Luzzatto's Derech Hashem: Understanding the Way of God

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to introduce the reader to Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's *Derech Hashem* and Luzzatto's thought process. It begins with an analysis of the introduction to the work and then examines three major themes: Fundamentals, Prophecy, and the importance of the *Shema* prayer. Where applicable, comparisons will be made to other Jewish thinkers. Themes will be explained within the Kabbalistic framework that influenced Luzzatto's work. By the end of the paper the reader should be able to grasp the key elements and reasons that inspired Luzzatto to write this book.

Le but de ce document est de présenter le lecteur processus de Moshe Chaim Luzzatto de Derech Hashem et de Luzzatto à pensée. Il commence par une analyse de l'introduction au travail et puis examine trois thèmes importants : Principes fondamentaux, prophétie, et l'importance de la prière de Shema. Là où applicables, des comparaisons seront faites à d'autres penseurs juifs. Des thèmes seront expliqués dans le cadre de Kabbalistic que le travail de Luzzatto influencé. Vers la fin du papier le lecteur devrait pouvoir saisir les éléments clé et les raisons qui a inspiré Luzzatto écrire ce livre.

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When an author writes a book it reflects his surroundings in a multifaceted way. Politics, religion, history and certainly the author's personal philosophy, all affect the point of view of a publication. *Derech Hashem* is a guidebook on how a Jew should approach God. It is a product of its time and it reflects the author's personal goals.

Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, known as the Ramchal, was a poet, playwrite and author of numerous books on Jewish philosophy and mysticism. He was born in 1707 in Padua, Italy. At an early age his genius was already recognized. Luzzatto learned with Rabbi Yeshaiah Basan and Rabbi Yitzchak Lampronti, as well as other noted rabbis of his day. He began learning Kabbalah at an early age and in fact, it is said of him, "by the time he was 14 years old, he already knew by heart the entire Talmud and Midrash, as well as all major classics of Kabbalah." He wrote plays and poems in "magnificent Biblical Hebrew" and is regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern Jewish culture.

Jewish Europe in 1700's was undergoing a radical change. Rabbi Isaac Luria's Kabbalah was part of the mainstream curriculum. Never before were mystical teachings so widespread and publically taught. Chaim Vital's Eitz HaChaim was a popular text, studied by many. Messianic hopes were high.

¹ Aryeh Kaplan, "Translator's Forward," <u>Way of God</u>, (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1997) 17.

² Joseph Dan, "Introduction<u>," Messianic Mysticism – Moses Hayim Luzzatto and the Padua School</u>, (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008) xii.

³ Ibid, xi.

Unfortunately this optimism was thwarted with the infamous pseudomessianism of Shabbatai Tzvi in a historical failure of disappointment and betrayal.

Following the tragic circumstances of Shabbatai Tzvi and the complete betrayal of his followers, the Jewish community experienced a devastating period of confusion and sorrow. As a precaution against further distress, mystical study and literature was carefully monitored by the Rabbinate. Anyone with any relation to the pseudo-Messiah was under suspicion, and certainly anyone spouting messianic propaganda was under scrutiny. Thus, from the year 1700 onward the outer shell of Kabbalah took on a much more conservative stance. The rabbis who fought the Shabbatian heresy attacked everyone who centred their studies on Kabbalah rather than Talmud.⁴ Scholars were careful to stay at a fair distance from the explosive controversy of the recent bout of messianism. Instead of preaching a message of redemption, most scholarship of the time focused on mystical fundamentals such as meditation, *kavanah* during prayer and ethical practice.⁵ Only a few great scholars in each generation were privy to more intense Kabbalistic study.⁶ Luzzatto was fortunate to be included in the

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 $^{^4}$ Solomon Grayzel, <u>A History of the Jews</u>, 2^{nd} ed (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1968) 448.

⁵ Gershom Scholem, <u>Kabbalah</u>, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974) 80.

⁶ Yirmeyahu Bideman, <u>Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto – His Life and Works</u>, (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc, 1995) 29.

company of such elite, and even established his own circle of scholars who studied the mystical texts together.

In 1727 Luzzatto claimed to be visited by a *maggid*. These visitations, or revelations, continued for a period of at least 3 years, yet there is some evidence to show that this went on until 1734.⁷ Luzzatto claimed that the *maggid* dictated to him secrets which he wrote down in books, and advised him to establish his own society. He even revealed to him that Luzzatto's own soul was in fact a reincarnation of Rabbi Judah the Prince, *Yehudah HaNasi*, the redactor of the Mishnah. ⁸

It is this claim that caused much of the controversy surrounding Luzzatto. In 1730 allegations surfaced and Luzzatto was brought to trial. The Rabbinate ruled that he was only allowed to continue studying Kabbalah under the stipulation that he ceased writing in the name of the *maggid* and that all further Kabbalistic study would be limited to oral teaching. He had to turn over all previous works in the name of the *maggid* to be sealed in a box and taken away. Luzzatto's creativity was by no means impeded by this injunction; over the next five years Luzzatto wrote over forty expositions and this was most likely the time when *Derech Hashem* was written.

This time period is also notable for the leaps and bounds taken in field of science. Isaac Newton had just published his *Principia* and this was

⁷ Isaiah Tishby, <u>Messianic Mysticism – Moses Hayim Luzzatto and the</u> Padua School, (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008)11.

⁸ Bideman 34.

⁹ Ibid 44.

"one of the most notable events in the whole history of physical science." ¹⁰ In this treatise Newton wrote a remarkable account of the entire system of the world as explained through general principles. This was characteristic of physics and science in general at the time. Robert Hooke had seen 'cells' in cork and soon it was observed that all things could be broken down to this universal unit. Carl Linnaeus was working on his structure of taxonomy, a systematic organization of all living things; animals were classified by generalized principles and common traits. Contemporary thinkers were taking "observable phenomena in the universe and demonstrating that everything could be explained on the basis of a few fundamental principles." ¹¹

Luzzatto built upon this scientific leitmotif and applied it to the spiritual realm. He thus was able to come up with general principles and rational explanations for the Jewish faith. In fact he is known for his systematic approach. He looks at details and sees them as bricks that give structure and form to a grand tower. By seeing the world in such a way he is able to explain the specific job of each and every brick and how they relate to one another. To many observers they would simply see either the brick or the wall, but few would describe it the way Luzzatto did.

Many of Luzzatto's major works reflect this systematic approach. His most famous book, *Mesilat Yesharim, The Path of the Just*, is an ethical work

¹⁰ I. Bernard Cohen, <u>The Birth of a New Physics</u>, 2nd ed. (New York: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, 1985) 148.

¹¹ Kaplan, 14.

that explains the way one should direct one's actions. It begins with a *Baraita* and then follows it step-by-step and is organized thorough a schematic. The book is written in a systemized fashion, following the order of its Talmudic source. Other works such as *Kalach Pischey Chochmah*, 138 *Gates of Wisdom*, and *Da'at Tenuvot*, *The Knowing Heart*, are written in a similar fashion, organized in a lucid arrangement.

