

THE ESSAY ON RESURRECTION

During his lifetime, Maimonides achieved fame throughout Jewish communities as well as in the non-Jewish community. Not only was he the recognized leader of Egyptian Jewry but also he was widely known for his extensive correspondence and his major works. Yet fame also brought him controversy and opposition. In particular, some Jews who denied the resurrection of the dead claimed to base their beliefs on the teachings of Maimonides. Eventually, Samuel ben Ali, the head of the talmudic academy in Baghdad, openly accused him of rejecting this cardinal belief of Judaism. In 1191, late in a long life of devoted service to the Jewish people, Maimonides wrote his *Essay on Resurrection* in order to defend himself against the charge of heresy. Even in this circumstance, however, he did not write solely for personal reasons.

In the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.¹

*Sincere are all the words of my mouth, there is nothing tortuous or perverse in them; they are all of them straightforward to the man of understanding, and right to those who find knowledge [Prov. 8:8-9]. A man of sense conceals what he knows, but fools proclaim their folly [Prov. 12:23].*²

It is not rare that a person aims to expound the intent of some conclusions clearly and explicitly, makes an effort to reject doubts and eliminate far-fetched interpretations, and yet the unbalanced will draw the reverse judgment of the conclusion he sought to clarify. Some such thing occurred even to one of God's declarations. When the chief of the prophets³ wished by order of God to teach us that He is One, without associates, and to remove from our hearts those wrong doctrines that the Dualists⁴ propound, he proclaimed this fundamental: *The Lord is our God, the Lord alone* [Deut. 6:4].⁵ But the Christians utilized this verse to prove that God is one of three, teaching that *Lord, our God, the Lord* makes three names, all followed by One,⁶ which indicates that they are three and that the three are one. Far be God from what they say in their ignorance.⁷ If this is what happened to Gód's proclamation, it is much more likely and to be expected to happen to statements by humans.

The same thing came to pass when some in our religious community challenged my understanding of one of the fundamentals of the Torah. I sought to call people's attention to the sorely neglected basic tenet that they doubted, notwithstanding the fact that it is a plain and explicit dogma of the faith and leaves no uncertainty about it. This is what happened. When I concentrated on a compilation of the law of the Torah and an exposition of its statutes, my object was to find favor with God, not to look forward to honor or reward from people.⁸ I wished to the best of my ability to provide guidance, understanding, and comprehension to whomever is not qualified to grasp the teachings of

the scholars of the Law who lived before me. I was persuaded that I had smoothed remote and difficult matters, and collected, and joined scattered and disarranged items. I knew that I would profit from it in either of two possibilities. If, as I thought, I smoothed, collected, and put within reach of people what was never done before me, I succeeded in bringing aid to people and in gaining reward from God. If it is not so, and my compilation has not resulted in better understanding and greater simplicity than was gained from the writings of any of my predecessors, I at least earned reward from God. My intentions were good, and God takes cognizance of intentions.⁹ It was this calculation that impelled my tongue to speak and my hand to write on every subject in which I hoped to succeed, as I stated, in its compilation and clarification.

When I applied myself to this task, I realized that it was not correct to strive to explain the ramifications of the religious law, and to leave its roots neglected, unexplained, and its essentials undiscussed,¹⁰ providing no guidance. This is especially urgent since I have met some who think they are among the sages of Israel—by God, they indeed know the way of the Law ever since childhood, and they battle in legal discussions¹¹—but they are not certain if God is corporeal, with eyes, hands, and feet, as the Bible says, or if He has not a body.¹² Others, whom I have met in some lands, assert positively that He is corporeal and call anyone who thinks differently a nonbeliever,¹³ name him a heretic and Epicurean.¹⁴ They explain the homilies of Berakhot literally.¹⁵ I have received similar reports of some whom I have not met.

When I learned of these exceedingly deficient folk and their doubts, who, although they consider themselves sages in Israel, are in fact the most ignorant, and more seriously astray than beasts, their minds filled with the senseless prattle of old women and noxious fantasies, like children and women, I concluded that it was necessary that I clearly elucidate religious fundamentals in my works on law.¹⁶ I determined not to teach these basic truths in the idiom of inquiry, since examination of these roots requires skills in many fields, of which, as I pointed out in the *Guide*,¹⁷ the learned in Torah know nothing.¹⁸ More than anything else I preferred to have the truths accepted by the masses.¹⁹ I therefore published principles that need to be acknowledged in the introduction to the commentary on the Mishnah²⁰ regard-

ing prophecy and the roots of tradition and what every Rabbanite had to believe concerning the Oral Law.²¹ In chapter 10 of Sanhedrin²² I expounded fundamentals connected with the beginning and the end, i.e., what pertains to God's unity and the world-to-come and the other tenets of the Torah. I acted the same way in my major work, which I called *Mishneh Torah*, a work whose worth only people of integrity will appreciate, scholars in religion and science, products of sound reliable training, who can evaluate the methods pursued in my work, and discern how I collected and compiled material that was dispersed and scattered.²³ I also listed all of the religious and legal roots, my objective being that those who are called disciples of the wise, or *geonim*, or whatever you choose to name them, build their legal details on legal foundations, so that their learning will be organized and their knowledge systematically arranged.²⁴ I wish to have all this established on religious dogmas. They will no longer cast the knowledge of God behind their backs,²⁵ but will exert themselves to the limit of their power to attain what will perfect them and bring them nearer to their Creator, not to what the general public imagines to be perfection.²⁶

Among the dogmas that demand our attention is the world-to-come. I undertook to relate its essence, emphasized and extended my remarks, and fortified them with proofs from relevant biblical verses and from pertinent words of the sages of blessed memory. I interpreted what was suitable in the view of the men of science.²⁷ I wrote an exposition of my views in chapter 10 of Sanhedrin, and disclosed why I set as my objective the elaboration of the belief in the world-to-come rather than in the Resurrection. I explained that we find men concerned only with resurrection; asking if the dead will rise naked or in their garments, and other such problems.²⁸ But the world-to-come is entirely overlooked.

