

Kindness), and Living in Israel.⁵

At first glance the list appears to be composed randomly, the items failing to exhibit any commonality. Of course the statements were made at varying times and places, with attendant ethos having their influence. Nevertheless, by being incorporated in the corpus of rabbinic literature transmitted over generations, these items carry significance for all time; and furthermore, by bearing the same designation of “equal to all”, the items must inhere of some common denominator that earned them this weighty accolade.

The Individual Notions Equal to All

In seeking to find a thread that conceptually binds the 15 items together, it is instructive to first analyze each notion separately to understand its individual importance. We will then conclude by proposing a contextual framework within which all the items can be understood.

Shabbat

Many sources describe the *mitzvah* of *Shabbat* as being equivalent to “all the *mitzvot*” or “all the *mitzvot* in the Torah” or “all the Torah.”⁶ So significant is the observance of the *Shabbat* that, just as observing it is equal to observing the whole Torah, violating it is considered akin to denying the validity of the whole Torah.⁷

⁵ Worthy of mention is the following source that the search string did find but nevertheless does not match the intent of “equal to all the *mitzvot*”. “Great is the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* as it is a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt ... Great is the Exodus from Egypt which requires an “ot and *totafot*” [i.e., *tefillin*] as a reminder against all the *mitzvot*” *Midrash* (Sechel Tov [Buber] Shmot 13:9,15). The phraseology here is distinctly dissimilar from the other statements in this analysis. That is, it does not say that *tefillin* or the Exodus is equal to all the *mitzvot*, but rather that the Exodus is of such significance that it requires a specific *mitzvah*, distinct from all the *mitzvot*, to serve as a reminder of it. Or, we might read that the Exodus is of such significance that it requires a specific sign as a reminder, to distinguish it from all the *mitzvot* – meaning that the *mitzvah* of “remembering the Exodus” is so critical that it has a unique symbol as a reminder, as opposed to other *mitzvot* which don’t have specific reminders. In any case, the intent here is not that the Exodus is equal to all the *mitzvot* – though as will be shown, such an idea is promulgated through other means. Nevertheless, it is strange that *tefillin* itself is not equated to all the *mitzvot*. And though the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 35a, *Makkot* 11a) does say that “*huksha kol haTorah l’tefillin*”, the statement is clearly of a different nature than “equal to all the *mitzvot*”. I am forced to leave this point as “needs investigation”.

⁶ *Shemot* R. 25:12, *Midrash Agada* [Buber] (Bamidbar 15:34), *Yerushalmi Nedarim* 3:9 (38b), *Yerushalmi Berachot* 1:5 (3c), *Shmot* R. [Vilna] 25:12, *Dev. R.* [Vilna] 4:4, *Dev. R.* [Lieberman] Reeh 4, *Tanhuma* [Warsaw] Ki Tisa 33, *Mishnat* R. Eliezer Ch. 20, p.371, *Otzar Midrashim* [Eisenshtein] “Gadol V’Gedula” p.79, *Yalkut Shimoni* Ve’ethanan 836.

⁷ *Midrash Agada* [Buber] (Bamidbar 15:34); *Otzar Midrashim* [Eisenshtein] “Gadol V’Gedula” p.79.

The *Midrash* (Shemot R. 25:12) explains that God has a predetermined time for the ultimate redemption of the world; however, if the people of Israel return to God's ways, performing the Torah and its commandments, the redemption will occur immediately.⁸ The *Midrash* goes on to explain that if all Israel were to keep just one *Shabbat*, this itself would qualify as the return of the Jewish people to God – for the *Shabbat* is equal to all the *mitzvot* – and thus usher in the final redemption.

Divine initiation of the final redemption, as a result of Man's return to God, indicates that the task of creation is complete. What is so fundamental about the observance of the *Shabbat* that it expresses the fulfillment of Creation? Perhaps the answer is alluded to by the *Midrash* (Y. Shimoni, Ve'ethanan 836) which explains that *Shabbat* is equal to all the *mitzvot* due to its quality of "remembrance" (*zachor*). The command to "remember" the *Shabbat* is mentioned in two prominent places in the Torah.

The first instance is found in the narrative of the giving of the Ten Commandments where observance of the *Shabbat* is characterized as Israel's way of bearing witness to the creation *ex nihilo*:⁹

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. **For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day.** Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Shemot (20:8-11).

Ramban (Ber. 1:1) explains that belief in creation *ex nihilo* is "the root of faith" upon which the whole Torah is founded. This is because, without ascribing to God such power, fundamental beliefs in God's ability to effect miracles and to reward or punish would not be

8 See also San. 97b.

9 See Sefer HaHinuch (#32).

possible.¹⁰ Sefer HaHinuch (32) writes that, “Belief in the creation of the world out of non-existence... is a cord that pulls [along with it] all the basic tenets of the religion.” Thus, the first step to accepting God’s will is to acknowledge Him as creator.

The second instance of the command to remember the *Shabbat* appears in the repetition of the Ten Commandments in the book of Devarim which provides a corollary reason for the *Shabbat*’s observance:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. **Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.**

Devarim (5:12-15).

Here the emphasis is not on God as Creator but as Master who demands obeisance as a consequence of His “mighty” act of redemption. That is, whereas the first citation states that observance of the day is to rest as God did after the act of Creation, the second citation reminds Israel that they were slaves, free now by the grace of God, and are as such beholden to Him.¹¹ Indeed, Rashi explains the words, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt”, to mean, “in order that you will be His servant and observe His *mitzvot*.”¹²

10 See R. Chavel on Ramban (Ber. 1:1), n.4. Additionally, R. Hirsch (Ber. 1:1) explains that belief in creation *ex nihilo* is essential, for only if God created the world *ex nihilo* can Man achieve the moral perfection commanded by the Creator and not be limited to the imperfections inherent in a world He found.

11 God states this explicitly in Vay. (25:55), “For unto me are the children of Israel servants; they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” Also Ramban (Guide II:31), “...He acquired us for Himself as servants.”

12 Similarly *Midrash* (Sechel Tov [Buber] Shmot 13:14). For alternative interpretations see Ramban (Dev. 5:14) who brings four explanations of the relationship between the Exodus and the *Shabbat*.

Thus, by observing the *Shabbat*, Israel acknowledges God as Creator and demonstrates unquestioning subservience to His will and word, otherwise known as “*yirah*” (awe).¹³ This is ultimately what observance of the commands in the Torah is supposed to achieve, as the *Midrash* (Ber. R. 44:1)¹⁴ explains that the commandments were given to refine man through obedience to God’s will.

Brit Mila (Circumcision)¹⁵

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedarim 3:9) teaches that *brit mila* (i.e., the covenant of circumcision) is weighed against all the *mitzvot* in that it symbolizes the obligation to all the *mitzvot* underlying the covenant, as it is written, “behold the blood of the covenant that God established with you concerning *all* these things” (Shemot 24:8).



