

לעינים

“...and you shall be as eyes for us...”

a view from a GER

יונתן נח בן אברהם

yonason noach BEN AVRAHAM

Parashas Va'eschanan: Our Lord is ONE

PREFACE: In this author's opinion – and please excuse these following words of admonition as they may seem harsh (but do understand that they are said with every good intention) – many of today's Torah Observant *Yidden* have (albeit inadvertently) within their worldview, *hashkafos* that are in direct contradiction (or at the very least, indirect) to the Rambam's Thirteen Principles. In this piece we will examine one such improper *hashkafah* (*Cheilek Elokah Mi'ma'al*, that the **created neshamah** is literally a “piece of HaShem,” and thus not really a “creation” at all), as well as touch upon at least one other questionable *hashkafah* (the understanding that HaShem retracted *physically* in order to “make room” for the physical universe, *tzimtzum*) somewhat in depth. We do this both as a requirement of *Vayikra* 19:17 “...you shall reason with your neighbor, and not allow sin on his account,” as well as in defense of the Rambam's Principles as The Basic Principles by which all of Torah, even the esoteric parts, *must* be understood.

Rabbi J. David Bleich in *With perfect Faith: The Foundations of Jewish Belief* writes (quoting/paraphrasing the *Brisker Rav*, Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik): “...There are certain simple and basic theological truths which in their simple formulation are not at all esoteric in nature. These truths can be recognized and comprehended by all, and, when affirmed, provide a degree of intellectual achievement sufficient to guarantee immortality ... [T]hese Thirteen Principles thus [serve], so to speak, as the minimum entrance requirements for admission to the Heavenly Academy.”

In other words, the Rambam's Thirteen Principles – in order for them to be true, basic Principles – must be available (comprehensible) to a girl of twelve years, or a boy of thirteen years, and they cannot be (in this author's opinion) “overturned” by a *Sod* that renders them all but meaningless. Rashi (*Shemos* 12:2), quoting *Shabbos* 63a³⁵, teaches us a “**Biblical verse does not lose its simple meaning (p'shat).**”

³⁵ **Shabbos 63a** “...What is R. Eliezer's reason for maintaining that they are *ornaments* for him? — Because it is written, *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty one, Thy glory and thy majesty.* [*Tehillim* 45:4] R. Kahana objected to Mar son of R. Huna: But this [“ornaments”] refers to the words of the Torah? [*‘Thy sword’ is metaphorical for learning, which is Israel's weapon. It is indicative of the peace-loving spirit of the Rabbis and their exaltation of Torah that they regarded it as axiomatic that such a verse could not be taken literally.*] — **A verse cannot depart from its plain meaning**, he [Mar son of R. Huna] replied. [*Granted that it is metaphorical, yet the Torah would not have been likened to the sword, unless the latter were ornamental.*] R. Kahana said: **By the time I was eighteen years old I had studied the whole Shas**, [*An abbreviation of shishah sederim, the six orders into which the Talmud is divided.*] **yet I did not know that a verse cannot depart from its plain meaning until today.** What does he inform us? — That a man should study and subsequently understand.”

In this author's opinion we have three lessons to learn from this passage: 1) The fact that the *p'shat* remains, regardless of any other interpretations or utilizations of a *passuk* or word, and; 2) It is possible to have learned the entire *Shas* without knowing this basic rule, and; 3) (Potentially) If one does not know this rule (and the ramifications of it) and one has ONLY learned *Shas* (without *Nach*, etc.) a student of Torah might mistakenly think he knows the *p'shat* of *Tanakh* when in reality the *passukim* he has learned in the *Shas* were utilized in a *midrashic* manner and he may have no idea of what the *p'shat* is.

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We believe that this teaching regarding the *p'shat* of a *passuk* applies similarly to the *p'shat* of the Rambam's Thirteen principles, and we believe that the Brisker Rav would agree.

SUMMARY: In this week's *Parasha* we have (arguably) the single most important *Passuk* in Torah, The *Shema* (*Devarim* 6:4), "**Here, O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One.**" This paper concerns itself with the Oneness of HaShem, especially as the above quoted *passuk* is utilized by the Rambam in his Thirteen Principles regarding the Absolute Oneness, the Indivisibility of our Creator.

We begin with a brief examination of one of the major "off-shoots" of *Yiddishkeit*, Christianity, and how an answer to a question, and the ramifications of that well-intentioned response, have consequences, and reveal a potential problem with the *hashkafos* of the speaker (or, at the very least, how he is expressing himself). First, however, consider the following verses from the Christian (*l'havdil*) Bible:

King James Version, John 8:56-59 "[*Yoshka* is speaking:] 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw *it*, and was glad.' Then said the Jews unto him, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?' Jesus said unto them, '*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*' Then took they up stones to cast at him...."

King James Version, Exodus 3:14 "And God said unto Moses, **I AM THAT I AM:** and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **I AM** hath sent me unto you."

These two texts are all that are necessary for a Christian to "prove" that Jesus of Nazareth not only claimed to be, but indeed was (*chas v'shalom*) G-d in the flesh.

A *Chassidic Yid*³⁶ [acting in the role of a counter-missionary] was asked by a Christian about Jesus of Nazareth's statement from the Gospel of John, "...**Before Abraham was, I am.**" The *Chassid* responded: "It says in the Torah [*Devarim* 4:39], '*You should know this day, and take it to your heart, that the Lord is G-d, in the heaven above, and the earth below, there's nothing else.*' There is nothing besides G-d. G-d is the 'I am.' Over in Hinduism they say, 'That man is G-d.' That's idolatry. G-d is all." The Christian asks, "So it's idolatry for a man to claim to be G-d." The *Chassid* responds, "G-d is ALL. If he says that '*it's all G-d, including me,*' that's not idolatry G-d is unlimited. G-d is infinite. That man is not infinite, he's limited ... We don't come up and say, 'I am G-d.' [As Jesus of Nazareth suggested in the Gospel of John.] When we understand the truth, we say G-d is all, including me. Big difference."

In a separated incident, this author was having a discussion about the Rambam's 9th Principle, the Immutability of the Torah, and this author made a comment about how those who would interpret any of our Sages' words to indicate that HaShem's Torah will change³⁷ in the future are (in his opinion) as

³⁶ This very same *Chassid* gave, in this author's opinion, the best *meshal* he has yet heard regarding HaShem as our ONLY King, Redeemer, and Savior as opposed to His *sheliach*, His *meturgeman* of flesh and blood, the *Mashiach*. The *Chassid* said to the Christian, "**Once upon a time there was a King. The most special, beloved King you could ever imagine. Now this King had many, many, many children. But for some reason, one of His children became the most famous. And much of the population called him "the prince." One day the King and the prince came to a village. And the whole village got so excited, and they went out and they welcomed the prince. How do you think the King felt? ... You [Christians] are focusing on a man, and you're forgetting G-d!**" If only today's *Yidden* would all listen to, and comprehend the lesson of this *meshal*, and apply it to their over-emphasis of the Real *Mashiach*....

³⁷ See the *Or HaChayim*, Bereshis 49:28 and Bamidbar 3:45 regarding the firstborn "returning to do the *avodah*" in *l'asid lavo*. However, then learn the *Or HaChayim*, Shemos 38:21 and know that to hold an opinion that

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misguided as those who believe their *neshamah* is not a creation, but is literally a piece of HaShem. A *kollel* member who had at one time attended an non-Chassidic yeshiva interjected, “I don’t see why you have a problem with your *neshamah* being a piece of HaShem.” Then he hit the table saying, “This *table* is a piece of HaShem!”

This author has spoken with many *Yidden*, as well as heard numerous stories about everyday *Yidden*, all the way up to well know Rabbaim, who believe their *neshamos* (the souls that occupies their *gufs*) are literally pieces of HaShem (or at the very least they ‘speak’ as if that were the case³⁸). This *D’var Torah* will examine this belief, and attempt to determine the reality, or falsehood thereof.

The Second Chapter of “*Likutei Amarim – Tanya*,” reads: “The second soul of a Jew is truly a part of G-d above (חלק אלוהים ממעל ממש), as it is written (*Bereshis* 2:7) ‘**And he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,**’ and (*Birchas HaShachar, B’rachos* 60b), ‘Thou didst breathe it [the soul] into me.’ And it is written in the Zohar (**Not found in our editions of the Zohar**), ‘*He who exhales, exhales from within him,*’ that is to say, from his inwardness, and his innermost, for it is something of his internal and innermost vitality that man emits through exhaling with force.”

Regarding חלק אלוהים ממעל ממש Tanya Footnotes cites: *Iyov* 31:2 “For what would be my portion from God above (חלק אלוהים ממעל)?”

Rabbi Yosef Wineberg’s commentary *Lessons in Tanya* (prepared with the guidance of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson³⁹) reads: “...The Alter Rebbe adds the word ‘truly’ (שמל) to stress the literal meaning of these words ... [S]ome verses employ hyperbolic language ... meant to be taken figuratively, not literally ... [T]he Alter Rebbe adds the word ‘truly (שמל),’ thus emphasizing that the Jewish soul is quite literally a part of G-d above ...”

The Nefesh HaChaim (Rav Chaim Volozhiner) teaches us, “...The Zohar (Saba 100b) says, ‘Even the *breath* of one’s speech is preserved.’” ... “How can the *neshamah* be the highest level of the soul when the word *neshamah* is related to *neshimah*, which means ‘breath,’ and breathing is a bodily function and a physical thing? ... [N]eshamah does not refer to human breath. It denotes the ‘Breath of G-d,’⁴⁰ as it says (*Bereshis* 2:7) ‘He blew into his nostrils the spirit of life (*nishmas chaim*)’ ... [T]he three levels of the soul: *nefesh, ruach, neshamah*. *Nefesh* ... is lodged completely inside man’s body [this is the ‘life force’ that man and animals have in common]. *Ruach* is ‘poured [‘breathed’?] into him from Above ... [T]he highest point of *ruach* is connected to the lowest part of *neshamah*, as it says (*Yishayahu* 32:15), ‘*Until a spirit from on high will be poured out upon us.*’ But the essence of the *neshamah* itself is completely hidden. Its source is **the Breath of G-d Himself**, and [with the exceptions of Adam (before

the *Or HaChayim* disagrees with the Rambam’s 9th Principle is not so simple. [This author has developed a *chiddush* that reconciles the two “seemingly” different opinions, but that is for another *D’var Torah*.]