I thereupon announced very clearly that the Resurrection is a fundamental of the Torah of Moses our master,²⁹ but that it was not the ultimate goal, and that the ultimate goal is the life in the world-to-come. I engaged in this long discussion so that I dispelled the serious skepticism that contends that the Torah knows of no reward that is not in this world, and that it makes no mention of reward or punishment in the afterlife. I quoted verses from the Torah, as explained to us by tradition, to demonstrate that it contemplated the world-to-come as the

ultimate goal of recompense and of punishment, which is rejection from the afterlife. These are the same concepts I expounded at length in my major work in the section on repentance.³⁰

After a protracted analysis of the world-to-come in chapter 10 of Sanhedrin, as all who look for it will find, I stated that the Resurrection was a biblical dogma, and that whoever did not accept it had neither religion nor any connection with the Torah of our master Moses,³¹ but that it was not the ultimate goal. Similarly, when I enumerated in my major work those who would not share in the world-to-come, I gave their number, specifying they were twenty-four, all this because of my fear that a copyist might omit one and someone would claim that I did not list it. Included in the twenty-four is "he who denies the Resurrection."³² In connection with the world-to-come, to which I referred there, I clearly stressed that it was the ultimate goal. To quote myself: "This is the reward with none greater, and the good with nothing better."³³

There I further explained that in the world-to-come no bodies would exist, in conformity with the talmudic description: In it there will be no food, nor drink, nor sexual intercourse.³⁴ It is absurd to assume that these organs will exist in vain; far be God from producing in vain! If it is a person with mouth, stomach, liver, and other food mechanisms, but he does not eat, and with genitals but he does not reproduce, the existence of the organs is absolutely futile.³⁵ It is not correct to parallel these strong, rationally established proofs of mine with homilies that more appropriately belong to women in their condolence calls.³⁶

It happens that someone contradicted this judgment of mine by arguing that Moses and Elijah survived for some time without food or drink, yet they had their bodies, and that this will be the condition of the members of the world-to-come.³⁷ *May it never befall you, all who pass along the road! Look about and see* [Lam. 1:12]. The organs of Moses and Elijah were not in vain, because they lived before the miracle and after it. What sort of analogy can be drawn from that to the extended, eternal existence in a world that is, as they describe it, "all good, all lasting"?³⁸ How then can it be a place for bodily organs in vain? It is well known that the body as a whole is only the carrier of the soul, which performs all its acts with it. Not a single one of

these acts is ever performed by the members in the world-to-come. But these fellows are not aware how necessarily disgraceful it is of anyone to ascribe to God creation in vain and the fashioning of organs from which purposeless purpose is expected.

However, all this is an inescapable consequence of premature misconceptions in the minds of the masses. They do not recognize true existence other than in a body.³⁹ They also admit that if something that is in a body but is not itself a body, like the accidents, is in existence, it is not as real as the body.⁴⁰ But what is neither a body nor an accident in a body is deemed nonexistent by the ignorant who, despite the hoariness of their bodies, are undoubtedly *weaned from milk, just taken away from the breast* [Isa. 28:9].⁴¹ For this reason, most of them believe that God is corporeal, because in their judgment He would not be in existence if He were not. Those, however, who can be called learned, not metaphorically but literally, have concluded by incontrovertible reasoning that everything separated from matter is more firmly existent than anything material, nay, not only more so; this is actual existence, since it is not affected by any of the variety of change.⁴² These know most certainly that God is neither a body nor a faculty within a body. Hence the level of His existence is the most absolute.

In the same way, every separated creature,⁴³ namely, the angels and the intellect, is firmer and more stable than any body. Hence, I believe that the angels are not bodies, and that the members of the world-to-come are separated souls, namely, intellects. In my work that I named *Guide of the Perplexed* I have culled proofs of this from the Torah.⁴⁴ If one of the simpletons does not care to accept this, and prefers to believe that the angels are bodies and even eat—because the text of the Bible reads *they ate* [Gen. 18:8]⁴⁵—and that the members of the world-to-come are also bodies, I do not mind.⁴⁶ I would this were the extent of the ignorance of any of them. I hope their view of the Creator is free from any acceptance of corporeality. There is no harm in their assuming it for the separated beings.⁴⁷

If a boor is not content with having his doubts about this, so that neither view prevails, but chooses to adhere to the popular opinion, and finds fault with my view and damns me for thinking that the angels and the members of the world-to-come are separated from matter and

free of it, I hold no grievance against him. I forgive him and freely admit my "fault." There is no limit to the number of homilies that serve as refutations of my opinion, and I am not surprised. There are just as many biblical verses and even prophetic passages that refute me, since their simple meaning teaches that God is a body with eyes and ears. However, since the intellectual proofs and the incontrovertible deductions that rule this out are valid, it becomes clear, as the sages say, that "the Torah speaks in the style of people."⁴⁸ But the anthropomorphist can neither grasp nor understand these unshakable conclusions or the intellectual proofs that teach that angels and the members of the world-to-come are divested of anything corporeal, so much so that I am compelled to assume that the passages that suggest corporeality are metaphorical. Those who presume that they are corporeal cannot appreciate these proofs. How then can it be imagined that they will concede that they are bare of matter? These conjecture that their very existence, I mean the angels and the souls, that is, the members of the world-to-come, cannot be known save by tradition rooted in the Torah, and there is no speculative approach that can teach that the angels exist and the souls are immortal. Such are the assertions of those who think that they have attained knowledge of the essential truths by leisurely living, by these vague notions, by relaxed study, by the lack of all the sciences, and by limiting themselves to the literal meaning of what has come down to us by tradition.⁴⁹ It is as though the sages of blessed memory never stated so many times in the Talmud that the words of the Torah carry an outer and an inner meaning⁵⁰—for this reason the hidden is called the inner meaning of the Torah—and as though they never breathed a word about the secrets of Torah. But these pathetic folk are much too distracted to know anything of all this. In the *Guide* I dealt with all these matters to an extent sufficient for the people of understanding, spoke of all the evidence from the sages regarding this, and called attention to where this evidence is located, so that the texts that serve me as proof are revealed and their true sense becomes known.⁵¹

