GUIDE 1:46
BOLD DESCRIPTION

SYNOPSIS

When we tell another of the existence of a thing, as opposed to defining its essence, we describe its appearance, actions, circumstances, and effects. We can even legitimately point to God's existence in this manner. We employ metaphors drawn from the physical attributes of His creatures. That is how the prophets established the existence of God in the minds of the people.

Because God is indefinable, we can only say *that* He is, not what He is. Still, we can boldly suggest much about Him through imaginative description. The prophets freely used descriptions of human perfections to suggest divine perfections, even though from God's standpoint these "perfections" really are defects. The prophets strove to establish God's perfect existence as far as human language would permit, according to the principle that Torah is written in the language of men. They must use physical imagery, because most people are incapable of abstract thought.

Thus, physical movement suggests God's existence, sight suggests His knowledge, and speech suggests that He inspires prophecy. There is a three-step process to interpret these physical metaphors, for example, when the prophet writes that God has "eyes," we mean that He "sees," which really means that He *knows.* These three steps, taken at a higher level, attribute "eyes" to mean that God shares certain perfections with men, by which we mean that these perfections are in God a special kind of unity, but we then recognize that those "perfections" have *no identity* with those attributes as they exist in men:

> "We shall explain, when we come to speak of the *inadmissibility* of Divine attributes, that all these various attributes convey but *one* notion, viz., that of the essence of God. The sole object of this chapter is to explain in what sense physical organs are ascribed to the Most Perfect Being, namely, that they are mere indications of the actions generally performed by means of these organs. Such actions being perfections respecting ourselves, are predicated of God, because we wish to express that He is most perfect in every respect, as we remarked above in explaining the Rabbinical phrase, *The language of the Torah is like the language of man*."

The Rabbis frequently used such language. They even constructed elaborate parables likening a flesh and blood king and his subjects to God and his creatures. They knew that these parables concerned corporeal beings and could not truly tell us about an incorporeal being. Nonetheless, they freely used such expressions unafraid that the intent would be mistaken. The Rabbis commended the prophets for their bold, even shocking, descriptions. We should not criticize the Rabbis for using this method.

The purpose of this chapter is not only to summarize this governing principle of the Lexicon, but also to prepare us to read the coming chapters on divine attributes in the proper light.

COMPARING THE CREATOR TO HIS CREATURES

Maimonides commends the prophets for comparing the Creator to his creatures, so that they could establish the existence of God in the public mind. But how can it be legitimate to compare any thing to God? Would not such a comparison inevitably attribute imperfection to Him?

That is the underlying problem of the chapter. Maimonides' response, if not his reasoning, is clear. He is favorably disposed to metaphorical, figurative and parabolic descriptions. He makes this point throughout the

Guide. Maimonides expects us to recognize the limitations of such corporeal descriptions and to sublimate them in our understanding.

At the conclusion of the chapter, he mentions those who find this approach offensive. He condemns those people for their ignorance, which harms only themselves and not the wise.

Who finds this parabolic approach offensive? It is not clear whom he might be attacking in this final sentence. I could conceive of a philosophical gentile arguing that the Torah is a poor instrument to demonstrate the existence of an ineffable God, inferior to, say, the *Enneads* of Plotinus (known then as the *Theology of Aristotle*), since the Torah describes God as a being who gets angry, speaks, has feet, etc. The philosophical gentile might be a Muslim, such as the convert Samuel ibn Abbas al-Maghribī and (died *c.* 1170) author of *Ifhām al-Yahud* (*Silencing the Jews*), which criticized biblical anthropomorphism.

Maimonides can respond to such an attack because of his expansive conception of God.

THE MAIMONIDEAN CONCEPTION OF GOD

Maimonides explains that we distinguish the essential divine attributes, such as will, existence, intelligence, and creativity, in our imagination only. The attributes are nothing but God Himself, and they are all one in Him. They coalesce in His non-numerical unity. They are atemporal and immediate to Him.

