GUIDE 1:34
TEACHING DIVINE SCIENCE

> "There are five reasons why instruction should not begin with Metaphysics (divine studies, *ha-limud ha-elohiut* in Ibn Tibon; Pines: "divine science"; Judeo-Ar: אלתעלים באלאלאהיאת), but should at first be restricted to pointing out what is fitted for notice and what may be made manifest to the multitude."

The five P's for the perplexed, the problems that prevent the public teaching of divine science, are:

1. Profundity and depth of the subject matter;
2. Potential perfection of the student's initially inactivated intellect;
3. Preliminary preparatory studies are lengthy;
4. Physical constitution and moral disposition of the student may prevent learning;
5. "*Parnasa*:" i.e., the pursuit of profession, acquisitions of possessions, and raising a family.

Maimonides devotes the greatest space to Problem Three above. It is the center of his discussion. It contains more parabolic material than the others do. This, and the fact that he concludes it with one of his trademark gnomic utterances, "On reflection, the truth will become obvious," signals it as the location of esoteric materials. I save for the end of this chapter my treatment of those parables, particularly The Parable of the Pit.

He carefully states that these five are "causes that prevent the commencement of instruction with divine science...to the multitude" (Pines translation), *ha-sibot ha-monot et petikhat ha-limudim b'inyanei ha-elohut...l'hamon khamesh sibot.* They are not complete impediments, except for the Fourth (when due to bad physical constitution). The problem is the "commencement." We cannot *commence* the study of divine science before transcending these "causes." These are all impediments to the activation of the potential intellect and its conjunction with the active intellect, which is the core of the study and practice of the divine science. Maimonides had already said, in the Introduction to the Guide, in his fifth "contradiction," that all educators, including the guide of the perplexed, must commence "difficult and obscure" subjects "beginning with the easier thing," in "any manner which he can devise." Only later, when the student has the capacity, we can teach the subject in its complete truth, which may contradict the first teaching (see my Introduction II: Contradictions).

These impediments to learning divine science are so serious that most people cannot overcome them. This is a major problem for religion. Only the divine science can provide certainty of the essential truths of religion. Religion requires the acceptance of certain major truths, such as Maimonides' Thirteen Principles (*Commentary on the Mishneh, Sanhedrin,* chapter 10). These include the unity and incorporeality of God with their ramifications. The attainment of these doctrines is an obligation of the heart for adherents. The unfortunate but unavoidable result is that the cognizant must give these truths in the form of dogmas to the multitude. These must substitute for their individual achievement of the certainty of these truths. This recognition made a profound impact on general Western thought when Aquinas adopted the five causes as fundamental to his system. After reciting them nearly verbatim in the name of "Rabbi Moses," he writes:

> "From all this it is clear that, if it were necessary to use a strict demonstration as the only way to reach a knowledge of the things which we must know about God, very few could ever construct such a demonstration and even these could do it only after a long time. From this it is evident that the provision of the way of faith, which gives all easy access to salvation at any time, is beneficial to man" (*De Veritate*, X, Reply). "Therefore in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fully and surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation." (*Summa Theologiae* 1.1.1)

Maimonides defines the subject matter of the divine science for the first time in this chapter. It is concerned with the subjects of cosmology and metaphysics, but that is not all. The divine science is also about angelology, the nature of the soul and its ascent, the nature of God and His relation to the soul, and similar topics of interest to religion. He returns with a somewhat different agenda for the divine science in the next chapter, 1:35.

THE FIRST PROBLEM: PROFUNDITY

It is dangerous for beginners to commence studying the divine science, just because it is so deep, complicated and subtle. Maimonides quotes Ecclesiastes, "Far off and *exceeding deep* (*amok amok*), who can find it out?" (7:24).

He relates the Parable of the Pearl-diver, which he attributes to the rabbis, which is about someone who never learned to swim diving deep for pearls. The swimmer gets the pearl; the non-swimmer drowns. This parable is similar to the one quoted in the Guide's Introduction about the pearl lost on the floor of a darkened room, which can be found when the searcher lights a penny candle. The light of the candle was the intellect. In this case, closer to Maimonides' purpose here, the swimmer's knowledge of swimming takes the place of the candle. Without knowledge of the extensive prerequisites to divine science, the student would drown in this sea of learning and never find its pearls of wisdom.

Later, in the Third Cause, he gives us the Parable of the Pit (which is also "deep," *amok*). It is his central figure in this chapter. That parable shows that the solution to the victim's problem is not merely the acquisition of knowledge (like knowledge of swimming), but, even more crucially, *the ability to form actual concepts* from potential knowledge (he calls this conceptualizing ability a "device" or "stratagem," *takhbula*).

