

Text 1.

Rabbi Moses Maimonides (1135 – 1204) on the Islamic thinker Al Farabi (c. 870 - 950):  
“I tell you: as for works on logic, one should only study the writings of Abū Nasr al-Fārābī. All his writings are faultlessly excellent. One ought to study and understand them. For he is a great man.”

(Maimonides' letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon, translator of Maimonides' *Guide* from Arabic into Hebrew, translated into English from the Hebrew translation by S. Pines, in 'Translator's Introduction,' *Guide of the Perplexed*)

Text 2:

From Al Farabi's *The Political Regime* (trans. Fazui M. Najjar, in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, eds. Lerner, Ralph, and Muhsin Mahdi)

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Since what is intended by man's existence is that he attain supreme happiness, he—[48] in order to achieve it—needs to know what happiness is, make it his end, and hold it before his eyes. Then, after that, he needs to know the things he ought to do in order to attain happiness, and then do these actions. In view of what has been said about the differences in the natural dispositions of individual men, not everyone is disposed to know happiness on his own, or the things that he ought to do, but needs a teacher and a guide for this purpose. Some men need little guidance, others need a great deal of it. In addition, even when a man is guided to these two [that is, happiness and the actions leading to it], he will not,

in the absence of an external stimulus and something to arouse him, necessarily do what he has been taught and guided to. This is how most men are. Therefore they need someone to make all this known to them and to arouse them to do it.

Besides, it is not in the power of every man to guide others nor in the power of every man to induce others to do these things. He who does not possess the power to arouse another to do anything whatever, nor to employ him in it, but only has the power, always to do what he has been guided to, is never a ruler in anything at all; he is always ruled in everything. He who has the power to guide another to a certain thing, to induce him to do it, and to employ him in it, is in that thing a ruler over the one who cannot do it on his own. And he who cannot discover something on his own, but does it when he is guided to it and instructed in it, and has the power to arouse another to do, and to employ him in, that thing in which he himself has been instructed and to which he has been guided, is a ruler over one man and is ruled by another. Thus the ruler may be a supreme or a subordinate ruler. The subordinate ruler is one who is subject to one man [49] and in turn rules over another. These two types of rule can be in one kind [of art], such as husbandry, trade, or medicine, and can pertain to all kinds of human [arts].

The supreme ruler without qualification is he who does not need anyone to rule him in anything whatever, but has actually acquired the sciences and every kind of knowledge, and has no need of a man to guide him in anything. He is able to comprehend well each one of the particular things that he ought to do. He is able to guide well all others to everything in which he instructs them, to employ all those who do any of the acts for which they are equipped, and to determine, define, and direct these acts toward happiness. This is found only in the one who possesses great and superior natural dispositions, when his soul is in union with the Active Intellect. He can only attain this [union with the Active Intellect] by first acquiring the passive intellect, and then the intellect called the acquired; for, as it is stated in *On the Soul*,<sup>3</sup> union with the Active Intellect results from possessing the acquired intellect. This man is the true prince according to the ancients; he is the one of whom it ought to be said that he receives revelation. For man receives revelation only when he attains this rank, that is, when there is no longer an intermediary between him and the Active Intellect; for the passive intellect is like matter and substratum to the acquired intellect, and the latter is like matter and substratum to the Active Intellect. It is then that the power that enables man to understand how to define things and actions and how to direct them toward happiness, emanates from the Active Intellect to the passive intellect. [50] This emanation that proceeds from the Active Intellect to the passive through the mediation of the acquired intellect, is revelation. Now because the Active Intellect

emanates from the being of the First Cause, it can for this reason be said that it is the First Cause that brings about revelation to this man through the mediation of the Active Intellect. The rule of this man is the supreme rule; all other human rulerships are inferior to it and are derived from it. Such is his rank.

The men who are governed by the rule of this ruler are the virtuous, good, and happy men. If they form a nation, then that is the virtuous nation, if they are associated in a single dwelling-place, then the dwelling-place that brings together all those subject to such a rule is the virtuous city; and if they are not associated together in a single dwelling-place, but live in separate dwelling-places whose inhabitants are governed by rulerships other than this one, then these are virtuous men who are strangers in those dwelling-places. They happen to live separately either because no city happens to exist as yet in which they can be associated, or because they were [associated] in a city, but as a result of certain disasters—such as an enemy attack, pestilence, failure of crops, and so forth—they were forced to separate. If at any one time a group of these princes happens to reside in a single city, in a single nation, or in many nations, then this group is as it were a single prince because they agree in their endeavors, purposes, opinions, and ways of life. If they follow one another in time, their souls will form as it were a single soul, the one who succeeds will be following the way of life of his predecessors, and the living will be following in the way of the ones who have died. Just as it is permissible for each of them to change, a Law he had legislated at one time [51] for another if he deems it better to do so, similarly it is permissible for the living who succeeds the one who died to change what the latter had legislated, for the one who died also would have changed it had he been able to observe the new conditions. But if it does not happen that a man exists with these qualifications, then one will have to adopt the Laws prescribed by the earlier ones, write them down, pre-serve them, and govern the city by them. The ruler who governs the city according to the written Laws received from the past imams will be the prince of the law (*summah*).

