

3
NOTES IN PREPARATION FOR RCA LECTURE AT CONVENTION

THEME: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN MAIMONIDES "GUIDE"

Major material is concentrated in part III,
Chapter 51 to end.

First emphasized the tremendous gap between
commentators of Maimonides. Many moderns, such as
Strauss, Pines, Yaakov Beker follow Ahad Ha'am (And to
follow such ~~xxx~~ classical commentators as Narboni and
Kaspi, etc) see in Maimonides a kind of intentional
hypocrisy, whereby halakhic Torah is meant for the ig-
norant masses, whereas the metaphysical truth ~~xxxxxxx~~
taught by Aristotle are identical to those taught ~~xx~~ by
Moses in the secret doctrine within the Torah, which
is beyond a personal doubt, beyond halakhah, and is meant
only for the ~~xx~~ aristocracy of philosophers. This is
an attempt to latch Maimonides on to the theory of his
contemporary Islamic theologian, Averroes, who maintained
that religion is ^{more} near morality for the masses, while it

is knowledge for the philosopher. This, however, requires of them to read the Guide as if it were a secret code , and over-emphasize Maimonides' constant cautions to the reader. In more realistic appraisal is that given by almost all other commentators, culminating, in modern times, in Julius Guttman. Here we acknowledge problems, and try to solve them but do not read the Guide as if it were a detective story. We shall accept this latter approach.

Chapter ~~52~~ 51 gives the parable of Maimonides on the city, the ruler, and the inhabitants. It clearly indicates that the three highest categories are, in ascending order, Halakhs, (TALMUDICIM) who have traditional beliefs but do not support it by speculative demonstrations. The next category, those who are in the perozdor are those who can philosophize; the last category, and the highest, those who are in the chamber with the king, are those who

reached the highest degree of speculative ability and certainty.

Maimonides then departs to speak to his students, "no know~~xxxx~~ my son," that the three highest categories for him are: respectively: mathematicla science and logic, natural science, and divine science. This appears to conflict with the previous categorization. However, I believe that it must be understood that he here is addressing Iben Akin personally, and knows that he has Talmudic training. Therefore, he adds that for the category for these who walk alone the habitation of the ~~Kxxx~~ King, there is required both Talmudic training and mathematics and logic. Once this is ~~achieved~~ achieved, the next highest category of philosophy is that a natural science and then finally metaphysics or divine science.

The next part of this chapter speaks of the Sh'ma and worship. Essentially what he says is that

first we require intellection, which refers to the love of G-d which, as he has ~~said~~ said, depends upon cognition, and then worship or contemplation of the First Course. All this requires withdrawal from society. In other words, all this is part of "divine science" or the highest degree. He then proceeds to instruct his students in how to achieve this latching of one's mind onto G-d. It is a discipline of training, the goal being that of the patriarchs and Mosés, who ^{all while} ~~are well~~ engaged in profane activities, had their minds securely in contemplation of the Almighty. Providence is directly dependent upon this intellectual apprehension, and is effective only during the time of this apprehension. If the prophet's mind occasionally wanders from this contemplation, he is at the mercy of the evils of the world; although, even during this time of absence of contemplation his providence is greater than that of the person who is

totally ignorant. Maimonides next discusses death; I believe that he does so because of an implicit question: if Moses and the patriarchs were always in contemplation ~~of~~ of G-d, and therefore always on the Providence, how could they ever have died? The answer that Maimonides gives is that with oncoming age their bodily appetites were weakened, and their intellectual apprehension correspondingly increased. This continued to the climax at the moment of death, when ~~max~~ their intellection reached the maximum point; thus, "Death by kiss." All of this chapter, therefore, treats ~~the~~ of the intellectual cognition of G-d.

Chapter 52, The burden of this chapter is that all of the Torah leads man to the fear of G-d, that is, to eliminate all distractions of this world in order to permit him to contemplate G-d. Thus, all positive and negative commandments, all of Torah and Halakhah, are geared to the fear of G-d. The realm of action corresponds to fear. Love of ~~g~~ G-d refers to knowledge and

contemplation.

Apparently, then, knowledge remains much higher than action, ~~xxxx~~ even as love is greater than fear.