Kafih believes that the source of the Parable of the Pearl-diver is the Talmud, *Baba Batra* 74a-b:

> "R. Johanan related: Once we were travelling on board a ship and we saw a chest in which were set precious stones and pearls and it was surrounded by a species of fish called *karisa*. There went down a diver to bring [the chest], but [a fish] noticed [him] and was about to wrench his thigh (cf. Genesis 32:26). Thereupon he poured upon it a skin bottle of vinegar and it sank. A *bat kol* (divine voice) came forth, saying unto us: 'What have you to do with the chest of the wife of R. Hanina b. Dosa who stored in it purple-blue [*tekhelet*: the dye essential to the manufacture of prayer shawls] for the righteous in the world to come."

In this case, the diver, though possessing the skill of diving, obviously lacked the ability to swim in the depths of obscurity where the *tekhelet* was. The Artscroll commentary to the Talmud does a fine job of portraying the traditional explanation of the parable:

> "The chest represents the wonderful reward that awaits the God-fearing in the World to Come. Only the outside of the chest was visible and it was studded with precious stones; what treasure lay in the chest no one knew. Similarly, a person can only have a very superficial picture of the reward of the World to Come. The chest was surrounded by fish because the wonderful reward is reserved for those who are engrossed in Torah study, and are compared to fish in water….*The diver thought he could devise some method* of reaching the chest, although he was really not deserving of its treasure. Such notions are *damaging* to a person, for he is guilty of 'doing deeds like Zimri, yet expecting reward like Pinchas (Talmud *Sota*, 22b).' Indeed, the intended recipients of the reward want to attack this impostor. When he sees that he is being attacked he pours vinegar on his opponents, and curses and vilifies them. When the righteous ones see his low tactics they do not want to engage him in rhetoric. They swim away from him. The wonderful reward is reserved for those, like R. Chanina ben Dosa's wife, who eschew worldly pleasures. The *Gemara* (Talmud, *Taanit* 25a) relates how she and her husband lived in dire poverty and once they miraculously received a gift from Heaven, but the pious woman refused to receive it. She prevailed on her husband to pray that the gift be taken back, so that their reward in the World to Come

should not he decreased on account of it. This story teaches that there is no shortcut to the reward of the World to Come. Furthermore, one should not enter into dialogue with wicked people whose sole interest is to revile the righteous."

If this story and its understanding are behind Maimonides' parable, note the emphasis on the undeserving student too lazy to learn the preliminary sciences, who dives into the most profound subject, and pours vinegar on those who advise him to take the proper path in learning. Note also, "the diver thought he could *devise* some *method* of reaching the chest," but had no such device, since he could not swim in those depths. He is like the ill-prepared student who dives into the divine science, but lacked the ability to frame an intellectual conception, a *muskal rishon.* All of these ideas recur in Maimonides' account of the Parable of the Pit, which I explain at the end of this chapter.

THE SECOND PROBLEM: POTENTIALITY

The Second Problem goes deeper. The mind has not yet come into existence at the inception of its studies for "man is born a wild ass" (Job 11:12), as Rashi comments: "like a wild donkey, accustomed to the desert, hasty, without sense." Recall the "demons" from Guide 1:7, "mere animal(s) in human shape," which contrast with the "sons of prophets," *bnai neviim.* Until the merely potential intellect becomes actual by extracting itself from its materiality, it cannot do the work expected of it, which is to learn and practice the complexities of the divine science. The student is not yet *mevin m'daato*, that is, able to think things through for himself. More, he requires leisure to acquire this intellectual power, and must have the physical and moral constitution for it, as will be seen. Just because a man has a potential, nothing guarantees its realization (*v'kol adam sh'yesh lo davar m'suyam b'koakh aino khiyuvi b'hekhrakh sh'yetze oto ha-davar b'poel*).

Maimonides calls this activation of the potential intellect man's "ultimate perfection," *shlemuto ha-sofit*. Connect this with his remark at the end of the chapter, in his account of the Fifth Problem, where he speaks of man's "first perfection," *ha-shlemut ha-rishonit*. He explains this pairing of perfections in Guide 3:27:

> "For it has already been found that man has a double perfection: the first perfection is that of the body, and the second (ultimate) perfection is that of the soul. The first consists in the most healthy condition of his material relations, and this is only possible when man has all his wants supplied, as they arise; if he has his food, and other things needful for his body, e.g., shelter, bath, and the like….The second perfection of man consists in his becoming an actually intelligent being; i.e., he knows about the things in existence all that a person perfectly developed is capable of knowing. This second perfection certainly does not include any action or good conduct, but only knowledge, which is arrived at by speculation, or established by research."

