# Far Away, So Close

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*The Royal Crown* (*Keter Malchut*), the famous poem composed by R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol in the eleventh century, is a moving description of the religious experience. One of the most important liturgical works written in Hebrew, it begins by glorifying God's inestimably awesome majesty and power—attributes that man, in his limited capacity, cannot possibly hope to comprehend:

> Thou existest,
> But hearing of ear cannot reach thee, or vision of eye,
> Nor shall the how have sway over thee, nor the wherefore and whence.
> Thou existest,
> But for thyself and for none other with thee.
> Thou existest,
> And before time began thou wast,
> And without place thou didst abide.
> Thou existest,
> And thy secret is hidden and who shall attain to it?
> So deep, so deep, who can discover it?[1]

In later sections, however, there is a noticeable shift in the speaker's tone. As Israel Levin, editor of a critical edition of the poem, points out, initially the speaker's language discloses his feeling of immeasurable isolation from the Almighty. Yet now, the speaker begins to refer to a personal divinity with whom he seems to feel a sense of intimacy.[2] It is to this God that he turns in despair, and entreats:

> Take me not away in the midst of my days,
> Nor hide thy face from me.
> Purify me from my sins,
> And cast me not out from thy presence,
> But quicken me with glory
> And with glory receive me afterwards.
> And when thou shalt bring me out of this world,
> Bring me in peace to the life of the world to come,
> And place me in glory among the saints,
> And number me with those whose portion is appointed in the world of life
> And purify me to shine in the light of thy countenance,
> And restore and revive me
> And bring me up again from the depths of the earth.
> Then will I say:
> I thank thee, O Lord,
> That though wroth with me,
> Thine anger is turned away and thou hast comforted me.
> Thine, O Lord, is loving-kindness
> In all the goodness thou hast bestowed on me,
> And which thou wilt bestow till the day of my death.[3]

Here we have, then, a clear demonstration of the dual aspects of faith in a transcendent God. On the one hand, the object of this faith is unattainable, unfathomable, and incalculably distant from man's lowly, finite experience. Indeed, although the Bible frequently describes God in anthropomorphic terms, traditional commentaries view these descriptions as allegorical, and insist that God has no form or appearance of the sort that characterizes

descriptions of pagan gods.[4] Accordingly, Jewish philosophers throughout the ages have emphasized the absolute otherness of God, and the infinite chasm that exists between him and the physical world. As Moses Maimonides (the Rambam) asserts in his classic work *The Guide for the Perplexed*:

> Just as it behooves to bring up children in the belief, and to proclaim to the multitude, that God, may he be magnified and honored, is one and that none but he ought to be worshipped, so it behooves that they should be made to accept on traditional authority the belief that God is not a body; and that there is absolutely no likeness in any respect whatever between him and the things created by him; that his existence has no likeness to theirs; nor his life to the life of those among them who are alive; nor again his knowledge to the knowledge of those among them who are endowed with knowledge. They should be made to accept the belief that the difference between him and them is not merely a difference of more or less, but one concerning the species of existence…. Now everything that can be ascribed to God, may he be exalted, differs in every respect from our attributes, so that no definition can comprehend the one thing and the other.[5]

And yet, who is the man of faith that could be satisfied with such an abstract view of God? Surely the believer seeks to bridge the enormous gulf that separates him from the object of his longings; surely he wishes to bask in the warmth of his Maker, and draw comfort and strength from his nearness. For the believer, God is not merely a theoretical idea. Rather, he is an active presence in one's life. As the American philosopher and psychologist William James once remarked, "In the distinctively religious sphere of experience, many persons (how many we cannot tell) possess the objects of their belief, not in the form of mere conceptions which their intellect accepts as true, but rather in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended. As his sense of the real presence of these objects fluctuates, so the believer alternates between warmth and coldness in his faith."[6] James understood that religious faith is first and foremost an *experience*, one defined largely by a yearning to overcome the terrible remoteness of the divine.

The question, then, is how can this remoteness be overcome? The world's various religions are rich with examples of rituals designed to effect a union between man and God. This is the dominant logic, for instance, behind certain sacrificial ceremonies, as well as the Catholic Mass, in which the believer is invited to "drink" the blood and "eat" the body of Christ. In fact, Christianity is based on the belief that the heavenly and the earthly merged in the miraculous coming of Jesus, who was, in the words of Swiss theologian Karl Barth, "Not only a man like us in time and space," but also "a figure that [embodies] the omnipotence, the grace, and the truth of God, and therefore is the authentic intermediary between God and the rest of mankind."[7] Still another means of uniting the finite with the infinite is the mystical path that strives to release human consciousness from the constraints of both physical existence and the human Ego. Again, the goal is to attain a state of purity and spiritual transcendence, and ultimately become one with the divine source of all being.

The Jewish tradition takes a different approach. Unlike those religions that assert that communion with God can be realized in the material world, or even the human body, Judaism insists that the very idea of such a merger is abominable.[8] True, scholars are divided over whether ecstatic practices that aspire to a physical communion with the divine can be found in Kabbalistic texts.[9] But even if such views do exist, they are decidedly out of step with the prevailing attitude of the Jewish tradition: Namely, that between Creator and created, the Holy One and mere mortals, there is always a certain ineradicable distance. In the Talmud, this distance is even given a symbolic estimation:

> And it has been taught: R. Jose states, neither did the *shechina* (divine presence) ever descend to earth, nor did Moses or Elijah ever ascend to heaven, as it is written (Psalms 115:16), "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth hath he given to the sons of men." But did not the divine presence descend to earth? Is it not in fact written (Exodus 19:20), "And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai"? That was above ten handbreadths [from the summit]. But is it not written (Zechariah 14:4),

> "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives"?—That will be above ten handbreadths. But did not Moses and Elijah ascend to heaven? Is it not in fact written (Exodus 19:3), "And Moses went up unto God"?—[That was] to a level lower than ten [handbreadths from heaven]. But is it not written (II Kings 2:11), "And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"?—[That was] to a level lower than ten handbreadths.[10]

And yet, along with its insistence on the separation between the human and the divine, Judaism also calls upon man to attach himself to the Holy One. This attachment, or *deveikut* ("cleaving") in Hebrew, is expressed in the passage from Deuteronomy, "You shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him."[11] The meaning of this commandment—which is not, it should be noted, merely a measure of one's devotion, but rather a requirement—is understandably a matter of some controversy among Jewish sages. Some interpret it literally, as an instruction to be in extremely close contact with the divine.[12] Others, however, explain it as an obligation to "walk after the Lord your God," and strive to obey all of his commandments—the interpretation that eventually became the accepted view in Jewish theology and halacha.[13] As the renowned scholar of Kabbala Gershom Scholem explains, the concept of deveikut, as it is widely understood, "is a perpetual being-with-God, an intimate union and conformity of the human and the divine will" while preserving "a proper sense of distance, or, if you like, of incommensurateness."[14]

