

## GUIDE 1:62 THE NAME OF THE ROSE

“It is cold in the scriptorium, my thumb aches. I leave this manuscript, I do not know for whom; I no longer know what it is about: *stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus.*”

(*The Name of The Rose*, Umberto Eco, p. 502, Harcourt 1983. Translated: “The ancient rose remains only as a name; all that is left for us are the simple names.” *De Contemptu Mundi*, Bernard of Morlay, 12th Century.)

### SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

There are three concealed names of God. They have, respectively, four letters, twelve letters, and forty-two letters. The first name is the Tetragrammaton. We do not know the other two names. The priests used the first two in the holy Temple during the Priestly Blessing and on Yom Kippur. They originally used the Tetragrammaton, but later substituted the twelve-letter name for it, “when the people became corrupted.” Even when pronouncing this name, they said it indiscernibly under the singing of the other priests. They taught the names only to a few priests, once in seven years. We do not know what the forty-two letter name meant or how they employed it, but it was holy and expressed a concept of God “very close to the truth.” They taught the forty-two letter name to those who had attained the prerequisites for prophecy, especially including *eternal memory*. We no longer know the meaning of any of these names. The pronunciation of twelve and forty-two letter names was not important, for they were just short phrases that express divine doctrines in human language. Because they were secret names of unknown pronunciation, deceivers misused them to obtain power and money.

### WHY THESE NAMES?

Maimonides does not tell us why he focused on just these three names, since there are other secret and peculiar names in Jewish lore. In Mishneh Torah he lists seven names that cannot be erased, but the twelve and forty-two letter names are not among them (*Ysodai* 6:2). Perhaps he follows the Talmud, which tells the history of these particular names in *Kiddushin* 71a.

Nor does he tell us what the twelve and forty-two letter names mean. What he does say is that these “names” (*shemot*) must be phrases, not single words of twelve or forty-two letters, and that the phrases express concepts of divinity. The idea that multi-lettered “names” are phrases embodying concepts may come from the Midrash. Kafih, footnote 11, cites *Bereshit Rabba* 42:19:

“R. Eleazar said in R. Jose’s name: The Holy One, blessed be He, promised our forefather that He would redeem his children with these two letters (*Y-H*); but if they repented, He would redeem them with seventy-two letters. R. Judan said: In the passage, ‘[Or hath God assayed] to go and take Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, and by wonders, and by roar, and by a mighty hand, and by an outstretched arm, and by great terrors’ (Deuteronomy 4:34), you will find seventy-two letters; and should you object that there are seventy-five, deduct the second nation, which is not to be counted. R. Abin said: He redeemed them by His name, the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, consisting of seventy-two letters.”

My search for the names was not especially productive or convincing. Rashi says that these two names of twelve and forty-two letters have been lost (*lo pirshu lanu*), and, as usual, he is closest to the truth (*ad loc.*, *Kiddushin*, 71a). The commentator Efodi (R. Profiat Duran, d.1414 C.E.) belabors the two names in the spirit of Maimonides’ statement that they are phrases expressing concepts. Efodi says that the twelve letters spell *mkhuv mtzot*, i.e., “necessarily existent.” He says that the forty-two letter name is: “First cause—uncaused—necessarily existent—necessary of existence,” *ila rishona bilti alula mkhayuvat ha-mitzot ha-krekhit b’nmtza*. These phrases

do add up to 12 and 42 letters respectively. I do not know why Efodi created these phrases, or why he thought anyone would accept his proposals. He does not say that they came to him by prophecy and it is hard to see from what tradition he could have got them. No, sooner than he mentions them, Efodi expresses doubt: “It is possible that it could be something other than this, only God knows,” *v'efshar sh'yihyeh zulat zeh, v'ha-el yodea*.