THE THIRD PROBLEM: PRELIMINARIES

Maimonides' Third Problem is the length of the preparatory study. He makes this section the longest of the five to demonstrate this point, for some of its length is repetition. Indeed, throughout this section, methods are ends, since by linking parables (there are three in this section) we reach the purpose of the preparatory study, which is the practice of the divine science (see, in my Introduction I, Section K, about Ben Azzai linking parables in a corona of flame).

What Are the Prerequisites? One cannot embark on the divine science without preliminary training in Torah studies (an unspoken if implied condition, see my comment on the prior chapter). The student must also graduate in mathematics, geometry, logic, astronomy, and physics. The particular usefulness of the preparatory studies should be obvious:

- The mathematical and logical studies prepare the student to handle propositions in abstract thought. For example, in geometry we learn of circular lines, from which we derive that a thing can exist without duplication or division (Crescas, *ad loc*).
- Physics teaches the work of God by which we know His ways;
- Astronomy prepares us for metaphysical cosmology, that is, God's relation to the universe.

The student learns these sciences as they were understood in Maimonides' time. The paradigm is their Aristotelian treatment, with the classic Arabic and Jewish translations and commentaries. Ancient astronomy, for example, with its ensouled spheres, was very different from our own. It depended on the concept of *cosmos*, the unified system of the *living* universe, as reflected and paralleled by our world, the *microcosm* (Guide 1:72).

These studies also remove or limit the imagination's stranglehold on our understanding of the higher things. Maimonides is thinking of the Kalam theologians who made imagination their principle guide. They doubted the usefulness of conceptualization and thereby undermined science. But the sciences could not exist if we could not extract the general notion from the particular instances. It was just this process of abstraction that the Kalam rejected. They also confused the essential with the accidental, betraying neglect of the prerequisite subject of logic.

Maimonides admits that some of these studies may not supply any premises for the divine science, particularly those that the scholastics called *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music—though he never mentions music). Yet they remain necessary for clear thought, free of confusion, which portrays things as they really are (*v'tosig l'adam tekhuna heikh l'lmod v'ladaat ha-emet b'dvarim shehem m'masiim*). They are necessary to anyone who wants to achieve human completeness (*ha-shlemut ha-enoshit*). Even though these studies may have nothing to do with the divine science, they bring the mind to maturity (immaturity being the subject of the Fourth Problem).

The Importance of Reflection on Material Reality. There is a truth behind all reality, connecting disparate parts of the divine science (which he lists here), as "you, however, know." The "you," mentioned here is Rabbi Joseph, who is in the midst of the preparatory studies, but just because of them, he can already grasp this truth. The fundamental principle is that there are only two existing things, God and His creation. There is no human apprehension of the divine except from God's own acts, from which we learn of His existence (*v'ayn sham derekh l'hasigo eleh al yeday maasav v'hem ha-morim al mtziuto*). We only learn the basics of God's existence, what we must affirm and deny of Him, having no access to his essence.

In all of this Maimonides carries forward a tradition of the disciplined *reflection* on existence called *bekhina.* His great predecessor, Bakhya Ibn Pakuda, made *bekhina* one of the "Gates" of his *Duties of the Heart*, *Hovot Ha-Levavot*:

> "The essence of reflection (*bekhina*) is (1) contemplation of the signs of the creator's wisdom manifested in creation, and (2) the soul's appreciation of them according to one's powers of perception." (Feldheim, vol. 1, p. 168)

Bakhya provides many examples of earthly wonders for us to reflect on, like the mechanism of the eye. He directs us to reflect on the eye's Creator, though it is one of His smaller miracles. While Maimonides proceeds differently from Bakhya, both regard *bekhina* as a precondition for the divine science.

Maimonides' *bekhina* differs in that by reflecting on the realities of *our* world, we learn all of the things that we must *deny* of God. Lacking clear concepts of the material universe, the student could not begin the study of Maimonides' negative theology, since he would not know what he could deny. Negative theology is an important branch of the study and practice of the divine science. So, for example, the negation of *numerical* unity, the

mathematic "one," provides some apprehension of the divine *non-numerical* unity. This would be inaccessible without some training in mathematics.

The Problem of Educational Resistance. These studies are lengthy. A person could die before completing them. Moreover, man's desire to reach ultimate truth in his lifetime makes him impatient with troublesome prerequisites. But if they were unnecessary, we could not justly call them "prerequisites," they would rather be "distractions and futilities." Although dialog form is clearly not his *métier* (he never gets farther than two or three turns of dialog), Maimonides briefly adopts that form to explain the importance of the prerequisites to an imagined interlocutor. This interlocutor is clearly not Rabbi Joseph, but, more likely, someone like the victim in the Parable of the Pit, who I will soon identify as a typical yeshiva student and would be intellectual. Maimonides asks if the student would like to learn the divine science, but the student's enthusiasm quickly fades when told he must spend even a week's time studying the preliminary course, for he is sure that he can conjure any background he needs from his own imagination (*lo yeot l'kakh, eleh yistapek b'dimionot kozvim sh'nafsho ninukhat behem*). The result is that he never possesses a clear notion of God.

