

# CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF CHAUTAUQUA

23 Vincent Avenue Chautauqua, NY 14722 T: (716) 357 - 3467 W: www.cocweb.org E: rabbi@cocweb.org

## Maimonides – “Freedom of Choice” – 2020

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1. Contemplate three things, and you will not come to the hands of transgression: Know what is above from you: a seeing eye, a listening ear, and all your deeds being inscribed in a book. (Ethics of the Fathers, 2:1)
2. *All is foreseen, and freedom of choice is granted.* (ibid, 3:15)
3. Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa taught: That angel that is appointed over conception is called: Night. And that angel takes the drop of semen from which a person will be formed and presents it before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and says before Him: Master of the Universe, what will be of this drop? Will the person fashioned from it be mighty or weak? Will he be clever or stupid? Will he be wealthy or poor?
4. But this angel does not say: Will he be wicked or righteous? This is in accordance with a statement of Rabbi Hanina, as Rabbi Hanina said:: All is in the hands of heaven, except for the awe of heaven, as it says, "And now, Israel, what does G-d want from you, other than that you should be in awe of Him [the L-rd your G-d, to walk in all of His ways, to love Him and to serve the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul]" (Deuteronomy 10:12)?" (Talmud Berachot 33b. Ibid Megillah 25a)
5. **Principle 10** - *That G-d knows man's actions and does not ignore [hide His eye from] them;*  
Unlike the opinion of those who says "G-d abandoned the land", but rather like it says (Jeremiah 32) "Who is great in counsel and mighty in carrying it out, for Your eyes are open to all the ways of mankind," "And the L-rd saw that the evil of man was great in the earth" (Genesis 6:5) And it says, "Since the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah has become great" (ibid 18:20). These demonstrate the 10th principle.
6. This G-d is one. He is not two or more, but one, unified in a manner which [surpasses] any unity that is found in the world; i.e., He is not one in the manner of a general category which includes many individual entities, nor one in the way that the body is divided into different portions and dimensions. Rather, He is unified, and there exists no unity similar to His in this world.
7. If there were many gods, they would have body and form, because like entities are separated from each other only through the circumstances associated with body and form.
8. Were the Creator to have body and form, He would have limitation and definition, because it is impossible for a body not to be limited. And any entity which itself is limited and defined [possesses] only limited and defined power. Since our God, blessed be His name, possesses unlimited power... we see that His power is not the power of a body. Since He is not a body, the circumstances associated with bodies that produce division and separation are not relevant to Him. Therefore, it is impossible for Him to be anything other than one.
9. The knowledge of this concept fulfills a positive commandment, as [implied by Deuteronomy 6:4]: "[Hear, Israel,] G-d is our L-rd, G-d is one." (Maimonides, The laws of the Torah's Foundations 1:7)
10. All existence, aside from the Creator - from the first form down to a small mosquito in the depths of the earth - came into being from the influence of His truth. Since He knows Himself and recognizes His greatness, beauty, and truth, He knows everything, and nothing is hidden from Him. The Holy One, blessed be He, recognizes His truth and knows it as it is. He does not know with a knowledge which is external to

Him in the way that we know, for ourselves and our knowledge are not one. Rather, the Creator, may He be blessed, He, His knowledge, and His life are one from all sides and corners, in all manners of unity.

11. Were He to live as life is [usually conceived], or know with a knowledge that is external from Him, there would be many G-ds, Him, His life, and His knowledge. The matter is not so. Rather, He is one from all sides and corners, in all manners of unity. Thus, you could say, "He is the Knower, He is the Subject of Knowledge, and He is the Knowledge itself." All is one.
12. This matter is beyond the ability of our mouths to relate, [or our] ears to hear, nor is there [the capacity] within the heart of man to grasp it in its entirety. [In expression of this concept, Genesis 42:15] states: "chay (By the life) of Pharaoh" and [I Samuel 25:26] states "chay, (By the life) of your soul," but [I Samuel, *ibid.*] does not say: "chay, (By the life) of G-d" but chai Adonai, "As G-d lives." [This shows] that the Creator and His life are not two, as are the lives of living beings or the lives of the angels.
13. Thus, He does not recognize and know the creations in terms of the creations as we know them, but rather He knows them in terms of Himself. Thus, since He knows Himself, He knows everything, for the existence of everything else is dependent on Him. (*ibid.*, 2:9-10)
14. Freedom of choice has been granted to every man.... This concept is a fundamental principle and a pillar of the Torah and its commandments. As it is written [Deuteronomy 30:15]: "See, I have set before you, life [and good, and death and evil]"... For were G-d to decree that a person be righteous or wicked, or if there were to exist something in the very essence of a person's nature which would compel him toward a specific path, a specific conviction, a specific character trait or a specific deed...how could G-d command us through the prophets "do this" and "do not do this,"...? What place would the entire Torah have? And by what measure of justice would G-d punish the wicked and reward the righteous? Shall the whole world's Judge not act justly!
15. A person should not wonder: How is it possible for one to do whatever he wants and be responsible for his own deeds? - Is it possible for anything to happen in this world without the permission and desire of its Creator as [Psalms 135:6] states: "Whatever G-d wishes, He has done in the heavens and in the earth?"
16. One must know that everything is done in accord with His will and, nevertheless, we are responsible for our deeds.
17. How is this [apparent contradiction] resolved? Just as the Creator desired that [the elements of] fire and wind rise upward and [those of] water and earth descend downward, that the heavenly spheres revolve in a circular orbit, and all the other creations of the world follow the nature which He desired for them, so too, He desired that man have free choice and be responsible for his deeds, without being pulled or forced. Rather, he, on his own initiative, with the knowledge which G-d has granted him, will do anything that man is able to do.
18. Therefore, he is judged according to his deeds. If he does good, he is treated with beneficence. If he does bad, he is treated harshly. This is implied by the prophets' statements: "This has been the doing of your hands" [Malachi 1:9]; "They also have chosen their own paths" [Isaiah 66:3].
19. This concept was also implied by Solomon in his statement [Ecclesiastes 11:9]: "Young man, rejoice in your youth... but, know that for all these things G-d will bring you to judgment," i.e., know that you have the potential to do, but in the future, you will have to account for your deeds.
20. One may ask: "G-d certainly knows all that will transpire... [so] if He knew that the person would be righteous, then it was not possible for that person not to be so. And if you say that He knew that the person would be righteous but it was nevertheless possible that he might be wicked, then G-d's knowledge was not complete!" Know that the answer to this question "longer than the land is its measure and broader than the sea,"<sup>1</sup> and that many great foundations and lofty mountains hang upon it. But understand well what I am

