

## EXISTENCE AND ESCHATOLOGY IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE MAHARAL (Part II)

by RIVKA SCHATZ

(The first half of this article, in which Prof. Schatz outlined the doctrine of the Maharal, R. Judah Loeb of Prague, regarding the concealed natural laws governing the existence of the Jewish people in exile, appeared in *Immanuel* 14, pp. 86-97.)

### The Meaning of Suffering

The elimination of the fear of destruction does not resolve the problem of suffering. Maharal sees suffering as a stopgap against destruction, purifying Israel and absorbing their sin, in much the same way as the earth absorbs metals. Earth, the lowliest of the four elements, has the greatest staying capacity and longevity of them all, "for the blows and sufferings which befall Israel not only do not destroy them, but are their very existence!" (p. 85)<sup>1</sup> Sufferings do not weaken the force of existence but, to the contrary, themselves provide its power. In this he rejects the Christian contention that the suffering of the Jews signifies their rejection. Indeed, were they to enjoy an excess of worldly good, they would be unable to reach spiritual heights "and would be on the level of materiality," and their path to the life of the World to Come, for whose sake they need to exist in this world, would be obstructed. The idea of exile as an opportunity for repair overrides, in Maharal's scheme, the idea of exile as punishment. This is both an important thesis in Judaism's self-understanding of its destiny, as well as a basic answer to Christianity.

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1. *Neṣaḥ Yisrael*, Jerusalem, 1971. All page numbers cited in this article refer to this book, in that edition.

Exile, which “diminishes the strength of Israel,” is simultaneously the power which “sustains” Israel — the emphasis being on the latter. “Troubles sustain them until their existence is sustained, while were it due to them (as punishment), it would destroy them . . . and this itself is the explanation for the length of our exile, that it is not fitting that Israel partake of this world because of their stature, for the good and pleasure of this world is not their portion.” (p. 87) This being so, the Christian argument is turned on its head: the length of the Exile is not an argument that God has abandoned them, as the Christians would have it, but a sign that the Exile itself performs a supportive function! At the same time that the Maharal struggles to defend the existence of Israel and its meaning, he reneges on this world — if one may use such an expression — as a scene of confrontation, retreating into an increasing spiritualization of the nature of the people Israel, even entailing a certain macabre awareness of alienation, disability, and a generally reduced “profile” of Israel, which may contain within itself an element of hidden hatred. Moreover, as the physiognomy of this world becomes progressively more ugly, the spiritual reckoning goes deeper and deeper, until one reaches the conclusion that this world was not intended for the Jewish people at all, and that it was an historical error from the outset to seek a portion in it. “As it is clear to us that the non-physical portion is set aside for Israel, how then can we say that the main thing is their portion in this world, to the extent that they should have power and greatness at most times? . . . Therefore, if you see that this world is not designed for Israel, do not be surprised, for it is not intended for them, and this is to their benefit in several respects.” (p. 87) “It oughtn’t puzzle you if they are pursued by troubles, as was the holy and pure generation of the Destruction, for if the power of Samael pursues them . . . Israel are pursued and harassed and troubled in this world because this world is not worthy of them, and therefore they encounter opposition in it.” (p. 89) This world is opposed to them from the very beginning: even in their mother’s womb Jacob and Esau were of different natures, Jacob’s form being less rooted in the physical. The natural physical distinctions between them also came into play in their destiny, while neither of them wished to forego the other’s portion, leading to the competition referred to as *rešīṣah* (struggling), each one in fact needed to know his own true place in this struggle. The Exile taught Israel their true spiritual destiny, to which Maharal adds, “these things are very deep.” However, the weak nature of their present survival not only indicates their social and political weakness, but also their ultimate purpose — spiritual existence in the World to Come.

An existential interpretation of a Talmudic account of a folk celebration in Rome, depicting the victory of Esau over Jacob and protesting the dishonesty of the latter, is cited in order to exemplify Esau-Samael’s victory in this world. But at the same time, Maharal invokes the shame of Israel’s culture at its adoption by the Christians, who use it to adorn themselves, as an external decoration, so long as Jacob limps on his thigh. The passage in *Abodah Zarah* 11b reads as follows:

Said Rab Judah in the name of Samuel: "They have another festival in Rome which occurs every seventy years. Then a healthy man is brought and made to ride on a lame man; he is dressed in the clothing of Adam, and on his head is placed the scalp of Rabbi Ishmael, and on his neck are hung pieces of fine gold to the weight of four zuzim. The market places (through which they pass) are covered with onyx stones, and the proclamation is made before him: 'The reckoning of the ruler is wrong! The brother of our lord, the imposter! Let him who will see it, see it; he who will not see it now will never see it. Of what avail is treason to the traitor or deceit to the deceiver!' And they concluded thus: 'Woe onto the one when the other will arise!'"

