

THE GUIDE

**An Explanatory Commentary
On Each Chapter of Maimonides' Guide Of The Perplexed**

By

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For my father,
Franklyn Alexander
Alav Ha-Shalom

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RELEVANT CHRONOLOGY

c.550	BCE	Pythagoras born
470	BCE	Socrates born
c.428	BCE	Plato born
384	BCE	Aristotle born
323	BCE	Euclid born
205	BCE	Plotinus born, beginning of Neoplatonism
168	BCE	Ptolemy died
20	BCE	Philo born
c.200		Mishna appears
c.500		Talmud appears
490		John Philoponus, Christian Aristotle critic, “Christian Kalām”
570		Muhammad born
650		Qur’an written
657		Damascus Caliphate (Umayyad)
680		Shiite Islam commences
691		Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem
732		Muslims stopped at Battle of Tours
748		Wasil ibn Ata died, began Mutazilite Kalām
754		Baghdad Caliphate (Abbasid)
755		Cordova Caliphate (Umayyad). Ends 1031
833		<i>Mihna</i> (inquisition) continues 15 years, persecution of Qur’an literalists by Mutazilites
833		Ibn Hanbal tried, flogged by <i>Mihna</i> : reaction leads to end of Mutazila dominance
850		Al-Farabi born
882		Saadia Ben Joseph Gaon born
969		Abu al-Hasan al-Ash’ari, died, Asharite Kalām succeeds Mutazilite Kalām
980		Avicenna born
1031		End of Umayyad Caliphate in Cordova
1058		Ghazali born
1080		Bakhyia Ibn Pakuda writes <i>Hovot ha-Levavot</i> , “Duties of the Heart”
1086		The Almoravids defeat the Christians in Spain

1099	The Crusaders capture Jerusalem.
1110	Maimon ben Joseph, Rabbinical judge in Cordova, father of Maimonides, born
1126	Averroes born
1137/8	Maimonides born
1140	Yehuda ha-Levi writes the <i>Kuzari</i>
1147	Almoravids overthrown in Maghrib (N. Africa) by the Almohads under Abd al-Mu'min
1148	Almohads in Cordova.
1149	Yosef Ibn Tzadik of Cordova, Author, <i>Olam ha-Katan</i> , "Microcosm," died
1151	Jews flee Spain, including Maimon family. Maimonides 13 years old.
1151	Maimon family location unknown to 1160
1158	Maimonides writes <i>Milot Ha-Higayon</i> , Treatise on Logic, in Arabic
1160	Maimonides in Fez, till 1165
1165	Maimonides in Acre. Visits Jerusalem. Arrives in Cairo.
1168	Maimonides completes <i>Perush al ha-Mishna</i> , "Commentary on the Mishnah," in Arabic
1169	Maimonides' brother David drowned in the Indian Ocean on merchant expedition
1170	Almohads transfer Caliphate from Marrakesh to Seville
1171	Saladin displaces Fatimids in Egypt, founds Ayyubid Caliphate
1177	Maimonides head of Egyptian Jews
1180	Maimonides completes <i>Mishneh Torah</i> , in Hebrew
1185	Maimonides appointed physician to al-Fadil, Saladin's Vizier
1186	Maimonides' son, Avraham ben ha-Rambam (Abraham Maimonides), born
1190	Maimonides writes the <i>Moreh Nevukhim</i> , "The Guide of the Perplexed," in Arabic
1191	Maimonides writes <i>Maamar Tehiyat ha-Metim</i> , "Treatise on Resurrection," in Arabic
1204	Death of Maimonides in Egypt. Ibn Tibbon translates Guide into Hebrew
1232	Guide burned in Marseilles
1240's	Translation of Guide into Latin
1274	Thomas Aquinas died
1340	Hasdai ben Abraham Crescas, Commentator and Critic of Guide, born
1461	Shem Tov ben Joseph, Commentator of Guide
1881	Michael Friedländer translation of Guide in English
1887	Harry Wolfson born, died 1974

MAIMONIDES' INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED

THE WELL, THE PEARL AND THE GOLDEN APPLE

“The first purpose of this Treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms in books of prophecy.”
Guide p. 5, Pines translation.

“This treatise also has a second purpose: namely, the explanation of very obscure parables occurring in the books of the prophets...” p. 6.

OVERVIEW

The Introduction is the most important chapter of the Guide of the Perplexed, since that is where Maimonides explains his purposes and methods. The core of the Introduction is his examination of parables found in biblical prophecies.

The Guide of the Perplexed is many things, but Maimonides' several purposes converge on one goal: to train prophets to lead Israel toward messianic redemption. He had made prophecy a required belief in his Thirteen Principles of Faith. There had once been schools or guilds of prophets. The Guide is his college for the training of prophets.

However, just as Maimonides had various purposes for writing his Guide, the Guide also acquired various audiences. It looks as though he wanted these audiences to select themselves, and some few among them he meant to pursue prophetic training. Those few, who might not at first have known who they were, he meant to attend closely to his words so that they could reach his intended end, the revival of prophecy.

But there could be no prophecy without understanding the multilevel writing of the prophets. Scriptural language is the prism through which we view prophecy. Maimonides wrote that the first purpose of the Guide was to explain certain terms in the prophetic books. All those terms possess corporeal meanings, and most are anthropomorphic. Their usual corporeal definitions mask their incorporeal intent. They conceal the mystery of God's creation and provident guidance of this world.

He located the key to prophecy in the articulation and interpretation of parables. They are the archetypal *mythoi* by which the prophets channel their unutterable inspirations to the minds of men. That is why Maimonides says that the explanation of very obscure parables occurring in the books of prophets constitutes the second purpose of the Guide, while the explanation of their words was its first purpose. He achieves both purposes, first considering the parables here in the Introduction to the Guide, while analyzing the words of the prophets in his Lexicon (Guide 1:1 – 1:45).

Why parables? Parables voice hidden truths through their capacity to simultaneously reveal and conceal. Maimonides' Introduction demonstrates for us the correct technique for reading between the lines of those prophetic parables.

The three parables that he treats in his Introduction are the Parable of the Well, the Parable of the Pearl, and the Parable of the Golden Apple. These three parables teach, respectively, the secret method, means, and content of prophecy.

There have not been many scholarly treatments of this material, despite its evident importance, and its few commentators mostly fail to recognize its concealed level.

Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508, sometimes spelled Abarbanel) wrote on those three parables at length. He had been a statesman, commentator, and financier during the period of the Spanish expulsion. His commentary is indispensable to this study. My conclusion, however, is that Rabbi Abravanel did not comprehend Maimonides' understanding of parables. We must try to understand why he did not penetrate their concealed core.

(I use the Shlomo Pines translation in this chapter, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, University of Chicago, 1960. In the rest of this book I use Michael Friedlander's translation, first edition, undated, The Hebrew Publishing Company of New York. Hebrew translations are from R. Yosef Kafih, Mossad Ha-Rav Kook Publishing, 1977. *Appendix A* attached to this chapter is my translation of Abravanel's commentary on the three parables of the Introduction to the Guide. *Appendix B* treats certain grammatical issues. I refer to various commentators and translators, who I identify fully in the Preface to this volume. On schools of prophets: 1 Samuel 19:18–24; 1 Kings 18:4; 2 Kings 2, and 2 Kings 4:38–4:40. Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Belief: Commentary on the Mishnah, *Helek*. On prophecy: Mishneh Torah, *Yesodai HaTorah* chapter 7.)

I. THE WELL

THE SYSTEM OF PROPHECY

Maimonides' discussed his system of prophecy near the end of his Introduction to the Guide, pages 10-14.

The key to his system is the understanding of the biblical prophets' multilevel writing. Their devices uncover the truths hidden in Torah. In Pines' translation, these truths are "very obscure" (*ha-stomot meod*, "very closed from understanding," like a stopped up well).

This was not a discussion of philosophy. Prophecy differs from philosophy. Prophecy reaches toward the essence of God, while philosophy stops at divine existence (David Bakan, *Maimonides on Prophecy*, Jason Aronson Publ. 1991, p. 5-6, Principles 6, 7, and 8). Philosophy, however, provides intellectual preparation that the prophet needs to make sense of revelation. According to Maimonides, while all prophets are trained as philosophers, prophecy is a stage beyond philosophy and different from philosophy.

It is important to understand that the meaning of the word "prophecy" in English is only a small part of what it means for Maimonides. The ability to foretell events is a part of some prophecies, but is neither necessary nor sufficient for a definition. In Hebrew, the word for prophecy is *navua*, closely related to *beea*, sexual intercourse, indicating a sense of penetration in which the prophet receives divine influx.

"...The true reality and quiddity of prophecy consists in its being an overflow overflowing (Heb.: *shefa ha-shofa*) from God...through the intermediation of the *Active Intellect* (*ha-sekhel ha-poel*), toward the rational faculty (*koakh ha-divri*) in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty (*koakh ha-dameh*). This is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species..." (Page 369, Guide 2:36)

The "active intellect" is the conceptualization of that moment when the mind, which can know, does know. It is the "image of God" in which man is made (Guide 1:1). In the cabalist system it is the lowest sefirotic channel, the one that connects God to man.

Maimonides believed it necessary to prepare the rational and imaginative faculties to receive prophecy. Abravanel and the majority of non-cabalist rabbis disputed this. They also rejected the need for intermediaries in the prophetic process, like the active intellect. These critics held that prophecy is entirely miraculous: no human act can either aid or prevent it. Maimonides finds support for his contrary view in various rabbinic and scriptural accounts, and some mainstream and many cabalist rabbis agreed.

He quotes a series of texts of increasing depth, three of which are themselves parables, briefly commenting on them: the Parable of the Well, the Parable of the Pearl, and the Parable of the Golden Apple.

Several of these passages come from the beginning of the *Midrash to Song of Songs*, a work well known to Maimonides. The first parable to be treated, The Parable of the Well, explains why Solomon, author of Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, created parables:

“And it said in the Midrash: ‘To what were the words of the Torah to be compared before the advent of Solomon? To a well the waters of which are at a great depth and cool, yet no man could drink of them. Now what did one clever man do? He joined cord with cord and rope with rope and drew them up and drank. Thus did Solomon say one parable after another and speak one word after another until he understood the meaning of the words of Torah.’” (*Midrash to Song Of Songs* 1:8, p. 11 of the Guide, p. 9 in Soncino translation of the Midrash.)

The passage compares Torah to a well of great depth, whose hidden and cooling waters were closed off and unavailable to mankind. By linking words, concepts, and parables together, as one would link ropes to reach the depths of a well, Solomon drew forth the hidden teaching.

The Hebrew word for “well,” *be'er*, vocalized slightly differently, can also mean “clarity of understanding” or “clarification of understanding.” The concept of the well is important in the book of Genesis. The patriarch Isaac spent a large part of his career opening wells dug by Abraham but stopped up by the Philistines (*va'yystemum*, Genesis 26:18). Maimonides’ understanding of these passages is that the wells contain the secrets of the Torah. In cabala, the wells are the *sefirot* (*Zohar* II: 151b-152a).

The “words of Torah” mentioned in the Midrash are not the surface meaning of the biblical text, the *pshat*. In the Guide, Maimonides is not interested in *pshat*, and his explanations defy it. These “words of Torah” requiring descent in deep wells conceal the Torah’s esoteric level.

R. ABRAVANEL’S COMMENTARY ON THE PARABLE OF THE WELL

R. Abravanel analyzed the Parable of the Well in the context of the few lines in the Guide preceding and succeeding the passage. (For my translation of his commentary, see *Appendix A*.) Maimonides wrote:

“As I have mentioned parables, we shall make the following introductory remarks: *know* that the key to the understanding of all that the prophets, peace be on them, have said, and to the knowledge of its truth, is an *understanding* of the parables, of their *import*, and the meaning of the *words* occurring in them.” (Guide, p. 10, my emphasis.)

Abravanel learns from Maimonides that there are three essential aspects of all prophetic parables, a) the simple or apparent *understanding* of the external meaning of the parable (*pshat*); b) the *import* of the parable, that is, its moral, including that which was intended by its moral; and c) the explanation of the *words* of the parable. That is, we must understand how the equivocal or homonymous terms in the parable teach its moral.

Abravanel explains that this three-part approach is the key to understanding prophecies. For you could not comprehend the parable without knowing whether you should take it literally or on its deepest level. Maimonides continues:

“*You know* what God, may He be exalted, has said: ‘And by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes.’” (Hosea 12:11, Guide page 11, Bible trans. as in Pines’ text)

Abravanel comments: “Consider the words of Maimonides who brings four quotations from the Bible and two from the Midrashic literature.” The four biblical quotes are:

A: “And by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes,” (Hosea 12:11);

B: “Put forth a riddle and speak a parable,” (Ezekiel 17:2);

C: “They say of me, is he not a maker of parables,” (Ezekiel 21:5);

D: “To understand a word and a figure, the words of the wise and their dark sayings,” (Proverbs 1:6).

The two passages from the Midrash are the Parable of the Well and the Parable of the Pearl (*Midrash on Song of Songs* 1:8).

Abravanel asks why it was necessary to bring all of these supporting texts. He answers that the first proof text shows that prophecy comes from God to the prophets in the form of parables. They are in the form of parables because of the special quality of the recipient, his power of imagination, which can materialize (*sh 'yagshim*) the divine emanation. The prophet Hosea related what God told him about the mechanism of prophecy: “I have spoken unto the prophets, and I myself have multiplied visions, and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes.” This means that God’s message or emanation (influx) is clear and pure but its reception by the prophetic recipient can only be through his faculty of imagination, and he can only comprehend the influx through imaginative “similitudes.” These similitudes and parables then become the prophet’s educational devices.

The second biblical text, “Put forth a riddle and speak a parable,” clarified that when the prophet speaks to the people he speaks in parables. This is a different matter. The teaching that he personally received in the form of parables, he now relates to the mass of the people in parables.

Maimonides introduces the third biblical passage above by saying:

“And you know too that because of the frequent use prophets make of parables, the prophet has said: ‘They say of me, Behold, he speaketh but in parables!’” (Ezekiel 21:5, Leeser trans.).

According to Abravanel, this passage shows that prophets characteristically and usually speak in parables.

He says that the fourth passage clarified a distinction between the public teaching of the prophets and their parabolic writing. In public speech they are like the wise man who uses parables and then explains them so that his hearers can comprehend him. But in his *written* parable the prophet does not explain its meaning, leaving only the apparent meaning (*pshat*) of the surface of the text. Thus, Solomon writes, “To understand a word (*mashal*, i.e., proverb,) and a figure,” to teach that men should strive for the deeper meaning of written Proverbs and parables beyond the *pshat*, just as they are also commanded to labor in the study of Torah.

Having made this case, Abravanel thought that Maimonides still doubted whether he had appropriately clarified the prophetic parables. Up until this point, he had only been speaking of prophecy in the five books of the Torah and in the books of the prophets, but had not considered the Proverbs of Solomon, which are, by contrast, matters of wisdom and investigation (*hokrim*). That is why Solomon does not mention Torah here, but rather says, “to [those who] understand a word (proverb), and a figure; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.” Maimonides needed to relate the *Proverbs* of Solomon to the inner secrets of the Torah, i.e., by means of the Parable of the Well. Mankind needed that method, from the Solomonic books of wisdom, linking parable to parable, to draw from the well of Torah its subterranean level of meaning.

If Solomon wrote the Proverbs to help us understand the Torah, we might think that he meant them to clarify the commands (*mitzvot*) of the Torah. To the contrary, “To the one who understands a proverb and a figure,” refers to the fundamental secrets of the Torah, not its laws. Therefore, Maimonides says that:

“I do not think that anyone possessing an unimpaired capacity imagines that the *words of Torah* referred to here (in the Midrash of the Well), that one contrives to understand through the understanding of parables, are *ordinances* concerning the building of tabernacles, the *lulav* and the law of the four trustees.”

Abravanel, therefore, supplied the emphasis, “To a well the waters of which were at a great *depth* and cool.” Solomon was obviously not writing about legal or ethical matters whose meaning is revealed and straightforward, but rather to the Torah’s deepest foundations. When Maimonides said, “Rather what this text has in view here is without a doubt, the understanding of obscure [deep] matters,” he derived the term “deep, obscure (*amuk*),” from the phrase: “...The waters were at great depth and cool.”

The secrets of the Torah are not its “ordinances.” Maimonides had emphasized that the prophets did not introduce their parables to clarify our understanding of ritual law or civil law, those requirements necessary for the constitution of Jewish society.

But what were these “ordinances” that were not secrets of the Torah, those “tabernacles, the *lulav* and the law of the four trustees”? The tabernacle was the place ordained for divine communion with the Jewish people. It was essentially an architectural plan, but, as Sampson Raphael Hirsch shows in his Torah Commentary, it embodied a vast symbolic structure. The *lulav* is a palm frond waved on the Feast of Tabernacles, *Sukkot*. On another level, the shape of the frond represents man, and symbolically perfects him. The “law of the four trustees” (four different types of bailees) is the foundation of property, contract and tort law.

Now, though Maimonides seems to deprecate these three things in relation to the secrets of parables, they are not “small things” (see Mishneh Torah, *Book of Knowledge*, 4:13). He devotes most of Mishneh Torah to these things, and he assumed that his Guide readers were already familiar with them. They establish the Jewish commonwealth. Nonetheless, all this is extraneous to the discussion. They are irrelevant to the obscure secrets, except that such a polity is the assumed precondition for the preparation of the prophetic mind. In other words, there is no possibility of prophetic man without at least a halachic man.

Even Gentile prophets, like Balaam, are in some sense halachic men, as Noahide law adherents, since Noahide law is a halachic category. Maimonides calls Noahides *hasidei umot ha-olam*, “righteous gentiles.” But note that Maimonides calls Balaam “almost a prophet,” and only “when he was good” (Guide 2:45; and see Friedlander’s trans., note 1, p. 209, sifting what Maimonides meant in saying that Balaam “... was good.”).

THE PROPHET MUST TEACH

While Abravanel was correct in his interpretation of the Well Parable, as far as he went, to get the whole story we need the full Midrashic substratum of Maimonides’ text.

The Midrash, both those parts quoted and those not quoted by Maimonides, argues that the parable is the framework of a public teaching, which becomes the precondition for the attainment of higher levels of prophecy.

This concept of the public articulation of prophecy links to Maimonides’ concept of human imagination. The perfected imagination and the perfected intellect are the two necessary parts of the prophetic mind (page 369; 2:36). Under the influence of the divine influx, the prophet’s imagination produces archetypal images.

He articulates them through parables and other devices. Through this public profession the prophet achieves a *tikkun*, perfecting the community. This endows him with the blessing of further divine engagement.

The Midrash twice brings, close by the previous passages, this doctrine of the meaning of the public teaching. It uses the term the *ruakh hakodesh* (“spirit of holiness,” “inspiration”), which is the lowest degree of prophecy, but which is, nonetheless, the basic included level of all prophecies (Guide 2:45). The twin passages use the following identical language:

“Rabbi Yudan states: this is to show that whoever teaches the Torah publicly merits that *ruakh ha-kodesh* should rest upon him, for so did Solomon; he taught, and the *ruakh ha-kodesh* rested on him, and he composed three books: Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.” (*Midrash to Song of Songs* 1:8-9, pp. 9, 11)

This remarkable statement comes in two different contexts.

The first time, it is the conclusion following the Parable of the Well and the Parable of the Pearl in the Midrash. To restate it, the Torah and its truths were closed off and unavailable to mankind, like a stopped up well. Solomon created the parabolic method to uncover these doctrines and taught them in public. This act of teaching prepared Solomon for a higher level of prophecy and revelation. According to Rabbi Yudan, Solomon’s reward was the revelation that resulted in his sacred writings. After climbing Jacob’s ladder, the prophet brings the teaching back down in order to merit another ascent. This is a continuous three-step process: the rise to prophetic insight, teaching what has been learned, and the reward of a more profound mystical experience.

The context of the second iteration of Rabbi Yudan’s statement (1:9) was that Solomon had a single prophetic dream in which he suddenly knew the entire Torah and its secrets. Dreams are important in prophecy. According to Maimonides, prophecy comes in dreams to all prophets except Moses. The dream is the mediating channel through which truth penetrates the prophet’s imagination. But the account of Solomon’s wonderful dream was only the first step.

The Midrash then takes a second step. Solomon performed a public act to celebrate the prophetic dream, a *Simkhat Torah* (celebration of the Torah). Because this act was like a public teaching, the Midrash repeats Rabbi Yudan’s doctrine that Solomon merited the inspiration for his famous writings. Solomon could have kept the dream to himself or conducted some sort of private celebration. In this case, his teaching took the form of a public ritual celebration of his dream, a kind of public parable, which guaranteed his further prophetic ascent.

Maimonides’ system of prophecy begins to emerge. Solomon created the parabolic method, which enabled the public teaching of what was originally an obscure revelation. The sage’s reward was prophetic access to the entire Torah and its secrets. He got its meaning immediately. It was engraved upon his mind (*Mishneh Torah, Yesodai ha-Torah* 7:3).

His imagination conceived the parable, which conveyed the public teaching, including the public parable of ritual, understood at different levels by different members of the public. This double perfection of Solomon’s imaginative faculty, allowing him to both understand and to teach, made him an excellent creator of parables, who was then inspired to write the biblical books of wisdom.

* * *

We will see that R. Abravanel, interpreting the next parable of The Pearl, created a distinction between the written parables of the prophets and their oral teachings. But Abravanel’s distinction between oral and written deflects the point. The public writings are, as a practical matter, all that are available to us. The prophet constructs his parable in his public writing. Maimonides, in *Mishneh Torah, Yesodai Ha-Torah* 7:3, says that occasionally the

prophets themselves write the solution of their parables, but his emphasis is on unsolved written parables and their esoteric content.

Maimonides does not believe that everyone can learn the Torah at once (Introduction, pp. 17-20; 2:33). We need to employ various educational methods. The parabolic method is the means of acquiring the truths that are deep and closed from understanding. Only one Torah exists: Solomon's project, and Maimonides' as well, was to *teach* one entire revelation, the one hidden in the parable, and the one exposed in its textual surface. The Parable form conceals and reveals. Because it has different levels, different people absorb what they can. The student must integrate the teachings, linking those ropes to draw fresh water from the depths of the well.

II. THE PEARL

“Our Rabbis say: A man who loses a sela or a pearl in his house can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an issar. In the same way this parable in itself is worth nothing but by means of it you can understand the words of Torah. (Midrash to Song of Songs 1:8). This too is literally what they say. Now consider the explicit affirmation of the Sages, may their memory be blessed, that the internal meaning of the words of Torah is a pearl whereas the external meaning of all parables is worth nothing (pshat shel kol mashal aino kloom), and their comparison of a subject by its parable's external meaning to a man who let drop a pearl in his house which was dark and full of furniture. Now this pearl is there [b'bayit, in the house], but he does not see it, and does not know where it is. It is as though it were no longer in his possession, as it is impossible for him to derive any benefit from it until, as has been mentioned, he lights a lamp—an act to which an understanding of the meaning of the parable corresponds.” (Guide p. 11)

Maimonides is concerned in these passages to “understand all that the prophets...have said,” and the understanding of “*obscure matters*.”

His procedure is peculiar, and seems out of character. He has told us that he does not want to speak parabolically. By explaining parables with other parables, he would have “replaced one individual by another of the same species” (page 9). Yet this is precisely what he does. A further difficulty: what “parables” usually mean for us is not what they meant for Maimonides. If he had wanted us to read each difficult Torah passage as though it contained some general moral truism, like a fable from Aesop, he could have done so, and others had. But he does not.

Instead, he confounds the perplexed by introducing two difficult and perhaps contradictory parables, the Pearl and the Golden Apple, and then somehow uses them to explicate two other parables, Jacob's Ladder and the Married Prostitute (Proverbs 7:6-21). We must follow his words closely to catch his meaning.

The Pearl, like the Parable of the Well, is from the *Midrash on Song of Songs*. The text is difficult for Maimonides and his commentators because of the statement that the parable is “worth nothing.” Since the parables are biblical, they could not be worth nothing.

R. ABRAVANEL'S COMMENTARY ON THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL

Struggling with this, Rabbi Abravanel first tries to persuade us that Maimonides thought that the penny candle does not stand for the worthless language of the parable, but, surprisingly, that the house is the parable text. The pearl of the Torah secret is lost in the *pshat* verbiage of the parable in which it is *housed*. The penny candle's light disperses the darkness of the house, that is, the obscurity of the parable. The light, which is the light of the mind, discovers the pearl, which is the truth of Torah. (See *Appendix A* for a full translation of Abravanel's commentary.)

Abravanel argued that when the text employed the otherwise surplus phrase “his house,” it could just as well have been outside the house or in the city street. By picking out the house, the Midrashic author meant to emphasize that the house stands for the parable text. We glimpse the truth concealed in the words of the Torah parable just as we can find the pearl lost in the midst of the house.

The pearl was lost in a “house, dark and full of furniture.” The darkness of the house is the darkness of human understanding, “full of furniture,” all the many things and the many words that confuse the understanding (i.e., the *pshat*, the surface meaning). “Now the pearl is there (in the house),” meaning, the moral is contained in the parable, “but he does not see it,” meaning, that the hearer of the parable does not comprehend it because of this darkness. On this account, the light or taper mentioned by the Midrash does not represent the parable or its moral, but rather represents the insightful mind, since by means of it the pearl in the house can be found. Thus, the pearl is the moral, the house is the parable, and the taper is insight. The light of the taper is the mind, as “The soul of man is the candle of the Lord (*ner hashem nishmat adam*) searching all his inward parts” (Proverbs 20:27).

Abravanel was still uncomfortable with this interpretation. Even if the house is the parable it is Torah, and we should not say that “this parable is worth nothing.” On reconsideration, he doubled back to say that the worthless candle was indeed the parable, but that it was only the oral form of the parable employed as a teaching device, not the written biblical parable itself. The candle is an external matter (*davar m’hutz*) which we use to find the pearl. Similarly, the parable would be a verbal aid (external to the text) for studying, in order to understand the words of the text, but otherwise “worthless.” To put it another way, the Pearl taught that a prophet’s verbal parable is “worthless” *other than as* a device used for teaching Torah. By contrast, in the Well Parable, the parable was itself sacred.

Even this second gloss leaves him cold. The prophet’s verbal parable may just be an external teaching device. But it still contains its wise moral, so how could it be “worth nothing”? Abravanel ends up trying to prove, through an unconvincing though intricate analysis, that Maimonides must have considered the Parable of the Pearl to be superfluous. He argued that Maimonides included the Parable of the Pearl only because of its close juxtaposition on the Midrash page to the Parable of the Well (*Midrash To Song Of Songs* 1:8).

Abravanel, however, knew that Maimonides would not have agreed with him. Maimonides thought that the Well parable and the Pearl parable are about the same thing: i.e., that the written words of Torah conceal secrets of scripture. Abravanel disagreed, arguing that the Pearl parable was merely an oral explanation external to the text (*davar m’hutz*).

Abravanel concludes:

“This is what Maimonides understands the Midrash to be teaching. I do not agree. I consider the parable the [verbal] public teaching (*sh’osei ha’melamed*), and that this is what they compared to the candlelight... Though Maimonides pursues his explanation, the truth should find its own way.”

Thus, we have Abravanel’s battle with the Pearl Midrash. By reducing parables to public oral teaching, he fails to do justice to Maimonides’ concept. In addition, his answer does not avoid the problem of the parable being worthless.

REJECTED MIDRASHIC SOLUTIONS

Another solution to the problem of the worthless taper would be to say that it was merely inexpensive, not worthless. The most important things to us, air and water, are the cheapest; the least important, gold, is the dearest. *Midrash to Song of Songs* brought this solution in a couple of parables not mentioned by Maimonides or Abravanel, but which are obviously close conceptually and linguistically, and which may be the Midrash’s amendment to its prior statements. The first of these parables reads:

“‘As an apple tree among the trees of the wood’ (Song of Songs, 2:3). Rabbi Judah Ben Rabbi Simon made two comparisons. Just as an *apple* costs an *issar* and you can smell it ever so many times, so Moses said to Israel, ‘If you desire to be redeemed, you can obtain your redemption with a very little thing.’ They were like a man who suffered with his feet and who went around to all the doctors and could not find a cure, till at last one came and said to him, ‘if you want to be cured, there is a very easy way of doing it; plaster your feet with the excrement of cattle.’ So Moses said to Israel: ‘If you want to be redeemed you can obtain your redemption with a very simple thing; viz., ‘And he shall take a bunch of hissoop and dip (Exodus 12:22).’ They said to him: ‘Our master Moses, how much is this bundle of hissoop worth, four farthings or five!’ He replied to them: ‘were it only worth one, it will enable you to acquire the spoil of Egypt and the spoil of the Red Sea and the spoil of Sihon and Og and the spoils of the thirty-one kings [of Canaan].’” (Soncino translation, Maurice Simon, 2:11, pp. 98-99)

The hissoop was the herbal brush the Israelites used to daub blood on their doorposts so that the angel of destruction would not “come into your houses to smite” on Passover night. Daubing sheep blood was a symbolic destruction of the Egyptian god (Guide 3:46, Pines 582). Thus, the “worthless” hissoop saved Israel.

A slightly different version of the worthless taper appears on the same *Midrash* page following its original (*ibid.*, 1:9, pp. 9-10):

“Rabbi Phineas Ben Yair opened his exposition of the text, ‘If thou seek her as silver, etc.’ (Proverbs 11:4) if you seek after words of Torah as after hidden treasures, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, will not withhold your reward. If a man loses a *sela* or an *obol* (very small coin) in his house, he lights lamp after lamp, wick after wick, till he finds it. Now does it not stand to reason: if for these things which are only ephemeral and of this world a man will light so many lamps and lights till he finds where they are hidden, for the words of Torah which are life both of this world and of the next world, ought you not to search as for hidden treasures?”

Thus, if you would burn a multitude of candles altogether costing more than the mislaid “*sela* or an *obol*,” so consider how much more would you spend to acquire real value, the Torah. This is a different approach to the problem. The time and trouble taken to compose and link parables, like the linking of different ropes and the lighting of different candles, is necessary to obtain the great prize. A further passage on the next page compares the efforts of farmers rising early to procure manure and straw, asking if they would go to that much trouble for these inexpensive but obviously not worthless items, should you not go to infinitely more trouble to acquire Torah, the true value.

MAIMONIDES’ SOLUTION

But these are not the answers that Maimonides wants us to hear right now, even though he was undoubtedly familiar with them, and agreed with them.

Where Pines translates, “the external meaning of all parables is worth nothing,” Schwarz translates “external meaning” as “*pshat*” (others: *pashuto*). The *pshat*, therefore, would be worth nothing. Maimonides compares the *pshat* to the house furnishings in which the light of the understanding finds the concealed pearl.

The word *pshat* immediately suggests the Hebrew acronym *PaRDeS* (*pardes*=paradise/Eden) spelled from the first letters of *Pshat Remez Derash Sod*, which are the four levels of meaning: surface/apparent, symbolic, homiletic and esoteric. It is a historically open question whether Maimonides knew of this acronym before its mention in the published *Zohar*. Be that as it may, he had used the Hebrew term *pshat* in his Mishneh Torah, conscious of this contrast. As he will soon demonstrate, he is not concerned with the symbolic (*remez*) or homiletic (*derash*) interpretation of prophetic texts, but rather with the esoteric level of the text (*sod*), the

“obscure” matters. (Mishneh Torah, Ysodai HaTorah 4:13; *pshat*, in its Judeo-Arabic original was טאהר, see Efron’s discussion in *Philosophic Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, 20, 101 and 141)

This has not entirely solved the issue of the worthlessness of the parable, but it shows how Maimonides chose this particular Midrash to suggest the classic *pshat-sod* distinction. He has clearly made a selection from various Midrashic possibilities. The selection itself shows that this distinction between exoteric and esoteric is what occupies his mind in the Midrash of the Pearl. The parallel Midrashim do not help him since the issue of worthlessness was not his primary concern, as it was with Abravanel. In other words, in his phrase *pshat shel kol mashal aino kloom* (“the external meaning of the parable is worth nothing”), Maimonides’ emphasis was on *pshat* and its distinction from *sod*, not on the *aino kloom* (worthlessness). He emphasizes this very distinction between *pshat* and *sod* again eleven lines down in the Judeo-Arabic original, in his portrayal of the Parable of the Golden Apple (טאהר ובאטן).

But the language is still there: he called the parable’s *pshat* worthless, not inexpensive, though the parable is in the text of prophetic revelation, which is clearly not worthless. Maimonides meant that the parable text is valuable as linguistic camouflage of the *sod*. Sometimes we must conceal the *sod*, as the following parable makes clear. It follows that *pshat* may mislead, even purposefully. He tends to interpret *against pshat*. Why?

Pshat is human language, but the ultimate truths of Torah transcend language. *Pshat shel kol mashal aino kloom* means that in comparison with divine truth, human language is insignificant. It is just so much furniture. This is the core lesson of the first volume of the Guide of the Perplexed.

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What we have so far is that we must link parable with parable to find the truth concealed in the esoteric level of the text. The next step is to discover what that esoteric truth is, and why it must be concealed.

Maimonides had chosen the story of the Pearl from post-biblical rabbinic literature. It would not be on the same level with the story of the Golden Apple, which comes from the Bible itself, from the Proverbs of Solomon, the creator of parables. Maimonides explicitly contrasted the Parable of the Golden Apple, written by “The Sage,” Solomon, to the Parable of the Pearl, from “Our Rabbis.” By this means, according to Abravanel, Maimonides subtly disparaged the uncomfortable language of the Parable of the Pearl.

III. THE GOLDEN APPLE

“The Sage has said: *a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings (maskiyot) of silver*’ (Proverbs 25:11). Hear now an elucidation of the thought he has set forth. The term *maskiyot* denotes filigree trceries; I mean to say trceries in which there are apertures and very small eyelets, like the handiwork of silversmiths. They are so called because a glance penetrates through them; for in the [Aramaic] translation of the Bible the Hebrew term *va-yashqef*, meaning, he glanced—is translated *va-istekhe*. The sages accordingly said that a saying uttered with a view to two meanings (*davar ha-davir al afanav*) is like an apple of gold overlaid with silver filigree work having very small holes (*nekevim*). Now see how marvelously this dictum describes a well-constructed parable. For he says that in a saying that has two meanings – he means an external and an internal one (*pashut v’sod* : טאהר ובאטן) – the external meaning ought to be as beautiful as silver, while its internal meaning ought to be more beautiful than the external one, the former being in comparison to the latter as gold is to silver. Its external meaning also ought to contain in it something that indicates to someone considering it what is to be found in its internal meaning, as happens in the case of an apple overlaid with silver filigree-work having very small holes. When looked at from a distance or with imperfect attention, it is deemed to be an apple of silver; but when a keen-sighted observer looks at it with full attention, its interior becomes clear to him and he knows that it is of gold...”

(Guide pages 11-12. See Pines' implausible footnote 35: *istekhe* is "a verbal form deriving from the same root as the word *maskiyot*, Genesis 26:8, and then my *Appendix B* to this chapter).

The Sage, of course, is Solomon, the creator of parables. It is obvious that for Solomon the parable's language, representing the silver setting, is not worthless, but is an integral part of the secret. It is the means of viewing the secret, as well as being a finely wrought silver jewel. Unlike the implication of the Pearl allegory, in which the parable was worthless, here we recognize it as part of the structure of Torah itself.

R. ABRAVANEL'S COMMENTARY ON THE PARABLE OF THE GOLDEN APPLE

Rabbi Abravanel continues his analysis only briefly to discuss the Golden Apple (see *Appendix A* to this chapter). He fails to address this material with anything like the critical attention he brought to the Parables of the Well and the Pearl. This is peculiar, since Maimonides devoted more space to it, and since it usually impresses readers more than the two previous parables.

Abravanel did not start out on a positive note. He opened his commentary on the Golden Apple section by saying that he had no idea why Maimonides brought this further parable for our consideration.

He surmised, however, that Maimonides brought the Golden Apple parable as counterpoint to the Parable of the Pearl. Where the Pearl held that the external meaning of all parables is worthless, the Golden Apple taught that the relation of the moral to the parable is like the relation of apples of gold in settings of silver. Abravanel explained that the silver setting represents political wisdom (*hokhmah mdinit*) and advantageous practice (*u'maasit muelet*). Nonetheless, with respect to the golden moral, its parable setting is of subsidiary value. (Acolytes of Leo Strauss generally agree, taking the silver to represent political philosophy and the gold to be metaphysics).

Abravanel concluded:

"Maimonides cites this Proverb to support and establish his explanation of the [Pearl] Midrash, that the candle and its light were comparable to the understanding. He was thus compelled to equate the golden apple to the moral; the silver to the parable. Finally the filigree with its apertures, through which the gold inside could be seen, represents the penetration of the understanding mind, just as the light of the candle was also compared to the understanding."

That is all that Abravanel says about the Golden Apple. Abravanel says nothing of the problem of the word *va-yashqef*, which punctures the center of Maimonides' presentation. This explains why Abravanel missed the point of the account of the parables. I will sort out the issues raised by Maimonides with respect to this term, which is the most important term in his account of the Well, the Pearl and the Golden Apple.

LANGUAGE AS CAMOUFLAGE FOR DANGEROUS CONTENT

Maimonides engages in a curious act of linguistic exegesis, though it is really a type of camouflage. He seems to want to derive "filigree setting" from "seeing." To do this he starts with a Hebrew term (*maskiyot*), proceeds to a completely different Hebrew term (*va-yashqef*), develops its Aramaic equivalent (*va-istekhe*, from Onkelos' ancient Aramaic translation, c.110 C.E.), and reads that back into the original Hebrew term, a four step process. He made it even stranger since in each case the triconsonantal root of the three words is spelled differently. What is going on? (I analyze the grammatical and etymological issues in depth in *Appendix B* to this chapter.)

Maimonides explains that *maskiyot* is a type of setting that is filigreed, and, consequently, seen through. According to Pines and Schwarz, we should understand it by comparison with *yashqef*, which means to glance or observe. But *yashqef* has no linguistic connection with *maskiyot*. *Yashqef*, however, appears at Genesis 26:8 (not

in the Parable of the Golden Apple, Proverbs 25:11), where Onkelos' ancient Aramaic translation made it *istekhe*, which may share a couple of root letters with *maskiyot*, but only by switching the S sounding *sin* (שׁ) with the S sounding *samekh* (ס).

But the whole exercise seems forced and unnecessary.

Its only conceivable purpose was to get us to look at Genesis, rather than Proverbs, the source of the Golden Apple parable.

When we look at Genesis 26:8, we find the Hebrew term *yashqef* coupled with Onkelos' Aramaic translation *istekhe*, but we find much more than that...

Isaac and Rebecca go to live among the Philistines in Gerar. In what is now a family tradition, he tells the natives that she is not his wife but his sister, "Fearing lest the men of the place should kill me for Rebecca, because she is fair to look upon," whatever that means.

After some time Avimelech, king of the Philistines *yashqef*, "looked out" his window and to his surprise, saw, through the window of Isaac's house, that Isaac was having sex with Rebecca. The Hebrew punningly says, "behold *Yitzkhak mtzakhek Rivka*," i.e., Isaac, whose name is a joke (*tzakhek/Yitzkhak*), is "joking" (*mtzakhek*) or sporting with his wife. We know that *tzahek* is a euphemism for sex (Jastrow, p. 1274), but what we might not know is Rashi's explanation of *yashqef*.

Rashi's commentary would be unknown to Maimonides, but expressed traditional exegesis that he would know. The words "And Avimelech *looked out* (*va-yashqef*)" Rashi defines: *Ra'ahu m'shamesh mitato*, i.e., "he saw him having sex." It is difficult to reproduce the effect in English but it looks as though Rashi were translating *yashqef* as "to observe sex." His idiom for sex is transitive, as there is none in acceptable English, producing something like "Avimelech observed him fornicating her" (Jastrow p. 1601).

This points to the esoteric truth concealed by parables. To look through the filigree is to observe the sexual subtext of the prophetic parable. Maimonides explains why this should be the case:

"We have no intellectual cognition of our bringing somebody other than us to existence except through sexual intercourse." (Guide page 99, Pines' footnote 8).

The mystery of all mysteries is the mystery of creation. There is no way our language can comprehend what creation *ex nihilo* could mean other than through the sexual metaphor. But no metaphor does complete justice to what it describes. The student, having recognized the carnal imagery in scripture, must take it as metaphoric of the basic act of creation, that is, the *Maaseh Bereshit*.

David Bakan called this sublimation the "principle of Rabbi Akiva." Prof. Bakan learned this from the Talmud, where Rabbi Akiva first explained the plural "thrones" in Daniel 7:9 to refer to the thrones of God and *his beloved*, but then *re-explained* them as thrones of justice and grace.

"One passage says: 'His throne was fiery flames'; and another Passage says: 'Till thrones were placed, and One that was ancient of days did sit!' — There is no contradiction: one [throne] for Him, and one for His beloved (*dod*); this is the view of R. Akiba. Said R. Jose the Galilean to him: Akiba, how long wilt thou treat the Divine Presence as profane! Rather, [it must mean], one for justice and one for grace. Did he [R. Akiva] accept [this explanation from him, or did he not accept it]? — Come and hear: One for justice and one for grace; this is the view of R. Akiba."

R. Akiva's re-explanation of the prurient meaning of the Daniel passage was an act of sublimation, made necessary by his recognition of the explosive content concealed within the silver filigree of the parable. The meaning of the Parable of the Golden Apple is that the parable's content is reserved for those who know how to sublimate its corporeal language.

(Rabbi Akiva's principle: Bakan, *Maimonides On Prophecy*, p. 6, principle 27; pages 27 through 33; Talmud, *Hagigah* 14a and b. Soncino mistranslates the key term in 14a as "David" instead of *dod*—"beloved," in their own misleading act of sublimation.)

THROUGH THE LATTICE: THE PARABLE OF THE MARRIED HARLOT

In the remainder of the Introduction, from the second paragraph on page 12, until the "Instruction with Respect to This Treatise" on page 15, Maimonides distinguishes two types of parables, by *composition*. In one type, we interpret each term independently, as well as in combination. In the second type of parable, there is one teaching, and the many parable elements merely embellish it, make it more coherent, or further conceal the meaning. For the first type, he cites the parable of Jacob's Ladder (explained: Guide 1:15). For the second type, he recalls the story of the Married Harlot. Maimonides emphasizes this latter type.

The key to the Parable of the Married Harlot is in the opening text:

"For at the *window* of my house I looked forth through my *lattice* (*eshnabi nishkafti*); and I beheld among the thoughtless ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding."
(Proverbs 7:6-7)

Maimonides called this a "prophetic parable," p. 13, despite that Solomon was only "almost a prophet," "prophet in the more general sense of the term," that is, a second-degree prophet (see Guide 2:45, the twelve degrees of prophecy).

David Bakan has explained this material well in his *Maimonides on Prophecy*. My main point, however, is the connection between the *filigree* in the Golden Apple parable and the *latticed window* in the parable of the Married Harlot (Proverbs 7:6-27).

Maimonides maintains that "the entire book" of Proverbs is based on the ripe sexual analogy between the Married Harlot and *matter*, on the one hand, and *form* standing for either the husband or the "young man void of understanding." Matter embraces form, but will embrace another form at another time.

The young man meets the Married Harlot.

"Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtle of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him."

Maimonides is explicit: “The circumstances described in it (the parable) being of the kind typical for adulterers....Also the spoken words and other such details are of a kind typical of words spoken among adulterers.”

Compare what Moshe Halbertal termed “visual trespass” in the story of the four who entered *Pardes*, “One peeked and perished, one peeked and was smitten, one peeked and cut down sprouts, one ascended in peace and descended in peace” (page 14, *Concealment and Revelation*, Princeton, 2007, quoting *Tosefta Hagigah* 2:3). Here again we *peek* through a window, through a filigree, through a lattice, to witness a sexual encounter, which, on consideration, we realize is the metaphor for divine formation of matter. But matter can also lead to destruction.

The image also occurs in Song Of Songs 2:9-10, where its meaning is positive: “Behold he stands behind our wall, he looks in through the windows, he peers through the lattice, my beloved spoke and said to me...” Who is peering through the lattice? The *Midrash on Song of Songs* makes the sublimation: God himself is looking through, seeking the Jewish people.

At the other end of Proverbs is the contrasting story of another kind of married woman, a Woman of Valor, (31:10) who is self-reliant, self-conscious, and loyal to her husband, a metaphor of union to one true form. She represents matter, her husband form, and adheres to him as Israel must adhere to God.

The conclusion Maimonides wants us to draw from these parables is that we embody the divine creative principle by loyally embracing the true form, God (See Guide 3:51). By contrast, the empty “joyless search for joy” as Leo Strauss put it, results in destruction, for the proverb concludes: “He goeth after her (the Married Harlot) straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks.” The young man “devoid of understanding,” is destroyed by his pursuit of materialism: “Her house [is] the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:22 –27)

THE FLAME OF KNOWLEDGE

Finally, I want to focus on Maimonides’ first sentence of the Introduction section beginning “Instructions with Respect To This Treatise,” which returns us to the subject of *linking*.

“If you wish to grasp the totality of what this treatise contains, so that nothing of it will escape you, then you must connect its chapters one with another (*hashav prakav ze al ze*); and when reading a given chapter your intention must not only be to understand the totality of the subjects of that chapter, but also to grasp each word that occurs in the course of the speech, even if that word does not belong to the intention of the chapter.”

Compare this with what he said earlier, in the Parable of the Well, about the prophetic method:

“And it is said in the Midrash: ‘to what were the words of the Torah to be compared before the advent of Solomon? To a well the waters of which were at a great depth and cool, yet no man could drink of them. Now what did one clever man do? He joined cord with cord and rope with rope (*sipek hevel b’hevel u’mshicha b’mshikha*) and drew them up and drank. Thus did Solomon say one parable after another and speak one word after another until he understood the words of the Torah.’”

Thus the parabolic linking procedure for learning Torah turns out to be the same way to learn the Guide. Linking is a mystical technique. The following passages from Talmudic and Midrashic literature show that the pursuit of knowledge by linking words of Torah produces a mystical state, receptive to prophetic influx.

These texts analogize the process to fire. Like fire, it can be dangerous, especially when pursued by the immature, who cannot sublimate its prurient content. In *Midrash to Song of Songs* (1:53), a passage known to Maimonides, we read:

“*Thy Neck With Pearls*: when they were *linking* up the words of the Torah with those of the prophets and the prophets with the Writings, the fire flashed around them and the words rejoiced as on the day when they were delivered from Sinai. For was not their original delivery from Mount Sinai with fire, as it says, ‘and the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of Heaven’ (Deuteronomy 4:11)? Once as Ben Azzai sat and expounded, the fire played round him. They went and told Rabbi Akiva, saying, ‘Sir, as Ben Azzai sits and expounds the fire is flashing around him.’ Rabbi Akiva went to him and said to him, ‘I hear that as you were expounding the fire flashed around you.’ He replied, ‘that is so.’ He said to him. ‘Were you perhaps treating of the secrets of the divine chariot (*Maaseh Merkava*)?’ ‘No,’ he replied. ‘I was only linking up the words of the Torah with one another and then with the words of the Prophets, and the Prophets with the Writings, and the words rejoiced as when they were delivered from Sinai, and they were sweet as at their original utterance. And were they not originally delivered from Sinai in fire, as it says, ‘and the mountain burned with fire?’ Once Rabbi Abbahu sat and expounded, and the fire flashed around him. He said, that ‘Am I perhaps not linking together the words of the Torah in the proper way?’ For Rabbi Levy said: ‘Some are able to link together but not to penetrate [to the secrets in the text], and some are able to penetrate but not to link together. ‘But I [R. Abbahu said] am an expert both at linking and penetrating.’”

The prophet is an expert at both linking and penetrating. Ben Azzai, the hero of this Midrash, is mentioned In Talmud, *Hagigah* 14b with Rabbi Akiva, Aher (Elisha Ben Abuya), and Ben Zoma as the four who entered *Pardes/Paradise*. Ben Azzai is sometimes (frequently) the Ben Zoma of the parallel accounts in these Aggadas. Ben Zoma (15a) discovered the secret of the upper and lower waters in the work of creation (*Maaseh Bereshit*). Linking and penetrating the parables and mysteries of the Torah caused Ben Azzai/Zoma to be in flame, inflamed with mystic knowledge.

Connect this with one of the mysteries considered by Maimonides (Guide 3:7), the meaning of “*hashmal*” (Ezekiel 1:27, *KJV*: “lightning,” *JPS 1917*: “amber”). Prof. Bakan unpacked the mystical/sexual importance of this essentially untranslatable term (*Maimonides on Prophecy* 137, 176, 225, and esp. 275; *Zohar II, Shemot* 203b). Note the *double entry* of a cautionary tale about the term *hashmal* in Talmud, *Hagigah* 13a. The context is the Mishna that established the law against public instruction in certain sensitive topics. That Mishna reads (Talmud, *Hagigah* 11b):

“The subject of forbidden sexual relations may not be expounded in the presence of three, nor the work of creation (*Maaseh Bereshit*) in the presence of two, nor the work of the chariot (*Maaseh Merkava*) in the presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge.”

The story involved the spontaneous combustion of a child who recognized the metaphorically creative phallic image in the vision of Ezekiel:

“May one expound the mysteries of *hashmal*? For behold there was once a child who expounded the mysteries of *hashmal* and a fire went forth and consumed him.”

The Talmud restates this admonition in similar terms a couple of lines down.

This passage, in both tellings, proclaims the underlying logic of the law of Jewish esoteric instruction. Why does the Mishna restrict Jewish mysticism and forbidden sexual relations to private instruction? So that their similar processes will not shock the immature. A Ben Azzai can link the parables of the Torah together and have flame flash around him; but another, such as the child suddenly realizing the phallic energy of *hashmal*, could be immolated.

Understanding this, Maimonides will next explain his own esoteric method, including his famous Seven Contradictions (see my next essay, Introduction II). His way to comply with Mishna *Hagiga*'s law against publicly teaching these dangerous matters was to lightly conceal them in apparently contradictory formulations. This way Maimonides can reveal this lore to the "single virtuous man" though "displeasing ten thousand ignoramuses."

CONCLUSIONS

This has been a "slow reading" of three pages of the Introduction to Guide of the Perplexed to discover what Maimonides meant by his peculiar presentation of three parables, The Well, The Pearl, and The Golden Apple. His stated purpose was to explain the meaning of parables and the use of the parabolic process.

In this investigation, I made considerable use of the classic commentary of R. Abravanel on the Guide. Abravanel recognized that these parables reveal hidden matters, not the normal matters of Jewish law. However, he concluded that the exoteric text of the parable only provides useful political or moral instruction. Because of this focus, he failed to address or even deal with the most important material in the text, the meaning of *maskiyot*, the silver filigree setting of the Golden Apple, and the way it masks its dangerous content.

