

GUIDE 1:67 AND HE RESTED

God does not rest. This means He is never passive and nothing about Him remains potential. Nor does He stop, cease, refrain, relax or refresh Himself. All such states imply change.

God's creation of the world is one entire creation, a unique event, beyond time or number. He does not change in creating the world. God's simple unchanging unity is always *active*.

This conclusion is at odds with the statement made repeatedly by the Torah that God rests on the seventh day.

Responding to this challenge, Maimonides conducts an intricate but, ultimately, unsuccessful investigation of the grammar of those statements. His investigation forces him to conclude that grammatical rules must fall when metaphysical principles are at stake.

This chapter contains the Guide's most concentrated discussion of grammar. This is strongly characteristic of scholasticism, which fought its major theological battles on the terrain of grammar and logic.

Maimonides defines the word "rested" in "and He *rested* on the seventh day" (Genesis 2:2) as "He finished creating the world on the seventh day." Maimonides reminds us that he had defined "*amirah*" ("speaking/statement") to mean creating, when used with God. For the same reason, the word "rested" means that God had stopped speaking, i.e., He finished creating the world. All of these formulations must be taken as metaphors only, *keyvan sh'hushaala ha-amira l'ratzon b'khal ma sh'nivra b'sheset y'mei bereshit, hushaala lo hashvita bayom ha-shabat*, since even the word "creating" describes an entirely internal mode of divine volition.

Friedlander sums up the significance of the chapter and its place in this section of Guide:

"In accordance with the explanation given in the preceding chapters, that the verbs 'He made,' 'He wrote,' etc., meant 'It was His will, that a certain thing be done, be written,' etc., Maimonides shows in the present chapter that the verb 'to rest' (*shavat, noakh*), used in reference to God, must not be understood in the ordinary sense, implying previous work, as if the Creation consisted in a material act. 'God rested' means that it no longer was His will to create a new thing; the Universe, as it existed at the end of the sixth day, was complete; nothing followed, except the regular development of that which had been created." (note 2, p. 249)

WHY IS THIS CHAPTER HERE?

Rest is a condition of corporeal beings, their cessation of motion. Of the four things in existence, God, the angels, the spheres, and the elements (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodai* 2:3), only the four elements come to rest in their "proper place." God does not come to rest.

Still, if Maimonides' only point in this chapter was to remove corporealism from descriptions of God, he would have had to have placed it with the lexical chapters, possibly with 1:11 (to "sit"), 1:13 (to "stand") or 1:15 (to "place oneself" or to "stand on").

Maimonides did not situate his chapter in the lexical section of the Guide because the thought sequence, though not explicitly acknowledged by him, follows from the last several chapters. In those chapters, he no longer concerns himself with biblical anthropomorphisms. His real concern now is creation *ex nihilo*, its proper articulation, and proper defense. He does this by emphasizing that *dibbur*, divine speech, is the figurative expression of God's will to create the universe from nothing.

It is difficult to explain why there should suddenly be a creation *ex nihilo*. It is just as hard to explain why that creation should stop. The Holy Grail in physics is to find out what happened in the first moment of the Big Bang, but it is just as difficult to explain why creation should cease.

The neo-Platonized Aristotelianism of the Middle Ages was prepared to accept that the universe had a beginning. But if God is all powerful, unchanging, and always *in actu*, why should there be any end to the creation? The Big Bang should just keep on creating new things. The universe should keep on expanding. This is the real question haunting Maimonides when he asks whether God rests. It is the converse of the issue of *dibbur* as the will to create from nothing. *Shavat* would then be the will to halt creation. That is why he placed this chapter here. After arguing that God willed creation from nothing, he must explain why God willed to stop creation.

Maimonides does not meet that challenge head on. The reason that God stopped creating, and completed creation with all its eternal natural processes in place, is that He willed it so. Divine “rest” is, then, just another imponderable aspect of that creation *ex nihilo*, of *Maaseh Bereshit*. It is a miracle. This will be Maimonides’ only answer. That is why our chapter appears in this section of the Guide: this is where Maimonides contrasts his sophisticated version of Jewish esotericism against popular magic (1:61—1:70).

