

GUIDE 1:8 BLESSED IS THE LORD FROM HIS PLACE

R. Michael Friedlander thinks that this chapter opens a new section of the Guide. He introduces the section in the following words:

“The next group of anthropomorphic expressions to be interpreted (chapters 1:8-1:27) consists of those which refer to space and motion. Having shown that the terms figure, likeness, etc., cannot be applied to God in their ordinary sense, Maimonides now proceeds to explain that the expressions which imply the idea of space with respect to God cannot be taken literally. It is possible that this order was suggested to our author by the passage, 'And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord' (Genesis 4:16); or, 'And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him' (Genesis 5:24); for these are the most striking instances of anthropomorphism in the beginning of Genesis after the phrase 'in our form and likeness.' Ibn Caspi, Efodi, and others are of opinion that this chapter is intended to explain the word 'there' in the passage "and there he put the man" (Genesis 2:8). The order of the chapters from 1:8 to 1:27 is as follows:—God occupies no space (*makom*); the throne (*kisei*), heavens (*shamayim*) which He is said to occupy, is not to be considered a material throne.—He does not ascend (*alah*), descend (*yarad*), sit (*yashav*), stand (*amad, kam, yatzav*) approach (*karov*), or fill a place (*malei*). He is not above a place (*ram*), does not pass by (*avar*), come in (*ba*), go out (*yatza*), return (*halakh*), walk (*halakh*) or rest (*shakhen*.”

(R. Friedlander, note 3, *ad loc.* Leo Strauss tends to agree with R. Friedlander, p. XI, Pines translation of the Guide)

I think that this chapter continues the train of thought from the prior chapter. While it is apparently about the anthropomorphic quality of the term *makom*, “place,” which “refers to space or motion” it is really about *intellectual progeny*, like 1:7. It continues to contrast those who are intellectual progeny, as Seth is the progeny of Adam, with those who are not intellectual progeny. I will show that Maimonides uses his choice of non-biblical proof-texts to obliquely refer to King Yehoram ben Yehoshafat of Judah as his paradigm of a son who is not the intellectual progeny of his father.

The chapter also disentangles the term “place” from its inevitable spatial context, so that it can be used appropriately in prophetic discourse. Maimonides tells us that his lexicon is not a dictionary, for he has no interest in exhaustively defining terms. There are meanings that he excludes, which are typically physical or anthropomorphic definitions. We must only use his definitions, and then only appropriately with the context. We should understand his wordbook as David Bakan does: Maimonides’ range of lexical meanings provides the prophetic unconscious a toolbox of transcendent images for the expression of the revelation (*Maimonides on Prophecy*, Jason Aronson, 1991).

This is a lexical chapter. (See Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”)

MAKOM (PLACE)

1. *General space and particular space.* By this definition, Maimonides includes the entire Aristotelian understanding of physical "place." See essay below. *He provides no proof-text for this definition.*
2. *Level of attainment of perfection*, especially regarding God. *Makom* “Denoted *position* or *degree* as regards the perfection of man...” To be in the *makom* of one’s ancestors means being their intellectual progeny.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“He filled his ancestors’ *place* (*m’malei makom avotav*).” (Talmud, *Horiot* 11b)

There is no instance given for Definition 1. Three out of five of the proof texts brought for Definition 2 of *makom* are, unusually, *not* from biblical sources. Two are Talmudic and one is Mishnaic. We must seek Maimonides’ purpose for this departure from format. We can find it in his bland elision of the key name *Yehoram*, that is, King Yehoram ben Yehoshafat of Judah, who is the subject of the Talmud’s citation, “He filled his ancestor’s place.” The sentence from Talmud *Horiot* reads in full:

“‘But the kingdom gave he [King Yehoshafat] to Jehoram; because he [was] the firstborn,’ (Chronicles 2:21:3. The Talmud continues:) Jehoram *worthily filled the place of his ancestors* (*Yehoram m’malei makom avotav*).”

The Talmud discusses here the very question of whether a firstborn son should precede a son who is the intellectual progeny of the father. There is a tradition embodied in the Talmud comment that Yehoram *began* his reign as a just king, worthily filling his father’s role, though his worthiness did not last long. See essay below for the significance of Yehoram to Maimonides.

