

תפארת ישראל

# The Splendor of Israel

# **Chapter 8 Introduction**

This discourse by the Maharal of Prague, a towering 16th-century Jewish thinker and mystic, addresses the true nature of Torah and mitzvos—not as naturalistic or utilitarian laws, but as expressions of divine, supra-natural wisdom. The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loew ben Bezalel, 1520–1609, based in Prague, a student of Kabbalistic and rationalist traditions, and a mentor to many later thinkers) challenges any attempt to rationalize mitzvos based on physical benefit or health logic. Instead, he presents mitzvah observance as the ultimate means of binding the human soul to divine intellect. This discourse is a masterclass in the Maharal's unique synthesis of philosophy, mysticism, and deep psychological awareness.

#### קּיּוּם הַמִּצְוֹת לֹא שֵׁיָּךְ לַשֶּבֶע אֶלָא לַשֵּׂכָל בִּלְבַד The observance of the commandments is not related to nature, but rather only to reason.

It has been explained to you that the Torah is a refining and purifying agent for the soul of a person.

הָתְבָּאֵר לְךְ כִּי הַתּוֹרָה הִיא צַרוּף וְזִכּוּךְ נֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם.

And in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:8): A certain gentile asked Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai: "These actions that you perform seem like sorcery. You bring a cow and burn it (Bamidbar 19:5), and crush it, and take its ashes, and someone among you who became impure from a corpse—you sprinkle two or three drops upon him, and you say to him: 'You are purified.'"

וּבַמִּדְרָשׁ (בְּמִדְבָּר רַבָּה יט, ח): שָׁאַל גּוֹי אֶחָד אֶת רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכָּאִי: אִילֵין עוֹבְרַיָא דְאַתּוּן עֶבְדִין נְרְאִים כְּמִין כְּשָׁפִים. אַתֶּם מְבִיאִים פָּרָה וְשׁוֹרְפִים אוֹתָה (בְּמִדְבֵּר יט, ה), וְכוֹתְשִׁין אוֹתָה וְנוֹטְלִין אֶת אֶפְרָה, וְאֶחָד מִכֶם מִטַמֵא לְמֵת, מַזִין עָלָיו שְׁנַיִם הוֹנִישׁה טִפִין, וְאַתֶּם אוֹמְרִים לוֹ: טָהַרְתָּ.

He said to him: Has a ruach chazazit (feverish spirit) ever entered you? He said to him: No. Have you seen someone who was afflicted with ruach chazazit? He said: Yes. He asked: And what do you do for him? He said: We bring roots and smoke them beneath him, and sprinkle water upon him, and the spirit flees. He said: Let your ears hear what your mouth is saying.

אָמַר לוֹ: נָכְנֵס בָּדְּ רוּחַ חֲזָזִית מִיֶּמֶידְּ, אָמַר לוֹ: לֹא.
רָאִיתָ אֶדָם שֶׁנִּכְנְסָה בּוֹ רוּחַ חֲזֶזִית, אָמַר לוֹ: הֵן.
אָמַר לוֹ: וּמָה אַתֶּם עוֹשִׁים, אָמַר לוֹ: מְבִיאִים עִקְרִים
וּמְעַשְׁנִין תַּחְתָּיו, וּמַרְבִּיצִין עֶלָיו מַיִם, וְהִיא בּוֹרַחַת.
אַמַר לוֹ: יִשְׁמִעוּ אַזְנֵיךְ מַה שֵׁאַתַּה מוֹצִיא מִפִּיךְ.

So too, this spirit is a spirit of impurity, as it is written (Zechariah 13:2): "And also the prophets and the spirit of impurity I will remove from the land." We sprinkle upon him and it flees.

כָּךְ הָרוּחַ הַזָּה רוּחַ טַמְאָה, דְּכְתִיב (זְכַרְיָה יג, ב): "וְגַם אֶת הַנָּבִיאִים וְרוּחַ הַטֶּמְאָה אַעֲבִיר מִן הָאֶרֶץ", מַזִין עָלָיו וְהוּא בּוֹרֵחַ.

