

GUIDE 1:23 HIDE AND SEEK

This is the lexical chapter on *yatza* (“come out”). Maimonides says that the term is opposite to *bo* (“come in”), last chapter’s lexical term, but it is only opposite in their corporeal senses. Once again, the references to God are all positive, the rest, negative. This chapter also defines *shuv* (to return) but Maimonides buries its definition at the end of the chapter. It is, therefore, his most important concern. The reason he hides it is that though the term is only applied to God, it is always negative in implication, and means “the hiding of the face,” which is the terrible withdrawal of God’s providence.

The Judeo-Arabic terms used for *yatza* are כָּרוּג, which also means “to be actualized” (Efros, *Philosophic terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, pp. 58, 185), and נִפְוֵד, “to propagate, to effectuate” (Pines’ Translation, *ad loc.*, notes 5 and 12, pp. 52-53). Through the actualization of his will God’s reveals His aspect as creator to us. Here is how Even-Shmuel portrays this concept in his brief chapter summary (my translation):

“The Second Rank (see last chapter for the list of his four Ranks) of actions, through which the existence of God is manifested to us, is the rank of Creator (*m’khadesh*). It is His unceasing renewal of nature, the ‘coming out’ (*y’tzia*—our lexical term) of things from nothing to existence. Through all of this, man perceives God as Creator.”

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

YATZA: (COME OUT, EXIT)

See below for: **SHUV (RETURN):**

1. The motion of a body from a place in which it had rested, to another place (whether the body is a living being or not). The opposite of *bo* (“come in”).
2. An incorporeal manifestation. The enunciation or effectuation of a decree. This is the only definition allowed to be used with God.

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And he (Joseph) commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men’s sacks [with] food, as much as they can carry, and put every man’s money in his sack’s mouth. And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack’s mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses. [And] when they were *gone out (yatzu)* of the city, [and] not [yet] far off, Joseph said unto his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good?” (Genesis 44:1-4)

Maimonides returns to Genesis Chapter 44, previously visited in Guide 1:18. See my essay there “The Midrash on *Vayigash*,” which was about Genesis 44:18. The passages above precede that passage. The synagogue reading breaks the chapter in two, making 44:18 the beginning of the weekly reading called *vayigash*. Here Joseph prepares his subterfuge of hiding his divining cup in his brother Benjamin’s sack, so that the brothers will be blamed for theft. Then at 44:18, *vayigash* (“Then Judah came near”), Judah and his brothers are arraigned before Joseph. The confrontation between Joseph and Judah takes place, which I supplied the Midrashic explanation of. As noted there, many issues involved in prophecy occur in *Vayigash*.

In context, the passage is supposed to illustrate the corporeal Definition 1 of *yatza*. But tradition quibbles whether the brothers have “gone out” at all. The Hebrew of the phrase is *hem yatzu et ha-ir*. The general particle *et* is thought to mean *with*, not *of*, and so the brothers are literally “gone out *with* the city,” that is, they have not yet

left its municipal border, for, as the text continues, they were “not yet far off.” We also saw in the last chapter that Maimonides’ quotation illustrating the corporeal definition for *bo* was not particularly apt. Maimonides is saying that we should not be quick to assign a corporeal definition to any word used in prophecy, even if it is a permissible lexical definition. The text is also chosen to remind us that “going out” and “crossing” (*avar*, see Guide 1:21) share a sense of *substitution*, since when the brothers were “gone out” the steward was supposed to ask: “Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good.” But the main theme for *yatza* is the *dissemination and effectuation of a decree*. Joseph is telling his steward what he is to say to the brothers. The superior commands his subordinate to announce or effectuate his decree. God, as we will see in Definition 2, requires no steward to effectuate His will.

“If fire *break out (tetze)*, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed [therewith]; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.” (Exodus 22:5)

This is an unusual citation of a *halakha* in the lexicon. This law makes the property owner responsible for any damage, foreseeable or not, that results from failing to guard burning coals ignited on his property. This quote is a corporeal reference, and a negative one. Recall that in Aristotle’s theory of proper place, fire’s elemental motion is upward, i.e., above the other three elements. It appears in its proper place not as a yellow flame but as the “darkness” (*khoshekh*, Guide 2:30) of the surrounding night sky. When wrenched from its proper place the movement of fire is destructive flame.