But this is not the time for him to explicitly reveal that both creation and its termination are miraculous (he does this in Section Two of the Guide). That is because he is about to begin, at Guide 1:71, a series of chapters devoted to the refutation of the Muslim Kalam theology. Their method was to answer every question, “Why?” with the answer, “It’s a miracle!” While he shares the Kalam’s desire to refute the eternalism of the Aristotelians, he does not want to be associated with their methods, which he believes would destroy Judaism. He will eventually respond with his own “It’s a miracle!” but only after he has destroyed Kalam occasionalism and undermined Aristotelian eternalism.

At this point, he confines himself to the grammatical refutation of the Torah’s assertion that God literally “rests.”

GOD “RESTS” IN BIBLICAL TEXT

The Torah says that God rested in three significant places. They all refer to the first Sabbath. Each uses a different term for rest:

Genesis 2:2: “And on the seventh day God ended (*va’yekhal*) His work which He had made; and He rested (*va’yishbot*) on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.”

Exodus 20:11 (from the Fifth Commandment): “For [in] six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them [is], and rested (*va’yanakh*) the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

Exodus 31:17: “It [is] a sign between Me and the children of Israel for ever: for [in] six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested (*shavat*), and was refreshed (*va’yinafash*).”

There is one more verse to keep in mind, which relates the first Sabbath to the giving of Torah on Sinai. Maimonides does not bring this verse in our chapter, but in Guide 1:64.

Exodus 24:16: “And the glory of the Lord *abode* (*va’yishkan*) upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day He called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud.”

This verse connects the giving of the Torah to the creation of the world in six days, by using similar language. Rashi quotes Midrash that the latter creation *depends* upon the former. This makes the giving of Torah part of *Maaseh Bereshit*.

I REST MY CASE

Of the terms used for *rest* in the first three quotes, *yishbot/shavat*, *yanakh*, and *yinafash*, the first two appear to be in the *kal* conjugation, which is the simple form of the Hebrew verb. They are intransitive, i.e., God rests, not God “rests” the world. *Yanakh*, “rest,” is from the root *noakh*. *Yishbot* is from the root *shavat*, which is the root from which we derive the word “Sabbath.” (*Va'yishbot* and *va'yanakh* are *kal* fut. 3d per. sing. with *vav*-conversive, see Benjamin Davidson’s *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, pp. 352, 323, London, 1970; I treat *yinafash* at the end of this chapter).

There are two possible solutions to the problem of God “resting.” Both amount to treating the intransitive verb as transitive.

The first is to show that “rest” means the same thing that lawyers mean when they “rest.” When the attorney “rests,” it means that he “rests” his argument, not himself. “Rests,” therefore, is short for “rests his case.” It conceals a transitive state.

Maimonides argues that *yashav* and *noakh* mean to rest from speaking, just as “the defense rests,” though the lawyer is not tired. He proves this from two passages. In the first, Job’s three friends “rest” (*va'yishbetu*) from arguing with him (Job 32:1). Job’s friends are not tired, but they have finished their speeches.

To interpret “And He rested” to mean that God *needed* to rest is not only false, but also base and ignoble. He implies this with his second example, from a story of David (1 Samuel 25:9).

David sends his soldiers to seek provisions for the evening from Nabal, a rich shepherd, who is preparing to feast his sheep-shearers. They politely make their request of Nabal, and then “rest” their case: “And David’s youths came, and spoke to Nabal according to all these words, in David’s name, and they rested” (*va'yanukhu*; Judaica Press translation). This story shows that the verb *noakh* (*va'yanukhu*) can mean to desist from speech.