After this book of mine, I mean my major work, was published and spread to the far corners, word reached me that a student in Damascus asserted there would be no resurrection, and the soul would not return

to the body after they separated. All of the people present questioned him: "How can you say so?" He took to citing what I wrote in my book, that the ultimate goal was the world-to-come, where there were no bodies.⁵² When his disputants brought proof from what the community believed and from what the sages repeated many times, his reply was that it was all metaphorical. Their discussion was long. But when the report reached me I paid no attention to it. I assumed it was an isolated incident, because no one else would speak with such ignorance, or find it so difficult to understand what I taught.

In the course of 1185 a letter reached me from Yemen inquiring about various matters. It also related that some among them decided that the body would decompose after death, the soul would not return to the body after separation, and reward and punishment would be reserved only for the soul. They relied on what I had written about the members of the world-to-come. When the clear and explicit statements of the sages were brought to their attention as well as some verses from the prophets they disposed of them by maintaining they were metaphorical and required interpretation. My correspondents further informed me that this view was popular among them and they discarded other beliefs. In my answer to their request for my position, I wrote very plainly that resurrection was a biblical fundamental, which means that the soul will return to the corpse, and that it was not to be explained away. Life in the world-to-come follows the Resurrection,⁵³ as I stated explicitly in chapter 10 of Sanhedrin.⁵⁴ I reckoned this was sufficient.

But this year, 1191, a letter arrived from some of my colleagues in Baghdad, in which they wrote that an individual from Yemen inquired regarding these selfsame issues of Samuel ha-Levi, the incumbent head of the Academy—may God protect him—who at present resides in Baghdad.⁵⁵ He composed an essay on resurrection, and in it he calls some of my views an error and a sin, and others defensible. His judgment of me is moderate, and he is somewhat reserved in his wording. Following this correspondence, I received a copy of the essay that the Gaon wrote.⁵⁶ I found it was a collection of the homilies and legends that he had gathered. Everyone knows that scholars are not expected to rehearse the homilies and the curious tales,⁵⁷ of the sort

that women tell one another in their condolence calls. What is wanted is their interpretation, and an exposition of their implied meaning, so that they conform to a rational position, or at least approximate it.

It is remarkable that he asserts that those amazing views he espouses are the doctrines of the philosophers on the soul. This clearly suggests that in his opinion what the *mutakallimun*⁵⁸ and others propose, and their wrong ideas, are philosophic theories. The strangest in this essay—it is all very strange!—is his contention that the wise philosophers do not deem the return of the soul to the body after separation absurd; no, it is rationally of the class of the possible. This is exactly what he writes. These statements of his indicate that in his estimate the *mutakallimun* are the wise philosophers and that he does not have the slightest notion of the methods by which the philosophers discern the necessary, the impossible, and the contingent.⁵⁹ He also includes matters taken from that tract on the afterlife by ibn Sina,⁶⁰ and from the *al-Mu'tabar*,⁶¹ which one of theirs in Baghdad wrote, and Samuel considers decidedly philosophic. I also discover that the Gaon decided that the immortality of the soul has not been validated by the philosophers, and that their judgments differ. Would I knew who those philosophers are whom he designates by this name.⁶² Still another surprise: the Gaon does not define the intellect. We do not know whether in his philosophy the soul and the intellect are the same, or the soul is immortal while the intellect perishes, or if it is the intellect that survives and the soul that perishes.⁶³ This is the soul that he says the philosophers do not know, and one of their theories is that it is the blood.⁶⁴ Perhaps in his judgment the intellect is an accident, which is what the *mutakallimun* assert, and in his opinion they are the wise philosophers. In that case it will undoubtedly perish.⁶⁵

It would have been far more attractive and preferable if a man like the Gaon had confined himself to a compilation of these homilies and tales and to the interpretation of the verses that prove midrashically that the Resurrection is clearly affirmed in the Torah. On the whole, all he wrote, or most of it, has been said in more or less the same manner. But my aim and purpose in this essay is the benefit that can result to the learner, not the defense and admiration of a person nor the disapproval and disparagement of another. The way of contention

and repudiation are open to whomever chooses to walk it. But may God close this road and the likes of it.

I shall now turn to the discussion of the objective of the treatise. You must realize, O inquirer, that in this tract I intend to elucidate what I believe regarding this fundamental, the Resurrection, which has become a subject of disagreement among students. There is absolutely nothing more in it about this theme than what I wrote down in the commentary on the Mishnah or in my major work.⁶⁶ It is nothing other than a repetition and a general elaboration, and some further comment, which even women and ignorant folk will understand.

The meaning of resurrection, I declare, which is popular and well known in our community, and all our sects agree on it, is the return of the soul to the body after separation. It is very frequently recalled in the prayers, sermons, and supplications that the prophets and the outstanding sages composed, and in the contents of the Talmud and the midrashim. Nothing contradicting it has been heard of in our community, nor any kind of reinterpretation. It is not right to suppose that anyone of our religion believes something contrary to that.⁶⁷ In this essay I shall clarify to you why these texts are not to be explained away, as I have done with many others in the Torah and abandoned their plain sense.⁶⁸ In the same way, this resurrection, the return of the soul to the body after death, is affirmed by Daniel in a form that does not allow for reinterpretation, for the verses read: *Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence* [Dan. 12:2]. And the angel adds: *But you, go on to the end; you shall rest and rise to your destiny at the end of the days* [Dan. 12:13].