If attachment to God is the supreme goal of religious life, then the *mitzvot*—God's commandments—are the principal means of achieving it. "Man cannot approach God except by means of deeds commanded by him," writes Rabbi Judah Halevi in his famous work *The Kuzari.*[15] Indeed, the purpose of many of Judaism's most notable obligations is to narrow the gap between man and the divine, while not altogether eradicating it. In the following article, I will distinguish between two types of commandments from the vast halachic array intended to realize this

ideal. First, there are those intended to act as a constant reminder of divinity in the daily life of believers, and thus bring the Holy One closer to man. Second, there are those intended to reinforce the believer's identification with God, thus bringing man closer to the Holy One. While the distinction between these two categories is admittedly not always clear, they nonetheless represent two opposite yet complementary vectors of religious observance: Inviting or "bringing down" the heavenly plane to the earthly one; and elevating and uplifting the earthly plane until it acquires a quasi-heavenly nature. I will then argue that there is one commandment—that of Tora study—that accomplishes both these goals at once, and creates, more than any other religious act, a mutual cleaving between man and God. For precisely this reason, the commandment of Tora study is considered the clearest demonstration of deveikut in Judaism, which explains the vital role it has played in traditional Jewish life throughout the generations.

Among the commandments discussed in this article, those that seek to bring God closer to man will likely be more recognizable to most readers. The reason for this is twofold: First, these commandments are ritual in nature. Second, their primary goal is to testify to the active involvement of the divine in the physical world, and to the gratitude man feels for that involvement. Indeed, Judaism teaches that God is not indifferent to what occurs in his cosmos. His interest in his creations did not cease after he brought them into being. God reveals himself throughout history precisely by demonstrating his awesome power and by meting out justice. So far as the Jewish people are concerned, God enacted a covenant with the Israelites, took them under his wing, and gave them the Tora so that they might become a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. According to tradition, the divine presence then dwelt in the land of Israel—first in the Tabernacle, and later in the First Temple—and accompanied the Jewish people when they were forced into exile.[16] It was then that these commandments took on a more urgent nature: At a time when God's face is

hidden, and signs of his stewardship on the wane, the believing Jew yearns more than ever to be graced with his presence. Accordingly, certain mitzvot enable him to summon this presence into his thoughts and deeds, making God an integral part of his daily life.

The "presence" to which we are referring here is not, obviously, divine revelation in the full sense of the word, an exceedingly rare event that few have been privileged to witness. It is, rather, a more modest, human phenomenon, one we might call "openness to the transcendent": A state characterized by the impression that accompanies it, or the unique state of being experienced by a person who directs his consciousness toward that which lies beyond his sensory perceptions. The eminent German scholar Rudolf Otto coined the term "numinous" to describe exactly this state in his classic work *The Idea of the Holy*. There, Otto explains that the "numinous feeling" is one of intense excitement and triumphal elation marked by "sudden, strong ebullitions of personal piety and the frames of mind such ebullitions evince, in the fixed and ordered solemnities of rites and liturgies, and again in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches."[17] He adds that "the feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane,' non-religious mood of everyday experience."[18] It will, perhaps, come as no surprise that the inspiration for Otto's book came from the Jewish liturgy: During a visit to a synagogue in Morocco in 1911, Otto was deeply moved by the congregation's recitation of the *Kedusha Desidra* during the Sabbath prayers, which, he wrote in one his letters, made him shudder with awe, testifying as it did to "the mystery of the other world."[19]

Otto provides us with a glimpse into the intense spiritual experience that can accompany the act of prayer, an experience the sages saw as the primary component of the commandment to pray. As the Talmud explains, "It is written (Deuteronomy 11:13), 'To love the Lord your God, and to serve

him with all your heart, and with all your soul.' And what service can be performed with the heart? The service of prayer."[20] Moreover, if the person praying does so with the proper devotion, he may derive great joy from the knowledge that he is not only addressing the Holy One with his words, but standing at the very feet of his Creator: "R. Chanah Bar Bizna said in the name of R. Shimon Chasida: One who prays must see himself as though the divine presence is opposite him, as it is stated (Psalms 16:8), 'I have set God before me always.'"[21] Similarly, Rabbi Joseph Karo maintained that

> The person praying must concentrate in his heart on the words that he utters; and he must think that he has the divine presence before him; and he must remove all thoughts that occupy him until his thinking and his intention remain pure in his prayer; and he must imagine how if he was speaking before a flesh and blood king he would organize his words and prepare them well lest he should fail, all the more so before the King of Kings, the Holy One blessed be he, who examines all thoughts. And this is what the pious ones and men of deeds would do; they were solitary and intent on their prayers until they attained consummation and augmentation of mental power, and approached the level of prophecy.[22]

Prayer opens the worshipper's soul to God, inviting him to enter and fill it. The sages emphasized that this feeling of divine affinity is not illusory: "Ravin Bar R. Adda said in the name of R. Yitzhak, From where [is it derived] that the Holy One, blessed be he, is in a synagogue? For it is stated (Psalms 82:1), 'God stands in the divine assembly'; and from where [is it derived] that when ten men pray [together] the divine presence is with them? For it is stated, 'God stands in the divine assembly.'"[23]

Of course, prayer is not the only means of ensuring that God remains ever-present in one's consciousness. There are other commandments designed to serve as a perpetual reminder of the Jew's connection with God, such as the obligations to affix the mezuza to one's door, to lay tefilin, and to wear tzitzit.

The mitzva of the mezuza is an excellent example of how Judaism strives to mark the presence of God in one's daily life. The mezuza, which contains a parchment scroll on which is written the biblical passages, "Hear O Israel" and "If you hearken,"[24] is affixed to the doorframes of the Jewish home in order that they may remind its occupants of their commitment to the Holy One, as it is written, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy arm, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them on the doorsteps of thy house, and on thy gates."[25] The visibility of this symbol ensures that both those who live in the home in question as well as those who visit it will always recall their link to the eternal. As Maimonides explains:

> A person should pay heed to the precept of the mezuza; for it is an obligation perpetually binding upon all. Whenever one enters or leaves a home with the mezuza on the doorstep, he will be confronted with the love due to God and will be aroused from his slumbers and his foolish absorption in temporal vanities. He will realize that nothing endures to all eternity save knowledge of the Ruler of the Universe. This thought will immediately restore him to his right senses and he will walk in the paths of righteousness. Our ancient teachers said: He who has phylacteries on his head and arm, fringes on his garment and a mezuza on his door may be presumed not to sin for he has many monitors—angels that save him from sinning, as it is said (Psalms 34:8), "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him and delivereth them."[26]

