

GUIDE 1:14 MAN

This is the shortest chapter in the Guide, fifty-seven words in the Judeo-Arabic Munk/Joel edition. The second shortest is 1:6, which is the lexical chapter on *ish* and *isha*, man and woman, with which 1:14 is closely connected. The short chapters are more difficult to interpret, and conceal esoteric material.

In the numerical series 1 : 7 : 14, our chapter is twice *seven*. Chapter 7 was the lexical chapter on birth, about intellectual progeny and its converse, the birth of demons. 1:1 contained the discussion of image and form. These numerical affinities imply that when we make ourselves His intellectual progeny, and come close to God in thought, we are in His form and His image.

Straussian interpretation assumes the importance of numerology in chapter arrangement. For a contrary view see, generally, Herbert Davidson, *Maimonides, the Man and his Works*, Oxford, 2004, pp. 323, 397 and elsewhere. I take a moderate stance. We may recognize numerical affinities only after the evidence otherwise emerges; that is, numerology is fun but not necessary. I do not deny that Maimonides enjoyed dabbling in numerology, or that the special nature of the Hebrew number/letters naturally conduces to it.

Fourteen is the Hebrew word/number combination for *yad*, “hand.” Leo Strauss notes that “hand” does not get a lexical chapter, but makes no further interpretation of the relation of “man” and “hand” apart from some typically oblique comments (*How to Begin to Study the Guide of the Perplexed*, p. xxx, in the Pines translation of the Guide).

Yad Ha-Hazakha, “The Strong Hand,” is the other name for the Mishneh Torah, the name more popular in the rabbinic world. It is called *Yad* because it has fourteen books, each a “strong hand” codifying Jewish law. The *Yad Ha-Hazakha* codifies all laws set forth in the Oral and Written Torah. The idea is that when man does what God wants he becomes the “hand” of God.

Adam, the name for man, is distinguished from *ish*, another name for man. *Ish* represents realized man. He realizes his intellectual potential. *Adam* is an animal potentially realized as man only when he embraces the law, but is otherwise a demon (See my essay in Guide 1:10, where *Enosh* is used the same way as *ish* here). The series 1 : 7 : 14 (image of God : realized man : potentially realized man) declines in holiness just as man declined after Eden. The return to Sinai (*teshuva*) returns man to the tree of life.

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

ADAM: (MAN) Homonym

1. The name of the first man, derived from *adamah*, “earth,” as in Genesis 2:7: “And the Lord God formed man (*ha-adam*) [of] the dust of the ground (*min ha-adama*).”
2. The species mankind.
3. The multitudes or masses of men, the lower class of men, men of unrealized potential.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with *man (adam)*, for that he also [is] flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Genesis 6:3)

Maimonides provides no text supporting Definition 1. This proof-text is about *mankind* as a whole, Definition 2. The term *adam* is homonymous because it can refer to either *Adam*, the first man, or to *bnei adam*, the human race, as in this example. In context, the quote means that God will not punish man for his misdeeds until the coming of the time of the flood. God does not now punish man since he is the result of a peculiar mixture of mind and matter: “for that he *also* [is] flesh.” This is the first of two quotes from Genesis Six—see essay below explaining the full context of these two passages.

“17: I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for [there is] a time there for every purpose and for every work. 18: I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. 19: For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a *man (ha-adam)* hath no preeminence above a beast (*ha-behema*): for all [is] vanity. 20: All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21: Who knoweth the spirit of [the children of] *man (bnei ha-adam)* that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? 22: Wherefore I perceive that [there is] nothing better, than that a man should *rejoice in his own works; for that [is] his portion*: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?” (Ecclesiastes 3:17-21)

Maimonides quotes two passages from this section. Both stand for Definition 2, man as the human species. We should notice when Maimonides brings more than one passage from a single Bible chapter. He uses this technique to emphasize the entire chapter including parts not quoted, as well as to remind his audience of the chapter’s traditional reading. The passage concerns the distinction between intellectual progeny and those unrealized humans who are not such progeny, as developed in Guide 1:7. God distinguishes the good from the bad men. Solomon, author of Ecclesiastes, remarks that God should show men that they are no better than beasts, if they will not act righteously. Like the beasts, their destiny is dust. By contrast, the spirit of the righteous men “goes upward.” Rashi provides the traditional gloss, *ad loc.*:

“‘Who knoweth,’ like in: ‘Whoever knows shall repent’ (Joel 2:14). Who is it who understands and puts his heart to [the fact] that the spirit of the children of men ascends above and stands in judgment, and the spirit of the beast descends below to the earth, and does not have to give an accounting. Therefore, one must not behave like a beast, which does not care about its deeds.”