Where did he develop this skill? Luzzatto may have been influenced by his teacher Lampronti, who wrote and organized *Pachad Yitzchok*, a rabbinic encyclopedia and one of the first of its kind. He could have also learned about systemization from his teacher Basan, who in his *Lachmei Todah*, *Breads of Thanksgiving*, presents a systematic treatment of Judaism.¹²

The revolution of modern science undoubtedly played a role in Luzzatto's way of thought. He went above and beyond basic categorization by organizing information in a way in which general concepts could be extracted from it. These general principles were then taken to explain the entire workings of Judaism. Luzzatto took the scientific method, expanded on it, and applied it to the theology of the Jewish faith. Such is the structure of *Derech Hashem, The Way of God.* In this book Luzzatto systemizes the basic principles of Judaism, creation, God and the logical corollaries that stem from these fundamentals.

He was not the first Jewish thinker to systemize a code of law or even systemize philosophical concepts. In fact much of the literature written in

¹² Kaplan, 17.

the rabbinic period is of a systematic nature. The *Mishnah* and *Gemara*, the earliest of the rabbinic works, were organized and codified over hundreds of years. Jewish law, *halacha*, has been systemized by many of the greatest minds in Jewish history. Maimonides wrote the Mishneh Torah. Joseph Karo wrote both the Beit Yosef and the Shulchan Aruch. Schneur Zalman wrote his own Shulchan Aruch. These and other codes of law are all massive undertakings and impressive works of logic and organization.

Jewish authors also constantly revisited the subjects of theology and philosophy and thus many different formulations of basic principles and explanations of Judaism have appeared. Philo was the first to formulate articles of faith. He numbered five tenets. Saadia HaGaon wrote *Emunot-ve-Deot*, a systemization of Jewish tradition. Fundamentals of Judaism are discussed in Joseph Albo's *Sefer Halkarim*. In his book, Albo numbers three basic principles of Jewish faith. The most notable formulation is the creed set forth by Maimonides where he numbers 13 principles of the Jewish faith. This is the most widely accepted system and is found in most prayer books. It is important to note that each system is a reflection of the specific concerns Jews were dealing with at that particular time.

Derech Hashem follows the tradition of such great works, as it is an impressive collection of the fundamentals of Judaism. It is distinguished

from other formulations by its "systematic and lucid presentation.... As a summary [Luzzatto's] work is unrivalled."13

As indicated earlier, it is Luzzatto's skill at organization that shines through in this work. Every point is presented individually; every detail noted. The structure is meticulous. Luzzatto clearly had a direction he was following and every point logically flows from the preceding one. He explains his thought process throughout. For example, he will often give rational explanations for how he drew upon one point to learn the other, or how a certain principle stands to be true because of an early principle stated. He often references other places in the book.

The book is concerned with Judaism, God and man, and how they relate to one another. Luzzatto describes each detail of the connection and the process of interrelation. The individual points can all be added up to create the entire structure of Judaism. His goal is to understand the whole by fully comprehending the pieces that make it up.

The presentation of the book makes it accessible to any reader. His explanations and step-by-step journey into Judaism allows even a reader with little background to understand and learn what Luzzatto puts forward. Concepts are explained fully, though without the over-simplification which would limit its readership. In fact, he never once specifies a specific target audience, unlike many other works of Jewish philosophy.

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¹³ Louis Jacobs, <u>The Principles of the Jewish Faith</u>, (London: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co. Ltd., 1964) 111.

Furthermore, the language that Luzzatto uses is smooth and clear. He writes in Hebrew, as opposed to a regional dialect. His literary style is direct and succinct. This lends an overall feeling of accessibility to the book; it is unintimidating and approachable.

Derech Hashem is a brilliant exposition of the philosophy and theology of Judaism, systematized in a lucid, organized manner. It consists of five parts: An introduction, the fundamentals of existence, providence, prophecy and the observances involved in serving God. By the end of the book, Luzzatto has summarized the major tenets and observances integral to the Jewish faith.

The book has its foundation in Kabbalah without overtly being a book of mysticism. Kabbalistic ideas and images are found consistently throughout its pages, however they are never pointed out to the reader; they are seamlessly woven into Luzzatto's text, blending in almost completely. Nevertheless this book does not require any prior knowledge of Kabbalah, any mystical concept is explained fully. Specific mystical terms are not used, only their concepts. In fact, *Derech Hashem* is a fine introduction to many basic Kabbalistic concepts.

Luzzatto frequents certain themes throughout his other Kabbalistic writings. *Tikkun*, restoration of the world and the *Shekhinah*, and *devekut*, clinging to God, are two of the most prevalent themes. ¹⁴ After 1730, when Luzzatto was told to cease writing Kabbalistic works, he still managed to

¹⁴ Tishby, 4.

cleverly weave into his literature these mystical themes, without using direct terminology. Nor does he cite specific mystical sources. He infuses these notions, and other mystical ideas into his writing style as if it were second nature. While it is outside the scope of this paper to deal with Luzzatto's messianic intentions, it is clear that a major goal of his was to bring redemption at the hands of the messiah in his lifetime. All of the above points must be kept in mind throughout reading *Derech Hashem* or any other of Luzzatto's works.

This paper will analyze the overall structure of Luzzatto's *Derech Hashem* and then examine specific themes and subjects that stand out to the reader. Concepts will be explained from a historical perspective and where applicable will be explained in their Kabbalistic connotation. Other subjects may be compared to their treatments in other authors' works in order to fully comprehend Luzzatto's point of view in *Derech Hashem*.

On the Introduction to *Derech Hashem*:

A typical introduction sets the tone for any work. It familiarizes the reader with the concepts that will be discussed throughout the book and provides an overview of the author's point of view and his approach in dealing with the content.

The introduction of *Derech Hashem* does not follow the traditional model of an introduction. Luzzatto barely touches on the subject matter of the book, nor does he explain his thought process. He does not direct the book to any one demographic.

Instead, the introduction should be regarded as an instruction manual on how the reader should approach the work. It explains the organizational method and the logic applied to the subject matter. The introduction is a significant work on its own demanding more attention than the scope of this paper allows. The intention of this summary is not exhaustive but rather to demonstrate the relevance of said introduction within the broader context of the entire book.

As explained above, *Derech Hashem* is a work of impressive schematics arranged in a precise, methodical order. Luzzatto moves logically from one detail to the next. It is the rationale for this approach that is elucidated and argued for in the introduction.

The first line of the introduction stresses the importance of systematic knowledge over general knowledge. In fact Luzzatto states, "When one knows a number of things, and understands how they are

categorized and systematically interrelated, then he has a great advantage over one who has the same knowledge without such distinction." Luzzatto explains that the understanding of categories and how they relate to one another within a whole greatly enhances the understanding of the entire subject. One must not only be concerned with the topic at hand, and its various subtopics and explanations, but also with its relationships, dependencies, and interactions with other subject matters. Furthermore, Luzzatto stresses the importance of being able to see how each point in the matrix reinforces and contributes to the totality of the whole. He explains the frustration a man will experience if he only knows of the details but lacks the ability to apprehend how they all converge as an indivisible wholeness. In fact he states, "Not having access to the concept as a whole, [man] will remain frustrated." 16

The corollary exists as well; with the understanding of subtopics within a framework and the knowledge of their associations with each other, one will be able to grasp the entire concept as a whole. Then man can then continue to expand on the knowledge he has and grasp other ideas that logically flow from one to the other.

Luzzatto has thus framed the unique approach that will be implemented on every level throughout this work. He will explain details of Judaism as individual points. These points will then be linked together to

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¹⁵ Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, <u>Way of God</u>, (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1997) 21.

