

GUIDE 1:19 FULFILLMENT

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.” Its two corporeal definitions are about the nature of matter, while its incorporeal definition concerns the attainment of the active intellect. This chapter features a short but important discussion of the “created light,” the *or ha-nivra*.

MALEI (FILL) Homonym

1. One substance enters another, and fills it.
2. The expiration or completion of a fixed period of time. Definitions 1 and 2 together represent the completion of a measure in space or in time (Even-Shmuel, p. 93)
3. Attainment of highest degree of excellency or perfection (*ha-shlemut b'davar na'alei v'ha-takhlitot bo*)

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And the damsel (Rebecca) [was] very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and *filled (va-temallei)* her pitcher, and came up.” (Genesis 24:16)

Maimonides only quotes two words of this passage. The context, as he knew, is quite prurient. Our term *malei*, fill, appears here in the chapters of feminine lexical terms after the bridge chapter 1:17, which was about concealing sexual metaphor in prophetic writing. Guide 1:17 was preceded by a series of masculine referent terms. Abraham’s servant Eliezer is on a mission to Haran to find a wife for Isaac among Abraham’s relatives there. He meets Rebecca. It is not just that she is “filling her pitcher.” Rabbinic tradition (Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 60:5) seized on the apparent redundancy of the phrase “a virgin, neither had any man known her,” which Maimonides delicately fails to quote. The Midrash makes it refer to the Haranic practice of treating a woman as a virgin as long as she had not been violated *genitally*. The joke is that her pitcher was filled but she never had been, in any way. Rebecca symbolizes feminine matter, but not like the married harlot of Proverbs 7: she had not promiscuously pursued masculine form. (For a different approach, see notes on “Privation” below.)

“And Moses said, This [is] the thing which the Lord commandeth, *Fill (m'lo)* an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 16:32)

Maimonides quotes the passage differently, as: *m'lo ha-omer l'ekhad*, “fill an omer for each.” Friedlander footnote 1, explains: “The editions of the Bible have *m'lo ha-omer mimenu*. Either Maimonides himself or the copyists confounded the two passages, Exodus 16:21, *shnei ha-omer l'ekhad*, and 16:32, *m'lo ha-omer mimenu*.” The quotation refers to the pitcher of manna kept as a national religious time-capsule of that miracle. But here the reference is negative, for it follows the sin of gathering manna on Sabbath. The passage is part of Moses’ speech castigating the Jews for breaking the Sabbath commandment. Maimonides usually supports corporeal definitions with such pejorative texts. Moreover, Rashi says that Jeremiah pointed to this omer vessel when he said “O generation, see ye the word of the Lord,” castigating the Jews for “chang(ing) their gods.” Unlike Rebecca, the Jews have abandoned their Lord, for Jeremiah says, “Can a maid forget her ornaments, a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.” God remembers Israel like a maiden following Him in the desert, while now they “recline as a harlot.” (Jeremiah 2:2-2:32, Rashi from Midrash *Mekhilta*).

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And when her [Rebecca’s] days to be delivered were *fulfilled (va-yimlu)*, behold, [there were] twins (Jacob and Esau) in her womb.” (Genesis 25:24)

All references to birth, blood, corpses, *etc.*, are instances of *tumah*, that is, biblical ritual defilement, and therefore carry intrinsically negative corporeal meaning for Maimonides. The context is Rebecca's *fulfillment* in the birth of the twins Jacob and Esau. The fulfillment is ambiguous, since corporeality and spirituality mingle. The previous line is, "Two nations are in your womb, and two kingdoms will separate from your innards, and one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom, and the elder will serve the younger." Jacob chooses to yoke himself to Torah, while Esau, pursues *hunting*, that is, the pursuit of matter.

"And forty days were *fulfilled (va-yimlu)* for him (Jacob); for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days." (Genesis 50:3)

This passage from the end of Genesis concerns Joseph's treatment of his father Jacob's corpse. Not only does this involve the *tumah* of ritual corpse defilement, but worse, embalming. Mummification transgresses Jewish burial laws, which require the clean corpse buried as soon as possible. Rashi's explanation (*ad loc.* to Genesis 47:29): "so that the Egyptians will not deify me," is interesting. Rashi understands that the Patriarch, Jacob, was so pure and righteous that his body would never decompose. Joseph's problem is that his father's eternally unpolluted corpse would entice Egyptians to add another deity to their pantheon. They embalmed Jacob's body to disguise the situation until they could bury him in Israel. Since Jacob had never pursued materialism, he had already transcended his material state. That is why this proof-text bridges over to Definition 3.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

"And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and *full (malei)* with the blessing of the Lord: possess thou the west and the south." (Deuteronomy 33:23)

