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which an individual has been sinned against, the purpose of such a rebuke being to prevent hatred from arising in his own heart (VI 6). The second kind of rebuke aims simply at the well-being of the other person, who has either committed a sin or has followed “a way that is not good” (VI 7). The responsibility for one's fellow man inherent in this commandment presupposes a common acceptance of the Law. The concern for what the sinner (or wrongdoer) has done to his life, goes so far as to require that the attempt at correction be repeated again and again until either the admonition is accepted or the benefactor is physically assaulted.

It is forbidden to put a man to shame in public. This prohibition applies only to matters that concern a man's conduct with his fellow man, not to “matters of Heaven.” By means of this distinction, Maimonides attempts to explain the public castigation of Israel by the prophets, who censured the people only for the violation of commandments involving “matters of Heaven” (VI 8).

The prohibition against being a talebearer proscribes three kinds of speech: a) the gossip of a “talebearer” (rakhil), in which the truth is told without defaming the other person; b) “the evil tongue,” in which another person is disparaged, even though the truth is told; c) slander, in which a lie is fabricated by “one who gives his fellow man a bad name” (VII 2). Even “dust of the evil tongue”—a hint of disparaging talk—is prohibited. Now, only the first of the three kinds of proscribed speech is expressly forbidden by the Torah: “You shall not go about as a talebearer (rakhil) among My people” (Lev. 19:16). The other two kinds were forbidden by the rabbinic sages, whose interpretation is stricter than that found in the Torah. This difference between the biblical and rabbinic teachings helps to explain why defamation is viewed differently in H. De'ot than in Eight Chapters. The latter work commends the vilification of vicious men, although it would, strictly speaking, fall into the class of “the evil tongue.” In Eight Chapters, Maimonides cites precedents from the Torah, not from the rabbinic tradition: the Israelites had been warned against imitating the evil deeds of the Egyptians, Canaanites, and Sodomites. Moreover he says that “virtue” requires vilifying the wicked to prevent people from falling under their influence. The philosophic standard of virtue as explicated in Eight Chapters is more lenient than the absolute rabbinic prohibition against “the evil tongue.”

The prohibition against being a talebearer is encompassed by the commandment to love your neighbor, which requires speaking only in praise of him. In fact, all the commandments that regulate man’s relations with his fellow man can be subsumed under love of neighbor. Thus, the last two commandments in H. De'ot, forbidding vengeance and bearing a grudge, are in effect corollaries of love of neighbor. The purpose of the prohibition against bearing a grudge is to make possible “the settlement of the earth and social relations among human beings” (H. De'ot, end).

Eight Chapters

Eight Chapters is the Introduction to Maimonides' Commentary on Pirqi Avot (Chapters of the Fathers). The health of the soul, although not neglected in H. De'ot, is a dominant theme of Eight Chapters. This can be explained by the significance piety assumes in the latter work, as indicated by the following rabbinic quotation cited by Maimonides in his Introduction: “Whoever wants to become a pious man should fulfill the words of Avot.” Maimonides interprets piety chiefly as a regimen for curing the diseases of the soul. Since piety is part of the prophet's self-discipline, the prophetic way of life is also examined in some detail. Here again Maimonides quotes the rabbis: “Piety brings about the holy spirit.”

He presupposes, here and elsewhere, that the Jewish and philosophic traditions are distinct from one another. Eight Chapters appears to be an emphatically Jewish work. Nevertheless, he admittedly draws upon the work of both ancient (Greek) and modern (Islamic) philosophers. He refuses to cite his philosophic sources, however, lest a parochial reader reject a teaching because it stems from an alien work. The theme of the relation between Judaism and philosophy is therefore subdued. In comparison to H. De'ot, however, it is quite clearly present, for he explicitly refers to the philosophers in a number of places in Eight Chapters and sometimes compares their position with that of the Jewish sages. In H. De'ot, he never expressly speaks of the philosophers, the wise men of Greece.
Eight Chapters begins with a discussion of the human soul, tacitly based upon the works of the philosophers. (There are almost no Jewish quotations in Chapter One.) The final chapter contains an extensive discussion of a number of Jewish sources in order to show that Judaism, in agreement with philosophy, affirms human freedom. The movement from philosophy to religion, seen in an overview of the work, is repeated in most of the individual chapters, where Maimonides begins with a philosophic doctrine and then reconciles or compares it with the relevant Jewish teaching. (The movement from philosophy to Judaism can also be discerned in H. De'ot as a whole and in some of the individual chapters.)

The discussion of the human soul in Chapter One lays the groundwork for the explanation of how to cure the soul's diseases, which are found in the appetitive part of the soul. Maimonides does not confine himself to describing only the appetitive part; he gives an account of all the powers of the human soul. The rational part is thereby given its full due, being considered not from the viewpoint of the subrational, but in its own right. In fact, the appetitive part is understood from the viewpoint of the rational part. Since the intellect informs all the parts of man's soul, thereby making it a human soul, the affects of the appetitive part are, as it were, accidents of the soul.

The diseases of the soul are bad character traits, i.e., moral vices. Since they are in the appetitive part of the soul, they are entrenched by habit, knowledge alone does not suffice to effect the cure. The sick soul must repeatedly perform actions that are opposed to his vice in order to make his character traits conform to the mean. If, for example, he is miserly, he must repeatedly be extravagant in order to achieve the middle way of liberality. If he is arrogant, he must wear tattered garments and degrade himself in various ways in the presence of other people (cf. H. De'ot, II 2). The repetition of the appropriate actions over a period of time can reshape the passions, producing new moral habits, so that reason can take command of the appetitive part of the soul.

Since the sick soul has a corrupt imagination and confuse good with bad actions, he needs a physician of the soul to lay down a regimen to cure him of his moral vice. Like the physician of the body, the physician of the soul "orders" the sick soul to follow the prescribed regimen. There is a fusion here of therapy and ethics: the prescription is a temporary ethic to enable the patient to acquire moral virtue.

The identification of moral virtue with the health of the soul is not arbitrary, but is a consequence of the way Maimonides conceives of health as such—for both the body and the soul. "Health is in general a certain equilibrium belonging to the domain of relation, and the privation of this relation generally constitutes illness." The mean, the guideline for moral virtue, is thus also the standard for the health of the soul. Man's character traits have a basis in bodily temperaments and, like the constituents of the body in general, they are in a state of health when they are neither excessive nor deficient. To view the soul's health as lying in the mean is tantamount to saying that the healthy soul is a stable soul. Maimonides places this commonsense view into a medical context and grounds it upon the nature of the human body.

Complete health of the soul, the perfection of all the moral virtues, is rarely found. This does not imply, however, that most people have sick souls. Sickness of the soul is identical with moral vice; people with sick souls are "bad men" (Ch. III). There are two intermediate conditions between moral virtue and moral vice, namely, continence and incontinence. The continent man is tempted to do what is bad, but controls his temptation, whereas the incontinent man is tempted and succumbs. Both, however, know which actions are good, whereas the sick soul has degenerated to the point where he confuses good with bad actions. The sick soul is especially in need of a physician of the soul to prescribe a course of treatment.

Piety, which entails inclining toward an extreme, is a therapeutic method for curing the diseases of the soul. It is also a precautionary measure against allowing moral vice to enter surreptitiously into the soul. Such a safeguard is needed because moral vice may develop slowly and, at first, imperceptibly in the soul.

The Law fulfills a similar pedagogic and therapeutic purpose, for it requires people to incline toward the extreme in order to train them to achieve the middle way in ethics. It does not take into account, however, the distinctive needs of a
particular individual, which could only be done by a physician of the soul. The Law must be distinguished from the art of medicine, which treats diseases on an individual basis. Nevertheless, the Law does take into account what may be called typical vices and prescribes a discipline for the entire community.

Although the Law lays down a strict discipline, it does not countenance the excesses of asceticism, a point emphasized by Maimonides to forestall any misunderstanding that might result from his teaching that going toward the extreme can be salutary. He does not recommend afflicting the body to cure the soul’s diseases. He reiterates his opposition to asceticism when he turns to the prophetic, or contemplative, way of life (Ch. V). In fact, he now says that beautiful surroundings and even decorative clothes can be justified to dispel the melancholia that might accompany the solitary contemplative life. For therapeutic purposes, Maimonides recommends walking in beautiful gardens, looking at beautiful objects, and listening to music. Beauty is understood as a means to an end, as instrumental to the intellect’s need for a joyful state of mind.

The prophet’s ultimate goal, like that of the wise man, is the intellectual perception of God. Although this goal is discussed briefly (in Chapter Seven), Eight Chapters is concerned with the prophetic way of life, not with prophecy as such. As a work on ethics, it has a practical intent, laying down a way of life which, in principle, can be followed at any time. Maimonides does not assume that prophecy ceased forever with the close of the biblical period, but that it is an ever present possibility for men with the appropriate gifts and training.

The prophet’s life is brought into order, it is given a focus, by being directed toward a single goal (Ch. V). This goal, to attain knowledge of God, reorients the earlier discussion of the health of the soul. A healthy soul is not an end in itself, but a means for the well-being of the intellect. Moreover, from this new vantage point, the standard of the mean is seen to be just a rough guideline, satisfactory only within a limited horizon. The contemplative life requires an extreme kind of devotion, subordinating everything else to its own purpose. If it strikes a mean at all, the “excess” of contemplation is balanced by a “deficiency” of other activities. A man’s actions and conversations are severely curtailed when guided by the goal of contemplation (Ch. V).

It is in this context that Maimonides forcefully condemns hedonism. If intellectual perception is the goal of human life, bodily pleasure becomes incidental. Man’s ultimate goal requires a concern with the body’s health rather than its pleasure.

Toward the end of Chapter Five, Maimonides hints that the all-encompassing contemplative goal might occasionally conflict with the demands of the Law. He resolves this difficulty by appealing to a rabbinic teaching that sanctions a transgression when committed in obedience to the dictum: “In all your ways know Him” (Prov. 3:6). At this point, Maimonides says the goal is the truth.

Chapters Six through Eight aim at reconciling the Jewish tradition with some of the philosophic doctrines that had been explicated or presupposed earlier in Eight Chapters. In Chapter Six, Maimonides examines certain rabbinic statements which apparently contradict the philosophic view that a virtuous man never desires to do anything bad and is simply superior to a continent man. In order to reconcile the apparent contradiction between Judaism and philosophy, he distinguishes between “traditions” and “generally accepted opinions.” When the rabbis laud someone who desires something bad but conquers his desire, they refer only to the desire for things prohibited by the particular tradition of the Jewish nation, such as mixing milk and meat, illicit sexual unions, etc. The man who successfully struggles to control his desire to transgress “traditions” is superior to one who is never even tempted. Judaism is in agreement with philosophy that the desire to violate “generally accepted opinions,” such as prohibitions against murder, theft, etc., is always wrong.

When Maimonides had spoken earlier of the moral vices as diseases of the soul, he had presupposed the philosophic understanding of the subject. In Chapter Seven he shows how the moral vices are viewed by the prophets. He quotes from Isaiah, who refers not to “moral vices” but to “sins” that separate man from God. Seen though the eyes of prophecy, the moral vices are like veils that hinder the contemplation of God.