In his trademark rationalistic fashion, Maimonides describes the mezuza as a symbol intended to stir the believer's religious and moral consciousness.[27] As other sages see it, however, the power of the mezuza, like that of prayer, lies not only in its subjective, psychological component;

it is also seen as providing protection to those who dwell in homes to which it is affixed, because it invites divine intervention.[28]

Whereas the commandment to affix the mezuza applies to a man's dwelling, the commandments of tefilin and tzitzit apply to an even more intimate space: The human body. In laying tefilin, the Jew binds upon his head and arm a declaration of the absolute authority of the Holy One. As such, his entire being is infused with divine inspiration. As Rabbi Judah Halevi writes in *The Kuzari*, the believer uses the tefilin as a means of connecting with what Halevi calls "the divine influence":

> [He] connects his mind with the divine influence by various means, some of which are prescribed in the Written Law, others in tradition. He wears the phylacteries on his head, on the seat of the mind and memory, the straps falling down on his hand, where he can see them at leisure. The hand phylactery he wears above the mainspring of his faculties, the heart. He wears the tzitzit lest he be entrapped by worldly thoughts, as it is written (Numbers 15:39), "That ye may not go astray after your heart and after your eyes." Inside the phylacteries are written [verses describing God's] unity, reward, punishment, and the "remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt," because they furnish the irrefutable proof that the divine influence is attached to mankind, and that Providence watches them and keeps record of their deeds.[29]

Rabbi Judah Halevi attributes an identical role to the commandment of tzitzit, which, like tefilin, prompts the wearer to strive to transcend his sensory impressions and to keep his base physical impulses in check. Here, the "numinous" experience is accomplished by means of the garment's blue and white fringes, a reminder of the colors of the firmament that houses God's throne:

> The blue is like that of the sea. And the sea resembles the grasses. And the grasses resemble the firmament. And the firmament resembles the throne of glory. And the throne resembles the sapphire. As it is written (Ezekiel 10:1), "Then I looked, and behold, on the firmament that was over the

heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire, in form resembling a throne."[30]

According to R. Meir, the tzitzit is not merely a piece of clothing, but an instrument that allows us a "glimpse" of the divine world—or at least a sense of its closeness. A similar notion is expressed in Midrash Tehilim: "R. Hezekia said, When the children of Israel are wrapped in their tzitzit, they will not consider that they are wearing blue, but will only look upon the tzitzit as though the glory of the divine presence were upon them."[31]

Of course, we must not make the mistake of identifying the mezuza, the tefilin, and the tzitzit with the supreme power itself; such identification is akin to idolatry. We must always take care to differentiate between the signifier and the signified, recognizing that the physical aspect of each commandment is but a medium through which our attention is directed towards that which lies above and beyond ordinary sensory perception. And yet, so long as we can fulfill this purpose through them, the mitzvot open before us a window onto the otherworldly, and allow us mere mortals to feel that we stand before the very presence of the Holy One himself. It is at such moments, writes Rabbi Avraham Isaiah Karelitz (the Hazon Ish), that "a new world is revealed, because in it a man can be for a moment like an angel and bask in the holy splendor, and all the pleasures of this world are as naught compared with the pleasure of man's affinity with his Creator."[32]

Unlike the ritualistic nature of the commandments discussed above, all of which serve as a constant reminder of God's presence in the material world, the mitzvot that endeavor to bring man closer to God are more abstract and intangible. They are primarily carried out in the realm of man's interaction with others and with his environment; yet, they too are considered a profound expression of devotion, since their purpose is ultimately to bring about an identification with the Holy One.

First, however, it must be made clear that, in contrast to corporeal materialization of the sort in which pagans and Christians believe, or spiritual unification of the kind sought after by mystics, the notion of identification with God extolled by Judaism is not synonymous with *becoming identical to* God. As noted earlier, Judaism is clear in its insistence that the difference between man and God cannot be abrogated. Nor, for that matter, *should* the uniqueness of man dissolve into the infinite divine. As Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, one of the twentieth century's greatest Jewish scholars, stated:

> First, it is impossible to talk about the unity of man with God, only about the cleaving of man to God; second, man does not cleave to God by denying his real essence; but, on the contrary, by preserving his essence. The actual personality… approaches its God when it lives an independent, multi-colored, original life, replete with direction, initiative, and activity, and frees itself from the semblance of overweening and impertinent independence. Then and only then does it begin to have a divine existence.[33]

Man's cleaving to his Creator does not require him to relinquish his sense of self. On the contrary, insists Rabbi Soloveitchik, man was not created to be a doormat. Thus, while he should avoid "overweening and impertinent independence," which is a kind of defiance of the heavenly, he cannot hope to "have a divine existence" if he does not initiate, work, and create. Only in so doing does he fulfill his potential as someone created *betzelem*, "in God's image." A similar notion is expressed in Midrash Leviticus:

> R. Yehuda Ben Rabbi Simon began his discourse with the text (Deuteronomy 13:5), "After the Lord your god shall ye walk." Said R. Yehuda Ben Rabbi Simon, But can a man of flesh and blood walk after the Holy One, blessed be he, the one of whom it is written (Psalms 57:20), "Thy way was in the sea, and thy path in the great waters and thy footsteps were not known"? Yet you say, "After the Lord your God shall ye walk!" And unto him shall ye cleave. But can flesh and blood go up into heaven to cleave to the shechina, the one of whom it is written (Deuteronomy 4:24), "For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire," and of whom it is written (Daniel 7:9),

> "His throne was fiery flames," and of whom it is further written (Daniel 7: 10), "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him"? Yet you say, And unto him shall you cleave! But in truth the Holy One blessed be he, from the very beginning of the creation of the world, was before all else occupied with plantation, as is proved by the text (Genesis 2:8), "And the Lord God planted a garden in the first instance in Eden," and so do you also, when you enter into the land [of Israel], occupy yourselves first with naught else but plantation; hence it is written (Leviticus 19:23), "And when ye shall come into the land, then ye shall plant."[34]

Understood literally, R. Yehuda Ben Rabbi Simon emphasizes, the act of "cleaving" to God is impossible. Flesh and blood cannot walk "after the Lord" or "go up into heaven to cleave" to him in the same way that it is incapable of withstanding the intense heat of a blazing fire. Thus does R. Yehuda Ben Rabbi Simon interpret the passage, "After the Lord your God shall you walk" as an instruction to *emulate* God: To follow his example to the best of human ability.

