

A Kingdom of Priests

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וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ-לִי מַמְלַכֶּת כֹּהֲנִים
וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ (שמות יט:ו)

אל תיראו — Do Not Fear

In Rambam's enumeration of the six hundred thirteen *mitzvos*, he counts a negative commandment prohibiting one from experiencing fear during war.

The 58th prohibition is that we are forbidden from fearing the infidels at time of war and not tremble before them. Rather, it is an obligation to strengthen one's heart and stand strong in the lines of battle. And any person who turns away and flees violates the negative commandment of "Do not tremble before them" (*Devarim* 7:21) which is also stated in the verse "Do not fear them" (*Devarim* 3:22). This concept of not trembling or turning back during war is repeated multiple times, for in this manner one is able to sustain the true faith.

Ramban argues that since the Torah calls upon the field commanders to warn soldiers at the front that "he who is fearful and faint of heart"¹ should leave the battlefield immediately after the priests have exhorted them with the words² "Let not your heart faint; fear not, nor be alarmed, nor tremble before them; for the L-rd your G-d is He that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you," it is difficult to believe that we consider experiencing this fear to be a Torah prohibition.³ "[Is it

¹ וְיִסְפוּ הַשֹּׁטְרִים, לְדַבֵּר אֶל-הָעָם, וְאָמְרוּ מִי-הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה הִנְרָא וְרָדוּ הַלֵּבָב, יֵלֶךְ וְיָשֹׁב לְבֵיתוֹ; וְלֹא יִמַּס אֶת-לֵבב אָחִיו, כְּלָבָבוּ (דברים כ:ח)

² וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, אַתֶּם קְרֹבִים הַיּוֹם לְמִלְחָמָה עַל-אֲבִיבֵיכֶם; אֵל-יְרֹד לְבַבְכֶם, אֵל-תִּירְאוּ וְאֵל-תַּחַפְּזוּ וְאֵל-תַּעַרְצוּ—מִפְּנֵיהֶם. (דברים כ:ג)

³ כתב הרב והמצוה חמשים ושמונה שנמנענו מלפחד מהכופרים בשעת מלחמה והוא אמרו יתעלה לא תערוץ מפניהם וכפל המניעה לא תיראום. וכפלו שוטרי העם זה העניין (שופטי' כ הובא

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probable] that one transgressing the *lav* is called upon to publicize his transgression and leave?” Thus Ramban substitutes⁴ for Rambam’s *lav* “to not fear” a *lav* based on another phrase in the same verse, “do not cause the hearts of your brothers to weaken,”⁵ which he interprets to mean actually fleeing while in the midst of battle. He who is “fearful and of faint heart”⁶ should in fact not engage in battle.⁷

It seems⁸ that at the root of Ramban’s objection to Rambam’s inclusion of this *mitzvah* is the belief that the Torah does not mandate what it is impossible for a person to fulfill, and thus, if the Torah commands one not to fear, this means that it is possible to control one’s fear. So why are the fearful allowed to present it as an excuse?⁹ After all, fear in the face of danger is natural. The Torah tells us that even Yaakov feared when he faced war (*Bereishis* 32:4). How could the Torah prohibit this emotion? Nevertheless, Rambam feels that it is forbidden and in fact in *Shemonah Perakim*¹⁰ he points to Yaakov’s fear as proof that even a prophet may have shortcomings. He describes how faith can conquer fear, and since it is possible to reach this level of faith thus it is possible to overcome one’s fear.

במ"ע קצא) וזו הבטחה לא מצוה. ואם מניעה היא לא יוסיפו השוטרים ויאמרו מי האיש הירא ורך הלבב שעבר הלאו יפרסם חטאו ויחזור (השגות הרמב"ן לספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות לא תעשה נח).

⁴ See added *lav* 10 in Ramban’s additions to the Rambam’s *Sefer HaMitzvos*.

⁵ ולא ימס לבב אחיו.

⁶ ירא ורך לבב.

⁷ There is room for discussion with regard to the nuances in Rambam’s statement of the *lav* and whether he in fact directed it only at the soldier in battle or also at this very soldier who is allowed to leave the front. See note 9.

⁸ See Rabbi Chavel’s comments quoting the *Maachshaves Moshe*.

⁹ Some commentators claim that אינו יכול לעמוד בקשרי מלחמה is another category of physical disability and that such a person does not transgress. Some claim as well that Rambam only placed the prohibition upon the one who is in the midst of war and flees because of his fear — closer to the position of Ramban. There is support in Rambam’s language in the *Sefer HaMitzvos* for this position. However, the fact that Rambam in *Hilchos Melachim* says the source of the prohibition is אל תיראו which precedes מי הירא would suggest otherwise as Ramban understands him. Even if Rambam means the fullest violation of this לאו is during battle, it is clear that there is some violation at every point, and that is why Rambam counts לא יירא rather than לא ימס. Also it seems that in מלחמת רך וירא ורך לבב Rambam contends there is no dispensation for the רך וירא and thus he does contend that one is certainly obligated to control this initial fear when faced with this type of war.

¹⁰ Chapter 7. Shmuel feared King Shaul as well.

