

# King Solomon's Wisdom: The Integral Relationship Between Torah and Science

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

## Rectifying Reality

Every true Jewish leader possesses a clear vision and plan of how to restore the world in its entirety to its original state of goodness and perfection (and, indeed, how to elevate the world to a state of Divine consciousness never experienced before). This is the goal of all mankind, as we proclaim in the *Aleinu* prayer: "to rectify the world under the Almighty's kingdom."

Of all Biblical archetypes, it was King Solomon who demonstrated this consciousness most. He knew how to deal properly with the nations of the world (many of whom came to Jerusalem to see him and visit the holy Temple that he built) and to elevate their wisdom and their intrinsic cultural senses of beauty and aesthetics.

This consciousness will manifest itself consummately in the person of the Messiah, as Maimonides writes: "He will rectify the whole world...to serve God together. As it is written, 'At that time, I will bring all nations to speak with one tongue, all to call upon God and serve Him together.'"

## The Role of the Seven Noahide Laws

The Torah's means of rectifying the seventy nations of the world is the seven Noahide commandments. Maimonides writes that God commanded Moses to teach all of the people of the world to accept these commandments. Any non-Jew who accepts them and is careful to perform them properly, attains the status of a "righteous gentile" and thereby merits a place in the World to Come.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the true rectification of the nations occurs only when they too, like the Jewish people, sincerely take upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven as revealed in the Torah.

This rectification, like all processes of spiritual growth, involves three stages—submission, separation, and sweetening—as taught by the Ba'al Shem Tov.

**Submission:** Despite the Torah's explicit focus on the Jewish nation, there is indeed much in the Torah that can enlighten and influence the nations of the world on their level. In addition, the Torah is the sole and ultimate source of the obligation of the nations of the world to fulfill the seven commandments given to them. The sages describe that before God gave the Jewish people the Torah at Mt. Sinai, He suspended



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the mountain over them insinuating that if they did not accept the Torah, they would be buried underneath it.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in order to accept the yoke of Heaven, the nations must submit themselves to the Jewish people, the custodians and teachers of the Torah. True submission—whether of man to God or man to fellow man—is the soul's way of giving thanks for the gift of true enlightenment. Without thanksgiving, there can be no real spiritual progress.

**Separation:** Following submission, the nations must acknowledge the separation, i.e., the difference between them and the Jewish people.

**Sweetening:** Only after the separation can come the sweetening, the completion, the transformation of the nations mentioned before: "I will bring all nations...to call upon God and serve Him together."

According to the sages, there are 70 archetypal non-Jewish nations. All non-Jews, past, present, and future, belong to one or another of these seventy nations. As is taught in Chassidut, the 70 nations are a reflection of the seven Divine emotional and behavioral *sefirot*, from loving-kindness to kingdom. This is the source of their spiritual nourishment. These seven attributes are manifest in the human form as the torso and limbs. In contrast, the Jewish people reflect the three higher Divine intellectual *sefirot* of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. The name of the Jewish nation, Israel, is in Hebrew a permutation of the words for "I have a head."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the seven Noahide commandments correspond to the seven *sefirot* that are the spiritual source of the seventy nations. By accepting the seven Noahide commandments, the nations draw Divine intellect into the emotions and thereby rectify them. As a result, the nations feel the Divine goodness associated with the commandments they perform.

## The Wisdom of the Nations of the World

Aside from the non-Jews' acceptance of the seven Noahide commandments, the rectification of the world further depends upon the refinement of the wisdom of the nations. Again, we take our cue from King Solomon. The Bible relates that,

*God gave wisdom to Solomon.... And the wisdom of Solomon increased, and he became wiser than any other person, and his fame spread among all the nations. He taught three thousand parables, and he was able to speak to the trees, to the animals, to the birds, to the insects, and to the fish. And all the nations came to hear Solomon's wisdom.*<sup>4</sup>

The sages teach us that the nations indeed possess human wisdom, but they do not possess the Divine wisdom of the Torah.<sup>5</sup> Their wisdom therefore needs to be refined and elevated by the Torah, which was given exclusively to the Jewish people. After the wisdom of the nations undergoes this true "conversion," the Torah can incorporate it into the pure faith of Israel. As the sages say, "You should believe that there is indeed wisdom amongst the nations." Specifically, "You should believe" means, you should "incorporate [the wisdom of the nations] under the wings of faith."

