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Purity of Motivation and Desiring the World to Come

Introduction: Egoism and Motivation

What is the best motivation for proper action? How should we define idealism? These questions are of both timeless and timely import. On the one hand, thousands of years of Jewish and general thought discuss such questions. On the other hand, particular trends in modern thought, trends that certainly have pre-modern antecedents,[1] render the discussion ever more important.

A certain cynicism runs through contemporary intellectual life that often challenges the idea of idealistic motivation. Historical works argue that the great figures of history acted as they did only because of a search for fame, power, or money. Some modern writers depict religious individuals as people who anticipate grand feasts in a future existence or who search for the cheap comforts of a Heavenly Father who removes all of their problems. The thought of Thomas Hobbes spawned a literature that argues that all of a person's actions are ultimately self-serving. On the other hand, many great writers on religion and morality do assert the possibility of idealistic motivation, and it therefore behooves us to analyze and justify that possibility. In particular, the role of a future pristine existence as a prod towards correct behavior deserves our study. Perhaps we shall discover that the idea of striving for the world to come need not contradict the notion of idealistic motivations.

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Hobbes argues for a philosophic position referred to as Egoism, which further divides into Ethical Egoism and Psychological Egoism. The former, Ethical Egoism, makes a claim about right and wrong. It contends that the purpose of existence is fulfillment of one's own desires. The latter approach, Psychological Egoism, makes a claim about the nature of people rather than about the nature of right action. It states that, in reality, people only act to further their personal desires. Psychological Egoism often stands as the support behind Ethical Egoism; if people are incapable of idealistic motivation, it seems foolhardy to demand it of them. If we can uncover flaws in Psychological Egoism, we thereby cause one of the central supports for Ethical Egoism to collapse.

Psychological Egoism claims to portray reality more accurately than rival theories. It argues that a discerning look at humanity discovers that, in truth, both the self-centered and the giving individual act on identical motivations. After all, both the selfish individual and the benevolent person simply do what they want to do. The only difference is that the former wants to help himself while the latter wishes to aid others. Moreover, both selfish and so-called unselfish people derive satisfaction from their actions. If so, all motivations are ultimately self-serving because they simply reflect what the doer desires and derives pleasure from.

The best critique of Psychological Egoism remains that penned by Bishop Joseph Butler in the eighteenth century. Butler distinguishes between self-love and other desires. These two motivational principles can work in tandem or they can conflict with one another. They conflict when a person chooses immediate gratification at the expense of long-term ruin, thereby prizing a particular desire over self-love.[2] Note that people make such choices even when they know full well that such actions will prove disastrous to their welfare. Evidently, other desires sometimes overpower self-interest.

Of course, self-love and other desires often work in tandem. Even in those situations, it would be a conceptual error to reduce those other desires to examples of self-love. In fact, the activity of self-love presupposes the independent existence of other desires. Only those who love poetry will be motivated by self-love to read it. For those with no affection for poetry, self-love will encourage them to eschew it totally.[3] Furthermore, Butler argues that those who operate with no principle other than self-love would lead rather unhappy lives. "If self-love wholly engrosses us and leaves no room for any other principle, there can be absolutely no such thing as happiness, or enjoyment of any kind whatsoever, since happiness consists in the gratification of

particular passions, which supposes the having of them."[4] As Hastings Rashdall puts it: "the imagined pleasantness is created by the desire, not the desire by the imagined pleasantness."[5] William Frankena also puts the point sharply. "Of course, we get satisfaction out of doing such things, but we do not want to do them because of the satisfaction we expect to get out of them, we get satisfaction out of them because we wanted to do them. The psychological egoist is putting the cart before the horse."[6]

Rashdall distinguishes between sensual pleasures and pleasures of an intellectual or moral kind. With regard to the senses, pleasure depends on a person's physical constitution. A person does not need to have a pre-existing desire for steak to enjoy a good sirloin. However, intellectual pleasure primarily depends on the pre-existent desire. "To the mind that does not desire knowledge, knowledge is not pleasant. . . . Benevolence does not give pleasure to people who are not benevolent."[7] The upshot of this is that the benevolent individual is not selfish because he or she wants to help others. Having the desire to help others is precisely what makes that person unselfish. The non-benevolent individual would receive no joy from helping others. In James Rachels's words: "The mere fact that I am acting on my wants does not mean that I am acting selfishly; it depends on what it is that I want."[8]

Motivation for Performance of the *Mizvot*

This philosophical introduction serves as the backdrop to our analysis of rabbinic literature on the concept of motivation. We will work with the assumption that idealistic motivations are both real and admirable. Furthermore, Butler and others have shown that wanting certain things does not render the motivation non-ideal by definition. We can consider what the Talmud means when it speaks of performing *mizvot lishmah*, out of pure motivation. The varying definitions that authorities suggest for this term reflect a fascinating debate about the nature of idealistic motivations. To illustrate this point, and to understand its implications, we must begin with a broader overview of the concepts involved in motivation for *mizvot*.