Divine Personality. In this conception, we see that God is not an *Ayn Sof*, a *Tao*, a negativity, the Plotinian One, etc. Unlike these concepts, He does somehow seem to have characteristics, though we cannot comprehend how these many can be one. That is not the Rabbis' concern. They do not need to construct a philosophically rigorous definition. If the concept is adequate to indicate God's *existence*, then they can describe Him by this agglomeration of perfections. Such description does not beggar God because, according to Maimonides, they recognized the inadequacy of those figures. Thus, we can truly say of God that He exists. This, despite that we know nothing but that He is *not* nonexistent. We can say that He creates. Still, how He creates something from nothing without a moment of creation is imponderable. And so on.

The contrary posture is not one that Maimonides would endorse, for if God were negativity, lacking any characteristics, we could not make these positive statements about his existence and actions. It would reduce God to a principle, like privation, or nothingness. This, clearly, is not Maimonides' idea of God, and it is not what he means by negative theology. The Maimonidean God is a being who exists and acts. "The object of all these indications (metaphors) is to establish in our minds the notion of the existence of a living being, the Maker of everything, who also possesses a knowledge of the things which He has made."

God of Miracles. The question then becomes whether this conception of God's existence and action is legitimate from a logical or philosophical point of view. Maimonides would certainly have thought so, but it is doubtful that Aristotle would have. From philosophy's point of view, there could be no creation *ex nihilo*, or providence, or prayer. Maimonides' responded that there was a limit to our knowledge: Aristotle could not prove that the universe was eternal and uncreated. Neither could he disprove the existence of miracles, including the miracle of creation. Even so, Maimonides still has to show that creation *ex nihilo* is a legitimate alternative account of creation. We will see later if he can.

Assuming, *arguendo*, that creation *ex nihilo* is a legitimately possible, it is a miraculous single event and not a natural eternal emanation from God. The miracle of creation is the basis for the possibility of all other miracles, for there could be no greater one. To be sure, miracles would be rare. That is because of the Talmudic principle that natural explanations should be our first resort. Miracles are those events that we cannot explain naturally. Though miracles are, by definition, not natural, Maimonides does not think they are inexplicable, only that we

cannot explain them. We must distinguish *natural* explanation from *rational* explanation. Miracles conform to some form of rationality, even if not the reason of nature. If Maimonides can assert some possible divine logic behind miracles, he can narrowly avoid the assertion that his theology is irrational.

Maimonides does not need to prove that God exists, since he can rely on Aristotle's proof. Aristotle was able to prove that God exists merely from the existence of motion, and the need to reach the ultimate cause of motion. His proof did not require an ultimate creator, only an ultimate mover. Since, then, even for Aristotle, who denies creation, God exists, all Maimonides has to do is show that his more expansive conception of God's existence is a *possible* conception. His concept is enriched by the claims that God is the Creator, that He is provident, and revives the dead bodily. All of these are possible. Maimonides can make room in his system for these and several other miracles.

Since this notion of God is broader than the Aristotelian notion, he can say more about God than is possible under the Aristotelian system. Thus, God can possess the "essential" attributes, such as life, wisdom, will and power, though His possession of these perfections and our possession of these perfections are so different as to be homonymous. To put it more accurately, these perfections are substantial, essential, and unified in God where they are merely accidental to man. Therefore, since the mission of the prophets is to bring knowledge of God's existence to the people, we justifiably commend them for describing those divine attributes in bold figurative language that people would immediately grasp.

BOLD DESCRIPTION

This is even true when they use extreme appellations. The two examples given are the bowels and the feet. Using several exegetical methods, Maimonides demonstrates that when the prophets say that the "bowels" of God are "troubled" they can only be referring to the heart, not literally to the bowels. The heart, as we have seen, was an organ of intelligence in ancient Hebrew. Thus, they mean that God's *mind* is "troubled" by human transgression, though, really, the sinner only projects his own "trouble" onto God. When we say His "bowels" are "troubled," we really mean that He *knows* His creations (*v'nimtza tadrikh kol otan ha-hashaalot lkvoa etzleinu sh'yesh sham mtzui khai, osei l'kol ma sh'zulato v'gam masig maasav*).

