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# Nahmanides (13th Century)

## *Launching the Kabbalistic Assault*

### MAIMONIDES VS. NAHMANIDES ON HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE SHAPING OF JEWISH IDENTITY

Although deliberation over which personalities to include when dealing with the long history of engagements with Maimonides is difficult, no such difficulty occurs with Moses Nahmanides. Maimonides and his posthumous ideological opponent Nahmanides (ca. 1195–1270), arguably two of the greatest medieval expositors of Jewish thought and law, vehemently disagreed on virtually every substantive issue crucial to Judaism as a belief system. Their positions diverged so drastically on notions such as prophecy, providence, ritual, biblical history, and even the very nature of God – and thus what qualifies as authentic monotheism – that it would be no exaggeration to infer they adhered to two different faiths. Though they practiced more or less the same religion, as embodied in the rabbinic legal tradition known as *halakha*, their theoretical and dogmatic frameworks within which they expressed that practice radically conflicted. As with the other thinkers dealt with in this book, Nahmanides' theology can only be fully appreciated in its counterexegesis, reaction to, and reworking of Maimonides' own theology and philosophical exegesis.

Nahmanides' mystical conception of God is a composite of kabbalistic intradeical components known as *sefirot*, bearing a multiplicity of attributes, a deity who can be affected and about whom much can be known and positively asserted.[1] Maimonides' God, in contradistinction, is an irreducibly unified

[1] For but one example, see his explanation of the secret behind sacrifices in his Torah commentary to Levitcus 1:9, and Dov Schwartz's explication of the theurgy it expresses in "From Theurgy to Magic: The Evolution of the Magical Talismanic Justification of Sacrifice in the Circle of Nahmanides and His Interpreters," *Aleph* 1 (2001): 165–213, at 167–74. All references to Nahmanides' Torah commentary are to volume and page number of Nahmanides' *Commentary on the Torah* (Heb.), 2 vols., ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1958–59), hereinafter referred to as *Commentary*. Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

being, absent of any attribute whatsoever, who can only be described in negative terms,[2] and who essentially eludes all linguistic attempts to grasp him. Nahmanides' God is a god of history, affected by and interacting with the material world, responding to human conduct, and intervening in temporal matters, while Maimonides' divine Being transcends all time and space so absolutely as to allow for no possible nexus between them. He is absolute perfection and therefore stable, constant, immutable, and invulnerable by definition to any affectation. Miracles are a commonplace of Nahmanides' world; he considers belief in them as the basic fabric of the world and a fundamental principle of faith, going so far as to state that "no one has a portion in the Torah unless he believes that everything about us and all our occurrences consist of miracles and are not nature or order at all."[3] Natural causation, however, is the operative rule of Maimonides' universe,[4] rendering it virtually impenetrable by any divine historical intervention subsequent to creation; his operative principle is captured by the rabbinic maxim "The world goes its customary way" (*olam keminhago noheg)*, of which he was particularly fond.[5]

As a result, their disagreement on the nature of Judaism is nothing less than theologically schismatic.[6] Maimonides would have considered Nahmanides' worship either directed toward a nonexistent deity, at best, or idolatry, at worst. Nahmanides would counter that Maimonides philosophically emasculated God to such an extent as to vacate spirituality and worship of any relational dimensions

[2] See Harry Wolfson, "Maimonides on the Negative Attributes," in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume*, (New York: AAJR, 1945), 411–46.

[3] *Commentary*, Exod. 13:16. שאין לאדם חלק בתורת משה רבינו עד שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם. See also Sermon on Kohelet, in *Writings of R. Moses ben Nahman (Kitvei Ramban)* (Heb.), 2 vols. (hereafter KR), ed. Chaim Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1971), 1:192.

[4] See his commentary to m. Avot 5:6 and chap. 8 of the *Eight Chapters* regarding ten miraculous events "created" during the twilight hours on the sixth day of creation. According to Maimonides, these are particularized by their specific time of input but are emblematic of all miracles, having been preprogrammed at Creation, only at different intervals of the Genesis account. However, in *Guide of the Perplexed*, ed. S. Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), II:29, p. 345, he seems to accept the occurrence of miracles but limits their duration. Some scholars have argued that Maimonides shifted his position on miracles from the maximalist one taken in the PM to a more moderate view in the GP. See Hannah Kasher, "Biblical Miracles and the Universality of Natural Laws: Maimonides' Three Methods of Harmonization," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1998): 25–52; Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Maimonides and Miracles: The Growth of a (Dis)belief," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 147–72; and Kenneth Seeskin's discussion of miracles in *Maimonides on the Origin of the World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160–65. Whatever his position is on miracles, though, it cannot entail some change in God.

[5] See GP, II:19, 25, 29 and Letter on the Resurrection of the Dead, chap. 6. Nahmanides specifically targets this maxim as one subscribed to by Maimonides indicating a disbelief in the uninterrupted divine governance of the world by way of miracles: *Torat HaShem Temimah* (hereafter TT), in KR, vol. 1, p. 153.

[6] For a good overview of the fundamental differences see Jose Faur, "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," *Shofar* 10, no. 3 (1992): 5–46, who details how the Andalusian tradition represented by Maimonides was "systematically challenged" by Nahmanides (19).

traditionally associated with them, leaving a lifeless, sterile faith, absent a divine presence in history. Indeed, Nahmanides considers belief in natural causation over an all-encompassing miraculous order tantamount to one of the most egregious theological offenses, which would "exclude one from any portion in the Torah of Moses our Master,"[7] implicitly disqualifying Maimonidean naturalism as a legitimate Jewish belief. Though David Berger has convincingly argued for a much-tempered understanding of Nahmanides' apparently extreme dismissal of nature, where "except in the rarest of instances, the natural order governs the lives of non-Jews, both individually and collectively, as well as the overwhelming majority of Jews,"[8] Nahmanides' views on nature and miracles are still fundamentally opposed to the Maimonidean model. This is especially so regarding the relationship between intellectual perfection and providence, which Maimonides views as one of direct one-to-one correspondence, while to Nahmanides, as Berger also notes, "[t]his central point of the *Guide* vanishes entirely."[9] These alternative theological frameworks within which the two expressed their Judaisms in turn shape their accounts of the origins of their religion, shared perhaps in name only, and its biblical founding fathers. As such, they provide alternative memories and historical consciousnesses from which emerge opposing definitions of what constitutes Jewishness.