But how is man to go about emulating the divine? And what form does this emulation take? First and foremost, say the sages, one must align himself with the moral stance of the Holy One as described in the biblical laws and in prophecy. The commandments are not, after all, merely a collection of imperatives expressing God's will. Rather, they comprise a comprehensive ideological system. As such, the Jew is commanded to keep not only God's laws, but also the *spirit* of those laws. Abba Shaul says as much in the Talmud: "Abba Shaul interpreted, 'and I will be like him': Be thou like him: Just as he is gracious and compassionate, so be thou gracious and compassionate."[35] In his *Book of the Commandments*, Maimonides expands on this point:

> By this injunction we are commanded to be like God, praised be he, as far as it is in our power. This injunction is contained in his words (Deuteronomy 28:9), "And thou shalt walk in his ways," and also in an earlier verse in his words (Deuteronomy 10:12), "To walk in all his ways." On this latter

> verse the sages comment as follows: Just as the Holy One blessed be he is called merciful, so shouldst thou be merciful; just as he is called gracious, so shouldst thou be gracious; just as he is called righteous, so shouldst thou be righteous; just as he is called hasid [one who does acts of loving kindness], so shouldst thou be a hasid. This injunction has already appeared in another form in his words (Deuteronomy 13:5), "After the Lord your God shall ye walk," which the sages explain as meaning that we are to imitate the good deeds and lofty attributes by which the Lord, exalted be he, is described in a figurative way—he being indeed immeasurably exalted above all such description.[36]

Clearly, Maimonides does not believe that the injunction "after the Lord your God shall ye walk" is limited to the fulfillment of his commandments. Rather, it is intended to cultivate good character and develop a moral personality. Man is not meant, as Rabbi Soloveitchik maintained, to be a submissive subject, doing merely (and only) what is expected of him. Instead, he is to be God's active partner in the betterment of the world, doing the right thing because he honestly and wholeheartedly believes in it. Only by raising humanity to a higher level is the ideal of modeling ourselves after God truly achieved.

One of the clearest examples of the command to adopt God's moral stance can be found in the laws pertaining to sexual conduct. For example, the Midrash interprets the biblical passage "And you shall be holy to me: For I the Lord am holy,"[37] as meaning, "Just as I am holy, so you be holy. Just as I am chaste, so you be chaste."[38] Of course, the sages did not intend for the adjective "chaste" to be taken literally. Rather, it is used as a means of emphasizing the vast difference between a God who transcends the needs and desires that accompany a physical form and the pagan deities who abandon themselves to sensual pleasures. Here we may recall Zeus, the Olympian patriarch, who fathered a substantial number of Greek heroes; Krishna, the avatar (physical incarnation) of Vishnu, who seduced young village girls in the Vrindavan forest; the frequent sexual intercourse between brothers and sisters in the Egyptian pantheon; and the countless fertility gods and

goddesses who presided over wild, orgiastic rituals. The Jewish God is the complete antithesis of all these. Not only is he above physical lust, but he loathes acts of debauchery, and explicitly forbids them. Indeed, the Tora is unrelenting in its view of sexual promiscuity as utterly repugnant:

> And if a man lie with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death: They have wrought unnatural sin; their blood shall be upon them. If a man also lie with a man, as one lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: They shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them. And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: They shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you…. And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless. You shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: That the land, into which I bring you to dwell, will not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the practices of the nation, which I cast out before you: For they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them.[39]

Immorality of the sexual kind—adultery, incest, and "unnatural" acts of intercourse—are so loathsome to God that he threatens those who indulge in them with the full measure of his wrath. This is precisely why, according to the Midrash, the prophet Balaam advised Balak, king of Moab, to tempt the children of Israel into licentious behavior:

> "Behold, these were caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam" (Numbers 31:16). What was the word of Balaam? He told them: Even if you bring in all the crowds of the world, you can not overcome them [the Israelites]. Maybe [you think] you are more populous than the Egyptians, that about them is said (Exodus 14:7), "He took six hundred of the best chariots," and as long as Israel does his will he will fight for them, as it is said (Exodus 14:4), "The Lord will fight for you," and when they do not do his will he will fight against them as it is said (Isaiah 63:10), "So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them." And

> not only that: They make the Merciful One act cruelly. As it is said (Lamentations 2:5), "The Lord is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel."[40]

And yet, as much as the Jew must strive to emulate the "chasteness" of the Holy One, he must also take care not to interpret this commandment too zealously. Unlike Catholicism, for example, Judaism does *not* encourage total abstention from sex, since this would be in clear violation of the divine commandment to "be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth,"[41] as well as contradict God's pledge to Abraham that his seed would be multiplied like the grains of sand on the shore. Therefore, following God's example does not mean a denial of sexuality, but rather the practice of sexual *temperance*: The subjection of one's sexual urges to the control of the spirit, and its channeling toward higher, worthy ends.

The Tora's attitude towards financial and property-related offenses is also anchored in the notion of identification with God. Although the commandments prohibiting offenses of this kind rely on a universally applicable "natural justice,"[42] parallels for which can be found in almost every set of human laws from time immemorial, they are reinforced by the pronouncement God placed in the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: "For I, the Lord, love judgment; I hate robbery with burnt offerings."[43] The Talmud explains:

> This may be compared to a human king who passed through his customhouse and said to his attendants, Pay the tax to the tax collectors. They said to him, But the whole tax, surely, belongs to thee! He answered them, All travelers would learn from me not to evade their payments of tax. So the Holy One blessed be he said, "I the Lord hate robbery in burnt offerings;" let my children learn from me and keep away from robbery.[44]

Although everything created—including the cattle, sheep, and birds sacrificed on the altar—belongs to God, he is not prepared to accept a sacrifice offered in a forbidden manner. While the crime of robbery is, in theory, an offense committed by man against his fellow, it is nonetheless hateful to God, and considered a direct and serious offense against him. For this

reason, the Tora obliges the transgressor not only to return what he has stolen to its owners and to pay additional compensation, but to make a guilt sacrifice to God as well.[45]

But there is more to the emulation of God than the adoption of his moral attitudes.[46] Equally important is the fact that man, like his Maker, is a creative force. Thus, when he alters his environment to suit his needs, his actions reflect the primordial act of creation. This idea is echoed in the words of R.Yehuda Ben Rabbi Simon cited above: "But in truth the Holy One, from the very beginning of his creation of the world was before all else occupied with plantation, as is proved in the text (Genesis 2:8), 'And the Lord God planted a garden in the first instance in Eden,' and so do you also, when you enter into the land of Israel, occupy yourselves first with naught else but plantation."[47] Of course, there is a crucial difference between the creative acts of man and God: Man does not make anything *ex nihilo*, "from nothing," but rather uses existing materials.[48] Nonetheless, the very fact that he is able to deviate from existing molds and renew the world by virtue of his own free will sets him apart from all other creations, and brings him closer to his Maker. Rabbi Haim of Volozhin (the Baal Nefesh Hahaim), the founder of the Lithuanian order of yeshivot, considers this creative ability the greatest attribute of humanity. "Man is called the soul and the life-spirit of a hundred million worlds… and to him alone is given the rule of choice, to turn himself and the worlds in whatever direction he chooses."[49]