Now, when it is reported of me that I maintain that the Resurrection in the Torah is metaphorical, this is a downright lie and a pure invention. My writings are in circulation; let them be perused, and let someone show where I say this. I did state that the sages of Israel disagree about the assertion of some of them regarding the dead in Ezekiel,⁶⁹ for example. But every issue that does not involve practice, on which opinions differ, cannot be resolved in favor of one over the other. This was pointed out several times in my commentary on the Mishnah.⁷⁰ These remarks make obvious to me that the individuals

who will return to their bodies will eat, drink, marry, and procreate, and they will die after a long life, like those who will live during the messianic age.

The life, however, that is not followed by death, is life in the world-to-come, since it will be bodiless. It is my view, a valid assumption with every intelligent person, that the world-to-come is made up of souls without bodies, like the angels.⁷¹ The reason for it is that the body is an aggregate of limbs and organs solely for the actions of the soul, as has been definitely established. The constituents of the body are of three parts: vegetative, by which nourishment is procured, like the mouth, the stomach, the liver, the intestines, in a word, all that is in the lower belly; generative, like the genital organs, the semen, and the fetus; means of improving the body so that it can supply the soul with all its needs, like the eye and the other senses, the muscles, the veins, and the ligaments by which all movement is accomplished. If it were not for these, the animal could not move toward the food it seeks, nor flee from what opposes it, and may destroy or spoil it. Consequently, since man's nourishment can only be acquired by acts he performs and by many preliminary preparations that require thought and reflection, he has been provided with the rational faculty to control his actions and the natural means with which he performs these acts, I mean hands and feet, because the legs are not only for walking. The details of this summary are known to students.⁷²

It thus becomes clear that the existence of the entire body is needed for certain ends, nourishment for its maintenance and reproduction of the like for its continued presence. Now, since these ends are discarded and unneeded in the world-to-come—the reason being, as the sages have all made clear, that there is no eating in it, nor drinking, nor intercourse⁷³—it is obvious there is no body. God creates absolutely nothing in vain, makes things only for things. Far, indeed, far be it from Him that His sophisticated acts bear any similarity to the work of the makers of idols. *They have eyes, but cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear . . .* [Ps. 135:16–17].⁷⁴ In the view of these folk God also creates bodies or limbs not to do what they were created for nor for any reason. According to them, maybe the members of the world-to-come do not have limbs but they are unquestionably bodies,

perhaps solid spheres, or pillars, or cubes. Really, they are laughable. *If you would only keep quiet it would be considered wisdom* [Job 13:5].⁷⁵

I have already explained what accounts for it all. The masses do not recognize existence except of a body or of what is in a body. What is not a body or in a body does not exist. The more secure they want to make the existence of something, the more they endow it with corporeality, that is, they solidify the substance of its body. I have expressly discussed it on many occasions in the *Guide*.⁷⁶ Now, whoever wishes to fault me for this view, it is up to him; if he desires to call it a mistake or an error let him say so. I do not mind. As I established in the *Guide*, I prefer to be followed by the intelligent in accepting the truth, even if it is one individual, and to have thousands from among the ignorant shun me because they believe nonsense.

What I do deny and disown before God is any assertion that the soul will never return to the body, and that it simply cannot happen. This kind of rejection leads to the rejection of all the miracles;⁷⁷ the denial of miracles is a denial of God and a defection from the Law. Absolutely nothing in all I have written suggests that I deny the return of the soul to the body. On the contrary, it suggests the opposite.⁷⁸ Whoever wishes and chooses to malign me and to attribute to me opinions which I do not hold—like one who suspects the pious of sin—and to invent the most farfetched explanations of what I have written, so that he can prove me guilty, will surely be punished for it,⁷⁹ and will be treated like anyone who suspects the innocent.⁸⁰

Following this clear declaration, no one has the right to maintain that I believe every reference in the Bible to the Resurrection to be a metaphor. No, some are valid truths, and some are undoubtedly fables; others raise the question: are they fact or fiction? If you study in depth everything written by the sages and by the Andalusian commentators,⁸¹ and the context of the doubtful passage, it will become clear to you. Considering the purpose of this essay, I do not need to go into it in detail. Ideas are not reinforced by a repetition of their formulation, nor is their validity weakened when they are not repeated.⁸² You surely know that the fundamental of God's unity, the Lord is one, is not repeated in the Torah.⁸³ Since I found a prophetic statement, not susceptible to interpretation, which speaks of the return of the soul to

the body,⁸⁴ the prophetic announcement is therewith made. This prediction will not increase in validity if you take every word in the Bible meaning *revival* to refer to the return of the soul to the body, nor will it lose its validity if you render some of the relevant verses, or all of them metaphorically. In a word, the prophetic prediction has been made either once or many times,⁸⁵ the ancient and more recent sages of Israel have stated it innumerable times, our religious community is unanimously agreed that the soul of man will return to the body. This is what resurrection means wherever a sage or an author speaks of it.⁸⁶

Others were also led astray because of what I wrote at the end of my major work.⁸⁷ This is what I said: "Do not think for a moment that the king, the Messiah, will be required to perform miracles and wonders, or that he will inaugurate new things in the world, or will resurrect the dead, or anything like it." I found support of it in what I expounded.⁸⁸ Some less than mature minds assumed that this was a repudiation of the Resurrection, and it contradicted what I stated explicitly in my commentary on the Mishnah, to the effect that the Resurrection is one of the fundamentals of the Law. But all this is perfectly clear, free from doubts and contradictions. I said that the Messiah would not be required to do wonders, like miraculously splitting the Red Sea, or resurrecting the dead. He would not be required to perform miracles, seeing that the early prophets, whose predictions are valid, foretold that he would come.⁸⁹ But from this analysis it does not follow that God will not revive the dead by His will and wish when He desires and whomever He desires to resurrect. It will happen in the lifetime of the Messiah, or before him, or after he dies. In short, in all I wrote in my compositions, nothing can lead any thinking individual to doubt, except students at the beginning of their studies.