As every citizen of the city does what is entrusted to him—either by knowing it on his own or by being guided and induced to it by the ruler—he acquires, by these actions, the good states of the soul, just as by continued practice in good writing a man acquires excellence in the art of writing, which is a state of the soul; and the more he continues practicing, the more firm his excellence in writing becomes, the greater the pleasure he takes in the resulting state, and the stronger the delight of his soul in that state. Similarly, the actions that are determined and directed toward happiness strengthen the part of the soul that is naturally equipped for happiness, and actualize and perfect it—to the extent that the power resulting from the perfection achieved by it enables it to dispense with

MISHNEH TORAH  
THE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE  
by  
MAIMONIDES

Edited according to the Bodleian (Oxford) Codex  
with Introduction, Biblical and Talmudical References,  
Notes and English Translation  
by  
MOSES HYAMSON

Text 3:  
Excerpts from Maimonides' Introduction

WHICH IS THE ORIGINAL FORM OF THE TORAH

In our days, severe vicissitudes prevail, and all feel the pressure of hard times. The wisdom of our wise men has disappeared; the understanding of our prudent men is hidden. Hence, the commentaries of the Geonim and their compilations of laws and responses, which they took care to make clear, have in our times become hard to understand so that only a few individuals properly comprehend them. Needless to add that such is the case in regard to the Talmud itself—the Babylonian as well as the Palestinian—the *Sifra*, the *Sifri* and the *Tosefta*, all of which works require, for their comprehension, a broad mind, a wise soul and considerable study, and then one can learn from them the correct practice as to what is forbidden or permitted, and the other rules of the Torah.

On these grounds, I, Moses the son of Maimon *the Sefardi*, bestirred myself, and, relying on the help of God, blessed be He, intently studied all these works, with the view of putting together the results obtained from them in regard to what is forbidden or permitted, clean or unclean, and the other rules of the Torah—all in plain language and terse style, so that thus the entire Oral Law might become systematically known to all, without citing difficulties and solutions or differences of view, one person saying so, and another something else,—but consisting of statements, clear and convincing, and in accordance with the conclusions drawn from all these compilations and commentaries that have appeared from the time of Moses to the present, so that all the rules shall be accessible to young and old, whether these appertain to the (Pentateuchal) precepts or to the institutions established by the sages and prophets, so that no other work should be needed for ascertaining any of the laws of Israel, but that this work might serve as a compendium of the entire Oral Law, including the ordinances, customs and decrees instituted from the days of our teacher Moses till the compilation of the Talmud, as expounded for us by the Geonim in all the works composed by them since the completion of the Talmud. Hence, I have entitled this work *Mishneh Torah* (Repetition of the Law), for the reason that a person, who first reads the Written Law and then this compilation, will know from it the whole of the Oral Law, without having occasion to consult any other book between them.

I have seen fit to arrange this Compendium in large divisions of the laws according to their various topics. These divisions are distributed in chapters grouped according to subject matter. Each chapter is subdivided into smaller paragraphs so that they may be systematically memorized. Among the laws in the various topics, some consist of rules in reference to a single Biblical precept. This would be the case when such a precept is rich in traditional matter and forms a single topic. Other sections include rules referring to several precepts when these all belong to one topic. For the work follows the order of topics and is not planned according to the number of precepts, as will be explained to the reader.

I have seen fit to divide this work into fourteen books.

#### FIRST BOOK.

I include in it all the precepts which constitute the very essence and principle of the faith taught by Moses, our teacher, and which it is necessary for one to know at the outset; as for example, acceptance of the unity of God, and the prohibition of idolatry. I have called this book: the Book of Knowledge.

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Text 4.

Moses Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Book One = Book of Knowledge, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," Chapter 1, nos. 1 – 6

Translated by Israel M. Sandman

(Capitalisation and punctuation added for the English translation)

1. The foundation of foundations and the pillar of the sciences (lit. wisdoms) is to know that there is a first existent (or: being). He<sup>1</sup> causes all existent things to exist. All existent things from the heavens to the earth and what is between them do not exist except from the trueness (or: realness) of His existence.
2. If it arises in (lit. upon) one's thought that He does not exist, then no other thing could exist.
3. And if it arises in one's thought that all existents other than He do not exist, He alone would be existent. He would not be negated by their negation. For all existents need Him, but He (may He be blessed) does not need them, not [any] one of them. Therefore, His trueness (or: realness) is not like the trueness (or: realness) of [any] one of them.
4. This is what the prophet said: "The Lord, God, is true (or: real)" (Jeremiah 10:10): He alone is the true (or: real), and no other has trueness like His trueness (or: realness like his realness). This is what the Torah says: "There is no other except

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<sup>1</sup> Or: It (Hebrew has no neuter pronoun; and English has no personal neuter pronoun.)

