

## *The Religious Phenomenology of Maimonides*

By: BEZALEL NAOR

Over the years, many have expressed the desideratum of a Jewish analog to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) by Harvard philosopher cum psychologist William James. It seems that the first to voice this need was the religious thinker and mystic, Hillel Zeitlin.<sup>1</sup> In a monograph entitled *Be-Ḥeryon ha-Neshamah (In the Hiding Place of the Soul)*,<sup>2</sup> Zeitlin bemoaned the fact that James had restricted his study to Christianity and almost totally neglected Judaism.<sup>3</sup> In the ensuing pages, Zeitlin sought to remedy this situation, becoming in the words of Jonathan Meir, “the Jewish James.”<sup>4</sup>

There are those who are convinced that in its own way, Ḥasidism—the East European Jewish mysticism whose roots lie in the teachings of the eighteenth-century Podolian wonderworker Israel Ba‘al Shem—answers this need, especially in its more analytic school of Ḥabad. On at least one occasion, the present writer heard from the late Zalman

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<sup>1</sup> See the recent anthology *Ḥasidic Spirituality for a New Era: The Religious Writings of Hillel Zeitlin*, ed. Arthur Green (Paulist Press: Mahwah, NJ, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Published in the journal *Netivot*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Ahisefer, 1913), pp. 205–235. Jonathan Meir publicized Zeitlin’s Jamesian tract in his lecture “Hillel Zeitlin, William James and Hasidism,” delivered March 7, 2016 at “Life as a Dialogue,” International Conference in Honor of Ephraim Meir, Bar Ilan University.

<sup>3</sup> “*Be-Ḥeryon ha-Neshamah*,” pp. 208–209. James’ token foray into the Jewish tradition is a symbolic survey of the Hebrew prophets followed by a reference to the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1929), pp. 469–471.

<sup>4</sup> In the video of Prof. Meir’s lecture (available on Youtube) at 19:57.

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Schachter-Shalomi that Habad provides a wonderful language of religious experience.<sup>5</sup>

I am about to propose that in truth, much before Habad, an eloquent, if subtle, religious phenomenology was crouching right under our eyes in the work of—Maimonides. Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) has the almost unimaginable distinction of wearing two crowns on his head: He is at once the greatest Jewish philosopher and the greatest Jewish legalist of all time. If you would have it, Maimonides' religious phenomenology is located where one would least expect it. Not in the philosophic masterpiece *Guide of the Perplexed*,<sup>6</sup> but tucked away in the nooks and crannies of the monumental code of law, *Mishneh Torah*.

I shall point out two passages in particular that lend themselves to phenomenological analysis.

This God, honored and revered, it is a commandment to love Him and fear from Him, as it is said, “You shall love the Lord, your God,”<sup>7</sup> and it is said, “The Lord, your God, you shall fear.”<sup>8</sup>

And what is the way to the love of Him and the fear of Him?

At the hour that a man contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures, and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightaway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and desire with an exceeding desire to know His great name, even as David said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is no coincidence that Hillel Zeitlin was raised in a Habad milieu. In his youth, the rabbi of his hometown of Korma, Rabbi Zalman Duchman, exposed him to the spiritual legacy of that great expositor of Habad Hasidism, Rabbi Eizik Epstein of Homel. Duchman was an eminent disciple of Rabbi Eizik Homler. (Rabbi E.E. Dessler was introduced to Habad thought in his youth, spent in Homel, by Rabbi Zalman's brother, Rabbi Mordechai Yoel Duchman, also an eminent disciple of Rabbi Eizik Homler.) See Bezalel Naor, *Mahol la-Tsaddikim* (Jerusalem and Monsey, 2015), p. 113.

Habad is well represented in Zeitlin's aforementioned tract *Be-Heyyon ha-Neshamah*. On p. 211 there is an unattributed quote from *Tanya* (I, 2, note; II, 9, note). And in note 3 on p. 226 we find an explicit reference to the “*Siddur of the Rabbi of Liadi, He'arah le-Tikkun Hatsot*.”