### THE TWELVE-LETTER NAME

A better (if not completely convincing) suggestion was made by Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne (Narboni, d. 1362 C.E.), who wonders why Maimonides had not looked up the twelve-letter name in the *Sefer Ha-Bahir*. Narboni does not question whether Maimonides had seen the *Bahir*. The *Bahir* was first published in 1176 in Provence. It is a fundamental early work of Cabala. The passage he refers to is 111:

“111. Rabbi Ahilai sat and expounded: What is the meaning of the verse [from the prayer liturgy], ‘God (YHVH) is king, God (YHVH) was king, God (YHVH) will be king forever and ever’? This is the explicit name (*shem ha-meforash*), for which permission was given that it be permuted and spoken. It is thus written [regarding the Priestly Blessing] (Numbers 6:27), ‘And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.’ This refers to the Name containing twelve letters. It is the name used in the Priestly Blessing, ‘May God bless you...’ It contains three names [each having four letters] making a total of twelve. Its vowel points are *yafa'al yfoel yifol* (in other words, if you wrote *Y\*H\*V\*H* with the same vowel points as here under the letters *y\*f\*a\*l*). If one safeguards it and mentions it in holiness, then all his prayers are heard. And not only that, but he is loved on high and below, and immediately answered and helped. This is the Explicit Name that was written on Aaron's forehead.” (*The Bahir*, trans. and comm. by Aryeh Kaplan, Weiser 1989.)

According to the *Bahir*, the twelve-letter name would be derived these ways:

1) The Tetragrammaton would be repeated three times, but vocalized in a pattern based on “God is, God was, God will be king.” That is, it would be vocalized three times according to the vocalization of “is...was...will be,” *hoveh haya yihyeh*. This makes some sense, since the root of the Tetragrammaton could conceivably be the same as the root of “is,” *hoveh*, *h\*v\*h*.

2) The Tetragrammaton would be written thrice with vowel substitutions in the pattern of the initial words of the Priestly Blessing (“May God bless you and guard you, May God cause his countenance to shine on you, and May God place in you peace”: *yvarekhekha adonai v'yishmarekha, yaer adonai panav elekha v'huneka, ysa adonai panav elekha, v'yasem l'kha shalom*). That is, we would vocalize it three times according to the first word of each clause: *yvarekhekha... yaer... ysa...*

The practical working out of all this is quite murky. The *Bahir* is trying to make us understand God's purely active character by tying it into Hebrew verb patterns. Our recognition of this verbification is more important than trying to figure out how it was accomplished. (I confess that I gave up trying. Aryeh Kaplan transliterates above according to the pattern *yafa'al yfoel yifol*, the *Bahir* using variations of the paradigmatic verb *paal* to demonstrate the vocalization, which is a typical approach. However, the Hebrew text included at the back of his volume shows the vocalization differently, *yifa'al y'foel yifol*. Friedlander's version of the *Bahir*'s vocalization is also different: *yafa'al yafel yifol*. The anonymous footnote to R. Shem Tov's commentary in the Ibn Tibbon Hebrew translation of the Guide, 93a, also has a different vocalization, but improves on the other attempts by asserting that the vocalization of the first Tetragrammaton is in the *piel* verb construction or mood (*binyan*), the second in the *hifil* construct, and the third in the *kal* construct. The verb in the *piel* is intensive, in the *hifil* causative, while the *kal* is simple.)

The point of the *Bahir*, irrespective of how it may have meant to array the vocalizations and the moods, was to make the Tetragrammaton into a verb, or, more accurately, three verbs (I could not figure out how to make this

translate into English). The Midrash makes God's name a verb in order to demonstrate that God is always active, *in actu*, not affected by potentiality in any way. Perhaps the priests learned this doctrine together with the pronunciation. Maimonides does not say. But he does recount the history of the use of the twelve-letter name:

“[This] refers [not just] to the pronunciation but also to its meaning.... Our Sages knew in addition a name of God which consisted of twelve letters, inferior in sanctity to the Tetragrammaton. I believe that this was not a single noun, but consisted of two or three words, the sum of their letters being twelve, and that these words were used by our Sages as a substitute for the Tetragrammaton, whenever they met with it in the course of their reading the Scriptures, in the same manner as we at present substitute for it *aleph, daleth*, etc. [i.e., *Adonai*, ‘the Lord’]. There is no doubt that this name also, consisting of twelve letters, was in this sense more distinctive than the name *Adonai*.... There is a tradition, that with the death of Simeon the Just, his brother priests discontinued the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton in the [Priestly] Blessing (*Yoma* 39b; *Menakhot* 109b.); they used, instead, this name of twelve letters. It is further stated, that at first the name of twelve letters was communicated to every man; but when the number of impious men increased it was only entrusted to the worthiest among the priests, whose voice, in pronouncing it, was drowned amid the singing of their brother priests [to conceal it]. Rabbi Tarphon said (Talmud, *Kiddushin*, 71a), ‘Once I followed my grandfather to the daïs [where the blessing was pronounced]; I inclined my ear to listen to a priest [who pronounced the name], and noticed that his voice was drowned amid the singing of his brother priests.’”