The righteous man considers “his own works,” that is, he meditates to improve his morals and bring his mind closer to God, “for that is his portion” of divine providence.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“[To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.] Hear this, all [ye] people; give ear, all [ye] inhabitants of the world, Both *low and high*, rich and poor, together (*gam bnei adam, gam bnei ish*). My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart [shall be] of understanding. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying (*khidati*) upon the harp. Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, [when] the iniquity of my heels (*akvei*) shall compass me about?” (Psalms 49:1-5)

The KJV is too laconic here (JPS 1917 is no improvement). The quote-shard in Hebrew reads *gam bnei adam, gam bnei ish*. Judaica Press gives a literal translation: “Both the sons of *adam*, and the sons of *ish*,” forcing the reader to look at Rashi, who says: “Both the sons of *adam*: The sons of Abraham, who was called: ‘the greatest man (*ha-adam*) among the giants’ (Joshua 14:15); the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. And the sons of *ish*: The sons of Noah, who was called: ‘a righteous man (*ish tzadik*)’ (Genesis 6:9).” The righteous man is called *ish*, after the *ishim*, “men,” the name of the tenth class of angels in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 2:7. The “righteous” that align their mind with God become *ishim*. They are the mediators between *bnei ha-adam*, the

unrealized men, and God. Unless the righteous *ishim* reach them, men are in danger of sinking to the level of beasts, for (as we saw in the last proof-text) unrealized man, *adam*, has no “preeminence” over the beast. Man is a mixture of mind and matter, but one must predominate over the other. The idea is ancient. In Plato’s *Timaeus*, man either realizes himself and comes to “return and dwell in his native star” or is changed into “some brute who resembled him in the evil nature he had acquired” (*Dialogues of Plato*, Jowett, 1937, vol. 2, p. 23, lines 41-43). Compare Guide 3:8, where Maimonides’ strong language distinguishes these two states and advocates a nearly Manichaean asceticism for the prophetic elite. In Maimonides’ reading, “The sons of *adam*” means the mass of men as distinguished from the elite. Abraham is indeed a great man but the sons of Ishmael and Keturah were not his intellectual progeny. As for Rashi’s reference to “giants” see my essay below. Moreover, our passage teaches that wisdom comes from meditation upon parables and upon “dark” (*khidati*) sayings. This should call to mind Maimonides’ Introduction to the Guide, which recommends meditation on prophetic parables and dark sayings, linking them together to learn the secrets of Torah. Also of interest is the suggestion of lurking danger, for “the iniquity of my *heels* shall compass me about.” We have already alerted the reader to Maimonidean “foot” allusions. The word for “heels,” *akvei*, also means “results,” i.e., the results of causes (“foot” means “cause,” Guide 1:28). There is another significant meaning of *heel* in Guide 2:30, in reference to the two quotations from Genesis Six, Eve’s heel (see essay below, where “iniquity” of Eve’s “heels” turns out to be a subtle reference to the mass of evil men).

“That the sons of God saw the daughters of *men (bnot ha-adam)* that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” (Genesis 6:2)

Definition 3 makes a distinction between the higher and lower grades of humanity. In this case, the “daughters of *men*” are the lower classes of women. The “sons of God,” *bnei ha-elokim*, is better translated by Rashi and Jewish tradition: “sons of princes and judges.” They are the rulers of society, but that does not make them righteous men. Recall that judges were not buried with scholars, and that they buried an adulterous excommunicate scholar with the judges rather than with the other scholars (Guide 1:2, from Talmud, *Moed Katan* 17a). This is the second quotation from Genesis Six. See essay below on the meaning of Genesis Six for Maimonides.

“5: They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course. 6: I have said, Ye [are] Gods (*elokim atem*); and all of you [are] children of the most High (*bnei elyon*). 7: But ye shall die like *men (k’adam)*, and fall like one of the princes (*ha-sarim*).” (Psalms 82:5-7)

By including this passage in Definition 3, Maimonides takes this quote-shard to mean that only the lower ranks of men “die.” That is, their existence terminates with the death of their bodies, to contrast with those able to raise themselves by becoming intellectual progeny of God, and uniting their minds with Him. Their “death” is mere physical death; otherwise, they are immortal. Rashi, explaining the traditional interpretation, agrees. On line 6, “Ye are Gods” he writes: “Meaning *angels*—when I gave you the Torah, I gave it to you on the condition that the Angel of Death should not rule over you.” But on the contrasting line “Ye shall die like men,” Rashi writes: “Indeed, as man, you will die.” The angel of death holds no sway over those accepting the Torah. Even rulers die ignominious deaths unless they unite their souls with the Timeless One.