¹⁶ Way of God, 21.

create a schematic, which will, eventually, represent the entirety of the Jewish faith system; one large matrix of interdependence.

Then Luzzatto explains his thought process. Within these subtopics and their details, there are concepts that are integral to the foundation of the general topic and those that aid or enhance in its understanding. There are explanations to causes of ideas, and descriptions of their effects and so on. The ability to classify categories and ideas is vital to succeed in the true understanding of the whole.

That being said, Luzzatto then rationalizes the beginning of his organizational process. Some concepts are so large in scope that it is daunting to attempt to understand every single detail, at least right away. In these cases, general principles should be formulated. Within these principles, he explains, are many details. Thus when one understands a general concept, he will, at the same time, automatically grasp those details. The careful study of the general principles will bring about the successful knowledge of all the particulars that make them up.

He then states this book's purpose: "My intent was to set forth the general principles of Jewish belief and religion, expounding them all in a way that is clearly understood, to provide a complete picture." He instructs the reader to apply the above-mentioned analytical process when tackling this book.

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¹⁷ Way of God, 25.

To summarize, Luzzatto stresses the importance that the understanding of parts, and the network of their connections, is integral to the understanding of the whole. The 'whole' that is being spoken of, is the general nature of reality, namely, G-d, man and the universe. The goal is to come to an understanding of the bigger picture, in order that one should be able to apply that wisdom in understanding the specifics. The method, however, is the exact opposite; grasping the certain important details in an effort to construct a meaningful appreciation of the whole.

With that understood, Luzzatto applied careful deductive reasoning to the writing of the book, starting with the general facts, the hypothesis that everything in the universe is connected, and then continuing onto observations, leading the reader on a journey into the specifics. It is a style that allows for gradual growth of knowledge, so that a reader can comfortably handle deeper Kabbalistic concepts when the time is right.

The elucidation of the proper thought process must be applied to the reading of his book, and can even be thought of as a key to understanding *Derech Hashem*. The reader must therefore relate these same concepts such as connecting details and understanding their integral importance to the whole to the goal of the book. He even gives a reader direct instructions with a warning, "You should therefore go through this work carefully, diligently

remembering each fact until you find use for it. Do not overlook any detail, for you may be neglecting a vital concept."¹⁸

In his introduction, Luzzatto leaves no detail unturned. He explains the meaning behind the title of the book, *Derech Hashem*, The Way of God. The book presents the process in which God's actions (ways) are revealed. This is done through a multitude of avenues, such as prophecy, angels, the Torah, providence and others as will be discussed below.

¹⁸ Way of God, 27.

Fundamentals - God and Creation:

The first section of *Derech Hashem* deals with those ideas, facts and integral beliefs that are the foundation of Judaism. This includes all details concerning the Universe and the processes that go on within it. The understanding and acceptance of these fundamentals is necessary for the continued study of the book and the Jewish religion in general.

Many Jewish thinkers throughout history have worked on analyzing the central principles relating to the Jewish faith. Judaism does not have any one set of dogmatic principles, which therefore leaves it open to interpretation. Faith is a more difficult subject to organize into tenets. By its very nature faith is abstract. However, this difficulty has not stopped some of the greatest minds in Jewish philosophy from attempting to formulate principles of faith.

Philo was the first to codify principles of Jewish faith. The five articles of faith reflected Philo's primary goal of the fusion of Hellenistic rationalism and Judaism.¹⁹ They were directed at addressing the specific doubts that Jews had regarding their own religion at this time.²⁰ Addressed in this section will be the formulations of Maimonides, Joseph Albo and Hasdai Crescas. They will be referred to throughout this section.

Luzzatto begins in the most logical place with the discussion of The Creator, God, He who existed before man and this universe. From there

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 $^{^{19}}$ Hans Lewy, "Introduction – Philo." <u>3 Jewish Philosophers</u>. (London: The Toby Press, 2006) 11.

²⁰ Ibid. 12.

Luzzatto can easily guide the reader through the process of creation and to the subject of man and his responsibilities. One could argue that starting with man would make more sense as the reader will be able to grasp concepts surrounding himself more easily that abstract Godly concepts, however Luzzatto's decision to structure his book is in itself a reflection of his intent, as will become clear with what is to be explained below.

The first point that Luzzatto addresses is the basis of all of a Jew's beliefs. He writes, "a Jew must believe and know that there exists a first Being, without beginning or end, who brought all things into existence and continues to sustain them."²¹

He stresses both belief and knowledge, not just one or the other. It is important to have both at the same time. Belief can encourage knowledge from a spiritual point of view. When a person believes in God then they may be encouraged to seek out the source and texts, thereby leading them to knowledge. One could also say that knowledge will bring on belief, as logical proof may be necessary for some in order to believe in God. That being said, neither are guarantees, and therefore it is noted that one must believe and know simultaneously.

The Bible does not command a Jew to believe in God. It is not contained within the 613 mitzvot however it is implied throughout the

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²¹ Way of God, 1.1.1.

Torah in regard to revelations and laws.²² Nevertheless, belief is integral to faith and is an important theme throughout Luzzatto's work.

Maimonides writes in the first law in his Mishnah Torah, "The basic principle and pillar of wisdom is to know that there exists a First Being." ²³

Man must know through investigations and observations and with his rational soul that there is a God. He stresses the importance of knowledge of God. On the other hand, the first principle in his 13 Principles of Faith states that one must believe in the existence of God. In his philosophical work,

Maimonides is clearly stressing the importance in belief of God as an integral feature of the Jewish faith.

In the *Guide for the Perplexed*, 1:33, Maimonides explains that there are certain populations who are not capable of logical reasoning, and for this group belief is paramount. This is not to say that this intellectual cannot know God; intellectuals may use logic (along with faith) to come to understand God. Maimonides shows that there are two ways to become close to God and both are integral to the system.

Derech Hashem was written as both a logical, codified study of Judaism while at the same time is a book of faith. Luzzatto encourages the use of both. Knowledge and belief are equally fundamental; one without the other will not lead man on the correct path that he is trying to find.

²² Jacobs, 8.

²³ Moses Maimonides, <u>Mishneh Torah</u>, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah, 1.1.

This method is confirmed by understanding the process of faith. The unique character of Judaism, Jacobs states, "is in the union of the ethical and the religious." ²⁴ A Jew must look at God as both an ethical and religious Being, who encompasses both at the same time. The laws and faith of the religion are so intimately intertwined that one cannot differentiate between the two in the worship of God. Therefore combining knowledge and belief in God forms a successful path whereby a Jew can more readily succeed in drawing close to the Creator.

Who is this first being that you must believe and know? Luzzatto continues by describing God as being "Without beginning or end." Here he implies the infinite nature of God's existence, His transcendence of the dimension of time. God existed before creation and will exist afterwards. Here he is teaching the reader that God's existence not only transcends time, but that he transcends the constraints of reality altogether. Implicit in this is the understanding that man lacks the intrinsic capacity to fully understand God's existence; to probe God's reasoning and question his motives.

The third part of this sentence, "who brought all things into existence and continues to sustain them" enforce two important ideas: The first that God created the universe. The second, which is equally significant, that God is in constant contact with the world and in fact sustains its existence at every moment.

²⁴ Jacobs, 3.

Thus within the first statement of *Derech Hashem*, Luzzatto endeavors to teach his reader the path with which to approach Judaism and lays out general statements regarding God that will prove invaluable for further study.