In a famous *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot* (1:3), Antigenos Ish Sokho teaches that we should not serve God like servants serve their master, that is, for the sake of a reward. Our performance should not be conditional upon the possibility of receiving recompense. Although Antigenos stresses the *wrong* way to serve God, he does not explain what the ideal and

proper motivation for religious worship is. The *gemara* (*Sotah* 31a) clarifies this issue somewhat when it praises those who perform *miẓvot* out of *ahavah* (love) or out of *yir'ah* (awe). Rashi there (s.v. *la-alafim le-ohavi*) points out that a different *gemara* (*Sotah* 22b) seems far less enthusiastic about *miẓvot* performed from *ahavah* or *yir'ah*. Rashi explains that the latter *gemara* refers to love of reward and fear of punishment. Service motivated by such considerations cannot be considered of noble quality. However, the *gemara* that holds up *ahavah* and *yir'ah* as ideal motivations speaks of love of God and reverence for His awesomeness. Such service represents the religious ideal. Rashi's distinction has become a commonplace among rabbinic writers, and the great *rishonim* all assume a similar distinction.[9]

At the same time, R. Yehudah states in the name of Rav that it is reasonable to engage in *miẓvot* for less than noble motives since such involvement will eventually lead towards more nobly motivated performance (*Sotah* 22b). Apparently, the physical acts of performing *miẓvot*, even if not performed out of *ahavah* or *yir'ah*, will impact the personality, refining it and making it capable of appreciating and acting on higher levels. Indeed, when the *Sefer ha-Ḥinukh* cites his famous formulation, "the hearts are drawn after the deeds,"[10] he explicitly notes that this positive impact occurs even when the *miẓvot* are done *she-lo lishmah*. Irrespective of motivation, particular acts have a positive impact on the religious personality.

In theory, we could offer two interpretations of Rav's dictum. Perhaps *miẓvot* performed for the sake of reward have no inherent value but can serve as a stepping-stone for acts of real value.[11] Alternatively, we could say that *miẓvot* done out of an ulterior motive have some minimal value and the hope is that they will lead to superior motivation.[12]

Although Rav's idea appears in several places in the Talmud, other *gemarot* (*Berakhot* 17a, *Ta'anit* 17a) convey a negative attitude towards *miẓvot* performed *she-lo lishmah*. A standard resolution to this contradiction differentiates between different types of *she-lo lishmah*.[13] We can live with people doing *miẓvot* for the sake of honor, popularity, or money. While these do not reflect ideal motivations, they are also not especially sinister or corrupt. On the other hand, we totally reject performance of *miẓvot* for the sake of harming another person. Such a negative motivation outweighs the performance of the *miẓvah* and may even ensure that no good can emerge out of such a performance. Thus, one can study in order to receive a rabbinic title but not so that he can utilize his knowledge to vex others.

Based on these sources, a hierarchy of motivations emerges. A person should not engage in *miẓvot* for the sake of a negative outcome, such as the desire to harm others. A person can engage in *miẓvot* for honor or riches, but he should understand that this is not the ideal. The individual who performs *miẓvot* out of love or reverence for God has achieved the pinnacle of religious motivation—*avodah lishmah*.[14] Some authorities went even further and distinguished between love and reverence in this hierarchy, but this distinction is less central to our purpose.

Note that the standard talmudic examples of *she-lo lishmah* speak of performing *miẓvot* for the sake of rewards in *this* world, such as honor and wealth. They do not mention the individual who performs *miẓvot* in order to merit a share in the world to come. How do we evaluate someone with that motivation?

We could categorize this motivation as *she-lo lishmah*, as the person tries to get something out of his proper behavior. Such a categorization may be implicit in a story told by R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik in *Halakhic Man* in which the Vilna Gaon purchases myrtle branches from a Polish noblewoman for the *miẓvah* of taking the *arba minim* on Sukkot in exchange for his reward for this *miẓvah* in the world to come. The Vilna Gaon was particularly joyous that Sukkot, as he was now able to rest assured that he had fulfilled a *miẓvah* without any intent of receiving a reward.[15] The story implies that aiming for the reward of *olam ha-ba* would render his performance *she-lo lishmah*. But perhaps desiring *olam ha-ba* is not identical with the desire for a good pastrami sandwich or a plaque on the wall with one's name on it. The rationale for such a distinction will become clear later in our discussion.

Reward in this World and in the World to Come

With the preceding background in mind, we can turn to Rambam's approach. Purity of motivation was an important theme for Rambam, and he expounded upon it both in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*[16] and in his *Mishneh Torah*, in the magisterial closing to *Sefer ha-Madda*. As is well known, Rambam ends most of the fourteen books in *Mishneh Torah* with a theological flourish, and the last chapter of *Sefer ha-Madda* does not disappoint. Rambam begins by asserting that a person should not perfrom *miẓvot* in order to receive reward or escape punishment. Such service represents the way of the ignorant and minors, not the path of the prophets or the wise.[17] The best service is the one performed out of love. For Rambam, this entails "involvement in Torah and *miẓvot*,

and walking in the paths of wisdom, not for anything in the world, not due to fear of punishment and not in order to inherit some good, but rather to do the truth because it is the truth."[18] Rambam's examples of performance *she-lo lishmah* speak directly to our question. Rambam says that a person should not engage in *miẓvot* in order to receive the blessings of physical bounty mentioned in the Torah or in order to merit life in the world to come.[19] Rambam equates these two motivations, terming them both *she-lo lishmah*. The implication seems to be that wanting a good steak and wanting *olam ha-ba* are both problematic motivations for *miẓvot*.

Does Rambam have earlier sources to bolster his claim? As mentioned, many listings of ignoble motivations (e.g. *Nedarim* 62a) focus exclusively on rewards in this world. However, two other sources support Rambam's approach. According to some versions, the *Sifrei* in *Devarim* (*Parashat Ekev*, 41) juxtaposes this worldly and otherworldly rewards as two examples of *she-lo lishmah*. The true lover of God would not think of either reward when performing *miẓvot*. Another *gemara* (*Pesahim* 8a) links giving charity in order to receive *olam ha-ba* with giving charity so that one's child is cured. Arguably, this linkage also indicates a lack of distinction between rewards experienced in this world and the next.