“He fills his ancestors’ *place* (*makom*) in point of wisdom and piety (*v’hava m’malei makom avotav b’khokhma o b’yira*).” (Talmud *Ketuvot* 103b)

This quotation is also Talmudic. The context is the succession of R. Gamaliel to head the Academy when R. Yehudah, author of the Mishnah, died:

“On the day that Rabbi [Yehudah ha Nasi] died ...[he said] ‘My son Simeon is wise.’ What did he mean? [One would naturally expect the wise son rather than the other son, Gamaliel, to succeed his father as *Nasi*. Why then did Rabbi mention the wisdom of the one son as a reason for the appointment of the other?— It is this that he meant: Although my son Simeon is wise, my son Gamaliel shall be the *Nasi*...What was his [Simeon’s] difficulty? Does not Scripture state, *But the kingdom gave he to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn?* (2 Chronicles 21:3, again) — The other [Jehoram] was properly representing his ancestors [at least in the beginning] but R. Gamaliel was not properly representing his ancestors [His younger brother Simeon having been wiser]. Then why did Rabbi act in the manner he did? — Granted that he [Gamaliel] was not representing his ancestors in wisdom he was worthily representing them in his fear of sin” (*nahi d’eino m’malei makom avotav b’hokhma, b’yirat khet m’malei makom avotav hava*).

My argument for Yehoram as Maimonides’ real interest is his central mention in both passages quoted. Maimonides’ problem is that the Yehoram passage, 2 Chronicles 21:3, does not use the term *makom*. It therefore cannot be a proof-text for the pejorative use of *makom* in discussions of intellectual inheritance. Hence Maimonides’ recourse to these two Talmud sentences which do use the word *makom*, but which also quote Chronicles 2:21:3. See essay, below, where I retell the story of King Yehoram.

“The dispute still remains in its *place* (*makom*).” (Mishnah *Mikvaot* 4:1)

Maimonides clips this phrase from a Mishnaic discussion of ritual bathhouses, when one becomes non-kosher. Rabbis Shammai and Hillel take contrary positions on an obscure point. The author concludes with the confession that the argument has not been decided. The phrase “The dispute still remains in its place” is a common technical phrase for an unresolved legal point. The dialogue stays at the *level* it has reached. The purpose of Maimonides’ quotation was to show that traditions, even or especially oral ones, become disputable over time, which is problematic for us as intellectual progeny of the tradition. This relates to Definition 4 in the last chapter, where *yeled* referred to the consequences of adopting bad opinion or doctrines.

“Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, [saying], Blessed [be] the glory of the Lord from his *place* (*mekomo*).” (Ezekiel 3:12)

The roar of the angels in Ezekiel’s vision uses two terms from Maimonides’ lexicon: “place” and “glory” (*kavod*). He defines the term “place” as in Definition 2: Blessed be His glory *according to the exalted degree of his existence* (*k’l’omar maalato v’romamut kvodo b’mziut*). This degree of existence is beyond human comprehension. See essay below.

“And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a *place* (*makom*) by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock (*ha-tzur*). And it shall come to pass, while my glory (*kavod*) passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock (*ha-tzur*) and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by.” (Exodus 33:21-22)

God directs Moses to the cleft in the rock from which he will see His “back.” The passage mentions both *makom* and *kavod*, and introduces another lexical term, “rock,” *tzur*. It is necessary, according to Maimonides, that we address each term mentioned in a prophetic verse by referring to the definitions in the Guide, choosing the one that is proper for its context. See essay below addressing these terms.

Aristotelian Space: General and Particular Place

The first line of the chapter gives Definition 1 of *makom*. It means “general and particular space” (*shem zeh ikar ha-nakhto l’makom ha-prati v’ha-klali*). He also means to include the doctrine of “proper place.” This is an excellent example of Maimonides’ talent for compression. The doctrines digested here appear in several places in Aristotle’s *Physics* (see, e.g.: 4:2:209a 31-32; 4:4:211a 30-34, 212a 5-6, and 212a 20).

The *particular place* of an object is its stationary border by which it is surrounded by other objects. Thus, the place of a river is the boundary of its running water. The *surroundedness* of objects means that none can be of infinite size. Aristotle’s doctrine was that all space is filled, i.e., there is no vacuum.

All things have a *proper place*. This means that the four elements, which combine to make all things, array *vertically*: fire on top, air below, then water, and finally, earth. When “violently” moved from its proper place by the prevailing motion of the outer spheres, an element must move *vertically* to return to its place.

The place of an object may also be conceived as its *general place* in that it participates in larger space; as, for instance, I am on the earth, and the earth is in the air: therefore my “general” place is in the sphere of the air.

