

GUIDE 1:45 *SH'MA*

This is the last chapter of the lexical section of the Guide. Even so, there will be other lexical chapters. Maimonides defines words throughout the book. The organization of the Guide thus defies classification. Maimonides now turns to the larger issue of why the lexical chapters were necessary, and the closely allied question of the divine attributes.

These last few chapters have really been about providence. The great question of this chapter is whether God answers individual prayers, which is part of that subject. The answer to the question turns closely on the meaning of the terms used, but, ultimately, must transcend the strictures of human language

This chapter employs a method unique in the lexical chapters. In the lexical breakdown below, Maimonides provides three standard definitions for *sh'ma*: 1) to hear, 2) to accept, 3) to know. Then he tells us that wherever we encounter the term or its root derivatives in relation to God we must first decide what the literal meaning of the passage, the "*pshat*," would be. If the passage literally suggests Definition 1, that God "hears," we must retranslate the passage according to Definition 3, "to know," which is what we have come to expect. However, if the *pshat* is Definition 2, that God "accepts" what he "hears," then we retranslate that God *answered* and fulfilled the prayer, or, if the passage is negative, that God *denied* the prayer.

DOUBLE-TRUTH?

Since Maimonides is telling us to translate such passages as God granting prayer, he seems to endorse the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer. Yet Herbert Davidson and others recognize an incongruity (p. 390-391, *Maimonides, The Man and His Works*, Oxford 2005).

In general, providence follows the ways of nature and does not tamper with the natural order. But God's miraculous response to personal prayer does not sit well with the Aristotelian view that nature does not change. Some Straussians assume Maimonides' silent acceptance of that view, suggesting that his affirmation of prayer was a public concession to pietism. Davidson strongly opposes Leo Strauss. Still, he attempts a moderate solution, asserting mere *inconsistency* on Maimonides' part, not willful contradiction of the seventh kind (see my Introduction II: this was the esoteric contradiction, where the author conceals his private view beneath a false exoteric explanation). He claims that the Guide is not a particularly well-constructed book. My assessment is that in the current stage of scholarship it is better to take Maimonides at his word. In the Introduction to the Guide, he says (Pines' trans.): "The diction of this treatise has been chosen not haphazardly but with great exactness and exceeding precision." Thus, we should try to understand him as he understood himself and not explain away apparent contradictions as examples of inconsistency.

The most extreme position is that Maimonides did not believe God answers prayers, and when he wrote otherwise he committed what came to be called Averroism. Although the term is associated with the great Islamic philosopher, Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198), it actually emerged in interpretations of Averroes by medieval European scholastics. Siger of Brabant (c. 1240-1280s) was branded, perhaps unfairly, with Averroism for teaching "double-truth": on the one hand, the real truth of science and philosophy, and on the other, a completely separate "religious truth." This idea was that the worlds of philosophy and religion are so disparate that no relation exists between their teachings. The Catholic Church branded this doctrine heresy in 1270. In this view, providence does not exist and human fate is completely determined. Prayer has no efficacy in this system.

The problem arises when we compare two statements of Maimonides. The first, in our chapter, is that "...God responded (*ana*) to the prayer of man and fulfilled his wish." He says this regarding several proof-texts from Exodus 22 (contextualized below) that God "hears" the prayers of widows, orphans and the poor. Compare and contrast this with his second statement. This is his doctrine of True and Necessary Belief announced in

Guide 3:28. The doctrine of True and Necessary Belief holds that the belief in God is intrinsically *true*, while the belief in prayer is *necessary* for the public good. The question is whether this doctrine is a “double-truth” and if his statements in our chapter are merely exoteric productions for public consumption:

