PART ONE

"Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in."—(Isa. xxvi. 2.)

CHAPTER I

Some have been of opinion that by the Hebrew zelem, the shape and figure of a thing is to be understood, and this explanation led men to believe in the corporeality [of the Divine Being]: for they thought that the words "Let us make man in our zelem" (Gen. i. 26), implied that God had the form of a human being, i.e., that He had figure and shape, and that, consequently, He was corporeal. They adhered faithfully to this view, and thought that if they were to relinquish it they would eo ipso reject the truth of the Bible: and further, if they did not conceive God as having a body possessed of face and limbs, similar to their own in appearance, they would have to deny even the existence of God. The sole difference which they admitted, was that He excelled in greatness and splendour, and that His substance was not flesh and blood. Thus far went their conception of the greatness and glory of God. The incorporeality of the Divine Being, and His unity, in the true sense of the word—for there is no real unity without incorporeality—will be fully proved in the course of the present treatise. (Part II., ch. i.) In this chapter it is our sole intention to explain the meaning of the words zelem and demut. I hold that the Hebrew equivalent of "form" in the ordinary acceptance of the word, viz., the figure and shape of a thing, is toār. Thus we find "[And Joseph was] beautiful in toār (‘form’), and beautiful in appearance" (Gen. xxxix. 6): "What form (toār) is he of?" (1 Sam. xxviii. 14): "As the form (toār) of the children of a king" (Judges viii. 18). It is also applied to form produced by human labour, as "He marketh its form (toār) with a line," "and he marketh its form (toār)
with the compass" (Isa. xlv. 13). This term is not at all applicable to God. The term ẓelem, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, viz., that which constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is; the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being. In man the "form" is that constituent which gives him human perception: and on account of this intellectual perception the term ẓelem is employed in the sentences "In the ẓelem of God he created him" (Gen. i. 27). It is therefore rightly said, "Thou despisest their ẓelem" (Ps. lixii. 20); the "contempt" can only concern the soul—the specific form of man, not the properties and shape of his body. I am also of opinion that the reason why this term is used for "idols" may be found in the circumstance that they are worshipped on account of some idea represented by them, not on account of their figure and shape. For the same reason the term is used in the expression, "the forms (ẓalme) of your emerods" (1 Sam. vi. 5), for the chief object was the removal of the injury caused by the emerods, not a change of their shape. As, however, it must be admitted that the term ẓelem is employed in these two cases, viz. "the images of the emerods" and "the idols" on account of the external shape, the term ẓelem is either a homonym or a hybrid term, and would denote both the specific form and the outward shape, and similar properties relating to the dimensions and the shape of material bodies; and in the phrase "Let us make man in our ẓelem" (Gen. i. 26), the term signifies "the specific form" of man, viz., his intellectual perception, and does not refer to his "figure" or "shape." Thus we have shown the difference between ẓelem and toär, and explained the meaning of ẓelem.

Demut is derived from the verb damah, "he is like." This term likewise denotes agreement with regard to some abstract relation: comp. "I am like a pelican of the wilderness" (Ps. cii. 7); the author does not compare himself to the pelican in point of wings and feathers, but in point of sadness." Nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in beauty" (Ezek. 8); the comparison refers to the idea of beauty. "Their poison is like the poison of a serpent" (Ps. liii. 5); "He is like unto a lion" (Ps. xvii. 12); the resemblance indicated in these passages does not refer to the figure and shape, but to some abstract idea. In the same manner is used "the likeness of the throne" (Ezek. i. 26); the comparison is made with regard to greatness and glory, not, as many believe, with regard to its square form, its breadth, or the length of its legs: this explanation applies also to the phrase "the likeness of the ḥayyot ("living creatures," Ezek. i. 13).