This anti-Jewish carnival sounds like an actual event, quite beyond the Maharal's reading of the passage, in which the officers, wearing precious jewelry on their necks reminiscent of the cross, walk through the streets attired in splendor with a radiance on their faces which is merely a mask borrowed from "Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest" — one of the Ten Martyrs slaughtered by the Romans whose beauty enchanted the emperor's daughter — whose face was stripped off and embalmed in balm. The theft of spiritual beauty from Israel in order to adorn oneself, and the act of riding upon Jacob as he limps upon his thigh, symbolize the great farce of Christian culture. Maharal's closing words are but one long sigh: "The reason that the rider doesn't completely overwhelm the lame man is that he cannot be destroyed. . . and we have explained to you very great matters." (p. 91) The "great matters" alluded to refer to the eschatological aspect of that which is seen in this world as a caricature of existence, to which we shall now turn our attention.

### **The Eschatological Dimension Within Nature**

What then is implied by the concept of the "eternity of Israel," over and beyond the fact of the people's continuing existence throughout the lengthy period of exile? The Maharal is unique in that he not only developed awareness of the mystery of existence, but expanded it far beyond the ideas of mere historical and social continuity and the naturalistic logic of continuity in time and space, to bestow existence itself with an eschatological dimension, contained within itself. Existence *per se*, as an infinite compound of form and matter, not only embraces the one-time phenomenon of nature with its iron-clad laws, but the "order of existence" within it which is the eschatological dimension of nature. The dimension of the possible includes new and more "developed" worlds, in which matter loses its "corporeality" and may unite with form on a new and "higher" basis. The undoing of the corporeality of matter is the eschatological vision which underlies the entire "order of existence" and opens the door to an eschatology of being. Julius Guttman, in his chapter on Judah Halevi, describes the doctrine of philosophical emanation which influenced Halevi, as follows: "The variety of form of the powers accorded to the different separate bodies depends on the disposition of their matter. Wherever the necessary disposition exists, the corresponding form is sure to realize itself. Divine activity produces form whenever the necessary condi-

tions exist in matter.”<sup>2</sup> This formulation of the problem parallels the Maharal’s theory; we may therefore define the eschatology of being as the creation of new conditions of matter and the removal of obstacles to the emergence of a new order. The Maharal sees the various systems within nature as corresponding to different levels of realization of the potential of matter in combination with form, which in turn suggests the new possibilities for nature contained in ever-changing matter, which guarantees a “new world.” Were we unable to see the “new” in this world in the natural order, we could not prophecy a “new world” in the times of the Messiah, there being no reason to suspect that nature contains an eschatological dimension. The openness and multiplicity of nature is proven by the existence of life on various levels of perfection, realizing the potential hidden within it since the Creation. In his words: “As we have already found this thing in the world now, even if not in this species but in another one, it is not called a new world.” It follows that “renewal” as such is a power immanent in nature, even if not equally present in all species — and particularly the “lower” species, which complete their eschatological cycle in this world more rapidly, do not have the same “opportunity” to develop new forms and bring them to a higher stage of development.

Those “Species” which achieve perfection complete their cycle, and perhaps even disappear from the scene, even as nature itself achieves a higher level of development of matter as a whole. In terms of the physical laws of matter and form, one may not speak of the eschatological world as a “new world,” for the same laws, namely, the laws of creation, apply at all times to the existence of being, and the form of a thing is always the test of its “truth,” but there is a “new world” which is a product of the processes of being itself. This problem is discussed by the Maharal in connection with the verse, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9) and his analysis of the Talmudic discussion: “Rabban Gamaliel said: ‘In the future time, a woman will give birth every day.’ ...A certain student ridiculed him, and said, ‘There is nothing new under the sun.’” (Shabbat 30b) In refutation, Rabban Gamaliel showed him various examples from nature which could be viewed as extraordinary, such as the fact that a chicken lays an egg every day! In the Maharal’s view, this example is cited to demonstrate that, while different creatures within nature may have different tempos to their life activities, there is no inherent reason why the gestation period for women should not change in the future, in accord with the further development of the species.

