

Moses Maimonides

Mishneh Torah [1177]

Introduction and "Book of Knowledge"

TRANSLATED BY RALPH LERNER

[1b]

In the name of the Lord, God of the World. [Gen. 21:33]

Then shall I not be ashamed,

When I look to all Thy commandments. [Ps. 119:6]

INTRODUCTION

All the commandments that were given to Moses at Sinai were given with their interpretation, as it is said: *And I will give thee the tables of stone, and the Law, and the commandment* [Exod. 24:12]. This "Law" [torah] is the Written Law; and "commandment" is its interpretation. He commanded us to perform the Law through the commandment; and this commandment is that which is called the Oral Law. The entire Law was written by Moses our Master in his own hand prior to his death. He gave a scroll to each and every tribe, and he deposited one scroll in the Ark for a testimony, as it is said: *Take this scroll of the Law and put it by the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee* [Deut. 31:26]. The "commandment," which is the interpretation of the Law, he did not write down but rather commanded it [orally] to the elders, and to Joshua, and to all the rest of Israel, as it is said: *All this word which I command you, that shall ye observe to do; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it* [Deut. 13:1]. This is why it is called the Oral Law.

Even though the Oral Law was not written down, Moses our Master taught the whole of it in his court to the seventy elders, and Eleazar and Pinhas and Joshua—the three of them received from Moses. And to

This translation is based upon the Hebrew text of Bodleian (Oxford) Codex 577, as presented in the Hyamson edition of *Mishneh Torah: The Book of Knowledge*, 1b–5a, 34a–40a (boldfaced numerals between square brackets refer to page breaks in this text). Italics in this translation are reserved for scriptural verses cited by Maimonides. The title of the first book of the *Mishneh Torah* is *Sefer ha-Madda'* (Book of the Knowledge), whose first treatise in turn is titled *Yesodei ha-Torah* (Laws Concerning the Foundations of the Law). Maimonides refers once to the first four chapters of *Yesodei ha-Torah* as *Sefer Madda'* (Book of Knowledge), apparently distinguishing it thereby from the larger text of which it is a part. See *Guide*, 1.70 (92b/174).

Joshua, who was Moses our Master's disciple, he transmitted the Oral Law and commanded him concerning it. And so Joshua, throughout his life, taught orally.

And many elders received from Joshua; and Eli received from the elders and from Pinḥas; and Samuel received from Eli and his court; and David received from Samuel and his court; and Aḥijah the Shilonite—who was one of those who went forth from Egypt and who was a Levite and who had heard from Moses (he being young in Moses' time)—he received from David and his court.

And Elijah received from Aḥijah the Shilonite and his court; and Elisha received from Elijah and his court; and Jehoiada the Priest received from Elisha and his court; and Zechariah received from Jehoiada and his court; and Hosea received from Zechariah and his court; and Amos received from Hosea and his court; and Isaiah received from Amos and his court; and Micah received from Isaiah and his court; and Joel received from Micah and his court; and Nahum received from Joel and his court; and Habakkuk received from Nahum and his court; and Zephaniah received from Habakkuk and his court; and Jeremiah received from Zephaniah and his court; and Baruch ben Neriah received from Jeremiah and his court; [2a] and Ezra and his court received from Baruch and his court.

Ezra's court are those called "Men of the Great Assembly." They were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and Nehemiah ben Hachaliah, and Mordecai and Zerubbabel, along with many other sages coming to one hundred and twenty elders. The last of them was Simeon the Just; he is included among the one hundred and twenty. He received the Oral Law from all of them; and he was a High Priest after Ezra.

Antigonos of Sokho and his court received from Simeon the Just and his court; and Joseph [= Yose] ben Yoezer of Ṣereda and Joseph [= Yose] ben Yoḥanan of Jerusalem and their court received from Antigonos and his court; and Joshua ben Peraḥyah and Nittai the Arbelite and their court received from Joseph and Joseph and their court. Judah ben Tabḥai and Simeon ben Shetaḥ and their court received from Joshua and Nittai and their court. Shemayah and Abtalion (righteous proselytes) and their court received from Judah and Simeon and their court. And Hillel and Shammai and their court received from Shemayah and Abtalion and their court. And Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and Rabban Simeon (Hillel's son), received from Hillel and his court.

Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai had five disciples; they were the greatest of the sages who received from him, and they were as follows: Rabbi

Eliezer the Great, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Simeon ben Nathanael, and Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh. And Rabbi Aqiba ben Joseph received from Rabbi Eliezer the Great; and Joseph his father was a righteous proselyte. And Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Meir, son of the righteous proselyte, received from Rabbi Aqiba; and Rabbi Meir and his colleagues also received from Rabbi Ishmael. The colleagues of Rabbi Meir were Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Yose, Rabbi Simeon, Rabbi Nehemiah, Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammu'a, Rabbi Yoḥanan the Sandalmaker, Simeon ben Azzai, and Rabbi Ḥananyah ben Teradion. Rabbi Aqiba's colleagues also received from Rabbi Eliezer the Great. The colleagues of Rabbi Aqiba were Rabbi Tarfon (teacher of Rabbi Yose the Galilean), Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar, and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Nuri.

Rabban Gamaliel the Elder received from his father Rabban Simeon ben Hillel. Rabban Simeon, his son, received from him. Rabban Gamaliel, his son, received from him. Rabban Simeon, his son, received from him. Rabbi Judah, son of Rabban Simeon—it is he who is called "Our Holy Teacher"—received from his father and from his [father's] colleagues, Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammu'a and Rabbi Simeon. [2b]

Our Holy Teacher compiled the Mishnah. From the time of Moses down to that of Our Holy Teacher they made no compilation from which the Oral Law was publicly taught. Rather, in each and every generation the head of the court or a prophet who was of that generation would write a memorandum for himself of the traditions [be-shemu'oth] he had heard from his teachers and which he would teach orally in public.

Thus each and every one would write for himself, as best he could, whatever he had heard concerning the explanation of the Torah and concerning its laws and concerning the things that had been innovated in the laws in each and every generation, which had not been learned through the tradition [ha-shemu'ah] but rather by means of one of the thirteen rules [for expounding Scripture], and the Great Court having agreed to them. That was how the matter always stood until Our Holy Teacher.

He assembled all the traditions [ha-shemu'oth] and all the laws and all the explanations and interpretations that had been heard from Moses our Master and that the court of each and every generation had deduced as regards the entire Torah. Out of all that he compiled the book of the Mishnah, and he taught it repeatedly in public so that it was disclosed to all Israel. They all wrote it down and spread it everywhere lest the Oral Law be forgotten in Israel.

Why did Our Holy Teacher act so and not leave the matter as it had been? Because he saw that disciples were diminishing and vanishing, and

calamities were arising and coming about, and the evil empire [= Rome] was spreading in the world and triumphing, and [the people of] Israel were wandering to the uttermost ends [of the earth]. He therefore made a single compilation to be available to all so that they learn it rapidly and it not be forgotten. All his days he and his court sat and taught the Mishnah in public.

These are the great ones among the sages who were in the court of Our Holy Teacher and received from him: Simeon and Gamaliel his sons, Rabbi Efes, Rabbi Hananyah [other MSS: Hanina] ben Hama, Rabbi Hiyya, Rab, Rabbi Yannai, Ben Qappara, Samuel, Rabbi Yoḥanan, and Rabbi Hoshayah. These were the great ones who received from him, and together with them were many thousands of other sages.

Even though these eleven received from Our Holy Teacher and attended his college, Rabbi Yoḥanan was young [at the time] and later was a disciple of Rabbi Yannai and received instruction [torah] from him. Similarly, Rab received from Rabbi Yannai, and Samuel received from Rabbi Hananyah ben Hama.

Rab compiled the Sifra and Sifre to expound and make known the roots of the Mishnah. Rabbi Hiyya compiled the Tosefta to expound the subjects of the Mishnah. Similarly Rabbi Hoshayah and Ben Qappara compiled Baraitot to expound the sayings of the Mishnah. Rabbi Yoḥanan compiled [3a] the Jerusalem Talmud in the Land of Israel about three hundred years after the destruction of the [Second] Temple.

Among the great sages who received from Rab and from Samuel were Rab Huna, Rab Judah, Rab Naḥman, and Rab Kahana. Among the great sages who received from Rabbi Yoḥanan were Rabbah bar bar Hana, Rab Ammi, Rab Assi, Rab Dimi, and Rab Abin.

Among the sages who received from Rab Huna and Rab Judah were Rabbah and Rab Joseph. And among the sages who received from Rabbah and Rab Joseph were Abaye and Raba, and the two of them also received from Rab Naḥman. Among the sages who received from Raba were Rab Ashi and Rabina. And Mar ben Rab Ashi received from his father and from Rabina.

Thus from Rab Ashi to Moses our Master there were forty men, as follows: Rab Ashi, from Raba, from Rabbah, from Rab Huna, from Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rab and Samuel, from Our Holy Teacher, from Rabban Simeon his father, from Rabban Gamaliel his father, from Rabban Simeon his father, from Rabban Gamaliel his father, from Rabban Simeon his father, from Hillel his father and Shammai, from Shemayah and Abtalion, from Judah and Simeon, from Joshua and Nittai, from Joseph and Joseph,

from Antigonus, from Simeon the Just, from Ezra, from Baruch, from Jeremiah, from Zephaniah, from Habakkuk, from Nahum, from Joel, from Micah, from Isaiah, from Amos, from Hosea, from Zechariah, from Jehoiada, from Elisha, from Elijah, from Aḥijah, from David, from Samuel, from Eli, from Pinḥas, from Joshua, from Moses our Master (master of all the prophets), from the Lord, God of Israel.

All the aforementioned sages were the great ones of the generations. Some of them were heads of academies, and some of them were exilarchs, and some of them were members of the Great Sanhedrin. Besides them, in each and every generation, were thousands and tens of thousands who heard from them and with them.