<sup>6</sup> In no way do I intend thereby to minimize the value of the experiential tenor of the fifty-first chapter of Part Three of the *Guide*, which deservedly earned the appellation “*Perek ha-Mitboded*” (“The Chapter of the Contemplative”).

<sup>7</sup> *Deuteronomy* 6:5.

<sup>8</sup> *Deuteronomy* 6:13.

<sup>9</sup> *Psalms* 42:3.

And when he ponders these very matters, he will straightaway recoil and be frightened, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge. And so David said, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers—what is man that You are mindful of him?”<sup>10</sup>

Maimonides has described an experience of great psychological impact. He could not have done a more splendid job of conveying all the key elements, all the essential ingredients that we have come to associate with Rudolf Otto’s groundbreaking work *Das Heilige* (terribly mistranslated as *The Idea of the Holy*). The Wholly Other is at the same time both [*mysterium*] *tremendum* and *fascinans*. One is attracted and fascinated even as one recoils in fear, terrified. For Maimonides, the aspect of *fascinans* is the motive of love (*ahavah*); the dimension of *tremendum* generates fear (*yir’ah*).

The student of Maimonides is forever in search of sources. In the overwhelming majority of cases, Maimonides did not write in an historical vacuum. There were antecedents galore in Talmudic or post-Talmudic literature. Almost a half century ago, I suggested as a source for the aforementioned passage the anonymous *Sefer Yetsirah* (*Book of Creation*).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Psalms* 8:4–5. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:1–2. In general, I have followed Hyamson’s translation with slight deviations. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: The Book of Knowledge*, trans. Moses Hyamson (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1971), p. 35b.

<sup>11</sup> I put forth the suggestion in a self-published monograph on Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Madda*, entitled *Lev Atsal* (5733/1973), pp. 35–36. By metathesis, the title alludes to the author’s name, Betsalel.

In 1972 (the last year of Heschel’s life), I met with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, at which time I proposed *Sefer Yetsirah* as the source for the passage in Maimonides. Heschel’s enigmatic response—to read his article in the *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume*, “Did Maimonides Believe That He Attained Prophecy?” (Hebrew)—has left me wondering to this day what Heschel meant to convey thereby.

I imagine that Heschel, while not responding directly to my suggestion that *Sefer Yetsirah* was the source, was countering that Maimonides’ source was not textual at all but rather experiential, rooted in Maimonides’ own prophetic or near-prophetic experience. Somewhat reminiscent of the Hasidic master Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli’s response when asked how he knew an obscure passage in the *Talmud Yerushalmi*: “Truly, I did not know of this passage in the *Yerushalmi*, but the same source from which the *Yerushalmi* derived this was revealed to me” (Mendel Zitrin, *Shivbei Tsaddikim*, Warsaw, 1884, pp. 30–31).

Earlier, Zeitlin (op. cit., pp. 224–225) assumed that Maimonides was describing his own personal experience of the divinity, and was impressed with the

The book, whose origin remains to this day a mystery, enjoyed immense popularity among Spanish Jewry, as attested to by the commentaries penned by Maimonides' predecessors Rabbi Judah ben Barzillai

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simplicity and candor by which Maimonides brings together the two opposite emotions of love and fear. Over several pages (pp. 220–227) Zeitlin documents Jewish sources about the fusion of positive and negative effects of the encounter with the divine.

While Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchik certainly juxtaposed the contents of the second chapter of *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* to the concept of “*Ratso va-Shov*” (which figures prominently in Habad Hasidic philosophy for which Rabbi Soloveitchik had a penchant), Rabbi Soloveitchik stopped short of boldly suggesting that *Sefer Yetsirah* served as the source for Maimonides' description of the experience. See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Jersey City, 2008), pp. 69–71. (This is a translation of the Hebrew essay “*U-Vikkashitem mi-Sham*,” which did not appear in print until 1978, when Rabbi Soloveitchik published it in the rabbinic journal *Hadarom*.)