These ideas recur in Maimonides’ Introduction to Book Two, Propositions 1, 2, 6, 8, and elsewhere in the Guide. They are basic to his physics and cosmology. We will, at the beginning of Book Two, discuss R. Hasdai Crescas’ (c. 1340–1410/11) opposition to these ideas and the meaning of that opposition in the history of Western thought.

Maimonides’ included this corporeal definition of *place* because he recognized its unavoidability. The concept of place does not belong in any discussion of the incorporeal world, the world of *divine* reality. But we can hardly formulate a sentence without referring to some part of the space/time/motion continuum. This concept is necessary for any understanding of *our* reality. That he displays this first physical “definition” of *place* without a proof-text shows that it should never be applied to the interpretation of biblical prophecy.

The Role of Context

Maimonides says we must mine his definitions, in this book “or others” to learn the meaning of prophetic utterances. The phrase “or others,” in his statement: “These words are a key to this treatise (the Guide) or others” (*hineni omer dvarim elu mafteakh l’maamar zei v’zulato*) means *any* relevant source (*contra*

Friedlander note 2, *ad loc.*, but in accord with Pines, p. 34). Maimonides thereby grants a broad writ to look at the whole context of a verse-shard given by him and to take each term in the verse according to *his* definitions, whichever is appropriate. He explains in chapter 1:10:

“We have already remarked that when we treat in this work of homonyms, we have not the intention to exhaust the meanings of a word (for this is not a philological treatise): we shall mention no other significations but those which bear on our subject.”

That is, his lexicon is not a dictionary. It does not exhaust the meaning of terms; moreover, it rejects or ignores certain common definitions, especially where they imply anthropomorphism. Maimonides finds ways to stress *his* concerns in these definitions. For example, we have seen and will continue to see sexual content in these terms. The explanation for this semantic pattern is that he believes that procreation is the only metaphor for divine creation, bearing in mind the limitations of metaphor.

We have called attention to David Bakan’s theory that the lexicon supplies tools for the subconscious imagination to articulate and comprehend prophetic revelation. He stresses that Maimonides rejects the common contextual meaning of key terms in prophecy. Maimonides’ lexical strategy is a “deliberate violation of context” because “the role of context is to conceal deeper levels of meaning.” The perplexity and heartache that Maimonides speaks of in the Guide Introduction result from interpreting visions and dreams in their external senses. “Apprehension of internal meanings provides relief.”

(Bakan, *Maimonides on Prophecy*, p. 25, 6, Jason Aronson, Inc., 1991. Bakan argues, p. 86, that *makom* could be interpreted against context as the female generative organ, therefore, as receptive *matter*. On Bakan, see my *Commentator’s Preface*).

The Glory of The Lord

The three lexical terms in the two biblical proof-texts are *makom*, *kavod*, and *tzur*, i.e., “place,” “glory,” and “rock.”

Makom. He says that “place” (“Behold a *place* is with Me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock,” Ex. 33:21) is the “Mountain which was pointed out to Moses for *seclusion* and for the *attainment of perfection*,” (*nosef al ha-makom ha-hityakhadut v’hasagat ha’shlemut*). The Arabic term that Friedlander translates as “seclusion,” is given by R. Kafih as *hityakhadut*; but in his note 14, R. Kafih says it could be *hitbodedut*, which is how Schwarz translates it. *Hitbodedut* is *meditation* as mystics use the term. This meditative “seclusion” brings Moses to the degree “attainment of perfection.” He becomes God’s true progeny.

(Avraham ben Ha-Rambam, Maimonides’ son, wrote an impressive essay on *hitbodedut* in *Sefer ha-Maspik l’Ovdei Ha-Shem, Perek Hitbodedut*, p. 178-9, Publ. S. Sason, Jerusalem 1965, Eng.: *The Guide to Serving God*, 409, Feldheim, 2013.)

Tzur. Maimonides explains the term *rock*, *tzur*, in Guide 1:16. He says that it means “cause,” which is also his explanation of *regel* (“foot,” see my chapter 1:5, above, and Guide 1:28). Thus, in Guide 1:16, he retranslates the last clause of Exodus 33:21, as follows:

““And thou shalt stand upon the *Rock*’ (Exodus 33:21), i.e., be firm and steadfast in the conviction that God is the *source* of all things, for this will lead you towards the knowledge of the Divine Being. We have shown (in 1:8, our chapter) that the words: ‘Behold, a *place* is with me’ (Exodus 33:21) contain the same idea.”