Once a soldier enters the throes of battle, he should rely on the Hope of Israel and their Savior in times of need. He should realize that he is fighting for the sake of the unity of G-d's Name. Therefore, he should place his soul in His hand and not be fearful or afraid. He should not worry about his wife or children. But rather, he should wipe their memory from his heart, and turn away from all things and towards war. Anyone who begins to think and lets his thoughts stray in the midst of battle to the point where he frightens himself violates a negative commandment, as it is written (*Devarim* 20:3): "Do not be faint-hearted. Do not be afraid. Do not panic and do not tremble before them." Furthermore, he is responsible for the blood of the entire Jewish nation. And if he is not valiant, if he does not wage war with all his heart and soul, it is considered as if he shed the blood of the entire people... While, anyone who fights with his entire heart, without fear, with the intention of sanctifying G-d's Name alone, is assured that no harm will come to him, nor will bad overtake him and he will build a fine family in Israel and gather merit for himself and his children forever. And he will merit eternal life in the World to Come as (*Shmuel I* 25:28–29) states: "G-d will certainly make my lord a faithful house, for my lord fights the wars of G-d and evil will not be found with you... and my lord's soul will be bound in a bond of life with G-d." (*Hilchos Melachim* 7:15)¹¹

The violation comes about when one lets his "thoughts stray" so that he "frightens himself" (**לחשב ולהרהר במלחמה, ומבהיל עצמו**). Fear is a matter of free choice and the *tzaddik* is able to use the mechanism of faith to control it. Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 5:2) says that every individual is capable of being a *tzaddik* "comparable to Moshe Rabbeinu" and thus the laws of the Torah make no distinctions in its obligations and will sometimes mandate that which only the very few will ever fulfill.

¹¹ יז [טו] "מי האיש הירא ורך הלבב" (דברים כח) — כמשמעו, שאין בליבו כוח לעמוד בקשרי המלחמה. ומאחר שייכנס אדם בקשרי המלחמה, יישען על מקוה ישראל ומושיעו בעת צרה, וידע שעל ייחוד השם הוא עושה מלחמה, וישים נפשו בכפו ולא יירא ולא יפחד, ולא יחשב לא באשתו ולא בבניו, אלא ימחה זכרם מליבו וייפנה מכל דבר למלחמה. **יה וכל המתחיל לחשב ולהרהר במלחמה, ומבהיל עצמו** — עובר בלא תעשה, שנאמר "אל יירך לבבכם, אל תיראו ואל תחפזו ואל תערצו — מפניהם" (דברים כג). יש ולא עוד, אלא שכל דמי ישראל תלויין בצווארו; ואם לא ניצח ולא עשה מלחמה בכל ליבו ובכל נפשו — הרי זה כמי ששפך דמי הכול, שנאמר "ולא יימס את לבב אחיו, כלבבו" (דברים כח). והרי מפורש בקבלה "ארור, עושה מלאכת ה' — רמייה; וארור, מונע חרבו מדם" (ירמיהו מח, י). כ וכל הנלחם בכל ליבו בלא פחד ותהיה כוונתו לקדש את השם בלבד — מובטח לו שלא ימצא נזק ולא תגיעו רעה, ויבנה לו בית נכון בישראל, ויזכה לו ולבניו עד עולם, ויזכה לחיי העולם הבא: שנאמר "כי עשה יעשה ה' לאדוני בית נאמן, כי מלחמות ה' אדוני נלחם, ורעה לא תמצא בך, מימך והייתה נפש אדוני צרורה בצרור החיים, את ה' אלוהיך" (שמואל א כה, כח-כט). (מלכים ז: טו)

On the other hand, Ramban's argument that it is implausible that the Torah would allow the sinner to announce his sin and thus claim an exemption, forces us to another conclusion as well with regard to Ramban's position. Since the Torah laws are sometimes so difficult to fulfill, their failure is sometimes to be accepted and condoned. If the soldier realizes that he will flee, he should leave the front and not endanger his whole troop even though in so doing he has given in to his fear and violates a Torah prohibition.¹²

With All Your Soul and All your Might — בכל נפשך ובכל מאדך

In defining the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem*, giving one's life rather than submitting under duress to the violation of even a single minor *mitzvah* in the Torah, Rambam writes about the uniqueness of Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah, who stood up for G-d's honor when the whole world was willing to bow before an idol.

This is the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem* **that all of Israel was commanded in**, to give ourselves up to death in the hands of the oppressor for the sake of the love of the Alm-ghty and our belief in His Unity as did Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the days of Nevuchadnetzar the Evil when he forced [all people] to bow to an idol, and all people bowed to it and Israel was amongst them, and there was none to sanctify (*mekadesh*) the Name of Heaven. And this was a matter of great shame to Israel that the *mitzvah* was lost from them all, and none was willing to fulfill it; all feared. And this *mitzvah* is only fulfilled in such a situation, where the entire world is in a state of fear, and then the obligation exists to publicize G-d's unity and to announce it at that time. (*Sefer HaMitzvos, Aseh 9*)

Rambam says such people are on the highest level that a human can reach.

When anyone about whom it is said: "Sacrifice your life and do not transgress," sacrifices his life and does not transgress, he sanctifies [G-d's] name. If he does so in the presence of ten Jews, he sanctifies [G-d's] name in public, like Daniel, Chananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues. These are those slain by [the wicked] kingdom, above whom there is no higher level. Concerning them, it states: "For Your sake, we have been slain all day, we are viewed as

¹² In the realm of war, the Torah permits even **אשת יפת תואר**, and according to Rambam, soldiers at the front need not even bother to look for kosher food (*Hilchos Melachim*, Chapter 8). It is along these lines that we permit the fearful to return from the front. It is an issue of **פקודת נפש**.

sheep for the slaughter,” (Psalms 44:23) and “Gather unto Me, My pious ones, those who have made a covenant with Me by slaughter” (Psalms 50:5). (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, Chapter 5)

While the *balachab* is that if one submits, he is called an אנוס (forced) and there is no punishment for his violation, still all Jews are obligated in this *mitzvah*.¹³ On the one hand, it is demanded of all, but on the other hand, the expectation is that only the exceptional few will fulfill it.