My conclusions are:

By teaching the meaning of parables using other parables, Maimonides violated his own ground rule against "replacing one individual by another of the same species" (p. 6). This was an explicit and obvious contradiction. His purpose was to signal that we must read his presentation at a deeper level. It was no conventional account of a mere literary device.

Neither was it a philosophical presentation, as nowhere in the passages we have discussed (10 – 14) had he made any mention, open or concealed, exoteric or esoteric, of philosophy, or of Plato or Aristotle. The only exception is his discussion of matter in his reading of the Married Harlot, where Maimonides said that:

"All the hindrances keeping man from his ultimate perfection, every deficiency affecting him and every disobedience, come to him from his matter alone. This is the proposition that can be understood from this parable as a whole. I mean that man should not follow his bestial nature; I mean his matter, for the proximate matter of man is identical with the proximate matter of the other animals."

In context, this no longer looks much like a discussion of philosophical hylomorphism, for it has transformed itself into religious admonition. That is, ultimately, because philosophy reaches the existence but not to the essence of the God, and what God wants from us. It cannot explain this essential mystery, why God created man.

The parable is the key to biblical prophecy. Parables are a system or process for uncovering hidden truths of Torah, those truths that relate to the divine essence, and to divine creativity. Parables appear as part of prophecy because the divinely inspired prophetic imagination has the unique capacity to articulate those messages in parables. Maimonides defines prophecy as an emanation overflowing from God, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect upon the imaginative faculty. R. Abravanel correctly explained that:

"They are in the form of parables because of the special quality of the recipient, his power of imagination which can materialize the divine emanation...God's message or emanation is clear and pure but its reception by the prophetic recipient can only be through his faculty of imagination, and comprehension of the influx can only be accomplished by the imagination through parables."

According to Maimonides, but not Abravanel, the rational and imaginative faculties can be prepared to receive prophecy. One preparation required for prophecy is a certain form of meditation, initiated by Solomon, by which we link concepts, passages, and parables together to open channels of meaning concealed by the Torah.

The prophet frequently delivers his prophecy in parabolic form. When the prophet does not explain these parables himself, we must search their meaning. The subject of these prophecies is divine creativity (*Maaseh Bereshit*) and divine providence (*Maaseh Merkava*), not Torah laws.

Maimonides based his understanding of parables on passages carefully selected from Midrashic sources, particularly the *Midrash on Song of Songs*, where we saw that the parable is the framework of a public teaching. The linking of different biblical materials is the *procedure* for the attainment of prophecy, while its public articulation is the prophet's *work*. The teaching is the precondition for the prophet's receipt of further inspiration. It is the prerequisite for further prophecy.

Maimonides explained three thoughtfully chosen parables, in ascending order of importance.

The meaning of the Parable of the Well is that the prophet, in his prophetic state, frames and links parables to reach the Torah's revelation.

In the Parable of the Pearl, we find the hidden truth through the illumination of those parables by the light of the rational faculty. We reviewed three possible interpretations. According to *R. Abravanel*, the light of the "worthless" candle in the Parable of the Pearl was a device for teaching the meaning of the parable, which he identified with the public oral teaching. The *Midrashic* understanding of the "worthless" candle in the Parable of the Pearl, developed in several parallel *Midrashim*, is that the truly valuable things for us are inexpensive and ready to hand, if we would comprehend their real purpose. Maimonides agrees with neither the Midrash nor Abravanel in his interpretation of the worthlessness of the parable. He holds that the *pshat*, the simple meaning of the parable, is not important for prophetic purposes. The emphasis is the *sod*, that is, the esoteric. In other words, the Parable of the Pearl directs us to the concealed level of the text, not its surface.

The Parable of the Golden Apple finally brings Maimonides to the esoteric *content* of the biblical parable. The content of the parable is the exposition of the *Maaseh Bereshit* (divine creation) and the *Maaseh Merkava* (divine providence). The Mishna legislated against the exposition of these Torah secrets in public. The reason for the law against the public teaching of Jewish mystical doctrine is that, like the teaching of forbidden sexual relations, to which it is explicitly connected, we cannot allow the public to ascribe carnal attributes to God in His relation to man and the world. Nonetheless, our language cannot comprehend divine creation or ongoing providence except through sexual metaphor, since "we have no intellectual cognition of our bringing somebody other than us into existence except through sexual intercourse." The prophet must recognize the anthropomorphic imagery of the prophetic parable, and then sublimate it as metaphorical of the basic processes of creation and providence. A similar process illuminates all corporeal terms employed by the prophet's imagery. To spotlight this, Maimonides began his Guide with an entire Lexicon interpreting the terms that prophets use in their corporeal imagery (Guide 1:1-45).

The parable, then, is our window through which we glimpse the essence of divine creativity. The ability to do so depends on the prior preparation of the prophetic adept, but is psychologically and morally dangerous to others, particularly the immature.

APPENDIX A

RABBI ABRAVANEL'S COMMENTARY ON PAGES 7a THROUGH 8a OF MAIMONIDES' INTRODUCTION TO THE IBN TIBBON TRANSLATION OF THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED.

R. ABRAVANEL'S COMMENTARY ON THE PARABLE OF THE WELL

[R. Abravanel analyzes the Parable of the Well in the context of the few lines in the Guide preceding and succeeding the passage. My translation of his commentary follows, which should open up much of what Maimonides had written. I include pagination and number the lines as in the standard print of the Ibn Tibon Hebrew translation. I have indented Abravanel's commentary without quotation marks, for easy identification. I have reproduced all quotes from the Guide alluded to by Abravanel in full, with quotation marks, from the Pines translation, unless otherwise indicated. Nonetheless, the reader will find the commentary easier to follow by following the Guide text. Biblical translations are from Pines unless otherwise indicated].

“As I have mentioned parables, we shall make the following introductory remarks: *know* that the key to the understanding of all that the prophets, peace be on them, have said, and to the knowledge of its truth, is an *understanding* of the parables, of their *import*, and the meaning of the *words* occurring in them.”
(Guide, p. 10)

Page 7a: line 15

Abravanel: “Know,” etc.: Maimonides says that while we find in the books of the prophets admonitions and prognostications, “The key to the understanding of all that the prophets, peace be on them, have said,” as well as all that they have intended by their words, is in three things (italicized above): a) the simple or apparent *understanding* of the external meaning of the parable (*pshat*); b) the *import* of the parable, that is, its moral, including that which was intended by its moral; and c) the explanation of the *words* of the parable.

This three part approach is the key to understanding the subjects of all the prophecies. For how could you know the truth of what they had written until you knew whether it was to be understood literally or as a parable? Their admonitions and prognostications could not be truly known without knowing if they were intended parabolically.

“*You know* what God, May He be exalted, has said: ‘And by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes.’” (Hosea 12:11, Guide page 11)

Consider the words of Maimonides who brings four quotations from the Bible and two from the Midrashic literature. The four biblical quotes are:

A: “And by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes,” (Hosea 12:11);

B: “Put forth a riddle and speak a parable,” (Ezekiel 17:2);

C: “They say of me, is he not a maker of parables,” (Ezekiel 21:5);

D: “To understand a word and a figure, the words of the wise and their dark sayings,” (Proverbs 1:6).

Maimonides also quotes Midrash: “To what were the words of the Torah compared before the advent of Solomon? To a well, the waters of which were at great depth and cool..., etc.,” (*Midrash on Song of Songs* 1:8). He brings as well a second text from that same Midrash: “Our Rabbis say: ‘A man who loses a *sela* or a pearl in his house can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an *issar*...etc.’” (*Midrash on Song of Songs* 1:8).

7b:L.2

It is appropriate that you should consider why Maimonides brings all these proof texts. It would have been sufficient to bring one or two of them since: “Upon the evidence of two witnesses...a case is established,” (Deut. 19:15, Leeser translation). It is evident that more than one citation is superfluous to ground the three simple points about parables made above. Furthermore, why is each one of the four biblical texts introduced by the phrase “You know” or “You know too [you already know],” but these phrases are not employed to introduce the two Midrashic messages?

I think that Maimonides brought the first passage, “And by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes,” to demonstrate that prophecy comes from God to the prophets in the form of parables. They are in the form of parables because of the special quality of the recipient, his power of imagination, which can materialize (*sh'yagshim*) the divine emanation. Hosea says, “I have spoken unto the prophets, and I myself have multiplied visions, and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes.” This means, that God’s message or emanation (influx) is clear and pure but its reception by the prophetic recipient can only be through his faculty of imagination, and so he can only comprehend the influx by the imagination through parables.

Maimonides brings the second biblical text, “Put forth a riddle and speak a parable,” to clarify that when the prophet speaks to the people he speaks in parables. This is a different matter. The teaching that he has received in the form of parables, he now relates to the multitude of the people in parables.

These passages teach only that the prophets use parabolic form several times, but we cannot derive from this that they *always* speak in parables. For this reason, Maimonides brings the third biblical passage, and introduces it saying:

“And *you know too* that because of the frequent use prophets make of parables, the prophet has said: ‘They say of me, Behold, he speaketh but in parables!’” (Ezekiel 21:5, Leeser).

He brings this passage to clarify that prophets characteristically and usually speak in parables.

Maimonides brings the fourth biblical passage, from Proverbs 1:6, saying: “*You know* how Solomon began his book: ‘To understand a proverb and a figure; the words of the wise (*divrei hakhamim*—matters of wisdom) and their dark sayings.’”

This passage is brought to further clarify a distinction between the public teaching of the prophets and their parabolic writing. In speaking publicly they employ the manner of the wise man who organizes parables in his speech so that the hearers comprehend him. But in his written parable the prophet does not draw forth the meaning in what he has written, leaving only the apparent meaning (*pshat*) on the surface of the text. Thus Solomon writes: “To understand a proverb and a figure,” and from this Solomon teaches that men are commanded to try to understand [by themselves] the meaning of written prophetic parables, just as they are also commanded to understand Torah knowledge, when he says, [you are commanded] “To know wisdom and understand instruction” (*hokhma u'mussar*, Proverbs 1:2).

L.14

Maimonides has brought four biblical passages to clarify four aspects of prophecy to our “knowledge.” He therefore introduces each one with phrases “*You know*,” and “*You know too* [already],” and “*You know* that he has said,” and, “*You know too* that because of the frequent use prophets made make of parables,” and “*Already you know* how Solomon began his book (Pines deletes ‘already’).”

However, Maimonides is still in doubt. He writes of [biblical] prophecy but he tells us to consider the Proverbs of Solomon, which do not mention matters of the Torah nor of the Prophets. These are matters of wisdom and of books of investigation (*hokrim*), and so he does not mention in his words Torah, but rather says, “to [those who] understand a proverb, and a figure; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.”

Therefore, Maimonides needs to quote the Midrash that relates the *Proverbs* of Solomon to the inner secrets of the Torah.

“And it said in the Midrash: ‘To what were the words of the Torah to be compared before the advent of Solomon? To a well the waters of which are at a great depth and cool, yet no man could drink of them. Now what did one clever man do? He joined cord with cord and rope with rope and drew them up and drank. Thus did Solomon say one parable after another and speak one word after another until he understood the meaning of the words of Torah.’” (Midrash to Song of Songs 1:8).

7b: L. 19

Since the words of the sages of the Midrash were a completion of the demonstration of what was to be learned from Solomon’s proverbs, Maimonides does not introduce the Midrashic passage with the phrase “And you know too,” as he did in the four biblical passages. He writes only “And it said in the Midrash,” since the Midrash is brought to complete the demonstration that he began when he brought the passage, “To [those who] understand a proverb, and a figure.” (i.e, we needed the Midrash to show that the explanation of the parabolic method requires the Torah, the Prophets, *and* the Solomononic books of wisdom).

Furthermore, since it is undisputed that the Proverbs of Solomon were created for an understanding of Torah, it might seem that they were meant to clarify the commands (*mitzvot*) of the Torah. The Midrash helps to clarify that when Solomon wrote, “To the one who understands a proverb and a figure,” he was actually referring not to the elucidation of Torah laws, but rather to fundamentals of Torah and secrets of the Torah.

Therefore, Maimonides says that:

“I do not think that anyone possessing an unimpaired capacity imagines that the words of Torah referred to here [in the Midrash of the Well] that one contrives to understand through the understanding of parables are ordinances concerning the building of tabernacles, the *lulav* and the law of the four trustees (bailees).”

Observe that Maimonides is very specific in the way he uses the language of the Midrash, “To a well the waters of which were at a great *depth* and cool.” He was obviously not talking about legal or ethical matters whose meaning is revealed and straightforward, but rather to the deepest foundations of the Torah. Therefore, Maimonides says: “Rather what this text has in view here is without a doubt, the understanding of obscure [deep] matters,” deriving the term “deep, obscure (*amuk*),” from the phrase: “...The waters were at great depth and cool.”

R. ABRAVANEL’S COMMENTARY ON THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL

P.7b:L.23

Abравanel: Maimonides brings the second Midrashic passage, with the specific introduction, “About this it has been said (*v’shem neemar*)”:

“Our Rabbis say: A man who loses a *sela* or a pearl in his house can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an *issar*. In the same way this parable in itself is worth nothing but by means of it you can understand the words of Torah.”

He concludes, “This too is clearly what they say” (“This is what they say *also*,” *zeh hu davram gam khen*).

This second Midrash, The Pearl, appears to be unnecessary. He indicates this by introducing it with the phrase “It has been said,” and not “You know.” Even more significant is the fact that the passage concludes, “This is what they say *also*.” We see that at the conclusion of the prior Midrash of the Well Maimonides does not say, “This is what they say *also*,” but rather, “That is really what they say” (i.e., “This is what they say,” *zehu davram*, without the *gam khen*, that is, without the additional “also” brought after the Pearl Midrash. Abravanel interprets the “also” to mean that Maimonides thought the Pearl parable was unnecessary.)

Additionally, Maimonides states:

L.25

“Now consider the explicit affirmation of the Sages, may their memory be blessed, that the internal meaning of the words of Torah is a pearl,”

This is not a new subject for him. What I think is that Maimonides found juxtaposed these two texts about the Well and the Pearl, close to each other on the Midrash page. The two juxtaposed statements, the first from Rabbi Hanina and the second from “The Rabbis,” were not brought to contradict each other. Both parables agree as far as their subjects are concerned (i.e., that parables teach the deepest foundations of Torah).

L.28

Nonetheless, from subsequent statements of Maimonides problems appear in three places [see at line 31] regarding his conclusion that both Midrashic texts were brought to the same purpose.

Therefore, after quoting the first Midrash about the Well, he then brings the Midrash about the Pearl, and by way of introduction states, “[And] about this it has been said; Our Rabbis say,” indicating the Rabbis say something that contradicts Maimonides’ understanding. Therefore, Maimonides goes to some lengths to explain what each item in the Midrash of the Pearl represents.

L.30

Indeed, this parable only comes to teach and accustom the listener to understand what are purely oral devices employed by teachers, and not sacred texts. The Pearl Parable was not intended to refer to parables appearing in the prophetic books. (This is Abravanel’s view. By reducing the “pearl” parables to verbal statements, he hopes to avoid calling biblical texts worthless).

L.31

Observe Maimonides’ doubts about the allegory of the Pearl (and its identity of meaning with the allegory of the Well) arise in three places. The *first place* is in the second Midrash where its author says: “... By means of it [the parable], you can understand (literally “see”) the words of the Torah,” which teaches that the parable is not the words of Torah (*divrei torah*), but rather it is a verbal technique that is employed by the wise to explain the words of Torah without reference to the apparent meaning (*pshat*). Thus, the words of the Midrash: “By means of it you can understand the words of Torah.” (In other words, it is “worthless” other than as a device used for teaching Torah; in itself, the parable is not Torah. By contrast, in the Well Parable, the parable was itself sacred.)

L.33

The *second place* causing Maimonides’ doubt is the reflective statement in that Pearl Midrash: “In the same way this parable by itself is worth nothing.” If it was the Torah’s intent to employ a parable, how can we say that it “is worth nothing”? Observe that within the parable is its moral, so how can we say regarding the parable as a whole, if wisdom is found within it, that the parable “is worth nothing”? This would teach that the oral parable a teacher constructs to teach the text is worth nothing. (He means to contrast this result with

the contrary teaching in the Well Parable. The well and the ropes were sacred writ themselves, and not “worth nothing.”)

The *third problem* with the Pearl Midrash emerges in Maimonides’ short discussion immediately following that Midrash:

“Our Rabbis say: A man who loses a *sela* or a pearl in his house can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an *issar*. In the same way this parable in itself is worth nothing but by means of it you can understand the words of Torah.’ This too is literally what they say. Now consider the explicit affirmation of the Sages, may their memory be blessed, that the internal meaning of the words of Torah is a pearl whereas the external meaning of all parables is worth nothing, and their comparison of a subject by its parable’s external meaning to a man who let drop a pearl in his house which was dark and full of furniture. Now this pearl is there, but he does not see it, and does not know where it is. It is as though it were no longer in his possession, as it is impossible for him to derive any benefit from it until, as has been mentioned, he lights a lamp—an act to which an understanding of the meaning of the parable corresponds.”

L.35

The *third problem*: the Midrash seems to compare the candle and the pearl, respectively, to the parable and the moral of the parable. It is clear that the moral is within the parable. But the pearl is not within the candle. The candle is an external matter (*davar m’hutz*), and man makes it a means to find the pearl which is there. Therefore, the parable is an aid [external to the text] for studying, to understand the words of the text.

L.37

Maimonides understands this interpretation as contradicting his view (that we are discussing prophetic parables, not oral teaching devices). Therefore, he concludes his reading of that Midrash with the formula, “this too [also] is literally what they say,” meaning, these are “also” the words of the Sages who spoke in the first Midrash. Just as he is supported in his understanding by the first Midrash, so it is appropriate for him to feel that the apparent contradiction between the two Midrashic texts is not between the sages themselves, for they brought them one after the other in the same place for the same purpose. Because of this, it was necessary to resolve the problem by saying, “Now consider the explicit affirmation of the sages...that the internal meaning of the words of Torah is a pearl” (i.e., it is not “worthless.” To the extent the second Midrash says more than this, Abravanel interprets Maimonides to regard it as superfluous).

L.40

He resolves the *first problem*, where the Midrash reads, “but by means of it [the parable] you can understand [see] the words of Torah,” that the “words of Torah” are the Torah secrets. The intent of the text, “you can understand [see] the words of Torah,” is you see to know and to comprehend what is within them, comparable to the first Midrash: “Thus did Solomon say one parable after another until he understood the meaning of the words of the Torah.” (i.e., Maimonides holds that the Well parables and the Pearl parables contain the same thing, that is, the secrets of the Torah. Abravanel disagrees, holding the Pearl parable is an oral explanation external to the text: *davar m’hutz*).

P.8, L.1

He resolves the *second problem* by saying:

“Now consider the explicit affirmation of the Sages that the internal meaning of the words of the Torah is a pearl, whereas the external meaning of all parables is worth nothing,”

That is, [Maimonides holds that] the *apparent* meaning of the parable is worthless, but not the parable itself and its moral message (i.e., Maimonides holds that the *pshat* is what is worthless in relation to prophecy.

Abravanel holds that the oral educational technique is worthless in relation to the biblical text it seeks to clarify).

L.3

He resolves the *third problem*, with the subsequent statement:

“And their comparison of the concealment of a subject by its parable’s external meaning to a man who let a pearl drop in his house, which was dark and full of furniture. Now this pearl is there [*b’bayit*, in the house] but he does not see it and does not know where it is. It is as though it were no longer in his possession, as it is impossible for him to derive any benefit from it until, as has been mentioned, he lights a lamp—an act to which an understanding of the meaning of the parable corresponds.”

Meaning, that one should not err in considering the light comparable to the parable in the Midrashic text, and the pearl comparable to the moral; it is not so. If it were the Sages’ intention that the pearl is the moral, then the house must be the parable since the pearl is within the house. Maimonides indicates that the house represents the parable when he says that it is a “house, dark and full of furniture.” The darkness of the house is the darkness of human understanding, “full of furniture,” all the many things and the many words that confuse the understanding (like the *pshat*, the surface meaning). “Now the pearl is there [*b’bayit*, in the house],” meaning, the moral is contained in the parable, “but he does not see it,” meaning, that he does not comprehend it. On this account, the light or the taper mentioned by the Midrash does not represent the parable or its moral, but rather represents the insightful mind, since by means of it the pearl in the house can be found. Therefore, Maimonides says, “Until, as has been mentioned, he lights a lamp, an act to which an understanding of the meaning of the parable corresponds.”

L.12

Observe here that the pearl is the moral, the house is the parable, the taper is insight, the light is the mind, as “The candle of God is the soul of man,” (Proverbs 20:27). This is how Maimonides explains the Midrash. However, it remains to be seen how he proves this explanation from the words of the Sages in the Midrash.

L.17

The Midrash states, “Our Rabbis say: A man who loses a *sela* or a pearl in [within, *b’toch*] his house can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an *issar*.” Since it says, “within his house” Maimonides holds that the house and not the taper represent the parable [so says Abravanel], because the text should not employ the otherwise surplus phrase, “Within his house.” It could just as well be outside the house or in the city street, and so the image would be of losing it in the obscurity of the night.

L.19

And where the Midrash says that the man “can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an *issar*,” we see that the taper is a source of light, a means of distinguishing the pearl amidst the clutter of the house, and is therefore comparable to the discerning mind.

L.22

However, after the Rabbis in the Midrash present the Parable of the Pearl they state, “In the same way this parable in itself is worth nothing but by means of it you can understand the words of Torah.” They are, in this statement, no longer concerned about the matter of the candle, but only with the moral and the parable, which have been compared, respectively, to the pearl and to the house. Therefore, when they say, “That this parable in itself is worth nothing,” the parable is that which has been compared to the house.

L.23

“But by means of it [the parable] you can understand the words of the Torah.” That is, the house where the pearl was left protects the pearl, and through the house you can find it; “The internal meaning of the words of

Torah is a pearl,” and this meaning is seen in the midst of the words of Torah just as the pearl is seen in the midst of the house.

L.24

This is what Maimonides understands the Midrash to be teaching. I do not agree. I consider the parable the public teaching (*sh'osei ha'melamed*), and that this is what they compared to the candlelight, in the same way Rabbi Hanina compared the ropes and cords which had to be joined together, by means of which the water is drawn from the well. According to this analysis, the approach of Rabbi Hanina and the approach of the Rabbis in the two parts of the Midrash are the same approach. Though Maimonides pursues his explanation, the truth should find its own way.

R. ABRAVANEL'S COMMENTARY ON THE PARABLE OF THE GOLDEN APPLE

[Abravanel continues his analysis only briefly to discuss the Golden Apple. He fails to address this material with anything like the critical attention he brings to the Parables of the Well and the Pearl. This is peculiar, since Maimonides devotes more space to it, and most readers are more impressed by this text than by the two previous texts. His commentary, in full, follows:]

“The Sage has said: a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver,” (Proverbs 5:11).

P. 8a:L.26

Abravanel: I do not know why Maimonides brought this further passage for our consideration. He could have bought any of the proverbial statements regarding parables made anywhere in the Bible instead.

Perhaps Maimonides needs it because the rabbis [*sic*] in the Pearl Midrash said, “The external meaning of all parables is worth nothing,” but that they really did not think that the parable is in itself worthless. He wants us to observe that the parable always contains political wisdom (*hokhmah mdinit*) and advantageous practice (*u'maasit muelet*), even though with respect to the moral itself the parable is worthless. Therefore, he brings the Proverb of the Apple and its subsequent explanation to disclose the value of the parable itself, which is like silver, and the value of the moral, which is like gold.

Further, Maimonides cites this Proverb to support and establish his explanation of the [Pearl] Midrash. He held that the candle and its light were comparable to the understanding. He is thus compelled to equate the golden apple to the moral; the silver to the parable. Finally the filigree with its apertures, through which the gold inside could be seen, represents the penetration of the understanding mind (Just as the light of the candle was also compared to the understanding).

[That is all that Abravanel says about the Golden Apple. But Abravanel says nothing of the problem of the word *va-yashqef*, which punctures the center of Maimonides' presentation. In the essay, and in Appendix B, I sort out the issues raised by Maimonides with respect to this term, which is the most important term in his account of the Well, the Pearl and the Golden Apple.]

APPENDIX B

THE GOLDEN APPLE: GRAMMATIC AND ETYMOLOGICAL ISSUES

LANGUAGE AS CAMOUFLAGE FOR DANGEROUS CONTENT

Maimonides engages in a curious act of linguistic exegesis, though it is really a type of camouflage. He seems to want to derive “seeing” from “setting.” To do this he starts with a Hebrew term (*maskiyot*, מַשְׁכִּיּוֹת) proceeds to a completely different Hebrew term (*yashkef*, יַשְׁקֵף) develops its Aramaic equivalent (*istekhe*, אִסְתַּכְה) from Onkelos’ ancient Aramaic translation (c.110 C.E.), and reads that back into the original Hebrew term, a four step process. He made it even stranger since in each case the consonantal roots [radicals] of the three words are spelled differently. What is going on?

Maskiyot מַשְׁכִּיּוֹת: “filigree setting.” In Hebrew grammar, all words are supposedly built on a three consonant root structure (but see Gesenius’ *Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford 1974, pp. 100-102, 30:2). It is unclear what the three root letters of *maskiyot* would be. Normally, despite the tradition of tri-literals, we would now regard every letter here beside “S*K” כַּשׁ as prefix or suffix (i.e., the “ma” and the “iyot” of *maskiyot* are prefix and suffix), which leaves only those two root letters. We now accept biliteral roots in Hebrew grammar. Biliterally, “S” and “K(h),” *sekh* שֶׁכַּח means either thorn/prick, or booth/enclosure, like a *sukkah*. These meanings combined would probably do nicely for a filigree setting. But but they don’t seem to do anything for Maimonides.

Maskiya מַשְׁכִּיָּה: the singular of *maskiyot*, is a locket in modern Hebrew, but that probably just comes from this use here in Proverbs 25:11. *Meshekh*, מִשְׁכַּח, “skin,” changing the “S” to “Sh” (שׁ > ש), yields a term, *meshekh orlah*, Maimonides would know from either his medical or Talmudic studies, denoting the stretching of the skin of the penis to disguise circumcision, but the usage still seems distant. What Maimonides needs is for *maskiyot* to mean some kind of jewelry setting that is minimally transparent, in order that the Golden Apple of the interior can be glimpsed, but only close up.

He turns to the *Targum*, the ancient Aramaic translation of the Bible, which Maimonides sometimes treats as a good source. But the *Targum* on Proverbs 25:11 gives the Aramaic for *maskiyot* as *n’goda* נְגוּדָא. According to Jastrow (*Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 873, which actually cites this passage), *n’goda* is a vessel of beaten metal. Rashi says that *maskiyot* means “covered with silver,” and compares it to Exodus 33:22, “... while My Glory passeth by, I will put thee (Moses) in the cleft of the rock, and I (God) will *cover* (*sakoti* שֶׁכַּחְתִּי) thee with my hand until I have passed by.” Maimonides’ predecessor Avraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164), also understood *maskiyot* to mean “covered with silver, i.e., that they were hidden with what was suitable for them (*ganuzim im ha-raui lehem*), such that *the word fitly spoken* was an appropriate saying that did *not* reveal some other secret.”

Succeeding commentators, like Gersonides (1288-1344), divert from this path, but only because they are following Maimonides’ interpretation, rather than Rashi. This includes the 18th century R. David Altschuler, in *Metzudat David*; however, his companion commentary, *Metzudat Zion*, still follows Rashi’s interpretation that *maskiyot* is a beaten metal covering, rather than a filigree covering.

So it seems that Maimonides had to go further afield if he felt he needed an etymological basis to define *maskiyot* as a filigree that is minimally transparent at close viewing. So he turns to the word *yashkef*. In fact, he really did not need to do that, since his authority was so great that, as we see, successor commentators followed his interpretation, even as they ignored his etymological and grammatical wanderings. Which is why I suggest that

this exercise was not really about this ostensible purpose, but was rather meant for the purpose of drawing us into the story of Isaac, Rebecca, and Avimelekh.

Yashqef יִשְׁקֵף: this is a good Hebrew word for glance/observe. Maimonides says, “*va-yashqef* ... is translated [in Aramaic] *va-istekhe*” (p. 12). *Yashqef* has no orthographic or etymological connection with *maskiyot* מַשְׁכִּיּוֹת (or *istekhe*). The “S” in *maskiyot* would have to become “SH” and the “K” (*kaf*) become “Q” (*kuf*), while the “Y” would be either a suffix or a placeholder for a suppressed radical. But the “F” is completely new. By etymological transfer, the root *shaqaf* is a doorway/window, *that which* we look through. Thus, the root not only implies seeing, but also that through which we see, approaching the notion of a filigreed aperture. Maimonides got this far, but why does this continue to interest him? And why does he next bring its Aramaic equivalent *istekhe* (from Genesis rather than Proverbs) ?

Istekhe אִסְתַּכֵּי: this is the reflexive form of the Aramaic *sekha* or *sekhi* (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 989), meaning: to look out. Except for the change from the Hebrew letter *sin* to the letter *samekh* (שׁ > ס, two different letters that sound “S”), it is similar to the Hebrew root of *maskiyot*, filigree, S*K (In the Aramaic *istekhe*, the “T” coming between the “S” and the “Kh” is part of the reflexive prefix, and ignored in radical diagramming). Pines and Schwarz read Maimonides as taking the similarity of the radicals to derive the Aramaic *va-istekhe* from the Hebrew *maskiyot*. But the apparent similarity of the roots of (Heb.) *maskiyot* and (Aram.) *istekhe* is a long way to go for the payoff of reading *maskiyot* to mean a filigreed setting that can be seen through. After all, you are supposed to be able to see through the thatched roof of (Heb.) *sukkah* (which does share the root S*K with *maskiyot*). Maimonides could have just asserted that this was the *pshat* literal meaning of *maskiyot*, and left it at that. The passage “apples of gold in settings of silver” is broad enough to support such a reading, which was exactly the way that Gersonides read it, and without the grammatical sideshow. But that is precisely *not* what Maimonides intended. What is critical for him is the *location* of Onkelos’ linkage of *va-istekhe* to *va-yashqef*, not the linkage itself. Maimonides was not preparing an etymology of *maskiyot*, but, rather, a pointer to a concealed meaning. Precisely like Ibn Ezra, *a word fitly spoken* is a suitable/appropriate (*raui*) locution designed to conceal a secret, a light camouflage.

Maimonides provides no citations for the location of his many biblical references, but his commentators do (including Pines, Schwartz, Kafih), pointing us to Genesis 26:8, where we find *yashqef* coupled with Onkelos’ Aramaic translation *istekhe* belabored by Maimonides. The real interest in that passage is its sexual content, which stands in for the incomprehensible processes of divine creativity. His purpose, as I explained in the essay, is to cause us to look for the explosive content concealed (and sublimated) by the prophetic parable.

GUIDE INTRODUCTION II CONTRADICTIONS

Maimonides employs contradictions to avoid a Mishnaic law against teaching certain topics in public (Talmud, *Hagigah* 11b). That Mishna reads:

“The subject of forbidden sexual relations may not be expounded in the presence of three, nor the work of creation (*Maaseh Bereshit*) in the presence of two, nor the work of the chariot (*Maaseh Merkava*) in the presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge.”

In the Introduction, Maimonides mentions several of the ways the Guide complies with this rule in principle while violating it in practice. One way he does this is by scattering these ideas throughout the Guide, forcing the student to find them and link them together, just as Solomon joined parable to parable.

Another way he conceals dangerous material is with *contradictions*. The student, armed with Maimonides’ theory of contradictions presented in this Introduction, transcends the concealment to come to the truth, without having participated in a *public* teaching. By means of his explanation, Maimonides also finds a way to direct the student’s attention to the dangerous *content* of the teaching.

The Mishna refers to *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*. Strictly speaking, these are names for biblical texts: the beginning of Genesis and the chariot vision in the beginning of Ezekiel. In Jewish esotericism, they refer to the mystery of creation and to the mystery of divine providence. Many commentators translate these terms as “physics” and “metaphysics.” I caution against doing so. While that interpretation may occur in passages in Maimonides’ earlier works, the Guide does not support it. Michael Schwarz translates the terms as “knowledge of nature” and “knowledge of divinity,” *ha-yedia ha-tviit* and *ha-yedia ha-elohit*. José Faur says they mean “cosmology” and the pursuit of “human perfection.” Maimonides’ in the Guide takes them in their rabbinic understanding, since he explicitly refers to the wealth of meaning concealed in the Genesis and Ezekiel accounts. Even if they we take them as references to the received titles of Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Metaphysics* and the worlds they contain, I would still hesitate to so translate them. The ancient view of these words is so distantly different from ours that their use becomes anachronistic (Schwarz’ translation of the Guide, notes 21 and 22, pp. 11, 12; Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, 18, 125, Syracuse, 1999).

SEVEN CAUSES OF CONTRADICTIONS

The last section of the Introduction to the Guide gives Maimonides’ list of contradictions found in books. He distinguishes them by their causes, their sources, and whether they were consciously created, as in the following chart:

CAUSE	INTENTIONALITY	SOURCES
1. ANTHOLOGIZATION	UNINTENTIONAL	MISHNA and TALMUD
2. RECONSIDERATION	UNINTENTIONAL	TALMUD
3. PARABOLIC	INTENTIONAL	PROPHETIC
4. APPLES & ORANGES	UNINTENTIONAL	PROPHETIC
5. EDUCATIONAL	INTENTIONAL	PHILOSOPHERS and GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED
6. LOGICAL PROCESS	UNINTENTIONAL	MIDRASH and AGADA
7. ESOTERICISM	INTENTIONAL	PROPHETIC and GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED

The first cause of contradictions, I term “anthologization.” These contradictions are typical of historical accounts in which the author presents a list of other people’s contradictory statements without naming those responsible. The author is not contradicting himself; rather he portrays other people’s contradictory statements to make some

point about them. The second cause of contradictions, “reconsideration,” is where an author changes his mind, so that his first statement contradicts his second statement. The third cause, parables, we discussed in the previous section. The fourth cause, “apples and oranges” are usually unintentional contradictions and generally so obvious as to be unimportant. The fifth cause, the education contradiction, arises when a teacher simplifies material for beginners who later learn the complexity of the subject. The sixth cause, the “logical process” contradiction, occurs in the usual course of dialectics and the production of syllogisms. Esoteric contradictions, the seventh class, are contradictions that an author purposely inserts to divert attention from dangerous content.

The contradictions are divisible into two broad groups, intentional and unintentional contradictions, meaning that the author inserted them in his text intentionally or unintentionally.

The walls between the categories are permeable and the contradictions blend in to one another. Thus, logical process contradictions and esoteric contradictions are both, to some extent, educational contradictions.

After giving an account of each type of contradiction, Maimonides locates the contradictions in various kinds of texts, as shown in the chart. According to Kafih, a variant manuscript locates the sixth cause of contradiction (logical process) in the Guide, in addition to the fifth and seventh causes (note 28, *ad loc.*). The standard manuscripts, and the one Kafih approves, only list the fifth and seventh causes as those appearing in the Guide, that is, the educational and the esoteric contradictions. Those two are intentional contradictions in my chart, by which I mean that Maimonides inserted them in the text purposefully. Both of them are educational, although we understand the esoteric contradictions as educational only for the excellent student, not the general public.

WHY DO WE HAVE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE GUIDE?

These contradictions raise the question of just what kind of book the Guide is. Maimonides admits to inserting educational and esoteric contradictions. Thus, when we see two statements in the Guide that seem contradictory, he wants us to assume that he inserted them purposefully, not accidentally. Herbert A. Davidson has recently suggested that we take this sort of claim with a grain of salt (*Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works*, Oxford, 2004). He thinks the book is not as carefully written as Maimonides would have us believe. By contrast, Leo Strauss held it a basic hermeneutic principle always to interpret great philosophers as though they meant what they said, to “understand them as they understood themselves.” I tend to the latter view, that the contradictions are purposeful.

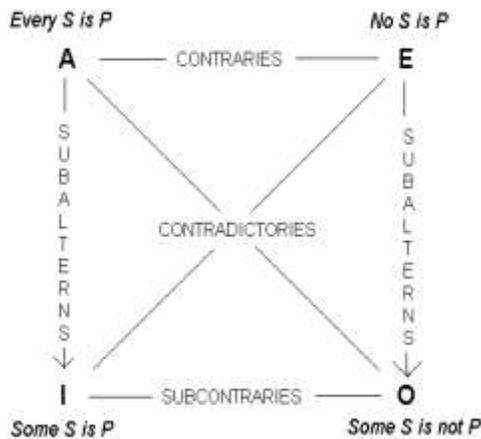
The second question we must ask is whether the contradiction is merely educational, the fifth cause. What we have to tell the elementary school student is different from what we tell the graduate student, because the elementary school student is not ready for the refinements of a theory the basics of which he can barely understand. If we can show that the contradiction is merely educational, it does not present a problem. Otherwise the contradiction may be esoteric, the seventh cause, and that is a problem. If the contradiction is otherwise unresolvable we must ask whether Maimonides is purposely misleading the student, and whether the Guide has a secret doctrine. The answer is somewhat complicated. Maimonides did not consider all students equally qualified to study the divine science. Moreover, the Mishna of *Hagigah* makes it clear that the *law* does not consider everyone qualified. Nevertheless, Maimonides has decided to commit the public teaching of divine science. By teaching those aspects of divine science enjoined by *Hagigah* in a contradictory way, he is, in a sense, not teaching in public, and commits no culpable violation.

I do not think a secret doctrine is involved, or that the contradictions are unresolvable. Maimonides applied a *medical* model to the presentation of doctrine. Thus, if Dr. ben Maimon gives Reuben a fine white pill for cancer, Simon, who suffers from heartburn, should not object that he only got a homely brown pill: the white pill would kill him. He wrote the Guide on various levels, a technique familiar to us from literature. He meant the Guide to be helpful to any student, to whatever extent he can make his way through it, and however much he can understand. Thus, the contradictions, the odd style of writing, the placing of related points in unrelated chapters

and the many other devices, all serve to make levels of doctrine variously available to the variety of students, according to their degree of qualification. The Guide is the only book organized this way, and it is a category by itself.

CONTRADICTIONS VS. CONTRARIES

The best guide to understanding Maimonidean contradictions is Marvin Fox' *Interpreting Maimonides*, University of Chicago, 1990, ch. 4. The actual Arabic terms used by Maimonides translate as "contraries," "contradictions" and "divergences." By *contradiction*, he follows common logical usage to mean that on a "square of contradiction," the two contradictory statements cannot be both true and both false. An example is "all men are living" vs. "some men are not living." *Contraries* cannot both be true, but both may be false. *Sub-contraries* are the opposite: both cannot be false but both may be true (*Treatise on Logic*, usually attributed to Maimonides, ch. 4). He tends to include "sub-contraries" in the term "contraries."



Several rules emerge. If statements used by Maimonides actually are 'contraries,' we must not treat them as 'contradictions.' Contraries can be resolved (*Treatise*, ch. 11).

Only *statements* can be contradictory. Thus, a *command* is never in contradiction to a *statement*. This includes all *mitzvot* and *halakhot*, that is, any law from the Torah or other sources of law.

Singular Propositions are statements that are not universal or made of a group, but have only one subject, such as "Reuben is a man." Maimonides does not treat these singular statements as subject to contradiction. This is important because all statements about God are singular propositions.

This leads to his term *divergences*, Arabic: *ikhtilāf* (Fox says the correct Hebrew for this should be *khiluf*). This is not a standard logical term. Maimonides uses it as a catch-all for inconsistencies that are not contradictions. He uses this actual term (as *khālāf*) for contradictions five and seven above, that is, those found in the Guide.

We are driven to the conclusion that in divine science there are few real contradictions, and that the purpose of the Guide is to teach the excellent student to dissolve apparent contradictions with the solvent of wisdom. The contrary position, pushed by self-styled "radical" Maimonideans throughout the history of the Guide's interpretation, is that the contradictions are real, revealing an external doctrine digestible by the faithful while concealing a wholly opposed anti-Torah doctrine acceptable to the Aristotelian elite. I caution against the ready acceptance of this too frequently expressed opinion because it makes Maimonides the bearer of an Averroistic "double-truth" which he would have been shocked to be identified with.

OPENING THE LOCK

Unlike this section on contradictions, Maimonides peppers the other parts of his Introduction with obscure rabbinic references and parables. This despite his expressed unhappiness with the method of explaining one type of obscurity with another. In this section, on contradictions, by contrast, he gives but one such obscure reference.

That Maimonides makes only one such reference here means we should pay close attention to it. This is the rule of the Guide. Surprisingly, most commentators have ignored this reference (Yehuda Even-Shmuel explains it homiletically, *ad loc*, Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1935).

The reference is a sentence from the Talmud, *Shabbat* 30a:

“Thou, Solomon, where is thy wisdom and where is thine understanding? Is it not enough for thee that thy words contradict the words of thy father David, but that they are [also] self-contradictory!” (Soncino translation).

The Talmudic section as a whole is significant (from near the beginning of 30a to a quarter ways down 30b), as I will show, and worth digesting. Maimonides quotes only this line, giving no explanation why he chose this example for the “third or fourth” kind of contradiction. Those are the prophetic contradictions and the trivial apples/oranges contradictions. They are not of the fifth or seventh class, and, therefore, should not be in the Guide, unless he intended to insert this as an esoteric contradiction here. Moreover, he does not say why he thought it important to present this one reference.

The rest of the passage not quoted by Maimonides treats in typical aggadic fashion several quotes from Solomon in Ecclesiastes (4:2 and 9:4) against one from David in Psalms (115:17). The Talmud takes David’s saying “The dead do not praise God,” to contradict Solomon’s “I praise the dead which are already dead,” but takes this also to contradict Solomon when he says, “A living dog fareth better than a dead lion.”

The Talmudic rabbis try to harmonize these statements many ways, with varying success. They try to divide the quotes as treating different subjects, i.e., as apple/orange contradictions. The point would then be that once we understand the contradictions, they cease to be actual contradictions.

More interesting are the particulars the Talmud gives, which explain why this passage is an example of Maimonidean prophetic/parabolic contradictions (third class). They also bear out general themes running through the Introduction.

One of those themes is the importance of Torah. Since they are dead, the dead cannot study Torah or practice it:

“For as soon as he dies he is restrained from [the practice of] Torah and good deeds, and the Holy One, blessed be He, finds nought to [reciprocally] praise in him.”

Since study of the words of God is praise of God, the “dead do not praise God.” The Guide is concerned to educate the excellent student so he will be led from his perplexities to perfection, and to help the less than excellent students in any way they can be helped. In this way, Maimonides saves them from death, which is the death of the mind, the inability to study Torah.

The Talmud follows with a second theme, the importance of traditional revelation. These are the revelations of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and by extension their intellectual progeny Joseph and Moses, devotion to which will unlock gates locked to all. Later in the second section of the Guide, the Patriarchs become Aristotle’s antagonists in the central debate over creation. These patriarchs are “the dead which are already dead” who are deserving of “praise” (Rashi explains that they died: “before the evil inclination overwhelmed them to repel them from God.”)

The Talmud story then describes Solomon’s struggle to finish the Temple by taking the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies, the gates of which were locked. King Solomon had tried every possible form of prayer seeking the power and the permission to enter:

“Yet he was not answered. But as soon as he prayed, ‘O Lord God, turn not away the face of thine anointed, remember the good deeds of David thy servant,’ (2 Chronicles 6:42) he was immediately answered. In that hour the faces of all David’s enemies turned [black] like the bottom of a pot, and all Israel knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had forgiven him that sin (of Bathsheba). Did then not

Solomon well say, ‘wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead’? And thus it is written (1 Kings 8:66), ‘on the eighth day (of the Temple dedication) he sent the people away, and they blessed the king, and went into their *tents* joyful and glad of heart...’ [30b] And as for the question which I asked before you, — a lamp (*ner*) is designated lamp, and the soul of man is called a lamp: better it is that the lamp of flesh and blood be extinguished before the lamp of the Holy One, blessed be He.”

This page of the Talmud began with a question whether one could justify extinguishing a candle on the Sabbath (a capital violation) to save the life of a sick man. I do not understand why extinguishing a candle could save a dying man (the Mishnah says it lets him sleep), but let us accept the premise. The conclusion, of course, is that the law can always be broken to save a life, except in three cases (one may not commit bloodshed, idolatry or sexual perversion). Recall the earlier parable of the penny candle that penetrates a room dark and full of furniture to find a lost pearl, where the light represents the light of the mind working through the parable to its moral. In this case, we see a more remarkable conclusion. The Talmudic author now says that we may extinguish the penny candle to save the soul of a man, God’s light. The light of the mind reveals that dousing the candle saves life. Thus, this light, which can distinguish the pearl in the dark, is God’s lamp. We do God’s work, in the sense of advancing His purpose, by using that lamp to illuminate the meaning of His prophet’s parables, and, by extension, the esotericisms of the Guide.

The words of Solomon “contradicted” the words of David regarding the meaning of death. Solomon was unable to resolve the issue. He could not open the doors of the Temple to atone for the people until he invoked God’s love for David. Recall that David was not allowed to build the Temple. Solomon, alone of David’s sons, is David’s true intellectual progeny. It is through Solomon that David yet lives and his project is fulfilled. Despite David’s pessimistic remark that the dead do not praise God, his thought lives through Solomon. David’s idea, a Temple for the Jews to praise God and for God’s indwelling, is built by David’s intellectual progeny, Solomon. The light of his soul saves the light of his father’s soul.

A key piece of the Talmud section on 30a notes that once Solomon’s prayer was answered and the gates of providence were opened, the people went into their *tents* joyful and glad of heart (1 Kings 8:66). The Talmud explains:

“‘And they went unto their *tents*,’ means that they found their wives clean (non-menstruant); ‘joyful,’ because they had enjoyed the luster of the Divine Presence; ‘and glad of heart,’ because their wives conceived and each one bore a male child; ‘for all the goodness that the Lord had showed unto David his servant,’ that He had forgiven them the sin of the Day of Atonement (i.e., not fasting).”

The word “tent” is like the word “house,” which in Jewish esotericism means “wife” or “spousal intercourse” (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, p. 168). The text links the opening of the Temple to the opening of their tents, that is, to sexual intercourse. Both are processes by which something new is created. Maimonides employs this analogy because there is no means but human conception to express this creative process in our language (Guide 1:46, p. 99, Pines’ note 8).

The gate of creation was locked to the people but by linking words and parables, Solomon unlocked it. Solomon resolved the contradiction by illuminating the truths obscured in Torah. He thus found the key to unlock the gates of the parables. He saves the souls of Israel by opening the Temple. They enter their tent joyful and glad of heart for their restored creativity, analogous to the creative impulse that causes creation *ex nihilo*. Our task is to use that creativity to unlock the Guide’s gate of contradictions, and save our own souls from perplexity.

GUIDE 1:3 FORM AND SHAPE

I continue to re-arrange these chapters in dictionary format, giving the full biblical quotations where Maimonides only gives them partially, with my comments. (See my explanation in Chapter 1:1 above, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”)

Maimonides’ purpose in this lexical chapter is to explain the difference between the *intellectual conception* of anything and the *physical shape* of anything (form vs. shape, *temura* vs. *tavnit*). He needs to do this in order to explain the following passage:

“Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of *similitude* (*temunah*) on the day [that] the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt [yourselves], and make you a graven image, the *similitude* (*temunah*) of any figure, the *likeness* (*tavnit*) of male or female: The *likeness* (*tavnit*) of any beast that [is] on the earth, the *likeness* (*tavnit*) of any winged fowl that flieth in the air.” (Deuteronomy 4:15-17)

Maimonides does not take the emphasized words synonymously. See my essay on this passage appearing after the dictionary sections below.

TAVNIT (SHAPE)

1. Maimonides gives this as his *only* definition of *tavnit*: “The build and construction of a thing—that is to say, its figure, whether square, round, triangular, or of any other shape.” The term is never used in speaking of the qualities of God. (Derived from the verb *banah*, “he built”).
2. Blueprint, the pattern of a construction.
3. Purely imaginary shapes in prophetic dream visions. Maimonides does not give either Definition 2 or 3 as separate definitions, but I have, since the proof-texts themselves seem to demand it (see Friedlander’s explanatory note 3, p. 39, *ad loc.*).

Instances Of Definition 1 and 2, Contextualized

“According to all that I shew thee, [after] the *pattern* (*tavnit*) of the tabernacle, and the *pattern* (*tavnit*) of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make [it].” (Exodus 25:9)

“And look that thou make [them] after their *pattern* (*tavnit*), which was shewed thee in the mount.” (Exodus 25:40)

Rashi reminds us of a Midrash, where God showed Moses the pattern of a menorah of fire “upon the mount” since Moses could not build the menorah merely from the verbal commandment he received. Maimonides thus subtly contrasts the use of *tavnit*, the *physical pattern* of a thing, from *temunah*, the formal, universal, intellectual conception of a thing. See essay below on *temunah*.

“The likeness of any beast that [is] on the earth, the *likeness* (*tavnit*) of any winged fowl that flieth in the air.” (Deuteronomy 4:17)

The verse takes “likeness” as the purely physical likeness of a sculpted idol. See essay below.

“Then David gave to Solomon his son the *pattern* (*tavnit*) of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat.” (I Chronicles 28:11)

This is similar to the pattern of the tabernacle and the menorah mentioned in the Midrash above.

Instance Of Definition 3, Contextualized

“And he put forth the *form (tavnit)* of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where [was] the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy (*ha-kina ha-maknei*).” (Ezekiel 8:3)

This is Ezekiel’s vision of the Temple defiled by the people’s idolatries. Maimonides wants us to understand “the form of an hand” as a prophetic dream image of Ezekiel’s, not a physical attribute of God. In Guide 2:46 Maimonides explains this passage as “processes of a prophetic vision, and not real things that could be perceived by the senses of the body.” He also understands the “hand” of God upon the prophet to mean the “terrible and fearful” moment when, by surprise and against his will, the prophetic vision seizes the consciousness of the prophet (Guide 2:41).

Leo Strauss commented that “hand” gets no lexical chapter, but failed to explain why. My interpretation is that when man does God’s will he becomes the “hand” of God. God’s will is done when man follows the law, codified in Mishneh Torah. Note that “hand,” *yad*, is the real name of the Mishneh Torah, *Yad ha-Khazaka*, “the Strong Hand.” In Hebrew the letters of *yad* represent the number of books in Mishneh Torah, fourteen. By absorbing “the Strong Hand,” the Jew makes himself the “hand” of God.

TEMUNAH (FORM):

Maimonides presents the following definitions of the perception of “form” in ascending order of incorporeality, progressing from 1) human sensory perception, to 2) the prophetic “sense,” to 3) the special perception enjoyed by Moses. Maimonides also seems to be using the term to distinguish the notions that idolators imagine of their gods (see essay below).

