

BS"D Soul Prayer, Class #1, September 3, 2019¹

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אל אדון על כל המעשים. ברוך ומבורך בפי כל הנשמה: גדלו וטובו מלא עולם. דעת ותבונה טובבים הודו: המתנאה על חיות הקדש. ונהדר בכבוד על המרכבה: זכות ומישור לפני כסאו. חסד ורחמים מלא כבודו: טובים מאורות שבראם אלהינו. יצרם בדעת בבינה ובהשכל: נח וגבורה נתן בהם. להיות מושלים בקרב תבל: מלאים זיו ומפיקים נוגה. נאה זיום בכל העולם: שמחים בצאתם ששים בבוואם. עושים באימה רצון קוניהם: פאר וכבוד נותנים לשמו. צהלה ורנה לזכר מלכותו: קרא לשמש ויזרח אור. ראה והתקין צורת הלבנה: שבה נותנים לו כל צבא מרום. תפארת וגדולה שרפים וחיות ואופני הקדש:

Hashem is Master over **all** creation. Intrinsically blessed [above], He is the Source of all blessing [below – when His praises are declared] by the mouth of every living soul. His greatness and His goodness fill the world. Knowledge and understanding surround His Majesty. He is exalted beyond [the conception of] the holy *chayot*. He is resplendent in glory far above the Chariot [of His creation]. The luminaries that our God created are for our benefit. He fashioned them with knowledge, with understanding, and with intelligence. He placed [His] power and strength within them, to be governors (ruling planets) over the earth plane. They are filled with [His] light and emit [His] glow. Their radiance is a delight for the entire world. They rejoice at their rising and exult at their setting. They perform the will of their Owner with awe. They render glory and honor to His name...The entire heavenly host offers Him praise. The holy *seraphim*, *chayot*, and *ophanim* [declare His] splendor and greatness.

This poem follows the *aleph-beit* in order to emphasize that the “orderly development of creation” is a lens through which to view the Creator who hides (*alam*) behind the scenes of His world (*olam*). It is also a treatise that describes the essential difference between the prophetic teachings of the Torah and all man-made religions, mythologies, and cults. It deals with the “problem” of Hashem’s hiddenness – both His transcendent hiddenness above and beyond this world, and His immanent hiddenness within this world:

Hashem Himself is hidden and beyond His creation. We know Him only through His creation. The problem is that the creative process unfolds from above to below – from transcendence to immanence – and involves a necessary diminution of Hashem’s light at each successive stage. This descending order of revelation results in the near-total concealment of Hashem’s presence (immanence) in the physical universe.

Mankind’s task from the very beginning was to see through the smoke-screen or veil of spacetime, to detect Hashem’s “fingerprints” everywhere, and to acknowledge the ultimate oneness of the Creator behind the almost infinite multiplicity of His creation. The generations that followed Adam, however, reacted against this pure, monotheistic notion of God. They worshipped various deities and powers as a coverup in order to glorify their own human power and glory. They especially utilized the “luminous bodies of the heavens” to justify their idolatry. “After all,” they said, “Hashem is invisible. He must have intended that we offer our praise to His starry servants.” What they really meant was that Hashem, the Eternal One, the Infinite Mind, cannot be controlled and manipulated. They decided, therefore, to worship the kinds of gods that could be appeased by the proper methods. Unlike Hashem, who is only pleased and appeased by moral action, the power-gods of the ancient world were appeasable by lots of gold, human blood, etc.; commodities which could be obtained through war and cruel conquest. Rambam describes this process of degeneration from pure monotheism (Rambam, *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* 1:1):

In the days of Enosh, the people fell into gross error, and the counsel of the wise men of that generation was idiotic. Enosh himself was among those who committed the error. Their error was this: They said: “In view of the fact that God created the stars and celestial spheres to guide the world, setting them on high and honoring them, and in view of the fact that they are His ministering servants, they therefore deserve to be praised, glorified, and honored. It is the will of the blessed God that we glorify and honor anyone or anything which He has glorified and honored, just as a king desires that respect be shown those who stand and minister before him, since this is an indirect way of honoring the king himself.” When this idea entered their minds, they began building temples in honor of the stars and offered sacrifices to them, praising them in speech and prostrating themselves before them, in order to win the favor of the Creator, according to their wrong thinking...