The observance of circumcision is thus equated with all the *mitzvot* since through its fulfillment man evidences his acceptance of the covenant which obligates observance of all the Torah,¹⁶ as the Yalkut Shimoni (Bo 195) states, “*Brit* means Torah ... and attachment to *mitzvot*.” Indeed, R. Hirsch (Ber. 17:10, p.301) explains

13 Prof. Y. Leibovitz (*Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, [ed. E. Goldman, Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1995], p. 20) explains that for all the explanations of why to observe *Shabbat*, without the Divine imperative, no one would choose such observances – and thus, *Shabbat* observance is an expression of subservience to the Divine Will, otherwise known as “fear (*yirah*) of God.”

14 See also Tanhuma (Tazria 7). Also R. Hirsch (Vay. 19:2).

15 *Brit Mila* is equated with all the Torah in the following sources: Tosefta Nedarim [Lieberman] 2:6, Nedarim 32a, Yerushalmi Nedarim 3:9 (37d), Yerushalmi Nedarim 3:9 (38b), *Midrash Tehillim* [Buber] 6:1, Ber. Rabati (Lech Lecha, p.75), Yalkut Shimoni (Bo 195), Yalkut Shimoni (Lech Lecha 81), Yalkut Shimoni (Ki Tisa 404).

16 It should be noted here that circumcision, while not normatively performed by the individual himself, nevertheless serves the individual as a symbol throughout his life. Jewish parents inculcate the ideals associated with the *brit mila* by performing it on their sons at the early age of eight days, thus themselves giving expression to their acceptance of the ideals. The individual upon whom the *brit* has been done will be forced to reflect upon the ideals impressed upon his flesh, his acceptance thereof only being reflected in his carrying it out on the next generation (for rare is the case that one seeks to replace the orlah as rejection thereof). Be that as it may, the focus of our discussion is to speak of the ideals represented by the symbol, and by those who perpetuate it.

that the sign (“*ot*”) of circumcision symbolizes complete submission to the authority of God, such total compliance being indicative of serving God in awe (“*yirah*”). The *Midrash*¹⁷ employs a numeric device to demonstrate how the *brit* represents both ‘observance of the *mitzvot*’ and ‘submission to God’: “The *mitzvah* of ‘*brit*’ is equal to all the Torah that has 613 [*mitzvot*] for the numerical value of ‘*brit*’ is 612 and the ‘awe’ [implicit in the act] brings the count to 613.”

Thus the *brit*, as symbol of accountability to observe all the *mitzvot* in awe (“*yirah*”), expresses the ultimate value of man described by Kohelet (12:13) when he concluded, “After all has been heard, fear (*yirah*) God and do his commands for this is all of man.” So fundamental is this statement of Kohelet that the Gemara (Ber. 6b) sees fit to place it as the definition of the purpose of the world, explaining, “For this the world was created.” Appropriately, the Yerushalmi¹⁸ states, “if not for the [*brit*] *mila* God would not have created the world.” That is, the whole purpose of creation is that Israel performs the *mitzvot* in awe of the Creator as established through the covenant of circumcision.

The covenant of circumcision is of such great import that its observance takes precedence even over the *Shabbat*.¹⁹ This is perhaps due to the fact that by performing circumcision one *actively* accepts the very covenant one *passively* demonstrates by not doing the work activities (“*melachot*”) of *Shabbat*. Indeed, whereas one rests on *Shabbat* to identify with the Creator, so one performs *brit mila* to identify one’s active partnership with the Creator.²⁰

17 Ber. Rabati (Lech Lecha, p.75).

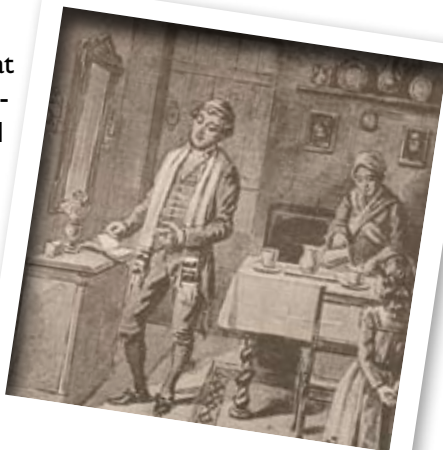
18 Yerushalmi Nedarim 3:9 (37d). The Bavli Nedarim 32a has a slightly different version stating that if not for the *brit* the world could not *continue* to exist.

19 Yerushalmi Nedarim 3:9 (38b). Such a comparison demonstrates the fact that, though two *mitzvot* may be equated with all the *mitzvot*, nevertheless that does not make them “equal”. As will be seen with other *mitzvot* in this genre, the “equating” of a notion with “all the Torah” is not mathematical, but rather a poetic device to indicate that the notion is a fundamental of the Torah.

20 See *Midrash Tanhuma* (Tazria 7) wherein R. Akiva explains that circumcision is the symbol of Man’s active partnership with God in perfecting creation. So too Sefer Ha-Hinuch (#2).

Tzitzit²¹

On the verse in the Torah that elucidates the function of *tzitzit* - "...and you will look upon it and remember *all* the *mitzvot* of God" - the Gemara (Men. 43b) learns that the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* is equal to *all* the *mitzvot*. The simple reason for the equation is that the *tzitzit* serve as a visual reminder to do all the *mitzvot*, for "seeing leads to remembering, and remembering leads to doing" (Men. 43b).



However, the *tzitzit* are not simply a mundane device akin to a string wrapped around one's finger to remind one to do something. Rather, they intrinsically symbolize the *reason* for obligation to the *mitzvot*. The *Midrash*²² states this explicitly: "God gave them the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* in order that Israel would remember the good that He did for them when he took them out of Egypt, and requited their enemies, and [thus] they should do all the *mitzvot* when they see it."²³

Indeed, Rashi (Bam. 15:41) explains that everything about the *tzitzit* comes to remind one of the redemption. First, the obligation of putting *tzitzit* specifically on a four cornered garment reminds one of the four terms used to describe the Divine redemption.²⁴ Second, the word *tekhelet* is linguistically connected to the word "bereaved", reminding

21 *Tzitzit* is equated with all the Torah in the following sources: Shavuot 29a, Menachot 43b, Nedarim 25a, Sifri Zuta 15:40, Pesikta Zutrata [Lekah Tov] (Shelach p. 113b), Ber: Rabati (Lech Lecha p.75), *Midrash Agada* [Buber] (Ber. 6:6), *Midrash Agada* [Buber] (Bam. 15:39), Yalkut Shimoni (Shelach 750), Yalkut Shimoni (Ki Teitzei 933).

22 *Midrash Agada* [Buber] (Bam. 15:39).

23 Similarly, the *Midrash* (Sechel Tov [Buber] Shmot 13:14) explains on the words, "with a mighty hand did God save us from Egyptian servitude": "We are subject to the King and not to [Egyptian] slavery."

24 In Shemot (6:6-7) are found the four verbs describing redemption: "Therefore say unto the children of Israel: I am the L-RD, and I will bring you out (*ve'hotzeiti*) from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you (*ve'hitzalti*) from their bondage, and I will redeem you (*ve'ga'alti*) with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments; and I will take you (*ve'lakachti*) to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and you shall know that I am the L-D your G-d, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

one that God redeemed Israel through “bereaving” the Egyptians of their first born. Third, the tekhelet strand is the color of the evening sky, reminding one of the time of the final plague at which point Israel’s redemption was effected. Additionally, tekhelet is the color of the sea, reminding one of the sea through which God miraculously effected the redemption.²⁵ Finally, the eight strings on each corner of the garment remind one of the eight days from the beginning of the Exodus until the singing of praise after crossing the Red Sea.