Not only his philosophical reliance upon God as the source of changing forms, but his insistence that all forms originate from God without any intermediary, remind one of the assumptions of Halevi. The Maharal defends this theory with great zeal, and argues that whomever speaks of “intermediaries” harms the concept of unity as the source of multiplicity, and removes the divine glory from the

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2. Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, Philadelphia, 1964. p. 131.

world — which, in his eyes, is idolatry. “I have found some people who accepted their view, in speaking of the many-staged devolution (of life) . . . and cited in support of this words of the Torah; but one who follows this doctrine commits a very great sin, because he denies the creation of the entire world by God, saying that this world is created through intermediaries . . . and if so, His glory “is removed from this world, Heaven forbid.” (p. 16-17)

This thesis, more than it's important in itself, is essential for an understanding of the eschatological dimension of being. Why? Because we cannot understand how the concept of multiplicity stems from absolute unity, which is perfect in itself, unless there is also a concept of unity deriving from the dynamics of multiplicity or, more precisely, a concept of unity as a dialectical concept, expressing the necessity of multiplicity for its own completion. The Maharal in fact understands existence as a multiplicity completing unity, derived as a primary concept or first cause from the perfect unity of God. Unity *qua* cause is different from unity as a primary effect of God, for as effect it exists by reason of its “lack” of completion, and not through its perfection in itself. This “lack” or “fault” is the logical consequence of the eschatology of being, which the multiplicity of being not only supports, but also completes. The perception of the primary basis of existence as “lack” — here called *reshit* (beginning) — explains the eschatological goal, meaning the spontaneous realization of all those forms which “await” their completion in matter. “Creation comes from the aspect of ‘beginning’ alone, for through ‘beginning’ everything comes into existence. Therefore, in all of existence itself there is beginning. This is very clear, although it is impossible to explain it in its deepest sense. . . . But these are true and correct words, that multiplicity comes about through the beginning.” (p. 18) We might say that “lack as the cause of being” (p. 131) is a formula through which Maharal can include both elements together: that of creation as forming conditions of lack or want not found in the cause itself, which is perfect; and the eschatological element, which finds its purpose in Being, which is a concept of developed existence. The Maharal summarizes this: “The world must have some lack by reason of itself, even if not by reason of its cause.” (p. 202) This subject is apparently developed in his *Sefer Ha-Gedulah* (Book of Greatness), a work which has unfortunately been lost and has not yet been found.

Both the principle of creation and that of its operation within the framework of the laws of matter and form therefore contain within themselves the eschatological law in a dialectic form — that is, that a universe which constantly “lacks” is also one which constantly develops to meet its higher end. In theological terms, Maharal speaks of Being “distancing itself” from God, in terms of its being created, that is, in terms of its lack and its seeking its own perfection on a higher level within the framework of matter and form. In his eyes, this is the meaning of the Midrash, “For six thousand years the world exists, and in the

seventh it is destroyed!" During the cycle of six thousand years, matter is progressively stripped of its "corporeality" and is increasingly weakened until it meets with its destruction, which is also its perfection in terms of its new connection to form. In other words, being undergoes an "aging" process, preparing it for a more spiritual stage. There is an eternal cycle of existence and destruction which, in philosophical categories, is caused by "God's difference from existent things, rather than His being the cause of them," for which reason, the "lack" in being is sustained and the ontological status of the lawfulness of deterioration and of Being is revealed.