“It is necessary to bear in mind that Scripture only teaches the chief points of those true principles which lead to the true perfection of man, and only demands in general terms faith in them. Thus Scripture teaches the Existence, the Unity, the Omniscience, the Omnipotence, the Will, and the Eternity of God. All this is given in the form of final results, but they cannot be understood fully and accurately except after the acquisition of many kinds of knowledge. Scripture further demands belief in certain truths, the belief in which is indispensable (“Necessary” –Pines trans.) in regulating our social relations: such is the belief that God is angry with those who disobey Him, for it leads us to the fear and dread of disobedience [to the will of God]. ...Consider what we said of the opinions [implied in the laws]; in some cases the law contains a truth which is itself the only object of that law, as e.g., the truth of the Unity, Eternity, and Incorporeality of God; in other cases, *that truth is only the means of securing the removal of injustice, or the acquisition of good morals* (v’yesh sh’tehei ota ha-dea ha-krakhit b’saluk aval o ha-kanit mida naala—the word “only” should not appear in Friedlander’s translation); such is the belief that God is angry with those who oppress their fellow-men. As it is said, ‘My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill,’ etc. (Exodus 22:23); or the belief that God hears (Pines: “responds instantaneously to”) the crying of the oppressed and vexed (*ytalei ona l’tzaakat he-ashuk o hamitana miyad*), to deliver them out of the hands of the oppressor and tyrant, as it is written, ‘And it shall come to pass, when he cryeth unto me, that I will hear, for I am gracious (Exodus 22:27).’”

Maimonides neither says nor implies that True beliefs contradict Necessary beliefs. I think it over-interpretive to assert that the Necessary beliefs are merely a “noble lie” constructed for political and social purposes.

What is true is that statements of Necessary beliefs require complex and lengthy amplification to bring out their truth. Thus, the Torah asserts that God “hears” the cries of the widow and orphan. If we ignore them, our wives shall be widows, and our children fatherless. This is the exemplary statement of the Jewish belief in the miraculous providence of God (Principle 11 from the 13 Principles of Faith, Maimonides’ *Commentary on the Mishna*, at the end of *Sanhedrin*). Maimonides is by no means ready to abandon this belief. Punishments and rewards all come as retribution from God: “All that is mentioned of the history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a perfect proof that Divine Providence extends to every man individually” (Guide 3:17).

Maimonides also holds that we cannot fathom the mechanism of divine providence, or of miracles. He believes in bodily resurrection, and says that the special providence attendant upon the Jews is an even greater miracle than resurrection. This miraculous providence appears in the salvation of Hezekiah cited again in our chapter. It is Elihu’s contribution in the story of Job, when he asserts angelic intervention in human dramas. While our intellectual alignment with the active intellect prepares these providential blessings, the manner of their production is a miracle beyond our limited understanding.

Taken together, Maimonides has an extensive and complex understanding of the True belief in providence as well as of prayer. Nonetheless, in its plain and unadorned assertion, the Necessary belief in prayer must be pounded into the minds of the public before it can be understood by a few in its fullness. It “cannot be understood fully and accurately except after the acquisition of many kinds of knowledge,” including knowledge glimpsed in prophecy. This is not the assertion of an “Averroist” double truth in which the efficacy of prayer is at once useful but untrue, but, rather, a nuanced and subtle comprehension that both the natural and supernatural exist as different levels of the same reality.

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This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

SH'MA (LISTEN) Homonym

1. To hear
2. To accept, obey, receive
3. To know, understand: mental perception

TWO SPECIAL RULES WHEN SH'MA IS USED WITH GOD:

- When the literal interpretation indicates that Definition 1, to “hear,” is used with God, retranslate as *to know*, Definition 3.
- When the literal interpretation indicates that Definition 2, to “accept,” is used with God, retranslate that God *answered* the prayer. Conversely, if it indicates non-acceptance, retranslate that God *denied* the prayer.

Instances of Definition 1, *Hear*, Contextualized:

In neither of the two proof-texts for Definition 1 does actual corporeal hearing take place:

“And in all [things] that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other Gods, **neither let it be heard** out of thy mouth (*lo yishma al pikha*).” (Exodus 23:13)

The text tells us what we should *not* hear. The traditional interpretation divides “neither let it be heard” from “out of thy mouth”: “neither let it (idolatry) be heard,” from *gentiles*, “out of thy mouth,” due to the Jew’s social integration with them. The idea is that by doing business with idolators, litigation might ensue forcing them to swear to evidentiary truth by their own god. Such an oath constitutes the offense of idolatry, which would not have occurred but for the Jew enmeshing himself in their business. That is a punishable offence for the Jew (see Rashi *ad loc.*, Talmud *Sanhedrin* 63b, Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Negative 14).