They were likewise puzzled by my statement that Isaiah's forecast: *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb* [Isa. 11:6], is a parable.⁹⁰ This is not only my view.⁹¹ In fact I was anticipated by the keen commentators on the meaning of the passage, men like Gikatilla, or ibn Bal'am, and other exegetes.⁹² The end of the sentence proves it: *In all of My sacred mount they shall do nothing evil or vile, for the land shall be filled with the knowledge of God.* . . . The reason is provided;⁹³ they will do nothing vile or evil because they will know God. Just look, all of you people who have a mind! Can you believe that the lion is under God's

command? That at present he is disobedient and hence carnivorous, but at that time repentant, learning from his Creator that which is right and that it is not permissible to be hostile, so that he will change and become herbivorous? Indeed, this characterization is confirmed: *So that all prophecy has been to you like the words of a sealed document* [Isa. 29:11].⁹⁴ I, for my part, have elucidated the meaning of this in a chapter of the *Guide*,⁹⁵ and in my major composition⁹⁶ I have expounded my clear proof of their statement that in the messianic age nothing will change of the laws of nature.⁹⁷

You must realize that I am not at all positive that all the promises and the like of them are metaphorical.⁹⁸ No revelation from God has come to teach me they are parables. Nor did I find any rabbinic tradition derived from the prophets in which they say categorically that these matters are allegorical. I will only explain to you what impels me to speak this way. My endeavor, and that of the select keen-minded people, differs from the quest of the masses.⁹⁹ They like nothing better and, in their silliness, enjoy nothing more, than to set the Law and reason at opposite ends, and to move everything far from the explicable. So they claim it to be a miracle, and they shrink from identifying it as a natural incident, whether it is something that happened in the past and is recorded, or something predicted to happen in the future. But I try to reconcile the Law and reason, and wherever possible consider all things as of the natural order. Only when something is explicitly identified as a miracle, and reinterpretation of it cannot be accommodated, only then I feel forced to grant that this is a miracle.¹⁰⁰

In the *Guide* I construed the plain biblical texts, and also the passages from the sages, to mean there are many fables among the words of the prophets.¹⁰¹ I went to such lengths in their exposition that none of the contentious boors will find it possible to reject it. For this reason, I, and the excellent commentators who preceded me, assert that these are allegories, as we have interpreted them.¹⁰² It may, however, be argued that as the population grows, and the earth becomes more cultivated, the hostility of the beasts to one another will decrease and they will become mutually amicable.¹⁰³ In his book on animals,¹⁰⁴ this is how Aristotle accounts for the decrease of the mutual discord among the beasts of Egypt. But this may also be fantasy, to use the expression of the sages: "The Torah speaks in hyperboles."¹⁰⁵ More-

over, if Isaiah's visions should come to be literally, they will be confined to the Temple Mount, for he adds: *In My holy mountains* [Isa. 11:9].¹⁰⁶ They will then be of a kind with the rabbinic tradition: "Never did serpent or scorpion do harm in Jerusalem."¹⁰⁷

To sum up, none of these matters is a fundamental of the Law, and no one should be concerned how they are regarded.¹⁰⁸ We must simply wait until the decision falls, may it come speedily, on how they are to be regarded, and then it will become known whether they are allegory or miracle.¹⁰⁹ It is recognized that I shun as best I can changes in the physical order.¹¹⁰ But everyone, whether he lived before the present or is not yet born, is mistaken if he does not realize the distinction between happenings that come as miracles and do not become permanent at all, so that they occur out of necessity or to confirm prophecy, and natural, continuous events that are the way of the world,¹¹¹ and of which our sages say: "The world runs its normal course."¹¹² They also rule: "Miracles cannot be used as proof."¹¹³ Solomon declared: *I realized, too, that whatever God has brought to pass will recur evermore; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it* [Eccles. 3:14].¹¹⁴ From this it becomes clear that natural events always continue regularly. This has also been explained in the *Guide* in my discussion of this world.¹¹⁵

It occurs to me that what has made this people be in error about my views of the Resurrection is the difference in treatment. When I dealt with the world-to-come I dwelt at length and in detail on its description, elucidated its essence, and cited all the statements of the prophets and the sages that refer to it. But when I wrote of the Resurrection I disposed of it in few words, asserting that it is a valid fundamental.¹¹⁶ Two considerations dictated this treatment. In the first place, all of my compositions are to the point and brief.¹¹⁷ I do not seek to enlarge the size of the books, nor to lose time on what yields no benefit. When I write a commentary, it is only on what requires exegesis, and only so far as it will help understanding, and when I write a book, I include only epitomized conclusions. Secondly, elaboration is to be applied only to the comprehension of a hidden matter so that it is achieved or its verity is proved. This is needed in the three classes of science: mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. In them, meaning is frequently obscure and comprehension remote until

their contents are adequately defined. Often the intelligible thesis requires very many arguments, so that the validity it wants is provided. But with miracles the understanding of what is told is neither hidden nor difficult. Nor is proof possible of the validity of what has not happened, or of what has been foretold. They are only witnessed with the senses or learned from one who saw them. For these reasons I expound themes of the world-to-come and shed light on its mysteries, and also because it, I mean the immortality of the soul, is a doctrine in harmony with the nature of the world order.