And though the *tzitzit* are not explicitly called an “ot” in the Torah,²⁶ they serve a purpose similar to the symbols (*‘otot’*), as a reminder of our absolute obligation to God and His Torah.²⁷ Each ‘ot’, each symbol, is a reminder of something which inherently obligates Israel to God’s command. Just as the *Shabbat* reminds one of the Creator and Redeemer, the *Brit* of Israel’s contract, the *Tefillin* of Israel’s redemption,²⁸ so too do the *tzitzit* serve as a reminder that there is a God in Heaven to whom Israel is beholden as their Redeemer.

And thus the verse teaches that when one looks at the *tzitzit* he is reminded to do all the *mitzvot* and “not to go after your heart and eyes” (Bam. 15:39). That is, by seeing the *tzitzit* one is reminded of the obligations incumbent upon one redeemed from Egypt – obligations to follow the Creator’s commands and not one’s subjective desires.²⁹ The ability to overcome subjective desires in deference to God’s objective commands is, once again, the awe (“*yirah*”) that is “all of man” (Kohelet 12:13). Appropriately then are the *tzitzit* equated with all the Torah.

25 Also Rashi (Men. 43b, s.v. *domeh*); Ritva (Hul. 89a, s.v. *yesh*). Rashi explains that tekhelet represents both miraculous events that effected redemption – i.e., the death of the firstborn and the splitting of the sea.

26 The explicit “otot” being: *Shabbat*, *Brit Mila*, *Tefillin*.

27 I would like to acknowledge my daughter Rebecca Navon for pointing this out to me. Indeed the *Midrash* (Sechel Tov [Buber] Shmot 13:15) equates, in this regard, *tzitzit* and *tefillin* – *tefillin* being an explicit “ot”. See also Kol Bo (9, s.v. *v’ahar*); Kol Bo (31, s.v. *katav*); Sefer HaMihagim (Asher MiLunil), p. 37b; Rambam, Sefer Hamitzvot (s.v. “Sefer Sheini”); Tur (YD, 260); Mashiv Davar (Part I, 44).

28 It is strange that *tefillin* is not included in the list of *mitzvot* that are “equal to all the *mitzvot*” - see fn 5.

29 See S. Bailey, *Kashrut, Tefillin, Tzitzit*, (Jerusalem: J. Aronson, 2000), ch. 9.

Avoda Zara (Idol Worship)³⁰

The *Midrash*³¹ states, “One who acknowledges idol worship is like one who denies the entire Torah.” Of all the 15 items in this genre, only that of idol worship is a prohibition. That is to say, while all the notions equated with the whole Torah are positive ones representing a Torah ideal, the act of idol worship is one which is anathema to the whole Torah.

As mentioned, the Torah is to bring man to completion through performance of the *mitzvot* in awe (*yirah*) of the Creator. Idol worship is the utter repudiation of this notion. Indeed, what is so intolerably odious about idol worship is not the superficial rites and rituals involved, but the rejection of God, His Word and His Will. If one accepts idol worship, one essentially denies God and thus makes His entire Torah irrelevant

On a practical level, rejection of the Divine authority behind the laws of the Torah reduces the laws to guidelines that can be rationalized away.³² The Tosefta (Shvuot 3:5) explains this as follows: “R. Reuven was asked by a philosopher in Tiberias: ‘Who is the most hateful [morally dangerous] person in the world?’ He replied, ‘He who denies his Creator, because the denial of all norms follows if one rejects God. No man violates a law unless he first repudiates the legislative authority of the law.’”

On a deeper level, by rejecting God one makes even the performance of the good deeds in the Torah a matter of self-interest. In general, Judaism looks at each and every *mitzvah* as standing on its own merit; however the act of idol worship expresses a rejection of the Divine basis of the *mitzvot*. As such, the act of a *mitzvah*, though promoting some “good” in and of itself, is nevertheless null and void by virtue of being disconnected from the One who commanded it. In such an instance, any, even virtuous, act is infinitely removed from the service of the Creator and thus merely an expression of serving one’s own self.

Indeed, this is what makes awe of the Creator, which is the subject of the next section, so important.

30 *Avoda Zara* is equated with all the Torah in the following sources: Horayot 8a, Shavuot 29a, *Midrash Aggada* [Buber] (Bamidbar 15:22), Yalkut Shimoni (Bo 195), Pesikta Zutra (Ekev 13a).

31 *Midrash Aggada* [Buber] (Bamidbar 15:22).

32 See R. Soloveitchik, *Reflections of the Rav*, (NJ: KTAV, 1993), Vol. 1, pp. 99-106; p. 194.

Yirah (Awe)

Having observed above that *yirah* (awe) is of ultimate import, it is not surprising that the *Midrash*³³ indeed equates it to the whole Torah:

Awe is equal in weight to the Torah, for you have no character trait greater than awe; and God has no desire for anything other than awe, as it says, “And now Israel, what does God ask of you other than to be in awe of Him” (Dev. 10:12) and it is written, “Awe of God is His treasure” (Isaiah 33:6).

Everything that man does can be conceptually reduced to whether he will follow his own will, or the will that commands him. When man follows his own will, he is merely following his own natural instincts and drives, much the same as an animal. It is only when man gives himself over to a will outside his own that he exercises the one thing that sets him apart from animal – his free will.³⁴ This giving of oneself over to God’s will is, as has been noted, “*yirah*” (fear/awe). As such, the Gemara (Ber. 33b) teaches: “Everything is in the hands of heaven, except for the fear (*yirah*) of Heaven.”

Appropriately, the Gemara (Ber. 6b) stated that the whole world was created just so that man achieves *yirah* (awe). Man, as a creation whose distinguishing feature is free will, is only worthy of having been created if he so expresses his unique nature – i.e., his free will. Yet his only venue for expressing his free will is in evincing “*yirah*”. This man does by performing the Divine commands simply because they are Divine commands.

So crucial is “*yirah*” to the human experience, that it is seen as the decisive element in evaluating one’s lifework. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 31a) explains that upon man’s passing to the other world he is asked six questions in examination of his life. Following the six questions, he is then judged as to whether he achieved “*yirah*”. If he did so achieve “*yirah*”, he is admitted to his eternal reward; and if not, regardless of the positive life reflected in the responses to the six questions, he is rejected.³⁵

33 Otzar HaMidrashim [Eisenstein] “Maasim” (p. 354). See also Berachot 6b; *Shabbat* 31a; Meiri, Beit HaBehira (*Shabbat* 31a).

34 Prof. Y. Leibovitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, (ed. E. Goldman, Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1995), p.21.