After the gentile departed, his students said to him: To this one, you pushed off with a reed; what do you say to us? He said to them: By your lives, it is not the corpse that renders impure, and not the water that purifies, but rather the Holy One, blessed be He, said: I have enacted a decree; I have issued a statute. You are not permitted to transgress My decrees, as it is written

לְאַחַר שֶׁיָצָא, אָמְרוּ לוֹ תַּלְמִידָיו: לָזֶה דָּחִיתָ בְּקָנָה, לָנוּ מָה אַתָּה אוֹמֵר, אָמַר לָהָם: חַיֵּיכֶם, לֹא הַמֶּת מְטַמָּא, וְלֹא הַמַּיִם מְטַהְרִים, אֶלָּא אָמֵר הַקָּדוֹשׁ־ בָּרוּדְ הוּא: חַקָּה חָקַקְתִּי, גְזְרָה גָּזַרְתִּי, אִי אַתָּה רַשַׁאי לַעֲבֹר גְזֵרוֹתַי, דְּכְתִיב (בְּמִדְבֵּר יט, ב): "זאת חֲקַת הַתּוֹרָה", עַד כָּאן

הַתּוֹרָה סֵפֶּר רְפוּאוֹת אוֹ סֵפֶּר הַטֶּבַע.

# The Maharal of Prague

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(Bamidbar 19:2): "This is the statute of the Torah." Until here (the Midrash).

Behold, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai answered the gentile that the commandments of the Torah are beneficial in and of themselves, in the manner that he said—that the red heifer removes the spirit of impurity.	הָנֵּה רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכָּאי הֵשִׁיב לַגוֹי, כִּי מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה הֵם תּוֹעֶלֶת בְּעַצְמָם, עַל דֶּרֶך זָה שֶׁאָמַר, כִּי כָּּרָה אֲדַמָּה הִיא מַעֲבָרֶת רוּחַ הַטֶמְאָה.
And just as some people have thought that the Torah prohibited forbidden foods because they generate harmful physical temperaments, and they have offered reasons for the prohibitions of blood and fat, saying all of them produce bad temperaments—	וּכְמוֹ שֶׁחָשְׁבוּ קְצָת בְּנֵי אָדָם, כִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֶסְרָה מַאֲכָלוֹת הָאֲסוּרוֹת מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵם מוֹלִידִים מֶזֶג רַע. וְכֵן נָתְנוּ טַעַם בְּדָם וּבְחֵלֶב, שֶׁכַּלָּם הֵם מוֹלִידִים מֶזֶג רַע.
All of these explanations are baseless regarding the true reason for their prohibition.	וְכָל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלוּ אֵין בָּהֶם מַמָּשׁ לְעִנְיַן אָסּוּר שֶׁלָּהֶם
And in the chapter "Amar Lahem HaMemunah" (Yoma 39a): ""And you shall become impure through them' (Vayikra 11:43), it was taught by Rabbi Yishmael: A sin dulls the heart of a person, as it says: 'Do not become impure through them and be impure by them'—do not read it as 'וְנִשְׁמְשֵׁם' but as 'וְנִשְׁמְשֵׁם' (you shall be dulled) through them."	וּבְפֶּרֶק אָמַר לָהֶם הַמְמַנָּה (יוֹמָא ל״ט, א): "וְנִטְמֵהֶם בָּם" (וַיִּקְרָא י״א, מ״ג), תַּנָּא רַבִּי יִשְׁמְצֵאל: עֲבַרָה מְטַמְטֵם לִבּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם, שֶׁנָּאֱמֵר: "אַל תְּטַמְאוּ בָּהֶם וְנִטְמֵתֶם בָּם", אַל תִּקְרָא 'וְנִטְמֵהֶם', אֶלָּא 'וְנִטַמְטֵם בָּם.
Behold, they only said that a sin dulls the heart of a person. And he explained that this dullness comes from the sin—because the person transgressed a commandment that was fitting for him, since his soul is a divine soul, as we said.	הָרֵי כִּי לֹא אָמְרוּ רַק עֲבַרָה מְטַמְטֵם לְבּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם. וְאָמַר כִּי הַמִּמְטוּם הַזֶּה מִעַד עֲבַרָה, כִּי מִפְּנֵי שֶׁעָבַר הַמִּצְוָה, אֲשֶׁר רָאוּי לָאָדָם מִעַד אֲשֶׁר וַפְשׁוֹ נֶפֶשׁ ;אֱלֹהִית כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַרְנוּ
Therefore, the sin dulls his heart—not because of the nature of the creeping creatures.	וּלְכָךְ הָעֲבַרָה מְטַמְטֵם לִבּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם, אֲבָל אֵין זָה מִצַד הַטֶבַע שֶׁל הַשְּׁרָצִים.
And even if it were true that all forbidden things generate a negative temperament, that is not the reason for the prohibition.	וְאָם הָאֱמֶת הוּא שֶׁכֶּל הַדְּכָרִים הָאֲסוּרִים מוֹלִידִים מֶזֶג רַע, אֵין זֶה טַעַם הָאָסּוּר,
Rather, what the Torah forbade shows that these are things with a deviation—they depart from the category of other foods that are pure.	רַק כִּי מַה שֶׁאָסְרָה הַתּוֹרָה אוֹתָם, בָּזֶה נִרְאָה כִּי הַם דְּבָרִים יֵשׁ בָּהֶם שִׁנּוּי, וְיוֹצְאִים מִכְּלָל שְׁאָר הַמַּאֲכָלִים שָׁהֵם טְהוֹרִים.
And because of the deviation within them, they draw after them a strange, altered nature—as we wrote above.	וּבִשְׁבִיל הַשָּׁנּוּי שֶׁבָּהֶם יִפֶּשֵׁךְ אַחֲרֵיהֶם טֶבַע זָר מְשַׁנָּה גַּם־כֵּן, וּכְמוֹ שֶׁכָּתַבְנוּ זָה גַּם־כֵּן לְמַעָּלָה.
But this is not the reason behind what is forbidden or permitted—for if it were so, the Torah would be a book of	אָבָל אֵין זֶה טַעַם בְּאָסוּר וְהָתֵּר, שָׁאָם־כֵּן הָיְתָה התורה ספר רפואות או ספר הטבע