The Resurrection, however, is a miraculous event. Its sense is easily grasped, and nothing more is needed than to believe in it as the authentic tradition teaches us. It is something outside the nature of existence,¹¹⁸ and no rational proof of it exists. It simply follows the pattern of all miracles; it is to be accepted, and that is that. What can I say on this subject, or how can I treat it at length? Or do you think I am expected to provide rational arguments from which resurrection will necessarily follow? Most probably such folk expect me to indulge in my works in those homilies that are preached on the theme and those legends,¹¹⁹ but this is a procedure suitable to someone other than myself, in line with the objective of its composition. All of you who have read my works know well that I always aim to avoid disagreements and challenges. If I could squeeze the entire Law of the Torah into one chapter, I would not write two chapters for it. How then can I be expected to speak of homilies and legends, when they can be found where they are? What advantage lies in their repetition and in the claim that I produced a book?¹²⁰

After reaching this point in this monograph, which was its objective, and realizing that it is entirely bereft of benefits, because it contains nothing more than repetition of what is written in my commentary to the Mishnah and in my major composition, with some additional explanation for the unintelligent or the skeptic, I think it proper not to deprive it of some new interest. I shall take up two problems relevant to this subject.

The first is to clarify the intent of the very many verses in the Bible that clearly indicate, beyond the possibility of interpretation, the denial of the Resurrection. For example: *If a man dies, can he live again?* [Job. 14:14], or *As a cloud fades away, so whoever goes down to Sheol*

does not come up [Job 7:9], or *Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death* [Job. 10:21]. These very numerous verses are in the book of Job. Hezekiah protests: *Nor do they who descend into the Pit hope for Your grace. The living, only the living can give thanks to You as I do this day* [Isa. 38:18-19]. This is proof that the dead are those who go down into the pit. It is also written: *We must all die; we are like water that is poured out on the ground and cannot be gathered up* [2 Sam. 14:14]. Another text says: *Do You work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise to praise You?* [Ps. 88:11]. *A passing breath that does not return* [Ps. 78:39]. If you follow the verses in the Bible closely you will discover them all generally negating the Resurrection, save some apparently different passages in Isaiah,¹²¹ which upon close examination raise doubts about whether they are literally true or symbolic.¹²² There is no conclusive text other than in Daniel and its assertion: *Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake . . .* [Dan. 12:2] and the sentence: *You shall rest, and arise to your destiny at the end of the days* [Dan. 12:12].¹²³ But this also creates great perplexity. Some become very skeptical of this fundamental of the Resurrection, and others who confirm this tenet are compelled to reinterpret every one of the explicit passages by explanations too farfetched to be acceptable.¹²⁴

The second problem is that the Torah has not mentioned this fundamental in any way, certainly not plainly, nor even by a hint. True, it has been undoubtedly claimed that the Torah implies this belief, and the matters of which I speak are introduced with the query: What proof of the Resurrection can be found in the Torah?¹²⁵ At most, it can be maintained that they are recondite suggestions or references, particularly since the sages disagree regarding them.¹²⁶ Accordingly, this second problem is why the Torah has not mentioned it in plain words in a style not susceptible to reinterpretation? If it has spoken of it, as these suppose, it is like one concealing the statement, wishing to keep it secret.¹²⁷

In answer to the first question, it is my opinion that the discourses of the prophets and the texts of the Hagiographa mean only to portray the customary, familiar pattern of existence. It is well known that the natural course is intercourse between male and female, procreation of the like,¹²⁸ and the gradual growth of the child until the individual

dies. It is not in the course of nature for that individual to return after his death and come into being a second time. The scheme of nature is that when the beasts of the animal world die, they never again return. On the other hand, they slowly disintegrate and decompose until they return to the elements and to the primary matter, to a degree that does not allow for the recovery of a noticeable remnant, of which it might be said it was part of so-and-so. Man alone receives the divine flow that makes for the survival of something that will neither perish nor become corrupted. His body, however, perishes, like the bodies of all the other members of the animal world. Anyone who devotes himself to investigate these profound problems, I mean the survival of the immortal something that the human has been granted, will learn this by speculative reasoning.¹²⁹ This is the course of nature, and this is what the prophetic books call by the homonyms soul and spirit.¹³⁰ The extinction of the body, and its decomposition into what it was made of in this manner of return, is detailed in the text: *And the dust returneth to the ground as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it* [Eccles. 12:7].¹³¹ This is the way of nature, and all the biblical verses are in accord with it.

Actually there is no difference between the question: *If a man dies, can he live again?* [Job. 14:14] and the challenge: *Shall we get water for you out of this rock?* [Num. 20:10].¹³² The sense is that naturally it is not so; it is impossible. Yet water did miraculously come out of that rock. Similarly, the Resurrection is simply one of the miracles.¹³³ There is no difference between the doubt: *Can the Ethiopian change his skin?* [Jer. 13:23] and the question: *Do you work wonders for the dead?* [Ps. 88:11].¹³⁴ Indeed the color of the noble hand did turn white.¹³⁵

If a person claimed that the inanimate objects could not possibly move, his contention would be correct in terms of the natural, but it would not disprove the change of the rod to serpent, since that was a miracle.¹³⁶ Likewise whatever you find in Scripture that repudiates the return of the dead follows the course of nature and does not contradict the return of the dead whom God will wish to resurrect. Thus the purport of these verses has been explained to you most plausibly, and you do not need to reinterpret any of these phrases with those outlandish and farfetched explanations that do not provide enlightening proof,¹³⁷

but reinforce the contentions of the person who rejects resurrection and supply solid ground to his challenges.