In the course of time, false prophets arose among men and asserted that God had expressly commanded them: Worship that particular star, or all the stars; offer such and such sacrifices and libations to it; erect a temple for it; draw a figure of it, that all the people may worship it...So they began to carve figures in the temples, under the trees and on the mountain-tops and the hills...Other impostors sprang up and declared that the star itself or the celestial sphere or the angel “spoke” with them and said to them: Worship me in such and such a fashion...Gradually, the custom of worshipping idols, and sacrificing to them, according to the various rites, spread throughout the world. As time passed, the awesome and revered name of God vanished from the lips and minds of all human beings and they knew Him no more. All the common people...thus only knew the idols of wood and

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stone and the temples...The world degenerated in this manner until our father Avraham was born...He broke the idols [and the ideologies that supported them] and began to instruct the people that it was wrong to worship anything but the Creator of the universe...Avraham taught that the entire heavenly host offers praise to Hashem...Their very existence is a song of glory and honor to Him alone!

Rambam – Yesodey HaTorah 1

(1) *Yesod Ha'yesodot Ve'amud Ha'chokhmot* (the foundation of all foundations and the pillar of all wisdoms) is the realization that there is a *Matzuy Rishon* (First Being, First Source of existence), *veHu mamtzi* (who constantly brings into existence) *kol nimitza* (all that exists); *ve'khol ha'nimitza'im* (and all existences) from the heavens to the earth and everywhere in between, *lo nimitze'u ela* (exist only) *me'amat himatzo* (because of the reality of His being the source of all existence).

(2) And if one could conceive *sh'Hu eino matzuy* (that He is not the source of existence), *ein davar acher yakhol le'himatzo* (nothing else could exist). (3) If, however, one could conceive *sh'Ein kol ha'nimtzaim mi'levado me'tzuyim* (that nothing else existed besides Him), *Hu levado yihiyeh matzuy* (He alone would continue to exist). His existence would not be affected by their lack of existence, for all that exists depends on Him [i.e., has only contingent existence], but He, blessed be He, is not affected by [and certainly does not depend on] them at all. We can therefore conclude that *ein amitato ke'anitat echad mehem* (His absolute existence is unlike the existence of anything else). (4) This is what the prophet meant when he said, "*Havayah Elohim emet*—Hashem is the ultimate reality" (Jeremiah 10:10). His alone is the reality [behind all existence]; nothing else shares His level of reality. This is what the Torah means when it says, "*Ein od mi'levado*—there is nothing besides Him" (Deuteronomy 4:35). That is, *ein sham matzuy emet mi'levado kamoto* (there is no other true absolute source of existence besides Him or like Him).

(7) *Eloah zeh echad* (this God—about whom we are speaking—is one/singular). He is not two or more, but one. *Sh'Ein ke'yichudo echad min ha'achadim ha'nimtzaim ba'olam* (no other unity/singularity exists in the world that can be likened to His). He is not one like a member of a species, which still encompasses many individuals. He is not one like a physical body/object, which can be divided into parts and dimensions. *Ela yichud sh'Ein yichud acher kamoto ba'olam* (rather, His oneness is such that there is no other unity like it in the entire world)...It is therefore not associated with anything physical. Since He is not physical, He is impervious to physical effects. For all these reasons, it is impossible for there to be more than one Infinite Being. To know this is a commandment of the Torah, as it is written, "*Shma Yisrael Havayah Eloheinu Havayah echad*—hear, O Israel, Hashem is our God. Hashem is ONE" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

(8) It is clearly expressed both in the Torah and in the Prophets that God has neither a body nor any other physical attributes... (9) All such expressions as..."the hand of God," "the eyes of God," and "the ears of God," are actually adaptations to human intellect which can only think in terms of the physical...They are all anthropomorphic metaphors...God's true nature is beyond the reach of the human intellect. Man is simply incapable of grasping or understanding...

(11) Since God is not a body or any other kind of physical entity, it is obvious that nothing associated with the physical can apply to Him. We cannot apply to Him such concepts as combination or separation, position or size, up high or down low, right or left, back or front, sitting or standing. He likewise does not exist in time. Such concepts as beginning, end, and age do not apply to Him. God does not change, since there is nothing that can cause Him to change...

(12) We must therefore realize that whenever the Torah or Prophets speak about God, they do so in a metaphorical and allegorical manner. This is true of the expressions mentioned earlier. It is also true of such expressions as "He who sits in the heavens laughs..." (Psalm 2:4), "They have provoked Me to anger with their vanity" (Deuteronomy 32:21), and "As God rejoiced over you..." (*ibid.* 28:63). Regarding all such statements, our Sages say that "the Torah speaks in the language of man" (*Berakhot* 31b). God Himself thus told His prophet, "Do they indeed provoke Me to anger!" (Jeremiah 7:19). He also said, "I am Havayah, I do not change!" (Malakhi 3:6). But if God would be happy at some times and angry at others, He would indeed change. [It is therefore obvious that none of these states can apply to Him at all.] All these states exist only in physical beings, living in this lowly, dark world, "dwellers in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust" (Job 4:19). God, however, is on a much higher plane than any of these things.