From a philosophic standpoint, the question of whether man
is free turns upon the nature of his “inborn disposition” (fīrah), or temperament, which has an effect upon traits of character and intellect. Since the “inborn disposition” is subject to habituation and training, man is able to become virtuous or wicked. This doctrine, based upon reason and observation, is in agreement with the premise of the Law concerning human freedom. Judaism, however, does not speak with an unambiguous voice on this subject. How are we to understand certain biblical statements—such as the reference to God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart—that seem to deny human freedom? Such questions of exegesis are inseparable from the “theological” problem of how God’s omniscience can be reconciled with human freedom. Maimonides discusses the cluster of problems surrounding human freedom in Chapter Eight.

On the Management of Health

In this work Maimonides applies his view of therapy to the problems of a particular individual, the Sultan al-Afdal, who had requested advice on how to cure his anxiety and depression. Maimonides' reply includes broad counsel on how to cure the diseases of the soul. Since the sultan had also complained of bodily ailments, Maimonides emphasizes the interdependence of body and soul. A disordered state of the passions—which have a bodily basis—affects the health of the body. Maimonides singles out depression as producing bodily symptoms, and he advises physicians in general to see first of all that their patients have a cheerful frame of mind.

The medical art does not provide the knowledge necessary for healing the diseases of the soul. Maimonides recognizes two sources of treatment: religion and practical philosophy. Both utilize essentially the same therapeutic method of compelling the sick soul to follow a regimen opposed to its vice. Besides the discipline imposed by religion, its therapeutic value derives from maxims, admonitions, and edifying tales.

In this work, intended to meet the difficulties of a ruler whose power and wealth were subject to great change, Maimonides teaches that a healthy soul is neither excessively joyful at good fortune nor depressed by bad fortune. The therapy consists in training the soul to become less and less affected by either good or bad fortune. Maimonides minimizes the importance of material goods by referring to their transitory character, and he completely deflates the significance of any worldly loss by comparing it to the finality of death. It is clearer in this work than in Eight Chapters that the opinions held by people affect the health of the soul. Maimonides emphasizes here the need to distinguish between imaginary and true happiness, though he only briefly alludes to the religious conception of eternal happiness, and does not further elaborate his view of true happiness.

As in Eight Chapters, we see that the imagination plays havoc with the sick soul, deceiving him into magnifying either good or bad fortune, causing him to grieve about things past, and making him fearful of the future. Health includes the recognition that what has happened in the past cannot be changed and that future events cannot be known and hence should not be feared. The misery of the sick soul is not regarded as simply bad, for distress can serve a useful purpose by forcing an individual to acquire moral virtue and to devote himself to the worship of God.

Letter to Joseph

The letter to Joseph ben Judah included in this volume is important for many reasons. It gives information about Maimonides' support of the Exilarch, a “secular” leader, and the concomitant opposition to Samuel ben Ali, the religious head of Babylonian Jewry; it helps to date the Guide of the Perplexed; it indicates that Maimonides did not study the works of Averroes until the Guide was substantially complete. This letter also shows the political acumen of Maimonides in dealing with a cunning foe, Samuel ben Ali, and throws light upon the relevance of ethics (“moral habits”) to political controversy.

Maimonides' disciple, Joseph, had become embroiled in a controversy with Samuel ben Ali and had been vilified by Samuel and his associates. Maimonides urges Joseph to conduct himself with humility in this dispute. As a model for Joseph, Maimonides refers to his own humility; he had trained himself to remain calm in the face of abuse. Maimonides would preserve his equanimity no matter what the provocation. His
CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Lev. 19:16.
2. Ibid.
3. When Saul was in pursuit of David, Doeg the Edomite reported to Saul that David had been aided by the priest, Ahimelech of Nob. As a result, Saul had eighty-five priests of Nob put to death by the hand of Doeg. All the inhabitants of Nob were also exterminated by Doeg. I Sam. 22:6-19.
7. B. T., 'Arakhin, 15b; Ps. 12:5.
11. Literally: the evil tongue.
12. B. T., 'Arakhin, 15a. According to the Talmud, the Hebrews were not permitted to enter the promised land because they accepted the evil report of the spies concerning the land of Canaan. Cf. Num. 13:31-14:23.
14. Reading de'ah with the traditional version, the Rome edition, and other editions listed in Lieberman; Hyamson has da'at.
15. B. T., Yoma, 23a; Sifra to Lev. 19:18.
16. Ps. 7:5. The next verse continues: "Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it, and tread my life down to the earth; let him lay my glory in the dust."
18. B. T., Yoma, 23a; Sifra to Lev. 19:18.
19. More literally: If he guards (noter) the thing. The primary meaning of the Hebrew word that refers to bearing a grudge is to "guard" or "keep."
20. Masa' umatan, a Hebrew idiom meaning literally, "carrying and giving."
21. Maimonides closes the work as he had begun, with a reference to "human beings" (benei 'adam) and an allusion to man's political nature. Cf. supra, Chapter One, note five.

EIGHT CHAPTERS

Eight Chapters is part of Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah. The Mishnah itself is an early rabbinic code of law, dating from the third century C.E. It later became part of the Talmud, which contains lengthy and often complicated discussions of the Mishnah. Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah, his first legal work, made the Mishnah accessible to readers who did not have extensive knowledge of the Talmud.

No tractate of the Mishnah deals with ethics as such. In order to give a coherent account of this subject, Maimonides wrote a long Introduction to Pirquei Avot (Chapters of the Fathers). This Introduction, a self-contained unit with surprisingly few quotations from Avot, has come to be known as Eight Chapters. The work was not entitled Eight Chapters by Maimonides, but he did divide the original Arabic text into eight chapters.1
EIGHT CHAPTERS

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to this composition, we explained the reason this compiler placed this tractate [Avot] in this Order, and we also mentioned its great utility. Several times in earlier parts of this composition we promised to speak about useful matters in this tractate and to do so at some length. For even though it is clear and easily understood on the surface, to carry out what it contains is not easy for all people, nor are all of its intentions understandable without a lucid explanation. However, it leads to great perfection and true happiness, and I therefore saw fit to discuss it in detail.

They [the sages], peace be upon them, said: Whoever wants to become a pious man should fulfill the words of Avot. According to us, there is no rank above piety except for prophecy, the one leading to the other. As they said: Piety brings about the holy spirit. Thus, from what they have said, it is clear that following the discipline described in this tractate leads to prophecy. We shall explain the truth of this, for it encompasses a large portion of morality.

Before taking up the explanation of each particular law, I saw fit to begin with some useful chapters, from which a man can acquire principles and which will also be like a key for him to what we shall present in the commentary.

Know that the things about which we shall speak in these chapters and in what will come in the commentary are not matters invented on my own nor explanations I have originated. Indeed, they are matters gathered from the discourse of the sages in the Midrash, the Talmud, and other compositions of theirs, as well as from the discourse of both the ancient and modern philosophers, and from the compositions of many men. Hear the truth from whoever says it. Sometimes I have taken a complete passage from the text of a famous book. Now there is nothing wrong with that, for I do not attribute to myself what someone who preceded me said. We hereby acknowledge this and shall not indicate that "so-and-so said" and "so-and-so said," since that would be useless profanity. Moreover, [identifying] the name of such an individual might make the passage offensive to someone without experience and make him think it has an evil inner meaning of which he is not aware. Consequently, I saw fit to omit the author's name, since my goal is to be useful to the reader. We shall explain to him the hidden meanings in this tractate.

I now turn to the chapters I saw fit to set forth here in accordance with my goal. There are eight chapters.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

On the soul of man and its powers

Know that the soul of man is a single soul. It has many different actions, some of which are sometimes called souls. One might therefore think, as the physicians do, that man has many souls. Even the most eminent physician stated that there are three souls: natural, vital, and psychic. These are sometimes called powers and parts, so that one speaks of the parts of the soul. This terminology is frequently used by the philosophers. By saying "parts" they do not mean that the soul is divided into parts as bodies are divided into parts. Indeed, they regard the different actions of the totality of the soul as parts of a whole composed of those parts.

You know that the improvement of moral habits is the same as the cure of the soul and its powers. The doctor who cures bodies needs first to know, in its entirety, the body he is curing and what the parts of the body are, I mean the body of man. And he needs to know what things make it sick so that they may be avoided and what things make it healthy so that they may be pursued. Similarly, the one who treats the soul and wishes to purify moral habits needs to know the soul in its entirety and its parts, as well as what makes it sick and what makes it healthy. Therefore I say that there are five parts of the soul: nutritive, sentient, imaginative, appetitive, and rational.

We have already indicated in this chapter that our discourse would be about the soul of man because man's nutritive part, for example, is not the same as the nutritive part belonging to a donkey or a horse. For man is nourished by the nutritive part of the human soul, a donkey is nourished by the nutritive part of the donkey's soul, and a palm tree is nourished by the
nutritive part of its soul. Now, all these individuals are said to be “nourished” solely due to the equivocal character of the word, not because the meaning itself is one. Likewise, an individual man and animal are said to be “sentient” solely due to the equivocal character of the word, not because the sensation which is in man is the same sensation which is in the horse. Nor is the sensation which is in one species the same sensation which is in another species. Rather, every single species having a soul possesses a unique soul, different from the soul of another species.

Certain actions necessarily stem from one soul and other actions from another soul. One action may resemble another action, so that the two actions are thought to be identical even though they are not. For example, consider three dark places: the sun shines upon one of them, and it is illumined; the moon rises over the second place, and it is illumined; a lamp is lit in the third place, and it is illumined. Light is found in each one of them, but the reason for the first light and its cause is the sun, the cause of the second is the moon, and the cause of the third is fire. Likewise, the cause of a man’s sensation is the soul of man; the cause of a donkey’s sensation is the soul of the donkey; and the cause of an eagle’s sensation is the soul of the eagle. There is no notion common to all of them except through equivocation. Grasp this notion, for it is extraordinarily marvelous. Many pseudo-philosophers stumble over it and therefore cling to repulsive views and incorrect opinions.

I return to our point about the parts of the soul. I say that the nutritive part consists in the power of attracting, retaining, digesting, excreting, growing, procreating its kind, and separating mixtures so that it isolates what should be used for nourishment and what should be excreted. The discourse concerning these seven powers, the means by which they act, how they act, in which organs their action is more obvious and evident, which powers are continuously in existence, and which ones cease at a given time—all of this necessarily belongs to the art of medicine. There is no need to go into it in this place.

The sentient part of the soul consists of the five powers well known to the multitude: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. The last is found in the entire surface of the body and has no specific organ like the other four powers.

The imaginative part is the power that preserves the impressions of sensibly perceived objects after they vanish from the immediacy of the senses that perceived them. Some impressions are combined with others, and some are separated from others. Therefore, from things it has perceived, this power puts together things it has not perceived at all and which are not possible for it to perceive. For example, a man imagines an iron ship floating in the air, or an individual whose head is in the heavens and whose feet are on the earth, or an animal with a thousand eyes. The imaginative power puts together many such impossible things and makes them exist in the imagination. Concerning this point the dialectical theologians committed a great, repulsive error, upon which they laid the foundation of their erroneous view concerning the division of the necessary, the admissible, and the impossible. They thought, or made people fancy, that everything that can be imagined is possible. They did not know that this power combines things whose existence is impossible, as we have mentioned.

The appetitive part is the power by which a man desires, or is repulsed by, a certain thing. From this power originate such actions as seeking something or fleeing from it, as well as being attracted to something or avoiding it; rage and agreeableness, fear and boldness, cruelty and compassion, love and hatred, and many such disturbances of the soul. This power uses all the organs of the body as instruments; for example, the power of the hand for hitting, the power of the foot for walking, the power of the eye for seeing, and the power of the heart for being bold or fearful. Likewise, the rest of the organs—both internal and external—and their powers are instruments for this appetitive power.

