



Happiness and the Life of Virtue

Moses Maimonides

BOOK III

CHAPTER 27

The general object of the Law is twofold: the well-being of the soul, and the well-being of the body. The well-being of the soul is promoted by correct opinions communicated to the people according to their capacity. Some of these opinions are therefore imparted in a plain form, others allegorically: because certain opinions are in their plain form too strong for the capacity of the common people. The well-being of the body is established by a proper management of the relations in which we live one to another. This we can attain in two ways: first by removing all violence from our midst: that is to say, that we do not do every one as he pleases, desires, and is able to do; but every one of us does that which contributes towards the common welfare. Secondly, by teaching every one of us such good morals as must produce a good social state. Of these two objects, the one, the well-being of the soul, or the communication of correct opinions, comes undoubtedly first in rank, but the other, the well-being of the body, the government of the state, and the establishment of the best possible relations among men, is anterior in nature and time. The latter object is required first; it is also treated [in the Law] most carefully and most minutely, because the well-being of the soul can only be obtained after that of the body has been secured. For it has already been found that man has a double perfection: the first perfection is that of the body, and the second perfection is that of the soul. The first consists in the most healthy condition of his material relations, and this is only possible when man has all his wants supplied, as they arise; if he has his food, and other things needful for his body, e.g., shelter, bath, and the like. But one man alone cannot procure all this; it is impossible for a single man to obtain this comfort; it is only possible in society, since man, as is well known, is by nature social.

The second perfection of man consists in his becoming an actually intelligent being; i.e., he knows about the things in existence all that a person perfectly developed is capable of knowing. This second perfection certainly does not include any action or good conduct, but only knowledge, which is arrived at by speculation, or established by research.

It is clear that the second and superior kind of perfection can only be attained when the first perfection has been acquired; for a person that is suffering from great hunger, thirst, heat, or cold, cannot grasp an idea even if communicated by others, much less can he arrive at it by his own reasoning. But when a person is in possession of the first perfection, then he may possibly acquire the second perfection, which is undoubtedly of a superior kind, and is alone the source of eternal life. The true Law, which as we said is one, and beside which there is no other Law, viz., the Law of our teacher Moses, has for its purpose to give us the twofold perfection. It aims first at the establishment of good mutual relations among men by removing injustice and creating the noblest feelings. In this way the people in every land are enabled to stay and continue in one condition, and every one can acquire his first perfection. Secondly, it seeks to train us in faith, and to impart correct and true opinions when the intellect is sufficiently

developed. Scripture clearly mentions the twofold perfection, and tells us that its acquisition is the object of all the divine commandments. Comp. “And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive as it is this day” (Deut. vi. 24). Here the second perfection is first mentioned because it is of greater importance, being, as we have shown, the ultimate aim of man’s existence. This perfection is expressed in the phrase, “for our good always.” You know the interpretation of our Sages, “‘that it may be well with thee’ (ibid. xxii. 7), namely, in the world that is all good, ‘and that thou mayest prolong thy days’ (ibid.), i.e., in the world that is all eternal.” In the same sense I explain the words, “for our good always,” to mean that we may come into the world that is all good and eternal, where we may live permanently; and the words, “that he might preserve us alive as it is this day,” I explain as referring to our first and temporal existence, to that of our body, which cannot be in a perfect and good condition except by the co-operation of society, as has been shown by us.

CHAPTER 28

IT is necessary to bear in mind that Scripture only teaches the chief points of those true principles which lead to the true perfection of man, and only demands in general terms faith in them. Thus Scripture teaches the Existence, the Unity, the Omniscience, the Omnipotence, the Will, and the Eternity of God. All this is given in the form of final results, but they cannot be understood fully and accurately except after the acquisition of many kinds of knowledge. Scripture further demands belief in certain truths, the belief in which is indispensable in regulating our social relations: such is the belief that God is angry with those who disobey Him, for it leads us to the fear and dread of disobedience [to the will of God]. There are other truths in reference to the whole of the Universe which form the substance of the various and many kinds of speculative sciences, and afford the means of verifying the above-mentioned principles as their final result. But Scripture does not so distinctly prescribe the belief in them as it does in the first case; it is implied in the commandment, “to love the Lord” (Deut. xi. 13). It may be inferred from the words, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (ibid. vi. 5), what stress is laid on this commandment to love God. We have already shown in the Mishneh-torah (Yes. ha-torah ii. 2) that this love is only possible when we comprehend the real nature of things, and understand the divine wisdom displayed therein. We have likewise mentioned there what our Sages remark on this subject.