The extent and force of Rambam's position emerges from another famous question about reward and punishment. Almost all of the philosophically oriented *rishonim* wonder why the Torah, in passages such as the second paragraph of *Shema* and in the two versions of the *tokhahah*, focuses exclusively on reward and punishment in this world when our *masorah* includes a clear notion of reward and punishment in the world to come. Such a wide range of answers was offered that Isaac Abravanel, who lived at the end of the period of the *rishonim*, lists seven different resolutions of earlier authorities.[20] The differences between the various answers are highly significant.

Abraham Ibn Ezra argued[21] that the common man understands nothing about rewards in a future existence. Tell him about rain, good crops, and fine food and he becomes motivated to perform the acts that will bring them to realization; he appreciates these things. Inform him of a future payoff involving basking in the divine radiance in a different plane of existence and he responds with a large yawn. He simply has no conception of such a life and what such enjoyment means.[22] The Torah therefore chose to emphasize a reward comprehensible to all members of our religious society.

R. Yosef Albo offers a different argument.[23] According to R. Albo, the Torah only mentions reward and punishment when discussing the Jewish collective. Providence in this world must often function on a collective level. After all, it is not going to rain in a given Israeli neighborhood only on the gardens of the righteous people, while leaving the gardens of the wicked dry and barren. Rather, physical bounty comes based on a judgment of the state of *Am Yisrael* as a whole. Reward and punishment in the next world, by contrast, function exclusively on an individual plane. As the Torah's discussions of providence were intended to address the Jewish collective, the Torah stresses rewards and punishments in this world.

Note the common denominator of these two answers. Both agree that the Torah does want to talk about reward and punishment in a motivational context. However, limitations of one kind or another prevented the discussion from including the reward and punishments of *olam ha-ba*.

This view is very different from that of Rambam. Rambam argues[24] that the Torah passages that talk about divine providence are not really employing reward and punishment as motivational tools at all. Rather, the Torah simply gives us a guarantee that if we perform *miẓvot*, *Hashem* will provide the protection necessary to continue performing *miẓvot*. The full harvests and the intimidated enemies are not rewards; they are simply enablers of more *miẓvah* performance. An analogy may prove helpful. Imagine a student who tries very hard to achieve academic success in a particular exam and the teacher reassures that student that he or she will be given all the time needed to finish the exam. The extra time is not a reward for good behavior but a statement that those who try should be given every opportunity to succeed. For Rambam, this reflects the model of Torah discussions of reward.

Rambam offers an alternative explanation in *Moreh Nevukhim*. He mentions the pagan belief that strict adherence to pagan practice would produce rain, crops, and physical bounty. Jews raised in such a culture might be nervous that abandoning paganism would bring about drought, famine, and pestilence. Therefore, the Torah needed to link physical blessings with Torah adherence. This reassured the people that dropping paganism would not have a negative impact on the success of their farms and the like.[25] This explanation shares an assumption with that of *Mishneh Torah*. Namely, the Torah does not *want* to utilize reward and punishment of any kind as a motivational tool. It was only the need to counter the influence of pagan beliefs that forced the Torah to associate

receiving blessings with religious observance. The Torah's rewards and punishments are intended more to stifle lingering fears from the pagan viewpoint than as motivational tools for proper behavior.

It turns out that, according to Rambam, the Torah does not discuss reward and punishment in a motivational sense, either in this world or in the next. Once again, Rambam takes a position that sets ups absolute purity of motivation as the ideal. The Torah does not motivate its adherents with the promise of reward or the threat of punishment because the authentic religious person does not need them as a motivational tool. He or she simply "does the truth because it is the truth."

R. Elazar Segal Landau points out that some commentators on Rambam failed to fully comprehend the strength of his position. In *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 4:9, Rambam explains that the soul is form and not matter, and that it therefore does not cease to exist with the death of the body. The anonymous commentator printed in the standard edition of *Mishneh Torah* makes the following comment: "Had people believed that there was no life after death, they would not have committed martyrdom to sanctify the divine name." R. Landau critiques this statement as contradicting the *gemara*.[26] It is certainly against Rambam, who would view martyrdom to sanctify the divine name as a truth worth fighting, and dying, for even without any thoughts of future compensation.[27]

The logic of Rambam's position is clear. We usually think of idealistic actions as those actions motivated by an ideal and not by the thought of personal benefit. If a religious person thinks about *miẓvot* as a means of acquiring a ticket to the world to come rather than as a fulfillment of the divine command or as an independent good, it would appear that this action includes a certain self-serving aspect. Indeed, R. Avraham Yiẓḥak ha-Kohen Kook writes that upon reading the introductory part of *Mesillat Yesharim*, which talks about the goal of achieving *olam haba*, "our ethical sense recoils because of the egotistical element and the love of pleasure in this principle."[28] Although R. Kook ultimately does justify R. Luzzato's position, the point is well taken. The highest idealism surely involves thinking about a cause rather than about oneself.

Justifying the opposing position will depend upon a different model for thinking about religious idealism as well as combing rabbinic source material for varying themes regarding pure motivation. One obvious source seems, at first glance, to counter Rambam's approach. "A person who says I will give this coin to charity in order that my son should live or that I should merit the world to come is a *ẓaddik gamur*, wholly

righteous" (*Pesaḥim* 8a). This *baraita* does not merely say that such charitable giving could lead to a more idealistic motivation or that a second best form of giving also has value. Rather, it declares such a giver to be fully righteous. How would Rambam deal with this source?