In *And From There You Shall Seek*, p. 174, n. 12, Rabbi Soloveitchik refers the reader to Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Likkutei Torah, Parashat Hukkat*. (See *ibid.* s.v. *Zot Hukkat ha-Torah* [56b].) For the record, the equation of “*ratso*” with the human emotion of love and “*shov*” with fear originated with Rabbi Shneur Zalman's master, Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezritch. See *idem*, *'Or Torah* (Korets, 1804), *Ha'azinu*.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's fondness for *Likkutei Torah* is famous. His groundbreaking essay “*Ysh ha-Halakha*” is chock-full of references to *Likkutei Torah*. (See Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, “*Ysh ha-Halakha*,” *Talpiyot* 1:3-4 [5704-5/1944], pp. 682–685, 690.) Rabbi Soloveitchik once confided to a Lubavitcher Hasid, Rabbi Israel Zuber of Boston, that he knows *Likkutei Torah* by heart (“*oisvenig*”). (Told to the writer by the late Rabbi David Edelman of Springfield, Mass., son-in-law of Rabbi Zuber.)

Further along in that lengthy note in *And From There You Shall Seek* (p. 175), Rabbi Soloveitchik speculates that it was Bahya ibn Pakuda's *Duties of the Heart* (Gate of Love of God, chap. 1) that inspired Maimonides' conception of the dialectic nature of love and fear of God. (His son Abraham Maimonides referenced Bahya's *Sha'ar ha-Perishut* in his own chapter on *Perishut*. See Abraham Maimonides, *Ha-Maspik le-Ovdei Hashem [Kitab Kifayah al-'Abidin]*, trans. Yosef Dori, Jerusalem 1973, p. 121.)

See now the parallel discussion in Lawrence J. Kaplan, *Maimonides—Between Philosophy and Halakha: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Lectures on the Guide of the Perplexed* (Jerusalem, 2016), pp. 219–235.

Finally, see Y. Tzvi Langermann's remarks regarding Maimonides and *Sefer Yetsirah* in his article “On Some Passages Attributed to Maimonides” (Hebrew) in *Me'ab She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. Fleischer, Blidstein, Horowitz, Septimus (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 224–227.

(Albargeloni) and Rabbi Judah Halevi.<sup>12</sup> And earlier, the man who is credited as being the father of Jewish philosophy, Sa'adyah Gaon, wrote his commentary to *Sefer Yetsirah*.<sup>13</sup> Never once does Maimonides mention *Sefer Yetsirah* by name, but given the intellectual milieu in which he was raised, it is most improbable that he was not familiar with its contents.

Not too far along in *Sefer Yetsirah*, we read:

Ten *Sefirot* of Nothingness.  
Bridle your mouth from speaking  
and your heart from thinking.  
And if your heart runs,  
return to the place.  
It is therefore written,  
“The *Hayyot* running and returning.”<sup>14</sup>  
Regarding this a covenant was made.<sup>15</sup>

The anonymous author of *Sefer Yetsirah* has done something quite remarkable. He has taken the image of “*ratso va-shov*” (“running and returning”) reserved for the *Hayyot* seen in Ezekiel’s prophetic vision and transformed it into a trope for the mystic’s own encounter with the divine. This to-and-fro motion, this dialectical movement has been appropriated

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<sup>12</sup> See *Kuzari* IV, 25–27 (Hirschfeld trans. pp. 201–212).