THE SONS OF GOD SAW THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN

The beginning of Genesis Six provides two of the proof texts above. We should note how Maimonides uses Genesis 6:1-5, line by line, with its Midrash, to develop his anthropology. We are in the time after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, but before the Flood:

“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them.” (Genesis 6:1)

The Midrash, *Genesis Rabba* 26:4, reports: “to multiply on the face of the earth. This teaches that they spilled their semen upon the trees and stones.” This promiscuous spillage mythically explains how the “demons” were generated in the post-Eden period (see my note on *Demons* in Guide 1:6). The world was populated by the sons of Abraham who were not his intellectual progeny, the ones both the Midrash and Maimonides called “demons.” Tradition understood the *bnei elokim*, “sons of God,” to mean the political rulers, the elite:

“That the sons of God saw the daughters of men (*bnot ha-adam*) that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” (Genesis 6:2)

The verse provides another hint of why the demons were generated. Maimonides quoted Psalm 49:2 above, on the distinction between *bnei adam* and *bnei ish*, the masses against the elite, but surely meant us to think of the conclusion of that thought, 49:5: “Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, [when] the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?” Maimonides seems to understand these “days of evil” as the days when the *ish* is “compassed about” by the demonic *bnei adam*, who are “the iniquity of my heels.” This should make us think of Eve’s heels, which he discusses in Guide 2:30. In that chapter, Maimonides gives his explanation of the work of creation, *Maaseh Bereshit*. He tells us the following amazing things about Eve, from Midrash:

“‘The serpent had a rider, the rider was as big as a camel, and it was the rider that enticed Eve: this rider was Samael.’ Samael is the name generally applied by our Sages to Satan....Samael and Satan are identical. There is a meaning in this name [Samael] (*semol*: ‘left’—the evil inclination, *suma*: ‘blind’), as there is also in the name *nahash* (‘serpent’—also, ‘imagination’). In describing how the serpent came to entice Eve, our sages say: ‘Samael was riding on it, and God was laughing at both the camel and its rider.’ It is especially of importance to notice that the serpent did not approach or address Adam, but all his attempts were directed against Eve, and it was through her that the serpent caused injury and death to Adam. The greatest hatred exists between the serpent and Eve, and between his seed and her seed; her seed being undoubtedly also the seed of man. More remarkable still is the way in which the serpent is joined to Eve, or rather *his seed to her seed*; the head of the one touches the *heel* of the other. Eve defeats the serpent by crushing its head, whilst the serpent defeats her by wounding her heel. *This is likewise clear*. The following is also a remarkable passage, most absurd in its literal sense; but *as an allegory* it contains wonderful wisdom, and fully agrees with real facts, as will be found by those who understand *all the chapters of this treatise*. ‘When the serpent came to Eve he infected her with poison; the Israelites, who stood at Mount Sinai, removed that poison; idolaters, who did not stand at Mount Sinai, have not got rid of it.’ *Note this likewise*.... Remarkable and noteworthy is the great wisdom contained in the names of Adam (‘earth’), Cain (*kayin*—‘possession’), and Abel (*havel*—‘breath,’ but also ‘vanity,’ i.e., pointlessness, as in Ecclesiastes 1:2: *havel havalim*, ‘vanity of vanities’), and in the fact that it was Cain who slew Abel in the field, that both of them perished, although the murderer had some respite, and that the existence of mankind is due to Seth alone. Comp. ‘For God has appointed me *another seed*’ (4:25). *This has proved true*.” (Guide 2:30, my emphases.)

The formulas “this is likewise clear,” “note this likewise,” and “this has proved true,” are typical Maimonidean indicators of esoteric content. According to Friedlander: Adam and Eve represent matter and form; Samael/Satan is the evil inclination born of the imagination which blinds Adam to the truth; intellect triumphs over the evil inclination of the imagination (crushing head); but the stimulation of material desire by the serpent (biting heel) still causes man to sin (Friedlander trans. of the Guide, *ad loc.*, notes 2-7 on vol. 2, p. 155 of his first edition). David Bakan, *ad loc.*, p. 173-179, *Maimonides on Prophecy*, Jason Aronson, 1991, turns to the obviously prurient content of this material:

“...Eve has sexual intercourse with Satan and gives birth to Cain and Abel. Adam at that time begets devils. It was only after they were out of the Garden of Eden that they had Seth, who is the only true human being from Adam and Eve. It is also an allegory concerning the true nature of human sexual and moral development....the serpent (is) representative of deviant sexuality....We note three things: first, it

refers to something patently sexual; second, Maimonides makes an announcement of this as having significance for the understanding of the treatise as a whole; third he makes an announcement that the sexual which is being expressed is a parable.”

