

# Why We Shouldn't Rush the Seder Meal

An analysis of the role of physical actions  
in the pursuit of spiritual goals

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A perennial debate invariably ensues every year at my family seder. The scholarly but insensitive members protract *maggid*, and then insist on abbreviating *shulchan orech* in order to complete the *afikomen* by midnight. Other family members, hungry and bored, having endured the drawn-out *divrai Torah*, resent the rushed *seudah* (meal), especially after so much effort was expended to prepare a delectable meal.

One might have expected the Rav to favor those who focus on *maggid*. After all, the Rav felt that the seder was a night of Torah study. However, in a fascinating essay,<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Soloveitchik argues that the former group errs, not just because of their egregious insensitivity to the hard work and legitimate feelings of the others, but in their basic presumption that the meal is not a crucial part of the seder experience, as opposed to merely a concession to the spiritually insensitive. Indeed, the *seudah* plays a crucial role in transforming the evening and reflects a central tenet of Jewish belief—the positive value of the physical amidst the spiritual. “In the eyes of the *halakhah*, the meal is not something incidental, meaningless, and completely mechanical ... *halakhah* has developed an etiquette as well as ethic of *seudah*” (*Festival of Freedom*, 4). How?

The Rav posited that to some degree the debate at my family seder reflects a longstanding disagreement concerning the role of physical actions in the pursuit of spiritual goals. Before we consider the Rav's considerable contribution to this question, we must take a step back and consider the presentation of the Rishonim.

In the *Guide* 3:26–49, Maimonides suggests reasons for the Torah's mitzvot, offering rationales even for enigmatic commandments (*chukkim*) such as *shatnez* (the prohibition against wearing

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<sup>1</sup> Printed in *Festival of Freedom* entitled “An Exalted Evening: The Seder Night” Edited by Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler. (Jersey City: Ktav, 2006)

garments made of wool and linen combined) and the red heifer. However, when it comes to the *lechem ha-pannim* (showbread), Rambam admits ignorance:

*The use of the altar for incense and the altar for burnt-offering and their vessels is obvious; but I do not know the object of the table with the bread upon it continually, and up to this day I have not been able to assign any reason to this commandment.*

**Guide for the Perplexed, 3:45**

והצורך למזבח הקטורת ומזבח העולה וכליהם מבואר, אבל השלחן והיות עליו הלחם תמיד לא אדע בו סבה, ואיני יודע לאיזה דבר איחס אותו עד היום.  
ספר מורה הנבוכים חלק ג פרק מה

One wonders what accounts for the showbread’s mysteriousness?<sup>2</sup> R. Moshe Stav once showed me that a clue can be found in the Shabbat zemer “*Ki Eshm'rah Shabbat*,” where R. Avraham ibn Ezra writes:

*Engraved in God’s law is a chok [decree] for His priest. To prepare showbread before Him. Therefore, fasting on Shabbat is prohibited, as explained by His sages. Except for on Yom Kippur.*

רשם בְּדַת הַקֵּל חֵק אֶל סִגְנֵיו. בּו  
לְעֵרֵךְ לְחֵם פְּנִים לְפָנָיו. עַל כֵּן  
לְהִתְעַנּוֹת בּו עַל פִּי נְבוּנָיו. אֲסוּר לְבַד  
מִיּוֹם כְּפֹר עֲוֹנָי:

In this poem, ibn Ezra alludes to the mysteriousness of the showbread, calling it a *chok*. Then he writes that the law of the showbread serves as the reason for the prohibition against fasting on Shabbat. How?