In creative work, then, and more precisely in what the sages call *melechet mahshevet*, or "workmanship," we find a distinct similarity between man and God.[50] At the same time, however, Judaism attaches profound religious significance to the act of *resting* from work: Just as God rested on the seventh day of creation, so are the children of Israel commanded to keep the Sabbath by refraining from those activities that demonstrate cognizance and intention. These actions, all of which come under the category of "workmanship," include plowing, sowing, harvesting, weaving, sewing, building, cooking, and writing, among others.[51] Philo of Alexandria, the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, elaborates on this analogy:

> The nation of the Jews keeps every seventh day regularly, after each interval of six days; and there is an account of events recorded in the history of the creation of the world, comprising a sufficient relation of the cause of this ordinance; for the sacred historian says, that the world was created in six days, and that on the seventh day God desisted from his works, and began to contemplate what he had so beautifully created; therefore, he commanded the beings also who were destined to live in this state, to imitate God in this particular also, as well as in all others, applying themselves to their works for six days, but desisting from them and philosophizing on the seventh day, and devoting their leisure to the contemplation of the things of nature, and considering whether in the preceding six days they have done anything which has not been holy, bringing their conduct before the judgement-seat of the soul, and subjecting it to a scrutiny, and making themselves give an account of all the things which they have said or done.[52]

For Philo, the purpose of the Sabbath is to make time for engaging in spiritual matters, such as philosophical reflection and moral accounting. Another, more prevalent approach perceives the commandment to rest on the Sabbath as social legislation, designed to ease the burden of toil on all mankind. While there is undoubtedly some truth to each of these explanations, neither provides us with the key to understanding the overall picture. This is because they both fail to take into account the mimetic aspect of the mitzva—namely, the perception of the Sabbath as a human reenactment of the seventh day of Creation. This error is understandable. Surely the Holy One does not need to "recover" from his labors or to contemplate their greatness afterward. What possible example, then, could God's act of rest provide for human beings?

As I have written elsewhere in these pages, I believe the solution to this puzzle lies in the fact that the act of resting—both divine and human—is *not*, as commonly assumed, extraneous to the creative process.[53] Quite the opposite: God's desisting from work on the seventh day provides the necessary *closure* to creation. The Midrash describes this idea by drawing a parallel between the divine and the human artisan:

> R. [Yehuda Hanasi] asked R. Ishmael the son of R. Jose: Have you heard from your father the actual meaning of (Genesis 2:2) "On the seventh day God finished the work which he had been doing"?… It is like a man striking the hammer on the anvil, raising it by day and bringing it down after nightfall. So, too, did the Holy One lift the hammer on the sixth day, while it was still light, and then lower it on the Sabbath, once night had fallen.[54]

This Midrash begins with a question about a seeming contradiction: Did God finish his work on the seventh day or did he rest? Why, according to the Tora, did God desist from his work "on the seventh day," and not at the end of the sixth? The answer compares the act of creation to the work of a blacksmith who raises up his hammer and slams it down on the anvil. Just as his effort is exerted in lifting the hammer, but the results are achieved only when it is lowered, the six days of divine effort achieve their necessary climax only on the seventh day. Not for nothing, then, does the prayer book refer to the Sabbath as "the *conclusion* of the creation of heaven and earth."[55]

The Sabbath is not to be perceived, therefore, as simply the absence of work. On the contrary, it, too, has a positive function: The principle of inactivity that defines the Sabbath both completes and concludes the process that preceded it. As Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague (the Maharal) indicates, "The Sabbath is the completion of creation, and everything is directed to its completion, which is the core of the matter. Accordingly, the entire six days of creation are directed to the Sabbath…. For this reason, the Sabbath is to be kept in mind all week long, so that everything will be directed toward the completion of creation."[56]

According to this interpretation, the commandment to observe the Sabbath teaches man how to wield his own creative potential. The divine example of creation reveals to man a primordial rhythm of action, one that combines motion with pause, activity with passivity, and being with nothingness. Indeed, the balance between these opposites is the secret of creativity in its highest form. The Sabbath offers

us the key to this secret, and allows us, to the extent that we are prepared to adopt the ideal it represents, to achieve our purpose not only as emulators of God, but as his actual partners in the act of creation.

The commandments we have examined so far belong to one or the other of the two categories introduced at the beginning of this essay: Those that seek to bring God's presence closer to man, and those that seek to bring man closer to God. The mitzva of Tora study, however, is unique in that it serves both these purposes simultaneously. It should come as no surprise, then, that the study of Tora is described by the sages as the essence of devotion to God, and is depicted in religious literature as the crowning glory of Jewish existence.

More than any other religious fiat, the commandment of Tora study is an *intellectual* activity. At its core, according to Maimonides, is the obligation "to teach and to study the Tora, which is called *talmud Tora*. This injunction is contained in his words (Deuteronomy 6:7), 'And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children'; the Sifre says: '*To thy children*,' means to thy students."[57] The obligation is not only to teach others, but also to study on one's own: "Just as it is incumbent on him to have his son taught, so is he under an obligation to obtain instruction for himself."[58] On the most basic level, then, God's commandment of Tora study has guaranteed that the divine gift he gave to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai—both the Written and the Oral Tora—will be preserved and passed on throughout the generations. Furthermore, Tora study enables the Jew to deepen his understanding of the mitzvot he observes, thus revitalizing and supporting him in the process. As Maimonides notes elsewhere, "Study leads to practice, but practice does not lead to study."[59] Although the study of Tora is both intellectually and physically demanding, Jewish tradition considers it a general duty from which no one is excused: "Every Israelite is under an obligation to study Tora, whether he is poor or rich, in sound health or ailing, in the vigor of youth or very old and feeble. Even a man so poor that he is maintained

by charity or goes begging from door to door, as also a man with a wife and children to support, are under the obligation to set aside a definite period during the day and at night for the study of the Tora, as it is said (Joshua 1:8), 'But thou shalt meditate therein day and night.'"[60]