Luzzatto continues with a number of principles that are essential to the understanding of God. He states that these things can be known in two ways: tradition and reason. This is a clear reference to the above discussion of belief and knowledge. Man can learn about God through the customs and stories handed down throughout the generations, originating with the Patriarchs and the prophets. On the other hand, possibly to silence those who might argue a naturalistic point of view, Luzzatto adds that man can learn these same tenets from observations of nature. That being said, Luzzatto is writing from a religious standpoint and presents the details from a traditional standpoint. He recognizes the validity of rational thought in the process of Judaism, but is choosing in this instance to approach it from the point of view of faith.

God is perfect and therefore cannot be understood by any being other than Him. This draws from the introduction where Luzzatto forewarns his reader that there are some concepts "beyond the power of the human mind."²⁵ To maneuver around this limitation, man can formulate general principles. Using general statements the reader can grasp broad knowledge necessary for the understanding of an infinitely great Deity. So keeping this

²⁵ Way of God, 23.

in mind the reader can then anticipate general statements about God. These are listed immediately afterwards: The necessity of God's existence, His absolute independence, His simplicity and His unity.

Simplicity implies that God has no parts to him. He possesses many attributes, but they are in no way independent of each other. He is unlike other beings whom are 'not simple'; they have separate faculties that can work on their own. God's memory is fundamentally intertwined with His desires and actions.

As learned above, God existed before anything else, and therefore cannot be dependent on anything. His existence is independent of anything else, but the entire universe is dependent on him. It is a logical statement that there is only one being whose existence is imperative. More than one would lessen the importance of the other. So therefore there can only be one being such as Him.

This sections ends with a summary of the six basic principles used in understanding God: His existence, His perfection, His necessity, His independence, His simplicity and His unity. The first four are the basis of the other four. The information laid out in this chapter is the foundation for the rest of the book. (As has been shown that God is necessary for all other things to exist.) Luzzatto thus has armed his reader with the basic principles that are essential in the understanding of the book as a whole.

With this the author concludes his description of God. Throughout the discussion Luzzatto stresses the limitations of man's intellect in

apprehending the Divine. He outlines the arguments for the value of tradition versus that of logic in dealing with the subject at hand. Herein the reader already encounters the major themes found throughout *Derech Hashem*, and is introduced to Luzzatto's method of reasoning and his system of organizing information.

The following chapters unfold in logical sequence, all building toward the articulation of the Luzzatto's goal.

The next chapter deals with creation. Luzzatto explains why God created the world. First he teaches that the God, a being of intrinsic goodness, created the world to impart that absolute goodness to another entity. This goodness would then be in God's allowing man to attain a level of closeness to God, the greatest pleasure for a human being. One would have to work towards this goal of coming close to God and in doing so would transform himself, and begin to resemble God.

Although a perfect God created the world, the world is neither perfect, nor does it only contain good; the concept of evil being deliberately introduced into creation. Evil is the outcome of God concealing himself. God's presence is the root of good, and His concealment is the cause of evil. It is a combination of presence and concealment that makes up created beings, namely man. It is only through the attainment of perfection by overcoming the faults instilled in him by his nature that he can become close to God and thus satisfy the purpose of creation.

The most important point that Luzzatto brings across in this section is that there are two worlds, the physical world, containing man and all physical objects, and the spiritual world, the domain of angels and God. The two worlds are intimately interconnected; anything that happens in the spiritual world is reflected by a similar event in the physical world, and vice versa, physical events will encourage energies and actions in the spiritual world.

This is a clear example of Luzzatto seamlessly working mystical concepts into his work without specifying their occult origin. This is the concept of *devekut*, the mystical clinging to God. Scholem states the main objective of Kabbalah and its study "is to help guide the soul back to its native home in the Godhead." *Devekut* is one of the main goals of Kabbalists; the ability to be close to God and to resemble Him in any way is a sublime objective. Luzzatto's words resemble this concept uncannily: "[man] cleaves to the Creator's Perfection, and is drawn to Him continually – until, ultimately, its earning of perfection and its bonding in closeness to Him are one matter."

In fact, the concept of *devekut* is a common theme in many of Luzzatto's other works. He believed that man should have no other purpose other than drawing near to God. ²⁸ *Devekut* was an important concept to

²⁶ Scholem, Kabbalah, 174.

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²⁷ Way of God. 1.2.3.

²⁸ Abraham Menes, "The Ethical Teachings of Moses Hayim Luzzatto." Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, (1947-1948) 64.

Luzzatto both from a personal standpoint, his desire to cleave to God, and as a general notion for all Jews. *Devekut* is not specific to intellectuals or specific populations, true *devekut* can be realized "in the normal life of the individual within the community."²⁹ He believed that *devekut* would be used in restoring "the honour of the people of Israel and renewing their holiness" ³⁰ which would be a precursor to the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of the Jewish people.

The last lines of an earlier Kabbalistic treatise of Luzzatto's summarize *devekut* and how man can use it to ascend the ladder to God. Luzzatto explains that Israel must adhere to God through desire and worship and that "the affairs of the world and of all creation have rested upon this basis ever since they came into existence and [will do so] to all eternity." ³¹

The attainment of *devekut* will bring a state of *tikkun* to the individual and the world. Man's spiritual deeds have the ability to affect forces in the spiritual world as explained above. Thus as man uses his free will to do good in the physical world, he will encourage positive spiritual forces, which include *tikkun*, into both the physical and spiritual world.

The section on fundamentals deals mainly with God, creation and man. Other topics such as prophecy, providence, and messiah and redemption are dealt with at length in other chapters in *Derech Hashem*.

²⁹ Gershom Scholem <u>Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism</u>, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1974) 233.

³⁰ Tishby, 7.

³¹ Ibid. 47.

That being said, Luzzatto calls this chapter, "The Fundamentals" and thus these must be integral beliefs to Judaism. As mentioned, Luzzatto is not the first to formulate of fundamental principles. Many, including, but not limited to, Maimonides, Albo and Crescas have also probed this area. These numerous formulations reflect the fact that few agreed on one specific set of rules. Some thinker preferred fewer tenets, others, more. Similar themes are found throughout the many formulations, and these are the foundational topics in Judaism, regardless of how they are divided, articulated or explained.

Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith, found in his Introduction to his commentary on Helek is the most widely accepted formulation of tenets of Judaism. It is a summation of the beliefs that are integral to the acceptance of the Jewish faith. If a man chose to disassociate himself from these articles, there would then be grounds to consider him a heretic.³² The principles cover God and his attributes, prophecy, Torah, providence, the Messiah and resurrection.

Crescas attempted to disprove the foundations of Jewish

Aristotelianism,³³ and channeled much of his energy on arguing Maimonides
works, including his thirteen articles. Crescas therefore suggested one main
tenet, the belief in God, and three sub-tenets: Fundamentals to Judaism, True

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³³ Daniel J. Lasker, "Models of Spirituality in Medieval Jewish Philosophy." <u>Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law</u>, (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 2005) 176.

³² Jacobs, 15.

Opinions, including creation and resurrection, and thirdly, Probabilities which consists of questions regarding the structure of the world and the spiritual realm.³⁴ Many of the same themes that Maimonides used are present, just organized differently. Instead of having thirteen equally important tenets; Crescas suggests the presence of a hierarchy within the system.