### **The Eschatological Dimension in History**

The essence of the theory of the eschatological dimension of being is intended to enhance the existential theory of history — that is, of the lack which is needed for completion, the destruction which is needed for redemption. Just as the destruction of the Temple was needed to make ultimate redemption possible, the physical power of Being was reduced during that period of time which had been intended as a time that the Temple was to have been standing, leaving room for the emergence of a new reality in a new astronomical time which, while it cannot be anticipated by means of "calculations of the end," is nevertheless certain as a result of the law of loss and being. The formula is, "When the Temple was destroyed, it became possible for the Messiah to come," or "Upon the Destruction (i.e., of the Temple) the existence of the world was transferred to the rule of other stars." Were history subject to a supreme causality which directs and guides it, God would not have involved Himself at all with the Destruction of the Temple, according to Maharal. This is not a theological question in the classical sense; Maharal is interested in a defense of the historical existence of the Jewish people as a model for existence in itself. From this, it is a brief step to understanding that Exile, as a moment of lack, contains within itself the moment of redemption. This is the true secret of Jewish existence — that they represent the dialectic which guarantees their eternity or, in political language, that the moment that the Fourth Kingdom shall fall, the Messianic kingdom of the Jewish people will become visible, just as the fruit appears as the peel or shell is removed. The Messianic world grows out of the world of yesterday by a necessary and natural spontaneity, and that same people who exhibit many signs of separation from this world, fragility and alienation, are the same people whose existence carries the seal of the new world, albeit in a very slight hint, but with unshakable confidence. Their persecuted and wandering appearance makes way for a Messianic physiognomy, just as on the eve of redemption the entire cosmos will be in a state of "nothingness of being" — in his words, the entirety of nature and even artificial objects will be in a situation of lack. "From the change which will take place in the world, we will know the new, supernal being which is to be." (p. 167) The criterion of Messianic time is measured by the existential eschatology of "the days of the world": "What follows is that the purpose or end of the days of this

world be *fit for perfection*, and this is the Messianic age, which is the end of time . . . And the end of this world is that it be divine, so that just as man, who throughout most of his life is not divine, when he reaches the end of his life and his physical powers wane is left as spiritual. . . . So is it true of the world, that at the end of the days of this world, which is the time of the Messiah, this world shall become divine . . . And at the end of days the world shall become completely unified, for the main property of perfection is unity.” (p. 172) The world which loses its “youth” and its history, which is played out under the control of the Gentile kingdoms, are parallel signs of the beginning of this “new world,” with its laws and its spiritual perfection. Thus, what seems to be a damaged and incomplete existence contains within itself “the days of the world.”

“And if you say, perhaps, that in the end it is a lack on our part that we are not ready and prepared for this world, this is due only to a lack in our own understanding, but those whose minds are whole and possess wisdom can anticipate the future and know their own portion and inheritance which God, may He be blessed, has given him for his good all the days . . . Israel are compared to the olive, for even though they continue to exist in the coming world, they suffer no loss or destruction in this world, even though this world is not *uniquely* theirs . . . for a man ought to prepare himself in this world for the next; therefore they exist in this world.” (pp. 99-101) “This world is the world of nature, which was created in seven days . . . while the perfection which is to be in the days of the Messiah will be above nature.” The difference between the time-scale of the life of Israel and of the nations is similar to the difference between the weed and the cedar tree; the first grows rapidly, and just as rapidly disappears, while the palm tree and the cedar, which do not mature rapidly, live a long time once they have come into being. We see that the Maharal attributes to Israel a different category of existence in time, and the fact that at most times they are in distress “does not indicate any lack of perfection in the world which is set aside for them, for that is the World to Come.” (p. 104) That they have not yet realized their potential indicates their enslavement, for “that which is not actualized is enslaved,” (p. 105) The natural cause for their failure to actualize their own beings, like the other nations, is rooted in the axiom that “their purpose is not in themselves” but that “God is their purpose.” In other words, they exist eternally because their purpose is God; they are the revelation of Existence itself, just as the effect is the principle of Existence itself. This is the climax of Maharal’s answer to those who argued the destruction of the Jew, on an existential basis. “Let the difference in the world as a result of the Jewish Exile be clear to you: This is not viewed as a lack in its essence, because lack may only exist in a thing which is God’s primary intention, such that it is as if the entire world were nullified. For He, may He be blessed, created Israel, and for this reason it would have been fitting that there be a total connection between the cause and the effect.” (p. 110)

## The Coming of Messiah and the New World

As to the practical question of when the Jewish Messiah will be revealed: in political terms, Maharal answers that will take place when the Fourth Kingdom falls — which in his day was interpreted as referring to the Christian world. Meanwhile, Maharal portrays it in colors of power, might, glory and greatness, a political power which is to defeat the Ottoman Empire, referred to here as “Persia” (*Paras*), which at that time was an expanding power, threatening the Christian world. However, the consciousness of “a minority in the world,” which came with the Destruction, is not a reason for “forcing the End,” in the Maharal’s view, nor even for “calculating the End.” In fact, “the End” exists within the natural order of time, so that it may neither be delayed nor brought closer, being the end of a natural process, until the renaissance of the world, when the hidden inner power which is the Messianic world shall come into being “and Israel will be considered as if born anew.” (p. 108) But the tradition makes the End contingent upon repentance. How, then, may they be redeemed without cause, and what will become of repentance?

