

MAIMONIDES

רמב"ם

THE ULTIMATE RATIONALIZATIONS

YEHUDA HALEVI (1075-1141)

KUZARI I:98

- Al Khazari: The theory I had formed, and the opinion of what I saw in my dream you now confirm, namely, that **man can only merit divine influence by acting according to God's commands**. And even were it not so, most men strive to obtain it, even astrologers, magicians, fire and sun worshippers, dualists etc.

• (צח) אָמַר הַכוֹזָרִי: כָּבֵר עֲזָרְתָּ עֲצָתִי
בְּמַה שֶּׁעָלָה בְּדַעְתִּי וּבְמַה שֶּׁרָאִיתִיו
בְּחִלּוּמִי, כִּי אֵין הָאָדָם מַגִּיעַ אֶל
הָעֲנִין הָאֱלֹהִי אֲלֵא בְּדָבָר אֱלֹהִי,
רְצוֹנִי לֹמַר: בְּמַעֲשִׂים שִׁיִּצּוּם
הָאֱלֹהִים. וְאִם לֹא – הִנֵּה רַב בְּנֵי
אָדָם מְשִׁתַּדְּלִים, אֲפִילוּ הַחוּזָה
וְהַקּוֹסִם וְעוֹבְדֵי הָאֵשׁ וְעוֹבְדֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וְהַמְּשַׁנִּים וְזוֹלָתָם .

KUZARI 2:26

- All this was systematically arranged by God. I do not, by any means, assert that the service was instituted in the order expounded by me, since it entailed something more secret and higher, and was based on a divine law. **He who accepts this completely without scrutiny or argument, is better off than he who investigates and analyses.** He, however, who steps down from the highest grade to scrutiny, does well to turn his face to the latent wisdom, instead of leading it to evil opinions and doubts which lead to corruption.

- כָּל זֶה בְּסֵדֶר וּתְכוּנַת הַחֲכָמָה הָאֱלֹהִית. וְאֵינְנִי גּוֹזֵר חֲלִילָה שֶׁהַכּוֹנֵן מֵהַעֲבוּדָה הַזֹּאת הוּא הַסֵּדֶר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר זָכַרְתִּיו, אָבֵל – מֵהַשֶּׁהוּא יוֹתֵר נִפְלָא וְנִעְלָה, וְשֶׁהִיא תוֹרָה מֵאֵת הָאֱלֹהִים יִתְבָּרַךְ, וּמִי שֶׁקִּבְּלָהּ קְבוּל שְׁלֵם מִבְּלִי שְׂיִתְחַכֵּם בָּהּ בְּשִׁכְלוֹ, הוּא מְעַלָּה מִמִּי שֶׁיִּתְחַכֵּם בָּהּ וְחָקֵר. אֲךָ מִי שֶׁנָּטָה מֵהַמְדַּרְגָּה הָעֲלִיוֹנָה הַהִיא אֶל הַמְּחָקֵר, טוֹב שְׂיוֹצִיא בָּהֶם מוֹצְאֵי הַחֲכָמָה מְשִׁיעֲזֵבֵם לְסִבְרוֹת רְעוֹת וְלִסְפִּיקוֹת מְבִיאֹת אֶל אֲבִדוֹן.

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA (1089-1164)

יסוד מורא

השער הששי

בו ידבר על הצורך בקבלת חז"ל,
והדרכים השונות בפירושם לתורה

א. יש מצות מבוארות בתורה. ויש מצות שלא ידענו פירושם באמת רק מפני הקדושים המעתיקים שקבלו בן מאביו ותלמיד מרבו, ולולי הקבלה יוכל אדם לפרש אותם פירוש אחר. ויש מצות קבלנום מהם ואין זכר להם בתורה.

וכלל אומר לך: לולי אנשי **כנסת הגדולה** ואנשי המשנה והתלמוד כבר אבדה תורת אלהינו ונשכח זכרה ח"ו. כי אלה העמידו כל דבר על בוריו, ובארו לנו המצות באר היטב וכל המשפטים כאשר קבלום. ויש שימצאו עדות ברורה מן התורה ויש דרך דרש ויש דרך אסמכתא בעלמא. ומי שיש לו לב יוכל להכיר מתי אומרים דרש ומתי אומרים פשט, כי אין כל דבריהם על דרך אחד. והשם שנתן להם חכמה הוא יתן משכורתם שלמה.