More interesting is how Maimonides gets *feet* into the discussion. He suggests *feet* in the first of a list of twenty scriptural quotations, allowing that people do not consider a being to be living, i.e., animate, unless it *moves*, and it cannot move without feet. It moves to acquire its needs. But the identification of life with movement is mistaken. We already know that movement is not part of Maimonides' definition of life, which is sensate growth, *tsomeakh margish* (Guide 1:42). He says, in our chapter, "Motion is not part of the definition of life, but an accident connected with it."

On the other hand, we already know that *foot* means *cause* because of its phallic suggestiveness. Since the topic is *bold description*, we should expect Maimonides to make the ascription of divine feet the boldest description of all. The divine *foot* means that God created the world.

Maimonides and Aristotle share the thought that God is intelligent, though Aristotle would not refer to God's "bowels," even if he could have been persuaded that "bowels" were a metaphor for the mind. Where they would surely part company is on "feet." The Aristotelian deity does nothing but think, it is "thought thinking itself." But it could have no *foot* since it did not create the world.

Maimonides makes the *foot* connection in a strange Aggadic interlude near the conclusion of the chapter. He quotes a Midrash that says that the prophets were "bold" (*gadol kokho*) to use figurative language to describe God, for they likened the Creator to His creature (Genesis *Rabba* 27:1). Maimonides then turns to the Talmud to show that the Aramaism for "bold" used by the Talmud in an arguably similar instance has the same meaning of

"bold" used in the Midrash. But this is unnecessary support, especially since the Talmudic portion he quotes, *Yevamot* 104A, is not about bold description.

The *Yevamot* reference is sort of about *feet*, or at least socks, or perhaps shoes. It is possible to take it pruriently. Here is the passage as Maimonides gives it from *Yevamot* (I translate literally in the form that he supplies it. Others question his text, and he is probably responsible for changing the two Rabbi's names to "Ploni"):

> "Rabbi Ploni did it at night alone in a sock (*mok*). [Another] Rabbi Ploni said *how bold* [*rav guvrea=gadol kokho*] was he that he did it alone." (*R. Ploni avad uvda b'mok bi'ykhidi u'va-laila. Amar R. Ploni: kama rav guvrei di'avad k'ykhidaa*.)

To be sure, we can take the passage non-pruriently, and, in context, Talmud does take it non-pruriently. Still, why did Maimonides cite it?

The passage is not about bold description, but, rather, about bold rabbinic action in the face of contrary rabbinic opinion. The argument is an obscure legal point in the procedure of rejecting levirate marriage (*yivum*). Upon the death of a husband, his brother must marry the widow unless he rejects her by symbolically handing over his shoe (*halitza*). In the Book of Ruth, Ploni Almoni (The name humorously suggests anonymity) rejects the levirate marriage to Ruth, clearing the way for Boaz to marry her. This rejection ceremony took place before a court during the day, so it is not obvious how one could do it in private at night. The Talmud agrees with Rabbi Akiva who ruled that it could be done in private at night. When the first Rabbi in the passage does it alone at night with a sock (instead of a shoe) the Talmud calls it a "bold" move. His boldness is bold legal interpretation. Though this Rabbi Ploni has a real name, Bar Hayya of Ctesiphon, he is called Rabbi Ploni, suggesting the original Ploni from Ruth. The second Ploni is R. Shmuel. Some translate "sandal" or "small shoe" rather than "sock."