Any investigation of these alternatives must first focus on their differing views of the purpose served by the historical dimension of the Torah. The opposition between Maimonides' and Nahmanides' overarching alternative rationales underlying the benefits of biblical narratives could not be more pronounced. Nahmanides subscribes to a cyclical view of Israelite history as a perpetual reenactment of its biblical antecedents, encapsulated by the rabbinic adage that "everything that happened to the fathers is an indication of what will happen to the children."[10] Indeed, the biblical annals enfold all of human history as indicated by the verse *This is the book of the generations of Adam*, taken literally to refer to the Torah, "which in its entirety is a record of the history of man."[11] The first couple is named corporately by the generic term Adam, or species, "because all of them [mankind] are contained in them potentially."[12] The same verse reiterates Adam's origins on the day he was created *in the image*

[7] Ibid.

[8] "Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 107–28, at 126.

[9] Ibid., 120.

[10] See *Commentary*, Gen. 12:6, where he offers this as a guiding principle of the biblical patriarchal narratives. Amos Funkenstein noted the Christian influence that inspired Nahmanides' typological exegesis with some essential differences, but in essence all the biblical characters are "historiosophical symbols," that "foreshadow, prefigure, and even predetermine events in the future of Israel." See his *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 114–15.

[11] *Commentary*, Gen. 5:1, p. 47.

[12] Ibid.

*of God,* "to stipulate that he is the work of God and the image of God." What follows, then, is that history charts not just mortal events, but divine life as well, since the human species is invested with a divine component. The Garden of Eden story, for example, transpires along parallel lower and upper lines, the human characters and environment mirrored by their metaphysical counterparts within the divine realm.[13] Mortal history, and singularly Jewish history, discloses mythic history.[14]

However, general history is ancillary to Jewish history, and the patriarchal narratives where it all begins map out particularly the nation of Israel's political and spiritual future. The historical record is crucial for Nahmanides, not for any arcane scholarly appeal, but for elevating Jewish history to a metaphysical plane that expresses the unfolding of divine will and governance. The actual physical enactment of those narratives recorded in the Bible ensures their reenactment in Israel's future, just as prophets often instantiate their predictions with physical acts to secure their realization.[15] More importantly, the biblical record becomes a crystal ball through which Israel's immediate destiny can be envisaged, "for when a circumstance of one of the patriarchs occurs one can better understand from it what is decreed to occur to his descendants."[16] Biblical history is so all-encompassing as to collapse all of Jewish history throughout time, including post-biblical history, into biblical time, as he concludes in his summary of the book of Genesis: it is "a book of the formation (*yetzirah*) regarding the creation (*hidush*) of the world and the formation of all that has been formed, and all the events of the fathers that are like a formation (*yetzirah*) for their descendants

[13] See Bezalel Safran, "Rabbi Azriel and Nahmanides: Two Views of the Fall of Man," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban)*, 75–106.

[14] Nahmanides comments, for example, on Deuteronomy 21:22 that a midrashic analogy of God and Israel to "twin brothers" "contains a secret." As Elliot Wolfson astutely comments, "For Nahmanides, Israel below and God above are not brothers only in a figurative sense but they are so in a mystical sense, for the secret he alludes to here involves the symbolic, and hence ontological parallelism between the Jewish soul and the divine paradigm." In "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic," *AJS Review* 14, no. 2 (1989): 103–78, at 161.

[15] *Commentary,* Gen. 12:6, 1:77.
ודע כי כל גזירת עירין כאשר תצא מכח גזירה אל פועל דמיון, תהיה הגזרה מתקיימת על כל פנים. ולכן יעשו הנביאים.מעשה בנבואות . . . ולפיכך החזיק הקדוש ברוך הוא את אברהם בארץ ועשה לו דמיונות בכל העתיד להעשות בזרעו, והבן זה.
Interestingly, Nahmanides' perspective here adumbrates modern scholarly interpretations of concrete symbolic prophetic actions accompanying prophecies, referred to by those such as J. Lindblom as a "visible word" paralleling the divine word where "such an action served not only to represent and make evident a particular fact, but also to make this fact a reality." See *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philidelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 172. For Maimonides, these actions are extremely problematic if taken literally, for they would have God "turn his prophets into a laughingstock and a mockery for fools by ordering them to carry out crazy actions." They are therefore to be taken as visionary rather than historical enactments. See GP, II:46. Once again, this highlights Maimonides' systematic devaluation of the Bible's historicity in favor of the reality of the mind.

[16] *Commentary,* ibid.
כי כאשר יבוא המקרה לנביא משלשת האבות יתבונן ממנו הדבר הנגזר לבא לזרעו

since all their occurrences are *figurae (tziyurei)* of things alluding to and informing about everything that will happen to them in the future."[17] The entire book is about creation in the clever way Nahmanides manipulates the term "formation," which is the type of creation that transpires after the initial big bang of *hidush*. All the patriarchal narratives are creation stories as well in the sense that they prefigure and generate all of Jewish destiny.[18] The book of Genesis is entirely about creation – the creation of the world and the creation of history. Maimonides, however, who views the Torah functionally, as an ideal teaching concerned with thought and practice, reads the biblical chronicles in kind as a primer.[19] Their role in the Torah's uniquely ideal blending of practical and theoretical philosophy is supplemental to the overall teaching in clarifying law and ethics, for "either they give a correct notion of an opinion that is a pillar of the Law, or they rectify some action so that mutual wrongdoing and aggression should not occur between men." In some sense, Maimonides' view of narratives prefigures the legal philosopher Robert Cover's groundbreaking study "Nomos and Narrative," which argues for the mutual integration of law and narrative using the biblical canon as his paradigm in which "every prescription is insistent in its demand to be located in discourse . . . and every narrative is insistent in its demand for its prescriptive point, its moral."[20] The biblical narratives can be viewed as a kind of legal storytelling, which assume their formal shape in biblical law.

