

2.5 The encompassing orb is that which configures the materials [that is, all matter], impresses them and puts them in order; it is that which fixes the form of every material.¹⁷ It sets the materials in motion so that they receive the forms, and it sets the forms in motion so that they trace themselves within the materials. [This takes place] through

the motion of the forces that are within it, so that existence emerges from potentiality to actuality, and so that things attain their final ends.

Understand this in connection with what we said earlier concerning the object of Moses' request when he said, *let me know Your ways* [Ex. 33.13]. But as for his saying (may his memory be blessed), *by His name YaH* [Ps. 68.5]: they (may their memory be blessed) have already said, "The world was created by means of half of the Name."¹⁸ They meant to say that all that exists has come to be from only part of His perfection (may He be exalted), not from all of His perfection; than is the intention of their saying, "half of the Name".

In the preceding I have already noted that existence consists of two parts, necessity and possibility.¹⁹ The necessity of corporeal existence belongs to the part of possibility.²⁰ *YaH* is half of *YHWH*. The proof of all of this—that is, that the cause of the existence of these existents whose existence consists of matter and form, and that which gives them their forms, is the motion of the encompassing orb (*arevot*)—is their saying (may their memory be blessed), "*arevot*, which contains correct judgment (*sedeq*), belief (*sedeqah*), justice, storehouses of life, storehouses of peace, storehouses of blessing, the soul of the righteous, souls and spirits that shall yet be created, and the dew by means of which the Holy One (Blessed be He) shall revive the dead."²¹

I have seen fit here to comment upon these notions, just as they (may their memory be blessed) have commented upon them for us.²² The verse *who rides the heavens in your aid* [Deut. 33.26] has given us cause to do that. The meaning of this utterance is that He (may He be exalted) is master over the encompassing orb whose motion is the means by which all existents compounded of matter and form fall into order. It is already known and proven that He (may He be exalted) is master over the existents. He maintains them—that which is spiritual and that which is corporeal, the simple and the compound. For the purpose and intent of the text of the Torah—indeed its ultimate desire—is to instruct man and inform him about the hidden matters which he cannot attain unless it be through his knowledge of [that part of] existence that is compound.²³

Moreover, man cannot successfully grasp as they really are the things that God has brought into existence and governs.²⁴ Consequently, when He (may He be exalted) informed us that He is the one who governs and gives order to existence by means of the motion of

the encompassing [orb], He followed it up with the verse, *the dwelling place of the eternal God* [Deut 33.27]. That is to say, the eternal divine wisdom anticipated that this body [the encompassing orb] be the location of the brilliant and sublime lights that issue forth from His perfection (may He be exalted). Understand that the Targum has rendered [“dwelling place”] *mador*, that is, that it is the location of these spiritual forms. ...²⁵

After this introduction I shall return to my intention. They (may their memory be blessed) said, “*arevot*, in which are found correct judgment, belief, [etc.]” They did not say, “within which”. They meant to say that all of this is produced by means of its [the encompassing orb’s] motion.²⁶ It is that which configures the materials upon which the forms fall, one after the other. Had they said “within which”, it would have indicated that the spiritual takes its place within the corporeal just as a body may take its place within another body.

The first thing that you must know is their saying:²⁷ “correct judgment”. They meant by this to hint at the human intellect that emanates from the first necessary thing which commanded and said, *pursue correct judgment, correct judgment in order that you may live* [Deut. 16.20]. This refers to that which man verifies by means of the balance [scale] of the intellect;²⁸ it is true probity and its origin lies in the non-corporeal intellect which is where the forms of those things that are understood may ultimately be traced back to. It [the human intellect] particularizes them and distinguishes between them. Now those who are ignorant and remiss think that the final end [of probity] is the regulation of weights and measures. They do not know that intellect is the judge of all weights and measures, and that there is one form within the intellect and no more. For this reason the judges and constables corrected every deviation by means of their intellects. They did not derive the truth from sensible weights and measures; they did not allow something external, something other than themselves, to rule over them. Had they done so, they would have placed their trust in this weight or in that measure rather than in the intellect. If someone thinks that that is proper, he is really far from the truth! ²⁹

As for “belief”: This hints at those human powers that are constituted so as to receive the ethical and rational perfections, as He said (may He be exalted), *and he believed in God, and He considered it to be belief on his [Abraham’s] part* [Gen. 15.6]. If this was so with regard

to one virtue, then how much more so with regard to the perfection of the soul in all of the virtues! The proof that the soul's perfection with regard to ethics and reason is called belief is His saying (may He be exalted), *and it shall be belief on our part if we listen [or: obey] so that we perform all that this Torah says* [Deut. 6.25]. Understand that!

As for "justice": it means giving everyone their just due, both material requirements and mental representations, as it says, *I shall reprimand them about my judgments* [Jer. 1.16].

"Storehouses of life" hints at the source of the life of the souls; this is their awareness of all the existents and their representation of these to themselves. The opposite of life is death, and is the soul's severance from delight in the representation of all of the existents, as He said (may He be exalted), *choose life in order that you may live* [Deut. 30.19].³⁰

"Storehouses of peace" hints at the source of the union as well as the accommodation of the human soul and nature in one place [in the human organism].³¹ For they are opposed to each other, as it were, since form seeks out one goal and matter another. That is clear and evident with regard to man; that which his matter seeks is different from that which his soul seeks. Precisely because the opposites have been joined in one place, it is known necessarily that it is the result of a divine governance, not the governance of the orb, just as our master explained it in the chapter on governance in the *Guide*.³²

"Storehouses of blessing" hints at the source of that perfection, that is, the perfection of the form in all types of perfection, which comes about by means of its apprehension of the existents—the universal and particular, the whole and the details, substance and accident, the one and the many, cause and effect, eternal and created, etc.—according to what was noted in the portion *we-Elah Masa'ei*. The hint is found in His saying (may He be exalted) *and the Lord blessed Abraham with everything* [Gen. 24.1].