Nabal *basely* rejects the request; he will not spend his money on a “runaway slave” (David was still at war with Saul). When the soldiers tell David what Nabal said, he decides to destroy Nabal and his household. Nabal’s wife Abigail learns of David’s decision and begs his mercy. She provides him with provisions from Nabal’s storehouse. The next morning she tells Nabal that David meant to slaughter him but relented. The miser dies of shock when he realizes that Abigail gave away some of his wealth (Rashi). David marries Abigail. David is the opposite of Nabal, whose soul is base and ignoble, since Abigail says that David’s soul, *nefesh*, shall be “bound up in the soul of life,” 1 Samuel 25:29. (Compare my comments on Guide 1:41 glossing this lexical proof-text, and on *va'yinafash* at the end of this chapter).

The word *nabal* (*naval*) means “disgrace.” His name is the byword for baseness, ignobility. That is why Maimonides chose this example. He means that if you think that God requires rest you are as base and ignoble as Nabal.

Maimonides notes that the text never says that David’s youths were tired. Even if they were tired, for them to say so here would have been contextually inappropriate. By “resting,” the Bible implies that they said nothing further that could justify Nabal’s ignominious refusal to quarter David’s men.

Similarly, Maimonides interprets scriptures that say “And He rested” to mean that God finished speaking, that is, He finished creating the world. Those verses conceal the alleged transitivity of the verb “rest.”

For his second possible solution, Maimonides argues that the grammar of these words for rest does not demand literal interpretation. When he fails to prove this point convincingly, he proceeds to argue that the grammar is not as important as the philosophic issue at stake.

For Maimonides already knew that the grammar would not work. He did not intend his discussion of grammar to be an empirical investigation. He only wanted to make the best possible case for the grammatical reinterpretation of divine rest, knowing that grammar would not finally resolve the problem. Ultimately, this chapter could not be about grammar anyway, for grammar is precisely the opposite of mysticism. Maimonides meant this section of the Guide to be his showcase for his sophisticated approach to Jewish mysticism.

In the next section, we review his grammatical argument. (Fair warning to readers allergic to Hebrew grammar!)

THE GRAMMATICAL ISSUE

The explanation that “rest” means “rest from speaking,” while somewhat satisfying, still avoids the problem that the verbs for “rest” in the three Torah passages are all intransitive. If those terms are naturally intransitive, it is hard to see how they could conceal a state of transitivity. (However, see Gesenius/Kautzch/Cowley, *Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford, 2d edition, 1974, which suggests historical drift in usage from intransitive to transitive and *vice versa*, p. 368, *u* and *v*; especially in irregular verbs, 118 and 119.)

Maimonides is sensitive to this concern. He argues three fallback positions to show that *noakh* in its simple *kal* conjugation really is transitive: i.e., instead of “He rested,” rather, “He rested (finished) the world.” (Saadia seems to agree, *Emunot v’Deot*, Rosenblatt Eng. trans., 128.)

The first fallback position is that the Rabbis have *interpreted* the term *va’yanakh* in Exodus 20:11 transitively. We may, as Maimonides argues later, have lost the ancient rabbinical knowledge of Hebrew. In Midrash *Genesis Rabba* 10:9 (Soncino), the Rabbis say:

“Neither with labor nor with toil did the Holy One, blessed be He, create the world, yet you say, [*and he rested...*] *from all his work!*And what was created therein? Tranquillity, ease, peace, and quiet. [Ft. 6: this implies that the resting itself was in order to make, i.e. create, something]. R. Levi said in the name of R. Jose b. Nehorai: As long as the hands of their Master were working on them they went on expanding; but when the hands of their Master rested, rest was afforded to them, and thus *He gave rest to His world on the seventh day (va’yanakh l’olamo ba’yom ha’shvii)* [Ft. 7: he interprets *va’yanakh* ‘and He rested’ as ‘He created a resting.’] (Exodus 20:11).”

According to Maimonides, the Rabbis here interpret *va’yanakh* as a causative *hif’il* form, i.e., *v’yaniakh* or *heniakh*, instead of the simple intransitive *kal* form of *noakh*. This is like the prayer for donning phylacteries, *l’haniakh t’fillin*, which is also *hif’il* of *noakh*. (See Arie Lev Schlossberg’s note on the Alhaziri trans. of the Guide, 271. Halkin, *201 Hebrew Verbs*, 1970, p. 209, shows no *piel* transitivizing form of *noakh*. Francisco Veismann directs our attention to this important brief article: S. Bolozky “Strategies of Modern Hebrew verb formation,” 1982, *Hebrew Annual Review* 6, pp 69-79.)