35 Meiri, Beit HaBehira (*Shabbat* 31a).

Para Aduma (Red Heifer)

The *Midrash*³⁶ equates the procedure of the red heifer (Bam. 19) with the entire Torah. The procedure of the red heifer is the great conundrum of the Torah, for it defies reason in its capacity to “purify the defiled, yet defile the pure.”³⁷ So enigmatic is this rule that King Solomon, of whom it is written that God gave him wisdom to the point that he was wiser than all men (Kings I, 5:9-11), was said to have been able to understand the rationale of all the *mitzvot* except for this one.³⁸ And indeed it is labeled by the Torah (Bam. 19:2) itself as “the *hok*”, the rule to which man is obligated though he understands it not.

The reason that this ritual in particular is equated with the whole Torah, we suggest, is precisely due to its being the quintessential “*hok*”. If man is to realize the potential inherent in the Torah, in the Torah’s goal of perfecting man by prompting him to act beyond his own instinctual drives and personal agenda, then he must relate to all the *mitzvot* in the Torah as “*hukim*”.³⁹

Though one may find reasons for the *mitzvot*, ultimately, one must perform them “*hok-like*”, in obedience to the Creator who commanded them.⁴⁰ For, as noted in the previous section on “*yirah*”, if man acts based solely on his rationale, he is really serving his own self-interests and not exercising his free will. If one does not perform the commands because they are Divine, Divine though they may be, one has reduced them to objects of one’s own desires.

Wisdom

The *Midrash*⁴¹ expresses the greatness of Wisdom as follows:

From where is it known that Wisdom is equivalent to the Torah? From the verse, “Wisdom and Morality the debased detest” (Mishlei 1:7). Now Morality refers to the Torah, as it states, “Hear, my son, the Morality of your Father” (Mishlei

36 Pesikta Rabati [Ish Shalom] 14.

37 Seforno (Bam. 19:2).

38 Bam. R. 19:3; Yoma 14a, see esp. Torah Temimah (Kohélet 7:23, n.89).

39 See Beis Halevi (Ki Tisa, p. 192-193).

40 R. Soloveitchik, *Reflections of the Rav*, Vol. I, pp. 99-106.

41 *Midrash Zuta* (Shir Hashirim [Buber] 1:1).

1:8). And not only this, but Wisdom preceded the Torah, as it says, “The beginning of Wisdom is Awe (*yirah*) of God” (Tehillim 111:10).

The *Midrash* links several concepts: Wisdom, Torah, Awe (*yirah*) of God, and Morality. Wisdom is equated with Morality (Mishlei 1:7), and Morality is equated with the Torah (Mishlei 1:8), thus establishing that Wisdom is equivalent to Torah. But then the *Midrash* teaches that Wisdom actually precedes Torah and that the beginning of Wisdom is Awe (*yirah*) of God. Thus, Awe (*yirah*) of God gives rise to Wisdom, which then allows for Torah, which is essentially Morality. Conveyed here is the idea that the definition of Morality, embodied in the Torah, cannot be implemented without the faculties of Wisdom and Awe (*yirah*) of God.

Perhaps it could be said that if Torah, equated with morality, constitutes the definition of right and wrong, then Wisdom is the capacity to understand it, and Awe (*yirah*) is the capacity to accept and apply it. So just as Awe is equated with the whole Torah,⁴² for only through Awe can one altruistically apply the Torah to daily life, so Wisdom is equated with the whole Torah in that without understanding what the Torah asks, man cannot act on its teachings.⁴³ In consonance with the interdependent relationship of Awe and Wisdom the Mishna (Avot 3:17) teaches, “if there is not Wisdom there is not *Yirah*, and if there is not *Yirah* there is not Wisdom.”

However, though both are essential to each other, the Psalmist taught, “The beginning of Wisdom is Awe (*yirah*) of God” (Tehillim 111:10). That is, Awe (*yirah*) precedes Wisdom. It could be argued that Wisdom should precede Awe in that one must first understand what is being asked and then one must evince Awe to act on that understanding. Nevertheless, the order is reversed because when the Wisdom sought is that of Morality, then the acquisition of such understanding must be preceded by a sense of awe, lest one learn to understand only what is convenient, and lest one twist teachings to fit private agendas and personal gains.⁴⁴

42 See above section on “*Yirah*”.

43 See Rashash (Avot 3:17) who explains that *yirah* is not possible without wisdom. See also Mishna Berura (156:4). Similarly Avot (2:5), “An ignoramus cannot fear sin, a simpleton cannot be righteous, and a bashful person [afraid to ask] cannot learn.”

44 Similarly Avot (3:9), however there “fear of sin” is seen as the essential prerequisite.

Talmud Torah

The Mechilta d'R. Yishmael (Bo 18) teaches that Talmud Torah, the act of learning Torah, is equivalent to everything. The Rambam (Hil. Talmud Torah 3:3) writes that “There is no *mitzvah* of all the *mitzvot* which is equal to Talmud Torah, but rather Talmud Torah is equal to all the *mitzvot* because Talmud Torah brings one to act ...”

Thus, as great as the study of Torah is, it is the implementation of its values to real life circumstances that makes it significant. Indeed, the Mishna (Avot 1:17) teaches, “It is not the study that is of import but the practice.” Of course, actualization of the Torah cannot come about without the concerted effort of learning its values. Thus, the implementation of the entire Torah is contingent upon its study. And so the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 40b) states, “Great is study for it leads to actions.”⁴⁵

But even more significantly than this, without learning Torah in order to act according to its ways man squanders the only thing that sets him apart from the animal – his free will. The Mishna (*Avot* 6:2) teaches:

Said R. Yehoshua ben Levi: Everyday a voice goes out from Horev and announces, ‘Woe to those creatures who insult the Torah, for he who does not involve himself in Torah is called ‘admonished’ as it says, ‘a gold ring in the nose of pig is a beautiful woman who turns from discretion⁴⁶’ (*Mishlei* 11:22). And it says, ‘The tablets are the work of God, and the writing is that of God engraved (*harut*) on the tablets’, don’t read *harut* (engraved), but *heirut* (freedom); for there is no free man other than he who is involved in Talmud Torah.

R. Yehoshua ben Levi taught that one is not free unless he studies the Torah. Using the words of *Mishlei*, where the “beautiful woman” is symbolic of Israel and “turning from discretion” is turning from the Torah, he thus analogizes a person who does not study Torah to a pig wearing a gold ring, conjuring a picture of great value gone to waste. For just as the pig recognizes not the value of the gold ring and as such makes no use of it, so too the individual who recognizes not the value of the Torah makes no use of his free will. He is, as such, reduced

45 See also *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Ekev* 861).

46 The word is literally “*taam*” which carries the meanings “taste”, “reason”, which further emphasizes the Torah as a means to fulfillment.

to the likeness of an animal, a pig – the most repudiated symbol in Jewish thought – for he squanders the very thing that distinguishes man from animal: free will. And free will itself can only be effectuated through the Torah, that is, by the study and subsequent voluntary compliance with its values and commands.⁴⁷

Mishna

The *Midrash* (Ber. Rabati, Ber. p. 6) equates the oral Torah with the written Torah, both being expressed at the outset of creation itself:

Why did God create His world [starting] with the letter “bet” [which represents the number 2]? [In order to declare] two Torahs, one written and one oral... This teaches you that the [oral Torah embodied in the] Mishna is equivalent to the whole Torah, and to inform you that it is all Torah and it was all told to Moshe on Sinai.⁴⁸

The equating of the Written and Oral Torahs can be understood via the following Talmudic anecdote:

Our Rabbis taught: A certain gentile once came before Shammai and asked him, ‘How many Torahs have you?’ ‘Two,’ he replied, ‘the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.’ ‘I believe you with respect to the Written Torah, but not with respect to the Oral Torah; make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the Written Torah [only]. [But] he scolded and repulsed him in anger. When [the gentile] went before Hillel, he accepted him as a proselyte. On the first day, he taught him, Alef, Bet, Gimmel, Dalet; the following day he reversed [them] to him. ‘But yesterday you did not teach them to me thus,’ he protested. ‘Must you then not rely upon me? Then rely upon me with respect to the Oral [Torah] too.’