All well and good, but the legal point is so irrelevant to the figurative language of prophets that we must conclude Maimonides wants us to look at the passage pruriently. He suggests this by saying of the phrase, *how bold*, that the sages "always speak in this way when they express their appreciation of the greatness of something said or done, but whose appearance is *shocking*" (This is Pines' translation. For "shocking," Kafih has: *zarut*; Schwarz: *ganai*; Ibn Tibbon: *ganut*; Jud.Ar.: שגאעה). While one might question R. Ploni's act, it could hardly be said to be *shocking*. By changing the name of Bar Hayya of Ctesiphon to R. Ploni, Maimonides wants us to recall the rejection of the *yivum* in the Book of Ruth. He wants us to recall that Ruth uncovered the feet of the sleeping Boaz, and to recall that *foot* is a euphemism for the male organ. The prurient suggestion of the *Yevamot* passage might be that Ploni rejected the *yivum* because he preferred his own company. (This could be a humorous reading of Midrash, *Ruth Rabba* 7:7: which has Ploni Almoni say "The first [husband of Ruth and Orpah] died because they took them as wives; shall I then take her? I will not contaminate [*m'arbev*] my seed...")

This reminds us of the principle of Rabbi Akiva that we sublimate prurient passages in prophetic revelation to learn about divine creativity, since man has no better figure to use than procreation to describe divine creation (see my Introduction). Maimonides actually mentions this concept in our chapter. On page 99 of the Pines' translation of the Guide, he says:

> "Again, as we have no intellectual cognition of our bringing somebody other than us to existence except through a *direct act* (footnote 8), He is described as active."

Pines' Footnote 8 reads: "The [Arabic] word *mubāshara* used here also means 'an act accomplished through contact' and 'sexual intercourse.'"

Moreover, we know that Maimonides frequently refers to male and female when he wants to symbolize the union of form and matter. The divine "foot," so understood, is really the limit case justifying all lesser figurative descriptions. It is also the most dangerous; for even though we know we are only speaking metaphorically, it is most upsetting to imagine God in the act of procreation. "Bold," indeed! In addition, it directly implicates the two categories the Mishnah *Hagigah* rules we may not discuss in public, to wit, *Maaseh Bereshit*/creation, and *gilui arayot/*forbidden couplings. Maimonides must cloak it in what we call esotericism. Nonetheless, *esoteric* is not the same as secret. Maimonides wants *us*, ultimately, to get the idea.

Thus, while Maimonides distracts us with a mere translational expansion on *gadol kokho*/boldness (that it is identical to the Aramaic *rav guvrea*), he really wants to show us how far the Rabbis would go in making even luridly physical comparisons to God. If I am right that this is a case of Maimonidean esotericism, we see that his esotericism is not a cover for Aristotelianism (as some argue). Rather, he conforms precisely to the law from *Hagigah* proscribing the *public* teaching of creation and forbidden couplings.

ABARBANEL VS. NARBONI ON THE MEANING OF "BOLD DESCRIPTION"

Two early commentators debate what Maimonides meant by quoting Midrashic language involving this phrase, "bold description," *gadol kokhan*, when it comments on Ezekiel's description of the *Merkava*, the divine "chariot." The Midrash, Genesis *Rabba* 27:1, says:

> "Great was the power of the Prophets; they compared the creature to its Creator (*gadol kokhan shel niviim, shehem m'damin et ha-tzura l'yotzra*); comp. 'And over the resemblance (likeness, *d'mut*) of the throne was a resemblance like the appearance of man' (Ezekiel 1:26)."