As man's distinction consists in a property which no other creature on earth possesses, viz., intellectual perception, in the exercise of which he does not employ his senses, nor move his hand or his foot, this perception has been compared--though only apparently, not in truth--to the Divine perception, which requires no corporeal organ. On this account, i.e., on account of the Divine intellect with which man has been endowed, he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form.

CHAPTER II

Some years ago a learned man asked me a question of great importance; the problem and the solution which we gave in our reply deserve the closest attention. Before, however, entering upon this problem and its solution I must premise that every Hebrew knows that the term Elohim is a homonym, and denotes God, angels, judges, and the rulers of countries, and that Onkelos the proselyte explained it in the true and correct manner by taking Elohim in the sentence, "and ye shall be like Elohim" (Gen. iii. 5) in the last-mentioned meaning, and rendering the sentence "and ye shall be like princes." Having pointed out the homonymity of the term "Elohim" we return to the question under consideration. "It would at first sight," said the objector, "appear from Scripture that man was originally intended to be perfectly equal to the rest of the animal creation, which is not endowed with intellect, reason, or power of distinguishing between good and
evil: but that Adam's disobedience to the command of God procured him that great perfection

which is the peculiarity of man, viz., the power of distinguishing between good and evil—the noblest of all the faculties of our nature, the essential characteristic of the human race. It thus appears strange that the punishment for rebelliousness should be the means of elevating man to a pinnacle of perfection to which he had not attained previously. This is equivalent to saying that a certain man was rebellious and extremely wicked, wherefore his nature was changed for the better, and he was made to shine as a star in the heavens." Such was the purport and subject of the question, though not in the exact words of the inquirer. Now mark our reply, which was as follows:—"You appear to have studied the matter superficially, and nevertheless you imagine that you can understand a book which has been the guide of past and present generations, when you for a moment withdraw from your lusts and appetites, and glance over its contents as if you were reading a historical work or some poetical composition. Collect your thoughts and examine the matter carefully, for it is not to be understood as you at first sight think, but as you will find after due deliberation; namely, the intellect which 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. ii. 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. The right and the wrong are terms employed in the science of apparent truths (morals), not in that of necessary truths, as, e.g., it is not correct to say, in reference to the proposition "the heavens are spherical," it is "good" or to declare the assertion that "the earth is flat" to be "bad": but we say of the one it is true, of the other it is false. Similarly our language expresses the idea of true and false by the terms emet and sheker, of the morally right and the morally wrong, by tob and ra'. Thus it is the function of the intellect to discriminate between the true and the false—a distinction which is applicable to all objects of intellectual perception. When Adam was yet in a state of innocence, and was guided solely by reflection and reason—on account of which it is said: "Thou hast made him (man) little lower than the angels" (Ps. viii. 6)—he was not at all able to follow or to understand the principles of apparent truths; the most manifest impropriety, viz., to appear in a state of nudity, was nothing unbecoming according to his idea: he could not comprehend why it should be so. After man's disobedience, however, when he began to give way to desires which had their source in his imagination and to the gratification of his bodily appetites, as it is said, "And the wife saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to the eyes" (Gen. iii. 6), he was punished by the loss of part of that intellectual faculty which he had previously possessed. He therefore transgressed a command with which he had been charged on the score of his reason; and having obtained a knowledge of the apparent truths, he was wholly absorbed in the study of what is proper and what improper. Then he fully understood the magnitude of the loss he had sustained, what he had forfeited, and in what situation he was thereby placed. Hence we read, "And ye shall be like elohim, knowing good and evil," and not "knowing" or "discerning the true and the false": while in necessary truths we can only apply the words "true and false," not "good and evil." Further observe the passage, "And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked" (Gen. iii. 7): it is not said, "And the eyes of both were opened, and they saw"; for what the man had seen previously and what he saw after this circumstance was precisely the same: there had been no blindness which was now removed, but he received a new faculty whereby he found things wrong which previously he had not regarded as wrong. Besides, you must know that the Hebrew word pakah used in this passage is exclusively employed in the figurative sense of receiving new sources of knowledge, not in that of regaining the sense of sight. Comp., "God opened her eyes" (Gen. xxi. 19). "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened" (Isaiah xxxviii. 8). "Open ears, he heareth not" (ibid. Xlii. 20), similar in sense to the verse, "Which have eyes to see, and see not" (Ezek. xii. 2).
When, however, Scripture says of Adam, "He changed his face (panav) and thou sentest him forth" (Job xiv. 20), it must be understood in the following way: On account of the change of his original aim he was sent away. For panim, the Hebrew equivalent of face, is derived from the verb panah, "he turned," and signifies also "aim," because man generally turns his face towards the thing he desires. In accordance with this interpretation, our text suggests that Adam, as he altered his intention and directed his thoughts to the acquisition of what he was forbidden, he was banished from Paradise: this was his punishment; it was measure for measure. At first he had the privilege of tasting pleasure and happiness, and of enjoying repose and security; but as his appetites grew stronger, and he followed his desires and impulses, (as we have already stated above), and partook of the food he was forbidden to taste, he was deprived of everything, was doomed to subsist on the meanest kind of food, such as he never tasted before, and this even only after exertion and labour, as it is said, "Thorns and thistles shall grow up for thee" (Gen. iii. 18), "By the sweat of thy brow," etc., and in explanation of this the text continues, "And the Lord God drove him from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground whence he was taken." He was now with respect to food and many other requirements brought to the level of the lower animals: comp., "Thou shalt eat the grass of the field" (Gen. iii. 18). Reflecting on his condition, the Psalmist says, "Adam unable to dwell in dignity, was brought to the level of the dumb beast" (Ps. xlix. 13)." May the Almighty be praised, whose design and wisdom cannot be fathomed."

