

The Maharal of Prague  
גְּבוּרוֹת ה' - Gevurot Hashem  
 (The Strengths/Mighty Acts of God)

First Introduction

הַתְּרַחֲקוּת מִן הַחֲקִירוֹת מְקַרְבֵּת לֵה' יִתְבָּרַךְ

**Distancing oneself from philosophical inquiries brings one closer to Hashem, may He be blessed**

**"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2).**

In Midrash Bereishit Rabbah (Parashah 9), it is stated:

Rabbi Levi said in the name of Rabbi Chama bar Chanina: From the beginning of the Book of Genesis until the verse "and they were completed" Genesis 2:1, it reflects "the glory of God to conceal a matter." From here onward, it is about searching out a matter. This teaches that the alignment of human comprehension with the divine requires that matters within the realm of understanding should not be entirely separated from the one who seeks understanding. If something is completely detached from human understanding, it is inappropriate for a person to comprehend it.

It is because human comprehension is related to the individual, necessitating that what is entirely separate from them is unsuitable for their understanding. This is why the Torah does not explicitly mention the World to Come or the immortality of the soul after death. If the Torah were like a king of flesh and blood instructing his servants not to disobey his command so that they might earn the promised reward, then the good reward of the World to Come and Gan Eden would undoubtedly have been mentioned, and it would also state that when one deviates from the command and rebels against their Creator, they will be judged in Gehinnom.

However, since the Torah is the word of the Living God delivered through prophecy, the things described in it correspond to the prophet's level of understanding. These matters are separate from the physical realm of humanity and do not exist with them in reality. Just as these matters are distinct in themselves and separate from humanity, so too is their knowledge distant from and separate from human understanding. Such matters do not fall within the scope of the prophet's comprehension if they are entirely separate from humanity.

There is a fundamental difference between wisdom and prophecy:

A wise person attains knowledge through their intellect. Since their understanding derives from intellect, they can grasp even deeply hidden and concealed matters. However, a prophet is called a "seer" or "visionary" because their perception depends

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on what they "see" externally. Therefore, every prophet requires a connection to the subject of their prophecy, becoming attached to those matters and gaining understanding through their prophecy.

**"And therefore the sages said (Bava Batra 12a): 'A sage is superior to a prophet.'**

The explanation of this is that prophecy resembles sensory perception, like the sense of sight that detects external phenomena. Although prophecy is not achieved through physical senses, it is similar in that the prophetic faculty, which is the imaginative or receptive power of the prophet, connects with the subject of the prophecy. The prophet becomes attached to what they are prophesying about.

For this reason, a sage is considered superior, as the sage comprehends and knows hidden matters, drawing them out from their intellect and internal reasoning. Due to this distinction, a prophet is called a "seer" or "visionary," which refers to seeing things externally, unlike a sage.

Thus, it is impossible for matters such as the World to Come or the immortality of the soul to be addressed through prophecy, as prophecy requires a "seer" or "visionary" connection, and these matters are entirely separate from humanity. Since they are completely separate from humans, prophecy cannot address them. As previously mentioned, prophecy requires an external attachment to the subject of the prophecy.

Therefore, concepts like the World to Come and the immortality of the soul are better explained through wisdom, as the sage is capable of grasping hidden matters more effectively than through prophecy. This is why a sage is superior to a prophet: the sage can comprehend things that are beyond the scope of prophecy.

The prophetic faculty is akin to the sense of sight, which perceives tangible objects from the outside. How, then, could the Torah address matters of the World to Come, which are not within the domain of prophecy? One who understands the difference between a sage and a prophet will recognize the impossibility of such matters being addressed through prophecy. Prophets connect with the subject of their prophecy, but matters of the World to Come and the immortality of the soul are beyond their realm of connection.