The rational part is the power found in man by which he perceives intelligibles, deliberates, acquires the sciences, and distinguishes between base and noble actions. Some of these activities are practical and some are theoretical. Of the practical, some are productive and some are reflective. By means of the theoretical, man knows the essence of the unchanging beings. These [theoretical activities] are called sciences without...
Eight Chapters

qualification. The productive is the power by means of which we acquire occupations, such as carpentry, agriculture, medicine, and navigation. The reflective is that by which one deliberates about a thing he wishes to do at the time he wishes to do it—whether it is possible to do it or not and, if it is possible, how it ought to be done. This is the extent to which the topic of the soul ought to be discussed here.

Know that this single soul, whose powers or parts are described above, is like matter, and the intellect is its form. If it does not attain its form, the existence of its capacity to receive this form is for nought and is, as it were, futile. This is the meaning of his [Solomon's] statement: Indeed, without knowledge a soul is not good.11 He means that the existence of a soul that does not attain its form, but is rather a soul without knowledge, is not good. This is not the place for a discourse about form, matter, or how many intellects there are and how they are attained. It is not needed for the discourse we wish [to present] about ethics, but is more appropriate for the Book of Prophecy which we have mentioned.13 Here I terminate this chapter and begin another.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

On the disobedience1 of the soul's powers and on knowledge of the part in which the virtues and the vices are primarily found

Know that disobedience3 and obedience4 of the Law are found only in two parts of the soul, namely, the sentient part and the appetitive part. All the transgressions and the commandments involve these two parts. There is no obedience or disobedience in the nutritive or imaginative parts, since thought6 and choice do not act upon them at all. By his thought the man is not able to suspend their action or to limit them to a certain action. Do you not see that these two parts—I mean the nutritive and the imaginative—are active during sleep unlike the other powers of the soul? Although there is perplexity concerning the rational part, I say that this power too may bring about obedience and disobedience, namely, belief in a false or a true opinion. But there is no act in it to which the terms commandment or transgression would apply. Therefore I said in what has preceded that the transgressions and the commandments are found in those two parts.

As for the virtues, there are two kinds: moral virtues and rational virtues. Opposed to them are two kinds of vices. The rational virtues are found in the rational part. Among them are: (i) wisdom, which is knowledge of the remote and proximate causes and which comes after knowledge of the existence of the thing whose causes are being investigated; and (ii) intelligence, which includes (a) the theoretical intellect, I mean, the first intelligibles, which we have by nature; (b) the acquired intellect, but this is not the place for that; and (c) brilliance and excellent comprehension, that is, excellent grasp of a thing quickly, in no time, or in a very short time. The vices of this power are the contrary of these or their opposite.

The moral virtues are found only in the appetitive part, and the sentient part is in this case a servant of the appetitive part. The virtues of this part are very numerous; for example, moderation, liberality, justice, gentleness, humility, contentment, courage,7 and others. The vices of this part consist in being deficient or excessive with regard to these [things].

Neither virtue nor vice is ascribed to the nutritive and imaginative parts. Rather, one says that they flow properly or improperly, just as one says that a given man's digestion is excellent, has stopped, or is impaired, or that his imagination is impaired or flows properly. There is neither virtue nor vice in any of these things. This is what we wished to set down in this chapter.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

On the diseases of the soul

The ancients said that the soul can be healthy or sick, just as the body can be healthy or sick.1 The health of the soul consists in its condition and that of its parts being such that it always does good and fine things and performs noble actions. Its
sickness consists in its condition and that of its parts being such that it always does bad and ugly things and performs base actions.

The health and sickness of the body are investigated by the art of medicine. Now due to the corruption of their senses, people with sick bodies imagine the sweet as bitter and the bitter as sweet. They fancy that what is suitable is not suitable; they strongly desire and take great pleasure in things which the healthy do not desire but loathe. In like manner, people with sick souls, I mean, bad and defective men, imagine bad things as good and good things as bad. The bad man always has a desire for ends that are in truth bad. Because of the sickness of his soul, he imagines them to be good.

When sick people not proficient in the art of medicine become aware of their illness, they seek out the physicians. They inform them of what they need to do, prohibit them from taking what they imagine to be pleasurable, and compel them to take vile, bitter things which will heal their bodies so that they will again delight in pleasant things and loathe vile things. Similarly, those with sick souls need to seek out the wise men, who are the physicians of the soul. The latter will prohibit the bad things which they think are good and treat them by means of the art that treats the moral habits of the soul, as we shall explain in the next chapter.

Those with sick souls who do not recognize their illness but imagine they are healthy or who recognize it but do not submit to medical treatment will meet the fate of a sick man who pursues his pleasures and does not submit to medical treatment—he will undoubtedly perish.

Those who recognize their illness and pursue their pleasures are spoken about in the true Scripture, which describes them as saying: *For in the stubbornness of my heart I walk, etc.* i.e., he intends to quench his thirst but he actually increases it.

Those who do not recognize their illness are described by Solomon in many places. He said: *The way of the fool is straight in his eyes, but he who listens to counsel is wise*—he means the man who accepts the opinion of the wise man, who informs him of the way which is truly straight, not the one he supposes to be straight. And he [Solomon] said: *There is a way which seems straight to a man, but its end is the ways of death.* He said of those souls are sick and who do not know what is harmful or useful to them: *The way of the wicked is like darkness; they know not why they stumble.*

The art of medical treatment for the soul is as I shall describe in the fourth chapter.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER**

**On medical treatment for the diseases of the soul**

Good actions are those balanced in the mean between two extremes, both of which are bad; one of them is an excess and the other a deficiency. The virtues are states of the soul and settled dispositions in the mean between two bad states [of the soul], one of which is excessive and the other deficient. Certain actions necessarily result from these states of the soul. For example, moderation is the moral habit in the mean between lust and insensibility to pleasure. Thus, moderation is one of the good actions, and the state of the soul that produces moderation is a moral virtue. Lust is the first extreme and total insensibility to pleasure the other extreme; both of them are completely bad. The two states of the soul necessarily giving rise to lust (the excessive state) and insensibility (the deficient state) are both moral vices. In like manner, liberality is the mean between miserliness and extravagance; courage is the mean between rashness and cowardice; wit is the mean between boisterous and dullness; humility is the mean between haughtiness and abasement; generosity is the mean between prodigality and stinginess; contentment is the mean between greed and laziness; gentleness is the mean between irascibility and servility; modesty is the mean between impudence and shyness; and so too, with the rest of them. If the meanings are understood, it is not absolutely necessary that names be assigned to them.

People often err concerning these actions and think that one of the two extremes is good and a virtue of the soul. Sometimes they think the first extreme is good, as when they think...
rashness is a virtue and call rash men courageous. If they see an exceedingly rash and bold person in a perilous situation who intentionally throws himself into danger but is saved by chance, they praise him for it and call him courageous. Sometimes they think the other extreme is good and say that someone who deprecates himself is gentle; or that a lazy man is contented; or that someone insensible to pleasure because of the dryness of his nature is moderate. Due to this kind of error, they also think that extravagance and prodigality are among the praiseworthy actions. Now all this is erroneous, for in truth one praises the mean, and a man needs to aim at it and continuously weigh all his actions with a view to this mean.

Know that these moral virtues and vices are acquired and firmly established in the soul by frequently repeating the actions pertaining to a particular moral habit over a long period of time and by our becoming accustomed to them. If those actions are good, we shall acquire the virtue; if they are bad, we shall acquire the vice. Since by nature man does not possess either virtue or vice at the beginning of his life (as we shall explain in the eighth chapter), he undoubtedly is habituated from childhood to actions in accordance with his family's way of life and that of the people of his town. These actions may be in the mean, excessive, or defective—as we have indicated.

Should his soul become sick, he must follow the same course in treating it as in the medical treatment for bodies. For when the body gets out of equilibrium, we look to which side it inclines in becoming unbalanced, and then oppose it with its contrary until it returns to equilibrium. When it is in equilibrium, we remove that counterbalance and revert to that which keeps the body in equilibrium. We act in a similar manner with regard to moral habits. We may, for example, see a man whose soul has reached a condition in which he is miserly toward himself. This is one of the vices of the soul, and the action he performs is one of the bad actions—as we have explained in this chapter. Thus, if we wanted to give medical treatment to this sick person, we would not order him to be liberal. That would be like using a balanced course for treating someone whose fever is excessive; this would not cure him of his sickness. Indeed, this man [with a miserly soul] needs to be made to be extravagant time after time. He must repeatedly act in an extravagant manner until the condition that makes him miserly is removed from his soul, and he just about acquires an extravagant disposition or comes close to it. Then we would make him stop the extravagant actions and order him to perform liberal actions continually. He must always adhere to this course and not go toward the excess or deficiency. Similarly, if we were to see him acting in an extravagant manner, we would order him to perform miserly actions repeatedly.

But we would not make him repeat miserly actions as many times as we made him repeat extravagant actions. This subtlety is the rule of therapy and is its secret. For a man can more easily turn from extravagance to liberality than from miserliness to liberality. Likewise, it is easier to turn from being insensible to pleasure to being moderate than from being lustful to being moderate. Therefore we make the lustful man repeat actions which lack pleasure more than we make the insensible man repeat lustful actions; we require the coward to practice rashness more than we require the rash man to practice cowardice; and we train the stingy man in prodigality more than we train the prodigal man in stinginess. This is the rule for the medical treatment of moral habits, so memorize it.

Because of this teaching, the virtuous men would not let a disposition of their souls remain in the mean, but would incline a little toward the excess or the defect as a precaution. I mean, they would, for example, incline from moderation a little toward insensibility to pleasure, from courage a little toward rashness, from generosity a little toward prodigality, from humility a little toward abasement, and likewise with the rest. This is the meaning expressed in their saying, inside the line of the law. What the virtuous men did at certain times and also what some individuals among them [always] did in inclining toward one extreme—for example, fasting, rising at night, abstaining from eating meat and drinking wine, keeping away from women, wearing garments of wool and hair, dwelling on mountains, and secluding themselves in desolate places—they did only with a view to medical treatment, as we have indicated. Again, if they saw that due to the corruption of the people of the city they would be corrupted through contact with them and through seeing their deeds and that social intercourse with them would bring about the corruption of their own moral
habits, then they withdrew to desolate places where there are no evil men. As the prophet said, peace be upon him: O that I were in the desert.\(^{10}\)

When the ignorant saw these virtuous men perform such actions, but without knowing their intention, they thought those actions to be good and aimed at performing them, claiming to be like those virtuous men. They set about afflicting their bodies with every kind of affliction, thinking they were acquiring virtue and doing something good and would thereby come near to God—as if God were an enemy of the body and desired its ruin and destruction. They were not aware that those actions are bad and that one of the vices of the soul is thereby acquired. Such men can only be compared to someone ignorant of the art of medicine who sees that skillful physicians have given deathly sick people the pulp of colocynth, scammony, aloe, and similar things to drink, while forbidding them any food, and that they are cured of their disease and completely escape destruction. Such an ignorant man then says: “Since these things cure disease, it is even more appropriate and fitting that they preserve or augment the health of a healthy man.” He therefore proceeds to take them continuously and follows the regimen of the sick; as a result he undoubtedly becomes sick. Similarly, those with sick souls are undoubtedly so from taking medication while they are healthy.