medicine or a book of natural science.

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And just as Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai answered the gentile that the commandment of the red heifer is like an act of nature or a kind of mystical charm, they said to him: "To him you pushed off with a reed."	ְוְכַאֲשֶׁר הֵשִׁיב רַבִּי יוֹחָנֶן בֶּן זַכָּאי לַגּוֹי כִּי מִצְוַת פָּרָה אֲדֵמָה עַל דֶּרֶך זֶה, וְהִיא כְּמוֹ פְּעֲלוֹת הַטֶּבַע אוֹ סְגֵלָה מָן הַסְגֵלוֹת, אָמְרוּ לוֹ: לָזֶה דְּחִיתוֹ בְּקֶנֶה,
That is, to say to him that the mitzvos of the Torah are of that sort. But we, who know that the commandments of the Torah are not of that sort—what do you say to us?	לוֹמֵר לוֹ כִּי מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה עַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה. אֲבָל אָנוּ, שֶׁאָנוּ יוֹדְעִים כִּי אֵין מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה עַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה, אִם־כֵּן מָה אַתָּה אוֹמֵר לָנוּ.
And he answered: "By your lives, it is not the corpse that defiles, and it is not the water that purifies." That is, there is no natural cause for the corpse to defile or for the water to purify.	ְהַשִּׁיב: חַיֵּיכֶם שֶׁאֵין הַמֵּת מְטַמֵּא וְאֵין הַמַּיִם מְטַהָּרִים. פֵּרוּשׁ, כִּי אֵין בַּטֶבַע שֶׁיִּהְיֶה הַמֵּת מְטַמָּא אוֹ שֶׁיִּהְיוּ הַמַּיִם מְטַהָּרִים.
For there is nothing natural in this commandment; rather, "I have issued a decree—you are not permitted to transgress it."	שֶׁאֵין כָּאן דָּבָר טִבְעִי בְּמִצְוָה זוֹ, רַק גְּזֵרָה גָּזַרְתִּי, אִי אַתָּה רַשַּׁאי לַעֲבֹר עָלֶיהָ.
And the explanation is: Everything stems from the order that Hashem, blessed be He, gave us. It is a rational commandment, and so it follows logically.	וְהַפֵּרוּשׁ הוּא, כִּי הַכּּל מִצַּד הַסֵּדֶר שֶׁנָּתַן הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַף לָנוּ, מִצְוָה שִׂכְלִית, מִתְחַיֵּב כָּךּ.
Therefore, the corpse defiles a person, and the water purifies him—and all of it is necessitated by wisdom, which is the Torah that Hashem, blessed be He, gave to man.	וּבִשְׁבִיל כָּךְ הַמֵּת מְטַמָּא אֶל הָאָדָם, וְהַמַּיִם מְטַהָרִים אוֹתוֹ, וְהַכֹּל מְחַיֵב הַחָכְמָה – הִיא הַתּוֹרָה – שֶׁנָּתַן הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ לָאָדָם.
But to say that this thing is natural—that it is not. Rather, this is the order of Hashem, blessed be He, for man in His wisdom, and because it is a decree appropriate to man, the corpse defiles and the water purifies.	אֲבָל שֶׁיְהֵא דָּבָר זֶה טִבְעִי – דָּבָר זֶה אֵינוֹ. רַק כִּי כָּךְ הַסֵּדֶר שֶׁל הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ לָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָתוֹ, וּמִצֵּד הַחֹק שָׁהוּא שַׁיָּךְ לָאָדָם – הַמֵּת מְטַמֵּא וְהַמֵּיִם מְטַהַרִים.
And therefore, one should not question this, for "deep, deep—who can find it?" (Koheles 7:24).	וּמִפְּנֵי כָּךְ אֵין לְהַרְהֵר אַחֲרָיו, כִּי "עָמֹק עָמֹק – מִי נִמְצָאָנּוּ" (קֹהֶלֶת ז, כ״ד).
For the Torah is not natural. For if the Torah were natural, then it would be difficult to understand the concept of impurity and purity. But this is not a natural thing at all—it is a rational order.	כִּי אֵין הַתּוֹרָה טִבְעִית. שֶׁאָלוּ הָיְתָה הַתּוֹרָה טִבְעִית, הָיָה זֶה קָשֶׁה – מַה עִנְיַן הַטֵּמְאָה וְהַטְּהְרָה? אֲבָל אֵין זֶה דָּבָר טִבְעִי כְּלָל, רַק הוּא סֵדֶר שִׂכְלִי.
And even if one does not know or understand the nature of this decree, behold the Torah was only given to refine the creations (Bereishis Rabbah 44:1), and this refinement applies to a person whether he knows the reason for the mitzvah or not.	וְאָם כִּי אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ וְאֵינוֹ מֵבִין עִנְיַן הַחֹק הַזֶּה, הַלֹּא הַתּוֹרָה לֹא נִתְּנָה רַק לְצָרֵף הַבְּרִיּוֹת (בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה מ״ד, א,