A paradigmatic case in point that highlights the two contrasting models of biblical history is the curiously extraneous account of various internecine military battles between ancient Near Eastern kings in Genesis 14. That passage culminates with Abraham's defeat of one of them, rescuing his nephew Lot who had been taken captive, and retrieving all his possessions that had been seized. For Nahmanides, those seemingly inconsequential events are in fact of utmost

[17] *Commentary*, 1:279.
שהוא ספר היצירה בחדוש העולם ויצירת כל נוצר ובמקרי האבות שהם כענין יצירה לזרעם מפני שכל מקריהם ציורי דברים לרמוז ולהודיע כל עתיד לבא להם I have adopted Amos Funkenstein's translation of *tziyurei devarim* as "figurae," which is a conscious approximation of the Christian equivalent of prefiguration. See his *Perceptions*, 112–13.

[18] The reason these biblical narratives achieve this relates to the nature of the text they are embedded in, which, according to Nahmanides, preceded the creation in a different form captured by the phrase "black fire on white fire." The Torah, therefore, is, as Nina Caputo correctly states, "divorced from temporality or historical circumstance, and according to Nahmanides' reading, it transcends and defines time." See "*In the Beginning* . . . Typology, History, and the Unfolding Meaning of Creation in Nahmanides' Exegesis," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999): 54–82, at 67.

[19] It should be noted that both these views of biblical history do not treat it as historiography and are no exceptions to Yerushalmi's determination that "historiography never served as a primary vehicle for Jewish memory in the Middle Ages." Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 39.

[20] *Narrative, Violence and the Law*, ed. M. Minnow et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 95–172, at 96.

consequence in not only presaging the ultimate political redemption of the Jews but in guaranteeing it. The four kings portend the four political empires within whose oppressive orbit Israel will be caught, climaxing in the final overthrow of Edom, the medieval sobriquet for Rome or Christianity, whose repressive hand is the lived experience of Jews contemporaneous with Nahmanides' own time.[21]

There is no historical significance to this narrative either for Israel's past or future for Maimonides, and it is of no interest as history per se.[22] First, its miraculous historical facticity is confined to Abraham's experience alone, simply "making known to us" a military victory he achieved against all odds. More importantly, its relevance is in its portrayal of Abraham as a political and moral archetype for human values in general. His actions are a testament to the power of ideas and common beliefs as a socially cohesive force since it "gives us knowledge of his defense of his relative because of the latter's sharing his belief" (GP, III:50, p. 614). In addition, Abraham's refusal of any material gain offered him as tribute for his victory is emblematic of an ethical constitution that is easily contented, eschews material gain, and is "of a striving for moral nobility" (614).[23] What is critical to note here is that Maimonides' view of the utility of this memory coincides with his notion of a national identity that is forged by knowledge rather than ethnicity. Abraham's courageous self-sacrifice specifically for a blood relative is precisely tailored to accentuate this notion. It is decidedly not motivated by tribal attachment or biological ancestry, as one would expect, but because of Lot's "sharing his belief." Abraham does not risk his life for his nephew out of devotion to family but rather out of dedication to opinions mutually held by the two. The lesson is that ideas, not blood, bind a nation together. That is why in Maimonides' writings one is considered to be of the "seed of Abraham" (*zera avraham*), the phrase commonly denoting Abraham's descendants, not by virtue of a common ancestor, but by how one conducts oneself. As Maimonides asserts, "It follows that he alone is a descendant of Abraham (*zera avraham*) who maintains his religion (*dat* or law) and his straight way,"[24] the implication being that Jewish heredity is a function of ethics. Consequently, ancestral claims are forged not in genetics, but in conduct that manifests notions of morality "fathered" by Abraham. Thus, while for Nahmanides Jewish history inheres in Abraham's biography both physically and metaphysically, to be played out by his biological descendants, for Maimonides Abraham's life provides a manual on how to qualify as his ideological offspring.

[21] המעשה הזה אירע לאברהם להורות כי ארבע מלכיות תעמודנה למשול בעולם ובסוף יתגברו בניו עליהם ויפלו כלם בידם, וישיבו כל שבותם ורכושם. *Commentary*, Gen. 14:1.

[22] For Maimonides' conceptions of history, see David Novak, "Does Maimonides Have a Philosophy of History?" *Proceedings of the Academy for Jewish Philosophy* 4 (1983).

[23] Abraham's selfless sacrifice for Lot's safety is also identified as the trait of the "good eye" associated with Abraham, the imitation of which warrants classification as a "disciple of Abraham." See Maimonides, Commentary on the Mishnah, Avot, 5:17, p. 303.

[24] MT, Kings 10:7.

It is trite to state that Jews throughout history have traced the roots of their Jewishness back to the first biblical patriarch Abraham, beginning with his initial divine encounter in Genesis 12:1, when Abraham is ordered by God to abandon his own familial roots for a yet to be disclosed destination. On its biblical face, Jewish history is grounded in a naive break with the past for an indeterminate future. However, as with all the Hebrew biblical narratives, this offers only a skeletal account, one that is, as Erich Auerbach famously characterized it, "fraught with background,"[25] inviting the embellishment and "gap-filling" that the subsequent rabbinic midrashic tradition so enthusiastically provides. That tradition did not cease with the end of the classical rabbinic period in the first five or so centuries of the common era, but continued with a flurry of medieval exegetical activity in a recurring reconstruction of Abraham's pioneering challenges to the pagan ideology of his time.

Here is a prime illustration of the way in which Jewish thought advances in the shadow of Maimonides by exegetical subversion. Although apparently adopting Maimonides' version of Abraham's beginnings by directly citing the pertinent section in the *Guide of the Perplexed* (III:29, pp. 514–15), Nahmanides subtly substitutes its theological tendentiousness with his own. Maimonides depicts Abraham as engaging in persistent debate against pagan belief which, much like Socrates' indictment for corrupting the youth in Athens, is viewed as politically subversive, causing the king to first imprison him, then confiscate all his property, and finally expel him (515). Abraham's success, eventually garnering "the consensus of the greater part of the population of the earth," was due to his formidable powers of persuasion in convincing others as to the truths of monotheism. However, while deferring to Maimonides' historical rendering,[26] Nahmanides at the same time subverts its naturalistic attribution of Abraham's accomplishments in favor of a supranatural one that singles out its miraculous nature: "Regardless, in that place of Ur Kasdim, *either a miracle or hidden miracle*, was performed on behalf of Abraham our father in that the king was moved to save him and not execute him and release him from prison without constraints, or it was a *renowned miracle* in being rescued from a pit of fire as our Rabbis have said" (emphasis mine).[27]

Except as an object of Abraham's own independent intellectual efforts, God's participation, if any, is minimized in Maimonidean Abrahamic achievements,

[25] Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[26] *Commentary*, 1:72–73, and its parallel in Nahmanides' *Torat Hashem Temimah: Kitvei HaRamban* (Writings), 1:145, which approvingly cited Maimonides' account of Abraham's rabble-rousing in Kutha based on the pagan Sabian historical source, *The Nabatean Agriculture*, in GP, III:29, 513–14. See also Maimonides' parallel account in MT, Idolatry, 1:3. See also b. Bava Batra 91a for differences of opinion on Abraham's time spent in Kutha and for one that identifies it with Ur Kasdim.

