

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2026, Term II.4

Moses Maimonides (1138-1204), *Treatise on Resurrection*

Let the discerning student know that our intent in this treatise is to explain that in which we believe relating to this fundamental principle concerning which controversy arose among the scholars, and that is the resurrection of the dead. This treatise contains nothing new or additional to that which we have already said in our *Commentary on the Mishnah* and the *Mishneh Torah*; rather it contains a repetition of subjects and general lengthening (of discussion) and expansion of explanations so that even women and the uneducated can understand it; and no more. And I say that the resurrection of the dead which is widely known and accepted among our people, and which is acknowledged by all branches (of our nation), and which is often cited in prayers and in legends and in supplications composed by the prophets and the greatest of our Sages, and which are found throughout the Talmud and homiletical commentaries on Scripture, means that the soul will return to its body after its separation. This is a premise about which there is no disagreement among the nation and this (matter) requires no interpretation. It is not permissible for any religious Jew to support a man who believes the opposite.

22. I will presently explain in this treatise why these Scriptural passages are not interpreted allegorically as we interpret many other passages in the Torah which we understand in other than the literal sense. Thus, the resurrection of the dead, which is the return of the soul to the body after death, has been mentioned by Daniel in such a way that it cannot be interpreted allegorically. For he said: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence." And the angel said to him: "As for you, go thy way till the end be, and thou shalt rest, and shalt stand up to thy lot, at the end of the days."

23. It is also apparent to us from those (Talmudic) statements that those individuals whose souls return to their bodies (after death) will eat and drink and engage in sexual intercourse and sire children and die after an extremely long life like the life which will exist during the days of the Messiah.

24. Further, the life following which there is no death, is the life in the world to come because there are no (physical) bodies there. We firmly believe - and this is the truth which every intelligent person accepts - that in the world to come souls without bodies will exist like angels.

25. Verily, the existence of the entire body is for a single goal and that is to receive nutrition for the maintenance of the body and for the bearing of children in the likeness (of the parents) in order to maintain the human race. And when that goal is removed because there is no longer a need therefor, that is to say in the world to come - and this has already been explained to us by many of our Sages, that "there is no eating or drinking or sexual intercourse there" - it is clear that the body will not exist. For the Lord, blessed be He, would not let anything exist without a purpose and would not create anything except for a reason.

26. The reason for all this is as we have explained (elsewhere) that the multitude of people do not conceive existence unless in connection with a body or that which is found within a body; and that which is not a body nor a property of the body has for them no existence. Whenever they wish to strengthen the existence of a certain matter, they add (physical) substance to it, that is to say that they overemphasize the essence of its substance.

27. Verily, we vehemently deny and we cleanse ourselves before Almighty God of the (accusation attributed to us that we espouse the) treatise that the soul will never return to the body and that it is impossible for that to occur. For such a denial (in the resurrection of the dead) leads to the denial of all miracles (chronicled in the Bible) and the denial of miracles is equivalent to denying the existence of God and abandonment of our faith. For we do consider the resurrection of the dead to be a cardinal principle of the Torah.

29. Since we find that the words of the prophet cannot bear any meaning (but the literal one) in that it states that the soul will return to the body, the definiteness of this prophetic narrative becomes established. In the final analysis, the prophetic narrative is met with once or twice, and the ancient and modern Sages of Israel mention it innumerable times, and it has become widely known among our people and accepted by them, that the soul of a person returns to the body. This is the accepted context of the resurrection of the body wherever it is mentioned by a scholar or an author.