It’s worth noting another *balachab*. Should a fire break out in one’s property on Shabbos, in a situation where there is no fear that there will be loss of life, one is not permitted to douse the fire, even if an uninsured fortune will be lost.¹⁴ In fact, even if the whole town is in danger of burning down, it is not permitted to put out the fire. Rema,¹⁵ to some degree, nullified this *balachab* by ruling that today whilst we live amongst the gentiles, fear of retribution makes this an issue of *pikuach nefesh*. Yet how many of us would have the self-control to not quickly douse a nascent fire that, if left alone, will destroy one’s savings and leave him a pauper? Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach notes the issue raised by the Aderes as to whether a *talmid chacham* faced with the destruction of a lifetime of his writings would perhaps be able to save them, for the pain of its loss will likely lead to his early death, as is attested to by known example. Comparably he suggests it can be claimed that were a wealthy man to lose his entire fortune in this way, he may very well die from a heart attack. Nevertheless the Torah demands that one sustain such a loss, rather than just step on a tiny flame. One who does not overcome his temptation is not judged as an *ones* but is in fact considered guilty of the death penalty for his violation. The Torah demands service “with all your soul and all your might” — בכל נפשך ובכל מאדך.¹⁶

Gentiles are not commanded in the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem*, and under duress may violate their seven *mitzvos* (*Hilchos Melachim* 10:2). Nor do Gentiles have a Shabbos. These *mitzvos* are the special legacy of the Jewish people.

Be Holy — קדושים תהיו

Ramban (*Vayikra* 19:2) understands that the general command of “To be holy” (קדושים תהיו) is meant to preclude one from being a “reprobate who does not violate Torah laws” (מנוול ברשות התורה), but he also sees in it an

¹³ *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* Chapter 5.

¹⁴ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 334.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *siman* 26.

¹⁶ See Rashi who brings *Chazal* that בכל מאדך means with all your money.

exhortation to go beyond the laws of the Torah and he says that this is why the Torah calls the *Nazir* holy, as he is superior to other Jews. He brings a Sin-offering (הטאת) upon completing his *Nezirus* for it is sinful for him to leave this exalted plane. In a similar vein, Ramban (*Vayikra* 27:29) objects to Ibn Ezra's claim that the daughter of Yiftach was not killed but merely condemned to live a life of celibacy, comparable to that of a Catholic nun. Were that the case, objects Ramban, why would her friends bemoan her separation to a superior life? In contrast, Rambam understands קדושים תהיו as a statement of what results when one does exactly as the Torah commands — he is then considered holy.¹⁷ The *Nazir* is a sinner for denying himself a pleasure that the Torah allows and for which there is a proper place.¹⁸ Likewise, a woman and man were meant to marry and refraining does not bring one to a higher spiritual level — it is a deficiency. The laws of the Torah are a demanding prescription for transcendence. None were meant to live above the law and none permitted to ignore its dictates.

Walk in His Ways — והלכת בדרכיו

The *mitzvah* of being Holy¹⁹ is a component of the larger *mitzvah* of “Walking in His ways” (והלכת בדרכיו) (*Devarim* 28:9), the imitation of G-d, which means: “Just as He is called Merciful, so too you should be Merciful; Just as He is called Holy, so too you should be Holy.”²⁰ Thus the Torah mandates not only how one must act but what one's character traits must be. We tend to think that our personality is a given and we must work to change our actions. Rambam explains that indeed we are born with certain proclivities and:

Each and every man possesses many character traits (דעות). Each trait is very different and distant from the others. One type of man is wrathful; he is constantly angry. [In contrast,] there is the calm individual who is never moved to anger... There is the prideful man and the one who is exceptionally humble. There is the man ruled by his desires...and [conversely,] the very pure of heart, who does not desire even the little that the body needs. With regard to all the traits: a man has some from the beginning of his conception, in accordance with his physical nature. Some are compatible with a person's nature and will [therefore] be acquired more easily than other traits. Some traits he does not have from birth but rather he learned them from

¹⁷ *Sefer HaMitzvos, Shoresb* 5.

¹⁸ *Hilchos Deos* 3:1.

¹⁹ On this, both Rambam and Ramban are in agreement.

²⁰ *Hilchos Deos* 1:11.

others, or turned to them on his own because of some inner thought, or because he heard that this was a proper trait for him, which he ought to attain. He then accustomed himself to it **until it became a part of his being.** (*Hilchos Deos* 1:1ff)

Nevertheless, we can change our character and we are commanded to do so.

A person should not entertain the thesis held by the fools among the gentiles and the majority of the undeveloped among Israel that, at the time of a man's creation, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, decrees whether he will be righteous or wicked. This is untrue. Each person is fit to be righteous like Moshe, our teacher, or wicked, like Yeravam. [Similarly,] he may be wise or foolish, merciful or cruel, miserly or generous, or [acquire] any other character traits. There is no one who compels him, sentences him, or leads him towards either of these two paths. Rather, he, on his own initiative and decision, tends to the path he chooses. (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 5:2ff)

Hilchos Deos is comprised of a description of the character traits that one must acquire. Rather than the term *middos* that is colloquially used, Rambam uses the term *deos* — thereby equating character traits with an acquired way of thinking. The *mitzvah* is to actually have the proper mental state (וייקבעו הדעות בנפש), not merely to act appropriately.²¹