Instance of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“Then the king returned (*shav*) out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther [was]. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word *went out (yatza)* of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. (Esther 7:8)

This passage and the next are from Esther. This is from the end of the story, and Maimonides cites it to show that *yatza* is an incorporeal decree. There is much action in the verse. The passage has prurient interest for the King conceives Haman’s evil to include attempted rape of the Queen. This reminds us that matter should cleave to its own true form and not promiscuously engage in the materialism of seeking another form. In context, the *word* that *went out* of the King’s mouth is: “Will he force the Queen also before me in the house?” Maimonides takes this as a *decree* of Haman’s guilt and a verdict of death, which the King’s servants carry out. The general idea is that kings do not do *anything* but sit on thrones. They make their will known by voice: others carry it out. This will be contrasted to God’s way of carrying out His will. The verse also uses the term *shav*, “return,” which Maimonides treats at the end of our chapter. There the “return” of God means His concealment and removal of His providence. In the same way, the King has “hidden his face” from Haman, whose face is therefore covered.

“And Memucan answered before the King and the princes, Vashti the Queen hath not done wrong to the King only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that [are] in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus. For [this] deed (*d’var*) of the Queen *shall come abroad (yetze)* unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the Queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.” (Esther 1:16-17)

Maimonides explains “the deed...shall come abroad,” *yetze d’var*, as “the propagation of the matter” (Pines’ translation). Pines carefully notes the use of the Arabic *nufudh* (נפוד) for “propagation,” but in footnote 5 says that the word can mean “effect.” See also his footnote 12 for Maimonides’ second use of the Arabic root as the effectuation of a decree. KJV and JPS 1917 insist on translating *davar* here as deed, while Judaica Press reads it as Maimonides does: “For the *word* of the queen will spread to all the women.” Compare *yetze d’var* to *va’yaviru kol* (Exodus 36:6) in Guide 1:21. Here the “going forth” of the “word” is similar to the “passing” of the “voice” which took place there. In 1:21 Maimonides used *va’yaviru kol* as his proof-text for the idea that *avar* meant “sound” so that he could take the phrase to mean “the sounding of a sound.” Here, with *yetze d’var*, and in the prior quotation from the Book of Esther, *yetze* also becomes sound, but, more to the point, it becomes the *willed effectuation* of the command sounded, irrespective of whether any real sound is actually heard. You could also read *ki yetze d’var ha-malka al kol ha-nashim* to mean that the Queen’s decree was propagated or effectuated

among the women, “so that they shall despise their husbands.” Vashti, who is not a King, tries to act as one. Note further that this passage is not a description of corporeal action, but rather describes a policy argument by the King’s advisor Memucan. His purpose is to persuade the King to issue a decree to his minions against Vashti. As we see from the prior quotation, King Ahasuerus does not even have to *articulate* a decree, since his minions will interpret his demeanor and his quizzical exclamations as though they were actual decrees.

“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, [that] the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go (*v’halkhu*) and say, Come ye, and let us go (*l’khu*) up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk (*v’nelkha*) in his paths: **for out of Zion shall go forth (*tetze*) the law**, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:1-3)

The Torah is the Word of the Lord, and is therefore the exemplar of decrees. Isaiah prophesies its universal acceptance. The Temple Mount will be to the world what Sinai was to Israel. The next chapter, Guide 1:24, the lexicon on *halakh* (“walk”), quotes line 5 from this Isaiah chapter: “O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk (*l’khu v’nelkha*) in the light of the Lord.” Maimonides says there that, “walk,” in this definition, “concerns only the inner life, and which requires no bodily motion.” The same is true of *yatza*, the *going forth* of the law, which means the universal adoption of God’s decree. It is not that the law “goes forth” but that God actualizes or effectuates His will. No particular action or “going forth” is required. This terminology is merely a concession to human understanding, which cannot conceive of the effectuation of will without some attendant physical activity.