**"And therefore the sages said (Berakhot 34b): 'All the prophets prophesied only about the days of the Messiah, but as for the World to Come, no eye has seen it except for You.'"**

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The explanation of this statement is that prophecy requires vision, which is an attachment to something external that is understood through prophecy. Therefore, the prophets were only able to prophesy about the Messianic Era, because the topic of the Messiah pertains to this world and is not entirely separate from humanity, as it exists within this world. However, the World to Come, which is separate from this world, cannot be the subject of prophecy, for "no eye has seen it," and prophecy is based on vision, as explained.

Nevertheless, the Torah does allude to the World to Come, as it is written (Deuteronomy 22:7): *"And you shall have a prolonged life,"* referring to a world that is entirely long-lasting. The promise of a prolonged life is not exclusively about the World to Come itself but rather assures the existence of a person in this world that their life will not be lost. For if one dies a natural death, it is not considered true death, as they will return to life, and this is not specifically about the essence of the World to Come. Instead, it is a promise that the existence of a person in this world will not be entirely destroyed.

However, to directly reference the World to Come in its own right, apart from the existence of people in this world, is not possible, because the World to Come in its essence is completely separate from humanity in this world. And just as it is separate from humanity, so too is it separate from their comprehension, and there is no connection for a prophet to it. How, then, could one prophesy about it?

This is the true explanation for why these matters are not explicitly mentioned in the Torah or by the prophets.

And if we could explain this in another way, which is also true: It is the way of the Torah to clarify the direct cause, for this is the path of wisdom—not something that is caused incidentally. The fact that the Torah brings a person to the life of the World to Come is not an essential cause but rather an incidental one, since the World to Come was created by God, just as this world was created.

If so, it cannot be said that merely observing the Torah and its commandments grants one prolonged days without any loss, for sin causes harm to a person, while fulfilling the commandments grants them prolonged days. This is mentioned frequently in the Torah, as in (Deuteronomy 22:7): *"And you shall have prolonged days,"* and (Deuteronomy 5:30): *"So that you may live."*

When a person has life, they naturally arrive at the World to Come, which is the ultimate goal. But if one does not observe the Torah, they will not have prolonged days, and

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death will come to them. How, then, can they reach the World to Come? It turns out that the Torah is not inherently the cause of the World to Come but rather of prolonged days.

An analogy: The Torah gives a person life in this world, but it is not the Torah that causes this world to exist. However, when the Torah provides a person with life in this world, they are naturally in this world. Similarly, the Torah is inherently the cause of prolonged days but not of the World to Come.

Therefore, the Torah only mentions the direct cause—prolonged days—as that is what the Torah is intrinsically a cause for.

Indeed, this explanation necessitates saying, as has been clarified from the matter of prophecy itself, that just as the sense of sight receives its perception through the connection of the sensory organ to the visible object, so too the power of prophecy receives its inspiration through the connection of the prophetic faculty to that which is being perceived.

Therefore, it is impossible for such connection to exist with something completely separate from the world. Hence, it is not possible to have a connection to the World to Come itself, but only through what is connected to this world. This is why it speaks of reaching existence in this world, as in "that you may prolong your days," and similar expressions, which refer to things extending to the existence one has in this world.

When one fulfills the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He, there will be continuity of the existence that one currently has in this world. This concept is clear and does not require further elaboration. Even though intellect grasps hidden matters, anything that is completely separate from man cannot be connected to him. For something that is entirely separate from man cannot have a connection with him, since all connection involves a union and bonding with what is perceived.

The emergence of the world into actual existence is distinct from its state prior to its creation, for what exists in its initial formation differs from its state after coming into being. Thus, connection to such a matter, namely, the process of the world's emergence into existence, is entirely separate from man, who exists within the world.

Therefore, regarding this, it is said: "The honor of God is to conceal a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). From the account of creation until the conclusion of "and they were finished," it speaks of the emergence of beings and how they came into existence. This is something that is meant to remain concealed.

