

PHILOSOPHY, KABBALAH, EXPERIENCE: DEVELOPING A RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW

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1. Rambam, *Guide* III:31

There is a group of human beings who consider it a grievous thing that causes should be given for any law; what would please them most is that the intellect would not find a meaning for the commandments and prohibitions. What compels them to feel thus is a sickness that they find in their souls, a sickness to which they are unable to give utterance and of which they cannot furnish a satisfactory account. For they think that if those laws were useful in this existence and had been given to us for this or that reason, it would be as if they derived from the reflection and the understanding of some intelligent being. If, however, there is a thing for which the intellect could not find any meaning at all and that does not lead to something useful, it undoubtedly derives from God; for the reflection of man would not lead to such a thing.

2. Rambam, *Book of Commandments*, negative #365

There is not a single commandment that does not have a reason, although most of the reasons are beyond the comprehension of the minds of the ordinary person.

3. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, *Kuzari*, II:26

I say that it is God's Torah. He who innocently accepts it without scrutiny or argument is better off than he who investigates and analyzes. He, however, who steps down from the highest level to scrutiny, does well to seek the reasons for these matters that are founded upon Divine wisdom, instead of abandoning them to evil opinions and doubts which lead man to perdition.

4. Rambam, *Laws of Idolatry* 11:2

If one whispers an incantation on a wound and recites a verse from the Torah; or recites a verse over a child to alleviate its fright; or places a Torah scroll or tefillin on a child to enable it to sleep—not only are such people in the category of sorcerers and soothsayers, but they are included among those who deny the Torah. They use the Torah's words as bodily cures, whereas they are for the health of the soul. But a healthy person who reads verses or a psalm with the idea that the merit of reading them will protect from sufferings and damages—this is permissible.

For further study:

Rabbi Marc D. Angel, *Voices in Exile: A Study in Sephardic Intellectual History* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic House, 1991).

Rabbi Marc D. Angel, *Foundations of Sephardic Spirituality: The Inner Life of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2006).

Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, *Aharekha Narutzah: Song of Songs: 'Let Us Run After You': A Contemporary Commentary on the Spiritual Significance of King Solomon's Love Poems* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Miskal-Yediot Aharonot and Hemed Books, 2003). Review of his book in Hayyim Angel, "Rabbi Yuval Cherlow's Interpretation of the Song of Songs: Its Critical Role in Contemporary Religious Experience," in Angel, *Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the Religious Significance in Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2009), pp. 171-189; reprinted in *Tradition* 43:3 (Fall 2010), pp. 17-28.

Rabbi Chaim Navon, *Genesis and Jewish Thought* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2008), pp. 259-295.