Putting the two versions together, we now read that “And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a *place* by me, and thou shalt stand upon a *rock*” means something like *meditate* on the *creativity* of God as the source of all things, to come to know Him and attain perfection. This knowledge is also a meditation on the way God emanates form into matter.

Kavod. We have still not addressed the role of “glory,” *kavod*. Guide 1:19 wonderfully brings the term *kavod* together with the term *malei*, “fill,” which is good for us because the first two definitions of *makom* are about “filling” one’s ancestor’s place, using the same Hebrew term. Maimonides defined *malei* in Guide 1:19, in his third and most important definition, as “the attainment of the highest degree of excellency.” It is thus nearly identical to Definition 2 of *makom* above, and so the phrase “The whole earth is *full* (*melo*, from the root of *malei*) of His glory” (Isaiah 6:4) has the same meaning as “Blessed is the *glory* of the Lord from his place (*makom*).” Maimonides rewrites the Isaiah passage as “All the earth gives evidence of His perfection, i.e., leads to knowledge of it.” Thus, the “glory” has something to do with God’s perfection.

In Guide 1:64 Maimonides defines “glory,” *kavod*, in three ways. *The first definition* and the one that interests him most is that the “glory” is a *created emanation* of God (see my chapter-essay on 1:64 for that seemingly contradictory formulation). This emanation is what he sometimes calls the “created light” (*or hanivra*) and sometimes the *Shekhina*. It is his understanding of the Active Intellect, the divine emanated intelligence which is our mediator with God.

Definition 2 of “glory” is the way we “glorify” God through praise. It extends to include the way the earth and its creatures “praise” God in “the whole earth is full of His glory,” which he says means that a consideration of His creation leads to *knowledge* of it, i.e., to the acquisition of the Active Intellect.

Definition 3 of “glory” is that it is God’s essence. H. A. Wolfson explains that there is an “old question as to whether the Biblical expression ‘The glory of the Lord’ refers to the *essence* of God or to something *emanated* from His essence.” Maimonides strictly warns us not to mix these definitions by confusing God with his creatures or His “attributes.” Thus “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place” can mean:

A) “Blessed is the glory (essence) of the Lord from His (Glory’s) place (*mim’komo*),” (Def. 3 of *glory*), or,

B) “Blessed is the glory (emanation) of the Lord from His (God’s) place (*mim’komo*)” (Def. 1 of *glory*).

Let’s look at how R. Hasdai Crescas’ understood this to grasp this nebulous issue better.

R. Hasdai Crescas’ Interpretation of “The Glory of the Lord”

R. Crescas, wrote:

“...‘The whole earth is full of His glory, is an allusion to the element of *impregnation* (*yesod ha-ibur*), which is one of the elements of Glory [meaning, that glory is the emanation of form into matter]. Of the same tenor is the conclusion of the verse, ‘Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place,’ that is to say, the ‘Blessedness’ and ‘Affluence’ [*ha-shefa* = emanation] ascribed to God is from His place, that is, to say, from God’s own essence and not from something outside Himself, and so the pronominal suffix, ‘His’ in ‘from His place’ [the final “o” in *mim’komo*] will refer to ‘glory.’ If, however, you prefer to consider ‘Glory’ as an emanation (*n’atzel*), the verse will be taken according to its more literal meaning, the pronominal suffix referring to God, the meaning of the

verse thus being, the ‘Glory of God’ is ‘blessed’ and is poured forth (*u’ mushfa*) in abundance ‘from the place of God,’ i.e., from His essence (*atzmuto*), inasmuch as it is an emanation (*n’ atzel*).”

Wolfson interprets here as follows:

“(Wolfson, note 93 to R. Crescas’ passage above:) In accordance with these interpretations of the term Glory, Maimonides had interpreted Isaiah 6:3 in two ways, one taking the term *kavod* to mean the essence of God and the other to mean an emanation (Guide 1:19). Now just as *kavod* has these two meanings, so the *Sefirot*, which are identified by the Cabalists with *kavod*, have two meanings with reference to their relation to God. According to some Cabalists, the *Sefirot* are identical with God’s essence while according to others they are emanations of God’s essence. Abraham Shalom (d. 1557?) compares this cabalistic controversy to the philosophic controversy as to whether the Prime Mover is identical with God or is something emanated from Him. What Crescas is trying to do in this passage is to transfer Maimonides’ discussion of the term *kavod* as he understood it to the term *kavod* as it was understood by the Cabalists in the sense of the *Sefirot*. Assuming first that *kavod*, or the *Sefirot*, is identical with God, Crescas interprets the verse to mean as follows: ‘The blessedness (*barukh*) of the Glory of God (*kavod h’*),’ i.e., of the *Sefirot*, ‘from Glory’s place (*mim’komo*),’ i.e., from the essence of God, inasmuch as the Glory or the *Sefirot* are identical with God’s essence. He takes *barukh* [which Wolfson translates as ‘the blessedness’] not as a passive participle but as a substantive.