The context is Moses' blessing the tribe of Naftali before he dies. The meaning, according to Maimonides, is that Naftali attained the highest degree of excellency, i.e., *fulfillment*. Only those who are fulfilled in this sense, who are Israel's intellectual progeny, possess the land. On this point, note that Maimonides in Guide 1:8 already understood *malei* to mean intellectual progeny, in the phrase *m'malei makom avotov* ("occupying the place of his ancestors," Talmud, *Shabat* 51a, *Ketuvot* 103b). Hiram of Tyre, Solomon's Temple builder, had a Naftalite mother; hence, this passage links to the coming passage from 1 Kings about Hiram's construction of the temple.

"Them hath he *filled with wisdom of heart (milei otam khakhmat lev)*, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, [even] of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work." (Exodus 35:35)

Three of the final four quotations are about the dwelling place of the Lord's presence: first in the Tabernacle of the desert, and later in the Temple at Jerusalem. The Shekhina *fills* the central place of Hebrew worship. On this motif, and its relation to *wisdom*, see essay on the "Created Light" below. This passage refers to Bezalel and his craftsmen who built the Tabernacle. "Tabernacle" in Hebrew is *mishkan*, which means the divine indwelling (same root as *Shekhina*), thus, the place constructed to be "filled" with God's glory.

"He [was] a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father [was] a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was *filled (va-yimalei)* with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning (*ha-khakhma v'et ha-tevuna v'et ha-daat*) to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work." (1 Kings 7:14).

This passage parallels the last two. It refers to Hiram of Tyre, the son of a Tyrean artisan and a Naftalite mother, hired by Solomon to build the Temple. We know from the earlier quote of the Naftalite heritage of *fulfillment*. Being Naftali's intellectual progeny, Hiram was prophetically inspired to build the place for the indwelling of God's presence. "Wisdom, and understanding, and cunning," in the KJV are *khakhma, bina* and *daat*, which Rashi says:

"Are the three tools with which the universe was created, as it is stated, '[The Lord] by *wisdom* founded the earth, by *understanding* He established the heavens, by His *knowledge* the depths were broken up' (Proverbs 3:19). With these same three the Temple was built."

They make up the famous acronym *KhaBaD*, the three upper principles of the Sefirot. The Sefirot are the bridge to the divine in Jewish esotericism. That Hiram was *malei* in the sense of Definition 3 means that he attained the highest degree of perfection both spiritually and in his ability to perfect base metals.

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the Temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] the Lord of hosts: the whole earth [is] full (*melo*) of his glory (*kavod*).”
(Isaiah 6:1-3)

Maimonides restates this text according to Definition 3: “All the earth gives evidence of His perfection, i.e. leads to knowledge of it.” This is Isaiah’s famous vision, which includes the burning of his mouth by the coal releasing his prophetic power. Maimonides places this passage with the several quotations about the establishment of the central place of worship because he wants us to compare the indwelling of the presence of God in the Temple with that same indwelling that causes the prophet’s vision. Maimonides’ use of the passage foreshadows his Definition 3 of *kavod* (usually “glory,”) in 1:64 as “praise,” viewing glory or honor as a type of praise (see my “Glory of the Lord” in 1:8, and notes in 1:16). The depth of our praise of God is directly related to the depth of our apprehension of His works. The Torah poetically personifies even inanimate creations as “praising” Him, by giving “evidence of His perfection.” He made them, so they “praise” Him for it. What we can intellectually apprehend of his creation is “praise,” and is one of the rungs of the ladder to prophecy, “for the true way of honoring Him consists in apprehending His greatness.” Again, at 3:52, he quotes the same passage, so that when “perfect men understand this (God’s ubiquitous creative presence expressed in the glory/light/Shekhina) they achieve such humility, such awe and fear of God, such reverence and such shame before Him...” (Pines’ translation). In other words, the praise is the Encounter. The Glory is the created intellectual emanation that mediates between our mind and God. (See notes 1:18, equating the glory/light/Shekhina)

“Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled (*malei*) the tabernacle.” (Exodus 40:34)

By completing the Tabernacle, Moses accomplished the conditions for the divine indwelling with the people. They achieved of the highest degree of perfection. The prophets are, so to speak, human tabernacles, with potential to reach this highest degree, the unification with the active intellect. Rabbi Abraham, Maimonides’ son, comments here that the glory/*kavod* that filled the tabernacle was the light of the *Shekhina*. On line 38, “For the cloud of the Lord [was] upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys,” R. Abraham says that the cloud is not an earthly cloud or the fire of elemental fire. Rather, he says, it is a created light which burns in prophetic vision. He quotes other passages where this light is a ministering angel, i.e., a mediator for the emanation of God to the prophet.