This perfect Law which perfects us makes no mention of such things. As [the Psalmist] who knew it testified about it: The Law of the Lord is perfect, making wise the simple, restoring the soul.\(^{11}\) Indeed, its goal is for man to be natural by following the middle way. He shall adhere to the mean when he eats whatever is his to eat, when he drinks whatever is his to drink, and when he has sexual intercourse with whomever is his to have sexual intercourse. He shall dwell in a city and follow justice and equity; he shall not inhabit caves or mountains, nor wear garments of hair and wool, nor torment his body or make it weary or afflict it. That is forbidden in the tradition which has come down to us. He [God] said about the Nazirite: He [the priest] shall make atonement for him because he sinned against the soul.\(^{12}\) They said: Now then, against which soul did he sin? His own, because he withheld himself from wine. Is there not here an argument from the lesser to the greater? If whoever afflicts himself regarding wine needs atonement, how much the more does the one who afflicts himself regarding everything [need atonement].\(^{13}\)

In the traditions of our prophets and those who transmit our Law, we see these men aiming at the mean and at preserving their souls and bodies in accordance with what the Law requires. God (may He be exalted) answered through His prophet those who asked if they should continue fasting one day in the year or not. They said to Zechariah: Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done for so many years?\(^{14}\) And He answered them: When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month these seventy years, did you at all fast unto Me, even unto Me? And when you eat and you drink, are you not the ones who eat and who drink?\(^{15}\) Then He commanded them to follow only the mean and virtue, and not to fast. This is what he said to them: Thus spoke the Lord of hosts saying: Execute true judgment and show loving-kindness and compassion, every man to his brother, etc.\(^{16}\) After that he said: Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be for the house of Judah joy and gladness and cheerful seasons. Love truth and peace.\(^{17}\) Know that truth refers to the rational virtues because they are immutably true (as we mentioned in the second chapter) and that peace refers to the moral virtues through which there is peace in the world.

I return to my purpose. If it be said by the men of our Law who imitate the [other] religious communities—and I speak only of them—that they torment their bodies and renounce their pleasures only to discipline the powers of the body so as to incline a little to one side (in the way we have explained in this chapter that a man ought to do), this is an error on their part, as we shall explain. The Law forbids what it forbids and commands what it commands only for this reason, i.e., that we move away from one side as a means of discipline. God therefore enjoined the following upon us: the prohibition of all forbidden foods, the prohibition of forbidden sexual intercourse,\(^{18}\) the ban concerning the prostitute, the requirement of a marriage contract and betrothal, and even so [sexual intercourse] not always being permitted but forbidden during the periods of menstruation and birth, and the further limitation upon sexual intercourse instituted by our elders who prohibited it during
the daytime, as we explained in Sanhedrin. The purpose of all this is that we move very far away from the extreme of lust and go a little from the mean toward insensibility to pleasure so that the state of moderation be firmly established within our souls. The same applies to everything occurring in the Law with respect to the paying of tithes, the gleaning of the harvest, the corner of the field, the fallen grapes, the gleaning of the vineyard, the decree of the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year, and charity sufficient for what the needy lack. These come close to prodigality so that we move very far away from the extreme of stinginess and approach the extreme of prodigality, the purpose being to establish generosity firmly within us.

If you consider most of the commandments in this way, you will find that all of them discipline the powers of the soul. For example, they eliminate revenge and vengeance by His saying: You shall not take revenge nor bear a grudge. You shall surely release it, and You shall surely help to lift them up, etc. These aim at weakening the power of rage and irascibility. Similarly, You shall surely bring them back, aims at removing the state of avarice. Similarly, the following aim at removing the state of impudence and instilling that of modesty: You shall rise before the aged and honor the old man; Honor your father; and You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him and You shall not fear the face of any man.

Only a manifestly ignorant individual would come and wish to add to these things and, for example, prohibit eating and drinking, in addition to the stipulated prohibition about food; and prohibit marriage, in addition to what is prohibited concerning sexual intercourse; and give all of his money to the poor or to the Temple property, in addition to what the Law says about charity, Temple properties, and valuations. His actions are bad and he does not know that he goes all the way to one extreme, completely leaving the mean. The sages have a statement about this subject in the Jerusalem Talmud, in the ninth [tractate] of Nedairim, and nothing more marvelous than it has yet reached me. They censure those who become like prisoners by imposing oaths and vows on themselves, and they literally say there: Rav Aidi [said] in the name of Rabbi Isaac: Is what the Torah has prohibited for you not enough, that you prohibit other things for yourself? This is precisely the meaning we have presented, neither more nor less. Thus, it has become clear to you from everything we have discussed in this chapter that it is necessary to aim at the mean in actions and not depart from it toward one of the two extremes, except with a view to medical treatment and to opposing something with its contrary.

When the man knowledgeable in the art of medicine sees his temperament changing ever so slightly, he does not neglect the disease and let it take possession of him so that he would need an extremely strong medicine. When he knows that one of his bodily organs is weak, he takes continual care of it, avoids things harmful to it, and aims at what is useful to it so that this organ becomes healthy or so that it does not become weaker. Similarly, the perfect man needs to inspect his moral habits continually, weigh his actions, and reflect upon the state of his soul every single day. Whenever he sees his soul inclining toward one of the extremes, he should rush to cure it and not let the evil state become established by the repetition of a bad action—as we have mentioned. Thus, as we said above, he should attend to the defective moral habit in himself and continually seek to cure it, for a man inevitably has defects. Indeed, the philosophers have said that it would be very difficult to find someone disposed by nature toward all of the moral and rational virtues. This has also been said frequently in the books of the prophets. He said: Behold, He puts trust in His servants, etc. And how can one born of woman be just? Solomon said absolutely: There is no man who is just upon the earth, who does only good and does not sin.

You know that God, may He be exalted, said to the master of the first and the last men, Moses our master, peace be upon him: Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me, Because you rebelled against My word, Because you did not sanctify. His sin, peace be upon him, in all this was that he inclined toward one of the two extremes away from one of the moral virtues—i.e., gentleness—when he inclined toward irascibility and said: Hear now you rebels. God disapproved of a man like him becoming irascible in the presence of the community of Israel when
irascibility was not proper. For this individual something like that was a *profanation of the Name*, because they would imitate his every movement and speech and would wish thereby to attain the happiness of this world and the other world. How could irascibility, which (as we have explained) is among the evil states of the soul?

We shall now explain the significance of His saying, *You rebelled against My word.* He [Moses] was not addressing the vulgar nor men without virtue, but people the least significant of whose women was like Ezekiel ben Buzi, as the sages have mentioned. They would reflect upon everything he would say or do. Thus when they saw him irate, they [in effect] said: “He, peace be upon him, has no moral vice, and if it were not that he knew God has become angry with us about our searching for water and that we have exasperated Him, may He be exalted, he would not have become irate.” We do not find that God, may He be exalted, was irate or angry when He spoke to [Moses] about this matter. Rather, He said to him: *Take the rod . . . and you shall give the congregation and their cattle drink.* We have departed from the purpose of the section, but we have solved one of the difficulties of the Torah. It is often spoken about and someone often asks: “What sin did he commit?” Examine what we have said and what others have said about it, and the truth will lead the way.

I return to my purpose. If a man continually weighs his actions and aims at the mean, he is in the highest of human ranks. In that way, he will come close to God and will attain what belongs to Him. This is the most perfect of the ways of worship. The sages, may their memory be blessed, referred to this goal, commented on it, and said: *Everyone who appraises his paths merits and sees the salvation of the Holy One, blessed be He. As it is said: “And to him who sets his way aright will I show the salvation of God.” Do not read wesam derekh, but wesham derekh.* Shumah means “assessing” and “appraising,” and this is precisely the meaning that we have explained in this entire chapter. This is the extent of what we saw to be necessary with respect to this subject.

**THE FIFTH CHAPTER**

On directing the powers of the soul toward a single goal

Man needs to subordinate all his soul’s powers to thought, in the way we set forth in the previous chapter, and to set his sight on a single goal: the perception of God (may He be glorified and magnified). I mean, knowledge of Him, in so far as that lies within man’s power. He should direct all his actions, both when in motion and at rest, and all his conversation toward this goal so that none of his actions is in any way frivolous, I mean, an action not leading to this goal. For example, he should make his aim only the health of his body when he eats, drinks, sleeps, has sexual intercourse, is awake, and is in motion or at rest. The purpose of his body’s health is that the soul find its instruments healthy and sound in order that it can be directed toward the sciences and toward acquiring the moral and rational virtues, so that he might arrive at that goal.

On the basis of this reasoning, he would not aim at pleasure one, choosing the most pleasant food and drink, and similarly with the rest of his conduct. Rather, he would aim at what is most useful. If it happens to be pleasant, so be it; and if it happens to be repugnant, so be it. Or he would aim at what is most pleasant in accordance with medical theory. For example, his desire for food subsides, it should be stimulated by agreeable, pleasant, good foods. Similarly, if the humor of bile agitates him, he should make it cease by listening to songs and various kinds of melodies, by walking in gardens and buildings, by sitting before beautiful forms, and by things which delight the soul and make the disturbance of bile disappear from it. In all this he should aim at making his body healthy, the goal of his body’s health being that he gain knowledge. Similarly, if he bestirs himself and sets out to require money, his goal in accumulating it should be to spend it in connection with the virtues and to use it to sustain his body and to prolong his existence, so that he perceives and knows of what is possible for him to know.

On the basis of this reasoning, the art of medicine is given a very large role with respect to the virtues, the knowledge of soul, and attaining true happiness. To study it diligently is among the greatest acts of worship. It is, then, not like weaving
and carpentry, for it enables us to perform our actions so that they become human actions, leading to the virtues and the truths. For if a man sets out to eat appetizing food which is pleasant to the palate and which has an agreeable odor, but is harmful and could be the cause of grave illness or eventually of destruction, then this man and the beasts are alike. That is not the action of a man insofar as he is a man. Indeed, it is the action of a man insofar as he is an animal: He is like the beasts that perish. A human action [requires] taking only what is most useful: one sometimes leaves the most pleasant aside and eats what is most repugnant, with a view to seeking what is most useful. This is an action based upon thought and distinguishes man in his actions from what is unlike him. Similarly, if he has sexual intercourse whenever he wishes, without heeding what is harmful or useful, then he performs this action insofar as he is an animal, not insofar as he is a man.

Now all of his conduct might be with a view to what is most useful, as we have mentioned, but if he makes his goal solely the health of his body and its being free from illness, he is not virtuous. For while such a man prefers the pleasure of health, another prefers the pleasure of eating or sexual intercourse, and neither has a true goal for his actions. The proper goal for all of one’s conduct is the body’s health and prolonging its existence in a sound manner in order that the instruments of the soul’s powers—which are the organs of the body—remain sound. Then the soul can be directed toward the moral and rational virtues without any obstacle.

There is no question about [the value of] whatever he learns from the sciences and from studies insofar as they provide a way for attaining that goal. Subjects not useful for attaining that goal—such as questions of algebra, the Book of Cones, mechanics, most questions of engineering and moving weights, and many such questions—aim at sharpening the mind and training the rational power in the method of demonstration, so that a man acquires the skill of distinguishing a demonstrative syllogism from one which is not. He then possesses this method for attaining knowledge of the true reality of His existence, may He be exalted.