In all this, the imagination overwhelms the still weak intellect. What is inaccessible to mind becomes the playground of fancy. When intellectual understanding is impossible, the imagination takes over. The imagination then wants to convince us that the preliminaries are irrelevant, harmful, anti-Torah, and misleading. It exalts itself over truth and deifies itself. Truth is not the imagination's *raison d'etre*. The purpose of the imagination is to connect diverse things beautifully. It is not concerned with the real requirements of the intellectual pursuit. The intellect, by contrast, is concerned with the reality of things as they are. The reality of things as they are merely bores the imagination.

Perhaps the worst educational problem is the tendency of the student beginning any study to imagine that he has grasped it whole just as he is starting, rejecting anything different, or new. The sophomoric imagination throws up every possible question, objection, and contradiction. In the traditional study of Talmudic subjects, this kind of sharp questioning is prized. In divine science, it is an obstacle. Demolishing a conceptual structure is much easier than raising one, for it is easier to raise doubts than to resolve them. When such a student does enter the field of divine science, he falls in a pit with no means to climb out. It would have been better had he never begun. Similarly, because of the dangers of the study (discussed in the last chapter), one must not begin the divine science without graduating in the prerequisites.

Maimonides associated these problems with what he, at first, calls *laziness*, the intellectual inertia derived from the physical inertia of all material bodies. This laziness affects those who style themselves intellectuals but do not graduate in the prerequisites. Their scholarly indolence has left them mired in false imaginings. These self-styled intellectuals wrongly deride the prerequisites as lacking benefit and dangerous to religion.

As we will see, it is not so much that they are lazy, but that they urge themselves toward the wrong objects. This is Maimonides' remarkable insight into the psychology of education. They fail in their preliminary studies since they do not sublimate these urges toward their studies.

The obstacles to learning flow from the nature of the subject matter itself. They are unavoidable. That is why, as we have seen, the beginning student must be satisfied with traditional dogmas and correct received opinions.

(We treat the three parables in the Third Problem separately at the end of this chapter).

THE FOURTH PROBLEM: PHYSICALITY

The Fourth Problem is that the physical and moral constitution of the student prevents him from learning. These obstacles include inertia or laziness, or there may be impediments that are more intractable. Maimonides makes little attempt to separate nature from nurture in this discussion, which may explain why this section is long, for the

two operate at various levels in his description of the problem. Maimonides' problem is his commitment to the freedom of the will, whereby the student should be free to remedy any natural handicap through education and training. Nonetheless, some people will never be able to enter the divine science.

He explains the physical impediments in the manner of medieval medical thought. The four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile), together with the "heat" and "moisture" of the genitals, form the natural temperamental limitations of the student (Crescas, *ad loc.*, surmises that those whose genitals are overheated lust for the wrong things). These temperaments include the neurological predisposition to agitation, the *shpilkes*, impetuosity and the "flame of youth." Under this heading come anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders. Ultimately, because of these limitations, Maimonides realizes that some are uneducable, and many cannot enter higher learning. He concludes that trying to remedy their defects is a waste of time (*v'hishtadlut imam b'zeh ha-inyan—sh'tut g'mura min ha-mishtadel*).

Still, even these people must acquire some fundamental education. He has lofty expectations for them. Everyone should master certain core dogmas of religion, such as divine unity and simplicity. He thinks most people can learn geometry, and, surprisingly, medicine (that is, medicine of the twelfth century). But the mere fact that even Socrates' slave boy Meno can learn geometry does not necessarily fit him to study theology or metaphysics.

Another core limitation is *immaturity*. The student must attain a certain age, settled character, patience, thoughtfulness and judiciousness without which scholarship is impossible. Maturity connects to morality, ethics, and conduct. These are the subject matters of the section of Mishneh Torah known as *Deot*. *Deot* is similar but broader than what Hebrew usually calls *middot* (conduct) and includes morality, but *deot* also includes health, diet, bathing and exercise. In other words, *deot* concerns physical *and* moral improvement. The student who would enter divine science must first achieve moral virtue. Moral virtues prepare for the intellectual virtues (*ha-maalot ha-midotiut hem ha-tzaot la-maalot ha-hegionot*, cf. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI:13:1144b30). But those whose physical humours result in bad physical "temperament" cannot hope even to attain moral virtue.