1. Perceived physical shape: “Outlines of things which are perceived by our bodily senses, i.e., their shape and form.”
2. “The forms of our imagination (*ha-tzura ha-dimyonot shel adam*), i.e., the impressions (after-images) retained in imagination when the objects have ceased to affect our senses.” Also, dream images.
3. “The true form of an object, perceived only by the intellect (*ha-inyan ha-amiti ha-nasig b’sekhel*): it is only in this third signification that the term is applied to God,” with respect to Moses’ special prophetic power.

Instance Of Definition 1, Contextualized

“Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of *similitude (temunah)* on the day [that] the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt [yourselves], and make you a graven image, the *similitude (temunah)* of any figure, the likeness of male or female” (Deuteronomy 4:15-16)

See my essay on these verses, below.

Instance Of Definition 2, Contextualized

“In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an *image (temunah)* [was] before mine eyes, [there was] silence, and I heard a voice, [saying], Shall mortal man be more just than God?” (Job 4:13-16)

This is a dream-image, an image I view in sleep. Maimonides wants us to take this like the after-image of an object that had been presented to sight (Friedlander note 20, p. 40, *ad loc.*). This agrees with Rashi, who cites the tradition that what Eliphaz perceived was not really a prophetic vision, but more like his own inspired nightmare.

Rashi says he perceived: “like a person who shouts into a barrel, that the voice of the barrel shouts toward him. That is an echo, not the voice itself.”

Instance Of Definition 3, Contextualized

“With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the *similitude* (*u'tmunat*) of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Numbers 12:8)

Maimonides retranslates: “He comprehended the true essence of the Lord.” The verse contends that Moses’ apprehension of God is unique. Rashi, based on Midrash, explains Moses’ “similitude” of God is the same vision in Exodus 33:23: “and you will see My back” which Maimonides understands as the *consequences* of divine action, *what God does*. But Maimonides *here* defines the vision differently as the “*comprehension of the true essence of the Lord*,” (*iniano u-perusho v'amatat hashem yasig*), *what God is*, a more perfect apprehension than “you will see My back.” Friedlander, note 3, p. 40 anticipating an objection, denies this contradicts Guide 1:37, which says, “no man can have a conception of the real existence of God.” Moses differs from all other prophets and all other men. Moses transcended his physicality when he fasted forty days on the mount. Maimonides wants us to understand here that Moses achieved unity with the active intellect, a more sublime notion than just the apprehension of God’s creations. This definition of *temunah*, then, represents Moses’ special power of perception on Sinai, unencumbered by physicality. Moses did not receive prophecy through any intermediary, that is, He receives it through a direct connection with God (*Mishneh Torah, Ysodei ha-Torah, 7:6*. But see R. Abraham ben Ha-Rambam, *Guide to Serving God*, p. 585).

HOW MAIMONIDES USES THE CONCEPTS OF SHAPE AND FORM

The first word of the chapter in the Hebrew translations is *hoshvim* (Kafih and Schwarz. Ibn Tibon: “y’hashev.” Pines: “It is thought”). Friedlander translates:

“*It might be thought* (*hoshvim*) that the Hebrew words *temunah* and *tavnit* have one and the same meaning, but this is not the case.”

The italicized “It might be thought” is an acceptable translation. But it can be translated “some think.” If so, the term indicates that there are people who think the words mean the same thing. Maimonides appears to have in mind Onkelos, the Aramaic Bible translator. Both terms, *temunah* and *tavnit*, are important and need to be explained or distinguished because they both appear in an important verse (Deuteronomy 4:15-17):

“(15) Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of *similitude* (*temunah*) on the day [that] the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: (16) Lest ye corrupt [yourselves], and make you a graven image, the *similitude* (*temunah*) of any figure (*semel*), the *likeness* (*tavnit*) of male or female: (17) The *likeness* (*tavnit*) of any beast that [is] on the earth, the *likeness* (*tavnit*) of any winged fowl that flieth in the air:”

Onkelos treats these words synonymously. He translates them in both instances as *demut*, that is, “form.” The King James Version above uses two different but essentially synonymous words “similitude” and “likeness,” perhaps following Onkelos’ lead. Rashi follows this tradition. This is the tradition Maimonides disparages when he says that “some think” the terms have the same meaning.

Maimonides, by contrast, seeks different meanings for different biblical terms. He goes to great lengths to do so here. He begins by dividing up Deuteronomy 4:15-17 instead of presenting it as a single quote. He gives 4:17 *first*, which concerns the more corporeal term, *tavnit* (shape), since that verse only uses *tavnit* and not *temunah* (form). That verse clearly refers to the particular *shape* of an animal, not to its “form” either in its Platonic or Aristotelian sense. It is telling us not to sculpt the shape of a bird or other animal for the purpose of worship. He then gives us 4:15-16 *last*, about *temunah*, leaving out that part of verse 16 that mentions the *tavnit*-shape of a

male or female figure. Maimonides rearranges the passage to demonstrate an upward progression from physical *tavnit* to notional *temunah*.

He wants us to distinguish the way we understand God from the way idolaters understand their gods. Exoterically, we may interpret the *temunah* appearing twice in 4:15-16, under the term's first definition: "Outlines of things which are perceived by our bodily senses, i.e., their shape and form." That definition distinguishes *temunah* from *tavnit* (shape) only in the sense that the former depicts shape as beheld by the senses; the latter depicts the actual material shape of the object presented to senses. That is very nearly a distinction without a difference. The trick is his comment that *temunah* "is used amphibolously (*m'supak*—ambiguously) in three different senses" (Pines trans.), listing them. Perhaps he wants us to see if the second or third sense can also be used. Otherwise, the distinction he proceeds to draw would be of little interest. This is a pattern of interpretation we should become familiar with in Maimonides, where he outwardly emphasizes one definition but wants us to also understand and substitute his other definitions, especially when he says they are being used ambiguously and not homonymously. Here he outwardly portrays idolatry as the worship of the *shape* of a created being. But students of Maimonides know he teaches a more complicated theory of idolatry than the mere adulation of sculptures in the shape of creatures. He wants us to apply the other definition (Definition 2) in which *temunah* means "the forms of our imagination" (*ha-tzura ha-dimyonot shel adam*). Definition 3, Moses' "comprehension of the true essence of the Lord," cannot apply to Deuteronomy 4:15-17.

Thus, he could translate the passage, replacing the term "similitude" with "the forms of our imagination":

"Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of *imagined form* (*temunah*) on the day [that] the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt [yourselves], and make you a graven image, the *imagined form* (*temunah*) of any figure, the likeness (*tavnit*) of male or female."

Maimonides wants us to recall his famous doctrine of the real nature of idolatry. When God spoke to Moses he saw *nothing*, no image whatsoever; no material image, sensory image, after-image, or dream image. He was not in thrall to his imagination. Idol worshippers are different. Maimonides says in *Mishneh Torah, Avoda Zara* ch. 1, that idol worshippers do not actually worship the sculpture but what they imagine is the force animating the celestial creature that the sculpture represents. In other words, the sculpture, by itself meaningless, channels the force of the god to the imagination of men. They believe that these divinities are God's servants or helpers, so to speak, and honor God by honoring them. The sculpture allows them to focus their adoration of these created forces. This notion is included in the second meaning of *temunah*. It verges on the philosophic sense of "form." Maimonides is saying that at Sinai the people did not envision any imagined idolatrous "similitude" of a *created* being to which worship could be directed. The text then turns and begins to talk about the actual sculpted creatures, male and female, bird and beast. Here the text addresses the actual physical requirements of the sculptor who represents the shape (*tavnit*) of the creature in a manner that the worshipper will recognize and fear.

The "forms of our imagination" not only include that which the idolaters worship, but also the "forms" of all those who employ any mediating concepts in their notion of God.

This distinction will become important in the first volume of the Guide. Maimonides starts by rejecting physical images of God represented in words. He then moves to reject conceptual images of God, including such advanced mediating abstractions as the "essential attributes" of God: power, will, creativity, and so on. Maimonides' interpretation of Deuteronomy 4:15-17 is that these ways of viewing God through mediations are also "forms of our imagination," condemned together with idolatry by the Torah. Having disposed of these two definitions of the ambiguous term *temunah*, we have only one definition left, the unique vision Moses sometimes achieved, the "comprehension of the true essence of the Lord," the comprehension only achieved through unity in the active intellect.

GUIDE 1:5 MORE WARNINGS

Maimonides interrupts his lexicon of terms used in prophecy to begin another prologue. He wants to slow down his over-hasty students. The biblical terms for “sight” discussed in the last chapter are the cause for these further warnings.

He has said elsewhere that sense perception is generally reliable, and that sight is the most reliable of the senses. But sense perception is not his concern in these chapters, his concern is prophecy. In the context of prophecy, the term “sight” is fraught with danger.

Maimonides locates this danger in the account in Exodus 24:11, where the Jewish elders and priests look upon God and have a feast. This story has good and bad messages for Maimonides, which he now begins to explain. He continues his explanation in several subsequent chapters, especially 1:28. This story contains elements of the account of creation and the account of providence, *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkavah*, and therefore links to themes in every other section of the book. On the other hand, the story displays the pitfalls of anthropomorphism, dangerous meditation, and sexual prurience.

REFERENTIALISM

The student should now read Guide 1:28, and refer to my section on that chapter.

I know that this jumping around slows the diligent reader. The student should recognize that the Guide is extremely self-referential. In the Introduction, Maimonides warned that we would have to link chapters strewn throughout the book. Part of his reason for organizing the material this way was to avoid violating the rule in Talmud *Hagigah* 11b against teaching the subjects of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava* in public. By forcing the reader to link passages (and through other techniques), he conceals these subjects sufficiently from the public. This linking is also the prophetic technique for the construction of imaginative allegory, as we saw in the Parable of the Well (see Introduction).

All commentators on the Guide seek to render these connections apparent, and the reader has to follow the breadcrumbs to understand the book. I try to make the major connections available in these commentary essays and through the index. You will discover links for yourself that others may not have appreciated.

MAIMONIDES ON ARISTOTLE

Maimonides usually invokes the rule of *Hagigah* when discussing the dangers in prophecy, repeating the law’s strictures against public teaching of the accounts of creation, providence, and prohibited sexual relations. In departure from usual practice, he begins by placing Aristotle in this tradition. Referring to *De Caelo*, Maimonides rephrases Aristotle to say that we should not call him reckless or impudent for venturing into obscure matters.

“When the chief of philosophers (Aristotle) was about to inquire into some very profound subjects, and to establish his theory by proofs, he commenced his treatise with an apology, and requested the reader to attribute the author’s inquiries not to presumption, vanity, egotism, or arrogance, as though he were interfering with things of which he had no knowledge, but rather to his zeal and his desire to discover and establish true doctrines, as far as lay in human power.”

Maimonides’ interpretation, however, takes a different path. He writes, “We take the same position, and think that a man, when he commences to speculate, ought not to embark at once on a subject so vast and important...”

That is, we should approach obscure subjects with humility. This “humility” is what makes the student train his mind and character for the studies ahead. Most importantly, he trains his imagination to be steered by his mind, not his lusts. God rewards Moses for such intellectual humility when he “hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God,” by granting him the blessing of divine vision (Exodus 3:6).

Maimonides came to a somewhat different conclusion than Aristotle. Aristotle holds that the theorist’s zeal is to be applauded, while Maimonides holds that humility is the virtue praised.

He repeats the paraphrase from Aristotle at Guide 2:19, but in different language. In neither case is the original (*De Caelo* 2:12, 291b24) reproduced accurately. In his text, Aristotle explains why theorists sometimes employ working hypotheses. Here is J. L. Stocks’ translation (Oxford, 1930):

“There are...difficulties, which may very reasonably here be raised, of which we must now attempt to state the probable solution: for we regard the zeal of one whose thirst after philosophy leads him to accept even slight indications where it is very difficult to see one’s way, as a proof rather of modesty than of overconfidence.”

On the accuracy of Maimonides’ quotes from Aristotle, Herbert Davidson (*Moses Maimonides, the Man and His Works*, Oxford, 2005, 93-107) says:

“The conclusion that the evidence strongly suggests, with all due reservations about arguments from silence, is that the Aristotle whom Maimonides praises as the greatest human intellect to have seen the light of day was known to him only in a truncated and distorted guise.” (See also Davidson’s note 150 criticizing Shlomo Pines’ contrary view, found in Pines’ “Translator’s Introduction” of the Guide, p. lxi.)

The context of the sentence from *De Caelo* (*On the Heavens*) is Aristotle’s concern that the motions of the astronomical spheres run counter to our expectations. “We find the greatest number of movements in the intermediate [astronomical] bodies,” where we should find fewer movements closer to the outer sphere and more movements closer to the earth at the center. The variation is disproportionate to their distance from the single primary motion of the final outermost sphere. He reasons, in a hypothetical spirit, that this is explained if the astronomical bodies are *animate*. His introductory statement suggests that he tentatively advanced this hypothesis and should not be blamed for temerity in doing so.

Beyond the issue of humility, Maimonides learned from the text that when Aristotle discussed astronomy he produced no apodictic proofs but only reasonable estimates. On the issue of the eternity or creation of the universe, that is the best guess one gets. Aristotle sought indulgence for hazarding an explanation “where it is very difficult to see one’s way.” We are reminded that Maimonides’ used phrases like this several times in his Introduction to the Guide, where he discussed flashes of inspiration occurring in the dark night of our consciousness, and also of the Allegory of the Pearl lost in the darkened room, both cases in which “it is very difficult to see one’s way.”

Ultimately, this will be Maimonides’ challenge to Aristotle’s contention that the universe is eternal and uncreated. Even Aristotle admits he has not proven his tentative conclusion; therefore, Maimonides is free to argue the contrary position. But both Maimonides and Aristotle are justified in trying to answer the question because both of them have approached the subject with *humility*.

All of which leads to Maimonides’ definition of the humility of Moses.

MOSES’ HUMILITY DEFINED

Moses understood the dangers of revelation, and humbly “hid his face.” For his humility, he was rewarded with the vision of God’s entire creation, His “goodness,” as abstracted by the Torah in the thirteen attributes of action (Guide 1:4: *middot*). This humility is required for the study of the divine science of creation and providence. It is also the precondition of prophecy. What a prophet can envision depends on his level of humility (*Shemonah Perakim*, ch.7). How is *humility* defined?

Humility has two parts, intellectual perfection and moral perfection. It goes without saying, and so it is not said, that the adept is expert in Torah, Talmud, *Midrash* and succeeding layers of Jewish learning, including the *Mishneh Torah* of Maimonides. The student then decides to enter the path to intellectual perfection. He must begin with mastery of logic. Logic prevents the student from suffering the “defilement of error” (*...ha-m'taharot et ha-hasaga m'tumata sh'hen ha-ta'uyot*). Having mastered the sciences of mathematics, astronomy, and so on, he graduates to metaphysics, that is, to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. He then masters the “true fundamental propositions.” These are the axioms of Aristotelean thought that Maimonides assembled as the first twenty-five propositions at the beginning of Book Two of the Guide.

He prepares for moral perfection by subduing his passions and desires, which are the “offspring of his imagination.” Maimonides does not provide a curriculum. It seems obvious, though, that the student must live a virtuous life in line with Maimonides’ revision of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* found in *Shemonah Perakim*, as well as the chapter *Deot* in *Mishneh Torah*.

There remains what we might call the moral aspect of the intellectual pursuit. This is the *patience* of the scholar in his pursuit of knowledge. Again and again he warns against accepting first impressions. The Elders of Israel lacked this intellectual humility. Although they were allowed the revelation of the vision of the *Maaseh Merkavah*, they lacked both the intellectual preparation to understand it correctly, and the moral humility to realize their deficiency.

THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL

“Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the Elders (*m'ziknei*) of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and [there was] under His *feet* as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone (*k'maaseh livnat ha-sapir*. *Livna* can mean “whiteness”), and as it were the body of heaven in [its] clearness. And upon the nobles (*atzilei*) of the children of Israel He laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.” (Exodus 24:9-11)

The Elders are condemned for their vision. Maimonides sides with Rashi and against Onkelos in taking the Elders action pejoratively. Exodus 24:11, “And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under His *feet*,” is only quoted by Maimonides up to “His *feet*” to underscore the extreme prurience and corporeality of their vision. The Elders failed to sublimate the imaginative elements of their vision. Instead of focusing on the feet, they should have understood that God has no feet. They should have realized what the “feet” are supposed to represent, as we explain below. Their lack of humility, as defined above, caused them to err in what was most important. The elders were condemned to death, and would perish after the extension Moses prayed for (Maimonides thought their punishment came after Golden Calf. See Kafih footnote 21).

The Elders failed to observe Solomon’s later commandment, significantly brought here by Maimonides, “Guard thy *foot* when thou goest to the house of God,” Ecclesiastes 4:17. This is a cautionary tale for all of us less prepared than the Elders of Israel:

“If such was the case with them, how much more is it incumbent on us who are inferior, and on those who are below us, to persevere in perfecting our knowledge of the elements [of the curriculum], and in rightly understanding the preliminaries which purify the mind from the defilement of error.”

Just before this event, Moses had given the Jews the entire Torah text up to this revelation (Exodus 24:4: “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord.” Rashi: *mi’bereshit v’ad matan tora*). This significant moment is celebrated in heaven and on earth by the revelation of the vision of God’s creation of matter. The Elders, having failed to sufficiently prepare themselves for the vision, drew a corporeal and prurient meaning for which they were condemned. What was the corporeal meaning that the Elders of Israel drew from their vision?

SAPPHIRE

Maimonides appreciates the way Onkelos (3d Century C.E.) retranslates corporeal terms into spiritual language. Maimonides notes that Onkelos’ translated “under *His feet*,” in Aramaic as *cursa yakria*, “under the *Throne of His glory*,” and not just as “throne.”

“For he does not say *v’takhat cursa* ‘and under His throne’; the direct relation of the throne to God, implied in the literal sense of the phrase ‘His throne,’ would necessarily suggest the idea that God is supported by a material object, and thus lead directly to the corporeality of God: he therefore refers the Throne to *His glory*, i.e., to the *Shekhinah*, which is a light created for the purpose.” (Guide 1:28)

Does this statement imply that the Elders were punished for interpreting “feet” as “throne,” i.e., for thinking that God sits on a chair? It is true that the Qur’an speaks of God sitting, and that Muslim fundamentalists took such statements literally. Maimonides may have used the passage about the Elders to criticize such literalism. There is more to it, but this is the surface meaning the un-inquiring reader takes from the Guide text. He wants us to search further.

Maimonides does not refer here to the three accounts of Ben Zoma found in the second chapter of Talmud *Hagigah*. The Guide’s target audience would have those passages in mind when they read of the “sapphire stone.” Ben Zoma was one of the four who entered paradise (*pardes*), gazed on “marble bricks,” and was warned not to call them “*water, water*.” His mind was “affected” by this experience, which resulted in the death and apostasy, respectively, of two of his comrades (14b). In another passage, this hero of Talmud mysticism meditated on the upper and lower *waters* of Genesis 1:7 and looked in the space between them (15b). In the third account, he held that *water* in a bath transports spermatozoa to cause pregnancy (15a). In all three accounts, “water” is the medium of creation.

The sapphire stone, the “marble brick,” seen as “water” by Ben Zoma, is the “*materia prima*,” hylic unformed matter. The marble bricks of *pardes* are the same as the sapphire stone under the Throne of Glory.

Maimonides explains the term *livnat*, usually translated as “paved” in “as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone” to instead mean “whiteness,” which is a plausible translation. He says in 1:28:

“They (the nobles of the children of Israel) therefore comprehended the real nature of the *materia prima*, which emanated from Him, and of whose existence He is the only cause. Consider well the phrase, ‘like the action of the whiteness of the sapphire stone.’ If the colour were the point of comparison, the words, ‘as the whiteness of the sapphire stone’ would have sufficed; but the addition of ‘like the action’ was necessary, because matter, as such, is, as you are well aware, always receptive and passive, active only by some accident. On the other hand, form, as such, is always active, and only passive by some accident, as is explained in works on Physics. This explains the addition of ‘like the action’ (*k’maaseh*) in reference to the *materia prima*. The expression ‘the whiteness of the sapphire’ refers to the transparency, not to the white colour: for ‘the whiteness’ of the sapphire is not a white colour, but the property of being transparent. Things, however, which are transparent, have no colour of their own, as is proved in works on Physics: for if they had a colour they would not permit all the colours to pass through them nor would they receive colours: it is only when the transparent object is totally colourless, that it is able to receive

successively all the colours. In this respect, it (the whiteness of the sapphire) is like the *materia prima*, which as such is entirely formless, and thus receives all the forms one after the other. What they (the nobles of the children of Israel) perceived was therefore the *materia prima*, whose relation to God is distinctly mentioned, because it is the source of those of his creatures which are subject to genesis and destruction, and has been created by Him. This subject also will be treated later on more fully.”

This is a two-stage metaphor. The first stage is the recognition of sapphire’s transparency. The second is that the transparency receives all colors. Sapphire, then, is a symbol for unformed matter in its aspect of *receptivity*.

The concept of *materia prima*, or hyleic matter, comes from the thought that there must be a substrate supporting changes in things. The ancients believed the elements could transform into one another. For example, they thought that the element of water became the element of air when vaporized, rather than remaining water in its vapor state, as we think. Since air and water were *elements*, there had to be something that remained through the transformation. That substrate was *matter* as yet *un-actualized* in its element form as air or water. Matter without form is pure potentiality, receptivity. That ungraspable concept is what Ben Zoma saw. It is the medium of creation. Matter is the medium that form actualizes; just as water is the medium that Ben Zoma thought transported spermatozoa. It is that which receives, and is therefore considered *female*. It follows that the next Guide chapter defines the words *ish* and *isha*, male and female, and that the emphasis there is on the female.

The lesson is that Ben Zoma had a vision of the prime matter, the *hyle*, and further, these “waters” are portrayed as shining marble that appears like water. Its pure receptivity is symbolized by the imagination as the transparency of water. This *matter* is essential to Divine causation. This is what the elders should have recognized in the vision of sapphire paving.

FOOT

In Chapter 1:28, Maimonides explains that the term “foot,” *regel*, means *cause*, but it is clear from other sources that “foot” is a euphemism for phallus (Jastrow 1448; Talmud *Berakhot* 22a-b *ha-margil*; Bakan, *Maimonides on Prophecy*, 215, 219). Like the foot, it sticks out, and may be said to be like a third foot. Maimonides never explicitly uses the term *regel* as a euphemism for the male genital organ. He always sublimates *regel* to the idea of *cause*, since by being generative it is causative. This is not prudishness. Dr. Ben Maimon was an expert on genitalia who published a work on venereal disease. Rather he is at pains to avoid prurience. Prurience is, after all, a target of the rule in *Hagigah* against teaching forbidden sexual relations in public. Maimonides will later explain that to avoid prurience the Hebrew language has no direct terms for the generative organs (Guide 3:8).

The Elders failed to sublimate “His feet” to “His causative power.” Had they done so they would have realized that their vision was the *formation* or “actualization” of unformed matter. *Regel* represents the male principle, the causative principle, and is therefore a metaphor for *form* in its relation with matter.

THE CREATED LIGHT

Maimonides concludes by reminding us that whenever terms for sight occur in the Torah with God, intellectual apprehension is meant and not sensual vision. Nonetheless, he makes a surprising concession. He says that some believers will still understand these words as physical sight, and if they think they mean *created lights*, or angels, or similar beings, “there is no harm in that” (*ayn nizek b’kakh*). He is not really indicating displeasure here. In Chapter 1:63-65 he will return to the subject of the created light, the “*or ha-nivra*” and to angels and show how they fit into his philosophy of prophecy (See, esp., my essay in Guide 1:65, *Is there a Physical “Created Voice” or a “Created Light”?*).

The created light is the *Shekhinah*, and it may also be the Throne of Glory. Maimonides understands the Throne of Glory as the “active intellect” (see essay on 1:19). At least one commentator, Hasdai Crescas, took it to be the

cabalistic *sefira* of *yesod*, the element of “impregnation” by which “through the emanative quality of His Glory, i.e., the *Sefirot*, He is present in the terrestrial world” (H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard, 1971, p. 201, note 92). In Cabala, *yesod* (foundation) represents the generative male principle, form, which enters the female principle, the *sefira* of *malkhut* (kingdom), matter.

GUIDE 1:7 PROGENY OR DEMONS?

This is a lexical chapter on *yalod*, “birth.” Maimonides insistently turns the definition of this most corporeal of terms to figurative extensions.

YALOD (BIRTH)

1. Procreation.
2. Figuratively used for the creation of natural things.
3. Figuratively used for things occurring in time, as though they were things that were born.
4. Figuratively used to refer to the consequences of opinions and doctrines, especially bad ones.
5. The creation of *intellectual progeny*, that is, of a student, one who is the intellectual product of another, or who has been instructed or provided with an opinion.

Instances Of Definition 1, Contextualized

“If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have *born (ve-yaledu)* him children, [both] the beloved and the hated; and [if] the firstborn son be hers that was hated. Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit [that] which he hath, [that] he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, [which is indeed] the firstborn.” (Deuteronomy 21:15-16)

This text leads to the discussion of the “stubborn and rebellious son” (at line 18) and a discussion of those humans who have not reached the stage of “the image of God.” This connects with Definition 2, that is, those humans have not developed the intellect that they share with God, as explained in Guide 1:1. See essay below.

Instances Of Definition 2, Contextualized

“Before the mountains *were brought forth (yulladu)*, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou [art] God.” (Psalms 90:2)

This text and the next demonstrate that *yeled* can be used figuratively. Both texts are positive and uplifting in spirit, and Maimonides will interpret the term in this light when necessary.

“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and *maketh it bring forth (holida)* and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater” (Isaiah 55:10)

When the subject is inanimate, such as mountains, rain, the earth, Maimonides can give *yeled* a positive interpretation. He does not make much of it here, but the two lines before this proof-text are favorites of his and demonstrate the divide between God’s intellect and ours: “For my thoughts [are] not your thoughts, neither [are] your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Instance Of Definition 3, Contextualized

“Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may *bring forth (yeled)*.” (Proverbs 27:1)

Maimonides brings this quote to demonstrate that birth may be used figuratively for the occurrence of things in time.

Instances Of Definition 4, Contextualized

“Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and *brought forth (ve-yalad) falsehood.*” (Psalms 7:14)

The verse discusses David’s wicked enemies. Maimonides uses the passage to demonstrate that opinions and doctrines followed blindly lead to evil consequences. By contrast, the human in the “image of God” transcends mere received opinion through his active cognition. Others follow “falsehood,” and worse. Maimonides’ real interest, though, is to distinguish those who are not “in the image of God” and the dangers they pose to the community, these include foreign enemies, idolators, and others in the grip of physicality. See essay on “demons” below.

“Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished (*malu*: full) from the east, and [are] soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the *children (yalde) of strangers.*” (Isaiah 2:6)

The Jews have joined the Philistines, and become their intellectual progeny, not Abraham’s. Rashi provides the traditional gloss:

“‘For they are full from the east’: Their hosts have become full of the deeds of the Arameans who dwell in the East, who were sorcerers and used the name of pagan deities. ‘And with children of gentiles they please themselves’: They cohabit with the daughters of the heathens and mingle with them, and they would bear children to them, with whom they are always pleased, and they occupy themselves [with them] and long for them and bother with them.”

Maimonides retranslates “they please themselves in the children of strangers,” as “they delight in their opinions.” He also quotes the retranslation by the Aramaic Targum, “they walk in the customs of the gentiles.”

Instance Of Definition 5, Contextualized

“And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and *begat (va’yoled) [a son] in his own likeness, after his image (bi’dmuto k’tzalmo)*; and called his name Seth.” (Genesis 5:3)

This case contrasts with the one above, since Seth is clearly in the image of God, and is not a “stubborn and rebellious son.” He is the intellectual progeny of Adam. See essay below.

THE CAPTIVE IDOLATOR AND HER REBELLIOUS SON

Kafih, in his commentary, missed the implication of the most important proof-text, the first one: “And they have borne him children.” He says, “I don’t know why Maimonides needs to reach this far, to Deuteronomy 21:15, when there are significant previous similar examples earlier in the Torah” (footnote 1, *ad loc.*, my translation). However, Maimonides has an important, if concealed, point in quoting this passage. The full section from Deuteronomy reads:

“When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her. If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, *and they have born him children,* [both] the beloved and the hated; and [if] the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit [that] which he hath, [that] he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, [which is indeed] the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated [as] the firstborn, by giving him a

double portion of all that he hath: for he [is] the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn [is] his. If a man have a *stubborn and rebellious son*, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and [that], when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son [is] stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; [he is] a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.” (Deuteronomy 21:10-21)

The rabbinic tradition emphatically ties these disparate rules to the conduct of soldiers. Soldiers are necessary to establish the people in the land, so that the Torah society can be established. Soldiers must conquer the enemy. Rape and pillage inevitably follow. That is the problem. Since a single cohabitation is enough to establish marriage in Torah law, the status of the soldier is troubling. The maiden is likely an idolator, and would raise idolatrous children. So the Torah allows him one free coupling, and then sets rules for the maiden’s conversion or emancipation within one month.

The Torah understands that the captive maiden’s conversion and marriage may not end happily. A man with two wives (before Rabbeinu Gershom, c. 960–1028 CE, banned bigamy), one of which is the former idolatrous captive and the other born Jewish, may prefer the Jewish wife. But he may not supplant the captive’s firstborn son’s primogeniture in favor of the later born son of the beloved first wife. Finally, the captive maiden’s son, coming from this conflicted background, may become the “stubborn and rebellious son” subject to capital punishment. Rashi, based on Midrash, makes the connection: “If he does marry her (the captive), eventually he will hate her...and eventually he will beget from her the stubborn and rebellious son, therefore these passages were juxtaposed (*l’kakh n’smkhu parshiot halalu*).”

Kafih could not see why Maimonides began Chapter 1:7 with “And they have born him children.” But in Guide 1:6 we saw that ‘female’ symbolizes matter and ‘male’ symbolizes form, and that matter always takes on new forms. Matter is like the “married harlot” of Proverbs 7, who strays from her husband to mislead the young men. Maimonides’ bland quotation of a few words from this section of Deuteronomy conceals a similar story. The youth is drawn to the captive idolator, and could become an idolator himself. This would spell disaster for the youth and his community, unless it successfully assimilates his captive. The Torah recognizes and regulates his lust. But the danger remains that he will produce a “stubborn and rebellious son.” The stubborn and rebellious son is “a glutton, and a drunkard,” that is, one caught up in physicality. He is not the intellectual progeny of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What is the status of children who are not our *intellectual* progeny?

DEMONS

Maimonides cites several negative examples for the word *yalod*, “to bear children.” His major proof-text is: “Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and [are] soothsayers like the Philistines, *and they please themselves in the children of strangers*” (Isaiah 2:6). The subject is the surrounding gentiles, and their distance from “the image of God.” This subject naturally flows from the law of the idolatrous maiden taken captive from the surrounding nations. The concern is that the soldier will fall into their idolatrous ways.

Maimonides wants to discuss the idolators of the surrounding nations. This leads him to the many failed sons of Adam, who are their forebears, and, finally, to the good son Seth. In the Talmud, *Eruvin* 18b, we learn that Adam produced subhuman progeny for a hundred and thirty years:

“R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar further stated: In all those years [from the expulsion from Eden] during which Adam was under the ban he begot ghosts and male demons and female demons, for it is said in

scripture: ‘And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and begot a son in his own likeness, after his own image’ (Genesis 5:3). From which it follows that until that time he did not beget after his own image. An objection was raised: R. Meir said: Adam was a great saint. When he [Adam] saw that through him death was ordained as a punishment he spent a hundred and thirty years in fasting, severed connection with his wife for a hundred and thirty years, and wore clothes of fig [leaves] on his body for a hundred and thirty years. [so why did R. Jeremiah say such bad things about Adam?—that statement [of R. Jeremiah] was made in reference to the semen which he emitted accidentally.”

He was certainly aware of this passage, and quotes a parallel text from the Midrash, *Bereshit Rabba* 20:11:

“For R. Simon said: Throughout the entire one hundred and thirty years during which Adam held aloof from Eve the male demons were made ardent by her and she bore, while the female demons were inflamed by Adam and they bore”

Maimonides characteristically sublimates the prurient context of these passages and reinterprets them to mark the difference of those children raised as disciples. The other offspring were like “demons.” His language is strong:

“Those sons of Adam who were born before that time were not human in the true sense of the word, they had not ‘the form of man’ (*ha-tzura ha-enoshit*).... It is acknowledged that a man who does not possess this ‘form’ (the nature of which has just been explained) is not human, but a mere animal in human shape and form (*sh'eino adam eleh baal khai b'tzurat adam v'tavnito*). Yet such a creature has the power of causing harm and injury, a power which does not belong to other creatures. For those gifts of intelligence and judgment with which he has been endowed for the purpose of acquiring perfection, but which he has failed to apply to their proper aim, are used by him for wicked and mischievous ends; he begets evil things, as though he merely resembled man, or simulated his outward appearance. Such was the condition of those sons of Adam who preceded Seth (quoting the Midrash), i.e., demons (*k'l'omar shedim*).”

Because Adam educated Seth, this son, unlike the others, is in the image of Adam, and thus, of God. Seth is in their image only because of his acquired intellect. The other sons were “mere animals in human shape.” Indeed, they were worse than animals. Maimonides recalls the harm only man and no animal can cause by abusing his capacities, “used by him for wicked and mischievous ends.” Seth is the first man to stop the chase after animal form and embody human form. In Guide 2:30, Maimonides says, “The existence of mankind is due to Seth alone.” By contrast, he also says in 2:30: “When the serpent came to Eve he infected her with poison; the Israelites, who stood at Mount Sinai, removed that poison; idolators, who did not stand at Mount Sinai, have not got rid of it. Note this likewise.” The idolators are infected with the poison of materiality and are not “in the image of God.”

This is a moral-political argument. The community has a responsibility to itself and to God to prevent its members from pursuing materialism to their downfall. It has therefore erected rules and boundaries to protect itself. But its greater responsibility is to create “humans,” intellectual progeny who embody Torah and pursue its purpose.

THE SONS OF PROPHETS

Maimonides also interprets “human” to mean one who is fit to receive prophecy. He indicates this possibility in a tangential discussion of the homonymous term *ben*, “son.” He says that he will have a lexical chapter on this term (it does not appear in the Guide). The Bible sometimes used the term *ben* in the phrase *benei niviim*, “the sons of prophets.” He takes this to mean the *students* of prophets, and understands Seth as Adam’s progeny in the same sense (*b'inyan zeh*):

“The pupils of the prophets are called ‘sons’ of the prophets, as I shall explain when treating the homonymy of *ben*, ‘son.’ In this figurative sense the word *yeled*, ‘birth,’ is employed...‘and Adam...begat a son (Seth) in his own likeness.’”

It is not merely that Seth is Adam’s student. It is not even necessary that he be Adam’s actual son. Seth is a *ben navi*, true prophetic progeny of Adam.

Can we become *bnei niviiim*? From Guide 1:1 we learned that “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.” And in 1:2: “Through the intellect man distinguishes between the true and the false. This faculty Adam possessed perfectly and completely,” for “Thou hast made him (man) little lower than the angels” (Psalms 8:6). But then, after the expulsion: “Adam unable to dwell in dignity, was brought to the level of the dumb beast” (Psalms 49:13) and was then not a “human.” Adam once reached the highest human level, the level in which God speaks to man “mouth to mouth,” (Exodus 33:11) as he did with Moses. Seth did so likewise because he was Adam’s intellectual progeny. Maimonides says here that Seth reached “human perfection” (*shlemut enoshit*). It is in this sense that he is Adam’s true son, for he is the son of Adam when Adam attained the state of being truly Adam, again, after the “ban” (*nizuf*—rebuke) was lifted, when he returned to intellectual-moral perfection. This is the level of prophecy, the highest grade of man. If this is what Maimonides means by “human,” then the lesson would be that prophecy is attainable by us all.

There remains but one exception. In principle, any human can attain the level of the *benei niviiim*. However, the actual experience of prophecy requires that God not prevent it (Guide 2:32, 3d opinion). Voluntarism and naturalism thus spin out a dialectic of prophecy. Man must choose to make himself “human,” a *ben navi*, and if he does, then God must also choose not to deny man the consequence of his choice.

GUIDE 1:8 BLESSED IS THE LORD FROM HIS PLACE

Friedlander thinks that this chapter opens a new section of the Guide. He introduces the section in the following words:

“The next group of anthropomorphic expressions to be interpreted (chapters 1:8-1:27) consists of those which refer to space and motion. Having shown that the terms figure, likeness, etc., cannot be applied to God in their ordinary sense, Maimonides now proceeds to explain that the expressions which imply the idea of space in reference to God cannot be taken literally. It is possible that this order was suggested to our author by the passage, ‘And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord’ (Genesis 4:16); or, ‘And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him’ (Genesis 5:24); for these are the most striking instances of anthropomorphism in the beginning of Genesis after the phrase ‘in our form and likeness.’ Ibn Caspi, Efodi, and others are of opinion that this chapter is intended to explain the word ‘there’ in the passage “and there he put the man” (Genesis 2:8). The order of the chapters from 1:8 to 1:27 is as follows:—God occupies no space (*makom*); the throne (*kisei*), heavens (*shamayim*) which He is said to occupy, is not to be considered a material throne.—He does not ascend (*alah*), descend (*yarad*), sit (*yashav*), stand (*amad, kam, yatzav*) approach (*karov*), or fill a place (*malei*). He is not above a place (*ram*), does not pass by (*avar*), come in (*ba*), go out (*yatza*), return (*halakh*), walk (*halakh*) or rest (*shakhen*.” (Friedlander, note 3, *ad loc.* Leo Strauss more or less agrees with Friedlander, p. XI, Pines translation of the Guide)

I think that this chapter continues the train of thought from the prior chapter. While it is apparently about the anthropomorphic quality of the term *makom*, “place,” which “refers to space or motion” it is really about *intellectual progeny*, like 1:7. Our chapter continues to contrast those who are intellectual progeny, as Seth is the progeny of Adam, with those who are not intellectual progeny. I will show that Maimonides makes oblique implied reference to King Yehoram ben Yehoshafat of Judah for his paradigm of a son who is not intellectual progeny of his father.

The chapter also disentangles the term “place” from its inevitable spatial context, so that it can be used in prophetic discourse. Maimonides tells us that his lexicon is not a dictionary, for he has no interest in exhaustively defining terms. There are meanings he excludes, typically physical or anthropomorphic definitions. We must only use his definitions, and then only appropriately with the context. We should understand his wordbook as David Bakan does: the range of lexical meanings provides the prophetic unconscious a toolbox of transcendent images for revelation (*Maimonides on Prophecy*, Jason Aronson, 1991).

This is a lexical chapter. (See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”)

MAKOM (PLACE)

1. General space and particular space. By this definition, Maimonides implicates the entire Aristotelian understanding of physical “place.” See essay below. He provides no proof-text for this definition
2. Level of attainment of perfection, especially regarding God. *Makom* “received a wider signification and denoted “position” or “degree” as regards the perfection of man in certain points.” To be in the *makom* of one’s ancestors means being their intellectual progeny.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“He filled his ancestors’ *place* (*m’malei makom avotav*).” (Talmud, *Horiot* 11b)

There is no instance given for Definition 1. Three out of five of the proof texts brought for Definition 2 of *makom* are not biblical or from prophetic sources. Two are Talmudic and one is Mishnaic. We must seek Maimonides

purpose for this departure from format. We can find it in his bland elision of the key word *yehoram*, that is, King Yehoram ben Yehoshafat of Judah, who is the subject of the Talmud's citation, "he filled his ancestor's place." The sentence from Talmud *Horiot* reads in full:

"But the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he [was] the firstborn,' (2 Chronicles 21:3) Jehoram worthily filled the place of his ancestors (*yehoram m'malei makom avotav*)."

The Talmud discusses here the very question of whether a firstborn son should precede one who is the real intellectual progeny of the father. There is a tradition embodied in the Talmud comment that Yehoram *began* his reign as a just king, worthily filling his father's role, though his worthiness did not last long. See essay below for the significance of Yehoram to Maimonides.

"He fills his ancestors' place (*makom*) in point of wisdom and piety (*v'hava m'malei makom avotav b'khokhma o b'yira*)."

 (Talmud *Ketuvot* 103b)

This quotation is also Talmudic. The context is the succession of R. Gamaliel to head the Academy when R. Yehudah, author of the Mishnah, died:

"On the day that Rabbi [Yehudah ha Nasi] died ...[he said] 'My son Simeon is wise.' What did he mean? [One would naturally expect the wise son rather than the other son, Gamaliel, to succeed his father as *Nasi*. Why then did Rabbi mention the wisdom of the one son as a reason for the appointment of the other?— It is this that he meant: Although my son Simeon is wise, my son Gamaliel shall be the *Nasi*... What was his [Simeon's] difficulty? Does not Scripture state, 'But the kingdom gave he to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn?' (2 Chronicles 21:3, again) — The other [Jehoram] was properly representing his ancestors [at least in the beginning] but R. Gamaliel was not properly representing his ancestors [His younger brother Simeon having been wiser]. Then why did Rabbi act in the manner he did? — Granted that he [Gamaliel] was not representing his ancestors in wisdom he was worthily representing them in his fear of sin" (*nahi d'eino m'malei makom avotav b'hokhma, b'yirat khet m'malei makom avotav hava*).

My argument for Yehoram as Maimonides' real interest is his central mention in both passages quoted. The biblical passage, 2 Chronicles 21:3, does not use the term *makom*. It therefore cannot be a proof text for the pejorative use of *makom* in descriptions of intellectual inheritance. Hence Maimonides' recourse to these two Talmud sentences which do use the word *makom*, but which also quote Chronicles 2:21:3. See essay below where I explain the significance of Yehoram.

"The dispute still remains in its place (*makom*)."

 (Mishnah *Mikvaot* 4:1)

Maimonides clips this phrase from a Mishnaic discussion of ritual bathhouses, concerning the circumstances in which one becomes non-kosher. Rabbis Shammai and Hillel take contrary positions on an obscure point. The author concludes with the confession that the argument has not been decided. The phrase "The dispute still remains in its place" is a common *termini technici* for an unresolved legal point. The purpose of Maimonides' quotation is perhaps to show that traditions, even or especially oral ones, become disputable over time, which is problematic for us as intellectual progeny of the tradition. This relates to Definition 4 in the last chapter, where *yeled* referred to the consequences of adopting bad opinion or doctrines.

"Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, [saying], Blessed [be] the glory of the Lord from his place (*mekomo*)."

 (Ezekiel 3:12)

The roar of the angels in Ezekiel's vision uses two terms from Maimonides' lexicon: "place" and "glory" (*kavod*). He defines the term "place" as in Definition 2: Blessed be His glory according to the exalted degree of his existence (*k'l'omar maalato v'romamut kvodo b'mtziut*). This degree of existence is beyond human comprehension. See essay below.

“And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a *place (makom)* by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock (*ha-tzur*). And it shall come to pass, while my glory (*kavod*) passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock (*ha-tzur*), and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by.” (Exodus 33:21-22)

God directs Moses to the cleft in the rock from which he will see His “back.” The passage mentions both *makom* and *kavod*, and introduces another lexical term, “rock,” *tzur*. It is necessary, according to Maimonides in this chapter, that we address each term mentioned in a prophetic verse by referring to the definitions in the Guide, choosing one appropriate to the context. See essay below addressing these terms.

ARISTOTELIAN SPACE: GENERAL AND PARTICULAR PLACE

The first line of the chapter gives Definition 1 of *makom*. It means “general and particular space” (*shem zeh ikar ha-nakhto l'makom ha-prati v'ha-klali*). He also means to include the doctrine of “proper place.” This is an excellent example of Maimonides’ talent for compression. The doctrines digested here are set forth in several places in Aristotle’s *Physics* (see, e.g.: 4:2:209a 31-32, 4:4:211a 30-34, 212a 5-6, 212a 20).

The *particular place* of an object is its stationary border by which it is surrounded by other objects. Thus, the place of a river is the boundary of its running water. The surroundedness of objects means that none can be of infinite size. Supporting this doctrine is Aristotle’s contention that all space is filled, i.e., there is no vacuum.

All things have a *proper place*. This means that the four elements, which combine to make all things, generally array vertically: fire on top, air below, then water and then earth. When “violently” moved from its proper place by the prevailing motion of the outer spheres, an element must move *vertically* to return to its place.

The place of an object may also be conceived as its *general place* in the sense that it participates in larger space; as, for instance, I am on the earth, and the earth is in the air and so my “general” place is in the sphere of the air.

These ideas recur in Maimonides’ Introduction to Book Two, Propositions 1, 2, 6, 8, and elsewhere in the Guide. They are basic to his physics and cosmology. We will, at the beginning of Book Two, discuss Hasdai Crescas’ (c. 1340–1410/11) opposition to these ideas and the meaning of that opposition for the history of Western thought.

THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

Maimonides says we must mine his definitions, in this book “or others” to derive the meaning of prophetic utterances. The “or others” in “these words are a key to this treatise (the Guide) or others” (*hineni omer dvarim elu maftakh l'maamar zei v'zulato*) seems to mean *any* source (*contra* Friedlander note 2, *ad loc.*, but in accord with Pines, p. 34). Maimonides grants a broad writ to look at the whole context of a verse shard given by and take each term in the verse according to *his* definitions, whichever is appropriate. He explains in chapter 1:10:

“We have already remarked that when we treat in this work of homonyms, we have not the intention to exhaust the meanings of a word (for this is not a philological treatise): we shall mention no other significations but those which bear on our subject.”

That is, his lexicon is not a dictionary. It does not exhaust the meaning of terms; moreover, it rejects or ignores certain common definitions, especially where they imply anthropomorphism. Maimonides finds ways to stress *his* concerns in these definitions. For example, we have seen and will continue to see sexual content in this terminology. The explanation for this semantic pattern is that he believes procreation the only metaphor for divine creation, bearing in mind the limit of metaphor.

We have called attention to David Bakan’s theory that the lexicon supplies tools for the subconscious imagination to articulate and comprehend prophetic revelation. He stresses that Maimonides rejects the common contextual meaning of key terms in prophecy. Maimonides’ lexical strategy is a “deliberate violation of context” because

“the role of context is to conceal deeper levels of meaning” (*Maimonides on Prophecy*, p. 25). The perplexity and heartache that Maimonides speaks of in the Guide Introduction results from interpreting visions and dreams in their external senses. “Apprehension of internal meanings provides relief” (*ibid.*, p. 6. Bakan argues, p. 86, perhaps doubtfully, that our lexical term *makom* could be interpreted against context as female genitalia, and, therefore, as receptive *matter*).

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

The three lexical terms in the two biblical proof-texts, when those texts are taken as a whole and not as the verse shards Maimonides gives, are *makom*, *kavod*, and *tzur*, “place,” “glory,” and “rock.” He says that “place” (“Behold a *place* is with Me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock,” Exodus 33:21) is the “mountain which was pointed out to Moses for *seclusion* and for the *attainment of perfection*,” (*nosef al ha-makom ha-hityakhadut v’hasagat ha’shlemut*). The term that Friedlander translates as “seclusion,” is given by Kafih as *hityakhadut*; but in his note 14, Kafih says it could be *hitbodedut*, which is how Schwarz translates it. *Hitbodedut* is *meditation* in the full meaning that mystics give the term. This meditative “seclusion” brings Moses to the degree “attainment of perfection.” He thus becomes God’s true progeny. (Avraham ben Ha-Rambam, Maimonides’ son, wrote an impressive essay on *hitbodedut* in *Sefer ha-Maspik l’Ovdei Ha-Shem, Perek Hitbodedut*, p. 178-9, Publ. S. Sason, Jerusalem 1965.)

Maimonides explains the term “rock,” *tzur*, in Guide 1:16. He says that it means “cause,” which is also his explanation of *regel* (“foot,” see my chapter 1:5, above, and Guide 1:28). In Guide 1:16, he retranslates the last clause of Exodus 33:21, as follows:

“‘And thou shalt stand upon the Rock’ (Exodus 33:21), i.e., be firm and steadfast in the conviction that God is the *source* of all things, for this will lead you towards the knowledge of the Divine Being. We have shown (1:8, our chapter) that the words: ‘Behold, a place is with me’ (Exodus 33:21) contain the same idea.”

Putting the two versions together, we now read that “And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock” means something like: *meditate* on the *creativity* of God as the source of all things, and thereby come to know Him and attain perfection. This knowledge implies a meditation on and comprehension of the way God emanates form into matter.

We have still not addressed the role of “glory,” *kavod*. Guide 1:19 wonderfully brings the term *kavod* together with the term *malei*, “fill,” which is condign for us because the first two definitions of *makom* are about “filling” one’s ancestor’s place, using the same Hebrew term. Maimonides defined *malei* in Guide 1:19, in his third and most important definition, as “the attainment of the highest degree of excellency.” It is thus nearly identical with Definition 2 of *makom* above, and so the phrase “the whole earth is *full* (*melo*, from the root of *malei*) of His glory” (Isaiah 6:4) has the same meaning as “Blessed is the glory of the Lord from his place (*makom*).” Maimonides rewrites the former verse as “all the earth gives evidence of his perfection, i.e., leads to knowledge of it.” This definition points to the idea that the “glory” has something to do with God’s perfection.

In Guide 1:64 Maimonides defines “glory,” *kavod*, in three ways. The first definition and the one that interests him most is that the “glory” is a *created emanation* of God (see my treatment of 1:64 for an account of that seemingly contradictory formulation). This emanation is what he sometimes calls the “created light” (*or ha-nivra*) and sometimes the *Shekhina*. It is his understanding of the active intellect, that divine emanated intelligence which is our mediator with God. Definition 2 of “glory” is the way we “glorify” God through praise. It extends to include the way the earth and its creatures “praise” God in “the whole earth is full of His glory,” which he says means that a consideration of His creation leads to *knowledge* of it, i.e., to acquisition of the active intellect. Definition 3 of “glory” is that it is God’s essence. As H. A. Wolfson explains, there is an “old question as to whether the Biblical expression ‘the glory of the Lord’ refers to the essence of God or to something emanated from His essence.” Maimonides strictly warns us not to mix up these definitions, by which he means that we are

not to confuse God with his creatures or His “attributes.” The result is that “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place” can mean either:

- A) “Blessed is glory (essence) of the Lord from His (Glory’s) place (*mim’komo*),” (Def. 3 of *glory*), or,
- B) “Blessed is glory (emanation) of the Lord from His (God’s) place (*mim’komo*)” (Def. 1 of *glory*).