CHAPTER III

IT might be thought that the Hebrew words temunah and tabnit have one and the same meaning, but this is not the case. Tabnit, derived from the verb banah (he built), signifies the build and construction of a thing—that is to say, its figure, whether square, round, triangular, or of any other shape. Comp. "the pattern (tabnit) of the Tabernacle and the pattern (tabnit) of all its vessels" (Exod. xxv. 9); "according to the pattern (tabnit) which thou wast shown upon the mount" (Exod. xxv. 40); "the form of any bird" (Deut. iv. 17); "the form (tabnit) of a hand" (Ezek. viii. 3); "the pattern (tabnit) of the porch" (1 Chron. xxviii. 11). In all these quotations it is the shape which is referred to. Therefore the Hebrew language never employs the word tabnit in speaking of the qualities of God Almighty.

The term temunah, on the other hand, is used in the Bible in three different senses. It signifies, first, the outlines of things which are perceived by our bodily senses, i.e., their shape and form; as, e.g., "And ye make an image the form (temunat) of some likeness" (Deut. iv. 16); "for ye saw no likeness" (temunah) (Deut. iv. 15). Secondly, the forms of our imagination, i.e., the impressions retained in imagination when the objects have ceased to affect our senses. In this sense it is used in the passage which begins "In thoughts from the visions of the night" (Job iv. 13), and which concludes "it remained but I could not recognize its sight, only an image--temunah--was before my eyes," i.e., an image which presented itself to my sight during sleep. Thirdly, the true form of an object, which is perceived only by the intellect: and it is in this third signification that the term is applied to God. The words "And the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. xii. 8) therefore mean "he shall comprehend the true essence of the Lord."