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In the second chapter of Chagigah (11b), [it is said]: "One does not expound upon forbidden relationships before three, nor upon the act of creation before two, nor upon the chariot (*Maaseh Merkavah*) before an individual." These refer to three concepts:

1. That the existence of the Blessed One is separate and distinct from all other existences, and He has no association or partnership with them.
2. That the Blessed One brought all other existences into being.
3. That they (the existences) are arranged by Him in their proper order. For the act of creating them—bringing them into actual existence—is one aspect, and the arrangement of them according to their order and function is another.

For example, a builder who constructs a house first organizes it in his mind, and only afterward brings it into physical existence. This is what is stated in Psalms 50:1: "The mighty God, the Lord, has spoken and summoned the earth."

Here, the name *Hashem* (YHWH), which is unique and refers to the essence of God, signifies that He is distinct from all existences, and by Him, all existences are sustained. The name *Elohim*, on the other hand, refers to God as the Creator and the one who brings all existences into being. This is why throughout the account of creation it says, "Elohim created."

The name *El* refers to the arrangement of all existences, as their creation involves justice (*din*), but the arrangement of all their details involves kindness (*chesed*). Thus, this name (*El*) signifies kindness.

This is what it means when it says that one should not expound upon the chariot (*Maaseh Merkavah*) before an individual. The chariot signifies that the Blessed One is separate from all existences, for anyone who rides something is distinct from that which he rides upon. The entire concept of the chariot illustrates His separateness from all existences and how He governs them. It is through His separateness that He governs them, just as a rider governs that upon which he rides.

Similarly, the soul within a person is distinct from the body. It is through its distinction from the body that it animates and directs it. Just as this concept indicates that the Blessed One is separate from all else and does not share any partnership with anything else, so too this understanding remains uniquely His, without participation or sharing with others. Therefore, this matter is not to be expounded upon to others.

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However, the account of creation (*Maaseh Bereshit*), which pertains to how the Holy One, Blessed be He, brought existence into being and how things came into actuality, is different. This is why it says, "The honor of God is to conceal a matter" (Proverbs 25:2), referring to the act of bringing things into being. But from the point of "*And they were finished*" onward, the Torah does not discuss what was brought into being by the Blessed One directly but rather what emerged naturally as consequences and derivatives.

Since the wisdom of the act of creation—how things were brought into being and came into actuality—relates to the Blessed One creating for others, it is permissible to expound upon this, as this wisdom is directed outward. Therefore, it is permitted to teach it to an individual.

Regarding forbidden relationships (*arayot*), it is permitted to expound upon them to two people. This is explained (in Chagigah) as referring to the "secret of forbidden relationships." The explanation of the "secret of forbidden relationships" pertains to the order of existence and the way they are interconnected. The secret of *arayot* involves how the Blessed One, in His wisdom, established which unions are forbidden and which are permitted, according to the order He arranged for the existences with wisdom.

Every order requires at least two elements, as there can be no arrangement with only one entity. Therefore, one may expound upon *arayot* to two individuals. The third, the one who is teaching, brings the matter to light. It is appropriate for the one teaching (*halamed*, the wisdom itself) to be reflected in the one learning (*halamud*), for just as wisdom spreads outward, so too does the teaching expand and become revealed.

This is why the discussion of *arayot* relates to the arrangement of existences, their connections with each other, and their separations. There can be no order except between two elements that are arranged by a third, the arranger. This concept inherently involves expansion into the world, unlike *Maaseh Bereshit* (the act of creation), which is only about bringing existence into actuality. Thus, *arayot* can be expounded to two, with the teacher being the third.

Furthermore, forbidden relationships are fundamentally about distancing from unions that are inappropriate, ensuring that existences remain within the boundaries and limits set for them by the Blessed One. This is why *arayot* are referred to as a *choq* (a decree), as it is written: "You shall keep My statutes" (Leviticus 18:4) regarding forbidden relationships.