You might ask at this point whether this active intellect is supposed to be entirely in the mind of the prophet, or whether it is a non-material being mediating between the prophet and God, like an angel. Maimonides does not achieve precision in his discussion of the active intellect. Efron’s *Dictionary* identifies at least five different senses for the term in the Guide alone: 1) the mind in the act of thinking; 2) angels; 3) the Platonic Ideas or eternal archetypes; 4) the intelligences or souls of the spheres; 5) the tenth and last of the intelligences. R. Abraham, speaking with some reluctance, claiming to be entering a “narrow strait” and a “secret of the Torah,” distinguishes the mediator in the visions of all other prophets from the mediator involved when Moses spoke “face to face” (Deuteronomy 5:4). Moses had an intermediary but that intermediary did not possess its own spirit or intellect like an angel does. The attempt to achieve greater precision on this issue did not press Jewish thinkers until the advent of scholasticism under the impact of Averroes. My assessment is that Maimonides felt that at the highest level all the above definitions view the same truth from different angles. (Abraham Maimonides, *Guide to Serving God*, p. 585, Feldheim, 2007. Against my view that there is mediation, see Seeskin, Kenneth, *Search for a Distant God*, pp. 26-30, Oxford, 2000.)

THE CREATED LIGHT REVISITED

Maimonides returns in our chapter to the subject of the “created light,” the *or ha-nivra*, which we wrote about briefly at Guide 1:5:

“...In fact, every application of the word (*malei*) to God must be interpreted in this manner (i.e., denoting attainment of the highest degree of excellency); and not that He has a body occupying space. If, on the other hand, you prefer to think that in this passage by ‘the Glory of the Lord,’ a certain light created for the purpose is to be understood, that such light is always termed ‘Glory,’ and that such light ‘filled the Tabernacle,’ we have no objection.”

His remark seems castoff or throwaway. We have seen this type of remark (1:5) and will see it again. He could be saying that it is not good to regard the Glory of the Lord as a “created light,” but that it’s not so corporeal as believing that God has a hand or an eye. But that is *not* his point.

Maimonides refers later (1:64) to the *or ha-nivra*, again defining it, not disparagingly, as the “Glory of the Lord.” In that chapter the “Glory” is taken as “the comprehension of His greatness,” which comprehension is the attainment of the active intellect. The classic source for the concept of the created light, well known to him (but unmentioned), is Talmud *Hagigah* 12a. The passage from *Hagigah* 12a is about the distinction between the light of the First Day and that of the Fourth Day:

“But was the light created on the first day? For, behold, it is written: ‘And God set them in the firmament of the heaven,’ (Genesis 1:17) and it is [further] written: ‘And there was evening and there was morning a fourth day,’ (1:19) — this is [to be explained] according to R. Eleazar. For R. Eleazar said: The light which the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, *one could see thereby from one end of the world to the other*; but as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, beheld the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion (after the Tower of Babel), and saw that their actions were corrupt, He arose and hid it from them, for it is said: ‘But from the wicked their light is withholden’ (Job 38:15). And for whom did he reserve it? For the righteous in the time to come.” (My ital.)

To be clear: no light seen by the eye lets you see the whole world, only the light of the mind does this. This is the light of wisdom.

R. Eleazar connects Wisdom to the Tabernacle (that which the light or glory fills) in Talmud *Berakhot* 33a. Maimonides does not mention this passage either, although it grounds the connection of the active intellect with the Glory upon a strong Talmudic base. Relevant footnotes from Soncino are in parentheses, my comments in braces:

“*Havdalah* in ‘That graciously grantest knowledge’ {This line is a quote from the Mishnah being commented upon here by the Talmud. *Havdalah* is a prayer demarcating the distinction between Sabbath and the rest of the week, said at the end of Sabbath as an insertion in the *wisdom* blessing of the evening prayer: ‘You graciously grant knowledge to man...dividing...the holy from the profane’ *mlamed le’enosha binah... v’tavdel...beyn kodesh l’khol.*} What is the reason? {for including *havdalah* in the wisdom blessing}— R. Joseph said: Because it is a kind of wisdom (*viz.*, discerning between holy and profane and between clean and unclean etc.) it was inserted in the benediction of wisdom. The Rabbis, however, say: Because the reference is to a weekday, therefore it was inserted in the weekday blessing. R. Ammi said: Great is knowledge, since it was placed at the beginning of the weekday blessings. R. Ammi also said: Great is knowledge since it was placed between two names (i.e., *two mentions of the Deity*), as it says, ‘For a God of knowledge is the Lord.’ (1 Samuel 2:3) And if one has not knowledge, it is forbidden to have mercy on him, as it says, For it is a people of no understanding, therefore He that made them will have no compassion upon them (Isaiah 27:11). R. Eleazar said: Great is the Sanctuary, since it has been placed between two names, as it says, ‘Thou hast made, O Lord, the sanctuary, O Lord’ (Exodus 15:7, lit. translation). R. Eleazar also said: Whenever there is in a man knowledge, it is as if the Sanctuary had

been built in his days; for knowledge is set between two names, and the Sanctuary is set between two names.”