“And the fame thereof [The reuniting of Joseph and his brothers] was **heard** in Pharaoh’s house (*v’ha-kol nishma beit paro*), saying, Joseph’s brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants.” (Genesis 45:16)

In the original Hebrew “in” does not appear “in Pharaoh’s house” but only “was heard Pharaoh’s house,” i.e., that the *house* itself “heard” it. The Midrash takes it to mean that Judah’s cry shook the walls of the palace. Even apart from the Midrash, the passage is clearly not about hearing but about notoriety.

Instances of Definition 2, *Accept/Obey*, Contextualized:

“And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: **but they hearkened** (*shamu*) not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.” (Exodus 6:9)

It’s not that the Jews did not listen Moses, but that they did not *obey*. The passage comes early in Moses’ prophetic career. Because the Egyptians deprived the Jews of straw to make their brick quota, they were too tired and depressed to respond to his call. The Midrash asserts that had they obeyed they could then have made their exodus successfully without the ten plagues and the forty-year Sinai detour.

“**If they obey** (*yishmu*) and serve [God], they shall spend their days in prosperity (*ykhalu ymeihem batov*), and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without *knowledge* (*da’at*).” (Job 36:11-12)

Elihu delivers this speech. He is Maimonides’ hero in the Book of Job (See our essay on Elihu in 1:13). His hermeneutic principle is to repeat what others have said so that readers miss his own unique contribution (just as Maimonides buried it here). This is a method of concealment. Elihu’s new ideas subtly connect prophecy to providence. If men “hear” God’s commands and obey them, all their days will be good (*ykhalu ymeihem ba’tov*,

“They shall spend their days in prosperity”), and they will eventually die with “knowledge,” as much as to say that they will not die at all. He also thought that when an angel intercedes for a dying man the intercession is sometimes accepted and he revives. In Job 33:14-16, Elihu says: “For God speaketh *once*, yea *twice*, [yet men] perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.” The word comes *once* to the imagination in the dream, *then* to the intellect. God opens the dreamer’s ears so he can hear the voice of the angel, which is the active intellect. His intellectual alignment produces the providential result that saves the dreamer from death and makes all his days good.

“In those days also saw I (Nehemiah) Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, [and] of Moab. And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, [saying], Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then *hearken (ha-nishma)* unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? And [one] of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, [was] son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.” (Nehemiah 13:23-28)

Not that we should not listen, but rather, we should not *obey* those who called for intermarriage. Nehemiah was the Persian King Artaxerxes’ Jewish governor for the returned exiles. He was charged with rebuilding the Temple. He is a Maimonidean hero because he is a righteous leader who accomplishes God’s will. He famously inveighed against intermarriage. Joiada’s son married the daughter of the chief of the enemy Samaritans who fought the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Nehemiah ejected Joiada’s son from the priesthood because of his intermarriage. Maimonides discusses the incident in Mishneh Torah, *Tefila*, 1:4 as the reason for composing the central Jewish prayer in Hebrew, rather than in the vernaculars of exile:

“When the people of Israel went into exile in the days of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, they mingled with the Persians, Greeks and other nations. In those foreign countries, children were born to them, whose language was confused. Everyone’s speech was a mixture of many tongues. No one was able, when he spoke, to express his thoughts adequately in any one language, otherwise than incoherently, as it is said, ‘and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people.’”

Not knowing how to speak means that they did not know how to pray. If they could not coherently pray, their prayer could not be *answered*. They were outside special divine providence.