<sup>13</sup> Many a student of Maimonides has been perplexed by the Master’s virtual silence in regard to Sa’adyah. The one outright reference to Sa’adyah catches the man at his worst moment: calculating the End. (See *Igeret Teiman* in Rabbenu Moshe ben Maimon, *Igrot*, ed. Kafah [Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1994], p. 40.) And though Maimonides defends Sa’adyah on that occasion, chalking up the deplorable exercise to extenuating circumstances (ibid. pp. 41–42), one might have imagined that Maimonides—who invokes ever so many philosophers in his literary *oeuvre*—would somewhere mention Sa’adyah’s name in some more salutary connection.

Although hardly explicit, many scholars assume that Maimonides’ derogation in the sixth chapter of the *Shemonah Perakim* of “some of the later wise men who came down with the illness of the *Mutakallimun*” is an oblique reference to Sa’adyah. See Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, ed. Kafah (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1963), *Seder Nezikin*, p. 258.

Into the next generation, Abraham Maimonides’ Commentary to the Pentateuch is replete with citations from Sa’adyah’s Bible commentaries. One assumes that his father Moses Maimonides also approved of Sa’adyah’s exegesis, while perhaps distancing himself from Sa’adyah’s philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> *Ezekiel* 1:14.

<sup>15</sup> *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1997), 1:8 (p. 66).

from the world of the angels and applied to the realm of human experience. (Later the term “*ratso va-shov*” will become a mainstay of Hasidic thought.) Short of actually quoting the verse at the beginning of Ezekiel, Maimonides has done everything possible to conjure up in a most graphic manner the magnetic pull of the divine followed by the inevitable recoil.

Add to this the context in which Maimonides shares this experience. It is his preamble to *Ma’aseh Merkavah* (the Work of the Chariot) and *Ma’aseh Bereshit* (the Work of Genesis). Those matters will go on for the next three chapters of *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* (chaps. 2–4). In fact, the love-fear dyad bookends the entire discussion. Summing up the discourse of *Ma’aseh Bereshit* and *Ma’aseh Merkavah*, Maimonides writes once again:

When a man reflects on these things, studies all these created beings, from the angels and spheres down to human beings and so on, and realizes the Divine Wisdom manifested in them all, his love for the Place (*Ha-Makom*) will increase,<sup>16</sup> his soul will thirst, his very flesh will yearn, to love the Place, blessed be He. And he will fear and be frightened on account of his lowliness, his poverty and his insignificance, when he compares himself to any one of the great and holy bodies; still more [when he compares himself] to any one of the pure forms that are incorporeal and have never had association with corporeal substance. He will then find himself a vessel full of shame and reproach, empty and deficient.<sup>17</sup>

Is it pure coincidence that this same dialectic is emblazoned on the doorpost to *Sefer Yetsirah*, the *Book of Creation*, a work which, as its name indicates, is devoted to *Ma’aseh Bereshit*?

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Man must be careful concerning the *mezuzah*, because it is obligatory upon all constantly, and whenever he enters and exits he will encounter the unity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and remember His love, and be aroused from his slumber and his erring in the vanities of the time, and will know that there is nothing that stands for eternity but the knowledge of the Rock of the World,

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<sup>16</sup> *Ha-Makom* (the Place) is a rabbinic term for the deity. As the Rabbis said: “He is the place of the world, and the world is not His place” (*Genesis Rabbah* 68:9). *Ha-Makom* is usually translated into English as “the Omnipresent.”

<sup>17</sup> *Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah* 4:12; Hyamson trans. page 39b (with slight deviations).

and immediately he regains his consciousness and goes on the ways of righteousness.

The early Sages said:<sup>18</sup> Whoever has phylacteries on his head and arm, and fringes on his garment, and a *mezuzah* at his entrance—is assured that he will not sin, for he has numerous reminders. And these are the “angels” that save him from sinning, for it says: “The angel of the Lord camps round about those who fear Him, and saves them.”<sup>19</sup> (*MT, Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 6:13)

Several of the motifs briefly touched upon in this *halakha* are familiar to us from other earlier passages in *Mishneh Torah*. The part about waking up from one’s spiritual slumber and renouncing the “vanities of the time” (“*havlei ha-zeman*”) reiterates Maimonides’ famous symbolism of blowing the *shofar* (*Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:4). Likewise, we are treated to a brief review of Maimonides’ theory of the immortality of the soul, elaborated upon in *Hil. Teshuvah* 8:2-3. It is only the knowledge of the Creator that will survive in the World to Come.