³⁸ To be vague, or obscure with one’s *lashon* is *lo safah b’rurah* (see *Avos* 1:11, *Avos* 2:5). The necessity of saying what we mean, and meaning what we say (as well as the commandment to NOT be a *michshol* to those who might misinterpret our words) is imperative as the gift of the *neshamah* came along with the gift of speech.

³⁹ From the Translator’s Forward, “***The commentary speaks with the authoritative ring of the erudition of the present*** [written in 1987] ***Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson ... who critically examined the prepared Yiddish text of each shiur before it was broadcast, correcting, adding and amending....***”

⁴⁰ Does HaShem/*Elokim* have “lungs” with from which to exhale? Just as He has no “hands,” or “arms,” (anthropomorphisms) nor does He have” emotions” (anthropopathisms). This “Breath of G-d” is expressed in the ‘language of men,’ (*Kesuvos* 67b; *Nedarim* 3a/b; *Avodah Zarah* 27a; etc.) so that we – as physical beings – might have a way to appreciate the spiritual world from which our *neshamos* derive, as well as their Spiritual Root (HaShem).

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the sin), and Moshe Rabbeinu (the greatest man who has lived, \or will live, (Devarim 33:1) ‘a man of G-d’] no part of [the *neshamah*] enters man’s body” ... “This idea [of Makom] is expressed in the verse (Yirmiyahu 23:24), ‘Do I not fill Heaven and earth?’ [But more] explicitly in (Devarim4:39), ‘**Realize it today ... HaShem is the Supreme Being in heaven above and on earth beneath – there is nothing else beside Him.**’ This means literally, that there is nothing in existence in all the worlds except HaShem’s Oneness....”

From the above texts one would think that it is a דבר פשוט (something taken for granted; a “simply understood” thing) that not only is the created soul literally a piece of HaShem, but that – despite all “evidence” to the contrary (“looks can be deceiving?”), NOTHING exists but HaShem (meaning that while we perceive that we exist, in reality we are nothing but a “figment in HaShem’s imagination.”) But as with all Torah, a statement taken out of context can be misunderstood to mean almost anything, and especially Kabbalistic Texts that deal with things of a spiritual nature – if taken literally, as opposed to metaphorically – can lead to significant error.

Below, the author will attempt to accomplish several things: 1) Convince those *Yidden* who believe that their created *neshamos* are pieces of HaShem that they are mistaken (*b’shogeg*), and that their mistake is easily demonstrable; 2) Convince those *Yidden* who understand certain texts to suggest that, “All is HaShem, including me,” that they do indeed exist, and that the created spiritual Heaven, as well as the created physical universe, and all that occupy them (excluding, of course, HaShem) were created *yesh m’ayin* – and this (again) includes our *neshamos*; and 3) Suggest to all *Yidden* that the Books of Kabbalah are so prone to misunderstanding that they should occupy a space on the bookshelf, but almost never be opened and “learned” (at least while we are in *Olam Haze*; *Olam Haba*, when we are no longer encumbered by the *guf*, is another story). But more than that, we have developed a *chiddush* that explains why these Kabbalistic texts even exist in *Olam Haze*, and what their purpose/role is.

First, the *neshamah*. The *passuk* from where we get the phrase חלק אלוקה ממעל, in context reads, (Iyov 31:1-4) **“I made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a virgin? For what would be my portion from God above (חלק אלוקה ממעל)? And my inheritance from the Almighty on high? Does not destruction befall the wicked? And disaster the workers of iniquity? Does He not see my ways, and count all my steps?”** Rashi on this *parasha* reads (Iyov 31:1), “I made a covenant with my eyes not to gaze upon a married woman. and why should I gaze upon a virgin? Why should I gaze upon her? Such was Job’s piety, not to lay an eye even on an unmarried woman. [He would say,] “Perhaps, after a time, she will be married, and I will find myself attracted to her.” So is [this verse] explained in *Avos D’Rabbi Nassan* (2:5).” Thus the פשת of this part of Iyov has to do with Iyov’s concern over his “*Cheilek* of *Olam Haba*,” if he were to have sinful thoughts regarding this woman. It has nothing whatsoever to do with his “soul” being a “piece” of HaShem.

The text (**Bereshis 2:7**) reads, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and **breathed** (ויפח) into his nostrils the breath of life (נשמת חייה); and man became a living soul (לנפש חיה).” Each morning in *Birchas HaShachar* we read, “My G-d (אלקי), the soul (נשמה) You placed within me is pure. **You created it** (אתה בראתה) ... You **breathed** it into me (אתה נפחתה בי)...” This phrase “You CREATED it” regarding the *neshamah*, contains the same root word from **Bereshis 1:1** “In the beginning God **created** (ברא) the heaven and the earth.” [More on ברא below, with an emphasis on how our Meforshim (some of whom were Kabbalists) understand the second word of the Torah.]

The *passuk* that begins the *Shema* (**Devarim 6:4**) reads, “**Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is One** (אהיה).” The Rambam’s 2nd Principle: **The UNITY of HaShem**, reads, “The Second

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Principle – G-d’s Unity (יחוד), be He blessed ... We shall believe that He Who is the Principle Cause of everything, is One (אחד). Nor is He like one ‘pair,’ nor like one ‘species,’ nor like one individual, who is divided into many parts (נהלק)[root חלק]; nor even like one simple unit of matter, which is one in number, but which can nevertheless be divided and subdivided into an endless array of smaller units (החלק)[root חלק]. But He, be He exalted, is One (אחד) with a unity which is unparalleled elsewhere under any circumstances. This is the Second Principle, which is expressed in the verse (*Devarim* 6:4) **“Hear [Understand] O’ Israel, the Lord, our G-d, the Lord is One.”**

The *Ramchal*, **Derek HaShem, Part One, Chapter 2**, reads, “G-d’s purpose in creation was to bestow of His good to another ... The purpose of all that was created was therefore to bring into existence a creature who could derive pleasure from G-d’s own good....”

If we consider the above texts we must come to the conclusion that either our Sages do not trust us with “The Truth,” (that our *neshamos* are really pieces of HaShem and, since HaShem can neither be added to, nor subtracted from, are not “creations” at all, or we have to conclude that the phrase חלק אלוהים ממעל as utilized by the Tanya (as well as all other Kabbalistic texts) are referring to a root spiritual concept, as opposed to a “created” spiritual concept.

This author contacted Rav Bentzion Twersky (son of Rav Michal Twersky), a Rebbe of Chassisha persuasion from Milwaukee, WI regarding the “creation status” of the *neshamah*. Rav Twersky said to this author that the soul was indeed a creation, and that the phrase, “G-d blew the *neshamah* into Adam,” was understood to mean that of all that HaShem created, He put (*kiviachol*) more “effort” into the creation of the *neshamah*. “HaShem created the world with Ten Utterances,” said Rav Twersky (paraphrased). “We can talk and talk and talk all day, and never weary. But if we try to blow air into balloons, after only a few we will become exhausted. Now, of course, the concept of exhaustion cannot apply to HaShem, but the Torah was written in the language of men, and thus the fact that HaShem put more “effort” [‘thought’] into the creation of the *neshamah* is implied by the *passuk*.”

What is of interest is that just after making the statement that the soul is a חלק אלוהים ממעל *ממש*, the Tanya continues, “... **Blowing tires a person much more quickly than speaking ... for it requires a greater exertion of effort and vitality** ... [T]he metaphor of blowing is used to describe G-d’s implanting the Jew’s soul into his body signifies that this soul originates in the ‘innermost’ aspect of G-dliness ...” Thus, it would seem, that the Ba’al HaTanya and Rav Twersky agree. But if this is the case, then how is it that so many *Yidden* seemingly hold this demonstrably wrong-headed belief? Perhaps we need to return to “Tanya” (and what was written, as opposed to how the text is understood today) in order to understand, in light of the Rambam’s Introduction to *Perek Cheilek* (which includes his Thirteen Principles), how to interpret the teaching of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi that the soul is a חלק אלוהים ממעל *ממש*. The Second Chapter of Tanya continues (Kehot Publication Society, 1984): “...So, **allegorically speaking (כך עד"מ), have the souls of Jews risen in [Divine] Thought ... [T]o use an anthropomorphism – the soul of each Israelite is derived from G-d’s (blessed be He) thought and wisdom. For he is wise – but not through a knowable wisdom, because He and His Wisdom are one; and a Maimonides says that (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:10) ‘He is the Knowledge and the Knower... and this is not within the power of any man to comprehend clearly....”**”

However, in *Lessons in Tanya*, the text reads: “So, too, allegorically speaking (כך על דרך משל), have Jewish souls risen in the [Divine] thought....” The word “too” (which is, in this author’s opinion, read *into* the text) suggests an interpretation that not only is the *neshamah* a חלק אלוהים ממעל *ממש*, but ALSO the concept of the *neshamah* is contained with the Mind of HaShem. The correct understanding of

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the Tanya is that the second paragraph explains the first paragraph, and when the Ba'al HaTanya says חלק אלוהים ממעל ממש, he clarifies this by informing us that this concept of חלק אלוהים ממעל ממש means that the root of the *neshamah* is contained within the Thought of HaShem, and since He and His Knowledge are One, it is understood to be ממש.

But still there will be those who want to believe their created soul (the *neshamah* that occupies their *guf*) is a piece of HaShem, and they will point to the fact that that is how their Rebbes and Rabbaim understood the concept, “literally,” and so (might be the chorus) who is this author to suggest that they are in error. But, this author suggests, is this belief prevalent only because they have learned it wrong? Or because they thought they understood the words of their teachers, when in fact they mistaken? Consider the two following pieces of evidence:

Moshe, Bezalel & the Construction of the *Mishkan*: HaShem’s Torah allows (even demands) that we make sure that Torah Makes sense to us, and the Torah gives us permission to correct the “mistakes” of the past, whether those mistakes were unintentional, or mere slips of the tongue.