Some commentators neutralize the impact of this *baraita*. Rabbenu Ḥananel[29] contends that the true version of the text reads not "*ẓaddik gamur*," but "*ẓedakah gemurah*." If so, the *baraita* makes no claim about the saintliness of such a giver, but rather simply declares that this act also constitutes charity. Ulterior motives do not negate acts of charity, but they do indicate that the giver lacks religious excellence. R. Nissim Gerondi (Ran)[30] finds another way to minimize the force of this source. He argues that *ẓaddik gamur* is not the highest level, as it represents a lesser stage of achievement than the status of the *ḥasid*. Although we normally view the term "*ẓaddik gamur*" as immensely positive, Ran insists that there are higher levels not yet attained. Presumably, a Maimonidean outlook influenced this interpretation. As this charitable giver wants to benefit from his gift, it could not possibly represent the highest attainable religious level.

Tosafot[31] suggest a different approach. They argue that this giver is indeed a *ẓaddik gamur*, a person of the highest religious caliber, even if he has an ulterior motive–as long as he meets one criterion. If the giver does not reap the requested reward from the act of charity, does he then regret the act of giving? If the answer is affirmative, then this giver does not exhibit pure motivations. However, if the giver remains content in his giving, then idealistic motivation was obviously also moving him to give. Having two motivations does not reflect poorly on a person as long as the idealistic motivation would suffice on its own.

Readers of ethical philosophy may notice a parallel to this idea in the literature on "overdetermination." Kant taught that a person should act ethically out of a sense of duty and not because of sympathy for the recipient. Many critics point out that Kant seems to prefer the inhuman giver, untouched emotionally by the plight of those he or she helps. This conflicts with our intuitive thinking, that sympathetic feelings for others reflect something ethically positive. Recent interpreters of Kant have argued that Kant would have no problem with a secondary motivation of sympathy as long as the primary motivation of duty would suffice to bring about the ethical action.[32] A similar line of reasoning animates this Tosafot.

I believe Tosafot's point to be crucial for leading healthy religious lives. Most of us have multiple motivations for performing *miẓvot*.

Mixed in with the most idealistic thoughts are thoughts of public acclaim and the like. Rejecting Tosafot's position and striving to eradicate any shred of secondary motives can lead to an atmosphere of constant negativity in which we endlessly try to cleanse ourselves from wanting anything but the fulfillment of the word of God. The end result of such efforts may be depression, frustration, and an attempt to almost escape our humanity. Tosafot offers a reasonable alternative. As long as the idealistic motivation has enough force to independently move the individual, the individual acts on the highest level even if other motivations also remain part of the personality. A slightly modified reading of Tosafot could argue that while dual motivation reflects a high level, a higher level would call for absolute purity of motivation.[33]

Some authorities challenge Rambam's position on the place of reward and punishment outright. Abravanel[34] cites the *gemara* about giving charity to receive *olam ha-ba* and argues that desiring rewards is not problematic at all. In his commentary on *Avot*, he disagrees with Rambam's reading of the third *mishnah*. According to Rambam, Antigenos Ish Sokho advocates Rambam's position; ideally, we are not to act as servants who serve their master in order to receive a reward, as that is impure motivation. Abravanel contends that this is a misreading of Antigenos. Interestingly, Abravanel mentions Rambam's interpretation and adds, "all the commentators have been led after him with one voice." Clearly, Rambam's interpretation of the *mishnah* became dominant, and Abravanel felt that he was swimming against the tide.

Abravanel offers several arguments against Rambam's position. First of all, the Torah on several occasions talks about rewards for *miẓvot* and punishments for *averot*. If we are not supposed to think of religious observance in those terms, why does the Torah mislead us with its emphasis on reward and punishment? Rambam has two answers ready. As we have already seen, he argues that those passages in the Torah are not truly about reward and punishment at all. Secondly, Rambam could argue that the Torah addresses everybody in the Jewish community, including the ignorant, who are not yet ready for *avodah me-ahavah*; the Torah therefore utilizes ulterior motives to try to encourage them towards the correct path.

Abravanel further argues that it is natural for people to want to receive something in return for their efforts. He also adds a fascinating critique that contrasts the approach of the philosophers with the approach of religious believers. Aristotle and other philosophers taught that truly good things are good for their own sake. Abravanel contends

that these philosophers were forced into such a position because they denied divine providence. If one denies reward and punishment, then the only value to a good act must inhere in the act itself. Since we affirm the principle of a providential God, we need not adopt the Aristotelian position.

Since Rambam vociferously argues that God commands things for the purpose of a good and not due to His arbitrary will,[35] he would certainly reject this aspect of Abravanel's argument. Rambam would deny that the philosophers stressed the importance of intrinsic goodness only because they lacked the motivation provided by a providential Supreme Being. Even someone who accepts the reality of reward and punishment could, and in fact should, still view certain acts as independently good.

The imagery utilized by Antigenos Ish Sokho helps buttress Abravanel's position. Antigenos charged his students to serve God like the servant who does not serve for the sake of a reward. Abravanel points out that most servants do not perform their duties out of appreciation for the greatness of their master. Quite the contrary! They serve because they have no other options. If Antigenos wanted to call for service out of love, as argued by Rambam, then he should have employed more fitting imagery. All of the above motivates Abravanel to offer alternative readings of this *mishnah* in *Avot*.