30. Some people have raised doubts about our words at the end of our *Composition* where we state the following: “Do not think that the King Messiah will have to perform signs and wonders, bring anything new into being, resurrect the dead or do similar things.” We cited evidence for this assertion in our explanation. Some people with weak intellects think that this assertion represents a denial in the resurrection of the dead and that it contradicts what we explained in the *Commentary on the Mishnah* that “the resurrection of the dead is a cardinal principle of the Torah.” This matter is all very clear, there is no doubt about it nor any contradiction. That which we asserted that the Messiah will not be required to perform a miracle such as splitting the sea or resurrecting a dead person in a miraculous way means that a miracle will not be asked of him since the prophets whose prophecies have been verified have foretold his advent. It does not follow from this treatise that the Almighty, at the time of His choice, will not resurrect those He wishes to resurrect, whether during the era of the Messiah or before him or after his death.

31. And in our *Composition* we clearly proved our thesis from the Sages' statement that the Messianic era will not differ from the order of creation.

32. For the most cherished and beloved thing to the multitude of Torah-observant people, because of their ignorance, is to consider the Torah and human intellect to be two opposite poles. Everything which is incomprehensible to their intellect they consider to be a miracle. They flee from explaining something as a natural phenomenon whether it pertains to something recorded in the past, or in regard to something which is discernible at the present time, or whether it relates to something which is written will happen in the future. We, on the other hand, strive to reconcile the Torah with human intellect and regard everything in its natural light wherever possible, unless it is self-evident therefrom that it is of miraculous connotation and cannot be interpreted at all; then we are forced to say that it is a miracle.

34. It is well known that we are very opposed to changing the order of creation. Let those who precede or follow us who are mistaken remain mistaken in that they cannot differentiate between miraculous events which do not endure and which are not permanent but occur as a temporary necessity or to accredit a prophet - and natural events which always recur and which represent the laws of nature which the Sages of blessed memory explained by repeatedly stating “the world follows the laws of nature.” They also said: “no proof can be brought from miraculous events.” And Solomon said: “For whatsoever God doeth shall be forever; nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it.” It is thus clear that natural events always follow natural laws.

35. It seems to me that that which led these people to be mistaken and to doubt our pronouncements about the resurrection of the dead is the fact that we described the world to come at great lengths by explaining verified treatises and citing all the statements of the prophets and the Sages which pertain thereto. When, however, we discussed the resurrection of the dead, we did so in few words and merely said that the resurrection of the dead is a cardinal principle of our faith. There are two reasons for this (lengthy discussion of the world to come and brief mention of the resurrection of the dead). The first is that all our compositions are concise and pure. And when we write, we write about subjects in a concise manner.

36. The second reason is that descanting should only be used to portray an obscure subject so that its features are completely elucidated or when bringing proof to the truth of that subject. This approach is needed for three types of wisdom; namely, didactic sciences, natural sciences, and theological sciences. For often times a subject in these (sciences) is obscure and its understanding is difficult until all its aspects have been adequately explained. Many times the subject to be elucidated requires numerous proofs for the verification of the truth of the subject whose truth one is seeking to establish. On the other hand, a miraculous event is not obscure nor difficult (to comprehend). It is impossible to bring proof to verify the truth of that (miracle) which has already occurred or that which we are (Divinely) promised will come to pass; rather we perceive it with our senses or accept it (as fact) from one who personally witnessed it. It is for this reason that we commented (at length) about the world to come and explained it to those who find it obscure and to show that this matter (of the world to come) is part of the natural course of events, that is to say, the immortality of the soul.

37. On the other hand, the resurrection of the dead is one of the miracles and is absolutely explicit. This matter is (clearly) understood and needs only that we believe in it as we cited in the true narrative. It is a matter outside the laws of nature and one cannot prove it in a speculative manner. Indeed, miracles do occur and are all accepted (by us) through tradition and there is no other way. What, therefore, could we say further about it and why (should we discuss it) at length? Do those who ask of us that we cite speculative proofs think that such proofs would make the resurrection of the dead an established fact?