Consider the *passuk* (Shemos 38:22) “And **Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the Lord commanded Moses,**” as well as the associated Rashi, which reads, “Bezalel, the son of Uri... had made all that the Lord had commanded Moses.” “That Moses had commanded him” is not written here, but [rather] *all that the Lord had commanded Moses,* [meaning that] even [in] things that his master [Moses] had not said to him, his [Bezalel’s] view coincided with what was said to Moses on Sinai. **For Moses commanded Bezalel to first make the furnishings and afterwards the Mishkan** ... Bezalel responded, ***It is common practice to first make a house and then to put furniture into it.*** He [Moses] said to him [Bezalel], ***This is what I heard from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed is He.*** Moses said to him [Bezalel], ***You were in the shadow of God [I.e., you are right], for surely that is what the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded me.***” And so he did: [Bezalel] first [made] the *Mishkan*, and afterwards he made the furnishings. [*B'rachos* 55a]

This exchange between Moshe and his student, Bezalel, presents us with the opportunity to examine how Torah views of the teacher/student relationship, the necessity of the student to question his teacher if his teacher’s words do not make sense to him, the possibility that even the greatest of us is capable of making a mistake, and – in our opinion, most importantly – the “setting” in which these lessons are taught.

First we have to ask, “Who was Bezalel to question a directive, any directive, given by Moshe Rabbeinu?” Wasn’t Moshe the Navi of Navi’im? Wasn’t Moshe the greatest human-being who has ever lived, or will ever live? Didn’t Moshe speak to HaShem “Face to face,” thus, Moshe should know what he was talking about, right? What if Moshe had written his instructions to build the furnishings first, and then the tent to Bezalel on a piece of parchment, given it to him, and then he [Moshe] had died of an aneurism? What would Bezalel do? First he has the concept of *Emunas Chachamim* to consider, but he also has his own mind, and that Torah (with the possible exceptions of the *Chukim*, and Kabbalah) has to be relayed by the teacher in a manner that is comprehensible by the student, and thus has to make sense to him. This, of course, is an academic scenario, but one that should give us pause.

Next consider how **A lesson learned in youth can be difficult to unlearn.** The reader might ask, “If you, our author are correct in your concerns, how did things get so far off track *hashkafically*?” The answer is simple – frighteningly simple. The question is, in essence, “How can a well-meaning, but wrong, concept (or understanding) become accepted as an axiom amongst so many G-d-fearing *Yidden*?” When we couple the concept of *Emunas Chachamim* with the fact that at one time or another each and every *Yid* – no matter how great he will eventually become – has less accessible Torah knowledge than a

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donkey⁴¹. Consider the lesson of the Gemara (*Pesachim* 112a, *Bava Basra* 21a⁴²) “*A lesson learned ion youth is difficult to unlearn.*” Now imagine that a “someday Talmud Chacham” while in his youth

⁴¹ “Accessible” because even though he was taught the entire torah in his mother’s womb (N Source), when he was born, he lost the ability to access the vast storehouse of Torah Knowledge that is contained within his subconscious. And “...than a donkey,” we refer the reader to *Shabbos* 112b and the Torah fact that each generation is that much diminished from the preceding generation that is they (the preceding generation) were men then we are donkeys. **An aside:** Is it any wonder that our teachers become frustrated with us as it is as if they are trying to teach Torah to a dumb animal!

⁴² **Pesachim 112a** “[W]hen you teach your son, teach him from a corrected scroll.’ (What is that? Said Raba, — others state, R. Mesharsheya: A new one [Torah scroll], for once an error has entered, it remains.) [A error learned in childhood is difficult to dispel.]”

Bava Basra 21a “Raba further said: If there are two teachers of whom one gets on fast but with mistakes and the other slowly but without mistakes, we appoint the one who gets on fast and makes mistakes, since the mistakes correct themselves in time. R. Dimi from Nehardea on the other hand said that we appoint the one who goes slowly but makes no mistakes, for once a mistake is implanted it cannot be eradicated.”

Pirkei Avos 4:25 “Elisha ben Avuya said: ‘One who studies as a child, to what can he be likened? – To ink written on a fresh piece of paper. And one who studies Torah as an old man, to what can he be likened? – To ink written on smudged paper.”

Ben Avraham – Consider the *Gallus* Effect on the generations of *Yidden* who have lived since the Edomite (read: “Christian/United States of America”) Exile began ...

Bava Metzia 31a “One of the Rabbis said to Raba: **[Thou shall not hate thy brother in your heart:] hokeah tokiah [thou shall surely rebuke] thy neighbor.** [*Vayikra* 19:17] Perhaps *hokeah* means once, *tokiah* twice? — He replied, *hokeah* implies even a hundred times. As for *tokiah*: I know only that the master [must rebuke] the disciple: **whence do we know that the disciple [must rebuke] his master? From the phrase. ‘hokeah tokiah’, implying under all circumstances.**”

Bava Metzia 33b “This teaching [*that Gemara is higher than Mishnah*] was taught in the days of Rabbi; thereupon everyone forsook the Mishnah and went to the Gemara; hence he subsequently taught them, ‘Yet run always to the Mishnah more than to the Gemara.’ [The two are not really in opposition. The Mishnah itself needs full discussion (Gemara) before it can be intelligently understood; on the other hand, discussion cannot be profitable unless it takes the Mishnah as its basis. It would appear that when Gemara was praised, number of disciples eagerly applied themselves thereto, forgetting however that the Mishnah is the foundation; and therefore the new statement was made, which is not so much a new statement as a fuller explanation of the old.] How was that inferred? [*that the study of Talmud is the more meritorious*] — Even as R. Judah son of R. Ila’i expounded: What is the meaning of, **Show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins?** [*Yishayahu* 58:1] **‘Show my people their transgression’ refers to scholars, whose unwitting errors [through inadequate application to the study of the Talmud] are accounted as intentional faults;** [*sins through ignorance, in the case of scholars, are accounted as intentional, since had they studied more thoroughly they would not have erred.* — ‘Transgression’ (פְּשָׁע) really means rebellion, and refers to intentional sin, whilst ‘sin’ (חַטָּא) often refers to sinning through ignorance, the root idea of חַטָּא being ‘to be defective, to miss.’] ‘and the house of Israel their sins’ — to the ignorant, whose intentional sins are accounted to them as unwitting errors. And that is the meaning of what we learnt: **R. Judah said: Be heedful of the [Talmud], for an error in Talmud is accounted as intentional.**”

Ben Avraham – The Written Torah, Nach, and the Siddur are, in this author’s opinion, the “foundational” texts by which the remainder of Torah must be understood, and the Rambam’s Thirteen Principles are the “foundation stones” upon which the remainder of Torah must be interpreted.

Cf. **Nedarim 81a** “They sent word from there [Palestine]: [*R. Eleazer b. Pedath — Sanhedrin* 17b] Be on guard against scabs; take good care (to study) in company [*this ensures greater keenness and understanding than studying alone*] and be heedful (not to neglect) the children of the poor, [or, *not to neglect their teaching (Ran).*] for from them Torah goes forth, as it is written, The water shall flow out of his buckets [*mi-dalyaw*]: [*Bamidbar* 24:7] [meaning], from the *dallim* [poor] amongst them goes forth Torah. [*Adopting the reading of ‘En Yaakov. Water being symbolic of Torah: cf. Yishayahu 55:1.*] **And why is it not usual for scholars to give birth to sons who are scholars?** — Said R. Joseph, That it might not be maintained, The Torah is their legacy. [*I.e., others should not*

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“learns” about an obscure Torah Topic. Then imagine that for some reason, he has learned it wrong, and the “mistaken understanding” is never corrected. When this “eager to learn Torah” youth develops into the *Talmud Chacham* that we all strive to be, he has that mistaken understanding still within him. He cannot help but be influenced by that “understanding,” and he has no qualms about teaching it to his students. Then, once it is codified in a *sefer* written by him, it is assumed by *Klal Yisroel* to be “Torah from Heaven,” when in fact it is a mistake (*b’shogeg*) of youth. [If this seems harsh, read further as the Rambam is the source of this hashkafah. Albeit, this author has developed the concept to point out the “potential” for the above to happen, but still, the foundation upon which this is based is found within Torah.]

The **Rambam’s Introduction to *Perek Cheilek*** teaches us how to deal with such occurrences, “...There are three approaches taken concerning statements of our Sages [that appear to contradict the principles of logic]. **The first approach is that of most people whom I have met, whose texts I have seen, and about whom I have heard. They understand [our Sages’] statements literally, and do not attempt to explain them [and extend their meanings] at all. They consider all the things that are logically impossible as what must be absolutely true.**

“They do this only as a result of their inexperience with wisdom and their distance from science. They have not developed themselves to the point where they feel motivated to seek [a deeper conception] themselves, nor have they found anyone else to motivate them. **Therefore, they think that our Sages’ intent in their wise statements was only what these people could themselves perceive – i.e., the simple meaning of our Sages’ words.**

“Certain of our Sages’ statements may appear strange and farfetched to the extent that if their simple meanings were told to the common people – let alone to the sophisticates – they would be startled and would exclaim: How is it possible that there exists a person who imagines these things and believes them to be true? Needless, to say, such words would not find favor in their eyes.

“The people who follow this approach are truly pathetic – may G-d have mercy on their foolishness. According to their conception, they are elevating the Sages, while in truth they are denigrating them utterly,⁴³ and yet they are unaware of their effects.

“As G-d lives, this approach destroys the glory of the Torah and dims its radiance. It distorts and perverts G-d’s Torah, causing it to be appreciated in opposition to its intent. For with regard to the wisdom of His Torah, G-d has said:⁴⁴ “When the nations will hear of all these statutes, [and they will say: ‘A wise and understanding people...’].” But when people who follow this approach expound on the literal meaning of our Sages’ words, those who hear them will say: “A foolish and perverse people is this puny nation.”

“Many of the preachers do this in their attempts to educate the people about that which they themselves do not understand. Would it be that they would be silent, for they do not understand. “O that you would all keep silent. It would be [an act of] wisdom.”⁴⁵ At the very least, they should say: we do not know our Sages’ intent in these statements, or what their meaning is.

complain that it is useless for them to study, or that they themselves should not think study unnecessary.] R. Shisha, the son of R. Idi, said: That they should not be arrogant towards the community. Mar Zutra said: Because they act high-handedly against the community. [because they are arrogant] R. Ashi said: Because they call people asses. [These observations show that there was a mutual antipathy between the scholars and the masses. It is noteworthy however that, as evidenced by this passage, many Rabbis themselves criticized the attitude of scholars.]”