going to say. We have already explained in the second chapter of *The Laws of the Torah's Foundations* that G-d does not know with a "mind" that is distinct from His being, as is the case with man whose being and mind are two distinct entities. Rather, He and His "mind" are one and the same - a concept that is impossible for the human mind to fully comprehend. Thus, just as man cannot discover and grasp the truth of the Creator... so, too, man cannot discover and grasp the "mind" of the Creator. In the words of the prophet, "My thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor are your ways as My ways." (Isaiah 55:8) Therefore, we lack the capacity to know the nature of G-d's knowledge of all creations and all events. But this we know without doubt: that the deeds of man are in his hands, and G-d does not compel him to do anything.

21. This matter is known, not only as a tradition of faith, but also, through clear proofs from the words of wisdom. Consequently, the prophets taught that a person is judged for his deeds, according to his deeds - whether good or bad. This is a fundamental principle on which is dependent all the words of prophecy. (ibid, Laws of Repentance 5)
- a. **RA'AVED** (Rabbi Abraham ben Dovid (1120?-1198): The author did not act in the manner of the wise: one ought not begin something that one is incapable of concluding. He begins by posing a difficult question, then remains with the difficulty and reverts to faith. It would have been better for him to have left it as a matter of faith for the innocent, instead of making them aware [of the contradiction] and leaving their minds in doubt....  
although there is no definitive answer to this, we had best offer at least something of an answer to the issue raised by Maimonides. The gist of the answer is that G-d knows what man will choose, but that this knowledge has no effect on the nature of man's choice. Rather, it is "like the predictions of the stargazers, who know, by some other means, what the behavior of an individual will be" but in no way determine it.
- b. **TOSAFOT YOM TOV** (Rabbi Yom Tov Lippman Heller 1579-1654): Rabbi Shmuel Uceda (circa 1575) in his work *Midrash Shmuel answers*, that there is no contradiction in the first place. G-d's knowledge of the future is the result of His observing the deed that the person is doing. Just as a person's observation of the deeds of his fellow in no way compels his fellow's actions, so, too, is it with G-d's observation of one's deeds. One cannot argue that because G-d knows the future actions of man He therefore compels them, since before Him there is no precedence and subsequence, as He is not governed by the laws of time.... There is no "future" in G-d's reality — the whole of time is "present" to Him. So just as our knowledge of the present has no compelling effect, so, too, His knowledge is always in [His] "present" and non-compelling.... indeed, this is consistent with the conclusion of the Raavad, who compares G-d's knowledge to that of a stargazer.
22. G-d's... thought and knowledge of all created beings embrace, in actuality, each and every creation; for [this knowledge] itself is its very life and being and that which brings it into existence from nothingness into actuality. (Tanya, part II, ch. 7)
23. ...by way of illustration, like a man who knows and feels within himself all that is happening to and being experienced by each and all of his 248 organs, such as cold and heat, feeling the heat even in his toe-nails, for example, as when he is scorched by fire; so also their essence and substance and all that is done to them, he knows and senses in his brain.  
Corresponding to this knowledge, by way of example, the Holy One, blessed be He, knows all that befalls all created beings, both higher and lower, because they all receive their flow of life from Him, may He be blessed, as is written: "For all things come of Thee." And this is the meaning of what we say: "Verily also nothing that is formed is withheld from Thee." And as Maimonides has said ...that "Knowing Himself, as it were, He knows all created things that exist by virtue of His true existence...."  
Nevertheless, this parallel is only an appeal to the ear. In truth, however, the analogy bears no similarity whatever to the object of the comparison. For the human soul, even the rational and the divine, is affected

by the fates of the body and its pain, by reason of its being actually clothed within the vivifying soul which is clothed in the body itself.

The Holy One, blessed be He, however, is not, Heaven forbid, affected by the fates of the world and its changes...(ibid, 42)

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