You must understand that the denial of the belief in the return of the soul to the body is positively rooted in one of two reasons. The repudiation may arise because it is contrary to nature. If so, all miracles must be refused because they are contrary to nature. Or the denial comes because it is not stated in the text, and there are no authentic traditions regarding it, as there are for the other miracles. However, I have demonstrated that there are texts, even if few, confirming the return of the dead. If one should object that he reinterprets these passages as he does others, my answer is that what impels you to reinterpret them is that the Resurrection is contrary to nature, so that you will explain the passages and make them conform to the natural phenomena.¹³⁸ But for this reason you must reinterpret the change of the rod to a serpent, the falling of the manna,¹³⁹ the theophany on Mt. Sinai,¹⁴⁰ and the pillars of cloud and fire.¹⁴¹ Nay, by this approach you are compelled to explain them all, so they will conform to the natural phenomena.¹⁴²

In my discussion in the *Guide* of the creation of the world, I pointed out that it necessarily follows that once the doctrine of the production of the universe is accepted, all miracles are possible; therefore the Resurrection is also possible.¹⁴³ I believe every possible happening that is supported by a prophetic statement and do not strip it of its plain meaning. I fall back on interpreting a statement only when its literal sense is impossible, like the corporeality of God; the possible however remains as stated. Anyone who continually strives to explain resurrection away so that there will not be a return (of the soul to the body) does so not because it is naturally unlikely, but because it is rationally inconceivable. If this is the case, the same is necessarily required with respect to the other miracles. All of them are decidedly impossible only in the light of the affirmation that the world is eternal. But one who affirms the eternity of the world cannot possibly be a member of the community of Moses and Abraham, as I established in the *Guide*.¹⁴⁴ Following these fundamentals, I affirmed the Resurrection literally. I counted it a fundamental of the Torah, and ruled that it would not be right to reinterpret plain texts that clearly establish it and are not susceptible of other explanations.

Now for the answer to the second problem, which is why is the Resurrection not mentioned in the Torah? This is my reply. You must realize that, as is well known, we do not believe that the Torah comes from Moses.¹⁴⁵ No, it is in its entirety the word of the Lord.¹⁴⁶ The problem then becomes a quest of God's wisdom in alerting us to life in the world-to-come and saying nothing to us clearly of the Resurrection.¹⁴⁷ The reason is that, as I explained, this resurrection is of the type of the miraculous, and the belief in what is of this nature comes only from the assertion by a prophet.¹⁴⁸ In those days all the people were Sabians, who affirmed the eternity of the universe.¹⁴⁹ They used to believe, as I taught in the *Guide*,¹⁵⁰ that the spirit in the spheres is God, and they called the claim a lie that the revelation comes from God to the human species. Following their assumption they have to repudiate miracles and attribute them to magic and chicanery.¹⁵¹ You know, do you not, that they tried to counter the miracles of Moses with their magic: *each cast down his rod* [Exod. 7:12].¹⁵² You know, do you not, that they marveled: *We have seen this day that man may live though God has spoken to him* [Deut. 5:21].¹⁵³ This indicates that they had regarded prophecy to be of the class of the impossible. How can a person who does not believe in prophecy be told a story of which there is no other proof save the faith in the prophet? It is decidedly impossible for those who followed their affirmation of the eternity of the world. Were it not for miracles, we would not regard the Resurrection to be of the class of the possible.¹⁵⁴

Now, when God willed to give Israel the Torah, and to promulgate His commandments and prohibitions in the entire world through the chief of the prophets¹⁵⁵—as is written: *And . . . that My fame may resound throughout the world* [Exod. 9:16]¹⁵⁶—He produced the miracles that are recorded in the Torah, to authenticate with them the messages of the prophets and the creation of the world. The genuine miracle is decisive proof of the production of the universe, as I pointed out in the *Guide*.¹⁵⁷ But in the area of reward and punishment He did not go beyond the happenings of this world and the course of nature.¹⁵⁸ This embraces immortality of the soul or its discontinuity, as I explained, that is, the world-to-come or extermination.¹⁵⁹ Beyond this He did not present the innovation of the return (of the soul to the body). Matters continued this way until, in the course of generations,

these fundamentals became firm and valid, with no doubts lingering about the veracity of the prophets and the performance of miracles.¹⁶⁰ After that, when the prophets informed us of what they were told of the Resurrection, its acceptance was facilitated.¹⁶¹

We encounter exactly this sort of solicitude in God's treatment of Israel. For it is written: *God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines because it was nearer; for God said: "The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt"* [Exod. 13:17].¹⁶² True, they had matured to some extent in the affairs of the world, but He anticipated¹⁶³ that they would return to Egypt, and would forfeit what was planned for them. Likewise, He also anticipated that they would not accept this principle, I mean the return of the soul to the body, and as a result would forfeit the ultimate goal provided for them. They will surely mature and will accept the doctrines as well, seeing that the Leader and the Developer is the same.¹⁶⁴

It is known that these masses, in whose time God willed to reveal the Torah, were firm in their wrong ideas. Even forty years later, after they had beheld God's wonders, He said of them: *The Lord has not given you a mind to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear* [Deut. 29:3].¹⁶⁵ He knew that when they were informed of the innovation of the return of the dead, they would consider it impossible and would emphatically shun it. They would indulge in sin, since retribution was greatly delayed.¹⁶⁶ For this reason they were warned and threatened with punishment, of which they were quickly persuaded: if you listen, . . . if you do not listen. . . .¹⁶⁷ Their acceptance of that was more immediate and more beneficial. This too is a great benefit as obedience will make their situation in this world prosper and disobedience will hurt it. The Torah affirms it as a continuous miracle over the generations, that is, success in their activities if they obey God, and failure if they disobey. It is written: *They shall serve as signs and proofs against you and your offspring for all time* [Deut. 28:46].¹⁶⁸

This is the basis of the rabbinic declaration: "Israel has no star,"¹⁶⁹ meaning that their success and failure are not the result of natural causes or customary existence, but are linked to their obedience and disobedience; this is the most convincing sign.¹⁷⁰ I have already stated that this applies to the community and to every individual.¹⁷¹ It is clear from that anecdote,¹⁷² which is in harmony with the verse: *and*

your offspring, and also from the counsel, well known in the community: When a person feels that he is being afflicted, let him examine his behavior.¹⁷³ This same idea is implied in God's assertion regarding the singularity of the community: *These the Lord your God allotted to the other peoples everywhere under heaven, but you the Lord took* [Deut. 4:19–20].¹⁷⁴ The meaning is that their situation does not follow the pattern of the situation of the other communities. No, they are singled out by this great miracle: success or failure in their activities will always be linked to their actions.¹⁷⁵