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA (1089-1164)

יסוד מורא: השער הששי

Some mitzvot are explained in the Torah. Others would be inexplicable, were it not for the saintly traditionists who transmitted them father to son and teacher to student. Were it not for Tradition, one could offer other explanations. There are other mitzvot we received from [the Sages] that are not mentioned in the Torah.

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Here's the rule: Without the Men of the Grand Assembly and the *tanaim* and *amoraim*, the divine Torah would have been lost and forgotten. They clarified everything and explained all the mitzvot fully through Tradition. For some, they found explicit support in the Torah, while others were derived through hermeneutics or simply linked to the text. An intelligent person can distinguish between the hermeneutic and the plain text, because they are not all the same. God, who grants wisdom, will reward them.

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על בוריו, ובארו לנו המצות באר היטב וכל המשפטים כאשר קבלום.
ויש שימצאו עדות ברורה מן התורה ויש דרך דרש ויש דרך אסמכתא
בעלמא. ומי שיש לו לב יוכל להכיר מתי אומרים דרש ומתי אומרים
פשט, כי אין כל דבריהם על דרך אחד. והשם שנתן להם חכמה הוא
יתן משכורתם שלמה.



Rambam was born in Spain in 1135 (or 1138). His father, Maimon (hence: Maimonides), was a *dayyan* (judge) in the city of Cordoba.

At the approximate age of 13, his family—along with many Jews—fled to North Africa to escape persecution by a fanatical Muslim sect called the Al-Mohades (Arabic: *al-muwahhadun*, stressing the unity of God).

From Morocco, the family moved to Fustat, Old Cairo, where he practiced medicine while composing his many philosophical and halakhic works.

He died in December of 1204.

RAMBAM: A HOLOGRAPHIC RESPONSUM

אטאל אללה בקרא תזרוב עמאדיו וסני א שיך אלה
א אהין ואדאס עבא מלגו עבדהא מגב יסל
עבא ויסתחש מן בעדה ויסאל תרילגא פ
ומאעדה מוילגא יסחק אדעי לאנה מן מעודת
ונכלס א קרי שייך לילג א גמאעה אמרה הג
יסתלג ערס נאלג למן עלה ועל אבנה גאלת
ואן אמק א תזרה פיסג למן ערס פי מעב חפכ
סבמע לענה סארי ומאון ללמן ג ובו יתנה למחא
לאור מהס יסא וס רעע יאעלג חסב א תקדוג
ואתנה ירבה ושלום בהרוב ושלום בע שייך
ועצ ברו חיים ושלום

GUIDE 1:2

The intellect that was granted to man as the highest endowment, was bestowed on him before his disobedience. With reference to this gift the Bible states that "man was created in the form and likeness of God." On account of this gift of intellect man was addressed by God, and received His commandments, as it is said: "And the Lord God commanded Adam" ([Gen. 2:16](#))--for no commandments are given to the brute creation or to those who are devoid of understanding. Through the intellect man distinguishes between the true and the false. This faculty Adam possessed perfectly and completely.

GUIDE 3:3 I

THERE are persons who find it difficult to give a reason for any of the commandments and consider it right to assume that the commandments and prohibitions have no rational basis whatever. They are led to adopt this theory by a certain **disease** in their soul, the existence of which they perceive, but which they are unable to discuss or to describe. For they imagine that these precepts, if they were useful in any respect, and were commanded because of their usefulness, would seem to originate in the thought and reason of some intelligent being. But as things which are not objects of reason and serve no purpose, they would undoubtedly be attributed to God, because no thought of man could have produced them.

According to the theory of those **weak-minded** persons, man is more perfect than his Creator. For what man says or does has a certain object, whilst the actions of God are different; He commands us to do what is of no use to us and forbids us to do what is harmless.

Far be this! **On the contrary**, the sole object of the Law is to benefit us. Thus, we explained the Scriptural passage, "for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day" ([Deut. 6:24](#)). Again, "which shall hear all those statutes (ḥuḳḳim), and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (ibid. 4:6). He thus says that even every one of these "statutes" convinces all nations of the wisdom and understanding it includes. But if no reason could be found for these statutes, if they produced no advantage and removed no evil, why then should he who believes in them and follows them be wise, reasonable, and so excellent as to raise the admiration of all nations?

But **the truth** is undoubtedly as we have said, that every one of the six hundred and thirteen precepts serves to inculcate some truth, to remove some erroneous opinion, to establish proper relations in society, to diminish evil, to train in good manners or to warn against bad habits.



3:49

Marvel exceedingly at the wisdom of His commandments, just as you should marvel at the wisdom manifested in the things He had made. It says: “The rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment.” It says that just as the things made by Him are consumedly perfect, so are His commandments consumedly just.