What is specific to the *mezuzah* is “the unity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He” and “His love.” A fuller version of the essential ingredients of the *mezuzah* is provided earlier in *Hilkhot Mezuzah*: “the unity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His love, and His service.”<sup>20</sup> These three components (unity, love, service) are direct quotes from the two paragraphs contained in the *mezuzah*, *Shema*’ and *Ve-Hayah ’im shamo’a*.<sup>21</sup> The first verse of *Shema*’ is a statement of the unity of the Lord.<sup>22</sup> The second verse enjoins: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means.”<sup>23</sup> The first verse of *Ve-Hayah ’im shamo’a* would ask of us “to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”<sup>24</sup>

Maimonides groups together in one unit the laws of *Tefillin*, *Mezuzah* and *Sefer Torah*. At the conclusion of these laws, he writes:

Whoever sits before a Torah scroll, should sit with gravitas (*koved rosh*) and awe and fear, for it is the faithful witness to all the inhabitants of the world, as it says, “and it will be there against you

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<sup>18</sup> b. *Menahot* 43b.

<sup>19</sup> *Psalms* 34:8.

<sup>20</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 5:4.

<sup>21</sup> *Deuteronomy* 6:4–9; 11:13–21.

<sup>22</sup> *Deuteronomy* 6:4.

<sup>23</sup> *Deuteronomy* 6:5.

<sup>24</sup> *Deuteronomy* 11:13.

as a witness.”<sup>25</sup> And he should honor it to his ability. The early Sages said<sup>26</sup>: “Whosoever desecrates the Torah, his body shall be desecrated by people; and whosoever honors the Torah, his body shall be honored by people.”<sup>27</sup>

One is struck by the radically dissimilar affect evoked by these sacred scripts. Whereas the *mezuzah* speaks to love, the *Sefer Torah* speaks to fear. Let us probe these emotions. Why can’t the *mezuzah* trigger fear? Why can’t the *Sefer Torah* move us to love the Lord?

If we focus on the texts associated with the ritual objects, the element of fear does not occur in the two paragraphs of the *mezuzah*, whereas love is repeated in both. When it comes to the *Sefer Torah*, on the other hand, Maimonides has chosen the verse from Deuteronomy “and it will be there against you as a witness” as its signature motif. Thus, the *Sefer Torah* creates a solemn atmosphere designed to instill fear. But, one counters, cannot the *mezuzah* produce a similar solemnity? Though it be only a *derash*, the large letters of the first verse of *Shema*—the ‘ayin of *Shema* and the dalet of *Ehad*—form the word *Ed* (witness).<sup>28</sup>

Something else is bothersome about Maimonides’ depiction of the scene of the *Sefer Torah*. Why must the affect that Maimonides attributes to the *Sefer Torah* be reserved for the seated position? Earlier, Maimonides enjoined one who beholds the *Sefer Torah* in movement to stand in its presence.<sup>29</sup> In that instance, Maimonides addressed none of the emotions. The proper attitude and frame of mind was delayed by Maimonides until he discussed sitting in the presence of the *Sefer Torah*. Why?

Let us now segue to *Hilkhot Shabbat* of Maimonides. The language that he employs there is highly reminiscent of the passage regarding the *Sefer Torah*:

What is honor (*kibbud*)? This is what the Sages said that it is incumbent upon man to wash his face, hands and feet in hot water on the Eve of the Sabbath because of the honor of the Sabbath. And he wraps himself in a fringed garment (*tsitsit*) and sits with gravitas (*koved rosh*), awaiting reception of the face of the Sabbath, as if he is going out meet the King. And the early Sages would gather their

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<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 31:26.