Rabina and Rab Ashi were the end of the sages of the Talmud. It was Rab Ashi who compiled the Babylonian Talmud in the Land of Shinear [= Babylonia] about a hundred years after Rabbi Yoḥanan had compiled the Jerusalem Talmud.

The concern of the two Talmuds is with the interpretation of the sayings of the Mishnah, and the explanation of its profundities and the things that had been innovated in each and every court from the time of Our Holy Teacher until the compilation of the Talmud. From the two Talmuds, and from the Tosefta and Sifra and Sifre, and from the Toseftoth [= the Baraitas]—from all of them there are explained the forbidden and the permitted, and the unclean and the clean, and the guilty and the innocent [or: the liable and the exempt], and the fit and the unfit, just as each copied it from the mouth of each, [and ultimately] from the mouth of Moses at Sinai.

There also are explained through them the things that sages and prophets [3b] in each and every generation decreed to serve as a fence around the Law in accord with what they heard expressly from Moses: *And ye shall keep my charge* [Lev. 18:30]—that is to say, “Make a charge for [the sake of] my charge.” Similarly there are explained through them the customs and ordinances [or: reforms] instituted or observed in each and every generation as the court of that generation saw fit. It is forbidden to depart from them, as it is said: *Thou shall not turn aside from any sentence which they shall declare unto thee, to the right hand, nor to the left* [Deut. 17:11; Maimonides adds “any”]. And thus wondrous judgments and laws that had not been received from Moses but that the Great Court of that generation had determined through the rules by which the Torah is interpreted, and which those elders adjudged to be law, deciding that the law is thus and such—all of this, stretching from the time of Moses to his own days, Rab Ashi compiled in the Talmud.

The sages of the Mishnah made other compilations to interpret the words of the Torah. Rabbi Hoshayah, a disciple of Our Holy Teacher, compiled an explanation of the book of Genesis. Rabbi Ishmael interpreted from *These are the names* until the end of the Torah [i.e., from the beginning of the book of Exodus through Deuteronomy]; it is that which is called Mekhilta. Rabbi Akiba too compiled a Mekhilta, and other sages after them compiled Midrashoth. All were compiled before the Babylonian Talmud.

Thus Rabina and Rab Ashi and their colleagues were the last of the great ones among the sages of Israel who copied the Oral Law, made decrees, instituted ordinances, and directed customs. Their decrees, ordinances, and customs spread through all Israel, wherever their settlements were.

After the court of Rab Ashi, who had compiled the Talmud and completed it in the time of his son, Israel was exceedingly dispersed, reaching the uttermost ends [of the earth] and the distant lands. Strife multiplied in the world, and armies threw roads into disorder. The study of Torah diminished, and Israel no longer entered into their academies by their many thousands to study as they had formerly.

Instead, in every city and country a few gathered together, the *remnant whom the Lord calls* [Joel 3:5]. They occupied themselves with Torah, became expert in the compilations of all the sages, and learned from them what the way of judgment [mishpat] is.

After [the completion of] the Talmud, if a court that arose in any country decreed or instituted or directed something for the inhabitants of its country or more generally, its practices did not spread among all Israel owing to the remoteness of their settlements, and the disorder of the roads, and the court of that particular country being [only] individuals (the Great Court of seventy having ceased some [4a] years prior to the compilation of the Talmud). Hence there was no compelling the people of one country to observe the custom of another country. Nor was there any telling this court to decree what another court had decreed in its country. So if one of the Geonim taught that thus was the way of judgment, and it became clear to another court that arose after him that this is not the way of judgment written in the Talmud, one does not heed the first but rather the one whose words are more congruent with reason, be he prior, be he later.

These remarks apply to laws, decrees, ordinances, and customs that were innovated after the compilation of the Talmud. But as for everything in the Babylonian Talmud, the entire house of Israel is obliged to follow them. Each and every city and country is compelled to observe all the customs in the Talmud that the sages observed, and to promulgate their de-

crees, and to follow their ordinances since all those things in the Talmud were consented to by all of Israel, and since those sages who ordained or decreed or directed or adjudged and taught that such was the [correct] law [mishpat] were all or most of the sages of Israel. They were the ones who heard the tradition [ha-qabalah] concerning the roots of the Torah in its entirety, each from the mouth of each, back to Moses.

All the sages who arose after the compilation of the Talmud and understood it and gained fame for their wisdom are those called Geonim. All these Geonim who arose in the Land of Israel and in the Land of Shinar and in Spain and France taught the way of the Talmud. Its hidden things they brought forth into light, and they explained its subjects because of its way being so exceedingly profound. Moreover, it is in Aramaic mixed with other languages, since that language was clear to all in Shinar at the time that the Talmud was compiled. But in other places as well as in Shinar in the days of the Geonim, no one understood that language unless he had been taught it [specifically].

People of each and every city posed many questions to every Gaon of their time, asking that they interpret for them difficult remarks in the Talmud; and they would respond according to their wisdom. Those interrogators collected the responses into books so that they might comprehend from them. In each and every generation the Geonim also made compilations to explain the Talmud, some interpreting specific laws, some interpreting specific chapters that proved difficult to understand in his times, some interpreting [entire talmudic] Tractates and Orders.

They also compiled [4b] legal decisions concerning the forbidden and the permitted, and the guilty and the innocent, in matters of immediate urgency so that someone incapable of descending into the depths of Talmud might [at least] come close to knowledge. This is the work of the Lord in which all the Geonim of Israel engaged from the day the Talmud was compiled down to this time, which is the eighth year after the eleventh century of the destruction [of the Second Temple] [= 1177].

Excessive troubles and distressful times press upon all now, and *the wisdom of our wise men has perished, and the understanding of our prudent men is hidden* [see Isa. 29:14]. Hence those interpretations and responses and laws, which the Geonim compiled and saw to rendering obvious, have in our times become difficult. Only a few in number properly understand their meanings. Needless to say, [the same holds for] the Talmud itself—the Babylonian and the Jerusalem—and Sifra and Sifre and the Toseftoth. For they require a broad understanding [da'at], a wise soul, and a long time, after which one may gather from them what is the straight way

as regards things forbidden and permitted and the rest of the laws of the Torah.

On account of this, I, Moses ben Rabbi Maimon, the Spaniard, *roused myself* [see Neh. 5:13], and relying on the Rock (blessed be He), *meditated in all these books* [see Dan. 9:2]. I had in view compiling the things that have become clear from all these compilations as concerns the forbidden and the permitted, and the unclean and the clean, along with the rest of the laws of the Torah—all this in clear language and succinctly so that the whole of the Oral Law might be set forth for all. [All this while] leaving aside argument and counterargument, or that one says this and the other says that, but rather [limiting the exposition to] clear, plausible, juridically correct things, as made clear from all those compilations and interpretations that have existed from the days of Our Holy Teacher down to now. [All this] so that all the laws might be evident to minor and adult alike, both as to each and every commandment and as to all the things instituted by sages and prophets. In short, so that no man would ever have need of another compilation as regards any one of the laws of Israel. Rather, this compilation will gather together the entire Oral Law including the ordinances, customs, and decrees made from the days of Moses our Master until the compilation of the Talmud, just as the Geonim interpreted for us in all the compilations that they made subsequent to the Talmud. Accordingly, I have titled this compilation “Mishneh Torah” [i.e., repetition of the Torah], because a man who first reads the Written Law and after that reads this, will know from it the entire Oral Law and will have no need to read any other book besides them. [5a]

I have seen fit to divide this compilation by laws according to topic; and I shall divide the laws into chapters according to that topic; and each and every chapter I shall divide into smaller laws so that they might be committed to memory.

As to these laws in the several topics: Some of them are laws that are judgments relating to only a single commandment—as when the commandment contains much that has come by way of tradition [qabalah] and is a topic unto itself. Some of them are laws that combine judgments relating to many commandments, yet all of those commandments form a single topic. For the classification of this compilation is according to the topics, not according to the enumeration of the commandments, as will become clear to one who reads it.

The number of commandments of the Torah that are to be practiced forever is 613. Of these, the positive commandments are 248 (their mnemonic is the number of a human being’s bones); and the prohibitory

commandments are 365 (their mnemonic is the number of days in the solar year).

Blessed be the Merciful who grants assistance to us.

[34a]

*O continue Thy loving-kindness unto them that know Thee;
And Thy righteousness to the upright in heart.* [Ps. 36:11]

BOOK ONE; BEING THE BOOK OF THE KNOWLEDGE
[TREATISE ONE:] LAWS CONCERNING THE FOUNDATIONS
OF THE LAW; COMPRISING TEN COMMANDMENTS . . .

Chapter 1

The foundation of the foundations and the pillar of the sciences is to know that there is a first existent, and it is he who brings into existence everything that exists. All existent things of heaven and earth and whatever is in between them would not exist but for the true reality of his existence. If it were to be supposed that he did not exist, not a single thing would be able to exist. And if it were to be supposed that none of the existent things other than he existed, he alone would [still] exist. His nonexistence is not entailed by their nonexistence, for all existent things are in need of him, while he (blessed be He) has no need of them—not even any one of them.

1. Hence His true reality is unlike the true reality of any of them. This is what the prophet says: *And the Lord is the true God* [Jer. 10:10]. He alone is the truth; no other is true like His true reality. This is what the Torah says: *There is none else beside Him* [Deut. 4:35]—as though to say, there is no true existent other than He that is like Him.

2. This existent, He is God of the world, Lord of all the earth. And it is He who is the Governor of the sphere¹ with a power that is without end and limit, with a power that is without [34b] pause. For the sphere revolves eternally, and it is not possible that it revolve without something making it revolve. And it is He (blessed be He) who makes it revolve, without [recourse to] either hand or body. To know this thing is a positive commandment, as it is said: *I am the Lord thy God* [Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6]. Whoever allows the thought to arise that there is some other god besides this one transgresses a negative commandment, as it is said: *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me* [Exod. 20:3; Deut. 5:7]. And he denies the root, this being the great root on which everything depends.

