

## QUOTATIONS

### MAIMONIDES ON NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL REINFORCERS<sup>1</sup>

. . . Imagine a small child who has been brought to his teacher so that he may be taught the Torah, which is his ultimate good because it will bring him to perfection. However, because he is only a child and because his understanding is deficient, he does not grasp the true value of that good, nor does he understand the perfection which he can achieve by means of Torah. Of necessity, therefore, his teacher, who has acquired greater perfection than the child, must bribe him to study by means of things which the child loves in a childish way. Thus, the teacher may say, "Read and I will give you some nuts or figs; I will give you a bit of honey." With this stimulation the child tries to read. He does not work hard for the sake of reading itself, since he does not understand its value. He reads in order to obtain the food. . . . As the child grows and his mind improves, what was formerly important to him loses its importance, while other things become precious. The teacher will stimulate his desire for whatever he wants then. The teacher may say to the child, "Read and I will give you beautiful shoes or nice clothes." Now the child will apply himself to reading for the sake of new clothes and not for the sake of study itself. . . . As his intelligence improves still more and these things, too, become unimportant to him, he will set his desire upon something of greater value. Then his teacher may say to him, "Learn this passage or this chapter, and I will give you a *denar* or two." Again he will try to read in order to receive the money, since

money is more important to him than study. The end which he seeks to achieve through his study is to acquire the money which has been promised him. When his understanding has so improved that even this reward has ceased to be valuable to him, he will desire something more honorable. His teacher may say to him then, "Study so that you may become the president of a court, a judge, so that people will honor you and rise before you as they honor So-and-So." He will then try hard to read in order to attain his new goal. His final end then will be to achieve the honor, the exaltation, and the praise which others might confer upon him.

Now, all this is deplorable. However, it is unavoidable because of man's limited insight, as a result of which he makes the goal of wisdom something other than wisdom itself, and assumes that the purpose of study is the acquisition of honor, which makes a mockery of truth. Our sages called this learning not for its own sake. . . .

. . . The masses . . . lose nothing when they do the commandments out of fear of punishment and out of hope for reward, since they are not perfect. It is good for them insofar as it strengthens and habituates them in loyalty to what the Torah requires. Out of this effort they may be reawakened to the knowledge of the truth and serve God out of love. This is what the sages meant when they said, "A man ought always to labor in the Torah, even if not for its own sake! For doing it not for its own sake, he may come to do it for its own sake."

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<sup>1</sup>Isadore Twersky (Ed.), *A Maimonides Reader*. New York: Behrman House, 1972. Pp. 404-407.