[27] Gen. 11:28: והנה על כל פנים במקום ההוא בארץ כשדים נעשה נס לאברהם אבינו, או נס נסתר, שנתן בלב אותו המלך להצילו ושלא ימיתנו והוציא אותו מבית הסוהר שילך לנפשו, או נס מפורסם שהשליכו לכבשן האש וניצל כדברי רבותינ

while Nahmanides charts Abraham's evolving personality along a divinely orchestrated script. Both construct "mythic" origins in their own ideal images of the Jew and the nation of Israel. If the primary mandate of the Jew is to know the existence of God and his unity, not via revelation or tradition, but by human reason, a mandate shared with all of humanity, then the Jewish story must begin in kind. It does so with a human being, having been raised in a culture steeped in pagan theology, who perfects his humanity by philosophical demonstration arriving sui generis, not being the beneficiary of any monotheistic tradition, at the truth of one God. He then gains followers by teaching other human beings to follow suit, and uniting them by a "way of truth" into a community that coalesces as a "nation that knows God."[28] The political glue of this nation is a shared knowledge of universal truths rather than a common ethnicity, or, as Nahmanides would have it in his own subscription to the rabbinic maxim, "Israel has no *mazel*,"[29] the singular focus of divine attention enjoyed by no other nation. While Maimonides does refer to Abraham's escape aided by a "miracle" in his parallel Mishneh Torah account, it is conspicuously missing in the relevant passage in the *Guide* to which Nahmanides refers, and plays no ensuing role in gaining adherents to Abraham's ideological camp in either account.[30] Nahmanides, though, places the miracle front and center as the cause of Abraham's fame and influence, as conveyed by his comments on the significance of the name *Ur Kasdim*, taking the very name of the city from which Abraham was banished as commemorating the miracle for "the place was called that [taking *Ur* in the sense of flame] because of the miracle."[31]

Nahmanides further reshapes, or rather with this move contorts, Maimonides' account, by drawing an analogy between Abraham's release from Ur Kasdim and Israel's later liberation from Egypt, in that both are attributed to the same divine activity of "brought you out" (*hotzetikha*). This term, according to Nahmanides, uniquely denotes a miracle, and

[28] MT, Idolatry, 1:1.

[29] See b. Sabbath 156a. According to Nahmanides, the world is governed by a myriad of powers, with each individual nation subjected to the authority of one or the other. Israel is distinct in its direct governance by God. See *Commentary*, Gen. 15:18, 17:1; Exod. 12:3, 20:2; Lev. 18:25; Num. 11:16; Deut. 4:19.

[30] In the MT version of Abraham's career, the detail that "a miracle was performed on his behalf" is overshadowed in the larger narrative of Abraham's natural efforts of persuasion. Maimonides may have inserted it there as a minor concession to the more general audience of the MT most familiar with the midrashic tale of Abraham's miraculous escape from a fiery furnace. It can also be read more naturally by its more intellectually sophisticated audience as a euphemism for any escape from imminent disaster, as the same phrase (*na'aseh lo nes*) is used in MT, Divorce, 12:5.

[31] The miracle is maintained consistently as the focal point of Abraham's life, gaining him followers and fame. Later, according to Nahmanides, a miracle is performed on behalf of a foreign king "in honor of Abraham," thus further corroborating the veracity of the miracle that rescued Abraham, for "if a miracle was performed for the king of Sodom in honour of Abraham, how much more probable would it be to believe that a miracle was performed on behalf of Abraham himself to save his life" (*Commentary*, Gen. 14:10).

therefore the verse states I am the God who brought you out (*hotzetikha*) of Ur Kasdim to give you this land as an inheritance (Gen. 15:7), as the term *hotzetikha* connotes a miracle, for it did not state who took you out of (*lokahtikha*) Ur Kasdim but rather *hotzetikha*, indicating that He brought out a captive from prison just like who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 20:2).[32]

Nahmanides' originating myth places Abraham's historical debut, as a microcosmic focus of divine attention, on a continuum macrocosmically with Israel's, anchoring them both in the miracle. The historical retrieval of Abraham's biography is a retrojection of the way he conceives of the first of the Ten Commandments, which conditions belief in the existence of God on a miracle and a particular historical experience of it. As he asserts:

> It states *who brought you out of Egypt* for bringing them out from there teaches divine existence and will since we went out from there through His knowledge and providence, and it also teaches creation, because nature cannot change if it is eternal, and it teaches His power, which in turn teaches His unity . . . and this is the reason for *who brought you out (hotzetikha)* for they know and are witnesses to all these things.[33]

Maimonides' formulation of the first commandment strategically omits the second half of the verse referring to the historical Exodus, and presents only the first half as its biblical source: *I am the Lord your God*. The exodus is neither a reenactment of Abraham's political travails, nor a presentation of empirical data that substantiates God's existence. Divine will, miracles, and eyewitness observation play no role in establishing the veracity of God's being for Maimonides, whereas the independent exertion of human thought does. Abraham is the founder of Israel because he conveyed universal truths through the medium of reasoned instruction. Abraham is constructed as the Socrates of his age who first reasons the existence of God by "thinking and wondering day and night," until he "attained the way of truth and apprehended the correct line of thought," and then proselytizes that truth in kind by "sowing doubt," "engaging in debate," "informing," "overpowering with demonstration," "accumulating a following," informing each follower "in accordance with his capacity," and ultimately "authoring treatises."[34] Successive generations, although privileged with seasoned teachers and textual guides, cannot receive their identities by simple