3. This God is one. He is neither two nor more than two, but one. There is nothing in His oneness like the “ones” existing in the world. It is

not like the “one” of a species comprising many [discrete] ones; nor is it like the “one” of a body which is divisible into parts and dimensions. Rather, it is a oneness unlike any other oneness in the world.

4. If the divinities were many, they would be corporeal bodies because multiple things that are equal in their existence can only be distinguished one from the other by the accidents that befall corporeal bodies. And if the Creator [ha-yoşer] were a corporeal body, He would have an end and limit, for it is impossible to be a body without an end. And whatever has an end and limit [correspondingly] has a power that has an end and is finite. And since the power of our God (blessed be His name) has no end and has no pause—for the sphere is eternally revolving—His power is not a physical power. And since He is not a body, there would be none of the bodily accidents by which He might be divided and distinguished from another. Hence it is impossible that He be anything but one. Knowledge of this thing is a positive commandment, as it is said: *The Lord our God, the Lord is one* [Deut. 6:4].

5. It is clearly set forth in the Torah and in the prophet that the Holy One (blessed be He) is not a corporeal body, as it is said: *For the Lord your God, He is the God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath* [a conflation of Josh. 2:11 and Deut. 4:39]. And a body cannot be in two places [simultaneously]. And it is said: *For ye saw no figure* [Deut. 4:15]; and it is said: *To whom then will ye liken Me, that I should be equal?* [Isa. 40:25]—for if He were a body He would be like other bodies.

6. If so, then, what signifies its saying in the Torah: *And there was under His feet* [Exod. 24:10]; *Written with the finger of God* [Exod. 31:18]; *The hand of the Lord* [Exod. 9:3]; and *The eyes of the Lord* [Deut. 11:12; Zech. 4:10]; and *The ears of the Lord* [Num. 11:1]; and other such things? All this is in accord with the understanding [da’at] of the sons of man who cannot acknowledge anything other than bodies, so “the Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man” [B.T., Baba Meşî’a 31b, Berakhoth 39b, Yebamoth 71a]. These are all substitutes [for the divine Name], as in its saying: *If I whet My glittering sword* [Deut. 32:41]—has He then a sword, and does He slay with a sword? It is but a parable, and all of it is a parable. A proof of this is that one prophet says that he saw the Holy One (blessed be He)—*His raiment was as white snow* [Dan. 7:9]—while another saw Him *with crimsoned garments from Bozrah* [Isa. 63:1]. Moses our Master himself saw Him at the [Red] Sea as a mighty wager of war [see Exod. 15:3], and at [Mount] Sinai as a congregational precentor wrapped [in a prayer shawl]. That is to say that He has no likeness and form. Rather, all of it is in a prophetic vision [mar’eh] [35a] and in a sight [maḥazeh].² And as for the

truth of the matter, a man’s understanding is incapable of grasping it or investigating it. This is what the Scripture says: *Canst thou find out the deep things of God? Canst thou attain unto the purpose of the Almighty?* [Job 11:7].

7. What was this that Moses our Master sought to grasp when he said: *Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory* [Exod. 33:18]? He sought to know the true reality of the existence of the Holy One (blessed be He) to the point that it would be known in his mind [lit., heart] [in a manner] comparable to one’s knowledge of an individual whose face has been seen and whose form has been so engraved in him as to distinguish [nifrad] that individual in his mind [da’at] from other people. Likewise Moses our Master sought that the existence of the Holy One (blessed be He) be distinguished in his mind [lit., heart] from the existence of other beings to the point that he might know the true reality of His existence as it is. And [He] (blessed be He) replied that the mind of a living man who is composed of body and soul is incapable of fully grasping this thing’s true reality. And [He] (blessed be He) informed him of what no man prior to him knew and no one subsequent to him knew, to the point that he grasped something of the true reality of His existence that distinguished the Holy One (blessed be He) in his mind from the other beings [in a manner] comparable to one’s distinguishing in one’s mind an individual, whose back has been seen and whose body and attire have been perceived, from other people. It is about this that the Scripture hints, saying: *And thou shalt see My back; but My face shall not be seen* [Exod. 33:23].

8. Since it has been made clear that He is not a corporeal body, it is evident that not one of the accidents [affecting] the body can happen to Him: neither composition, nor separation, nor place, nor dimension, nor ascent, nor descent, nor right, nor left, nor front, nor back, nor sitting, nor standing. Neither does He exist in time so as to have a beginning and an end and a [specific] number of years. Neither does He change, having nothing in Him that might occasion change in Him. He has neither death, nor life like the life of the living body, nor foolishness, nor wisdom like the wisdom of the wise individual, nor sleep, nor awakeness, nor anger, nor laughter, nor joy, nor sadness, nor silence, nor speech like the speech of man. Thus the sages said: “In the upper world there is neither sitting nor standing, neither division nor junction” [B.T., Hagigah 15a].

9. This being so, all these expressions and their like that are said in the Torah and in the sayings of the prophets are all of them figurative and metaphoric—as when it says: *He that sitteth in heaven laugheth* [Ps. 2:4]; *They have provoked Me with their vanities* [Deut. 32:21]; *As [the Lord] re-*

joined [Deut. 28:63]; and the like. As to all of it, the sages said: "The Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man" [B.T., Baba Meši'a 31b, Berakhoth 39b, Yebamoth 71a]. So while he says: *Do they provoke Me?* [Jer. 7:19], yet he says: *I the Lord change not* [Mal. 3:6]. If He were at times angry and at times joyous, He would be changing. All these things exist only in bodies: [35b] dark, lowly, *dwellers in houses of matter* [ḥomer] *whose foundation is in the dust* [Job 4:19]. But He (blessed be He) is magnified and exalted above all this.

Chapter 2

1. This honored and feared deity—it is a commandment to love Him and to fear Him, as it is said: *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God* [Deut. 6:5]; and it is said: *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God* [Deut. 6:13].

2. And what is the way to loving Him and fearing Him? When a man reflects upon His wondrous great works and creatures and perceives from them His inestimable and infinite wisdom, he at once loves, praises, glorifies, and yearns greatly to know the Great Name—as David said: *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God* [Ps. 42:3]. And when he meditates on these things themselves, he at once recoils in a start, and will fear and tremble and know that he is a small, lowly, dark creature standing with slight, insignificant understanding [da'at] before [Him who is] perfect in understanding [tamim de'ot]. Just as David said: *When I behold Thy heavens*, and so on; *What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?* and so on [Ps. 8:4–5]. And in accord with these sayings, I shall explain important principles [or: general rules] concerning the work of the Master of the Worlds so that they might be an entry for one who understands [to come] to love the Name. As the sages said concerning love: "Thereby you come to acknowledge Him who spoke, and the world came to be" [see Sifre, Ve-ethanan 33, ed. Finkelstein, p. 59].

3. All that the Holy One (blessed be He) created in His world is divided into three parts: Some are creatures that are a composite of matter [golem] and form and that are ever subject to generation and corruption, such as the bodies of man and animal and the plants and the minerals. Some are creatures that are a composite of matter and form but do not change from body to body and from form to form as do the former. Rather, their form is permanently fixed in their matter, and they do not change as do those. They are the spheres and the stars within them. Their matter is not like other matters, nor is their form like other forms. Some creatures are form without any matter at all. They are the angels, for the angels are not a physical body but rather forms distinguished [nifradoth] from one another.

4. What is it, then, when the prophets say they saw the angel of fire and possessing wings? This is all in a prophetic vision and by way of riddle, [in effect] saying it was not a body, nor heavy like bodies having weight. Just as it is said: *For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire* [Deut. 4:24]—yet He is not a fire; it is but a parable—and just as it is said: *Who makest winds His angels* [Ps. 104:4].

5. In what respect are the forms distinguished from one another, given that they are not bodies? It is on account of their not being on a par in their existence. Rather, every one of them is below the rank [36a] of its counterpart and exists owing to the power of the one [immediately] above it—with the whole existing owing to the power and goodness of the Holy One (blessed be He). This is what Solomon in his wisdom alluded to in saying: *For one higher than the high watcheth* [Eccles. 5:7].

6. Our saying "below the rank" does not refer to a spatial rank as when a man is seated above his counterpart, but rather as when they say concerning two wise men of whom the one is greater in wisdom than his counterpart that he is above the other's rank, or as when they say concerning a cause that it is above [or: superior to] the effect.

7. The various names of the angels is on account of their [differing] ranks. Hence they are called "Ḥayyoth ha-qodesh" [or: holy living creatures]—and they are above all—and "Ophanim," "Er'elim," "Ḥashmalim," "Seraphim," "Mal'akhim," "Elohim," "Sons of Elohim," "Cherubim," and "Ishim." All ten of these names by which the angels are called correspond to their ten ranks. The rank to which there is none superior other than the rank of God (blessed be He) is the rank of the forms that is called "Ḥayyoth." Hence it is said in prophecy that they are beneath the Throne. The tenth rank is the rank of the form that is called "Ishim," and they are the angels who speak with the prophets and appear before them in a prophetic vision. Hence they are called "Ishim" [or: individuals] since their rank is close to the rank of human understanding.

8. All these forms live, acknowledge the Creator [ha-bore'], and know Him with a knowledge [de'ah] that is exceedingly great, each and every form according to its rank, not according to its size. [Yet] even the first rank is incapable of grasping the truth of the Creator as it is; rather, its knowledge falls short of grasping [that]. But it grasps and knows more than the form below it grasps and knows. And so it is with each and every rank down to the tenth rank. It too knows the Creator with a knowledge the likes of which the sons of man, composed of matter [golem] and form, lack the power to grasp and know. But none of them know the Creator as He knows Himself.