Yaniakh is future tense *hif’il*-causative. By adding the *vav*, “and,” *va’yaniakh* would become the past tense “and He rested” according to the doctrine of the *vav*-conversive. (But Gesenius, 49:a:1, note 1 p. 133, holds the doctrine of *vav*-conversive to be antique). But it does not say *va’yaniakh*.

If *va’yanakh* were causative like *va’yaniakh*, “rested” should be able to take an object and thus act transitively: *and He rested* something, i.e., He caused something to rest. But the Midrashic interpretation does not convince without changing the spelling, and spelling is all-important. Worse, given Maimonides’ strong *ex nihilo* commitment, is the Midrash’s demiurgic suggestion, like the Platonists’ evocation of the potter’s hand’s “creating” the world by forming the primordial hyle.

The second fallback position is to see in *va’yanakh* a different root (instead of *noakh*) that would be naturally transitive. The choices hinted at are *yanakh* and *nakhah* (Kafih ft. 14, Schwarz ft. 8, and Schlossberg 2d note).

Maimonides explains that he is looking at verbs with “weak” *pey* and *lamed*-radicals (1st and 3rd radicals). These are taken as separate verb roots with separate meanings. First we look at *yanakh*.

Yanakh is a weak *pey*-radical transitive verb meaning to cause to rest (Alkalay *Dictionary*, 936). But for *yanakh* to be taken as past tense with the *vav*-conversive future form in the *kal*, this weak first-radical verb would have to be conjugated *va'yenekh*, not *va'yanakh* (see chart 6 of *pey-yod* verbs in Blumberg, *Modern Hebrew Grammar and Composition*, New York, 1959; Even-Shmuel suggests *va-yenakh*, p. 354). Maimonides suggests the transitive *hinniakh*, “to place” (Numbers 19:9, 1 Kings 8:9), from *yanakh*, but, as Kafih points out in notes 15 and 16, the “n” in this declension is doubled (*dagesh nun*), which is a different spelling and pronunciation. It does so even when 1st Samuel 10:25 (unquoted by Maimonides!) takes it transitively in nearly the same spelling of *va'yannakh* that appears in Exodus 20:11: “and God rested (*va'yanakh*).” The difference is that in the Samuel quote the “n” is doubled “Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote [it] in a book, and laid it up (*va'yannakh*) before the Lord...”

The grammar does not work, but Maimonides likes *hinniakh* and *va'yannakh* as etymological sources for *va'yanakh* in Ex. 20, since both arise in the *hiphil* construction (Davidson, 323; Bolozky above), and are, therefore, naturally causative and transitive.

Nakhah was Maimonides other suggested alternative source for *va'yanakh* (as opposed to *noakh*). *Nakhah* is a weak *lamed*-radical transitive verb meaning “to lead” (Alcalay, p. 1613). If we were to take *nakhah* as the source of *va'yanakh*, the latter could be interpreted to mean that God lead the world to rest on the seventh day. But this is a lot of freight to make the word carry in Ex. 20:11 (“For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth... and rested the seventh day...”).

The grammatical problem with *nakhah* is that when conjugating this weak last-radical verb in future *kal* with *vav*-conversive to make it past tense, it would have to come out as *va'yinkhei* not *va'yanakh* (Blumberg, chart 10 of *lamed-hey* verbs). The grammar and meaning are impossible if we force *va'yanakh* into the root *nakhah* instead of deriving it from *noakh*.

In his third fallback position, Maimonides offers three texts, urging us to treat the root *noakh*, “rest,” as transitive, but only by straining interpretation:

“Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind [was] in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the *ephah* between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me: Whither do these bear the *ephah*? And he said unto me: To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be (*ve-hukhan*) established, and set (*ve-hunnikhah*) there upon her own base.” (Zechariah 5:9-11. See in my chapter on Guide 1:49 the section “Zechariah’s Female Angels”)

“And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest (*la-nuakh*) on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.” (2 Samuel 21:10).

