

וּבְקַשְׁתָּם מִשָּׁם And From There You Shall Seek

MeOtzar HoRav SERIES:
SELECTED WRITINGS OF
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הֶרְ�בָ שְׁמוֹאֵל צְבִי בָן יוֹסֵף הַלְוי

הַלְוי חָמֵס וְפָעֵל צְדָקָה אֶחָד בְּכָבוֹן

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Maimonides put it this way in *Guide of the Perplexed* (1:61):

All the names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. The only exception is one name, the Tetragrammaton. This is the name of God, may He be exalted, that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason it is called the Explicit Name. This means that this name signifies His essence, may He be exalted, a signification that is distinct and unequivocal [having only one meaning]. On the other hand, all the other great names signify in an equivocal way, being derived from terms signifying actions the like of which... exist as our own actions.... Scripture promises that an apprehension that will put an end to [the] delusion [that God has many attributes] will come to men. Thus it says: "On that day shall the Lord be one and His name one" (Zech. 14:9), which means that in the same way as He is one, He will be invoked at that time by one name only, by that which is indicative only of the essence and is not derivative.

The *Zohar*, however, as we emphasized above, as well as the Kabbalists who followed its view, believes that the Infinite cannot be grasped even with the Explicit Name. "It is forbidden to one who apprehends Him as He is before Creation to picture Him under any form or shape whatsoever, not even by His letters *He*, *Vav*, and *Yod*, nor by the whole of His Holy Name, nor by any letter or sign whatsoever" (*Zohar* II, 42b).

R. Hayyim Vital as well, in *Etz Hayyim* [*Tree of Life*], writes that the supernal light which is supremely high, without any limit, is called the Infinite, and its name proves that it cannot be grasped in thought or imagination in any way whatsoever, being abstract and separated from all thought (*Sha'ar ha-Kelalim*, chap. 1).

The Vilna Gaon writes, *contra Maimonides*:

Know that the Infinite, may He be blessed, cannot be thought of at all, because it is forbidden to include within Him even the necessity of existence. Even the first sphere is called "nothing"; the second is called "existence" (*Likkute ha-Gra, Sifra di-Tzenyuta*, 11).

16. The idea that the Creation of the world was a moral act, and that man must try to imitate God by devoting himself to acts of creativity,

is the foundation of Maimonides' theory of the attributes of action. It is permitted to use attributes that describe the works of the Creator, with which He created the world and continues to govern it, since these are all moral acts – attributes that require man to adapt his actions to them. Prophecy, which revealed God's acts to humans, sees the entire world as the embodiment of the Hidden Intellect within the Supreme Will, as the uncovering of the divine apprehension-volition, which is totally moral and purposeful. This is the source of the moral lawfulness in the world. God provided Moses with knowledge of the entire world through the enlightenment of the thirteen divine attributes, which are the foundations of prophetic morality.

Maimonides expressed this as follows:

Know that the master of those who know, Moses our Teacher, peace be on him, made two requests and received an answer to both of them. One request consisted in his asking Him, may He be exalted, to let him know His essence and true reality. The second request, which he put first, was that He let him know His attributes.... His request regarding knowledge of [God's] attributes is conveyed in his saying: "Show me now Your ways, that I may know You" (Ex. 33:13).... Then he asked for the apprehension of His essence, may He be exalted. This is what he means when he says, "Show me, I pray, Your glory" (Ex. 33:20); whereupon he received a [favorable] answer with regard to what he had asked for first, namely, "Show me Your ways." For he was told: "I will make all My goodness pass before you" (Ex. 33:19). The phrase "All my goodness" alludes to the display to him of all existing things.... This notion is indicated when it says, "He is trusted in all My house" (Num. 12:7); that is, he has grasped the existence of all My world with a true and firmly established understanding.... Scripture restricts itself to mentioning only the "thirteen characteristics," although [Moses] apprehended "all his goodness" – I mean to say, His actions – because these are the actions proceeding from Him, may He be exalted, in respect of giving existence to people and governing them. This was [Moses'] ultimate object in his demand, the conclusion of what he says being: "That I may know You, to the end that I may find grace in Your sight, and consider that this nation is Your people" (Ex. 33:13), that is, a people for the governance of which I need to perform actions that I must seek to make similar to Your actions in governing them.... It behoves the governor of a

city, if he is a prophet, to acquire similarity to these attributes, so that his actions may proceed from him in accordance with a determined measure and in accordance with the deserts of the people affected by them...for the utmost virtue of man is to become like unto Him, may He be exalted, as far as he is able; which means that we should make our actions like unto His (*Guide of the Perplexed* 1:54).