38. [Two questions arise regarding the Scriptural teaching on the resurrection.] The first of these is to elucidate the subject of those Scriptural passages which are very numerous and which seem to clearly prove that resurrection of the dead is impossible. These (passages) seemingly cannot be interpreted (otherwise); for instance, it is written: “If a man die, may he live again?” It is also written: “As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more;” and “Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death;” such phrases are numerous in the book of Job. And Hezekiah said: “They that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth; the living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day” thus proving that they that

go down into the pit are dead (forever). And it is also written: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again." And it is written: "Wilt Thou work wonders for the dead? Or shall the shades arise and give Thee thanks? Selah." And it is written: "A wind passeth away, and cometh not again." If one delves into such Scriptural verses, one finds that they all totally negate the resurrection of the dead except for some literal interpretations in Isaiah. With a little reflection, it becomes clear that there is doubt as to whether such (a verse in Isaiah) is an allegory or is really true. The following clearly-stated verses in Daniel are also responsible for the great confusion among the people: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake," and "And thou shalt rest, and shalt stand up to thy lot, at the end of the days." Some of these (Scriptural verses) have resulted in great doubts about this fundamental principle of the resurrection of the dead. Even some of those who (fully) believe in this fundamental principle have been forced to explain each of these aforementioned Scriptural verses (which negate resurrection) with extremely farfetched explanations in order to render them acceptable.

39. The second question relates to the fact that the Torah does not mention this fundamental principle at all, either in the form of an allusion and certainly not explicitly. If one thinks that it is impossible that the Torah should not cite even allusions to this fundamental principle, - and when the Sages quote verses when they ask "How do we know that the resurrection of the dead is based on the Torah?," their intent is to show that these are hidden allusions - and all the more so because the Sages differ among these (verses), then this second question would be: why is this subject not mentioned explicitly and with such clarity that no interpretation would be needed? Rather, according to the person who thinks, it seems like the citation of a person who states something cryptically because he wishes to conceal it.

40. In response to the first question, I hereby state that the words of the prophets and the language of the (Holy) books are narratives describing the existence of nature in its usual manner. It is well known that nature as it exists includes the union of the females of living beings with their males and the birth of like offspring, and the gradual growth of the offspring until that living being dies. It is not part of nature that that being return and exist again after its death. However, it is part of nature that when living beings die, those beings never return; rather they die and slowly dissolve until they disintegrate into the elements and the original substance from which they came, so that not even a limited part is recognizable as part of (the dead) about which it could be said: this was such and such. Man alone is endowed with a measure of Godliness and, therefore, of necessity, (this) part of him remains and does not perish nor become lost. However, the body of man perishes like all other living beings. A person who searches vigorously into these deep matters can also provide evidence from searching proofs on this subject, that is to say the immortality of the soul. This is something which is part of nature and this is what the books of prophecy call the soul or the spirit in partnership with God. And the perishing of the body and its return to the elements from which that species was formed is as stated in Scriptures: "And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it." This is the law of nature.

41. All these Scriptural verses must be understood in this manner. There is no difference between the verse "If a man die, may he live again?" and the verse "Shall we draw water for you from this rock?" because neither is part of nature and is in fact impossible by natural means. Rather the water issued out of the rock through a miracle. So, too, the resurrection of the dead is one of the (Divine) miracles. Similarly, all the (Scriptural verses) which seem to be in opposition to the (doctrine of the) return of the dead refer to natural means, but such (verses) do not contradict the return of the dead if the Almighty wishes them to return.