CRESCAS’ INTERPRETATION OF “THE GLORY OF THE LORD”

Crescas, interpreting slightly differently (see my treatment of Crescas’ interpretation in Guide 1:64), wrote:

“...‘The whole earth is full of his glory, is an allusion to the element of impregnation (*yesod ha-ibur*), which is one of the elements of Glory (meaning, that glory is the emanation of form into matter). Of the same tenor is the conclusion of the verse, ‘Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place,’ that is to say, the ‘Blessedness’ and ‘Affluence’ (*ha-shefa* = emanation) ascribed to God is from His place, that is, to say, from God’s own essence and not from something outside Himself, and so the pronominal suffix, ‘His’ in ‘from His place’ (the final “o” in *mim’komo*) will refer to ‘glory.’ If, however, you prefer to consider ‘Glory’ as an emanation (*n’atzel*), the verse will be taken according to its more literal meaning, the pronominal suffix referring to God, the meaning of the verse thus being, the ‘Glory of God’ is ‘blessed’ and is poured forth (*u’mushfa*) in abundance ‘from the place of God,’ i.e., from His essence (*atzmuto*), inasmuch as it is an emanation (*n’atzel*).” (My parenthetical comments)

Wolfson interprets the passage as follows:

“(from note 93) In accordance with these interpretations of the term Glory, Maimonides interprets Isaiah 6:3 in two ways, one taking the term *kavod* to mean the essence of God and the other to mean an emanation (Guide 1:19). Now just as *kavod* has these two meanings so the *Sefirot*, which are identified by the Cabalists with *kavod*, have two meanings with reference to their relation to God. According to some Cabalists, the *Sefirot* are identical with God’s essence while according to others they are emanations of God’s essence. Abraham Shalom (d. 1557?) compares this cabalistic controversy to the philosophic controversy as to whether the Prime Mover is identical with God or is something emanated from Him. What Crescas is trying to do in this passage is to transfer Maimonides’ discussion of the term *kavod* as he understood it to the term *kavod* as it was understood by the Cabalists in the sense of the *Sefirot*. Assuming first that *kavod*, or the *Sefirot*, is identical with God, Crescas interprets the verse to mean as follows: ‘the *blessedness* (*barukh*) of the Glory of God (*kavod h’*),’ i.e., of the *Sefirot*, ‘from Glory’s place (*mim’komo*),’ i.e., from the essence of God, inasmuch as the Glory or the *Sefirot* are identical with God’s essence. He [Wolfson refers to his translation ‘the blessedness’] takes *barukh* not as a passive participle but as a substantive.

“(note 94) Referring now to the other Cabalistic view, that the *Sefirot* are intermediaries and tools of God, Crescas interprets the verse as follows: ‘*Blessed* is (*barukh*) the Glory of God (*kavod h’*),’ i.e., the *Sefirot*, ‘from His place (*mim’komo*),’ i.e., from God’s essence.”

(Crescas, quoted in H.A. Wolfson’s translation and commentary, with original text, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard, 1929, pp. 201, 202, 460-462.)

YEHORAM BEN YEHOSHAPHAT, KING OF JUDAH

In the definition section, above, I suggested that there was something suspicious in Maimonides’ departure from his usual lexical format. Instead of giving proof-texts from the Bible, he provided three (out of five) from Rabbinic literature: the Talmud and the Mishnah. He brought the first two quotes from the Talmud to show that *makom* means “level of attainment.” The quotes use variants of the phrase “filling the place of one’s ancestors” to

demonstrate this. They connect strongly with the thrust of the last chapter, Guide 1:7, which contrasted Seth with the Adam's other children fathered after the expulsion, since only Seth *filled the place* of his ancestor as Adam's intellectual progeny. Both Talmud quotations are based on the same biblical passage, Chronicles 2:21:3 about one of the most striking cases of botched succession in the Bible, that of Yehoram to the throne of Yehoshaphat, King of Judah. The Chronicler generally praises Yehoshaphat, except for his marrying Yehoram off to the idolatrous daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel. Unfortunately, for Maimonides, the passage does not employ the term *makom*. Still, this story would have great significance for Maimonides:

“1. Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 2. And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these [were] the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3. And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he [was] the firstborn. 4. Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and [divers] also of the princes of Israel....6. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought [that which was] evil in the eyes of the Lord. 7. Howbeit the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons for ever....10. So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time [also] did Libnah revolt from under his hand; because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers. 11. Moreover, he [Jehoram] made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication (*va-yezzen*), and compelled Judah [thereto]. 12. And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13. But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring (*va-tazneh*), like to the whoredoms (*k'ha-znot*) of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, [which were] better than thyself: 14. Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: 15. And thou [shalt have] great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day. 16. Moreover, the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that [were] near the Ethiopians: 17. And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. 18. And, after all this, the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. 19. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. 20. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.”
 (Chronicles 2:21:1-20. The passage is not directly mentioned in the Guide. Maimonides invoked it in another context in Comm. on the Mishnah, *Kedoshim* 1:5)

A horrible and disgusting story! The King James Version is the best of the English translations because the others all insist on translating the variants of *zona* as “to go astray” (JPS 1917 translation) instead of whoring, their correct definition. The link with the Parable of the Married Harlot (*isha zona*) from Proverbs chapter 7 is obvious (See Introduction I above, section J). By marrying into idolatry, Yehoram not only failed the intellectual and moral succession of the Davidic line but also polluted the polity of the covenantal community. Worse, he murdered his brothers who were their father's true intellectual progeny: “better than thyself.” Elijah, who is *already dead* by the time of Yehoram, makes his unique appearance, by *sending a letter* to the king to persuade him to the right path. This particular appearance of Elijah inspired the tradition of his immortality. The great central line of Elijah's letter is Chronicles 21:13:

“But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring (*va-tazneh*), like to the whoredoms (*k'ha-znot*) of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, [which were] better than thyself.”

This verse nicely joins Maimonides' two main themes in this group of chapters, intellectual succession and the danger of materialism: the succession of Moses and Seth, against the devolution of Yehoram and the demon spawn of Adam.

GUIDE 1:9 THRONES

This is a lexical chapter (See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide). Maimonides continues his discussion of the distinction between God’s essence and His emanation, and introduces his cosmology.

KISSAY (CHAIR)

1. Throne.
2. Superior rank, dignity, or position
3. A place which God governs or in which He has manifested his glory, i.e., the Sanctuary, heaven, or the uppermost sphere, and possibly, but only by extension, the ether or quintessence that the sphere is composed of (See Guide 1:28, 2:26, last paragraph, 1:73 Prop. VIII). Maimonides hints at this extended meaning in the last sentence at the end of our chapter, “Our opinion will be further elucidated in the course of this Treatise”). The key to Definition 3 is that this “throne” is *created* by and separate from God.
4. The essence and greatness of God, inseparable from himself. This would include the “essential attributes” of will, wisdom, power, existence. The key to Definition 4 is that this “throne” is *identical* with God and used tautologically with Him.

Instances of Definition 2 and 3, Contextualized:

“A *glorious high throne* from the beginning [is] the *place* of our *sanctuary* (*kissay kavod marom me’rishon makom mikdashenu*).” (Jeremiah 17:12)

I have italicized the four key English terms: *glory*, *throne*, *place*, and *sanctuary*. Maimonides says that the meaning of *throne* extends from the seat of royalty, to mean any place exalted by “God’s manifestation of his greatness causing his *Shekhina* and splendor to rest upon it (*gdolat mi sh’nigla bo v’hashra shekhinato v’yakro alav*).” The whole verse would then mean that the *sanctuary* of our communion with God is a *throne*, since God caused his created emanation to rest upon it. See essay “The Created Light” in 1:5 above.

“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven [is] my *throne* (*kissay*), and the earth [is] my footstool (*hadom raglai*): where [is] the house that ye build unto me? And where [is] the place of my rest?” (Isaiah 66:1)

Maimonides says that those whose “mind. . . observes...with intelligence” extend the meaning of *throne* to the heavenly spheres. This suggests to him “The omnipotence of the Being which has called them (the spheres) into existence, regulates their motions, and governs the sublunary world by their beneficial influence (*b’shefa tovam*).” See Guide 2:5, which is about God’s government of the spheres, and see my essay below.

Instances of Definition 4 Contextualized:

“For he said, because the Lord hath sworn (*ki yad al kes y-h*): the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” (Exodus 17:16)

The KJV does not reproduce this clearly. JPS 1917 renders it better: “For My *hand* is upon the *throne* of God.” The phrase includes two anthropomorphisms, *hand* and *throne*. The verse is God’s oath, sworn on His eternal

throne, to destroy Amalek. Maimonides argues that we never swear on anything beneath us, only on what is superior to us. But no throne, however defined, is superior to God. Were God to swear, it could only be by Himself. This reflexive interpretation is suggested by the duplicative phrase “generation to generation,” *midor dor*. Thus, the term *throne* conceals a tautologous reference to God, to His eternal essence. See essay below, and the chapters on the divine attributes, 1:51 to 1:60.

“Thou, O Lord, remainest (*teshev*—JPS: “enthroned”) for ever; Thy *throne* (*kisakha*) from generation to generation.” (Lamentations 5:19)

Maimonides: “By ‘Thy throne’ we understand something inseparable from God.” He uses the same idea from the previous quotation, “from generation to generation,” to suggest the eternal *identity* of the throne with God. The idea that anything else could be eternal *with* God constitutes heresy (*zohi kefirā bli sofek*), suggesting “partnership” (Arabic: *shirk*) and polytheism. Therefore, the *throne* that is *eternal* must be a tautologous reference to God himself, his self-same essence. The throne eternally “with” God reminds us of the eternal attributes of God. Maimonides teaches that the so-called “essential attributes” of God, i.e., His will, intellect, etc., are identical with God. Their distinction as separate attributes is no more than our anthropomorphic projection of the humanly familiar upon God.

Maimonides also implies that though he has two contradictory definitions for *throne*, Definitions 3 and 4, they can be harmonized. In this regard, notice that he has proof-texts from the same “traditional” author to support either definition (the rabbinic tradition identifies Jeremiah as author of Lamentations). While it is not easy to bridge the contradiction, turn to my *Introduction II*, which discusses contradictions in the Guide, and why we should not take them as absolute contradictions.

WHEN IS A CHAIR NOT A CHAIR?

The definition that Maimonides excludes for *kissay* is the most obvious: a chair you sit on. Kafih says, footnote 1, *ad loc.*, (my trans.): “In Maimonides’ day, in Europe, everyone sat on chairs and ceased using the term “chair” to indicate degree or level of spiritual significance.” This democratic assertion is not precisely true, since in English we still distinguish between chairs and thrones. What he means is that in the distant past people usually sat on the floor, but to indicate the superiority of the leader they gave him a chair. Maimonides certainly knows the general use for chairs, and discusses the subject at 1:69:

“The same argument holds good in reference to all final causes. If you assign to a thing a certain purpose, you can find for that purpose another purpose. We mention, e.g., a (wooden) chair; its substance is wood, the joiner is its *agens*, the square its form, and its purpose is that one should sit upon it [the four Aristotelian causes]. You may then ask, For what purpose does one sit upon it? The answer will be that he who is sitting upon it desires to be high above the ground. If again you ask, For what purpose does he desire to be high above the ground, you will receive the answer that he wishes to appear high in the eyes of those who see him. For what purpose does he wish to appear higher in the eyes of those who see him? That the people may respect and fear him. What is the good of his being feared? His commands will be respected. For what purpose are his commands to be respected? That people shall refrain from injuring each other. What is the object of this precaution? To maintain order amongst the people. In this way one purpose necessitates the pre-existence of another, except the final purpose, which is the execution of the will of God, according to one of the opinions which have been propounded, as will be explained (3:13 and 3:14), and the final answer will be, ‘It is the will of God.’ According to the view of others... ‘It has

been decreed by His wisdom.’ According to either opinion, the series of the successive purposes terminates, as has been shown, in God’s will or wisdom, which, in our opinion, are identical with His essence, and are not any thing separate from Himself or different from His essence. Consequently, God is the final purpose of everything.”

God’s idea of the chair (or at least of chair-ness) links all four definitions in 1:9. Whether it is a chair to sit on, a throne, a degree of majesty, the *glory* or the “created light,” all exist because God wills or thinks of them. These attributes, *will* and *thought* are identical with God, an idea developed in chapters 1:51 to 1:60. This is how Maimonides harmonizes Definitions 3 and 4 above. This resolution is suggested by his choice of two references from the prophet Jeremiah (Lamentations is rabbinically attributed to Jeremiah) as instances of the two definitions of *throne*. Since Jeremiah uses both, the assumption is that they must be harmonizable (*gezera shaveh*).

AN ETERNAL PRE-EXISTENT THRONE?

H. A. Wolfson in a chapter entitled “The Pre-existent Throne and Created Will,” mentions the Qur’an passages (7:52, 20:4) showing Allah mounting or seated on a pre-existent throne borne by four angels. He argues that these texts reminded the Jews of similar material in the Bible and in the Talmud (1 Kings 22:19, Ezekiel 1:5, *Pesakhim* 54a). They also learned of Muslim scholars who opposed the literal interpretation of these verses in the Qur’an and who contended that the throne was the ninth and outermost Aristotelian sphere (*Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy*, Harvard, 1979, pp. 113, 114, and 116)

The Muslim idea of a pre-existent throne closely parallels the Muslim discussion of a pre-existent uncreated Qur’an. Wolfson contends that this discussion of a pre-existent divine partner was a repercussion in Islam an older idea. This was the Philonic Logos reconstituted as the Johannian “Word,” in “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). As there is in Christianity an incarnated word, Wolfson argued that the Qur’an became the “inlibrated” word of God. Furthermore, just as the Word was “with” God, so the Qur’an was “with” God, eternally.

This notion was deeply disturbing to the Jewish conception of monotheism. It provoked responses from medieval Jewish philosophers, including R. Saadia Gaon and R. Ibn Gabirol. Maimonides is part of this tradition, which calls forth his chapters 1:51 to 1:60, where he rejects the separate existence of divine “essential attributes” such as power, will, or wisdom. We must take these attributes as *identical* with God. They are tautologous utterances. To say that God is “wise” is as much as to say that He is God.

Maimonides treats the concept of the *throne* similarly. Since it is what God himself swears on when he vows eternal war on the Amelekites, and since all vows are made on that which is superior, God can only vow by *Himself*. We should take this as the meaning of *ki yad al kes y-h*, “For My hand is upon the throne of God.” Moreover, the doubled clause in that verse “from generation to generation” supports this reflexive reading, especially since it is heresy (*kefira*) to hold anything else an eternal partner (Arabic: *shirk*) with God.

GOD OR HIS SHEKHINA?

The foregoing reading of *throne* as God’s essence seems to contradict Onkelos and differs from another Maimonidean discussion of this passage. In the “foot” chapter, 1:28, Maimonides applauds Onkelos’ translation of *foot* (*regel*) as *throne* in the discussion of the vision of the elders of Israel, Exodus 24:10. Nor does he there

dispute Onkelos' translation of *ki yad al kes y-h* as "by God whose *Shekhina* is upon the throne of His glory." The *Shekhina* is the personification of the divine indwelling or presence. It happens to bear a feminine ending. Onkelos frequently substitutes this term when the Biblical text makes direct or anthropomorphic references to God. Maimonides takes the *Shekhina* as a creation of God, not His essence, and certainly not as a "partner." However, the thought had not eluded the Talmudic tradition. In my *Introduction I*, I mentioned Rabbi Akiva's interpretative dance around Daniel 7:9, a famous passage about thrones, pointedly *not* quoted by Maimonides here (but see Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 1:9). The Daniel passage reads:

"I beheld till the *thrones* were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment [was] white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne [was like] the fiery flame, [and] his wheels [as] burning fire."

The passage obviously parallels the vision of the elders of Israel as well as the classic visions of the *Merkava* in Isaiah and Ezekiel. However, this is the only passage that takes the celestial throne as *plural*. Rabbi Akiva (*Hagigah* 14a and b) first interprets the plural "thrones" as the thrones of God and *his beloved*, but then *re-explained* them as thrones of justice and grace. R. Akiva obviously sublimates his initial prurient idolatrous gloss of the Daniel passage (Soncino mistranslates the passage in 14a as *David* instead of *dod*—beloved). The explosive character of this realization makes the concealment necessary. It is precisely this plural understanding that Maimonides must avoid in his discussion of the *Shekhina*.

In the "foot" chapter, Maimonides explains that the whiteness of the sapphire (*livnat ha-sapir*) which is "under His feet" or "under His throne" in the elder's vision, is the created *materia prima*, unformed prime or potential matter. Additionally, in our own chapter, Definition 3 of *throne*, is specifically about *created* exalted existences other than Himself. There is thus a contradiction whether *throne* in Exodus 17:16 should refer to:

"His glory, i.e., to the *Shekhina*, which is a light *created* for that purpose," (Guide 1:28);

Or whether, as he says in our chapter:

"These, however, need not be considered as something separate from the existence of God or as part of the *creation*, so that God would appear to have existed both without the throne and with the throne; such a belief would be undoubtedly heretical."

Is the throne created or not? The key may be the term *yad*, "hand," which does not get a lexical chapter, but which Maimonides explains at 2:41 in the following language:

"I need not explain what a dream is, but I will explain the meaning of the term *marei*, 'vision,' which occurs in the passage: 'In a vision (*be-marei*) do I make myself known unto him' (Numbers 12:6). The term signifies that which is also called *marei ha-nevua*, 'prophetic vision,' *yad ha-shem*, 'the hand of God,' and *makhazei*, 'a vision.'"

Thus *yad ha-shem*, "hand of God," can mean prophetic vision. Apparently, we should reinterpret *throne* in *ki yad al kes y-h* as tautologously essential and uncreated from the point of view of God, *but* occurring as a "created light" in the prophetic *vision* of the elders. God's essence is unavailable to prophecy, but the prophetic

imagination receives images that darkly illumine its understanding of His ungraspable essence.

THE BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE OF THE SPHERES

“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven [is] my *throne* (*kissay*), and the earth [is] my footstool (*hadom raglai*): where [is] the house that ye build unto me? And where [is] the place of my rest?” (Isaiah 66:1)

With this quotation, Maimonides begins to introduce his cosmology. He defines God’s “throne” in Definition 3 as the cosmological spheres. Because *throne* indicates a high degree of majesty, those in the know (*sh’yodan u’mithbonen*) understand the greatness of their Creator (*g’dolet m’mtsiam*) who created the celestial spheres that govern the world through their beneficial influence or emanation (*b’shefa tova*).

The passage extends the idea of the previously cited verse, Jeremiah 17:12, that the throne “is the place of our sanctuary” upon which God emanated his *Shekhina*. The sanctuary is but a physical place, but because of this divine manifestation, it becomes the place of our communion with God. But if the spheres are mere astral objects, why should they receive the dignity of the designation *throne* from Him? In other words, what have the objects of astronomy to do with the divine *Shekhina*?

Maimonides’ answer, set forth in Guide 2:5, is that the spheres are *alive*:

“The opinion of Aristotle, that the spheres are capable of comprehension and conception, is in accordance with the words of our prophets and our theologians or Sages. The philosophers further agree that this world below is governed by influences *emanating* from the spheres, and that the latter comprehend and have knowledge of the things which they influence. This theory is also met with in Scripture: comp. ‘[the stars and all the host of heaven] which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations’ (Deuteronomy 4:19), that is to say, the stars, which God appointed to be the means of governing His creatures, and not the objects of man’s worship. It has therefore been stated clearly: ‘And to rule over the day and over the night’ (Genesis 1:18). The term ‘ruling’ here refers to the power which the spheres possess of governing the earth, in addition to the property of giving light and darkness. The latter property is the direct cause of genesis and destruction; it is described in the words, ‘And to divide the light from the darkness (*ibid.*).’ It is impossible to assume that those who rule a thing are ignorant of that very thing which they rule, if we take ‘to rule’ in its proper sense.”

The medieval spheres were not planetary orbits, but rather a system of transparent globes rotating around the earth. The planets are fixed permanently on these rotating globes. Thus, the apparent movement of the planets is really the movement of these spheres. They are like layers of a glass onion around the earth. They are moved by their souls in eternal rotation. The outer sphere, the ninth sphere according to Aristotle, the eighteenth according to Maimonides, *causes* the motion of the inner spheres and of all life on earth. It moves because its soul’s desire for God draws it to Him. The sphere, drawn by love of God, cannot reach him, and so it rotates forever. God is, therefore, the ultimate indirect cause of its motion as the unmoved mover.

The ultimate mover of the spheres in eternal rotation must correspondingly possess an eternal and infinite force. The mover cannot be a *material* thing, since all matter is finitely bounded in its “particular place,” as explained in the last chapter. The uniquely infinite non-material force could only be God. This is the only philosophic proof

for God's existence that Maimonides accepts.

The matter of the spheres is different from matter on earth. The unique "fifth element" of the spheres contrasts with the sublunar hylic matter. There are thus two substances. Prophetic discourse distinguishes these two material substances (2:28): the unformed hylic matter is the "white" or "sapphire" like substance underneath the "throne" in the elder's vision, while the superlunar "fifth element" is the "garment of light" of Psalms 104:2.

If the heavens are God's throne, why is the earth the stool for his feet (*hadom raglai*)? Maimonides' invocation of Isaiah 66:1 links our chapter, 1:9, with Guide 1:28, the "foot" chapter. Recall that "foot" is the male causative principle in Maimonides' lexicon. Through their motion, the spheres cause all physical change, generation and corruption. The spheres are the means by which the forms emanate upon matter. That is why Maimonides is prepared to call the spheres the *throne*, Definition 3: not that they are the throne in themselves, but because of the emanation associated with them. They thereby act as God's *Shekhina*, His indwelling, symbolizing the emanation of form into matter.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel, in his opening note to this chapter, aptly portrays the meaning of this definition of *throne*:

"This Definition is the intellectualization of the concept of the Creator's governance of the universe. The wonderful ordering of the levels of existence in the universe, i.e., the levels of the heavenly spheres and their lawful movements, which engender the receipt of forms in matter, according to the preparation of matter; and the emanation of the upper world upon that which is in the lower world—all of these attest to the existence of universal order, from which flow all the levels of the universe and by means of which they are connected, all from the existence of the upper world, its movement, and its emanative governance of the lower world." (My translation)

GUIDE 1:10 ASCENT AND DESCENT

This is a lexical chapter (See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide”). The terms *ascent* and *descent* introduce the theme of divine providence and its interplay with prophecy.

ALAH (ASCENT) **YARAD (DESCENT)**

1. Ascending and descending of a physical body.
2. Ascending and descending in greatness and power.
3. Intellectual processes: When we reflect on something beneath ourselves, we are said to descend, and when our attention is raised to a subject above us, we ascend.
4. Prophetic influence or “overflow” *from* God is called *yerida*, “descending,” while termination of the prophetic communication or the departure of the divine glory from a place is called *aliyah*, “ascending.”
5. Descending: used when divine punishment is visited upon man. Maimonides returns to *descent* (*yarad*) in 1:27, to show that Onkelos, the early Bible translator, usually rendered it with Aramaic euphemisms for divine “manifestation.”

Instances of Definition 2, Contextualized:

“The stranger that is within thee shall *get up* (*yaalei*) above thee very high, and thou shalt *come down* (*tered*) very low.” (Deuteronomy 28:43)

This verse is from the chapter known as the *tokhacha* (“rebuke”), Deuteronomy 28:15-68. That chapter tells of the punishments Israel will suffer for breaking commandments. The verse is an excellent choice for Definition 2 because it uses variants of both terms *alah* and *yarad*, while introducing the theme of divine providence. See essay below.

“And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe [and] to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on *high* (*elyon*) above all nations of the earth” (Deuteronomy 28:1).

This verse commences the short list of blessings preceding the *tokhacha* in Deuteronomy 28. By adopting the Torah, the people receive special providential beneficence. All others are subject to the natural forces. Notice that Maimonides gives us this verse out of order in relation to the verse above. This is his observance of the principle of “ascending in holiness.” See below.

“And the Lord *magnified* Solomon exceedingly (*lema’alah*) in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him [such] royal majesty (*vayiten alav hod malkhut*) as had not been on any king before him in Israel.” (I Chronicles 29:25)

The passage is from the conclusion of First Chronicles, about the death of David and his son’s succession. It thus continues the theme of *intellectual progeny* (see Guide 1:7). Although this proof-text is only supposed to illustrate Definition 2 it certainly points to Definition 4 of *yerida*, inasmuch as the latter part of the verse, unquoted by Maimonides, is about the divine bestowal of “royal majesty” (*hod malkhut*) upon Solomon, who was “almost a prophet” (2:45). Definition 4 is about the providential bestowal of prophecy by God through a process of emanation, figuratively conceived as a *downward* motion.

Instance of Definition 2 and 3, Contextualized:

“In holy matters men must *ascend* and not *descend* (*maalin b'kodesh v'ayn moridin*).”

(Talmud, *Berakhot* 28A)

This rule is from the Talmud, not the Bible. Schwarz, footnote 3 *ad loc.*, gives sixteen citations for the rule in Talmud. In this particular case, the rabbis' concern is the succession crisis in the Yeshiva between Gamaliel and Eleazar b. Azariah. After Eleazar was promoted to head the Yeshiva, the question arose whether he could be deposed without committing a descent in “holy matters.” The Talmud passage is thus an example of Definition 3, about intellectual ascent and descent. The passage also links to the immediately preceding proof-text about the Solomonic *succession* (Definition 2).

The rabbis generally took the rule of ascending in holiness as a precept of personal or societal *conduct*. The idea is that our actions should always move toward intellectual and moral improvement. Maimonides, however, also seems to take it as a rule governing textual *content* and organization. He usually tries to set his definitions and proof texts in the order of ascension to holiness. That is why they frequently begin with the most physical or anthropomorphic use of a term. It also explains the odd way he arrays the proof-texts themselves, especially in this chapter, frequently treating later verses before previous verses. He does this with the two *tokhakha* chapter verses, above (Deuteronomy 28), and he does it again with the two verses about the Tower of Babel, cited below (Exodus 19).

Instances of Definition 1 and 3, Contextualized:

“And Moses *went up* (*alah*) unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel.” (Exodus 19:3)

Maimonides does not bring this proof-text for Definitions 1 and 3 in order, but throws it to the end of our chapter. Maimonides provides Definition 3 in one sentence, without quoting a text, just after the Talmud quote, above: “The two words (*alah* and *yarad*) are also applied to intellectual processes, namely, when we reflect on something beneath ourselves we are said to go down, and when our attention is *raised to a subject above us* we are said to rise.” It is only at the end of our chapter that he cites this verse as the example for Definition 3. What he means is that when “Moses went up to God” he went up in his mind, “raised to a subject above us.” Next, he invokes Definition 1, physical ascension. He cannot avoid the physical definition, since Moses really did climb the mountain, a historical occurrence. However, he says:

“...in addition to its *literal* meaning that Moses also ascended to the top of the mount, upon which a certain *material light* (the manifestation of God's glory) was visible; ...we must not imagine that the Supreme Being occupies a place to which we can ascend, or from which we can descend. He is far from what the ignorant imagine.”

Once again, as in Guide 1:5, he mentions the created material light (*or ha-nivra*) at the very end of a chapter, in connection with a physical definition of a term. He does not invoke this material light in a disparaging sense. The light appears in the imagination of the prophet in the moment of vision. See our section “The Created Light” in 1:5 above.

Instances of Definition 4, Contextualized:

“And I will *come down* (*v'yaradti*) and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which [is] upon thee and will put [it] upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear [it] not thyself alone.” (Numbers 11:17)

This passage concerns the beginnings of the institution of the Sanhedrin, after the “burning” at Taverah. God talks “with thee,” Moses, not with the seventy elders, but afterward God “will take of the spirit which [is] upon thee and will put [it] upon them.” This is an apt illustration of the bestowal of prophecy, and of the political significance of prophecy. Definition 4 teaches that the Bible figuratively conceives the divine bestowal of prophecy as a descent.

Maimonides also placed this verse in our chapter because the rabbinic tradition grasped this succession from Moses to the Sanhedrin as a descent in holiness (Definition 3). Before this, Moses guided the people through his uninterrupted access to revelation, a level of prophecy the elders could not obtain. By contrast, the following proof-texts ascend in holiness because they are about the revelation at Sinai.

“And the Lord *came down* (*vayered*) upon Mount Sinai on the top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses [up] to the top of the mount; and Moses *went up* (*v'yaal*).” (Exodus 19:20)

This passage and the next, and the passage at the end of our chapter, all came from Exodus 19, about the initial reception of the Torah on Sinai. The thought is that when it says “And the Lord *came down*,” God does not physically descend but causes his divine emanation or *Shekhina* to descend upon Sinai. That is why Maimonides includes this passage under Definition 4. God’s emanative influence (*shefa*) can rest upon a person, making him a prophet, or upon a place, making it a sanctuary where divine communion can occur (Guide 1:9).

“And be ready against the third day: for the Lord will *come down* (*yered*) in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai.” (Exodus 19:11)

The idea is not that God descends, but that prophecy descends upon the people, “in the sight all the people,” meaning that they become “seers,” i.e., prophets.

“And God *went up* (*va'yaal*) from him (Jacob) in the place where He talked with him.” (Genesis 35:13)

The subject is the revelation during which God changes Jacob’s name to Israel. With this verse, Maimonides shifts to the topic of God’s *ascension* from revelation. At the conclusion of prophecy, God figuratively ascends from the prophet. That is why the passage, “And Moses went up unto God” (Exodus 19:3), is not an example of Definition 4, since in Definition 4 *ascension* indicates God’s *conclusion* of revelation to Jacob. By contrast, in Exodus 19:3, Moses ascends in thought (Definition 3) to *commence* the reception of the Torah.

“And he left off talking with him, And God *went up* from (*me'al*) Abraham.” (Genesis 17:22)

The Midrash, explaining this passage, states that “the Patriarchs are [God’s] heavenly chariot” (*Genesis Rabbah* 47:6, 82:6). When the prophet’s intellect is activated in the divine communion of revelation, he unites with the emanated intelligence, the active intellect, which equates to the *merkavah*, the divine chariot. Thus, Maimonides links several themes: prophecy, the Account of the Chariot, and God’s ongoing providence over His creations. Compare his *extra* definition of *alah* and *yarad* in Guide 1:15, where he says that the terms represent the ascent and descent of the prophet himself. See essay below.

Instances of Definition 5 Contextualized:

“Go to, let us *go down* (*nerda*) and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” (Genesis 11:7)

Maimonides reserves Definition 5 for the *descent* experienced when God punishes men. This quote and the next are from the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Maimonides explains that before God *descends* to punish malefactors, He first “visits” them (*pakad*). Thus, we should divide the text: “Let us go down” is the visitation, “and there confound their language” is the actual punishment. Rashi (on the next passage), quoting Midrash, explains that “He (God) did not need to do this (i.e., visit), except to teach judges not to condemn a defendant until they see the case and understand it.”

“And the Lord *came down* (*vayered*) to see the city and the tower, which the children of men (*bnei ha-adam*) builded.” (Genesis 11:5)

This quote precedes the one above in Genesis 11, and illustrates the actual visitation before the punishment, although it does not use the term “visit,” *pakad*. Maimonides’ odd textual arrangement constitutes an ascent, so to speak, because the visitation is better than the actual punishment.

More importantly, the verse invokes the term “children of men” *bnei ha-adam*, to describe the denizens of Babel. The Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 38:9, explains the significance of this phrase, as quoted and explained by Rashi:

“The sons of whom else [could they have been]? The sons of donkeys and camels? Rather, [this refers to] the sons of the first man, who was ungrateful and said: ‘The woman whom You gave [to be] with me’ (Genesis 3:12). These [sons of Babel], too, were ungrateful in rebelling against the One who lavished goodness upon them, and saved them from the Flood.”

See essay below, together with what I wrote on 1:7 in the section “Demons.” The “sons of men” receive a different *kind* of providential supervision than that granted to the Patriarch’s intellectual progeny.

“I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.” (Genesis 18:21)

This quote is from the account of Sodom in Genesis 18. God “visits” the “children of men” of Sodom who had sunk far below their human potential, thus removing themselves from the providential supervision that benefits those true to the Torah; indeed, when divine punishment comes, these “children of men” even lose the benefit of the general “providence” provided all other beings by nature.

PROVIDENCE: INTRODUCTION

Maimonides introduces his theory of divine providence in our chapter. At this early stage of the Guide, he develops the *exoteric* description of providence. The *esoteric* description of the mechanism of providence is the *Maaseh Merkava*, the account of the chariot found in the prophetic books of the Bible. He gives this esoteric mechanism systematic treatment in Book Three of the Guide.

His keynote is a non-lexical verse: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalms 8:4). We can divide the text in two parts.

The first half, “What is man (*enosh*), that thou art mindful of him?” notes man’s inferiority. Despite his inferiority, the psalmist exclaims that God remembers man for good: “For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.” This first half of the verse calls man *Enosh*.

The second half of the verse, “and the son of man (*ben adam*), that thou visitest (*tifkdenu*) him?” employs the term *tifkdenu*, “visitest him” (a variant of *pakad*, “visit,”) which Maimonides says is always used *before* God punishes man. In this half of the verse, man is called “*ben adam*.” Recall my essay “Demons,” on Guide 1:7. In that chapter, Maimonides wrote:

“Those sons of Adam who were born before that time were not human in the true sense of the word, they had not ‘*the form of man*’ (*ha-tzura ha-enoshit*) ...It is acknowledged that a man who does not possess this ‘form’ (the nature of which has just been explained) is not human, but a mere animal in human shape and form (*sh’eino adam eleh baal khai b’tzurat adam v’tavnito*). Yet such a creature has the power of causing harm and injury, a power which does not belong to other creatures. For those gifts of intelligence and judgment with which he has been endowed for the purpose of acquiring perfection, but which he has failed to apply to their proper aim, are used by him for wicked and mischievous ends; he begets evil things, as though he merely resembled man, or simulated his outward appearance. Such was the condition of those sons of Adam (*benei adam*) who preceded Seth...i.e., demons (*k’lomar shedim*).”

Thus, in the Psalms passage, the “son of man” is “visited” (before punishment) because he had not lived up to his human potential. By contrast it is Enosh, who is the son of Seth, and the grandson of Adam, (Genesis 4:26, 5:6), that God “art mindful of.” Enosh is Adam’s intellectual and moral progeny. He achieves the ‘the form of man’ (*ha-tzura ha-enoshit*). This is so despite his other faults, amply portrayed in the tradition. The Talmud, *Shabbat* 118b, recites of Enosh:

“R. Hiyya b. Abba said in R. Johanan’s name: He who observes the Sabbath according to its laws, even if he practices idolatry like the generation of Enosh, is forgiven, for it is said, ‘Blessed (“Happy” in JPS 1917: *ashrei*) is man [*Enosh*] that doeth this ... that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it (*mekhalelo*)’ (Isaiah 56:2): read not *mekhalelo* but *makhulo* [he is forgiven].”

The Midrash, *Genesis Rabba* 23:6, on Enosh, reminds us of Maimonides’ anthropology:

“‘And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh’ (Genesis 4, 26). Abba Cohen Bardela was asked: ‘[Why does Scripture enumerate] Adam, Seth, Enosh, and then become silent?’ ‘Hitherto they were created in the likeness and image [of God],’ he replied, ‘but from then onward Centaurs (*keintorin*) were created.’”

The Psalm, then, embodies the principle of divine providence. Those who are intellectual progeny of Adam, Abraham, and Moses are those God “art mindful of.” Those who are not such progeny, who in some sense are less than human, are “visited” and punished by God. They are called *beni adam*, but not *enosh*. Maimonides links our chapter 1:10 to Guide 3:17 with this Psalm. Guide 3:17 details the way providence works:

“It may be by mere chance that a ship goes down with all her contents (Maimonides’ brother died by shipwreck), ... or the roof of a house falls upon those within; but it is not due to chance, according to our view, that in the one instance the men went into the ship, or remained in the house in the other instance: it is due to the will of God, and is in accordance with the justice of His judgments, the method of which our mind is incapable of understanding. I have been induced to accept this theory by the circumstance that I have not met in any of the prophetic books with a description of God’s Providence otherwise than in relation to human beings. The prophets even express their surprise that God should take notice of man, who is too little and too unimportant to be worthy of the attention of the Creator: how, then, should other living creatures be considered as proper objects for Divine Providence! Comp. ‘What is man, that thou takest knowledge of him?’ (Ps. 144:3): ‘*What is man (Enosh), that thou art mindful of him?*’ (*ibid.* 8:8). It is clearly expressed in many Scriptural passages that God provides for all men, and controls all their deeds (many citations)... All that is mentioned of the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a perfect proof that Divine Providence extends to every man individually. But the condition of the individual beings of other living creatures is undoubtedly the same as has been stated by Aristotle... I hold that Divine Providence is related and closely connected with the intellect, because Providence can only proceed from an intelligent being, from a being that is itself the most perfect Intellect. Those creatures, therefore, which receive part of that intellectual influence, will become subject to the action of Providence in the same proportion as they are acted upon by the Intellect.”

In Guide 3:51 he tells us more: man’s participation in divine providence is *directly relative* to his ability to fix his thought on God, to “keep God before him always.” Otherwise, he is subject to the law of nature, and not to providential benefit. Animals are only subject to *nature*. To the extent that men are not in the presence of God, they are in the grip of nature. Worse yet, those “children of Adam” who do not embrace their human potential become the subject of divine punishment, falling even below the level protected by the laws of nature. This explains why Maimonides begins our chapter with two passages from the *tokhacha*, that compendium of God’s providential benefits to the Jews, and of their horrible, even unnatural, punishments. The punishment of the evil cities of Babel and Sodom, the coming down, *yerida*, of their destruction, is the subject of three further quotes in this chapter, illustrating the same line of thought.

PROPHECY AND PROVIDENCE

The remaining quotations link providence to prophecy in the lives of Jacob, Abraham and Moses. Just as God brings down providence and punishment, so He also brings down the divine emanation that causes prophecy. Maimonides said this clearly in Guide 1:15, where he *again* considers the definitions of our terms *alah* and *yarad*,

ascent and descent. Observe the interplay between the treatment in our chapter and the treatment in 1:15. In that chapter, he says about Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:10-17):

“How suggestive, too, is the expression ‘ascending and descending on it (*olim v'yordim bo*)’! The ascent is mentioned before the descent, inasmuch as the ‘ascending’ and arriving at a certain height of the ladder precedes the ‘descending,’ i.e., the application of the knowledge acquired in the ascent for the training and instruction of mankind. This application is termed ‘descent,’ in accordance with our explanation of the term *yarad* (in our chapter 1:10).”

Maimonides in 1:15 maintains that the angels on the ladder are prophets. This passage should remind you of what Maimonides said in the Introduction to the Guide about the profession of Solomon (See my *Introduction I*, section C, “The Prophet Must Teach.”) Solomon reached the level of prophetic inspiration, *ruakh ha-kodesh*. He did not himself become a prophet, according to Guide 2:45, although, in his Introduction, Maimonides calls Solomon's parables as “prophetic.” We learned in the Introduction that prophecy is a three-step process. The prophet, having perfected his mind and morals, may, when permitted by God, *ascend* the ladder to revelation. He subsequently *descends*, bringing what he learned to the people, in order to improve their minds and morals. Having completed both steps, the prophet gains the *merit* to receive further prophecy. The prophet is a “chariot,” that is, a focus of divine communion with men. In our chapter, in Definition 4, we learn that God figuratively descends when bestowing prophecy. In Guide 1:15, we learn that the prophet descends to provide this gift to mankind.

The placement of part of the definition of *alah* and *yarad* in 1:15 may explain the purport of the first paragraph of our chapter. Maimonides repeats there what he said in 1:8 that the Guide is not a dictionary. We should not expect him to list all meanings of a term, just those that suit his purpose (*ele nazkir m'otam ha-inyanim ma sh'anakhnu tzarikhim lo l'inyanenu lo yoter*). We must ask, if this is not a comprehensive dictionary, what meaning of *alah* and *yarad* is excluded?

The answer is that our chapter is primarily about providence. The passage in 1:15 is about prophecy. Although the two are connected, he develops one theme at a time. Here he develops God's perspective. In 1:15, he develops man's perspective, specifically the perspective of the prophet. Maimonides thereby avoids confusing the *direction* of the flow: God's providential flow *descends* on the prophet as the prophet *ascends* Jacob's Ladder to receive the flow; the flow *ascends* returning to God as the prophet *descends* to bring the revelation to the people (cf. the discussion of the “downward way” and the “upward way,” in Kalman Bland, *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect*, Ibn Rushd, commentary by Moses Narboni, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982, pp 3-4). Since the Lexicon is not a dictionary, it makes sense for him to divide the discussion of the ascent of the prophet in prophecy from God's ascent after the bestowal of His providence upon the prophet.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel's introductory comment to our chapter is apt:

“Until now we have seen how man ascends intellectually to God. There is an attainment higher than this, the attainment of prophecy. In prophecy, we witness the path that God takes toward man. Man cannot attain prophecy by his power alone, for God must emanate it upon man. As this emanation grows man ascends to the grade of prophecy, and as it wanes man descends.” (My translation)

GUIDE 1:11 ENTHRONED

This is a lexical chapter (See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide”). Maimonides uses the term “sit” to summarize his doctrine of God’s relation to His creations.

YASHAV (SIT)

1. Sitting. The term may not be used for sitting on a chair (Guide 1:9). It can only mean sitting on a throne.
2. Immobility, changelessness, especially when applied to God, and when portraying God’s relationship with any other being.

Instance Of Definition 1, Contextualized:

“So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest *sat* (*yoshev*) upon a seat (*ha-kissay*) by a post of the Temple of the Lord.” (I Samuel 1:9)

This passage precedes Hannah’s famous prayer for a child. We have already learned that neither “seat” nor “chair” are permitted definitions of *kissay*. “Throne” is a permitted definition. Maimonides has in mind the traditional interpretation of this passage, as articulated by Rashi: “The defective spelling (of *yoshev*, without a *vav*) denotes that on that day, he (Eli) was seated on a huge chair, for he was appointed judge over Israel.” The word *kissay*, “seat,” is otherwise superfluous since we know that Eli *sat*. Tradition therefore interpreted Eli’s *kissay* as throne.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“He maketh the barren woman to keep house (*moshivi akeret ha-bayit*, lit. ‘to *sit* in the house’), [and to be] a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord.” (Psalms 113:9)

The passage is difficult to translate. JPS 1917 has: “Who maketh the barren woman to dwell in her house.” Maimonides makes it a metaphorical reference to Jerusalem’s higher calling: “In the promise that Jerusalem should remain constantly and permanently in an exalted condition.” “House” can mean “wife” (Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud*, 168). Thus, it could mean that He makes stricken Jerusalem a fruitful wife, producing a nation of priests. This theme repeats an idea from the prior chapter: God sanctifies a place by causing his emanation to descend (*yarad*) upon it.

“And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one. All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, (lit., ‘she will rise and *sit* in her place,’ *v’raama v’yashva*) from Benjamin’s gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and [from] the tower of Hananeel unto the king’s winepresses.” (Zechariah 14:9-10)

This passage also refers to the permanent establishment of Jerusalem as a place of divine communion. Maimonides wants us to translate “sit” as “fixed eternally.” *Raama*, “she will rise,” is close in meaning to *kima*, “rise,” the term defined in the next lexical chapter. Maimonides probably included this passage to combine the meanings he gives “rise” and “sit,” to say that Jerusalem is *confirmed* (“rise”) as the *eternal throne* (“sit”) for man’s communion with God.

“Thou, O Lord, *remainest* (*teshev*, *sit*) for ever; thy throne (*kisakha*) from generation to generation.” (Lamentations 5:19)

The verse combines the idea of sitting with the idea of *throne*. When we associate *sitting* with God, it means, according to Maimonides: “He who is everlasting, constant, and in no way subject to change; immutable in His Essence, and as He consists of nought but His Essence, He is mutable in no way whatever; not mutable in His relation to other things: for there is no relation whatever existing between Him and any other being.” In this instance, he invokes Definition 4 of *throne* from Guide 1:9, not Definition 3; that is, *throne* is the divine essence,

not the divine emanation. The verse has “sit” and “throne” together with God, meaning that His eternal essence is permanent, i.e., immutable, not subject to change.

“A Song of degrees. Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest (*ha-yoshvi*, sits) in the heavens.” (Psalms 123:1)

The discussion turns to God’s relations with his creatures, beginning with the heavens. God is *unchanging* in His relationship with the heavens. The “heaven,” which is God’s “throne,” takes *throne* according to its Definition 4, a place created by God on which His emanation descends. We learn from God’s “sitting” in the heavens that his relation to the rotating spheres is a relation in which neither He nor the spheres change. In the Maimonidean/Aristotelian view, the particular individuals rotate eternally but otherwise do not change. This includes the stars, the planets, and the spheres to which they are attached. Their movements are eternal and unvarying. This immutability is the *fundamentum* they have in common with God. There is no “relationship” without such a *fundamentum*. The relation that God has with the heavens is that He is their unmoved mover. God cannot have a relationship with the evanescent, mutable individual creatures of the world. That would imply change in God (see “Generation and Corruption,” below).

“He that *sitteth* (*yoshev*) in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” (Psalms 2:4)

The literal context is God’s laughter at the hubristic and evil strategies of the nations of the world. However, Maimonides quotes the passage for the same reason as the previous passage: “sitting in the heavens,” means that God is unchanging in relation to heaven’s unchanging existence.

“[It is] He that *sitteth* (*ha-yoshev*) upon the circle of the earth (*khug ha-aretz*), and the inhabitants thereof [are] as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.” (Isaiah 40:22)

By “circle of the earth,” Maimonides understands the lunar sphere rotating the earth, for the earth is *stationary* in his cosmology. Maimonides retranslates the passage: “Who remains constantly and unremittingly over the sphere of the earth; that is to say, over the things that come into existence within that sphere.” Next, he introduces a different shade of Definition 2: “The verb is also employed in descriptions of God’s relation (the term “relation” is used homonymously) to existing *species* of *evanescent* things: for those species are as constant, well organized, and unvarying as the individuals of the heavenly hosts.” In the Aristotelian/Maimonidean view, the universal forms of the species are permanent, while the individual instances are mutable. Since God is unchanging, he can have no relation with individual creatures but only their universal forms. This still does not complete God’s catalog of relationships. Elsewhere we learn that God extends providence to those who are with Him in thought (Guide 1:51), and to those who adhere to the Torah in the right way (*Letter on Astrology*). This works because of the principle of the unity and permanence of the active intellect. The conjunction with the active intellect raises man above the level of mutable matter (on all of this see essays below).

“The Lord *sitteth* (*yashav*) upon the flood; yea, the Lord *sitteth* (*v’yeshev*) King for ever.” (Psalms 29:10)

Maimonides explains the meaning of God’s relation to his physical creations: “Despite the change and variation of earthly objects, no change takes place with respect to God’s relation (to the earth): His relation to each of the things which come into existence and perish again (*havim o nifsadim*, generation and corruption) is stable and constant, for it concerns only the existing species and not the individuals.” There is then some (homonymously meant) “relation,” *yakhas*, with the natural species but not with its changing individuals. Fundamental to this thought is the Maimonidean notion of time. Change occurs in time. According to Aristotle, time is the number of motion, which is an accident of matter. Since God is incorporeal, He has nothing to do with time. God creates the world and its constitutive natural processes without any relation to time. This concept cannot be expressed verbally. It is not, as some critics have it, that He creates the world and forgets about it or leaves it to run on its own. That would imply an *initial* creation, which is a temporal concept. God’s relation is to the universe He creates, to all of it. Through all its mutations, it is a single creation, upon which He *sits* stably and unchangeably. The relationship occurs beyond time (see my essays below).

PROVIDENCE AND NATURE

Maimonides makes a controversial point in this chapter:

“He who is everlasting, constant, and in no way subject to change; immutable in His Essence, and as He consists of nought but His Essence, He is mutable in no way whatever; not mutable in His relation to other things: for there is no relation whatever existing between Him and any other being, as will be explained below....The verb is also employed in descriptions of God’s relation (the term ‘relation’ is here used as a homonym) to existing species of evanescent things: for those species are as constant, well organized, and unvarying as the individuals of the heavenly hosts....His relation to each of the things which come into existence and perish again is stable and constant, for it concerns only the existing species and not the individuals. It should therefore be borne in mind, that whenever the term ‘sitting’ is applied to God, it is used in this sense.”

This statement continues the discussion of providence and nature from the last chapter. Here his focus is on nature. God’s relationship with the natural things is with their species, with the universals of each particular individual.

The statement seems to demand a reading that God has no relationship with individual man. Some critics take it this way. But this denies individual providence. We know, from other passages in the Guide, that God does have a providential relation with *some* men. This is the meaning of the theme of intellectual progeny recurring in the past few chapters. The intellectual progeny of Adam and Moses benefit from divine providence. Those less than human beings who are not progeny are classed with the natural things, and their fate is determined by nature.

Maimonides’ God is a non-corporeal, non-numerical unity. God can have no relation with numerate individual corporal natures. God only enters into relations with spiritual or conceptual entities. Since they are not corporeal, they are outside of time and change. Our mind, as opposed to our brain, is also non-corporeal. To the extent that we truly activate our intellect through the act of cognition, we suppress our individual corporeal nature and enter a relation with God.

In his *Letter on Astrology*, Maimonides says that there is a separate providence for Jews (who follow Torah in the right way) and non-Jews. Nature governs all material things, and all who do not embrace Torah. Nature, *teva*, is the set of rules and processes that God “stamped” on the world. The term *teva* means “stamp, impress.” In *gematria*, the Hebrew letters of *teva* exchange numerically for the letters of the name of God. Thus, His stamp is on nature. When Jews, according to Maimonides, actualize their intellectual form, they receive special providential supervision from God. This works because their minds obtain a relation with Him. Otherwise, they place themselves in thrall to the rules and processes by which God governs all of nature.

MODALISM: AN INTRODUCTION

“The stable One...undergoes no manner of change...in His essence—as He has no *modes* besides His essence with respect to which He might change.”

This is Pines’ translation. Unlike Kafih, Friedlander or Schwarz, he takes the Arabic *hal* to mean “mode” (see his footnote 7, *ad loc*). H. A. Wolfson explained Modalism well. The idea comes from the 10th century Muslim theologian and philosopher Abu Hashim (Sometimes spelled Abu Hisham). Modes are a minor variation on the theory of attributes. The “will,” “wisdom,” and “power,” of God, taken as attributes, are separate entities eternally *with* God. When taken as modes, they are like ideas in God’s mind, modes of thought. To Maimonides this is a distinction without a difference. Maimonides rejected both attributes and modes when applied to God. (Wolfson on modes: see p. 30-31 and index references to modes in *Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish*

Philosophy, Harvard, 1979; and his *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 1976. *Kalām* is the usual term for Muslim theology.)