Abravanel first suggests that the word "*peras*" in the *mishnah* ("do not serve God like a servant who serves his master *al menat le-kabbel peras*, on the condition of receiving a reward") refers specifically to rewards found in this world. Antigenos' advice was that a person should not perform *miẓvot* for reward in this world, but rather do so for the sake of compensation in the next world. What makes this latter goal superior? Abravanel mentions that the rewards in this world are temporary and that other factors found in this world sometimes get in their way of their realization. Rewards of the next world, apparently, are both eternal and protected from the interference of external forces. The more intelligent investor looks forward to the payoff available in *olam ha-ba*.

Abravanel is quite comfortable with the idea of performing *miẓvot* for the sake of a reward—he only demands that we do so for the sake of authentic reward and not the ersatz rewards found in our current existence. It would seem that Abravanel adopts a more pessimistic view of humanity than Rambam, in which people act positively only when they know that they will receive something in return. From such a perspective, it becomes reasonable to do *miẓvot* with an eye towards the benefits of the world to come.

As we mentioned earlier, the *Sifrei*, which refers to observance of *miẓvot* for the sake of any reward as *she-lo lishmah*, seems to explicitly endorse Rambam's position that we should not observe *miẓvot* in order to merit *olam ha-ba*. Abravanel introduces a clever interpretation of the *Sifrei* to neutralize the proof for Rambam. He notes that many medieval philosophers taught that man achieves immortality through intellectual achievements. Of course, this apparently flies in the face of the many Torah texts indicating that it is the *miẓvot* a person performs that earns him or her a share in the next world. Abravanel makes passing reference to R. Ḥasdai Crescas's rebuttal of the intellectualist approach in Crescas's *Or Hashem*.[36] When the *Sifrei* rejects learning Torah in order to merit *olam ha-ba*, Abravanel argues, it does not teach about the proper motivation for *miẓvot*, but about the authentic path to the next world. The *Sifrei* teaches us that learning, intellectual cognition, does not provide the key that opens the door of the world to come, as the philosophers argued. Rather, it is the fulfillment of *miẓvot* that grants entry into *olam ha-ba*. The *gemara* in *Pesaḥim* endorsed giving charity to get into the world to come because this represents a fine motive for religious observance. As charity is not an intellectual *miẓvah,* the possible mistake of the philosophers regarding how to achieve *olam ha-ba* does not apply, and the *gemara* came out strongly in favor of such observance. The *avodah she-lo li-shmah* disparaged in the *gemara* refers only to observance in order to receive reward in this world.

A second approach found in Abravanel modifies the picture considerably. According to this approach, we are to fulfill *miẓvot* out of gratitude for all the kindness that God has done for us. When *Ḥazal* wrote about "*lishmah*," they referred to this gratitude. Emphasizing future reward for *miẓvot* as a motivation reveals a lack of gratitude, as the many favors bestowed upon us by God should make the importance of adherence to Torah obvious, without need for further motivation. Antigenos Ish Sokho equally rejected rewards in this world or in the next as motivations because such reasons for observance lack the necessary quality of gratitude. In this approach, Abravanel agrees with Rambam's view, classifying *olam ha-ba* as a problematic motivation for observance of *miẓvot*; it seems superior to Abravanel's first approach as it more successfully maintains an idealistic version of *lishmah*.

A more substantive challenge to Rambam emerges from the writings of R. Ẓadok ha-Kohen from Lublin. Like Abravanel's first presentation, R. Ẓadok[37] argues that Antigenos only deplores serving God for the rewards of this world. He agrees that the word "*peras*" refers to rewards of

this world. At the same time, he notes that many commentaries seem to think that *olam ha-ba* is a *she-lo lishmah* motivation. R. Ẓadok resolves the contradiction by distinguishing two types of *olam ha-ba* motivations.

> But it seems that this is only when the intent is selfish, that he should be a *ben olam ha-ba*, and that he should live a long life in *olam ha-ba*, and that he should have it good in *olam ha-ba*, because this is no different than the rewards of this world. However, regarding the essence of *olam ha-ba*, enjoying the splendor of the Divine presence, this is not a selfish pleasure. . . .
>
> For a reward like this, one can aspire to, and it is permissible to perform *miẓvot* for this reward and it is the purest of intentions (*lishmah gamur*).

Let us try to explain R. Ẓadok's distinction in different words. A person can desire entry into the world to come because he likes to win contests or because he thinks that the future existence provides the opportunity to indulge in material pleasures. From either of those perspectives, the motivation lacks nobility and is truly the same as wanting to win a contest or achieve physical pleasure in this world. R. Ẓadok categorizes such motivation as *she-lo lishmah*. On the other hand, a person can conceive of closeness to God as the true good of human existence, and see *olam ha-ba* as the place where that closeness finally is realized in the most powerful way. Such a person does exhibit a discerning taste for the noble, and we could hardly term such desire an impure motivation.

C. S. Lewis[38] provides an excellent analogy for this distinction in an unduly neglected essay entitled "The Weight of Glory." When someone marries a spouse for money, we feel that that person entered the marriage with a problematic motivation. Yet when a person marries for love, we do not feel that way, even though the person is deriving a personal benefit from the marriage. Lewis explains the difference well:

> There is the reward which has no natural connection with the things you do to earn it and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover and he is not mercenary for desiring it.
>
> The proper rewards are not simply tacked on the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.[39]

The desire for a good meal bears no connection with a life of Torah and *miẓvot*. Therefore, performing *miẓvot* for the sake of a steak represents an ulterior motive divorced from an authentic connection to

Torah. However, desiring a close connection with the *Ribbono shel Olam* is part and parcel of a healthy and vibrant religious life. The desire to strengthen this connection naturally flows from religious ideals and values. As Lewis would have it, *devekut* with *Hashem* reflects "the activity itself in consummation."