The Maharal relates to the Talmudic dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua (Sanhedrin 97b) in order to develop his own thesis. The passage in question reads as follows:

Rab said: “All the predestined dates (for redemption) have passed, and the matter (now) depends only on repentance and good deeds. But Samuel maintained: “It is sufficient for a mourner to keep his (period of) mourning.” This matter is disputed by the tannaim. R. Eliezer said: “If Israel shall repent, they will be redeemed; if not, they will not be redeemed.” R. Joshua said to him: “If they do not repent, will they not be redeemed?! But the Holy One, blessed be He, will set up a king whose (cruel) decrees . . . will bring them back to the right path.”

Maharal argues against Rabbi Eliezer, who sees everything as dependent upon repentance, with the argument that there is a far more basic obstacle to Redemption — namely, the natural order which is subject to laws totally unrelated to repentance. In what way? He interprets the concept of “the Ends” (*ha-kišin*), which is phrased in the plural, as a choice of several existing potentialities, each one of which is a possible “End” or “time of Redemption,” and only after all these “Ends,” each containing this “readiness,” shall have passed from the world will the End which *requires* redemption come. As we do not know which is the true “End,” we cannot make repentance contingent upon any given “time” at all — and Rabbi Eliezer referred to this when he said “All the predestined dates have passed.” Only after all the dates have passed will the redemption be entirely dependent upon repentance. It is therefore clear that Maharal’s interpretation here is intended, before all else, both to reject “calculations of the end” and at the same time to avoid making redemption entirely dependent upon repentance. He therefore follows in the wake of Rabbi Joshua, who argues that they will surely repent, and that this is not a condition of redemption as such. In all this, it is clear that the Maharal wishes to transfer the tannaitic argument from the question of repentance to that of the End or the prohibition against “calculating the End.”



For the Maharal, redemption is not dependent upon any condition, but belongs to the natural order of creation; there is therefore no room for speculation on the matter. “No man may reveal the end, because of its profundity . . . Therefore, let those who calculate the end be refuted, and thus we shall know that all that the Sages said about the End is to be understood, not as absolute predictions — that it will surely come at such-and-such a time and such-and-such an hour — but that they disclosed the time during which the End may take place, and that until that time it is not fitting that the end come at all . . . The End is among those hidden things, which may not be revealed clearly.” (p. 180) “The End is of His own truth . . . The Redemption is like an entirely new world.” (p. 181) While this “new world” itself does not stand outside the “order of existence,” nevertheless one may not predict anything about it except to say that it is on a higher, more spiritual level than this world — “a world capable of perfection,” as the Maharal puts it. “For all this is to make known the level of the new existence which will come into the world with the coming of the redeemer, as if it were a new world, and understand this, for it is a very wondrous thing . . . In the time of the Messiah the world will be simple, and this is the virtue of the world of Messiah.” “The simple world” refers to this world, which is built of simple matter, while the Messiah, as is appropriate, will be “pure mind.” The Messiah — and it is not clear whether he is a concrete personality, as he has no personal name and the title is conferred upon whomever grasps it, or whether he is the symbol of the new age — will come in a generation which is completely guilty. An entirely guilty generation symbolizes a world which is immersed in a situation of lack, “a lowly generation” (lower, in his view, than all generations), which shall merit to see the Messiah because there is no vitality left in this world but only lack. Then the Messianic being will renew itself together with the being of Israel, and of the whole world, so that “in accordance with the lack of being, so will all of Being be renewed.” (p. 167)

Not infrequently, one receives the impression within the Maharal’s writings that the name Messiah is identical to that of the people of Israel itself, and that the “lowly generation” is an expression of the depths of degradation of Gentile culture when it is completed, and there remains in the world only one people which is fit, according to its spiritual stature, for the “new world.” It is, in fact, emphasized that this is primarily a biological rather than a cultural decline, and there is more than a hint of the bold naturalistic dialectic which states that the only seed to survive this decline is that included in the strain of Israel, from which will spring forth a new shot — which is the seed of the Messiah.