We are commanded to walk in these middle paths — and they are good and straight paths — as it states: “And you shall walk in His ways” (*Devarim* 28:9). [Our Sages] taught [the following] explanation of this *mitzvah*: Just as He is called “Gracious,” you shall be gracious; just as He is called “Merciful,” you shall be merciful; just as He is called “Holy,” you shall be holy. In a similar manner, the prophets called G-d by other titles: “Slow to anger,” “Abundant in kindness,” “Righteous,” “Just,” “Perfect,” “Almighty,” “Powerful,” and the like. [They did so] to inform us that these are good and just paths. A person is obligated to accustom himself to these paths and [to try to] resemble Him to the extent of his ability. How can one train himself to follow these temperaments to the extent that they become a permanent fixture of his [personality]? He should perform — repeat — and perform a third time — the acts which conform to the standards of the middle-road temperaments. He should do this constantly, until these acts are easy for him and do not present any difficulty. **Then, these temperaments will become a fixed part**

²¹ See also *Shemonah Perakim*, chapter 6, with regard to which תאוות need to be suppressed and which eradicated.

of his personality. Since the Creator is called by these terms and they make up the middle path which we are obligated to follow, this path is called “the path of G-d.” This is [the heritage] which our Patriarch Avraham taught his descendants, as it states: “for I have known Him so that he will command his descendants... to keep the path of G-d” (*Bereishis* 18:19). One who follows this path brings benefit and blessing to himself, as [the above verse continues]: “so that G-d will bring about for Avraham all that He promised” (*Hilchos Deos*, chapter 1:6–7).²²

Hilchos Deos concludes with prohibitions against taking revenge and bearing a grudge: **לֹא תִקּוֹם, וְלֹא תִטּוֹר**. While any form of physical revenge is prohibited, these prohibitions go much deeper and require one to eradicate feelings of vengeance from one’s heart.

A person who takes revenge against a colleague transgresses a Torah prohibition, as it states: “Do not take revenge” (*Vayikra* 19:18). Even though [revenge] is not punished by lashes, it is a very bad trait. Instead, a person should [train himself] to rise above his feelings about all worldly things, for men of understanding consider all these things as vanity and emptiness which are not worth seeking revenge for. Similarly, anyone who holds a grudge against another Jew violates a Torah prohibition, as it states: “Do not bear a grudge against the children of your people” (*Vayikra* 19:18). Instead [of doing so], he should wipe the matter from his heart and never bring it to mind. As long as he brings the matter to mind and remembers it, there is the possibility that he will seek revenge. Therefore, the Torah condemned holding a grudge, [requiring] one to wipe the wrong from his heart entirely, without remembering it at all.

This is a proper quality which sustains civilization, and facilitates commerce amongst peoples. (*Hilchos Deos* 7:7f)

One is expected to overcome the natural impulse for revenge (**בְּקִמָּה**) by understanding that the physical world is of no consequence — by having otherworldly concerns. The command against “bearing a grudge,” **בְּטִירָה**, requires one to go beyond the middle road, to take a step into extremism as a preventative measure within one’s character. If one has a scintilla of resentment, he violates this *lav*. This hardly seems reasonable to ask of the average person. Yet, Rambam says that developing this

²² Rambam also speaks of **דֶּרֶךְ הַסִּידִים** followed by those who are more stringent than the law requires. But he says this path is inferior to that of **דֶּרֶךְ הַחֲכָמִים** which is **דֶּרֶךְ ה'**.

character trait is what is called for and is the cornerstone for creating a prosperous and peaceful society.

In *Hilchos Teshuvah* (9:6) Rambam explains that this prosperous society is important because it is a prerequisite for Messianic times. And Messianic times are important because then man will be able to dedicate himself to study and the perfection of the intellect.²³ This Messianic Utopian world is a distinctly Jewish concept and its fruition is dependent on the fulfillment of the *mitzvos* in *Hilchos Deos*. Every Jew is charged with the task of perfecting his character, and in this way helping to bring about the coming of the Messiah.

ידיעת ה' — Knowledge of G-d

Whereas it is generally understood that the first of the Ten Commandments is an obligation to have faith in G-d, according to Rambam the *mitzvah* is “The Knowledge of G-d.”²⁴ It is not the foundation from which the *mitzvos* sprout but the goal to which all the *mitzvos* of the Torah point. One reads the beginning of *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* and is quickly overwhelmed by what a Jew is commanded to understand about the nature of the Divine.²⁵

The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being. If one would imagine that He does not exist, no other being could possibly exist. If one would imagine that none of the entities aside from Him exist, He alone would continue to exist, and the nullification of their [existence] would not nullify His existence, because all the [other] entities require Him and He, Blessed Be He, does not require them nor any one of them. Therefore, the truth of His [being] does not resemble the truth of any of their [beings]. This is implied by the prophet's statement “And G-d, your L-rd, is true” (*Yirmiyahu* 10:10) — i.e., He alone is true and no other entity possesses truth that compares to His truth. This is what [is meant by] the Torah's statement “There is nothing else aside from Him”

²³ See *Hilchos Teshuvah* 9:6.

²⁴ See *Sefer HaMitzvos, Aseh* 1, Kappach edition and *Hagabos* of Ramban. Ramban explains that B'Hag did not count it as a *mitzvah* since it is the foundation from which all *mitzvos* spring. Ramban himself uses both the terms *להאמין* and *לידע* but it can be discerned that Rambam's understanding is unique and according to Ramban the *mitzvah* is to have faith.

²⁵ Even before Rambam explains *מעשה בראשית ומעשה מרכבה*.