The result of all these preliminary remarks is this: The reason of a commandment, whether positive or negative, is clear, and its usefulness evident, if it directly tends to remove injustice, or to teach good conduct that furthers the well-being of society, or to impart a truth which ought to be believed either on its own merit or as being indispensable for facilitating the removal of injustice or the teaching of good morals. There is no occasion to ask for the object of such commandments: for no one can, e.g., be in doubt as to the reason why we have been commanded to believe that God is one; why we are forbidden to murder, to steal, and to take vengeance, or to retaliate, or why we are commanded to love one another. But there are precepts concerning which people are in doubt, and of divided opinions, some believing that they are mere commands, and serve no purpose whatever, whilst others believe that they serve a certain purpose, which, however, is unknown to man. Such are those precepts which in their literal meaning do not seem to further any of the three above-named results: to impart some truth, to teach some moral, or to remove injustice. They do not seem to have any influence upon the well-being of the soul by imparting any truth, or upon the well-being of the body by suggesting such ways and rules as are useful in the government of a state, or in the management of a household. Such are the prohibitions of wearing garments containing wool and linen; of sowing divers seeds, or of boiling meat and milk together; the commandment of covering the blood [of slaughtered beasts and birds], the ceremony of breaking the neck of a calf [in case of a person being found slain, and the murderer being unknown]; the law concerning the first-born of an

ass, and the like. I am prepared to tell you my explanation of all these commandments, and to assign for them a true reason supported by proof, with the exception of some minor rules, and of a few commandments, as I have mentioned above. I will show that all these and similar laws must have some bearing upon one of the following three things, viz., the regulation of our opinions, or the improvement of our social relations, which implies two things, the removal of injustice, and the teaching of good morals. Consider what we said of the opinions [implied in the laws]; in some cases the law contains a truth which is itself the only object of that law, as e.g., the truth of the Unity, Eternity, and Incorporeality of God; in other cases, that truth is only the means of securing the removal of injustice, or the acquisition of good morals; such is the belief that God is angry with those who oppress their fellow-men, as it is said, "Mine anger will be kindled, and I will slay," etc. (Exod. xxii. 23); or the belief that God hears the crying of the oppressed and vexed, to deliver them out of the hands of the oppressor and tyrant, as it is written, "And it shall come to pass, when he will cry unto me, that I will hear, for I am gracious" (Exod. xxii. 25)....

CHAPTER 30

ON examining these old and foolish doctrines we find that it was most generally believed by the people that by the worship of stars the earth will become inhabited, and the ground fertilized. The wise, pious, and sin-fearing men among them reproved the people and taught them that agriculture, on which the preservation of mankind depended, would become perfect and satisfy man's wishes, when he worshipped the sun and the stars. If man provoked these beings by his rebelliousness, the towns would become empty and waste. In the above-named books it is stated that Mars was angry with [lands, that form now] deserts and wastes, and in consequence of that anger they were deprived of water and trees, and have become the habitation of demons. Tillers of the ground and husbandmen are praised in those books, because they are engaged with the cultivation of the land in accordance with the will and desire of the stars. The idolaters also held cattle in esteem on account of their use in agriculture, and went even so far as to say, that it is not allowed to slay them, because they combine in themselves strength and willingness to do the work of man in tilling the ground. The oxen, notwithstanding their great strength, do this, and submit to man, because it is the will of God that they should be employed in agriculture. When these views became generally known, idolatry was connected with agriculture, because the latter is indispensable for the maintenance of man, and of most animals. The idolatrous priests then preached to the people who met in the temples, and taught them that by certain religious acts, rain would come down, the trees of the field would yield their fruit, and the land would be fertile and inhabited. See what is said in the Nabatean Agriculture in the chapter on vineyards. The following words of the Sabeans are quoted there: "All ancient wise men advised, and prophets likewise commanded and enjoined to play before the images on certain instruments during the festivals. They also said--and what they said is true--that the deities are pleased with it, and reward those who do it. They promise, indeed, very great reward for these things; e.g., length of life, protection from illness, exemption from great bodily deformities, plenty of the produce of the earth, and of the fruits of the trees." These are the words of the Sabeans. When these ideas spread, and were considered as true, God, in His great mercy for us, intended to remove this error from our minds, and to protect our bodies from trouble; and therefore desired us to discontinue the practice of these useless actions. He gave us His Law through Moses, our teacher, who told us in the name of God, that the worship of stars and other corporeal beings would effect that rain would cease, the land be waste, and would not produce anything, and the fruit of the trees would wither; calamities would befall the people, their bodies would be deformed, and life would be shortened. These are the contents of "the words of the covenant which God made" (Deut. xxviii. 6-9). It is frequently expressed in all parts of Scripture, that the worship of the stars would be followed by absence of rain, devastation of the land, bad times, diseases, and shortness of life. But abandonment of that worship, and the return to the service of