⁴³ By ascribing such ideas to the Sages, they are causing people at large to lose respect for the Sages.

⁴⁴ ***Devarim 4:6*** Observe therefore and do them; *for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, that, when they hear all these statutes, shall say: ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’*

⁴⁵ ***Iyov 13:5*** Oh that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it would be your wisdom.

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“Instead, they think that they do understand, and place themselves in a position to convey to the people what they understood, but not what the Sages said. They expound upon the homiletic content of the tractate of *B'rachos*, **that of the chapter of *Chelek***, and the like literally, word for word [without seeking to understand or interpret the symbolism the Sages employed].

“The second approach – and there are also many who follow it – saw or heard the words of our Sages and understood them literally. They also imagined that the Sages had no deeper intent than the literal meaning of their words. As a result, they belittle and malign them, deeming bizarre that which is not at all bizarre. They ridicule the words of the Sages frequently, and consider themselves to be more intelligent and clearer thinkers than they. They deem our Sages to be fools, men with no understanding, and utterly witless, as if they never understood anything at all.

“The majority of those who follow this approach are physicians and astrologers, who see themselves as clever men of wisdom and philosophers. How distant from humanity are they when compared to those who are truly wise and philosophical! They are even more foolish and more inane than those who follow the first approach. They are a cursed persuasion who flare out against men of lofty character, whose wisdom was appreciated by the wise.

“Had these [misguided individuals] trained themselves in science to the extent that they knew how to explain the metaphysical concepts and the like to the common people and to the Sages, and had they rained themselves in the practical application of philosophy, they would understand whether or not our Sages were wise. And they would understand the intent of our Sages' words.

“The third approach – and indeed, as G-d lives, the number of people who follow it are so few, it can hardly be called a persuasion, just as the sun cannot be called a species, for it is unique – is followed by people who have been impressed by the greatness of our Sages and the excellence of their wisdom, from having discovered statements that reflect profound truths within their teachings as a whole.

“Although these [truths] are dispersed throughout [our Sages'] texts, they show their personal development and their comprehension of the truth. Similarly, [these people] have appreciated that certain situations are impossible, and that certain rules always prevail. They appreciate that the Sages did not speak empty words, and they understand that their words contain both a simple meaning and deeper secrets. Thus, whenever [our Sages] made a statement mentioning things that could not possibly have occurred, they understood that these were merely allegories and analogies.

“This is the manner in which great sages speak, and therefore the greatest of the wise men opened his book with the statement⁴⁶: “To understand and analogy and a proverb, the words of the wise and their allegories.” And, as is known to the master linguists, the intent of the word “*chiddah*” – allegory or riddle – is a message whose meaning is hidden and is not revealed in its literal meaning, as reflected in the verse,⁴⁷ “Let me propose a riddle (“*chiddah*”) for you.” For when all the masters of wisdom would speak about abstract matters, which are the ultimate [goal of wisdom], they would speak in allegories and analogies.

“Why then should one wonder that [our Sages] communicated their wisdom through allegories, despite the fact that some would interpret them to be lowly and common matters? We see that the wisest of all men, Solomon, did so, inspired by the spirit of prophecy in the Book of Proverbs, in the Song of Songs, and in portions of Ecclesiastes. Why then should we consider it foreign to interpret our Sages' words in this fashion, understanding them in the abstract, so that they will benefit their intellectual content, reflect the truth and be germane to Scripture?

⁴⁶ **Mishlei 1:6** *To understand a proverb, and a figure; the words of the wise, and their riddles.*

⁴⁷ **Shoftim 14:12** And Samson said to them, *I will now put a riddle to you*; if you can tell me what it is within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty changes of garments;

“Indeed, we find that [our Sages] would interpret Scripture in this manner, abstracting the content beyond the literal meaning and explaining it as allegories – and this is the approach. For example, the verse states:⁴⁸ “And he smote the two lionhearted men of Moab” – this is an analogy⁴⁹, as is the continuation of the verse, “and he slew the lion in the cistern on the day of the snowstorm.”⁵⁰ Similarly, the request,⁵¹ “O that someone would draw water for me from the cistern of Bethlehem,” and the remainder of the subsequent narrative is interpreted as an analogy.⁵² Similarly, one of the Sages stated⁵³ that the entire Book of Job is an allegory. The intent of this allegory is not explained.⁵⁴ Similarly, [the narrative of the resurrection of] the dead by Ezekiel is interpreted as an allegory by one of the Sages.⁵⁵

“If you, my reader, follow one of the first two approaches, do not pay any attention to my words about this matter, for they will not suit your thinking. On the contrary, they will embitter you and cause you to hate them. For how could food that is light in substance, but high in quality, be attractive to a person who has already accustomed himself to eating heavy, bad foods? [Such foods] will cause him only harm and he will hate them. For example, people who were used to eating onions, garlic and fish said⁵⁶ of the manna, “We are disgusted by this loathsome bread.”

“But if you follow the third approach, and thus, whenever you encounter a statement of [our Sages] that reason rejects, contemplate the matter at length, knowing that it is an allegory or an analogy. Concentrate your energies, both emotional and intellectual, on understanding it. Endeavor to find the path of truth and a straightforward conception, as it is written,⁵⁷ “To find desirable words and to write the words of truth in a straightforward manner. [With this approach,] consider the text, and it will bring you benefit with G-d’s help....”

After allowing the Rambam’s words to speak for themselves, we will look at the *Nefesh HaChaim* in context, as see if we can discern the Spiritual Truth that our Sages were attempting to convey to us. **The *Nefesh HaChaim*** (Rav Chaim Volozhiner, chief student of the Vilna Gaon, a Kabbalist) teaches us, “The Torah says (*Bereshis* 1:27), ‘G-d created man in His image, in the image of G-d did He create him’ ... (*Bereshis* 1:26) ‘Let us make man with Our image, after Our likeness’ ... The commentators say that the terms ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ cannot be taken literally, because it says explicitly

⁴⁸ ***Shmuel Beis 23:20*** But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines; and the Lord wrought a great victory.

Divrei HaYomim Alef 11:22 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a brave man of Kabzeel, who had done many acts; he slew two lion like men of Moab; and he went down and slew a lion in a pit in a snowy day.

⁴⁹ See **B’rachos 18b**; this is interpreted as meaning that no person of Benayahu’s caliber arose in either the First or Second Temple era.

⁵⁰ See **B’rachos 18b**: this is interpreted as a reference to him breaking the ice to immerse himself after a seminal emission. Alternatively: that he learned the *Sifra*, the most difficult book on Biblical exegesis, on a winter day.

⁵¹ ***Shmuel Beis 23:15*** And David saw that Saul came out to seek his life; and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood.

Divrei HaYomim Alef 11:17 And David longed, and said, Oh, that one would give me drink from the water of the well of Beth-Lechem, which is by the gate!

⁵² See **Bava Kamma 60b**: this is interpreted as a reference to a clarification on a place in Torah Law which David sought from the elders of Bethlehem.

⁵³ See **Bava Basra 15a**: there we find an opinion that the story of Job never actually happened, and that the entire text of Job is an analogy.

⁵⁴ See **Guide for the Perplexed**, Vol. II Chapters 21 and 22 for the Rambam on the Book of Job

⁵⁵ See **Sanhedrin 92b**

⁵⁶ ***Bamidbar 21:5*** And the people spoke against God, and against Moses, Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, nor is there any water; and our soul loathes this light bread.

⁵⁷ ***Kohelles 12:10*** Kohelles sought to find out acceptable words; and words of truth written in proper form.

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(*Yishayahu* 40:18), ‘What likeness can you attribute to him’ ... [T]he word *tzelem*, ‘image,’ should not be taken literally ... Why did the Torah choose the name *Elokim*, in the phrase *b’tzelem Elokim*, as opposed to a different Divine Name? Because the name *Elokim* signifies ‘the All-Powerful G-d,’ which correctly expresses the difference [clearly separates] between the norms of mortal man and the norms of the holy One, blessed be He ... [A mortal being] who builds a wooden house does not create the wood. He buys ready-made beams and boards and uses them [pre-existing materials] to put up the house ... Not so HaShem *Yisbarach*. With His infinite power, He created the universe out of nothing (ex-nihilo) **שׁ מֵאֵין**...”

This concept, **שׁ מֵאֵין**, is an important part of the correct understanding of **the Rambam’s First Principle – Belief in the existence of the Creator, be He blessed**, which reads, “...there is a ‘Being’ ... [Who] is the Primary Cause of existence of all that exists ... And though we should entertain the thought of all existence, other than His own being null and void, the existence of the Creator, be He blessed, would not be nullified, nor would it be diminished ... And all else that exists, such as the purely intellectual beings – that is, the Angels – and the heavenly constellations and all that they contain, as well as all that exists below them, are all dependent for their existence on Him....”

שׁ מֵאֵין is understood by the Ramban (another Kabbalist!) in his commentary to *Bereshis* 1:1 as follows: “Now listen to the perfectly clear and correct interpretation of this verse in its simplicity. **The Holy One, blessed is He, created all that exists from utter nothingness. There is not word in the Hebrew language which refers to the bring forth of matter from nothingness, other than the word בָּרָא – He created** ... The Ravad (*Mishnah Torah, Hilchos T’shuvah* 3:7), citing *Bereshis Rabbah* 1:12 ... observes that an individual who claims that the Almighty did not create the world from nihility, but only formed it from other substances, is a **מְרִיף** – a heretic ... The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim*, Part II, *perek* 13, 30a) writes, “The understanding of everyone who believes in the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu **הַרְבֵּה**, is that **the world in its entirety, that is, everything that exists besides the Creator, was brought into existence by G-d after having been entirely non-existent, and that G-d Himself existed, and nothing else beside Him** – no Angel, or heavenly sphere, nor anything which is within the heavenly spheres – and then He brought into existence everything that exists ... from nothingness” ... Rabbeinu Bachya (another Kabbalist) on *Bereshis* 1:1 reads, “The meaning of this chapter is that the heavens and the earth and all that they contain were created on the first day from absolute nothingness and from utter nihility...” ... Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (*Bereshis* 1:1) writes, “**בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים**” expressed the fact that nothing preceded G-d’s creation, that heaven and earth came into existence solely by the creation of G-d. This affirms creation out of nothing – **שׁ מֵאֵין** – a fact that forms the foundation-stone of the understanding which G-d’s Torah wishes to build up in us.”

