

## GUIDE 1:8 BLESSED IS THE LORD FROM HIS PLACE

Friedlander thinks that this chapter opens a new section of the Guide. He introduces the section in the following words:

“The next group of anthropomorphic expressions to be interpreted (chapters 1:8-1:27) consists of those which refer to space and motion. Having shown that the terms figure, likeness, etc., cannot be applied to God in their ordinary sense, Maimonides now proceeds to explain that the expressions which imply the idea of space in reference to God cannot be taken literally. It is possible that this order was suggested to our author by the passage, ‘And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord’ (Genesis 4:16); or, ‘And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him’ (Genesis 5:24); for these are the most striking instances of anthropomorphism in the beginning of Genesis after the phrase ‘in our form and likeness.’ Ibn Caspi, Efodi, and others are of opinion that this chapter is intended to explain the word ‘there’ in the passage “and there he put the man” (Genesis 2:8). The order of the chapters from 1:8 to 1:27 is as follows:—God occupies no space (*makom*); the throne (*kisei*), heavens (*shamayim*) which He is said to occupy, is not to be considered a material throne.—He does not ascend (*alah*), descend (*yarad*), sit (*yashav*), stand (*amad, kam, yatzav*) approach (*karov*), or fill a place (*malei*). He is not above a place (*ram*), does not pass by (*avar*), come in (*ba*), go out (*yatza*), return (*halakh*), walk (*halakh*) or rest (*shakhen*.” (Friedlander, note 3, *ad loc.* Leo Strauss more or less agrees with Friedlander, p. XI, Pines translation of the Guide)

I think that this chapter continues the train of thought from the prior chapter. While it is apparently about the anthropomorphic quality of the term *makom*, “place,” which “refers to space or motion” it is really about *intellectual progeny*, like 1:7. Our chapter continues to contrast those who are intellectual progeny, as Seth is the progeny of Adam, with those who are not intellectual progeny. I will show that Maimonides makes oblique implied reference to King Yehoram ben Yehoshafat of Judah for his paradigm of a son who is not intellectual progeny of his father.

The chapter also disentangles the term “place” from its inevitable spatial context, so that it can be used in prophetic discourse. Maimonides tells us that his lexicon is not a dictionary, for he has no interest in exhaustively defining terms. There are meanings he excludes, typically physical or anthropomorphic definitions. We must only use his definitions, and then only appropriately with the context. We should understand his wordbook as David Bakan does: the range of lexical meanings provides the prophetic unconscious a toolbox of transcendent images for revelation (*Maimonides on Prophecy*, Jason Aronson, 1991).

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

### **MAKOM (PLACE)**

1. General space and particular space. By this definition, Maimonides implicates the entire Aristotelian understanding of physical “place.” See essay below. He provides no proof-text for this definition
2. Level of attainment of perfection, especially regarding God. *Makom* “received a wider signification and denoted “position” or “degree” as regards the perfection of man in certain points.” To be in the *makom* of one’s ancestors means being their intellectual progeny.

#### Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“He filled his ancestors’ *place* (*m’malei makom avotav*).” (Talmud, *Horiot* 11b)

There is no instance given for Definition 1. Three out of five of the proof texts brought for Definition 2 of *makom* are not biblical or from prophetic sources. Two are Talmudic and one is Mishnaic. We must seek Maimonides

purpose for this departure from format. We can find it in his bland elision of the key word *yehoram*, that is, King Yehoram ben Yehoshafat of Judah, who is the subject of the Talmud's citation, "he filled his ancestor's place." The sentence from Talmud *Horiot* reads in full:

"But the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he [was] the firstborn,' (2 Chronicles 21:3) Jehoram worthily filled the place of his ancestors (*yehoram m'malei makom avotav*)."

The Talmud discusses here the very question of whether a firstborn son should precede one who is the real intellectual progeny of the father. There is a tradition embodied in the Talmud comment that Yehoram *began* his reign as a just king, worthily filling his father's role, though his worthiness did not last long. See essay below for the significance of Yehoram to Maimonides.

"He fills his ancestors' place (*makom*) in point of wisdom and piety (*v'hava m'malei makom avotav b'khokhma o b'yira*)."