The reason that Maimonides gives for considering this passage together with the problem of Rabbi Ploni's sock is that the phrase there, *rav guvrei* is the Aramaic for *gadol kokho.* He then comments,

> "They have thus plainly stated that all those images which the Prophets perceived, i.e. in prophetic visions, are images created by God. This is perfectly correct; *for every image in our imagination has been created*. How pregnant is the expression, 'Great is their boldness!*'* They indicated by it, that they themselves found it very remarkable; for whenever they perceived a word or act difficult to explain, or apparently objectionable, they used that phrase. (Here he quotes the story of R. Ploni's sock, and the translational link between the two versions of the phrase). Hence, in the preceding quotation, the sense is, How remarkable is the language which the Prophets were obliged to use when they speak of God the Creator in terms signifying properties of beings created by Him. This deserves attention (*v'haven et zei heitav*). Our Sages have thus stated in distinct and plain terms that they are far from believing in the corporeality of God; and in the figures and forms seen in a prophetical vision, though belonging to created beings, the Prophets, to use the words of our Sages, 'compared the creature to its Creator.'"

The italicized words prompt Narboni (Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne, d. 1362), a commentator of the Averroist school, to claim that the "likeness of the throne" is really the active intellect, symbolized as a great angel (perhaps Metatron), while the "appearance of the likeness of a man" is the first cause, God. Since, as we learn from Guide 1:49, wings are attributed to angels but not God, since they are a grossly physical appendage associated with a lower life form, they indicate that angels are on a lower level in the great chain of being. Maimonides says there, "It was thereby shown, that the existence of God is more perfect than that of angels, as much as man is more perfect than the lower animals." Thus, according to Narboni, the bold comparison in Ezekiel is his comparison of God to the angel, and when Maimonides says *for every image in our imagination has been created*, i.e, that the angel in the prophet's imagination was created, he meant that the forms appearing in the prophetic vision are wholly imaginary, created by the visionary. This makes the bold description even bolder, since it relates God to a purely imaginary corporeal form.

This is Abarbanel's reading of Narboni. It is based on two words in Narboni's comment: after quoting Maimonides' statement that "all those images (forms) which the Prophets perceived, i.e., in prophetic visions, are images created by God," Narboni interjects: "*in the soul of the prophet* (*b'nefesh ha-navi*)." Other commentators, including Even-Shmuel, took Narboni to mean that those images *in the soul of the prophet* were *created by God*. The problem is that *Narboni* did not say they were created by God, *Maimonides* said it. Focusing on the two-word comment only, Abarbanel thought Narboni meant that the forms in the vision are *only* in the soul of the prophet, and have no external referent. Since he knew that Narboni believed in the God of the philosophers, who never concerns Himself with particular individuals, Abarbanel could not see how Narboni's deity could have created the forms in a particular prophet's vision. So, for Abarbanel, it seemed to follow that Narboni's prophet's vision was entirely imaginary. That is why Narboni, the strict Aristotelian, was forced to say that the particular vision was only "in the soul of the prophet."

Abarbanel complained that Narboni's interpretation was unnecessarily "indirect," "strange," and even "worthless." When Maimonides says *for every image in our imagination has been created*, he really means that the forms appearing in the imagination of the prophet reflect real *created* entities in this world, not imagined entities. These real entities were ultimately created by God, not by the imagination, *brua lo b'dimion.* What the sages meant by *bold description* is the metaphorical relation of created physical things to The Creator. According to Abarbanel, the great doctrine intended by the phrase is that "every form that a man portrays in his imagination is a real physical existent," *rotze lomar, sh'kol tzura sh'yakhol ha-adam l'tzair oto b'dimiono hi brua b'mitziot.* To prove that this was Maimonides' intent, he quotes him saying here, "How remarkable is the language which the Prophets were obliged to use when they speak of God the Creator in terms signifying properties of *beings* created by Him; this deserves attention." Beings, not figments.

Abarbanel does not here attempt to explain the meaning of the terms used by Ezekiel, and is probably right not to do so, since, as he repeatedly points out, this is not the purpose of the chapter. Maimonides addresses those issues early in section three of the Guide, especially 3:7, although he does so in bafflingly cloaked language. Abarbanel believes that the purpose of our chapter is to explain corporeal terms appearing in prophecy that had not been treated in the Lexicon. This chapter, then, grants us license to boldly interpret such terms without having to fall back on the Lexicon for justification.