“And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses. Whosoever [he be] that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not *hearken (yishma)* unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage.” (Joshua 1:16-18)

The people should *obey* their leader. This passage comes at the beginning of Joshua’s leadership. He reminds the two and a half tribes that wanted to live east of the Jordan of their promise to Moses to be in the vanguard of the fight for Israel. Here they affirm their loyalty. Joshua is another Maimonidean hero. Maimonides quotes this passage in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Positive 173 (trans. Charles B. Chavel), authorizing the death penalty for disobeying a good king:

“The Talmud says explicitly: ‘the King takes precedence over the prophet (*Horiot* 13a),’ and when this King gives an order which is not in conflict with a Commandment of the Torah, we must obey his behest, and he has the right to put to death by the sword anyone who disobeys him. This our ancestors took upon themselves when they said: ‘Whosoever [he be] that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not *hearken* unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death.’ The life of anyone

who rebels against the kingly authority, be he who he may, is forfeit to the king duly appointed in accordance with the Torah.”

Instance of Definition 3, Know, Contextualized:

“The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, [as swift] as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not *understand (tishma)*.” (Deuteronomy 28:49)

This passage comes from the *Tokhekha*, the terrifying list of punishments the Jews will receive when they do not *obey* the commandments. In this case, it is not that they do not “hear” the foreigner’s language but that they do not *know* it. This passage pairs with Nehemiah’s complaint against the mongrelization of the holy tongue. Exile amidst a *unknown* tongue is a horrible punishment because there is no way to improve the situation of exile through business or social ascension. Worse, it leads to the loss of prayer, which makes it impossible to attain intellectual alignment with God. These passages also suggest that without Maimonides’ Lexicon the language of prophecy remains unheard and unknown.

PROOF-TEXTS WHERE GOD IS THE SUBJECT OF THE VERB *SH’MA*

Maimonides has three special rules when the text tells us that God “hears.” When the literal meaning of the text (*pshat*) is that God “hears,” interpret as God *knows*. If the *pshat* is that God “accepts” or “receives” a prayer, interpret that God *grants* it, in the sense that He effectuates the prayer (this distinction between *hear* and *accept* is difficult to make in context, so we must rely on these cases where Maimonides makes it). If the sense is that God did not “accept” the prayer, then He *denied* it. The point of all this is that while God does not actually “hear” or even “receive” prayers, He knows them and grants them.

The terminology is significant. Divine subjection to sensory input is an obvious anthropopathism. It is harder to recognize that God is not a passive recipient of non-sensory data. This helps to explain Maimonides’ basic criticism of the Targumic project. The effort to translate anthropomorphism out of the Bible is doomed because of the nature of human language. Instead, what we need are readers who know how to *interpret* the text, and who can understand, in some sense, the linguistically inexpressible.

Even-Shmuel, in his commentary, tried to reduce the distinction between *hear* and *accept* by showing that one conjugation of *sh’ma*: i.e. *hishamut (nishma)*, means “accept.” This is true, but Hebrew translations preserve the distinction by using some variant of *kibul*, accept/receive, for Definition 2, as does the Judeo-Arabic original, אלקבול.

Instances of the First *pshat*, Hear, Contextualized:

“And [when] the people complained, it *displeased* the Lord (*ra b’aznei ha-shem*—literally, it was bad in the ear of God): and the Lord *heard* [it]; (*va’yishma*) and His anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed [them that were] in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the Lord burnt among them. ... (They said,) But now our soul [is] dried away: [there is] nothing at all (to eat), beside this manna, [before] our eyes.” (Numbers 11:1-3, 6)

“And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that He *heareth (b’shamo)* your murmurings against the Lord: and what [are] we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, [This shall be], when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the Lord *heareth (bi’shmoa)* your murmurings which ye murmur against Him: and what [are] we? Your murmurings [are] not against us, but against the Lord.... And when the children of Israel saw [it], they said one to another, It [is] manna.” (Exodus 16:7-8, 15)

These two passages tell of the manna in the Sinai desert. The first is about the “burning” at Taberah, where the people despised the manna; the second, which occurred first, is the original arrival of the manna. Manna exemplifies the idea of God’s miraculous providential supervision of the Jewish people. Since the *pshat* of the passage is that God actually “heard” the people complain with His “ears,” i.e., Definition 1, we must retranslate that God *knew*, i.e., Definition 3. Divine *knowledge* and punishment through divine *will* are simultaneous, really, atemporal. Similarly, when the people repent, God blesses them instantly with manna.