 (Talmud *Ketuvot* 103b)

This quotation is also Talmudic. The context is the succession of R. Gamaliel to head the Academy when R. Yehudah, author of the Mishnah, died:

"On the day that Rabbi [Yehudah ha Nasi] died ...[he said] 'My son Simeon is wise.' What did he mean? [One would naturally expect the wise son rather than the other son, Gamaliel, to succeed his father as *Nasi*. Why then did Rabbi mention the wisdom of the one son as a reason for the appointment of the other?— It is this that he meant: Although my son Simeon is wise, my son Gamaliel shall be the *Nasi*... What was his [Simeon's] difficulty? Does not Scripture state, 'But the kingdom gave he to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn?' (2 Chronicles 21:3, again) — The other [Jehoram] was properly representing his ancestors [at least in the beginning] but R. Gamaliel was not properly representing his ancestors [His younger brother Simeon having been wiser]. Then why did Rabbi act in the manner he did? — Granted that he [Gamaliel] was not representing his ancestors in wisdom he was worthily representing them in his fear of sin" (*nahi d'eino m'malei makom avotav b'hokhma, b'yirat khet m'malei makom avotav hava*).

My argument for Yehoram as Maimonides' real interest is his central mention in both passages quoted. The biblical passage, 2 Chronicles 21:3, does not use the term *makom*. It therefore cannot be a proof text for the pejorative use of *makom* in descriptions of intellectual inheritance. Hence Maimonides' recourse to these two Talmud sentences which do use the word *makom*, but which also quote Chronicles 2:21:3. See essay below where I explain the significance of Yehoram.

"The dispute still remains in its place (*makom*)."

 (Mishnah *Mikvaot* 4:1)

Maimonides clips this phrase from a Mishnaic discussion of ritual bathhouses, concerning the circumstances in which one becomes non-kosher. Rabbis Shammai and Hillel take contrary positions on an obscure point. The author concludes with the confession that the argument has not been decided. The phrase "The dispute still remains in its place" is a common *termini technici* for an unresolved legal point. The purpose of Maimonides' quotation is perhaps to show that traditions, even or especially oral ones, become disputable over time, which is problematic for us as intellectual progeny of the tradition. This relates to Definition 4 in the last chapter, where *yeled* referred to the consequences of adopting bad opinion or doctrines.

"Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, [saying], Blessed [be] the glory of the Lord from his place (*mekomo*)."

 (Ezekiel 3:12)

The roar of the angels in Ezekiel's vision uses two terms from Maimonides' lexicon: "place" and "glory" (*kavod*). He defines the term "place" as in Definition 2: Blessed be His glory according to the exalted degree of his existence (*k'l'omar maalato v'romamut kvodo b'mtziut*). This degree of existence is beyond human comprehension. See essay below.

“And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a *place (makom)* by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock (*ha-tzur*). And it shall come to pass, while my glory (*kavod*) passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock (*ha-tzur*), and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by.” (Exodus 33:21-22)

God directs Moses to the cleft in the rock from which he will see His “back.” The passage mentions both *makom* and *kavod*, and introduces another lexical term, “rock,” *tzur*. It is necessary, according to Maimonides in this chapter, that we address each term mentioned in a prophetic verse by referring to the definitions in the Guide, choosing one appropriate to the context. See essay below addressing these terms.

### ARISTOTELIAN SPACE: GENERAL AND PARTICULAR PLACE

The first line of the chapter gives Definition 1 of *makom*. It means “general and particular space” (*shem zeh ikar ha-nakhto l'makom ha-prati v'ha-klali*). He also means to include the doctrine of “proper place.” This is an excellent example of Maimonides’ talent for compression. The doctrines digested here are set forth in several places in Aristotle’s *Physics* (see, e.g.: 4:2:209a 31-32, 4:4:211a 30-34, 212a 5-6, 212a 20).

The *particular place* of an object is its stationary border by which it is surrounded by other objects. Thus, the place of a river is the boundary of its running water. The surroundedness of objects means that none can be of infinite size. Supporting this doctrine is Aristotle’s contention that all space is filled, i.e., there is no vacuum.

All things have a *proper place*. This means that the four elements, which combine to make all things, generally array vertically: fire on top, air below, then water and then earth. When “violently” moved from its proper place by the prevailing motion of the outer spheres, an element must move *vertically* to return to its place.