<sup>26</sup> *M. Avot* 4:8. See Maimonides’ commentary there (Kafah ed., p. 291). Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch writes that Maimonides deliberately reversed the order of the Mishnah to end these *halakhot* on a salutary note. *Yad Peshutah*, p. 790.

<sup>27</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 10:11.

<sup>28</sup> See *Ba’al ha-Turim* and *Keli Yakar* to Deuteronomy 6:4.

<sup>29</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 10:9.



disciples on the Eve of the Sabbath, wrap themselves up and say  
“Let us go out to meet Sabbath the King.”<sup>30</sup>

The common denominator is that both in the presence of the *Sefer Torah* and the approaching Sabbath, one “sits with gravitas” (*yoshev be-koved rosh*). Sitting is conducive to meditation. It seems that “on the go” it is certainly difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to enter this state of mindfulness. Thus, the *mezuzah* and the “*Sefer Torah ke-she-hu mehalekeh*” (“walking *Sefer Torah*”)<sup>31</sup> do not occasion this peculiar gravitas.

Normally, one does not sit opposite the *mezuzah* reflecting on its contents. As Maimonides put it, one’s interaction with the *mezuzah* is “whenever he enters and exits.”<sup>32</sup> But what if one *were* to sit opposite the *mezuzah* the way one sits opposite the *Sefer Torah*? Why doesn’t Maimonides entertain that possibility?

It is possible that there is yet another touchstone here. The gravitas that Maimonides describes can only occur vis-`a-vis an external presence; only when confronted with the wholly other. This is so in the case of the *Sefer Torah*. It is especially so in the case of the Sabbath which has been personified as a King. The *mezuzah*, on the other hand, has been internalized; it has become an extension of man’s self. Just as the “*tefillin* on his head and arm, and *tsitsit* on his garment,” so too the “*mezuzah* at his entrance” has been absorbed within his extended self.<sup>33</sup> There is a well-known saying: “Familiarity breeds contempt.”<sup>34</sup> Granted the *mezuzah* acts as a “guardian angel” staving off sin, but it is too close to evoke fear.

There is only one man in Israel who enjoys this closeness with the *Sefer Torah*. That is the King of Israel. In addition to the *Sefer Torah* that every Jew must write, the King is obligated to write a second *Sefer Torah*. Concerning that additional Torah scroll, Maimonides writes:

It shall be with him always. If he should go to war, this *Sefer Torah* is with him; if he should enter in, it is with him; if he should sit in judgment, it is with him; if he should recline, it is opposite him, for it says, “It shall be with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life...”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Hil. Shabbat* 30:2.

<sup>31</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 10:9.

<sup>32</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 6:13.

<sup>33</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 6:13.

<sup>34</sup> The *Talmud Yerushalmi* alluded to this truism: “Do out of love and do out of fear...Do out of fear, so that if you come to kick, know that you fear, and one who fears, does not kick” (*y. Berakhot* 9:5).

<sup>35</sup> Deuteronomy 17:19; *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 7:2.

It shall depart from him only at night or when he enters the bathhouse or the lavatory or to sleep in his bed.<sup>36</sup>

If our psychological perception of the *Sefer Torah* is correct, then we should observe a difference in the way the King relates to the *Sefer Torah*. Its utter proximity should engender love. It is possible that exactly this attitude of love was alluded to by the Aramaic Targum. The verse in Psalms 45:10 reads:

Kings' daughters are among your favorites; at your right hand stands a concubine in gold of Ophir.

The Targum paraphrases the verse thus:

Principalities come to receive your face and render you homage at the time the *Sefer Torah* is ready<sup>37</sup> at your right side written in pure gold from Ophir.

Perhaps we are reading too much into the Targum, but its image of the *Sefer Torah* as a royal concubine (*shagal*) suggests a level of intimacy reserved for the King alone in view of his unique halakhic status.<sup>38</sup> Gone the *distance* that characterizes the common Jew's relation to the *Sefer Torah*. In its stead, there develops a unique relation of *love*.