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Only when a person's actions follow the rational order that is proper for him, then his actions are as they should be according to reason—and this is the refinement and purification of his soul from its source, as was explained.	ְהַצֵּרוּף הַזֶּה הוּא לָאָדָם בֵּין יוֹדֵעַ טַעַם שֶׁל מִצְוָה אוֹ לֹא יֵדַע, רַק כַּאֲשֶׁר מַעֲשָּׁיו הֵם נִמְשָׁכִים אַחַר הַפַּדָר הַשֵּׂרְלִי מֵה שֶׁרָאוּי לוֹ, וּבָזֶה מַעֲשָּׁיו כְּמוֹ שֶׁרָאוּי לְפִי הַשֵּׂרְלִי, וְהוּא צֵרוּף וְזִכּוּךְ נַפְשׁוֹ מִן הַמָּבוֹעַ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִתְבָּאֵר.
For the Torah is the rational order that is fitting for a person as a human being. And through the commandments, he cleaves to the rational; and through this, he cleaves to Him, blessed be He. And this is what is written (Bamidbar 19:2): "This is the statute of the Torah"	פִּי הַתּוֹרָה הִיא סֵדֶר הַשֵּׂכְלִי אֲשֶׁר רָאוּי לָאָדָם בַּמֵּה שֶׁהוּא אָדָם. וְעַל־יְדֵי הַמִּצְוֹת דָּבֵק בַּשֵּׂכְלִי, וְעַל־יְדֵי־זֶה דָּבֵק בּוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ. וְזֶהוּ דִּכְתִיב (בְּמִדְבֵּר י״ט, ב): "זֹאת חָקַת הַתּוֹרָה" וגו׳
And we have already said that even if we do not know the reason and cause for each and every detail found in a person—why it is the way it is—nonetheless, we know that nothing exists in vain.	וּכְבָר אָמַרְנוּ, שֶׁאַף אִם אֵין יָדוּעַ לָנוּ טַעַם וְסִבָּה עַל כָּל דָּבָר וְדָבָר שֶׁנִּמְצָא בָּאָדָם לְמָה הוּא כָּדְּ, מִכָּל מָקוֹם יָדוּעַ לָנוּ שָׁאֵין דָבָר אֶחָד לְבַטְלָה.
And so did Hashem, blessed be He, arrange in His wisdom all created beings—upper and lower.	וְכָדְ סְדֵר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּחָכְמָתוֹ כָּל הַנִּבְרָאִים עֶלְיוֹנִים וְתַחְתּוֹנִים.
And the same applies to the commandments: why are they the way they are? Certainly, we know that this is the order that Hashem, blessed be He, established in the Torah, and so it necessarily follows.	ְרֵבֵן עִנְיָן הַמִּצְוֹת לָמָּה הֵם כָּךּ; בְּוַדַּאי יָדַעְנוּ שֶׁכָּךְ נוֹתֵן הַפֵּדֶר שֶׁסְדֵר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ הַתּוֹרָה, וְכָךְ מִתְחַיֵּב מִמֶּנוּ.
Therefore, one should not question the reason behind the commandments—why they are this way—for so did Hashem decree the order according to His wisdom, and nothing is in vain. So did Hashem, blessed be He, engrave.	וּלְכָּדְ אֵין לִשְׁאל עַל טַעַם הַמִּצְוֹת לָמָה הֵם כָּדְ, כִּי כָּדְ גָּזַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַדְ הַסֵּדֶר לְפִי חָכְמָתוֹ, וְאֵין דָּבָר אֶחָד לָבַטָלָה, וְכָדְּ חָקַקְ הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַדְּ
And the person who performs and keeps this order that Hashem, blessed be He, arranged—this is a refinement and purification of his soul.	וְהָאָדָם הָעוֹשֶׁה וְהַשׁוֹמֵר הַפֵּדֶר הַזָּה אֲשֶׁר סִדֵר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, דָּבָר זֶה צַרוּף וְזִכּוּךְ נָכֶשׁ הָאָדָם.
For through the performance of the commandments—which are the rational order—he cleaves to the rational, and through this, he cleaves to Hashem, blessed be He.	פִּי עַל־יְדֵי עֲשָׂיַת הַמָּצְוֹת, שֶׁהֵם הַפֵּדֶר הַשָּׂכְלִי, הוּא דָּבֵק בַּשָּׂכְלִי, וְעַל־יְדֵי זָה דְּבֵק בּוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ.
And one who transgresses the commandments departs from the rational order that Hashem, blessed be He, ordained. And whatever departs from order brings complete destruction of the soul.	וְהָעוֹבֵר עַל הַמָּצְוֹת, הוּא יוֹצֵא מָן הַסֵּדֶר הַשָּׂכְלִי שֶׁפָּדַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יוֹצֵא מָן הַסֵּדֶר, מֵבִיא לוֹ זָה אִבּוּד הַנָּפָשׁ לְגַמְרֵי.