The place of an object may also be conceived as its *general place* in the sense that it participates in larger space; as, for instance, I am on the earth, and the earth is in the air and so my “general” place is in the sphere of the air.

These ideas recur in Maimonides’ Introduction to Book Two, Propositions 1, 2, 6, 8, and elsewhere in the Guide. They are basic to his physics and cosmology. We will, at the beginning of Book Two, discuss Hasdai Crescas’ (c. 1340–1410/11) opposition to these ideas and the meaning of that opposition for the history of Western thought.

### THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

Maimonides says we must mine his definitions, in this book “or others” to derive the meaning of prophetic utterances. The “or others” in “these words are a key to this treatise (the Guide) or others” (*hineni omer dvarim elu maftakh l'maamar zei v'zulato*) seems to mean *any* source (*contra* Friedlander note 2, *ad loc.*, but in accord with Pines, p. 34). Maimonides grants a broad writ to look at the whole context of a verse shard given by and take each term in the verse according to *his* definitions, whichever is appropriate. He explains in chapter 1:10:

“We have already remarked that when we treat in this work of homonyms, we have not the intention to exhaust the meanings of a word (for this is not a philological treatise): we shall mention no other significations but those which bear on our subject.”

That is, his lexicon is not a dictionary. It does not exhaust the meaning of terms; moreover, it rejects or ignores certain common definitions, especially where they imply anthropomorphism. Maimonides finds ways to stress *his* concerns in these definitions. For example, we have seen and will continue to see sexual content in this terminology. The explanation for this semantic pattern is that he believes procreation the only metaphor for divine creation, bearing in mind the limit of metaphor.

We have called attention to David Bakan’s theory that the lexicon supplies tools for the subconscious imagination to articulate and comprehend prophetic revelation. He stresses that Maimonides rejects the common contextual meaning of key terms in prophecy. Maimonides’ lexical strategy is a “deliberate violation of context” because

“the role of context is to conceal deeper levels of meaning” (*Maimonides on Prophecy*, p. 25). The perplexity and heartache that Maimonides speaks of in the Guide Introduction results from interpreting visions and dreams in their external senses. “Apprehension of internal meanings provides relief” (*ibid.*, p. 6. Bakan argues, p. 86, perhaps doubtfully, that our lexical term *makom* could be interpreted against context as female genitalia, and, therefore, as receptive *matter*).

### THE GLORY OF THE LORD

The three lexical terms in the two biblical proof-texts, when those texts are taken as a whole and not as the verse shards Maimonides gives, are *makom*, *kavod*, and *tzur*, “place,” “glory,” and “rock.” He says that “place” (“Behold a *place* is with Me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock,” Exodus 33:21) is the “mountain which was pointed out to Moses for *seclusion* and for the *attainment of perfection*,” (*nosef al ha-makom ha-hityakhadut v’hasagat ha’shlemut*). The term that Friedlander translates as “seclusion,” is given by Kafih as *hityakhadut*; but in his note 14, Kafih says it could be *hitbodedut*, which is how Schwarz translates it. *Hitbodedut* is *meditation* in the full meaning that mystics give the term. This meditative “seclusion” brings Moses to the degree “attainment of perfection.” He thus becomes God’s true progeny. (Avraham ben Ha-Rambam, Maimonides’ son, wrote an impressive essay on *hitbodedut* in *Sefer ha-Maspik l’Ovdei Ha-Shem, Perek Hitbodedut*, p. 178-9, Publ. S. Sason, Jerusalem 1965.)

Maimonides explains the term “rock,” *tzur*, in Guide 1:16. He says that it means “cause,” which is also his explanation of *regel* (“foot,” see my chapter 1:5, above, and Guide 1:28). In Guide 1:16, he retranslates the last clause of Exodus 33:21, as follows:

“‘And thou shalt stand upon the Rock’ (Exodus 33:21), i.e., be firm and steadfast in the conviction that God is the *source* of all things, for this will lead you towards the knowledge of the Divine Being. We have shown (1:8, our chapter) that the words: ‘Behold, a place is with me’ (Exodus 33:21) contain the same idea.”