But Tora study is more than merely a didactic practice. In truth, the driving force behind this commandment is not the desire to perpetuate the tradition, or the need to understand the mitzvot in order better to keep them. Rather, it is an expression of the will to create a genuine link between the human and the divine. Here we must recall that, from the traditional Jewish point of view, the Tora is far more than a body of knowledge; it is the miraculous revelation of the Holy One, and the power that emanates from it nourishes and invigorates his entire creation. As the Talmud argues, "But for the Tora, heaven and earth would not endure, for it is said (Jeremiah 33:25), 'If not for my covenant by day and by night, I had not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth?'"[61] Although it was brought down from heaven to earth, the Tora retains the mark of the divine and, in certain sources, is even identified with God himself. Thus opined, for example, Rabbi Haim of Volozhin, who concluded in *Nefesh Hahaim* that "There is no Tora but the Holy One."[62]

This belief in the divine qualities of the Tora naturally makes the act of studying it a powerful religious experience, one associated with a feeling of closeness to God. Rabbi Soloveitchik relates that, "When I am thus immersed in study, I feel as if the Almighty is there standing behind me, putting his hand on my shoulder, looking with me at the text lying on the table and asking me about it. This is not something I imagine. For me this is a true-to-life experience."[63] In *Pirkei Avot*, we find a similar description of the affinity between man and the divine achieved through Tora study:

> R. Halaphta ben Dosa, of Kefar Hananiah, said: When ten men sit together and are occupied with Tora the *shechina* rests among them, as it is said (Psalms 82:1), "God standeth in the congregation of judges." And whence [is it proved for] even five? As it is said (Amos 9:6), "He hath founded his troop upon the earth." And whence even three? As it is said (Psalms 82:1),

> "He judgeth among the gods." And whence even two? As it is said (Malachi 3:16), "Then they that feared the Lord spake one to another and the Lord hearkened and heard." And whence even one? As it is said (Exodus 20:24), "In every place where I record my name, I will come to thee and bless thee."[64]

The presence of God in the *beit midrash*, or house of study, is a prominent motif in rabbinic literature. In one famous talmudic story, for example, a voice from heaven actually intercedes in an argument between the sages, although the intercession is eventually rejected.[65] Elsewhere, we see God taking interest in another dispute, this time between R. Jonathan and R. Abiathar on the matter of the concubine of Giva:

> R. Abiathar said that the Levite found a fly with her, and R. Jonathan said that he found a hair on her. R. Abiathar soon afterwards came across Elijah and said to him, What is the Holy One blessed be he doing? and he answered, He is discussing the question of the concubine in Giva. What does he say? said Elijah, [He says], my son Abiathar says so-and-so, and my son Jonathan says so-and-so. Said R. Abiathar: Can there possibly be uncertainty in the mind of the Heavenly One? He replied: Both [answers] are the words of the living God. He [the Levite] found a fly and excused it, he found a hair and did not excuse it.[66]

These depictions of the Holy One as an active member in a community of Tora scholars—even to the extent of getting involved in halachic disputes—may at first strike the reader as odd. Yet they express an important idea: The study of Tora is not merely the act of "reading" a text. Rather, it is an activity of profound metaphysical significance, translating the "words of the living God" into the language of reality. No other field of human life offers the possibility of such a close affinity between man and God. Not for nothing, then, did the sages laud those who made halachic judgments with the appellation, "The Lord is with him."[67]

But Tora study does more than fill the beit midrash with the presence of God. It also raises Tora scholars (*talmidei hachamim)* to a higher spiritual,

and sometimes even physical, level than that of ordinary mortals. Agadic literature—parables and legends in rabbinic texts—abounds with stories of the superhuman abilities of the sages: R. Yochanan Napacha, for example, cured R. Elazar Ben Padat by laying his hands on him, and R. Shimon Bar Yochai is attributed with the power to set fire to objects and people merely by looking at them.[68] The nearness of these scholars to the Holy One elevated them to the status of his representatives on earth, and thus into figures who are occasionally to be treated as one would treat God himself. The talmudic tractate Pesahim includes a rather bold statement made by R. Akiva:

> R. Shimon Imsoni—others state, R. Nehemiah Imsoni—interpreted every *et* in the Tora [in an inclusive fashion]; [but] as soon as he came to [the passage] (Deuteronomy 6:13), "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God," he desisted. Said his disciples to him, Master, what is to happen with all the *etim* which you have interpreted? Just as I received reward for interpreting them, he replied, so will I receive reward for retracting. Subsequently R. Akiva came and taught, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God" is to include scholars.[69]

R. Imsoni explained to his students why the Hebrew connective *et* appears in many places in the Tora, even though, in certain circumstances, it seems unnecessary. In his opinion, whenever this connective is used, it testifies to the fact that its objects are far more numerous than might be assumed from a superficial reading of the passage. The verse "And the Lord visited Sara,"[70] for example, suggests that together with the biblical matriarch, God was gracious to *all* the barren women of the same generation. Yet R. Imsoni was reluctant to apply the same logic to "You will fear the Lord your God," for to him, it was inconceivable that the fear appropriate to the Holy One should be accorded to others as well. R. Akiva disagreed with him on this point, insisting that the passage also applies to Tora scholars, who are to be treated with the same awe usually reserved for God.

This is a radical conclusion, to be sure, but not an altogether exceptional one. Elsewhere in the Talmud, the *Amorite* (later talmudic authority) R. Elazar Ben Padat makes a similar argument:

> Master, I have found for them [the illiterate] a remedy in the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 4:4), "But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day." Now is it possible to "cleave" to the divine presence, concerning which it is written in Scripture (Deuteronomy 4:24), "For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire"? But [the meaning is this:] Any man who marries his daughter to a scholar, or carries on a trade on behalf of scholars, or benefits scholars from his estate is regarded by Scripture as if he had cleaved to the divine presence.[71]

Like R. Yehuda Ben Rabbi Simon, R. Elazar Ben Padat also considers "cleaving" to the Holy One to be simply impossible—God is too exalted and too awesome for humanly contact. In light of this, he proposes a more practical alternative: Anyone who seeks to cleave to the divine presence should associate himself with those who are closest to God—that is, with Tora scholars. In this way, even laymen can attain a measure of closeness to God.

The crucial contribution the commandment of Tora study makes towards bridging the earthly and the heavenly grants it a unique status in Jewish law. In many ways, it is considered the most important mitzva. The Talmud even goes so far as to maintain that the study of Tora is "greater" than the sacrificial offering, the building of the Temple, the commandment of honoring one's parents, and even saving a life.[72] So, too, does the Jerusalem Talmud insist that "even the world in all its entirety is not equivalent to a single word of Tora," and "even [the performance of] all the religious duties specified in the Tora is not equivalent to a single word of Tora."[73] These are not mere attempts at self-glorification by men who take their intellectual endeavors too seriously. Rather, these sayings communicate a basic dictum of Jewish tradition: If the Israelite nation was indeed chosen by God to fulfill a divine purpose on earth, this can only be achieved through the dedicated study and teaching of the Tora. Only in this way can the Jewish people live up to the expectations of their father in heaven; only in this way can they fulfill the hopes and longings that their sons and daughters have nurtured for centuries.