(*Devarim* 4:35) — i.e., aside from Him, there is no true existence like His. This entity is the G-d of the world and the L-rd of the entire earth. He controls the sphere with infinite and unbounded power. This power [continues] without interruption, because the sphere is constantly revolving, and it is impossible for it to revolve without someone causing it to revolve. [That One is] He, Blessed Be He, who causes it to revolve without a hand or any [other] corporeal dimension. (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1ff)

Nor is Rambam satisfied with cataloging a single *mitzvah* devoted to acquiring *Yedias Hashem* but he counts as well a second related *mitzvah* of *Yichud Hashem*. Ramban²⁶ writes that the verse of *Shema*, שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד, “Hear O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is One,” is a restatement, and perhaps a clarification of the original *mitzvah* of faith in G-d. But according to Rambam it is a second *mitzvah*, and we can readily understand why it is recorded only in *Sefer Devarim* as an addendum to the restatement of the *Aseres HaDibros*. Only after forty years of halachic and philosophical study in the desert does Moshe articulate this *mitzvah* which requires one to plumb the depths of philosophical understanding to understand the Uniqueness of the Creator.^{27 28}

This G-d is One. He is not two or more, but One, unified in a manner which [surpasses] any unity that is found in the world; i.e., He is not One in the manner of a general category which includes many individual entities, nor One in the way that the body is divided into different portions and dimensions. Rather, He is unified, and there exists no unity similar to His in this world. If there were many gods, they would have body and form, because like entities are separated from each other only through the circumstances associated with body and form. Were the Creator to have body and form, He would have limitation and definition, because it is impossible for a body not to be limited. And any entity which itself

²⁶ See Ramban *Al HaTorah*, *Devarim* 6:4. Though Ramban does not argue with Rambam’s counting of *Yichud Hashem* as a separate *mitzvah* in his commentary on the *Sefer HaMitzvos*, he tells us that in his version of Rambam’s *Sefer HaMitzvos*, 8 *mitzvos* were missing. I believe one of those was the *mitzvah* of *Yichud Hashem* and he considers it a part of the *mitzvah* of *Yedias Hashem* and believed Rambam did as well.

²⁷ See *Iggeres Techiyas HaMeisim* where he makes a similar point with regard to the doctrine of *Techiyas HaMeisim*.

²⁸ It is a companion *mitzvah* to *Yedias Hashem* as were the *lavim* of לא תסור לא תאמר לא תתאוו לא תתאוה לא תתאוו לא תתאוה — a pattern of *mitzvos* that are followed by others that deepen the first. Here *mitzvas Yichud* calls for the deepening of the knowledge of G-d.

is limited and defined [possesses] only limited and defined power. Since our G-d, Blessed Be His Name, possesses unlimited power, as evidenced by the continuous revolution of the sphere, we see that His power is not the power of a body. Since He is not a body, the circumstances associated with bodies that produce division and separation are not relevant to Him. Therefore, it is impossible for Him to be anything other than one. The knowledge of this concept fulfills a positive commandment, as [implied by]: “[Hear, Israel,] G-d is our Lord, G-d is One” (*Devarim* 6:4) (ibid.).

Much of *Moreh Nevuchim* deals with explaining *Yichud*. Whereas the *mitzvah* of *Yediab* may be fulfilled by each according to his level of intellect, this second *mitzvah* would seem unreachable except to the very few. And actually Rambam concludes by saying that none really fully understand it.

The truth of this concept cannot be grasped or comprehended by human thought. This is what the verse states: “Can you find the comprehension of G-d? Can you find the ultimate bounds of the Alm-ghty?” (*Iyov* 11:7) (ibid.).²⁹

Yet this is the Torah’s command. Those who marshal all their faculties in an attempt to fulfill this goal will still fail. Yet, even after death they continue in this pursuit, enabled by what they have accomplished during their lifetime.

Since free choice is granted to all men as we have explained, a person should always strive to do *teshuvah* and to confess verbally for his sins, striving to cleanse his hands from sin in order that he may die as a *baal teshuvah* and merit the life of the World to Come... [there] the righteous will sit with their crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence.... the phrase, “their crowns on their heads,” [is a metaphor, implying] that they will possess the knowledge that they grasped which allowed them to merit the life of the World to Come. This will be their crown.... What is meant by the expression, “delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence”? That they will comprehend the truth of G-dliness which they cannot grasp while in a dark and humble body. (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:1ff)

The *teshuvah* that Rambam speaks of in the latter chapters of *Hilchos Teshuvah* is the concept expressed in the verse “And you will return (*tashuv*) to the L-rd your G-d” (ושבת עד ה' אלקיך) (*Devarim* 30:2).³⁰ One lives his

²⁹ We will return to the latter part of this chapter later in the essay.

³⁰ Repentance from individual sins, the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*, is part of this broader concept and *Hilchos Teshuvah* begins with the *mitzvah* and then turns to the broader concept.

life so that he may merit *Olam HaBa* for in so doing his soul will be able to engage more fully in the *mitzvah* that transcends death, “the Knowledge of G-d.” As the *Mishnah* (*Sanhedrin* 10:1) says, “All of Israel have a portion in the World to Come,” and the pursuit of as large a portion as possible is to be the task of each member of Israel.

Worship out of Love — עבודה מאהבה

Yet, even more than an all-embracing dedicated pursuit of *Yediso V'Yichudo* is expected of a Jew. In the last chapter of *Hilchos Teshuvah*, Rambam tells us that one must worship out of love.

It is not fitting to serve G-d in this manner. A person whose service is motivated by these factors is considered one who serves out of fear. He is not on the level of the prophets or of the wise. The only ones who serve G-d in this manner are the *amei ha'aretz*³¹ women, and minors. They are trained to serve G-d out of fear until their knowledge increases and they serve out of love. One who serves out of love occupies himself in the Torah and the *mitzvos* and walks in the paths of wisdom for no ulterior motive: not because of fear that evil will occur, nor in order to acquire benefit. Rather, he does what is true because it is true, and ultimately, good will come because of it. This is a very high level which is not attained by every wise man. It is the level of our Patriarch Avraham, whom G-d described as “he who loved Me,” for his service was only motivated by love. This is the level that the Holy One Blessed Be He commanded us in by way of Moshe as it states: “Love G-d, your L-rd” (*Devarim* 6:5). (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 10:1ff.)

