

themselves to hear the word of God. They thus made themselves holy and prepared themselves to achieve prophecy and, moreover, to hear the words of God 'face to face'⁸⁸ (without intermediaries).

[2] "After three days, wondrous things began to happen: there were sounds and lightning and thunder, and a fire surrounded Mount Sinai (this fire would linger for forty days over the mountain in clear sight of all, and they would regularly see Moshe walking in and out of it). The nation then heard God proclaim Ten Commandments in a very lucid voice. These commandments were intended as the pillars and foundation of the entire Torah.⁸⁹ One of these commandments was the law of the Sabbath,⁹⁰ which had already been introduced when the provision of manna began. The nation did not receive these Ten Commandments from a group of individuals or even a prophet; they came

לשמע דברי אלהים, והתקדש העם ונזדמן למדרגת הנבואה ולשמע דברי האלהים פנים בפנים.

והיה זה אחר שלשה ימים, בהקדמות אותות גדולות, מקולות וברקים ורעמים, ואש שסבבה את הר סיני, ונשארה האש ההיא ארבעים יום, רואין אותה העם, ורואין את משה בא כתובה ויוצא מקונו, ושמע העם דבור צח בעשרת דברים, הם אמות התורה ושרשיה, אחד מהן מצות שבת, וקבר קרמה מוצתו עם הורדת המן, ואלה עשרת הדברים, לא קבלם ההמון מאנשים יחידים ולא מנביא,

88. *Devarim* 5:4.

89. See Rashi on *Shemos* 24:12, under *es muchos haéven*, etc., in which he states that all 613 commandments are encapsulated in the Ten Commandments. See also Ramban's essay (in Hebrew), "The 613 Commandments Derived from the Ten Commandments," in *Kisvei Ramban* (Mosad Harav Kook), vol. 2, page 521.

90. This, then, is the third reason why we observe the Sabbath (which the Rabbi had said that he would explain in this section). The three reasons are: (1) Because God rested on the seventh day of creation, (2) because there is a special kind of Divinity that is associated with the Sabbath, as evidenced by the manna, and (3) because the Sabbath is one of the fundamental precepts of the entire Torah. On this third reason, see *Kisvei Ramban*, *ibid.*, page 538.

87. [1] The Rabbi said: "The Sabbath was commanded to us because of this,⁸³ and because of the six days of creation,⁸⁴ and because of [another] reason which I recount here. Even though the Jewish nation believed in God and Moshe as a result of all the miracles, there still lingered in their hearts one question: How could God speak to man? Perhaps, they thought, the origins of their religion were man-made, and that these origins only helped to induce Divine aid and might.⁸⁵ They had difficulty attributing speech to an entity that was not human, for after all, speech is a physical act. God wished to remove this doubt from their hearts. He therefore commanded them [at Mount Sinai] to sanctify themselves both internally and externally.⁸⁶ To accomplish this, God required that they separate from their wives⁸⁷ and prepare

מן. אבר הסבר: השבת נזהר עליו מזה, וקריאת העולם בשבת וטיב בראשית, ומזה שאני עתיד לזכור, והוא שהעם, עם מה שהאמינו בזה שבה בו משה אחר המופתים האלה, ונשאר בנפשותם ספק, איך ידבר האלהים עם האדם. כדי שלא תהיה התחלת התורה מעשה והמחשבה מחמת אדם, ואחר וסברו עני ואמין משה האלהים, טקף שהיה רחוק הדבור בעיניהם מנולת אדם, בעבור שהדבור נשמר, ורצה ה' להסיר הספק הזה מלבושתם, וצוה אותם להתקדש, הקדשה העמומה והגלויה, וישם הדבר המצוין בה - פרישות מן הנשים והזמון

83. See *Shemos* 16:29.

84. *Ibid.*, 20:11.

85. Compare this to the belief of the philosopher in the beginning of this Essay, which was that specific religious practice is up to the individual, for there are many paths that lead to spiritual perfection. It is this very same Greek dogma which made it difficult to believe that a God Who is so removed from the physical universe would manifest Himself in any physical manner (O.N.).

86. *Shemos* 19:10 thus reads, "You will sanctify them today and tomorrow, and they shall launder their clothes." "Sanctify" refers to internal preparation, and "launder their clothes" refers to external preparation. (See Malbim on this verse.)