Of course, a rapprochement between the human and the divine is only one of the many objectives that the commandments strive to achieve. Halacha comprises, after all, an extensive normative system covering the full range of human existence: Interpersonal, familial, and communal relationships; economics and business dealings; politics; recreation; and even basic physical functions. Obviously, such a complex structure cannot rest solely on a single theological principle. Nonetheless, the commandments discussed here touch upon a theme underpinning much of halacha, and help us to understand the basic drive that imbues it with so much vitality and tenacity. This drive is a powerful longing to "be with God"—that is, to break through the mental and physical barriers of human experience and connect with the Creator himself. Thus, while Judaism does not accept the possibility of a merger between man and God, it does acknowledge the passion of the finite for the infinite, and strives to give it appropriate expression.

In this essay, I have delineated between two ways of "being with God"—or "cleaving" to him—within the Jewish religion. The first is by bringing the divine down to the human plane, a process that occurs primarily in the consciousness of the believer who senses the "presence" of God in the course of performing the daily religious rites. The second is by elevating humans to a divine level by deepening the identification of the believer with the moral attitude of God and encouraging divine emulation through creative activity—and, upon its conclusion, through ceasing from work.

Each way underscores a different strategy for achieving the ideal of deveikut. Yet each also represents a certain point of view in respect to man's status before God: On the one hand, those commandments that serve as a permanent reminder of the divine—including prayer, affixing the mezuza, and laying tefilin—are solemn declarations of loyalty and obedience to the kingdom of heaven, and of our desire for its presence in our daily lives. The human image reflected in these rituals is that of a faithful and humble

servant who surrenders always to the will of the Holy One. On the other hand, the notion of emulating God is rooted in the idea that man is a superior being, created in God's image. Therefore, he has vast, almost unlimited potential for spiritual and moral development.[74] This duality of the human condition has pervaded Jewish thought from its earliest days, but perhaps none has expressed the idea better than King David, who writes in the Psalms, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? Yet thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and thou dost crown him with glory and honor."[75]

Ironically, it is the sublime qualities that man acquires when attempting to bridge the gap between himself and God that testify to the positive value of such a gap in the first place. While we strive to reduce the distance between the heavenly and the earthly, we should not forget the distinct advantages that distance holds for humanity: Though the belief that man is the apex of creation understandably fills us with pride and spurs us to undertake astonishing tasks, the knowledge that we are weak mortals, mere flesh and blood, grants us a humility that has merits of its own. If anything, human greatness is nurtured by the tension between these two established truths. The longing for the divine that plays such a central role in every religious experience is therefore not necessarily a symptom of a cosmic crisis or a metaphysical rift in need of repair. Rather, it is simply the price we must pay for the grace God bestowed upon us when he created us in his image, gave us free will, and sent us to find our own way in this terrible and wonderful universe he made from nothing.

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## *Notes*

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1. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, "The Royal Crown," in Israel Davidson, ed. *Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1952), p. 84.

2. Israel Levin, "The 'Keter Malchut' of Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gabirol and Man's Struggle with Sin," *Haaretz*, November 11, 2005 [Hebrew].

3. Ibn Gabirol, "The Royal Crown," pp. 122-123.

4. Exegetic tradition maintains that such anthropomorphic descriptions are to be understood purely metaphorically.

5. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), pp. 79-80. A contrary opinion is expressed by R. Moshe Taku in his "Sefer Ketav Tamim," in *Otsar Nehmad* (Vienna: Yitzhak Blumenfeld, 1848), pp. 58-99 [Hebrew].

6. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), p. 64.

7. Karl Barth, *The Formation of Christian Dogma*, trans. Ran Hacohen (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2004), pp. 111, 114 [Hebrew].

8. A famous example of this approach can be found in chapter 4 of the fourteenth-century polemical work *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, in which the Jewish philosopher Hasdai Crescas attacks the belief in Christ's divinity because "man's uniting with God is impossible, since it would involve a contradiction. This is clear since man is finite and God, may he be blessed, is infinite." Hasdai Crescas, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, trans. Daniel J. Lasker (New York: State University of New York, 1992), p. 50.

9. Gershom Scholem and many of his disciples were of the opinion that the phenomenon of unio-mysticism was alien to the kabbalistic tradition, maintaining that "it is only in extremely rare cases that ecstasy signifies actual union with god, in which the human individuality abandons itself to the rapture of complete submersion in the divine stream. Even in this ecstatic frame of mind, the Jewish mystic almost invariably retains a sense of the distance between the Creator and his creature." See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1946), pp. 122-123. Moshe Idel, a renowned scholar in the field of Kabbala, takes exception to this convention. He argues that it is possible to find unio-mystical expressions in the Judaism, specifically in the writings of the Kabbalist Avraham Abulafia and first-generation Hasidic writers. See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah:*

*New Perceptions* (New York: Yale, 1988), pp. 59-73. It goes without saying that most of the writers on whom Idel relies are very far from mainstream. Abulafia, for instance, was excommunicated by Rabbi Solomon Ben Abraham Adret (the Rashba), and first generation Hasidim drew heavy criticism on account of their pretensions to unity with God.

10. Sukka 5a.

11. Deuteronomy 13:5.

12. See, for example, Sanhedrin 64a: "R. Judah said in Rav's name: A gentile woman once fell sick. She vowed, If I recover, I will go and serve every idol in the world. She recovered, and proceeded to serve all idols.... But ye, O House of Israel, were not so, [as it is written (Numbers 25:5), 'Slay ye every one his men] that were joined unto Baal Peor': Ye were attached to it like an air-tight lid. Whereas (Deuteronomy 4:4), 'Whilst ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God' implies merely like two dates sticking to each other. In a baraita it has been taught: 'That were joined unto Baal Peor,' like a bracelet on the hands of a woman; whereas 'Whilst ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God' indicates that they were firmly attached."

13. See Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted Through the Generations,* eds. and trans. Gordon Tucker and Leonard Levin (New York: Continuum, 2005), pp. 190-193. According to Heschel, the controversy in question reflects the dispute between R. Ishmael the realist and R. Akiva the mystic. See also Idel, *Kabbalah*, pp. 38-39, and notes 9-11 on pp. 288-289.

14. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 123.

15. Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (London: Routledge, 1906), 2:46, p. 111.