God, would be the cause of the presence of rain, fertility of the ground, good times, health and length of life. Thus Scripture teaches, in order that man should abandon idolatry, the reverse of that which idolatrous priests preached to the people, for, as has been shown by us, the principal object of the Law is to remove this doctrine, and to destroy its traces.

CHAPTER 31

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. vi. 24). Again, “which shall hear all those statutes (*hukkim*), and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (*ibid.* iv. 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. All this depends on three things: opinions, morals, and social conduct. We do not count words, because precepts, whether positive or negative, if they relate to speech, belong to those precepts which regulate our social conduct, or to those which spread truth, or to those which teach morals. Thus these three principles suffice for assigning a reason for every one of the Divine commandments.

CHAPTER 32

ON considering the Divine acts, or the processes of Nature, we get an insight into the prudence and wisdom of God as displayed in the creation of animals, with the gradual development of the movements of their limbs and the relative positions of the latter, and we perceive also His wisdom and plan in the successive and gradual development of the whole condition of each individual. The gradual development of the animals’ movements and the relative position of the

limbs may be illustrated by the brain. The front part is very soft, the back part is a little hard, the spinal marrow is still harder, and the farther it extends the harder it becomes. The nerves are the organs of sensation and motion. Some nerves are only required for sensation, or for slight movements, as, e.g., the movement of the eyelids or of the jaws; these nerves originate in the brain. The nerves which are required for the movements of the limbs come from the spinal marrow. But nerves, even those that come directly from the spinal cord, are too soft to set the joints in motion; therefore God made the following arrangement: the nerves branch out into fibres which are covered with flesh, and become muscles: the nerves that come forth at the extremities of the muscles and have already commenced to harden, and to combine with hard pieces of ligaments, are the sinews which are joined and attached to the limbs. By this gradual development the nerves are enabled to set the limbs in motion. I quote this one instance because it is the most evident of the wonders described in the book *On the use of the limbs*; but the use of the limbs is clearly perceived by all who examine them with a sharp eye. In a similar manner did God provide for each individual animal of the class of mammalia. When such an animal is born it is extremely tender, and cannot be fed with dry food. Therefore breasts were provided which yield milk, and the young can be fed with moist food which corresponds to the condition of the limbs of the animal, until the latter have gradually become dry and hard.