9. All the existents, excepting the Creator, from the first form down to the tiny insect deep within the earth, all exist by the power of His true existence. And since He knows Himself and acknowledges His greatness, His glory, and His true existence, He knows the whole, and nothing escapes Him.

10. The Holy One (blessed be He) acknowledges His true existence and knows it as it is. He does not know it by a knowledge [or: intelligence] [de'ah] external to Himself the way we know. For we and our knowledge [da'ateynu] are not one, whereas the Creator—He, His knowledge [da'ato], and His life—are one in every respect and from every aspect. For if He were living by life and knowing by knowledge, there would be [36b] many divinities: He, His life, and His knowledge. But this is not how it is. Rather, He is one in every respect and from every aspect and in every manner of oneness. Consequently, He is the knower, He is the known, and He is the knowledge [de'ah] itself—all of it being one. This is something the mouth is incapable of uttering, and the ear of hearing, and the human mind [lit., heart] of acknowledging thoroughly. Hence one says, *By the life of Pharaoh* [Gen. 42:15], and *By the life of thy soul* [1 Sam. 17:55]; and one does not say “By the life of the Lord,” but rather *As the Lord liveth* [Judg. 8:19; 1 Sam. 25:26]. For the Creator and His life are not two, as with the lives of living bodies or as with the lives of the angels. Hence He does not acknowledge and know the creatures in consequence of [their being] creatures—which is how we know them—but rather knows them through Himself. Hence, because He knows Himself He knows the whole, because the whole is supported in its being by Him.

11. These things that we have said on this subject in these two chapters are like a drop from the ocean compared to what would be needed to explain this subject. The explication of all the roots in these two chapters is what is called the “Account of the Chariot.”

12. The early sages commanded not to expound these things other than to a single individual alone—he being wise and able to comprehend on his own [or: out of his own intelligence] [mi-da'ato]—whereupon they convey the chapter headings to him and inform him of a bit of the subject, leaving it to him to comprehend its ultimate implication and profundity [see B.T., Hagigah 11b, 13a]. These things are exceedingly profound, and not each and every mind [da'at] is fit to bear them. It is of them that Solomon in his wisdom said by way of parable: *The lambs will be for thy clothing* [Prov. 27:26]. Likewise the sages have said in interpreting this parable: “Things that are the mystery of the universe [‘olam] shall be for thy clothing—that is to say, for you, for you alone, so do not expound them in public”

[B.T., Hagigah 13a]. It is of them that he said: *Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee* [Prov. 5:17]. And it is of them that he said: *Honey and milk are under thy tongue* [Song of Songs 4:11]; which the early sages interpreted thus: “Let things that are like honey and milk be [kept] under your tongue” [B.T., Hagigah 13a].

Chapter 3

1. And the spheres are those called Heaven, Firmament, Zebul, and 'Araboth. And they are nine spheres. The closest of the spheres is the sphere of the moon. The second, which is above it, is the sphere with the planet called Mercury. And the third sphere, which is above it, is the one containing Venus. And the fourth sphere contains the sun. And the fifth sphere contains Mars. And the sixth sphere contains the planet Jupiter. And the seventh sphere contains Saturn. And the eighth sphere contains all the rest of the stars visible in the firmament. And the ninth sphere is the sphere that rotates daily from east to west.

2. And it [37a] encompasses the whole and makes the whole go round. That all the stars appear to be all in a single sphere despite their being one above another is owing to the spheres being pure and transparent like glass and crystal. Hence stars in the eighth sphere appear to be below the first sphere.

3. Each and every sphere of the eight spheres containing stars is divided into many spheres, one above another, like the scales of onions. Some of them are spheres revolving from west to east; some of them revolve from east to west like the ninth rotating sphere. And between them all, there is no void.

4. None of the spheres is either light or heavy. And they have neither a red color nor a black nor any other color. That we see them as having a blue color is only an appearance to the eye owing to the height of the air [avir]. Similarly, they have neither taste nor smell since these accidents exist only in bodies that are beneath them.

5. All these spheres encompassing the entire world are a round globe,³ with the earth suspended in the middle. Some of the stars have small spheres in which they are fixed [= epicycles]; and those spheres do not encompass the earth, but rather a small nonencompassing sphere is fixed within a large sphere that does encompass [the earth].

6. The number of all the spheres encompassing all the world is eighteen, and the number of small nonencompassing spheres is eight.⁴ And from the course of the stars and knowledge of the measure of their revolution in each day and each hour, and from their inclination toward the north

or toward the south, and from their height above the earth and their nearness, there may be known the number of all these spheres and the form of their movement and the way they encompass [each other]. It is this that is the science of calculating cycles and planets. The sages of Greece have composed many books on it.

7. The ninth sphere which encompasses the whole has been divided by the ancient sages into twelve parts. To each and every part they assigned a name after the name of a form to be seen among the stars beneath it and which is situated below it. These are the constellations whose names are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces.

8. The ninth sphere itself has no division, none of these forms, and no star. But by grouping the stars in the eighth sphere, it can appear that among the large stars there is a pattern of these forms or something close to them. [37b] It was only at the time of the Flood, when their names were assigned, that these twelve forms were situated in [exact] correspondence with these divisions.⁵ By now, however, they have shifted somewhat. For although all the stars in the eighth sphere all revolve like the sun and the moon, they do so slowly. So the division [of the zodiac] traversed by the sun in a single day correspondingly takes every one of those stars approximately seventy years.

9. Of all the visible stars, some are so small that the earth is larger than any one of them; some of them are [so large] that every one of them is multiple times larger than the earth. The earth is about forty times larger than the moon, and the sun is about one hundred seventy times larger than the earth; hence the moon is approximately one six-thousand-eight-hundredth [the size of] the sun. Among all the stars there is no star larger than the sun nor smaller than the star in the second sphere [= Mercury].

10. All the stars and the spheres, all of them are endowed with soul, intelligence, and understanding [haskel]. They are alive, and understand [ʿomdim] and acknowledge "Him who spoke, and the world came to be." Each and every one, according to its greatness and rank, praise and glorify their Creator [yošram], just like the angels. And as they acknowledge the Holy One (blessed be He), so do they acknowledge themselves and acknowledge the angels above them. The knowledge possessed by the stars and the spheres is less than the angels' knowledge and greater than the knowledge of the sons of man.

11. God created [ha-'el bara'] a single matter beneath the sphere of the moon, unlike the matter of the spheres. He created four forms for this matter which are unlike the form of the spheres. And each and every form is fixed

in a portion of this matter. The first form is the form of fire. When joined to a portion of this matter, there arises out of these two the body of fire itself. The second form is the form of air [ruah]. When joined to its portion, there arises out of these two the body of air itself. The third form is the form of water. When joined to its portion, there arises out of these two the body of water itself. The fourth form is the form of earth. When joined to its portion, there arises out of these two the body of earth itself. Hence, beneath the firmament there are four bodies, divided one above the other, each and every one encompassing whatever is beneath it on all its sides, like a sphere. The first body adjacent to the sphere of the moon is the body of fire. Beneath it is the body of air; beneath it is the body of water; beneath it is the body of earth. And between them there is no void without any body at all. [38a]

12. These four bodies are not endowed with soul, neither do they understand or acknowledge. Rather they are like dead bodies. Each and every one of them has a custom which it neither knows nor comprehends nor is able to change. This is what David said: *Praise the Lord from the earth, ye sea-monsters, and all deeps; Fire and hail, snow and vapor* [Ps. 148:7–8]. The meaning of the words is: Praise Him, O sons of man, on account of His mighty acts that you see in fire and hail and in the other created things that you see beneath the firmament, which mightiness is constantly evident to minor and adult [alike].

Chapter 4

1. These four bodies—being fire, air, water, and earth—are elements of all the created things beneath the firmament. Everything that is—including man and beast, bird, reptile, fish, plant, metal, precious stones, pearls, other building materials, mountains, and earthen clods—the matter of all of these is composed of these four elements. Consequently, all the bodies beneath the firmament, apart from these four elements, are composed of matter and form. And their matter is composed of these four elements, but each one of the four elements is composed solely of matter and form alone.

2. The way of fire and air is to move from beneath, from the center [ṭabbur] of the earth upward toward the firmament. And the way of water and earth is to move from below the firmament downward to the middle [ʿemša'], for the middle of the firmament is the uttermost low point. Their movement is neither conscious [be-da'atam] nor voluntary. Rather, it is a custom fixed in them, and a nature stamped into them. The nature of fire is hot and dry, and it is lighter than all of them. And air is hot and moist; and water is cold and moist. And earth is dry and cold, and it is heavier than all of them. Water is lighter than it; hence it is to be found above the earth. And

air is lighter than water; hence it *hovers over the face of the waters* [see Gen. 1:2]. And fire is lighter than air. Since they are elements of all bodies below the firmament, hence the matter of each and every body—man, cattle, beast, bird, fish, plant, metal, and stone—is composed of fire, air, water, and dust. The four of them are mingled together, and each one of them is changed at the moment of mingling to the point that the composite of the four of them bears no resemblance to any one of them when it is by itself. Whatever is compounded of them has not even a single part that is separately fire, or separately water, [38b] or separately earth, or separately air. Rather, they have all been changed and made into another body. Each and every body composed of the four of them will simultaneously have within it coldness and heat, moistness and dryness. But some of them are bodies in which there will be a preponderance of the element of fire, such as animals [lit., those possessing a living soul]; hence heat will be very apparent in them. Some of them are bodies in which there is a preponderance of the element of earth, such as stones; hence dryness will be much apparent in them. In this way a hot body may be hotter than another hot body, and a dry body drier than another dry body. Similarly, there will be bodies in which only coldness is apparent, and bodies in which only dryness is apparent, and bodies in which coldness and dryness are simultaneously and equally apparent, or coldness and moistness simultaneously and equally, or heat and dryness simultaneously and equally, or heat and moistness simultaneously and equally. Corresponding to the major element at the root of the compound will be the evident effect and nature of that element in the [particular] compounded body.