Similarly in all of his conversation, a man should speak only about what is useful for his soul or about what wards off harm from his soul or body, or about knowledge or virtue, or to praise virtue or a virtuous man, or to censure vice or a vicious man. If the purpose of vilifying defective men and denouncing their deeds is to belittle them before the people so that they will be warned about them and not perform their actions, then that is necessary and is a virtue. Have you not seen His statement, may He be exalted: Like the deeds of the land of Egypt where you dwelled [you shall not do] and like the deeds of the land of Canaan; and so too, the description of the Sodomites. In the Bible, whenever corrupt and defective individuals are censured and their deeds denounced and good men are praised and glorified, the purpose (as I mentioned to you) is for the people to follow the way of the latter and avoid the way of the former.

If a man sets this notion [i.e., knowledge of God] as his goal, he will discontinue many of his actions and greatly diminish his conversation. For someone who adheres to this goal will not be moved to decorate walls with gold or to put a gold border on his garment—unless he intends thereby to give delight to his soul for the sake of its health and to drive sickness from it, so that it will be clear and pure to receive the sciences. Thus, they said: An attractive dwelling, an attractive wife, attractive utensils, and a bed prepared for the disciples of the wise give delight to the mind of a man. For the soul becomes weary and the mind dull by continuous reflection upon difficult matters, just as the body becomes exhausted from undertaking toilsome occupations until it relaxes and rests and then returns to equilibrium. In a similar manner, the soul needs to rest and to do what relaxes the senses, such as looking at beautiful decorations and objects, so that weariness be removed from it. As they said: When our masters grew weary from study, ... Now it is doubtful that when done for this purpose, these are bad or futile, I mean, decorating and adorning buildings, vessels, and garments.

Know that this level is very lofty and is difficult to reach. Only a few perceive it and then, only after very great discipline. So if a man happens to exist in this condition, I would not say that he is inferior to the prophets. I refer to a man who directs all the powers of his soul solely toward God, may He be exalted; who does not perform an important or trivial action nor utter a word unless that action or that word leads to virtue or to something leading to virtue; and who reflects and deliberates
upon every action and motion, sees whether it leads to that goal or not, and then does it. This is what the Exalted requires that we make as our purpose when He says: And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. He means, set the same goal for all the parts of your soul, namely, to love the Lord your God. The prophets, peace be upon them, have also urged this purpose. He [Solomon] said: In all your ways know Him. The sages explained this and said: Even with a transgression; i.e., you should make your goal the truth when doing such a thing, even if from a certain point of view you commit a transgression. The sages, peace be upon them, summarized this whole notion in the briefest possible words and encompassed the meaning with utmost perfection, so that if you were to consider the brevity of those words—how they express the greatness and magnificence of this notion in its entirety, about which so many works have been composed without being able to grasp it—then you would know it was undoubtedly spoken by divine power. This is what they say in one of their commands in this tractate: Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven. This is the notion we have explained in this chapter and is as much as we think needs to be mentioned here in accordance with these introductory remarks.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

On the difference between the virtuous man and the continent man

The philosophers said that even though the continent man performs virtuous actions, he does good things while craving and strongly desiring to perform bad actions. He struggles against his craving and opposes by his action what his appetitive power, his desire, and the state of his soul arouse him to do; he does good things while being troubled at doing them. The virtuous man, however, follows in his action what his desire and the state of his soul arouse him to do, and he does good things while craving and strongly desiring them. There is agreement among the philosophers that the virtuous man is better and more perfect than the continent man. However, they said that the continent man can take the place of the virtuous man in most things, even though he is necessarily lower in rank due to his desire to do something bad. Even though he does not do it, his strong desire for it is a bad state of the soul.

Solomon had said something like this. He said: The soul of the wicked desires evil. He spoke about the joy of the virtuous in doing good things and the pain of the nonvirtuous in doing them. This is what he says: A joy to the righteous is the doing of justice, but dismay to evil-doers. This is what appears in the speech of the Law in agreement with what the philosophers have said.

When we investigated the speech of the sages about this matter, we found that according to them, someone who craves and strongly desires transgressions is more virtuous and perfect than someone who does not crave them and suffers no pain in abstaining from them. They even said that the more virtuous and perfect an individual is, the stronger is his craving for transgressions and his pain in abstaining from them. They related stories in that vein. And they said: Whoever is greater than his friend has a greater [evil] impulse than he. As if this were not enough, they said that the reward of the continent man is proportionate to his pain in restraining himself. They said: The reward is according to the pain. Even more significant is their commanding a man to be continent and their forbidding him to say: "I would not naturally yearn to commit this transgression, even if it were not prohibited by the Law." This is what they say: Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: "Let a man not say, 'I do not want to eat meat with milk, I do not want to wear mixed fabric, I do not want to have illicit sexual relations,' but [let him say] 'I want to, but what shall I do—my Father in heaven has forbidden me.'"

If the external meaning of the two accounts [i.e., by the philosophers and the Jewish sages] is understood superficially, the two views contradict one another. However, that is not the case; rather, both of them are true, and there is no conflict between them at all. For the bad things to which the philosophers referred when they said that someone who does not desire them is more virtuous than someone who does desire them and restrains himself—these are the things generally accepted by all the people as bad, such as murder, theft, robbery, fraud, harming an innocent man, repaying a benefactor with evil, degrading parents, and things like these. They are
the laws about which the sages, peace be upon them, said: *If they were not written down, they would deserve to be written down.*\(^\text{12}\) Some of our modern wise men who suffer from the sickness of the dialectical theologians\(^\text{13}\) call them rational laws.\(^\text{14}\) There is no doubt that the soul which craves and strongly desires any of these bad things at all nor suffers pain from the prohibition against them.

When the sages said that the continent man is more virtuous and his reward is greater, they had in mind the traditional\(^\text{15}\) laws. This is correct because if it were not for the Law, they would not be bad at all. Therefore they said that a man needs to let his soul remain attracted to them and not place any obstacle before them other than the Law. Consider their wisdom, peace be upon them, said: *Let a man not say: *I do not want to steal, I do not want to steal, I do not want to steal, but I want to—*, but what shall I do.* On the contrary, he mentioned only traditional\(^\text{15}\) matters: *meat with milk, mixed fabric, and illicit sexual unions.* These laws and similar ones are what God calls, *My statutes.*\(^\text{16}\) They said: *Statutes which I have prescribed for you, you have no permission to investigate.* The nations of the world argue against them and Satan criticizes them, such as the red heifer and the scapegoat, etc.\(^\text{17}\) Those called rational\(^\text{18}\) by the moderns are called commandments\(^\text{19}\) in the explanation of the sages.

Thus, from everything we have said it has become clear what the transgressions are for which, if a man has no desire, he is more virtuous than someone who desires them but restrains himself, and which transgressions are the opposite. This is a marvelous subtlety and a wonderful reconciliation of the two views. The texts supporting both views indicate that what we have explained is correct. The purpose of this chapter has been completed.

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THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

On the veils and their meaning

In the *Midrash*\(^\text{1}\) and the *Haggadah*\(^\text{4}\) as well as in the *Talmud*, it is often found that some of the prophets saw God from behind many veils, while others saw Him from behind a few veils, depending upon their closeness to God and their level of prophecy. They [the sages] said that Moses our master saw God from behind one diaphanous veil, I mean, a transparent one. This is what they said: *He looked through a transparent glass (sefaqlaria).*\(^\text{2}\) Sefaqlaria is the name of a looking glass made from a transparent body, such as beryl or glass, as we shall explain at the end of [the tractate] *Kelim.*\(^\text{3}\) I shall now tell you what is intended by this notion.

In the second chapter we explained that some virtues are rational and some are moral. Similarly, some vices are rational, such as ignorance, stupidity, and a slow understanding; and some are moral, such as lust, arrogance, irascibility, rage, impudence, love of money, and similar things—these moral vices are very numerous. In the fourth chapter, we gave the rule for recognizing them. All these vices are veils separating man from God, may He be exalted. To explain that, the prophet said: *Only your sins have separated you from your God.*\(^\text{4}\) He says that our sins, which (as we have mentioned) are these evil things, are veils separating us from the Exalted.

Know that no prophet prophesies until after he acquires all the rational virtues and most of the moral virtues, i.e., the most important ones. This is their saying: *Prophecy only comes to rest upon a wise, powerful, and rich man.*\(^\text{5}\) Wise undoubtedly includes all of the rational virtues. Rich refers to one of the moral virtues, I mean, contentment, for they call the contented man rich. This is what they say in defining the rich man: *Who is rich? He who rejoices with his lot.*\(^\text{6}\) That is, he is content with what time brings him, and he is not pained at what it does not bring him. Similarly, powerful man refers to one of the moral virtues, I mean that he governs his powers as thought dictates—as we explained in the fifth chapter. This is their saying: *Who is a powerful man? He who conquers his impulse.*\(^\text{7}\)

To possess the moral virtues in their entirety, to the extent of not being impaired by any vice at all, is not one of the conditions of prophecy. Solomon was a prophet according to the testimony of Scripture: *In Gibeon the Lord appeared, etc.*\(^\text{8}\) Yet we find that he had a moral vice, namely, manifest lust. This can be seen from the number of wives he took, which is an action stemming from the state of lust. It clearly says: *Did not Solomon*
Similarly David, peace be upon him, was a prophet. He said: *The Rock of Israel spoke to me.* Yet we find that he was cruel, even though he directed it [his cruelty] against the *Gentiles* and toward killing the infidels, while being compassionate to *Israel.* Still, it is explained in *Chronicles* that because of his frequent killing, God did not find him fit to build the *Temple* and said to him: *You shall not build a house unto My name, because you have shed much blood, etc.* We find that Elijah, *may his memory be blessed,* had the moral habit of irascibility, even though he directed it against the heretics and was irate at them. Still the *sages, may their memory be blessed,* explained that God removed him [from the world] and said to him: "Someone with as much zeal as you is not suitable for the people, for he would destroy them." Similarly, we find that Samuel was afraid of Saul, and Jacob was fearful of meeting Esau.

These moral habits and others like them are the veils of the prophets, peace be upon them. Thus, whoever has two or three moral habits not in the mean, as we explained in the fourth chapter, is said to see God from behind two or three veils. Do not fail to know that the defectiveness inherent in some moral habits diminishes the degree of prophecy. We have found that some moral vices, such as irascibility, prevent prophecy entirely. They said: *If anyone who becomes angry is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him.* They infer this from Elishah, for when he was irascible, revelation ceased until his irascibility disappeared. This is what he said: *And now bring me a musician.* The same holds for anxiety and grief, for the *soul* was removed from our father Jacob during all the days of his sadness over Joseph until the news came that he was alive. It [Scripture] said: *The holy spirit came to rest upon Jacob their father.* And there is the text of the *sages: Prophecy does not come to rest through laziness,* nor through sadness, but through something joyful.

When our master Moses knew that no veils remained which he had not pierced and that all the moral virtues and all the rational virtues had become perfected in him, he sought to perceive the true reality of God's existence, since no obstacle remained. So he said: *Let me see Your glory.* God, may He be exalted, informed him that this was not possible, due to his being an intellect existing in matter, I mean, since he was a human being. This is what He said: *For man shall not see Me and live.* Between him and the perception of the true reality of God's existence there remained only one transparent veil, namely, the unseparated human intellect. God favored him and granted him more perception after his request than he had before it. God informed him that the goal was not possible for him as long as he had a body.

The true perception was referred to as *seeing a face,* for if a man sees the face of his companion, he attains an image in his soul which he will not confuse with another. However, if he sees the back [of his companion], even if he picks him out by sight, he might be in doubt and confuse him with another. Similarly, to perceive the Exalted in truth is to attain in one's soul with regard to the verity of His existence what none of the other beings share with that existence, so that one finds His existence firmly established in his soul and distinct from the existence of the other beings found in his soul. Human perception cannot reach this level of perception, but [Moses], peace be upon him, perceived a little below it. This was referred to [in the verse]: *And you shall see My back.* I shall treat this subject in detail in the Book of Prophecy.