To answer these questions we must recollect a highly unusual element of the showbread’s service. Generally, when it comes to Temple service, the services done inside, and therefore in close proximity to the Holy of Holies, were not eaten. Thus, the inner alter was used only for incense. Any sacrifice whose blood was brought inside was not eaten. For example, a regular *chatat* (sin offering) was consumed by *kohanim*, while the *chatat penimi* (inner sin offering),<sup>3</sup> which was brought inside, was entirely burnt. Rambam understood that this stems from the sacrifice’s proximity to the Divine Presence (see *Guide* 3:46). Thus, the holiness of the *korban*, as reflected by its being brought inside, precludes the possibility of its being eaten. Put differently, physical ingestion contradicts holiness, such that the holiest sacrifices may not be consumed. If this is the case, Rambam is left with a mystery: the showbreads were brought inside, reflecting intense holiness, and yet were entirely consumed.<sup>4</sup> This apparent inconsistency with the law of sacrifices clarifies the reason for Rambam’s admission that he cannot understand the reason for the showbread.<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Ezra, aware of the enigma, concludes that the secret of the showbread is that physical activities, such as eating, do not contradict holiness. On the contrary, activities such as eating can elevate us spiritually in a manner that purely spiritual activities cannot. The *lechem hapanim* demonstrate this, and therefore teach us that we may not fast on Shabbat, the holiest day of the week.

Indeed, this debate relates to a fundamental question concerning physical actions and spiritual achievements. Maharal writes:

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Ramban, Shemot 25:24 as well as *Chinukh* 97 offer reasons for the law.

<sup>3</sup> פר העלם דבר של ציבור, פר הכהן המשיח, ופר ושעיר של יום הכיפורים.

<sup>4</sup> Only the cups of *levona* were offered upon the altar.

<sup>5</sup> This may also relate to the midrashic interpretation (see *Midrash Rabba*, Vayikra 32:3) that the mitzva of the showbread caused the blasphemer to blaspheme.

*The philosophers that we mentioned earlier give recognition and glory exclusively to the intellect, believing that through intellectual achievements a person can achieve eternity [olam haba].<sup>6</sup> They made physical acts [mitzvot] like a ladder to reach intellectual achievements. And from this ladder they [the philosophers] fell.*

### **Tiferet Yisrael 9**

הפילוסופים אשר זכרנו למעלה, יתנו שם ותפארת אל השכל, ועל ידי המושכלות יקנה האדם הנצחיות, ויעשו המעשים הישרים והטובים כמו תכונה וסולם, אשר יגיע בהן אל המושכלות. ומזה הסולם נפלו.

**ספר תפארת ישראל פרק ט**

According to Maharal, the philosophers erred when they elevated the intellect upon a pedestal, claiming that physical activities ran counter to spiritual achievements.<sup>7</sup> Their focus on the intellect ignores the fact that we, as humans, are physical as well as spiritual creatures.<sup>8</sup> The mitzvot, many of which involve physical activities alongside intellectual involvement, elevate the human and allow him to achieve his full potential.

Likewise, the author of *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* blames Aristotle's pernicious influence upon Rambam for Rambam's negative attitude toward marital relationships.<sup>9</sup>

This debate likely relates to the dispute concerning the physical body in *Olam Haba* (the World to Come). The Talmud states:

*In Olam Haba there is no eating, drinking, procreation, business, jealousy, hatred, or competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and bask in the radiance of the divine presence.*

### **Berachot 17a**

העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא פריה ורביה ולא משא ומתן ולא קנאה ולא שנאה ולא תחרות, אלא צדיקים יושבין ועטרותיהם בראשיהם ונהנים מזיו השכינה תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף יז.

According to Rambam, *Olam Haba* is an entirely spiritual existence. He derives this from the above passage; after all, if there is no eating or drinking, why would there be a body?

<sup>6</sup> See Addendum for an elaboration on this point.

<sup>7</sup> Maharal's critique of philosophers does not imply a lack of veneration for Rambam and respect for the *Guide*. Maharal calls Rambam "the great rabbi—who was filled like the sea with wisdom in all natural, theological, and scholastic disciplines." (*Be'er ha-Golah, Be'er 4, p. 49*)

<sup>8</sup> Maharal argues that that the philosophic worldview is highly elitist:

לפי דבריהם לא תהיה רק לאחד או לשנים בדור, וכי בשביל אלו העולם נמצא.

*According to the philosophers [who value only abstract cognitive activity] there could only be one or two people in a generation who could achieve greatness. Could we imagine that for these [one or two philosophers] the world was created?*

<sup>9</sup> *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* is a small work dealing with marriage and is attributed to Ramban, but the source of its attribution to Ramban is unclear. R. Chaim Dov Chavel included it in the second volume of his *Collected Writings of the Ramban* (Mosad HaRav Kook, Jerusalem 5724 1964), where he discusses the authorship of this important work.