87. *Shemos* 19:15.

two precious stone tablets. He then gave the tablets to Moshe, and the people were able to see God's own writing just as they had heard God's own voice. Moshe then made an Ark for the tablets by Divine decree,⁹³ and surrounded it with the famous Tabernacle. The Ark remained with the Jewish people as long as prophecy was prevalent among them, for about nine hundred years.⁹⁴ When they sinned, the Ark was hidden away,⁹⁵ and Nebuchadnezzar conquered the nation and exiled them."

88. The Kuzari said: "Some-one who hears you say

that God spoke with your people, that He wrote tablets for them, and other such anthropomorphisms, will conclude that you believe in a physical God. It would seem that you could not condemn such a person, because no one can dispute the great physical revelations of God that you just mentioned. [And even though a physical God does not seem logical,] it would still be correct for you to reject [the philosophers' path] of arriving at religion through proofs and intellectual analysis [since your historical revelations supersede all else]."

93. *Shemos* 25:10.

94. According to T.B., *Gittin* 88a, the Jews were in Eretz-Yisrael for 850 years until the Babylonian exile. Adding the forty years of living in the desert gives us 890 years.

95. T.B., *Yoma* 53b; *Mishnah Shekalim* 6:2 and T.Y. *Shekalim* *ibid*.

האלה בשני לוחות אבנים וקרות. ונתן אותם אל משה. וראו אותם מכתב אלהי. כאשר שמעו אותם דבור אלהי. ועשה להם משה במצות האלהים ארון. והקים עליו המשכן החדש. ונשארו זה בין בני ישראל כל ימי הנבואה. כתשע מאות שנה. עד שפורו העם ונגזו הארון. וגבר עליהם בוכדנצר והגלים.

פז. אמר הפזרי: מי ששומע דבריכם. פי האלהים דבר עם המוניכם. וכתב להם לוחות וזולת זה. הדיו עמו שניסס עליכם דעת ההקשמה. וגם אתם. אין להאשימכם כי אין מדרגה למעמדות הגלויים הגדולים האלה. ויש לדון אתכם לזכות בהשקפת ההקשמה והעיון השכלי.

directly from God.⁹¹ However, the people were not as strong as Moshe was, to be able to endure this great and wondrous confrontation [on a protracted basis]. They therefore placed their faith from that day forward in Moshe, since they believed that he was spoken to by God exclusively; Moshe's messages were not intermingled with his own thoughts and ideas.

(3) "This type of prophecy is unlike that described by the philosophers, namely that the soul — when it is purified in thought — attaches itself to the Active Intellect (also known as the Holy Spirit), or to the Angel Gavriel, who then guides the individual to prophecy.⁹² This latter experience may occur in a dream or in a state of quasi-sleep. The individual 'hears' the words, but through his soul, not his ears. He 'sees' the vision, but through his thoughts, not his eyes. He then attests that God spoke to him.

(4) "This belief of the philosophers was disproved by the great event at Sinai [which was an actual, physical confrontation]. It was further debunked by God's own writing, in that God engraved those Ten Commandments on

פי אם באת האלהים ונתנו. אבל לא היה בהם כח כמשה לראות הדבר הגדול ההוא. ונאמנו העם מן היום ההוא כי משה. מדבר בו בדבור התחלתו מאת הפורא. לא כדרכה למשה בו משכבה ולא עצה.

שלא תהיה הנבואה כאשר תשבו הפילוסופים: מנפש יודקכו ממשכבותיה. ותדבק בשכל הפועל הנקרא רוח הקודש או בנבראלי. ויעזרוהו וישפילוהו. ונאפשר שייתדמה לו בעת ההיא. כהלום או בין שנה וקוצה. כאיש מדבר עמו ושומע דבריו בנפשו לא באניו. ובמשכבתו לא בעיניו. ואז יאמר כי הפורא דבר בו.

יוסרו אלה הספרות במעמד הגדול ההוא. ומה שנקלה אל הדבור האלהי מן הסקתה האלהי. שחקק עשרת הדברות

91. There is a dispute in the Midrash whether all Ten Commandments were spoken by God directly, or only the first two. See *Midrash Rabbah on Shir HaShirim* 1:2 (par. 2). The Rabbi seems to follow the opinion of Rabbanan, that all ten were spoken by God.

92. See *Moreh* 2:32.