

of My unity established. You, however, have come to dismiss that purpose, and cling to those things that were merely instituted for its sake. You have attached doubt to My existence: *They have denied the Lord and said, he existeth not* (Jeremiah 5, 12). You have worshipped idols: *will ye . . . burn incense to Baal and walk after other gods . . . and then come and stand before my presence in this house?* (Jeremiah 7, 9-10): you still visit the temple of God and offer sacrifices, though these were not intended as a primary purpose.

That very same idea which is here expressed by Jeremiah, is also put forward in the Psalms as a reproof for the whole people, because they ignored at that time the primary purpose and made no clear distinction between it and the secondary purpose: *Hear, o my people and I will speak; o Israel and I will testify against thee: God, thy God, am I. Not because of thy sacrifices will I reprove thee, and thy burnt-offerings are continually before me. I will not take a bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds* (Psalm 50, 7-9). Wherever this idea is expressed it has this meaning. Think this well over and take it to heart.

CHAPTER LI

THE chapter that now follows does not contain any new ideas other than those found in the preceding chapters of this treatise. It is a kind of conclusion or summary. At the same time ^{new} it discusses the manner of worship proper for those who have apprehended the truths relating particularly to Him after apprehending what He is, and guides such men towards achieving this worship, which is the highest purpose of mankind. It further informs them how divine providence affects them in this world until they are gathered into the bundle of life (I Samuel 25, 29). see p. 192

I shall open this chapter with a simile: A prince is in his castle; his subjects are partly dwelling in the city and partly without. Of those in the city, some have turned their backs towards the prince's house and face another way. Others are making for the house of the prince and are directed towards it,

seeking to obtain entry to it to have audience with the prince; but to this moment they have not yet seen the walls of the palace. Some of those who are going towards it have reached the palace and are wandering round it in search of the gate. A few have entered through the gate and are passing through the forecourt. Others again have got so far as to enter the inner courtyard of the palace and thus are in the same locality as the prince, i.e. in the palace itself. Penetrating as far as the inside of the palace does not yet mean that they see the prince or speak to him. Far from this, after entering the palace further efforts are required: then only does one reach the presence of the prince and see him from afar or nearby, hears him speak, or is allowed to address him.

I shall now explain this simile to you which I have invented: those who are outside the city are all those human beings who possess no religious belief whatever, be it of a speculative or of a traditional nature, such as the outlying tribes of the Turks in the distant north and the negroes in the distant south, as well as those in our own part of the world who resemble them in this respect. These are like animals devoid of reason; in my view they are not to be classed as human beings, but among the beings below the humans and above the apes, since they possess human shape and outline and higher intelligence than the ape.

Those who are in the city but turn their backs to the prince's palace are men of thought and speculation who have arrived at false opinions, be this due to some major error that crept into their reasoning or to their acceptance of erroneous ideas of others. Because of these opinions they are in such a position that with every step they become further removed from the palace. These are much worse off than the first group. It is they whose killing and the utter extermination of whose ideas is at times required by necessity, lest they cause others to go astray.⁸⁰

Those who are making for the palace and aim at entering it, but have never seen the palace yet, are the great mass of those who obey the Law, or in other words the 'men without learning who occupy themselves with religious duties'.

Those who have arrived at the palace and are walking round it are those possessed of religious learning, who accept the right opinions as traditional beliefs and study the detailed ordinances of the works demanded in the service of God, but have never made an attempt to speculate on the principles of their faith or inquired in any way into the justification of any item of faith.

Those who have embarked on speculation concerning the principles of religion have entered the forecourts. No doubt the people there are of varying ranks. Those finally, who have succeeded in obtaining demonstrative proof of everything that can be demonstratively proved, and have reached certainty with regard to all those metaphysical matters on which certainty can be reached, and have almost reached certainty wherever no more than this was possible, those, I say, have penetrated to the presence of the prince in the inner parts of the palace.