When the *sages* (peace be upon them) learned that these two kinds of vices, I mean, the rational and the moral, form a veil between man and God, and that by them the degrees of the prophets may be distinguished, they said about some [disciples], on the basis of what they had observed of their knowledge and moral habits: *They are worthy of the Presence resting upon them, as upon Moses our master.* Do not let the meaning of this comparison escape you, for they likened these others to [Moses] but did not regard them as equal to him, God forbid. Similarly, they spoke about others, like Joshua, in the way we have indicated. This is the meaning we intended to explain in this chapter.

**THE EIGHTH CHAPTER**

**On man's inborn disposition**

It is not possible for a man to possess virtue or vice by nature, from the beginning of his life, just as it is not possible for a man
to possess one of the practical arts by nature. Still, it is possible to be naturally disposed toward a virtue or a vice, so that it is easier to perform the actions that accord with a [particular virtue] or a [particular vice]. For example, if his temperament is more inclined toward dryness and the substance of his brain is pure and has little moisture, memorization and understanding-meanings are easier for him than for a phlegmatic individual who has much moisture in his brain. However, if the individual disposed by temperament toward this virtue is left without any instruction and none of his powers is given direction, he will undoubtedly remain ignorant. Similarly, if a natural dolt with much moisture [in his brain] is instructed and made to understand, then he will attain knowledge and understand, but with difficulty and hard work. In the same manner, an individual whose heart has a temperament a little warmer than necessary will become courageous. I mean, he is disposed toward courage; and if he is trained in courage, he will easily become courageous. Another, whose heart has a temperament colder than necessary, is disposed toward cowardice and fear, so that if he is educated and habituated accordingly, he easily acquires [these traits]. If he is directed toward courage, he can, with some hard work, become courageous, but he will undoubtedly become so if he is habituated to it.

I have explained this to you so you will not think that those senseless ravings fabricated by the astrologers are true. They go so far as to claim that an individual's time of birth determines whether he possesses virtue or vice and that he is necessarily compelled to perform certain actions. You, however, should know that our Law and Greek philosophy agree that all of man's actions are given over to him—which has been verified by true proofs. There is no compulsion on him nor is there any external cause which makes him incline toward a virtue or a vice, except for his being disposed by temperament so that something is easy or difficult for him—as we have explained. There is no way at all that he is forced or hindered.

If man's actions were done under compulsion, the commandments and prohibitions of the Law would be nullified and they would all be absolutely in vain, since man would have no choice in what he does. Similarly, instruction and education, including instruction in all the productive arts, would necessarily be in vain and would all be futile. For according to the doctrine of those holding the above opinion, there is inevitably and necessarily an external cause making man perform a certain action, learn a certain science, and acquire a certain moral habit. Reward and punishment would also be sheer injustice, not be be meted out by some of us to others nor by God to us. For if Simon, the killer of Reuben, were inevitably compelled to kill, and the latter inevitably had to be killed, why should we punish Simon? And how would the Exalted, just and righteous is He, permit him to be punished for a deed which he unavoidably did and which, had he desired not to do, he would not have been able to avoid doing? All precautions, down to the very last one, would also be useless, such as those involved in building houses, procuring food, fleeing in fear, and so forth, because what had been preordained would inevitably happen. All of this is utterly absurd and false, contrary to what is grasped by the intellect and perceived by the senses, destructive of the wall around the Law, and a judgment upon God, the Exalted, as being unjust—may He be exalted above that.

The truth about which there is no doubt is that all of man's actions are given over to him. If he wishes to act he does so, and if he does not wish to act he does not; there is no compulsion whatsoever upon him. Hence it necessarily follows that commands can be given. He said: See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil...choose life. He gave us choice about that. It necessarily follows that disobedience is punished and obedience is rewarded. If you obey...and if you do not obey. It necessarily follows that there can be instruction and learning, as well as everything that involves instruction in, and habituation to, the laws. And you shall teach them to your children, etc. And you shall learn them and observe them in order to do them. All the precautions stipulated in the Book of Truth also necessarily follow. And you shall make a parapet for your roof...if anyone fall. Lest he die in the battle; In what shall he sleep? He shall not take the mill and upper millstone as a pledge. In the Torah and in the prophetic books there is very often something about this subject, I mean, precaution.

The statement of the sages saying, Everything is in the hands of Heaven except fear of Heaven, is correct and is similar to what we have discussed. However, people often err about it and
think that a man is compelled to perform some actions which are in fact voluntary; for instance, marrying a certain woman or seizing a sum of money illegally. That is incorrect because if someone takes a woman by a marriage contract and betrothal and she is permitted to him and he marries her to be fruitful and to multiply, then this is fulfilling a commandment; God does not preordain performing a commandment. If there were some wickedness in marrying her, it would be a transgression; God does not preordain a transgression. The same applies to a man who robs someone of his money, or steals it, or deceives him about it and denies it and swears an oath to him about his money. If God had preordained that this money would go from the possession of the latter to that of the former, He would have preordained a transgression. This is not the case. Rather, the obedience and disobedience of the Law can undoubtedly be found throughout man's voluntary actions. We have already explained in the second chapter that the commandments and prohibitions of the Law concern actions which man can choose to do or not to do. Fear of Heaven is not in the hands of Heaven, but in this [appetitive] part of the soul. Indeed, it is given over to man's choice, as we have explained. Thus, in saying everything is in the hands of Heaven, they [the sages] mean the natural matters about which a man has no choice, such as his being tall or short, or a rainfall or drought, or the air being putrid or healthy—and so too with respect to everything in the world, except for the movement and the rest of man.

When the sages explained that obedience and disobedience do not take place through the power of the Exalted but through the will of the individual, they followed the text of Jeremiah. This is what he says: Out of the mouth of the Exalted proceeds neither evil (ra'ot) nor good (tov). Ra'ot are bad things and tov good things. Thus he says God does not preordain that man shall do either bad or good things. If such be the case, it is proper for man to be sad and to lament over the sins and the outrages he has committed, since he did wrong by his own choice. He [Jeremiah] said: Why does a living man lament, a strong man because of his sins? Then he reconsidered and said that the medical treatment for this sickness is in our hands, because just as we have done wrong by our choice, so too it is up to us to repent and to turn away from our evil actions. So he said afterward: Let us search and examine our ways and return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in heaven.

The account generally accepted among the people, examples of which may be found in the discourse of the sages and in the texts of the books, is in a way correct: man's standing up, sitting down, and all his movements derive from the volition of God, may He be exalted, and from His will. Let us suppose, for example, that someone throws a rock into the air, and it then falls down. If we say it fell down by the volition of God, this is a correct account because God wanted the whole earth to be in the center. Therefore, whenever a piece of [the earth] is thrown up, it moves toward the center; similarly, every single particle of fire moves upward through the volition that occurred in the past making fire move upward. It is not the case that now, when this piece of the earth is in motion, God wishes it to move down.

The dialectical theologians disagree with this. I have heard them say that volition with respect to each thing takes place one moment after another, continuously. We do not believe that; rather, volition occurred during the six days of Creation, and since then all things act continuously in accordance with their natures. As [Solomon] said: What was is what will be; what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. Therefore the sages insisted that there was a prior volition, during the six days of Creation, for all the miracles which deviate from custom and which have come about or will come about as has been promised. At that time the natures of those things were determined in such a way that what has taken place in them would take place. When it takes place at the time it is supposed to, something new is presumed to occur, but that is not so. They expounded at length upon this subject in Midrash Qohelet and in other places. One of their sayings concerning this subject is: The world goes along according to its custom. In all that they say, peace be upon them, you will always find they avoid positing volition in each particular thing and at each particular moment. Thus it is said of man that when he stands up and sits down, he stands up and sits down by the volition of God. This means that at the beginning of man's existence, He determined his nature in such a way that he would stand up and sit down by his own choice, not that He now wishes when he stands up that
he stand up or that he not stand up. So too, He does not wish now, when this stone is falling down, that it fall down or not fall down.

To sum up the matter, you should believe that just as God wishes man to be erect in stature, broad-chested, and to have fingers, so too He wishes him to move or be at rest of his own accord and to perform actions voluntarily. He does not force him to perform them nor prevent him from performing them. This notion was explained in the Book of Truth, where He said: Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. The Targum has already made clear the interpretation of His appraisal, [like one] of us, knowing good and evil. It means that he [Adam] has become unique in the world, i.e., a species having no similar species with which he shares this quality he has attained. What is this quality? It is that he himself, of his own accord, knows the good and the bad things, does whatever he wishes, and is not prevented from doing them. Since this is so, he might stretch out his hand, take from this tree, and eat and live forever. Since this is necessary for human existence, it means that man performs good and bad actions by his choice when he wishes, it necessarily follows that he can be instructed in the good ways and be commanded, forbidden, punished, and rewarded. All of this is just. It is necessary for him to accustom his soul to good actions until he acquires the virtues, and to avoid bad actions until the vices disappear from him, if he has acquired any. He should not say he has already attained a condition that cannot possibly change, since every condition can change from good to bad and from bad to good; the choice is his. With a view to this subject and for its sake, we set down everything we discussed concerning obedience and disobedience.

Something still remains for us to explain regarding this subject. There are some verses which lead people to fancy that God preordains and compels disobedience. That is false and we shall explain these verses because people are often preoccupied with them. One of them is His saying to Abraham: And they shall be enslaved and oppressed. They said: "He preordained that the Egyptians would oppress the seed of Abraham. Why then did He punish them, when they necessarily and inevitably enslaved them [the Hebrews] as He preordained?" The answer is that this is like the Exalted saying that some people born in the future will be sinful, some will be obedient, some virtuous, and some bad. Now, this is correct, but it does not necessarily follow from this statement that a given bad man is bad without fail, nor that a given virtuous man is virtuous without fail. Rather, whoever is bad is so by his own choice. If he wishes to be virtuous, he can be so; there is nothing preventing him. Similarly, if any virtuous man wishes to, he can be bad; there is nothing preventing him. The prediction is not about a particular individual, so that he could say: "It has been preordained for me." Rather, it is stated in a general way, and each individual remains able to exercise his choice upon his original disposition. Similarly, if any individual Egyptian who oppressed them and treated them unjustly had not wanted to oppress them, he had choice about that; for it was not preordained that a given individual would oppress them.

This answer is the same as the answer to the problem posed by His saying: Behold, you are about to sleep with your fathers, and this people will rise up and go astray after the foreign gods of the land. There is no difference between this and His saying: thus we shall act toward and deal with whoever worships idols. If there were never anyone who committed a transgression, then the threats, all of the curses, and likewise all of the punishments which are in the Law would be futile. The existence of the judgment of death by stoning in the Torah does not make us say that the man who profaned the Sabbath is compelled to profane it, nor do the curses force us to say that those idol worshippers, upon whom these curses fell, were preordained to idol worship. Rather, everyone who worshipped [idols] did so by choice and punishment befell him. Just as they have chosen their ways... I too shall choose, etc.