(Shabbat 31a).

47 Also worthy of note is that the pig is seen to feign being kosher in that it has the external sign of kashrut, nevertheless it lacks the internal sign. This being the case, the comparison here to the pig conveys the idea that one who does not involve himself in Torah is really only feigning free will, but deep down he expresses nothing but his animal instincts. (Thanks to Joel Guberman for this insight).

48 See also Ber. 5a, Megilla 19b, Vay. R. 22:1 which explain that Moshe received *all* oral teachings.

The would-be proselyte expresses the idea that, while the authenticity of the Written Torah is something one can more readily accept, man is reluctant to accept that of the Oral Torah. Hillel demonstrated that without accepting the Oral Torah, the Written Torah remains wholly inaccessible. For this reason, the Mishna, as representative of the Oral Torah, is equated with “the whole Torah.”

But the importance of the Oral Torah to the Written Torah goes much further than serving as explanatory guide. The Oral Torah includes the methodology for applying the fundamental principles of the written Torah to the myriad cases throughout time.⁴⁹ This is what is meant when the *Midrash* stated that the entire Oral Torah was told to Moshe on Sinai.⁵⁰ The Oral Torah, then, is an ever-growing, ever-evolving body of thought that includes all the discussions, derivations and applications of the law to the ever changing circumstances that make up the human condition. R. Chaim Eisen, in an article discussing the dynamism between the Written and Oral Torahs, puts it as follows:

At the heart of [the] ongoing process of development in Torah is the dynamism that characterizes the growth of *Torah shebe'al-peh* from its inception at Sinai. Just as *Nevi'im* and *Kethuvim* essentially “were given to Mosheh from Sinai” (Berachot 5a), inasmuch as the basic truths and principles that they elaborate originate in the Torah received by Mosheh, so does every aspect of these later developments of *Torah shebe'al-peh* derive from basic truths and principles from Sinai. And just as *Nevi'im* and *Kethuvim* as they appear before us represent the realization of these truths and principles unfolding through history, so too does the growth of *Torah shebe'al-peh* represent a process of historical development predicated upon the basic truths and principles of Torah, applied and reapplied throughout time. While these truths and principles are immutable and static, their applications are dynamic and endless.⁵¹

49 See Shmot R. 41, Rambam (Mishna, Introduction), Rambam (Yad Hazaka, Introduction).

50 Torah Temimah (Shmot 24, n.28; Dev. 9, n.3).

51 R. Chaim Eisen, “Mosheh Rabbeinu And Rabbi Akiva”, Jewish Thought, Vol. I, No.2, p.85.

This is reflected in the blessing of the Torah which is pronounced upon the public reading of the Torah. R. Yosef Karo (Orech Hayim 139:10) codifies the blessing as follows, “The concluding blessing [recited upon reading from the Torah in the synagogue is composed of two phrases: the first,] ‘...who gave us the Torah of truth’ corresponds to the written Torah, [and the second,] ‘and implanted everlasting life in our midst’⁵² corresponds to the oral Torah.” That is, the written Torah contains fundamentals “given” to us as immovable truths, as opposed to the oral Torah which is likened to a seed “implanted within us”⁵³ through which “everlasting life” is earned by the effort of our creative application of the law.⁵⁴

Without the Oral Torah, the Written Torah remains a static document: basic truths without application.⁵⁵ The Oral Torah brings the truths of the Written Torah to life⁵⁶ and thus makes them eternal.⁵⁷ It is for this for this reason that the Oral Torah is equated with the whole Torah.

52 Translation of Art Scroll Sidur. “Nata” has two meanings – see fn. 53.

53 The phrase “*nata betocheinu*” is derived from Kohelet (12:11), “The words of the sages are like a switch and like nails set in [netu'im]...” Rashi (ibid), based on the Gemara (Hagigah 3b), explains the word “*neta*” with its twofold meaning: just like a nail fixed in place (*nata*), so too are the words of the sages fixed in place, and just like a seedling (*neta*) that flourishes, so too do their words flourish with reasoning. Similarly, Torah Temimah (on Hagigah 3b) writes that the learning of Torah is such that all the time that man toils over it he brings out new interpretations, understandings and novelties (Kohelet, n.79).

54 Indeed life in the hereafter is not something vouchsafed to anyone, but rather something to be achieved. R. Hayim MiVolozhin (Nefesh HaHayim, 1:11, [Bnei Brak: Y.D. Rubin, 5749], p.50) explains on the verse, “All of Israel have a place in the world to come, [*la'olam haba*]” – that if the intent was a guaranteed portion it should have said “*ba'olam haba*”; but given that it says “*la'olam haba*” this teaches that all of Israel is guaranteed a path to eternity, an opportunity to achieve eternity, but not a guarantee of eternity.

55 See R. Eliezer Berkovitz, *Not In Heaven*, (New York: KTAV, 1983), p.83.

56 The Zohar (Ve'ethanan 268a) likens the Oral Torah to the Shechina and the Written to the Godhead, the two together exhibiting wholeness, the Shechina (feminine) bringing forth life from the Godhead (masculine).

57 This notion is dramatized by the Gemara (Baba Metzia 59b) in the famous incident of “Achnai’s Oven” which pits R. Eliezer against R. Yehoshua. R. Eliezer employs a heavenly voice to prove the veracity of his position, upon which R. Yehoshua exclaims that the Torah’s rulings are “not in heaven”, thus arguing that the Divine will is now promulgated according to human reasoning based on accepted principles (e.g., “majority rule”). Following this exchange, God is said to have laughed in satisfaction, “*nitzhuni banai, nitzhuni banai*”. Though the literal translation is “my children have won me”, the *Maharatz Chajes* (R. Tzi Hirsh Chayot, 1805-1855) explains (ibid) that *nitzhuni* is linguistically connected to the word *netzach* (eternity), thus implying that God rejoiced in the Sanhedrin’s taking responsibility for *halacha* by which they made God eternally “alive”, as it were, in this world where prophecy cannot continuously be relied upon. See also R. E. Berkovits, *Not in Heaven*, pp. 78-79, 81.

Sage Talk

The words of the sages should be tied to one's heart, as it says, "Tie them ever to your heart" (Mishlei 6:21); and of their riddles R. Meir said, 'Even their mundane speech is equal to the whole Torah.'

(Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei 929).⁵⁸

R. Meir here teaches that included in the traditional transmission of the Torah is anything expressed by the sages. Similarly the Gemara (Taanit 19b) states, "all that the sages say is worthy of study." The Meiri (Avot 1:5) explains that all their words are worthy of study because even their seemingly mundane statements serve as an opportunity to learn proper character traits and ethical values.

The words of the sages are of such significance because their entire beings were completely imbued with the spirit of the Law such that anything they said was an expression of the Torah. The Rambam (Hil. Deot 5:1) teaches that just as the wise are known by their wisdom, so too are they distinguished by their manners in every area of life. As such, the Mishna (Avot 6:5) counsels that one of the ways to acquire the Torah is through serving the sages.⁵⁹ In fact the Gemara (Ber. 7b) states that merely serving the wise is more beneficial than learning the Torah itself. Accordingly, the Gemara (Ber. 62a) tells of how various scholars followed their teachers wherever they went in order to learn the Torah behaviorally.⁶⁰

Commenting on the Gemara (Makkot 22b) that tells of the 'foolish people who stand in the presence of a Torah scroll but not in the presence of a great human being', R. Jonathan Sacks writes: "A great sage is a living Torah scroll. There are textbooks and there are textpeople. We learn rules from books. But we learn virtue by finding virtuous people and seeing how they behave."⁶¹ Thus, anything the sages do or say—even their "mundane speech"—is equated with the whole Torah; for the sages are the living incarnation of the Torah, giving expression to the ideals of the whole Torah.

58 *Midrash Mishlei* [Buber] 1.

59 See also Yoma 86a.

60 When asked why they followed their teachers, they answered, "This is Torah and I need to learn."

61 <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/thoughts/kedoshim5765.pdf>.

Peace

Love peace and pursue peace, even if you must run from city to city, village to village, state to state, do not desist from making peace for it is equal to all the *mitzvot* in the Torah.

Avot D'Rebbi Natan (Nuscha Bet, 24).

Indeed, so great is peace that the *Midrash*⁶² explains that there is no vessel that can hold blessings other than the vessel called peace. That is, only through peace can one enjoy the beneficence that the world has to offer.

But the equating of the pursuit of peace with all the *mitzvot* goes much deeper than this, for the whole goal of the Torah is the attainment of peace in the world. R. Akiva commented on the verse, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Vay. 19:18), stating that it is “a great principle of the Torah.”⁶³ On this R. Y. Ashlag explains that, “... when he says the commandment ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself’ is an important principle in the Torah, we must understand that the other 612 *mitzvot* in the Torah ... are no more or less than the sum of the specifics contained and conditioned in this one commandment, ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself.’”⁶⁴

Hillel said essentially the same thing to a would-be proselyte who wanted to learn the whole Torah in the time he could remain standing on one foot: “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor – this is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary, now go and learn” (*Shabbat* 31a). Both Hillel and R. Akiva articulated the value that peace is the goal of the Torah, and thus it is clear why peace is equated with all the *mitzvot* in the Torah. Indeed the Gemara (*Gittin* 59b) states explicitly that the whole purpose of the Torah is peace.

62 Ber. Rabati (Ber. p.7).

63 Ber. R. 24:7, Yerushalmi Ned. 9:4 (30b), Yal. Shimoni (Ber. 40). Note also that even though Ben Azzai states that “These are the Generations of Man” is a greater principle – his point, as elaborated by R. Tanhum, is also that the ultimate goal is to love one’s neighbor, but he is concerned that one may not love oneself enough; as such, he exhorts that man should love one’s neighbor because the individual is a creation of God (as implied in his source verse) – see N. Leibowitz (Vay. p. 197).

64 R. Y. Ashlag, *Matan Torah*, ch. 1.

Derech Eretz

Great is *Derech Eretz* for it is equal to the entire Torah. It was taught by Bar Kappara, “What is the smallest section upon which all the parts of the Torah are dependant? It is *Derech Eretz*, as it says, ‘in all your ways know Him’ (Mishlei 3:6).” Great is *Derech Eretz* as it is equal to the entire Torah. Great is *Derech Eretz*, for all who possess it are beloved by God and Man.

(Otzar Midrashim).⁶⁵

There are at least three ways that we can understand how *Derech Eretz* is equated with the whole Torah. On the simplest level, the *Midrash* (Vay. R. [Vilna] 9:3) derives from the verse, “Guarding the way (*derech*) to the tree of life”, that *Derech Eretz* is “the way” to the Tree of Life – which is nothing other than the Torah itself. R. Tzodok MiLublin explains that this means that *Derech Eretz* is the way to achieving the Torah.⁶⁶ On a deeper level, the Mishna (Avot 3:17) explains that *Derech Eretz* and the Torah are mutually dependent⁶⁷ – for “without *Derech Eretz* there is no Torah and without Torah there is no *Derech Eretz*.” This explains why the two are equated: each is vitally necessary for the achievement of the other.

Finally, and perhaps most profoundly, we can explain the equivalence as follows. R. Yona (Avot 2:2) notes that *Derech Eretz* can be variously translated as either “well-mannered righteous behavior”⁶⁸ or “work”, depending on context. In the context of our *Midrash* which employs the verse “in *all* your ways”, clearly the term is not limited to work but rather expresses the kind of well-mannered righteous behavior one is to exhibit in *all* his actions such that both God and Man love him. It can be said that to be beloved by Man is the consequence of fulfilling the golden rule of “Love thy neighbor,” which, as explained previously, is the goal of the Torah. Thus *Derech Eretz* is equated with the whole Torah in that it expresses the crowning achievement of man living the life of the Torah.

65 [Eisenshtein] “Gadol VeGedula” p.81.

66 *Tziakat HaTzadik*, 121.

67 Rambam (ad loc.).

68 See *Mishnat Reuven* (ad loc.) fn. 2.

Tzedaka (Charity)

The Gemara (Baba Batra 9a)⁶⁹ equates *Tzedaka* (charity) with all the *mitzvot*. The Maharal⁷⁰ explicates the reason:

“When a person gives *Tzedaka* (charity) this is called *tzedeck* (righteousness) and uprightness; and this *mitzvah* in particular is called “*Tzedaka*” to show you that the *mitzvah* is *tzedeck* (righteousness), and so too are all the *mitzvot tzedeck* (righteousness) and uprightness as it is written, ‘It will be for us *Tzedaka* (righteousness) that we observe and do all the commands...’ (Dev. 6:25). And since this *mitzvah* of *Tzedaka* (charity) specifically carries the name *Tzedaka* (righteousness), being that the act of charity is inherently righteousness as its name demonstrates, ... it is equated with all the *mitzvot*, even though every *mitzvah* also inheres of *tzedeck* (righteousness).”

According to the Maharal, *Tzedaka* is equated with all the *mitzvot* because the act itself is exemplary of the quality of righteousness (*tzedeck*) that all the *mitzvot* are to inculcate and engender. It is the paradigmatic *mitzvah* because, along with the quality of the act itself, its very name declares its purpose, which is really the goal of all the *mitzvot*.