In order to incorporate the wisdom of the nations, we need to follow King Solomon's example. The Bible describes that, "King Solomon possessed the wisdom of God, which enabled him to execute justice." Thanks to his dedication and devotion to the strength and holiness inherent in the wisdom of Torah, he was able to apply the Torah's wisdom to the wisdom of nature and the wisdom of material reality. Indeed, "God gives [the] wisdom [to apply the Torah to worldly wisdom] only to somebody who already possesses [the] wisdom [of the Torah]." Similarly, "God gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the wise."

By successfully incorporating the wisdom of the nations, "Solomon's wisdom flourished" and multiplied. As is taught in Chassidut, the wisdom of the nations contains "sparks" of holiness and truth—sometimes openly, sometimes hidden—that we are called upon to refine and incorporate into the realm of holiness. Already 1900 years ago, the *Zohar* revealed an essential connection between the discoveries of the natural sciences and the revelation of the esoteric wisdom of the Torah.

The Bible describes that during Noah's flood, "all the fountains of the great abyss split open and the windows of heaven were opened."<sup>6</sup> In the *Zohar*, the outpouring of water, from the heavens above and the great abyss below symbolize the simultaneous and complementary revelation of Divine and worldly wisdom. The natural sciences are likened to the waters rising from below and the revelation of the hidden wisdom of the Torah is likened to the waters descending from above.

## Rectifying the Arts

What applies to the nations' wisdom, or science, equally applies to the arts. It is written that, "God will beautify Japheth, and he will dwell in the tents of Shem."<sup>7</sup> Shem, Japheth, and Ham were Noah's sons. Shem is the progenitor of the Jewish people and Japheth is the progenitor of the Greek people, the founders of secular civilization.

The true Jewish leader is open-minded enough to recognize the beauty that exists in non-Jewish culture and is not threatened by it. He does not try to accommodate ("bend") his Jewishness to secular culture, but rather robustly refines it with the strength of the Torah's wisdom.<sup>8</sup> He applies the Torah's wisdom to both music and the visual arts. A beautiful example of King Solomon's success in refining the arts, including architecture, was the construction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the most magnificent structure on Earth in his time. In addition, the Bible relates that Solomon collected treasures of art and had a company of singers.<sup>9</sup>

Presently, authentically Jewish expressions of beauty and art are still in exile. As a result, Jews who are gifted in these areas, unfortunately feel that they must seek their inspiration and skills from non-Jewish artists who do not express holiness in their work. But, by virtue of his immersion in the wisdom of the Torah, the Jewish leader knows how to refine the beauty and art that is dispersed throughout the world and to redeem

it. This process, like the refinement of secular wisdom, is a process of elevating the sparks of holiness that are scattered throughout creation.

## Knowledge of Torah

In order to rectify all aspects of secular art and science, it is necessary to harness the power of all aspects of the Torah, the Torah as it is pure and complete. This means that a true Jewish leader must be conversant in and imbued in all four facets of the Torah: its literal meaning, its symbolic meaning, its homiletic meaning, and its esoteric meaning. Through the rectification of the arts and the sciences, new facets of the Torah are revealed.

This point is beautifully illustrated mathematically: the numerical value of the Hebrew words for "art" (אמנות) is 497. The numerical value of the word for "science" (מדע) is 114. Their sum is 611, the numerical value of "Torah" (תורה). Thus, the Torah inspires the unification of the two primary domains of human endeavor, art and science, and is thereby blessed in return with the revelation of deeper and deeper dimensions of its own Divine wisdom.

In further depth: yet unrevealed dimensions of wisdom, whether secular or Divine, are referred to in Kabbalah and Chassidut as "darkness." The Torah inspires the revelation of hitherto unrevealed dimensions of the lower darkness of art and science, which in turn arouses the higher darkness of hitherto unrevealed dimensions of Torah to reveal itself.

As noted above, secular knowledge, the wisdom of the nations, is symbolized by the body, while the Divine knowledge of the Torah, the wisdom of Israel, is symbolized by the head. This suggests that the higher waters of Torah wisdom are relatively theoretical, while the lower waters of secular wisdom are relatively practical. The sages teach that it is our task in this world to apply the relatively theoretical knowledge of the Torah to our day-to-day lives in the performance of the Torah's commandments in action. In the future, however, action itself will arouse knowledge. In extension of this teaching: Today, the higher waters of the Torah can inspire the lower waters of secular knowledge to rise from the abyss (the lower darkness); in the future, the lower waters will arouse the higher darkness of the hidden secrets of the Torah to reveal itself. Then, to paraphrase a Chassidic idiom, the body will impregnate the soul (the head) and the Divine Essence itself (the higher darkness) will become Light.