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. xix. 6) by means of the knowledge of God.. “Unto thee it was showed that thou mightest know that the Lord is God (Deut. iv. 35); “Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord is God” (ibid. v. 39). The Israelites were commanded to devote themselves to His service; comp. “and to serve him with all your heart” (ibid. xi. 13); “and you shall serve the Lord your God” (Exod. xxiii. 25); “and ye shall serve him” (Deut. xiii. 5). 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 bum incense before them; religious and ascetic persons were in those days the persons that were devoted to the service in the temples erected to the stars, as has been explained by us. 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. For this reason God allowed these kinds of service to continue; He transferred to His service that which had formerly served as a worship of created beings, and of things imaginary and unreal, and commanded us to serve Him in the same manner; viz., to build unto Him a temple; comp. “And they shall make unto me a sanctuary” (Exod. xxv. 8); to have the altar erected to His name; comp. “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me” (ibid. xx. 21); to offer the sacrifices to Him; comp. “If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord” (Lev. i. 2), to bow down to Him and to bum incense before Him. He has forbidden to do any of these things to any other being; comp. “He who sacrificeth unto any God, save the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed” (Exod. xxii. 19); “For thou shalt bow down to no other God” (ibid. xxxiv. 14). He selected priests for the service in the temple; comp. “And they shall minister unto me in the priest’s office” (ibid. xxviii. 41). He made it obligatory that certain gifts, called the gifts of the Levites and the priests, should be assigned to them for their maintenance while they are engaged in the service of the temple and its sacrifices. 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. There occurs in the Law a passage which contains exactly the same idea; it is the following: "God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt; but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea," etc. (Exod. xiii. 17). Here God led the people about, away from the direct road which He originally intended, because He feared they might meet on that way with hardships too great for their ordinary strength; He took them by another road in order to obtain thereby His original object. In the same manner 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 contrary to man's nature that he should suddenly abandon all the different kinds of Divine service and the different customs in which he has been brought up, and which have been so general, that they were considered as a matter of course; it would be just as if a person trained to work as a slave with mortar and bricks, or similar things, should interrupt his work, clean his hands, and at once fight with real giants. It was the result of God's wisdom that the Israelites were led about in the wilderness till they acquired courage. For it is a well-known fact that travelling in the wilderness, and privation of bodily enjoyments, such as bathing, produce courage, whilst the reverse is the source of faint-heartedness: besides, another generation rose during the wanderings that had not been accustomed to degradation and slavery. All the travelling in the wilderness was regulated by Divine commands through Moses; comp. "At the commandment of the Lord they rested, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed; they kept the charge of the Lord and the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses" (Num. ix. 23). In the same way the portion of the Law under discussion is the result of divine wisdom, according to which people are allowed to continue the kind of worship to which they have been accustomed, in order that they might acquire the true faith, which is the chief object [of God's commandments]. You ask, What could have prevented God from commanding us directly, that which is the chief object, and from giving us the capacity of obeying it? This would lead to a second question, What prevented God from leading the Israelites through the way of the land of the Philistines, and endowing them with strength for fighting? The leading about by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night would then not have been necessary. A third question would then be asked in reference to the good promised as reward for the keeping of the commandments, and the evil foretold as a punishment for sins. It is the following question: As it is the chief object and purpose of God that we should believe in the Law, and act according to that which is written therein, why has He not given us the capacity of continually believing in it, and following its guidance, instead of holding out to us reward for obedience, and punishment for disobedience, or of actually giving all the predicted reward and punishment? For [the promises and the threats] are but the means of leading to this chief object. What prevented Him from giving us, as part of our nature, the will to do that which He desires us to do, and to abandon the kind of worship which He rejects? There is one general answer to these three questions, and to all questions of the same character: it is this: Although in every one of the signs [related in Scripture] the natural property of some individual being is changed, the nature of man is never changed by God by way of miracle. It is in accordance with this important principle that God said, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me," etc. (Deut. v. 26). 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.

I now return to my theme. As the sacrificial service is not the primary object [of the commandments about sacrifice], whilst supplications, prayers, and similar kinds of worship are nearer to the primary object, and indispensable for obtaining it, a great difference was made in the Law between these two kinds of service. The one kind, which consists in offering sacrifices, although the sacrifices are offered to the name of God, has not been made obligatory for us to the same extent as it had been before. We were not commanded to sacrifice in every place, and in every time, or to build a temple in every place, or to permit any one who desires to become priest and to sacrifice. On the contrary, all this is prohibited unto us. Only one temple has been appointed, “in the place which the Lord shall choose” (Deut. xii. 26); in no other place is it allowed to sacrifice: comp. “Take heed to thyself, that thou offer not thy burnt-offerings in every place that thou seest” (ibid. v. 13); and only the members of a particular family were allowed to officiate as priests. All these restrictions served to limit this kind of worship, and keep it within those bounds within which God did not think it necessary to abolish sacrificial service altogether. But prayer and supplication can be offered everywhere and by every person. The same is the case with the commandment of *zizit* (Num. xv. 38); *mezuzah* (Deut. vi. 9; xi. 20); *tefillin* (Exod. xiii. 9, 16); and similar kinds of divine service.