Lewis repeats this idea with even greater eloquence in *The Problem Of Pain*.

> We are afraid that heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal, we shall no longer be disinterested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God for only the pure of heart want to. There are rewards that do not sully motives. A man's love for a woman is not mercenary because he wants to marry her, nor his love of poetry mercenary because he wants to read it, nor his love of exercise less disinterested because he wants to run and leap and walk. Love, by definition, seeks to enjoy its object.[40]

In this citation, Lewis apparently moves on to a stronger claim. Not only does he view the desire to achieve closeness to God in the world to come as part of the most idealistic motivation, but he also states that the idea of heaven cannot possibly lead to a mercenary perspective. "Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire." Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to argue that Lewis here refers specifically to those with an authentic understanding of heaven. Those people who imagine it as an exclusive club akin to a private golf course or as a massive party of physical indulgence could certainly take a mercenary approach to the hereafter. Lewis would agree with R. Ẓadok that it all depends upon how a person conceives of the world to come.

R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik interprets Rambam in a manner almost identical with the analysis offered by Lewis and R. Ẓadok. He cites Rambam's view that doing *miẓvot* for the sake of *olam ha-ba* reflects *she-lo lishmah* motivation. He then distinguishes between two different conceptions of the future reward. In one conception, the religious person thinks of eternal life as a reward for fulfillment of *miẓvot*. This constitutes *she-lo lishmah*. In the other conception, the religious individual views eternity as the necessary metaphysical conclusion to a life of Torah and *miẓvot*. *Olam ha-ba* is not a reward, but rather the continuation of a life dedicated to purity and sanctity. From this perspective, the world to come truly begins already in this world.[41] "It is not for naught that *Ḥazal* compare the Sabbath with the world to come." R. Soloveitchik, like Lewis, contends that the idealistic approach conceives of the world to come as the religious activity of this world in consummation.

The common insights of R. Ẓadok, R. Soloveitchik, and Lewis take us back to the philosophical discussion at the start of this essay. Butler and others argued that having a desire for the right thing is a mark of the refined personality. Therefore, acting in order to achieve those noble things reflects excellence in character rather than selfish behavior. It seems that desiring closeness to God in a future existence represents just such a desire. Those individuals who want that *devekut* and are motivated by that desire remain paragons of religious greatness.

While no one can dispute the profundity of this approach, it remains an open question as to whether Rambam truly adopts the above distinction between different types of *olam ha-ba* motivations. Arguably, the simplest reading of the last chapter in *Hilkhot Teshuvah* leads to a view in which any thought of achieving *olam ha-ba* via the performance of *miẓvot* is *she-lo lishmah*. After all, Rambam does not explicitly make any distinctions in this matter. We shall therefore temporarily set aside the interpretation of R. Soloveitchik and assume that Rambam disagrees with R. Ẓadok.

Although both Abravanel (in his first approach) and R. Ẓadok disagree with Rambam, an important distinction lies between them. Abravanel's point of view leaves out any grand vision of an idealistic motivation, assuming that people predominantly act to receive something in return and that the Torah does not ask more of them. R. Ẓadok maintains a vision of a more noble motivation; he simply, *contra* Rambam, thinks that wanting the closeness to God in the next world represents such a noble motivation. The desire for such closeness is one of the hallmarks of a successful religious life.

In truth, a close reading of Rambam reveals that he also sees value in wanting the stronger relationship with our Maker in the world to come. In *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam writes, "The good waiting for the righteous is the life of the world to come."[52] A bit later in the same chapter, he adds, "How strongly did David desire the life of the world to come."[53] Presumably, he mentions this fact about King David as a model for how others are to relate to *olam ha-ba*. In the penultimate *halakhah* of *Mishneh Torah*,[54] Rambam says that the sages and prophets desired the messianic era because it will bring a life free of political and economic difficulties that will allow people to study the Divine matters and earn a share in the world to come. It certainly seems that Rambam values a desire to make it into *olam ha-ba*.

This conclusion might support R. Soloveitchik's reading of Rambam. If Rambam thinks that the righteous desire *olam ha-ba*, then

maybe being motivated to perform *miẓvot* based on that desire would be a good thing. If so, we can turn to R. Soloveitchik's distinction between two different conceptions of the world to come as a motivational tool. Rambam would support the desire for *olam ha-ba* if it is viewed as a natural continuation of worship of God in this world, but not if it is seen as an independent reward.

Alternatively, we could argue that valuing desire for *olam ha-ba* does not contradict an absolutist position regarding purity of motivation. Rambam can argue that a person should *desire* the world to come but that such desire should not be the *motivation* for *miẓvah* performance. I take a *lulav* and listen to the *shofar* only because it is correct to fulfill the Divine command or because the truth is the truth.[45] At the same time, I also harbor hopes for an opportunity to get closer to *Hashem* in the next world. Rambam is quite explicit about this issue in his commentary on the *mishnah*. He writes, "The end goal is the world to come . . . and therefore the sage who holds the true opinions eyes this final goal."[46] Yet the same paragraph adds, "Even though this is the desired goal, it is not fit for someone who wants to serve God out of love that he should serve in order to achieve the world to come." Wanting *olam ha-ba* is a positive thing, but it is not the correct motivation for religious observance.