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This is the secret of *arayot*: The Blessed One brought existences into being and gave them boundaries (*choq*), from which they should not stray. This applies to all creations, as each has its own law (*choq*) to preserve. *Arayot*, which involve a union with someone inappropriate, represent a breach of these boundaries. Therefore, the concept of *arayot* is closely tied to the world in the sense that it pertains to the laws of existence, ensuring that they do not stray from the boundaries that are appropriate for them.

The levels are threefold:

1. The first level is the *Merkavah* (Divine Chariot), which signifies that the Blessed One is entirely separate from all existences. Because this understanding highlights His absolute distinction from the world, it is not fitting for this matter to be fully publicized in the world. Therefore, one may not expound upon the *Merkavah* even to an individual.
2. The second level is *Maaseh Bereshit* (the act of creation), which concerns the emergence of the world into actual existence from the Blessed One. This level is more apparent in the world and may be expounded to one person, but not to two. This is because *Maaseh Bereshit* pertains solely to the process of bringing creations into existence and not their subsequent arrangements.
3. The third level pertains to *arayot* (forbidden relationships), which represent the laws governing the existences themselves, ensuring that they do not deviate from their proper order. This level is even more directly related to the existences themselves and thus is closer to the world. Therefore, it is permissible to expound upon it to two individuals but forbidden to three.

As has been stated, all these matters involve separation from the world itself after its creation and after the Blessed One established its order. This explains why there is a stricter limitation on public teaching for these subjects. As it is explained, if one were to expound upon these matters to three, then while the teacher is explaining to one individual something that is inherently meant to remain hidden, the second individual might engage with the third in discussions about these hidden matters. This could lead to misunderstandings and errors, especially concerning concepts that are inherently separate from the world itself.

It says, "And the honor of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). This means it is fitting to investigate the honor of a king who rules over his people. The reasoning is that the king's honor lies in "the multitude of people is the glory of a king" (Proverbs

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14:28). A king's people are his honor, and when one investigates how he governs them, it brings honor to the king because it shows his role in leading and ruling over his people.

Similarly, with regard to the King of Kings, whose glory fills the entire earth, this does not refer to His act of bringing creations into being and arranging them—that is before they fully exist. His honor is specifically when He governs creations that already exist, as these creations themselves are His honor. This is why it is forbidden to expound publicly on *Maaseh Bereshit*—how He brought the creations into being. All the more so, one must not delve into His glory in terms of how He is entirely separate from the existences.

The same applies to the laws (*choq*) He gave to creations, which are the foundation of the *arayot* (forbidden relationships). These laws ensure that creations do not deviate from their designated boundaries. All these matters—His act of creation, His separateness, and the laws of the universe—are not part of the revealed honor of a king. His honor lies in having a people (creations) to govern, not in how He brought them into existence.

One who delves into these hidden matters is like someone who intrudes into the innermost chambers of a mortal king. This is not an honor for the king; such private matters are meant to remain hidden. Therefore, all these topics fall under the principle of “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter” (Proverbs 25:2).

However, from “*And they were finished*” onward—when all creations had already been brought into being and became part of His honor—the discussion shifts to how He governs these creations, as they are His honor. From this point forward, it is permissible to investigate, as this inquiry reflects His honor and glory. Even though these are wondrous matters, more awe-inspiring than the act of creation itself (such as the miracles and wonders performed by the Holy One, Blessed be He, after the creation of the world), the verse says, “And the honor of kings is to search out a matter.” The concealment applies only to how the world came into being and the secret laws of *arayot*, which are the order of creation. These must remain hidden.

But His governance of creations after they have been brought into being is His honor. For all that exists after creation reflects His glory, and the greater the wonder, the more it glorifies God. Investigating these matters demonstrates His power and capability.



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Therefore, inquiry into this brings honor to the Blessed One, for it emphasizes His might and omnipotence.

Moreover, such investigation serves to silence those who speak falsely and slander the Righteous One of the world. The merit of truth will stand for us, and He, in His truth, will guide us on the path of truth.