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Undoubtedly, the best solution to the differing postures vis-à-vis the *mezuzah* and the *Sefer Torah* is that provided by Maimonides himself in the guidelines that he laid down in the penultimate chapters of the later work, *Guide of the Perplexed*. There, the Great Eagle will sum up in remarkably terse language his entire outlook on the Torah and the commandments:

For these two ends, namely *love* and *fear*, are achieved through two things: *love* through the opinions taught by the Law, which include the apprehension of His being as He, may He be exalted, is in truth; while *fear* is achieved by means of all actions prescribed by the Law, as we have explained. Understand this summary.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 7:3. Maimonides repeats these laws in *Hil. Melakhim* 3:1.

<sup>37</sup> *Di-me'atar* is obviously a copyist's error. The Targum should read *di-me'atad*.

<sup>38</sup> For Maimonides' understanding of the term "*shagal*" within the context of Psalms 45:10, see *Guide of the Perplexed* III, end chap. 8. Cf. Ibn Ezra to Psalms.

<sup>39</sup> *Guide of the Perplexed* III, end chap. 52; Pines translation, p. 630. (The italics occur in Pines' translation.)

This then is the crux of the issue. When it comes to the *mezuzah*, we contemplate the *de'ot*, the teaching contained therein, which is “*yibud sbemo shel Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*,”<sup>40</sup> “the unity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He.”<sup>41</sup> This in turn engenders “*ahavato*” (“His love”),<sup>42</sup> and finally “*avodato*” (“His service”).<sup>43</sup> Were we to reflect upon the theological truths contained in the Torah scroll, then it too might evoke the love response. But that is not the case. We are directed not to “the opinions of the Torah,” the “*de'ot ha-Torah*,” but rather to the “actions of the Torah,” the “*ma'asei ha-Torah*.” Our focus is upon the *Sefer Torah* as a symbol of authority commanding gravitas, awe and fear. This all-encompassing perception of the *Sefer Torah* as awe-inspiring was given eloquent expression in that passage of the *Guide*:

He, may He be exalted, has explained that the end of the actions prescribed by the whole Law is to bring about the passion of which it is correct that it be brought about, as we have demonstrated in this chapter for the benefit of those who know the true realities. I refer to the fear of Him, may He be exalted, and the awe before His command. It says: *If thou wilt not take care to observe all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful Name, the Lord thy God.*<sup>44</sup> Consider how it is explicitly stated for your benefit that the intention of *all the words of this Law* is one end, namely, *that thou mayest fear the Name*, and so on.<sup>45</sup> ❧

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<sup>40</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 5:4 and 6:13.

<sup>41</sup> A sentence earlier in that passage of the *Guide*, Maimonides writes:

As for the opinions that the *Torah* teaches us—namely, the apprehension of His being and His unity, may He be exalted—these opinions teach us *love*, as we have explained several times. (Pines translation, p. 630; italics in Pines’ translation).

<sup>42</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 5:4 and 6:13.

<sup>43</sup> *Hil. Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 5:4. Cf. *Guide* III, 51:

The *Torah* has made it clear that this last worship to which we have drawn attention in this chapter can only be engaged in after apprehension has been achieved; it says: *To love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul* [Deuteronomy 11:13]. Now we have made it clear several times that love is proportionate to apprehension. After *love* comes this worship to which attention has also been drawn by [the Sages], may their memory be blessed, who said: *This is the worship in the heart*. In my opinion it consists in setting thought to work on the first intelligible and in devoting oneself exclusively to this as far as this is within one’s capacity. (Pines translation, p. 621; italics in Pines’ translation)

<sup>44</sup> *Deuteronomy* 28:58.

<sup>45</sup> Pines translation, p. 630; italics in Pines’ translation.