Rambam is quite clear that very few actually really do worship out of love as it is only Avraham Avinu who is called “He who loves me,” אהבי. Nevertheless, this is every Jew’s obligation.

However, in reading of this requirement we immediately recognize a contradiction that should cause us to question the demands of *ahavah*. As we have just noted, earlier in *Hilchos Teshuvah*, Rambam writes that one should do *teshuvah* so that he will merit *Olam HaBa*, while here he says that one should not do *mitzvos* so that he may merit *Olam HaBa* (כדי שאזכה לחיי (עולם הבא). Moreover, if one performs *mitzvos* in order to gain *Olam HaBa*, he is essentially doing so in order to come to a fuller knowledge of G-d. One prepares himself in life to continue this *mitzvah* in *Olam HaBa*. Is not

³¹ And he makes clear that this refers only to young women who have not yet been educated and women are expected to study and pursue this goal as they advance in years. See “Ramban and Zevulun” in *Hakirah* 6.

this thirst for knowledge the essence of Love of G-d? Rambam ends *Sefer Ahavah* with the words “לפי האהבה לפי הדעה”. I translate this as “The degree of love is commensurate with the degree of knowledge.” Apparently he means that these two qualities of אהבה and דעה feed off each other. Each is commensurate with one’s accomplishment in the other. Indeed, in the second chapter of *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* he describes the inextricable link between love of G-d and a thirst of knowledge.

When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify [Him], yearning with tremendous desire to know [G-d’s] great name, as David stated: “My soul thirsts for the Lord, for the living G-d” (Psalms 42:3). (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:1)

This description of a Jew’s goal and motivation seems strikingly similar to that of the Greek Hero embodied by Tennyson’s Ulysses who desires “To follow knowledge like a sinking star, Beyond the utmost bound of human thought?” Is not a Jew’s soul meant to yearn “To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths Of all the western stars, until I die?” Apparently not, as even more that this is expected of the Jew.

Rambam follows his description of the motivation for love with that of the motivation for fear that flows directly from it:

When he [continues] to reflect on these same matters, he will immediately recoil in awe and fear, appreciating how he is a tiny, lowly, and dark creature, standing with his flimsy, limited wisdom before He Who is of perfect knowledge, as David stated: “When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers... [I wonder] what is man that You should take note of Him” (Psalms 8:4–5). (ibid.)

Love of G-d is perforce coupled with Fear of G-d, with humility, and a feeling of futility in the quest for knowledge of G-d.³² To understand what Rambam means here in the closing passages of *Sefer HaMada* about service of G-d for its own sake, עבודה לשמה, we must pay attention to his every word. The crucial phrase in defining לשמה is “The truth because it is true” “האמת מפני שהוא אמת,” words that hearken back to the first *halachos* of the first chapter of *Sefer HaMada* — to the opening words of *Mishneh Torah*.

³² See *Moreh HaNevuchim* 1:60, that we can only speak of what G-d is not (שליליות), not what He is.

א יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות, לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון. והוא ממציא כל הנמצא; וכל הנמצאים מן שמיים וארץ ומה ביניהם, לא נמצאו אלא מאמיתת הימצאו. [ב] ואם יעלה על הדעת שהוא אינו מצוי, אין דבר אחר יכול להימצאות. [ג] ואם יעלה על הדעת שאין כל הנמצאים מלבדו מצויים, הוא לבדו יהיה מצוי ולא ייבטל הוא לביטולם: שכל הנמצאים צריכין לו; והוא ברוך הוא אינו צריך להם, ולא לאחד מהם.

ב לפיכך אין אמיתתו כאמיתת אחד מהם. [ד] הוא שהנביא אומר "וה' אלוהים אמת" (ירמיהו י, י) — הוא לבדו האמת, ואין לאחר אמת כאמיתו. והוא שהתורה אומרת "אין עוד, מלבדו" (דברים ד, לה), כלומר אין שם מצוי אמת מלבדו כמותו.

The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them **came into existence only from the truth of His being**. If one would imagine that He does not exist, no other being could possibly exist. If one would imagine that none of the entities aside from Him exist, He alone would continue to exist, and the nullification of their [existence] would not nullify His existence, because all the [other] entities require Him and He, Blessed Be He, does not require them nor any one of them. **Therefore, the truth of His [being] does not resemble the truth of any of their [beings]. This is implied by the prophet's statement "And G-d, your L-rd, is true" (Yirmiyahu 10:10), i.e., He alone is true and no other entity possesses truth that compares to His truth. This is what [is meant by] the Torah's statement: "There is nothing else aside from Him" (Devarim 4:35), i.e., aside from Him, there is no true existence like His.**

Some translate the word אמת as "reality," but certainly it has the connotation of "truth" as well, and the search for truth is not the same as the search for knowledge. The full meaning of these words is perhaps only understood by those who actually acquire this knowledge. Yet this is the quest of every member of the "Kingdom of Priests and Holy Nation," ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש" (*Shemos* 19:6).