Furthermore, so fundamental is the act of *tzedeck* that on the verse in Mishlei (10:2), “charity saves from death”, the Zohar (Behukotai 113b)⁷¹ explains that the act saves not only man from death, but even God Himself is so saved. For charity is the quintessential act of bringing harmony and peace to the world, and as such, brings completion to the act of creation, or in the words of the Zohar, “completes God’s name”. The act, in its effecting perfection, is thus equated to all the *mitzvot* whose goal is to effect perfection.

69 Also *Yalkut Shimoni* (Nehemiah 1071), and *Tosefta Peah* [Leiberman] 4:19.

70 *Chidushei Agadot*, commentary to *Aggadot HaShas* (on Baba Batra 9a); *Netiv HaTzedaka* 4.

71 See esp. *Matok Midvash* (*ibid.*, pp. 735-6).

Gemilut Hasadim (Gratuitous Kindness)

Tzedaka and *Gemilut Hasadim* are equal to all the *mitzvot* in the Torah. However, whereas *Tzedaka* is performed on the living, *Gemilut Hasadim* is performed on the living and the dead; and whereas *Tzedaka* is performed on the poor, *Gemilut Hasadim* is performed on the poor and the rich; and whereas *Tzedaka* is performed with one's money, *Gemilut Hasadim* is performed with one's money and one's body.

Tosefta (Peah [Leiberman] 4:19).⁷²

Whereas we saw previously that *Tzedaka* is equal to all the *mitzvot*, here the Tosefta teaches that both *Tzedaka* and *Gemilut Hasadim* are equal to all the *mitzvot*. Furthermore, the Tosefta goes on to demonstrate that *Gemilut Hasadim* is in fact even greater than *Tzedaka*. Clearly, the statement “equal to all the *mitzvot*” does not serve as a mathematical formulation. Rather, it indicates that each one is in some way equated with the *purpose* of all the *mitzvot*. (Indeed it has been the contention of this essay from the outset that the expression “equal to all” is used as a device to communicate the importance of the notion in question and not as an arithmetic equation.)

The three examples noted in the Tosefta illustrate three reasons why *Gemilut Hasadim* is deemed greater than *Tzedaka*. Starting from the end, *Gemilut Hasadim* allows for the application of a broader array of “object” resources (i.e., one's body as well as one's money). Furthermore, *Gemilut Hasadim* applies to a greater range of “subjects” (i.e., both rich as well as poor). Yet even more profound than these aspects, *Gemilut Hasadim* offers one the possibility to act without the anticipation of receiving anything in return.⁷³ It is this element of altruism that makes *Gemilut Hasadim* ideally equal to all the *mitzvot*; for ultimately the *mitzvot* aim to train man to overcome his own selfish, or self-serving, tendencies, and perform acts of gratuitous loving-kindness.⁷⁴ This is illustrated in the following Talmudic discussion:

R. Hama bar R. Hanina asked, “What means the verse: ‘You shall walk (*teilchu*) after the Lord your God’? Is it possible for a

72 Also Talmud Yerushalmi (Peah 1:1 p. 15b), Yalkut Shimoni (Tehillim 859).

73 See Rashi (Ber. 47:29).

74 See R. Hirsch (Vay. 19:2, 18).

human being to walk after the Shechina; for has it not been said, 'For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire'? Rather [the verse means] that one is to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, ..., so too you clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He visited the sick, ..., so too you visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He comforted mourners, ..., so too you comfort the mourner. The Holy One, blessed be He buried the dead, ..., so too you bury the dead.

(Sotah 14a).

Based on the verse, 'You shall walk after the Lord your God', the Gemara learns that man is to imitate God, *imitatio Dei*. The exemplary Divine acts that man is to so perform are nothing more and nothing less than acts of *Gemilut Hasadim*. Indeed, the Gemara (ibid.) then continues to imply that the entire Torah is ultimately about *Gemilut Hasadim* in that the Torah begins and ends with *Gemilut Hasadim*: "It begins with *Gemilut Hasadim* as it is written 'And God made for man and his wife leather garments and He dressed them.' And it ends with *Gemilut Hasadim* as it is written, 'And He buried him in a valley.'"

Living in Israel

It once came about that R. Yehudah ben Beteira and R. Matya ben Harash and R. Hanina and R. Yohanan were traveling abroad. When they reached Palatum [outside of Israel], they remembered Eretz Yisrael, their eyes filled with tears and they rent their clothes, recited the verses, "... you shall possess it and dwell therein. And you will do all these decrees and laws" (Dev. 11:31-32) [whereupon they retraced their steps and went back home] saying: residence in Eretz Yisrael is equal in weight to all the *mitzvot* in the Torah.

Sifrei (Dev. 80).⁷⁵

This emotionally charged story powerfully conveys the notion that living in the land of Israel is equated with all the *mitzvot*. Yet this begs the question: why? Many explanations have been given as to why residence in the land is so fundamental. The Abarbanel (Yishayahu 5) states, "It is impossible for the Jewish nation to reach perfection

⁷⁵ Also Tosefta (Avodah Zara [Tzuckermandel] 4:3), Midrash Tanaim (Dev. 12:29), Yalkut Shimoni (Reah 885).

anywhere outside the chosen land.” The Ritva (Git. 2a) understands the necessity of dwelling in the land of Israel because it is beloved by God. The Avnei Nezer defines the need to dwell in the Land in order to facilitate a closer relationship with God.

But perhaps the most comprehensive rational⁷⁶ explanation, one that includes all the individual ideas expressed, is that of R. Eliezer Berkovits who writes, “The great spiritual tragedy of the exile consists in the breach *between Tora and life*, for exile means the loss of a Jewish-controlled environment. . . .”⁷⁷ There is a symbiotic relationship between the Torah, the land and the people of Israel in that only through control of the land can the people bring about the complete manifestation of the Torah.

We can understand this based on the Jewish people’s mission to be “a light unto the nations” (Yishayahu 42:6).⁷⁸ This mission is ultimately accomplished by being an object lesson of national success. It was for this purpose that God gave His Torah – as a guidebook to fulfilling that national mission.⁷⁹ Martin Buber writes, “God is the absolute authority over the world because He is separate from it and transcends it but He is not withdrawn from it. Israel must, in imitating God by being a holy nation, similarly not withdraw from the world of nations but rather radiate a positive influence on them through every aspect of Jewish living.”⁸⁰

Yet a nation cannot function in such a comprehensive manner without a land. The land of Israel is thus that indispensable substrate upon which God’s Torah is brought to life. In the words of R. Eliezer Berkovits:

Judaism looks upon life as the raw material which has to be shaped in conformity with the spiritual values contained in the Bible.... The teachings of the Torah can therefore reveal their

76 R. Kook (Orot, Ch.1) dismissed all rational explanations stating that living in the land expressed a spirituality not bound by the rationale of facilitating physical or even spiritual goals.

77 R. E. Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism* (Jerusalem: Shalem, 2002), p. 162 [emphasis added].

78 See especially Radak (ibid., s.v. *le-brit am*).

79 “Our people is a people only through the Torah” (R. Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, III:132).