[32] *Commentary*, Gen. 11:28 רמב"ן בראשית פרק יא
וזהו שאמר הכתוב (להלן טו ז) אני ה' אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים לתת לך את הארץ הזאת לרשתה, כי מלת "הוצאתיך" תלמד על נס, כי לא אמר
"אשר לקחתיך מאור כשדים", אבל אמר "הוצאתיך", שהוציא ממסגר אסיר, כמו אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים

[33] *Commentary*, Exod. 20:2:
אמר אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, כי הוצאתם משם תורה על המציאות ועל החפץ
כי בידיעה ובהשגחה ממנו יצאנו משם, וגם תורה על החדוש, כי עם קדמות העולם לא ישתנה דבר מטבעו, ותורה על היכולת, , והיכולת תורה
על הייחוד, כמו שאמר (לעיל ט יד) בעבור תדע כי אין כמוני בכל הארץ. וזה טעם אשר הוצאתיך, כי הם היודעים ועדים בכל אלה

[34] MT Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim, (Laws of Idolatry) 1:3. Similarly, the parallel passage in GP, II:39, portrays Abraham having "assembled the people and called them by way of teaching and

transmission, but must reestablish them anew by approximating Abraham's lead. Jewish identity is perpetuated by self-generated convictions based on philosophical demonstration, guiding others in that same methodology, and leaving written testaments to it for posterity.

Nahmanides' schema, however, of the Jewish historical continuum remains uninterrupted by the intergenerational relay of memory as the instrumental vehicle for preserving the correct God concept. Jewishness is in part passed on and received. Those essential monotheistic principles regarding the existence of God and his nature are perpetuated by recalling the witnessing of those original events that testify to them. Nahmanides imports the same rationale he offered for the first commandment's conditioning of knowing God's existence on the deliverance from Egypt to the parental prescription for transmitting the details of the Exodus to children. The Bible standardizes those historical details as a formulaic response to children's inquiries about the rationale for the commandments. When the child asks about them, a filial inquiry traditionally associated with Passover, the response is prescribed, consisting of God's "bringing us out" of Egypt by way of the miracles He performed "in Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his house in front of our eyes" (Deut. 6:21–22). The reason for this specific response, Nahmanides claims, is

> precisely the same as why it refers to *who brought you out of Egypt* in the Ten Commandments … and that is the reason the verse states *in front of our eyes* because we are the ones who know and are witnesses to the signs and miracles for we saw there that our Lord is the God in heaven and earth and there is none beside Him since all this is known through the Exodus as I explained the first commandment.[35]

For Maimonides, there is a general functional rationale for all holidays that serves emotional, social, and political needs, since "they are all for rejoicings and pleasurable gatherings which in most cases are indispensable for man; they are also useful in the establishment of friendship, which must exist among people living in political societies" (GP, III:43, p. 570). The particular purpose of Passover is to inculcate a moral as well as an opinion that "consists in the commemoration of the miracles of Egypt and in the perpetuation of their memory throughout the periods of time" (572). Passover observance conjures up a nation conceived out of an experience of miracles whose memory must be perpetuated as a testament to a creator God but not as *proof* of it. Creation out of nothing eludes unequivocal philosophical demonstration, but is accepted on a balance of arguments so that biblical law, miracles, and sanctions for proper conduct are not vitiated since belief in an eternal world "destroys the Law in its

instruction to adhere to the truth that he had grasped … attracting them by means of eloquent speeches and by means of the benefits he conferred upon them" (379).

[35] *Commentary*, Deut. 6:20: והכוונה בזה, הוא הטעם במה שאמר בעשרת הדברות (לעיל ה ו) אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, כי יתכוון שנודיע לבן השואל כי ה' הוא הבורא והחפץ והיכול כאשר נתבאר לנו ביציאת מצרים. וזה טעם "לעינינו", כי אנחנו היודעים ועדים מן האותות והמופתים שראינו שם כי השם אלהינו הוא האלהים בשמים ובארץ ואין עוד מלבדו, כי כל זה יודע ביציאת מצרים כאשר פירשתי בדבור הראשון

principle, necessarily gives the lie to every miracle, and reduces to inanity all the hopes and threats that the Law has held out" (GP, II:25, p. 328). For Maimonides, memory and history serve to preserve the community, to consolidate the social unit, and to buttress the Torah, its foundational constitution, which provides the framework in which each individual must cultivate independently the fundamentals of religion related to the knowledge of God. In other words, their national Jewishness is expressed through a shared history while their "religious" identity is expressed autonomously. For Nahmanides, on the other hand, memory and history intrinsically promote those fundamentals with the knowledge of and belief in God emerging organically from a retelling of the past.

Maimonides' version of the Sinaitic revelation replicates Abraham's intellectual journey on a national scale for each and every individual present, who, according to a prominent rabbinic tradition, heard the first two commandments, *I* and *Thou shalt not have*, directly from God (*mipi hagevurah – from the mouth of the Force*). He interprets this to mean that the people bypassed Moses in accessing the two truths of divine existence and unity since "they are knowable by human speculation alone . . . with regard to everything that can be known by demonstration, the status of the prophet and that of everyone else who knows it are equal" (GP, II:33, p. 364). The rabbinic understanding of the divine immediacy of the first two commandments is turned on its head by Maimonides to one that displaces God from any involvement in their apprehension, severing Him from the sensual experience, except as the object of human thought. However, the other commandments are Mosaically mediated since "they belong to the class of generally accepted opinions and those adopted in virtue of tradition, not to the class of the intellecta" (364). Knowledge concerned with politics, ethics, and correct conduct, as opposed to that concerned with universal absolute truths, is subjective and therefore fickle, requiring the ordinances of an expert in governance, a prophet, or a "philosopher king," to maintain an ordered society. The shift from the noetic quality of the first two commandments to the others echoes the intellectual journey of primordial Adam, whose intellectual focus declined from one centered on universal truths (true and false) to one on "generally accepted things . . . judging things to be bad or fine" (GP, I:2, p. 25). This reconstruction of the Sinaitic theophany startlingly imbues the core of what is supremely emblematic of Israel's particularity, chosenness, and uniqueness, with a universal dimension or the state of the human condition. When Jews recollect their historically pristine formative moment, they are at the same time projected back to the embryonic historical moment of all humankind.