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Therefore, whoever assigns to the commandments a reason based in nature—for example, saying that the Torah forbade pork (Vayikra 11:7–8) because it produces a harmful bodily temperament—and even if this is truly the caseand likewise they gave a reason for the prohibition of	וּלְפִיכָךְ כָּל מִי שֶׁנּוֹתֵן בַּמִּצְוֹת טֵעֵם עַל־פִּי הַטֶּבַע, לוֹמֵר כִּי לְכָךְ אֶסְרָה תּוֹרָה חְזִיר (וַיִּקְרָא י״א, ז–ח), מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא מוֹלִיד בַּגוּף מֶזֶג רַע, וְכֵן הוּא בְּוַדַּאי הָאֱמֶת
forbidden fat—that it produces harmful temperament—and so with blood.	ְוְכֵן נָתְנוּ טַעַם בְּאָסּוּר חֵלֶב, שֶׁהוּא מוֹלִיד מֶזֶג רַע, וְכֵן בָּדָם.
And all the more so with insects and impure birds—for all of them they gave naturalistic reasons. As if the Torah were a book of medicinal remedies or a book of nature—Heaven forbid to say so.	וּמִכֶּל שֶׁכֵּן בַּשְׁקְצִים וּבָעוֹפוֹת הַטְמֵאוֹת, בְּכַלָּם נָתְנוּ טַעַם עַל־פִי הַטֶּבַע. וּכְאָלוּ הָיְתָה הַתּוֹרָה סֵפֶּר מִמִּפְרֵי הָרְפוּאוֹת אוֹ סֵכֶּר הַטֶּבַע, חַס וְשָׁלוֹם לוֹמֵר כָּךְ.
For if the matter were as they say, behold they said in Chullin 17a: "And houses filled with all good things' (Devarim 6:11)—Rabbi Yirmiyah said in the name of Rav: It refers to houses of pigs which were permitted to them."	ְוְאִם הָיָה הַדָּבֶר כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ הֵם, הֲרֵי אֶמְרוּ בְּפֶרֶק קַמֶּא דְּחַלִּין (י״ז, א): "וּבָתִּים מְלֵאִים כָּל טוּב" (דְּבָרִים ו, י״א), אָמֵר רַבִּי יִרְמְיָה אָמֵר רַב: כָּתְלֵי בֹּחַזִירֵי הִתִּיר לָהֶם.
And if the reason for the prohibition was due to harmful temperament—where did the concern go?	וְאָם שׁרֶשׁ הָאָפּוּר בִּשְׁבִיל מֶזֶג רַע, הָאָפּוּר לְהֵיכָן הָלַךְּ
And similarly with forbidden fat—if its nature is harmful, then why is the fat of a ben pakuah (fetus born alive) permitted, as brought in Chullin 74a?	ְוְכֵן חֵלֶב, אָם מִזְגוֹ רַע, אָם־כֵּן כֶּן פָּקוּעַ לְמָּה חֶלְבּוֹ מַתָּר, בִּדְאִיתָא בְּפֶרֶק בְּהֵמָה הַמַּקְשָׁה (חֻלִּין ע״ד, א), מַה טַעַם בָּזָה.
And likewise, if slaughter was forbidden so that we should not be cruel, then why did the Torah permit ben pakuah without slaughter?	וְכֵן אָם אָסַר הַשְּׁחִיטָה שֶׁלֹּא נִתְאַכְזֵר, לָמָּה הִתִּירָה הַתּוֹרָה בֶּן פָּקוּעַ בְּלֹא שְׁחִיטָה (שֶׁם).
Therefore, it is not fitting to speak in this manner. And even though it is true that all of these indeed have a harmful temperament—that will certainly result from their inner negative character—this is not the essential reason for the mitzvah.	לְכָךְ אֵין רָאוּי לוֹמַר כָּךְ. וְאַף אֶמְנָם כִּי הָאֱמֶת הוּא כִּי כָּל אֵלוּ יֵשׁ בָּהֶם מֶזֶג רַע, דָּבָר זֶה יִמְשֶׁךְּ בְּוַדַּאי בַּמָּה שָׁיֵשׁ בָּהֶם שִׁנּוּי רַע גַּם־כֵּן. אֲבָל אֵין זֶה עִקַּר טַעַם הַמִּצְוָה,
Rather, they are simply not fitting for man, according to the order Hashem established, and therefore He distanced them. And sometimes, the Torah did not distance such things.	רַק שֶׁאֵינָם רְאוּיִים אֶל הָאָדָם כְּפִי הַפֵּדֶר אֲשֶׁר סְדַּר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְּ, לְכָךְ הָרְחִיקָה אוֹתָם. וְלִפְעָמִים לֹא הָרְחִיקָה הַתּוֹרָה.
And this is what Hashem promised: "And you shall consume all the nations," for in this case, distancing was not appropriate—since now it was fitting to fulfill (Devarim 6:11): "And houses filled with all good things."	ְוֹזֶה אֲשֶׁר הִבְטִיחַ הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ: "וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת כָּל הָעַמִּים", לֹא הָיָה רָאוּי הַרְחָקָה, מִצַּד שֶׁעַתָּה רָאוּי שֶׁיִּהְיֶה מְקַיֵּם (דְּבָרִים ו, י״א): "וּבָתִּים מְלֵאִים כָּל טוּב", וּלְפִיכָךְ לֹא הִרְחִיקָה הַתּוֹרָה דְּבָרִים אֵלוּ.