“The sun **was risen (*yatza*) upon the earth** when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” (Genesis 19:23)

From reading Maimonides’ quote-shard alone, it would not be obvious that the context is the destruction of Sodom. Thus Friedlander, note 3, wonders why this passage about the sun is included among examples of *incorporeal* manifestations, and argues that the solutions of commentators have been unsatisfactory. Friedlander is not aware of the Midrashic interpretation of the passage. The answer to his question is that Maimonides thinks that the sun here is a metaphor for divine visitation of punishment. He says (Pines’ translation and emphasis) “I refer to the manifestation of the light. Every *mention of going out* occurring in Scripture with reference to Him, may He be exalted, conforms to this figurative use.” The “light” manifested for Lot is the execution of God’s will to wreak darkness and destruction upon Sodom. Rashi reminds us of the Midrashic context, that the “sun was risen” refers not to its normal daily rise, but rather a particular moment. This particular cosmic moment shows that the punishment came from God, not from any other forces:

“At the rise of dawn, as it is stated (verse 15): ‘And as the dawn rose, [the angels pressed Lot, saying, Get up, take your wife, etc.]’ a time when the moon is in the sky with the sun. Since some of them worshipped the sun and some of them the moon, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, ‘If I punish them by day, the moon worshippers will say, Had it been at night, when the moon rules, we would not have been destroyed.’ And if I punish them at night, the sun worshippers will say, ‘Had it been by day, when the sun rules, we would not have been destroyed.’ Therefore, it is written: ‘And as the dawn rose’: He punished them at a time when the sun and the moon [both] rule. — [from Gen. Rabbah 60:12]”

On the final proof-text for Definition 2, “For, behold, the Lord **cometh out (*yotze*) of his place (*mi’mkomo*)” Isaiah 26:21, see essay below.**

THE LORD COMETH OUT OF HIS PLACE

“(19) Thy dead [men] shall live, [together with] my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew [is as] the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead. (20) Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. (21) **For, behold, the Lord cometh out (*yotze*) of his place**

(mi'mkomo) to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." (Isaiah 26:19-21)

This last quote for *yatza*, Definition 2, is important for Maimonides since he quotes it here twice. It mentions *makom*, "place," and contributes to our understanding of that term. See my previous discussion in chapters 1:8 and 1:16, the chapters on *makom* and *tzur* ("rock"). Once again, Maimonides recasts *makom* in his own terms, this time as God's will.

"The word of God, which until now has been in secret, cometh out, and will become manifest,' i.e., something will come into being which had not existed before: for everything new emanating from God is ascribed to His Word: 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth' (Psalms 33:6). This is a simile taken from the conduct of kings, who employ the word as the means of carrying their *will* into effect. God, however, requires no instrument wherewith to operate in order to perform anything; the effect is produced solely by His *Will* alone. He does not employ any kind of speech, as will be explained further on (Guide 1:65)." (My emphases)

He begins by changing the phrase. "The Lord cometh out (*yotze*)" becomes "the *word* of the Lord cometh out." He then argues that the *makom* is God's creativity seen from man's point of view, in man's language. Before creation *ex nihilo*, we *say* that God is hidden; afterward, we *say* that He came out of His secret place and created. Maimonides then employs Psalms 33:6 to compare and contrast God's action with a king's. A king just sits on his throne, but in order to govern must *utter* a decree. His minions, who are his instrument, effectuate the decree. By contrast, God requires no action, instrument, word, or Logos to create the universe. Compare Guide 1:1, where we learned that intellectual apprehension requires no physical action. It was therefore "likened unto the apprehension of the deity, which does not require an instrument" (Pines' translation).

Chapter 1:65, referred above, closely connects with our chapter. There Maimonides explains attributionless divinity. He says that speech as such may not ascribed be to God as an eternal attribute. The "word of God" is Torah, yet that decree is a *divine creation*. This forcefully contrasts with the Muslim attribute of divine speech, the uncreated Qur'an, which is "with" God eternally. This is a dangerous pretension upon divine unity. God needs no "instrument." God's will is just Himself.

"A proof for this, namely that the phrase 'God said,' in the first chapter of Genesis, must be taken in a figurative sense 'He willed,' and not in its literal meaning, is found in the circumstance that a command can only be given to a being which exists and is capable of receiving the command."

Meaning that the phrase "God said," in the first chapter of Genesis, must be figurative, since on Day One there is as yet no other being "which exists and is capable of receiving the command." We only imagine that God is like the king who commands but needs a servant to effect his will. Maimonides develops this at 1:68: some Muslim theologians had denied that God is a "cause" because then there would have to be an "effect" eternally "with" God. He counters that God is the *form* of the universe: through His will *alone*, with no servant, He *causes* the universe to pass from potentiality to actuality. He alone causes it to remain existent. He is the Creator.