Maimonides turns next to several prerequisites to divine science listed in the Talmud *Hagigah*, essential to the student's educational maturity:

> "The headings of chapters (of *Maaseh Merkava*) may be transmitted only to the head of a court (Chief Justice: *av bet* din) and to one whose heart is *doeg* (anxious, depressed, humble) within him. Others say (*ika d'amri*): Only if his heart is *doeg* within him. R. Ammi said: The mysteries of the Torah may be transmitted only to one who possesses five attributes, [namely], The captain of fifty (*sar khameshim*), and the man of rank, and the *yoetz* (counselor), and *khakham kharashim* (sharp scholar) and *navon lakhash* (interpreter of parables, see Isaiah 3:3)." (*Hagigah* 13a, and compare to 14a)

These terms establish the Maimonidean prerequisites for the character of a scholar in divine science:

1. <u>*Humility*</u>. I identify in Maimonides' description a stage where the youth is broken hearted over his directionless striving, and, in *perplexity* (*ha-mevikha*), humbly turns to a more directed path. This is *doeg*, the characteristic of one "whose heart is full of care, i.e., in whom wisdom is united with humility, meekness, and a great dread of sin." Humility means that the student can exercise patience before the apparent contradictions rife in divine science. It is the most important characteristic. Maimonides says that the student who "conquers his heart liberates his soul to attain God, meaning, the divine science, which is the *Maaseh Merkava*" (my trans., *yikna'u libotehem...v'az y'romemu et atzmam la-draga zo, v'hi hasagato ytalei, k'lomar ha-mada ha-eloki asher mekhanim b'maaseh ha-merkava*). Note his equation of humility / the attainment of God / divine science / *Maaseh Merkava*. Humility, the conquering of the heart, is the first step to divine illumination of the mind. It is as though he has to kill his heart to have it resurrected—Maimonides quoting Isaiah:

> "I dwell in the high and lofty place, with him that is of a humble and contrite spirit: to revive (*l'hakhiot*—resurrect) the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isaiah 57:15)

The Talmud *Hagigah* at first states that the student must attain the office of Chief Justice, *av beit din*. But this higher rabbinic degree is not really a requirement. That is because the clause "others say whose heart is *doeg*" implies that the rank of *av beit din* is not the real requirement but that only *doeg* is. The student should rather have the *qualities* of a Chief Justice: judiciousness, fairness, weighing sides, collegiality, etc.

2. <u>*Political ability*</u>. In *Hagiga* this is called *yoetz*, "counselor." One who is only a *yoetz* has a highly developed imagination linked to a less developed intellect. He is a leader who retains information and makes good quick decisions, as well as long-term political judgments. One who exemplifies only this trait may not enter philosophic discourse at any level. Maimonides says that this person is unable to understand "first intelligibles," *muskalot ha-rishonim.* This is probably an exaggeration. What it means is that this person lacks the ability to conceptualize. Schwarz (note 36, *ad loc.*, following Alfarabi), says that a "first intelligible" is a self-evident truth. That "opposites do not unite at the same place and time" is a "first intelligible." In the moment of recognition of this first intelligible, the *potential intellect* becomes *active intellect* on that point. Maimonides calls these first intelligibles "devices" (Judeo-Arabic חילה, Ibn Tibon: *takhbula*), since they are the necessary tools for the practice of the divine science. One who is merely a *yoetz* "might be very stupid and lacking in *intelligent devices*," *hu sakhal meod, ayn takhbula imo* (Eng., Pines; Heb., Tibon).

3. <u>*Completion of the preliminary studies*</u>. The "sharp scholar," *hakham harashim*, according to Maimonides' understanding, has the above three constitutional requirements, and has also mastered the lengthy preliminary studies, that is, logic, mathematics, geometry, physics, and astronomy.

4. <u>*Insightfulness*</u>. *Navon lakhash* is literally translated "the understanding of whispering." This is the ability to interpret hints, allusions, and obscure references. It is the *positive* contribution of the imagination to the intellect. This person can simultaneously conceal concepts from the masses while revealing them to the wise. One, however, who is only a *navon lakhash*, cannot achieve wisdom through the sciences. Even-Shmuel calls him a poet who lacks substance, *baal signon v'tokhen dal.*

5. <u>*Age*</u>. This is the *sar khameshim*, the "captain of fifty," mentioned in *Hagigah*. The term is taken to mean fifty years of age. The traditional understanding of the age requirement of *Maaseh Merkava* and *Maaseh Bereshit* usually takes "fifty" to mean forty. But if the student acquired requisites 1 through 4 above he probably satisfies this requirement despite his actual age in years. Maimonides does not mention any particular age. It is less a requirement than recognition that the candidate has attained the qualities associated with age forty: the ability to conceptualize and comprehend what his teachers taught him (Rashi to *Pirke Avot* 5:21: *l'havin davar m'tokh davar...m'khan l'talmid sh'ayno omed al daat rabo ad sh'hu ben arbaim*). Age also refers to the "flame of youth." He must overcome youthful nervousness and the unsettled cast of mind that impede learning.