Those who hold that G-d “retracted” (*tzimtzum*) so that there was a “physical place” for the universe, and who go further suggesting that the created universe is really just Him, have to contend with the words of the above quoted Sages: “...from utter nothingness .. from nihility ... from non-existence ... out of nothing...” and reconcile that our Sages would have had to use these words to describe HaShem/*Elokim* – Who, of course – is the Ultimate SOMETHING, not “utter nothingness.”

We have now see how the *Nefesh HaChaim* dealt with “physical creation,” but as for the *neshamos*, *Nefesh HaChaim* teaches us, “[W]hen G-d created man, He empowered him to control forces and worlds, handing over to him so that he should direct then according to his actions, words or thoughts, whether for good or, G-d forbid, for the opposite” ... “Every deed [man] perform[s] has repercussions in

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the loftiest heights and affects the brilliance of the spiritual lights Above”⁵⁸ ... “[I]n order to rectify the ‘World of Action’ (*Olam Haze*), the soul must enter a human body ... [O]ur deeds having an impact on the higher worlds is referred to in the verse (*Tehillim* 33:15) ‘*He fashions their hearts all together, He comprehends all of their deeds*’⁵⁹ ... This is also implied by the verse (*Kohelles* 12:14) ‘*For G-d will judge every deed – even every hidden thing – whether good or evil.*’ This verse can be [understood] as: ‘For each of his far-reaching powerful deeds man will be judged’ ... [W]hen a person stands before the Heavenly Tribunal, G-d, Who is the Master of all ‘powers,’ will judge him not only for each of his actions [and their impact on *Olam Haze*], but also for the impact his actions had on the higher worlds and ‘powers’ – for good or for evil”⁶⁰ ... “In the same way, every word one speaks has an effect on the higher world, as it says (*Amos* 4:13), ‘For behold, He forms mountains and creates winds; He recounts to a person what were the words [he spoke]’ ... [E]ach single word you utter has either a constructive or destructive effect on the upper worlds ... The Zohar (*Saba* 100b) says, ‘Even the *breath* of one’s speech is preserved.’” ... “How can the *neshamah* be the highest level of the soul when the word *neshamah* is related to *neshimah*, which means ‘breath,’ and breathing is a bodily function and a physical thing? ...

⁵⁸ However, in this author’s opinion, one area where some *Yidden* are mistaken is when they believe that their thoughts, words, or deeds (even their *davening* and *mitzvos*) effect HaShem. The “plain meaning” of the *b’racha* “*L’Shaim Yichud...*,” [“**For the sake of the unification of the Holy One, Blessed is He ... to unify the Name yud-kei with vav-kei – in perfect unity...**”] would suggest that one who recites of that *b’racha* is somehow effecting HaShem. The Rambam (N source) tells us that the Torah was given for our benefit, not HaShem’s, and in no way are we “doing Him a favor” (making Him MORE “G-d”) by being righteous (cf. *Iyov* 35:7). The *Nefesh HaChaim* also holds this way: “The word *b’ruch* does not mean ‘blessed’ or ‘praise,’ as most people think ... Thee true meaning of “*b’racha*” is asking G-d to increase that which is being blessed ... [W]hen we recite a *b’racha* and ‘bless G-d,’ we are not speaking about G-d Himself. **After all, G-d is perfect and lacks nothing; thus, ‘increasing’ anything about Him is ridiculous.**”

In this author’s opinion, HaShem will be “unified” as a result of our recognizing Him as our ONLY King, [Redeemer, and Savior]! And from where do we get the right to suggest this? It is explicitly stated by a *Navi HaShem* (*Zechariah* 14:9) “**And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; on that day the Lord shall be one, and His Name one.**”

⁵⁹ This *passuk* is quoted in the *Ani Ma’amim* regarding **HaShem’s Omniscience** (the Rambam’s 10th Principle, which is followed by the related Principle of Reward and Punishment), and should be understood to mean that HaShem “Orchestrates” our every thought, word, and deed both as we – of our own free will – make choices here in *Olam Haze*, but the ramifications are felt not only here in this world, but also for Eternity in *Olam Haze*.

⁶⁰ Rav Noach Weinberg ל"צ"ט taught this author that when we are commanded to emulate HaShem, it is more than being patient, or quick to forgive, or clothing the naked, or burying the dead, it also means that we emulate Him by being a “creator.” But how is one to accomplish this? HaShem created the world *yesh m’ayin* (out of utter nothingness), and we are expected to emulate that? We are each created with the potential to inherit the World to Come, but our potential *Olam Haba* stands before us “without form, and void.” Thus, working off of the teaching of Rav Noach Weinberg *, are tasked with being the “creator” (*L’HAVDIL/kiveyakal*) *yesh m’ayin* of our own *Olam Haba*! But, the most important lesson that the *Nefesh HaChaim* is teaching us, is that our thoughts, words, and deeds have far reaching consequences, both in this world and the next.

There is concept in thermodynamic physics called ‘chaos theory.’ This theory is popularized by the vision of a “butterfly beating its wings in Siberia, and – as a result of the movement of the air caused by the butterfly’s wings – a hurricane sprouts in the Atlantic Ocean.” We would like to utilize this ‘theory’ to conceptualize the far-reaching impact of our every thought, word, and deed on this world, and – ultimately – our World to Come. We have no idea of how ‘powerful’ what we think, what we say, and what we do are when they are “Orchestrated” by HaShem, and thus what may seem to us as the mere fluttering of a wings of a butterfly, can in reality lead to the blowing of a tropical storm.

[N]eshamah does not refer to human breath. It denotes the ‘Breath of G-d,’⁶¹ as it says (*Bereshis* 2:7) ‘He blew into his nostrils the spirit of life (*nishmas chaim*)’ ... [T]he three levels of the soul: *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*. *Nefesh* ... is lodged completely inside man’s body [this is the ‘life force’ that man and animals have in common]. *Ruach* is ‘poured [‘breathed’?] into him from Above ... [T]he highest point of *ruach* is connected to the lowest part of *neshamah*, as it says (*Yishayahu* 32:15), ‘*Until a spirit from on high will be poured out upon us.*’ But the essence of the *neshamah* itself is completely hidden. Its source is **the Breath of G-d Himself**, and [with the exceptions of Adam (before the sin), and Moshe Rabbeinu (the greatest man who has lived, \or will live, (*Devarim* 33:1) ‘*a man of G-d*’)] no part of [the *neshamah*] enters man’s body ... All man can hope to attain [earn] is that *neshamah* ‘sparks’ will glow over his head [commensurate with the effort he puts into perfecting himself] ... [It is the ‘sparks’ of the *neshamah*] that impart to man the insight needed to grasp the profound mysteries of the Holy Torah, [but one must have prepared himself with the proper foundation of Torah, Nach, Mishnah, Gemara, Halachah, and Aggadah BEFORE he can expect these ‘sparks’ to ‘enlighten’ him. If he delves into the esoteric texts of Torah without these prerequisites, he will ultimately misunderstand the concepts contained therein, and do untold damage to his *neshamah* as well as the ‘worlds above.’]” ... “The three levels of the soul [contained within, or associated with the *guf*] are matched by corresponding levels in the higher world. The heavenly counterpart of the *neshamah* is called *Eim Habanim*, ‘Mother of Children.’ Just as the condition of man on earth was changed by Adam’s Sin, and [subsequently] man’s *ruach* level receives only ‘sparks’ of the *neshamah*, so, too, in the higher realm, only the lowest part of the *Eim Habanim* enters that [spiritual] world ... *Mishlei* 2:6 reads, ‘*HaShem grants wisdom; from His Mouth [comes] knowledge and understanding*’ ... [T]he sparks of the light of the *neshamah*, whose source is hidden in the breath of G-d’s Mouth, [are only attainable] by exerting oneself, by delving deeply [thoroughly, as opposed to superficially, and with the guidance of our illustrious *Meforshim*] into the Holy Torah, and learning Torah for torah’s sake ... When the children of Yisrael were assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, they asked to hear the commandments from the Mouth of G-d Himself⁶², as implied in (*Shir HaShirim* 1:2), ‘*Let Him give me the kisses of His Mouth*’”

⁶¹ Does HaShem/*Elokim* have “lungs” with from which to exhale? Just as He has no “hands,” or “arms,” (anthropomorphisms) nor does He have “emotions” (anthropopathisms). This “Breath of G-d” is expressed in the ‘language of men,’ (*Kesuvos* 67b; *Nedarim* 3a/b; *Avodah Zarah* 27a; etc.) so that we – as physical beings – might have a way to appreciate the spiritual world from which our *neshamos* derive.

⁶² **HaShem/*Elokim* v. His *sheliach/meturgeman*, there IS a difference**

Shemos 19:9 “And the Lord said to Moses, *Behold, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever. And Moses told the words of the people to the Lord.*” Rashi on this *passuk* reads, “**And Moses relayed ... the words of the people, etc.** A response to this statement I have heard from them [the Israelites], that **they want to hear [directly] from You.** [They maintain that] **there is no comparison between one who hears [a message] from the mouth of the messenger and one who hears [it] from the mouth of the King [himself].** [They say,] ‘*We want to see [perceive/learn to ‘fear’] our King!*’”

Rav David Goldberg (*Uvacharta Bachaim*) teaches us, “The Vilna Gaon often was visited by *maggidim* (heavenly messengers) who offered to reveal to him the mysteries of the Torah without any exertion on his part. The Gaon [said,] ‘...I want to gain Torah knowledge through toil and exertion. G-d will grant me wisdom, and when I understand a concept, I know that I have found favor in G-d’s “eyes.” I want only that [which] comes from His mouth. Insights coming from *maggidim*, knowledge for which I did not toil, I do not desire.’”