Each Jew receives an equal allotment of manna. Maimonides, in Guide 3:12, therefore makes manna symbolize the *general* distribution of natural justice, distinguishing it from *individualized* providence. All members of species generally have the same physical constitution and enjoy the same essential goods. We usually possess four limbs and enjoy enough water, air and vegetation to live: any more is superfluous. Similarly:

“It is no wrong or injustice that one has many bags of finest myrrh and garments embroidered with gold, while another has not those things, which are not necessary for our maintenance; he who has them has not thereby obtained control over anything that could be an essential addition to his nature, but has only obtained something illusory or deceptive. The other, who does not possess that which is not wanted for his maintenance, does not miss anything indispensable: ‘He that gathered much (manna) had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack: they gathered every man according to his eating’ (Exodus 26:18). This is the rule at all times and in all places; *no notice should be taken of exceptional cases*, as we have explained. In these two ways you will see the mercy of God toward His creatures, how He has provided that which is required, in proper proportions, and treated all individual beings of the same species with perfect *equality*. In accordance with this correct reflection the chief of the wise men says, ‘*All his ways are judgment*’ (Deuteronomy 32:4).”

Having touched on the general providential regime, Maimonides, in the Second *pshat*, turns to God’s special response to individual prayer.

Instances of the Second *pshat*, *Accept*, Contextualized:

“Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will *surely hear (shamoa eshma)* their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. If thou lend money to [any of] my people [that is] poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that [is] his covering only, it [is] his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will *hear (v’shamati)*; for I [am] gracious.” (Exodus 22:22-27)

“Lord, bow down thine *ear, and hear (aznkha u-shma)*; open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and *hear (u’shma)* the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.” (2 Kings 19:16)

Maimonides assigns these three quote-shards a *pshat* of *acceptance* (Definition 2) of what is “heard.” He apparently assumed that any reader of these sentences would realize that the literal meaning of “heard” was that God “accepts.” It is not obvious to this reader. Perhaps the real distinction is that unlike the cases involving manna, which involved the prayers of the Jews as a group, these proof-texts feature the prayer of the individual Jew. God does not merely *know* these prayers, He *grants* them.

Since *pshat* on both Exodus proof-texts (the first two immediately above), is supposed to be that God *accepts* the prayer of the widow, orphan and poor, then, according to the second rule, we must retranslate that God *answered* their prayer. Maimonides is not satisfied with interpreting “hear” as “accept” because God does not “accept” or “receive” anything (God is not a *mkubal*).

In Guide 1:48 he notes the Targumic system of paraphrasing “to hear” when applied to God. *Targum* retranslates as either “*It was heard before* the Lord,” which does not dispense with physical sensation; or, as “He *accepted*” prayer, which makes God an object of the praying subject. It is clear from our chapter that Maimonides does not agree with *Targum*. To accept or receive prayer implies change or passivity on the part of God, but God does not change and is impassive.

Since this is a doctrine of *Maaseh Merkava*, and the law in *Hagigah* proscribes publishing such doctrines, he presents it in camouflaged form here. The public must not be allowed to read the bald statement that God is *not* a being who *receives* prayer, at least without many preambles. What happens is that God knows the circumstances of the widow and grants her prayer in a unified, simultaneous, atemporal manner as part of His thought, which thought is identical to Himself. Nonetheless, he says in Guide 3:28 that “the belief that God hears the crying of the oppressed and vexed, to deliver them,” is a *necessary* truth that the public must be made to learn to secure the good of society. As I explained above, when understood fully, the doctrine of providence is not only a *necessary* belief but a *true* one as well.

The last proof-text above is part of Hezekiah’s Prayer. Hezekiah is dying and Jerusalem is about to be invaded. Sennacherib boasted that he always destroyed the local deities by conquering their domains. The first “hear,” which is part of the quote-shard, literally means that God should *accept* his prayer, and so we retranslate that God should *grant* the prayer. God does grant the prayer. Simultaneously and miraculously, God revives Hezekiah as He destroys Assyrians army. The second “hear” literally means that God should physically *listen* to Sennacherib (Definition 1), and so must be retranslated that God should *know* Sennacherib’s boast (Definition 3). Hezekiah argues from God’s point of view to God: Sennacherib destroys the local gods of his victims, therefore let him not “destroy” our God by obliterating the Temple, the place of His *Shekhina*.