משנה תורה הלכות מעילה ח:ח

ראוי לאדם להתבונן
במשפטי התורה
הקדושה, ולידע סוף
עניינם כפי כוחו.
ודבר שלא ימצא לו
טעם, ולא ידע לו
עילה--אל יהי קל
בעיניו; ואל יהרוס
לעלות אל ה', פן
יפרוץ בו.

It is worthy of a man
to investigate the
laws of the holy Torah
and comprehend
them to the best of
his ability. Anything
for which he finds no
explanation and
knows no reason for
it—let him not
dismiss it; let him also
not attempt to
forcubly ascend unto
God, lest He strike

(2)

ולא תהא
מחשבתו בו,
כמחשבתו בשאר
דברי החול.

בוא וראה, כמה
החמירה תורה
במעילה:

One's thoughts
in regard to
[Torah] should
be unlike his
thinking in
secular affairs.
See how
seriously the
Torah treats
trespass:

(3)

ומה אם עצים ואבנים
ועפר ואפר--כיון
שנקרא שם אדון
העולם עליהם בדברים
בלבד, נתקדשו;

וכל הנוהג בהן מנהג
חול, מעל בה'—

ואפילו היה שוגג, צריך

If trees and
stones, once
God's name is
pronounced over
them orally,
become
sanctified and
anyone who
treats them as
mundane is
guilty of trespass
and requires

(4)

קל וחומר למצוות
שחקק לנו הקדוש
ברוך הוא—
שלא יבעוט אדם בהן,
מפני שלא ידע טעמן;

ולא יחפה דברים
אשר לא כן על ה',
ולא יחשב בהן
מחשבתו בדברי
החול.

How much more
so the *mitzvot* that
God has enacted—
let no man trample
them because he
knows no reason
for them.

Nor should he cast
aspersions towards
God by treating
them as he does
mundane matters.

GUIDE 3:32

ON considering the Divine acts, or the processes of **Nature**, we get an insight into the prudence and wisdom of God...

Many precepts in our Law are the result of a similar course adopted by the same Supreme Being. It is, namely, impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other: it is therefore according to the **nature of man** impossible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed. Now God sent Moses to make [the Israelites] “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” ([Exod. 19:6](#)) by means of the knowledge of God... But the custom which was in those days general among all men, and the general mode of worship in which the Israelites were brought up, consisted in sacrificing animals in those temples which contained certain images, to bow down to those images, and to burn incense before them...

It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan of God, as displayed in the whole Creation, that He did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service; for to obey such a commandment it would have been **contrary to the nature of man**, who generally cleaves to that to which he is used; it would in those days have made the same impression as a prophet would make at present if he called us to the service of God and told us in His name, that we should not pray to Him, not fast, not seek His help in time of trouble; that we should serve Him in thought, and not by any action.



By this Divine plan it was effected that the traces of idolatry were blotted out, and the truly great principle of our faith, the Existence and Unity of God, was firmly established; this result was thus obtained without deterring or confusing the minds of the people by the abolition of the service to which they were accustomed, and which alone was familiar to them.

I know that you will at first thought reject this idea and find it strange; you will put the following **question** to me in your heart: How can we suppose that **Divine commandments, prohibitions**, and important acts, which are fully explained, and for which certain seasons are fixed, should not have been commanded for their own sake, but only for the sake of some other thing: as if they were only the means which He employed for His primary object? What prevented Him from making His primary object a direct commandment to us, and to give us the capacity of obeying it? Those precepts which in your opinion are only the means and not the object would then have been unnecessary.



Hear my **answer**, which will cure your heart of this disease and will show you the truth of that which I have pointed out to you...

God refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable of obeying, and gave the above-mentioned commandments as a means of securing His chief object, viz., to spread a knowledge of Him [among the people], and to cause them to reject idolatry...

It is also for this reason that He distinctly stated **the commandments and the prohibitions**, the reward and the punishment. This principle as regards miracles has been frequently explained by us in our works: I do not say this because I believe that it is difficult for God to change the nature of every individual person; on the contrary, it is possible, and it is in His power, according to the principles taught in Scripture; but it has never been His will to do it, and it never will be. If it were part of His will to change [at His desire] the nature of any person, the mission of prophets and the giving of the Law would have been altogether superfluous.