The preceding two are examples of *Hashkafah Emes* when it comes to dealing with a mere “messenger,” verses dealing directly with HaShem. In the first example from *Sefer Shemos*, we see that the very people who (for the most part) sinned with the Golden Calf forty days after “Sinai,” and were guilty of *shittuf* regarding Moshe’s role in what was happening around them (the Exodus and the associated miracles, as well as the parting of the sea, these same people desired HaShem over Moshe. The *maggidim* that visited the Vilna Gaon? They were presumably “sent” by HaShem, yet the Gaon – recognizing the vast, vast difference between HaShem on His “messengers.” Yes, the Gaon did not desire a shortcut to the Torah knowledge he craved, but, after all, these were “messengers”

Regarding “*HaMakom*,” that G-d is the “Place” of the world, Nefesh HaChaim writes: “[C]alling HaShem HaMakom (*Bereshis Rabbah* 68) [is done] [b]ecause He is the *Makom* (Place) of the world, but the world is not His place ... [T]he Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 45) says (quoting HaShem), ‘The ‘place’ is dependent on Me, but I am not dependent on the ‘place’ ... If, G-d forbid, He would remove His attention from creation for an instant, all the worlds would cease to exist....” ... “On a deeper level, the description of HaShem as ‘the Place of the world’ is based on a very profound concept. The fact that HaShem is called ‘the Place of the world’ has nothing to do with a place supporting the object that rests on it ... [but rather] the continued existence of all the worlds depends upon HaShem. If He would cease to will their continued existence, they would revert to absolute nothingness in an instant” ... “[T]he Sages intimated that just as an object, even though it may exist independently, cannot exist without a place on which to stand, so, too, the tangible universe, which seems to exist independently, has a place on which it stands. Its place is HaShem. If not for His Will to be the Place for the worlds, the universe most certainly would be non-existent....”

The *Nefesh HaChaim* cautions us, though, “This idea [of Makom] is expressed in the verse (*Yirmiyahu* 23:24), ‘*Do I not fill Heaven and earth?*’ [But more] explicitly in (*Devarim*4:39), ‘***Realize it today ... HaShem is the Supreme Being in heaven above and on earth beneath – there is nothing else beside Him.***’⁶³ This means literally, that there is nothing in existence in all the worlds except HaShem’s Oneness....” ... “[Regarding] the words of the Sages ... One should take care not to ponder and reflect excessively on subjects that should not be studied in depth, for it may be harmful ... [These Kabbalistic subjects are] meant only for the wise man who is capable of understanding [them] and will be inspired by it to pray with a pure heart⁶⁴ ... The early authorities made it a point to conceal [Kabbalah] ... I concluded that their approach [of concealing Kabbalah] was the appropriate course to follow for their generation. **But at the present time, we have not had a leading authority for a long time, and everyone lets his thoughts wander in whatever directions he pleases. What is worse, some people think that [Kabbalah] is for everyone, and there are fools who say that pure G-dliness can be found everywhere and in everything. All their thoughts are focused on studying mysticism; even young boys are behaving g according to their own understanding ... One must guard himself against acting on the basis of [mystical] ideas, for this will do away with many fundamental principles of the Torah**” ... “I want to caution people to avoid the errors that may occur from [the unprepared person learning Kabbalah], and I want [those who would choose to discount my warning] to understand clearly the things the Sages alluded to. ‘*For it is a time to act for HaShem*’ (*Tehillim* 119:126)⁶⁵ ... “All the fundamentals of Torah ... are based on the concept that from our perspective, there definitely are different places [a Shul v. a bathroom] ... Without this human outlook, there is no reason at all for the Torah and the mitzvos ... [However] [f]rom HaShem’s point of view, He fills all the worlds uniformly, without

from HaShem – does one turn down a “gift” from \HaShem? In the Gaon’s case, yes! He desired HaShem, and His insights, not a mere “messenger” “sent by Him. If only we could learn from these lessons, and set our sights on HaShem, instead of flesh and blood, then – perhaps – the “exile” would be quickly over!

⁶³ The Rambam writes in the opening paragraphs of his *Mishneh Torah* on this phrase (“...***there is nothing else beside Him.***”), “This means, there is no other existing truth, other than His own, which is comparable to Him ... He alone is truth, and the truth of nothing else is like His truth.”

⁶⁴ The last *passuk* in *Tehillim* reads, “***Let all souls praise G-d, Praise the Lord.***” If all the *neshamos* are really just “pieces of HaShem,” then that means that pieces of HaShem are being told to praise HaShem. This is absurd, and only someone intent on holding fast to a long-held belief would continue in an *hashkafah sheker* of this magnitude.

⁶⁵ Consider the warnings of some of our other Sages:

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any separation or differentiation. There is only complete Oneness, exactly as before creation.⁶⁶ But we are unable, and even forbidden, to attempt to understand this awesome concept as to how HaShem's Presence fills all existence with undivided, absolute Oneness. As the *Rokeach* expresses it: *'Do not delve into things that are beyond your comprehension' ...*"The greatest sages cannot understand these matters ... Moshe, eager to understand this concept, said (*Shemos* 33:18), *'Please let me comprehend Your unique nature,'* but his request was not granted" ... "[F]rom our vantage point ... HaShem 'surrounds all the worlds' ... [He is not 'palpable' to us] because He confined His Glory [to allow] for the physical world to come into existence [to be a testing ground for our *neshamos*, 'clothed' within a *guf*, placed in a world with seeming 'powers,' and tasked with perceiving He Who cannot be perceived while we are living in the physical world, and looking behind all of those 'powers' to find him Who is the Source, their *Makom!*]"

If the reader will not hear the warnings of the Nefesh HaChaim regarding the learning of Kabbalah, perhaps he will consider the warnings of some of our other Sages:

Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:32

Concerning this matter of intellectual understanding it is said (*Mishlei* 25:16): *Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need otherwise you will be glutted with it and vomit it.* This wonderful parable that likens knowledge to eating is used by our Sages to explain the heresy of Elisha ben Abuya (*"Acher"*). It mentions honey – the most delicious of foods. However, when honey is eaten to excess it causes stomach irritation and causes vomiting. In other words, the nature of intellectual activity – even involving the greatest, most sublime issues of perfection – if not maintained within its limitation changes into something harmful. ...Just like honey if ingested to excess is all lost. It doesn't say that you come to dislike it but that it will be vomited up... There are a number of other verses that indicate this.... Furthermore [*Chagigah* 13a] refers to this: "That which is too wondrous for you – don't inquire and that which is concealed from you don't investigate.. But that which you are permitted you should understand and do not involve yourself in secrets." All this comes to tell you that you should apply your mind to those things that it is capable of comprehending. Studying those things that are beyond the inherent capacity of the mind to grasp can cause great harm.... It is important to note however that these statements of the prophets and sages are not meant to prevent a person from thinking and to completely close off intellectual endeavors and to prevent the intellect from grasping that which it is capable of understanding – as the fools and the lazy ones who consider their deficiencies and stupidity as perfection and wisdom and the perfection and wisdom of others as deficits and religious transgression. In short, they consider darkness to be light and light to be darkness⁶⁷. The point is simply that man's intellect has limitations that cannot be ignored.

Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim*, Introduction to Part III

We have stated several times that it is our primary object in this treatise to expound, as far as possible, the Biblical account of the Creation (*Ma'aseh Bereshis*) and the description of the Divine Chariot (*Ma'aseh Mercabah*) in a manner adapted to the training of those for whom this work is written⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ This is more easily "understood" by reviewing the Rambam's First Principle: "... And though we should entertain the thought of all existence, other than His own being null and void, the existence of the Creator, be He blessed, would not be nullified, nor would it be diminished ..."

⁶⁷ These statements, coupled with the concept that *each successive generation is a bit lower than those that preceded it*, should be enough to teach us that the esoteric parts of Torah are not the playground that our minds should be occupied with.

⁶⁸ The *Moreh Nevuchim* was written for the average Jew seeking answers to the ideas of the day that might – if unanswered – damage his *Emunas HaShem*. The Rambam was not writing to the leaders of his day, and this is

We have also stated that these subjects belong to the mysteries of the Law. You are well aware how our Sages blame those who reveal these mysteries, and praise the merits of those who keep them secret, although they are perfectly clear to the philosopher. In this sense they explain the passage, “Her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently” (*Yishayahu 23:18*), which concludes in the original with the words *ve-li-me-kasseh ‘atik*, i.e., that these blessings are promised to him who hides things which the Eternal has revealed [to him], viz., the mysteries of the Law (*Pesachim 119a*⁶⁹). If you have understanding you will comprehend that which our Sages pointed out. They have clearly stated that the Divine Chariot includes matters too deep and too profound for the ordinary intellect. It has been shown that a person favored by [Divine] Providence with reason to understand these mysteries is forbidden by the Law to teach them except *viva voce*, and on condition that the pupil possess certain qualifications, and even then only the heads of the sections may be communicated. This has been the cause why the knowledge of this mystery has entirely disappeared from our nation, and nothing has remained of it. This was unavoidable, for **the explanation of these mysteries was always communicated *viva voce*, it was never committed to writing**⁷⁰. Such being the case, how can I venture to call your attention to such portions of it as may be known, intelligible, and perfectly clear to me? But if, on the other hand, I were to abstain from writing on this subject, according to my knowledge of it, when I die, as I shall inevitably do, that knowledge would die with me, and I would thus inflict great injury on you and all those who are perplexed [by these theological problems]. I would then be guilty of withholding the truth from those to whom it ought to be communicated, and of jealously depriving the heir of his inheritance. I should, in either case, be guilty of gross misconduct.

To give a full explanation of the mystic passages of the Bible is contrary to the Law and to reason; besides, my knowledge of them is based on reasoning, not on divine inspiration [and is therefore not infallible]. I have not received my belief in this respect from any teacher, but it has been formed by what I learned from Scripture and the utterances of our Sages, and by the philosophical principles which I have adopted.

The Ramban, Introduction to his Commentary on the Chumash

“And now, know and see what I shall answer to those who question me concerning my writing a commentary on the Torah. I shall conduct myself in accordance with the custom of the early scholars to bring peace of mind to the students, tired of the exile and the afflictions, who read in the *Seder* [weekly parasha] on the Sabbaths and festivals, and to attract them with the plain meanings of Scripture⁷¹ and with

why he wrote this caveat – so that we should learn from him and consider the Torah Knowledge Base of the person to whom we might be speaking. To cause someone to question the authenticity of Torah, or the existence of HaShem – or worse, to introduce concepts that might twist the mind of the listener toward *apikorsis* – is exactly what the Ramban would not want us to do.