Perhaps R. Ẓadok might respond that such a distinction works better in the realm of abstract logic than in the human psyche. If a person truly desires closeness to God in the world to come and *miẓvah* performance will enable the achievement of such desires, then the reward of *olam ha-ba* will naturally become one motivation for the performance of *miẓvot*. If we view that desire as something positive, the spillover effect into the realm of motivation for *miẓvot* might not bother us. Rambam, however, in his passion for absolute purity of motivation, would argue that the religious individual can maintain the division between positive desires and motivation for *miẓvot*.

R. Kook offers another approach to understanding Rambam's position. He suggests an analogy in which an individual saved thousands of people from calamity and received a financial reward. If that person takes more joy in his newfound money than in the saving the thousands of lives, we would view that as reflecting poorly on his character. In a similar fashion, according to R. Kook, all other motivations for religious behavior, including the desire to achieve spiritual heights, pale in comparison to the good of fulfilling the Divine will. Therefore, that fulfillment should be the sole motivation for *miẓvah* performance.[47] In

response, we could argue that desiring closeness to God ranks much higher in the motivational hierarchy than wanting to make money. If so, other noble motivations such as the desire to adhere to the Divine command need not stifle this second idealistic motivation.

Rambam might still distinguish between the person who sees *miẓvot* as the ticket to wealth and the person who wants to get to *olam ha-ba*, despite the fact that he terms both *she-lo lishmah*. Even assuming that both deserve the term *she-lo lishmah*, we could rank them differently. The person who desires a share in the world to come is religiously superior to the person who only wants a good steak. Such a distinction emerges from the writings of a prominent *rishon* as well as a less well-known *aḥaron*.

R. Avraham from Slonim suggests that a person who thinks in terms of any personal reward serves his Creator *she-lo lishmah*.[48] Yet someone who studies Torah for the sake of honor violates a prohibition not to utilize the Torah for our own benefit. In contrast, someone who studies to receive *olam ha-ba* may lack pure love of God, but has not violated the same prohibition. Although his service is *she-lo lishmah*, it is better than that of the person who acts for honor or such reward.

Alternatively, we might reserve the term *she-lo lishmah* for those thinking of this-worldly rewards and view those motivated by *olam ha-ba* as on a level somewhere between *she-lo lishmah* and the most idealistic motivations. Ramban[49] sets up a hierarchy regarding motivation for *miẓvot* along these lines. Those motivated by rewards, termed service *she-lo lishmah*, receive their compensation in this world. Those motivated by the chance to merit the world to come, termed *ovedim mi-yir'ah*, receive reward in the world to come. Finally, those who serve God out of love merit rewards both in this world and in the world to come. Clearly, Ramban ranks those thinking about *olam ha-ba* rewards as superior to those thinking about this worldly honor or pleasure. At the same time, a purer motivation would ignore any kind of personal benefit.

In sum, we have located the following positions. Rambam terms both this worldly and otherworldly motivation as *she-lo lishmah*. Yet he thinks positively about wanting to achieve *olam ha-ba* in contexts other than motivation for *miẓvot*. Ramban views wanting *olam ha-ba* as a better motivation than rewards from this world, but it is not yet the ideal. R. Ẓadok argues that it depends on how one thinks of *olam ha-ba*. The person who wants to win the prize reduces *olam ha-ba* to a less noble motivation. The person who sees *olam ha-ba* as the opportunity to finally develop greater closeness to the divine presence exhibits the

purest of motivations. R. Soloveitchik contends that Rambam endorses R. Ẓadok's distinction.

Perhaps we can broaden the point made by R. Ẓadok to the wider canvass of religious life. Clearly, the religious individual should be motivated by the Divine command. Yet there are several religious contexts in which an independent desire to perform the *miẓvah* reflects religious maturity. Do we not expect our children to grow to love Shabbat for reasons beyond the fact that it is a *miẓvah*? Do we not want them to revel in the intellectual and emotional joys of learning Torah?[50] If they do not develop such attachment to these *miẓvot*, we feel that their religious growth has been stunted. We think that people of religious substance will look forward to Shabbat even had it not been commanded. Along similar lines, I have argued before that there is a religious demand to develop those virtuous dispositions that would motivate us to act benevolently, independent of divine commands.[51] We feel that a person committed to religion would start to love Shabbat and Torah learning and be motivated to perform *miẓvot* due to his or her love for these endeavors. Can we truly term this behavior as service *she-lo lishmah*?

At the same time, we do not want our independent spiritual yearnings to cause us to lose the sense of being beholden to divine command. Tosafot's position mentioned above may prove helpful here. Tosafot argued that multiple motivations are fine as long as the *lishmah* motivation could suffice independently. This can help us create the following model. The committed religious person will come to love many *miẓvot* and be motivated to perform them due to the enjoyment they provide. He or she will also accept the yoke of divine kingship and commit to performing *miẓvot*, whether or not they provide any enjoyment. This person will keep Shabbat due to the delights it offers, but will also feel an obligation to keep Shabbat even if it proved annoying and frustrating.

This combination includes two crucial aspects of the religious personality—adherence to the divine word as well as emotional attachment to the truly beautiful aspects of religious existence. The thinking of Rambam, R. Ẓadok, and Tosafot helps us arrive at a broader understanding of an important question in religious life. We hear the commanding voice of our Maker and respond accordingly. Above and beyond the divine command, we appreciate the splendor of Shabbat, love the joys of Talmud Torah, and feel ethically pulled to help those in need. Indeed, we also yearn for the greater closeness to Him that awaits us in the world to come.

Notes

I thank Dr. David Shatz for his many helpful comments and Meira Mintz for her fine editing.