3. Everything composed of these four elements ultimately disintegrates [nifrad] into them [again]—one disintegrates after a few days, one disintegrates after many years. Everything that is composed of them cannot possibly not disintegrate into them. It is impossible even for gold or ruby not to disintegrate and return to its elements, a part returning to fire, a part to water, a part to air, and a part to earth.

4. Since it is to these that everything that disintegrates [nifrad] does so, why was it said to Adam, *And unto dust shalt thou return* [Gen. 3:19]? It is because the major part of his bulk is of dust. Not everything that decays [nifsad] does so by immediately returning to the four elements. Instead, it decays and turns into something else, and that something else into [yet] something else; and ultimately the things return to the elements. And so all things return in a cycle.

5. These four elements are always changing into one another, daily, hourly, but only partially, not in their entire bodies. How so? The portion of earth closest to water changes, breaks down, and becomes water. Similarly,

the portion of water closest to air changes, evaporates, and becomes air. Similarly, the portion of air closest to fire changes, whirls, and becomes fire. Similarly, the portion of fire closest to air changes, condenses, and becomes air. Similarly, the portion of air closest to water changes, condenses, and becomes water. Similarly, the portion of water closest to earth changes, condenses, and becomes earth. This transformation occurs bit by bit and over a long period. Nor does the entire element change [39a] to the point that all the water becomes air, or all the air fire, for it is impossible that one of the four elements should be abolished [altogether]. Rather, some portion will change from fire to air, some portion from air to fire, and similarly between each one and its counterpart. Consequently, the transformation between the four of them returns in a cycle.

6. This transformation occurs by the revolving of the sphere. And from its revolving, the four of them combine themselves and there come to be the other [kinds of] matter of the sons of man, animal, plant, stone, and metal. The deity gives each and every matter the form proper to it by means of the tenth angel, which is the form called “Ishim.”

7. You will never see matter without form, or form without matter. It is rather the human mind [lit., the heart of man] that divides the body it conceives in thought [be-da’ato] and knows it to be composed of matter and form, and knows that there are bodies whose matter is composed of four elements, and [other] bodies whose matter is simple and not combined with another matter. The forms that are devoid of matter are not visible to the [physical] eye, only to the mind’s eye [lit., the eye of the heart]. They are known [to us] just as we know the Lord of the whole without [recourse to] physical vision.

8. The soul of all flesh is its form which the deity gave it. And the extraordinary understanding [da’at] found in the soul of man is the form of the man who is perfect in his understanding. It is in regard to this form that it is said in the Torah: *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* [Gen. 1:26]—that is, that he may have a form that knows and apprehends the intelligences [de’ot] that are devoid of matter, to the point that he is like them. This [“in our image”] is not said with regard to the form evident to the eyes—the mouth, nose, cheeks, and other bodily characteristics for which the term is “feature” [or: external form] [to’ar]. Nor is it [with regard to] the soul found in every animal by which it eats, drinks, reproduces, feels, and considers, but rather [to] the intelligence [de’ah] that is the form of the soul. It is of the form of the soul that Scripture speaks many times calling this form “soul” and “air.”⁶ One must therefore be wary as regards names lest you err. Each and every name has to be understood from its context.

9. This form of the soul is not composed of the elements so that it would disintegrate into them. Nor is it from a power of the breath of life [neshamah] so that it would stand in need of the breath of life just as the breath of life needs the body. Rather it comes from God, from heaven. Hence, when the matter which is composed of the elements disintegrates, and the breath of life is lost (since that is found only with the body and needs the body for all its activities), this form is not destroyed, since it does not need the spirit of life for its activities. Rather, it knows and apprehends the intelligences that are separated from matter. And it knows the Creator of the whole, and endures forever and eternally. It is this that [39b] Solomon said in his wisdom: *And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the air shall return unto God who gave it* [Eccles. 12:7].

10. All these things that we have said about this subject are like a drop from a bucket [see Isa. 40:15]. They are profound things, though not as profound as the subject of chapters 1 and 2. The explication of all these things that are in chapters 3 and 4 is what is called the "Account of the Beginning." Thus the early sages commanded not to expatiate in public concerning these things as well. It is to a single man alone that these things may be conveyed and taught.

11. How does the subject of the Account of the Chariot differ from the subject of the Account of the Beginning? The subject of the Account of the Chariot is not expatiated upon even to one unless he be wise and able to comprehend on his own—and then he is given [only] the chapter headings. The subject of the Account of the Beginning is taught to an individual even if he is incapable of comprehending on his own; and we convey to him whatever he can understand of these things. Why do we not teach him in public? Because not every man has a broad enough understanding [da'at] to grasp the interpretation and explanation of all the things as they are.

12. When a man reflects on these things and acknowledges all the created things, from angel and sphere [to] man and the like, and sees the wisdom of the Holy One (blessed be He) in all the formed and created things, he increases the love for God [ha-maqōm]. His soul thirsts, his flesh longs to love God [ha-maqōm] (blessed be He). He will fear and tremble on account of his lowliness, wretchedness, and insignificance when he compares himself to one of the great holy bodies. All the more [when he compares himself with] one of the pure forms that are separate from matter and have never at all been combined with matter. It will dawn upon him that he is like a vessel full of shame and disgrace, worthless and defective.

13. The subjects of these four chapters concerning these five commandments⁷ are what the early sages called "Pardes" [or: enclosure, garden]. As

they said: "Four entered Pardes" [B.T., Hagigah 14b]. And although they were great ones of Israel and were great sages, not all of them had in them the capacity to know and grasp all the things as they are. And I myself say that only he ought to stroll in Pardes whose stomach is filled with bread and meat. "Bread and meat" means knowing the explanation of the forbidden and the permitted and the like and the rest of the commandments. And although the sages called these things a small thing—for lo! the sages said: "A great thing is the Account of the Chariot, and a small thing is the discussion of Abaye and Raba" [B.T., Sukkah 28a]—even so they ought properly to come first. For they [40a] settle a man's mind first. And furthermore, they are the great good the Holy One (blessed be He) causes to overflow for the betterment of this world so as to come into possession of life in the World to Come. And it is possible for all to know them: adult and minor, man and woman, one with broad intellect [lit., heart] and one with narrow.

1. The Hebrew word *galgal* corresponds to the Arabic *falak*. I follow Pines's usage in his edition of the *Guide* in translating this as "sphere." Currently the technical term is "orb."

2. Maimonides treats these two Hebrew terms as equivalents in *Guide*, 2.41 (87a/385).

3. The Hebrew word *kadur* corresponds to the Arabic *kura* and might be translated as "sphere" or "globe." I use the latter to distinguish it from *galgal*. Maimonides resorts to both Arabic terms in *Guide*, 2.9–11, as Pines duly notes in his translation.

4. It is not clear how Maimonides' understanding of the Ptolemaic models leads him to arrive at this counting. The attempt of an early anonymous commentator to explain this passage is translated in Tzvi Langermann, "The 'True Perplexity': The *Guide of the Perplexed*, Part II, Chapter 24," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, for the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1991), 163 n. 17.

5. The reference is to the thirty-degree divisions of the zodiac.

6. The Hebrew *ruah* is usually rendered as "wind" or "spirit." I follow Pines, who in his version of the *Guide* (see p. 90 n. 1) translates the word as "air" on account of Maimonides' emphasis on this, its primary meaning.

7. Namely: (1) to know that there is a God; (2) not even to entertain the thought that there is any God other than the Lord; (3) to declare His unity; (4) to love Him; (5) to fear Him. [34a8–9]

Notes on Maimonides' *Book of Knowledge*

If it is true that the *Guide of the Perplexed* is not a philosophic book but a Jewish book, it surely is not a Jewish book in the same manner in which the *Mishneh Torah* is a Jewish book. Maimonides has made clear the difference between these two kinds of Jewish books by saying that the *Guide* is devoted to the science of the Law in the true sense: the *Mishneh Torah* as well as the *Commentary on the Mishna* belong to the science of the Law in the ordinary sense, i.e., the *fiqh* or *talmud*. The most obvious difference between these two kinds of Jewish books corresponds to the most obvious difference between the two kinds of science of the Law: the foundations of the Law are treated in the *Mishneh Torah* with much greater brevity than in the *Guide*, although they are alluded to in the former work in a manner that approaches clear exposition. Consequently, in the *Guide* Maimonides discusses as fully as possible the fundamental question at issue between the adherents of the Law and the philosophers—the question whether the world is eternal or has a beginning in time—whereas in his *fiqh* books he establishes the existence of God on the basis of the view, which he rejects in the *Guide*, that the world is eternal.¹ This would seem to mean that in an important respect Maimonides' *fiqh* books are more "philosophic" than the *Guide*.

Within the *Mishneh Torah* philosophy seems to be most powerfully present in the First Book, the Book of Knowledge. That Book is the only one in which the term indicating the theme is supplied with the article. More precisely, it is the only Book of the *Mishneh Torah* in which the noun

indicating the theme is supplied with the article both in the Introduction to the whole work and in the heading of the Book. For in the case of the Book of Sacrifices the noun indicating the theme is supplied with the article in the heading of the Book but not in the Introduction.² On the basis of the *Guide* this seeming irregularity could easily be understood as a hint: the Book of Knowledge deals first and above all with the foundations of the Torah; the first intention of the whole Torah is the elimination of idolatry, or the foundation of our Torah as a whole and the pivot around which it turns consists in the elimination of the opinions that support idolatry, and the primary instrument for uprooting idolatry is the Mosaic legislation regarding sacrifices.³ On the basis of the *Mishneh Torah* alone that hint could hardly be said to approach clear exposition.