THE FIFTH PROBLEM: *PARNASA*

Man's "initial" or "first" perfection is his physical perfection. It is the prerequisite for the "ultimate" or "second" perfection, the perfection of the intellect. The latter is most important, but it comes second in time. The student must acquire the "first perfection," the necessities of life, before embarking on the tour of the mind. The first perfection includes all the accoutrements of civilized urban life, from reasonably fashionable and clean clothing to decent repasts, community, income, family, etc. The student must also pursue some profession, *parnasa*, if not born wealthy. (On the "perfections," see above, Second Problem, and Guide 3:27)

Compounding the *parnasa* problem is our inability to identify a standard of living. We become accustomed to unnecessary material attachments or even luxuries. These change with the times. Indoor plumbing was a luxury a century ago but a requirement today, while television is an extravagance many now imagine necessary. The

problem is not so much the type or nature of the material attachment but the desire for it. The growing desire for material things crowds out the desire for the intellectual or spiritual pursuits:

> "Even the perfect man to whom we have referred, if too busy with these necessary things, much more so if busy with unnecessary things, and filled with a great desire for them—must weaken or altogether lose his desire for study, to which he will apply himself with interruption, lassitude, and want of attention."

However we sort this out, one needs leisure and money to support scholarship. The Rabbis described earning a living, *parnasa*, as more difficult than crossing the Red Sea (Talmud, *Pesakhim* 118). This may be the hardest of the five problems, but its solution is an absolute prerequisite to the divine science. The result, uncomfortably for moderns, is that this science is the pursuit of the elite:

> "For these reasons it was proper that the study of Metaphysics (Pines: "these matters," *kol ha-davarim halalu*) should have been exclusively cultivated by privileged persons, and not entrusted to the common people. It is not for the beginner, and he should abstain from it, as the little child has to abstain from taking solid food and from carrying heavy weights."

We should appreciate Maimonides' realism. "All men are created equal but differ greatly in the sequel," as American founding father Fisher Ames said. This realism grows from Maimonides' medical appreciation of the different treatments required for different diseases. His educational theory parallels his understanding that each patient is unique. Leveling may produce geometricians but never philosophers or prophets.

THE PARABLE OF THE PIT

> "There is also a necessity of another kind for achieving knowledge of the preliminary studies. It arises from the fact that when a man seeks to obtain knowledge quickly, many doubts occur to him, and he moreover quickly understands objections—I mean to say the destruction of a particular doctrine, this being similar to the demolition of a building (Friedlander here, 'the demolition of a building is easier than its erection'). Now the establishment of doctrines as true and the solution of doubts can only be grounded upon many premises taken from these preliminary studies. One engaged in speculation without preliminary study is therefore comparable to someone who walked on his two feet in order to reach a certain place, and, while on his way fell into a deep well (*bor amok*: pit rather than well is meant) without having any device (Judeo-Ar.: חילה, *takhbula* in Ibn Tibon), to get out of there before he perishes. It would have been better for him if he had foregone walking and quietly remained in his own place." (Pines trans., 75-76)

Maimonides built the third section, about the need to conclude the lengthy preliminaries, around the Parable of the Pit, but this section also contains two other parables. Just before the Parable of the Pit is the Parable of Demolition, followed by the Parable of the Slothful One. Maimonides wrote the Guide to resolve parables in prophetic literature, and their resolution is the practice of divine science. Still, he usually refrains from parables. When he does use allegorical method, it is the means to achieve his desired end. He not only wants to prove the importance of the preliminary studies, but also to give his reader a taste of the practice of divine science.

The Parable of Demolition and the Parable of the Pit appear to be folk parables. The Parable of the Slothful One, is Solomonic, from Proverbs.

He begins with the very brief Parable of Demolition. Maimonides' context, at this point in the Third Problem, is his discussion of the sophomoric propensity of newly minted intellectuals to raise objections, questions and apparent contradictions. They question both the need for preparatory studies and even the divine science itself. Jewish educational culture, centered in yeshivas, exalts the sharp scholar, the champion of debate (*pilpul*) who overturns mountains when he speaks. This person cannot begin to learn the divine science, for it is penetrated by

apparent contradictions, concepts we grasp fleetingly, like reflections of lightning in amber. He approaches these delicate structures with a wrecking ball, though demolition really requires no great force. When you remove a brick from the foundation of a building, the structure collapses. Just as a building is one interdependent structure, so are the structures of divine science, and the latter are upset with even less difficulty.