Thus, though the twelve-letter name was also a metonym used instead of the Tetragrammaton, it was “more distinctive” than the metonym *Adonai*. In the last chapter, we saw that *Adonai* tended to shed any specific meaning as “Lord” to act as the direct metonym. By contrast, the twelve-letter name communicated some doctrine so central to God that they made it the first substitute for the Tetragrammaton. Perhaps this concept was the eternally active character of God, as the *Bahir* suggests. Maimonides does not say.

Aryeh Kaplan in *Meditation and the Bible*, p. 143, holds that the twelve-letter name has the power to banish depression, and that it is the reverse initials of the twelve tribes. Kaplan also discusses the forty-two letter name. He maintains that it stands for *Maaseh Bereshit* gematrically, and so symbolizes the power of creation. Most mystics hold that the forty-two letter name is taken from the number of initial letters to the morning prayer *ana b'koakh*.

I have seen explanations that are more elaborate. See, for instance <http://home.utah.edu/~rfs4/jkm.htm> at 10.8 (self-published by Jeff Spiegel as *Dancing with Angels*). This lists every possible derivation of the names, at enormous length.

### **THE FORTY-TWO LETTER NAME: ETERNAL MEMORY**

Though we have forgotten the meaning and the pronunciation of the names, some things seem to remain in memory. Memory, its loss and recovery, is the key to this chapter.

About the middle of the chapter, Maimonides makes the following series of statements that focus the concept of memory. He ostensibly discusses a different idea, that the pronunciation of these names is less important than their meaning:

“...observe now that the instruction in regard to the names of God extended to the signification of each of those names, and did not confine itself to the pronunciation of the single letters which, in themselves, are destitute of an idea....Those two names must have included some metaphysical ideas. It can be proved that one of them conveyed profound knowledge, from the following rule laid down by our Sages: ‘The name of forty-two letters is exceedingly holy; it can only be entrusted to him who is modest, in the midway of life, not easily provoked to anger, temperate, gentle, and who speaks kindly to his fellow men.’”

He who understands it, is cautious with it, and keeps it in purity, is loved above and is liked here below; he is respected by his fellow men; *his learning remaineth with him (talmudo mtkayim b'yado)*, and he enjoys both this world and the world to come.' So far in the Talmud (Kiddushin 71a). How grievously has this passage been misunderstood! Many believe that the forty-two letters are merely to be pronounced mechanically; that by knowledge of these, without any further interpretation, they can attain to these exalted ends, although it is stated that he who desires to obtain a knowledge of that name must be trained in the virtues named before, and go through all the great preparations which are mentioned in that passage. On the contrary, it is evident that all this preparation aims at a knowledge of metaphysics (*inyanim elohim*, lit.: "divine concepts"), and includes ideas which constitute the 'secrets of the Law,' as we have explained (1:35). In works on metaphysics (*b'madai ha-elohut*, lit.: "divine science") it has been shown that *such knowledge, i.e., the perception of the active intellect (ha-sagat ha-sekhel ha-poel), can never be forgotten (ee efshar l'ishkoakh oto): and this is meant by the phrase 'his learning remaineth with him.'*" (My emphases)

The phrase, "his learning remaineth with him," does not occur in our version of the Talmud, *Kiddushin 71a* (I checked the authoritative *Snunit* version at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem online, which also lacks the phrase). Schwarz comments, note 13, in Hebrew, that Maimonides' version contains "minor changes." We know that Maimonides had access to ancient manuscripts of the Talmud that he claimed were superior to the then current copies (see MT, *Mishpatim, Malveh v'Loveh 15:2*; thanks to David Guttman for this reference. Davidson, Oxford, 2005, 82-83).

