

## Completing Creation

By: ASHER BENZION BUCHMAN

עשרה דברים נבראו בין השמשות--פי הארץ, פי הבאר, פי האתון,  
והקשת, והמן, והמטה, והשמיר, והכתב, והמכתב, והלוחות. ויש אומרים  
אף המזיקין, וקבורתו של משה, ואילו של אברהם. ויש אומרים אף צבת  
בצבת עשויה. (אבות ה:ו)

Ten things were created at dusk. The mouth of the earth; and the mouth of the well; and the mouth of the ass; and the rainbow and the manna; and the rod; and the shamir-worm and the writing; and that which was written, and the tablets. And some say, the spirits; and the sepulcher of Moses and the ram of Avaham our father. And some say, [the first] tongs to make tongs. (*Avos* 5:6)

### The Creation of Miracles

In his commentary on the above Mishnah, Rambam reiterates what he had explained in the eighth chapter of his introduction to *Avos*, that miracles do not defy the laws of nature and thus all were put into nature at creation:

They do not believe that G-d's will is renewed time after time, but at the very creation it was put into the nature of things to do all that that they will do, whether it be a constant performance which is nature, or only rare occurrences which is a miracle, and so they say it was put into the earth in the sixth day that it would split beneath Korach and his congregation. (*Perush HaMishnah Avos* 5:6)

The ten items listed in the Mishnah differ from all other wonders, only in that their creation was at dusk of the sixth day. All other miracles are a function of the matter from which they were

---

Asher Benzion Buchman is the author of *Encountering the Creator: Divine Providence and Prayer in the Works of Rambam* (Targum, 2004), and *Rambam and Redemption* (Targum, 2005).

created and were placed into that matter on the day they were created.

For example, on the second when the waters were divided, it was put into their nature that the *Yam Suf* would split for Moshe, and the *yarden* for Yehoshua... and so too all the other miracles, besides for these ten which were put into nature at dusk. (ibid.)

Elsewhere, Rambam supports this fundamental principle, that miracles were programmed into nature at Creation, with a midrash regarding the splitting of the *Yam Suf*:

R. Yochanan said, G-d made an agreement (תנאי) with the sea that it should divide before the Israelites: thus it is said, “And the sea returned to its strength (איתנו)<sup>1</sup> when the morning appeared” (*Shemos* xiv. 27). R. Yirmiyahu, son of Elazar, said: Not only with the sea, but with all that has been created in the six days of the beginning [was the agreement made]: this is referred to in the words, “I, even my hands have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded” (*Isa.* xlv. 12); i.e., I have commanded the sea to divide before Israel... the sun and moon to stand still before Yehoshua. (*MN* 2:29 from *Beresbis Rabbah* 5:5 and *Pirkei D’R Eliezer*).

Even Rabbenu Bachye, a commentator associated more with the mystical school of thought of Ramban, believed this Midrash was clear testimony to Rambam’s position and states it emphatically:

This midrash proves that all miracles and wonders that G-d did in all the generations through the prophets, were placed into the nature of the things created during the six days of creation... and thus when there is [an apparent] change of nature in the eyes of the observers, there is no change in the will of G-d as if to will something He had not willed earlier, for this had been His primeval will that nature should change at the appointed time in the eyes of the observers via the righteous of the generations. (*Shemos* 14:27)

---

<sup>1</sup> The midrash relates the word איתנו to תנאי.



miracles were put into nature at creation as G-d's will (רצון) is unchanging, and thus raises Rambam's and R. Bachye's question of why *Chazal* singled out the ten creations of dusk. He couples this query with a question that he notes had puzzled many before him. Rambam in the *Moreh* (2:43) writes:

We have already shown that the appearance or speech of an angel mentioned in Scripture took place in a vision or dream; it makes no difference whether this is expressly stated or not... That which happened to Bilaam on the way, and the speaking of the donkey, took place in a prophetic vision, since further on, in the same account, an angel of G-d is introduced as speaking to Bilaam.

How, asks Rema, could Rambam say that the donkey (אתון) was a dream character and yet justify its being listed among the ten items? He notes that while Ralbag follows Rambam in this opinion, many had felt that the Mishnah was ample reason to disprove this radical approach. He himself has the answer, which also answers the previous question concerning the uniqueness of these ten things:

These ten things are natural things like all things created, and had the "mouth of the donkey" been meant literally it would be something miraculous and not natural, and thus it is said to have been created at *bain hashmoshos*, which is in doubt (*safek*) as to whether it is part of the day or of the night of the seventh. For it is known that all which was created on the six days of creation was new and not part of nature, and from the seventh day and on the world proceeded in a natural course... and while these things seem miraculous they have a natural quality... thus the "mouth of the donkey" qualifies as natural since it was part of a vision, and so too the tablets and the writing and the written as he explains well. (*Moreh* 1:76) (*Toras HaOlah* 2:18)

According to Rema, these ten miraculous things are singled out to explain that in fact they were miraculous although they appear to be natural. He goes on to explain how the other items, such as the rainbow and the earthquake that swallowed the congregation of Korach, are natural phenomena or at least phenomena that seem natural. The crucial element of his revolutionary answer, which he states with little fanfare, is that *Chazal* were referring to the phe-

nomenon of Bilaam's dream when they spoke of the creation of the "mouth of the donkey" (פי האתון). Whereas Ralbag sees the Mishnah as contradicting Rambam's stance, that the donkey appeared in a vision and consequently opts to differ with the Mishnah, Rema realizes that the Mishnah must be consistent with Rambam's interpretation. In Rambam's commentary on the Mishnah he explains that "mouth of the donkey" refers to the donkey's speaking and expresses no difficulty with it, while taking great pains to describe the concept that the Mishnah puts forth. One could argue that in his later years when he wrote the *Moreh Nevuchim*, Rambam changed his attitude, but in fact Rambam apparently contradicts himself in the *Moreh* itself. In *Moreh* 2:6 he proves that even animals are affected by angels (מלאכים) from the story of Bilaam's donkey, and in 3:17 he proves that there is a Biblical prohibition against causing pain to animals (צער בעלי חיים דאורייתא) from the verse "Why have you smitten your donkey." Biblical allegory must be read at two levels, and both levels teach us laws and concepts. Of course it was a vision, but *Chazal* have identified what the donkey represents, and what it represents was created at dusk on the sixth day.

### Interpreters of Midrashim

Rambam divides the interpreters of midrashim into three categories.