Know, my dear son, that as long as you are occupied with the mathematical sciences and the technique of logic, you belong to those who walk around the palace in search of the gate, as our Sages have expressed it metaphorically: 'Ben Zoma is still outside' (Hagiga 15a). As soon as you learn the natural sciences you enter the palace and pass through its forecourts. When you complete your study of the natural sciences and get a grasp of metaphysics, you enter unto the prince *into the inner courtyard* (Ezekiel 44, 21, 27) and have achieved to be in the same house as he. This is the rank of the learned, though they are of different degrees of perfection. But as for the man who after having reached full perfection in metaphysics exercises his mind independently and inclines with his whole being to God, leaving aside everything else, and devotes all activities of his intellect to contemplation of the universe in order to find in it guidance towards God, so as to learn how God governs it – such men are those who have obtained admission to the audience-chamber of the prince. This is the rank of prophets.⁸¹ One among these, through the high degree of his perception and his complete abstraction from everything else, got so far that it was said of him *and he was there with God* (Exodus 34, 28).

There he was, in that sacred place, asking and receiving replies, speaking and being spoken to. Owing to the supreme happiness caused by that which he perceived, he *did neither eat bread, nor drink water* (ibid.); for the intellect had grown so strong that every crude force in the body, that is the manifestations of the sense of touch, was put out of action. Other prophets only saw from nearby and others again only from afar, as it is said: *the Lord hath appeared from afar* unto me* (Jeremiah 31, 3**). We have spoken above (part ii, ch. xl) of the different degrees of prophecy.

Let us now return to the subject of this chapter, which is the obligation*** of exercising one's independent power of thinking on the subject of God alone after having obtained the knowledge of Him, as we have explained before. This is the form of service to God which is reserved for those who have apprehended Truth. The more they think about God and let their minds dwell upon Him, the more intensive their service to Him.⁸²

Those, however, who think of God and mention Him frequently§ without any knowledge, but just following some imagination or a belief taken over on the authority of others, are in my opinion not only outside the palace, but¶ far removed from it, and neither really mention God nor think of Him, since that idea which is in their imagination and which they mention with their lips does not correspond to any reality whatsoever. It is merely a figment of their imagination, as we have shown in our chapter on Attributes. §§ Such a form of service to God can be undertaken only after intellectual ideation. It is only after having apprehended God and His works according as the intellect requires it, that you can attempt to devote yourself to Him and strive to come near Him and to broaden the bond that links you with him, i.e. the intellectual

*Maimonides' interpretation agrees with the Peshitta, and possibly the Septuagint, against Jewish tradition. A.V.: 'of old'. Cf., however, Sotah 11a.

**Hebrew vs. 2.

***For this meaning of *ta'hid* cf. Guide iii. 125.a.6 (Munk).

§ A quotation from Koran iii. 41?

¶Reading *ba'ldan*.

§§Cf. p. 65.

function. It is said: *Unto thee it was shewed that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God* (Deuteronomy 4, 35); *Know therefore this day and consider it in thine heart that the Lord he is God* (ibid. 39); *Know ye that the Lord he is God* (Psalm 100, 3).

The Torah has made it quite clear that this ultimate form of service, to which we draw attention in this chapter, is possible only after God has been apprehended: *to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul* (Deuteronomy 11, 13). We have on several occasions shown that love is proportionate to the degree of apprehension. After love follows that service, to which also our Sages allude (with reference to this verse): 'this is service in one's heart' (Taanith 2a, etc.).* In my view it (the service) consists in exercising one's power of thinking with regard to the First Intelligible (πρῶτον νοητόν) and in concentrating upon Him as far as this is possible.⁸³ For this reason you find that David in his last will enjoined upon Solomon these two duties, zeal in apprehending God and zeal in His service after apprehending Him: *And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him . . . if thou seek him, he will be found of thee* (I Chronicles 28, 9).

The stress is in every instance on intellectual apprehension, not on imaginations, for thinking about imaginations is not called 'knowing' but *that which cometh into your mind* (Ezekiel 20, 32). It has also become clear that, after apprehending, the aim should be complete devotion to God and perpetual exercising of intellectual thought in His love. This succeeds mostly in a state of solitude and seclusion; which is why every man of virtue secludes himself as much as possible and keeps company with others only when this is unavoidable.

*In the Talmud: 'which is service in one's heart?'