To demystify this, the Talmud is employing a unique system of Jewish logic to show the exalted status of knowledge/wisdom.

First, the Talmud makes the point that *Havdalah* is like wisdom because both involve differentiation: *Havdalah* is the prayer that divides the Sabbath from the weekday; indeed, the word itself means to divide or differentiate; while *wisdom* is that which distinguishes between the holy and the profane. *Binah*, the word for understanding/wisdom, has a basic meaning of “distinguish” (from *beyn*, “between”).

Next, the exalted status (“great”) of knowledge/wisdom is expressed by the fact that in I Samuel 2:3 the word “knowledge” is placed between two instances of God’s names: “Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let [not] arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord [is] a God of knowledge (*k-l deot hashem* אֱלֹהֵי דַעוּת יְהוָה), and by him actions are weighed.” The phrase, *k-l deot hashem*, is literally “God knowledge God,” placing *knowledge* between two names of God.

Next we get a *gezerah shaveh*, a form of Talmudic logic in which two biblical phrases with the same word or words are taken as proof that the words mean the same in both instances. A similar phrase pattern is spoken of the *Sanctuary* (Tabernacle) at Exodus 5:17 and the Soncino helpfully provides a literal translation to reveal the pattern: “Thou hast made, O Lord, the Sanctuary, O Lord. (*hashem mikdash ad-noy* יְהוָה מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדָנָי). “Sanctuary” is between two names of God. The first instance of the verbal pattern in Samuel shows that *knowledge* is “great,” and therefore, applying the *gezerah shaveh* to the second instance, the *Sanctuary* is “great.” The real importance of this “greatness” appears in the final Talmudic moment:

“R. Eleazar also said: Whenever there is in a man *knowledge*, it is as if the Sanctuary had been built in his days; for *knowledge* is set between two names, and the Sanctuary is set between two names.”

Now this really would be important to Maimonides, because it is a direct Talmudic statement linking *knowledge* to the *Sanctuary*, and making the Maimonidean adept a Temple builder like Hiram or Bezalel, with clear implications of prophethood. The *filling* of the Sanctuary with *created light* means that it is filled with light unseen by the eyes, by which we mentally distinguish the “ends of the world.” We build the Tabernacle in ourselves now by this same light of knowledge.

PRIVATION

My reflections on Rebecca’s pitcher (Genesis 24:16, above) adopted the standpoint of the pitcher being *filled*. Yehuda Even-Shmuel considered the pitcher from its prior unfilled state. This led him to determine that privation was the theme of the chapter, particularly since Maimonides had only just introduced privation in 1:17. He is right insofar as Definition 1 is concerned, but the rest of the chapter concerns the fullness of time (Def. 2) and the fulfillment of intellectual/spiritual potential (Def. 3).

Privation is a stage in the process by which all material things undergo generation and corruption. “Particularized” privation always accompanies matter as one form succeeds another. Incorporeal God is not subject to privation. Even-Shmuel summarizes our chapter as follows (my trans., and my comment in parentheses):

“Just as God bears no relation to materiality, He has no relation to privation. To the Creator of privation there is no privation, neither generalized privation nor particularized privation. He is always ‘filled,’ *malei*, and complete to the ultimate completion of perfection. [Unlike matter] He does not advance

toward completion by the movement of successive forms that fill [a privation], since in God the whole is already actual, no aspect of Him being *in potentia*, just as He is not bounded by place, or connected to time (since to go from potential to actual requires time).”

Efros’ *Dictionary* (p.37) defines “generalized” privation as “nihil, absolute non-existence.” God is obviously not subject to this type of privation. Neither is God subject to particularized privation. He defines “particularized” privation as “privation of a particular form.” It is “relative non-being, i.e., that which is not yet but will be.” It is the privation of a particular form, which potentially in-forms matter. Privation, matter and form are principles, not substances, since they do not exist independently of each other. Privation is not a cause (*contra* Efros), because non-being, even “relative” non-being, causes nothing. Privation is integral to the Aristotelian *dunamis*, which is the capacity to be formed.

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