The first group constitutes the majority of those whom I have met and whose works I have seen and heard about; they understand them literally and do not understand them at all, and all things that are impossible are considered by them to be necessary, and this is because of their lack of knowledge of the wisdoms and sciences... this group destroys the beauty of the Torah and darkens its light. The second group is also large who also take the words [of the Midrash] literally believing there is no other meaning intended and thus they mock and degrade them and consider strange that which is not strange, and make fun of the words of the *chachamim* considering themselves smarter than they... and they are dumber than the first group and greater fools... had they prepared themselves with the [study of] the wisdoms until they understood how one writes about G-dly matters and other abstract issues in a way that it

can be read both by the masses and the scholars<sup>4</sup> and had they understood anything of practical philosophy, they would understand if the *chachamim* were indeed wise, and could understand the meaning of their words. The third group is... very small, and they are those who have recognized how great the *chachamim* are and... realized that in their words there is the simple meaning and the secret meaning (סוד) and in all statements of impossibilities the intent is allegorical and metaphorical.” (*Perush HaMishnah*, Introduction to tenth chapter of *Sanhedrin*)

There is no question that Rema is in this third category. He struggles to find meaning to midrashim with the knowledge that their thought must be reconciled with the philosophical principles of Rambam. He saw *kabbala* as a language for expressing philosophical ideas, and his *Toras HaOla* integrates the philosophy of Rambam with the philosophical ideas expressed in the Zohar in a different, and even more abstract manner.

Rambam explains in his introduction to the *Moreh*, that he decided against writing a book explaining midrashim. “For I observed that by expounding these passages by means of allegorical and mystical terms, we do not explain anything, but merely substitute one thing for another of the same nature, whilst in explaining them fully our efforts would displease most people; and my sole object in planning to write those books was to make the contents of midrashim and the exoteric lessons of the prophecies intelligible to everybody.” To some degree Maharal set out to write this book that Rambam had intended to write,<sup>5</sup> and of course Maharal’s work is important and valuable. Being faced with the difficulty Rambam articulated, however, he too was forced to “substitute one thing for another of the same nature,” and the meanings often remain hidden. In works like *Toras Haolah*, *Tzror HaMor*, *Meiri*, *Rabbenu Bachye*, and sometimes in *Abarbanel* and *Akedas Yitzchok*, as well as in later works of a mystical nature such as *Kedushas Levi*, a clearer picture of *Chazal*’s intent is often presented.

---

<sup>4</sup> To each on their own level.

<sup>5</sup> See Rav Chaim Eisen’s essay “Maharal’s Be’er Ha-Golah and His Revolution in Aggaidc Scholarship,” *Hakirah* 4 pp. 137–195.

## The Creation of Creativity

In the *Tzror Hamor* (צֵרוֹר הַמּוֹר), Rav Avraham Saba elaborates further on the idea of future miracles lying within creation:

By saying which G-d had created ‘to do’ there is a hint of including all that exists in the world until the end of time, that appears new but really is not new... as if to say that G-d created on the sixth day all the things that will be done in the future and put into them the power to create, and this is what is referred to in the Mishnah in *Avos* as the ten things that were created at dusk... for these things are like fathers (אבות מלאכות) [of categories] of work that include all the other types of work that came into existence afterwards which are the extensions (תולדות)<sup>6</sup> of these things. Thus when the earth opened up it was nothing new, for it is a function of ‘the mouth of the earth’... and when one sees a work of a smith made up of [so] many fine figures that it would appear that a human could not have made it, this is a function of the ‘first tongs’... and so too ‘the writing and the written’ refers to when an author or *chochom*... composes new books, for in fact ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ for on the Sabbath eve this power was put into writing that it could emerge. (*Tzror Hamor*, *Breishis* Ch. 2)

The *Tzror HaMor* adds a dimension. First he broadens the concept of “mouth of the earth” to encompass all physical changes in nature, but then even more significantly he explains that the forces of human creativity were themselves part of this final creation. One of the objects that is in the supplementary list was the key in pointing to this interpretation—“the first tongs.” Any new artistic and physical work was implied by the first tongs, and similarly any great literary work was implied by “writing.” Rav Hai Gaon was a precursor to this line of thought in commenting on “writing and the written” (כתב ומכתב).

The ‘writing and the written’ refer to speech and writing, as in them mankind is distinguished from other living beings. In them G-d placed in the beginning the ability to express letters

---

<sup>6</sup> Lit., “children.” R. Avraham uses the language of אבות ותולדות as it is used to categorize the types of work on Shabbos.

and words to speak with so that all things can be understood; and so too He placed another power in him enabling writing of all these things with a pen so that later generations could understand these words, for without this the wisdom of the wise men would be lost upon their demise.<sup>7</sup>

The things created at dusk are not merely the ability for natural objects to depart from nature, but the ability for humans to change and to create change. Following this explanation we gain added insight into the explanation of the Rema with regard to the donkey. When we say Bilaam's dream was created, we are in fact saying that some element within the human psyche was created at dusk, that would enable change—or perhaps we should say progress—later on.

### Completing Creation

The Meiri, well-known as a rationalist, echoes the words of R. Bachye with regard to the medrash on the word אֵיתָנוּ indicating that G-d's will (רצון) did not change after Creation, and he emphasizes also that the subsequent miracles give evidence to the world's having been created (חדוש העולם) and refutes the claim that the world always existed (קדמות העולם). He then refers to Rambam's<sup>8</sup> distinction between these ten miraculous creations and the other miracles, which leads him to ask the question that R. Bachye had asked. What reason is there for these things to be singled out as coming last? He answers that they are of particular interest to man who was created last. These miracles will serve to convince man of reward and punishment and hence continue to change man.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, upon further analysis, and being the rationalist he is, he finds reason to question our fundamental premise. Some of the members of the list are not miraculous. Why are the rainbow and

---

<sup>7</sup> See the commentary on *Avos* of R. Yitzchok (quoted in *Torah Shelema*).

<sup>8</sup> Although surprisingly not quoting Rambam.

<sup>9</sup> ואפשר שפי הבאר ופי הארץ עיקר מציאותם להעניי ולגמול בני אדם שנבראו בששי וכן שאר הדברים וכונת המאמר לקבוע בלבבות אמונת גמול ועונש אפילו ע"י שינוי הטבעים באין התחדשות רצון התחדשות הבריאה שכן הונח מתחילה בטבעי הדברים לשנות את תפקידם ברצון האומר והגזור ומ"מ אף באחרים ראוי לומר כן

the *shamir* included?<sup>10</sup> He feels compelled to explain the Mishnah's intention differently from what has been assumed until now.

These things are the sustenance of the nation and the essence of success; some are beliefs and some are part of nature; and they are said to have been created at dusk, meaning that without them there would be no sustenance to our faith... which is the essence of perfection whose attainment is without doubt the purpose of Creation.<sup>11</sup>

According to this second explanation, these things make creation complete as their existence will enable the goal of Creation to be reached. Some represent beliefs that it is necessary for Israel to accept,<sup>12</sup> and others are functions within nature that make Israel's existence possible. There was no physical creation of these items; the midrash is merely teaching about their significance. In fact *bein hasmashos* refers not to the last moment of the creation process, but to the first moment of the world's existence. Israel, the purpose of creation, must have access to these things, to be able to prosper and accomplish its goals.

### Completing Man's Creation

Both explanations of Meiri are compelling. Logic dictates that these things be last because they are the completion of Creation as the second answer states. On the other hand, man is created last. Should not these creations be related to man as proposed in the first answer? On the one hand, most of the elements are miraculous, and thus the first answer seems correct, that these are the miracles put into nature comparable to what the midrash clearly speaks of else-

---

<sup>10</sup> He questions others on the extended list as well and does further acute analysis that is not fully recorded here.

<sup>11</sup> הזכיר כאן הדברים שהם היו קיום האומה ותכלית ההצלחה קצתם מצד האמונה וקצתם מצד הטבע ומתוך כך ייחס בהם שהם נבראו בין השמשות כלומר שאומר דרך הפלגה שאלולא הדברים לא היה קיום לזאת האמונה שבה וכדומה לה תכלית השלימות שהוא בלי ספק תכלית כוונת זה המציאות ונמצאו אלו הדברים שהעמידו כוונת הבריאה על מכונה וענין בין השמשות הוא כלומר שתיכף לבריאה התחייבו מצד הקבלה להאמין כן והזכיר פתיחת פי הארץ להאמין [בדת] בעונש הרעים ופי הבאר להאמין בגמול הטובים שהן פנות גדולות (בד"ת) [בדת]

<sup>12</sup> Indeed these are the necessary beliefs that Rambam speaks of in *Moreh Nevuchim*.

where. On the other hand there are some exceptions, so perhaps it is not the miraculous nature that is important, but what these things represent that is important. There is overlap in these answers with the understanding of *tzror hamor* and R. Hai Gaon, in that they also stated that not all the elements are miraculous, but some are rather qualities that complete man and in several cases are related to man's creativity. Meiri adds to this list, man's "evil inclination" (יצר הרע) which he identifies with the "demons" (מזיקין) of the Mishnah.<sup>13</sup>

Meiri makes one final comment, which opens up a path of analysis for integrating his two explanations as well as those of *Tzror Hamor* and the Rema. He refers to a gemara in *Pesachim* that adds to our list "the cave that Moshe and Eliyahu stood in" and interprets it as referring to prophecy, since these two men "were the elite of the prophets... and there is no doubt that the sustenance of the religion and its continued success is contingent on prophecy." As we have noted previously, the Rema had explained that when Rambam teaches us that the donkey was created at dusk, he refers to a quality within man. Explanations for the "tongs" and the "writing" also refers to qualities within man—especially in *Tzror Hamor's* emphasis on human creativity. But while these commentators feel that certain of the ten things refer to man's abilities, what is unique about Rambam and his explanation of the "donkey" is the revelation that even those things that would appear to apply to creations in nature are in fact referring to creations within the human psyche. All ten items are aspects of human development.

Proper textual and midrashic analysis confirms the first explanation of Meiri that all ten things are related to the creation of man. Man was created last as he is the goal of earth's creation,<sup>14</sup> thus those things created *bein hashmoshos* must be elements within man that perfected him. Other midrashim detail how every hour of the sixth day marked a different level of man's development.

In the first hour, his dust was collected into a mound, in the second his *tzurah* was created, in the third he was given a physical form, in the fourth his limbs were tied together, in the

---

<sup>13</sup> See the final footnote.

<sup>14</sup> See *hakdamah* to *Perush HaMishnah*.

fifth the openings were made functional, in the sixth the soul was given, in the seventh he stood on his feet, in the eighth he was paired with *Chava*, in the ninth he entered *Gan Eden*, in the tenth he was commanded, in the eleventh he soured, in the twelfth he was driven out and left. (*Avos D'Rav Nosson*, ch. 1)

This midrash teaches that the Torah's depiction of man's creation and his fall are all part of an allegorical portrayal of the human psyche's natural development—ending with man's distancing from *Gan Eden*. The Mishnah of *bein hashmoshos*, however, explains that what was given to man by G-d would allow him to overcome his failings and return to Eden.

Meiri sensed, in his first answer, that the ten things had to be related to man, but was not willing to say that they were elements within man himself—but rather miracles put into nature that would influence man, so as to perfect him. But Rema has shown us that Rambam's profound grasp of Biblical metaphor and midrashic interpretation deciphered the totality of this midrash. Rambam's general philosophy, in fact, promotes the concept that “miracles” put into nature are in fact placed into the human psyche. Divine Providence<sup>15</sup> is on humans and commensurate to the level of perfection the individual has reached. As Meiri explains in his second interpretation, these ten things are necessary concepts rather than miracles. On the other hand, that which enables man to rise above his earthly essence and transcend to the heavenly sphere are the final miraculous creations of *bein hashmoshos*. As Rema explained, placing these elements at *bein hashmoshos* defines them as the supernatural elements of natural phenomena.

### Creating the *Mikdash*

The concept of undoing man's exile from G-d that began with his banishment from Eden, is embodied in the building of the *Mikdash*—“Make for me a *mikdash* that I may dwell amongst them.”

---

<sup>15</sup> See *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:17-18.

The Messiah will build the mikdash and gather the exiles and enable us to do G-d's service as it had been intended.<sup>16</sup>

Our Mishnah is the last of a set of *mishnayos* that lists “tens.” The first Mishnah of the chapter (Avos 5:1) speaks of the ten statements that constituted Creation, and thus our Mishnah's listing of the ten last elements in Creation is a fitting ending to the set. The Mishnah that directly precedes it lists the ten miracles that occurred in the *Bais HaMikdash*—thus a literary link and hint to the nature of our Mishnah exists. A cursory look at the ten objects reveals the link to *Mikdash* as well. The last 3 objects, according to the most standard explanation, which is Rambam's as well, refers to the *Luchos Habris* and the writing on them. This is the object placed at the heart of the Mikdash. The *manna* (מן) and the staff (מטה) were also placed there. The *shamir* (שמיר) was the creature necessary for building the Mikdash. Thus, without any in-depth analysis, we realize that six of the ten objects are central elements of the *mikdash*, with the very last being the most central. Thus it makes sense to assume that if we can ascertain the allegorical significance of all ten things, we will be able to discern in the Mishnah a pattern of ascending concepts that enable man's growth so that he can build the *Mikdash*.<sup>17</sup> We should note before we proceed further, that Rambam departed from the rationalists who quickly grasped upon the interpretations of “the writing and the written” as the ability to formulate abstract ideas, for he sees the Mishnah as an analysis of allegorical Torah messages. The Mishnah is commenting primarily not on the human psyche but on the teachings of the Torah texts.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> א המלך המשיח עתיד לעמוד, ולהחזיר מלכות בית דויד ליושנה הממשלה הראשונה, ובונה מקדש, ומקבץ נדחי ישראל. וחוזרין כל המשפטים בימיו, כשהיו מקודם: מקריבין קרבנות, ועושין שמיטין ויובלות ככל מצותן האמורה בתורה. (הל' מלכים יא:א)

<sup>17</sup> Abarbanel explains כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעריו refers to the growth of the world just like that of the growth of an individual, and these steps perhaps reflect this chronological process.

<sup>18</sup> Thus the writing on the tablets is what is being referred to. In the case of the שמיר, the Torah text never speaks of it explicitly, nevertheless its message is found in the Torah, as we will explain.

## The Earth and its Mouths

The concepts of *chomer v'tzurah* (חומר וצורה), representing man's physical and spiritual aspects, are used by the early philosophers and *Chazal* when speaking of abstract ideas that merge philosophy and psychology.<sup>19</sup>

Know that the *nefesh* of man is one, with many functions... and know that this singular *nefesh* of which we have described its forces or parts, is like *chomer*, and the intellect is its *tzurah*, and should it not acquire a *tzurah*, then its preparation for this *tzurah* would be for naught as if it were itself naught, and this is the meaning of 'For without knowledge the *nefesh* is not good' (*Mishlei* 19:2). (*Shemonah Perakim*, Ch. 1)

The *chomer* includes not only the physical body but also the emotions and even the imagination (כח המדמה), whereas the *tzurah* is the intellect.<sup>20</sup> In the *Moreh* (2:6), Rambam explains that this *chomer* is subject to the influence of "angels":

**Even the movements of the brute creation without the power of speech, are sometimes due to the action of an angel, when such movements serve the purpose of the Creator, who endowed it with the power of performing that movement; e.g., "G-d hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me" (Dan. vi. 22). Another instance may be seen in the movements of Balaam's donkey, described as caused by an angel... [the term angels] is also used for ideals, perceived by prophets in prophetic visions, and of man's animal powers, as will be explained in another place. When we assert that Scripture teaches that G-d rules this world through angels, we mean such angels as are identical with the Intelligences. (*Moreh* 2:6)**

Thus, the "mouth of the donkey" is the ability of the *chomer* to interact with the angel of G-d (מלאך ה'). Within the *chomer* was placed the drive to elevate itself and seek sanctity, and this is the meaning of פני האתון. Normally a donkey is referred to in the Torah

---

<sup>19</sup> See *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:17.

<sup>20</sup> See first *perek* of *Shemona Perakim*.

as *חמור*, and this serves an allegorical purpose. Avraham “saddled his donkey” *ויהבש את חמרו*—when he began his mission of sacrificing Yitzchok. The donkey represents the *chomer* which he is subduing. Here the change of the word to *אתון* is to demonstrate another characteristic of the physical essence of man that was placed within it in *Bein HaShmoshos*. Onkelos translates *בני אתנו* in the poetic blessing of Yaakov to Yehuda (*Beresbis* 49:11) as *יבני היכלי* “will build the Mikdash.” The term *אתא* means “to come” and denotes the drive within the physical to enter the sanctuary. It is this drive that diverted Bilaam from the road he was on, that caused him to bless rather than curse, to say “Let my *nefesh* die the death of the righteous and let my end be as them (Israel)” — *תמת נפשי מות ישרים ותהי* — *אהריתי כמהו*.

The Mishnah’s first three steps in establishing the Mikdash are all defined as *פי* “mouths” i.e. “openings” or “pathways,” and each shows a facet of the *chomer* with which it interacts with the Divine. The “mouth of the earth,” *פי הארץ*, is an obvious allusion to the *chomer* of man. As Meiri points out, the concept of punishment is implied by the mouth of the earth. The gemara associates it with a pathway to hell, *גיהנום*.

‘If G-d will create a creation.’ (*Bemidbar* 16) ‘A creation’ refers to hell, [meaning] if the creation of hell exists, then it is good, but if not then G-d should create it. Is this possible (that hell needed to be created)? We learned (in a *beraisa*) that seven things were created before the world was created... Torah, Repentance, *Gan Eden*, and hell... but this is the meaning, ‘if the mouth of hell is not near, bring it close.’ (*Nedarim* 39b)

Whereas the ultimate punishment for sin is *גיהנום*, which Rambam tells us means to not merit eternal life after earthly death, the pain and suffering that one brings to himself with his immersion in physicality is the concept of hell during life, *חיים שאלה*. It was the congregation of *Dasan* and *Aviram* who bemoaned the lack of the “milk and honey” and the lost bounty of Egypt who were swallowed up by the earth, *ארץ*. The immersion in the physical brings

its own destruction naturally and costs man even this world. This is “the mouth of the earth,” פי הארץ.<sup>21</sup>

This class of evils originates in man’s vices, such as excessive desire for eating, drinking, and love; indulgence in these things in undue measure, or in improper manner; or partaking of bad food. This course brings diseases and afflictions upon body and soul alike. The sufferings of the body in consequence of these evils are well known; those of the soul are twofold: First, such evils of the soul as are the necessary consequence of changes in the body, insofar as the soul is a force residing in the body; it has therefore been said that the properties of the soul depend on the condition of the body. Secondly, the soul, when accustomed to superfluous things, acquires a strong habit of desiring things which are necessary neither for the preservation of the individual nor for that of the species. This desire is without a limit, whilst things which are necessary are few in number and restricted within certain limits; but what is superfluous is without end. (*Moreh* 3:12)

Israel’s recognition of this phenomenon steers them towards sanctity, קדושה, and away from the tent of *Dasan V’Aviram*. The Torah explains the impact on Israel when the earth swallowed up that congregation.

And all of Israel that surrounded them fled at the sound for they said, perhaps the earth would swallow them up.

Rambam tells us that the “mouth of the well,” פי הבאר, was unique in “that it brought forth water” (שהוציא המים). Meiri says that it refers to G-d’s reward. Just as improper conduct by the *cho-mer* leads to man’s destruction, proper conduct sustains it. This is the meaning of “the mouth of the well.”

If you worship G-d with joy, and follow His path—he will grant you these blessings and distance the curses, so that you

---

<sup>21</sup> ואם עזבתם את ה' ושגיתם במאכל ומשקה וזנות ודומה להם--מביא עליכם כל הקללות האלו לב פנוי ולא גוף שלם. ומסיר כל הברכות, עד שייכלו ימיכם בבהלה ופחד, ולא יהיה לכם לעשות המצוות, כדי שתאבדו מהי העולם הבא. ונמצא שאיבודתם שני עולמות: שבזמן שאדם טרוד בעולם הזה בחולי ובמלחמה ורעבון, אינו מתעסק לא בחכמה ולא במצוה שבהן זוכין להי העולם הבא (תשובה ט:א)

will be free to grow wiser in Torah and immerse in it, so that you will merit the World to Come, and have the good of the world that is entirely good... and thus you will merit two worlds, life in this world which leads to life in the World to Come, for if you do not acquire wisdom and good deeds here, you will have nothing with which to merit. (*Hilchos Teshuva* 9:1)

This realization that physical rewards accrue from following the Torah's guidelines is the lesson of the well, and at its deepest level this is the understanding of the value of the mitzvos and how they bring G-d's providence, His *hashgacha* (השגחה).

'Speak to the rock'—When a child is young, his Rebbe hits and teaches him. Once he has grown, he is disciplined with speech. So too G-d told Moshe that when the rock was young you hit it as it says 'and hit the rock,' but now speak to it, teach a chapter upon it and the rock will bring forth water. (Midrash)

The *chomer* of Israel was to be molded during the forty years in the desert. First they recognized G-d's presence only by His might which they feared and this was represented by the earth's stone (סלע) that had to be hit. After forty years they were meant to recognize that serving G-d with joy will sustain them and the rock of their *chomer* was to be moved by speech and understanding. At that point they would attain to G-d's *hashgacha* which<sup>22</sup> would guide even their mundane decisions and sustain their existence. "Behold I stand before you on the rock." G-d Himself stands in front of Moshe on this rock.<sup>23</sup> This act was to determine "Is G-d in our midst or not," i.e., they were to learn that the *shechina*, שכינה,<sup>24</sup> was within the *chomer* of the world, within their own being.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> See *Moreh* (1:15-16), where Rambam explains that while the צור is a rock on the simple level, part of the earth, on a metaphoric level it refers to the presence of הקב"ה (הצור תמים פעלו)

<sup>23</sup> שמשה לא היה יודע איזו צור הוא עד שאמר לו הקב"ה הסימן של אותו הצור שראה השכינה נראתה עליו, אז ידע כי הוא הצור (מדרש אגדה ת"ש 128 חקת)

<sup>24</sup> Which Rambam equates with השגחה.

<sup>25</sup> As Israel ends their journey they sing a song of this well.

טו ומשם, בארה: הוא הבאר, אשר אמר ה' למשה, אסף את-העם, ואתנה להם מים יז אז ישיר ישראל, את-השירה הזאת: עלי באר, ענו-לה. יח באר תפרוה שרים, ברוה נדיבי העם, במחקה, במשענותם; ומדבר, מתנה.

The *chomer* of man is so made that wrongdoing itself destroys it (פי הארץ), good sustains it (פי הבאר), and it yearns to elevate itself (פי האתון). As mankind realizes these truths about itself it begins its journey towards spirituality.

### A Covenant with G-d

יג את-קשתי, נתתי בענן; והיתה לאות ברית, ביני ובין הארץ. יד והיה, בענני ענן על-הארץ, ונראתה הקשת, בענן. טו וזכרתי את-בריתי, אשר ביני וביניכם, ובין כל-נפש חיה, בכל-בשר; ולא-יהיה עוד המים למבול, לשחת כל-בשר. טז והיתה הקשת, בענן; וראיתה, לזכר ברית עולם, בין אלהים, ובין כל-נפש חיה בכל-בשר אשר על-הארץ.

I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow is seen in the cloud, that I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between G-d and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

With regard to the rainbow, קשת, Ramban has already questioned the *mikra* itself for suggesting that it was created at the time of the flood, when the scientists explain that it is a fact of nature. It has a metaphorical meaning. It is the covenant (ברית) between the earth and G-d, between the earth within man, the *chomer*, and G-d. With the drive embodied in “the mouth of the donkey,” man has elevated his *chomer*, and we now speak of man as a joint product of the physical and spiritual. Physical man reaches a point at which he cannot be destroyed for he has become inextricably bound with the *tzura*, that which the Torah characterizes as “the spirit of G-d” (רוח) (אלקים ממעל). Ramban calls the midrashic statement of this idea a secret, סוד.

---

The midrash tells us that these שרים are the *Avos*, and the well is the one first dug by Avraham. The accomplishment of Avraham, to connect man with the שכינה, is finally celebrated by his children.

‘I have placed my *kesbes* קשת—קישותי [implies] that which has been compared<sup>26</sup> to me, is there any such thing? But rather the hard part of the fruit<sup>27</sup>... it was expounded otherwise, ‘when the *kesbes* is in the cloud, I will see it to remember the everlasting covenant between G-d and all living *nefesh*’; ‘between G-d’ is the attribute of justice above, and ‘all living *nefesh*,’ is the attribute of G-d below, the attribute of justice above is hard and that below is soft.

Man’s recognition of G-d comes from recognizing Him in the patterns of nature

How does one come to love... of G-d, when he contemplates His great and wondrous actions and creations, and sees from them His wisdom which is beyond evaluation and limit—immediately he feels love and praises... and has a great desire to know the Great Name. (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2)

When man recognizes G-d in nature, he develops a connection to the Divine, and this is what the *kesbes* represents. Rambam quotes the blessing Chazal required because of this *parsha* together with the blessing instituted when seeing the new moon.

He who sees the rainbow in a cloud, blesses ‘Blessed are you Hashem... who remembers the covenant, is trusted in His covenant, and is everlasting in His word.’ One who sees the moon renewing blesses ‘Blessed are you HaShem... who with His word created heavens, and by the breath of His mouth all their hosts, He gave them rules and times that they cannot change, they rejoice... to do the will of their possessor...’<sup>28</sup> And this blessing must be said standing, for all who bless the moon at its appointed time are as if they had greeted the face of the *shechina*. (*Hilchos Brachos* 11:16,17)

Seeing the rainbow reminds man that G-d gives rain to sustain life and yet limits it so that it will not destroy. This is a companion concept and an initial step in recognizing the wonder of all the hea-

---

<sup>26</sup> The word קשת is similar to היקש—meaning something comparable or linked.

<sup>27</sup> The word קשה means hard.

<sup>28</sup> A new halacha begins here.

venly bodies that Rambam refers to in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*. The moon was created earlier on the fourth day, and man would eventually turn to it and all the heavenly bodies for insight and inspiration—but the first step in this recognition and the more immediate link between the *chomer v'tzurah* was with the קשת.

### He Who Takes Less will Not be Wanting

Rav Saadiah Gaon expresses a novel idea with regard to the *manna*, מן. He feels that since food affects not only the physical but the spiritual essence of man<sup>29</sup> therefore it was necessary for them to maintain a diet of this very fine food “so that they would be able to acquire wisdom.”<sup>30</sup> This is apparently the intent of Chazal, in saying “The Torah could be given only to those eating the *man*.”<sup>31</sup> In Rambam’s elaboration on the quality of *histapkus*,<sup>32</sup> הסתפקות, he also relates it to the *manna*.

“He who lacks luxuries of life is missing nothing necessary, and he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack: they gathered every man according to his eating” (Exod. xvi. 18) (*Moreh* 3:12). The *manna* represents the mental state that fosters the quality of *histapkus*.

When the Torah speaks of *manna* it does not look at it from the perspective of what G-d has given Israel but rather calls it a trial, נסיון. “Remember the road which G-d led you upon for forty years

<sup>29</sup> As we noted with regard to הארץ.

<sup>30</sup> ואם יספיק לו המזון העב היבש, וינהיג עצמו בו ויעבה טבעו ויכער, תבטל זכות החכמה ודקותה, וכמ"ש (משלי כ"ה י"א) תפוחי זהב במשכיות כסף דבר דבור על אפניו. הלא תראה בני ישראל במדבר, זנם הבורא במזון דק רוצה לומר המן, כדי שילמדו החכמה, כמו שאמר (שמות ט"ז ד') ויצא העם ולקטו דבר יום ביומו למען אנסנו הילך בתורתך אם לא; (אמנות ודעות מאמר י')

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Rambam equates the inability to understand midrashim to those who could not appreciate the מן.

כי לא יתאים לך ממנו מאומה, ולא עוד אלא שיזיק לך ותשנאהו, כי איך יתאימו מיני המזון קלי הכמות ממוצעי האיכות לאדם שכבר הורגל למיני המזון הרעים והכבדים, הלא רק יזיקוהו וישנאם, הנך רואה דבר אותם שהורגלו באכילת הבצלים והשומים והדגים על המן מה הוא ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלל. (פירוש המשנה לרמב"ם מסכת סנהדרין פרק י')

<sup>32</sup> It is hard to translate this word. It is the quality of being content with the minimum that is really necessary of all worldly needs. Perhaps “abstemiousness” is the proper word.

in the desert, to cause you suffering and to test you, to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep his commands or not—He who fed you in the desert, in a way unknown to your fathers, to cause you suffering and to test you that it be to your benefit at the end.” The prophet Yirmiyahu many years later calls it Israel’s act of love. “I remember the kindness of your youth, your all-encompassing love—your following after me in the desert, in an unplanted land.” Rambam explains as follows:

Having shown that the term “to know” means “that all people may know,” we apply this interpretation to the following words said in reference to the *manna*: “To humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or not” (Deut. viii. 2). All nations shall know, it shall be published throughout the world, that those who devote themselves to the service of G-d are supported beyond their expectation. In the same sense it was said when the *manna* commenced to come down, “that I may test them whether they will walk in my law or not” (Exod. xvi. 4); i.e., let everyone who desires try and see whether it is useful and sufficient to devote himself to the service of G-d. It is, however, said a third time in reference to the *manna*: “Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might test thee, to do thee good at thy latter end” (Deut. viii. 16). This might induce us to think that G-d sometimes afflicts man for the purpose of increasing his reward. But in truth this is not the case. We may rather assume one of the two following explanations: either this passage expresses the same idea as is expressed in the first and second passages, viz., **to show [to all people] whether faith in G-d is sufficient to secure man’s maintenance and his relief from care and trouble**, or not. Or the Hebrew term *le-nassoteka* means “to accustom thee”;... The meaning of the above passage would then be: “G-d has first trained you in the hardships of the wilderness, in order to increase your welfare when you enter the land of Canaan.” **It is indeed a fact that the transition from trouble to ease gives more pleasure than continual ease. It is also known that the Israelites would not have been able to conquer the land and fight with its inhabitants, if they had not previously undergone the trouble and hardship of the wilderness. Scripture says in**

reference to this: “For G-d said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt. But G-d led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea; and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt” (Exod. xiii. 17, 18). **Ease destroys bravery, whilst trouble and care for food create strength; and this was [also for the Israelites] the good that ultimately came out of their wanderings in the wilderness.** (*Moreh* 3:24)

Perhaps this concept is best expressed in *Mishneh Torah*.

Not only the tribe of Levi, but any man in the entire world whose spirit bequeaths itself and whose mind directs itself to separate and stand before G-d to serve Him and worship Him that he may know G-d, and go straight as G-d made him, and unburdens his neck from the yoke of many calculations that men seek out, becomes sanctified as the holy of holies (קדש) (קדשים, and G-d will be his portion and inheritance forever, and he will be granted in this world that which is necessary for him (דבר המספיק לו) just as He granted the priests and Levites. (*Hilchos Shemitta* 13:13)

Some interpret this passage as faith and indeed it is related to it, but it is in fact more complex, as it is joined with the quality that underlies *histapkus*.<sup>33</sup> מן represents the ability of the human spirit to endure hardship because of its faith—for the values of the spirit to rise above the needs of the flesh. Thus the מן was placed near the ארון as an exhortation to Israel, to strengthen themselves that they may enter the holy of holies, קדש קדשים.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> As Radvaz notes, דבר המספיק לו is the key.

<sup>34</sup> לב ויאמר משה, זה הדבר אשר צוה יהוה--מלא העמר ממנו, למשמרת לדתיתכם: למען יראו את-הלחם, אשר האכלתי אתכם במדבר, בהוציא אתכם, מארץ מצרים. לג ויאמר משה אל-אֱהֲרֹן, קח צנצנת אחת, ותז-שמה מלא-העמר, מן; והנח אתו לפני יהוה, למשמרת לדתיתכם. לד כֹּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה; וַיִּנְיַחְהוּ אֶהֱרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדֻת, לַמִּשְׁמֶרֶת.

## A Solitary Man and a Staff

The history of the *mateh* of Moshe is discussed in *Pirkei D'Eliezer*:

R. Levi says, the staff (מטה) which was created at dusk was handed to Adam HaRishon from Gan Eden and Adam handed it to Chanoch and Chanoch handed it to Noach and Noach to Shem and Shem handed it to Avraham and Avraham to Yitzchok, Yitzchok to Yaakov and Yaakov took it down to Mitzrayim and handed it to Yosef his son. When Yosef died and they looted his house it was given to the palace of Pharaoh. And Yisro, one of the magicians of Mitzrayim, saw the *mateh* and the signs (אותות) written on it and desired it in his heart and took it and planted it in the garden of his house and none could draw near to it again. When Moshe came to his house, he entered the garden and saw the *mateh* and read the signs which were on it. He pulled out his hand and took it. Yisro saw Moshe and said he will redeem Israel from Mitzrayim. He therefore gave him Tziporah, his daughter, as a wife. (*Pirkei D'R Eliezer* (39))

Some midrashim say the symbols ע"ש באח"ב of the ten plagues were written on the *mateh*, while other midrashim say it was the name of G-d (שם הוי"ה). Rambam in the *Moreh* (2:38) explains what this *mateh* represents.

Every man possesses a certain amount of courage, otherwise he would not stir to remove anything that might injure him. This psychical force seems to me analogous to the physical force of repulsion. Energy varies like all other forces, being great in one case and small in another. There are, therefore, people who attack a lion, whilst others run away at the sight of a mouse. One attacks a whole army and fights, another is frightened and terrified by the threat of a woman. This courage requires that there be in a man's constitution a certain disposition for it. If man, in accordance with a certain view, employs it more frequently, it develops and increases, but, on the other hand, if it is employed, in accordance with the opposite view, more rarely, it will diminish. From our own youth we remember that there are different degrees of energy among boys.

The same is the case with the intuitive faculty; all possess it, but in different degrees. Man's intuitive power is especially

strong in things which he has well comprehended, and in which his mind is much engaged. Thus you may yourself guess correctly that a certain person said or did a certain thing in a certain matter. Some persons are so strong and sound in their imagination and intuitive faculty that, when they assume a thing to be in existence, the reality either entirely or partly confirms their assumption. Although the causes of this assumption are numerous, and include many preceding, succeeding, and present circumstances, by means of the intuitive faculty the intellect can pass over all these causes, and draw inferences from them very quickly, almost instantaneously. This same faculty enables some persons to foretell important coming events. The prophets must have had these two forces, courage and intuition, highly developed, and these were still more strengthened when they were under the influence of the Active Intellect. Their courage was so great that **a solitary man with only a staff** in his hand, dared to address a great king in his desire to deliver a nation from his service. He was not frightened or terrified, because he had been told, "I will be with thee." (Exod. iii. 12) (*Moreh* 3:28)

The ability for man to transcend himself and do unfathomable acts of courage and accomplish miracles is symbolized by the *mateh* of Moshe.<sup>35</sup> The rod of Aharon (מקל של אהרן) was that very same staff according to some midrashim, while according to others the staff was sliced into 12 with one part being given to the heads of each tribe.<sup>36</sup> Only that which was given to Aharon of the tribe of Levi blossomed, and was placed near the ark (ארון) that Israel might learn what qualities were needed to enter the קדש קדשים.<sup>37</sup>

This enormous power is given only to G-d's chosen, those who possess "the spirit of G-d,"<sup>38</sup> רוח ה', that comes from reaching the stage of "G-d is with you."

<sup>35</sup> A staff is used for support, to strike with and extends the reach of he who hold it.

<sup>36</sup> In the gemara *Pesachim* the מקל של אהרן is what is listed, not our term מטת.

<sup>37</sup> ויאמר יהוה אל-משה, השב את-מטה אהרן לפני העדות, למשמרת לאות, לבני-מרי; ותכל תלונתם מעלי, ולא ימתו. בו ויעש, משה: פאשר צוה יהוה אתו, פן עשה.

<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere in the *Moreh*, Rambam refers to this explicitly as רוח ה', the first level of prophecy.

### If Your Sword Shall Wave upon it You Will Have Profaned It

כא ואם-מזבח אבנים תעשה-לי, לא-תבנה אתהן גזית: כי חרבך  
הנפת עליה, ותחללה

Should you build me an altar of stones, do not build it of cut stones, for if you wave your sword upon it, you will have profaned it.

Chazal explain that because the sword is a weapon of violence it could not be used in building the altar. While it was not practical to disallow cutting stone for the entire Bais HaMikdash, this principle was the source for requiring all iron cutting of stones to be outside the confines of the Mikdash. The building of the Mikdash had to be pure of the instinct for violence.<sup>39</sup>

The building of the Bais Hamikdash could not be by Dovid, because “your hands are full of blood,” which Rambam interprets to refer to a quality of cruelty (אכזריות)<sup>40</sup>. The ability that is central to building the Bais Hamikdash was possessed by the king of peace, שלמה – המלך שהשלום,<sup>41</sup> “Shlomo—the king to whom peace belongs,” and is embodied in the *shamir*, שמיר. Thus *Chazal* say that it vanished with the destruction of the *Bais HaMidkash*.<sup>42</sup>

The שמיר represents a power stronger than the forbidden iron sword—the power within man to substitute wisdom for force, to harness nature in order to build. Nature itself provides an animal

<sup>39</sup> כשבונין ההיכל והעזרה, בונין באבנים גדולות; ואם לא מצאו אבנים, בונין בלבינים. ואין מפצלין את אבני הבניין בהר הבית--אלא מפצלין אותן ומסתתין אותן מבחוץ, ואחר כך מכניסין אותן לבניין: שנאמר "אבנים גדולות אבנים יקרות, לייסד הבית--אבני גזית" (מלכים א ה, לא), ואומר "ומקבות והגרזן כל כלי ברזל, לא נשמע בבית בהיבנותו" (מלכים א ז, ז).

<sup>40</sup> *Shemonah Perakim*.

<sup>41</sup> referring to Hashem, with Shlomo being the king who embodied this identity of G-d.

<sup>42</sup> טו, א משחרב בית המקדש בטל שמיר ונפת צופים אמר ר' יהודה מה טיבו של שמיר זה [בריה היתה מששת ימי בראשית משנותנים אותו על גבי אבנים על גבי קורות מתפתחות לפניו כלוחי פנקס ולא עוד אלא כשנותנין אותו ע"ג ברזל הוא בוקע ויורד מלפניו ואין כל דבר יכול לעמוד בו כיצד עושין לו כורכין אותו במוכין של צמר ונותנים אותו לתוך מני של עופרת מלא סובין של שעורין ובו בנה שלמה את בית המקדש שנא' (מלכים א ו) ומקבות והגרזן כל כלי ברזל וגו' דברי ר' יהודה ר' נחמיה אומר מגוררת במגרה היה מבחוץ שנאמר (מלכים א ז) כל אלה אבנים יקרות כמדות גזית מגררות במגרה מבית ומחוץ מה ת"ל מבית ומחוץ בבית לא היו נשמעין אלא מתקנין אותו ומכניסין אותו לפנים] אמר ר' נראין דברי ר' יהודה באבני מקדש ודברי ר' נחמיה באבני ביתו ( תוספתא סוטה טו: א)

that is stronger than iron. Shlomo asked G-d only for wisdom. Judaism sees existence not as a struggle, not of man against nature, nor man against man, but as mankind at peace with itself and in harmony with nature.