His saying, And I will harden Pharaoh's heart—and then punishing him and destroying him—contains a subject for discussion and a major principle stems from it. Reflect upon any discourse on this subject, set your mind to it, compare it with the discourse of everyone who has discussed it, and choose the best for yourself. If Pharaoh and his followers had committed to other sin than not letting Israel go free, the matter would undoubtedly be problematic, for He had prevented them from letting [Israel] free. As He said: For I have hardened his heart and
the heart of his servants. Then [according to this assumption] He requested that [Pharaoh] set them free, though he was compelled not to set them free. Then He punished him and destroyed him and his followers for not setting them free. This would have been an injustice and contrary to everything we have previously set forth.

However, the matter is not like this, but rather Pharaoh and his followers disobeyed by choice, without force or compulsion. They oppressed the foreigners who were in their midst and treated them with sheer injustice. As it clearly is said: And he said to his people: Behold, the people of Israel... Come, let us deal shrewdly with them. This action was due to their choice and to the evil character of their thought; there was nothing compelling them to do it. God punished them for it by preventing them from repenting so that the punishment which His justice required would befall them. What prevented them from repentance was that they would not set [Israel] free. God explained this to [Pharaoh] and informed him that if He had only wanted to take [Israel] out of Egypt, He would have exterminated [Pharaoh] and his followers, and they would have gone out. But in addition to taking them out, He wanted to punish [Pharaoh] for oppressing them previously. As He had said at the very outset: And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge. It was not possible to punish them if they repented, so they were prevented from repenting and they continued holding [Israel]. This is what He says: Surely now I have put forth my hand... but because of this I have left you standing, etc.

No disgrace need be attached to us because of our saying that God may punish an individual for not repenting, even though He leaves him no choice about repentance. For He, may He be exalted, knows the sins, and His wisdom and justice impose the extent of the punishment. He may punish in this world alone, He may punish in the other [world] alone, or He may punish in both realms. His punishment in this world varies: He may punish with regard to the body, money, or both. He may impede some of man's voluntary movements as a means of punishment, like preventing his hand from grasping, as He did with Jeroboam, or the eye from seeing, as He did with the men of Sodom who had united against Lot. Similarly, He may prevent the choice of repentance so that a man does not at all incline toward it and is destroyed for his sin. It is not necessary for us to know His wisdom to the extent of knowing why He punished this individual with this kind of punishment and did not punish him with another kind, just as we do not know the reason he determined this species to have this form and not another form. But the general rule is that all of His ways are just. He punishes the sinner to the extent of his sin and He rewards the beneficent man to the extent of his beneficence.

If you were to say: “Why did He request, time after time, that [Pharaoh] set Israel free, although he was prevented from doing so? It is as though the plagues came down upon him for remaining obstinate, although his punishment—as we have said—was that he remain obstinate. Was it not futile, then, to request of him what he was unable to do?” However, this too was part of God's wisdom, to teach [Pharaoh] that if God wanted to abolish his choice He would do so. So He [as it were] said to him: “I request that you set them free, and if you set them free now, you will be saved. But you will not set them free so that you will be destroyed.” [Pharaoh] would have had to respond favorably, which would have been the opposite of the prophet's claim that he was prevented from responding favorably. Thus, he was not able to. There is an important verse about that, well known to all the people. He said: And for the sake of declaring My name throughout all the earth. God may punish a man by preventing him from choosing a certain action, and he knows it but is unable to struggle with his soul and drive it back to make this choice.

The punishment of Sihon King of Heshbon took place in the same manner, for God punished him for his previous transgression—to which he was not compelled—by preventing him from yielding to Israel, and so they killed him. This is what He said: But Sihon King of Heshbon did not let us pass by him; for the Lord your God hardened his spirit, etc. Now what made this so difficult for all the commentators was their supposition that Sihon was punished for not letting Israel pass through his country. They said: “Why was he punished, if he was under compulsion?”—just as they supposed that Pharaoh and his followers were punished because he did not set Israel free. The matter is precisely as we have explained. Pharaoh and his
followers, due to their previous oppression [of Israel], had as
did God already explained through Isaiah that He, may He be
exalted, might punish some sinners by preventing them from
repenting and not leaving them any choice about it. As He said:
*Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy* [and shut
their eyes; lest they, seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears
and understanding with their heart,] return and be healed.*

This is a clear text not needing interpretation; indeed, it is a key to many
locks.

The following statement of Elijah, peace be upon him,
against the heretics of his age is in accordance with this
principle: *For you have turned their heart backward.* He means
that because they were disobedient by their will, Your punish­
ment for them was to remove their hearts from the path of
repentance and not to leave them choice or will to abandon this
disobedience. Because of that, they continued in their heresy.
He said: *Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.* That is, he is a
friend of the idols by his choice and he loves them. His
punishment is to be left loving them, which is the meaning of *let
him alone.* This belongs to the finest commentaries, for whoever
understands the subtlety of meanings.

Isaiah's statement, *O Lord, why do You make us stray from Your
ways and harden our heart against fear of You,* is dissociated from
this whole subject and is not connected with anything involving
this notion. The intention of that statement, as can be seen from
its context, was to complain about the Exile, our being
strangers, our being cut off, and the victory of the [other]
religious communities over us. So he said in a pleading man­
er: *O Lord, when they see this victory by the heretics, they
will stray from the way of the truth, and their hearts will turn
away from fear of You. It is as if You were the one who causes
these ignorant ones to move away from the truth.* That is
similar to the statement of Moses our master: *Then the nations that
have heard of Your fame will say . . . *"Because the Lord was not
able . . . ." Accordingly, he [Isaiah] said afterward: *Return, for
Your servants' sake, the tribes of Your inheritance,* he means, so
that no profanation of the Name occur there.

In the minor prophets, there is an explanation of what was said
by the followers of the truth conquered by the *Gentiles* during
the time of the Exile. Reporting what they said, he [Malachi]
said: *Everyone that does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He
delights in them; or where is the God of justice?* He also reported
what we have said about the severity of the Exile: *You have said:
"It is vain to serve God; what benefit is there in keeping His charge
and in walking mournfully because of the Lord of hosts? And now we
deem the proud blessed, etc.* So he explained and said that He,
may He be exalted, will explain the truth. And he said: *Then
shall you again discern [between the righteous and the wicked].*

We have surely explained the meaning of those difficult verses
in the Torah and the Bible which make [people] fancy that God
compels disobedience. It is an explanation that is correct
according to the most rigorous reflection, and we preserve our
principle that obedience and disobedience are in man's hands
and that he is a free agent in his actions. What he wants to do,
he does; what he does not want to do, he does not do. However,
God punishes him for his sin by nullifying his volition, as we
have explained. Acquisition of the virtues and the vices is
[also] in his hands. Therefore it is obligatory and necessary that
he be avid and work hard for his own sake to acquire the
virtues, since there is no one outside of himself moving him
toward them. This is what they say in the moral teachings of
this tractate: *If I am not for myself, who will be for me?* With
respect to this subject, only one notion must still be
briefly spoken about for the purpose of the chapter to be
completed. Although I did not want to speak about it at all,
necessity forces me to consider God's knowledge of the things
that come into being. For that is the argument made against us
by the one who claims that man is compelled to obedience and
disobedience and that in all of man's actions he has no choice,
since his choice depends upon God's choice. What prompts this
belief is that he [the adversary] says: *Did God know whether
this individual would be decent or depraved, or did He not
know?* If you were to say "He knew," it would follow that he
was compelled to this condition which God knew previously, or else His knowledge would not be true knowledge. If you were to say, “He did not know that previously,” extremely repulsive things would follow and walls would be torn down.

Listen to what I shall say and ponder it well; without a doubt it is the truth. In divine science, I mean, metaphysics, it has already been explained that God, may He be exalted, does not know by means of knowledge nor is He alive by means of life, such that He and the knowledge are two things, like man and his knowledge. Indeed, man is different from knowledge and knowledge different from man, and they are thus two [different] things. If God were to know by means of knowledge, there would necessarily be multiplicity and the eternal things would be multiple—God, the knowledge by which He knows, the life by which He is alive, the power by which He is powerful, and likewise with all of His attributes. I have mentioned only a simple proof to you, one which comes close to the understanding of the common people. However, the arguments and proofs which nullify this [i.e., the adversary's position] are very strong and are demonstrative. It is correct that He (may He be exalted) is identical with His attributes and His attributes are identical with Him, so that one says that He is the Knowledge, the Knower, and the Known; He is Life, the Living, and the one who prolongs His living essence; and likewise with the rest of the attributes. These are difficult notions. Do not desire to understand them perfectly from two or three lines of my discourse. Indeed, only a report about them is given to you.

Due to this major principle, it is not permitted to say in Hebrew, Hei Adonai [the life of the Lord], as they say Hei Nafshekha61 [the life of your soul] or Hei Far'oh62 [the life of Pharaoh], i.e., the genitive construction. For the noun in the genitive case and the noun to which it is related are two different things, and a thing cannot be put into a genitive construction with itself. Because the life of God is His existence and His essence is His life and nothing other than He, they did not speak of it by means of a genitive construction. Rather, they said: Hai Adonai63 [the Lord lives]. The intention is that He and His life64 are one thing.

It has also become clear in metaphysics that by our intellects we are unable to attain perfect comprehension of His existence, may He be exalted. This is due to the perfection of His existence and the deficiency of our intellects. His existence has no causes by which He could be known. The inadequacy of our intellects to perceive Him is like the inadequacy of the light of [our] vision to perceive the light of the sun. That is not due to the weakness of the light of the sun, but to the latter being stronger than the light [of vision] which wants to perceive it. This subject has been frequently discussed, and all the discourses are correct and clear.

It therefore follows that we do not know His knowledge either, nor do we comprehend it in any way, since He is His knowledge and His knowledge is He. This idea is strange and marvelous, but it eluded them so they perished. Although they knew that His existence (may He be exalted) could not be perceived in all its perfection, they sought to perceive His knowledge so that it would fall within their intellects. This is impossible, since if we were to comprehend His knowledge, we would comprehend His existence—because the whole is one thing. To perceive Him perfectly would be to perceive [Him] as He is in His existence with respect to knowledge, power, volition, life, and His other noble attributes. Thus we have explained that speculation about perceiving His knowledge is sheer ignorance. However, we know that He knows, just as we know that He exists. So if we are asked how He is identical with His knowledge, we shall say that we do not perceive that, just as we do not perceive His existence perfectly. He who wished to perceive His knowledge (may He be exalted) was rebuked and he was told: Can you find out the deep things of God?266

It follows from everything we have said that the actions of man are entrusted to him and that it is up to him to be virtuous or wicked, without God compelling him to either of these conditions. It therefore follows that there can be commands, instruction, precaution, reward, and punishment. There is no uncertainty concerning all that. As we have explained, our intellects are unable to represent His knowledge, may He be exalted, or His perception of all things.

This is the totality of what we intended to summarize in this section. It now behooves me to terminate the discourse and to begin the commentary on the tractate to which we prefaced these chapters.
NOTES

PREFACE

1. In the Commentary on Avot, Maimonides simply calls this work, "the preceding chapters." Elsewhere he refers to it as "Chapters on Avot" (Commentary on the Mishnah, Kelim, XXX 2) and "Commentary on Avot" (C.M., Menaḥot, IX 6), as well as "Introduction to Avot" (Guide, III 35 [76b25]). The Commentary on the Mishnah is cited in the notes as C.M.