LETTER ON ASTROLOGY

I also have read in all matters concerning all of idolatry, so that it seems to me that there does not remain in the world a composition on this subject, having been translated into Arabic from other languages, but that I have read it and have understood its subject matter and have plumbed the depth of its thought. From those books [*The Order of Nabatean Worship*] it became clear to me what the reason is for all the commandments that everyone comes to think of as having no reason at all other than the decree of scripture. I already have a great composition on this subject in the Arabic language [i.e., *The Guide*] with lucid proofs for every single commandment.



THE precepts of the second class are those which we have enumerated in the section "On idolatry." It is doubtless that they all tend to save man from the error of idolatry and the evil practices connected with it; e.g., observing the times, enchantment, witchcraft, incantation, consulting with familiar spirits, and the like. When you read the books which I mentioned to you, you will find that witchcraft, which will be described to you, is part of the customs of the Sabeans, Kasdim, Chaldeans, and to a higher degree of the Egyptians and Canaanites...

After this remark, which you will understand when you have read such of their works as are at present extant, and have been mentioned by me, hear what I will tell you. It is the object and centre of the whole Law to abolish idolatry and utterly uproot it, and to overthrow the opinion that any of the stars could interfere for good or evil in human matters, because it leads to the worship of stars...

We have explained in our large work that it is prohibited to round the corners of the head, and to mar the corners of the beard, because it was the custom of idolatrous priests. For the same reason, the wearing of garments made of linen and wool is prohibited: the heathen priests adorned themselves with garments containing vegetable and animal material, whilst they held in their hand a seal made of a mineral. This you find written in their books. (3:37)



הלכות מלכים ח:יא

- Anyone who accepts upon himself and carefully observes the Seven Commandments is of the Righteous of the Nations of the World and has a portion in the World to Come. This is as long as he accepts and performs them because (he truly believes that) it was the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Who commanded them in the Torah, and that is was through Moses our Teacher we were informed that the Sons of Noah had already been commanded to observe them. But if he observes them because he convinced himself logically⁸¹ *By his own intellect and conscience, but he does not agree that they were commanded by G-d.*, then he is not considered a Resident Convert and is not of the Righteous of the Nations of the World, but merely one of their wise.

• כָּל הַמְקַבֵּל שִׁבְעַת מִצְוֹת וְנִזְהָר
לְעִשׂוֹתָן הָרִי זֶה מִחֲסִידֵי אֲמוֹת
הָעוֹלָם. וַיֵּשׁ לוֹ חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.
וְהוּא שִׁיקְבֵּל אוֹתָן וַיַּעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָן
מִפְּנֵי שִׁצּוּחַ בְּהֵן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
בַּתּוֹרָה וְהוֹדִיעָנוּ עַל יְדֵי מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ
שֶׁבַּנִּי נָח מִקֶּדֶם נִצְטוּוּ בְּהֵן. אָבֵל
אִם עָשָׂאן מִפְּנֵי הַכְּרַע הַדַּעַת אֵין
זֶה גֵר תּוֹשֵׁב וְאֵינוּ מִחֲסִידֵי אֲמוֹת
הָעוֹלָם וְלֹא מִחֲכָמֵיהֶם:

רמב"ן דברים כ"ב:ו' "כי יקרא קן צפור לפניך"

This also is an explanatory commandment, of the prohibition ye shall not kill it [the dam] and its young both in one day, because the reason for both [commandments] is that we should not have a cruel heart and be discompassionate, or it may be that Scripture does not permit us to destroy a species altogether, although it permits slaughter [for food] within that group. Now, he who kills the dam and the young in one day or takes them when they are free to fly [it is regarded] as though he cut off that species.

Now, he [Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon] wrote in the Moreh Nebuchim that the reason for the commandment to release the mother bird when taking its nest and the prohibition against killing the dam with its young on one day is in order to admonish us against killing the young within the mother's sight, for animals feel great distress under such circumstances.

גם זו מצוה מבוארת, מן: אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד (ויקרא כ"ב:כ"ח). כי הטעם בשניהם לבלתי היות לנו לב אכזרי ולא נרחם. או שלא יתיר הכתוב לעשות השחתה לעקור המין, אף על פי שהתיר השחיטה, והנה ההרג האם והבנים ביום אחד, או לוקח אותם בהיות להם דרוך לעוף, כאלו יכרית במין ההוא.

וכתב הרב במורה הנבוכים (רמב"ם מו"נ ג'מ"ח) כי טעם שלוח הקן וטעם אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד (ויקרא כ"ב:כ"ח) כדי להזהר שלא ישחוט הבן בעיני האם, כי יש לבהמות דאגה גדולה בזה...