⁶⁹ **Pesachim 119a** -- What does ‘and for stately clothing’ [*li-mekasseh ‘athik*] [*This completes the verse.*] mean? That refers to him who ‘conceals’ [mekasseh] the things which the Ancient [‘athik] of days [G-d; **Daniel 7:13**. *I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like a son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.*] concealed. And what is that? The secrets of the Torah. [*Esoteric teaching, which was to be confined to the few.*] Others explain: That refers to him who reveals the things which the Ancient of days concealed [kissah]. And what is it? The reasons of the Torah. [*It is meritorious to investigate the reasons of Scriptural laws.*]

⁷⁰ It can be argued that the only way one can comprehend *kabbalah* is through a teacher who himself has mastered the discipline. In any case, *kabbalah* is not something one can learn from a book.

⁷¹ The Ramban here stresses the *p’shat* aspect of his commentary as that which the vast majority of us should focus upon; then he makes an allusion to the esoteric aspects of his commentary which, he writes, are reserved for those scholars who already have knowledge of the cabala. In the paragraph to follow, the Ramban tells us what he thinks of those of us who desire to delve into the cabalistic side of Torah.

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some things that are pleasant to the listeners and which give grace [*chein*; “*chochmah nistarah*”⁷²] to the scholars. And may the gracious G-d [*Tehillim* 67:2] *be merciful unto us and bless us* so that we shall [*Mishlei* 3:4] *find grace and good favor in the sight of G-d and man*.

“Now behold I bring into a faithful covenant and give proper counsel to all who look into this book not to reason or entertain any thought concerning any of the mystic hints which I write regarding the hidden matters of the Torah, for I do hereby firmly make known to him [the reader] that my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning or contemplation, excepting from the mouth of a wise Cabalist speaking into the ear of an understanding recipient⁷³. Reasoning about them is foolishness; any unrelated thought brings much damage and withholds the benefit. [*Iyov* 15:31] *Let him not trust in vanity, deceiving himself*, for these reasonings will bring him nothing but evil as if they spoke falsely against G-d, which cannot be forgiven, as it is said [*Mishlei* 21:16] *The man that strays out of understanding shall rest in the congregation of the shades*. [*Shemos* 19:21,24] *Let them not break through unto the Eternal to gaze*, [*Devarim* 4:24] *For the Eternal our G-d is a devouring fire, even a G-d of jealousies*. And He will show those who are pleasing to Him wonders from His Torah. rather let such see in our commentaries novel interpretations of the plain meanings of Scripture and Midrashim, and let them take moral instruction from the mouths of our holy Rabbis [*Bereshis Rabbah* 8:2]: “Into that which is beyond you, do not seek; into, that which is more powerful than you, do not inquire; about that which is concealed from you, do not desire to know; about that which is hidden from you, do not ask. Contemplate that which is permitted to you, and engage not yourself in hidden things.”

Rema (#7): I am more concerned with avoiding independent study of Kabbalah than with studying philosophy. That is because there is a greater danger in erring in Kabbalah than philosophy as we see from the warning of the Ramban in his introduction to his introduction to his commentary to the Torah.

Rema (*Toras HaOlah* 3:4): ... Kabbalah is the foundation of faith and all other aspects of religion are built on it. So how can I talk about this subject based on my own analysis and not direct knowledge of the subject? However I decided that this is an emergency situation that requires that I ignore my own inadequacies. This is because this generation has sunk so low that I have not seen in my lifetime a kabbalist who understand the True Kabbalah clearly. In addition, many of the masses run to learn kabbalah with a tremendous desire. They are especially interested in the words of the later scholars who have revealed these matters in detail in their writings. The phenomenon is even more prevalent today since kabbalistic books such as the Zohar, Recanti and Shaarei Orah are readily available through printed editions. The ready availability of these kabbalistic texts and commentaries enable anyone who can read to think he understands kabbalah. However in spite of the apparent ease of understanding these books, they are not truly understood since they are not learned the way kabbalah is supposed to be learned – directly from a teacher with the proper traditional understanding. **It is bad enough that this problem exists amongst scholars, but it is even worse since the masses are also attracted to these studies. They are people who exist in darkness and can’t differentiate between the right and the left. There ignorant people – who can’t even explain the Torah properly with Rashi’s commentary – run to study kabbalah.** All this cause that we have an orphaned degenerate generation. Genuine knowledge is so rare that it is as noticeable as a stone in a pitcher (*Bava Metzia* 85b). Therefore, anyone who sees a glimpse of the glory of kabbalah gives public discourses on the matter. They will pay for this lack of knowledge in the Future. However, the fact is that their lack of knowledge is actually useful for them in that they are totally unaware of how ignorant they are. In contrast, the scholars know very well the great

⁷² “hidden wisdom; the *kabbalah*”

⁷³ The *Kabbalah* must be taught *ba'al peh*, and only to those prepared for it.

damage caused by the inappropriate teaching of Kabbalah as the Ramban notes in his introduction to his commentary to the Torah. This concern is also found in the writings of the other early kabbalists...

Rema (Yoreh Deah 246:4): A person should learn only Chumash, Mishnah, Gemara and the Poskim, and with [these] he will acquire both this world and the next. However, he should not learn other wisdoms. Nevertheless, it is permitted to learn other wisdoms on occasion as long as they are not books of heresy, and this was referred to by the sages as strolling in paradise. A person should not stroll in paradise except after he has satiated himself with meat and wine i.e., that he knows the Halachah concerning what is prohibited and permitted and the laws of the mitzvos.

And if the warnings of our Sages are not sufficient, perhaps the Gemara's warning will suffice:

Chagigah 11b MISHNAH: THE [SUBJECT OF] FORBIDDEN RELATIONS MAY NOT BE EXPOUNDED IN THE PRESENCE OF THREE, [*I.e., it is forbidden to expound this subject in the presence of more than two.*] NOR **THE WORK OF CREATION** [*Bereshis 1:1-3, the secret doctrine of Ma'aseh Bere'shis.*] IN THE PRESENCE OF TWO, NOR [THE WORK OF] THE CHARIOT [*Yechezkel. 1: 4f, 10, and Yishayahu 6*] IN THE PRESENCE OF ONE, UNLESS HE IS A SAGE AND UNDERSTANDS OF HIS OWN KNOWLEDGE.

WHOSOEVER SPECULATES UPON FOUR THINGS, A PITY [*Rashi translates: 'it were better for him'*] **FOR HIM! HE IS AS THOUGH HE HAD NOT COME INTO THE WORLD, WHAT IS ABOVE, WHAT IS BENEATH, WHAT BEFORE, WHAT AFTER.** [*From the Gemara 16a and the Tosefos it is clear that the terms have also a temporal significance. i.e., what happened before Creation and what will happen hereafter.*] **AND WHOSOEVER TAKES NO THOUGHT FOR THE HONOUR OF HIS MAKER.** [*Chagigah 16a*] **IT WERE A MERCY IF HE HAD NOT COME INTO THE WORLD.**

GEMARA. You say at first: NOR [THE WORK OF] THE CHARIOT IN THE PRESENCE OF ONE; [*This means, apparently, that a person is not permitted to study the mysteries of the Chariot even by himself, although the fact that he can study without the aid of a teacher shows that he is a Sage and understands of his own knowledge.*] and then you say: UNLESS HE IS A SAGE AND UNDERSTANDS OF HIS OWN KNOWLEDGE! — This is the meaning: the forbidden relations may not be expounded to three, [*I.e., the number refers to the pupils and does not include the teacher.*] nor **the work of creation to two**, nor **[the work of] the chariot to one**, unless he is a Sage and understands of his own knowledge. [*I.e., is able to speculate by himself. Such a disciple will not require to ask his teacher questions, for these mysteries may not be explained explicitly.*⁷⁴]

This demonstrably erroneous *hashkafah* that holds that “Everything is literally G-d, that all creation is literally an emanation of G-d,” and that eventually all creation – including our *neshamos* – will return to its source: HaShem, (an expanding/contracting *tzimtzum*) and that “[He] will outlast everything,” is found in the literal understanding of the phrase, “*Cheilek Elokah Mima'al,*” or “*Nishmas Elokah Mima'al,*” which many *Yidden* understand to mean (unfortunately) that their *neshamos* are not creations, but rather are literally part of HaShem. These thoughts were expressed in the past by a *Yid* who was put into *cherem* because of his thesis:

Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677 C.E.) “By G-d, I understand Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence ... Besides G-d, no substance can be, nor can be conceived ... Since G-d is Being absolutely infinite, of Whom no attribute can be denied which expresses the essence of the substance, and since He necessarily exists, it follows that if there were any substance besides G-d, it would have to be explained by some

⁷⁴ If these things cannot be explained out of the mouth of a teacher, how much more so....

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attribute of G-d, and thus two substances would exist possessing the same attribute, which is absurd; and therefore there cannot be any substance excepting G-d, and consequently none other can be conceived ... Whatever is, is in G-d, and nothing can either be, or be conceived, without G-d ... G-d is the imminent, and not the transitive cause of all things ... All things which are, are in G-d and must be conceived through Him, and therefore He is the cause of the things which are in Himself ... Moreover, outside G-d there can be no substance, that is to say, outside Him nothing can exist which is in itself....”

Spinoza wrote of:

Pantheism is the view that the Universe (Nature) and God are identical.^[1] Pantheists thus do not believe in a personal, anthropomorphic or creator god. The word derives from the Ancient Greek: παν (pan) meaning ‘all’ and θεός (theos) meaning ‘God’. As such, Pantheism denotes the idea that “God” is best seen as a way of relating to the Universe.^[2] Although there are divergences within Pantheism, the central ideas found in almost all versions are the Cosmos as an all-encompassing unity and the sacredness of Nature.

The other side of the **Pantheism** coin is albeit closer to the Theological/Spiritual Truth, but – if understood as relating to the created world – is equally as troublesome:

Panentheism (from Greek παν (pân) "all"; ἐν (en) "in"; and θεός (theós) "God"; "all-in-God") is a belief system which posits that God exists and interpenetrates every part of nature, and timelessly extends beyond as well. Panentheism is distinguished from pantheism, which holds that God is synonymous with the material universe.