A Kingdom of Priests — ממלכת כהנים

The Torah makes the Jewish people unique. Unlike other religions, Judaism recognizes righteousness in all the peoples of the world and believes that they can attain the rewards of the Hereafter without joining our faith.³³ But as we have already noted, other nations are not commanded in *Kiddush Hashem*, which signals their entirely different

³³ *Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:5.

relationship with G-d. Rambam explains that the concept of a “Kingdom of Priests” (ממלכת כהנים) is with regard to “Knowledge of Him” (בידיעתו) (יתעלה). “G-d sent Moses to make [the Israelites] a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (*Shemos* 19:6) by means of [acquiring] the knowledge of G-d.”³⁴

The *Medrash Tanchuma* (*Noach*) explains that although with regard to the Written Law, *Torah SheBiKsav*, the Jewish people readily said, “We will do and we will listen (נעשה ונשמע)” — in other words, readily accepting the Torah without even knowing all the details. It was on the Oral Law, *Torah SheBe’al Peh*, that it was necessary that they be forced to accept it — “the mountain was placed over their head” (כפה עליהם הר כגיגית),³⁵ and Israel’s selection is based on this latter commitment.

The Holy One Blessed Be He, who chose Israel from the seventy nations, as it is written, “For G-d’s portion is His people, Yaakov is the lot of His inheritance” (*Devarim* 32:9) and gave us the Written Torah with hidden and obscure hints and explained them in the Oral Torah and revealed them to Israel... for you will not find the Oral Torah with those who seek worldly pleasures, and their lusts and honor and greatness in this world but only in those who kill themselves for it, as it says, “This is the Torah, When a man dies in the tent” (*BeMidbar* 19:14), And such is the way of Torah, bread with salt shall you eat and measured rations of water shall you drink, and on the earth you shall sleep and a life of pain you shall live, and in the Torah you toil, for G-d only made a Covenant with Israel over the Oral Torah. (*Medrash Tanchuma, Noach*)

The first paragraph of *Shema*, which centers on *Talmud Torah* and demands “all one’s effort” (וכל מאדך) as well as his love while promising no reward, encapsulates the unique obligation of Israel.

The first *parashah* of *Shema* speaks of no reward as does the second by saying, “When you obey, etc., I will give you the rain in your land” referring to the reward to those who engage in the Written Torah but do not engage in Talmud, and in this second *parashah* it writes “With all your heart and all your soul” but it does not write “with all your might,” to teach you that all who love wealth and pleasure will not be able to learn the Oral Torah because it entails great pain and abandonment of sleep and one exhausts and ruins himself over it and thus he receives the reward of the World to Come. (Ibid.)

³⁴ *Moreh HaNevuchim* 3:32.

³⁵ Talmud Bavli *Shabbos* 88a. See introduction to *Eshkol HaKofer* on *Megillas Esther* and *Meshech Chochmah* (*Shemos*, chapter 19) that this refers to the overpowering experience of the Divine Presence at Sinai that precluded any real choice.

Other nations have recognized the truth of the second *parashah* of *Shema*, and understand that the values of the Torah must be followed to create a prosperous society. But Israel accepted the first *parashah*, that of dedicating oneself to understand G-d's unity and His uniqueness and this is an end unto itself.

Rambam in *Iggeres Teiman* responds to those who claim that the other western religions spawned by Judaism are similar to ours by explaining that the similarity is like that between a mannequin and a human being. These religions lack internal organs.

Our religion differs as much from other religions for which there are alleged resemblances as a living man endowed with the faculty of reason is unlike a statue which is ever so well carved out of marble, wood, bronze or silver. When a person ignorant of Divine wisdom or of G-d's works sees the statue that superficially resembles a man in its contours, form, features, and color, he believes that the structure of the parts of a statue is like the constitution of a man, because he is deficient in understanding concerning the inner organization of both. But the informed person who knows the interior of both, is cognizant of the fact that the internal structure of the statue betrays no skillful workmanship at all, whereas the inward parts of man are truly marvelously made, a testimony to the wisdom of the Creator, such as the prolongation of the nerves in the muscles and their ramifications, the branching out of the sinews and their intersections and the network of their ligaments and their manner of growth, the articulations of the bones and the joints, the pulsating and non-pulsating blood vessels and their ramifications, the setting of the limbs into one another, the uncovered and covered parts, every one of these in proportion, in form and proper place. Likewise a person ignorant of the secret meaning of Scripture and the deeper significance of the Law, would be led to believe that our religion has something in common with another if he makes a comparison between the two. For he will note that in the Torah there are prohibitions and commandments, just as in other religions there are permitted and interdicted acts. Both contain a system of religious observances, positive and negative precepts, sanctioned by reward and punishment.

If he could only fathom the inner intent of the law, then he would realize that the essence of the true Divine religion lies in the deeper meaning of its positive and negative precepts, every one of which will aid man in his striving after perfection, and remove every impediment to the attainment of excellence. These commands will enable the throng and the elite to acquire moral and intellectual qualities, each according to his ability. Thus the G-dly community

becomes pre-eminent, reaching a two-fold perfection. By the first perfection, I mean man's spending his life in this world under the most agreeable and congenial conditions. The second perfection would constitute the achievement of intellectual objectives, each in accordance with his native powers. The tenets of the other religions which resemble those of Scripture have no deeper meaning, but are superficial imitations, copied from and patterned after it. They modeled their religions upon ours in order to glorify themselves, and indulge the fancy that they are similar to so and so. However, their counterfeiting is an open secret to the learned. Consequently they became objects of derision and ridicule just as one laughs and smiles at an ape when it imitates the actions of men.