Similar to Crescas, Albo too limits his principles to three in number, each with sub-principles. He devotes an entire book to this purpose, *Sepher Ha-Ikkarim*, *Book of Principles*. His three principles are: Belief in God, Belief in Revelation and Belief in Reward and Punishment. In terms of organization Albo's structure closely resembles that of Luzzatto. Though systemized in a different order, Luzzatto's first three sections, Fundamentals, Providence, and Prophecy deal with the same topics and give importance to each one of the overall fundamentals. Albo saw Judaism as evolving and dynamic however with roots firmly situated in Torah. Thus he was attempting to lay out a systematic doctrine yet keep the basic principles fixed.³⁵

Luzzatto clearly did not highlight specific articles of faith in *Derech*Hashem. It was not his goal to set up a list of beliefs to be followed

mindlessly. From the beginning of the book the reader is challenged to read

between the lines and to decipher for himself the structure. In that sense he

³⁴ Jacobs, 19.

³⁵ Isaac Husik, "Joseph Albo the Last of Medieval Jewish Philosophers." Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research (1928-1930) 62.

resembles Crescas in that he suggested that certain principles are more important than others without creating a dogmatic list.

In *Derech Hashem*, Luzzatto covers many of the principles listed by all three thinkers. These topics are integral to the Jewish faith, regardless of how they are organized. However, Luzzatto's careful systemization should not be overlooked. In it through his ordering and structure that one is really able to apprehend his presentation of the fundamentals of the Jewish faith.

Prophecy:

Prophecy has always been a central subject within the realm of Jewish philosophy. The great Jewish philosophers, Saadia HaGaon Maimonides, HaLevi, and others have all written about the subject. Prophecy contains the ultimate paradox; how can the Absolute, God, come into contact with the imperfect world? Conversely, how can man attain such a level? This topic encompasses themes stemming_from all aspects of Jewish philosophy. It touches upon the nature of God and man, providence, the human soul, law and interpretation of the Torah. In the study of prophecy one will need to be proficient in the above notions in order to succeed in grasping the concept.

The third section of *Derech Hashem* is dedicated to prophecy. Taking the above into account, it is in its logical place. Luzzatto has already laid down the basic principles of God and man in the first section. The second section deals with providence and free will. So now that the designations of God and man have been explained fully, and their spiritual relationship defined, Luzzatto is able to approach the prophetic relationship between God and man.

As noted above, knowledge of the soul is included in the list of corequisite subjects with prophecy, and Luzzatto keeps up with the schematic and first deals with the human soul before delving into the subject of

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³⁶ Howard Kreisel, <u>Prophecy – The History of an Idea in Medieval</u> <u>Jewish Philosophy</u>, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001) 590.

prophecy. Humans have two souls, an animal soul and a Divine soul,
Luzzatto explains. It is this duality that makes man unique from other beings.
It is also this dichotomy that gives man the potential to draw himself closer
to God, to be constantly bettering himself. The Divine soul is divided into
five parts, each with their own characteristics.

Luzzatto then tackles the theoretical question of prophecy head on.

He explains that God created the world in a way that the laws of nature could be suspended. In such situations man could have the potential to rise above his physical limitations and even be able to have contact with the Divine. One must always keep in mind that it is God who allows for this to occur and it is therefore at His will.

It is unsaid, but obviously assumed, that prophecy, communication between God and man, does occur. It is beyond rational thought; it is entirely supernatural. The author tries to explain prophecy from the point of view of the prophet; however one must keep in mind that prophecy in general is not something that one can comprehend with human reason alone. This is one of the subjects that Luzzatto refers to in his introduction that the human mind cannot fully fathom.

The first level of prophecy that Luzzatto deals with is Divine
Inspiration, *ruach hakodesh*. This is the attainment of knowledge that would
be inaccessible to the human mind, or even the explanations of accessible
knowledge. It comes at many different levels, the lowest being the
clarification of natural phenomena and the highest can be found in the

foretelling of future events and hidden secrets. ³⁷ Every case is unique, however anyone who experiences Divine Inspiration will be sure that they did, there will be no doubt in their mind.

Prophecy is at a much higher level than Divine Inspiration. It is a point where man can raise himself to such a level at which he can bind himself to God. This will be experienced by all his senses; he will be able to feel this physically, and again, just like with Divine Inspiration, there will be no doubt in his mind that he is close to God.

Luzzatto carefully differentiates the two. Divine Inspiration is passive; it is granted to the individual at the time and for reasons determined by God. Prophecy, on the other hand, is presented as an attainable achievement. The language used is active. Man "binds himself to God."³⁸ A prophet will gain knowledge of the hidden mysteries of God.

Note that Luzzatto describes prophecy as being a "high degree of perfection."³⁹ The reader will immediately recall the earlier discussion on *devekut*, the mystical clinging to God. In fact, one of the levels of *devekut* is prophecy.⁴⁰

One must keep in mind that prophecy does not come at man's will.

One has to be righteous and earn it, but even then he is not guaranteed prophetic communication, no matter how high he may climb in the spiritual

³⁹ Ibid. 3.3.2.

³⁷ Way of God, 3.3.2.

³⁸ Ibid, 3.3.4.

⁴⁰ Scholem Kabbalah, 174.

realms. Ultimately, everything in the creation is completely dependant on God's will, and prophecy is no exception. Prophecy is at the will of God; He reveals Himself and imparts His influence on man. It is God who decides who and when, what and how and everything in between.

Prophecy comes in different ways and at different levels. These differences are manifest in the varying intermediaries, or lenses, which mediate the divine flow between God and man at all times. Different types of lenses exist, with varying levels of opacity. Some offer a relatively 'clear' prophecy, while others obscure the message to varying degrees, resulting in a less than optimal transmission.

Luzzatto then delves deeper into the subject of prophecy. Up until now he has spoken about general principles behind prophecy. Now he will systemize the actualization of prophecy and how it affects man.

The highest level of prophecy is not achievable right away; it is a stepby-step process where man must elevate himself, from level to level, until he has reached an altitude wherein prophecy can be achieved.

How can a man prepare himself for prophecy? By studying specific disciplines such as meditations, pronouncing holy names, praising God etc.. Primarily though, prophecy is a gift bestowed on those with pure intentions and remarkable devotion, a unique combination best described in the Hebrew word *Kayannah*.

Luzzatto advises that prophecy be attained in a similar fashion to an apprenticeship – through a relationship of master to student. The master

should guide the student through the primary process of learning, and even once the student has received prophetic contact, the master should continue guiding him. This is to ensure that the student does not get mislead

Prophecies can be in the form of information and also in the form of a mission. Any mistakes in prophecy are at the hands of the prophet. It is human imperfection that is to blame for misunderstandings.

Prophecies come in different forms; some are abstract, without wording, and other with precise messages. Prophecies can be in the form of a symbolic vision, and in this case the prophet is free to communicate his prophecy in any way he chooses. On the other hand, prophecies that have a specifically worded message must relay them word-for-word, as this is the wish of God.

The purpose of evil forces discussed in the section on fundamentals ⁴¹ is to deceive and influence man. Luzzatto does not mention the source or the nature of these forces here. However he refers to them throughout the course of the book as a deficiency in various degrees of the presence of God, the first time discussed in the chapter on creation. ⁴² They are consequently the cause of false prophecies. It is entirely possible that even one with correct intentions will prophesize falsely due to improper guidance and training. These errors only occur in the case of a student. Once a student has gained true prophecy they will know the difference between a true prophecy

⁴¹ Way of God, 1.5.8.