Maimonides could easily have given to the First Book of the *Mishneh Torah* the title *Sefer Madda'*. In the 70th chapter of the *Guide* he refers to what he had said on the equivocacy of "soul" and "spirit" at the end of the *Sefer Madda'*. One could think for a moment that he thus refers to *Teshubah* VIII, 3; but apart from the fact that that passage could not properly be called the end of the Book of Knowledge, Maimonides does not speak there of "spirit" nor of the difficulties attending the meaning of the term "soul." He refers in *Guide* I, 70 to *Yesodē Ha-Torah* IV, 8. By this reference he suggests that there is a difference between the *Sefer Ha-Madda'* and the *Sefer Madda'*, the latter consisting only of the *Yesodē Ha-Torah* I–IV. By this hint he underlines the obvious and radical difference between those four chapters and the rest of the Book of Knowledge, to say nothing of the 13 other books of the *Mishneh Torah*. One may say that those four chapters are the Book of Knowledge *par excellence*, for they are devoted to the Account of the Chariot and the Account of the Beginning, which are identical, according to the *Guide*, with the divine science and the natural science respectively.⁴

The four chapters indicated, and only these four chapters, are devoted to the Account of the Chariot and the Account of the Beginning. These two Accounts and especially the first are a great thing, whereas the halakhic discussions are a small thing (*Yesodē Ha-Torah* IV, 13). Yet the Halakhah proper is not the only subject excluded from the two Accounts. Also excluded from the Account of the Chariot and the Account of the Beginning are the following subjects taken up in the Book of Knowledge after *Yesodē Ha-Torah* IV: the names of God (VI, 2), prophecy (VII–X), the unchangeable and absolute character of the Torah of Moses (IX, 1), ethics (*De'ot*), man's free will (*Teshubah* V), particular providence (*ibid.*, IX, 1–8), the life to come (*ibid.*, VIII), and the Messianic age (*ibid.* IX, 9–10).

In the *Mishneh Torah* the Account of the Chariot precedes the Account of the Beginning. This order is in accordance with the order of rank of the two Accounts, but it is not in accord with the fact that the Account of the Beginning (natural science) supplies the premises from which the Account of the Chariot (divine science) starts.⁵ What then is the foundation of the Account of the Chariot in the *Mishneh Torah*? We note a kindred difficulty. According to Maimonides the Account of the Chariot is the doctrine of God and the angels while the Account of the Beginning is the doctrine of the creatures lower than the angels. Hence his distinction between the two Accounts blurs the fundamental difference between the Creator and the creatures. He overcomes the second difficulty to some extent by his division of the five commandments that he explains in the first four chapters; he devotes the first chapter (the chapter devoted to the doctrine of God) to the explanation of the first three commandments, and the three following chapters (the chapters devoted to the doctrine of the creatures) to the explanation of the two remaining commandments. This implies that the foundation of the doctrine of God is supplied in the Book of Knowledge, not by natural science, but by the most fundamental commandments. For instance, the first commandment—the commandment to acknowledge the existence of God—takes the place of the proof of His existence.

This must be taken with a grain of salt. Maimonides opens the body of the Book of Knowledge with the assertion that knowledge of the existence of God is the foundation of the foundations and the pillar of the sciences: he does not call it the pillar, or a pillar, of the Law, while he calls the knowledge of God's inspiring human beings with prophecy a pillar of the Law (*Yesodē Ha-Torah* VII, beginning). Accordingly he hints at the demonstration of the existence of God that starts from the sempiternal, never-beginning and never-ending, revolution of the sphere; he also refers a few times to what is "impossible." (Cf. also *Yesodē Ha-Torah* I, 11, beginning.) Furthermore, according to Maimonides, knowledge of the existence of God is commanded by the words "I am the Lord, thy God"; this commandment is immediately followed by the commandment that forbids thinking or imagining that "there is another God besides this one." It is not as clear as it might be whether the words that follow immediately—namely, "this is the great root on which everything depends"—refer to both commandments or only to the prohibition (cf. 'Abodah Zarah II, 4), nor whether the first commandment obliges us to recognize the absolute uniqueness and incomparability of God rather than His existence. At any rate, the first chapter of the *Mishneh Torah*, the theological chapter *par excellence* of the *Mishneh Torah*, sets forth that God exists, is one, and is incorporeal. God's incorporeality is not presented as the subject of a commandment; that God is incorporeal is inferred partly from His being one and partly from Biblical passages.⁶

5. *Guide* I, Introduction (5a) and 71 (98a).

6. Cf. *Guide* III, 28, beginning.

In the first chapter Maimonides had avoided the term "to create" (*bara'*) and derivatives from it. He begins to use that term when he comes to speak of the creatures. The treatment of the creatures as creatures (*Yesodē Ha-Torah* II–IV) serves the purpose of explaining the commandments to love God and to fear Him. The doctrine of the creatures is emphatically Maimonides' own,⁷ at least to the extent that it does not go back to Jewish sources. Knowledge of the creatures is the way toward love of God and fear of Him because that knowledge makes us realize God's wisdom; it is not said to be required for knowing God's existence or His unity and incorporeality. Maimonides enumerates the three classes of creatures (the earthly beings, the heavenly bodies, and the angels) initially in the ascending order (*Yesodē Ha-Torah* II, 3) while he discusses them in the descending order. This change makes no difference at least in so far as in both cases the heavenly bodies occupy the central place. In his discussion of the heavenly bodies he does not speak of "creating," nor does he quote the Bible; he refers, however, to the Sages of Greece (III, 6). It is not surprising that he speaks of God's knowledge and in particular of His omniscience, not in the theological chapter proper, but when speaking of the creatures, for the problem concerns precisely His knowledge of the creatures. His knowledge of all His creatures is implied in His self-knowledge (II, 9–10). Accordingly, the angels knew God much less adequately than He knows Himself, and the heavenly bodies are aware of God still less adequately than are the angels; but as they are aware of God, so are they aware of themselves and of the angels (II, 8; III, 10). Maimonides is here silent on whether the angels and the heavenly bodies know the beings inferior to them. This is not contradicted by the fact that the angels of the lowest degree "speak with the prophets and appear to them in prophetic vision," for Maimonides speaks here "according to the language of human beings"; it suffices to say that in fact there is only one angel of the lowest degree (cf. II, 7 with IV, 6).

The Account of the Beginning is more accessible to men in general than the Account of the Chariot. The most accessible part of the Account of the Beginning is the one dealing with the sublunar creatures.⁸ When discussing the characteristics of the four elements, Maimonides speaks first of the "way" of each element, then of its "custom," and only after this preparation, of its "nature" (IV, 2). He thus lets us see that "nature"—a notion pointing back to the Sages of Greece—cannot be used in the context without some preparation.⁹ Maimonides calls air "spirit"; this enables him to throw light on the relation between spirit and water as stated in Gen. 1:2 and on the relation between spirit and dust as stated in Eccles. 12: 7.¹⁰

7. Cf. the "I" in *Yesodē Ha-Torah* II, 2.

8. *Yesodē Ha-Torah* IV, 11; III, end; cf. *Guide* II, 24 (54a) and III, 23 (50b).

9. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago 1953), pp. 81–83.

10. *Yesodē Ha-Torah* IV, 2 and 9; cf. the mention of *awir* in III, 3 (*M. T.* 37a9); cf. *Guide* I, 40 and II, 30 (68a).

Knowledge of the creatures leads to love of God and to fear of Him because it leads to knowledge of His infinite wisdom and therewith to thirst and longing for knowledge of the Great Name. Yet when man considers His marvelous and great creatures themselves, he recoils and becomes afraid and realizes his littleness and lowliness and the poverty of his knowledge compared with that of God. Although knowledge of the creatures is to lead to both love and fear of God, Maimonides introduces his account of the angels as the way to love of God (II, 2). At the end of his account of the creatures other than the angels, i.e., of the bodily beings, he says that through knowledge of all creatures, man's love of God is increased; and by comparing himself with any of the great and holy bodies (i.e., the heavenly bodies) and still more with any of the pure immaterial forms (i.e., the angels) man comes into a state of fear and realizes his utter lowliness (IV, 12). This seems to imply that love of God, as distinguished from fear of Him, does not altogether depend on knowledge of the creatures. This agrees with the well-known teaching of the *Guide*¹¹ only in so far as both teachings ascribe a higher rank to the love of God than to the fear of Him.

The highest theme of the first four chapters is God and His attributes. From God's attributes one is easily led to His names,¹² which are in a sense the theme of the next two chapters, i.e., of the central chapters of the *Yesodē Ha-Torah*. Maimonides' treatment of the names or rather of the name of God serves the purpose of explaining the three commandments to sanctify His name, not to profane it, and not to destroy things bearing His name. The opening of these two chapters makes it clear that these three commandments, in contradistinction to the study of the Accounts of the Chariot and of the Beginning (II, 12; IV, 11), are obligatory on every Jew. The discussion of the commandments regarding the sanctification and the profanation of the Name includes the discussion of the question of which prohibitions may not be transgressed under any circumstances or are in the strictest sense universally valid;¹³ the strictest of those prohibitions are those against idolatry, unchastity (incest), and murder. In the seventh chapter Maimonides returns to "the foundations" by taking up the subject of prophecy to which he devotes the last four chapters of the *Yesodē Ha-Torah*. While prophecy belongs to "the foundations of the Law," it does not belong, as is indicated by the place where it is discussed, to the Accounts of the Chariot and of the Beginning. Maimonides did speak of prophecy when treating the Account of the Chariot, but only in order to reject such views of God and the angels as are based on ignorance of the character of prophetic utterances. The sole positive commandment regarding prophecy opens Maimonides' enumera-

11. III, 52. Cf. III, 27–28 and 51 (125a). Cf. above all the explanation of the commandments to love God and to fear Him in the *Sefer Ha-Misvot*.