Maimonides treats the subject of divine attributes fully in Guide chapters 1:50-60. The attributes (*middot*) of God divide into essential attributes and action attributes. The attributes of action are such attributes as mercy and justice, reflecting our view of what God *does*. The essential attributes include unity, wisdom, will, power; usually five to seven in number. What are the essential attributes and what is their relation to God?

The Christians, adopting the Philonic Logos, made the attribute of wisdom the “word of God.” John 1:1 identified the *incarnated* “word” as Jesus, the “word” eternally with God. The repercussion of this idea in Islam recast the Qur’an as the “inlibrated” word (Wolfson’s coinage), eternal with God. The Mutazilites (early Islamic theologians) were uncomfortable with this idea since it involved the “association,” *shirk*, of another being with Allah. *Shirk* is the paradigmatic heresy in Islam. This idea of *shirk* later emerges in Judaism as the Hebrew *shituf*.

By Abu Hashim’s time the *eternal* Qur’an was the doctrine of the faith. Before Abu Hashim the Mutazilites had argued that the “word” inlibrated in the Qur’an was “identical” with God. The problem was that this Dualism looked too much like Trinitarianism in Christianity. Instead, Abu Hashim argued that the essential attributes had “modal” existence, that is, they only existed as concepts, not as beings. He may have been thinking of the Aristotelian controversy over the real versus conceptual existence of universals. By the famous formulation, “God is wise in virtue of wisdom,” Abu Hashim meant that “wisdom” exists as a mode of divine thought.

By itself, the formulation does not seem alarming, but Maimonides develops a devastating argument against even this fallback position in his chapters on attributes. His alternate formulation is quite strict, “God is wise but *not* in virtue of wisdom.” This means that we use the term “wisdom” only homonymously in the divine context. What it means to men and what it means to God are two completely different things. He contends that the Jewish “Kalām” unilaterally disarmed itself in the battle with Islam by adopting their doctrines of attributes and modes. By contrast, he recognized and exploited the Muslim contradiction between strict monotheism and their belief in attributes. Moreover, even Abu Hashim’s modal fallback position fails to resolve the problem. If we reduce attributes to conceptual modes, they remain eternal, and define God. But God cannot be defined.

Maimonides invokes the concept of modes in our chapter in order to deny any version of the attributes of God. He contends that God’s unity is perfect simplicity. It remains to be seen whether he maintains this position consistently, about which I express doubts. See essays on 1:50-60.

GENERATION AND CORRUPTION

“He who is everlasting, constant, and in no way subject to change.”

This sentence from our chapter literally reads: “The Permanent One does not change in any of the fashions of the fashions of change” (*ha-yatziv asher lo yishtanei b’shum ofen m’afnei ha-shinui*). Kafih says that the line refers to the four types of change listed in the Introduction to Book Two of the Guide, Fourth Proposition. Maimonides writes there:

“PROPOSITION IV.

Four categories are subject to change :

(a.) Substance. – Changes which affect the substance of a thing are called genesis and destruction (*ha-haviya v’ha-hefsed* generation and corruption).

(b.) Quantity. – Changes in reference to quantity are increase and decrease.

(c.) Quality. – Changes in qualities of things are transformations (i.e., I am cold now but will be hot later).

(d.) Place. – Change of place is called motion.

The term ‘motion’ is properly applied to change of place, but is also used in a general sense of all kinds of changes.”

It is obvious that God does not change by increase or decrease, by change in accidental qualities, or by change of place. It is the first category, substantial change, which interests Maimonides, since he makes at least five references to it in our chapter. The category of substantial change is the category of the *generation and corruption* of all physical beings. God has *no relationship* with beings subject to such “substantial change.” God can have no relationship with the changing things without Himself changing (Aristotle, *Categories* 10:12b21).

Maimonides’ concept of substantial change becomes important in his critique of Muslim theology, chapters 1:71-76 (See Aristotle’s *On Generation and Corruption* for the source). Here is a summary of the doctrine.

All *non*-substantial change is mere *alteration*. The Pre-Socratics (and their Muslim epigones) conceived all change as the alteration of indivisible atoms grouping and ungrouping in the vacuum of space. Aristotle disagreed. He contended that such atomic alteration could not explain organic growth.

He explained organic growth in the following manner. The movement of the heavens, especially the diurnal activity of the sun, cause changes in the four terrestrial elements. Since it seemed that water transformed to air (not water vapor, as we think) they posited the transformation of elements and therefore of all things. Underlying such elemental transformations there must be some substance: that substance is unformed matter. All these changes led to the *agent* of form meeting the *patient* of matter, which means that *actuality* transforms *potentiality*. By their encounter, the patient somehow becomes the agent and the agent the patient.

At a lower level of abstraction, the agent being finds stuff that is *actually* food but *potentially* flesh. The being’s nutritive soul causes its physical body to transform the food to flesh. Nourishment causes the body to increase in size. The increase is organic, not just the mere alteration stemming from the clumping and unclumping of atoms. Organic change always changes every part of the being, whereas atomic alteration affects only the individual atom. The principle of organic change is that the being is *preserved*, whether the change is of increase or decrease. At the final moment of substantial organic change, when quantitative increase or decrease goes over to qualitative change, generation and corruption occur simultaneously. The old being is destroyed as a new substance results: man becomes dust and dust becomes man. In the moment of privation of form, matter acquires new form.

All of this is natural. Moreover, as we said above, nature is God’s stamp. Though God creates the process, He is not involved in the actual individual changes. By such involvement He would change, which is impossible. He creates the universal forms, but not the individual actualities of their in-formed matter. He relates to the world and its forms as a whole in the timeless now (Guide 1:72).

Another kind of change is the movement of the heavens. Though the movement of the spheres is *change of place* (the fourth kind of change, above), it does not mean that the celestial actors themselves change. They rotate eternally, never changing or dissipating. Their heavenly matter is neither generable nor corruptible. Their matter is the unique Fifth Element, defined as the substance that is *unlike* the four terrestrial elements. God has a relation with the immutable spheres: He is the ultimate cause of their movement, their unmoved mover. God also has some kind of relation with the souls animating the spheres.

Finally, God has a relation with terrestrial intellectual life. The mind, activated from its merely material potential state, is incorporeal, eternal and unchanging. To the extent that man acquires his active intellect, he has a relation with God. The Guide is largely about the process by which man acquires his active intellect.

Yeshiva, “sitting,” according to Maimonides, is the figurative term that prophecy employs to portray God’s unchanging relation with all of these unchanging things.

GUIDE 1:12 RISE

This is a lexical chapter. (See explanation, Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”)

***KIMA* (RISE) Homonym**

Some of the lexical chapters begin with an initial sentence declaring the term “homonymous,” *shem mshutaf*, i.e., susceptible of *completely* different meanings. This is the first such chapter in the Guide. It begins “The term *kima* is a homonym,” *kima shem mshutaf*. I indicate in the heading of my treatment of subsequent lexical chapters when Maimonides commences by saying the term is homonymous. In other chapters, Maimonides mentions that the term is homonymous, but only in the body of the text. When that is the case, I also do so. *Kima* is homonymous because Maimonides cannot dispose of the term’s physical meaning. That physical meaning is unavoidable since first use is Cain *rising* to slay Abel (Genesis 4:8, not quoted in our chapter).

1. To physically rise, the opposite of “to sit.”
2. Confirmation and verification of a thing, especially with reference to God. In law, the confirmation of legal rights
3. To resolve or agree to do a thing (Maimonides explains that we rise from our seats when we express resolve).
4. Figuratively, the execution of a divine decree of punishment.

Instance Of Definition 1, Contextualized:

“Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, that he *stood* not up (*kam*), nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.” (Esther 5:9)

The context, from the story of Queen Esther, is her foster-father Mordecai’s refusal to stand and bow to the evil Haman. *Kima* frequently signifies rising to show respect to a superior. This is Maimonides’ most physical definition and is therefore placed first, on the principle of *ascending in holiness* (Talmud *Berakhot* 28A, see notes on Guide 1:10).

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the Lord *establish* (*yakem*) his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him.” (1 Samuel 1:23)

All three quotations from First Samuel continue the theme of *intellectual progeny* (see my notes, Guide 1:7, and my essay there, *Demons*). All concern the succession of leaders in Israel. The first is about the succession of Samuel to Eli’s judgeship; the last two tell of David’s succession to Saul’s monarchy. In each instance, biological progeny are passed over in favor of intellectual progeny. This particular case concerns the infancy of the prophet Samuel. Samuel’s parents donated him to the sanctuary, to be raised as Eli’s own son, his intellectual progeny. By contrast, Eli’s own biological sons, plunder and fornicate in the sanctuary.

The problem with this passage is the ambiguity of the word *yakem*, in the phrase “the Lord *establish* his word.” What exactly is established?

The barren Hannah prayed for a child. She promised God that if her prayer were granted her son would be given to the Lord’s service. Eli tells her that her prayers will be granted, whatever they are. The child is born, and Hannah tells her husband, Elkanah, that when the child is weaned he will be given to God. Elkanah replies,

obscurly, “the Lord will establish his word.” The idea is that God’s “word” is the *covenant* with Hannah, not completed until the miracle child is devoted to the sanctuary service. Jewish tradition found this convoluted. There is an interesting Rashi, whose interpretation fits into Maimonides’ theme of intellectual progeny, in this instance, to the intellectual progeny of God:

“Rabbi Nehemiah said in the name of Rabbi Samuel, the son of Rabbi Isaac: Every day, a divine voice would resound throughout the world, and say: A righteous man is destined to arise, and his name will be Samuel. Thereupon, every woman who bore a son, would name him Samuel. As soon as they saw his deeds, they would say, ‘This is not Samuel.’ When our Samuel was born, however, and people saw his deeds, they said, ‘It seems that this one is the expected righteous man.’ This is what Elkanah meant when he said, ‘May the Lord fulfill (establish) His word,’ that this be the righteous Samuel.”

Samuel, in Hebrew, Shmuel, means “God’s name,” an apt moniker for God’s intellectual progeny (Shemuel, “name of God,” i.e., the name of God is in him. But see Samuel 1:1:20, deriving Shemuel from *sha’ul me’el*, “asked of God”). The next proof-text provides another explanation of Elkanah’s statement, making it a legal term for the establishment of contractual rights.

“17: And the field of Ephron, which [was] in Machpelah, which [was] before Mamre, the field, and the cave which [was] therein, and all the trees that [were] in the field, that [were] in all the borders round about, were made *sure (va-yakom)* 18: Unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city.” (Genesis 23:17-18)

The KJV divides the passage as shown above, which actually reads, “the field of Ephron rose,” *va-yakom sde efron*, with the KJV splitting that phrase with the topographical description “which [was] in Machpelah...in all the borders round about.” The meaning of the phrase “the field of Ephron rose” is that the field was established as Abraham’s property. The context is clear when read together with 23:18. This passage describes a real estate transaction. Abraham purchases the patriarchal burial ground. In this case, *va-yakom*, “it rose,” in the sense of “it was established,” is the legal term for the execution of the deed for title of the land.

Reflecting back on the prior quote, about Hannah’s prayer, Elkanah’s declaration the Lord’s “word” would “rise,” means that a legal covenant was transacted by Hannah and God, whereby the infant Samuel would be born and Hannah would, in return, devote him to God’s service.

Rashi, quoting Midrash, *Genesis Rabba* 48:8 tries to interpret “the field of Ephron rose”: “It experienced an elevation, for it left the possession of a simple person [and went] into the possession of a king.” If Maimonides was thinking of that Midrash, it relates to his definition of *alah*, “ascending” as *ascension in rank* (Guide 1:10), which would not be surprising since the words *alah* and *kima* are close in meaning.

“And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; [within] a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that [is] in the walled city shall be *established (v’kam)* for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubilee.” (Leviticus 25:29-30)

This passage also describes a legal state of affairs, in which the unredeemed house in a walled city becomes the permanent possession of the purchaser.

“And now, behold, I (Saul) know well that thou (David) shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be *established (v’kama)* in thine hand.” (1 Samuel 24:20)

This is the second quote in our chapter from First Samuel. We come in just before Samuel’s death at the beginning of 1 Samuel 25. As noted, all these quotes from First Samuel concern the theme of intellectual progeny. Here David is the intellectual progeny of Samuel, the kingmaker. David demonstrates to Saul that though he is not his son, he will be king. Having the opportunity to kill Saul, David merely slices cloth from his

coat, to show Saul that he means him no harm. Saul now apologizes and admits that David “shalt surely be king.” The term *v’kama* indicates that David has now secured the legal succession of the throne.

Instances Of Definition 2 And 4, Contextualized

“Now shall I rise (*akum*), saith the Lord.” (Psalms 12:5 or Isaiah 33:10)

This passage presents several problems. It is not clear whether Maimonides refers to Psalms 12:5 or to Isaiah 33:10. All he ever gives us are quote-shards: he never provides actual citations. The second problem is that he makes this passage stand for both Definitions 2 and 4. That is, the verse must stand for God confirming or verifying that a thing will happen, and it must also exemplify the execution or visitation of divine punishment. Psalm 12:5 seems to work, when read with 12:3 and 4:

“The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, [and] the tongue that speaketh proud things: Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips [are] our own: who [is] lord over us? For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, *now will I arise, saith the Lord*; I will set [him] in safety [from him that] puffeth at him.”

The cutting off the “flattering lips” refers to divine punishment (Definition 4). Rashi understands it as saying that God will “rise” to punish Saul because of his slaughter of the priests of Nob and plundering of the poor.

On the other hand, Isaiah 33:10 could also be appropriate, for it speaks of God’s resolve to punish the Assyrians: “*Now will I rise, saith the Lord*; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself.” I believe Maimonides was thinking of this passage rather than Psalm 12:5 since it has a lovely triplet cadence: I rise, I am exalted, I lift myself: *atah akum, yomar ha-shem, atah aromam, atah anasei*. Maimonides responds with a triplet cadence of his own. Pines translates: “What He intends to say by this is: Now will I carry out My decree, My promise, and My menace,” *r”l atah akayim pkudati v’havtakhti v’ayomi* (the Judeo-Arabic also has a triplet rhyme). Schwarz prefers the Isaiah verse; Pines, Friedlander and Kafih prefer the Psalms verse.

“Thou shalt arise (*takum*), [and] have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.” Psalms 102:13

This passage is also supposed to satisfy Definitions 2 and 4. Definition 2 is no problem. Maimonides comments: “Thou wilt establish what thou hast promised, viz., that thou wouldst pity Zion.” As for Definition 4, I find it difficult to see who is being punished. The entire psalm is about the Jews in exile, but it only seems to say that God will remember and redeem them, not that He will punish their tormentors.

It is of greater significance that the passage is preceded by verse 12: “But Thou, O Lord, sittest enthroned for ever; and Thy name is unto all generations.” “Enthroned” is a scholarly interpretation by the KJV editors, since the text only says *l’olam teshev*, “forever seated.” We learned in Guide 1:11 that “seated” must mean “enthroned” when spoken of God. The problem is that God sits in verse 12 and rises in verse 13. This language is similar to language in the Qur’an where God sits and then rises, which some Muslims take literally. The reaction of the anti-anthropomorphic Mutazila Kalām, the early stage of Islamic theology, was to make “throne” an eternal attribute with God. Maimonides rejected that approach (see essay below).

Instances Of Definition 3, Contextualized:

“That all of you have conspired against me, and [there is] none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and [there is] none of you that is sorry for me, or sheweth unto me that my son hath stirred up (*heikim*) my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?” (I Samuel 22:8)

Maimonides’ idea of this passage is that one resolves to do something by standing up. Thus “rising” (KJV “stirred up”) figuratively indicates *resolve*. Jonathan caused David to *resolve* against Saul. (Pines alone translates “resolve” in this Definition as “revolt,” writing: “whoever has revolted over some matter is said to rise up.”) This third quotation from First Samuel shows that Jonathan supported David as the true intellectual progeny

of God (or of Samuel). Saul rightly accuses Jonathan of supporting David. In his rage, Saul slaughters the priests of Nob.

Instances of Definition 4 Contextualized:

“And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise (*v'kamti*) against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” (Amos 7:9)

God will punish the evildoer, in this case Jeroboam II, son of King Joash of Israel. Amos' vision of the “plumb-line” precedes this verse. See essay below on the significance for Maimonides of Amos and his prophecies. This definition carries forward the discussion of divine punishment initiated in chapter 1:10. *Yarad*, according to Definition 5 in that chapter, meant the *visitation* before the actual punishment. The two proof-texts in our chapter look to the actual future punishment, where the visitation must have already occurred. In both cases, the evildoers not only fall below the level of true intellectual progeny, but even below the level of nature, and so receive God's special punishment as demons. This is a negative sort of special providence.

“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because [they are] many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord! Yet He also [is] wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back His words: but will arise (*kam*) against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity.” (Isaiah 31:1-2)

This verse is about Hoshea, who sought Egyptian assistance against Assyria (2 Kings 17). God, will “arise” to punish the ten tribes of the northern Kingdom of Israel for trusting the idolatrous nations rather than trusting God.

ON THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

The quotation from Amos calls to mind the prophecies immediately preceding and following in the text. They represent the two sides of Maimonides' theory of prophetic dreams.

The context for these prophecies is the northern kingdom's corruption by wealth. Amos foresees a dismal result for Israel in the quick succession of four prophecies. In the first (Amos 7:1-3) he is shown a plague of locusts; in the second (7:4-6), a plague of fire. Amos prays for the Jews in both instances, and the Lord relents.

God does not relent of the last two prophecies. The third prophecy tells the vision of the plumb-line, concluding in the proof-text brought by Maimonides (Amos 7:7-9):

“Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall (*nitzav al khomat*) [made] by a plumb-line (*anakh*), with a plumb-line in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb-line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more: And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise (*v'kamti*) against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

The plumb-line, according to Rashi, represents strict justice. The “high places” and the “sanctuaries” are not plumb: they are crooked, and they will tumble!

The fourth prophecy (8:1-3), the vision of the basket of summer fruit, is worse:

“Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit (*kluv kayitz*). And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end (*ha-ketz*) is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. And the songs of the Temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God: [there shall be] many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast [them] forth with silence.”

The rest of the chapter is a harrowing account of this tragedy, similar to the *tokhakha*, Deuteronomy 28:15-68, (see Guide 1:10). The fruit basket, *kluv kayitz*, a homely vision, is similar in *sound* to “the end,” *ketz*, which “is come upon my people of Israel.”

These prophecies inspire a response from Maimonides in Guide 2:43. In that chapter, he articulates a system of dream interpretation. The prophets prophesy in imagery, and in the same prophecy, the meaning of those images is given:

“In our dreams, we sometimes believe that we are awake, and relate a dream to another person, who explains the meaning, and all this goes on while we dream. Our Sages call this ‘a dream interpreted in a dream’ (*khalom sh’niftar b’tokh khalom*). In other cases we learn the meaning of the dream after waking from sleep.”

Maimonides distinguishes two kinds of images. In the first type, prophets see images that stand for certain ideas. Under this heading, he lists the vision of the plumb-line, an metaphor for justice. There is a second type of vision:

“The prophets, however, are also shown things which do not illustrate the object of the vision, but indicate it by their name through its etymology or homonymity. Thus the imaginative faculty forms the image of a thing, the name of which has two meanings, one of which denotes something different [from the image]. This is likewise a kind of allegory.”

In this second type of vision, the object of the vision does *not* represent the intended idea. We learn of the intended idea through etymological variation of the word for the object, or we learn of it by canvassing other different meanings of the word for the object. He then presents a series of examples, in which the vision of the basket of summer fruit is included:

The same is the case with the *kluv kayitz*, ‘a basket of summer fruit,’ seen by Amos, by which the completion of a certain period was indicated, ‘the end (*ha-ketz*) having come’”

One need not stop at such obvious puns. There is a third way to derive meaning from a word. We can vary it anagrammatically:

“Still more strange is the following manner of calling the prophet’s attention to a certain object. He is shown a different object, the name of which has neither etymologically nor homonymously any relation to the first object, but the names of both contain the same letters, though in a different order.”

Thus *shaked*, “staff,” becomes *shoked*, “I will watch” (Jeremiah 1:11-12); *khovelim*, “destroyers, binders,” is *transposed* to *bakhala*, “abhor” (Zechariah 11:7-8). Maimonides tells us to treat similarly a list of various prophecies strongly connected with the *Maaseh Merkava*, which conceal sexual references. By such anagrammatic, etymological and homonymic means, their prurient nature is concealed. Their meaning comes clear only to readers qualified to read them and sublimate their meaning, by recognizing the analogy between creation and procreation. Maimonides subtly points to these meanings now as he moves lexically from *kima*, “rising,” in this chapter, to *amida*, “standing,” in the next. The difference between the two terms is that “standing” implies *feet* to stand on, and foot is a euphemism for the male principle of causation.

METATRON

At the end of our chapter, Maimonides quotes the Talmud’s assertion (*Hagigah* 15a) that *God* neither rises nor sits (“In no way should it be understood that *He* rises or sits—far be such a notion!”). It might seem like he chose

this proof-text to counter those, especially under Islamic influence, who take God's rising or sitting literally. But much more is involved.

The commentators worry that Maimonides' version of the *Hagigah* line differs from our received version, but this is a minor issue. He has said that he inherited a first edition of the Talmud, which sometimes varies from ours. Here is his version: "In the world above there is neither sitting nor standing," *ain l'maalah lo yeshiva v'lo amida*. The line is good for him because it uses the term defined in the next chapter, Guide 1:13, *amida*, "standing," in the sense of "rising," *kima*, the subject of our chapter.

The problem is that the passage is *not* about God. His statement misleads the unwary reader. The passage is actually about the angelic figure known as Metatron.

Maimonides' quotations from *Hagigah* are very important, for the second chapter of that Talmudic treatise is the *fons et origo* of Jewish mysticism. *Hagigah* 15a is a significant page, giving important information on two actors in an early drama of the soul's ascent: Ben Zoma and Akher (Elisha Ben Avuya). The subject of the page is Dualism, both in its extreme variety, like Manichaeism, and in a more restricted sense: the interplay of matter and form, God and his angels, male and female. Here is the whole passage:

"Akher mutilated the shoots (misled youth). Of him Scripture says: Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt (his misleading of youth was stereotypically Hellenic, and meant to suggest Hellenic perversions). What does it refer to? — He saw that permission was granted to Metatron to *sit* and write down the merits of Israel. Said he (Akher): It is taught as a tradition that on high [in heaven] there is no *sitting* and no emulation (Maimonides' version: 'and no *standing*'), and no back (the angels have faces in all directions), and no weariness. Perhaps, — God forbid! — there are two divinities! (taking Metatron's sitting as divine enthronement.) [Thereupon] they led Metatron forth, and punished him with sixty fiery lashes (to show he was not a deity), saying to him: Why didst thou not rise before Him when thou didst see Him? Permission was [then] given to him (Metatron) to strike out the merits of Aher (for articulating the heresy of Dualism). A *Bat Kol* (divine word) went forth and said: Return, ye backsliding children (Jeremiah 3:22) — except Akher. [Thereupon] he said: Since I have been driven forth from yonder world [the world to come], let me go forth and enjoy this world. So Aher went forth into evil courses."

Metatron is the "prince of the countenance," *sar ha-panim*, of whom it is said that "God's name is in him" (Talmud *Sanhedrin* 38b. The Karaite, non-canonic, version of Talmud *Sanhedrin* reads, "This is Metatron, who is the lesser Y*H*V*H"). In *Heikhalot* mysticism Enoch, who walked with God (Genesis 5:22), is taken deathlessly to heaven and becomes Metatron. Metatron has various functions in medieval esoteric literature, including the heavenly scribe, the advocate for men in divine court, the creator of the world, and the prince of the world after its creation. The *Shiur Komah*, an early kabalist text, identified the seven-lettered Metatron with divine emanation, while the six-lettered Metatron was Enoch (it could be spelled with six or seven letters). The name probably comes from the combination of the two Greek words *meta* and *thronos*, *metathronios*, in the sense of "one who serves behind the throne." R. Isaac of Acre's association "Enoch is Metatron," follows the frequent association of primordial man, *adam kadmon*, and Metatron. The primordial "body" of *adam kadmon* can be connected with the *sefirot*, the system of emanative causes of Cabala. (On all of this lore, see Gershom Scholem, in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, "Metatron")

The connections in these chapters should be obvious. We now make a transition to the word *amida*, "standing," like *kima*, "rising," but with *feet*. Foot is the male euphemism for the system of emanative form causing ongoing providential creation, identified with Metatron in Jewish esoteric thought.

GUIDE 1:13 STAND

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.” We learn that the prophet who “stands” is the mediating channel between man and God.

AMIDA: (STANDING) Homonym

1. To stand upright.
2. To stop, cease or interrupt.
3. To endure, to be permanent, especially referring to God or his works. *Possibly*: When referring to God, *amida* means “to cause,” an “intermediate cause,” or (with Moses) to “cause to prophesy.”

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And Joseph [was] thirty years old when he stood (*b'amdo*) before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:46)

This verse outwardly illustrates the physical definition of “standing.” But Joseph’s first appearance before Pharaoh is like a resurrection, since he was last seen hopelessly imprisoned in a pit in the ground. He had once before been buried in a pit by his brothers and resurrected. While we recognize a continuation of last chapter’s theme of *ascent in rank*, i.e., from prison to royalty, this new theme of *resurrection* is more important, for it recurs in Maimonides’ next proof-text.

“Then said the Lord unto me, though Moses and Samuel *stood* (*ya'amod*) before me, [yet] my mind [could] not [be] toward this people: cast [them] out of my sight, and let them go forth.” (Jeremiah 15:1)

Jeremiah relates God’s warning: even prayer will not save the unrepentant Jews. Even were Moses and Samuel to stand in their graves to intercede for them, this could not prevent their punishment. The *resurrection* theme links this quote to the prior one, for Jeremiah envisions the image of leaders resurrected. Maimonides does not address bodily resurrection in the Guide directly. In *Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin* 10:1 he pronounced corporal resurrection one of the thirteen articles of faith. Nevertheless, critics accused him of forsaking the belief in resurrection. He responded by writing the *Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead* (*Maamar Tekhiat Ha-Metim*). In the *Treatise*, resurrection is a miracle for the future, beyond human explanation, but by no means the most remarkable of God’s miracles.

“And he (Abraham) took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set [it] before them; and he *stood* (*omed*) by them under the tree, and they did eat.” (Genesis 18:8)

The context is Abraham serving dinner to the angelic guests. Maimonides always connects his special doctrine of prophecy to Genesis Chapter 18. This doctrine maintains that if an angel or a prophetic vision is mentioned anywhere in a biblical chapter, then the *whole series* of actions take place in the prophetic dream-vision (see Guide 2:42). The doctrine has been controversial. If Abraham envisioned God even once in the narration, then the whole chapter took place in a prophetic dream, including the details of the preparation of the meal, and so on. This doctrine does not apply to Moses. Unlike all other prophets, Moses received revelations while awake. Since all actions occurring in Genesis 18 occur in the dream, they are subject to Maimonides’ prophetic dream exegesis techniques. This passage opens the main subject of our chapter, prophecy; and, especially, the distinction between Mosaic prophecy and that of all other prophets.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“When I had waited, for they spake not, but *stood (amdu)* still, [and] answered no more.” (Job 32:16)

The context of this passage is the beginning of Elihu’s speeches to Job. Maimonides has a major section on the book of Job, Guide 3:22-23. He holds Elihu’s speeches in high regard. In this case, “stood still” means to stop speaking. See essay below on the special role of Elihu in Maimonides’ theory of the interpretation of prophecy.

“And she (Leah) conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah; and *left bearing (va-ta’amod miledet)*.” (Genesis 29:35)

Here again, “standing” means “ceasing,” in this case, from childbirth. This quotation may not add anything new, but see essay below on Elihu’s principle that unremarkable quotations serve as camouflage.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may *continue (yaamdu—stand)* many days.” (Jeremiah 32:14)

In context, the Jews face certain exile, yet God tells Jeremiah to buy land from his cousin. By this purchase, he preserves his family’s hereditary right in the land. The prophecy and the purchase suggest eventual redemption from exile and return to Jerusalem. The mechanics of the transaction, on the Babylonian model, involve two written deeds in land, one inside an earthenware vessel sealed with clay, and one printed on the outside. If people thought that the outside text was tampered with, they broke open the vessel before the court to compare the original. Our verse carries forward the last chapter’s interest in property law. Maimonides says that *yaamdu* in this passage should be interpreted “to be enduring and lasting.” Perhaps the law of property ownership represents man’s frail attempt to secure some measure of *permanence* in this world.

“If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee [so], then thou shalt be able to *endure (amod)*, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.” (Exodus 18:23)

In this passage Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, argues for the creation of the first judiciary. In Guide 1:10 Maimonides brought another proof-text about the inception of this forerunner of the Sanhedrin, Numbers 11:17. That passage stood for the definition of *yarad* as the descent of divine holiness upon places, people and institutions. It specifically meant the descent of prophecy upon the leaders of Israel. In our verse, people will “stand,” *endure*, through the institutionalization of prophetic insight in their political system. The *Mekhilta* on this passage, brought by Rashi, suggests another issue. He says that the verse means, “Consult God; if He commands you to do this, you will be able to endure, but if He *prevents* you (from doing it), you will be unable to endure.” The *Mekhilta* thereby points to a new Maimonidean theme, the *prevention* of prophecy. Maimonides contends that prophecy *naturally* descends upon the properly prepared prophet, *but only if God does not prevent it* (Guide 2:32, 3d Opinion).

“Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste *remained (amad)* in him, and his scent is not changed.” (Jeremiah 48:11)

Jeremiah compares Moab to stored wine. “It has settled on its lees” means that the wine absorbs taste from the grape remnants in the bottle. If they are good, the wine is improved, if not, its taste is bad. Moab, unlike Israel, did not suffer exile—it was not “emptied from vessel to vessel.” Nonetheless, it is a bad concoction, though anciently preserved in its territory. Maimonides comments: “it has continued and remained in existence without any change.” Note that this passage employs an image similar to the one used by Jeremiah, the earthenware vessel that preserves evidence of permanent territorial ownership.

“His work [is] honourable and glorious: and his righteousness *endureth (omedet—stands)* for ever.” (Psalms 111:3)

To say that God’s righteousness “stands” means, according to Maimonides, that “it is permanent and everlasting.”

“And His feet shall *stand* (*ve-'amdu*) in that day upon the mount of Olives, which [is] before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, [and there shall be] a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.” (Zechariah 14:4)

This is a transitional quotation moving toward the ideas of the next chapter and of Guide 1:28. Zechariah foretells that though things look bad for Israel, God will again “stand” in Jerusalem and move mountains to bring peace for the Jews. For Maimonides, it means that God will *cause* his emanation to dwell there, so that prophecy can once more arise. He calls this another instance of Definition 3, but goes on to say that it means, “His causes, i.e., the events of which he is the cause (the effects) will remain efficient (*yitkaamo sibotav k'lomar m'sovevav*); this will be further elucidated when we speak of the meaning of *regel* (foot) [in Guide 1:28].” This is different from the other proof-texts for Definition 3 because the verse mentions “His feet,” *raglav*. Since God has no feet, Maimonides explains in Guide 1:28 that “foot” means “cause.” “Foot” is a euphemism for the male principle. In this quote and the next two, “stand,” *amida*, means “to cause” and specifically, “to cause prophecy.”

“But as for thee, *stand* (*amod*) thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do [them] in the land which I give them to possess it.” (Deuteronomy 5:27)

In this quote and the next from Deuteronomy Chapter 5, the Jews have asked Moses to intercede with God to receive the law. He thus becomes the mediator between God and the people, channeling the prophetic emanation. In the same sense as the prior quote from Zechariah, when Moses “stands” with God, it means he is “caused to prophecy” and made to be the mediating channel.

“I *stood* (*omed*) between the Lord and you at that time, to shew you the word of the Lord: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount.” (Deuteronomy 5:5)

The verse completes Maimonides’ thought from the prior two texts: to say that Moses “stood” means that God *caused* him to be the prophetic channel for the revelation of Torah. One line up, at Deuteronomy 5:4, we learned that “The Lord talked with you (Moses) face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire.” These passages demonstrate the uniqueness of Moses’ prophecy. Maimonides’ doctrine is that Moses’ prophecy is distinguished from other prophets because of its characteristics of wakefulness, directness, clarity, and boldness (Guide 1:63; Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei HaTorah* 7:6). Prophecy is subject to Moses’ will, and he is constantly ready to receive it. Alone among the prophets, he separates from his wife, making God his constant preoccupation. Finally, He alone is on a mission from God to bring law to the world. Moses is the first prophet-king who is a law-giver, and since Maimonides understands all prophets to be philosophers, he is a philosopher-king as well. Maimonides says that Moses has reached a higher stage of evolution: “He was the chosen one of all mankind, superior in attaining knowledge of God to any other person who ever lived or ever will live. He surpassed the human condition and attained the angelic (*hu alav ha-shalom higia hitaluto min ha-enoshit ad ha-maala ha-malakhit, v'n'klal b'maala ha-malakhit*). There remained no veil he did not rend and penetrate behind, nothing physical to held him back This is what is meant by saying that he spoke to God without angelic mediation.” (Commentary on the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 10, *Helek*, Seventh Fundamental Principle; A. J. Wolf translation.)

ELIHU ON PROPHECY

“When I had waited, (for they spake not, but *stood* (*amdu*) still, [and] answered no more). [I said], I will answer also my part, I also will shew mine opinion. For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me.” (Job 32:16-18)

This passage introduces us to one of Job’s friends, Elihu, who Maimonides calls the best of his interlocutors. Since Maimonides told us to link passages together to understand his intent (see Guide: Introduction), we should take a brief look at Guide 3:23. We learn two things there about Elihu: his system of literary concealment; and his explanation of the prophetic process. Guide 3:22 and 3:23 are an important section of the Guide, in which Maimonides provides his understanding of the “strange and wonderful Book of Job.”

In 3:23, we learn of Elihu's rhetorical method:

“A profound and wonderful discourse then follows. Reflecting on his words we may at first thought be surprised to find that he does not add anything to the words of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zofar; and that he only repeats their ideas in other terms and more explicitly. For he likewise censures and rebukes Job, attributes justice to God, relates His wonders in nature, and holds that God is not affected by the service of the worshipper, nor by the disobedience of the rebellious. All this has already been said by His colleagues. But after due consideration we see clearly the new idea introduced by Elihu, which is the principal object of his speech, an idea which has not been uttered by those who spoke before him. In addition to this he mentions also other things set forth by the previous speakers, in the same manner as each of the rest, viz., Job and his three friends, repeat what the others have said. *The purpose of this repetition is to conceal the opinion peculiar to each speaker, and to make all appear in the eyes of the ordinary reader to utter one and the same view, although in reality this is not the case.*” (My italics)

The reason Maimonides now directs us here is to clarify his own methodology in these lexical chapters. Several of the quotes above, for instance, do not seem to introduce anything new. We originally said that Maimonides does not quote as lawyers do, piling on to deaden opposition. For him each quotation has purpose. Nonetheless, when he adds apparently unremarkable quotations, we may well ask whether he is following Elihu's method of using proof-texts to camouflage from the unqualified reader profound ideas about the concealed subjects of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*.

Next, we see the idea that Elihu has concealed, suggesting an understanding of prophecy similar to Maimonides' understanding:

“The new idea, which is peculiar to Elihu and has not been mentioned by the others, is contained in his metaphor of the angel's intercession. It is a frequent occurrence, he says, that a man becomes ill, approaches the gates of death, and is already given up by his neighbors. If then an angel, of any kind whatever, intercedes on his behalf and prays for him, the intercession and prayers are accepted; the patient rises from his illness, is saved, and returns to good health. This result is not always obtained: intercession and deliverance do not always follow each other: it happens only twice, or three times. (In other words, God can *prevent* providential intercession.) Elihu therefore says: ‘If there be an angel with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness,’ etc. (33:29). He then describes man's condition when convalescent and the rejoicing at his recovery, and continues thus: ‘Lo, all these things worketh God twice, three times with man’ (*ibid.* 29). This idea occurs only in the words of Elihu. His description of the method of prophecy in preceding verses is likewise new. He says: ‘Surely God speaketh in one way, yea in two ways, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon man, in slumberings upon the bed’ (*ibid.* 14, 15).”

The last line reminds us of Maimonides' special doctrine of prophecy announced in Guide 2:42: a mention of an angel or a vision in any biblical chapter about the prophet's actions means that the entire chapter takes place in a prophetic dream vision. Thus, in Genesis 18, everything that happened to Abraham was part of his dream. For prophets who are not Moses, that vision takes place “In a dream, in a vision of the night when deep sleep falleth upon man.”

The second idea is that the angelic intercession “speaketh in *one* way” through the *imagination* of the dreamer, and possibly “yea in *two* ways” through the *imagination* and the *intellect* (See Guide 2:32), but only some are predisposed to hear it, and only a few of those can benefit from it. Those alone benefit who are physically, morally, and intellectually prepared (Friedlander, note 1, Guide 3:23, *ad loc.*, p. 109). The angel is the “active intellect,” the *sefira* of *malkhut*, the result of intellectual unification with divine emanation. Moreover, there is a note in the passage above, which resounds in Guide 1:51: divine providence is directly relative to a man's ability

to keep God as his constant contemplation, as it says, “I keep the Lord always before me” (Psalm 16:9, quoted in Guide 3:51). Here Elihu has a similar idea; conjunction with the Divine angel cures disease. Maimonides recognizes in Elihu’s convalescent’s revival a suggestion of the resurrection of the dead. Two other proof-texts in our chapter suggest this principle of the faith. Elihu links the coming of the angel to the sufferer’s repentance; that is, the return (*teshuva*) of the soul to its home in the active intellect, which is the image of God. Surely the great physician of body and soul, Maimonides, was deeply impressed with Elihu’s prognosis and prescription:

“In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that He may withdraw man [from his] purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong [pain]: So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones [that] were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger (*malakh* = angel) with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness. Then He is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s: he shall return to the days of his youth. He shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto him: and he shall see His face with joy: for He will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and [if any] say, I have sinned, and perverted [that which was] right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these [things] worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.” (Job 33:15-33)

GUIDE 1:14 MAN

This is the shortest chapter in the Guide, fifty-seven words in the Judeo-Arabic Munk/Joel edition. The second shortest is 1:6, which is the lexical chapter on *ish* and *isha*, man and woman, with which 1:14 is closely connected. The short chapters are more difficult to interpret, and conceal esoteric material.

In the numerical series 1 : 7 : 14, our chapter is twice *seven*. Chapter 7 was the lexical chapter on birth, about intellectual progeny and its converse, the birth of demons. 1:1 contained the discussion of image and form. These numerical affinities imply that when we make ourselves His intellectual progeny, and come close to God in thought, we are in His form and His image.

Straussian interpretation assumes the importance of numerology in chapter arrangement. For a contrary view see, generally, Herbert Davidson, *Maimonides, the Man and his Works*, Oxford, 2004, pp. 323, 397 and elsewhere. I take a moderate stance. We may recognize numerical affinities only after the evidence otherwise emerges; that is, numerology is fun but not necessary. I do not deny that Maimonides enjoyed dabbling in numerology, or that the special nature of the Hebrew number/letters naturally conduces to it.

Fourteen is the Hebrew word/number combination for *yad*, “hand.” Leo Strauss notes that “hand” does not get a lexical chapter, but makes no further interpretation of the relation of “man” and “hand” apart from some typically oblique comments (*How to Begin to Study the Guide of the Perplexed*, p. xxx, in the Pines translation of the Guide).

Yad Ha-Hazakha, “The Strong Hand,” is the other name for the Mishneh Torah, the name more popular in the rabbinic world. It is called *Yad* because it has fourteen books, each a “strong hand” codifying Jewish law. The *Yad Ha-Hazakha* codifies all laws set forth in the Oral and Written Torah. The idea is that when man does what God wants he becomes the “hand” of God.

Adam, the name for man, is distinguished from *ish*, another name for man. *Ish* represents realized man. He realizes his intellectual potential. *Adam* is an animal potentially realized as man only when he embraces the law, but is otherwise a demon (See my essay in Guide 1:10, where *Enosh* is used the same way as *ish* here). The series 1 : 7 : 14 (image of God : realized man : potentially realized man) declines in holiness just as man declined after Eden. The return to Sinai (*teshuva*) returns man to the tree of life.

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

ADAM: (MAN) Homonym

1. The name of the first man, derived from *adamah*, “earth,” as in Genesis 2:7: “And the Lord God formed man (*ha-adam*) [of] the dust of the ground (*min ha-adama*).”
2. The species mankind.
3. The multitudes or masses of men, the lower class of men, men of unrealized potential.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with *man (adam)*, for that he also [is] flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Genesis 6:3)

Maimonides provides no text supporting Definition 1. This proof-text is about *mankind* as a whole, Definition 2. The term *adam* is homonymous because it can refer to either *Adam*, the first man, or to *bnei adam*, the human race, as in this example. In context, the quote means that God will not punish man for his misdeeds until the coming of the time of the flood. God does not now punish man since he is the result of a peculiar mixture of mind and matter: “for that he *also* [is] flesh.” This is the first of two quotes from Genesis Six—see essay below explaining the full context of these two passages.

“17: I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for [there is] a time there for every purpose and for every work. 18: I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. 19: For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a *man (ha-adam)* hath no preeminence above a beast (*ha-behema*): for all [is] vanity. 20: All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21: Who knoweth the spirit of [the children of] *man (bnei ha-adam)* that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? 22: Wherefore I perceive that [there is] nothing better, than that a man should *rejoice in his own works; for that [is] his portion*: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?” (Ecclesiastes 3:17-21)

Maimonides quotes two passages from this section. Both stand for Definition 2, man as the human species. We should notice when Maimonides brings more than one passage from a single Bible chapter. He uses this technique to emphasize the entire chapter including parts not quoted, as well as to remind his audience of the chapter’s traditional reading. The passage concerns the distinction between intellectual progeny and those unrealized humans who are not such progeny, as developed in Guide 1:7. God distinguishes the good from the bad men. Solomon, author of Ecclesiastes, remarks that God should show men that they are no better than beasts,

if they will not act righteously. Like the beasts, their destiny is dust. By contrast, the spirit of the righteous men “goes upward.” Rashi provides the traditional gloss, *ad loc.*:

“‘Who knoweth,’ like in: ‘Whoever knows shall repent’ (Joel 2:14). Who is it who understands and puts his heart to [the fact] that the spirit of the children of men ascends above and stands in judgment, and the spirit of the beast descends below to the earth, and does not have to give an accounting. Therefore, one must not behave like a beast, which does not care about its deeds.”

The righteous man considers “his own works,” that is, he meditates to improve his morals and bring his mind closer to God, “for that is his portion” of divine providence.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“[To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.] Hear this, all [ye] people; give ear, all [ye] inhabitants of the world, Both *low* and high, rich and poor, together (*gam bnei adam, gam bnei ish*). My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart [shall be] of understanding. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying (*khidati*) upon the harp. Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, [when] the iniquity of my heels (*akvei*) shall compass me about?” (Psalms 49:1-5)

The KJV is too laconic here (JPS 1917 is no improvement). The quote-shard in Hebrew reads *gam bnei adam, gam bnei ish*. Judaica Press gives a literal translation: “Both the sons of *adam*, and the sons of *ish*,” forcing the reader to look at Rashi, who says: “*Both the sons of adam*: The sons of Abraham, who was called: ‘the greatest man (*ha-adam*) among the giants’ (Joshua 14:15); the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. *And the sons of ish*: The sons of Noah, who was called: ‘a righteous man (*ish tzadik*)’ (Genesis 6:9).” The righteous man is called *ish*, after the *ishim*, “men,” the name of the tenth class of angels in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 2:7. The “righteous” that align their mind with God become *ishim*. They are the mediators between *bnei ha-adam*, the unrealized men, and God. Unless the righteous *ishim* reach them, men are in danger of sinking to the level of beasts, for (as we saw in the last proof-text) unrealized man, *adam*, has no “preeminence” over the beast. Man is a mixture of mind and matter, but one must predominate over the other. The idea is ancient. In Plato’s *Timaeus*, man either realizes himself and comes to “return and dwell in his native star” or is changed into “some brute who resembled him in the evil nature he had acquired” (*Dialogues of Plato*, Jowett, 1937, vol. 2, p. 23, lines 41-43). Compare Guide 3:8, where Maimonides’ strong language distinguishes these two states and advocates a nearly Manichaean asceticism for the prophetic elite. In Maimonides’ reading, “The sons of *adam*” means the mass of men as distinguished from the elite. Abraham is indeed a great man but the sons of Ishmael and Keturah were not his intellectual progeny. As for Rashi’s reference to “giants” see my essay below. Moreover, our passage teaches that wisdom comes from meditation upon parables and upon “dark” (*khidati*) sayings. This should call to mind Maimonides’ Introduction to the Guide, which recommends meditation on prophetic parables and dark sayings, linking them together to learn the secrets of Torah. Also of interest is the suggestion of lurking danger, for “the iniquity of my *heels* shall compass me about.” We have already alerted the reader to Maimonidean “foot” allusions. The word for “heels,” *akvei*, also means “results,” i.e., the results of causes (“foot” means “cause,” Guide 1:28). There is another significant meaning of *heel* in Guide 2:30, in reference to the two quotations from Genesis Six, Eve’s heel (see essay below, where “iniquity” of Eve’s “heels” turns out to be a subtle reference to the mass of evil men).

“That the sons of God saw the daughters of *men (bnot ha-adam)* that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” (Genesis 6:2)

Definition 3 makes a distinction between the higher and lower grades of humanity. In this case, the “daughters of *men*” are the lower classes of women. The “sons of God,” *bnei ha-elokim*, is better translated by Rashi and Jewish tradition: “sons of princes and judges.” They are the rulers of society, but that does not make them righteous men. Recall that judges were not buried with scholars, and that they buried an adulterous excommunicate scholar with the judges rather than with the other scholars (Guide 1:2, from Talmud, *Moed Katan* 17a). This is the second quotation from Genesis Six. See essay below on the meaning of Genesis Six for Maimonides.

“5: They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course. 6: I have said, Ye [are] Gods (*elokim atem*); and all of you [are] children of the most High (*bnei elyon*). 7: But ye shall die like men (*k’adam*), and fall like one of the princes (*ha-sarim*).” (Psalms 82:5-7)

By including this passage in Definition 3, Maimonides takes this quote-shard to mean that only the lower ranks of men “die.” That is, their existence terminates with the death of their bodies, to contrast with those able to raise themselves by becoming intellectual progeny of God, and uniting their minds with Him. Their “death” is mere physical death; otherwise, they are immortal. Rashi, explaining the traditional interpretation, agrees. On line 6, “Ye are Gods” he writes: “Meaning *angels*—when I gave you the Torah, I gave it to you on the condition that the Angel of Death should not rule over you.” But on the contrasting line “Ye shall die like men,” Rashi writes: “Indeed, as man, you will die.” The angel of death holds no sway over those accepting the Torah. Even rulers die ignominious deaths unless they unite their souls with the Timeless One.

THE SONS OF GOD SAW THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN

The beginning of Genesis Six provides two of the proof texts above. We should note how Maimonides uses Genesis 6:1-5, line by line, with its Midrash, to develop his anthropology. We are in the time after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, but before the Flood:

“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them.” (Genesis 6:1)

The Midrash, *Genesis Rabba* 26:4, reports: “*to multiply on the face of the earth*. This teaches that they spilled their semen upon the trees and stones.” This promiscuous spillage mythically explains how the “demons” were generated in the post-Eden period (see my note on *Demons* in Guide 1:6). The world was populated by the sons of Abraham who were not his intellectual progeny, the ones both the Midrash and Maimonides called “demons.” Tradition understood the *bnei elokim*, “sons of God,” to mean the political rulers, the elite:

“That the sons of God saw the daughters of men (*bnot ha-adam*) that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” (Genesis 6:2)

The verse provides another hint of why the demons were generated. Maimonides quoted Psalm 49:2 above, on the distinction between *bnei adam* and *bnei ish*, the masses against the elite, but surely meant us to think of the conclusion of that thought, 49:5: “Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, [when] the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?” Maimonides seems to understand these “days of evil” as the days when the *ish* is “compassed about” by the demonic *bnei adam*, who are “the *iniquity of my heels*.” This should make us think of Eve’s heels, which he discusses in Guide 2:30. In that chapter, Maimonides gives his explanation of the work of creation, *Maaseh Bereshit*. He tells us the following amazing things about Eve, from Midrash:

“‘The serpent had a rider, the rider was as big as a camel, and it was the rider that enticed Eve: this rider was Samael.’ Samael is the name generally applied by our Sages to Satan...Samael and Satan are identical. There is a meaning in this name [Samael] (*semol*: ‘left’—the evil inclination, *suma*: ‘blind’), as there is also in the name *nahash* (‘serpent’—also, ‘imagination’). In describing how the serpent came to entice Eve, our sages say: ‘Samael was riding on it, and God was laughing at both the camel and its rider.’ It is especially of importance to notice that the serpent did not approach or address Adam, but all his attempts were directed against Eve, and it was through her that the serpent caused injury and death to Adam. The greatest hatred exists between the serpent and Eve, and between his seed and her seed; her seed being undoubtedly also the seed of man. More remarkable still is the way in which the serpent is joined to Eve, or rather *his seed to her seed*; the head of the one touches the *heel* of the other. Eve defeats the serpent by crushing its head, whilst the serpent defeats her by wounding her heel. *This is likewise*

clear. The following is also a remarkable passage, most absurd in its literal sense; but *as an allegory* it contains wonderful wisdom, and fully agrees with real facts, as will be found by those who understand *all the chapters of this treatise.* ‘When the serpent came to Eve he infected her with poison; the Israelites, who stood at Mount Sinai, removed that poison; idolaters, who did not stand at Mount Sinai, have not got rid of it.’ *Note this likewise....* Remarkable and noteworthy is the great wisdom contained in the names of Adam (‘earth’), Cain (*kayin*—‘possession’), and Abel (*havel*—‘breath,’ but also ‘vanity’, i.e., pointlessness, as in Ecclesiastes 1:2: *havel havalim*, ‘vanity of vanities’), and in the fact that it was Cain who slew Abel in the field, that both of them perished, although the murderer had some respite, and that the existence of mankind is due to Seth alone. Comp. ‘For God has appointed me *another seed*’ (4:25). *This has proved true.*” (Guide 2:30, my emphases.)