What I must clarify at this point, although it is too important for this essay,¹⁷⁶ is that miracles may occur in the realm of the naturally impossible¹⁷⁷—like the change of the rod into a serpent, or the sinking of the earth in the story of the followers of Korah,¹⁷⁸ or the splitting of the Red Sea¹⁷⁹—and they may occur in the realm of the naturally possible—like the onset of the locust, the hail, and the pestilence in Egypt.¹⁸⁰ It is the way of these latter happenings to occur at certain times and in certain places.¹⁸¹ So also is the breaking of the altar of Jeroboam when the man of God announced: *Here is the portent which the Lord has decreed: This altar shall break apart, and the ashes on it shall be spilled* [1 Kings 13:3].¹⁸² For it is the way of structures to fall apart, particularly recently reconstructed buildings. Similarly the rain, so rare in the summer, which Samuel foretold,¹⁸³ and also the blessings and curses in the Torah.¹⁸⁴ Every one of them may come at any time in any country. They are all of the class of the possible when you examine them.

However, these possible occurrences become miracles by one of three conditions or by all of them. One: that the possible incident comes when the prophet says it will, as happened to Samuel: *I will pray to the Lord and He will send thunder and rain. . . . Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain* [1 Sam. 12:17–18]. This is what happened to the man of God who came from Judah: *The altar broke apart and its ashes were spilled—the very portent which the man of God had announced. . . .* [1 Kings 13:5]. Two: that that possible happening is singular and exceptional beyond anything imaginable of its kind. The locust is described: *before it there had been no locust like it, nor will there ever be like it* [Exod. 10:14]. Of the hail it is written: *Such as had not fallen on the entire land of Egypt since it had become*

a nation [Exod. 9:24]. Of the pestilence it is stated: *But of the livestock of the Israelites not a beast died* [Exod. 9:6]. The particularity of that possible happening, whether in a class referred to, or some specific place, or some species mentally conceived,¹⁸⁵ is the singularity and the exclusiveness of that possible event. Three: the duration and the persistence of that possible event, like the blessings and the maledictions.¹⁸⁶ For, if it came once or twice, it would not be miraculous; it could be claimed to have been a chance incident. This has been clearly expounded in the Torah: *And if you remain hostile to Me and refuse to obey Me* [Lev. 26:21],¹⁸⁷ that is, if you regard the afflictions that will befall you as accidents and not as punishment, He will protract the violent distress you thought was an accident. He expresses it thus: *And if you remain hostile to Me, I will act against you with wrathful hostility.*

Now that this has been clarified, you must realize that the miracles in the naturally impossible class will not last at all, nor will they tarry or remain with their features. For, if they persisted, they would open the way to suspicion.¹⁸⁸ If the rod remained a serpent, the uncertainty would be entertained that it had been originally a serpent, so that the miracle is achieved by its return to a rod: *And it became a rod in his hand* [Exod. 4:4]. If, in the incident of the followers of Korah, the ground had burst asunder, and stayed open for good, the miracle would be challenged. In fact, the miracle was completed when the ground returned to its former condition: *The earth closed over them* [Num. 16:33]; so also: *And at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state* [Exod. 14:27].¹⁸⁹ Because of this fact, which I have alerted you to, I refuse to accept the duration of an unnatural situation, as I have explained in this essay.

But the miracle in the class of the possible is more wondrous the longer it lasts and endures. This is why I accept the blessings that come from obedience and the maledictions on the community from disobedience unto eternity. For they become a sign and a portent, as I pointed out. If someone should ask why this miracle was performed before them, why not the ultimate wonder, that is, the Resurrection, or the reward and punishment of the soul and body together after death, he may just as well ask regarding any of the miracles of the apostle: Why was the rod changed into a serpent? Why not into a lion? The

entire issue is connected with the decision of divine wisdom of which we know nothing. Moreover, I have suggested a sort of sensible explanation of it,¹⁹⁰ but perhaps there is another reason or reasons that His wisdom requires, of which we know nothing.

No intelligent person has the right to blame me for the repetition in this essay, the additions to the main idea, or for the extensive clarification of what does not really require further light.¹⁹¹ I wrote this tract only for the common people who had begun to doubt what I had stated explicitly, and for those who reproached me for brevity when I spoke of the Resurrection. Those who are truly learned are satisfied with a suggestion; they need neither repetition nor prolonged exegesis; they need only summary statements, as I have done with the profound questions in the *Guide* and in all my works.¹⁹² I followed the method related by the sages: He said to him: Explain it, but he answered: A sage needs no explaining. He said: Repeat it, but he answered: A sage requires no repetition.¹⁹³ From this it becomes clear that discourse with the wise stands in need of neither repetition nor elucidation: *Instruct a wise man, and he will grow wiser* [Prov. 9:9]. But the common people need both, *precept after precept, precept after precept, now here, now there* [Isa. 28:13].¹⁹⁴ The sense of it is that they understand but little, they comprehend a bit, a little here, a little there. But the right thing to do is to address each group according to its capacity.¹⁹⁵

May God lead me in word and deed, may He protect me from mistake and error in His goodness, graciousness, and mercy, blessed be He. Amen. Amen.

The essay is finished with the help of God, blessed be He and blessed be His name.

NOTES

1. This formula appears at the beginning of many of Maimonides' writings, and is also used by Yemenite writers and copyists. See S. Lieberman, *Hilkhot ha-Yerushalmi* (1947) p. 5 and note 7.

2. The purpose of these introductory verses is to create the proper mood for the reader. He is about to read a work that is honest, correct, and clear to him who peruses it, as is its author.

3. A reference to Moses, universally accepted by the Jews as the master, the greatest of all the prophets.