Later in our chapter, Maimonides repeats "the Lord cometh out of his place," (line 21) as a transition to the lexical term *shuv*, "return." He understands *shuv* to be the withdrawal of providence called "The hiding of the face." The passage does not actually use the term *shuv*, but its theme is the termination of the "hiding of the face," when the divine presence returns to Israel. The verse proceeds to tell how God will eventually punish those now killing the Jews, "to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." The Jews are instructed to return to their synagogues ("enter thou into thy chambers," line 20) and to "hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast," that is, till God cometh out of His hidden place, where He has *hidden His face*, withdrawing providence from them. But then He will come out of his *place* to uncover the deeds of the

murderers, and bring the dead back to life, that is, to grant his people power over their oppressors. For this He requires no instrumentality to effect His will.

THE HIDING OF THE FACE

If, as we see above, God needs no instrument to create everything, did He also create evil? The conclusion of our chapter supplies the answer by introducing the new lexical term, *shuv*.

SHUV (RETURN): Maimonides defines this as a figurative term meaning the discontinuance of God's manifestation. In support, he quotes Hosea:

“Therefore [will] I [be] unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah [saw] his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. For I [will be] unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, [even] I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue [him]. I will go (*elekh*) [and] return (*ashuva*) to my place (*mkomi*), till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early.” (Hosea 5:12-15)

Now, only at the end of the chapter, Maimonides reveals the key term and principle point of the chapter: the definition of *shuv*. He writes that this passage means:

“I.e., the Divine presence (Shekhina) which had been in our midst departed from us, the consequence of which has been the absence of Divine protection from amongst us.... Thus the Prophet foretelling misfortune (Pines: ‘by way of threat’) says, ‘I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured’ (Deuteronomy 31:17), for, when man is deprived of Divine protection he is exposed to all dangers, and becomes the butt (Pines: ‘target’) of all fortuitous circumstances: his fortune and misfortune then depend on chance. Alas! How terrible a threat! –This is the idea contained in the words, ‘I will go and return to my place.’”

The Hosea passage refers to God's *place* to which He “returns.” This time God is hidden from the Jews until their suffering causes *them* to *return*. We then *project* their return on God. Their return to God returns them to his unceasing providence: this we *call* His return. The passage mentions Deuteronomy 31:16-18, which is the classic locus of the “hiding of the face:”

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring (*v'zana*) after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go [to be] among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. (17) Then My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face (*v'histarti panai*) from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God [is] not among us? (18) And I will surely hide My face (*astir panai*) in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned (*pana*) unto other gods.”

Here is how Maimonides explains this passage in 3:51:

“If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him; for it is only that intellectual link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents. Hence, it may occur that the perfect man is at times not happy, whilst no evil befalls those who are imperfect; in these cases,

what happens to them is due to chance. This principle I find also expressed in the Law (quoting here, in full, Deuteronomy 31:17), It is clear that *we ourselves* are the cause of this hiding of the face, and that the screen that separates us from God is of our own creation. This is the meaning of the words: "And I will surely hide My face in that day, for all the evils which they shall have wrought" (31:18). There is undoubtedly no difference in this regard between one single person and a whole community. It is now clearly established that the cause of our being exposed to *chance*, and abandoned to destruction like cattle, is to be found in our separation from God. Those who have their God dwelling in their hearts, are not touched by any evil whatever." (My italics)

Recall from the last chapter, 1:22, that when God "comes" in a dark cloud to the Jews in the desert, it is really not God in the cloud but the Jews. Again, it is not God that has hidden His face, but we that have hidden ours by turning (*shuv*, but also *pana*) to other gods. The "right way" of knowledge is intellectual meditation on God, that is, being *present* before him, "I have set the Lord before me always" (Psalm 16:8). It is that eternal now where there is only God and me, the perceiver, with no distracting ego or mediator. There is no "I" left in the flame of that encounter to suffer evil: the perceiver is one with the great chain of being. That is true providence flowing from love of God (See my essay: "Providence and Nature," on Guide 1:11). When man "does not meditate on God" he is subject to *chance*: as Maimonides says in our chapter, "his fortune and misfortune then depend on chance. Alas! How terrible a threat!" Like the creatures of nature, man is then subject to nature only, and providence does not save: he is "abandoned to destruction like cattle" because of his separation from God. That is the meaning of the "hiding of the face." The cause of evil is our distance from God.

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