80 M. Buber, “Behirat Yisrael”, *Darko shel Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1964), p.96, quoted in N. Leibowitz, *Studies in Vayikra*, p. 168.

real sense only when there is a concrete reality to which they are applied. Judaism is a great human endeavor to fashion the whole of life, every part and every moment of it, in accordance with standards that have their origin in unchallengeable authority. Its aim is not merely to cultivate the spirit, but infuse prosaic, everyday existence with the spirit.⁸¹

Appropriately, R. Ya'akov Emden calls Eretz Yisrael “the peg upon which the entire Torah hangs.” Without the land of Israel, the Torah can simply not be made manifest in all its fullness.

Three Pillars, One Purpose

Now that we have understood why each individual item might be equated with the entire body of *mitzvot*, we are still left wondering if there is any commonality, any comprehensive theme or structure, to which these 15 items belong. As we have noted throughout this essay, each of the items merits being equated with all the *mitzvot* because, in some way, it embodies the ideals of the Torah. And it is the Torah which provided the reason and purpose for creation, as the *Midrash* (Ber. R. 1:1) explained, “God looked in to the Torah and created the world.”⁸² Thus, we can infer that each of these fifteen items in some way addresses the reason why man was created, that is, each notion points to the very purpose of creation. As such, it can be said that these items are in some way the foundations of creation. The Mishna enumerates three such foundations of creation:

Shimon HaTzadik was from the Great Sanhedrin and he taught, “The world stands on three things: on the Torah, on the Service, and on *Gemilut Hasadim*.” (Avot 1:2).⁸³

81 R. E. Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism* (Jerusalem: Shalem, 2002), pp. 160-1.

82 See for example Meiri (Avot 1:2) who explains the *Midrash* (Ber. 1:1), “God looked in to the Torah and created the world”, to mean that God looked at the ideas of the Torah which are for the perfection of Man and thus brought God to create the world.

83 For the sake of completeness it should be noted that the Mishna (Avot 1:18) states that, “The world stands [is maintained] on three things: Justice, Truth, and Peace.” The Rambam sees these elements as paralleling those in Avot 1:2, whereas the Meiri (Avot 1:2) and the Rashbatz (Avot 1:18) explain that Avot 1:2 speaks of the *reason* for creation whereas as Avot 1:18 speaks of the continued *maintenance* of creation.

R. Ovadya MiBartenura⁸⁴ explains that the intent of Shimon HaTzadik is that these three pillars are the reason and purpose of creation – for them the world was created. Similarly the Meiri⁸⁵ writes that the import of the Mishna is to convey the very purpose of man’s existence: the achievement of perfection. This perfection, he explains, is to be had in the three areas referred to by Shimon HaTzadik. It is our contention that each of the 15 notions equated with the whole Torah correspond to one of the three “pillars” of creation.

Starting with the pillar of “Torah”, this area of perfection is one in which the individual refines intellectual or contemplative (*iyuni*)⁸⁶ faculties. Into this category we can comfortably place the items of Wisdom,⁸⁷ Talmud Torah, Mishna, and Sage Talk.

Skipping to the pillar of “*Gemilut Hasadim*”, this area of perfection consists of refining one’s character traits,⁸⁸ and consequently, the world.⁸⁹ The Akeidat Yitzhak (Shaar 63) writes that these are acts which oblige a spirit of benevolence between man and his fellowman. The notions of Peace, *Derech Eretz*, *Tzedaka*, and *Gemilut Hasadim*,⁹⁰ all neatly fit into this “pillar”.

Finally, the pillar of “Service” consists of perfecting one’s relationship with the Creator. The Akeidat Yitzhak (Shaar 63) describes the “service” as encompassing those things through which man subjugates himself to his Creator. This “service” is exemplified by the *Para Aduma* ritual wherein man must subjugate his rationale and submit to the will of God. It is through such *hok*-like observance of the *mitzvot* that one aspires to develop and demonstrate his subjugation to the will of God known as “*Yirah*” (Awe). The symbol of the individual’s

84 So too R. Yona (ibid.).

85 So too Tifferet Yisrael (Yahin, ibid.).

86 Similarly Akedat Yitzhak (Shaar 63) calls the Torah the “*iyuni*” aspect of the triad.

87 We explained that Wisdom was the faculty that allowed the comprehension of the Torah. See also Rambam (Avot 1:2); Tiferet Yisrael (Yachin, Avot 1:2) who equate Wisdom with that of the Torah.

88 Meiri (ad loc.).

89 See R. Ovadya MiBartenura (ad loc.) who explains the term by quoting the verse, “The world is built through kindness” (Tehillim 89:3). See also Rashbatz (ad loc.) who expands on the notion.

90 Note that we use the term *Gemilut Hasadim* as a general category as well as referring to one of the specific elements that compose the category. As a general category it refers to all acts of benevolence between man and man. Its specific inclusion within the category is to include the specific acts as mentioned in the section above on *Gemilut Hasadim*.

submission to the authority of God in “Awe” is the *Brit Mila*. And the act whereby one outright rejects God’s authority is *Avoda Zara*. Thus, the items of *Para Aduma*, *Yirah*, *Brit Mila*, and *Avoda Zara* are fall squarely into the “pillar” of “Service”.

Then there are the items of *Shabbat* and *Tzitzit*. Each of these, it was shown, expresses the notion of the redemption from Egypt and more importantly Israel’s consequent obligation to the will of God as “Master”, serving Him in *yirah* (awe). As such, they too fit into this category of “Service”, expressing man’s subjugation to God’s will. Interestingly, the Meiri describes the pillar of “Service” to include both belief in the creation *ex nihilo*—one of the primary symbolic meanings of the *Shabbat*—as well as belief in divine providence, which again is something the redemption from Egypt epitomized and is subsequently symbolized in the *Shabbat* and *Tzitzit*.

Finally, having categorized 14 of the 15 items, all that remains unresolved is the notion of living in the land of Israel. This item does not readily fit into any of the three “pillars”. Perhaps this is because living in the land of Israel is much greater than any pillar. Indeed, the land of Israel is a microcosm of the world itself. From Israel the world was created⁹¹ and to Israel does the world anticipate its final perfection.⁹² Consequently, we suggest that the land of Israel parallels “the world” itself; as in the words of the Mishna: “*the world stands on three things*”. The land of Israel is to stand as representative of the ideal perfection for the world; a perfection brought about through the various notions which make up the pillars upon which the world stands.

Thus, while on the one hand residence in the land of Israel facilitates the realization of the Torah, on the other hand it is much greater than that. Residence in the land of Israel, when lived according to the Torah, is the manifest goal of creation. It is man living in perfection; like Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden, so the Jews living in Israel, and so all of humanity living in the world perfected.

91 Zohar (Teruma 222a).

92 Isaiah 35:10.

We might pictorially graph our findings as follows:

The World		
Living in Israel		
Wisdom	<i>Shabbat</i>	Peace
Talmud Torah	Brit Mila	Derech Eretz
Mishna	Tzitzit	Charity
Sage Talk	Avoda Zara	Gemilut Hasadim
	Awe (Yirah)	
	Para Aduma	
Torah	Avoda	Gemilut Hasadim

In conclusion, the words of the sages, transmitted over centuries and continents, do not address some parochial need in time or space, but rather articulate ageless relevance. The choice of the 15 items is not random, but rather expresses fundamental truths about man's task in creation – the task of achieving perfection.

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