While Maimonides traces a history of the Jewish origins from Abraham to Sinai that evolves, and at times devolves, along intellectual patterns, Nahmanides plots one that is animated by miracles – a transcendent history of a people who are witnesses to the transtemporal and transnatural within time and nature. Nahmanides' view of the direct communication of the first two commandments is the mirror image of that of Maimonides, who anchored them in reason. It is the

quality of divine communication that distinguishes the first two commandments from the others, whereby the first two are heard and comprehended while the rest are articulated by an unintelligible sound made intelligible by Moses' elucidation of them. The midrashic intent is so that "*all are prophets* with respect to belief in God and the prohibition against idolatry, for they are the foundation of the entire Torah and the commandments" (emphasis mine). Where Maimonides equalizes all of Israel and Moses in the intersection of intellect, all being engaged in the same philosophical quest, Nahmanides equalizes them in a prophetic experience that uniformly renders them privy to a divine revelation of the same content. Only a miraculous channel can access a being defined by miracles, or one that intervenes supranaturally into nature and history, as opposed to the Maimonidean deity who is defined by the simple ontology of an irrefutable necessary existence.

These opposing notions of what determines the contours of Jewish historical consciousness translate concretely into a halakhic debate concerning normative expressions of memory mandated by the Torah. The positive injunctions for transmitting the memories of both Sinai and the Exodus are reinforced by negative admonitions to inhibit the loss of those memories prescribing the greatest of precautions "*so that you do not forget the things you saw with your own eyes and so they do not fade from your mind as long as you live*" (Deut. 4:9), in the case of the events at Sinai, and "*so you do not forget the Lord who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage*" (6:12), in the case of the liberation from Egyptian servitude. Nahmanides considers these to consist of formal laws and vigourously challenges Maimonides' conspicuous omission of these two legislative prescriptions in his enumeration of the negative commandments. The latter is so paramount as to constitute the negative concomitant of the very first positive commandment to believe in the existence of God, since its intent is to preserve the memory of "what transpired in the exodus from Egypt that was realized by new signs and miracles changing nature indicating a pre-existent God that wills, is powerful, and creates, for this matter of the exodus from Egypt for those who are familiar with it silences any denier in the creation of the world and sustains the belief in God's knowledge, providence, and power over all generalities and particulars."[36] Likewise does Nahmanides take Maimonides to task for "forgetting" to enumerate a mandate "not to forget" the Sinaitic theophany that establishes beyond all doubt its historical veracity and which all are obligated "not to be remiss in their transmission to all children and descendants of all future posterity."[37]

Maimonides' only juridic citation of Deuteronomy 4:9 is of its latter half, "*and you shall make it known to your children and children's children,*" to endorse the extension of the obligation to teach Torah beyond the first generation.[38] This halakhic dispute crystallizes conflicting views on the purpose

[36] *Sefer HaMitzvot*, ed. Shabse Frankel (New York: Congregation Bnei Yosef, 1995), 406.
[37] Ibid.
[38] MT, Torah Study, 1:2.

of commemorating national history with far-reaching implications for sustaining national survival, which hinges on parental nurturing. For Nahmanides the fundamental teaching that forges the generational links in the chain of Judaism is the historical narratives of its origins. Recollecting the past constitutes the very essence of the "Jewishness" imparted from parent to child because the past is an intrinsic vehicle for theology. Maimonides' normative reading of Deuteronomy 4:9 adopts an unequivocal rabbinic application of the verse to the general prescription of teaching Torah to children. Nahmanides acknowledges the problem of the apparent inconsistency between his interpretation of the verse and that of a long-standing rabbinic one but resolves it with a casuistry that sharply distinguishes his view of Jewish survival, and the role of memory in ensuring it, from that of Maimonides. Nahmanides asserts the identity of his reading with the classic rabbinic derivation of simply teaching Torah by equating the "teaching of faith in the Torah" with "the teaching of Torah."[39] The primary goal of teaching Torah is not to impart knowledge and to train one in the art of deduction and independent derivation of it, but to perpetuate the memory of an originating event on which all Jewish faith hinges. Nahmanides reduces the rudimentary mitzvah of transgenerational teaching to the inculcation of a national memory, while Maimonides simply views it as the art of pedagogy and all that is associated with it in cultivating the next generation of autonomously thinking human beings who can proceed in kind with their successors.

Their respective positions on the content of transmission in the perpetuation of Judaism also explains their differing conceptions of the relationship between parent and child. When accounting for the order of the Ten Commandments, Nahmanides relates the first four to the most important principles regarding God – unity, governance, omnipotence, omniscience, providence – and their practical grounding in the concrete action of Sabbath observance. The remainder deals with "corporeal matters and begins with the father for just as you are commanded to honour the first Creator, so I command you to honour the second creator who brought you into existence and they are the father and mother."[40] The parallel drawn between the earthly and heavenly creator is critical since all knowledge about the latter is inherently substantiated by the former. Constructed as a creator/creation relationship, every gesture of respect by the child evokes the primary Creator since it is inspired by the parent as a living signifier of the deity. In addition, the truth of the Creation is authenticated by an uninterrupted succession of parents and children that can be traced back to Adam as recorded in the Bible. Moses' father saw Levi, who in turn saw Jacob, who himself studied with Shem the son of Noah, who personally experienced the Flood which then corroborates creation, "for whoever admits to the Flood, by

[39] כי לימוד אמונת התורה הוא הלימוד בתורה

[40] KR, vol. 1, TT, p. 152.

necessity admits to the creation of the world."[41] Finally, the evidentiary chain of earthly creators culminates in the heavenly creator since Adam, its primogenitor, "was aware that he himself was alone in the world without a father or mother." Thus, any warrant of respect by the parent from the child conjures the one who had no parent, transporting the child along finite regress that ends only penultimately in primordial man and ultimately, by inference, in the Creator. For Maimonides the duty to respect parents is purely a function of political and social welfare that "preserves correct relations between human beings," and whose goals are accomplished in this world since, "if one conducts himself in this way and another does the same, he will benefit from its effect."[42] Respect for parents does not generate a historical continuum back to primordial time but instigates benefits contemporaneous with its performance, guaranteeing treatment in kind, for "if you don't respect your father, your son will not respect you."[43] Identity, as defined by the tenets of Jewish faith, for Nahmanides is transferred by parental pronouncements, and the respect commanded by parents preserves the integrity of its transfer, while for Maimonides it simply maintains an environment within which the independent shaping of identity can flourish.