Because of this principle which I explained to you, the Prophets in their books are frequently found to rebuke their fellow-men for being over-zealous and exerting themselves too much in bringing sacrifices: the prophets thus distinctly declared that the object of the sacrifices is not very essential, and that God does not require them. Samuel therefore said, “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord” (1 Sam. xv. 22)? Isaiah exclaimed, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord” (Isa. i. 11); Jeremiah declared: “For I spoke not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offering or sacrifices. But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and [paragraph continues] I will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Jer. vii. 22, 23). This passage has been found difficult in the opinion of all those whose words I read or heard; they ask, How can Jeremiah say that God did not command us about burnt-offering and sacrifice, seeing so many precepts refer to sacrifice? The sense of the passage agrees with what I explained to you. Jeremiah says [in the name of God] the primary object of the precepts is this, Know me, and serve no other being; “I will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Lev. xxvi. 12). But the commandment that sacrifices shall be brought and that the temple shall be visited has for its object the success of that principle among you; and for its sake I have transferred these modes of worship to my name; idolatry shall thereby be utterly destroyed, and Jewish faith firmly established. You, however, have ignored this object, and taken hold of that which is only the means of obtaining it; you have doubted my existence, “ye have denied the Lord, and said he is not” (Jer. v. 12); ye served idols; “burnt incense unto Baal, and walked after other gods whom ye know not. And come and stand before me in this house” (ibid. vii. 9-10); i.e., you do not go beyond attending the temple of the Lord, and offering sacrifices: but this is not the chief object.--I have another way of explaining this passage with exactly the same result. For it is distinctly stated in Scripture, and handed down by tradition, that the first commandments communicated to us did not include any law at all about burnt-offering and sacrifice. You must not see any difficulty in the Passover which was commanded in Egypt; there was a particular and evident reason for that, as will be explained by me (chap. xlvi.). Besides it was revealed in the land of Egypt; whilst the laws to which Jeremiah alludes in the above passage are those which were revealed after the departure from Egypt. For this reason it is distinctly added, “in the day that

I brought them out from the land of Egypt.” The first commandment after the departure from Egypt was given at Marah, in the following words, “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments” (Exod. xv. 26).” There he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them” (ibid. ver. 25). According to the true traditional explanation, Sabbath and civil laws were revealed at Marah: “statute” alludes to Sabbath, and “ordinance” to civil laws, which are the means of removing injustice. The chief object of the Law, as has been shown by us, is the teaching of truths; to which the truth of the creatio ex nihilo belongs. It is known that the object of the law of Sabbath is to confirm and to establish this principle, as we have shown in this treatise (Part. II. chap. xxxi.). In addition to the teaching of truths the Law aims at the removal of injustice from mankind. We have thus proved that the first laws do not refer to burnt-offering and sacrifice, which are of secondary importance. The same idea which is contained in the above passage from Jeremiah is also expressed in the Psalms, where the people are rebuked that they ignore the chief object, and make no distinction between chief and subsidiary lessons. The Psalmist says: “Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings, they have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds” (Ps. l. 29).— Wherever this subject is mentioned, this is its meaning. Consider it well, and reflect on it.

CHAPTER 33

IT is also the object of the perfect Law to make man reject, despise, and reduce his desires as much as is in his power. He should only give way to them when absolutely necessary. It is well known that it is intemperance in eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse that people mostly rave and indulge in; and these very things counteract the ulterior perfection of man, impede at the same time the development of his first perfection, and generally disturb the social order of the country and the economy of the family. For by following entirely the guidance of lust, in the manner of fools, man loses his intellectual energy, injures his body, and perishes before his natural time; sighs and cares multiply; there is an increase of envy, hatred, and warfare for the purpose of taking what another possesses. The cause of all this is the circumstance that the ignorant considers physical enjoyment as an object to be sought for its own sake. God in His wisdom has therefore given us such commandments as would counteract that object, and prevent us altogether from directing our attention to it, and has debarred us from everything that leads only to excessive desire and lust. This is an important thing included in the objects of our Law. See how the Law commanded to slay a person from whose conduct it is evident that he will go too far in seeking the enjoyment of eating and drinking. I mean “the rebellious and stubborn son”; he is described as “a glutton and a drunkard” (Deut. xxi. 20). The Law commands to stone him and to remove him from society lest he grow up in this character, and kill many, and injure the condition of good men by his great lust.

Politeness is another virtue promoted by the Law. Man shall listen to the words of his neighbour; he shall not be obstinate, but shall yield to the wish of his fellow-men, respond to their appeal, act according to their desire, and do what they like. Thus the Law commands, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked” (Deut. x. 16); “Take heed and hearken” (ibid. xxvii. 9). “If you be willing and obedient” (Isa. i. 19). Those who listen [to the words of others] and accept as much as is right are represented as saying, “We will hear and do” (Deut. v. 24), or in a figurative style, “Draw me, we will run after thee” (Song i. 4).