CHAPTER IV

THE three verbs raah, hibbit, and hazah, which denote "he perceived with the eye," are also used figuratively in the sense of intellectual perception. As regards the first of these verbs this is well known, e.g., And he looked (va-yar) and behold a well in the field" (Gen. xxix. 2) here it signifies ocular perception: "yea, my heart has seen (raah) much of wisdom and of knowledge" (Eccles. i. 16); in this passage it refers to the intellectual perception.
In this figurative sense the verb is to be understood, when applied to God e.g., "I saw (ra'îî) the Lord" (1 Kings xxii. 19); "And the Lord appeared (va-ya'ar) unto him (Gen. xviii. 1); "And God saw (va-yar) that it was good" (Gen. i. 10) "I beseech thee, show me (ha'reni) thy glory" (Exod. xxxiii. 18); "And they saw (va-yirû) the God of Israel" (Exod. xxiv. 10). All these instances refer to intellectual perception, and by no means to perception with the eye as in its literal meaning: for, on the one hand, the eye can only perceive a corporeal object, and in connection with it certain accidents, as colour, shape, etc.: and, on the other hand, God does not perceive by means of a corporeal organ, as will be explained.

In the same manner the Hebrew hibbit signifies "he viewed with the eye; comp. "Look (tabbit) not behind thee" (Gen. xix. 17); "But his wife looked (va-tabbet) back from him" (Gen. xix. 26); "And if one look (ve-nibbat) unto the land" (Isa. v. 30); and figuratively, "to view and observe" with the intellect, "to contemplate" a thing till it be understood. In this sense the verb is used in passages like the following: "He hath not beheld (hibbit) iniquity in Jacob" (Num. xxiii. 21); for "iniquity" cannot be seen with the eye. The words, "And they looked (ve-hibbitu) after Moses" (Exod. xxxiii. 8)—in addition to the literal understanding of the phrase—were explained by our Sages in a figurative sense. According to them, these words mean that the Israelites examined and criticised the actions and sayings of Moses. Compare also "Contemplate (habbet), I pray thee, the heaven" (Gen. xv. 5); for this took place in a prophetic vision. This verb, when applied to God, is employed in this figurative sense; e.g., "to look (me-habbit) upon God" (Exod. iii. 6) "And the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (yabbit) (Num. xii. 8); And thou canst not look (habbet) on iniquity" (Hab. i. 13).

The same explanation applies to ḫazah. It denotes to view with the eye, as: "And let our eye look (ve-taḥaz) upon Zion" (Mic. iv. 11); and also figuratively, to perceive mentally: "which he saw (ḥazah) concerning Judah and Jerusalem" (Isa. i. 1); "The word of the Lord came unto Abraham in a vision" (maḥazeh) (Gen. xv. 1); in this sense ḫazah is used in the phrase, "Also they saw (va-yeḥezu) God" (Exod. xxiv. 11). Note this well.

The Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith

1. Belief in the existence of the Creator, who is perfect in every manner of existence and is the Primary Cause of all that exists.

2. The belief in G-d's absolute and unparalleled unity.

3. The belief in G-d's non-corporeality, nor that He will be affected by any physical occurrences, such as movement, or rest, or dwelling.

4. The belief in G-d's eternity.

5. The imperative to worship G-d exclusively and no foreign false gods.

6. The belief that G-d communicates with man through prophecy.

7. The belief in the primacy of the prophecy of Moses our teacher.

8. The belief in the divine origin of the Torah.

9. The belief in the immutability of the Torah.
10. The belief in G-d's omniscience and providence.

11. The belief in divine reward and retribution.

12. The belief in the arrival of the Messiah and the messianic era.

13. The belief in the resurrection of the dead.

For Review and Discussion

1. How does Maimonides go about doing his philosophical analysis? Do you think this is a good way of going about understanding religious and biblical concepts?

2. An integral part of Maimonides' project necessitates the idea that sacred texts can be reinterpreted and critiqued. Should religious practitioners and scholars do this? What weight should the classic interpretations and traditions have when compared to newer understandings of the same passages?

3. The "Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith" came about through Maimonides attempting to summarize and clarify what the most fundamental aspects of his religion. However, they are not espoused by all practitioners of Judaism. How do these match up with what you understand of Judaism? What do you think the impact on religious practice is for those that follow these principles?