- for Him" (Deuteronomy 4:35), as if to say: aside from Him, there is no true (or: real) existent like Him.
5. It is this existent who is the God of the world, master of the entire earth. It is He who conducts the sphere with a power that does not have an end or depletion, with a power that does not have an interruption. For the sphere is constantly revolving, and it is impossible that it revolve without one who causes it to revolve. It is He (may He be blessed) who causes it to revolve, without a hand and without a body.
  6. The knowing of this thing is a positive commandment, for it is stated, "I am the Lord, your God" (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). And whoever raises up in his thought that there is another God, aside from this one, transgresses a negative [commandment], for it is stated, "You shall not have other gods before my face" (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7); and he denies the fundamental [principle] – for this is the great fundamental upon which everything is contingent.
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## CHAPTER II.

This God, honoured and revered, it is our duty to love and fear; as it is said "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God" (Deut. 6:5), and it is further said "Thou shalt fear the Lord, thy God" (Deut. 6:13).

2. And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great Name; even as David said "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:3). And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil affrighted, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge. And so David said "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers — what is man that Thou art mindful of Him?" (Ps. 8:4-5). In harmony with these sentiments, I shall explain some large, general aspects of the Works of the Sovereign of the Universe, that they may serve the intelligent individual as a door to the love of God, even as our sages have remarked in connection with the theme of the love of God, "Observe the Universe and hence, you will realize Him who spake and the world was."

3. All that the Holy God, blessed be He, created in His universe falls into three divisions. Some are creatures consisting of substance and form, continuously coming into being and decaying. Such are bodies of human creatures and other animals, plants and minerals. Others are creatures consisting of substance and form which do not however like those of the first category, change, from one body to another or from one form to another, but retain their form permanently in their substance, not varying like the members of the former class. Such are the heavenly spheres and the stars placed in them. Their substance is not like other substances nor are their forms like other forms. Others again are creatures that consist of form without substance. These are the angels. For the angels are not material bodies, but only forms distinguished from each other.

4. What then is meant when the prophets say that they saw an angel of fire, possessing wings? Such descriptions are to be understood as prophetic visions and are to be taken in an allegorical sense. They are meant to indicate that the angel is not corporeal and has no gravity like bodies which have weight. Thus too, it is said "For the Lord, thy God, is a devouring fire" (Deut. 4:24). Yet God is not fire. The expression is a metaphor. Similarly it is said "He makes his angels winds" (Ps. 104:4).

(Ibid. trans. Hyamson. Previous text from ch. II; following text from ch. IV)

10. The matters just discussed are like a drop in a bucket, and are very deep, but are not as deep as those treated in the First and Second Chapters. The exposition of the topics dealt with in the Third and Fourth Chapters, is termed *Maaseh Bereshith* (cosmogony). Our ancient sages enjoined us that these matters are not to be expounded in public, but should be communicated and taught to an individual privately.

11. What distinction is there between the *Maaseh Mercabah* (Ezek. I) and the *Maaseh Bereshith*? The subject matter of *Maaseh Mercabah* is not expounded even to an individual unless he is wise and able to draw conclusions independently; and then, only the heads of the subjects are communicated to him. But the topics of the *Maaseh Bereshith* are taught to an individual; and even if he is unable to form independent conclusions we nevertheless teach him as much as he is capable of learning on these matters. Why is the subject not taught in public? Because not every one possesses the breadth of intellect requisite for obtaining an accurate grasp of the meaning and interpretation of all its contents.

12. When a man reflects on these things, studies all these created beings, from the angels and spheres down to human beings and so on, and realises the Divine Wisdom manifested in them all, his love for God will increase, his soul will thirst, his very flesh will yearn, to love God. He will be filled with fear and trembling, as he becomes conscious of his own lowly condition, poverty and insignificance, and compares himself with any of the great and holy bodies; still more when he compares himself with any one of the pure forms that are incorporeal and have never had association with corporeal substance. He will then realise that he is a vessel full of shame, dishonour and reproach, empty and deficient.

13. The topics connected with these five precepts, treated in the above four chapters, are what our wise men called *Pardes*, (Paradise), as in the passage "Four went into *Pardes*" (T.B. Chagiga 14). And although those four were great men of Israel and great sages, they did not all possess the capacity to know and grasp these subjects clearly. Therefore, I say that it is not proper to dally in *Pardes* till one has first filled oneself with bread and meat; by which I mean knowledge of what is permitted and what forbidden, and similar distinctions in other classes of precepts. Although these last subjects were called by the sages "a small thing" (when they say "A great thing, *Maaseh Mercabah*; a small thing, the discussion of *Abaye* and *Rava*"), still they should have the precedence. For the knowledge of these things gives primarily composure to the mind. They are the precious boon bestowed by God, to promote social well-being on earth, and enable men to obtain bliss in the life hereafter. Moreover, the knowledge of them is within the reach of all, young and old, men and women; those gifted with great intellectual capacity as well as those whose intelligence is limited.

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Text 5.

Book 14 = Book of Judges. Laws of Kings and their Wars, containing 23 commandments, 10 positive commandments, and 13 negative commandments; and these are their details: 1. To appoint a king in Israel ...