The idea of the passage is that the priest must prepare to receive the forty-two letter name with the same preparations required of the initiate to *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*. These are the same requisites that Maimonides gave for divine science (maturity, acquisition of religious and philosophical scholarship, and, most importantly, intellectual modesty). The student needed these attainments in order to make the imagination serve the intellect, rather than the opposite. It now appears that the point of such preparations is to reach the stage where "his learning remaineth with him." This stage is the point where he attains "perception of the active intellect." The keynote of this concept of the active intellect is the eternal retention of memory.

R. Shem Tov and Even-Shmuel maintain that the forty-two letter name spells out this concept. Kafih and Friedlander both note connections between this idea and Greek philosophy. Kafih seems to hear echoes of it in Plato's *Phaedrus*, and Friedlander in Aristotle's *De Anima*, but the references in both places concern the active intellect, not so clearly the retention of memory. The Muslim philosopher Avicenna (980-1037) makes the connection with memory clear. For Avicenna a man does not have to *recall* a thought from his physical memory, he can rejoin with the active intellect to recover it. (Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge, in *Maimonidean Studies*, Vol. 3, p. 95 finds the source for this idea in Ibn Bajja, d. 1138). The eternal recovery of ideas is possible because pure thought does not participate in the transiency of matter.

### **PROPHECY AS THE RECOVERY OF MEMORY**

How do we rejoin the active intellect to recover our eternal memory?

Maimonides gives the answer in *Commentary on the Mishnah (Khelek, Sanhedrin 10:1)*, in the sixth of his 13 Fundamental Principles of Judaism, on prophecy:

"One should know that among men are found certain people so gifted and perfected that they can receive pure intellectual form. Their human intellect clings to the Active Intellect, whither it is gloriously raised. These men are the prophets; this is what prophecy is." (Arnold Wolf trans., in Twersky, *Maimonides Reader*, 418-419.)

But we also know that, with the exception of Moses, the intellect of the prophets only “clings” to prophecy, that is, to the active intellect, *intermittently*, in states of *altered consciousness*. “Some perceive the prophetic flash at long intervals; this is the degree of most prophets,” because “I make myself known unto him in a vision, and speak unto him in a dream” (Guide, Introduction and 2:42, quoting Numbers 12:6. *Lawa'ih*, the Arabic term Maimonides used for “flashes” in his Introduction, is a standard Sufic term. The Sufi sages as-Sarraaj and Jami both wrote “books of flashes,” *Kitab al Luma'* and *Lawa'ih*, respectively).

The conclusion is that the initiate to the holy name was a priest who had attained prophecy. To attain that state he nullified the corporeal barriers to participation in or conjunction with the active intellect. Once he attained prophecy, he remained a prophet halakhically even though prophecy only came to him from time to time in flashes.

That is because time is an irrelevant consideration. The state of the active intellect is not a temporal state, since it is incorporeal. It is also non-numerically single, again, because of its incorporeality. Because it is one and non-temporal, what it knows it always knows. It is our link to God. It is the eternal “image of God” in which we are made (Guide 1:1, “On account of the Divine intellect with which man has been endowed, he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty”). That is what Maimonides means when he says that they entrusted the divine science of the name of God only to one who attained the state where his prophetic perception “can never be forgotten.”

### WHY WERE THE NAMES CONCEALED?

Originally, the names were taught openly, both their pronunciation and their attendant meaning, with the exception of the Tetragrammaton, which was only uttered by the priests when they gave the Priestly Blessing and by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. They concealed the Tetragrammaton from the public because “...the majesty of the name and the great dread of uttering it are connected with the fact that it denotes God Himself” (Guide 1:61).

At first, they did not withhold twelve-letter name from students. In our chapter, Maimonides says, “Whoever wished to learn it had the opportunity given to him without any reserve.” This suggests that this name did not embody any concepts from *Maaseh Bereshit* or *Maaseh Merkava*, subject, as such concepts were, to Mishnah *Hagigah's* rule against public dissemination. Thus, while this name was “more distinctive” (*miyukhad yoter*) than the metonym *Adonai* in its reference to God, it did not disclose any secret.