Instances of the Third *pshat*, *Non-acceptance*, Contextualized:

The next three quotations are opposite to the preceding. In these, since the *pshat* is that God did not accept the prayer, we must retranslate that He *denied* it.

“And ye returned (*tashuvu*) and wept before the Lord; but the Lord would not *hearken* (*shama*) to your voice, nor give *ear* (*he’ezin*) unto you.” (Deuteronomy 1:45)

Here God denies the Jews’ belated repentance after the incident of the spies (*meraglim*), when the people decided to go back over the Amorite hills into Israel, though commanded not to. Their lack of intellectual alignment results in their slaughter by the Amorites.

“Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; [it is] iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear [them]. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: *yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear* (*shomea*): your hands are full of blood.” (Isaiah 1:13-15)

“Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not *hear* (*shomea*) thee.” (Jeremiah 7:16)

Since the people combine idolatry with worship of God, He *denies* their services and prayers. It is not just that he does not “accept” them. Mishneh Torah, *Teshuva* 7:7, movingly explains, quoting from both of these scriptural chapters, Isaiah 1, and Jeremiah 7:

“How exalted is the degree of repentance? But last night a certain individual was separated from the Lord, God of Israel...He cries aloud and is not answered, as it is said, *yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear*. He fulfills religious precepts and they are flung back in his face, as it is said, *who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?* (Isaiah 1:12); and, *Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh*. (Jeremiah 7:21). Today the same individual, (having properly repented) is closely attached to the Divine Presence...he cries and is immediately answered...he fulfills religious precepts and they are accepted with pleasure and with joy..., yet more, they are eagerly desired.”

Maimonides pairs these passages again in Guide 3:32, where he explained the meaning of the sacrificial service. Maimonides minimizes sacrifice, that it was a means to eliminate idolatry and was never the original object of the law (but see my interpretation there that sacrifice remains on the books as long as man remains corporeal). The main idea of these commandments was not to encourage empty ritual but to prompt the meditation that aligns our mind with His. Only then does providence, miraculously, overleap nature to bless individual men.

MISSING PROOF-TEXTS

The reader should ask why Maimonides omits two obvious proof-texts for *sh'ma*.

The motto “*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One,*” (Deuteronomy 6:4), *sh'ma yisrael ha-shem elohenu ha-shem ekhad*, is, for Jews, the most familiar passage in the Bible. In Mishneh Torah, he makes this passage a True Belief, not just a Necessary one (*Yesodai Ha-Torah* 1-7, Guide 3:45). It is the doctrine of divine unity. Our acceptance of it (Definition 2) requires our knowledge of it (Definition 3). If we do not know this, but, rather, profess dualism or atheism, our minds hold falsehoods that prevent their achieving active intellect. This is a veil separating most men from God, preventing their prayers from being answered. Maimonides could have included the *Sh'ma* in the chapter. However, since the passage is such an obvious choice, he wants the reader to supply it together with its interpretation as a kind of final exam for the lexical section of the Guide.

Maimonides also omits the first use in Torah of *sh'ma*. That use is Genesis 3:8:

“And they *heard* (*va-yishmu*) the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.”

He did include the verse in the lexical chapter 1:24 to illustrate the lexical term *walking*. Significantly, Onkelos' *Targum* substitutes for “voice” the word “*memra*,” his Aramaism for “Word.” He translates “And they heard the voice of the *Word* of the Lord walking,” *u'shma'u yat kal memra d'hashem elohim mehalekh*. The *Word* is the *Logos*, an entity created by God, like “*Shekhina*.” Adam and Eve “hear,” i.e., *know* of the presence of God, so the verse could also have been included in our chapter. Moreover, the passage exemplifies Maimonides' understanding of “the hiding of the face” as human *projection*, since, as we explained in 1:24, the “walking” of God is a walking *away*, a “hiding of the face” which is the *denial* of individual providence.

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