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Just as the Torah forbade something when it was appropriate according to the rational order, so too did the Torah permit it when it was fitting to permit.	וּכְמוֹ שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה אֶסְרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה רָאוּי לֶאֱמֹר לְפִי הַפֵּדֶר הַשִּׂכְלִי, כָּךְ הַתּוֹרָה הִתִּירָה אוֹתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא לָהַתִּיר.
Everything depends on the intellect, through which the conduct of man should be directed.	וָהַכּּל לְפִי הַשֵּׂכֶל אֲשֶׁר רָאוּי שֶׁיּהְיֶה בּוֹ הַנְהָגַת הָאָדָם.
And this is what our Sages, of blessed memory, said (Torat Kohanim on Vayikra 20:26): "A person should not say: 'I cannot stand eating pig meat,' or 'I dislike such-and-such thing,' but rather, 'I indeed desire it, but what can I do—my Father in Heaven decreed it upon me."	וְזֶה אֶמֶרֶם זִכְרוֹנֶם לִבְרָכָה (תּוֹרַת־כּהְנִים עַל וַיִּקְרָא כ, כו): "לֹא יֹאמֵר הָאָדָם אִי אֶפְשִׁי בְּבְשֵׂר חֲזִיר, אִי אֶפְשִׁי בְּדָבָר פְּלוֹנִי, אֶלֶּא אֶפְשִׁי, וּמָה אֶעֱשֶׂה שֶׁאָבִי "שֶׁבַּשָׁמַיִם גָּזַר עָלַי.
This teaches that one must not say the Torah is based on natural law. For if it were natural, then there would be no divine reward for something that comes by nature.	הוֹרוּ בָּזֶה שָׁאֵין לוֹמַר כִּי הַתּוֹרָה הִיא טָבְעִית. שָׁאִם הָיְתָה טִבְעִית, לֹא הָיָה בָּה קִבּוּל שָׂכָר אֱלֹהִי עַל דָּבָר שָׁהוּא טִבְעִי.
Therefore, he should say: "I desire it" because of nature, but Hashem, blessed be He, has decreed upon me in His wisdom what is not fitting for man and unique to his soul.	וּלְכָךְ יֵאָמֵר: אֶפְשִׁי מִצַּד הַטֶּבַע, רַק הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ גָּזַר עָלַי בְּחָכְמָתוֹ מַה שֶׁאֵין רָאוּי אֶל הָאָדָם וּמִיּוּחָד בּוֹ נַכְּשׁוֹ
And if a person asks: Why did the rational order determine that man should perform these commandments?	וְאָם יֹאמַר הָאָדָם, לָמָה נוֹתֵן הַסֵּדֶר הַשִּׂכְלִי שֶׁיַּצֲשֶׂה ?הָאָדָם אֵלוּ הַמִּצְוֹת
Certainly, regarding mitzvos whose reason is known, like charity (Devarim 15:8), prayer, honoring parents (Shemos 20:12), and distancing from theft and robbery (Vayikra 19:11–13), one may say that it is fitting for man to be distinguished by these acts, for they are appropriate to human dignity.	בְּוַדָּאי מִצְוֹת שֶׁבַּדַע טַעֲמָן, כְּמוֹ מִצְוַת צְדָקָה (דְּבָרִים ט״ו, ח), וּתְפָּלָּה, וּמִצְוַת כִּבּוּד אָב וָאֵם (שְׁמוֹת כ, י״ב), וְהַרְחָקַת גְּנֵבָה וּגְזַלָּה (וַיִּקְרָא י״ט, י״א–י״ג), דָּבָר זָה יֵשׁ לוֹמַר כִּי רָאוּי שֶׁיִהְיֶה הָאָדָם מְיֻחָד בְּמֵעֲשִׂים אֵלּוּ, כִּי הֵם רְאוּיִים לָאָדָם.
But as for the mitzvos whose reasons are not known or revealed—they are nevertheless known to Moshe and to other sages according to their level and spiritual standing.	אֲבֶל הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁאֵין טַעֲמָן יָדוּעַ וְנִגְלֶה, הֲלֹא הֵם יְדוּעִים לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְשְׁאָר חֲכָמִים לְפִי מַעֲלָתָם וּמַדְרֵגָתָם.
For all of them, according to the rational order, are fitting for man—and that is why they purify and refine his soul until it becomes pure and clear.	עַד שֶׁכֹּל בָּהֶם לְפִי סֵדֶר הַשִּׂכְלִי רְאוּיִים לָאָדָם, וּלְכָהְ הֵם מְזַכִּים וּמְצָרְפִים אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ עַד שֶׁהִיא צְרוּפָה וְזַכָּה.
And this clarifies what was said (by Rabbi Yochanan), that it is not the corpse that defiles nor the cow that purifies the impure—	וְהָתְבָּאֵר לְךְ בֵּרוּר הַדְּבָרִים מֵה שֶׁאָמֵר (רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן) כִּי לֹא הַמֵּת מְטַמֵּא, וְהַפָּרָה מְטַהֵר טְמֵאִים.
Meaning, it is not a natural property of the dead that it defiles, nor a natural property of the waters of sprinkling that they purify.	כְּלוֹמֵר שֶׁאֵין זֶה דָּבָר טִבְעִי לְמֵת שֶׁהוּא מְטַמֵּא, וְדָבָר טִבְעִי לְמֵי הַנִּדָּה שֶׁהוּא מְטַהֵר.