Chapter 53. Here Maimonides begins by a definition of the terms hessed, tzedakah (where he gives two definitions; the minor one, not ~~xx~~ referred to in the Bible, is where you give to another according to the other's legal claims; and the second, where you do something for someone else as ~~a~~ a way of responding to your own inner ~~xxxxxxxx~~ moral virtues -- a marvelous definition!), and mishpat. These are all actional attributes and therefore applicable to G-d. This chapter, as will be seen, is introductory to the last chapter in which action suddenly assumes a new dimension.

Chapter 54. Maimonides begins by discussing four definitions of "wisdom" . They are: artistic, moral, rational , and "evil" -- or , alternatively,

the meaning of wisdom is stratagem or cunning which ~~x~~ can be used either ~~for~~ for art, morals, reason, or evil .

Then comes the ~~crust~~^x of the matter, a quotation from Berakhot. When man dies, he ~~x~~ is asked three questions: Have you engaged in Torah, have you engaged in the dialectics of wisdom, and have you understood one thing from another. These are interpreted by Maimonides as meaning, respectively, have you studied the traditional Torah, have you engaged in speculative philosophy and demonstration, and have you , therefrom, determine how you ought to act in life.

Maimonides now continues the argument by preparing for another ~~exegesis~~ exegesis. There are four perfections: in ascending order, possessions, body, moral virtues, and rational knowledge. The first two we need not bother~~xx~~ with. Moral ~~xxx~~ virtues are those inculcated by most of the commandments of the Torah,

However, they are ~~ex~~ not an end in themselves. For one thing, ~~xxxx~~ they all refer to the relations of man to man, and hence are essentially utilitarian. They do not refer, therefore, to the true perfection of one's self, which is only the rational.

He then quotes a verse in Jeremiah, which he asserts is the agreement of prophecy to the idea of philosophy, namely, that the three first perfections (possessions, body, moral virtues) are not worthy of our efforts, and that all of them should be geared to the fourth. Thus, Jeremiah says ~~xxxx~~ that the wise man (used, in this sense, of moral virtues,) ought not to boast of his ~~ex~~ wisdom, so the strong man (body) and the rich man (possessions), only the man who knows G-d (rational). Thus, says Maimonides, even the moral virtues (which he quotes with ~~xxxx~~ maasei ha-Torah^tilam) are only propædæugic to the knowledge of G-d.

~~ex~~ What have ~~ex~~ we so far? Essentially in discussing

the moral virtues, Maimonides is merely interpreting what he has adumbrated from the Talmud before: the question have you engaged or set aside time for ~~Txxxxx~~ Torah? Afterwards, Maimonides shows that the setting aside of time for Torah is only introductory to the engaging of dialectical wisdom or speculative philosophy, i.e. the knowledge of G-d.

Now, however, we come to the conclusion. At the very end, Maimonides says that we must look at the rest of the verse from Jeremiah: to know me for I am the L-rd who does hessed ~~xxx~~ mishpat, and tzedakah in the world for these are what I want. ("In the World" refers, ~~xxxx~~ says Maimonides, to G-d's providence in the sublunar sphere). In other words, ~~xx~~ the sum, ret¹⁰⁰ult and result of all this intellectual or engaging ~~in~~ speculative wisdom is the doing by man of these three qualities we mentioned before, which actually are a summary of the

thirteen middot, This is equivalent ~~to~~ to the category of "knowing one thing from another." Maimonides clearly maintains that the knowledge of G-d ~~leads through~~ ^{to} imitatio dei of His actional attributes of the thirteen middot.

This is where Maimonides ends the Guide. One might now ask, concerning this last chapter, what is the difference between the third and first question, between setting aside time for Torah, and understanding how to act? Are they not both related to action?

I believe Guttman, who fails to phrase the question as ~~sharply~~ sharply as we have, has the essential answer. There is no comparison between ethical action that comes nearer as the result of habit and inclination, and that which results in imitatio ~~dei~~ dei of G-d whom we know rationally and philosophically. The action itself is transformed by knowledge, there is an action that ~~is~~

is prior to full knowledge, and an action that follows.

The two are worlds apart.

I might add that Maimonides offers a similar~~arx~~
~~distinction~~ distinction, though not quite the same, with
regard to gentile, when he maintains that there is
a difference between the gentiles who observe the seven
commandments of the sons of Noah because of habit or
tradition (they are referred to as "the wise of the world")
and the gentile who observes these self-same^m commandments
because he accepts them as being revealed by Moses (these
are referred to as "the pious of the nations of the world.")

All this should have, compared to it, the theories
of R. Hayyim of Volozhin.