דע כי חבור זה הוא ענין קדוש ונקי כשיהיה הדבר כפי מה שראוי ובזמן הראוי ובכוונה הנכונה. ואל יחשוב אדם כי בחבור הראוי יש גנאי וכיעור ח"ו. שהחבור הראוי נקרא ידיעה, ולא לחנם נקרא כך כאמור (ש"א א) וידע אלקנה את חנה אשתו. וזהו סוד טפת הזרע כשהיא נמשכת ממקום הקדושה ובטהרה נמשכת הדעה [והחכמה] והבינה והוא המוח. ודע שאלו לא היה בדבר קדושה גדולה לא היו קוראין אל החבור ידיעה. [ואין הדבר כאשר חשב הרב המורה ז"ל במורה הנבוכים בהיותו משבח לארסטו"ו על מה שאמר כי חוש המשוש הוא חרפה לנו. חלילה, אין הדבר כמו שאמר היוני, לפי שדעתו היוני יש שמץ מינות שאינו מורגש, שאלו היה מאמין שהעולם מחודש בכוונה לא היה אומר כך זה היוני הבליעל. אבל כל בעלי התורה מאמינים שהשם] (והשי"ת) ברא את הכל כפי מה שגזרה חכמתו, ולא ברא דבר שיהיה גנאי או כיעור, שאם יאמר שהחבור הוא דבר של גנאי, הנה כלי המשגל הם כלי הגנות, והרי השי"ת בראם במאמרו דכתיב (דברים לב) הוא עשך ויכוננך ואז"ל במסכת חולין (נו ב) שברא הקב"ה כונניות באדם. ובמדרש קהלת (ב, יב) אמרו אשר כבר עשוהו מלמד שהוא ובית דינו נמנו על כל אבר ואבר והושיבוהו על כנו. ואם כלי המשגל גנאי, היאך ברא השי"ת דבר שיש בו משום חסרון או גנות חלילה, אלא פעולותיו של הקב"ה תמימות שנאמר (שם לב) הצור תמים פעלו. [ואמר וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד].

Rather, the pleasures of *Olam Haba* are entirely spiritual and beyond our ability to relate to.

*Life in the World To Come does not involve a body or an inner body. The World To Come is inhabited by souls of the righteous people without their bodies, like the ministering angels. Since they do not have any bodies they don't need to eat or drink, nor do they need to do any of the things that men's bodies in this world need, and nor do they do any of the things that people in this world do with their bodies, such as standing, sitting, sleeping, dying, feeling pain, acting frivolously, et cetera. The first Sages said that in the World To Come there is no eating, drinking or coition, but that the righteous people sit with their crowns on their heads and benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence. This shows that because there is no eating or drinking there is no [physical] body. When they said that the righteous people sit they meant it figuratively, i.e. the righteous people are there, without laboring or pains. Similarly, when they said that the righteous people have crowns on their heads they were referring to the knowledge because of which they inherited a place in the World To Come. This knowledge is always with them, as is their crown, as Solomon said, "...with the crown with which his mother crowned him." It is also written, "...and everlasting joy shall be upon their head" —this is not physical pleasure that they will receive, but the crown of the Sages, i.e. knowledge. When they said that they will benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence they meant that they will know and understand the existence of God in a manner that they couldn't while in their gloomy and paltry bodies.*

### **Hilchot Teshuvah 8:2**

העולם הבא אין בו גוף וגויה אלא נפשות הצדיקים בלבד בלא גוף כמלאכי השרת, הואיל ואין בו גויות אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתייה ולא דבר מכל הדברים שגופות בני אדם צריכין להן בעולם הזה, ולא יארע דבר בו מן הדברים שמארעין לגופות בעולם הזה, כגון ישיבה ועמידה ושינה ומיתה ועצב ושחוק וכיוצא בהן, כך אמרו חכמים הראשונים העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתייה ולא תשמיש אלא צדיקים יושבים ועטרותיהם בראשיהן ונהנין מזיו השכינה, הרי נתברר לך שאין שם גוף לפי שאין שם אכילה ושתייה, וזה שאמרו צדיקים יושבין דרך חידה אמרו, כלומר הצדיקים מצויין שם בלא עמל ובלא יגיעה, וכן זה שאמרו עטרותיהן בראשיהן כלומר דעת שידעו שבגללה זכו לחיי העולם הבא מצויה עמה והיא העטרה שלהן כענין שאמר שלמה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו, והרי הוא אומר ושמחת עולם על ראשם ואין השמחה גוף כדי שתנוח על הראש כך עטרה שאמרו חכמים כאן היא הידיעה, ומהו זה שאמרו נהנין מזיו שכינה שידועים ומשיגין מאמתת הקב"ה מה שאינם יודעים והם בגוף האפל השפל.

**רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ח:ב**

Most Rishonim, among them Ramban in *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul*, disagree and maintain that *Olam Haba* is a future existence that begins with the resurrection of the physical body.<sup>10</sup> Explaining the need for the physical body in *Olam Haba* lies beyond the scope of this essay, but presumably this debate is yet another manifestation of the discussion concerning the value of the physical body in the spiritual realm.

The Rav frequently inveighed against the dangers of an entirely intellectual or spiritual religion. In *U-vikkashtem Mi-sham* he writes: "Confining religious experience and existence to a purely spiritual framework deprives religion of its splendor and influence" (*U-vikkashtem Mi-sham*, 162).<sup>11</sup>

With this the Rav notes that halakha deals with man as he is—its realistic approach allows for its tangible results. He continues:

<sup>10</sup> **תורת האדם שער הגמול:** עכשיו ביארנו כונתנו בשכרי המצות ועונשן, ונחזור בקצרה כי שכר הנפשות וקיומם בעולם הנשמות נקרא לרבנותינו גן עדן, ופעמים קורין אותו עליה וישיבה של מעלה, ואחרי כן יבאו ימי המשיח והוא מכלל העולם הזה, ובסופן יהא יום הדין ותחיית המתים שהוא השכר הכולל הגוף והנפש והוא העיקר הגדול שהוא תקות כל מקוה להקב"ה, והוא העולם הבא שבו ישוב הגוף כמו נפש, והנפש תדבק בדעת עליון כהדבקה בגן עדן עולם הנשמות, ותתעלה בהשגה גדולה ממנה ויהיה קיום הכל לעדי עד ולנצח נצחים.

<sup>11</sup> Translation by R. Ronnie Ziegler.

*Religiosity lacking an objective-revelatory foundation, which obligates one in certain actions, cannot conquer the animal in man. Even if it assumes a guise of love of God and man, the subjective faith of which Paul of Tarsus spoke ... cannot endure if it does not contain explicit commands to perform good deeds and to fulfill specific mitzvot. ... The Holocaust can serve as proof of this. All those who spoke of love stood by silently and did not protest. Many of them even participated in the extermination of millions of human beings (U-vikkashtem Mi-sham, 163).<sup>12</sup>*

With this powerful quote in mind we can return to the Rav's presentation of the *seudah*:

*At the root of the halakhic conception of the seudah lies a problem which assailed the minds of our sages. Man responds to the biological pressure to take nourishment; he has no choice in the matter ... So acts the brute, the beast in the field ... There is nothing human or meaningful about the act of consuming food ... Judaism maintains the universality of the process does not mean that man and animal must engage in an identical performance. (Festival of Freedom, 4)*

R. Soloveitchik then elaborates upon four differences between human and animal eating as a means of describing how the human being can convert this animalistic act into a uniquely human endeavor. Remarkably, eating can be transformed from a means of survival to an act of communion with God. The Rav proves the magnificent spiritual quality of eating from the numerous verses which describe “eating **before** God”; for example:

*and there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.*

**Devarim 12:7**

וְאָכַלְתֶּם-וְשָׂם, לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם,  
וְשִׂמְחֶתֶם בְּכֹל מַשְׁלַח יְדְכֶם, אֲתֶם  
וּבְתֵיכֶם--אֲשֶׁר בְּרָכָה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ.  
דְּבָרִים יב:ז

The Rav contrasts the Torah's view with that of the Greeks, who ridiculed the notion of connecting to God through such an unrefined carnal activity, and who maintained that only through intellectual cognition can a human connect to the Divine.