42. Know that the denial of the return of the soul to the body is based on one of two reasons: either the denier rejects (the resurrection of the dead) because it is not a natural phenomenon and, according to this reason, he is forced to deny also all the miracles since they are unnatural phenomena; or he rejects (resurrection) because it is not (explicitly) stated in a Scriptural verse and he does not recognize the true narratives of the miraculous events. We have already explained that there are Scriptural verses, albeit few, which prove the return of the dead. And if he asserts that we should interpret those verses as we interpret others, we would say to him: that which forces you to explain (these verses allegorically) is the fact that the return of the dead is not natural and, therefore, you interpret these Scriptural verses so that they coincide with natural phenomena; similarly you are required to explain the conversion of the stick to a serpent and the descent of the manna and the standing (of the Jews) at Mt. Sinai and the pillar of fire and cloud; all these you are forced to interpret in a way that they coincide with natural phenomena. But we have already explained in the *Guide for the Perplexed* when we discussed the inception of the world that if one believes in the creation *ex nihilo* of the world one is of necessity forced to believe that all the miracles (in the Torah) are possible, and among these is the possibility of the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, we believe in every possible occurrence, if it is related to us by a prophet, and we do not find it necessary to interpret it (allegorically) nor to remove it from its literal meaning.

43. Nevertheless, certain things whose literal meanings are impossible such as the corporeality of God must be interpreted (allegorically). However, that which is possible remains as is. He who strives to explain the resurrection of the dead in such a way that the soul does not return to the body does so because he believes that it is inconceivable to the human intellect and is not part of the laws of nature. We believe in these fundamental principles and consider among them the resurrection of the dead in its literal meaning which we accept as a basic tenet of the Torah. And we say that it is not proper to interpret (allegorically) the two explicit Scriptural verses which provide clear evidence thereto and which cannot support any (allegorical) interpretation.

44. Now, in regard to the answer to the second question, that is to say, why is the resurrection of the dead not mentioned in the Torah, the answer is as I will proceed to state: Know that it is widely appreciated and accepted that the whole Torah (to which we adhere) was not conceived by Moses our Teacher; rather it is entirely from the Almighty. We are, therefore, faced with the need to explore the question in intelligent ways in that God commented to us (in His Torah) about life in the world to come but did not explain the resurrection of the dead to us at all. The reason for this is that the resurrection of the dead will indeed occur as a miraculous event as we have explained, and the credibility of such an event can only be based on the words of the prophet. At that time (nearly) all of mankind belonged to the sect of Sabians who believed in the eternity of the world and who considered the Almighty to be the spirit of the planets as we have explained in the *Guide for the Perplexed*. And they deny the transmission of prophecy from God to mankind.

45. According to their belief, they are forced to deny (the verity of) miracles and attribute them to sorcery and cunning. Thus we perceive them attempting to belie the miracles of Moses our Teacher of blessed memory with their enchantments: "For they cast down every man his rod." We also perceive how the (Israelites) themselves wondered: "We have seen this day that God doth speak with man, and he liveth" showing that prophecy was something they thought impossible. How then could the Torah describe a basic tenet which requires belief in (the words of) a prophet to someone to whom the whole concept of prophecy is unacceptable? They who believe in the eternity of the world also totally reject

this (basic tenet). Were it not for (our belief) in miracles, we would not be able to consider resurrection of the dead as a possible occurrence.

46. And when Almighty God wished to give the Torah to mankind and to make known through the prophets His positive and negative commandments throughout the world, as it is written: “And that My name may be declared throughout all the earth,” - He produced the great miracles recorded throughout the Torah to authenticate thereby the prophecy of the prophets and the creation of the world. For a true miracle is clear proof of the creation of the world as we have explained in the *Guide for the Perplexed*. And He did not exclude them from the matters relating to this world such as reward and punishment, and from natural phenomena such as the immortality of the soul or its perdition, as we have mentioned, that is to say the world to come, and *kareth*. Other than that, He cites nothing more (in the Torah) about resurrection. The matter continued this way until this basic tenet became accepted and verified after the passage of generations. And there remained no doubt about the (truth of) the prophecies of the prophets nor about the occurrence of miracles. After that, the prophets narrated to us that which they were told by the Almighty concerning the resurrection of the dead and it became easy to accept it.