## King Solomon and the Messiah

The involvement with the nations of the world, their wisdom and their art, requires extreme caution. King Solomon's desire, or passion,<sup>10</sup> to rectify worldly art and science together with his attraction to the culture and aesthetic of the nations eventually adversely affected his devoted obedience to the law of the Torah. The Torah permits a king to marry eighteen wives; in an attempt to elevate all of the beauty and wisdom

unrectified of the nations (embodied in the princess of each nation) King Solomon married a thousand wives: "King Solomon loved many foreign women, and he had many wives, that numbered seven hundred, and three hundred concubines."<sup>11</sup> In descending to clarify the arts and wisdom of the nations, one must be careful to assume the role of the influencer and not that of the influenced, for otherwise one may well be drawn down into the as yet unrectified clutches of foreign culture and worldviews.

To use Kabbalistic terminology: until the *sefirah* of kingdom (representing the feminine aspect of reality—i.e., the nations of the world) is rectified, the *sefirah* of foundation (representing the male aspect of reality—i.e., the Jewish people) must take lead and not be led. Only the rectified kingdom, i.e., the rectified feminine consciousness associated with nature, its beauty and wisdom, can channel the energy of foundation correctly. Until then, foundation must control and limit itself in order to fine-tune its relationship with kingdom.

The Messiah, a direct descendant of King David and King Solomon, will fully rectify King Solomon's passion to elevate the beauty and wisdom inherent in nature and manifest in the nations of the earth. The Messiah will be even wiser than King Solomon, and he will know how to uplift the nations and redeem their sparks of wisdom.

### Comments About this Article from Prof. Eduardo Zeiger, a World-Famous Biologist

This article by Harav Ginsburgh provides us with far-reaching insight on the integral relationship between Torah and science. For some, the realms of Torah and science should be kept safely separated. For others, the Torah is a complete source of wisdom and knowledge that makes science dispensable. For others, science provides an increasingly complete explanation of the universe that does not require the involvement of Divine forces.

The unique viewpoint found in the present article is that not only are Torah and science meant to interact, but they are meant to do so in a precise and specific fashion. Central to this viewpoint is the concept that science is the most recent and advanced expression of the wisdom of the nations.<sup>12</sup> So defined, the relationship between Torah and the sciences constitutes the latest instance of the relationship between the Torah and the wisdom of the nations.

In this article, Harav Ginsburgh also explains that the world was created in a state of goodness and perfection, but subsequently descended into imperfection. It is the role of both the Jewish people (with the help of the Torah) and the nations (with the help of their wisdom) to strive to restore the perfection of the world.

The remarkable conceptual breakthrough of "King Solomon's Wisdom" is the precise description of the process whereby the interaction between the Torah and the sciences contributes to the process of rectification of the world. The sciences embody sparks of

holiness and truth that reveal the wonders of creation. Scientific knowledge is meant to be refined by the wisdom of the Torah, and the essence of such rectification is the injection of pure faith into the wisdom of the sciences. Thus, the Torah fertilizes the wisdom of the sciences with the power of faith and belief. And thus fertilized, scientific knowledge becomes a key instrument in the revelation of new secrets of the Torah.

Contemporary developments in physics and cosmology, in which scientists are asking questions about the origin of the universe that were considered completely out of bounds of the scientific discourse not long ago, provides us with a most plausible scenario for a fertilization of the sciences by Torah wisdom.

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<sup>1</sup>. This is true, of course, only when he keeps these commandments because he was so commanded by God in the Torah.

<sup>2</sup>. Chassidic teachings reveal that the "mountain" was in fact God's infinite love; God coerced the Jewish people to accept His Torah by overwhelming them with His love.

<sup>3</sup>. ישראל = לי ראש

<sup>4</sup>. 1 Kings 5:9-14.

<sup>5</sup>. *Eichah Rabbah* 2:13.

<sup>6</sup>. Genesis 7:11.

<sup>7</sup>. Genesis 9:27. See *Megilah* 9b.

<sup>8</sup>. As explained above, if the entire human form symbolizes all of humanity, then the Jew represents the head, the seat of wisdom.

<sup>9</sup>. Ecclesiastes 2:8.

<sup>10</sup>. See 1 Kings 9:1

<sup>11</sup>. *Ibid.* 11:1-3.

<sup>12</sup>. In Hebrew: חִכְמַת הָאוֹמוֹת.