⁴² Way of God, 1.1.2.

and a false one. This is the reason why the apprenticeship relationship is so important. Unfortunately there are also those who purposely prophesize falsely, the result of which can have devastating consequences on the person, the community and Jewish life in general.

Luzzatto then does something uncharacteristic of the rest of the book. He brings in a narrative of the biblical story of King Achav⁴³ that tells of a group of prophets who all prophesized falsely. The group of prophets knew that they were false prophets as that was their intention. One prophet in particular, strove so hard to prophesize that he ultimately believed in his prophecy. The reader is reminded that this is all how God wanted the event to unfold. This story shows an example of what can happen when man prophesies without the proper intentions. The prophet wanted to prophesy so badly that the evil forces deceived him and not only did he receive false prophecy, he ultimately believed, due to his naiveté, that this was indeed true prophecy.

This is the one of the only times that Luzzatto brings in outside sources; he did not cite his sources otherwise. Here, he not only quotes, but also takes a notably sized quote from the bible and dedicates a large amount of effort to stress this point of false prophets and their intentions. To further the cryptic nature of this paragraph, Luzzatto ends it with a few simple but poignant words: "Understand this well." Evidently the subject of false

⁴³ *Melachim* I Chapter 22.

⁴⁴ Way of God, 3.4.11.

prophets is important to Luzzatto, although he does not clarify why. One can speculate that this is referring to the trail held against him, or even a enigmatic reference to Shabbatai Tzvi. Regardless of his intention, Luzzatto has told his reader to highlight this passage and to remember this in the future.

The last chapter on prophecy is dedicated to the supremacy of Moses as a prophet. Luzzatto explains that there are two totally different levels of prophecy. One is every prophet that has existed other than Moses, and then the second is just Moses. Other prophets receive their prophecies in states where they are not awake, through dreams and visions. In fact, the prophetic experience is so strong that they are physically not able to stay conscious; his physical body cannot deal with the intensity of the prophecy.

Furthermore, the content of the prophecy will be dulled down through the lenses spoken about above.

Now that the restrictions of the general prophet have been pointed out, Luzzatto can now contrast them with the superiority of Moses. Moses prophesied while awake and with full control over of his senses. He was still restricted, in a sense, from seeing God directly, but his metaphoric lens, Luzzatto explains, is a clear, sharp one, which does not hinder the quality of the image. Moses also could approach God with any subject matter, while other prophets were limited to God's will on when to receive prophecies and on the subject matter of their communication.

Now that Luzzatto's core ideas regarding prophecy have been explained, now they can be compared to some of the prevailing philosophy on the same subject. Prophecy is an important subject in Jewish philosophy. Saadia HaGaon, Judah Halevi and Maimonides have all discussed prophecy, its nature and its significance in the Jewish faith. While the subject may be the same, their treatments of it differ. Luzzatto's treatment seems to take a totally different stance than the other three.

A philosopher's thought is usually the product of his time, and all four of the above authors wrote for a specific purpose and intended readership. Every time period has its unique challenges that the philosopher needs to contend with, whether it be external factors such as other religions or an overwhelming drive toward rationality over religion, or even in cases where it is internal, like the challenges Luzzatto faced in the post-Shabbatai Tzvi era. Each situation requires a different approach.

Luzzatto did not write a defense of Judaism, nor a treatise with the intention of equating Judaism with any outside thought. Therefore his treatment of prophecy is innately different than the approach of the other three. He does not use prophecy as evidence for Jewish preeminence nor does he try to explain prophecy from the point of view of its importance in rational thought. In *Derech Hashem* Luzzatto treats prophecy very matter-offactly; it is something that occurs which is an integral component of Judaism and the relationship between God and man.

Saadia HaGaon wrote *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* for a multitude of reasons, including the literal interpretation of the Torah by the Karaites.⁴⁵ His goal was to show that Judaism is not at odds with reason, and that in fact, the many fundamental principles of Judaism can be rationalized by reason alone. His challenge, where prophecy is concerned, is how revelation is necessary if it only confirms what man can know through reason. Why is prophecy even needed in a world where things can be understood in the light of rationality? He does not devote any specific section to prophecy, however the subject is brought up throughout the course of the book.

His basic answer is that there is one truth, but two ways to get to it.⁴⁶
There is no intrinsic conflict between reason and revelation. That being said, revelation has the ability to explain reason. On the other hand, reason can transform and reinforce revelation.⁴⁷ Regardless, Saadia does believe in the necessity of revelation and in fact "mankind is fundamentally in need of prophets, not solely on account of the prophetic laws, but also on account of the rational laws [which require demonstration of their performance.]"⁴⁸
For Saadia, revelation is necessary for knowledge of the details of rational

⁴⁵ Alexander Altmann, "Introduction – Saadya Gaon: Book of Doctrines and Beliefs." <u>3 Jewish Philosophers</u>. (London: The Toby Press, 2006) 129.

⁴⁶ Abraham Heschel, "Reason and Revelation in Saadia's Philosophy." <u>The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series</u>. (1944) 394

⁴⁷ Kreisel. 31.

⁴⁸ Saadia HaGaon. <u>The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs</u>. (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946), 3.3.

laws. For example, reason may bring man not to steal, but it cannot teach the laws of property.⁴⁹

The differences between Luzzatto and Saadia are clearly based on the differences in their goals. One of the most poignant disparities between the two is their treatment of the prophet Jonah. Saadia approaches Jonah in the context of a messenger who does not what to carry out his specific mission. Why would God send someone who is unwilling? Saadia explains that Jonah was sent on two separate missions, the first which was not recorded in the scripture. Saadia believes that Jonah did in fact carry out this first mission, but simply did not want to receive a second mission. Thus Saadia demonstrates that God did not choose an unfit prophet. 50

Luzzatto's treatment of Jonah⁵¹ is very different that Saadia's.

According to Luzzatto, it is the ambiguity of the divine message that was the cause for his error. God's message that "Nineveh shall be overturned"⁵² has the ability to hold a double meaning, one for the positive, that the city will repent and be moral citizens, and one for the negative, that the city will be destroyed. Jonah mistakenly understood the message only from the negative side. God simply reissued the same message with its inherent double meaning. Luzzatto quotes Sanhedrin 89b where it is written that Jonah did not know whether it was for the good or the bad. The author, just like Saadia,

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⁴⁹ Kreisel, 40.

⁵⁰ Kreisel 53.

⁵¹ Way of God. 3.4.7.

⁵² Jonah 3.4.

does not believe in mistake made by a perfect God, however, in stark contrast to Saadia, Luzzatto points out the room for human error in prophecy, even in a learned individual.