47. And one finds that the Almighty Himself took such an approach with the Israelites. He said to them: “And God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, lest peradventure, the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.” Just as He gradually acclimatized them to matters of the world for fear lest they return to Egypt and the Divine plan for them become nullified, so, too, He further feared that they would not accept this tenet, that is to say, resurrection, and the intended goal for them in this regard would also be nullified. How could they, therefore, not be also gradually acclimatized to beliefs (in the tenets of Judaism)? And their leader and their acclimatizer is one (and the same). And it is well known that those people to whom the Almighty wished to have the Torah understood in their time adopted erroneous ideas. It was said of them at the end of the forty years (of desert wandering) after they had seen all the miraculous acts of God: “But the Lord hath not given you an heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.” And God, may He be blessed, knew that if He would tell them about the tenet of the resurrection of the dead, it would be strange to them and extremely difficult to accept. And they also made light of transgressions since the punishment therefor would not occur until much later. And, therefore, He frightened them and assured them of both good and bad which would occur speedily: “if thou shalt hearken (you will be speedily rewarded); if thou shalt not hearken (you will be speedily punished);” and because of this, it was easier to accept and more beneficial. This, too, is of great benefit, that is to say listening (to God's commandments) improves one's worldly matters and disobedience makes them perish.

48. It is already mentioned in the Torah that it is a permanent sign, that is to say the improvement of things (for Jews) by serving (the Lord) and their loss by disobedience. He said: “And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed forever.” For this reason, the Sages said: “Israel is not under the influence of the constellations,” that is to say, their success or their failure is not governed by natural causes nor by happenstance but is dependent upon serving or disobeying (the Lord). And this sign is greater than any other sign.

49. And that which now (at the conclusion of our treatise) remains for us to elucidate - even though it is more important than all which has been said above - is that miracles are sometimes outside the realm of nature, such as the conversion of the rod (of Moses) to a serpent and the opening of the earth (which swallowed) Korach and his followers and the splitting of the (Red) sea. Other times, miracles occur in

manners that are consistent with the laws of nature such as (the plagues of) locusts and hail and pestilence in Egypt. It is common that these types of occurrences happen at certain times and in certain places such as the rending of the altar of Jeroboam at the bidding of the man of God: This is the sign which the Lord hath spoken: "Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out," for it is not unusual that a building may split, especially when newly constructed. Similarly, the inundating rains that fell at the time of the harvest through (the prayer of) Samuel, and the blessings and the curses which are mentioned in the Torah - for each of these events can occur in any country and at any time, and these are all within the realm of possibility if one contemplates thereon.

50. However, these incidents which are within the realm of possibility are in fact miracles because (they fulfill) one or all three of the following conditions. The first of these is that the event occurred at precisely the time stated by the prophet as it happened in the case of Samuel: "'I will call unto the Lord that He may send thunder and rain' ... so Samuel called unto the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day," and as happened to the man of God who came from Judah: "The altar also was rent and the ashes poured out from the altar according to the sign which the man of God had given." The second condition is that the event occurred as an extremely rare type of occurrence such as the case of the locusts (where it states): "before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such," because the event occurred only in relation to a specific nation or a specific place or a specific severity, all of which are extremely unusual, although possible. The third condition is the protraction and renewal and constancy of that event such as the blessings and the curses. For if they occurred only once or twice, it would not have been (thought of as) a miracle and would have been considered as a chance occurrence. This matter has already been elucidated in the Torah where it is written: "And if ye walk contrary unto Me, and will not hearken unto Me," that is to say if you assume that an affliction which befalls you is a chance occurrence and not (Divine) punishment (for disobedience), the Almighty states that He will protract that suffering because of His burning anger in that you considered it as a chance occurrence, and it is written: "And if ye walk contrary unto Me, then I will walk contrary unto you in fury."