Briefly put, in pantheism, "God is the whole"; in panentheism, "The whole is in God." This means that the Universe in the first formulation is practically the Whole itself, but in the second the universe and God are not ontologically equivalent. In panentheism, God is not necessarily viewed as the creator or demiurge, but the eternal animating force behind the universe, some versions positing the universe as nothing more than the manifest part of God. In some forms of panentheism, the cosmos exists within God, who in turn "pervades" or is "in" the cosmos. While pantheism asserts that God and the universe are coextensive, panentheism claims that God is greater than the universe and some forms hold that the universe is contained within God. Hinduism is highly characterized by Panentheism and Pantheism.

Neither of these “*hashkafos*” (pantheism and panentheism) accurately depict the created universe, and panentheism – in this author’s opinion – because it is “closer” to a Spiritual Truth is actually more dangerous, as something that is close to a truth, without actually being truth poses more of a threat than something that is so far from the truth as to never even be considered.

The “Preexistent Neshamah” & Hashkafah Emes about Creation

It is our understanding that there was a “time” (we put time in “quotation marks” because time itself is a creation) when the only Entity that existed was HaShem. HaShem then created our *neshamos* in order to be good to us, in order to fulfill His “need” to be good. (Again, the word “need” cannot be used to describe HaShem as He has no needs, but this is how we “created beings” have to understand this concept – HaShem’s “need” to be good to something, and that “something” was our *neshamos*.) Our *neshamos*, however, to a certain degree, “rebelled” against HaShem. “We have not *earned* these blessings You are heaping upon us,” cried out our collective *neshamos*. “Exactly,” responded HaShem. “What you are experiencing is called ‘the bread of shame,’ undeserved reward. I will create a place where each of you – of your own free will – can choose whether or not to have a relationship with Me,

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and to what degree that relationship consists.” HaShem knew how He had created us (His Torah was, is, and will be THE blueprint for all that HaShem created to be “good” to), and He knew we would ‘rebel’ because of the feeling of the ‘bread of shame’ that He had created within our *neshamos*. He then implemented His “plan” for *Olam HazeH* – the place of freedom of choice, and of *earned* reward or punishment – and placed *Adam HaRishon* there.

We live in that world of freedom of choice, where we have the opportunity to choose the quality and “quantity” of relationship with HaShem that we can muster ourselves to desire. We have HaShem’s Torah to keep us on track, and we are assured that after our one hundred and twenty years that if we have been an asset in *Olam HazeH*, that HaShem will reward us in *Olam Haba*. That reward, according to the Rambam, will eventually – in the final incarnation of “existence” – revert to the situation as it was before we “forced” HaShem to create (place us within) *Olam HazeH*. In other words, we will “then” (we place the word then in quotation marks as we understand that when *Olam HazeH* is “dismantled” that time will be discarded as well) go back to an existence where there will be only HaShem and our *neshamos*, only this time we will have earned our *Cheilek Olam Haba*, our Share of the World to Come (which – in reality – was were we started off in the first place)

In *Modeh Ani* we find the phrase, “...**You** [HaShem] **have returned my neshamah within me...**” This phrase is important for two reasons. First it identifies our *neshamah* as belonging to us. And second, therein lies a “hint” to the concept of *Gilgul HaNefesh* (Transmigration of the Soul), where each and every day is another *gilgul* of our *neshamah* [Re: Rabbi Yisroel Riesman on the *Arizal*, the *Or HaChayim*, etc.]. But this very first phrase that exits our mouth each morning [re: the gift of speech, and the *Targum* to *Bereshis* 2:7] can be coupled with a prayer in *Birchas HaShachar*, “**Elokai, My G-d, the neshamah You placed within me** [today, as each day is a *gilgul* of my *neshamah*; another opportunity to “get it right”] **is pure. You CREATED IT** [*yaish m’eyin*; the *neshamah* is a creation, and thus cannot be a piece of HaShem], **You fashioned it** [as each of us have different gift, tasks, potentials], **You breathed it into me** [see *Bereshis* 2:7; the written Torah does not mention the “creation of the *neshamah*” as they existed before the first day of creation]... **You will take it from me, and** [You will] **restore it to me in Time to Come** (*L’asid Lavo*).” This last part quoted is pertinent to our current issue. We can see that it was the *hashkafah* of the Men of the Great Assembly that our *neshamos* would still exist in *Olam Haba*, the Time to Come, else *Chazal* would not have codified this concept into our prayers.

However, at the beginning of *Adon Olam* we do find an interesting couple of sentences, that could, without a proper *hashkafah*, be misunderstood. *Adon Olam* begins: “**Master of the universe, Who reigned** [in *Olam HaEmes* before the “rebellion” of our *neshamos*] **before any** [physical] **form was created.** [The substance of this phrase is echoed in *Birchas Krias Shema*: “*The King Who was exalted in solitude before creation, Who is praised, glorified, and upraised since days of old.*”] **At that time** [the beginning of “time”] **when His will brought all** [of physical creation, *Olam HazeH*] **into being – then as “King” was His Name proclaimed. After all** [physicality] **has ceased to be** [in *L’asid Lavo*], **He, the Awesome One, will reign alone** [as all *other gods* who might have assumed some degree of “power” will have been relegated to their true place]. **It is He Who was** [before He created our *neshamos*], **He Who is** [the *only* Power in *Olam HazeH*], **and He Who will remain, in splendor** [when our *neshamos* return to *Olam HaEmes* and bask in the Splendor of His *Shechinah*]... **Without beginning, without conclusion** [*Yishayahu* 48:12. ... I am He; I am *the first*, I am also *the last*] – **His is the Power and Dominion** [All “power” must be seen to be dependent upon HaShem, and all human kingship, all kings of flesh and blood, must be understood to be subservient to HaShem’s Kingship .]” The phrase in *Adon Olam* that could be misunderstood: “**After all has ceased to be, He, the Awesome One, will reign alone,**” can now [with the above explanatory insertions] be understood with an *hashkafah emes*. [This idea, that HaShem is in *Olam HaEmes*, and should be in *Olam HazeH* /*Olam HaSheker*, the very center of focus, is also found toward the end of *Birchas HaShachar* where it reads: “*It was You before the world was created, it is You since the world was created; it is You in This World, it is You in the World to Come.*”]

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In *Yigdal* we find additional support for a correct *hashkafah* visa vi our understanding of HaShem, and our *neshamos*. [We have added notes for clarification, edification, and reference to other concepts within HaShem's Torah.] *Yigdal* begins:

“Exalted be the Living G-d and praised [HaShem is exalted in *Olam HaEmes*, and should be recognized and praised in *Olam Haze*h in order to maximize that relationship with our Creator that we will realize in *Olam Haba*],

“He exists – unbounded by time is His existence. [Time is a creation, and HaShem is dependent upon nothing; He can only be understood by us created beings as “existing.”]

“He is One – and there is no unity like His Oneness. [We know from the *Shema* that HaShem is One (*Echad*), but we are to understand from *Yigdal* (a paraphrase of the Rambam's Thirteen Principles) that even though, according to the Rambam, each of us have one (*echad*) *neshamah* – albeit made up of different levels (see the Rambam's *Shemoneh Perakim*), our created *neshamah*, though it may be HaShem-like in that the *neshamah* is that part of us that cannot be quantified, cannot be likened to HaShem's Oneness.]

“Inscrutable and infinite is His Oneness. [To image that we can grasp HaShem as He is, as the concept of His Oneness is depicted to us in His Torah, is akin to imagining that a grasshopper can grasp the existence of a human-being (*Yishayahu* 40:22. It is He who sits upon the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are as grasshoppers; Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.) The difference is, that a grasshopper is closer to understanding us, than we are to understanding HaShem!]

“He has no semblance of a body, nor is He corporeal;

Nor has His Holiness any comparison. [Again, we are tasked with understanding that nothing that is holy – such as our *neshamos* which are “separate” from all other levels of creation – can be compared to the Holiness of HaShem.]

“He preceded every being that was created –

The First, and nothing precedes His precedence.” [We find the lesson further driven home: HaShem exists, He was not created, and all other that HaShem was created (*yaish m'eyin*) – including our *neshamos*. HaShem was The “First,” Who existed before all created beings. There was nothing before Him who created Him (*chas v'shalom*). (See *Megillah* 9a where the story of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Chumash, is taught. Note the emendation of the Rabbis to preserve this important point in *hashkafah*.)]

In this author's opinion, we need to get back to the basics, Torah, Nach, the Siddur, and this author tasks all Yidden to actually read the Rambam's entire Introduction to Perek Cheilek, rather than think they have knowledge of The Thirteen Principles because they have sung *Yigdal*, or said the Ani Ma'amims a few times. Consider:

Tanna D'bei E;liyahu (*Perek Alef*), “When a person has learned the books of Torah, Prophets and writings, and studied Midrash, Gemara, Halachah and Aggadah, ruach hakodesh comes to rest on him....”

Rashi, Shemos 31:18 “...for the Torah was delivered to him [Moses] as a gift, as a bride [is given] to a bridegroom, because [otherwise] he could not have learnt it all in such a short time (Tanchuma, Ki Sissa 18). Another explanation: Just as a bride is adorned with twenty-four ornaments [i.e.,] the ones listed in the book of Isaiah (3:18-22), **so too must a Torah scholar be adorned with the twenty-four books [of the Scriptures]**, i.e., possess the knowledge of the entire Scriptures] (Tanchuma, Ki Sissa 16)....”

As for the *chiddush* regarding Kabbalistic texts, in this author's opinion the existence of these texts is our version of the *Eitz HaDa'as*, the Tree of Knowledge. The promise of the serpent was (*Bereshis* 3:5), “...you shall be as gods, *knowing* good and evil.” The “promise” of Kabbalah is to

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attempt to understand (“knowing”) that which Moshe Rabbeinu couldn’t even understand: the inner workings of Creation and *Olam Haba*. The Rambam says in *Hilchos T’shuvah* that *T’shuvah Shalaymah* is attained when one is confronted with a similar situation where one failed in the past, but this time he doesn’t ‘listen to the serpent.’ *T’shuvah Shalaymah* for the Sin of Adam means that we had Kabbalah within our grasp, but we wait until *Olam Haba* in order to partake of its delights.

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