16. The sages, however, argued that the divine presence did not reside in the Second Temple: "Surely R. Samuel Ben Inia said: What is the meaning of the scriptural verse (Haggai 1:8), 'and I will take pleasure in it and I will be glorified?'... To indicate that in five things the first Sanctuary differed from the second: In the ark, the ark-cover, the cherubim, the fire, the shechina, the Holy Spirit [of prophecy], and the urim-we-thummim [the Oracle Plate]," Yoma 21b; see also Rashi in his commentary on Haggai 1:8.

17. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford, 1973), pp. 9, 12.

18. Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, pp. 12-13.

19. Otto's letter is quoted in Rudolf Otto, "Buddhism and Christianity: Compared and Contrasted," trans. Philip C. Almond, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 4 (1984), p. 101.

20. Taanit 2a.

21. Sanhedrin 22a.

22. Joseph Karo, *Shulhan Aruch, Orach Haim* 98:1.

23. Berachot 6a.

24. Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

25. Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

26. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora: The Book of Adoration*, ed. and trans. Moses Hyamson (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1975), Laws of the Tefilin and the Mezuza and the Scrolls of the Law 6:13, p. 129a.

27. In cognitive psychology, such a symbol is sometimes referred to as a "mnemonic device": A device or method used as an aid in remembering.

28. See, for example, Rashi, Pesahim 4a, Introduction to Hovat Hadar: "As it comes under his protection." See also Avoda Zara 11a and Yerushalmi Peah 1:1. This belief is connected with the events described in Exodus 12:21-22, when the Israelites were instructed to mark the lintels of their homes with the blood of a sacrificial lamb. This marking ensured that their homes would be "passed over" when God struck down the firstborn sons of all Egyptians.

29. Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari*, 3:11, p. 147.

30. Jerusalem Berachot 1:2.

31. Midrash Tehilim, Shoher Tov 90.

32. Avraham Isaiah Karelitz, *Book of Faith and Trust Concerning the Hazon Ish* (Jerusalem: Rav Shmuel Graynman Publication, 1997) [Hebrew].

33. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "And You Shall Search from There," *Halachic Man: Revealed and Hidden* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1979), p. 190 [Hebrew].

34. Leviticus Rabba 25:3.

35. Shabbat 133b; see also *Zohar Hadash*, vol. 2, and the Book of Ruth 51:1.

36. Moses Maimonides, *The Commandments*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Soncino, 1967), positive commandment 8, pp. 11-12. See also Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 75-79.

37. Leviticus 20:26.

38. Sifra Kedoshim, ch. 10.

39. Leviticus 20:12-23.

40. Sifre Numbers, sec. 157. See also Sanhedrin 106a.

41. Genesis 1:28.

42. See Erubin 100b: "R. Johanan observed: If the Tora had not been given, we could have learnt modesty from the cat, honesty from the ant, chastity from the dove."

43. Isaiah 61:8.

44. Sukka 30a.

45. Leviticus 5:21-26.

46. Over and above the prohibitions on lechery and stealing, the laws of kashrut may also be cited as commandments aimed at establishing an identification with God. These laws are abstruse, thus, the Jew obeys them as he would a king's decree—simply because God commanded him to. The Midrash states this very clearly: "R. Elazar Ben Azariah says, How do we know that someone should not say, I do not want to wear mixed fibers, I don't want to eat pork, I don't want to have incestuous sexual relations. Rather: I do want [to wear mixed fibers, I do want to eat pork, I do want to have incestuous sexual relations]. But what can I do? For my father in heaven has made a decree for me! So Scripture says (Leviticus 20:26), 'and I have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.' So one will turn out to keep far from transgression and accept upon himself the rule of heaven," Sifra Kedushim ch. 10. There are some sources, however, which maintain that God views the eating of non-kosher food as an abomination. This belief is reflected in the Midrash that depicts the Exodus from Egypt as a liberation from the need to eat the food of the land of the pharaohs: "The Holy One declared, Had I brought up Israel from Egypt for no other purpose but this, that they should not defile themselves with reptiles, it would be sufficient for me." Bava Mezia 61b.

47. Leviticus Rabba 25:3.

48. See Rabbi Haim of Volozhin in *Nefesh Hahaim* 1:2: "The Holy One blessed be he is called omnipotent because he is not of the same nature as flesh and blood. Because when a man constructs a building, for example out of wood, the builder does not create and invent the wood by his own efforts, but only takes trees that have already been created and arranges them in the building and once they have been arranged to his satisfaction, if his power is removed and taken away from them, the building nevertheless exists. But he, as at the creation of the entire universe, created and invented them *ex nihilo* by his unlimited power, and since then, every day and every moment, all their powers of invention and organization and existence are dependent on the power and the abundant new light that he impresses upon them every moment by his will. And if he took away the power of his influence even for a moment, everything would be instantly nothing and chaos."

49. Rabbi Haim of Volozhin, *Nefesh Hahaim* 1:7.

50. The expression derives from the biblical description of the talents of the engineer appointed as chief architect of the Tabernacle: "Then Moses said to the Israelites, See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship" (Exodus 35:30-33). The various activities connected with the building of the Tabernacle represent the range of the "skills, abilities, and knowledge" with which the Holy One imbued its builders. These qualities are joined under the heading "workmanship," which means, according to Rashi, craftsmanship "that was intended and that fulfilled its purpose," or, in other words, work that has as its catalyst a will and a purpose. See Rashi on Hagiga 10b.

51. Shabbat 49b.

52. Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge (USA: Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 526-527.

53. Lifshitz, "Secret of the Sabbath," AZURE 10 (Winter 2001), pp. 85-117.

54. Genesis Rabba 10:9.

55. Sabbath evening prayers. Emphasis added.

56. Yehuda Livai Bar Rabbi Bezalel, *Gvurot Hashem*, ch. 39.

57. Maimonides, *The Commandments*, positive commandment 11.

58. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*: *The Book of Knowledge*, Laws of Tora Study 1:3, p. 57b.

59. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*: *The Book of Knowledge*, Laws of Tora Study 1:4, p. 57b.

60. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*: *The Book of Knowledge*, Laws of Tora Study 1:8, p. 57b.

61. Pesahim 68b.

62. Rabbi Haim of Volozhin, *Nefesh Hahaim* 4:10.

63. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *On Repentance* (Jerusalem: Orot, 1980), p. 326.

64. Mishna Avot 3:6.

65. Bava Metzia 59b.

66. Gitin 6b.

67. Sanhedrin 93b.

68. Berachot 5b; Shabbat 33b.

69. Pesahim 22b.

70. Genesis 21:1.

71. Ketubot 111b.

72. Megilla 3a, 15b; Erubin 63b.

73. Jerusalem Peah 1:4.

74. See Yair Lorberbaum, *The Image of God: Halacha and Agada* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2004), pp. 474-475 [Hebrew].

75. Psalms 8:5-6.