There is a long tradition in Judaism that the Messiah shall be of foreign origin — for example, the Sages’ explanation of the verse, “No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord,” (Deut. 23:4): “‘a Moabite’ — and not a Moabites; ‘an Ammonite’ — and not an Ammonites,” (JT Yebamoth 8:3) in order to explain the birth of King David from a descendant of

Ruth the Moabite as legitimate. The Maharal utilized this paradox in order to explain the need for the merit of the Messiah to symbolize the “new world”: a Messiah who comes “from a different planting than the first,” which needs to bring forth “a new fruit,” “a new seed,” “that which did not exist before,” “and it is fitting that the Messiah should be born from them, for it is a new Being” (p. 149) The same “drop” which was taken from Lot needs to be purified until the Messiah can be born from it, once it is connected to Israel, and this is the “seed which comes from another place” (Gen. R. 49), whose original form must become erased through its planting in Israel, “for that seed was drawn down from the form and grafted onto Israel, and then the holy divine form, that of Messiah, emerges . . . for there is need of a new, different fruit and a new planting — and these things are very deep, as it is said of seed that comes from another place — as you shall understand if you probe deeply.” (p. 151) This refers, of course, to Maharal’s understanding of how all the nations will be united in “one unity” in Messianic times, and that the entire human stock will become entwined in the people of Israel through the Messianic “seed.”

“The King Messiah is the ‘end of the opposition’ of the nations, because he comes to negate idolatry, and the nations will therefore oppose the Messiah with all their strength.” (p. 152) The beginning of this “opposition” to Messiah was in the time of King David; the second phase was in the generation of the Hadrianic persecutions (ca. 125 C.E.); and the third in the days of the Messiah! This implies that the nations of the world vainly struggle against the necessary appearance of Messiah, as a result of their own fear of disappearance. This is perhaps also intended to explain the overturning of the thesis of the destruction of Israel, which goes beyond superficial, external victory into the depths of the dialectic of existence. The “final battle” against the Messiah will come in the seventh, Sabbatical year, at the conclusion of which the son of David will come. The seventh millennium is the period of the wars of Gog and Magog, in which the potential power of the Messianic days and the “post-natural world” — i.e., the metaphysical world — begin to reveal their signs, with the disappearance of the natural world and the destruction of the old reality. “Therefore, in the seven-year cycle in which the son of David comes, because it is close to the new being, it will cause the loss of the first existence . . . and all this, because of the approach of the new existence . . . And in the seventh year there shall be wars, because the strength of Israel will then begin to grow, by the strength of the new existence which shall enter the world, and it is already known that the strength of Israel opposes that of the nations, so that there will be wars in the seventh year.” (p. 148) These wars are interpreted in terms of the suffering which the Messiah shall undergo, in the course of the trauma that the world shall experience in its passage from the era of “nature” to the era of “spirit” “for the natural world is opposed to the divine element.” (p. 156) The natural world is opposed to the existence of the Messiah in its midst “and those sufferings he shall suffer until the time of the End, when his existence shall be in actuality, for until then his being is only in potential . . . Until,

in the future, there will be a new world, and will be spiritual and he will no longer have opposition and will no longer suffer.” (p. 156) In the historical drama of the destruction of the old world — which is a mirror of the cosmic drama — Messiah son of Joseph is slain, until finally Messiah son of David wins the struggle to “remove the lacks of this world.” Messiah son of Joseph bears the brunt of the struggle of the transitional period, during which the old and the new are still found together, until the old dies and the new grows up over the ruins of the old, like fruit which drops from a tree. It is clear that the world which is progressively shaped here is the world of Israel, and that Israel is the Messiah of humanity, carrying the “hidden inner level” without its voice being heard, “like the sand, whose voice is not heard.” This hidden attribute, which is an object of contempt in the eyes of the nations, is their true strength — “and the seed of Israel possesses an extremely inner power before God . . . and through this power they perform great and awesome deeds.”

The redemption, which is perhaps still a distant dream, is like the object of the parable of the king who gave his son “a distant land” — his enemy emphasized its distance, and his friend, the great hopes attached to it. “For in truth the land which the King of Kings granted to Israel, the world of the Messiah, is a distant land, but his friend says that it is very close.” (p. 219)

The Maharal stresses that it is difficult to understand the redemption, and that it sounds impossible, but in fact Jewish history itself sounds like a story of riddles, “and these things — all that passed over us in our Exile until the present — are difficult to believe . . . Both law and reason require that one not uproot the tree, and that the hand of man ought not forcibly remove it from its place, and that drought not strike it, even if instead of glory (*pe'er* — symbolized by the *tefillin* of the head) there is a Jew’s hat, and instead of the seal against the heart (i.e., the *tefillin* worn on the hand) there is ‘the seal of the contemptible stranger’” — an apparent reference to the yellow star.

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