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Rather, Hashem, blessed be He, engraved and arranged man's actions according to what the divine intellect obligated—such that this is the method through which he becomes purified. But it is not natural; it is entirely divine intellect.	רַק הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַהְּ חָקַק וְסִדֵּר לָאָדָם מַצְשָּׁיו כְּפִּי מַה שֶׁחָיֵיב הַשֵּׂכָל, שֶׁכָּךְ יִקַּח לְטָהָרָתוֹ, אֲבָל אֵינוֹ דָּבָר טִבְעִי, רַק הַכּּל שֵׁכֶל אֱלֹהִי.
And for man, this is a statute and decree—especially when he cannot grasp the reason for the mitzvah, which is a divine intellect.	וְאֶל הָאָדָם הוּא חֹק וּגְזֵרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵינוֹ עוֹמֵד עַל טַעַם הַמִּצְוָה, שָׁהוּא שַׂכָל אֱלֹהִי.
And so it is with all commandments: they are divine intellect—not human intellect.	וְכָךְ הֵם כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת, שֶׁהֵם שֵׂכֶל אֱלֹהִי, וְלֹא שֵׂכֶל אָדָם.
Therefore, a person who possesses a divine soul, even though it is bound in material form—through performance of divine, rational mitzvos, when he cleaves to them and fulfills them—he thereby cleaves to Hashem, blessed be He, and brings his soul out of the realm of nature.	וּלְפִיכָךּ הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לוֹ נֶפֶשׁ אֱלֹהִית, וְהִיא עוֹמֶדָת בַּחֹמֶר, עַל־יָדִי מִצְוֹת הַשִּׂכְלִיּוֹת הָאֱלֹהִיוֹת – בַּאֲשֶׁר הוא דָּבֵק בָּהֶם וְעוֹשֶׂה אוֹתָם – הוּא דָּבֵק בּוֹ יִתְבָּרַדְּ, וּמוֹצִיאִים אָת נַפְשׁוֹ מִן הַשֶּבַע.
And even though he does not know the reason for the mitzvah, still, when he performs it and cleaves to the mitzvah—which is divine intellect—he is cleaving to Hashem, blessed be He.	וְאַף שֶׁלֹּא יֵדַע טַעַם הַמִּצְוָה, הָלֹא כַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עוֹשֶׂה הַמִּצְוָה, וְדָבֵק בַּמִּצְוָה שֶׁהוּא הַשֵּׁכֶל אֱלֹהִי, נִדְבָּק בּוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ. וְהָבֵן בַּדְּכָרִים הָאֵלוּ, וְדֵי בָּזָה.