The formulas “this is likewise clear,” “note this likewise,” and “this has proved true,” are typical Maimonidean indicators of esoteric content. According to Friedlander: Adam and Eve represent matter and form; Samael/Satan is the evil inclination born of the imagination which blinds Adam to the truth; intellect triumphs over the evil inclination of the imagination (crushing head); but the stimulation of material desire by the serpent (biting heel) still causes man to sin (Friedlander trans. of the Guide, *ad loc.*, notes 2-7 on vol. 2, p. 155 of his first edition). David Bakan, *ad loc.*, p. 173-179, *Maimonides on Prophecy*, Jason Aronson, 1991, turns to the obviously prurient content of this material:

“...Eve has sexual intercourse with Satan and gives birth to Cain and Abel. Adam at that time begets devils. It was only after they were out of the Garden of Eden that they had Seth, who is the only true human being from Adam and Eve. It is also an allegory concerning the true nature of human sexual and moral development...the serpent (is) representative of deviant sexuality...We note three things: first, it refers to something patently sexual; second, Maimonides makes an announcement of this as having significance for the understanding of the treatise as a whole; third he makes an announcement that the sexual which is being expressed is a parable.”

What happened when these children of primal deviancy went forth upon the earth? They “saw the daughters of men that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose” (Genesis 6:2). Maimonides quotes “Daughters of men” for Definition 3, so we know that they were the lowest of women. These demonic rulers saw that these “women were fair,” which Rashi, from Midrash, understands to mean that they made themselves fair for the *bridal* canopy, but these rulers violated their marriages, exercising *droit du seigneur*. They took “all which they chose,” but even worse, they took “even a married woman, even males and animals. The generation of the Flood was not blotted out from the world until they composed nuptial songs in honor of pederasty and bestiality” (*Genesis Rabbah* 26:5). Despite these terrible things:

“And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also [is] flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Genesis 6:3)

God relented, at least for the span of a life. For man is *also* flesh, a mixture of the soul and the elements. He can save himself only by separating them. But the law had not yet been given at Sinai, whereby the “poison” that the snake inserted in Eve’s *heel* was “got rid of.”

“There were giants (*nefilim*) in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God (*bnei elokim*) came in unto the daughters of men (*bnot ha-adam*), and they bare [children] to them, the same [became] mighty men which [were] of old, men of renown (*anshei ha-shem*).” (Genesis 6:4)

These giants were the rulers, but they were not righteous. “*Nefilim* denotes that they hurled (*hippilu*) the world down, themselves fell (*naflu*) from the world, and filled the world with abortions (*nefilim*) through their immorality...They were the greatest of all masters of the arts of war” (*Genesis Rabba* 26:7). It happened “in those days,” the days of “Enosh and the children of Cain” (Rashi, *ad loc.*). After Enosh, son of Seth, intellectual

progeny of Adam ceased, and the “daughters of men” bore “giants,” rulers who would rebel against God (Rashi). They were “men of renown (*shem* = name),” meaning: “men of desolation (*shimamon*), who made the world desolate,” (*Genesis Rabba, ibid.*).

The Midrash next reminds us of the story of the Married Harlot, the *isha zona*. “And also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men (Genesis 6:4): R. Berekiyah said: A woman would go out into the market place, see a young man, and conceive a passion for him, whereupon she would go, cohabit, and give birth to a young man like him” (*Genesis Rabba, ibid.* On *isha zona*, see Proverbs 7:6-27, and my *Introduction I: “Through The Lattice: The Parable Of The Married Harlot”*).

“And God saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every *imagination* (*yetzer*) of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5)

But the intellectual progeny of Moses, who had got rid of the poison of that *imagination*, were able to rise above those *bnei ha-adam*, to make themselves *ishim*, men of the active intellect, the truly human mediators between base men and God. Maimonides quotes the Psalmists warning at the end of our chapter: unless they become *ishim*, they “shall die like men (*k’adam*)” (Psalms 82:7). Better to become Moses’ intellectual progeny and realize that: “I have said, ye [are] Gods (*elokim atem*); and all of you [are] children of the most High (*bnei elyon*)” (Psalms 82:6).

PROMISCUITY: MODERN REFLECTIONS

Permit me a personal observation. I viewed a new film treatment of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. I found myself wondering whether Austen’s 18th Century story still move us in the 21st Century?

Part of the story’s force is an episode of sexual promiscuity involving Lydia Bennett and the cad Wickham. I still feel the power of the episode, as I had when reading it thirty five years ago. But I wonder whether younger audiences got it. I had read that the film’s makers had the same concern. What used to make for gripping narrative might now seem passé. It’s not just that “heaven knows, anything goes,” but, rather, that “anything” had been going on now for many generations.

In the eons preceding pharmaceutical contraception, these things did not need explanation. They were the sublimated obsessions of everyone. This was so because Judaism won its war against paganism. It was not merely a bloodless theoretical controversy between “monotheism” and “polytheism.” Maimonides knew that the Torah connected practical paganism with deviant promiscuous sexuality (see, e.g., Guide 3:37). The Torah lays down the first code of sexual propriety. The benefits of the system were obvious, but in Guide 1:2, we got the trade-off: the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood was exchanged for morality. Part of this trade involved sublimation, the ability of the subconscious to suppress sexual obsession by transforming it into economic or artistic energy. This is what Maimonides would recognize as the *work* of the imagination. David Bakan’s early *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, Dover, 2004 (orig. 1958) was his theory of the impact of this simmering Jewish sexual lore on Freudianism.

Maimonides is not writing a pamphlet warning of the dangers of promiscuity. He did not have to. He understood the power of sexualized imagery, but in days past, everyone understood it. Clearly, he makes the polarities of this imagery refer to divine and human creativity, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, imagination and intellect, and so on. But these philosophical speculations only affect our heart if we know what they sublimate. Without regaining access to these polarities in sublime awe, we truly have not heard Maimonides’ message.

GUIDE 1:15 THE PROPHET STANDS

This is the third chapter in which Maimonides considers some variant of the word “stand,” in this case, *natzav* and *yatzav*. He notes that *natzav* and *yatzav* have the same meaning as the word *kima*, “rise, stand,” defined in 1:12, and *amad*, “stand,” defined in 1:13. I suggested that *kima* is *amad* without *feet* (*regel*, see 1:28): “Foot” refers to the *causative* element in God’s *permanent* (“standing”) relation to the world.

Our chapter also serves as the second lexical chapter for *alah* and *yarad*, “ascent” and “descent.” The occasion for that seemingly tangential departure is Maimonides’ citation of the Parable of Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28), which includes references to the angels *ascending* and *descending* the ladder, as well as to God’s *standing* above it. We had learned in Guide 1:10 two significant definitions of *alah* and *yarad*. In Definition 3 the words refer to our ascending or descending in thought to subjects above or below us. Definition 4 illustrated God’s action in prophecy: when He emanates prophecy upon the prophet, it is *descending*, but when He concludes the prophecy, the emanation *ascends* from the prophet. Although the subject is the same, the actions of the two definitions move in opposite directions. In our chapter, Maimonides relates back to chapter 1:10: the prophet *ascends* and then *descends* Jacob’s ladder, “in accordance with our explanation of the term *yarad*, descent [in 1:10].” That “explanation” could only be Definition 3, not 4. That is because the prophet *ascends* to prophecy just as, in Definition 3, we rise to a notion above us. Definition 4 cannot work because in that definition God *descends* to bestow the prophecy to which the prophet is *ascending*. But in the parable of Jacob’s ladder it is only the angels that ascend or descend, and our chapter defines “angels” as “prophets.” We explained in 1:10 that Maimonides had to divide the definitions of *alah* and *yarad* between these two chapters to avoid this traffic snarl of the prophecy *descending* from God as the prophet *ascended* to it.

What is really happening is that our chapter supplies an *extra* definition for *alah* and *yarad*. It is an extra definition because the prophet’s ascent to prophecy is really not the same as my mind rising to a higher notion, although they are analogous.

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

Maimonides begins with a grammatical point. He notes that “the two roots *natzav* and *yatzav* are distinct” (Y*Tz*V and N*Tz*V), although “you know” they have the same meaning in all declensions. The lexicographer Yehuda Even-Shmuel says, *ad loc.*, that the two roots Maimonides had in mind were *natzav* and *hityatzav*. Without getting into antique Hebrew grammar, we now view them as having the same root, the first radical varying with the tense.

NATZAV and YATZAV (STAND) Homonym

1. To stand or to place oneself.
2. Continuance and permanence: always used in this fashion when applied to God, not to physical position. Also, God’s permanent causative relation with the world.

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And his sister *stood* (*va-tetatzav*) afar off, to wit what would be done to him.” (Exodus 2:4)

The context is that Moses’ sister, Miriam, had just placed him in a basket floating in the Nile. Mosaic prophecy is the main topic in this group of chapters, but there seems to be no other purpose for this citation. We are suspicious, since, following his discussion of the major topic of Jacob’s Ladder, Maimonides says “To return to our subject,” *v’akhazor l’inyanenu*, a remark he typically makes to divert attention from the subject of his real

interest. The only subject he could logically “return” to is this first group of four quotations, which portray the non-anthropomorphic use of “stand” as “permanence.” He wants the uncritical to think that he is only interested in that not particularly compelling issue. Were that the center of his interest, he would only need the first and last of these first four proof-texts. Clearly though, his real interest is in the last two proof-texts in our chapter, about standing upon a rock or a ladder. The subject of those passages is prophecy and *Maaseh Merkava*. Therefore, it may be that the first repetitive group of four quotes follows Elihu’s principle of quotational camouflage for the *Maaseh Merkava* material that must be concealed. See my essay “Elihu on Prophecy” in chapter 1:13 above.

“1: Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? 2: The kings of the earth *set* themselves (*yityatzvu—stand*), and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, [saying], 3: Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. 4: He that sitteth (*yoshev*) in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” (Psalms 2:1-4)

Maimonides referred to line 4, “He that sitteth (*yoshev*) in the heavens shall laugh” in Chapter 1:11, which was about the closely related term *yashav*, “sit,” where we said that the context is God’s laughter at the evil strategies of the nations of the world. The Talmud, *Berakhot 7b*, takes the Psalm to refer to the war of Gog and Magog. The nations *stand* against God, *enthroned* permanently over the world, who laughs at their hubris.

“So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and *stood* (*nitzavim*) in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children.” (Numbers 16:27)

Korah (Korakh), soon to be swallowed by the earth, is standing with his allies against Moses and his people. This proof-text and the previous one both stand for Definition 1 because neither the “kings of the earth” nor Dathan and Abiram are *permanent* in their stance. Their standing is corporeal, hubristic and brief. These quotations provide pejorative context for the physical use of the term.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“For ever, O Lord, thy word is *settled* (*nitzav—stands*) in heaven.” (Psalms 119:89)

Maimonides comments that the word of the Lord “remains for ever,” unlike the word of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. If the “word” is taken as a divine attribute, it can only be understood in the Maimonidean fashion, i.e., as identical to the divine essence, not as a separate eternal *logos*.

“And he (Jacob) dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord *stood* (*nitzav*) above it, and said, I [am] the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.” (Genesis 28:12-13)

Maimonides quotes two parts of this passage, but not in order. He writes, “[God] appeared as eternal and everlasting ‘above it,’ namely, above the ladder, the upper end of which reached to heaven, while the lower end touched the earth.” He understands the ladder as a figure for the prophetic process. That God “stood above it” also calls to mind His relation to the world as the “rider on the aravot” (Guide 1:70). He causes all changes in the spheres of the universe without any physical contact, for he *stands* “above.” See essays below.

“And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] *a place by me*, and thou shalt *stand* upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:20-23)

Maimonides retranslates “and thou shalt stand upon a rock” in our next chapter, 1:16 as, “be firm and steadfast in the conviction that God is the source of all things, for this will lead you towards the knowledge of the Divine Being.” He defined “rock” there as “cause” or “source.” It means that Moses, infused with divine emanation,

becomes the mediating channel between man and God. Rashi quotes here an important Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 68:9: “(God) is speaking of the place where the *Shekhina* is, and He says that there is *a place by Me*, but He does not say: *I am in the place*, for the Holy One, blessed is He, is the place of the world, but the world is not His place.” In other words, just as the *Shekhina* mediates between God and the world, God has put Moses in the “place” of the *Shekhina*, where he will “stand on the rock,” channeling the divine emanation, giving Torah to the people.

JACOB’S LADDER AND PROPHECY

“How suggestive, too, is the expression ‘ascending and descending on it’! The ascent is mentioned before the descent, inasmuch as the ‘ascending’ and arriving at a certain height of the ladder precedes the ‘descending,’ i.e., the application of the knowledge acquired in the ascent for the training and instruction of mankind. This application is termed ‘descent,’ in accordance with our explanation of the term *yarad*.”

In the account of Jacob’s ladder, we had previously learned that God “stands” above the ladder, in the sense that He permanently presides over access to Himself. Maimonides now focuses in our chapter on the ascent and descent of the prophet rather than of God. The prophet’s progress is like Plato’s Cave parable in the *Republic*, 514a–520a. The prophet must do what is necessary to ascend to the light, and, subsequently, for theological-political reasons, must descend to bestow the light he obtained. He stresses the non-physical character of this descent by pointing to the definition of *descent* (*yarad*) given in Chapter 10, that is, the refocusing of the mind upon what is below it. It is the same point made in the Introduction to the Guide, that prophetic inspiration is a three-step process: Solomon ascends in thought to receive the vision, descends to teach it to the world, and thereby gains the merit to rise again.

We then reach several interesting sentences that require close attention. First, Maimonides says:

“By means of this ladder all may climb up who wish to do so, and they must ultimately attain to a knowledge of Him who is *above* the summit of the ladder, because He remains upon it permanently.” (Kafih: *u’bo m’tapes v’ola kol mi sh’ola ad sh’yasig mi sh’alav b’hekhalat keyvan sh’hu yatziv v’kayam al rosh ha-sulam*. Pines has, “Everyone who ascends does so climbing up this ladder, so that he necessarily apprehends Him who is upon it, as He is stably and permanently at the top of the ladder.”)

The translation is difficult, not to say tortured, both in this rescension by Friedlander, as well as by Pines, who in footnotes gives a more literal translation. The line is also difficult for Kafih. Friedlander’s footnote explains that there are two ways of taking the line. Either it means that man can strive and apprehend Divine knowledge; or it says tautologically that God is permanently on the ladder because He is eternally on the ladder. The former seems the better reading. The point to be taken, I think, is that God’s relationship to man is a relation of immanence. If He were entirely supernal to man so that there was no relative term between them, there could be no ladder. However, “all may climb up who wish to do so.” This strengthens our conviction that on the issue of divine attributes Maimonides is not an absolute negativist, but only a moderate negativist (see 1:40-1:50). A sentence or two later Maimonides says that man can reach a certain rung of the ladder (*l’maalot msuyemet*), perhaps indicating some limit to his knowledge.

Next, we learn that the angels who are climbing the ladder are the prophets:

“It must be well understood that the term ‘upon it’ is employed by me in harmony with this metaphor. ‘Angels of God’ who were going up represent the prophets. That the term ‘angel’ was applied to prophets may clearly be seen in the following passages: ‘He sent an angel’ (Numbers 20:16—Moses): ‘And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim’ (Judges 2:1—Phineas).”

Maimonides repeats the two cited passages about Moses and Phineas in Guide 2:42, making the same point about angels being prophets (quoting Midrash, *Leviticus Rabba* 1:1 both times. His definition of angels is at 2:6 and 2:7, although prophets are only one of his definitions).

We know from his later discussion of prophecy, that while the prophet should be able to complete the ascent and receive the light, God can prevent this from happening. Nonetheless, if our interpretation is correct, man holds in his own power the ability to ascend, at least as far as his physical constitution and “complexion” permits him (Gad Freudenthal, “The Biological Limitations of Man’s Intellectual Perfection according to Maimonides,” p. 137, *Die Trias Des Maimonides, Jewish, Arabic and Ancient Culture of Knowledge*, Walter De Gruyter, Berlin, 2005.). Maimonides was an emanationist, but like his neo-Platonist contemporaries, he was no determinist. He believed that divine influence is a *willed* flow of goodness, radiating to all unless occluded.

Our problem is that the inspiration we occasionally have comes in unconscious or semi-conscious states, and then only intermittently and reflectively. As we learned in the Introduction, we only see flashes, as though reflected in amber. This universal inspiration is called “the spirit of holiness,” *ruakh ha-kodesh*, and it represents the ground level of all states of inspiration and prophecy. Prophecy is distinguished as a regularized type of divine inspiration. It is, in principle, automatically available to the adept, but mostly prevented because of theological-political problems such as exile and the destruction of the Temple. Maimonides, disagreeing with other rabbis, did not think it always would be unavailable or blocked, even in exile. The ability of the adept to reach prophecy is largely his responsibility; he must attach himself permanently and constantly to the Divine in thought. Thus, discussing Moses, who prophesied under the same theological-political circumstances, he says:

“To return to our subject. The phrase ‘stood upon it’ indicates the permanence and constancy of God, and does not imply the idea of physical position. This is also the sense of the phrase ‘Thou (Moses) shalt stand upon the rock.’” (Exodus 33:21)

Moses need not physically stand on a rock at all, but “stands” permanently attached in thought to God. Nonetheless:

“The ascent is mentioned before the descent, inasmuch as the ‘ascending’ and arriving at a *certain height* of the ladder precedes the ‘descending...’”

Here is one final clarification. While all who ascend should reach the top, he retreats a step here to say that they may reach a “certain height” on the ladder. While this complication introduces some ambiguity, I still think that men have the opportunity and power to attain Divine knowledge. Each may receive a different goodness; some may so regularly attain it that they are called prophets; and one, Moses, is able to live at the top in constant converse with divinity.

WHAT IS THE SUBJECT OF JACOB’S LADDER?

Maimonides deals with Jacob’s ladder in two chapters. In our chapter, he says that the ladder angels are prophets. In Guide 2:10, he relates the four angels to the four elements, as well as to all aspects of physics that come in fours.

Rabbi Hasdai Ha-Levi wrote a letter to Maimonides asking whether these two references in the Guide were contradictory. Either the angels are prophets or they are elements. We can take the question in a larger sense, asking whether the parable is about prophecy or physics, or, better, about *Maaseh Merkava* or *Maaseh Bereshit*.

The reply to Rabbi Hasdai could be an opportunity to enter the laboratory of Maimonides’ mind. (Kafih is not impressed by the letter; see note 11, *ad loc.* Leon D. Stitskin, *Letters of Maimonides*, Yeshiva U. Press, 1977, pp. 95-101, thinks that Joseph Ibn Akin probably wrote it under Maimonides’ direction). It says (my translation):

“About your question on the explanation of the ascent and descent upon Jacob’s ladder: in Guide 1:15 we explained that it refers to prophets, but in 2:10 we referred it to the elements. This discrepancy should not be difficult for you to resolve, when you see how the complex and the simple come into full view. In our explanation of the [four] elements we said that the prophet is affected by them. No prophet ascends [the ladder] until his element of fire prevails over the element of earth, nor does he descend unless the element of earth overcomes him. The fire is always striving upward to apprehend (*l’hasig*), but the cold dry earth always tends downward to rest. So [the prophet] strives upward and not to return again, like Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11: ‘And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven’). We noted how well chosen were the words of the parable that the *ascending* precedes the *descending*. Our idea was that man, created of the element of earth [unlike angels], must rise before his descent [to bring the prophetic message to men], since he [begins] very low as a creature of the ‘dust of the ground’ (Genesis 2:7).”

The answer is that there is ultimately no contradiction, since both *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava* are two ways of looking at the same cosmos. Man is a microcosm of the universe (Guide 1:72) and the *fourness* of the forces of the cosmos find their compliment in him, for the four elements are reflected in the humors, and so on. Thus the prophet must overcome the elements so that his soul of fire can rise above his corporeality. Moreover, there is no real contradiction between 1:15 and 2:10 because 2:10 does not unequivocally say that the ladder angels represent the elements, in the same unequivocal way that 1:15 says they are prophets. The last few paragraphs of 2:10 throw out a considerable number of strong hints that the parable really is about the *Maaseh Merkava*. This shows us once again that Maimonides did not think that there are real contradictions in divine science.

GUIDE 1:16 ROCK

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

***TZUR* (ROCK) (Homonym)**

1. A mountain or a stone.
2. A quarry, and then, figuratively, the root, origin and cause of anything, particularly with respect to God. By extension, a name of God. By further extension, *tzur*, in the sense of Aristotelian form (This last is not explicit in the chapter).

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock (*ba-tzur*), and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.” (Exodus 17:6)

God instructs Moses to bring water to his thirsty people miraculously by striking Mount Horeb with his staff. Maimonides actually says: “*tzur*...is the name of *the* mountain,” *tzur...hu shem ha-har*, in both Kafih and Schwarz translations (Pines has “a mountain,” Friedlander, “a rock”). This proof-text is shared with the last chapter, where we learned that “I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb,” meant that God’s relation to Moses at that place was “stable, permanent and constant, not the erect position of the body.” We are meant to link this to Definition 2, *tzur* as “cause,” so that the entire passage, in which Moses strikes the rock, splitting it (see Rashi), drawing water for the people, is an image of the prophetic process, like Jacob’s Ladder. In both cases, God “stands” over the place, the prophet draws forth divinely emanated prophecy for the people. Springs of water always represent the prophetic channel.

“At that time the Lord said unto Joshua, Make thee *sharp* knives, (“Knives of *stone*”: *khavot tzurim*) and circumcise again (*shuv mol*) the children of Israel the second time.” (Joshua 5:2)

Maimonides merely notes that the knives were flint (*khalamish*). The context was Joshua’s mass circumcision of the Jews. According to rabbinic tradition, the term *shuv mol* is a more complex process than the original sort of circumcision practiced by Abraham, a fact Maimonides the urologist would know. By bringing a reference, however tangential, to the male genital organ, we recall its figurative sense as “form” or “cause” (especially as “formal cause,” one of the four causes). This links to the next chapter, about the metaphor of male and female for matter and form.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“1: Harken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the *rock* (*tzur*) [whence] ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit [whence] ye are digged. 2: Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah [that] bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.” (Isaiah 51:1-2)

Maimonides writes, “It (*tzur*) is next employed to signify the quarry from which the stones are hewn.” He notes Isaiah’s rhetorical device:

“From this latter meaning of the term another figurative notion was subsequently derived, *viz.*, ‘the root and origin’ of all things. It is on this account that after the words ‘Look to the rock whence ye are hewn,’ the Prophet continues, ‘Look unto Abraham your father,’ from which we evidently may infer that the words ‘Abraham your father’ serve to explain ‘the rock whence ye are hewn’: and that the Prophet meant to say, ‘Walk in his ways, put faith in his instruction, and conduct yourselves according to the rule of his life! for the properties contained in the quarry should be found again in those things which are formed and hewn out of it.’”

Rashi is more explicit: “And who is the rock? He is Abraham your forefather. And who is the hole? She is Sarah who bore you.” This proof-text and Maimonides’ treatment ties our chapter to the next chapter, 1:17, about sexual imagery in Plato’s form-matter physics. It also links to 1:28, the “foot” chapter. Maimonides defines *rock*, like *foot*, as “cause”: specifically the masculine causative form as it in-forms feminine matter. We took this as the genital implication of “Knives of *stone*,” *kharbot tzurim*, in Joshua 5:2, knives for circumcision. Since Sarah is the “hole,” “that bore you,” by parallelism *rock* could be a figure for phallus, as *foot* is its euphemism. The general idea would then be: make yourself intellectual progeny of Abraham, and you make yourself a forming channel for God’s creative emanation, i.e., a prophet, a lawgiver, the former of the people. The world has already been formed from matter, but the Jewish people have not yet been formed. The creation of the Jews is more than merely *procreation*, but true *re-creation* of the patriarchal consciousness in each Jew.

“4: [He is] *the Rock (ha-tzur)*, his work [is] perfect: for all his ways [are] judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right [is] he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4)

“17: They sacrificed unto devils (*la-shedim*), not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new [gods that] came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. 18: *Of the Rock (tzur)* [that] begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. 19: And when the Lord saw [it], he abhorred [them], because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters.” (Deuteronomy 32:17-19)

“30: How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except *their Rock (tzuram)* had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up? 31: For their *rock* [is] not as our *Rock (ki lo k’ztureinu tzuram)*, even our enemies themselves [being] judged.” (Deuteronomy 32:30-31)

These three prooftexts are all from Moses’ poem at the end of the Torah called *Haazinu* (from its the first line: *haazinu ha-shamayim*, “Give ear, ye heavens”). He invokes these passages to explain that “It is in the latter sense (Definition 2) that the Almighty is called ‘rock,’ the origin and the *causa efficiens* of all things besides Himself.” In other words, by virtue of its meaning as *cause*, “Rock” is a *name* of God. See essay below on *Haazinu*.

“[There is] none holy as the Lord: for [there is] none beside thee: *neither [is there] any rock (tzur)* like our God.” (1 Samuel 2:2)

The passage is from Hannah’s prayer for a child, the future prophet Samuel. The passage is used explicitly by Maimonides to add support to the definition of Rock as a name of God, contrasting it with the other pagan deities. They do not possess God’s causative power because they do not create *ex nihilo*. Moreover, the passage implicitly understands *tzur* in its other sense of *metaphysical* “form.” God is the ultimate source of the forms. (See my essay on Guide 1:3, “How Maimonides Uses the Concepts of Shape and Form.”) Maimonides knew that this understanding is explicit in the Talmud, *Berakhot* 10a:

“Come and observe how the capacity of human beings falls short of the capacity of the Holy One, blessed be He. It is in the capacity of a human being to draw a figure on a wall, but he cannot invest it with breath and spirit, bowels and intestines. But the Holy One, blessed be He, is not so; He shapes one form in the midst of another (*tzar tzura b’tokh tzura*), and invests it with breath and spirit, bowels and intestines. And that is what Hannah said: ‘There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none beside Thee, neither is there any *tzur* (rock, form) like our God.’ What means, neither is there any *tzur* like our God? There is no artist (*tzayyar*—former, artist) like our God....To whom did David refer in the five verses beginning with ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul’? He was alluding only to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to the soul. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the whole world, so the soul fills the body.”

The soul (in Maimonides, the mind), is the form of man, and God is the form of the world (1:69). Rashi summarizes the Talmudic passage (*ad loc.* to 1 Samuel 2:2): “There is no artist like our God, Who makes a form within a form.” Thus, “rock” could imply the whole system of Aristotelian hylomorphism, as understood by the neo-Platonic Aristotelians of Maimonides’ day.

“Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord God [is] *everlasting strength (rock of eternity, tzur olamim)*” (Isaiah 26:4)

Maimonides again demonstrates that “rock” is a name of God, implying His eternity (“for ever”) as well as His role as ultimate cause. His son, Abraham ben Ha-Rambam, reads *tzur olamim* as the “...First Cause Who

activates all intermediate causes, thus called ‘the power of the worlds’ (*tzur olamim*), blessed be His name... all causes are attributed to His doing, function according to His will, and are subservient to His desire.” Taking *tzur* in a slightly different sense as God’s formation of prophetic consciousness, Rabbi Abraham emphasizes the first part, “Trust (*bit’khu*, rely) ye in the Lord,” to mean that Isaiah makes it obligatory to rely on messages received from God’s prophets (*The Guide to Serving God, HaMaspiq l’Ovdei HaShem*, trans. Wincelberg, p. 237, 309, Feldheim, 2008).

“And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a place (*makom*) by me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock (*v’nitzavta al ha-tzur*).” (Exodus 33:21)

God is the source of all things. He allows Moses to receive the divine glory if he agrees to remain steadfast in contemplation of Him. See below the second essay discussing this passage.

HAAZINU

Haazinu (Deuteronomy 32:1-43) is a long poem combining historical and hortatory themes, one of the finest songs in scripture. When Maimonides quotes three verses from a chapter in scripture, we can be sure that the whole chapter is important to him.

Moses begins by contrasting the evil generation of the flood with God’s subsequent creation, the Jews. Like a father, he raised them, but (line 17) they became rebellious children and sacrificed to demons (*shedim*—see my essay “Demons” on Guide 1:7). They sacrificed to gods who were not eternal like God is, and who did them no good. The poem frequently uses the term “rock,” either synonymously with God, or by ironic antithesis with the idols.

Unlike the rocks of the idolators, “[He is] *the Rock (ha-tzur)*, His work [is] perfect,” *ha-tzur tamim paalo*. This verse (32:4) is cited nine times in the Guide. For Maimonides it means that God created the world but will not destroy it, since it is perfect, and His system of justice is perfect. This separates him from Aristotle’s eternal uncreated world, as well as from Muslim theology’s created but not eternal world. It also differentiates him from the Manichaeism of a perfect God and an imperfect world. He defends this “perfect world” theme against all opponents in Guide 3:25:

“The consequences of that error (that the world is imperfect and purposeless)... are doubts and confusion, which lead many to imagine that some of God’s works are trivial, others purposeless, and others in vain. Those who adopt this absurd idea that God’s actions are utterly purposeless, and refuse to consider them as the result of His wisdom, are afraid they might otherwise be compelled to admit the theory of the Eternity of the Universe, and guard themselves against it by the above theory [that the works of God are purposeless]. I have already told you the view which is set forth in Scripture on this question, and which it is proper to accept. It is this: it is not unreasonable to assume that the works of God, their existence and preceding non-existence, are the result of His wisdom, but we are unable to understand many of the ways of His wisdom in His works. On this principle the whole Law of Moses is based; it begins with this principle: ‘And God saw all that He had made, and, behold, it was very good’ (Genesis 1:31): and it ends with this principle: ‘*The Rock, perfect is His work*’ (*ha-tzur tamim paalo*, Deuteronomy 32:4). Note it. When you examine this view and that of the philosophers, taking into consideration all preceding chapters which are connected with this subject, you will find that there is no other difference of opinion as regards any portions of the Universe, except that the philosophers believe in the Eternity of the Universe and we believe in the Creation. Note this.” (Compare similar language at the end of Guide 2:28)

By using “note it” and “note this,” and even more explicitly, “taking into consideration all preceding chapters which are connected with this subject,” he not only wants us to have in view the central philosophical disputes of the Guide, but to relate them to our chapter defining “Rock.” The meaning is this: *prophecy* is the nerve of his

argument against Aristotle. Prophecy's announcement of the perfection of God's creation overturns perfectly balanced arguments for and against creation. The prophet "stands on the Rock" and is the "rock from which you were hewn." By making himself the channel for the divine emanation, he becomes the creator of his people, who, beyond all argument, *know* from prophecy that God created the world. The knowledge the prophet draws from the "flinty rock" sets them on "high," in the language of *Haazinu*:

"(13) He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock (*mi'sela*), and oil out of the flinty rock (*v'shemen me'khal mish tzur*)."

But what happens when these children are not the prophet's intellectual progeny? "(15) Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked." They rebelled, sacrificing to "devils," *shedim*, that their fathers did not *know* or fear. They committed "abominations" (line 16) which Rashi says means "homosexuality and sorcery"—underlining the *adulterous* prurient character of their abandonment. God "(19) abhorred [them], because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters." He will punish them (24) with "demons" (per Rashi on *u'likhumei reshef*), "with the poison of serpents of the dust," for their "(33) Their wine [is] the poison of serpents (*taninim*), and the cruel venom of asps (*ptanim*)."
Instead of their matter being in-formed by the Rock, as Sarah was by Abraham, they were injected with the poison of the serpent who envenomed Eve to create the first race of demons. That was the primal rebellion of the Adamites, who exchanged the apprehension of intellectual truth for imaginative opinion (Guide 1:2). "(28) They are a nation void of counsel, and there is no understanding in them." Moses warns them that they must make themselves again progeny of God: "(46) set your heart unto all the words wherewith I testify against you this day...to do all the words of this Torah. (47) It is no vain thing for you because it is your life..."

THERE IS A PLACE BY ME, AND YOU SHALL STAND ON THE ROCK

Bakan's Theory of the Relation of *Makom* and *Tzur*. On the passage: "And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a *place (makom)* by me, and thou shalt stand upon the *rock (v'nitzavta al ha-tzur)*" (Exodus 33:21), Maimonides writes:

"And thou shalt stand upon the Rock,' i.e., Be firm and steadfast in the conviction that God is the source of all things, for this will lead you (*ki hu ha-meivo*—Pines translates: 'this is an *entryway*') towards the knowledge of the Divine Being. We have shown (Guide 1:8) that the words 'Behold, a place (*makom*) is with me' (Exodus 33:21) contain the same idea."

The Maimonidean God is not completely inaccessible. The "place with Me," which is the source of all, is also the way back to Him. The question becomes whether the rock is the place or whether it is in the place.

Guide 1:8, the lexical chapter on *makom*, "place," was about the theme of intellectual progeny (see my essay there, "The Glory of the Lord"). Maimonides connected that chapter to ours by mentioning the "key" to the "entryway":

"These words are a key to this treatise or others" (*hineni omer dvarim elu maftakh l'maamar ze v'zulato*).

And, more elusively:

"We have already remarked that when we treat in this work of homonyms, we have not the intention to exhaust the meanings of a word (for this is not a philological treatise): we shall mention no other significations but those which bear on our subject."

We noted there by way of explanation:

“We have called attention to David Bakan’s theory that the lexicon supplies tools for the subconscious imagination to articulate and comprehend its ineffable prophetic revelation. He maintains that Maimonides rejects the common notion of contextual meaning. Maimonides lexical strategy is a ‘deliberate violation of context’ because ‘the role of context is to conceal deeper levels of meaning’ (*Maimonides on Prophecy*, p. 25). The perplexity and heartache that Maimonides speaks of in the Introduction to the Guide is associated with interpreting visions and dreams in their external senses. ‘Apprehension of internal meanings provides relief’”

Bakan argues (*Maimonides on Prophecy*, p. 86), with weak support, that *makom* should be interpreted as female genitalia. His argument ties, in a Freudian way, Rashi’s the identification of Sarah with “hole” to Maimonides’ term “entryway,” (*meivo*) in our chapter. He notes that the Zohar (1:22a) likens Moses’ prophetic process to sexual intercourse with the *Shekhina*. Bakan also notices that Maimonides in 1:8 calls attention to other unmentioned meanings of *makom*. Bakan quotes Maimonides in 1:8 (using Pines’ translation, p. 34):

“You should examine the prophetic books and other works composed by men of science, notice the meaning of every word which occurs in them, and take homonyms in that sense which is in harmony with the context. What I say in a particular passage is a key for the comprehension of all similar passages. For example, we have explained here *makom* in the sentence ‘Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place’ (*mekomo*): but you must understand that the word *makom* has the same signification in the passage ‘Behold, a place (*makom*) is with me’ (Exod. 33:26), viz., a certain degree of contemplation and intellectual intuition (not of ocular inspection), in addition to its literal meaning ‘a place.’” (*dragat iyun v’hashkafat sh’kol lo hashkafat ayin, nosef al makom*)

Bakan implies that though “rock” is to Abraham, as “hole” is to Sarah (see Rashi above), Maimonides has no lexical entry for “hole” or its physical referent in Sarah, so that *makom* must be the lexical stand-in for that prurient term. Thus, as *tzur* is to Abraham, so *makom* is to Sarah. Maimonides immediately *sublimates* this prurient perception (for “the principle of Rabbi Akiva,” Bakan’s rule of sublimation, see Bakan, *ibid.* p. 32, on Talmud, *Hagigah*, 14a). Maimonides does this by moving this prurient notion of *makom* to a “degree of contemplation and intellectual intuition.”

Bakan’s assertion is plausible but not strongly supported. There is no example I know where *makom* means female genitalia.

Makom = Matter/Shekhina and Tzur = Form/Kavod. At the very least, it seems that Maimonides wants us somehow to complete the parallelism and have *makom* stand for matter and the *Shekhina*. The word *makom* is connected with *meilo*, “fill,” and *kavod*, “glory” in Guide 1:19. The *makom* is the *place filled (malei)* by the emanated *form (tzur)* of God, which is His Glory (*kavod*). *Malei* is defined in 1:19, as “the attainment of the highest degree of excellency.” When the *makom/matter* is filled by glory/form it attains its highest excellency. This is nearly identical with the Definition 2 of *makom* in 1:8 (one’s level of attainment of perfection), and so the phrase “the whole earth is *full (meilo, from malei)* of His glory” in Isaiah 6:4 means “all the earth gives evidence of his perfection, i.e., leads to knowledge of it,” i.e., by witnessing the divine intelligence manifested in nature we learn of divine perfection. This is almost identical in meaning to “Blessed is the glory (*kavod*) of the Lord from his place (*mi’mekomo*),” Ezekiel 3:12, which he says means, “Blessed be the Lord according to the exalted nature of His existence.” In both these cases, the *glory* found in the *place* is the *perfection* or *excellence* of God evident in His work. In Guide 1:64, he defines “glory,” *kavod*, as a *created emanation* of God. It represents the active intellect, the intelligence emanated from God that is our mediator with divine intelligence.

Thus, Blessed be the *kavod* of the Lord from his *makom*, means that the perfection of His emanation of intelligence and form is evident in the excellence of his created works.

In 1:23 Maimonides quotes Isaiah 26:21, “For, behold, the Lord cometh out (*yotze*) of his *place* (*mi’mkomo*) to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.” He retranslates:

“‘The word of God, which until now has been in secret, cometh out, and will become manifest,’ i.e., something (that) will come into being which had not existed before: for everything new emanating from God is ascribed to His Word...This is a simile taken from the conduct of kings, who employ the word as the means of carrying their will into effect. God, however, requires no instrument wherewith to operate in order to perform anything; the effect is produced solely by His Will alone. He does not employ any kind of speech...”

The creative word (*logos*) of God equates to His will. The will of the Former comes out from the undefined, the secret place which “until now” has been unformed. This created will fills and forms the unformed so it can reach its highest excellence. The highest such excellence is prophecy, the self-recognition of the active intellect. It is the ultimate product of the ultimate source, which is the will expressed by God but undifferentiated in Him.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel, *ad loc.*, essentially understands the chapter the same way:

“The highest attainment of prophecy is the apprehension of God as the “rock of the worlds.” The highest concept is at once the highest percipient, and the source of the apprehension is the source of its apprehenders, which is the Creator of all things, the apprehension and the apprehender together. He is the Creator. While He is not their external [immediate] cause, He is their internal [ultimate] cause. His relation to them is like a rock to its quarry. He is the beginning (“rock”) of all other things, meaning, things have no foundation other than their emanatory source. The conclusion is that the nature of all creatures is from the nature of their creator, ‘for properties contained in the quarry should be found again in those things which are formed and hewn out of it.’”

God is the ultimate cause of the formation of that emanation just as he forms his intellectual progeny, but the recognition must be reciprocal for the prophetic process to occur. That was the moral of *Haazinu*.

GUIDE 1:17 PHILOSOPHICAL PARABLES?

In this chapter, Maimonides briefly rehearses the history of philosophy, and provides a moral reason for the philosopher's use of parables. Here is the text of this short chapter:

“Do not imagine that only Metaphysics (*mdai ha-elohut*: divine science) should be taught with reserve to the common people and to the uninitiated: for the same is also the case with the greater part of Natural Science (*mdai ha-teva*). In this sense we have repeatedly made use of the expression of the Sages, ‘Do not expound the chapter on the Creation (*maaseh bereshit*) in the presence of two’ (*vide* Introd.) (Talmud, *Hagigah* 11b). This principle was not peculiar to our Sages: ancient philosophers and scholars of other nations were likewise wont to treat of the *principia rerum* obscurely (*hayu mistirim ha-devarim b’maaseh bereshit*), and to use figurative language in discussing such subjects. Thus Plato and his predecessors called Substance [matter] the female, and Form the male. (You are aware that the *principia* [*rashit*] of all existing transient things are three, *viz.*, Substance, Form, and Absence of a particular form [Privation] ; the last-named principle is always inherent in the substance, for otherwise the substance would be incapable of receiving a new form: and it is from this point of view that absence [of a particular form] is included among the *principia* [*ha-rashiot*]. As soon, then, as a substance has received a certain form, the privation of that form, namely, of that which has just been received, has ceased, and is replaced by the privation of another form, and so on with all possible forms, as is explained in treatises on natural philosophy.) – Now, if those philosophers who have nothing to fear from a lucid explanation of these [metaphysical] subjects still were in the habit of discussing them in figures and metaphors, how much more should we, having the interest of religion at heart, refrain from elucidating to the mass any subject that is beyond their comprehension, or that might be taken in a sense directly opposite to the one intended. This also deserves attention.”

The pre-philosophic mind first encounters the world. It finds tables, chairs, cups, saucers, people, clothes, trees, and all the other clutter of existence. Some items resemble other items, for example; we do not just recognize a table, but that there are *tables*. In what do they resemble each other? We also notice some regularity, that all is not chaos. Why? Is there an unchanging truth in this?

THE PRE-SOCRATICS

The Pre-Socratics tried to answer these questions by concentrating on the physics of their environment, but it was not like physics we would recognize. They would identify one of the more pervasive items in this world, and ask whether it might be the hidden truth, the basic principle and constituent material of the universe: the *arche*. Thales (624-585 B.C.E.) focused on water. There is a great deal of it, and even dry things, like people and trees, are mostly composed of water. When you pour water on the ground plants grow. Without water, we die of thirst. Things seem to always change, and so does water, therefore we cannot step in the same river twice. Since water gives life, and preserves it, it is alive and ensouled. It is a god.

Or it could be the air, since it is everywhere and we need it to breathe. It is the spirit of life. On a higher plane, the air represents the unlimited from which all definite things come. Or it could be fire, which always rises and which changes even more than water: prompting the response that we cannot step in the same river even once (Cratylus *c.* 400). It is also the spirit of destruction, representing the process by which things are regularly consumed, die and pass away. Fire is represents contradiction, dispute, duality. (Air: Anaximenes, *c.* 550. Unlimited: Anaximander, *c.* 611-547. Fire: Heraclitus, 540-475).

We notice that things change. Since seeds become trees, apples become rotten, and friends die, it follows that there must be at least two principles behind everything and not just one: The before and the after; love and strife; attraction and repulsion (Empedocles, *c.* 490-430).

A question was raised. How can there be two principles? How can anything come from nothing? How can something come from something else? If it comes from something else, it is not the other thing, for A cannot produce B without creating something from nothing. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. Something from nothing cannot be. (Parmenides, c. 515-450)

A response: Perhaps everything is made of many indestructible, eternal and tiny things combining, moving, and recombining to form the bigger things we see. They did not come from something else. When A seems to have come from B, rather, a lot of little bits of the four elements, earth/air/fire/water, condensed to form A, then came apart, and then recombined in a different way and became B. (Anaxagoras, c. 500-428. Democritus, c. 460-380).

PLATO

We come to the Athenian philosophers. Plato sympathizes with the motives of the other thinkers, but they have not focused high enough. At the highest level of abstraction is the Good. This is God (*theon*), perfect, unchanging and everlasting. There is also *being*. This is existence itself, understood as an incorporeal organism. It is called a *substance* because it needs no others to exist. Being as such is beyond time because it exists purely in the mind of the Good, the only true existent. Since it is incorporeal, despite being a substance, it is not differentiated from the Good. There is also *becoming*, a pregnant negativity, possibility, potentiality, which is, finally, a “receptacle” for *being*. The Good subjects the *receptacle* of *becoming* to *being* to produce the *copy*, which is our world. Our world is also an organic unity, but because it is a copy, it is less real, perfect or enduring, while more brute and physical than the pure being from which it is copied.

How can the philosopher communicate such an idea? The philosopher must turn to poetry and its metaphors (*Timaeus* 50). The perfumer requires a liquid base, which he subjects to his skunk, rat, or mink oils, and this base must be the most undistinguished and odorless “receptacle” achievable by the perfumer’s art. Or the craftsman conceives of what his tool or figurine should look like. He prepares his clay, making it as smooth, undistinguished, and lacking in characteristic as possible through his craft. He imposes his vision on this base and creates a bowl or a Baal. Finally, a man joins with a woman, contributing his seed, and they produce offspring:

“Moreover, it is proper to liken the Recipient to the Mother, the Source to the Father, and what is engendered between these two to the Offspring; and also to perceive that, if the stamped copy is to assume diverse appearances of all sorts, that substance wherein it is set and stamped could not possibly be suited to its purpose unless it were itself devoid of all those forms which it is about to receive from any quarter.” (*Timaeus* 50d)

Plato’s account does not seem to mention “matter” at all (matter: hyle: wood. See Pines, “Translator’s Introduction” to the Guide, lxxvi.) The *Timaeus* does not speak of matter but of *receptacle* (*hupodoche*). Pines thinks that Maimonides got his reading from an Arabic paraphrase of Plato. (I note that Jowett’s *Timaeus* also freely uses the translation “matter.”) Plato comes to these poetic metaphors of “mother” and “father” to make the concept of being and becoming less indigestibly abstract to our reified consciousness.

ARISTOTLE

Finally, Aristotle reviews this history. He takes us back to the initial scene, where we confronted the clutter of everyday life and asked how the chair could emerge from nothing. He disapproves the answer that many little indestructible things combine and recombine. For one thing, it begs the question. It does not tell us how the little chair things come from tree things. Nor does it explain how all those *atoms* (Greek: “uncuttables”) can move around when nothing we see is really empty. Things would be too crowded with atoms to allow motion: there are no spaces. After you remove all the clutter, there remains air. Since the air would be composed of air atoms, there is no space for anything else to move.

Aristotle begins again, by returning to the history of this thought. First we thought that there must be *two* things, the before and the after. However, there really must be three. There must be the thing before, the thing after, and the thing acted upon. To accommodate the change there must be an underlying thing, a substrate. Between the before and the after there must remain the thing acted upon, the *matter*. The chair itself, its chair-ness, i.e., its shape, purpose and structure, are, so to speak, *in the chair*, and constitute its *form* imposed on the matter. But the chair comes from what is not a chair and will eventually become that which is not a chair. The matter adopts another form. Aristotle called this *generation* and *corruption*. However, form and matter are different from each other. One does not become the other, just as A does not become B. There must be a *third* principle beyond matter and form. That principle is the *potential* of the chair to become something else. This potential is pure negativity pregnant with potential to achieve subsequent form. He calls this principle *privation*. Privation is yoked to matter. Because the object contains its own *privation*, matter can achieve a new form, including a new potential for change: a new privation. This movement exhibits regularity and rhythm. Now we really have returned to the original question of what the underlying truth behind existence is, including its movement and change.

Abstracting from what we see before us there are therefore three principles (Hebrew: *rashiot*) in things: the *form*, the underlying *matter*, and the particular *privation*. Privation and form are opposites, and matter is the object of their action. None of these exists in and of itself, but only concurrently, correlatively. They are *principles* rather than *substances* because they do not exist independently.

The question then becomes whether these principles operate as causes. Privation is a principle and not a cause. Though it moves the substance from one possible form to another, it exists only as pure negativity bearing possibility. Negativity is nothing, and nothing causes nothing. We can regard the formal and material aspects of the chair as *causes*, but the privation, which actually moves the change, cannot be conceived as a cause, only as a principle (*Physics* 6-9).

These three principles are the subsisting reality behind the changing clutter. In this scheme, nothing comes from nothing, although nothingness (as *privation*) is one of the principles of change. The same unchanging everlasting substrate, matter, persists despite the wood's progress from chair to dust to another form. That substrate manifests itself as empty potentiality when considered apart from form.

This may be just a "likely story"; but even today, we do not think things are made of uncuttable everlasting "atoms." Instead, we also theorize a concatenation of basic forces, and consider this force field as the underlying reality of all things.

MAIMONIDES

Now back to Maimonides (we later ask how much of this he accepts). He begins by repeating his warning from the Introduction to the Guide that we must be careful teaching this material in public. Why? He says that people will either not understand it, or they will understand opposite to our purpose. Is this really so troubling?

We also have to question his account of Plato. He says that Plato uses the parable of male and female to conceal the principles of matter and form. Plato does this even though his audience was hardly in danger of having their nonexistent Torah learning weakened. Maimonides argues from Plato's reserve that teachers in the Torah community should be even more careful than he was to conceal this learning. Still, what Maimonides tells of Plato is not true: Plato did not design his parable for concealment, but for revealing an overly abstract concept to our reified consciousness. Plato openly tells the truth of these things, *being* and *becoming*, and, only later, poetically, analogizes them to male and female. Plato is concerned that the public will not comprehend the truth since they are incapable of abstraction, but that is far from the concerns bothering Maimonides.

Maimonides' first problem lies in what the *Timaeus* teaches about divinity. After telling us that the Good created the world, Plato tells us the world is a god (34b). In other words, God (*theon*) created a god (*theon*): "Such was the whole plan of the eternal God about the god that was to be." A god is timeless in some sense. Being, becoming, form, matter, and privation, are by their nature everlasting principles. They are true, enduring, and, therefore, perhaps, "with" God. But that suggests the heresy of "partnership," (*shituf* in Hebrew, *shirk* in Arabic). The idea is that polytheism flows from the suggestion that anything is eternal *with* God. We cannot let the perplexed deal unguided with the possibility that our principles led us to polytheism, at least without a proper explanation why these are not gods. Hence, the underground, private nature of this entire course of study. That principles are not gods is difficult to explain, see, e.g., Guide chapters 1:51-1:60.

Maimonides is also concerned with the effect of the prurient nature of Plato's metaphors upon young and unsophisticated readers. That these notions are prurient becomes clear when we read this chapter with Guide 3:8:

"Transient bodies are only subject to destruction through their matter (I substituted "matter" in three places where Friedlander translates "substance") and not through their form, nor can the essence of their form be destroyed: in this respect they are permanent. The generic forms, as you know, are all permanent and stable (*sh'kol ha-tzurot ha-miniot tamidiot v'kayamot*). Form can only be destroyed accidentally, i.e., on account of its connexion with matter (*aval hasig ha-hefsed et hatzura b'mikra, k'lomar makhmat tzamiduta la'khome*), the true nature of which consists in the property of never being without a disposition to receive form (*v'teva ha-khome v'amitato sh'laolam lo yishtakhrer min ha-tzmidot l'heder. Ha-tzmidot l'heder* lit. means "yoked to privation"). This is the reason why no form remains permanently in matter; a constant change takes place, one form is taken off and another is put on. How wonderfully wise is the simile of King Solomon, in which he compares matter to a faithless wife (Pines: 'married harlot,' *l'eshet ish zona*, cf. Proverbs 6:26, 7:6-27): for matter is never found without form, and is therefore always like such a wife who is never without a husband, never single; and yet, though being wedded, constantly seeks another man in the place of her husband: she entices and attracts him in every possible manner till he obtains from her what her husband has obtained. The same is the case with matter. Whatever form it has, it is disposed to receive another form; it never leaves off moving and casting off the form which it has in order to receive another. The same takes place when this second form is received. It is therefore clear that all corruption, destruction, or defect comes from matter."