In a Yiddish lecture,³⁶ Rav Soloveitchik, the Rav, ז"ל, spoke of G-d's description of Israel as "*ki atem ha'me'at mi'kol ha'amim* — for you are the fewest of all peoples" (*Devarim* 7:7):

Had Jews reproduced naturally over the generations like other nations, there would today have been at least 150 million Jews. As a result of repeated persecutions and assimilation we are today a tiny people, perhaps only ten million in number. But that is not coincidental, for it reflects the abiding truth of the Torah's statement "*ki atem ha'me'at mi'kol ha'amim* — for you are the fewest of all peoples" (*Devarim* 7:7). This was true not just at the time of the Exodus when the verse was written, but throughout Jewish history, starting with the Patriarchs and continuing till our own time. G-d chose us precisely because we were the smallest nation, and He wanted us to remain that way (until the time of *Mashiach*)... it was the hand of Divine Providence that precluded the mass adoption of the Jewish faith.... *Yabadus* by its very nature demands extraordinary discipline and consistency of belief and action in every aspect of life, at every hour of every day. Only a select group can be expected to maintain the strictures and responsibilities demanded by our faith... And thus, had either Rome or Arabia converted en masse to Judaism, the result would inevitably have been the thorough dilution, distortion, and ultimately the disappearance, of historical Judaism as a religion. There would have been enormous pressures to modify and reform the faith. As the *Midrash* put it by way of illustration, murder by Romans (i.e., the descendants of Esau),³⁷ theft by

³⁶ This is excerpted from the Hirhurim Blog of Oct. 13, 2013, edited by Rabbi Basil Herring. <<http://www.torahmusings.com/2013/10/the-pew-the-few-and-the-many-rav-soloveitchik-on-jewish-numbers/>>

³⁷ Murder? Indeed, abortion is classified by Rambam as murder.

Moslems³⁸ (i.e., the descendants of Ishmael), and sexual depravity³⁹ (in the case of the descendants of Amon and Moav) would have been justified and accommodated into the faith by popular demand. Thus, to preserve the Torah inviolate, it was G-d's Will that the Jewish faith would be the exclusive patrimony and possession of "the fewest of all peoples." Only of a select few, those who would remain loyal and committed to the Torah and its demands over time, could He expect fealty to the 613 commandments and all that they entailed.

The strength of Judaism, and the secret of its survival, is in its exclusivity. It is in our very smallness as a nation that the faith endures inviolate. ...

Of course, in keeping with the prophets and the *Aleinu*, there will indeed come a time when the world will recognize our faith as the true one, and many will embrace it via conversion, thus finally rendering us a religion and a people of universal proportions. But that will only happen "*ba'yom habu*, on that day" — i.e., at a time when humanity will have progressed to the point that we will no longer have to dilute the principles and the practices of our faith so that the masses might embrace it. Until then, our task and our fate is to be and remain separate and apart, uniquely dedicated as a small minority to our unique and treasured spiritual patrimony.

Too many Jews in our time seek only to be numerically strong, always in search of larger and larger numbers, more and more adherents, as supposed proof of their being right, or strong or successful. Such thinking forgets that the more there is numerical strength, the more there is a danger of distortion and falsehood. Because our synagogues constantly crave more members, they risk having to make halachic compromises of one kind or another.

Marx considered religion "the opiate of the masses" and indeed new "movements" in Judaism have always been as they are today, the creations of men and women looking for solace and personal fulfillment. Judaism is not like the religions made by men and cannot accommodate them. In facing the developments of the "modern" world, a Jew has only one place to look for guidance. As the *Mishnah* in *Avos* explains, "Delve into it (the Torah) and continue to delve into it, for all is in it" (*Avos* 5:25).

We are a utopian people. The twelfth of the *Ikkarim* is of Mashiach. And in a passage censored for many years and recently restored in *Mishneh*

³⁸ Theft? Perhaps Communism, which would deny citizens to keep the wealth their efforts produced, would qualify.

³⁹ Gay marriage being the final step (or perhaps there is still another step ahead).

Torah, Rambam makes a statement of how the other Western religions were only intended to set the table for the coming of Mashiach.

יא אבל מחשבות בורא עולם--אין כוח באדם להשיגם, כי לא דרכינו דרכיו ולא מחשבותינו מחשבותיו. וכל הדברים האלו של ישוע הנוצרי, ושל זה הישמעאלי שעמד אחריו—אינן אלא ליישר דרך למלך המשיח, ולתקן את העולם כולו לעבוד את ה' ביחד: שנאמר "כי אז אהפוך אל עמים, שפה ברורה, לקרוא כולם בשם ה', ולעובדו שכם אחד" (ראה צפניה ג,ט). (הל' מלכים יא:ד)

Nevertheless, the intent of the Creator of the world is not within the power of man to comprehend, for His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts, our thoughts. Ultimately, all the deeds of Yeshu of Nazareth and that Ishmaelite who arose after him will only serve to prepare the way for Mashiach's coming and the repairing (improvement) (לתקן) of the entire world, motivating the nations to serve G-d together as Tzephaniah (3:9) states: "I will transform the peoples to a purer language that they all will call upon the name of G-d and serve Him with one purpose."

Whereas there has been some doubt raised⁴⁰ as to whether the ancient *Aleinu* prayer really speaks of an obligation of *tikkun olam*, this restored passage makes fairly clear that indeed the correct text is "לתקן עולם," but on the other hand it also makes clear what the term means. It is not to be taken to mean that Israel's goal is to "correct" all the inequities of the world, but rather to bring all the nations to worship the G-d of Israel together with us.

But even this twelfth of the *Ikkarim* is not enough, as the last *Ikkar* is *Techiyas HaMeisim*, and three times a days we praise G-d as "He who brings back to life the dead." We do not accept even the finality of death.

While Tennyson may not have fully appreciated the quest of the Jewish nation, his words still describe the spirit that must inspire the denizens of an ancient people.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.



⁴⁰ See *Hakirah* 11, "*Aleinu*: Obligation to Fix the World or the Text?" where the author raises the question whether the prayer should read לתקן עולם or לתכן עולם (meaning "to establish").