“When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that *I might rest* (*anuakh*) in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.” (Habakkuk 3:16)

The KJV gives the usual intransitive context for “rest” in each of these cases. Maimonides reads them differently. Maimonides takes the *ve-hunnikhah* in the Zechariah quote to mean that the angel *has rested* the *ephah* on its base (transitive) rather than the *ephah rests* on its base (intransitive). He does not read *la-nuakh* in Samuel to mean that Rizpah prevented the *birds resting* on the corpses (intransitive) but that Rizpah *did not rest them* on the

corpses (transitive). Finally, *anuakh* in Habakkuk is not that I might rest in the day of trouble (intransitive), but that I might cause myself to be established on that day (transitive).

These are dubious interpretations for *noakh*. *Ve-hunnikhah* in the Zechariah quote is listed as *huf'al* (causative) by Davidson (p. 201), but it is not a good example since *noakh* in its *kal* configuration (as in *va'yanakh*) is not causative. *La-nuakh* in Samuel admittedly is the infinitive *kal* of *noakh*, and *anuakh* in Habakkuk is future *kal* of *noakh*, so that both are in the same declension as *va'yanakh*. Still, it is hard to accept Maimonides' interpretation of either as transitive. *Noakh* never becomes transitive in any sense unless it is in the *hiphil* or *huphal* declension, which *va'yanakh* is not (Davidson, 539-540).

Maimonides decides to move beyond grammar.

PHILOSOPHY TRUMPS GRAMMAR

“Our explanation is not impaired by the fact that the form of the word deviates from the rules of verbs of these two classes: for there are frequent exceptions to the rules of conjugations, and especially of the weak verbs: and any interpretation which removes such a source of error must not be abandoned because of certain grammatical rules. We know that we are ignorant of the sacred language, and that grammatical rules only apply to the majority of cases.” (Guide 1:67)

This quotation in the original is really one long sentence in which Maimonides throws every possible objection to the grammatically literal interpretation of divine “rest.” He begins by raising the spectre of irregular verbs, and the difficulty of interpreting them, especially when they have weak radicals. He then makes his powerful claim that philosophy must trump grammar. He next argues that we have lost the true ancient understanding of the holy tongue. His last and most effective move is to assert the mere conventionality of grammar.

Schwarz explains that “any interpretation which removes such a source of error must not be abandoned because of certain grammatical rules,” means that “The [philosophic] postulate that God does not rest after labor, should not be nullified due to reliance on rules of Hebrew verb declension” (note 12, my translation).

Josef Stern writes that Maimonides follows a tradition of Muslim philosophers, especially Al-Farabi (c. 870-950), who contend that we should not confuse the external grammatical form of a sentence with its internal logical form (“Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language,” *Maimonides and the Sciences*, Cohen and Levine, Kluwer 2000, p. 179-188, esp.185). They hold that the philosopher *reforms* external corporeal speech to conform to our knowledge of metaphysics. Thus, since we know that God is not a corporeal being who needs rest, and we know that God is always active, we should never *say* that He rests. The fact that the Torah repeatedly does say that He rests on the seventh day must therefore be *interpreted*: if the grammar demands that reading, the grammar must not be allowed to get in the way of the interpretation. One may fairly wonder whether this becomes a license to ignore the sacred text itself.

The meaning of these texts, according to Maimonides, should, therefore, be: In the six days of creation of the world, every event occurs outside of nature, since in nature new orbs do not appear in the heavens and new phyla and genera do not appear on the earth. Friedlander says, “Every new thing created on the six days produced a kind of revolution in the universe.”