51. After we have explained all this, know that a miracle that occurs outside the realm of nature is not at all protracted and is not prolonged and does not persist unchanged. For were it to become permanent, it would lead to doubt concerning (the genuineness of) that miracle; had the staff remained a snake, one might suggest that it was a snake from the beginning. For this reason, the miracle was proven genuine when it reverted to being a staff: "and it became a rod in his hand." It is because of this fundamental principle which I have elucidated that I do not believe in the permanence of an occurrence which is outside of nature as we have explained in this treatise. On the other hand, concerning a miracle which occurs through natural means, the more permanent it becomes and the longer it lasts, the more likely it is to be a miracle. For this reason, we believe that the permanence of the blessings and the curses, - blessings for serving (the Lord) and curses if Israel constantly disobeys (the Lord) - proves that they are a sign and a miracle as we explained.

51. Someone may ask: why was this miracle shown to them rather than the ultimate miracle, that is to say, the resurrection of the dead and reward and punishment after death to the soul and the body? This question would be equivalent to asking: why did (Moses), the servant of God, effect a miracle by having the staff change into a snake rather than change a stone into a lion? This whole matter is dependent upon Divine wisdom of which we don't understand even a small amount, especially in view of the fact that we

have already discussed the classification of this wisdom. Perhaps, there is a reason or there are many other reasons which dictate Divine wisdom to act in this manner, but we cannot fathom them.

53. And it is not appropriate for any intelligent person to criticize us for repeating a single topic many times in this treatise or for the length of the explanation of this topic which doesn't require lengthy explanations. For I composed this treatise (solely) for the multitude of people who are in doubt about our clearly enunciated statements (in our other writings) and for those who criticize the brevity of our words in regard to the resurrection of the dead. On the other hand, mere hints suffice for those who are completely wise. For them it is not necessary to repeat nor to provide lengthy explanations since brief summaries are adequate as we provided for all these profound subjects in the *Guide for The Perplexed* and in all our compositions conforming to the teaching of our Sages of blessed memory: "He said to him: explain it. The latter replied: a wise man needs no explanation. He said to him: repeat it. The latter replied: a wise man needs no repetition." It is thus clear to you that words to the wise do not require repetition or elucidation - give (a little) to a wise man and he will be yet wiser. On the other hand, the multitude of people require both things together: "precept by precept, precept by precept, line by line, line by line." And with all that they understand a little: "here a little, there a little." Indeed it is appropriate to speak to each group according to its ability. And may Almighty God, because of His kindness, help us to maintain righteousness in word and in deed and save us from sin and from error. Amen, Amen.

Completed is the Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Chapter 8

The good that is hidden for the righteous is the life of the world to come. This will be life which is not accompanied by death and good which is not accompanied by evil. The Torah alludes to this in [the promise, Deuteronomy 22:7]: "So that good will be granted you and you will live long." The oral tradition explains: "So that good will be granted you" - in the world that is entirely good; "and you will live long" - in the world which is endlessly long, the world to come. The reward of the righteous is that they will merit this pleasure and take part in this good. The retribution of the wicked is that they will not merit this life. Rather, they will be cut off and die. Whoever does not merit this life is [truly] dead and will not live forever. Rather, he will be cut off in his wickedness and perish as a beast. This is the intent of the meaning of the term *karet* in the Torah as [Numbers 15:31] states: "That soul shall surely be cut off." [Based on the repetition of the verb,] the oral tradition explains: *hikaret* means to be cut off in this world and *tikaret*, to be cut off in the world to come. After these souls become separated from bodies in this world, they will not merit the life of the world to come. Rather, even in the world to come, they will be cut off.

In the world to come, there is no body or physical form, only the souls of the righteous alone, without a body, like the ministering angels. Since there is no physical form, there is neither eating, drinking, nor any of the other bodily functions of this world like sitting, standing, sleeping, death, sadness, laughter, and the like. Thus, the Sages of the previous ages declared: "In the world to come, there is neither eating, drinking, nor sexual relations. Rather, the righteous will sit with their crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence." From that statement, it is clear that there is no body, for there is no eating or drinking. They will comprehend the truth of Godliness which they cannot grasp while in a dark and humble body.