INTRODUCTION

1. R. Judah the Prince, the rabbinic sage who compiled the Mishnah.
2. Nezīqin, one of the six Orders of the Mishnah.
3. C.M., Introduction (Kafih, pp. 29–31). Maimonides says there that Avot sets down the chain of tradition through which the Law has been transmitted and authenticated. (Concerning the importance of the chain of tradition for establishing the authority of the Law, see infra, Logic, VIII, p. 156.) He also says that Avot describes the moral conduct of the sages, who serve as models for the rest of the people.
4. Babylonian Talmud (cited henceforth as B.T.), Baba Qamma, 30a.
5. Reading ʿīndānā with the Arabic Introduction in Gorfinkle and with Ibn Tibbon (ʿetleinu), instead of ʿīndā (Kafih). The readings from Ibn Tibbon are taken from the critical edition published by J. Gorfinkle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912).
6. B.T., ‘Avodah Zarah, 20b. The passage there reads: "Piety brings about humility; humility brings about fear of sin; fear of sin brings about holiness; holiness brings about the holy spirit." ʿĀdāb, which can also refer to good manners. In C.M., Avot, IV 10, he contrasts al-ʿādāb with what is obligatory.
7. Reading mushtalamah (Gorfinkle), instead of mushtalamah (Kafih).
8. Reading ʿādāb with infra, Logic, VIII, p. 156.) He also says that Avot describes the moral conduct of the sages, who serve as models for the rest of the people.
9. Reading ʿārāʾ (Wolff), instead of ārāʾ (Kafih).
10. Reading yanqaḍī with Wolff and Ibn Tibbon (yiḥkleḥ), instead of yaqḍī (Kafih).
11. Muṭakallimūn or proponents of the Ḵalām. They tried to defend the Islamic faith against rationalist attacks and often became entangled in pseudo-philosophic arguments.
12. Cf. the tenth premise in Guide, I 73.
14. C.M., Sanhedrin, X 2 (Kafih, p. 213). Maimonides later abandoned his plan to write this work and replaced it with the Guide. See Guide, Introduction (5b–6a).

THE FIRST CHAPTER

1. The reference is probably to Galen. See Herbert Davidson, op. cit., p. 37, n. 10. Maimonides accepts this tripartite division of the soul as having a certain validity. See, e.g., Guide, III 12 (21b). In one of his medical works, he says that the natural power is strengthened by nourishment, the vital power by music and cheerful news, and the psychic power by pleasant odors. These three powers have a bodily basis in spirits of fine vapor. The natural spirit is the vapor in the liver's blood; the vital spirit is the vapor in the heart's blood; the psychic spirit is found in the vapors of the brain. Fr Tadbīr Al-Sīhah (On the Management of Health), ed. H. Kroner, pp. 32, 42–43; English trans. by A. Bar-Sela, H. Hoff, and E. Faris in Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, LIV, 4 (July 1964), pp. 22, 27.
2. Improvement of Moral Habits (Islāḥ al-ʿAkhlaq) is the title of a book by Solomon ibn Gabirol, an eleventh century Spanish Jewish thinker.
3. Reading ʿārāʾ (Wolff), instead of ārāʾ (Kafih).
4. Reading yanqaḍī with Wolff and Ibn Tibbon (yiḥkleḥ), instead of yaqḍī (Kafih).
5. Muṭakallimūn or proponents of the Ḵalām. They tried to defend the Islamic faith against rationalist attacks and often became entangled in pseudo-philosophic arguments.
6. Cf. the tenth premise in Guide, I 73.
7. Or: accidents (ʿawārid).
8. Reading al-ʿquistaw (Wolff), instead of al-quṣwā (Kafih).
10. Literally: according to what they are.
12. Literally: moral habits.
13. C.M., Sanhedrin, X 2 (Kafih, p. 213). Maimonides later abandoned his plan to write this work and replaced it with the Guide. See Guide, Introduction (5b–6a).

THE SECOND CHAPTER

1. The text has the plural.
2. Reading awwalan (Wolff), instead of awlah (Kafih). Although this reading is preferable, a question remains as to why Maimonides refers here to one part of the soul, but in the chapter itself, to two parts of the soul containing the virtues and vices.
3. The text has the plural.
4. The text has the plural.
5. Or: opinion (ra'y).
6. See infra, Logic, VIII, p. 156.
7. There probably was an additional virtue at this point in the original text, but it cannot be identified with certainty. Kafih has the impossible reading, al-jubn, “cowardice” (or al-ghabn, “fraud”). A number of manuscripts read al-jidd, “seriousness” or “eagerness.” (E.g., Bibliothèque Nationale, Manuscrit Hébreu 579 and Epstein 4/57; British Museum, Oriental 2393; Oxford, Bodleian, 404, 1.) Ibn Tibbon renders the virtue in question as 'emunah, which usually means “faithfulness” or “faith” and can connote “firmness” and “strength” (e.g., Exod. 17: 12). Wolff does not have an additional virtue at this point in the text.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

1. “It is a well-known saying of the philosophers that the soul can be healthy or sick, just as the body can be healthy or sick.” Fūsūl Mūsa fī al-Tibb (The Chapters of Moses on Medicine), Section XXV, Ch. 40, beg. Arabic text and English trans. by J. Schacht and M. Meyerhof in Bulletin of the Faculty of the Arts, Cairo, V 1 (May 1937), pp. 65 and 78.

2. Reading li-istityāb (Wolff), instead of li-istitab (Kafih).
5. Omitting ya`umnuh with Wolff and Ibn Tibbon.
7. Prov. 4:19.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

1. Reading hai'āt with Wolff and Ibn Tibbon (tekhunot), instead of hai'ah (Kafih).
2. Reading fadīlah with Wolff and Ibn Tibbon (ma'ālah), instead of fadā'il (Kafih).
3. Generosity (karam) is the right disposition in giving good things to other people. The following are among the commandments which help instill generosity (karam): the remission of debts on the Sabbatical and Jubilee years; leaving the gleanings and a corner of the field for the poor. (See Eight Chapters, IV, supra, p. 72, Kafih, p. 385). Regarding the difference between generosity (karam) toward other people and liberality (sakhā) toward oneself, cf. Abraham Maimonides, The High Ways to Perfection, ed. and trans. by S. Rosenblatt (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), Vol. I, pp. 170–71.

5. Reading khair with Wolff and Ibn Tibbon (iqd); missing in Kafih.
6. Reading lahā (Wolff), instead of lahumā (Kafih).
7. Reading fī tibbih with Wolff and Ibn Tibbon (birefu'ato); missing in Kafih.
8. Reading as hai'ah with Wolff.
9. Cf. M.T., Laws Concerning Character Traits, I 5, where those identified here as “virtuous men” (fudālā) are called “pious men” (hasidim). Ibn Tibbon translates fudālā throughout as hasidim.
11. Ps. 19:8. The original verse reads: “The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”
12. Num. 6:11.
13. B.T., Ta'anit 11a; Nedarim, 10a; Nazir, 19a, 22a; Baba Qamma, 91b.
17. Zech. 8:19.
18. The text has the plural.
25. Ibid.
28. This refers not simply to giving charity to the poor, but to giving a man what he “lacks,” which partially depends upon his previous circumstances. Thus, if a rich man is impoverished, what he “lacks” must be restored to him—even a horse to ride upon and a servant to run before it. M.T., Laws of Gifts for the Poor, VII 3.
30. Exod. 23:5. The complete verse reads: “If you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall surely release it with him.”
31. Deut. 22:4. The complete verse reads: “You shall not see your brother’s ass or his ox fallen down by the way, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him to lift them up.”
32. Deut. 22:1. The complete verse reads: "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep driven away, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely bring them back to your brother."

33. Lev. 19:32.

34. Exod. 20:12.

35. Deut. 17:11.


38. Temple property is property dedicated to the Temple; valuation refers to the monetary value of an individual's life which he may vow to dedicate to the Temple. The latter sum is fixed by the individual's age and could never exceed 50 shekels. A man is forbidden to dedicate more than one-fifth of his property to the Temple or to give more than one-fifth of his wealth to the poor. M.T., Laws of Valuations and Dedicated Objects, I 3 and VIII 12.

39. Reading al-hai'ah (Wolff), instead of al-hai'at (Kafih).


41. Reading yaskun with Wolff and Ibn Tibbon (yinafesh), instead of yakun (Kafih).

42. Source unknown.

43. Deut. 6:5.

44. Prov. 3:6.

45. Prov. 21:10.

46. Prov. 21:15.

47. Reading kān shawquh li al-ma'āsiy wa ta'ullumuh (Wolff), instead of lākinah (Kafih).

48. B.T., Sukkah, 52a.


50. Cf. Sifra to Lev. 20:26, where a similar statement is attributed to R. Elazar ben Azariah. "Mixed fabric" (sha'tnez) contains a mixture of linen and wool.

51. More literally: intellectual laws (al-sharā'ī'āqliyyah). The noun...
is the plural of the word Maimonides uses to designate the divine Law, the Torah (al-shari‘ah). The adjective has the same root as such words as “intellect” (‘aql) and “intelligible” (ma‘qūl). Saadia, the tenth-century Jewish sage, thought that there are such laws (The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs, III 2).

15. al-sam‘iyyah. This word has a connotation similar to the word al-maqbūlāt, translated as “traditions” in Logic, VIII.


17. B.T., Yoma, 67b. Concerning the use of the red heifer for the purification from sin, see Num. 19:2–10, and for the use of the scapegoat as an atonement for sin, see Lev. 16:5–10.

18. Cf. note fourteen.

19. Mitzvot.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

1. The text has the plural: Midrashot and Haggadot.
2. B.T., Yevamot, 49b.
3. G.M., Kelim, XXX 2. This tractate is in a later part of the Mishnah.
7. Ibid.
8. I Kings 3:5.
10. II Sam. 23:3.
14. I Sam. 16:2; Gen. 32:8.
15. B.T., Pesahim, 66b.
16. II Kings 3:15.
17. Gen. 45:27.
18. The Targum is the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch.
22. I.e., not separated from the body.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

1. Reading tahaddā (Wolff), instead of tuthār (Kafih).
2. The text has the singular.
3. I.e., that of the astrologers.
5. Deut. 30:15, 19.
7. Deut. 11:19.
9. Deut. 22:8. The complete verse reads: “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you do not bring the blood-guilt upon your house, if anyone fall from it.”
10. Deut. 20:5–7. These verses read: “Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying, ‘What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. And what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit. And what man is there who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.’ ”
11. Exod. 22:26. The complete passage reads: “If you take your neighbor’s garment in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun sets; for that is his only clothing, the sole covering for his skin. In what shall he sleep?” (vs. 25–26).
13. B.T., Berakhot, 33b; Megillah, 25a; Niddah, 16b.
14. Reading wa with Wolff and Ibn Tibbōn (we), instead of aw (Kafih).
15. The text has the singular.
16. Lam. 3:58.
17. Lam. 3:59.
18. Lam. 3:40–41.
19. Maimonides does not specify what books he refers to.
21. Literally: the six days of the Beginning.
23. Literally: the six days of the Beginning.
26. Reading hādhāhi al-shajarah (Wolff), instead of hādhā (Kafih).
ON THE MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH

This work was written in response to a letter from Saladin's son, al-Afdal, who ruled Egypt for a short period of time. He had written to Maimonides complaining about a variety of bodily and emotional ailments, including constipation and indigestion as well as "bad thoughts," general anxiety, and the fear of death.

The letter to al-Afdal, known as On the Management of Health, is divided into four chapters. After giving him some general medical advice, Maimonides discusses the treatment for al-Afdal's particular illness in Chapter Three. In the first part of that chapter, which is not reproduced here, he prescribes remedies for al-Afdal's physical ills. The rest of Chapter Three, which is translated below, deals with healing the diseases of the soul.