Thus, the *seuder*, which celebrates our formation as a people, necessarily involves a *seudah*—because the *seudah* is the:

*... means by which Judaism distinguishes between eating as a beastly-brutish function and as a human spontaneous performance... Judaism tries to convert the meal into a covenantal feast, a covenantal event. (Festival of Freedom, 27)*

<sup>12</sup> Another element of this realistic approach is that which perpetually guides the ever-changing human. This notion is powerfully expressed in Halakhic Man:

*The fundamental tendency of the Halakha is to translate the qualitative features of religious subjectivity—the content of religious man's consciousness, which surges and swells like the waves of the sea, then pounds against the shores of reality, there to shatter and break—into firm and well-established quantities, 'like nails well fastened' (Kohelet 12:11), that no storm can uproot from their place. (57)*

*The Halakha wishes to objectify religiosity not only through introducing the external act and the psychophysical deed into the world of religion but also through the structuring and ordering of the inner correlative in the realm of man's spirit. The Halakha sets down statutes and erects markers that serve as a dam against the surging, subjective current coursing through the universal homo religiosus, which, from time to time, in its raging turbulence sweeps away his entire being to obscure and inchoate realms. (59)*

How is the meal covenantal? Through his eating, the human being can reaffirm his place in a covenantal community that transcends the present and connects the Jew with his past and future. At the *seder* meal, we see our *seudah* in the historical context of the Jewish people throughout the ages and renew our commitment to the historical covenant—hence the focus on the family on this night. Moreover, the halakhic obligation to join together into a *chaburah* (group) ensures that the seder will be an act of *chesed*, reminding all involved of their shared historical tradition with the covenant at its center.

This remarkable innovation began at the dawn of our history—on the night of redemption:

*Did the liberated slaves set fire to the exclusive neighborhood of their former overlords? Did the teenagers smash at least the windowpanes of the offices where their taskmasters used to assemble and plan sadistic edicts? Nothing of the sort. Not one person was hurt, not one house destroyed. The liberated slaves had the courage to withdraw, to defy the natural call of the blood. What did the Jews do in the hour of freedom? They were locked up in their houses, eating the paschal lamb and reciting the Hallel. (Festival of Freedom, 33)*

Thus, in this essay, originally entitled “The Redemption of Eating,” we discover that those who wish to shortchange *shulchan orech* deny a central element of our redemption. Surely the *divrai Torah* of *maggid* are important, but they alone do not express the nature of our redemption and uniqueness. For the transformative element of the seder to be fully realized, we must redeem the meal—and with this we will become truly human.

*Translations of scripture are from the JPS 1917 edition. Translations of Mishna Torah are from Immanuel O'Levy [www.panix.com/~jjbaker/rambam.html](http://www.panix.com/~jjbaker/rambam.html). All translations from the Guide for the Perplexed are from the Friedländer tr. [1904], at [sacred-texts.com](http://sacred-texts.com).*

## Addendum: Rambam's Association of Olam Haba and Intellectual Acquisitions

*Life in the World To Come does not involve a body or an inner body. The World To Come is inhabited by souls of the righteous people without their bodies, like the ministering angels. Since they do not have any bodies they don't need to eat or drink, nor do they need to do any of the things that men's bodies in this world need, and nor do they do any of the things that people in this world do with their bodies, such as standing, sitting, sleeping, dying, feeling pain, acting frivolously, et cetera. The first Sages said that in the World To Come there is no eating, drinking or coition, but that the righteous people sit with their crowns on their heads and benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence. This shows that because there is no eating or drinking there is no [physical] body. When they said that the righteous people sit they meant it figuratively, i.e. the righteous people are there, without laboring or pains.*

העולם הבא אין בו גוף וגויה אלא נפשות הצדיקים בלבד בלא גוף כמלאכי השרת, הואיל ואין בו גויות אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתייה ולא דבר מכל הדברים שגופות בני אדם צריכין להן בעולם הזה, ולא יארע דבר בו מן הדברים שמארעין לגופות בעולם הזה, כגון ישיבה ועמידה ושינה ומיתה ועצב ושחוק וכיוצא בהן, כך אמרו חכמים הראשונים העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתייה ולא תשמיש אלא צדיקים יושבים ועטרותיהם בראשיהן ונהנין מזיו השכינה, הרי נתברר לך שאין שם גוף לפי שאין שם אכילה ושתייה, וזה שאמרו צדיקים יושבין דרך חידה אמרו, כלומר הצדיקים מצויין שם בלא עמל ובלא יגיעה, וכן זה שאמרו

