous note).

implied by the command [“Love God, your Lord,] with all your heart and all your soul” (*Devarim* 6:5). **One can love God only [as an outgrowth] of the knowledge with which he knows Him. The degree of one’s love depends on the degree of one’s knowledge! A small [amount of knowledge arouses] a lesser love. A greater [amount of knowledge arouses] a greater love. Therefore, it is necessary for a person to focus himself in order to understand and conceive wisdom and concepts that make his Creator known to him according to the potential that man possesses to understand and comprehend, as we explained in *Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah*.**

Rambam asserts that to the extent that we know God we can love Him. Increasing one’s knowledge of God simultaneously facilitates love and fear of God. He invokes his famous comments from *Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah*:

רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק ב הלכה ב<sup>11</sup>  
והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו, בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול כמו שאמר דוד צמאה נפשי לאלהים לאל חי, וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן מיד הוא נרתע לאחוריו ויפחד ויודע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה עומדת ברעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות, כמו שאמר דוד כי אראה שמין מעשה אצבעותיך וגו' מה אנוש כי תזכרנו וגו', ולפי הדברים האלו אני מבאר כללים גדולים ממעשה רבון העולמים כדי שיהיו פתח למבין לאהוב את השם, כמו שאמרו חכמים בענין אהבה שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם.

What is the way to cultivate love and fear God? When one contemplates the great wonders of God’s works and creations and sees that they are a product of a wisdom that has no bounds or limits, he immediately will love, laud, and glorify [God]. He will yearn with an immense passion to know God, like [King] David

11. English translation adapted from Immanuel O’Levy available at <http://www.panix.com/~jjbaker/rambam.html>. Generally, translations from *Mishneh Torah* are by R. Eliyahu Touger, first published by *Moznayim* and available at [chabad.org](http://chabad.org).

said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (*Tehillim* 42:3). And when one thinks about these matters, he immediately will feel a great fear and trepidation. He will know that he is a low and insignificant creation with hardly an iota of intelligence compared to that of God. Like [King] David said, “When I observe Your heavens, the work of Your fingers...what is man that You are heedful of him?” (*Tehillim* 8:4–5) Based on these ideas, I explain important concepts of the Creator’s work as a guide to the discerning individual to love God. Concerning this love, the Sages said that from it one will come to know the Creator.

Rambam writes that contemplation of God’s staggering creations ignites fear and love of God. It is noteworthy that Rambam emphasizes that this contemplation does not merely generate love of God but an intense desire to *know* God (מתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול). Frequently we think of the notion of *ta’ava* (desire) as a negative force – Rambam emphasizes it can be positive. Two chapters later, having further described aspects of physics and metaphysics, Rambam further elaborates upon the same point.

**רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק ד הלכה יב**  
בזמן שאדם מתבונן בדברים האלו ומכיר כל הברואים ממלאך וגלגל ואדם וכיוצא בו ויראה חכמתו של הקב"ה בכל היצורים וכל הברואים, מוסיף אהבה למקום ותצמאה נפשו ויכמה בשרו לאהוב המקום ברוך הוא, ויירא ויפחד משפלותו ודלותו וקלותו כשיערוך עצמו לאחד מהגופות הקדושים הגדולים, וכ"ש לאחת מהצורות הטהורות הנפרדות מן הגולמים שלא נתחברו בגולם כלל, וימצא עצמו שהוא ככלי מלא בושה וכלימה ריק וחסר.

When a man contemplates these matters and recognizes the creations – angels, spheres, man, etc. – and sees God’s wisdom in all the formations and creations, his love for God will increase, his soul will thirst, and his flesh will yearn to love God. When he compares himself to one of the great holy bodies, and certainly to one of the holy incorporeal forms, he will fear [God] on account of his lowliness, paucity, and insubstantiality.

He will see himself as an empty and deficient vessel, full of shame and disgrace.

Perceiving God's profound wisdom as manifest in the physical and spiritual universe can have a powerful effect on a person. Accordingly, Rambam writes that contemplation of physics and metaphysics ignites ardent love and intense fear of God. We are not discussing a dispassionate academic discipline – the study of science and philosophy serves as the basis for a deeply emotional relationship with God.<sup>12</sup> We will explore Rambam's understanding of *ahavat Hashem* and its relationship to wisdom in 10.2.

### Maintaining Focus

Many works warn of the danger of placing insufficient focus on the non-halachic aspects of Torah study. For example, in the Introduction to *Chovot ha-Levavot*, R. Bachya ibn Pakuda<sup>13</sup> chastises the Torah scholar who excels in Talmudic jurisprudence but “neglects to investigate the root principles and fundamental precepts of his religion ... without the knowledge of which no precept can be fulfilled.” To correct this misdirection, R. Bachya devotes his work to the study of *chovot ha-levavot* or duties of the heart (as opposed to duties of the limbs, i.e., *mitzvot* that have some sort of physical component). Carrying out the *chovot*

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12. If they do not, then presumably the study of these disciplines no longer would constitute a fulfillment of *mitzvot* like loving and fearing God, though they might still have some other value. R. Kook, in his Introduction to *Ein Aya* (p. 24), discusses how different paths in the service of God direct a person in the right direction. If practicing a particular *derech* does not bring a person closer to God, then it is either inappropriate for that person, inauthentic, or not being practiced properly.

13. Little is known about the life of this philosopher and *dayan* who lived in Saragossa, Spain, in the first half of the eleventh century. R. Bachya authored (in Arabic) the first systematic approach to divine service in 1040 entitled *Al Hidaya ila Faraid al-Qulub* (Guide to the Duties of the Heart), which was translated into Hebrew by R. Yehuda ibn Tibbon in the years 1161–1180 under the title *Chovot ha-Levavot* (Duties of the Heart). R. Bachya ibn Pakuda should not be confused with R. Bachya b. Asher ibn Halawa (1255–1340) who is also known as Rabbeinu Bachya.