But the student has another problem. He has an intense *desire* to learn the secrets of the divine science: he just doesn't want to do the preliminary work. These labors would have equipped him with the ability to think, i.e., the ability to actualize a "first intelligible," *muskal rishon*. Maimonides illustrates this problem with a parable: his student enters the divine science carrying with him nothing but strong desire for it. He proceeds on his way and falls (or perhaps dives?) into a pit. Maimonides does not say that there is any particular problem with his chosen path: he did not take a wrong turn nor did he get lost in the woods. He falls into a pit that is so deep that he cannot get out. This compares to the deep water that the non-swimmer drowned in (at the beginning of our chapter), because he lacked knowledge of swimming. The problem now is that the victim fell in a deep pit (*bor amok*) "without having any *device* to get out of there before he perishes" (Pines translation; Friedlander misleadingly leaves out "device"). What device did he fail to bring? Why did he fail to bring it?

The Judeo-Arabic term is חילה, *ḥiyala*, which Ibn Tibon consistently translates as *takhbula*/device, stratagem (accord, usually, Schwarz and Pines, Kafih uses *etza*). Efros, *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, p. 122, says that it means "artifices" and locates it in Guide 1:73 where it is the name of a book, *Kitáb al-Hiyal, The Book of Ingenious Devices of the Banu Shakir* (English translation, Springer; 2007). This book listed various inventive contraptions, such as waterclocks, that were based on the principle of *horror vacui*, that nature abhors a vacuum. For Maimonides, the *horror vacui* is a intellectual concept, which, in Guide 1:73 he uses to defeat the Kalam theologians (about which we learn much more later). Since they believed there could be no fixed intellectual concepts, they could have no explanation why these vacuum devices worked. They entered divine science with nothing to guide them but the rule of their imaginations, rejecting the efficacy of all cognition. They also fell into a vacuum, so to speak, with no device to save themselves.

The term חילה appears again in the account of the Fourth Problem, where Maimonides discusses politicians. We learn what he means by an ingenious device (Pines, p. 78):

> "...such a one is called *yoetz* (counselor). However, someone of that sort might not understand an intelligible notion even though it were close to being one of the first intelligibles. He might be very stupid (*peti*) and lacking in *ingenious devices* (חילה, *takhbula* in Ibn Tibon)

When Maimonides uses חילה, he makes it the basic *cell* of intellectual activity. This device is the product and practice of thought, the concept as well as its actualization. The educational prerequisites prepare for such thought by removing it from the grip of the imagination. They give thought logical method and real objects for that method to work on. The "device" is just this ability to cognize. Without this device, the journey through divine science must end in the pit, for the imagination substitutes its images for the divine concepts, creating gods in its own material image. Since the victim was without "any device" he cannot "get out of there before he perishes," *sh'ayn takhbula lo latzet mimenu ad sh'yamut* (Ibn Tibon).

What was the device did he neglected to bring? He must have failed to bring the *rope*. With a rope he could have climbed out of the pit. Recall that in the Introduction, Maimonides noted Solomon's advice to make a rope to draw water from a well, and that such a rope was *twined* from different strands. Similarly, by linking concept to concept, device to device, we safely journey through divine science, actualizing the intellect as both practice and end. With no device we "perish" not only from the spiritual life (as Even-Shmuel suggests), but also because we have no recourse but idolatry, which, from Maimonides' standpoint, is death.

Why did the victim neglect to bring the rope? This is the subject of the final parable. Maimonides focuses on the psychology of this victim (in rather modern terms). He begins with its apparent manifestation, the laziness of lazy

people, *ha-atzelim v'atzlutam* (Ibn Tibon), too lazy to seek wisdom: "He speaks thus of a man who *desires* (*ba'teshukat ha-mishtokek*) to know the final results" without the preliminaries, saying in the words of Solomon: "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not" (Proverbs 21:25-26). He responds to this Proverb:

> "...He does nothing but desire, and hopes to obtain a thing without using the means to reach it. It would be better for him were he without that desire."

He should have stayed home without venturing into the field of divine science. Maimonides deconstructs the Proverb, subtly emphasizing lust over laziness. He explains that the antithesis for Solomon was not between "righteous" and "slothful," *tzaddik* and *atzel*. The key is that the *atzel* "coveteth greedily," while the *tzaddik* "giveth." *Giveth* means that the *tzaddik* "gives everything its due," *ha-ish ha-tzedek m'bnai adam ha-noten l'kol davar et raui lo* (cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I:9:1367b14). He does this by devoting due time ("all his time") to the preliminary studies. The *atzel*, by contrast, only lusts. He really is not lazy; his problem is his misdirected devotion. It begins to look like the contrast is between "studious" and "lustful." But that is not the solution either.