There is only one creation of the world. God programmed all natural developments into the world at creation, including miracles, especially including the providential dispensation of the Jews when they follow the Torah. We should take God’s “rest” to mean that on the seventh day He accomplished this entire creation.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel explains this well:

“All the occurrences of the six days of creation occurred outside of any fixed, lawful, prevalent regime, of which none existed yet in all of creation. But on the seventh day everything was fixed and remains in the manner that we find it today. The days of creation were days of cosmic catastrophe, one-time happenings, unconnected with any prior cause apart from the divine will. After creation, everything takes place within the lawful natural regime in which they are fixed, in which cosmic catastrophes are never known to occur. According to Maimonides’ theory, this natural regime is established for all time.” (My translation)

GOD MADE SOULS

“The word (*va’yinafash*, Exodus 31:17) is a verb derived from *nefesh*, the homonymity of which we have already explained (Guide 1:41), namely, that it has the signification of intention or will: (*va’yinafash*) accordingly means: ‘that which He desired was accomplished, and what He wished had come into existence.’”

This passage, coming at the end of our chapter, explains the last of the three mentions of God resting on the seventh day. The text in Exodus reads:

Exodus 31:17: “It [is] a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for [in] six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He *rested* (*shavat*), and was *refreshed* (*va’yinafash*).”

He wants us to read the last five words as “He finished willing the world which He had willed to exist.”

Shavat is an intransitive verb (*kal* third person past), and therefore presents the same problem as its derivative *va’yishbot*.

Va’yinafash is the third person singular future *nif’al*/passive-reflexive of the word *nefesh*, which the *vav* makes past tense. *Nefesh* as a verb means to respire, take a breath, refresh oneself (Davidson, pp. 324, 558). As a noun, *nefesh* means “soul.” Maimonides takes it here to mean that God had accomplished His will. This he bases on his own explanation of *nefesh* in Guide 1:41 as will or volition (Guide 1:41 is the lexical chapter on *nefesh*). He treats it as a transitive verb, i.e., it means that God finished the process of the creation of the world by bringing it to his desired conclusion.

It could also mean, as David Bakan points out in *Maimonides on Prophecy*, p. 191, that God had “ensouled,” meaning He created the souls of men and the soul of the world. This would indeed be the completion of the creation.

That this might be Maimonides’ real interpretation of *va’yinafash* is suggested by his reference to Guide 1:41 taken in juxtaposition to our next chapter, Guide 1:68 (compare my treatment of both chapters).

Guide 1:41 is about the relation between its Definitions 4 and 5 for *nefesh*. Definition 4 was the human intellect, the loftiest of the five divisions of the soul. Definition 5 was the only one used with God, where *nefesh* means the divine will.

The relation between the human intellect and the divine will suggested by 1:41 is called *teshuva*, “return.” Maimonides understood this as the alignment of the human mind with the divine will. The beneficence that descends upon men when they so align themselves, we call providence. Providence is the subject of *Maaseh Merkava*.

Thus, *va'yinafash* expresses both Definitions 4 and 5, for at the *conclusion* of God's creation, (*Maaseh Bereshit*, Def. 5, divine will to create) the regime of divine providence (*Maaseh Merkava*, Def. 4, human mind/soul, which is subject to providence) *commences*. Of course, for God, there is neither conclusion nor commencement. The word *va'yinafash* links God's will to complete creation to His will to provide for that creation.

Maimonides refers to *va'yinafash* only at the end of our chapter (and nowhere else in the Guide), because it is his bridge to the next chapter, 1:68, where he identifies the divine mind with the human mind. He argues there that in their active state no distinctions exist between the divine mind and ours. All are united in the unity of mind.

This identification constitutes the radical break from negative theology that he has been moving toward in these ten chapters about the names and creations of God (1:61—1:70).

His point in these chapters is that the only things separating the divine and human mind are the “accidents” that principally occur when we interpose our imagination in the process of cognition. The recovery from such disastrous accidents is called *teshuva*, and the result of the reunification of mind is called prophecy. Maimonides' reference to *va'yinafash* signals his transition from the account of creation, *Maaseh Bereshit* (1:66-67), to the account of providence, *Maaseh Merkava* (1:70); from the “Creator” of the universe, to the “Form” of the universe (1:69).

Copyright © 2012, Scott Michael Alexander, no copying or use permitted except in connection with the Maimonides Listserve