17. Ibn Gikatilla writes:

And that which our Sages inquired [Ketubbot 11b]: "Is it possible for a human being to cleave to the *Shekhinah*?" is all true...and you should know and believe that there is a matter inherent in the secret of the form of the purity of the bodily organs, enabling human beings to cleave to the *Shekhinah*... This is the fire with which those who cleave to the *Shekhinah* indulge themselves with a pure soul that is called the divine candle. From it the candle of the soul is lit, and it cleaves to it and desires it... (*Shaarei Orah*, 1).

Nahmanides stated toward the end of his commentary on *Parashat Ekev*:

It is possible that cleaving to God includes the idea that you should always be thinking of God and His love, that your thoughts should never depart from Him. And perhaps people who have this good quality are such that their souls are connected with the source of life even while they are alive, because they themselves are the dwelling-place of the *Shekhinah*, as hinted at by the author of the *Kizari* (commentary to Deut. 11:22).

R. Judah Halevi's teaching is founded upon the aspiration to cleave to God. The idea of the "divine faculty" that becomes joined to the prophet expresses a metaphysical cleaving to God. Such cleaving can occur on the individual level (the prophet) or the national level (the congregation of Israel). Historical periods encompass the embodiment of the cleaving of the divine faculty to the Jewish people.

Maimonides developed the idea of man's spiritual ascent, that is, cleaving to God in affection and trembling. The basic principles of the Jewish religion – prophecy, divine providence, and the continued existence of the soul after death – are bound up with man's cleaving to God. But while Halevi based man's cleaving to God on an emotional and moral foundation, Maimonides spoke in praise of an intellectual and moral activity. The vision of the Song of Songs is total cleaving to God.

Maimonides' distinction with regard to the permanence of the holiness imparted to *Eretz Yisrael* by Joshua and by Ezra is well known. The first sanctification, imparted to *Eretz Yisrael* by [Joshua's] conquest of the land, was only temporary, lasting as long as the Israelite nation actually lived there. The second sanctification, imparted to the land by Jewish settlement there, is obtained in perpetuity and not abrogated by the Exile. The two sorts of sanctification derive from two different biblical verses. The sanctification imparted by conquest is derived from the verse at the end of *Parashat Ekev* (Deut. 11:24): "Every spot on which your foot treads I have given to you." As explained by Maimonides (Laws of Terumot 1:2), this verse refers to the sanctity imparted to *Eretz Yisrael* through its conquest by the Israelite nation. The sanctity imparted by Ezra is based on the verse in *Parashat Nitzavim*: "And He will benefit you more and make you more numerous than your ancestors" (Deut. 30:5). This verse refers to the later conquest, which was based on a new element: the sanctification of the land through settlement without an act of conquest and aggression. (See the Jerusalem Talmud, *Shevi'i* 6:1: "Your ancestors [observed the commandments related to the land only] while they were not under foreign rule; you must observe them even though you are under foreign rule.")

But this thesis still needs some more clarification: Why should the sanctification imparted by settlement be longer-lasting than the sanctity imparted by conquest? At first glance, the verse "And He will benefit you" does not imply that the consequences of the later sanctification are better than those of the early one. It implies only that at the time of Ezra the sanctification of *Eretz Yisrael* was accomplished by a new means that had not been used earlier (settlement). "Benefit" implies that something new was introduced there.

We are familiar with Maimonides' thesis that the early sanctification of the Temple and Jerusalem was permanent. Maimonides distinguished between the sanctification of the Temple by King Solomon and the sanctification of the land by Joshua. The former was permanent from its inception, whereas the latter was abrogated [by the Babylonian exile, and became permanent only from the time of Ezra]: