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## MAIMONIDES ON THE LOVE OF GOD

by

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Immediately after the profession of divine unity in the *Shema*<sup>1</sup>, the Torah introduces us to one of the fundamental precepts of Judaism, namely, *ahavat Hashem*, the Love of God: ("thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy might"—Deut. 6:4). It is self-understood that so powerful and central a theme in religion in general, and especially in Judaism,<sup>2</sup> has engaged the attention and careful scrutiny of almost every Jewish thinker.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, we expect the subject to be treated by Maimonides, and our expectations are not disappointed. No serious consideration of any aspect of Jewish thought or philosophy can or may avoid considering the views of Maimonides.

Before proceeding to the more analytic interpretations of our key verse, all of which concern the nature of the Love of God, it is appropriate to mention a midrash that gives an entirely different "spin" to the commandment to "love the Lord thy God." The Sifrei takes the verb *ve'ahavta*, "and thou shalt love," in the causative sense:

Another explanation of, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6:4): *Cause* Him to be beloved by humans, even as your father Abraham did, as it is written, "(And Abram took Sarai his wife, and his brother's son Lot and all the substance that they had gathered) and the souls that they had gotten in Haran" (Gen. 12:5)<sup>3</sup>

In an old and well-known midrash, "the souls that they had gotten in Haran" is interpreted by the Sages as referring to the proselytes whom Abraham and

1. "All the Torah is included in the commandment to love God, because he who loves the King devotes all his thoughts to doing that which is good and right in His eyes"—*Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* (Venice ed., reprinted in Jerusalem, 1960), Pos. Com. 3, p. 96b.

2. The most comprehensive work on this subject is that of Georges Vajda, *L'amour de Dieu dans la théologie Juive du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1957).

3. Sifrei, Va-ethanan, piska 32, ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1969) 54.

Sarah had brought from paganism to monotheism.<sup>4</sup> Hence, to love God means so to act as to make Him beloved of others.

In a parallel text in the Talmud, this same theme is recorded elaborately:

Abaye cited a *baraita*: "'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God' (Deut. 6:4) means that because of you the Name of Heaven will become beloved." (This means) that if a person studies Scripture and Mishnah and attends on scholars of the Torah, and his business dealings are honest, and he speaks pleasantly with people (*'im ha-beriyot*)—what do people say about him? (They say:) "Happy is his father who taught him Torah; happy is his teacher who taught him Torah; woe to those who have not studied Torah. Have you seen so-and-so who studied Torah? How beautiful are his manners! How refined are his deeds!"<sup>5</sup>

The Sifrei and the Talmud see the Love of God as a functional and societal as well as a personal and affective commandment: We are to live and act so that others (whether Jews or non-Jews, believers or non-believers; note the use of *beriyot*, literally "creatures," and thus the word for human beings in general) turn to Him in love.

That we have here not only a charming homily but also an important principle is evident from the space that Maimonides devotes to it: he mentions the passage from Sifrei, and expands on it in his *Book of Commandments* (*Sefer ha-Mitzvot*), where it takes up fully one half of his description of the mitzvah of the Love of God. To love God, says Maimonides, is to be impelled to bring others to know Him and to love Him.<sup>6</sup> But while this provides us with an important and inspiring insight, it does not touch directly on the content of the precept of the Love of God.<sup>7</sup> It is to that to which we must now turn our attention.

The *locus classicus* of the Maimonidean views on *ahavat Hashem* is the passage in his immortal code, the *Mishneh Torah*:

← shouldn't Sefer  
Ha-Mitzvot be  
italicized, or  
it is in A.B.?

4. Gen. R. 39:14, ed. Yehuda Theodore and Chanoch Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965) 378 f.

5. TB Yoma 86a. My translation (based on Soncino ed., Yoma 427).

6. *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, ed. Rabbi Hayyim Heller (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1946) Pos. Com. 3, p. 35f.

7. In general, the Talmud and Midrash are more behavioral and practical in their interpretation of the commandment to love God, whereas the philosophically inclined Rishonim tended to a more affective and mystical view; but the line should not be drawn too tightly. See Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), 154.

What is the way to attain the Love and Fear of God? When a man contemplates His great and wondrous deeds and creatures, and sees in them His unequaled and infinite wisdom, he immediately (*miyad*) loves and praises and exalts Him, and is overcome by a great desire to know the great Name; as David said, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalms 42:3). And when he considers these very matters, immediately (*miyad*) he withdraws and is frightened and knows that he is but a small, lowly, dark creature who, with his inferior and puny mind, stands before Him who is perfect in His knowledge; as David said, "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers. . . What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" (Psalms 8:4, 5). Thus do I explain many great principles concerning the actions of the Master of the Worlds, [namely,] that they provide an opportunity for a wise person to love God. As the Sages said concerning Love, "as a result of this you will come to know Him by whose word the world came into being"<sup>8</sup>

There are several ideas in this passage that are worthy of notice and require careful attention.

First, there is, according to Maimonides, a common origin, even method, for the two religious emotions of Love and Fear: the contemplation of the cosmos. Such deep reflection on creation leads to two apparently divergent religious affects: *ahavat Hashem* and *yirat Hashem*. The two, Love and Fear, are different but they are fundamentally linked to each other and one cannot discuss, let alone understand, the one without the other.

Second, Love and Fear differ in that each is the mirror image of the other: Love of God is a centrifugal motion of the self as man, overwhelmed by the wisdom revealed in the marvels of creation, seeks to reach outward and upward towards the Creator the better to know Him. Fear of God is the precise opposite: overwhelmed by the greatness of the Creator, man traumatically realizes his own unimportance, his marginality, and his very nothingness, and in a centripetal psychological motion pulls inward and retreats into himself.<sup>9</sup>

Third, the implicit relationship between Love and Fear: the first reaction to the contemplation of Nature is, instinctively and impulsively, Love. But

8. *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2.2.

9. This analysis of Love and Fear of God should be compared with the 19th century Protestant thinker Rudolf Otto who, in *The Idea of the Holy* (translated by John W. Harvey [New York: Oxford University Press, 1958]) 12-40, wrote of two reactions to Nature; the first is *fascination* with the divine wisdom implicit in Nature, and the second is *terror* as man retreats before the *Mysterium Tremendum*. I do not know if Maimonides influenced him directly, but he certainly preceded him in this almost identical formulation.



this reaching out in a cognitive quest for the Creator is, intuitively and instinctively, countered and curtailed by the limiting impulse of Fear. The use of *miyad*, which we above translated in its usual sense of "immediately," once with regard to Love and again with regard to Fear, must, I believe, be taken in this sense of an intuitive reaction, one that is *immediate* in the sense of being un-mediated.

The role of intuition is significant in the works of Maimonides. In the Introduction to the *Guide*, he speaks of momentary flashes of intuition—unmediated by any act of ratiocination—as the mode of apprehension of both metaphysical knowledge and prophecy. This epistemology, of course, presents a problem because of Maimonides' high esteem for metaphysical deduction and clear, logical analysis. Julius Guttmann, who raises this issue, offers no solution.<sup>10</sup> The most obvious answer, however, is provided by a close reading of our key passage. Here, Maimonides does not speak of the intuitive (*miyad*, "immediately") reaction as the first response to Nature, but the second. Thus, the Love of God comes about after one "contemplates" the wonders of creation and "sees" in them the infinite wisdom of the Divine, and only then does he "immediately" love Him, etc. The same pattern holds for the Fear of God: when man "considers" these matters, i.e., the wonders of creation, he "immediately" withdraws into himself in fear, etc. What we have here is a two-step process: First one studies Nature, *then* this evokes from him the latent intuitive response of the appropriate religious emotions. Hence, the study of natural science leads to the intuitive reaction of Love and Fear to the creation. It is later left for the philosopher to elaborate these responses in the language of metaphysics. This philosophical elaboration too involves a flash of insight which is, however, different from the Love and Fear reaction; it is, as it were, a "normal" epistemological act and one which must then be set down according to all the rules of metaphysical argument.

Fourth, despite the fact that Love is immediately limited by the emotion of Fear, Maimonides obviously agrees with the Sages that "one who acts out of Love is greater than one who acts of Fear."<sup>11</sup> Thus, he concludes the *halakhah* with a comment on Love only, that the Creator does certain things in order to grant man the opportunity (or will) to love Him. Fear serves a vital

10. See his *Philosophies of Judaism* transl. David W. Silverman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1964), 156f.

11. TB Nedarim 31a.



but ancillary role to Love; it is the latter which remains the most significant and valuable religious quality.

Let us return to the first idea in the Maimonidean passage: the common origin of Love and Fear in the contemplation of the divine wisdom in His creation. While Maimonides here focuses on the creation or Nature as the object of man's contemplation in order to arrive at Love, he elsewhere elaborates on the object of such contemplation. Thus, in *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10.6 he presents his severely rationalistic view of the Love of God, and declares it to be proportional to one's *knowledge* of Him: "One loves the Holy One only with the mind, thus knowing Him; for Love is in accordance with knowledge, whether little or much." This is followed by the advice to attend to intellectual immersion in the various branches of wisdom which lead to the knowledge of God (and, thus, to love of Him):

Therefore must a man set aside [time] to understand and comprehend the [various branches of] wisdom and learning which impart to him knowledge of his Creator, depending on man's capacity to understand and apprehend, etc.

It should be noted that the branches of "wisdom and learning" are not necessarily limited to the natural sciences, although they certainly include them. Maimonides unquestionably intended that the immediate reaction to nature must be lead to and be shaped by proper and correct metaphysical speculation.

The study of Nature (which, as mentioned, is the prerequisite for the intuitive reactions of Love and Fear) is far less esoteric than metaphysical speculation. The Talmud *requires* one who is capable of studying geometry and astronomy to do so, and "one who knows how to calculate the cycles and planetary courses but does not do so, of him Scripture says, 'but they regard not the work of the Lord, nor have they considered the work of His hands' (Isaiah 5:12)."<sup>12</sup> We find no Talmudic encouragement of the study of philosophy as such. But Maimonides raises philosophy to the highest rung in the religious life, higher than that of the natural sciences. Thus, after introducing chapter 2 of *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* by describing the source of Love and Fear, Maimonides undertakes to teach the reader about matter and

12. TB Shabbat 75a. See Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950) 180-193, on the Talmud's positive attitude to the need for scientific knowledge for the proper observance of certain mitzvot; and pp. 100-114 on the ban on studying Greek "wisdom."

form, the angels, the nature of divine knowledge, divine unity, etc. All this, he says (2.11) is included in the term *ma'aseh merkavah*, the highly esoteric study of the "divine chariot." The next two chapters deal with astronomy and physics. "All these matters are only a drop in the bucket and profound, but not as profound as [the matters taken up in] the first two chapters." The latter two chapters are referred to as *ma'aseh bereshit*, literally, the account of creation, which, while it is not popular fare, is not as recondite and restricted as is the study of *ma'aseh merkavah* (4.10, 11).<sup>13</sup> Hence, the study of Nature is available, even required, of those who have the talent for it, but not for all others, while the study of metaphysics is clearly reserved for those who have both the aptitude and the spiritual preparation for it.<sup>14</sup>

In his *Book of Commandments*, the canvas is broadened even further: "for He has commanded us to love Him; and that [means] to understand and comprehend His mitzvot and His actions."<sup>15</sup> Here Maimonides includes not only "His actions"—which may well embrace the divine guidance of history as well as His governance of nature—but also "His mitzvot," His commandments. This may be an indirect reference to the study of Torah, repository of the commandments, as a source of inspiration to the Love of God. This is stated explicitly (in his own name) by the author of *Sefer ha-Hinukh*, who usually follows Maimonides: "That is, along with reflection in Torah necessarily comes a strengthening of Love in the heart."<sup>16</sup>

There is further indication that in this passage from his *Book of Commandments* Maimonides did indeed intend that study of Torah is a source of *ahavat Hashem*; it was not added as a mere afterthought. The reason for this assertion is the proof-text from the Sifrei. He writes, following the lines we mentioned above:

This is the text of the Sifrei: It is said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6:4). But (from this) I do not know *how* one loves Him; therefore is it

13. See further in my *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1990) 77–81 on Maimonides' views on the study of the sciences and philosophy as part of *pardes*.

14. See too R. Isaac Simcha Hurewitz, *Y. l Levi* (Commentary to Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*) Shores 1, no. 40 (Jerusalem, 1927) 18a, b.

15. *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Pos. 3. This follows the Heller edition; the Kapah translation has slight but insignificant variations.

16. *Sefer ha-Hinukh* 417, ed. Chayyim D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1952) 529.

said, "And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart" (Deut. 6:6)—as a result of this you will come to know Him by whose word the world came into being.<sup>17</sup>

The antecedent of "as a result of this" is obviously "these words," and this undoubtedly refers to the words of Torah (or, at the very least, the words of the *Shema*) and not to the contemplation of Nature.

However, here we face a dilemma in the exegesis of Maimonides' thought. Is Nature, the divine creation of the cosmos, the sole object which, when contemplated, leads to the Love and Fear of God—or is the Torah, the direct revelation of the divine Will, equally a source of Love and Fear? In the two passages from his legal code, the *Mishneh Torah*, the first from *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah) and the second from *Hilkhot Teshuvah* (Laws of Repentance), he clearly stipulates Nature as the source of such inspiration which leads to the Love and Fear of God. Yet in his *Book of Commandments* he mentions both the commandments (using two synonyms) and His works, i.e., Nature.

Which, then, according to Maimonides, is the primary object the contemplation of which leads to Love—Nature (and metaphysics which follows upon and elaborates the Love and Fear responses to Nature) or Torah and mitzvot? Is there perhaps a double focus, with each holding equal value? Is the *Sefer ha-Hinukh* offering a valid interpretation of Maimonides' view or is the author of this work imposing his own view, one with an apologetic slant?

Viewing all the major passages in which Maimonides discusses the Love and Fear of God, we find the following: In the *Mishneh Torah* he mentions only Nature as the source of the two fundamental religious emotions. (This, despite the effort by some to find justification for the inclusion of Torah alongside Nature as the source of Love and Fear by reading this into the closing phrase of Maimonides in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, cited above, or as an addition to it.)<sup>18</sup> In the *Book of Commandments* he posits both Torah and Nature, with emphasis on the former.

17. See note 3, above.

18. The same uncertainty about the correct interpretation of the Sifrei will be noticed in the comment of R. Naftali Zevi Yehuda Berlin ("The Netziv") in his *Ha'amek Davar* to Deut. 6:7, especially in the addendum to this commentary taken from the author's manuscript. In the commentary proper he cites the Sifrei and takes it clearly to imply that the study of Torah is the means to achieve the Love of God. In the addendum, however, he concedes that the plain sense of the Sifrei passage would indicate that the contemplation of the creation and Nature are the vehicles to *ahavat Hashem*, and that Maimonides, in the above passage from *Hilkhot*



We now turn to his major philosophical work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and are not all perplexed that our guide, Maimonides, identifies the contemplation of Nature as the source of the emotions of Love and Fear.

The two most important passages in the *Guide* appear in Part III. In Chapter 28, he tells us that the Torah, "in regard to the correct opinions through which the ultimate perfection may be attained," ideas such as God's existence, unity, power, etc., spoke only in general and apodictic terms, without going into much detail:

With regard to all the other correct opinions concerning the whole of being—opinions that constitute the numerous kinds of all the theoretical sciences through which the opinions forming the ultimate end are validated—the Torah, albeit it does not make a call to direct attention toward them in detail as it does with regard to [the opinions forming ultimate ends], does so in summary fashion by saying, "To love the Lord" (Deut. 22:7). You know how this is confirmed in the dictum regarding love: "With all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5). We have already explained in *Mishneh Torah* that this love becomes valid only through the apprehension of the whole of being as it is and through the consideration of His wisdom as it is manifested in it.<sup>19</sup>

*Yesodei ha-Torah*, supports that understanding. However, the Netziv adds, one cannot derive *ahavat Hashem* from the study of Nature alone; such exclusive contemplation may well lead to an appreciation of the greatness of the Creator, but hardly to *loving* Him. It may be compared to one who knows *that* another person is great and worthy of love, but he does not know *him* personally, so that even if he sees him he cannot love him because he does not truly *know* him. So, the study of natural science can lead to love only if it is preceded by the study of Torah for then, to continue the analogy, one knows the other person directly and can then learn to love him. Note the intellectual honesty and also the breadth of Netziv's own approach—he points to the inadequacy of Nature as a source of *ahavat Hashem* without disqualifying it altogether, and recommends that both study of science and study of Torah together provide the entree to Love of God, with Torah taking priority over science (a point he makes often, see e.g., *Ha'amek* to Deut. 4:2). Such breadth and intellectual capaciousness, with the accompanying sensitivity to complexity and to subtle nuances, should not be confused with the kind of ambivalence that bespeaks an inability to make up one's mind for fear of making the wrong choice. For more on the attitude of Netziv on this issue, see my *Torah Umadda* 40–41, 44, and 72, n.2. Also see Hannah Katz, *Mishnat ha-Netziv* (Jerusalem, 1990) 109–116; however, her use of the term "ambivalent" for Netziv's breadth of scope and sensitivity to complexity is unfortunate because it implies indecisiveness which clearly was not part of Netziv's personality.

19. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 512–513.

Here, then, Maimonides posits Nature—its study and philosophical elaboration—as the source of Love—as he did in the various passages in the *Mishneh Torah*.

In Chapter 52 of Part III of the *Guide*, Maimonides distinguishes between two categories of commandments: the practical ones, the do's and the don't's of Scriptural legislation; and the "opinions" or theological propositions taught by the Torah. The former lead to Fear of God, the latter to Love.

As for the opinions that the Torah teaches us—namely, the apprehension of His being and His unity, may He be exalted—these opinions teach us love, as we have explained several times. You know to what extent the Torah lays stress upon love: "With all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might." For these two ends, namely, love and fear, are achieved through two things: love through opinions taught by the Torah, which include apprehension of His being as He is in truth; while fear is achieved by means of all actions prescribed by the Torah, as we have explained.<sup>20</sup>

We have, then, in the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed* the assertion that Nature and the correct philosophical ideas resulting from its contemplation are the source of Love, while the *Book of Commandments* adds, and appears to emphasize, Torah and the commandments. Is this a trivial inconsistency, or is there an idea behind Maimonides' apparent contradictions, which does indeed make him consistent and coherent? I believe that the latter is the case, and the principle is one that characterizes much of Maimonides' thought, namely, the distinction between the masses and the learned elite.<sup>21</sup>

The average man is expected to observe all the actional commandments—the Halakhah—in all their details. These actions, plus the summary of otherwise profound philosophical ideas concerning God that the Torah offers ever so briefly, are enough to give this average person the wherewithal to conduct his life in an orderly, moral, and civilized manner and with an awareness of the basic ideas that distinguish Judaism. The mitzvot will guide

20. Maimonides, *Guide* 630.

21. In the very beginning of the *Guide*, Introduction to Part I (Pines trans. 8f.), Maimonides holds that the deeper understanding of the Torah, which he identifies with philosophic truth, was available to the intellectual elite, and was not to be revealed to ordinary folk. However, this does not result in disdain for the benighted masses; the latter are granted, in simple and uncomplicated fashion, certain basic truths, such as the incorporeality of God. Thus, Maimonides (like Onkelos) held that the figurative interpretation of biblical anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms must be taught to all Jews regardless of intellectual sophistication or lack of it.

him and her onto the right path, consistent with such person's intellectual capacity. The elite, however, whose curiosity and intellectual ability raise them beyond the ordinary, are expected to strive for a far higher standard, much beyond the limits set by the Torah for the masses. Such a person must aspire to understand the most refined conceptions of the Deity and His attributes.<sup>22</sup>

Now, in the *Book of Commandments*, which—as its very name indicates—deals with an enumeration of the commandments, Maimonides is writing for ordinary Jews who wish to observe what is required of them and what is within their ability to understand. Hence, the very mitzvot which are such a person's principal connection to the service of God—the behavioral commandments plus the outline the Torah offers of the major concepts of the Deity—are the source of his or her Love of God. To the extent that such a person's ability permits, Nature and its reflection of the imponderable wisdom of the Creator are also available to him.<sup>23</sup> But his primary source for religious inspiration is—the commandments and, of course, the Torah of which they form a part. Hence, the passages cited in this Maimonidean “popular” work.

However, the *Mishneh Torah* offers seeming resistance to our thesis. After all, this is his principal halakhic work, it is meant for all Jews equally, and hence here he ought to confine the source of Love to Torah and mitzvot and omit the contemplation of the cosmos and its consequent requirement of metaphysical speculation. But it so happens that the two passages in this work in which Maimonides does discuss Love and Fear are those in which the context call for a different standard rather than the popular one. Thus, in the *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* his goal is to impart, in non-technical terms and in a manner accessible to the non-philosopher, the theological foundations of Judaism. However, even though the information is simplified for the masses, the subject matter remains intrinsically so difficult and so intellectually demanding that even in its pedagogically simplified form it constitutes a formidable intellectual challenge. Thus, Maimonides maintains that it is a key to understanding the divine governance of the universe,<sup>24</sup> and that it forms the essential content of the *ma'aseh merkavah*—the exegesis of

22. The elite, however, must continue to abide by the actional commandments along with the masses; their higher aspirations and deeper understanding are not a dispensation to do away with the obligations that devolve upon all other Jews. Everything in the life and writings of Maimonides rejects the notion, sometimes proposed, that the elite are beyond the law.

23. See above, n.13.

24. *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, 2.2, end.



Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot which the Sages declared an esoteric study,<sup>25</sup> rather than halakhic discourse which is accessible to all, "young and old, men and women."<sup>26</sup> Hence, it is to be expected that here Maimonides will point to the contemplation of Nature as the source of the intuition that leads to both Love and Fear. Moreover, since the context of these first chapters of the *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* concern matters scientific and metaphysical—such as matter and form, the essentials of Ptolemaic astronomy, spiritual beings, etc.—it stands to reason that the source assigned to Love and Fear will be Nature rather than the commandments and the Torah.<sup>27</sup>

The second such place is the passage in *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, the Laws of Repentance. The context here shows that Maimonides is using an alternative definition of Fear—the conventional one, that is—as opposed to his more sophisticated version as presented at the beginning of *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*. Chapter 10 of *Hilkhot Teshuvah* is devoted to the distinction between those who observe the laws for their own sake and those who do so for ulterior motives—such as the desire for reward or the fear of punishment. The latter—which includes "the ignorant, women, and children"—operate out of Fear which, of course, is a lower form of religious devotion; whereas the former do so out of Love.

What is the proper kind of love?—When one loves God with very powerful, great, and overflowing love, such that his soul is bound up in the love of God and he is constantly absorbed in it, as if he were love-sick and his mind is never free of that woman, being constantly absorbed in [that love] whether sitting or standing, whether eating or drinking.<sup>28</sup> It is well known that the love of the Holy One does not become bound up with the heart of man until he thinks about it constantly and properly and abandons everything in the world except for it; as we were commanded, "with all thy heart and with all thy soul." One loves the Holy One only with the mind, thus knowing Him; for love is in accordance with knowledge: if little [knowledge] then little [love], if much [knowledge] then much [love]. Therefore must a person dedicate himself to understand and comprehend the [branches of] wisdom and learning which inform him about his Creator according to his capacity to understand and comprehend. . .<sup>29</sup>

25. *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, 4.10. And see above, n.13.

26. *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, 4.13.

27. See the commentary to Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* by R. Hananiah b. Menachem, *Kin'at Soferim* (Livorno, 1740), Pos. Com. 3.

28. *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10.3.

29. *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10.6.

This form of Love is, then, that which goes beyond Fear as the latter was described in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*; it is a higher level—and, hence, one that can come to a person who is prepared “to understand and comprehend the [branches] of wisdom and learning,” Maimonides’ term for both natural science and metaphysical thinking.

And, of course, in the *Guide*, his often esoteric philosophical *magnum opus*, we expect to find the higher standard of the elite predominate, as it most certainly does. Hence, Maimonides was consistent in his identification of Nature or Torah and mitzvot as the object of thought which leads to Love of God.

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