### The Making of Moshe Rabbenu

Rambam did not interpret “the writing and the written” *כתב ומכתב* in the rationalistic way of R. Hai Gaon and Meiri—referring to the ability to form speech and writing—for these last elements are the culmination of the creation of man. As with all the other steps, they refer here to concepts described explicitly in the Biblical Narrative.<sup>43</sup> Just as the first three creations of *Bein HaShmashos* are a single group of ideas, the final three are a similar grouping. The first group are the creations that perfect the *chomer* while the final group perfect the *tzura*.

The *kesav* is the Torah that is written before He the Exalted, and we do not know how (ולא נדע איך), as it says “and I gave you the *luchos* of stone, and the Torah and the commandment that I have written (אשר כתבתי) to teach them.” And the *michtav* is the writing on the *luchos* as it says, “and the *michtav* is the *michtav* of G-d.” (*Perush HaMishnah*, *ibid.*)

The ability of Moshe to perceive the word of G-d clearly “as it is written before Him” is the *כתב* and corresponds to the 7<sup>th</sup> *ikkar* of Rambam’s 13 *ikkarim*, the unique prophecy of *Moshe Rabbenu*. The *מכתב* is the ability of Moshe to express it, and corresponds to the 8<sup>th</sup> *ikkar*.<sup>44</sup>

That we believe that this entire Torah was given through Moshe Rabbenu, that it is completely from the Almighty, meaning that it reached him completely from G-d, in a manner that we refer to metaphorically as ‘speech,’ and we do not know how it reached him, but it was to Moshe that it reached, and he was like a scribe, to whom one reads and he writes all

<sup>43</sup> Except for the שמיר which is nevertheless based on the *mikra* and described by *Chazal*.

<sup>44</sup> Where we find the same phrase לא נדע איך that Rambam uses here for the *כתב*.

the events being recorded, the stories and the commandments, that is why he is called scribe, מחקק.

These qualities are within human potential but it was with Moshe that this potential was realized.<sup>45 46</sup>

וַיִּפֹּן וַיֵּרֵד מֹשֶׁה, מִן-הַהָר, וּשְׁנֵי לְחֹת הָעֵדוּת, בְּיָדוֹ: לְחֹת, פְּתָבִים מְשֻׁנֵּי עֵבְרִיָּהִם--מִזָּה וּמִזָּה, הֵם פְּתָבִים. טו וְהַלְחֹת--מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים, הַמָּה; וְהַמְּכֻתָּב, מְכֻתָּב אֱלֹהִים הוּא--הָרוּת, עַל-הַלְחֹת.

And Moshe turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets written on both sides, on this side and that they are written. And the *lu-chos* are the action of G-d, and that which is written is that which is written by G-d—carved on the *luchos*.

The “tablets of testimony,” לוחות העדות, are “the doing of G-d,” מעשה אלקים, for they are a part of nature, created in the last moment of the six days of creation. On the meaning of the לוחות Rambam gives no explanation, as the literal meaning is self-evident. Their symbolic meaning should also be self-evident, as they lie at the heart of the *mikdash*. The midrash<sup>47</sup> connects the לוחות from G-d to those in the heart of man. “Why did He give them *luchos*? To indicate to them that they must write the words of the Torah on the *luach* of their heart. As it says ‘Write them on the *luach* of your heart’” (*Midrash HaGadol*).

*Midrash Tanchuma* sees in them the call to emulate He who made them.

Every day a voice goes out from Mount Chorev and says, ‘Woe to the creations because of the disgrace of the Torah,’ for

<sup>45</sup> Thus the surprising phrase near the end of the first chapter in *Hilchos Avodah Zara* become clear:

ומאהבת ה' אותנו, ומשומרו את השבועה לאברהם אבינו, עשה משה רבנו ורבן של כל הנביאים, ושלחו.

<sup>46</sup> Rambam further clarifies the issue in the *Moreh* (1:66). He points us to the radical interpretation of Onkelos that G-d created what is called the אצבע of G-d's creation, from which to create the לוחות. Onkelos is saying that the quality that allowed the man called Moshe to write these *luchos* was a unique creation—referring to the כתב ומכתב rather than the *luchos* themselves, and it is this that Chazal tell us was created *Bain HaShmoshos*.

<sup>47</sup> *Midrash HaGadol* is a late midrash based on the teachings of Rambam.

anyone who is not perpetually [engaged] with the Torah is scorned before G-d for it says the 'luchos are the action of G-d,' in the manner of how a man<sup>48</sup> says to his friend, 'what is the work of that person?' [And the response is] 'pure silver.' So too the work of the King of kings is engaging in the Torah. (*Midrash Tanchuma (Warsa) Ki Sisa 16*)

The creation of mankind is complete when the human potential to emulate G-d is fulfilled. The creation of this potential to become מעשה אלקים—symbolized by the לוחות—was the final act of creation.

The perfection, in which man can truly glory, is attained by him when he has acquired—as far as this is possible for man—the knowledge of G-d, the knowledge of His Providence, and of the manner in which it influences His creatures in their production and continued existence. Having acquired this knowledge he will then be determined always to seek loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, and thus to imitate the ways of G-d. (*Moreh 3:54*)<sup>49</sup> ❧

<sup>48</sup> The person who is a silversmith is referred to by the product that he works with, 'pure silver.'

<sup>49</sup> We have dealt with only one of the four that others contend were created between השמשות—the צבת. We will leave it to the readers to contemplate what the others refer to, but one important note to be made is that the concept of מזיקין i.e. שדים, is, like all the others, not some magical force but a quality within man himself. The Meiri thinks it is the יצר הרע. Academics make much of the fact that Rambam does not believe in demons despite the Talmud's frequent reference to them. Of course Rambam does not mention them, because Chazal themselves did not believe in them. When they refer to them, they are referring to a function of the human psyche. Rambam (*Moreh 1:7*) refers to the midrash that says they were born to Adam during the first 130 years of his life when he was excommunicated by G-d—a form of evil created by man himself. According to one opinion in our Mishnah it is a destructive force G-d put into man. Like the donkey in Bilaam's dream, the demons are perceived by man as something external. Chazal understood, however, that the forces of destruction come from man himself.