Putting the two versions together, we now read that “And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock” means something like: *meditate* on the *creativity* of God as the source of all things, and thereby come to know Him and attain perfection. This knowledge implies a meditation on and comprehension of the way God emanates form into matter.

We have still not addressed the role of “glory,” *kavod*. Guide 1:19 wonderfully brings the term *kavod* together with the term *malei*, “fill,” which is condign for us because the first two definitions of *makom* are about “filling” one’s ancestor’s place, using the same Hebrew term. Maimonides defined *malei* in Guide 1:19, in his third and most important definition, as “the attainment of the highest degree of excellency.” It is thus nearly identical with Definition 2 of *makom* above, and so the phrase “the whole earth is *full* (*melo*, from the root of *malei*) of His glory” (Isaiah 6:4) has the same meaning as “Blessed is the glory of the Lord from his place (*makom*).” Maimonides rewrites the former verse as “all the earth gives evidence of his perfection, i.e., leads to knowledge of it.” This definition points to the idea that the “glory” has something to do with God’s perfection.

In Guide 1:64 Maimonides defines “glory,” *kavod*, in three ways. The first definition and the one that interests him most is that the “glory” is a *created emanation* of God (see my treatment of 1:64 for an account of that seemingly contradictory formulation). This emanation is what he sometimes calls the “created light” (*or ha-nivra*) and sometimes the *Shekhina*. It is his understanding of the active intellect, that divine emanated intelligence which is our mediator with God. Definition 2 of “glory” is the way we “glorify” God through praise. It extends to include the way the earth and its creatures “praise” God in “the whole earth is full of His glory,” which he says means that a consideration of His creation leads to *knowledge* of it, i.e., to acquisition of the active intellect. Definition 3 of “glory” is that it is God’s essence. As H. A. Wolfson explains, there is an “old question as to whether the Biblical expression ‘the glory of the Lord’ refers to the essence of God or to something emanated from His essence.” Maimonides strictly warns us not to mix up these definitions, by which he means that we are

not to confuse God with his creatures or His “attributes.” The result is that “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place” can mean either:

- A) “Blessed is glory (essence) of the Lord from His (Glory’s) place (*mim’komo*),” (Def. 3 of *glory*), or,
- B) “Blessed is glory (emanation) of the Lord from His (God’s) place (*mim’komo*)” (Def. 1 of *glory*).

### **CRESCAS’ INTERPRETATION OF “THE GLORY OF THE LORD”**

Crescas, interpreting slightly differently (see my treatment of Crescas’ interpretation in Guide 1:64), wrote:

“...‘The whole earth is full of his glory, is an allusion to the element of impregnation (*yesod ha-ibur*), which is one of the elements of Glory (meaning, that glory is the emanation of form into matter). Of the same tenor is the conclusion of the verse, ‘Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place,’ that is to say, the ‘Blessedness’ and ‘Affluence’ (*ha-shefa* = emanation) ascribed to God is from His place, that is, to say, from God’s own essence and not from something outside Himself, and so the pronominal suffix, ‘His’ in ‘from His place’ (the final “o” in *mim’komo*) will refer to ‘glory.’ If, however, you prefer to consider ‘Glory’ as an emanation (*n’atzel*), the verse will be taken according to its more literal meaning, the pronominal suffix referring to God, the meaning of the verse thus being, the ‘Glory of God’ is ‘blessed’ and is poured forth (*u’mushfa*) in abundance ‘from the place of God,’ i.e., from His essence (*atzmuto*), inasmuch as it is an emanation (*n’atzel*).” (My parenthetical comments)

Wolfson interprets the passage as follows:

“(from note 93) In accordance with these interpretations of the term Glory, Maimonides interprets Isaiah 6:3 in two ways, one taking the term *kavod* to mean the essence of God and the other to mean an emanation (Guide 1:19). Now just as *kavod* has these two meanings so the *Sefirot*, which are identified by the Cabalists with *kavod*, have two meanings with reference to their relation to God. According to some Cabalists, the *Sefirot* are identical with God’s essence while according to others they are emanations of God’s essence. Abraham Shalom (d. 1557?) compares this cabalistic controversy to the philosophic controversy as to whether the Prime Mover is identical with God or is something emanated from Him. What Crescas is trying to do in this passage is to transfer Maimonides’ discussion of the term *kavod* as he understood it to the term *kavod* as it was understood by the Cabalists in the sense of the *Sefirot*. Assuming first that *kavod*, or the *Sefirot*, is identical with God, Crescas interprets the verse to mean as follows: ‘the *blessedness* (*barukh*) of the Glory of God (*kavod h’*),’ i.e., of the *Sefirot*, ‘from Glory’s place (*mim’komo*),’ i.e., from the essence of God, inasmuch as the Glory or the *Sefirot* are identical with God’s essence. He [Wolfson refers to his translation ‘the blessedness’] takes *barukh* not as a passive participle but as a substantive.