Similarly, when they said that the righteous people have crowns on their heads they were referring to the knowledge because of which they inherited a place in the World To Come. This knowledge is always with them, as is their crown, as Solomon said, "...with the crown with which his mother crowned him." It is also written, "and everlasting joy shall be upon their head"—this is not physical pleasure that they will receive, but the crown of the Sages, i.e. knowledge. When they said that they will benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence they meant that they will know and understand the existence of God in a manner that they couldn't while in their gloomy and paltry bodies.

Whenever the word "soul" is mentioned, it does not mean the soul-body combination but the actual soul itself, which is the understanding given by the Creator and which causes other understandings and actions. This is the form which was explained in the fourth chapter of the Laws of The Basic Principles of The Torah. It is called "soul" with respect to this matter. This life, which does not involve death, for the reason that death is an occurrence of the body, or a body is called the bond of life, as it is written, "Yet the soul of my lord shall be bound with the bond of life"—this is the reward above which there is no other rewards, and the goodness above which there is no other goodness, and with which all the Prophets were granted.

### Hilchot Teshuvah 8:2-3

As Rambam explains in the Guide 3:54, this is because there is a true attachment between a person's intellectual achievements and their soul:

*The ancient and the modern philosophers have shown that man can acquire four kinds of perfection. The first kind, the lowest, in the acquisition of which people spend their days, is perfection as regards property ... The second kind is more closely related to man's body than the first. It includes the perfection of the shape, constitution, and form of man's body ... The third kind of perfection is more closely connected with man himself than the second perfection. It includes moral perfection, the highest degree of excellency in man's character. Most of the precepts aim at producing this perfection; but even this kind is only a preparation for another perfection, and is not sought for its own sake. ... **The fourth kind of perfection is the true perfection of man: the possession of the highest intellectual faculties: the possession of such notions which lead to true metaphysical opinions as regards God. With this perfection man has obtained his final object; it gives him true human perfection; it remains to him alone; it gives him immortality, and on its account he is called man...***

Rambam proves this order of achievement from Jeremiah:

עטרותיהן בראשיהן כלומר דעת  
שידעו שבגללה זכו לחיי העולם הבא  
מצויה עמהן והיא העטרה שלהן כענין  
שאמר שלמה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו,  
והרי הוא אומר ושמחת עולם על ראשם  
ואין השמחה גוף כדי שתנוח על הראש  
כך עטרה שאמרו חכמים כאן היא  
הידיעה, ומהו זהו שאמרו נהנין מזיו  
שכינה שיודעים ומשיגין מאמתת  
הקב"ה מה שאינם יודעים והם בגוף  
האפל השפל.  
כל נפש האמורה בענין זה אינה הנשמה  
הצריכה לגוף אלא צורת הנפש שהיא  
הדעה שהשיגה מהבורא כפי כחה  
והשיגה הדעות הנפרדות ושאר  
המעשים והיא הצורה שביארנו ענינה  
בפרק רביעי מהלכות יסודי התורה  
היא הנקראת נפש בענין זה, חיים אלו  
לפי שאין עמהם מות שאין המות אלא  
ממאורעות הגוף ואין שם גוף נקראו  
צורר החיים שנאמר והיתה נפש אדוני  
צורה בצורר החיים, וזהו השכר שאין  
שכר למעלה ממנו והטובה שאין אחריה  
טובה והיא שהתאוו לה כל הנביאים.  
הלכות תשובה ה:ב-ג

Thus saith the LORD: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth Me.