What happened when these children of primal deviancy went forth upon the earth? They “saw the daughters of men that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose” (Genesis 6:2). Maimonides quotes “Daughters of men” for Definition 3, so we know that they were the lowest of women. These demonic rulers saw that these “women were fair,” which Rashi, from Midrash, understands to mean that they made themselves fair for the *bridal* canopy, but these rulers violated their marriages, exercising *droit du seigneur*. They took “all which they chose,” but even worse, they took “even a married woman, even males and animals. The generation of the Flood was not blotted out from the world until they composed nuptial songs in honor of pederasty and bestiality” (*Genesis Rabbah* 26:5). Despite these terrible things:

“And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also [is] flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Genesis 6:3)

God relented, at least for the span of a life. For man is *also* flesh, a mixture of the soul and the elements. He can save himself only by separating them. But the law had not yet been given at Sinai, whereby the “poison” that the snake inserted in Eve’s *heel* was “got rid of.”

“There were giants (*nefilim*) in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God (*bnei elokim*) came in unto the daughters of men (*bnot ha-adam*), and they bare [children] to them, the same [became] mighty men which [were] of old, men of renown (*anshei ha-shem*).” (Genesis 6:4)

These giants were the rulers, but they were not righteous. “*Nefilim* denotes that they hurled (*hippilu*) the world down, themselves fell (*naflu*) from the world, and filled the world with abortions (*nefilim*) through their immorality....They were the greatest of all masters of the arts of war” (*Genesis Rabba* 26:7). It happened “in those days,” the days of “Enosh and the children of Cain” (Rashi, *ad loc.*). After Enosh, son of Seth, intellectual progeny of Adam ceased, and the “daughters of men” bore “giants,” rulers who would rebel against God (Rashi). They were “men of renown (*shem* = name),” meaning: “men of desolation (*shimamon*), who made the world desolate,” (*Genesis Rabba, ibid.*).

The Midrash next reminds us of the story of the Married Harlot, the *isha zona*. “*And also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men* (Genesis 6:4): R. Berekiyah said: A woman would go out into the market place, see a young man, and conceive a passion for him, whereupon she would go, cohabit, and give birth to a young man like him” (*Genesis Rabba, ibid.* On *isha zona*, see Proverbs 7:6-27, and my *Introduction I: “Through The Lattice: The Parable Of The Married Harlot”*).

“And God saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every *imagination* (*yetzer*) of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5)

But the intellectual progeny of Moses, who had got rid of the poison of that *imagination*, were able to rise above those *bnei ha-adam*, to make themselves *ishim*, men of the active intellect, the truly human mediators between base men and God. Maimonides quotes the Psalmist’s warning at the end of our chapter, that unless they become *ishim*, they “shall die like men (*k’adam*)” (Psalms 82:7). Better to become Moses’ intellectual progeny and realize that: “I have said, ye [are] Gods (*elokim atem*); and all of you [are] children of the most High (*bnei elyon*)” (Psalms 82:6).

PROMISCUITY: MODERN REFLECTIONS

Permit me a personal observation. I viewed a new film treatment of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. I found myself wondering whether Austen's 18th Century story would still move us in the 21st Century?

Part of the story's force is an episode of sexual promiscuity involving Lydia Bennett and the cad Wickham. I still feel the power of the episode, as I had when reading it thirty five years ago. But I wonder whether younger audiences got it. I had read that the film's makers had the same concern. What used to make for gripping narrative might now seem passé. It's not just that "heaven knows, anything goes," but, rather, that "anything" had been going on now for many generations.

In the eons preceding pharmaceutical contraception, these things did not need explanation. They were the sublimated obsessions of everyone. This was so because Judaism won its war against paganism. It was not merely a bloodless theoretical controversy between "monotheism" and "polytheism." Maimonides knew that the Torah connected practical paganism with deviant promiscuous sexuality (see, e.g., Guide 3:37). The Torah lays down the first code of sexual propriety. The benefits of the system were obvious, but in Guide 1:2, we got the trade-off: the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood was exchanged for morality. Part of this trade involved sublimation, the ability of the subconscious to suppress sexual obsession by transforming it into economic or artistic energy. This is what Maimonides would recognize as the *work* of the imagination. David Bakan's early *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, Dover, 2004 (orig. 1958) was his theory of the impact of this simmering Jewish sexual lore on Freudianism.

Maimonides is not writing a pamphlet warning of the dangers of promiscuity. He did not have to. He understood the power of sexualized imagery, but in days past, everyone understood it. Clearly, he makes the polarities of this imagery refer to divine and human creativity, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, imagination and intellect, and so on. But these philosophical speculations only affect our heart if we know what they sublimate. Without regaining access to these polarities in sublime awe, we truly have not heard Maimonides' message.

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