#### **NOTE Summary**

Understand these matters well. This is enough.

The Maharal opens by affirming that mitzvos do not stem from nature but from divine intellect. Torah is not a system to align man with biological health or practical function—it is a divine order that purifies and elevates the soul. He illustrates this through the example of the Red Heifer (Parah Adumah), whose purification process defies all natural explanation, as even Rabbi Yochanan taught that the corpse does not naturally impart impurity, and the ashes do not inherently purify. Rather, these are divine decrees without natural basis.

The Midrash cited clarifies: one must not say, "I naturally dislike pork," but rather "I desire it, yet Hashem forbade it." This shows that Torah is not based on taste, temperament, or scientific benefit, but on divine decree. If Torah were naturalistic, it would carry no divine reward. Even when certain prohibitions happen to align with natural dangers (like harmful foods), that is not their true reason. Were Torah merely medicinal, inconsistencies such as the permission to consume meat from a ben pakuah (a fetus found alive after slaughter) would undermine the system. These examples prove the Torah is not governed by biology or ethics alone.

While some mitzvos like tzedakah or honoring parents may appear rational, their inner reason still flows from divine intellect. Mitzvos with unknown reasons are known to Moshe and great sages, not because they are arbitrary, but because they lie beyond normal cognition. All mitzvos conform to the "order of divine reason," which, when followed, purifies and clarifies the soul. Deviating from this order brings spiritual disintegration.

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Therefore, even when one cannot grasp the rationale, performing mitzvos binds him to Hashem, for he cleaves to divine intellect through divine action.

#### **Practical Takeaway**

Avoid reducing mitzvos to explanations based on physical health, psychology, or social benefit. Even when those factors are present, they are not the source of the mitzvah's obligation. Approach mitzvos as pathways of divine connection. Even without understanding the reason, trust that each command refines your soul and binds you to Hashem's infinite wisdom.

#### **Chassidic Story**

#### **NOTE**

The Maharal of Prague was once approached by a physician in the emperor's court who scoffed at dietary laws in the Torah, claiming they were just ancient hygienic customs. The Maharal invited him to his home and served a meal of the finest kosher meat. After eating, the doctor praised the flavor and asked, "What medicinal value is in this meat that makes it kosher?"

The Maharal replied, "None more than the non-kosher meat you claim is equal. The reason I served it was not for health or flavor, but because this act—permitted by the Creator—unites my soul with Him. If I had served you the tastier meat, but one that Heaven forbade, it would have been poison for my soul even if nourishing to my body."

The physician was silent. Years later, he told others that in that moment, he realized that Judaism was not a culture of laws, but a map to another world.

(Source: based on oral traditions recorded by students of the Maharal; see also *Netzach Yisrael*, chapter 11) **END NOTE**]