**Jeremiah 9:22-23**

כה אָמַר ה' אֵל יִתְהַלֵּל חָכֵם בְּחַכְמָתוֹ וְאֵל יִתְהַלֵּל גִּבּוֹר בְּגִבּוֹרָתוֹ אֵל יִתְהַלֵּל עֲשִׂיר בְּעֲשָׂרוֹ: (כג) כִּי אִם בְּזֹאת יִתְהַלֵּל הַמֵּתְהַלֵּל הַשֶּׁפֶל וְיָדַע אוֹתִי יִרְמִיָּהוּ ט:כב-כג

Nevertheless, in this very chapter, Rambam notes the verse's conclusion indicates that intellectual apprehension alone is not the true end:

But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth Me, because I am the LORD who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

**Jeremiah 9:23**

כִּי אִם בְּזֹאת יִתְהַלֵּל הַמֵּתְהַלֵּל הַשֶּׁפֶל וְיָדַע אוֹתִי כִּי אֲנִי ה' עוֹשֵׂה חֶסֶד מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה בָּאָרֶץ כִּי בְּאֵלֶּה חַפְצָתִי נְאֻם ה': יִרְמִיָּהוּ ט:כג

Ultimately, Rambam readily concedes that kindness and justice are God's truest desire. Thus, in numerous places Rambam stresses the importance of mitzvot, and not merely wisdom, in achieving immortality. Thus, in his commentary to *Makkot* 3:17 he writes that performing one mitzva perfectly guarantees olam haba. Likewise, in the ninth chapter of *Hilchot Teshuva* he repeatedly stresses the role of mitzvot alongside wisdom:

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, gave us this Torah, which is a support of life, and anybody who does what is written in it and knows that everything contained in it is complete and correct, will merit life in the World To Come. He will merit [a portion] in proportion to the magnitude of his actions and to the extent of his knowledge... If one does not acquire wisdom and if one has no meritorious deeds, then with what will one merit life in the World To Come?! For it is written, "...and there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol." If one ignores God and transgresses by means of food, feasting, adultery or similar activities, then one will bring upon oneself all these curses and remove all the blessings, so that one's days will end in panic and fear and one will not have the opportunities or perfect body to perform mitzvot, and one will not merit life in the World To Come, and then one will have lost out on two worlds, for when someone is troubled in this world by illness, plague or hunger he does not busy himself with learning or mitzvot, with which life in the World To Come is merited.

**Hilchot Teshuvah 9**

הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נָתַן לָנוּ תוֹרָה זוֹ, עֵץ חַיִּים, וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה כָּל הַכְּתוּב בָּהּ, וְיִוְדְעוּ דַעַת גְּמוּרָה נְכוֹנָה--זוֹכָה בָּהּ לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא; וְלִפִּי גִדְל מַעֲשָׂיו וְגִדְל חַכְמָתוֹ, הוּא זוֹכָה... נִמְצָא פְרוּשׁ כָּל אוֹתָן הַבְּרָכוֹת וְהַקְלָלוֹת, עַל דֶּרֶךְ זוֹ: כְּלוּמַר אִם עֲבַדְתֶּם אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה, וּשְׂמַרְתֶּם דְּרָכָיו--מִשְׁפִּיעַ לְכֶם הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וּמִרְחִיק הַקְלָלוֹת, עַד שֶׁתִּהְיוּ פְנוּיִים לְהִתְחַבֵּם בְּתוֹרָה וְלַעֲסֹק בָּהּ, כְּדִי שֶׁתְּזַכּוּ לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְיִיטֵב לָהּ לְעוֹלָם שֶׁכֵּלּוּ טוֹב וְתִאֲרִיךְ יָמִים לְעוֹלָם שֶׁכֵּלּוּ אָרוּךְ. וְנִמְצָאֲתֶם זוֹכִין לְשְׁנֵי הָעוֹלָמוֹת, לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה הַמְּבִיאִין לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא: שְׂאֵם לֹא יִקְנֶה הַנֶּה חַכְמָה וּמַעֲשָׂים טוֹבִים--אֵין לוֹ כְּמָה יִזְכָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר "כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֶׂה וְחֶשְׁבוֹן, וְיָדַעַת וְחַכְמָה, בְּשִׂאוֹל... " (קוהלת ט, י). הַל' תְּשׁוּבָה פֶּרֶק ט'

Thus, Rambam's view on this topic is complex, and a full analysis is beyond the scope of this essay. However, clearly he is not adopting the position that the above passage in Maharal is attributing to philosophers.