Referring to both the twelve and forty-two letter names, he goes on to say that they “necessarily taught *some sort* of divine science” (Pines' trans. *Kafih: mosifim ydiah m'suyemet b'elohut b'hekhlal*. Ibn Tibbon gives *k'tzat hokhma* instead of *ydiah m'suyemet*). Even-Shmuel reads “some sort” closely to mean some inferior part of divine science,

“...not the essence of divine knowledge, which is the unity of subject and object in God, but something preparatory to divine knowledge, i.e., the critical examination and clarification of the divine attributes. The Tetragrammaton is the unique name of God which articulates the divine essence, while these other names articulate the divine revelation *in the world*.” (My trans. of Even-Shmuel's comm., v.1, p. 329, *ad loc.*)

In other words, when the Talmud (Kiddushin 71a, quoted by Maimonides immediately after his remark about “some sort” of knowledge), states that the adept qualified to learn these names is one who “enjoys both this world and the world to come,” it means that they taught him the two names that express divine action in *this* world. Having acquired this preparatory knowledge, he could then go on in independent meditation and study to encounter the four-letter name of the divine essence, which manifests itself in the “world to come,” which is the world of the active intellect. While the twelve-letter name openly demonstrates God's action in this world, the

forty-two letter name, evocative of the active intellect, is the transitional name that ushers us into the realm of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*, the realm of the one unique name of the divine essence, the Tetragrammaton.

Nonetheless, despite the terrestrial location of these two names, and despite the fact that they were once taught publicly, the sages concealed them. Maimonides explains why, in this terse and difficult line:

“When, however, unprincipled men (*perutzim*, Judeo-Ar.: מטיון, see Friedlander, p. 232, note 3) had become acquainted with that name which consists of twelve letters and in consequence had become corrupt in faith—as is sometimes the case when persons with imperfect knowledge become aware that a thing is not such as they had [originally] imagined—the Sages concealed also that name...” *v'kaasher hayu b'nai adam perutzim lomdim zeh ha-shem ben shteim esrei otot u'mshabshim b'kakh et ha-deot, k'fi sh'ye'era l'mi sh'aino shalem im yada, sh'ain ha-davar k'fi sh'haya m'dama l'atzmo m'kedem, l'fikakh ha-elimo gam shem zeh...*

What was wrong with these “unprincipled men” was that they were intellectually unethical. Maimonides returns to this important theme frequently (see, in particular, Guide 1:32). We must be intellectually modest when we confront that which is different from what we originally imagined.

This educational principle becomes, for Maimonides, a moral demand. Thus, in 1:32, he makes it the basis for his analysis of the heresy of Akher. It ascends to the highest moral sphere because the substitution of imagination for knowledge in divine science tends to idolatry, the exaltation of the brazen image. These men become “corrupt in faith.” Shocked that things are not what they seemed, they revolt against the good and become morally degenerate.

Shem Tov provides a homely parable to explain this. A man finds and adopts an abandoned infant. The foundling grows up believing this man is his father. Someone asks him why he honors this man as a father who only found him in a dung-heap. Shocked, the orphan comes to reject and despise the man whom he ought to have honored more than any biological father. It is something like the disappointed generation of the 1960's, who revolted against the world they inherited, failing to recognize that they ought to have honored their parent's patrimony.

Maimonides, in Guide 1:32, damns this degeneration in powerful language, citing Proverb 25:16: “Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it”:

“If, on the other hand, you aspire to apprehend things that are beyond your apprehension; or if you hasten to pronounce false, assertions the contradictories of which have not been demonstrated or that are possible, though very remotely so—you will have joined Elisha Aher. That is, you will not only not be perfect, but will be the most deficient among the deficient; and it shall so fall out that you will be overcome by imaginings and by an inclination toward things defective, evil and wicked—this resulting from the intellect's being preoccupied and its light's being extinguished.” (Pines trans.)

The problem becomes, if possible, much worse, with the forty-two letter name, because it expresses a more profound concept than the twelve-letter name (see below: *Hasidei Ashkenaz*). Both express the divine revelation in our world. While it may be that the twelve-letter name expressed Maimonides' doctrine of attributes, the forty-two letter name moves us toward the highest level of divine science, the ultimately prophetic encounter with the active intellect. Because the forty-two letter name does express this more profound knowledge, its misunderstanding by the imagination leads to a more profound degeneration, the descent into sorcery and witchcraft.