Watch what Maimonides does next. He rewrites the last part of the Proverb so that instead of "The righteous giveth and spareth not," he has it read, "The righteous man devotes his days to wisdom and is not sparing of them" (Pines). But then he goes further and says that his rewritten Proverb "corresponds to his (Solomon's) saying, 'Give not your strength unto women' (Proverbs 31:3)."

This unusual deconstruction and reconstruction demands our special attention. The first rewrite is about the *tzaddik*, and, in a negative way, the second rewrite is also about him. He not only devotes his time to his studies but he does not allow any other extraneous desire to divide his consciousness. But the real target of the second rewrite, "Give not your strength unto women," is the *atzel*.

Maimonides has a clear concept of what "Give not your strength unto women" means. In Mishneh Torah, *Deot*, 4:19 he writes:

> "Semen constitutes the strength of the body, its life and the light of the eyes. Its emission to excess causes decay, debility and diminished vitality. Thus, Solomon, in his wisdom, said 'Give not your strength unto women.'"

The *Treatise on Unity*, *Maamar Ha-Yikhud*, a short work attributed to Maimonides, refines the concept further: "'Give not your strength unto women'...meaning, do not give the essence of your strength to those who corrupt (cause the loss of) the intelligent" (Fred Rosner, *Three Treatises Attributed to Maimonides*, 83. *Lo titen helekh l'mafsidei haskelim*). The woman who corrupts the intelligent ones could be the "Married Harlot" of Proverbs 7:5 (Guide, Introduction) or it could mean any material or imagined distraction.

Having rewritten the Proverb twice, he briefly summarizes his position:

> "Now the majority of the men of knowledge, I mean those generally known as men of knowledge, labor under this disease—I mean that which consists in seeking to achieve the ends and in speaking about them without having engaged in studies preliminary to them. With some of them, their ignorance or their desire to have the first place (desire to rule, *bakashat ha-srara*) goes so far as to cause them to disapprove of these preliminary studies, which they are incapable of grasping or are too lazy to seek to understand. Accordingly, they wish to show that these studies are harmful or useless. However, when one reflects, the truth of the matter is clear and manifest."

What alleged "men of knowledge" was he writing about? What do they seek? What is their disease? What is "clear and manifest?"

Here is my portrayal of the past few paragraphs containing the three parables. The Parables of the Demolition, the Pit, and the Slothful One all depict the same person. He is a novice intellectual in religious studies, probably similar to what we would now call a yeshiva student. We teach him the basics of religion and a considerable amount of other material. Like all sophomores he learns perhaps too quickly (*sophos*/clever; *moros*/fool). Since he already knows it all, he throws up myriad clever problems and contradictions, impatiently demolishing entire structures of subtle speculative knowledge. He has a strong desire to learn the secrets of the Torah, but does not want to engage in the preparatory studies. He has many wonderful reasons why he should not have to do so. Because he thinks that he knows everything he needs, he does not worry about the dangers of entering the divine science. He resolves contradictions in that field by exercising his vibrant imagination on them, but just because of this, he falls into the pit of idolatry, the world of images. It would have been better had he stayed home and memorized the dogmas rather than attempting paradise with no tools but his imagination. Had he learned the preparatory studies he would have known how to think, i.e., how to actualize a first intelligible. He would be able to link them like a rope to form some device to save his soul. Why did he neglect to bring such a device? His *eros* was for the wrong things, either because of ignorance or, more likely, a desire to rule. He engaged in divine science, "seeking to achieve the ends and in speaking about them without having engaged in studies preliminary to them," perhaps purchasing a popular book on Cabala so that he could discuss it engagingly at a coffee-house. Worse, he actively and loudly "disapprove(s) of these preliminary studies."

In truth, he was still engaged in a material pursuit, not an intellectual one: he weakened his mind through this lust, like one who, proverbially, weakens his body by giving his strength to women. Solomon's Proverb should have reminded us of the Parable of the Married Harlot, where we saw other students lust for the Married Harlot to their doom, just as matter absorbs any new form.

On one level, instead of giving his strength to women the student should sublimate that strength in his studies, thereby raising himself to the divine science with a saving device. On another level, by pursuing his material eros for the secrets of Torah he dies a spiritual death like the *atzel*, since "The *desire* of the slothful killeth him."

He should have stayed home with his studies. Solomon's Book of Proverbs concludes with its thirty-first chapter. That chapter begins at verse three with the admonition not to give thy strength unto women. It concludes at verse ten with the encomium to the "Woman of Valor" whose price is above rubies, whose husband safely trusts in her because she devotes herself only to his household. Just because she stayed and devoted herself to her home, when "she openeth her mouth" she does so "with wisdom," unlike those "generally known as men of knowledge." This secret is "clear and manifest," but only to those who know.

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