THE PARABLE OF THE BANKER AND THE BEGGAR

To explain how we may use indirect descriptions to portray the existence of God without saying anything definitive about Him, Maimonides gives us an extended parable about the king of a country:

> "If you wish to describe the king of a country to one of his subjects who does not know him, you can give a description and an account of his existence in many ways. You will either say to him, the tall man with a fair complexion and grey hair is the king, thus describing him by his accidents; or you will say, the king is the person round whom are seen a great multitude of men on horse and on foot, and soldiers with drawn swords, over whose head banners are waving, and before whom trumpets are sounded; or it is the person living in the palace in a particular region of a certain country: or it is the person who ordered the building of that wall, or the construction of that bridge; or by some other similar acts and things relating to him. His existence can be demonstrated in a still more indirect way, e.g., if you are asked whether this land has a king, you will undoubtedly answer in the affirmative. 'What proof have you?' 'The fact that this banker here, a weak and little person, stands before this large mass of gold pieces, and that poor man, tall and strong, who stands before him asking in vain for alms of the weight of a carob-grain, is rebuked and is compelled to go away by the mere force of words: for had he not feared the king, he would, without hesitation, have killed the banker, or pushed him away and taken as much of the money as he could.' Consequently, this is a proof that this country has a ruler and his existence is proved by the well-

> regulated affairs of the country, on account of which the king is respected and the punishments decreed by him are feared. In this whole example nothing is mentioned that indicated his characteristics, and his essential properties, by virtue of which he is king."

The aggadists frequently used parables about a flesh and blood king to refer to God. Maimonides' first version, which describes the king by his physical appearance only, shows that we may point to another without having to define him. Apart from that, the example is irrelevant to God who has no physical description. Nonetheless, there are such examples of physical descriptions in text and liturgy, the most striking of which is the *Shir ha-Kavod* (*anim zmirot*) of R. Yehuda ha-Khasid (12th C.), an awe-inspiring catalogue of such descriptions. But even R. Yehuda recognized that physical descriptions fail:

> "By the hand of Your prophets or alone to Your servants, You portrayed in images the splendid glory of Your power, Your greatness, Your strength. They described You according to Your deeds. They imagined You, but not as You really are, but only from your deeds. They made parables about You in many visions, yet here You are One, for all of their imagined forms." (my trans.)

The second example, the king surrounded by his host, frequently appears as the *pamalia* of the divine angelic host which chants 'holy holy holy' before God. The third example locates the king in a particular place, but though we say that God is 'in heaven,' we do not take this to be a discrete location. While God is said to be the place of the world, the world is not His place (Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 68:5). The fourth example shows that the king is the author of certain public edifices, but though God showed the Jews through prophecy the plan for the Tabernacle, He was in no sense its builder. Nonetheless, we may indicate God's existence by way of his creations.

The last and most striking example seems to come closest to what Maimonides has in mind when he says we know of God by His actions in the world. Just as God creates a natural law for all things, and a Torah law to govern all Jews, so we know the king by his imposition of a system of lawful justice upon his realm. It was one of the Noahide prescriptions that the gentiles shall have a system of law (Genesis 9).

The problem is that the king only distantly governed the Jewish community, whether in Egypt or in Europe, and such a king would not have paid much heed to a violent beggar in the Jewish quarter. But the fact that the Jewish banker would not have been attacked by the Jewish beggar hardly reveals the existence of a distant gentile monarch (a Jewish one being out of the question), but rather the existence of Torah law administered by a community of rabbis.

The banker clearly failed the obligation of *tzedaka* (charity). As for the beggar, when Maimonides says, "...for had he not feared the king, he would, without hesitation, have killed the banker," it really would mean that had a Jewish beggar not feared the King of kings he would have killed the banker.