“(note 94) Referring now to the other Cabalistic view, that the *Sefirot* are intermediaries and tools of God, Crescas interprets the verse as follows: ‘*Blessed* is (*barukh*) the Glory of God (*kavod h’*),’ i.e., the *Sefirot*, ‘from His place (*mim’komo*),’ i.e., from God’s essence.”

(Crescas, quoted in H.A. Wolfson’s translation and commentary, with original text, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard, 1929, pp. 201, 202, 460-462.)

### **YEHORAM BEN YEHOSHAPHAT, KING OF JUDAH**

In the definition section, above, I suggested that there was something suspicious in Maimonides’ departure from his usual lexical format. Instead of giving proof-texts from the Bible, he provided three (out of five) from Rabbinic literature: the Talmud and the Mishnah. He brought the first two quotes from the Talmud to show that *makom* means “level of attainment.” The quotes use variants of the phrase “filling the place of one’s ancestors” to

demonstrate this. They connect strongly with the thrust of the last chapter, Guide 1:7, which contrasted Seth with the Adam's other children fathered after the expulsion, since only Seth *filled the place* of his ancestor as Adam's intellectual progeny. Both Talmud quotations are based on the same biblical passage, Chronicles 2:21:3 about one of the most striking cases of botched succession in the Bible, that of Yehoram to the throne of Yehoshaphat, King of Judah. The Chronicler generally praises Yehoshaphat, except for his marrying Yehoram off to the idolatrous daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel. Unfortunately, for Maimonides, the passage does not employ the term *makom*. Still, this story would have great significance for Maimonides:

“1. Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 2. And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these [were] the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3. And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he [was] the firstborn. 4. Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and [divers] also of the princes of Israel....6. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought [that which was] evil in the eyes of the Lord. 7. Howbeit the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons for ever....10. So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time [also] did Libnah revolt from under his hand; because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers. 11. Moreover, he [Jehoram] made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication (*va-yezzen*), and compelled Judah [thereto]. 12. And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13. But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring (*va-tazneh*), like to the whoredoms (*k'ha-znot*) of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, [which were] better than thyself: 14. Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: 15. And thou [shalt have] great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day. 16. Moreover, the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that [were] near the Ethiopians: 17. And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. 18. And, after all this, the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. 19. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. 20. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.”  
(Chronicles 2:21:1-20. The passage is not directly mentioned in the Guide. Maimonides invoked it in another context in Comm. on the Mishnah, *Kedoshim* 1:5)

A horrible and disgusting story! The King James Version is the best of the English translations because the others all insist on translating the variants of *zona* as “to go astray” (JPS 1917 translation) instead of whoring, their correct definition. The link with the Parable of the Married Harlot (*isha zona*) from Proverbs chapter 7 is obvious (See Introduction I above, section J). By marrying into idolatry, Yehoram not only failed the intellectual and moral succession of the Davidic line but also polluted the polity of the covenantal community. Worse, he murdered his brothers who were their father's true intellectual progeny: “better than thyself.” Elijah, who is *already dead* by the time of Yehoram, makes his unique appearance, by *sending a letter* to the king to persuade him to the right path. This particular appearance of Elijah inspired the tradition of his immortality. The great central line of Elijah's letter is Chronicles 21:13:

“But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring (*va-tazneh*), like to the whoredoms (*k'ha-znot*) of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, [which were] better than thyself.”

This verse nicely joins Maimonides' two main themes in this group of chapters, intellectual succession and the danger of materialism: the succession of Moses and Seth, against the devolution of Yehoram and the demon spawn of Adam.

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