A striking distinction on the details of Judaism's origins through Abraham's own discovery of monotheism (or, more appropriately in Nahmanides' case, monolatry) crystallizes much of what has been discussed to this point. Abraham's intellectual journey toward the truths of a single creator deity is initiated sui generis within the Maimonidean version. Having been raised in a thoroughly pagan culture, Abraham, Maimonides recounts, independently began to question the regnant ideology while still a minor, emphasizing a consummate intellectual void within which his philosophical doubts germinated – "and he had no teacher, and no one to inform him as to anything, but he was steeped among the ignorant idolaters in Ur Kasdim. And his father, his mother, and the entire nation were idol worshippers, and he worshipped along with them."[44] Biblical genealogy, Nahmanides calculates, has Abraham's and Noah's lives overlap, and therefore, in opposition to the utter monotheistic vacuum suffused by its absolute idolatrous antithesis in which Maimonides first locates him, Abraham does in fact have a mentor in his quest for theological truths. As he insists, in a passage that actually begins by subscribing to Maimonides' historical reconstruction, "Abraham, our ancestor, conversed with Noah, the second Adam to the creation, who, with his children, reported to him about the Flood, their stay in the ark, their departure from the ark and how the world was renewed like the day of creation."[45] Since, according to

[41] Ibid., 144.
[42] PM, Peah 1:1.
[43] GP, III:40.
[44] MT, Idolatry, 1:3.
[45] KR, TT, p.145.

Nahmanides, the Flood is proof of creation ex nihilo, Abraham was educated in it by those who could provide firsthand testimony as to its historical veracity.

Inasmuch as history provides incontrovertible evidence of the foundational principles of Jewish belief, Nahmanides cannot tolerate any radical breaches in its continuous flow. Abraham must have some historical nexus to the creation via those who witnessed it. A succession of fathers who preserve that memory is crucial for Jewish survival as a faith. Maimonidean history, on the other hand, is punctured by a series of caesuras where ideas have been near irrevocably lost, only to be autonomously retrieved and reintroduced by outstanding individuals such as Abraham. Since it is not history that demonstrates an idea but the intrinsic cogency of philosophical argument, Maimonides cannot only dispense with the carriers of history and historical memory embodied by parents, but actually necessitates it in order to inculcate how truth is preserved – that is, not by history but by independent thought. The lesson of Maimonides' reconstructed history is for its expandability in the ongoing process of generating thought anew each generation.

An instructive model that practically manifests theoretical conceptions of identity, belonging, and the role of memory in a group, is the outsider who somehow gains entry into a group, and how that newly enlisted member is viewed by others already well ensconced within the establishment. In the case of religion, and in our particular discussion of Judaism, that model is of course the convert and what kind of a welcome is extended to the convert by the veteran members of the group. In this model, it is the significance of initiation into the group by way of circumcision, the supreme symbol of entry into the Jewish covenant, and thus of Jewishness, that underscores the difference between Nahmanides and Maimonides on identity. Though the topic is large and has been dealt with extensively and cogently by Josef Stern,[46] suffice it for our purposes to summarize that circumcision for Maimonides serves utilitarian purposes theologically, socially, and ethically. Socially, it promotes empathy and cohesion among its bearers, while ethically it diminishes that sensual aspect of man that Maimonides most abhors as a distraction from intellectual endeavors. Most importantly, it signifies an incomparably ardent commitment to the theological and philosophical tenets of Judaism as fostered by Abraham, its founding father. One of the most radical halakhic implications of this conception of circumcision is Maimonides' unique and, in defiance of accepted rabbinic law to the contrary, ingenious subsuming of the descendants of Ishmael, in other words Muslims, in the obligation of circumcision.[47] While this ruling is not

[46] *Problems and Parables of Law: Maimonides and Nahmanides on Reasons for the Commandments* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), chap. 5, "Maimonides on the Parable of Circumcision," and Shaye Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 146–54.

[47] MT, Kings, 10:7–8. See Josef Stern's discussion at 95–98. As he concludes, Islam satisfies all of Maimonides' criteria for membership in his category of the "Abrahamic covenant," which is not

surprising given Maimonides' biographical account of Abraham's turn to monotheism, subsequent formation of a monotheistic community bound ideologically, and classification of Islam in his time as pure monotheism, it is nothing less than revolutionary considering rabbinic jurisprudence on the matter.[48] What is traditionally the quintessential insignia of exclusiveness and parochialism in the construction of Jewish identity is deconstructed into an inclusive gesture that transcends ethnicity and heredity precisely because history and national memory are not the essential ingredients of Abrahamic descent.

Nahmanides, who views the lives of Abraham and the other patriarchs as not just prefiguring Jewish history, but embodying it, cannot tolerate a covenantal inscription that is decoupled from the body. That is why Nahmanides reads Genesis 17:4, "*Behold my covenant is with you and you shall be a father to all the nations*," in a way that conditions the second half of the divine pronouncement on the first. The covenant is identified as circumcision and "it is only after the covenant that you become a father to all the nations."[49] What is for Maimonides a physical symbol of Abraham's accomplishments is for Nahmanides an integral stage of their realization, achieving a metamorphosis in his very being. That this is so is confirmed by a further observation on the same verse praising God for his calculated timing of the circumcision command, which "preceded Sarah's conception *in order that his seed be holy*" (emphasis mine).[50] Circumcision ontologically transforms Abraham and enables a transfer of his genetic makeup, consisting of holiness chromosomes, to his descendants, but to the express exclusion of Ishmael, who was conceived prior to Abraham's circumcision.[51]

Maimonides concludes his responsum to the convert Ovadyah,[52] extending to the convert a wholehearted welcome to participate fully in liturgical expressions of particularist history and ancestral memories with encouraging words

meant to be "coextensive with any other term specifically for the Jews such as the 'people of Israel' or 'the Mosaic covenant.'" (95). See also David Novak, "The Treatment of Islam and Muslims in the Legal Writings of Maimonides," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, ed. W. Brinner and S. Ricks (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 233–50.

[48] See b. Sanhedrin 59b.

[49] *Commentary*, Gen. 17:4.