Still, assuming that this parable is set in the gentile bazaar, we admit that Maimonides' portrayal of the weak banker and the strong beggar is strikingly realistic, typical of the realistic views of medical men. But we should be careful here, since he had a negative view of the philosophic capabilities of other physicians (*Letter to Ibn Tibbon***)**. While this realistic portrayal of the state of nature has some affinities with Hobbes, the purpose of the Maimonidean *melekh*, unlike Hobbes' Leviathan, was not to bring peace, except tangentially. Peace should already have been established by the acceptance of Torah.

Indeed, while the term "king" appears once in the parable, the more frequent appellation is "sultan" (Jud. Ar.: אלסלטאן). He does not use the word "caliph." The distinction is important. In Maimonides' own case, he did not

serve Saladin himself, but his viceroy, who would only have qualified as the sultan, the "authority" who brings order.

We do not lack clarity on Maimonides' conception of the purpose of the Jewish king. His *melekh* is more like the Muslim caliph, rather than a sultan.

The first purpose of the king, in Mishneh Torah, is to wipe out Amelek (*Melakhim* 1:1). Since, apart from the odd Haman or Hitler this seems to have been accomplished, the question is why would Maimonides make this the very first purpose of a Jewish king? The Torah tells us that the Amelekite problem was their mode of war, i.e., ambush. Still, it seems hard to condemn a whole race for its adherence to a standard military doctrine. Maimonides answers the question in Guide 3:41: "As Amalek was the first to attack Israel with the sword, it was commanded to blot out his name by means of the sword," in other words, this command has to do with the original establishment of Israel, and was meant as a lesson to deter others who would destroy the covenant nation.

The main purpose of the king is to establish the religion: "His purpose and intent shall be to elevate the true faith and fill the world with justice, destroying the power of the wicked and waging the wars of God" (*Melakhim*, 4:10). Some of these wars are obligatory, as with Amalek and the seven Canaanite nations, but others need not be. "He may wage a *milkhemet hareshut*, i.e., a war fought with other nations, in order to expand the borders of Israel or magnify its greatness and reputation" (5:1).

The king's religious role is clear: "If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its *mitzvot* as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law, as David, his ancestor did, and will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of God, we may, with assurance, consider him *Mashiakh*" (Messiah. *Ibid.* 11:4). He continues, emphasizing the king's universal mission, "He will then improve the entire world, motivating all the nations to serve God together."

Compare the purpose of the caliph. The word *khalifa* means "successor." He is the representative of Muhammad himself. He is called *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, commander of the faithful. Every man is, in a sense, just such a successor, charged to be a *khalifa* to Allah. But there could only be one caliph, since the caliphate represents the political unity of the Muslim *umma.* How this leader was to be chosen became the focus of the great dispute between the *Shia* and the *Sunna.* That there would be order under the rule of the caliph was a tangential benefit, not the true purpose of the institution. The purpose of the Caliphate was to conduct *jihad* against obstacles in the path of Islamic expansion.

Sarah Stroumsa grasped Maimonides' absorption and transmutation of certain Islamic and specifically Almohadic values in her illuminating monograph, "The Politico-Religious Context of Maimonides." She writes: "Maimonides' depiction of the messiah is characterized by an overwhelming insistence on the messiah's military role. One suspects that the frequent military campaigns of the Almohads, in which they were accompanied by a magnificent copy of the Qur'an and advancing under the banner of the Mahdi, offered Maimonides a messianic model that went well with his reading of the *Laws of Kings*, both in Deuteronomy and in the Talmud." (*Nuremberg Essays on Maimonides, Die Trias des Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic, And Ancient Culture of Knowledge* (*Studia Judaica*) Georges Tamer, ed., 263-265).

Maimonides' parable perhaps answers the question of how we know that there is law and order in a gentile country. That their people have a king who maintains the law shows that they are Noahides. But the existence of order does not establish the existence of a Jewish king in a Jewish polity, it only reveals the community's commitment to Torah law.