## HASIDEI ASHKENAZ

“When bad and foolish men were reading such passages, they considered them to be a support of their false pretensions and of their assertion that they could, by means of an arbitrary combination of letters, form a *shem* (name) which would act and operate miraculously when written or spoken in a certain particular way. Such fictions, originally invented by foolish men (lit. “by the first evil fool,” *ha-rasha ha’baar ha-rishon*), were, in the course of time, committed to writing, and came into the hands of good but weak-minded and ignorant persons who were unable to discriminate between truth and falsehood, and made a secret (*v’ha-tsinuam*) of these *shemot*. When after the death of such persons those writings were discovered among their papers, it was believed that they contained truths: for, (Proverbs 14:15) ‘The simple believeth every word.’”

That is, since the “good but weak-minded” people thought that the *shemot* were holy names, they would not destroy these inscriptions. They, therefore, secreted them in storage with other abandoned but sacred articles. When their heirs opened these *genizot* they found those writings stored there. The peculiarity of these inscriptions combined with their age to clothe them with authority.

Who were the “bad and foolish men” that Maimonides complains of? My best guess is that he is referring to some of the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* or to Sephardim who acted similarly or under their influence. The *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, (lit.: pious Germans) was a religious movement of the 12th and 13th centuries which began in Regensburg, Speyer, Worms and Mainz. It spread to most of Germany and France. It produced a vast esoteric literature, mostly under the family name of the Kalonymids, especially Yehuda Ha-Hasid (d. 1217). Joseph Dan, writing in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, says that they believed in the strength of the holy names and the mystic power of the letters of the holy language of Hebrew. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Yale 1988, p. 98, affirms:

“Several indications of recitations of names—either angelic or divine—are extant in *Heikhalot* literature (2nd—8th Century). These recitations ... were still practiced during the Gaonic period (to Maimonides’ time). There is conclusive evidence that the pronunciation of mystical names was known and cultivated in Germany, at least during the lifetime of R. Eleazar of Worms (1165—1230).”

Moshe of Taku (13<sup>th</sup> Century) was a student of Yehuda Ha-Hasid who turned against these practices. He testifies:

“They set themselves up as prophets by practicing the pronunciation of holy names, or sometimes they only direct their intention upon them without actually pronouncing the words. Then a man is seized by terror and his body sinks to the ground. The barrier in front of his soul falls, he himself steps into the centre and gazes into the faraway, and only after a while, when the power of the name recedes, does he awaken and return with a confused mind to his former state. This is exactly what the magicians do who practice the exorcism of demons... (he) falls down on the ground where he was standing and his veins become cramped and stiff and he is as one dead. But after a while he rises without consciousness and runs out of the house, and if one does not hold him at the door he would break his head and his limbs. Then when he again becomes a little conscious of himself he tells them what he has seen.” (In Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 102, Schocken 1974, and Idel *op.cit.* 98)

But compare Maimonides in Mishneh Torah:

“...[The prophets] all, [however, share certain commonalities]. They receive prophetic visions only in a visionary dream or during the day after slumber has overtaken them, as [Numbers 12:6] states: ‘[I make Myself known to him in a vision. I speak to him in a dream.’ When any of them prophesy, their limbs tremble, their physical powers become weak, they lose control of their senses, and thus, their minds are free to comprehend what they see, as [Genesis 15:12] states concerning Abraham: ‘and a great, dark dread

fell over him.’ Similarly, Daniel [10:8] states: ‘My appearance was horribly changed and I retained no strength.’” (*Ysodai Ha-Torah* 7:2).

What is the difference between the ecstatic enslaved by his imagination and the prophet? Outwardly, they are indistinguishable. But the prophet has taken pains to prepare himself intellectually and morally before receiving the vision (*ibid.*, 7:1, Guide 1:32). The preparations result in his intellectual control over his imagination. By contrast, according to Maimonides, the ecstasies made a fantastic magical power out of the pronunciation of the names, to the exclusion of their intellectual content.

Maimonides opposed these trends, because they made Cabala a public profession, with the inevitable vulgarization that results. He always reminds us of Mishna *Hagigah*’s proscription of the public teaching of the *Maaseh Bereshit*. These ecstasies reified the divine name by emphasizing pronunciation over meaning, with the inevitable descent into magic. Maimonides considered them like the false priests who originally created idolatry through deception (MT *Avoda Zara* 1:2, *Letter on Astrology*).

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