12. Cf. *Guide* I, 61 ff. with I, 50–60.

13. Cf. *Melakhim* X, 2.

tion of the positive commandments regulating man's conduct toward man, as distinguished from his conduct toward God; it is there immediately followed by the commandment to appoint a king.¹⁴ One is tempted to say that prophecy is a subject, not of theoretical, but of practical wisdom. As for the sole negative commandment regarding prophecy—the prohibition against excessive testing of claimants to prophecy—it is identical with the prohibition against testing or trying God.¹⁵

The plan of the *Mishneh Torah* and all of its parts must be presumed to be as rational as possible. This does not mean that that plan is always evident. That this is the case would seem to be shown sufficiently by the mere fact that Maimonides could divide all the commandments into fourteen classes in so different ways in the *Mishneh Torah* and in the *Guide* (III, 35). The plan of the first chapter devoted to prophecy (VII) is very lucid. Maimonides states first that if a man fulfills all requirements for becoming a prophet, the Holy Spirit immediately rests on him (1). As we learn from the *Guide* (II, 32), this is the view of the philosophers; it differs from the view of the Torah, according to which God may miraculously withhold prophecy from a man who is perfectly fit for becoming a prophet. Maimonides next states the characteristics of all prophets (2–4); he speaks here emphatically of "all" prophets. He then qualifies his first statement: if a man is properly prepared for prophecy, he will not necessarily become a prophet (5). While in the first statement he had stated, or almost stated, the philosophic view, he states in the repetition the view of the Torah. In the first statement he has spoken of "the Holy Spirit," which he had used synonymously with "the spirit,"¹⁶ whereas in the repetition he speaks of the *Shekhinah*. One may compare this change with the avoidance of "creation" in chapter I and its use in the sequel. To begin with philosophy (although not *eo nomine*) and to turn almost at once to the Torah may be said to be the law governing the *Mishneh Torah* as a whole. He then qualifies his second statement: everything said about the nature, or rather the way, of prophecy is true of all prophets with the exception of Moses. Both second or qualifying statements have the same character: both introduce, or make explicit, the miraculous or supernatural. Moses' knowledge is more radically supernatural than that of the other prophets since it is angelic rather than human (6). Finally, Maimonides makes clear that signs and wonders are necessary but not sufficient for accrediting a prophet; the signs and wonders, together with the claimant's possession of wisdom and holiness, do not make certain that he is a prophet although they establish a binding legal presumption in his favor. In accordance with this Maimonides speaks rather frequently of "believing," i.e. of believing in a prophet, when discussing prophecy, while he had not spoken

14. Nos. 172–173.

15. Negative commandment No. 64.

16. Cf. his use or interpretation of Gen. 1:2 in IV, 2.

at all of "believing" when discussing the Accounts of the Chariot and of the Beginning.¹⁷ The difficulty caused by the difference between binding legal presumption and indubitable truth is solved in the next chapter in which Maimonides shows—on the basis of the premise established in chapter VII that the prophecy of Moses is absolutely superior to that of the other prophets—that Israel believed in Moses because they were eye- and ear-witnesses of the Sinaitic revelation.¹⁸ The authority of the other prophets is therefore derivative from the authority of the Torah.

As is sufficiently indicated by the title *Hilkhot Yesodē Ha-Torah*, the *Mishneh Torah* stands or falls by the distinction between what is a foundation or a root and what is not. Yet the fact that all commandments of the Torah are equally of divine origin and meant to be valid for ever and ever, deprives that distinction of much of its importance.¹⁹ Therefore one ought not to expect that the fundamental distinction made by Maimonides should be entirely lucid. The foundations of the Torah in the strict sense consist of (1) what one must know regarding God, His attributes, and His names, and (2) what one must know or believe regarding the "absoluteness" of the Torah of Moses. We have seen that already the first part of these foundations consists of heterogeneous ingredients. The first four chapters of the *Yesodē Ha-Torah* (and perhaps most obviously the paragraph devoted to the bodily creatures), in contradistinction to the last six chapters, introduce philosophy into the Holy of Holies by as it were rediscovering it there. Since philosophy requires the greatest possible awareness of what one is doing, Maimonides cannot effect that fundamental change without being aware that it is a fundamental change, i.e. without a conscious, although not necessarily explicit, criticism of the way in which the Torah was commonly understood. The two parts of the *Yesodē Ha-Torah* are linked to each other by the fact that the God whose knowledge is commanded is "this God," the God of Israel.²⁰ Accordingly, the first section of the *Mishneh Torah* teaches that only "this God" is to be acknowledged, loved, and feared and that only His Torah is true.

On the basis of what Maimonides says in the *Guide* (III, 38) on the *De'ot*, one is inclined to suggest that with an obvious qualification the *De'ot* are devoted to man's fundamental duties toward his fellows, just as the *Yesodē Ha-Torah* are devoted to man's fundamental duties toward God. In fact all commandments discussed in the *Yesodē Ha-Torah* explicitly speak of God; yet the same seems to be true of the first two of the eleven commandments discussed in the *De'ot*. However, the second of these commandments ("to Him shalt thou cleave")²¹ means according to the interpretation which

Maimonides follows, "to those who know Him (i.e., the Sages and their disciples) shalt thou cleave" (VI, 2). Accordingly one must wonder whether the first of the two commandments in question (the commandment to assimilate oneself to His ways or to walk in His ways) has an immediate theological reference. To walk in God's ways means to be gracious, merciful, just, mighty, powerful, and so on (I, 6). In order to understand the meaning of the *De'ot*, one must understand the plan of this section. The first three chapters are devoted to the explanation of the commandment to walk in the ways of God, whereas the last two chapters (VI–VII) are devoted to the explanation of the ten other commandments whose explanation Maimonides assigned to the *De'ot*. The central chapter is an appendix to the first three; it is medical rather than halakhic. The fifth chapter is another appendix to the first three, but its purport is not obvious. To understand its purport, one must first consider the chief point made in the first three chapters.

Maimonides makes there a distinction between two kinds of human goodness, which he calls wisdom and piety. Wisdom comprises all character traits that are the mean between the corresponding two faulty extremes. Piety, on the other hand, consists in deviating somewhat from the middle toward one or the other extreme, for instance in being not merely humble but very humble. One may say that what Maimonides calls wisdom is moral virtue in Aristotle's sense and that by juxtaposing wisdom and piety he in fact juxtaposes philosophic morality and the morality of the Torah. Accordingly the tension between philosophy and the Torah would here become thematic to a higher degree than in *Yesodē Ha-Torah*.²² The tension proves on closer inspection to be a contradiction. Just as in *Yesodē Ha-Torah* VII he said in effect, first, that all prophets prophesy by means of the imagination, and then that the prophet Moses did not prophesy by means of the imagination; he says now, first, that in the case of all character traits the middle way is the right way, and then that in the case of some character traits the pious man deviates from the middle way toward one or the other extreme. More precisely, according to Maimonides the right way, the way in which we are commanded to walk, is in every case the middle way that is the way of the Lord (*De'ot* I, 3–5, 7; II, 2, 7); yet in the case of anger and pride, man is forbidden to walk in the middle way (II, 3). One obviously does not solve this difficulty by saying that Maimonides explicitly identifies the ways of the Lord only with wisdom as distinguished from piety; this act of Maimonides could be compared with his leaning toward the doctrine of the eternity of the world in *Yesodē Ha-Torah* I. The difficulty is solved somehow in the fifth chapter of the *De'ot*. That chapter is apparently devoted to "actions" of the wise man as distinguished from his character traits (and his wisdom). But the "actions" of which he speaks here cannot be dealt with separately from

17. Cf. Albo, *Roots* I, 14 (128, 4–5 Husik).

18. Cf. the thorough discussion of this subject in Albo's *Roots* I.

19. Cf. Abravanel, *Rosh Amanah*, chs. 23–24; cf. Albo, *Roots* I, 2, end.

20. *M.T.* 34b5 and 15.

21. Deut. 10:20; the passage is not quoted in the *Guide*.

22. Consider the relative frequency of "nature" in *De'ot* I, 2–3.

character traits.²³ In fact the fifth chapter differs from the chapters preceding it in that Maimonides therein moves from the theme of the wise man in the strict or narrow sense as defined above to the "disciple of the wise," i.e., the Jewish sage who is both wise and pious or in some respects wise and in others pious (cf. especially V, 5 and 9). The transition is illustrated by Maimonides' interpreting the commandment to love one's neighbor as meaning that everyone is obliged to love every Jew (VI, 3–5, 8; VII, 1, 8), as well as by his here qualifying the duty to be truthful by the requirements of peace (V, 7; cf. II, 10); furthermore, he limits, with a view to the practice of all prophets in Israel, the prohibition against publicly humiliating a Jew by the duty to proclaim his sins toward God, as distinguished from his sins toward other men (VI, 8–9). His hesitation to identify unqualifiedly the right way with the middle way may be explained by an ambiguity occurring in his source (*Pirqē Abot* V, 13–14). There it is said that he who says "what is mine is thine and what is thine is thine" is pious, but that he who says "what is mine is mine and what is thine is thine" possesses the middle character or, according to some, the character of Sodom.

The *Talmud Torah* reasonably follows immediately on the *De'ot* and thus forms the center of the Book of Knowledge. If God's demands on man—on his conduct both towards God and towards his fellow men—are delivered in the most perfect manner in the Torah and only in the Torah, knowledge of the Torah, study of the Torah is the first of all duties; for even the Accounts of the Chariot and of the Beginning form part of the study of the Torah (I, 11–12). The central section makes clear that the extreme humility demanded by the Torah does not preclude the sage's concern with being honored and enjoying other privileges, for that concern only reflects his concern with the Torah being honoured (V, 1; VI, 11–12).