1. In an e-mail correspondence, Professor J. B. Schneewind pointed out that Epicureanism could be viewed as an ancient form of Egoism.
2. Joseph Butler, *Five Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (New York, 1950), 24, 38-39.
3. Ibid., 51-53.
4. Ibid., 53.
5. Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, Volume 2 (London, 1924), 15.
6. William Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ,1973), 21-22.
7. Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, 16.
8. James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia, 1986), 58
9. See R. Yosef Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* 3:32, R. Nissim Gerondi, *Derashot ha-Ran*, *Derush* 10, R. Baḥya Ibn Pekuda, *Ḥovot ha-Levavot*, *Sha'ar* 10; note the differences between Rambam, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:1 and *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10:1.
10. *Sefer ha-Ḥinukh*, *mizvah* 16.
11. See the strong formulation in *Sefer ha-Ḥasidim*, 164.
12. This would seem to be the majority position. In a fascinating responsum that questions whether or not a person can study Torah and write an analysis of it for the sake of a doctorate or to win a prize, Rav Ovadiah Yosef argues in favor of this position. He points out that the *gemara* (*Nazir* 23a) mentions the sacrifices of Balak as an example of the worth of *she-lo lishmah* motivation, even though Balak never achieved *lishmah* motivation. See *Yabia Omer* 3:73, p. 339.
13. See *Tosafot Berakhot* 17a s.v. *ha-oseh* and *Ta'anit* 7a s.v. *ve-khol*. For a different resolution, see *Tosafot Sotah* 22b s.v. *le-olam*.
14. I am not addressing a kabbalistic view that suggests a level of motivation higher than love of God. From this perspective, the most exalted motivation is the desire to bring about the unification of the divine name.
15. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, tr. Lawrence Kaplan, (Philadelphia, 1983), 30.
16. See his *Hakdamah le-Perek Ḥelek*, 113-128 in the *Rambam le-Am* edition (Jerusalem, 5749).
17. *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10:1.
18. Ibid., 10:2.
19. Ibid., 10:1.
20. Abravanel, Commentary on *Vayikra* 26:3 (Jerusalem, 5744), 163-166.
21. Ibn Ezra, Commentary on *Devarim* 32:39.
22. David Shatz pointed out to me that Ibn Ezra could be making two distinct arguments. He could say that the common person cannot even envision the world of *olam ha-ba*. Alternatively, the common person might envision it without difficulty but fail to understand why anyone would desire such a state.
23. *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* 4:39-40.

24. *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 9:1 and *Hakdamah le-Perek Ḥelek*, 127-128.
25. *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:30.
26. R. Elazar Segal Landau, *Yad ha-Melekh, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 4:9.
27. Other *rishonim* do agree with the position of the anonymous commentator. Both R. Saʿadayah Gaon in *Emunot ve-Deʿot* 9:2 and Isaac Abravanel in his *Commentary on Bereshit* (Jerusalem, 5744), 267 argue that Avraham and Yiẓḥak would not have gone through with the *akedah* had they not believed in a reward after death. I thank R. Shalom Carmy for pointing out these sources to me. In contrast to these commentaries, Rambam explicitly denies that Avraham was thinking about reward and punishment (*Moreh Nevukhim* 3:24).
28. R. Avraham Yiẓḥak Ha-Kohen Kook, *Orot ha-Kodesh* 3 (Jerusalem, 1985), 167.
29. See the commentary of Rabbenu Ḥananel on the side of the Talmudic page in the Vilna Shas, *Rosh Hashanah* 4a.
30. R. Nissim Gerondi, commentary to *Pesaḥim* 8b. See also R. Shimon ben Zemaḥ Duran, *Magen Avot, Avot* 1:3.
31. *Tosafot Pesaḥim* 8b s.v. *she-yizkeh*.
32. See my "The Implications of a Jewish Virtue Ethic," *Torah U-Madda Journal* 9 (2000): 19-41, esp. 23 and 38, note 23.
33. See the discussion of dual motivations in R. Avraham Dori, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Adderet Tif'eret* 1, (Jerusalem, 5753), 191-196. R. Moshe Ḥayyim Luzzato sees dual motivation as less than ideal in *Mesillat Yesharim*, chapter 16.
34. R. Yiẓḥak Abravanel, *Naḥalat Avot, Avot* 1:3 and Commentary on *Devarim* 10:12, (Jerusalem, 5744), 104-109.
35. *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:25.
36. R. Ḥasdai Crescas, *Or Hashem* 2:6.
37. R. Ẓadok Rabinowitz, *Divrei Soferim* 4.
38. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York, 1980), 3-11.
39. Ibid., 4.
40. The Problem of Pain (New York, 1962), 145.
41. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "*U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*," *in Ish ha-Halakhah—Galuy ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1979), 175-176, note 14.
42. *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:1.
43. Ibid., 8:7.
44. *Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:4.
45. David Shatz commented that performing *miẓvot* because the truth is the truth is not identical to performing *miẓvot* because God commanded it. He is correct, but I am conflating the two here because they share the rejection of trying to achieve some personal result or benefit from the *miẓvot*.
46. *Hakdamah le-Perek Ḥelek*, p. 132.
47. R. Avraham Yiẓḥak Ha-Kohen Kook, *Musar Avikha*, Chapter 2, Section 4.
48. R. Avraham from Slonim, *Yesod ha-Avodah* (Jerusalem, 5733), 1.
49. Ramban, commentary on *Vayikra* 18:4.
50. See the famous introduction to the *Eglei Tal* by R. Avraham of Sokhachov.
51. "The Implications of a Jewish Virtue Ethic."