“(Wolfson, note 94:) Referring now to the other Cabalistic view, that the *Sefirot* are intermediaries and tools of God, Crescas interprets the verse as follows: ‘Blessed is (*barukh*) the Glory of God (*kavod hashem*),’ i.e., the *Sefirot*, ‘from His place (*mim’komo*),’ i.e., from God’s essence.”

(Crescas, quoted in H.A. Wolfson's translation and commentary, with the original text, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard, 1929, pp. 201, 202, 460-462. See my chapter-essay on R. Crescas’ interpretation in Guide 1:64.)

Yehoram ben Yehoshaphat, King of Judah

In the definition section, above, I suggested that there was something suspicious in Maimonides’ departure from his usual lexical format. Instead of giving *all* his proof-texts from the Bible, he provided three (out of five) from Rabbinic literature: the Talmud and the Mishnah.

He brought the first two quotes from the Talmud to show that *makom* means “level of attainment.” Those quotations use variants of the phrase “filling the place of one’s ancestors” to demonstrate this. They connect strongly with the thrust of the last chapter, Guide 1:7, which contrasted Seth with the Adam’s other children fathered after the expulsion, since only Seth *filled the place* of his ancestor as Adam’s intellectual progeny.

Both Talmud quotations are based on the same biblical passage, Chronicles 2:21:3, which was about one of the most striking cases of botched succession in the Bible, that of Yehoram to the throne of Yehoshaphat, King of Judah. The Chronicler generally praises Yehoshaphat, except for his marrying Yehoram off to the idolatrous daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel. Unfortunately, for Maimonides, the passage does not employ the term *makom*. Still, this story has great significance for his theory of *intellectual progeny*:

“1. Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And Yehoram his son reigned in his stead. 2. And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these [were] the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3. And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of

precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he [was] the firstborn. 4. Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and [divers] also of the princes of Israel....6. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought [that which was] evil in the eyes of the Lord. 7. Howbeit the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons for ever....10. So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time [also] did Libnah revolt from under his hand; because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers. 11. Moreover, he [Jehoram] made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication (*va-yezen*), and compelled Judah [thereto]. 12. And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13. But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring (*va-tazneh*), like to the whoredoms (*k'ha-znot*) of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, [which were] better than thyself: 14. Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: 15. And thou [shalt have] great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day. 16. Moreover, the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that [were] near the Ethiopians: 17. And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. 18. And, after all this, the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. 19. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. 20. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.”
 (Chronicles 2:21:1-20. The Guide never directly mentions the passage. Maimonides invoked it in another context in his Commentary on the Mishnah, *Kedoshim* 1:5)

A horrible and disgusting story! The King James Version is the best of the English translations because the others all insist on translating the variants of *zona* as “to go astray” (JPS 1917 translation) instead of whoring, their correct definition. The link with the Parable of the Married Harlot (*isha zona*) from Proverbs chapter 7 is obvious (See Introduction I above, section J). By marrying into idolatry, Yehoram not only failed the intellectual and moral succession of the Davidic line but also polluted the polity of the covenantal community. Worse, he murdered his brothers who were their father's true intellectual progeny: “better than thyself.” Elijah, who is *already dead* by the time of Yehoram, makes his unique appearance, by *sending a letter* to the king to persuade him to the right path. This particular appearance of Elijah inspired the tradition of his immortality. The great central line of Elijah's letter is Chronicles 21:13:

“But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring (*va-tazneh*), like to the whoredoms (*k'ha-znot*) of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, [which were] better than thyself.”

This verse nicely joins Maimonides' two main themes in this group of chapters, intellectual succession and the danger of materialism: the ascendance of Moses and Seth, against the devolution of Yehoram and the demon spawn of Adam. It illustrates abundantly what results from confusion over our place in this world, whether we merely fill that material space or whether we strive to fulfill our great divine inheritance.

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