

"Ethics,"⁷ Aristotle states that this was the general practice of the religious communities in ancient times. He says literally: The ancient sacrifices and gatherings used to take place after the harvesting of the fruit. They were, as it were, offerings given because of leisure. This is literally what he says. In addition, it is possible to live in the *tabernacle* during that season, there being no great heat nor an uncomfortable rain. Both these festivals, I mean *Tabernacles* and *Passover*, inculcate both an opinion and a moral quality. In the case of *Passover*, the opinion consists in the commemoration of the *miracles of Egypt* and in the perpetuation of their memory throughout the periods of time. In the case of *Tabernacles*, the opinion consists in the perpetuation of the memory of the *miracles of the desert* throughout the periods of time. As for the moral quality, it consists in man's always remembering the days | of stress in the days of prosperity, so that his gratitude to God should become great and so that he should achieve humility and submission. Accordingly *unleavened bread* and *bitter herbs* must be eaten on *Passover* in commemoration of what happened to us. Similarly one must leave the houses⁸ and dwell in tabernacles, as is done by the wretched inhabitants of deserts and wastelands, in order that the fact be commemorated that such was our state in ancient times: *That I made the children of Israel dwell in tabernacles, and so on.*⁹ From this we went over to dwell in richly ornamented houses in the best and most fertile place on earth, thanks to the benefaction of God and His promises to our fathers, inasmuch as they were perfect people in their opinions and in their moral character — I mean *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. For this too is one of the pivots of the Law, I mean the belief that every benefit that will be or has been granted is *due to the merit of the Fathers, since they kept the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment.*¹⁰

One's going over from *Tabernacles* to a second festival, I mean to the *Eighth Day of Assembly*, can be accounted for by the consideration that in this way one can complete such rejoicings as are impossible in *tabernacles* but only possible in spacious dwellings and in buildings.

As for the *four species that constitute a lulab*,¹¹ the *Sages, may their memory be blessed*, have set forth some reason for this in the manner of *Midrashim*¹² whose method is well known by all those who understand

7. In fact, the passage occurs in Book VIII (1160a25–28) of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

8. During the Feast of Tabernacles. 9. Lev. 23:43. 10. Cf. Gen. 18:19.

11. In this passage the Hebrew word apparently means any bunch composed of four plants. The four species alluded to are the branches of the palm tree, the citron, the myrtle, and the willows of the brook.

12. Here and in the following passages, the term *Midrashim* is substituted for the word *derashoth* used by Maimonides.

their discourses. For these [namely, the Midrashim] have, in their opinion, the status of poetical conceits; they are not meant to bring out the meaning of the text in question. Accordingly, with regard to the *Midrashim*, people are divided into two classes: A class that imagines that [the Sages] have said these things in order to explain the meaning of the text in question, and a class that holds [the Midrashim] in slight esteem and holds them up to ridicule, since it is clear and manifest that this is not the meaning of the [biblical] text in question. The first class strives and fights with a view to proving, as they deem, the correctness of the *Midrashim* and to defending them, | and think that this is the true meaning of the [biblical] text and that the *Midrashim* have the same status as the traditional legal decisions. But neither of the two groups understands that [the Midrashim] have the character of poetical conceits whose meaning is not obscure for someone endowed with understanding. At that time this method was generally known and used by everybody, just as the poets use poetical expressions. Thus [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed*, say: *Bar Qappara teaches: [In the verse —] And thou shalt have a paddle [yathed] upon azenekha [thy weapon]¹³ — do not read azenekha, but aznekha [thy ear]. This teaches us that whenever a man hears a reprehensible thing, he should put his finger into his ear.¹⁴* Would that I knew whether, in the opinion of these ignoramuses, this *Tannaite* believed this to be the interpretation of this text, that such was the purpose of this *commandment*, that *yathed* [*paddle*] means a finger, and that *azenekha* [*thy weapon*] refers to the two ears. I do not think that anyone of sound intellect will be of this opinion. But this is a most witty poetical conceit by means of which he instills a noble moral quality, which is in accordance with the fact that just as it is forbidden to tell them, so is it forbidden to listen to obscene things; and he props it up through a reference to a [biblical] text, as is done in poetical compositions. Similarly all the passages in the *Midrashim* enjoining, *Do not read thus, but thus*, have this meaning. I have deviated from the subject, but this is a useful observation that may be needed by everyone endowed with intellect among those who profess the Law and are Rabbanites.¹⁵ I will return to the order of our discourse. What seems to me regarding the *four species that constitute a lulab*¹⁶ is that they are indicative of the joy and gladness [felt by the Children of Israel] when they left the *desert* — which was *no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither was there any water to drink*¹⁷ — for places in which there

13. Deut. 23:14. 14. B.T., Kethuboth, 15a.

15. This term is probably used in contradistinction to the term Qaraites.

16. Cf. n. 11, this chap. 17. Num. 20:5.

were fruit-bearing trees and rivers. For the purpose of commemoration, the finest fruit of these places was taken and the one that was most fragrant, as well as their finest leaves and finest verdure, I mean *the willows of the brook*. Three things are found in common in these *four species*. | The first one is that at that time they were plentiful in the *Land of Israel* so that everyone could procure them. The second one is that they are beautiful to look at and full of freshness; and some of them, namely, the *citron* and the *myrtle*, have an excellent fragrance, while the *branches of the palm tree* and the *willow* have neither a good nor an offensive smell. The third one is that they keep fresh for seven days, which is not the case with peaches, pomegranates, asparagus, pears, and the like.

CHAPTER 44

The *commandments* comprised in the ninth class are the *commandments* that we have enumerated in the *Book of Love*. All of them have manifest reasons and evident causes. I mean that the end of these actions pertaining to divine service is the constant commemoration of God, the love of Him and the fear of Him, the obligatory observance of the *commandments* in general, and the bringing-about of such belief concerning Him, may He be exalted, as is necessary for everyone professing the Law. Those commandments are: prayer, the *recital of Shema*^c,¹ the *blessing of food*² and what is connected with it, the *blessing of the Priests*,³ *phylacteries*,⁴ the *inscription on the posts of the houses and on the gates*,⁵ acquiring a *book of the Torah* and reading in it at certain times.⁶ All these are actions that bring about useful opinions. This is clear and manifest and does not require another discourse, for that would be nothing but repetition.

1. I.e., the recital of the passage (Deut. 6:4 ff.) that begins: *Shema^c Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel).
2. I.e., the recital of grace. Cf. Deut. 8:10. 3. Cf. Num. 6:23-26.
4. Cf. Exod. 13:9 and 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18. 5. *mezuzah*. Cf. Deut. 6:9; 11:20.
6. According to rabbinic tradition, this last commandment may be deduced from Deut. 31:19. Cf. Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Sepher Torah, VII 1.