The Married Harlot is an adulteress. Adultery is clearly a forbidden sexual union in the Torah. It is part of the subject of *gilui arayot* (*sitre arayot*) those sexual matters not to be taught in public. The same Mishna that proscribes the public teaching of *gilui arayot* also limits the public teaching of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava* (Talmud *Hagigah* 11b. See my treatment, Introduction I, near the end, and Introduction II, beginning; Idel, Moshe, "Sitre Arayot in Maimonides' Thought," pp. 79-91, *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed., Pines and Yovel, M. Nijhoff Publ., 1986). Maimonides also says in Guide 3:8 that he is concerned about the sense of touch, the subject of the next lexical chapter, 1:18:

"Some consider, as we just said, all wants of the body as shame, disgrace, and defect to which they are compelled to attend: this is chiefly the case with the sense of touch, which is a disgrace to us according to Aristotle (*Nichomachean Ethics* 3:10 1118b 1-4), and which is the cause of our desire for eating, drinking, and sensuality (*v'ha-tashmish*—literally: sex)."

The prurience of these metaphors and concern about their open transmission to immature students (who have not yet learned to sublimate) becomes the second reason for the underground nature of this study.

PARABLES AND POETRY

Our chapter 1:17 interrupts the flow of the lexical chapters of the Guide. The next chapter, chapter 18, is about *touch*. All the terms we have considered, with the exception of Man, Woman, and Adam, are terms of physical

spatial location. Thus, we have seen a series of terms involving the masculine concept of *erectness*, for example, stand, stand erect, rock, etc. Our chapter is a bridge to a group of terms suggesting feminine receptivity by *touching* and *filling*.

The metaphors of male and female come from the realm of poetry to explain the abstract movement of being into becoming. This reification of the purely abstract imposition of form in matter, though necessary, necessarily produces conflict (i.e., perplexity) between the poetic and the real understanding. Poetry is concerned with the beautiful, not the true, with the imagination, not the intellect. Our imagination creates good, evil, and idolatry; but our purpose is to return to the intellect, and to truth.

GUIDE 1:18 ENCOUNTER

According to Maimonides three words, *karav*, *nagash*, and *naga*, carry similar meanings in prophetic writings. The basic meaning is “contact” or “approach.” This approach occurs on the corporeal level and then is analogized to the intellectual level, Definitions 1 and 2 below.

We will see, however, that he does not treat the term *naga*, “touching,” the way he does the others, so I entered a third definition. While the other two are words of approach, *naga* is, unavoidably, more physical. Maimonides frequently quotes Aristotle that the sense of touch is a disgrace to man (*Nichomachean Ethics* 3:10 1118b 1-4), and usually couples this observation with some purient reference. Since “touch” is a corporeal activity, Maimonides chooses proof-texts that are negative in character. His *naga* passages depict the visitation of divine punishment on men.

Our chapter begins a new group of lexical chapters involving *touching* and *filling* (the next chapter) which balance the series of chapters leading to the bridge chapter, 1:17. That chapter concerned the role of sexual metaphor in prophecy, and the need to conceal that metaphor. The chapters preceding 1:17 were about *rock*, *standing*, *erectness*: all masculine in connotation, symbolizing *form*. As expected, we now enter a series of chapters that are about *matter*, connoting femininity. Friedlander, note 3, p. 69, also recognizes this as a new section, but portrays the next series of lexical terms as illustrative of the *descent* of the divine manifestation to certain physical places, such as “filling” the Tabernacle, or “sitting” on a throne, etc. Yehuda Even-Shmuel, *ad loc.*, agrees but shows that terms denoting “filling” and “sitting” really are about matter. Where Maimonides says, “When a being is without corporeality it cannot occupy space (place),” *ki b’histalek ha-gashmut, ystalek ha-makom*, Even-Shmuel explains that the philosophical definition of “matter” is dimensionality and magnitude: these determine space or place, i.e., that which is “filled.”

The highest form of “approach” is our encounter with God. Maimonides’ says that our contact with the divine is a “union of cognition with the cognized,” calls to mind chapter 1:68. In that chapter, he repeats Aristotle’s formula for God as “the knowledge, the knower, and the known.” Man and God achieve contact mind to Mind. Indeed, only “mind” exists at the level of actualized intellect, for, “when a being is without corporeality, it cannot occupy space.” Thus, in 1:68, after reviewing his argument for the unity of mind, I concluded:

“The fascinating point is that this is the sole difference Maimonides finds between the structure of the mind of God and the structure of the mind of man: only purely external accidents deprive the human psychology of its likeness to the divine psychology.”

The subtle issue that intrudes is whether can there be a “relationship” between two such unequal powers, the mind of man and the mind of God. This question is particularly salient since Maimonides spends so many chapters in Book One of the Guide denying that there is anything “with” God (1:51-60 on attributes). What will emerge from the selection of proof texts below is that some mediation must occur between God and His creatures. What is the nature of this mediation? The mediator is the “active intellect.”

Man *activates* his intellect when he “comprehends anything which he had not comprehended previously.” This is Maimonides’ succinct explanation of Aristotelian psychology. When man learns he activates his potential for knowledge, his “potential intellect,” thereby acquiring knowledge, his “acquired intellect.” The *act* of acquiring knowledge and contemplating it is the state called “active intellect.” Medieval philosophy hypostatized this *state*, that is, understood it as a higher being. This being receives such names as *Shekhina*, Angel, Metatron, Created Light (*or ha-nivra*), etc. Maimonides refers to this idea in our chapter when he invests Sinai with the emanation of active intellect:

“If, however, you wish to take the words ‘And Moses shall draw near’ to mean that he shall draw near a certain place in the mountain, whereon the Divine Light shone, or, in the words of the Bible, ‘where the glory of the Lord abode,’ you may do so.”

He means that while a direct mind to Mind relation of man and God is doubtful, God creates mediating gradations so that there can be an “approach.”

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

KARAV (TO COME NEAR)

NAGASH (TO APPROACH)

NAGA (TO TOUCH)

1. Contact, touch; nearness or approach in space.
2. The approach of man’s knowledge to an object, “as if it resembled the physical approach of one body to another.” It is the “union of cognition with the cognized” (Pines’ translation), *hitkhabrut ha-yedia b’moda*. This contact takes place only thru comprehension:
“Not in reference to space....Wherever a word denoting approach or contact is employed in the prophetic writings to describe a certain relation between the Almighty and any created being, it has to be understood in this latter sense [*viz.*, to approach mentally]. For, as will be proved in this treatise (2:4), the Supreme is incorporeal, and consequently He does not approach or draw near a thing, nor can aught approach or touch Him; for when a being is without corporeality, it cannot occupy space, and any idea of approach, contact, distance, conjunction, separation, touch, or proximity is inapplicable to such a being.”
3. *Naga*, “touch,” when used with God, means that He visits punishment upon the guilty.

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And it came to pass, as soon as he *came nigh (karav)* unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.” (Exodus 32:19)

Moses’ approach to the camp is a grossly physical approach to a people that have made themselves grossly physical. The Jews have descended to the pursuit of corporeality. Maimonides thus begins with this most negative passage, on the principle of *ascending in holiness* (Talmud *Berakhot* 28a).

“And when Pharaoh *drew nigh (hikriv)*, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord.” (Exodus 14:10)

This is the terrifying moment of the Exodus when Pharaoh was on one side and the sea roared on the other. Rashi, *ad loc.*, quotes Midrash (*Mechilta; Tanchuma Beshallah* 9), that the Jews “seized the art of their ancestors” (i.e., they prayed), and continues by recalling moments when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did the same. Maimonides chose this passage to contrast the physical *approach* of the Egyptians to the Jews, against the spiritual *approach* of the Jews crying out to God.

“Then Zipporah took a sharp stone (*tzur*), and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast [it] (*va-taga*—and caused it to touch) at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband (*khatan damim*—bridegroom of blood)[art] thou to me.” (Exodus 4:25)

This quotation compresses several sexual references in one verse. Moses’ wife Zipporah has to perform emergency circumcision on his son. She removes the foreskin, casts it at Moses “feet,” and says “a bridegroom of blood art thou to me.” The term “foot,” of course, is a euphemism for penis. Maimonides will return to circumcision two quotes down. Circumcision is the covenant of loyalty between God and the Jewish people. It dedicates the *forming* principle to the true *Form* of the world, God.

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] the Lord of hosts: the whole earth [is] full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe [is] me! for I am undone; because I [am] a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, [which] he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid [it] (*va-yaga*) upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched (*naga*) thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.” (Isaiah 6:1-7)

This seems to be the reverse of the Talmudic account of the origin of the *philtrum*, the vertical indent in the midline of the upper lip (*Niddah* 30b). In that story, the angel touches every infant’s lip, making it forget its inborn knowledge. With Isaiah, by contrast, the touch purges him of corporeal hindrances preventing him from uttering prophecy. He *reacquires* his previously potential knowledge (unlike the infant, who forgot it). He activates his knowledge, and he also perfects his imagination. He has now reached the level of the vision of the chariot, and his famous prophecy is his version of the *Maaseh Merkava*. The inclusion of this proof-text with the corporeal definitions of *naga* is questionable since this touching occurs entirely in Isaiah’s vision. See essay below, “Gradations.”

“Then Judah came near (*va-yigash*) unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou [art] even as Pharaoh.” (Genesis 44:18)

Maimonides writes that this verse stands for “*nagash* in the first sense, viz., to approach or move towards another person.” He knows more than he is telling about this famous opening verse to *Parashat Vayigash*. See my essay “The Midrash on *Vayigash*,” below.

Instance of Both Definitions 2 and 3, Contextualized:

“We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth (*naga*) unto heaven, and is lifted up [even] to the skies.” (Jeremiah 51:9)

This is the first quote that Maimonides produces for the incorporeal meaning of our three lexical terms. The idea is that God knows the iniquity of Babylon and will punish her for it. All instances of *naga*, “touching,” when used with God, are examples of the visitation of divine punishment. Since Maimonides places it as the first quote of Definition 2, I have also, since it does signify knowledge of the known, but it really stands for Definition 3, visitation of punishment. It should be recalled that the visitation always precedes the punishment (Guide 1:10).

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; [but] ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment [is] God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring [it] (*takribun*) unto me, and I will hear it.” (Deuteronomy 1:17)

Maimonides says, “This is equivalent to saying, ‘Ye shall make it known unto me,’” i.e., Moses is not talking about the physical approach of the litigants, but that they must their issue comprehensible to him. The reason they made it known to Moses was to bring it to the mind of God. The passage recounts the beginning of the Sanhedrin. Prior to the Sanhedrin, Moses judged the people, that is, he acted as prophet-king, resolving the problems of the people through his mediation between them and God. The Sanhedrin represents the beginning of political institutions among the Jews. Still, the Sanhedrin did not solve the theological-political problem, for the hard cases had to be resolved in the light of prophecy. Thus, the “approach” here is not just the approach of the minds of the people to the mind of Moses, but to God by way of the Moses. It is mediation through a king to the King, mind to Mind. This must be the case because the tradition disapproved of Moses’ statement “bring it unto me and I will hear it.” The Talmud criticized his presumption in thinking he could resolve all cases on his own. “Because of this (presumptuous) statement, Moses was punished” by making him forgot the law in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (*Sanhedrin* 8a, referring to Numbers 27:1-5).

“And Abraham *drew near (vayigash)*, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” (Genesis 18:23)

This proof-text comes from Abraham’s debate with God whether Sodom should be destroyed if it had a significant number of righteous people. Maimonides says, “This took place in a prophetic vision and in a trance, as will be explained” (i.e., in 1:21, and 2:41). Maimonides repeatedly returns to Genesis 18 to illustrate his doctrine that all the actions taking place in a vision of prophecy are part of that vision, no matter how corporeal they seem. The other purpose for bringing this passage is to emphasize that Abraham, like Judah, engaged in prayer, meditation, and prophetic approach to God in moments of crisis (*Genesis Rabba* 49:8). See essay, “the Midrash on *Vayigash*,” below.

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people *draw near (nigash)* [me] with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” (Isaiah 29:13).

Isaiah inveighs against the substitution of lip service for the service of the heart. Maimonides follows this proof-text with several passages on false or feigned worship. In the case of ancient Israel, the meaning would have been that the people turned in faith to the gods but feigned worship of the one God. Since God knows the heart, the Jews cannot conceal their spiritual adultery. On a different level, Maimonides contrasts the spiritual reality of intellectual attachment against the corporealized form of verbal service.

“The Lord [is] *nigh (karov)* unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.” (Psalms 145:18)

Maimonides explains that God is spiritually, not physically nigh. He says there should be no “perplexity” (Kafih: *pikpuk*, Shwartz: *navokh*) over this or like passages: “for when a being is without corporeality, it cannot occupy space,” *ki b'histalek ha-gashmut yistalek ha-makom*. In other words, what occupies space is *matter*. No spiritual or intellectual activity takes place in space as such because neither participates in matter.

“Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in *approaching (kirbat)* to God.” (Isaiah 58:2)

This is another prophecy from Isaiah against insincere worship. When he says “they delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness,” he really means “as *if they were* a nation that did righteousness.” The prophet speaks of their *delight* “in approaching to God” with heavy irony. Approaching God is a very good thing for Maimonides (see notes on “Encounter” below) but all such approach requires a combination of spiritual discipline and intellectual pursuit, the opposite of the hypocritical service that Isaiah decries.

“(27) For, lo, they that are *far* from thee (*r’khekeikha*, the opposite of our term *karav/kirvat*/approach) shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a *whoring* (*zonei*) from thee. (28) But [it is] good for me to *draw near* (*kirvat*) to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.” (Ps. 73:27-28)

Maimonides says, “All such phrases intimate a spiritual approach, i.e., the attainment of some knowledge, not, however, approach in space.” There is another idea here as well. The previous line in this Psalm, 73:27, presents a contrasting state of spiritual distance, even of spiritual adultery. This passage is about false worship, like the two Isaiah quotes above. The Psalmist warns that false worshippers, those who go a whoring after other gods, shall perish. Similarly, all material things decompose. Corruptible matter pursues *any* other form or god, which is why Maimonides likened matter to the Married Harlot (Proverbs 7).

“Keep therefore and do them [the commandments]; for this [is] your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation [is] a wise and understanding people. For what nation [is there so] great, who [hath] God [so] *nigh* (*krovim*) unto them, as the Lord our God [is] in all [things that] we call upon him [for]?” (Deuteronomy 4:6-7)

This quotation, from Moses’ speech to the people, is one of Maimonides’ favorites. He uses these verses in Book Three of the Guide to show that there are reasons for the commandments (3:31). The passages link prophecy to law and place both in the category of wisdom. God is nigh to the Jews through his Torah given to Moses, the prophet-king.

“*Go thou near* (*kerav*), and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear [it], and do [it].” (Deuteronomy 5:23, 5:27 in KJV, 5:24 in Judaica Press)

The occasion for this passage is the giving of the Ten Commandments. The people ask Moses to intercede as their emissary with God since they believe they will die if they receive prophecy directly. This passage connects to the earlier quotation about the inauguration of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin mediates between the source of law and the governed people. The Jews need mediators who can bring prophecy to politics so that their laws align with God’s purposes in the universe. Moses can “go near and hear” not because he physically goes anywhere but because he can approach God mind to Mind.

“And Moses alone shall *come near* (*ve-nigash*) the Lord: but they shall not *come nigh* (*yigashu*); neither shall the people go up with him. (Exod. 24:2).

Maimonides writes:

“If, however, you wish to take the words ‘And Moses shall come near’ to mean that he shall draw near a certain place in the mountain, whereon the Divine Light shone, or, in the words of the Bible, ‘where the glory of the Lord abode,’ you may do so, provided you do not lose sight of the truth that there is no difference whether a person stand at the centre of the earth or at the highest point of the ninth sphere, if this were possible: he is no further away from God in the one case, or nearer to Him in the other; those only approach Him who obtain a knowledge of Him; while those who remain ignorant of Him recede from Him. In this approach towards, or recession from God there are numerous *grades* one above the other... (in) what constitutes the difference in our perception of God.” (My italics)

Maimonides does not discount the idea that Sinai is a place where the divine light (*or hanivra*) has emanated. He has previously shown that this is an acceptable understanding, that the light is a created intermediary. There is a similar passage in the next chapter. The meaning is there can be a physical place or even a mental “place,” conducive to a certain type of meditation. (See *The Guide to Serving God*, by Abraham ben Ha-Rambam, Y. Wincelberg, Feldheim, 2007, “Hitbodedut,” p. 409, on meditation in the Temple.) In such a place where the prophet “approaches alone” to God, he can learn what he can of God and His works, thereby actualizing his potential intellect. Nonetheless, the student cannot reach that *mediating* place unless he understands that God has

no “place.” Moses alone shall approach since he achieves “unity of the cognition with the cognized.” The people may not “approach” Sinai to make a corporeal fetish of the place.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“Bow thy heavens, O Lord, and come down: *touch (ga)* the mountains, and they shall smoke.” (Psalms 144:5)

The Psalmist’s passage is about the visitation of divine punishment upon the wicked. This is the only way these prophetic texts employ the term *ga/touch* with God. Of our three lexical terms, *ga (naga)* illustrates the most corporeal form of physical approach.

“But put forth thine hand now, and *touch (v’ga)* his bone (*atzmo*: his bone/himself) and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.” (Job 2:5)

The context is Satan’s debate with God in the book of Job. Would the righteous but unintellectual Job remain devoted if God gratuitously inflicted punishment upon him? The passage illustrates again that, for Maimonides, God engages in *naga*, “touching,” only in the sense of the visitation of punishment upon man. His contention is that Job could save himself through appropriate intellectual training. Job had not actualized his *intellectual* attachment to the divine. His righteousness was only a moral response rote-learned from tradition (3:22-23).

GRADATIONS

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the Temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] the Lord of hosts: the whole earth [is] full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe [is] me! for I am undone; because I [am] a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, [which] he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he *laid [it] (va-yaga’)* upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched (*naga*) thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.” (Isaiah 6:1-7)

The inclusion of this passage by Maimonides among *corporeal* meanings of *naga* is questionable since this touching occurs entirely in Isaiah’s *vision*. R. Hasdai Ha-Levi, a contemporary of Maimonides, noticed this use of the grossly physical *naga* in this most spiritual of settings and wrote the master for an answer. One of Maimonides’ students responded, in a letter included in collections of Maimonides’ own letters. Maimonides probably suggested this response to the writer and perhaps dictated it:

“You inquired about the meaning of the verse in Isaiah (6:7), ‘And he touched therewith upon my mouth and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips.’ Does not this allude to something corporeal coming into contact with another material object? This statement may appear obscure unless we realize that every prophetic utterance stresses a specific gradation in the scale of values. When he says: ‘then flew unto me’ this represents an advanced *gradation*; ‘one of the seraphim,’ a lower degree; ‘and he touched therewith upon my mouth and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips’ this reflects the lowest level. Generally, then, a vision may be delineated as a spiritual entity which is first apprehended by the subtle, abstract mind as a pure concept and then upon its descent, its extension increases and thickens until converted into a physical object.’ It is similar to a cloud of vapor which initially appears to have no bodily properties but as it changes to drops of rain it assumes a physical form. Thus, in symbolic form, the prophet describes this process of a vision. He begins with the statement: ‘Then flew unto me,’ symbolizing an entity completely devoid of any bodily properties. Then he proceeds: ‘And he touched therewith upon my mouth,’

indicating that he came in contact with another object outside himself, a physical one in order to cleanse the prophet of his corporeality which might impede the implementation of his mission. The phrase, ‘one of the seraphim,’ refers to a combination of the incorporeal and the material. For the term ‘one’ connotes a spiritual unit and ‘seraphim’ denotes corporeality implying the destruction of the material element in a body (the seraphim were fire angels)...For the prophetic vision was experienced in such a variety of gradations.” (Translation: Leon Stitskin, pp. 109-110, *Letters of Maimonides*, Yeshiva, 1977. Emphasis, mine)

In other words, Maimonides includes the Isaiah text here to illustrate the *gradation* of corporeality into incorporeality. In prophetic vision there is a range of grades or levels, twelve in number (Guide 2:44). Maimonides writes about these grades in 1:59:

“The following question might perhaps be asked: Since there is no possibility of obtaining a knowledge of the true essence of God, and since it has also been proved that the only thing that man can apprehend of Him is the fact that He exists, and that all positive attributes are inadmissible, as has been shown, what is the difference among those who have obtained a knowledge of God? Must not the knowledge obtained by our teacher Moses, and by Solomon, be the same as that obtained by any one of the lowest class of philosophers, since there can be no addition to this knowledge? But, on the other hand, it is generally accepted among theologians and also among philosophers, that there can be a great difference between two persons as regards the knowledge of God obtained by them. Know that this is really the case, that those who have obtained a knowledge of God differ greatly from each other; for in the same way as by each additional attribute an object is more specified, and is brought nearer to the true apprehension of the observer, so by each additional negative attribute you advance toward the knowledge of God, and you are nearer to it than he who does not negative, in reference to God, those qualities which you are convinced by proof must be negated.”

So that by a peculiar process of negative intellectual meditation, one can know more about the One whose essence is unknowable. Referring to the grades of prophets, he says in 2:32:

“For we call also prophets all those who reveal something unknown by surmises, or conjectures, or correct inferences. Thus ‘prophets of Baal’ and ‘of Asherah’ are mentioned in Scripture. And God says, ‘If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams,’ *etc.* (Deut. 13:1). As to the revelation on Mount Sinai, all saw the great fire, and heard the fearful thunderings, that caused such an extraordinary terror; but only those of them who were duly *qualified* were prophetically inspired, each one according to his capacities. Therefore, it is said, ‘Come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu.’ Moses rose to the highest degree of prophecy, according to the words, ‘And Moses alone shall come near the Lord.’ Aaron was below him, Nadav and Avihu below Aaron, and the seventy elders below Nadav and Avihu, and the rest below the latter, each one according to his degree of perfection. Similarly our Sages wrote: Moses had his own place and Aaron his own.”

The term “qualified” used in this passage refers first to moral training in the Torah, and secondly to intellectual training, as in the Guide. There had in the past been schools of prophets where these qualifications could be acquired (1 Sam. 19:18-24, 2 Kings 2:3, 15; 4:38, 6:1, *inter alia*).

The gradations in prophecy come from the level of divine knowledge reached by the prophet. They are represented poetically by Jacob’s Ladder. Jewish esotericism also features mediating grades of approach to God and of emanation from Him, hypostatized as the Sefirot.

THE MIDRASH ON VAYIGASH

“Then Judah *came near* (*va-yigash*) unto him, and said, Oh my Lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my Lord’s ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou [art] even as Pharaoh.” (Genesis 44:18)

I noted above Maimonides’ disingenuous and brief response to this proof text, that the verse stands for “*nagash* in the first sense, viz., to approach or move towards another person.” *Vayigash* is the name for the section of the synagogue Torah reading commencing with this passage. The section attracted Midrashic attention, duly headlined in Rashi.

In my treatment of Maimonides’ proof-texts I look for passages from the sea of Midrash that would come to the minds of his educated contemporaries. Rashi (1040-1105 C.E.) is a good indicator of such passages. The Midrash on *Vayigash* exemplifies of the type of learned background immediately recollected by the mention of Judah’s “approach” to Joseph. The Midrash’s extensive comments on this verse contain core themes of Maimonides’ theory of prophecy (*Genesis Rabba*, 93:1-12, pp. 856-867, Soncino). I see five such broad thematic responses in the Midrash:

1. *Mind to Mind*. The Midrash wants us to grasp that Joseph and Judah were great kings of nations who wielded both temporal and cosmological power. It recites many times, as a kind of refrain:

“When kings contend with each other, what has it to do with us? It is fitting for a king to contend with a king! Therefore, ‘Then Judah came near unto him.’”

The problem is that Joseph and Judah are obviously *not* kings, but emissaries of real kings. Joseph is the emissary of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, as Judah is the emissary of Jacob, the real king of the Jews. The prophetic idea alluded to here is that prophetic “approach” is a state of the “unity of cognition with the cognized,” i.e., an equal meeting of minds, as between two “kings.” But it also signals the idea of *gradation*, that in fact they are emissaries, mediators between different powers. The prophet, the possessor of the actualized intellect, is the mediator between man’s un-actualized mind and the mind of God.

2. *Judah is Solomonic*. At 93:3-4, p. 857, the Midrash recites two passages that Maimonides used in his Introduction to the Guide to illustrate Solomon’s contribution to prophecy (see my *Introduction I, supra*). First, Proverbs 20:5, “Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out,” inspired the Midrash (*Song of Songs* 1:8) to teach that Solomon linked parables to teach prophecy as though they were linked ropes to draw water from a well (Guide, Pines translation, p. 11). Similarly, according to the Midrash on *Vayigash*, Judah linked his speeches together until he “penetrated (Joseph’s) very heart.” Secondly, the *Vayigash* Midrash recites Solomon’s “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word fitly spoken,” Proverbs 25:11, (Guide p. 11-12), to illustrate *Judah’s* ability to communicate the true core of his words to Joseph. This true core includes their prurient aspect (Theme 4 below. In my comments on the Introduction, I explain how the Parable of the Golden Apple implied this aspect).
3. *Joseph Represents Form, Judah Matter*. The *Vayigash* Midrash (93:5, p. 858) compares Joseph to a reaper, a treader of grapes, and a sower of his father’s seed; as opposed to Judah, who it compares to a plowman, to the grapes being trodden, and, impliedly, to that which the seed is sown in (quoting Amos 9:13, Genesis 37:7, and Zechariah 9:13).

4. *Sexual Metaphor*. At 93:8, p. 859, the *Vayigash* Midrash looks at the final clause of our text, when Judah says to Joseph, “for thou art even as Pharaoh.” The Midrashic author says that just like Pharaoh, the Vizier is a homosexual: “As Pharaoh lusts for males, so dost thou,” implying deviant purpose to Joseph’s keeping Benjamin hostage. When Joseph reveals his identity, the brothers do not believe him at first. He has them approach, and reveals his circumcision (93:10, 867), since “they did not believe him until he uncovered himself and showed that he was circumcised” (i.e., he follows the law and would presumably not be homosexual). The point is that when our mind pursues *any* mind, that is, any god, rather than the true Form, it is likened to deviant sexuality, *gilui arayot*, a form of spiritual adultery. According to the *Hagigah* rule, the secrets of *gilui arayot* must not be taught in public. The circumcision is the powerful symbol of the Jews’ covenant. It marks man’s prophetic encounter with God.

5. *Judah’s “Approach” is Intellectual Meditation*. Prayer and sacrifice are external forms of internal meditation. The *Vayigash* Midrash (93:6, p. 858) says that *vayigash* means “I (Judah) come whether it be for battle, for conciliation, or for prayer.” The Midrash (49:8) to a parallel proof-text in our chapter, “And Abraham approached (*vayigash*)” (Genesis 18:23), repeats this theme, for like Judah, “Abraham approached to speak harshly, to placate, to pray.” We saw above that when Pharaoh pursued them at the sea, the Jews “seized the art of their ancestors [i.e., they prayed],” and continued by recalling moments when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did the same. The Midrash also understands Judah’s *vayigash* to mean that he made a sacrifice. It explains (93:7, p. 865), “And Judah *came near* unto him: . . . R. Nehemiah said, It applies to sacrifice, as it says, And the bullock of the sin offering was *brought near* (Lev. 8:14).” *Sacrifice*, that is, a *korban*, from *karav*, “approach,” one of the three lexical terms in our chapter. By identification with the sacrifice, we ascend to the incorporeal. Through prayer and sacrifice, we transcend corporeality and attain prophecy. They are external means through which man encounters God.

ENCOUNTER

This notion of “approach” is the center of the theology of Rabbi Abraham, son of Maimonides. He teaches that the purpose of human existence is to become close to God. He calls this proximity by the Sufic term *wuṣul*. This term takes various translations, including “union,” “bliss,” “perfection,” “clinging to God.” I prefer Yaacov Wincelberg’s choice of “encounter” (*ibid.* p. 33; see also *The High Ways To Perfection of Abraham Maimonides*, Samuel Rosenblatt, Columbia, 1927, pp. 95-101). Encounter is the final goal, where God is the only thought remaining in man’s mind, as in “I have set the Lord always before me” (Psalms 16:8). Encounter describes Moses’ “face to face” proximity with God (Exodus 3:11). In our chapter, Maimonides uses the term “intellectual conjunction,” which is the conjunction with the active intellect (Judeo-Arabic *ittiṣal ‘ilm*. *Ittiṣal* is a variant of *wuṣul*. See Efros, I, *Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, AMS Press, 1966, p. 23. *Wuṣul* appears in Guide 1:51 and elsewhere meaning Encounter in the form אלוֹצִלָּה).

There are gradations on the path to *wuṣul*. Rabbi Abraham uses the term both for the ultimate Encounter and also to characterize the attainment of any of the grades along this path. Not only Moses, but all prophets (*ibid.* 577), as well as such religious heroes as Rabbi Akiva and Shimon bar Yochai attained some grade of Encounter. Rabbi Abraham describes it as an ecstatic state of the soul, but also as the highest perfection.

Rabbi Abraham’s book, *Maspik L’Ovdei Ha-Shem*, charts the path through these grades. The highest grade of encounter is *hitbodedut*, which is mystical meditation, in which the “external” forms of meditation bring one to the state of “internal” meditation. He says (my trans, *ibid.*, 491):

“The intent of external meditation is the attainment of internal meditation, which is the highest step on the ladder of Encounter, moreover, it is no other than the encounter itself!” (*v’lo od ele sh’hi-hi ha-hitgalut [ha-pegiah] atzma!*). “External meditation is like a journey, but internal meditation starts as a journey and

ends in the Encounter—the last one is equal to all the rest of the grades.” (*hitbodedut ha-khitzonit kamao k’masa, v’ha-hitbodedut p’nimit t’khilata masa v’sofa ha-saga [ha-pegiah], u’mashlim k’neged kulam. Ibid., 531*).

Maimonides speaks of meditation in Guide 3:51: “It has thus been shown that it must be man’s aim, after having acquired the knowledge of God, to deliver himself up to Him, and to have his heart constantly filled with longing after Him. He accomplishes this generally by seclusion and retirement. Every pious man should therefore seek retirement and seclusion, and should only in case of necessity associate with others.”

Even-Shmuel agrees that this chapter is about Encounter, which he calls *devekut*, following Ibn Tibbon’s Hebrew translation of *ittiṣal* as *davek* (see Kafih, note 7, *ad loc.*). Gershom Scholem defines *devekut* as “mystical cleaving to God” (Efros calls *ittiṣal/devekut* “human unity with the absolute Being.”). Here is how Even-Shmuel summarizes our chapter (my trans.):

“The unified triad of matter/form/privation in no way relates to the Creator. No one of these principles or their definitions bears any relation to Him. Matter, the source of multiplicity, is defined by place: the materiality of an individual is contiguous to its place. The Creator, despite his ‘proximity’ (*n’gia*) to his creatures (as ‘the nature of the quarry must exist in what is hewn from it,’ Guide 1:16), is not near them except in closeness of apprehension. Such proximity is purely of intellectual apprehension, *devekut*.”

GUIDE 1:19 FULFILLMENT

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.” Its two corporeal definitions are about the nature of matter, while its incorporeal definition concerns the attainment of the active intellect. This chapter features a short but important discussion of the “created light,” the *or ha-nivra*.

MALEI (FILL) Homonym

1. One substance enters another, and fills it.
2. The expiration or completion of a fixed period of time. Definitions 1 and 2 together represent the completion of a measure in space or in time (Even-Shmuel, p. 93)
3. Attainment of highest degree of excellency or perfection (*ha-shlemut b'davar na'alei v'ha-takhlitot bo*)

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And the damsel (Rebecca) [was] very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and *filled (va-temallei)* her pitcher, and came up.” (Genesis 24:16)

Maimonides only quotes two words of this passage. The context, as he knew, is quite prurient. Our term *malei*, fill, appears here in the chapters of feminine lexical terms after the bridge chapter 1:17, which was about concealing sexual metaphor in prophetic writing. Guide 1:17 was preceded by a series of masculine referent terms. Abraham’s servant Eliezer is on a mission to Haran to find a wife for Isaac among Abraham’s relatives there. He meets Rebecca. It is not just that she is “filling her pitcher.” Rabbinic tradition (Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 60:5) seized on the apparent redundancy of the phrase “a virgin, neither had any man known her,” which Maimonides delicately fails to quote. The Midrash makes it refer to the Haranic practice of treating a woman as a virgin as long as she had not been violated *genitally*. The joke is that her pitcher was filled but she never had been, in any way. Rebecca symbolizes feminine matter, but not like the married harlot of Proverbs 7: she had not promiscuously pursued masculine form. (For a different approach, see notes on “Privation” below.)

“And Moses said, This [is] the thing which the Lord commandeth, *Fill (m'lo)* an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 16:32)

Maimonides quotes the passage differently, as: *m'lo ha-omer l'ekhad*, “fill an omer for each.” Friedlander footnote 1, explains: “The editions of the Bible have *m'lo ha-omer mimenu*. Either Maimonides himself or the copyists confounded the two passages, Exodus 16:21, *shnei ha-omer l'ekhad*, and 16:32, *m'lo ha-omer mimenu*.” The quotation refers to the pitcher of manna kept as a national religious time-capsule of that miracle. But here the reference is negative, for it follows the sin of gathering manna on Sabbath. The passage is part of Moses’ speech castigating the Jews for breaking the Sabbath commandment. Maimonides usually supports corporeal definitions with such pejorative texts. Moreover, Rashi says that Jeremiah pointed to this omer vessel when he said “O generation, see ye the word of the Lord,” castigating the Jews for “chang(ing) their gods.” Unlike Rebecca, the Jews have abandoned their Lord, for Jeremiah says, “Can a maid forget her ornaments, a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.” God remembers Israel like a maiden following Him in the desert, while now they “recline as a harlot.” (Jeremiah 2:2-2:32, Rashi from Midrash *Mekhilta*).

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And when her [Rebecca’s] days to be delivered were *fulfilled (va-yimlu)*, behold, [there were] twins (Jacob and Esau) in her womb.” (Genesis 25:24)

All references to birth, blood, corpses, *etc.*, are instances of *tumah*, that is, biblical ritual defilement, and therefore carry intrinsically negative corporeal meaning for Maimonides. The context is Rebecca’s *fulfillment* in the birth of the twins Jacob and Esau. The fulfillment is ambiguous, since corporeality and spirituality mingle. The previous line is, “Two nations are in your womb, and two kingdoms will separate from your innards, and one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom, and the elder will serve the younger.” Jacob chooses to yoke himself to Torah, while Esau, pursues *hunting*, that is, the pursuit of matter.

“And forty days were *fulfilled (va-yimlu)* for him (Jacob); for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days.” (Genesis 50:3)

This passage from the end of Genesis concerns Joseph’s treatment of his father Jacob’s corpse. Not only does this involve the *tumah* of ritual corpse defilement, but worse, embalming. Mummification transgresses Jewish burial laws, which require the clean corpse buried as soon as possible. Rashi’s explanation (*ad loc.* to Genesis 47:29): “so that the Egyptians will not deify me,” is interesting. Rashi understands that the Patriarch, Jacob, was so pure and righteous that his body would never decompose. Joseph’s problem is that his father’s eternally unpolluted corpse would entice Egyptians to add another deity to their pantheon. They embalmed Jacob’s body to disguise the situation until they could bury him in Israel. Since Jacob had never pursued materialism, he had already transcended his material state. That is why this proof-text bridges over to Definition 3.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and *full (malei)* with the blessing of the Lord: possess thou the west and the south.” (Deuteronomy 33:23)

The context is Moses’ blessing the tribe of Naftali before he dies. The meaning, according to Maimonides, is that Naftali attained the highest degree of excellency, i.e., *fulfillment*. Only those who are fulfilled in this sense, who are Israel’s intellectual progeny, possess the land. On this point, note that Maimonides in Guide 1:8 already understood *malei* to mean intellectual progeny, in the phrase *m’malei makom avotov* (“occupying the place of his ancestors,” Talmud, *Shabat* 51a, *Ketuvot* 103b). Hiram of Tyre, Solomon’s Temple builder, had a Naftalite mother; hence, this passage links to the coming passage from 1 Kings about Hiram’s construction of the temple.

“Them hath he *filled with wisdom* of heart (*milei otam khakhmat lev*), to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, [even] of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.” (Exodus 35:35)

Three of the final four quotations are about the dwelling place of the Lord’s presence: first in the Tabernacle of the desert, and later in the Temple at Jerusalem. The *Shekhina fills* the central place of Hebrew worship. On this motif, and its relation to *wisdom*, see essay on the “Created Light” below. This passage refers to Bezalel and his craftsmen who built the Tabernacle. “Tabernacle” in Hebrew is *mishkan*, which means the divine indwelling (same root as *Shekhina*), thus, the place constructed to be “filled” with God’s glory.

“He [was] a widow’s son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father [was] a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was *filled (va-yimalei)* with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning (*ha-khakhma v’et ha-tevuna v’et ha-daat*) to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work.” (I Kings 7:14).

This passage parallels the last two. It refers to Hiram of Tyre, the son of a Tyrean artisan and a Naftalite mother, hired by Solomon to build the Temple. We know from the earlier quote of the Naftalite heritage of *fulfillment*. Being Naftali’s intellectual progeny, Hiram was prophetically inspired to build the place for the indwelling of

God's presence. "Wisdom, and understanding, and cunning," in the KJV are *khakhma, bina* and *daat*, which Rashi says:

"Are the three tools with which the universe was created, as it is stated, '[The Lord] by *wisdom* founded the earth, by *understanding* He established the heavens, by His *knowledge* the depths were broken up' (Proverbs 3:19). With these same three the Temple was built."

They make up the famous acronym *KhaBaD*, the three upper principles of the Sefirot. The Sefirot are the bridge to the divine in Jewish esotericism. That Hiram was *malei* in the sense of Definition 3 means that he attained the highest degree of perfection both spiritually and in his ability to perfect base metals.

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the Temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] the Lord of hosts: the whole earth [is] full (*melo*) of his glory (*kavod*)." (Isaiah 6:1-3)

Maimonides restates this text according to Definition 3: "All the earth gives evidence of His perfection, i.e. leads to knowledge of it." This is Isaiah's famous vision, which includes the burning of his mouth by the coal releasing his prophetic power. Maimonides places this passage with the several quotations about the establishment of the central place of worship because he wants us to compare the indwelling of the presence of God in the Temple with that same indwelling that causes the prophet's vision. Maimonides' use of the passage foreshadows his Definition 3 of *kavod* (usually "glory,") in 1:64 as "praise," viewing glory or honor as a type of praise (see my "Glory of the Lord" in 1:8, and notes in 1:16). The depth of our praise of God is directly related to the depth of our apprehension of His works. The Torah poetically personifies even inanimate creations as "praising" Him, by giving "evidence of His perfection." He made them, so they "praise" Him for it. What we can intellectually apprehend of his creation is "praise," and is one of the rungs of the ladder to prophecy, "for the true way of honoring Him consists in apprehending His greatness." Again, at 3:52, he quotes the same passage, so that when "perfect men understand this (God's ubiquitous creative presence expressed in the glory/light/Shekhina) they achieve such humility, such awe and fear of God, such reverence and such shame before Him..." (Pines' translation). In other words, the praise is the Encounter. The Glory is the created intellectual emanation that mediates between our mind and God. (See notes 1:18, equating the glory/light/Shekhina)

"Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled (*malei*) the tabernacle." (Exodus 40:34)

By completing the Tabernacle, Moses accomplished the conditions for the divine indwelling with the people. They achieved of the highest degree of perfection. The prophets are, so to speak, human tabernacles, with potential to reach this highest degree, the unification with the active intellect. Rabbi Abraham, Maimonides' son, comments here that the glory/*kavod* that filled the tabernacle was the light of the *Shekhina*. On line 38, "For the cloud of the Lord [was] upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys," R. Abraham says that the cloud is not an earthly cloud or the fire of elemental fire. Rather, he says, it is a created light which burns in prophetic vision. He quotes other passages where this light is a ministering angel, i.e., a mediator for the emanation of God to the prophet.

You might ask at this point whether this active intellect is supposed to be entirely in the mind of the prophet, or whether it is a non-material being mediating between the prophet and God, like an angel. Maimonides does not achieve precision in his discussion of the active intellect. Efron's *Dictionary* identifies at least five different senses for the term in the Guide alone: 1) the mind in the act of thinking; 2) angels; 3) the Platonic Ideas or eternal archetypes; 4) the intelligences or souls of the spheres; 5) the tenth and last of the intelligences. R. Abraham, speaking with some reluctance, claiming to be entering a "narrow strait" and a "secret of the Torah," distinguishes the mediator in the visions of all other prophets from the mediator involved when Moses spoke "face to face" (Deuteronomy 5:4). Moses had an intermediary but that intermediary did not possess its own spirit or intellect like an angel does. The attempt to achieve greater precision on this issue did not press Jewish thinkers until the advent

of scholasticism under the impact of Averroes. My assessment is that Maimonides felt that at the highest level all the above definitions view the same truth from different angles. (Abraham Maimonides, *Guide to Serving God*, p. 585, Feldheim, 2007. Against my view that there is mediation, see Seeskin, Kenneth, *Search for a Distant God*, pp. 26-30, Oxford, 2000.)

THE CREATED LIGHT REVISITED

Maimonides returns in our chapter to the subject of the “created light,” the *or ha-nivra*, which we wrote about briefly at Guide 1:5:

“...In fact, every application of the word (*malei*) to God must be interpreted in this manner (i.e., denoting attainment of the highest degree of excellency); and not that He has a body occupying space. If, on the other hand, you prefer to think that in this passage by ‘the Glory of the Lord,’ a certain light created for the purpose is to be understood, that such light is always termed ‘Glory,’ and that such light ‘filled the Tabernacle,’ we have no objection.”

His remark seems castoff or throwaway. We have seen this type of remark (1:5) and will see it again. He could be saying that it is not good to regard the Glory of the Lord as a “created light,” but that it’s not so corporealist as believing that God has a hand or an eye. But that is *not* his point.

Maimonides refers later (1:64) to the *or ha-nivra*, again defining it, not disparagingly, as the “Glory of the Lord.” In that chapter the “Glory” is taken as “the comprehension of His greatness,” which comprehension is the attainment of the active intellect. The classic source for the concept of the created light, well known to him (but unmentioned), is Talmud *Hagigah* 12a. The passage from *Hagigah* 12a is about the distinction between the light of the First Day and that of the Fourth Day:

“But was the light created on the first day? For, behold, it is written: ‘And God set them in the firmament of the heaven,’ (Genesis 1:17) and it is [further] written: ‘And there was evening and there was morning a fourth day,’ (1:19) — this is [to be explained] according to R. Eleazar. For R. Eleazar said: The light which the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, *one could see thereby from one end of the world to the other*; but as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, beheld the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion (after the Tower of Babel), and saw that their actions were corrupt, He arose and hid it from them, for it is said: ‘But from the wicked their light is withholden’ (Job 38:15). And for whom did he reserve it? For the righteous in the time to come.” (My ital.)

To be clear: no light seen by the eye lets you see the whole world, only the light of the mind does this. This is the light of wisdom.

R. Eleazar connects Wisdom to the Tabernacle (that which the light or glory fills) in Talmud *Berakhot* 33a. Maimonides does not mention this passage either, although it grounds the connection of the active intellect with the Glory upon a strong Talmudic base. Relevant footnotes from Soncino are in parentheses, my comments in braces:

“*Havdalah* in ‘That graciously grantest knowledge’ {This line is a quote from the Mishnah being commented upon here by the Talmud. *Havdalah* is a prayer demarcating the distinction between Sabbath and the rest of the week, said at the end of Sabbath as an insertion in the *wisdom* blessing of the evening prayer: ‘You graciously grant knowledge to man...dividing...the holy from the profane’ *mlamed le’enosh binah... v’tavdel...beyn kodesh l’khol*.} What is the reason? {for including *havdalah* in the wisdom blessing}— R. Joseph said: Because it is a kind of wisdom (*viz.*, discerning between holy and profane and

between clean and unclean etc.) it was inserted in the benediction of wisdom. The Rabbis, however, say: Because the reference is to a weekday, therefore it was inserted in the weekday blessing. R. Ammi said: Great is knowledge, since it was placed at the beginning of the weekday blessings. R. Ammi also said: Great is knowledge since it was placed between two names (i.e., *two mentions of the Deity*), as it says, ‘For a God of knowledge is the Lord.’ (I Samuel 2:3) And if one has not knowledge, it is forbidden to have mercy on him, as it says, For it is a people of no understanding, therefore He that made them will have no compassion upon them (Isaiah 27:11). R. Eleazar said: Great is the Sanctuary, since it has been placed between two names, as it says, ‘Thou hast made, O Lord, the sanctuary, O Lord’ (Exodus 15:7, lit. translation). R. Eleazar also said: Whenever there is in a man knowledge, it is as if the Sanctuary had been built in his days; for knowledge is set between two names, and the Sanctuary is set between two names.”

To demystify this, the Talmud is employing a unique system of Jewish logic to show the exalted status of knowledge/wisdom.

First, the Talmud makes the point that *Havdalah* is like wisdom because both involve differentiation: *Havdalah* is the prayer that divides the Sabbath from the weekday; indeed, the word itself means to divide or differentiate; while *wisdom* is that which distinguishes between the holy and the profane. *Binah*, the word for understanding/wisdom, has a basic meaning of “distinguish” (from *beyn*, “between”).

Next, the exalted status (“great”) of knowledge/wisdom is expressed by the fact that in I Samuel 2:3 the word “knowledge” is placed between two instances of God’s names: “Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let [not] arrogance come out of your mouth: for the Lord [is] a God of knowledge (*k-l deot hashem* אֱלֹהֵי דַעוּת יְהוָה), and by him actions are weighed.” The phrase, *k-l deot hashem*, is literally “God knowledge God,” placing *knowledge* between two names of God.

Next we get a *gezerah shaveh*, a form of Talmudic logic in which two biblical phrases with the same word or words are taken as proof that the words mean the same in both instances. A similar phrase pattern is spoken of the *Sanctuary* (Tabernacle) at Exodus 5:17 and the Soncino helpfully provides a literal translation to reveal the pattern: “Thou hast made, O Lord, the Sanctuary, O Lord. (*hashem mikdash ad-noy* אֱלֹהֵי מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי). “Sanctuary” is between two names of God. The first instance of the verbal pattern in Samuel shows that *knowledge* is “great,” and therefore, applying the *gezerah shaveh* to the second instance, the *Sanctuary* is “great.” The real importance of this “greatness” appears in the final Talmudic moment:

“R. Eleazar also said: Whenever there is in a man *knowledge*, it is as if the Sanctuary had been built in his days; for *knowledge* is set between two names, and the Sanctuary is set between two names.”

Now this really would be important to Maimonides, because it is a direct Talmudic statement linking *knowledge* to the *Sanctuary*, and making the Maimonidean adept a Temple builder like Hiram or Bezalel, with clear implications of prophetship. The *filling* of the Sanctuary with *created light* means that it is filled with light unseen by the eyes, by which we mentally distinguish the “ends of the world.” We build the Tabernacle in ourselves now by this same light of knowledge.

PRIVATION

My reflections on Rebecca’s pitcher (Genesis 24:16, above) adopted the standpoint of the pitcher being *filled*. Yehuda Even-Shmuel considered the pitcher from its prior unfilled state. This led him to determine that privation was the theme of the chapter, particularly since Maimonides had only just introduced privation in 1:17. He is

right insofar as Definition 1 is concerned, but the rest of the chapter concerns the fullness of time (Def. 2) and the fulfillment of intellectual/spiritual potential (Def. 3).

Privation is a stage in the process by which all material things undergo generation and corruption. “Particularized” privation always accompanies matter as one form succeeds another. Incorporeal God is not subject to privation. Even-Shmuel summarizes our chapter as follows (my trans., and my comment in parentheses):

“Just as God bears no relation to materiality, He has no relation to privation. To the Creator of privation there is no privation, neither generalized privation nor particularized privation. He is always ‘filled,’ *malei*, and complete to the ultimate completion of perfection. [Unlike matter] He does not advance toward completion by the movement of successive forms that fill [a privation], since in God the whole is already actual, no aspect of Him being *in potentia*, just as He is not bounded by place, or connected to time (since to go from potential to actual requires time).”

Efros’ *Dictionary* (p.37) defines “generalized” privation as “nihil, absolute non-existence.” God is obviously not subject to this type of privation. Neither is God subject to particularized privation. He defines “particularized” privation as “privation of a particular form.” It is “relative non-being, i.e., that which is not yet but will be.” It is the privation of a particular form, which potentially in-forms matter. Privation, matter and form are principles, not substances, since they do not exist independently of each other. Privation is not a cause (*contra* Efros), because non-being, even “relative” non-being, causes nothing. Privation is integral to the Aristotelian *dunamis*, which is the capacity to be formed.

GUIDE 1:20 ELEVATION

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.” It contains a general introduction to the problem of attributes.

The terms *ram* and *nasa* have the same meanings, first, a corporeal sense of spatial elevation, and then an incorporeal sense of elevation in rank. The two meanings, corporeal and incorporeal, are said to be homonymous. This is supposed to mean that there is no shared middle ground or progression between their corporeal and incorporeal meanings. Maimonides devotes a paragraph to *ram* and a second to *nasa*; so to retain consistent presentation, I present them in that order, though they carry the same meanings. The idea is that in prophetic discourse these terms cannot mean the physical elevation of some object, but, rather, that it is in some way exalted. This perhaps trivial observation provides Maimonides the opportunity to begin a series of chapters on the nature of God, His relation to his attributes, and to His creation.

RAM: (HIGH) Homonym

1. Elevation in space.
2. Elevation in dignity, i.e., greatness, honor, and power. This is the only sense used when used of God, in which case it is a divine attribute.

Instance of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and *bare up* (*v'yisu*) the ark, and it was *lift up* (*va-taram*) above the earth.” (Genesis 7:17)

Maimonides only quotes, imprecisely, “and it (he adds, ‘the ark’) was lift up above the earth.” For the corporeal use of *ram* we have come to expect a negative sort of quotation. The passage describes the fortieth day of Noah’s voyage, when the waters destroyed the world.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one[s], and saidst, I have laid help upon [one that is] mighty; I have *exalted* (*harimoti*) [one] chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him.” (Psalms 89:19-20)

Not that God raised David up on a podium, but that He made David king. The passage begins a block of four quotations about the commencement and corruption of the Jewish monarchy, reminding us again of the motif of intellectual progeny. After Solomon, few kings were David’s intellectual progeny, and the next two kings mentioned were not his physical progeny either. The repetition of such motifs in the proof-texts of the Maimonidean lexicon is difficult to explain in terms of modern thematic organization. I am reminded that in Aggadic literature and in Hebrew poetry, *piyutim*, repetition acquires sublimity. Although this proof-text and the next two are nearly identical in language, notice that in this one David was “chosen,” while Jeroboam and Baasha were not. It means that he alone of these kings was the intellectual progeny of the prophet (Samuel, as Samuel was the non-filial progeny of Eli).