The commandments explained in the '*Abodah Zarah*' are mostly the immediate specifications of the first and most fundamental prohibition, namely the prohibition against thinking that there is any other god but the Lord. Accordingly, 49 of the 51 commandments discussed there are prohibitions; even the two commandments that are positive in form are in fact also negative. In order to see why the laws regarding forbidden worship form part of the Book of Knowledge, we start from the most obvious peculiarity of this section. That peculiarity is that the section is opened by an introductory chapter preceding the explanation of any of the 51 commandments in question. That chapter sets forth the relation in time of forbidden worship to the true or right worship. True worship preceded forbidden worship. This, we may say, follows necessarily from man's having been created by God in His image. Man originally knew that all beings other than God are God's creatures. This knowledge was gradually lost, with the result that the great

23. Cf. *De'ot* VI, 5 and *Sanhedrin* XVIII, 1 with *De'ot* I, 7.

majority of men became worshippers of idols while the wise men among them knew no other god but the stars and the spheres; the truth was preserved only by solitary individuals like Noah. The truth was recovered by the efforts of Abraham, who realized that the sphere cannot possibly move itself and that its mover is the creator of the whole, the only God. He fought the worship of idols as well as of the heavenly bodies by deed and by speech, his speech consisting of demonstrations. He was therefore persecuted, but saved by a miracle. This miracle is all the more remarkable since it is the only divine intervention in Abraham's recovery and propagation of the truth that is mentioned by Maimonides here. At any rate, forbidden worship—the worship of any creatures (II, 1)—is based on the most fundamental error, a demonstrably wrong view, the alternative to "the foundation of the foundations and the pillar of the sciences."²⁴ It is for this reason that forbidden worship is a proper theme of the Book of Knowledge.

It could seem that the teaching of '*Abodah Zarah*' I is at variance with the teaching of the *Guide*, according to which the creation of the world is not demonstrable and the prohibition against idolatry is not accessible to reason or the intellect.²⁵ This would cause no difficulty since the purposes of the *Guide* and the *Mishneh Torah* differ so greatly. The case would be different if this particular difference between the two works flatly contradicted what Maimonides says in the *Guide* about the most important substantive difference between them.²⁶ Nor are we perplexed by his stressing the defects of the minds of most men and the ensuing necessity of establishing certainty and unanimity by means of revelation even regarding the existence of God, for what is true of most minds is not true of all ('*Abodah Zarah*' II, 3). A difficulty is caused by what he says toward the end of this section (XI, 16), at the end of his discussion of the prohibitions against divination, astrology, the use of charms, and similar things: everyone who "believes" in such things and thinks that they are true and words of wisdom but to be foregone only because they are forbidden by the Torah, is a fool. One wonders whether this statement is meant to apply retroactively to idolatry proper or whether Maimonides is here suggesting a distinction between idolatry and what we would call superstition.

The last section of the Book of Knowledge is devoted to the explanation of a single commandment—the commandment that the sinner repent his sins before the Lord and make confession—as well as of the roots, or dogmas, that are "connected with [that commandment] for its sake." The dogmas in question do not belong, then, to the Accounts of the Chariot and of the Beginning. Their rationale is solely that without their acceptance repentance would be impossible; they are purely practical, i.e., they are

24. *Yesodē Ha-Torah*, beginning and '*Abodah Zarah*' II, 4.

25. II, 33 (75a).

26. Cf. the beginning of this article.

more practical than the dogmas concerning prophecy and the Torah of Moses, for revelation also discloses theoretical truths; or, to use a distinction made by Maimonides in the *Guide* (III, 28), they are opinions that ought to be believed not so much on account of themselves as because they are necessary for the improvement of human living together. Besides, the heading of the last section of the Book of Knowledge implies that none of the 613 commandments of the Torah explicitly commands acceptance of the opinions in question.

The question arises, why are dogmas of this kind connected with repentance and required for the sake of repentance, as distinguished from other commanded actions, such as prayer; and which are the dogmas in question? Maimonides' codification of the particulars of the law on repentance prepares the answers to these questions. The distinction between perfect repentance and repentance as such seems to be of decisive importance. Perfect repentance requires that the sinner not again commit the repented sin although the relevant circumstances have not changed or although he is exposed to the same temptation to which he earlier succumbed: an old man cannot perfectly repent the sins he committed in his youth by virtue of his youth. From this it follows that there cannot be any perfect repentance on one's deathbed. Hence if there were not repentance pure and simple, men could not repent many of their sins. Yet they are commanded to repent all their sins. Hence repentance pure and simple requires only that man deplore his sins, confess them with his lips before the Lord, and resolve in his heart not to commit them again. Even if a man has perfectly repented a given sin, he is not for this reason free from sin, for he will commit other sins. Repentance pure and simple, as distinguished from perfect repentance, is sufficient for his sins being forgiven him (II, 1-3; cf. III, 1). Forgiveness of sins is needed because sinfulness, i.e. preponderance of one's sins over his meritorious deeds, is literally deadly, and only God knows the true weight of the various kinds of sins and meritorious deeds (III, 2). When Maimonides mentions in this context (III, 4) the fact that the sounding of the Shofar on Rosh ha-shanah is a decision of Scripture, i.e., not explicable, he gives us a hint to the effect that the commandment to repent has a reason accessible to man; that reason is the one that has just been restated. Repentance is then not possible if there is not particular providence, which in turn requires that God be omniscient. Furthermore, the crucial importance of deathbed repentance is connected with the prospect of the life to come. Accordingly Maimonides enumerates in the immediate sequel (III, 6 ff.) the kinds of men who do not have a share in the world to come; among those kinds we find him who says that the Creator does not know what men do and those who deny the resurrection of the dead and the coming of the Redeemer.

Maimonides does not explicitly introduce these three dogmas in the *Teshubah* as dogmas or roots. He speaks in the *Teshubah* of roots in the

sense of dogmas only in chapters V-VI, i.e., in the central chapters of that section. "The great root" without which repentance is impossible, is man's freedom. Man is free in the sense that it depends entirely on him whether he will choose the good or the bad; it is in every man's power to be as just as Moses or as wicked as Jeroboam, to be wise or to be foolish. No other being in the world possesses this privilege. One must go beyond what Maimonides says and say that no other being possesses that privilege: God cannot be unjust or unwise. Man would not be truly free to choose good and evil, truth or error, if he did not by his own power know good or evil or truth and error. Neither God nor anyone else nor anything²⁷ compels man to act well or badly or draws him to either justice and wisdom or injustice and folly. Maimonides thus implicitly denies what he had asserted in the *De'ot* (I, 2) that different human beings have from their birth, by nature, inclinations to different vices; in fact, he now refrains from speaking of "nature" (*teba'*) altogether. Since the difficulty is not disposed of by silence, he replaces the statement "freedom is given to everyman" by the statement "the freedom of everyman is given to him."²⁸

Man's freedom is a pillar of the whole Torah: he could not reasonably be told "do this" or "do not do that" if he were not able to do in each case the opposite of what he is told. In particular, if he lacked freedom he could not reasonably be punished for his transgressions or rewarded for his obedience. Man can avoid the punishment he deserves by repenting his evil deeds; because man is free to do evil, he is also free to repent his evil deeds. Man's freedom extends even to his knowledge or science and to his emotions. Man's freedom seems to be incompatible with God's omniscience, with His knowledge of all future things. The solution of this difficulty requires profound thought—thought that is not at the disposal of all men—and "many great roots" depend on that solution. The solution is supplied by the insight that God's knowledge differs radically from human knowledge, so much so, that God's knowledge is as unfathomable to man as His essence. But while we cannot know how God knows all creatures and their actions, we know without any doubt that man is free. This knowledge derives not merely from the acceptance of the Law but from clear demonstrations taken from the words of wisdom, i.e. from science. There remains another difficulty to the solution of which Maimonides devotes the whole sixth chapter. This difficulty is caused by many scriptural passages that seem to contradict the dogma of human freedom; in those passages God seems to be said to decree men's doing evil or good. To solve this difficulty, Maimonides explains in his own name "a great root." The explanation starts from the fact that every

27. *M.T.* 87a18.

28. Cf. *Teshubah* V, beginning with VII, beginning. The latter formulation may be the correct reading also of V, beginning; cf. Hyamson's edition and Albo, *Roots* I, 3 (59, 17-18). Cf. Pines' Introduction to his English translation of the *Guide* (Chicago 1963), p. xcv, n. 63.

unrepented sin of an individual or community requires a fitting punishment—God alone knowing which punishment is fit—in this life or in the life to come or in both lives. If the individual or the community has committed a great sin or many sins, justice requires that the sinner not escape punishment through his repentance and hence that repentance, i.e. the freedom to return from his wickedness, be withheld from him. This is what is meant by God's hardening the heart of Pharaoh and similar expressions.

Maimonides concludes the thematic discussion of repentance in the seventh chapter, in which he speaks more emphatically than before of the exalted rank of repentance: the rank of those who repent is higher than that of those who never sin; Israel will not be redeemed except through repentance; repentance brings man near to the Presence. Particularly remarkable is the suddenness with which a man through his repentance is transformed from an enemy of God into a friend of God. Those who repent have the characteristics of the pious as distinguished from the wise.

The next two chapters deal with the world to come and the Messianic age; the connection of these two themes with repentance has become clear from the thematic discussion of repentance. The life to come is the highest reward for the fulfillment of the commandments and the acquisition of wisdom. Yet, as Maimonides points out in the last chapter, as long as we fulfil the commandments of the Torah and concern ourselves with the wisdom of the Torah in order to receive any reward, we do not yet serve God properly, for we serve Him only from fear, not from love. But one can love God only to the extent to which one knows Him. Therefore one must dedicate oneself to the study of the sciences and insights that enable him to know God to the extent to which this is possible for man, "as we have made clear in the *Yesodē Ha-Torah*." With these words the Book of Knowledge ends. The reference to the *Sefer Madda'* makes it unnecessary for Maimonides to state explicitly what the required sciences or insights are.