"The soul of the righteous." By this they mean those pure forms that are free from the exigencies of matter because they are bound to their own matters. Their source is there [the encompassing orb] and to there they return.³³ The souls that are hinted at here are those that have come to perfection. They have emerged from potentiality to actuality by means of the performance of the practical commandments. Understand this very well. I have already clarified it in the portion *we-Elah Masa'ei*.

“Souls and spirits that shall yet be created.” By this they hint at the forms that are collated to matters and potentially belong to them but have not come to actuality; as they said, “that shall yet be created”.

“The dew by means of which the Holy One (blessed be He) shall revive the dead.” That is a hint towards the divine efflux, that is the means of life for the souls that are found in these dark and lifeless bodies which are truly dead. If these forms are not accompanied by divine aid that rescues them from the exigencies of the matter within which they are submerged, they will perish and fade away.³⁴ Look at how His saying (may He be exalted) *why was the bush not consumed?* [Ex. 3.3] was explained in this midrash.

The sages (may their memory be blessed) said that when Israel heard that voice during the event at Mount Sinai, “their souls flew away upon hearing it, and the Holy One (blessed is He) brought down upon them the dew of resurrection and their souls returned.” These words mean that when they apprehended that voice, their souls linked up with the noncorporeal intellect. Nevertheless, they remained in the darkness of matter all the while their souls were engaged in that state [of intellectual ecstasy]. Had the noncorporeal [intellect] not dressed [the soul of each Israelite] with the forms, then that human soul would have dressed itself with imaginings and fantasies, something that would have caused it to err and deflected it from the equanimity of that apprehension.³⁵ Understand this. This is the most appropriate place [for this discussion] because here the Torah has come to its completion.³⁶

“The Sukkos festival, however, comes when the summer is turning to winter. It is a time when it is difficult to travel the roads, a time of hardship. It is a time when the people of Yisrael do not find it easy to come and go.

“Therefore, the Holy Blessed One said: ‘Stay over, and you and I will celebrate for yet one more day.’

“And indeed, we find that the Atzeres is for Hashem and for the people of Yisrael together. For it is written, You shall have a restraint (Bamidbar 29:35), and it is written, A restraint for God your Lord (Devarim 16:8).

“And it is also written, This is the day that God made, we will exult and rejoice on it (Tehillim 118:24).”

The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 55b):

Rabbi Levi said: “During the seven days of Sukkos a total of seventy oxen are brought as sacrifices. What is the significance of this number?

“It represents the seventy gentile nations of the world.

“And the single ox brought on Shemini Atzeres?

“It represents the Jewish nation which has been singled out from among them.

“There is an analogy to this. The servants of a mortal king of flesh and blood prepared a feast for him. On the final day of the festivities the king said to his favorite servant:

‘Make me a small meal so that I can have enjoyment from you alone.’”

Rabbi Yochanan said: “Woe is to the gentile nations, for they have suffered a loss and are not even aware of it. While the Bais Hamikdash was still standing there were sacrifices brought on the altar that atoned for them. Now, what is there to atone for them?”

There are some communities where it is customary to read the Book of Koheles on Shemini Atzeres. The Midrash finds mention of Shemini Atzeres in that which is written, Give a

portion to seven, and also to eight (Koheles 11:2). This is taken as a reference to the seven days of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres (Koheles Rabah 11:2). Shlomo Hamelech, however read the Book of Koheles at the assembly during the festival of Sukkos. Therefore, it would be appropriate to read it on Sukkos itself

The pious people of our early times used to rejoice in the Bais Hamikdash on this festival, because it was especially set aside for the Jewish people to celebrate with the Lord of their fathers. This joy was a holy joy for the sake of heaven, and it was very great. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 51a):

[The Mishnah says:] The pious people and men of deeds used to dance with lighted torches in their hands, singing songs and hymns of praise. And the Leviim played violins, harps, drums, cymbals, and countless instruments of every sort on the fifteen steps between the men's section and the women's section. These were the fifteen steps upon which the Leviim sang their daily songs. They corresponded to the fifteen Songs of the Steps from the Book of Tehillim.

The Talmud goes on (Sukkah 53a):

[The Gemara says:] Our rabbis have taught: Some of the celebrants would call out: "How fortunate is our youth, for it has not embarrassed our old age!"

These were the pious people and men of deeds who had always lived righteous lives.

Others would call out: "How fortunate is our old age, for it has atoned for our youth!"

These were the baalei teshuvah who had sinned and repented.

Both groups would call out: "Fortunate is the one who has not sinned! But let the Holy Blessed One forgive the one who has sinned."

It was taught: It was said of Hillel the Elder that when he

rejoiced at the water-drawing festivities on Sukkos he would say: "If the Divine Presence is here everyone is here, but if the Divine Presence is removed who will be here?"

"And the Holy Blessed One also says: 'If you will come to My house I will also come to your house, as it is written, In every place where I shall make My Name be mentioned I will come to you, and I will bless you (Shemos 20:24).'"

...It was taught: It was said of Rabban Shimeon the son of Gamaliel that when he rejoiced at the water-drawing festivities on Sukkos he would juggle eight flaming torches in the air, and they would not touch each other. He would drive both thumbs into the ground and bend over until he kissed the ground. No other part of his body touched the ground. This was something no one else could do. This was the keedah bow mentioned in the Scriptures.

...Our rabbis have taught: Whoever did not witness the celebration at the water-drawing festivities in the Bais Hamikdash on Sukkos never saw a true celebration.