Just like Saadia, Judah Halevi did not devote any particular section of his *Kuzari* to prophecy, and instead mentions it throughout the course of his book. The fact that the author continuously returned to the topic shows how important it was to him. Prophecy is brought up in two important points: Prophecy as perfection and ascribing magnitude to the revelation at Sinai. Overall Halevi believed that prophecy is a miracle, as opposed to a naturally occurring phenomenon and furthermore he believed that miracles have greater significance than reasoned considerations.⁵³ The Jewish faith is based upon factors that are beyond the scope of the natural world and this is why it is superior to other philosophies [which are based on human reason.] Religion should be approached from the historical-experiential stance in lieu of an Aristotelian philosophical one.⁵⁴

Halevi puts the prophet at the height of the chain of existence.⁵⁵ He sees Jews as being superior to other religions and furthermore prophets as being the superior subset, even above the level of a human being.⁵⁶ Just like Luzzatto, Halevi suggests that even though prophecy is the result of God's

⁵³ Isaak Heinmann, Introduction – Yehuda Halevi: Kuzari." <u>3 Jewish Philosophers</u>, (London: The Toby Press, 2006) 339.

⁵⁴ Michael S. Berger, Toward a New Understanding of Judah Halevi's Kuzari." <u>The Journal of Religion</u>, (1992) 213.

⁵⁵ Kreisel 101.

⁵⁶ Yehudah Halevi, <u>The Kuzari: In Defense of the Despised Faith</u>, (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2009) 1.41 pg 74.

will, there are certain conditions necessary for the attainment of revelation. Prophecy is the ultimate in perfection, involving a bond with the Divine world. In fact it is this aspect of prophecy that is stressed over the message itself.

The Mosaic prophecy at Sinai is given a special significance within the Jewish faith. The revelation at Sinai not only defined the people of Israel and set their course but confirms the validity of Judaism as the chosen people.

There is no way that so many people could experience such a revelation and all concur about its occurrence if it did not actually happen.

The idea of perfection of prophecy is a common thread in both Halevi's and Luzzatto's thought. This may be due to the fact that some believe that Halevi had mystical purposes in his writing.⁵⁷ With this light shone on the Kuzari, many of Halevi's thoughts on prophecy go in line with those which Luzzatto writes about, even nearing the concept of *devekut* with its wording (perfection, bonding.)

Maimonides deals with prophecy in many ways and at different point of his many books and it becomes a task to summarize his thoughts in merely a few paragraphs, for the sake of the comparison with Luzzatto.

According to Maimonides a prophet is one who has achieved the following: high moral virtues, study of sciences and who devotes himself to the study of God.⁵⁸ It is through training the mind through intellectual

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⁵⁷ Kreisel, 96.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 186.

endeavors that one can reach the level of prophets; only with the intellectual mind engaged can one properly love and fear God. He holds, just like Luzzatto, that a prophet must acquire the spiritual tools, but then he is not guaranteed prophecy; he must wait for God to bestow prophecy. Those that have attained the level spoken of above may still fail to become a prophet due to God's will.⁵⁹

Interestingly, Saadia, Halevi and Maimonides all include discussions on verification of prophecy, yet Luzzatto does not. Saadia devotes a short chapter to the sake of verifying prophecy. He explains that a prophet will bring one of the following signs: the ability to subdue the elements of nature, the ability to change the essence of the elements. Upon seeing these signs one must believe that this man is a prophet. Halevi states that fellow prophets will acknowledge the others. In the Mishneh Torah Maimonides states that God gives his prophets signs and wonders, and upon seeing these, along with other qualifications Maimonides lays out, the people should believe that this person is in fact a prophet. 61

Luzzatto, on the other hand, does not speak about verification at all in *Derech Hashem*. Verification clearly is a central issue for the others; seemingly this is not an important point for Luzzatto to give attention to.

Instead, he focuses his attention to stressing the fact that will innately know when he receives prophecy. He is more concerned with the prophet himself

⁵⁹ Ibid. 223.

⁶⁰ Book of Doctrines and Beliefs. 3.4.

⁶¹ Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 10:1-2.

knowing his own status, rather than how others perceive him. The one who receives a revelation will be left "with an awareness that leaves no room for any doubt whatsoever." In fact not once does Luzzatto speak about a prophet's mission or how a prophet would convey a prophetic message. It would appear as if Luzzatto wrote about prophecy not from the point of view of an observer looking in, but rather as the prophet himself. Any of the concerns an observer would have are absent from this discourse, yet the issues concerning the prophet himself, abound.

As explained above, Luzzatto's concept of prophecy equates with the mystical *devekut*, a topic deeply rooted in Luzzatto's mystical yearning. The attainment of *devekut* is the ultimate achievement and clearly a phenomenon that he strove toward. It seems natural then, that Luzzatto would write from the point of view of the person attempting to achieve, or who has already achieved the said experience.

Another interpretation of the lack of content on verification in *Derech Hashem* is Luzzatto's encounter with the *maggid*, a messenger sent from Heaven. Although *Derech Hashem* was written after the accusations and the burning of Luzzatto's works, it is evident that his mystical thoughts still subsisted so it is fitting that thoughts of the *maggid* still held their significance. This is especially true if his revelations continued into 1734 as Tishby suggested above, which is approximately the time of the penmanship of *Derech Hashem*. This could be interpreted as part of Luzzatto's continued

⁶² Way of God, 3.3.4.

defense. It would align with Luzzatto's emphasis on the fact that the prophet will know that he received prophecy, and certainly fits with the lack of discussion of verifications.

Another point of contention between the above authors and Luzzatto is the role of Moses. As mentioned above, Luzzatto dedicated about a quarter of the section on prophecy in *Derech Hashem* to Moses and his superiority over other prophets. In comparison to the aforementioned philosophers and their treatment of Moses, Luzzatto is clearly the odd man out.

Saadia treats Moses as the model messenger, the ideal, not the exception to the rule.⁶³ He recognizes that Moses' prophecy was intrinsically different than all other prophecies in that he received revelation directly from God and not through intermediaries. He sums it up simply by saying that there is one path that all prophets take, and some prophecies come directly from God and others through mediums.

Halevi does ascribe special status to Moses, especially in the parable in *Kuzari* 1.109.5, where he differentiates Moses from all other Jewish prophets. Here he states that Moses soul had the spiritual light rested upon him. Moses is the messenger of the Divine word, the Torah, and Halevi even ascribes to him "a separate level from the rest of mankind"⁶⁴

In the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides differentiates Moses from all other prophets in a similar vein as Luzzatto does. He lists the fact that Moses did

⁶⁴ Kuzari 1.41.

⁶³ Kreisel, 62.

not prophesy in a dream, or through mediation, nor did he tremble with fear at every revelation and lastly that Moses was able to prophesy at his own will.⁶⁵ In the *Guide for the Perplexed* Maimonides describes Moses' prophecy as legislation as opposed to all other prophets who achieved an intellectual perfection below that of Moses.⁶⁶

In terms of proportions, Luzzatto's treatment of Moses compared to the other prophets is greater than the others philosophers'. He differs from Saadia, clearly stating, "There are two totally different levels of prophecy,"67 that of Moses, and that of all other prophets. Luzzatto produces a similar list of the differences between Moses and other prophets to that which Maimonides set out. He takes it a step further by discussing Moses' knowledge of the secrets of creation and learning their "deepest aspects"68 This clearly has Kabbalistic implications. The wording used in this section conveys a deep admiration that Luzzatto must have held for Moses. Moses did attain a level that no other human being could reach, *devekut* closer than any other had achieved.

Historical evidence shines another light on the Moses-Luzzatto connection. Clearly Luzzatto's interest in Moses was beyond his mere participation in the revelation at Sinai; it was much deeper than that. In a number of mystical writings describing the workings of Luzzatto's society,

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⁶⁵ Mishneh Torah 7.6.

⁶⁶ Kreisel 151.