[50] וברוך השם אשר לו לבדו נתכנו עלילות שהקדים וצוה את אברהם לבא בבריתו להמול קודם שתהר שרה, להיות זרעו קדוש. See also his use of the term "holy seed" in *Commentary*, Deut. 23:7, to refer to the origins of the descendants of Edom who stem from Esau, born after the circumcision of Isaac his father. Subsequent kabbalists pick up on this notion of Isaac's conception in "holiness." For but one example see Meir ibn Gabbai, Avodat HaKodesh, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Yerid HaSeforim, 2004), III:46, vol. 2, p. 424: "For Sarah did not become pregnant before Abraham's circumcision so that the holy soul would be generated through a pure and holy drop from which Isaac was born, so that the nation that would emerge from him would be uniquely suited for the worship of God."

[51] This notion of Israel's ontological uniqueness becomes a staple of the kabbalistic tradition. For a book-length study of this feature of Jewish mysticism, see Elliot Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[52] The letter is one of a series of three responses on different issues to Ovadyah and was most probably written in Hebrew. They appear in both *Teshuvot Ha-Rambam*, ed. J. Blau (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1958), nos. 293, 436, and 448, and vol. 1 of Y. Shailat, *Iggerot Ha-Rambam*

that reverse the preconceived roles of born Jew as insider and convert as outsider.[53] Lack of ethnic pedigree is actually superior to biological heredity, for "we [natural-born Jews] can only trace our lineage back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – whereas you [convert] can trace it to *He who spoke and the world came to be*."[54] The natural-born Jew's faith is always suspect since one can never be certain whether adherence to the faith is not somehow motivated by national memory, shared history, and familial allegiances. The convert's intentions, however, like those of his or her archetypical predecessor, Abraham, are not subject to challenge since the convert arrived at the essential truths of Judaism by reason. Tradition and upbringing played no role in the acquisition of the truth of God's existence and oneness. Therefore the convert's relation to God is direct and free of extraneous cultural and social factors. In some sense, authentic membership in Judaism entails an overcoming of history, memory, and heredity, by connecting directly with God who transcends all such mundane dimensions of human experience. Ironically, for Maimonides, the true Jew is one who can claim a universal heritage in the Creator God, the truth of which was arrived at through the universal means of reason available to all human beings.

For Nahmanides, since access to the idea of God as creator is through the historical experience of miracles at Egypt and Sinai, the convert must adopt his or her new host's national consciousness in terms of history and memory, and therefore can never be completely domesticated. Ontologically, the convert is not a product of a "holy seed" and, biologically, the convert does not share a common ancestry with his or her new compatriots. A subtle halakhic consequence of this condition, I believe, is Nahmanides' interpretation of the verse regarding an alien's obligations vis-à-vis the Passover sacrifice, the ultimate symbol of national historical origins since the Egyptian exodus is "the archetypal locus of Jewish historical reference,"[55] and the original cultic prototype of distinguishing the Israelite from outsiders – *And if a stranger who resides with you would offer a Passover sacrifice to God, he must offer it in accordance with the rules and rites of the Passover sacrifice. There shall be one law for you whether stranger or citizen* (Deut. 9:14). The general consensus among traditional commentators is that, given the context of this passage, it refers to the "second Passover" that is a kind of makeup for those who were ritually disqualified from performing the sacrifice on the regular Passover. Nahmanides,

(Jerusalem: Ma'aliyot Press, 1987). Shailat believes they all form parts of the same correspondence. An English translation is available in Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1972), 475–76. See also Menachem Kellner's well-developed thesis regarding Maimonides' nonessentialist view of the Jewish people (as opposed, for example, to Judah Halevi and the *Zohar*) in *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), especially chap. 6.

[53] For a detailed examination of this responsum, see my "Maimonides and the Convert: A Juridical and Philosophical Embrace of the Outsider," *Journal of Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11, no. 2 (2003): 125–46.

[54] Maimonides, Iggerot, p. 235, lines 5–6.

[55] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 43.

however, asserts that this is directed toward converts, charging the newcomer with the same sacrificial obligation as the natural-born Jew. What is problematic with this interpretation is that there already exists precisely this prescription as formulated previously by Exodus 12:48. His resolution to that problem and thus the need for this verse's apparently redundant command is that the previous verse

> refers to the specific Passover celebrated in Egypt, for that passage relates to the Passover of Egypt, as I have explained there; the implication of that passage is that the converts, or the mixed multitude, who left Egypt are included since they also experienced the miracle; however, those who converted afterward in the desert or in the land of Israel would not have been obligated in the Passover since neither they nor their fathers were included in *and He took us out of there* (Deut. 6:23); therefore it was necessary here to obligate those generations of the desert and Israel in the Passover.[56]

Two separate commands highlight a distinction rather than a seamless inclusion. The convert's duty to conduct the Passover sacrifice rites results from a formal norm that is secondary to the normative basis for the native Jew, whose rationale is anchored in history and memory. Even the convert who actually experienced the original historical Exodus is contemplated by the primary norm since the convert is addressed just as the native Jew is by its historicity. Thus, for Nahmanides, the convert's celebration of Passover will always be a reminder of his or her difference, since it is a formalistic expression of a divine command, while the indigenous Jew, though also in obeisance to a divine imperative, expresses an identity shaped by historical consciousness.[57]

[56] *Commentary*, Num. 9:14. ויתכן כי מה שאמר בסדר בא אל פרעה (שמות יב מח) וכי יגור אתך גר ועשה פסח, הוא על פסח מצרים, כי הפרשה ההיא על פסח מצרים נאמרה כאשר פירשתי שם (בפסוק מג). והיה במשמע, כי הגרים היוצאים ממצרים ערב רב יעשו פסח שאף הם היו באותו הנס אבל המתגיירים אחרי כן במדבר או בא"י לא יתחייבו בפסח שלא היו הם או אבותיהם בכלל ואותנו הוציא משם (דברים ו כג), לפיכך הוצרך בכאן לחייבם בפסח דורות במדבר ובארץ

[57] David Novak cites this passage to support the very opposite implication, demonstrating that "one need not have experienced the miracles directly, or even be descended from ancestors who did." However, for the reasons laid out here regarding a norm that is divorced from ancestral experience to cover the convert, I respectfully disagree with Novak's conclusion. See his *Theology*, 117–18.