The Law is also intended to give its followers purity and holiness; by teaching them to suppress sensuality, to guard against it and to reduce it to a minimum, as will be explained by us. For when God commanded [Moses] to sanctify the people for the receiving of the Law, and said, “Sanctify them to-day and to-morrow” (Exod. xix. 10), Moses [in obedience to this

command] said to the people, “Come not at your wives” (ibid. ver. 15). Here it is clearly stated that sanctification consists in absence of sensuality. But abstinence from drinking wine is also called holiness; in reference to the Nazarite it is therefore said, “He shall be holy” (Num. vi. 5). According to Siphra the words, “sanctify yourselves and be ye holy” (Lev. xx. 7), refer to the sanctification effected by performing the divine commands. As the obedience to such precepts as have been mentioned above is called by the Law sanctification and purification, so is defilement applied to the transgression of these precepts and the performance of disgraceful acts, as will be shown. Cleanliness in dress and body by washing and removing sweat and dirt is included among the various objects of the Law, but only if connected with purity of action, and with a heart free from low principles and bad habits. It would be extremely bad for man to content himself with a purity obtained by washing and cleanliness in dress, and to be at the same time voluptuous and unrestrained in food and lust. These are described by Isaiah as follows: “They that sanctify themselves and purify themselves in the gardens, but continue their sinful life, when they are in the innermost [of their houses], eating swine’s flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse” (Isa. lxvi. 17): that is to say, they purify and sanctify themselves outwardly as much as is exposed to the sight of the people, and when they are alone in their chambers and the inner parts of their houses, they continue their rebelliousness and disobedience, and indulge in partaking of forbidden food, such as [the flesh of] swine, worms, and mice. The prophet alludes perhaps in the phrase “behind one tree in the midst” to indulgence in forbidden lust. The sense of the passage is therefore this: They appear outwardly clean, but their heart is bent upon their desires and bodily enjoyments, and this is contrary to the spirit of the Law. For the chief object of the Law is to [teach man to] diminish his desires, and to cleanse his outer appearance after he has purified his heart. Those who wash their body and cleanse their garments whilst they remain dirty by bad actions and principles, are described by Solomon as “a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness; a generation, oh how lofty are their eyes!” etc. (Prov. xxx. 12-13). Consider well the principles which we mentioned in this chapter as the final causes of the Law: for there are many precepts, for which you will be unable to give a reason unless you possess a knowledge of these principles, as will be explained further on.

CHAPTER 34

IT is also important to note that the Law does not take into account exceptional circumstances; it is not based on conditions which rarely occur. Whatever the Law teaches, whether it be of an intellectual, a moral, or a practical character, is founded on that which is the rule and not on that which is the exception: it ignores the injury that might be caused to a single person through a certain maxim or a certain divine precept. For the Law is a divine institution, and [in order to understand its operation] we must consider how in Nature the various forces produce benefits which are general, but in some solitary cases they cause also injury. This is clear from what has been said by ourselves as well as by others. We must consequently not be surprised when we find that the object of the Law does not fully appear in every individual; there must naturally be people who are not perfected by the instruction of the Law, just as there are beings which do not receive from the specific forms in Nature all that they require. For all this comes from one God, is the result of one act; “they are all given from one shepherd” (Eccles. xii. 11). It is impossible to be otherwise; and we have already explained (chap. xv.) that that which is impossible always remains impossible and never changes. From this consideration it also follows that the laws cannot like medicine vary according to the different conditions of persons and times; whilst the cure of a person depends on his particular constitution at the particular time, the divine guidance contained in the Law must be certain and general, although it may be effective in some cases and ineffective in others. If the Law depended on the varying conditions of man, it would be imperfect in its totality, each precept being left indefinite. For this reason it would not be right to make the fundamental principles of the Law dependent on a certain time or a certain place; on the contrary, the statutes and the judgments must be definite, unconditional

and general, in accordance with the divine words: “As for the congregation, one ordinance shall be for you and for the stranger” (Num. xv. 15); they are intended, as has been stated before, for all persons and for all times.

Moses Maimonides. *Guide for the Perplexed*. Book III, Chapters 27-34. Trans. M. Friedländer. New York: Dover, 1904.

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