⁶⁷ Way of God, 3.5.1.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 3.5.6.

which the *maggid* had instructed him to form, it has come to light that the society ascribed specific roles to certain members in regard to the messianic redemption.

This society held by a tradition that the Messiah would come in a process requiring three messianic figures: Joseph, David and Moses. All three are required, but Moses is considered the head of the two others, unifying them.⁶⁹ The role of Moses was ascribed to Luzzatto. He therefore had a personal interest in the figure of Moses and his purpose. Moses is the figure who has gotten to closest to God out of all other prophets. It is clear that Moses was the ultimate goal for Luzzatto, both in terms of his intimate relationship with God and his messianic status.

Throughout the analysis of Luzzatto's treatment of prophecy it is clear that his stance on the topic varied widely from other philosopher's treatments. This is undoubtedly due to the Kabbalistic inclinations and goals of Luzzatto.

⁶⁹ Tishby, 90.

On the Shema:

Another significant passage in *Derech Hashem* is Luzzatto's treatment of the *Shema* and its blessings. It is found in the fourth section of the book, Serving God, where Luzzatto explains the significance of certain observances. This sections covers observances from the general areas of Divine service to the specific rites connected to the holidays and blessings. The *Shema* is the third chapter, with the chapter on prayer following it. The logical conclusion from this would be that the information in the chapter on prayer is not required for the understanding of the significance of the *Shema*; the *Shema* is in a different category altogether.

Luzzatto begins with a clear definition: "The main idea of the *Shema* is to acknowledge God's Oneness and accept Him as our Ruler and King." He then proceeds to summarize many of the points brought up at the beginning of the book, namely God's Oneness, His will and His power. Evil, Luzzatto explains, exists when God hides His unity, again as discussed in the earlier sections of this book. However at this point Luzzatto amplifies the significance; at the time of redemption evil will disappear and God's unity and rule will be universally acknowledged.

One must understand that God is King over creation, that which is natural, that which is supernatural and even that which is beyond the intellect of man. Subjects must honour their king, and there is no difference here. Jews are commanded to do God's bidding and obey Him. When this

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⁷⁰ Way of God, 4.4.1.

happens, when Jews acknowledge God as the Creator and King then God will manifest Himself in world, removing the evil that stood in His stead.⁷¹ This will only happen in the hands of man.

The *Shema* is the ultimate expression of God as King. When man recites the verse he bears witness to God's rule, thus drawing God closer, which in turn perfects the world and brings the world closer to the ultimate redemption, when the world will be perfect and void of all evil.

The key to this is the intentions of man while he recites the *Shema*. Ideally these words should inspire the readiness to give one's life for God, to sanctify God's name. For the individual, the merit attainable with this intention is as great as if he had actually given up his life. At a higher level this brings rectification, *tikkun*, to the world. As explained earlier, *tikkun*, the restoration of the *Shekhinah*, is an integral theme in Luzzatto's Kabbalistic works and this will be expanded on below.

Soloveitchik explains the intention required during the *Shema* is not equated with what is considered normal intention. In other mitzvot intention is connected with the simple desire to act in accord with God's will. While reading the *Shema*, man should consider full spiritual surrender.⁷²

The second verse of the *Shema*, "baruch shem...etc.", relates to the concept of God's name resting upon mankind, which would be the realization

⁷¹ Way of God, 4.4.3.

⁷² Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Intention in Reading the *Shema* and in Prayer," Worship of the Heart, (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 2003), 89.

of God's Holiness being attached to them.⁷³ Luzzatto explains that only angels merit this connection, and thus the recitation of this verse must be done in an undertone, as man does not merit such closeness.

The remaining verses of the *Shema* continue the same themes. Throughout their recitation one must have in mind to "transmit the Illumination of God's Holiness and the yoke of His Kingdom to his children."⁷⁴

The third paragraph recalls the commandment to remember the exodus from Egypt. The exodus is a parallel event to the Messianic redemption. When Adam sinned, he brought all of mankind down a level away from God, thereby leaving room for evil to infiltrate. Israel thus had to be exiled and purified to be raised back up. This was done by bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. So basically the recitation of this paragraph is exalting God for his taking the Jews out of Egypt, thereby strengthening the bond.

The Shema contains 248 words, which corresponds to the 248 parts of a human body, each signifying an essence of man's soul, each which corresponds to a part of creation. Therefore the recitation of these 248 words allows for God's light to unite all of creation as one. *Tikkun* will occur on three levels: man's physical body, man's soul, and all of creation.

The blessings proceeding and following the *Shema* speak of God's recreation of the world everyday, both man and everything outside of man.

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⁷³ Way of God, 4.4.4.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 4.4.8.

Recitation of the *Shema* and its blessings is done twice a day, in the morning and at night. The morning is when the world is renewed, and the evening where there is a sense of conclusion.

The recitation of the *Shema* is included in a list of commandments Luzzatto compiled. It was written pre-1730 and then afterwards translated into Hebrew. Luzzatto explains that the *Shema* is the serving of God through song, as the soul returns to the body in order to work, to bring the world into a state of tikkun. ⁷⁵

The *Shema* is clearly has alternative importance to Luzzatto, beyond the simple recitation of words. The power of the *Shema* raises lower beings on the ladder towards the Divine, raising them toward *devekut* and therefore attaining perfect *yichud*, connection with God. This in turn instills *tikkun* throughout the world. ⁷⁶ These themes, as has been noted before, are central themes in Luzzatto's philosophy and thus are the subject of a considerably sized section of *Derech Hashem*.

⁷⁵ Tishby, 109.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 113.

Conclusion:

Moshe Chaim Luzzatto wrote at the beginning of the enlightenment, and thus may be classified as a medieval thinker. Many of the greatest works in Jewish thought were published during this time period, and thereby lend themselves best to the comparisons made in this paper. Overall, medieval thinkers developed their approach in the broad environment of Aristotelian philosophy. Some embraced it and strove to fit their religion within its bounds; others were vehemently against the philosophy. Thus two models of spirituality emerged: One purely intellectual and the other one of holistic spirituality, where all the aspects of the soul would take part in the spiritual quest. Maimonides is placed in the first category and Halevi would be placed in the second. From the above definitions, it would seem that the Luzzatto in *Derech Hashem* would certainly fall into the second category. While the author emphasizes his rational schematic numerous times, it is tradition and faith that drives Luzzatto, not a quest for intellect.

The main purpose of *Derech Hashem* is to explain how keeping the commandments will bring man to an enhanced situation, and thereby bringing him closer to God. Certain commandments help man avoid sin, others remind man of God's presence, and yet others help make physical objects holy. Whatever the purpose of each individual commandment, as a whole their purpose is to elevate man and the world around him. Man must

⁷⁷ Kreisel, 589.

⁷⁸ Lasker, 165.

therefore make every effort to keep these commandments. He must allow his spiritual soul reign over the physical. Only then will he be able to be elevated.

Luzzatto managed to write a book of Jewish faith based on a

Kabbalistic outlook without once mentioning a mystical term or
rationalization. However his treatments of subjects such as God's
fundamentals, prophecy and liturgy give away his true intentions;
comparisons only amplify his Kabbalistic infusions. *Derech Hashem* is a work
of impressive organization and redaction, making it an exemplary choice in
which to showcase Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's systematic method, his
unbridled genius and masterful scholarship.

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