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu the son of Hanani against *Baasha* (King of Israel), saying, Forasmuch as I *exalted* thee (*harimotikha*) out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins.” (I Kings 16:1 and 2)

“Go, tell *Jeroboam*, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I *exalted* thee (*harimotikha*) from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, And rent the kingdom away from the

house of David, and gave it thee: and [yet] thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do [that] only [which was] right in mine eyes.” (I Kings 14:7 and 8).

I have placed these two quotes together since they are meant to be taken parallel. In both cases, the lexical term is *harimotikha*, a form of *ram*, which means “I (God) exalted thee” (first, Baasha, second, Jeroboam, in reverse temporal order). The language in both cases indicates humble origins, “out of the dust (*afar*)” and “from among the people.” Neither Jeroboam nor Baasha came from royalty and their origins are obscure. Both Tenth Century chiefs of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) rose on the force of their personalities and their arms. Jeroboam founded Israel and set the low standard of rule. Both led revolutions against their predecessors. Both instituted idol worship. Both were overthrown by other revolutionaries who slaughtered their families. The texts employ similar prophetic language to show that the houses of both would shortly be “expunged” (*u’viarti*, 14:10, *mavir*, 16:3). Dogs and fowl would eat their dead in the field (14:11, 16:4). The Talmud notes the pattern (*Gittin* 88a, quoting Deuteronomy 4:25), “When thou shalt beget children and children’s children, and ye shall have been long in the land, and shall corrupt [yourselves], and make a graven image,” that:

“The land of Israel was not laid waste until seven courts of justice had sanctioned idolatry, namely, Jeroboam..., Baasha, (etc.)...as it says, ‘she that hath borne seven languisheth, she hath given up the ghost, her sun is gone down while it was yet day, she hath been ashamed and confounded (Jeremiah 15:9).’ Where is this intimated in the Torah? In the verse, ‘when thou shalt beget children and children’s children.’”

The point is that the idolatrous Baasha was indeed Jeroboam’s intellectual progeny even though they were not related: “you have gone in the way of Jeroboam.” (16:2)

“Be thou *exalted* (*ruma*, raised up), O God, above the heavens; [let] thy glory [be] above all the earth.” (Psalms 57.6; 57:5 in KJV)

Not that God is physically raised but that He is supreme. The traditional explanation of the Psalm is that it took place when David hid in the cave from Saul. He offers this Psalm thanking God for saving his life without having to kill Saul. It is an apt counterpoint to Baasha, who slaughtered the house of Jeroboam.

NASA: (TO LIFT UP) Homonym

1. Elevation in space
2. Elevation in rank and dignity.

Instance of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“*And they laded* (*va-yisu*) their asses with the corn, and departed thence.” (Genesis 42:26)

The quote tells of Joseph’s brothers’ first trip back to their father from Egypt. Having loaded their beasts they later learn that Joseph’s steward had placed the brothers’ money back in their sacks. Thus starts a sad chain of events leading to Judah’s confrontation with Joseph and the revelation that he is their brother. This qualifies as negative context for the corporeal meaning that the money was physically raised upon the asses, not that it was in any way exalted.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed [shall be] in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted (*ve-tinase*).” (Numbers 24:7)

In our proof-text, the kingdom “shall be exalted,” by which Maimonides does not mean that it is physically raised as on a plateau. “His king shall be higher than Agag,” is Balaam’s prophetic anticipation of Saul’s defeat of Agag, king of Amalek. The passage is part of Balaam’s song of praise of the Jews, “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!” It is an example of prophecy settling upon non-Jews. Maimonides believes that prophecy is universally available. Balaam was a prophet of the second class in the classification of Guide 2:45. The term “prophet,” when used of these inspired men of the second class, is meant in a “wider sense” than when used of biblical prophets: he says that they are “almost” prophets. It may be that “when he was good” Balaam was momentarily a prophet in the “wider sense,” but Maimonides expects his prophets to prophecy on a regular basis. Abraham Maimonides says that Balaam’s illumination here was an influx of perfect and complete prophecy (*zakha l’hitgalut shlema u’gemura*, see *The Guide to Serving God*, p. 396).

“In all their (the Jews) affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and *carried them (va-y’nasem)* all the days of old.” (Isaiah 63:9)

Rashi says, “It speaks of the Shekhina anthropomorphically, to convey to the ear what it can hear.” Maimonides quotes the passage again at 2:29, where he catalogs other examples of parabolic speech in Isaiah. Explaining this passage there, Maimonides says that Isaiah “gives an account of God’s past kindness to us.” God does not physically carry the Jews; rather, he exalted them triumphant over their enemies. Chapter 63 in Isaiah foretells the coming of the Shekhina, as the destroying angel, trampling the Jewish vineyards, the blood of grapes staining its garment. Isaiah then recalls the good things God did for the Jews, swiftly returning in verse 10 to the subject of their rebellion and apostasy.

“And they [the band of Korach] gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, [Ye take] too much upon you, seeing all the congregation [are] holy, every one of them, and the Lord [is] among them: wherefore then *lift ye up yourselves above (titnasu)* the congregation of the Lord?” (Numbers 16:3)

Not, why do you stand on a podium, but why do you act holier-than-thou, *exalting* yourselves? This passage is from Korach’s speech inspiring rebellion against Moses. Maimonides answers Korach’s question in Guide 2:35 where he proves that Mosaic prophecy is uniquely superior to all other prophets. Abraham Maimonides (*ibid.* 117) stresses that Korach was also a humble and pious man, but was not content to serve God except in the capacity of high priest. He did not recognize Moses’ prophetic superiority or its source in Moses’ humility. Moses was vindicated because he was more humble: fearing to be compared to Korach he “fell on his face” (16:4). The true prophet “lifts” himself, so to speak, by lowering himself in his own estimation.

“O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself. *Lift up thyself (hinasei)*, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.” (Psalms 94:1 and 2)

Not that God physically lifts Himself but that He assumes His role as judge. This passage is the opening of the Psalm for Wednesday, the Fourth Day, when God created the sun and moon. It is a song of vengeance against those who worship those creations of the Fourth Day. This ties in the real theme of the chapter, the meaning of God’s relation to his creations. Maimonides’ theory of prophecy (Mishneh Torah, *Avodah Zara* 1:1) is that idolators honor the sun and moon at first only as servants of God: by honoring the servants they honor the Master. Later they forget that subtle distinction and worship them in their own right. See essay below.

“For thus saith the *high and lofty One (ram v’nisa)* that inhabiteth eternity, whose name [is] Holy; I dwell in the high and holy [place], with him also [that is] of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isaiah 57:15)

This passage is good for Maimonides because it uses both *ram* and *nisa* synonymously. Isaiah 57:15 is preceded at 13 with a rant against the Jews’ collections of idols, which cannot save, carrying on the idea of the prior Psalm about idolatry of the sun and moon. The danger is that the attributes easily become gods in their own right. The

passage again stresses humility in comparison to the loftiness of God. Abraham Maimonides repeatedly quotes this passage for his theme that we rise through self-abasement. Indeed, quoting his father, R. Abraham insists that “wherever you find God’s greatness you find His humility” (*Guide to Serving God*, 133; Talmud *Megilla* 31a). Maimonides says that the passage denotes “elevation in rank, quality, and power, and not elevation in space.” This leads him to consider those three things, “rank, quality, and power” *romemut, gedola v’oz*. He continues by mentioning other attributes: “ability, perfection, goodness, and others” *ha-yakholet v’ha-shlemut v’ha-tov v’zulatan*. He then asks how do so many ideas emerge from one idea of elevation? This is the opportunity for him to introduce his ideas on the essential attributes, as well his general approach to current views on emanationism. See essay below.

INTRODUCTION TO ATTRIBUTES

“You may be surprised (*u’shema yikashei lekha*) that I employ the expression, ‘elevation in rank, quality, and power,’ and you may say, How can you assert that several distinct expressions denote the same thing? (*heyakh ata osei inyanim rabim mei’inyan ekhad?*) It will be explained later on that those who possess a true knowledge of God do not consider that He possesses many attributes, but believe that these various attributes which describe His Might, Greatness, Power, Perfection, Goodness, etc., are identical, denoting His Essence, and not anything extraneous to His Essence.”

This concluding paragraph is the real introduction to Maimonides’ upcoming discussion of attributes, 1:51-60. In the next chapter he begins with the divine attribute of Voice (*Logos, Kol, Memra, Word*). He asserts that these attributes do not exist of themselves, but “denote” His Essence.

He begins by stating the philosophic problem. Friedlander translates, “How can you assert that several distinct expressions denote the same thing?” Better: “How can you derive many ideas from one idea?” (*inyanim* = Ar. *ma’ānī* = attributes, see Efos, *Dictionary*, p. 96). He asks the same question at 2:22, “It is impossible that anything but a single simple thing should proceed from a simple thing.” The classic formula is: “From what is one and simple only what is one and simple can come to be” (See Arthur Hyman’s famous article of the same title, p. 111, *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed., Lenn Goodman, SUNY, 1992).

The problem begins with Plato’s Socrates, who found all things patterned as copies from perfect forms, and who found the source of all in the Good. But were the forms in the Good, or separate from it? Were they real or just names? What was their status vis-à-vis God? Philo (20 BCE - 40 CE) tries to answer these questions. He locates the forms in the “word” of God, that is, in the “mind” of God, which is the created entity he called Logos. Logos is Torah, the creative word (IV *Questiones in Genesis* 140). The Logos is the first-begotten son of the uncreated Father (*On the Confusion of Tongues*, 63). In Plotinus (c. 205–270 C.E.) the Good, God, creates this intelligence through emanation, just as sunlight emanates from the sun.

Maimonides receives the doctrine of emanationism in the name of “Aristotle,” really, in Avicenna’s (980-1037 C.E.) rewrite of Plotinus, and presents it in *Guide* 2:22. “Aristotle holds that the first Intelligence is the cause of the second, the second of the third, and so on, till the thousandth, if we assume a series of that number.” The doctrine holds that God thinks of himself: this reflexive action necessarily emanates a simple singular first intelligence, *possible* in and of itself, *necessary* with respect to its cause, God. This intelligence likewise considers itself. When it considers its *possible* existence, it produces the body of the first celestial sphere. As it considers its *necessary* existence from God, it emanates the soul of the first celestial sphere (sphere, not planet—the planets are “hung” on the transparent spheres that surround us onionlike.). This goes on to the soul of the tenth sphere, the Active Intellect, and our sublunar existence. Maimonides criticized the determinism in this conception:

“Now the first Intellect is undoubtedly simple. How then can the compound form of existing things come from such an Intellect by fixed laws of Nature, as Aristotle (*sic*) assumes? We admit all he said concerning the Intelligences, that the further they are away from the first, the greater is the variety of their compounds, in consequence of the larger number of the objects comprehensible by the Intelligences: but even after admitting this, the question remains, By what law of Nature did the spheres emanate from the Intelligences? What relation is there between material and immaterial beings? Suppose we admit that each sphere emanates from an Intelligence of the form mentioned; that the Intelligence, including, as it were, two elements, in so far as it comprehends itself and another thing, produces the next Intelligence by the one element, and a sphere by the other; but the question would then be, how the one simple element could produce the sphere, that contains two substances and two forms, namely, the substance and the form of the sphere, and also the substance and the form of the star fixed in that sphere. For, according to the laws of Nature, the compound can only emanate from a compound.”

The solution, he says, is that “A single agent that acts with design and will, and not merely by the force of the laws of Nature, can produce different objects.” He was not the first to take this step, radically transforming the deterministic nature of emanationism. The great problem for religion was the *necessary* character of existence, both in the original Aristotelian version and in those of his philosophical children. Maimonides solves religion’s problem by identifying the contradiction in philosophical creation and solving it. Multiplicity can flow from unity if God wills such a miracle. Maimonides endorses creation as the greatest miracle of all, and makes it the basis of all other miracles. God can and does create a world of multiplicity, not only from what is one and simple, but, better, from *nothing*. Maimonides never endorses Avicenna’s emanationist scheme, although he does accept a more general system of willed emanation in the created world, not in the initial creation *ex nihilo*.

God created the world with its own nature. It is a world of natural cause and effect. Miracles are the exceptions. In that sublunar world, Aristotle’s science adequately explains natural necessity. Above that world, neither Aristotle nor anyone else other than God *knows* anything. In that world, forms somehow providentially emanate being into unformed matter. God emanates intelligence to intelligent beings. Since He is not bound by necessity, He retains the power to withhold emanation, and to change that which He wills to change, though He does not will to do so.

The universe manifests God’s “might, greatness, power, perfection, goodness.” It is all one in Him, a non-numerical undifferentiated unity. They are “identical, denoting His Essence, and not anything extraneous to His Essence.” We, who lack God’s perspective, only see the kaleidoscopic infinity of His works and ascribe them to many attributes, but “those who possess a true knowledge of God do not consider that He possesses many attributes.” Maimonides resembles the Talmudic Rabbi Chanina, (*Berakhot* 33b quoted in *Guide* 1:59) who ridiculed another who verbalized many attributes: “Have you finished all the praises of your Master!”

Yehuda Even-Shmuel’s summary of this chapter comes to the same conclusion from a different angle, that these three chapters express the triad of matter/privation/form. This triad is the dynamic of generation and corruption in our world. He understood that matter was the subject of *Guide* 1:18 and that privation was the subject of 1:19. He showed that God bore no relation to matter or to privation. Now, in 1:20 he completes the triad, taking our chapter’s theme to be form, and God’s non-involvement with form. For Even-Shmuel the attributes are the “forms” that God cannot be characterized by. He writes (my trans.):

“Just as matter and privation bear no relation to the creator, so even form must be negated from Him. However, God is not lacking in qualities; on the contrary, his perfections are infinite, so much so that His lofty plane is over the plane of all other perfections. We do not call these perfections forms or attributes (*taarim*)—since forms are but accidents inhering in particular essences in a more or less regular manner. The essences are subjected to these forms, and exist through them. In respect of God, however, His

perfections are His essence and His essence is His perfections. His attributes (if we can speak at all about them) do not exist apart from his essence. Just as the Creator of matter is not matter, and just as the Creator of privations has no privation, so the Creator of forms is not formed (*kakh borei ha-tsurot aino tsura*).”

PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE FIRST TWENTY CHAPTERS

Now that we have concluded our close examination of the first twenty chapters of the Guide, we should take stock and briefly review what Maimonides has accomplished.

I have placed this chapter here, rather than before the first chapter, because it was necessary to examine the individual trees before the forest could come into view.

I have approached these chapters phenomenologically, going through thickets of biblical quotations to discover Maimonides' true purpose in the Lexicon. Maimonides' designated student for the Guide, Rabbi Joseph, was a man perfect in his grasp of Torah, Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash, who had studied mathematics, logic and astronomy. His background caused him to be perplexed by metaphysics and the world of the higher sciences. Given his scriptural education, Maimonides' chosen student would have needed no explanation of implications of the many quote-shards which are the salient feature of the lexical chapters, and too numerous to be explained merely as examples of the definitions for these lexical terms. Besides, as we learn in 1:10, the Guide is not a dictionary. Since we do not come to the Guide with the background of a Rabbi Joseph, we must recreate that background, which explains my procedure of taking these quotations seriously and searching out their traditional meaning. Since this understanding is premised upon imaginative poetry, the results of my phenomenological investigation are necessarily personal, and you may see this forest differently than I do, or see more of it than I can. Maimonides anticipated all of this. I will merely canvass the themes and their purposive drift as they present themselves to me, in the hope that my journey will help the reader.

Perhaps Maimonides could not have written the Lexicon chapters in any other way. The purpose of the Guide is to train prophets. The restoration of prophecy is crucial to the project of the restoration of Zion and the Temple. This training is multilevel in nature and requires the direct engagement of the student in the work. Nonetheless, Maimonides was constrained by the rule of *Hagigah* not to make this teaching a public teaching. These factors determined the peculiar and difficult format of these important beginning lessons in the school of prophecy.

Maimonides divided the Guide into three books each of which is divided into discrete chapters, but the outline of the chapters is not clear. Leo Strauss, in his introductory essay to the Pines translation of the Guide, attempts an outline of the book. In his view, the Lexicon tends to follow a seven based system of organization. Friedlander tends to agree (see his introductory "Analysis Of The Guide For The Perplexed," xlii). Both, in my view, focus too much on patterns of similar lexical terms. There is some merit in a seven-based system, as I show, but more for identifying thematic threads running through the fabric of the Guide than for establishing its division into sections. On reviewing the content of these chapters, focusing on the quotations and their interplay with Maimonides' comments, especially those that seem to digress from the apparent topic, it is clear that the organization of the Lexicon is ten based, with important subsections every fifth chapter: or perhaps it is actually five-based.

Each chapter presents one or more lexical terms found in the prophetic books, and we can take each term in a corporeal sense as well as an incorporeal sense. In some cases, these two senses are homonymous, meaning that they have absolutely different meanings denoted by a term that merely sounds alike in each case. In other cases, there is a range and perhaps a gradation of meaning. In nearly

all cases, the terms carry both a negative and positive connotation in their proof-texts, and the negative meaning always connects to the corporeal definition of each term.

The first ten chapters, including the important motto standing at the head of chapter one, are about the recovery of Torah and of prophecy. First we consider man's relation to God on the one hand and to his material existence on the other (image/form/shape). The theme of the first chapter is the conflict between the intellect and the imagination. We are like God in virtue of our intellect only: our imagination only creates likenesses of God. The production of such *imaginative form* leads to idolatry. Rather than making ourselves like God, the imagination leads to adultery against God. One way this occurs is through the imposition of *shape* upon God (*shiur koma*). To return from imaginative form to the *activated intellect*, the true image of God, requires the recovery of the meaning of Torah, much as Josiah recovered the Deuteronomic scroll.

The second chapter is non-lexical. Maimonides reviews the beginning of the Genesis account of Eden, leaving the suggestion that the Lexicon is the genesis to his newly recovered Torah. Truth, that which only concerns intellect and not the imagination, comes from Eden, but after Eden we exchanged truth for moral consciousness. The answer to the *melamed's* wonderful question was that the punishment of Adam was God's cunning design to have men exercise their potential for *discernment*. This choice made men judges, *elokim*. *Elokim* is an ambiguous category: in its negative form it represents tyranny, while its positive form is acceptance of Torah.

Chapter Three moves from *image* to *form*, the negative aspect of which is once again physical shape. Such shape can elevate when we make the Tabernacle or the Menorah, but not when we make graven images. Idols are the products of an imagination that always tries to impose familiar mediating structures on our relationship to the incorporeal: moving, at its least physical level, to the assertion of real divine attributes. Seeking a different path back to Eden, Moses obtains comprehension of the true essence through conjunction with the active intellect. In that essence the attributive forms are recognized for what they are, nothing but our projections on His unique essence.

What do we *see* when we apprehend incorporeal forms and physical shapes? Chapter Four makes the distinction between physical sight and the vision of the prophetic *seer*. The term for the instrument of sight, *ayin*, is also the *well*, metaphor for the prophetic channel. This recognition prompts an introduction to the system of Maimonidean prophecy. The proof-texts discuss various biblical prophets, suggesting the eleven degrees of non-Mosaic prophecy in Guide 2:45. But the sight of those seers was not direct perception, rather it was the product of dreams and visions. Thus are introduced the problems that bedevil prophecy, all of which stem from the confusion of imaginative form with direct intellectual perception. These false illuminations descend to the production of astrology, and finally to merely physical sight, which the proof-texts link to resultant divine punishment.

Chapter Five, as expected, leads to a new beginning. It is the second non-lexical chapter. Despite this new beginning, we remain concerned with the dangers of *sight* in prophecy. The apprehension of imaginative form brings in its train anthropomorphism, dangerous meditation, and sexual prurience. All of this emerges from the discussion of the *throne* vision of the Elders of Israel, who "did eat and drink." Chapter Five warns that although we must enter *Maaseh Merkava* and *Maaseh Bereshit* to recover the true meaning of Torah, we must do so with *humility*, where humility is grasped as a combination of educational and moral preparations. Moses was the paragon of such humility. Unlike Moses, the

Elders, lacking humility, failed to appropriately sublimate the grossly physical image of the *foot* that they saw upon the sapphire stones. In the same way, Akiva's companions failed to sublimate, as he did, the marble stones/waters that they saw in their similar vision. Only Moses and Akiva recognized these images of receptivity as visions into divine creativity rather than grossly material shapes. The biblical prophets must recognize their illuminations as a light created by God (*or ha-nivra*) and not confuse them with the forms of their imaginations.

These images of receptivity lead to a meditation on the archetype of the eternal feminine. Chapter Six, ostensibly about the terms male and female (*ish* and *isha*), is solely interested in the female. We must recognize that the female principle of receptivity is not a co-partner with God in creation. Still, the human imagination takes this receptivity as sexual and falls to unsublimated prurience. The imagination loves to create goddesses. Since the dangers of materialism are not merely metaphorical, Maimonides prescribes a form of asceticism to counterbalance those dangers.

What comes of both human procreation and divine creation is called *birth*. Chapter Seven introduces the negative aspect of birth, which turns out to be the generation of *demons*. Demons are the practical result of the acceptance of *bad doctrine*. This bad doctrine preoccupies men when imaginative form dominates their minds. Men who are demons are mere *shapes*, not like men who are in the image of God. They are the children of the Married Harlot, and of the Captive Maiden: these children are Stubborn and Rebellious Sons. Seth, however, saves the human race from the demons by ending the pursuit after material form, making himself in Adam's image as his *intellectual progeny*. This returns us to Chapter Two, and to the answer to the *Melamed's* wonderful question: God wants man to choose to become progeny by choosing to become a disciple of Torah.

Does Chapter Eight, the lexical chapter about *place*, begin a new section? Only on the surface does it seem that Maimonides shifts from *image* and *sight* to physical *positionality*. The theme remains intellectual progeny versus biological successors who pursue imaginative form. After all, as he says here, this is not a dictionary, and we should therefore expect that he determined the section divisions by their leading motifs, not by variations in the types of lexical terms treated. The question of Chapter Eight is whether men will reach the *place* of their prophetic ancestors who attained the active intellect, that intellect which is the true *place* of His emanation. Or will they rather choose material pursuit, like Yehoram, who began as progeny but ended merely as biological successor. He choose bad doctrine, literally marrying idolatry. Maimonides views the problem of bad doctrine from the standpoint of the deterioration of learning over time. This deterioration is caused by the reliance on old books, which produce disputes over their meaning. By contrast with Yehoram, Moses understands the positive aspect of *place*. He secludes himself in a place of meditation on that *rock*, recognizing the causative principle inherent in the meaning of that rock in that place, not taking it as merely physical (Aristotelian) space. The prophet must discern whether the Glory of the Lord in that place is the divine essence or the divine emanation, depending upon its appropriate context.

What is that place? The prophets see it as a *throne*, and sometimes as *thrones*. They see it as thrones when they confuse the eternal feminine with the process of divine causation. This is the negative physical aspect of Chapter Nine's lexical term. This negative aspect leads the imagination to the prurient acceptance of the female on one of the thrones, and of the foot on the throne as a masculinely causative image. At worst, the throne image produces idolatry. But even at a more rarified level, the imaginative form of the throne is taken as if it were an eternal preexistent throne. This eternal

preexistence begins as the *Logos*, and then the eternal *Qur'an*, and ultimately the Son. On a more positive cosmological level, the throne symbolizes the revolving astronomical spheres. God's will is the ultimate cause of their revolutions. Those revolutions begin all physical causative chains, so we see that God wills the sublunar creations through the action of the spheres: "The heaven is my throne and the earth my *footstool*." The souls of the spheres are channels which emanate form into matter. This system of universal order and governance is symbolized by the divine indwelling, the *Shekhina*. Still, even that metaphysical understanding must be sublimated by the recognition that all divine attributes including His creative power and His will are nothing more than Himself. Tautology is essence and essence is tautologous.

Chapter Ten begins a new section whose theme is the interplay of divine providence with prophecy. The chapter is about the metaphoric *descent* of God to the prophet and the *ascent* of God from the prophet. The *ascent* and *descent* going the other way, from the prophet to God and *vice versa*, is the subject of Chapter 15. The subject is, therefore, the mechanism of prophecy: the metaphor of ascent and descent gets framed on the emanation or overflow of intellect from God to the prophet. This mechanism is the three-step process that we learned from the *Introduction*. The prophet ascends the ladder of prophecy as the emanation descends toward him, he returns to the world to bring the fruits of the emanation to the people, and that voluntary gift is rewarded by further inspiration leading to further prophecy. Moses receives the prophetic vision, the *or ha-nivra* (mentioned at the end of the chapter just as in 1:5) and bestows prophetic power on the Sanhedrin. But now the dark material side of these lexical terms appears. Just as the Sanhedrin contrasts with the Elders of Israel (1:5), caught up in the materiality of their vision, we return to those whose primary pursuit is material. These are the demons who symbolize the *bnei adam*, who, compared to *enosh*, are like the "children of donkeys and camels" (1:7). The proof-texts in Chapter Ten come from the *Tokhakha* section of the Torah, moving from blessing to condemnation, and, finally, to the visitation and infliction of punishment. Mere men, *bnai adam*, receive punishment, while the true intellectual progeny receive a providence of blessing. Chapter Ten links to Guide 3:17, the chapter on providence, by connection with the proof-text, "What is man (*enosh*) that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man (*ben adam*) that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8:4). "Providence," we are told, "is closely connected with the intellect," understood as being directly relative to man's ability to keep God before him always (Psalm 16:8). Otherwise, man falls to the level of the animals whose providence is nature, or, worse, to the demons whose "providence" is divine punishment.

Having learned about *thrones* in Chapter Nine, Chapter Eleven turn to *sitting* (*yashav*). Obviously, we can take this in its most grossly physical sense, but here Maimonides skips the negative implications. Sitting means *permanent relation*. This chapter meditates on the meaning of God's permanent relation to his creatures, and on what a *relationship* with God could be. His only proof-text for the physical sense of sitting is a reference to the throne that Eli the priest occupied when Hannah prayed for a child. In this sense, the throne exalts him as prophetic channel for the people. God placed Eli on the throne, and he is enthroned because he recognizes God's *permanent* role in *relation* to his creatures. God thus sanctifies certain places and people by the descent of holiness upon them (1:10). We strive in our relation to God for such a permanent relationship, like the "barren woman" *sits* in her house and becomes a joyful mother (Psalms 113:9). Contrast this "barren woman" with the *isha zona* whose relation to the form of the world is impermanent because of her promiscuous pursuit of passing forms. Similarly, this chapter mentions *rising*. Rising, in the sense of permanent relation, is the subject of the next chapter (here *raama*, there *kima*) but instead of being the opposite of sitting, it is rather an

intensification, since *rise* will mean the confirmation in this permanent relation (“She will rise and sit in her place,” Zechariah 14:10). Maimonides distinguishes the permanent *essence* of God in his relation to his creatures from the *emanation* by which He confirms a place permanently in holiness, like Zion. His relation to the *eternal* cosmos and its spheres is permanent, as is his relation to species. Relation requires a *fundamentum*, and there can be none with anything mutable. This is because time and its meaning are irrelevant to God. Similarly, there really can be no attributes of God, even taken in their most rarified form as *modes*, because of their impermanence: only permanent attributes could bear a relation to God, but if permanent they would be deities themselves, and there is only one God. Man can break through to a relationship only through conjunction with the Active Intellect, which is permanent. It is permanent because there is no plurality or division in thought, only in matter.

Continuing the interest of the last several chapters in the theme of permanence, Chapter Twelve finds that *rise* (*kima*) also means to confirm or to establish. This includes the legal establishment of rights in physical things such as property. Still, the important thing for Maimonides remains the establishment of the intellectual progeny of the prophets, and their opposition by the merely biological progeny. In several passages we hear more about the punishment of these faithless ones, such as Jeroboam II and the wicked Hoshea. Maimonides opposes those proof-texts to passages about David and Eli. The passage about Jeroboam II is meant to evoke Amos’ vision of the plumb-line, provoking Maimonides’ comments in 2:43 which lay out his system of dream interpretation. The Lexicon is not a dictionary, but instead provides a means by which the imagination can both suggest and obscure prurient and otherwise dangerous ideas. The imagination accomplishes this by anagrammatic, etymological and homonymic means. As an example of such imaginative camouflage, he cites a Talmudic passage about Metatron without actually naming him, clearly expecting his reader to fill in the blank. Metatron is a troubling figure, as the Talmudic passage made clear. Tradition connects him with the work of providential creation, but makes us understand that he is still only a creation, and not the Creator. These patterns of concealment become more important for Maimonides now, since the term *stand*, which the next chapter defines, is merely *rise* with *feet*, a prurient term.

Chapter Thirteen continues to amplify the theme of permanence, including legal permanence, but the interest is now clearly the subject of prophecy, and the need to make distinctions to understand that subject. *Stand* means for God to cause prophecy. Not every prophet is alike, for Moses’ prophecy is formally different from Abraham’s prophecy. Abraham’s prophecy always comes in a dream, and he is not a permanent channel for prophecy. Moses’ prophecy is the conscious product of the perfection of his intellect, and he is the permanent channel between God and the people, even unto our own day. When Moses *stands*, it means he reaches a higher stage of evolution. That is because of what he stands on, which is the *foot*, understood as the power of causation (Zechariah 14:4), Moses makes himself God’s causative channel. Unlike other prophets, he had no “veil,” no angelic mediator, and his prophetic power was subject to his will. An important feature of this chapter is the reference to Job’s companion Elihu, and Elihu’s theory of prophecy as system and concealment. The *system* is the mechanism of the interplay of the intellect and the imagination in prophecy. The *concealment* is the proliferation of apparently unremarkable quotations to conceal important prophetic quote-shards from those not prepared to properly interpret them

Chapter Fourteen is perhaps the most concealed chapter in the Guide, since it is the shortest. This chapter, on *man* (*adam*), directly relates to the second shortest, 1:6, about *ish* and *isha*. Recall that 1:6 was allegedly about man *and* woman, but that chapter completely focused on the feminine, and so

Chapter Fourteen is the masculine complement to 1:6. Strauss and Friedlander both recognize the pattern of sevens which carry forward the anthropological themes of the Lexicon chapters: the series 1 : 7 : 14. Guide 1:1 is the chapter about man being in the *image* of God, 1:7 addresses *birth*, and now 1:14 is *man*. 14 in Hebrew number-letters spells *yad*, that is, *hand*, which is a term that Strauss noticed had no lexical chapter. These numerical affinities imply that when we make ourselves God's intellectual progeny, coming close to Him in thought, we are then in His image. When man performs God's will he makes himself the "hand" of God. There is a decline in holiness in the system of 1 : 7 : 14—first, the image of God; then, the birth of realized man; and finally, the merely potentially realized man. It is a decline because *adam* is lower than *ish* in the Maimonidean system of anthropological evolution. *Ish* is actually born; whereas *adam*, implying earthiness, *adama*, is not so much born as generated. *B'nei adam* are like the demons generated by the spilling of Adam's seed on the rocks and the trees, until Seth and Enosh came to redeem the *b'nei ish* (*ish = enosh*). These *b'nai adam* are men of unrealized potential, that is, they are the mass of men generated from Eve's *heels*. These men are the *elokim*, an ambivalent term, which in this sense could mean either judges or tyrants. The scholars, who are the true intellectual progeny, oppose them. Eve's heel becomes the key to all the chapters in the Guide (2:30). Her children, the *b'nei adam*, go to meet the *isha zona*. They will "die like men," unlike the "children of the most high," the *b'nei elyon*, who achieve some measure of immortality. The *b'nei elyon* encounter Sinai. Sinai removes the venom that the snake injected into Eve's heel.

Chapter Fifteen moves from masculine back to feminine, a transitional chapter. It is the third chapter on the term *stand* (Guide 1:12—*kima*; 1:13—*amad*; 1:15—*natzav, yatzav*). 1:10 was about *ascent*, which is like standing. 1:11 was *sitting*, only apparently opposite to standing since the terms are linked by the proof-text "rise and sit" (Zechariah 14:10). 1:14 is about *man*, the only animal that stands. Finally in 1:15 the prophet stands, having risen above *b'nei adam* to *b'nei elyon*. 1:15 links back to 1:10 since both are about ascent and descent, the difference being that 1:10 addressed these antipodes from the divine point of view while 1:15 takes them from the point of view of the prophet. This, of course, leads Maimonides back to Jacob's ladder, which is the three-stage system of prophecy: the prophet ascends to the prophetic insight, descends to confer the boon upon the people, and thereby earns the right to re-ascend the ladder. All the *stand* chapters have the same definitions: first a literal one; secondly, the permanent causal relationship between God and man (same as *foot*). All of the *stand* terms when used in the Bible are homonyms, merely sounding the same in these two definitions but carrying different meanings. Still, the key interest in Chapter Fifteen is not Definition 2, but the relationship of prophecy to providence (*Maaseh Merkava*). Employing Elihu's principle of burying important points beneath the repetition of previous themes, we can see that Maimonides' interest is in God's "standing above" the ladder and Moses "standing on" the rock. We explained (*Letter to R. Hasdai*) that this *standing* is at once physical and metaphysical, or, better, elemental and prophetic, inasmuch as Maimonides is on record advocating that the four angels ascending and descending the ladder are at once both *prophets* and *elements*. The meaning is that the adept overcomes his elemental physical *complexion* when he realizes that he has the potential to attain divine knowledge through the prophetic channel.

The theme of the next four chapters is sexual imagery in neo-Aristotelian form/matter physics. Chapter Sixteen continues the interest in *standing* and in *permanence*. Its lexical term is *tzur*, rock. It is what the prophet stands on, especially Moses at the Sinai rock: standing on the rock represents the permanent relation of Moses to God, and that relation is causative. God "stands over" the rock, while the prophet draws forth a spring from the rock. The rock is the root, origin, or cause. God, "rock of the world" (*tzur*

olamim) is the *form* of the world, that is, the first cause who activates all intermediate causes according to His will. “Trust ye in the Lord forever...rock of the worlds (*tzur olamim*)” means that it is our duty to rely on the messages of His authenticated prophets. As rock of the worlds, His work is perfect (*ha-tzur tamim paalo*). What this means to Maimonides is that God created this perfect world from nothing, and it is enduringly permanent. He thereby disputes Aristotle (God did not create the world), Islam (the world will be destroyed, i.e., it is not *perfect*), and the Manichaeans (God created an evil world). But this world is neither evil, imperfect or purposeless. *Prophecy’s* announcement of the perfection of God’s creation overturns perfectly balanced arguments for and against creation *ex nihilo*. How does the prophet come by this information? Because the rock is also a quarry, and the stone is split to draw water: “look unto the rock (Abraham) whence ye are hewn.” Because the prophet is the true intellectual progeny made in the image of God, he can function as a true channel for the transmission of the Torah. But just as Abraham is the rock whence ye are hewn, Sarah is the quarry, the “hole of the pit whence ye are digged.” This recognition of the sexual metaphor of creation must be sublimated, else the imagination takes over. The rock is really the form and the quarry represents matter. The message of the *Haazinu* poem is that the creation of progeny works both ways, especially since, “properties in the quarry should be contained in those things that are found or hewn out of it.” In *Haazinu*, Moses contrasts the evil generation of the flood with the subsequent creation of the Jews. The children of the flood were raised by the father, but became rebellious children who sacrificed to demons. Moses, however, recognized that the true nature of all creatures is from the nature of their creator, and sought the return back.

Chapter Seventeen is non-lexical, like 1:2 and 1:5 and is, therefore, a bridge chapter. 1:12 through 1:16 were in some way about standing (1:12-*kima*; 1:13-*amad*; 1:14-*adam*; 1:15-*natzav/yatzav*; 1:16-*tzur*) while 1:18 and 1:19 are, respectively about touching and filling. In other words, Chapter Seventeen is a bridge between five masculine chapters and two feminine chapters. Appropriately, the subject of the chapter is Plato’s alleged concealment of the sexuality of metaphors in the discussion of creation, which Maimonides urges is the same concern that moved the author of Mishnah *Hagigah* to legislate the concealment of that subject as *sitrey arayot*. This is a meditation on the use of poetry and metaphor to communicate the incommunicable truth of creation. Poetry and metaphor are the realm of the imagination, which is always opposed to the intellect, the realm of truth, just as matter is opposed to mind. This triad of form, matter and privation constitute the principles of the generation and corruption of all things. Chapter Seventeen is our first introduction to the concept of *privation*, which is the feminine aspect of matter. The reasons for the concealment of the sexual metaphor are twofold: the need to avoid prurience and the need to avoid the heresy of *partnership* (*shituf*).

The sense of *touch* is a disgrace to man, according to both Aristotle and Maimonides. Chapter Eighteen is the lexical chapter for three terms that portray different aspects of touch, moving in a more spiritual direction from *touch* to *approach* to *encounter*. Even-Shmuel, taking seriously the discussion in 1:17 about the triadic mechanism of generation and corruption, holds that the following chapters 1:18, 1:19, and 1:20 compose a triad of matter/privation/form. He understands that Chapter Eighteen is the chapter of matter, i.e., matter is what *touches* all its surroundings (magnitude/dimension). Nothing touches God, for mind does not occupy space. “There is no difference whether a person stand at the centre of the earth or at the highest point of the ninth sphere,” in his relation to God. Though we cannot touch Him, it is possible to approach Him, perhaps even to encounter Him. Friedlander says that 1:18 and 1:19 are about the descent of prophecy. He supports this by the chapter’s return to the discussion of *relation*, and specifically the grades by which the relationship is intensified, the mediating gradations on the path to

the prophet's encounter with God. The escalation through the grades is an escalation away from matter, which can have no relation, toward intellect, which, as the image of God, is the only *fundamentum* for the relation. It is the union of cognition with the cognized. In this perspective, the touch of the angel on the prophet's *philtrum* confers intellect (a metaphor closely related to the meaning of circumcision), but the opposite of the traditional interpretation of the *philtrum* as the touch of forgetfulness. The prophet discovers his relationship with God and becomes a channel because he has mastered the tool of *prayer*. True prayer is encounter. Moses was foremost in prayer, for his entire conscious life is in the prayer/meditation relation to God. Because he is foremost in prayer, and become the perfect channel, he can *confer* prophetic power on others, especially the Sanhedrin, who are now no longer the Elders of Israel "who did eat and drink." Important to Chapter Eighteen is the Midrash on *Vayigash*, which takes up the meeting of Judah and Joseph as a prism through which different aspects of prophecy appear: mind to mind encounter, the method of Solomonic linkage, the sexual metaphor, and intellectual meditation in Judah's *vayigash*, his *approach*. Now Judah represents matter and Joseph form. The problem, of course, is that all this is imaginative poetry, and presents distinct dangers. Uninterpreted poetry is the wrong *approach*. The poetically inspired Job failed to train his intellect, a deficit in humility. The dream vision of the prophet, unchecked, leads to exaltation of the imaginative image in idolatry; to false and feigned worship.

Fill (Malei), the subject of Chapter Nineteen, is the term most likely to lead the imagination to the feminine, but that must be sublimated as *privation*, according to Even-Shmuel. It is privation if viewed from the standpoint of Rebecca's empty pitcher, penetration from the standpoint of the pitcher filled. Unlike the *isha zona*, Rebecca's pitcher is not open to all manner of form. Jeremiah seizes on this image when in pointing to the manna pitcher he castigates the Jew's breaking the Lord's commandment: "They recline as a harlot." The ambivalence of the fulfillment of Rebecca appears in the struggle between matter and form in Rebecca's womb. The metaphor of the Tabernacle filled with holiness succeeds Rebecca's filled pitcher. Man realizes his purpose in that *place* by seeking its fulfillment with divine emanation. This was the path of Naftali, Bezalel and Hiram: filled with the blessing of the Lord they were capable of making the Tabernacle/Temple a place filled by the indwelling of that blessing. Maimonides turns to the concept of *praise*, that which the whole earth is *full* of, for even the "rocks" praise God. Praise is consequent on knowledge of God and creation. It is the encounter. When this encounter takes place in the completed Tabernacle/Temple, the place is filled with divine *glory*, and this leads Maimonides, once again, at the end of a chapter (1:5, 1:10), to the encounter with the created light, *or ha-nivra*, defined as the "comprehension of His greatness" but necessarily at once enlightening the mind.

Chapter Twenty *raises us high (nasa, ram)*. This elevation culminates these twenty chapters. Saul, Jeroboam, Korach and Baasha were physically elevated over others, as *elokim*, unlike David, elevated over them through prophecy (Second degree, 2:45). David's relation to God was real because there was an intellectual *fundamentum* for it. Moses' epitomized this intellectual relation because unlike Korach, he was the humblest of men, his humility the result of his moral and intellectual preparation for prophecy. Having, in these twenty chapters, dissected matter from mind and imagination from intellect, Maimonides rises now to the problem that particularly infects the mind with the remnant of imaginative form, the problem of the attributes of God. In Chapter Twenty-one he addresses the attribute of creative speech/thought, the *Logos* (understood in the lexical term *avar*: the *passing* of a voice). To prepare for this new direction, he asks how it is possible "that several distinct expressions denote the same thing?" which really means how do the many come from the One. It is the miracle of *ex nihilo* creation: how

multiplicity comes from unity. In the attribute chapters 1:51 through 1:60, we learn that the many attributes are only our projection of different aspects of the single divine essence. In Book II, we learn about the creation *ex nihilo* and its relation to the emanatory system. In other words, we begin to move from the realm of the interpretation of imaginative poetry. We move toward the philosophic purification of the intellect from the material imagination, that same imagination that produces attributes and melds them with the emanatory system to create deities. Chapter Twenty is the final stage of Even-Shmuel's triad of matter /privation/form. He considers the attributes as *attributive forms* that men may not impose upon God.

It should now be obvious why few have attempted to reproduce the doctrines of these twenty chapters. It should also be obvious why Maimonides wrote them in this peculiar format. They clearly contain a doctrine as well as a method. But this doctrine and method cannot be described in a straightforward western conceptual mode. These ideas flash in the darkness and the student can barely grasp them without the kind of interpretive training that comes from studying the Lexicon.

“You must know that if a person, who has attained a certain degree of perfection, wishes to impart to others, either orally or in writing, any portion of the knowledge which he has acquired of these subjects, he is utterly unable to be as systematic and explicit as he could be in a science of which the method is well known.” (*Prefatory Remarks*, p. 4)

GUIDE 1:21 CROSSING

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

The Hebrew translation of this chapter is easier to understand than the English translations. Both English translations bog down in grammatical jargon.

It is also unclear, at first, what the actual subject of the chapter is supposed to be. The ostensible subject is the word *avar*, which means to pass or to cross, that is, to move positionally from one place to another. There is no lexical chapter on the word *kol*, which means sound or voice, yet much of this chapter is devoted to that word, and *kol* may be the real subject of the chapter. If Maimonides’ object is to bury the word so that casual readers would miss that this is the lexical chapter for *kol*, he succeeded. (See essay below on “Crossing or Voice?”)

ENCOUNTER

The point of the chapter, however, is clear. We may encounter God (ar. *ittiṣal*) but we do not become God. In other words, we have no access to His essence allowing us to unite (ar. *ittiḥad*) with Him. Maimonides warns that there are limits to our powers of intellectual apprehension and clear dangers confront those who attempt to pass them:

“In asserting that God withheld from Moses the higher knowledge I mean to say that this knowledge was unattainable, that by its nature it was inaccessible to Moses; for man, whilst able to gain perfection by applying his reasoning faculties to the attainment of what is within the reach of his intellect, either weakens his reason or loses it altogether as soon as he ventures to seek a higher degree of knowledge—as I shall elucidate in one of the chapters of this work (1:32)—unless he be granted a special aid from heaven, as is described in the words, ‘And I will cover thee with my hand until I pass by.’ (Exodus 33:23)”

The passage is meant to suggest the fate of Akiva’s companions in *pardes* who lost their reason seeking knowledge beyond the limits of their comprehension. This shows that for Maimonides unity with God is impossible (but see our analysis in Guide 1:68, suggesting the identity of human and divine psychology). Gideon Freudenthal, who otherwise makes excellent observations about Maimonides’ philosophical mysticism, disagrees, portraying him as a pantheist. Gershom Scholem clarifies the matter, generally denying pantheistic implications in Jewish mysticism. “*Devekut* (‘cleaving to God’) results in a sense of beatitude and mystical union, yet it does not entirely eliminate the distance between the creature and its Creator, a distinction that most Cabalists, like most Hasidim, were careful not to obscure by claiming that there could be a complete unification of the soul and God.” Compare the statement of Maimonides’ son, R. Abraham, “When we say that God spoke to Moshe without an intermediary it means that although he spoke through a medium (*b’geshem nosei*) the medium does not possess its own spirit or intellect like an angel does (*aino bal nefesh v’lo geshem sikhli k’malakh*).” Nonetheless, there was still an intermediary. Even-Shmuel’s summary of this chapter (though missing the major role of *kol*) gets this point right about man’s inability to unite with God:

“The identity of the attributes with the essence and the essence with the attributes cannot be apprehended by men. Even the most percipient among them, Moses, was not granted the “vision of the face” (*raiat panim*) which is the essence of God. If a man discovers God’s way, what he apprehends can be nothing other than the revelation of the divine in this world. United at the level of prophecy are the *middot* of God, his “attributes of action.” This is God’s connection (*gesher*) to man. To man it appears in the world in its triadic aspect of matter/particularized-privation/form; but this form as apprehended by man is an intellectual apprehension (*ha-saga ha-sikhli*). From the divine perspective it is the aspect of His essence.”

(G. Freudenthal, “The Philosophical Mysticism of Maimonides and Maimon,” in *Maimonides and His Heritage*, ed., Dobbs-Weinstein, SUNY, 2009, p. 122. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem, 1974, p. 176. R. Avraham, *Guide to Serving God*, Feldheim, 2008, 585)

AVAR: (PASSING, CROSSING)

1. Physical motion, passing or crossing from place to place, never used in the case of God
2. Sound—particularly the *transmission* of sound
3. “The appearance of the Light and the Divine Presence (Shekhina) which the prophets perceived in their prophetic visions”
4. Drunkenness
5. Substitution (crossing) of one goal for another

Let’s follow the thread of Maimonides’ thought. He begins by listing five definitions of *avar*. The second and fifth definitions are important for the purposes of this chapter. The fourth is significant in a general way for the concept of prophecy. The first definition is obvious: moving physically from place to place. The second definition is completely non-obvious: the *transmission of sound* through the air, but Maimonides gives scriptural sources for this use. The word “sound” is the Hebrew *kol*. Next, Maimonides gives Definition 3, *avar* as a metaphor for the *presence* of God. This idea lies behind his second and fifth definitions, since *sound*, Definition 2, turns out to be the indwelling presence of God, His Shekhina; while *crossing*, Definition 5, turns out to be the *substitution* of the indwelling presence for Moses’ request to know God’s essence. Definition 4 of *avar* is drunkenness, in the sense of “*crossing* the line.” He quotes a passage from Jeremiah where the prophet describes his experience of prophecy as one intoxicated. It is the ecstatic overcoming of the prophet’s physical senses, important later in the Guide. The Definition 5, *crossing*, is also non-obvious. Just as Jonathan, David’s friend, sent his servant off in one direction, while he shot the arrow in another, *avar* means the *substitution* of one goal for another. The lesson of Definition 5 is that even Moses cannot know God’s essence, but receives a *substitution*: knowledge of God’s actions, of His creative and providential role in the world. This is identical to His *presence*.

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“So *went* the present *over* (*va-ta’avor*) before him (Jacob): and himself lodged that night in the company. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two women-servants, and his eleven sons, and *passed over* (*va-ya’avor*) the ford Jabbok.” (Genesis 32:21-22)

“And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. And he (Jacob) *passed over* (*avar*) before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother (Esau).” (Genesis 33:1-3)

The context is Jacob’s final meeting with his feared brother Esau, after long separation. He begins by sending a present *over* to Esau to appease him. The text continues to invoke *crossing*, not just Jacob crossing from the rear to the front of the camp, but Jacob also crosses the women and children before Esau, hoping this will appease him. This points toward *substitution*, Definition 5. Maimonides further says that *avar* is physical movement in a *straight* line, *yashar*. This implicates the Aristotelian doctrine of space: sublunar elements move in a straight line up or down to resume their “proper place,” unlike the superlunar *fifth element* whose movement is circular (see on this concept my notes on 1:8).

“And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me. And the Lord said unto Moses, *Go on (avor)* before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.” (Exodus 17:4-5)

Rashi quotes Midrash *Tanchuma Beshallah* 22: “And see whether they stone you. Why have you slandered My children?” When people cried for water, Moses told God that he expected them to stone him. God tells him to test his fear. In that sense, crossing before terror is a shared idea with the prior quote. Crossing before terror is also what the people do every time they seek the *substitution* of Moses, the Sanhedrin or a king for their own prophetic access.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be *proclaimed (va-ya'aviru kol)* throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing.” (Exodus 36:6)

This is the moment when the people had brought everything needed to build the Tabernacle. This contrasts with the next proof-text in which the Tabernacle is defiled. Maimonides takes *avar*, usually “passing” to mean the *transmission of sound, va-ya'aviru kol*, as if to say “the sounding of a sound.” It gives him the opportunity to read “sound,” *kol*, into *avar*, with implications for the idea of God’s voice, Logos, which he takes up at the end of the Guide chapter. See essay below.

“Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons did unto all Israel, and how that they lay with the women that did service at the door of the tent of meeting. And he said unto them: 'Why do ye such things? For I hear evil reports concerning you from all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report which I hear the Lord’s people do *spread abroad (ma'avirim)*.’” (1 Samuel 2:24, from JPS 1918, better than KJV here)

In this passage, Maimonides’ interest is in the idea of the *spreading* of the bad report, that is, in *sound*, so that he can translate the use of *avar* in Exodus 34:6, his last proof text, as the created voice of God. Turning to the context of the passage, it is obvious that the high priest’s sons, who brought fornication into the Tabernacle, are not his intellectual progeny. The text goes on to contrast Samuel, who is not Eli’s son, with Eli’s own sinful sons. Samuel is his real progeny.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that *passed (avar)* between those pieces.” (Genesis 15:17)

Maimonides says: “Figuratively it denoted the appearance (*l'khalot*) of the Light and the Divine Presence (Shechinah) which the prophets perceived in their prophetic visions... This took place in a prophetic vision, for the narrative commences, ‘And a deep sleep fell upon Abram.’” What *passed* was the Created Light, the *or ha-nivra*, the angel inspiring Abraham’s prophetic vision.

“For I will *pass (ve-'avarti)* through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.” (Exodus 12:12)

Maimonides says that “I will pass” means “I shall reveal myself.” Not that anyone actually sees *God*. Instead, the *presence* of God, the Shekhina, appears to those whose prophetic insight allows them to see it—the Egyptians cannot see it. But the verse itself contrasts this revelation of God’s presence with God’s own acts, as the *Passover Haggadah* says on the end of this passage: “I, by Myself, and not through a messenger.” The Shekhina passes over the land, causing the decree to be known, but God *executes* the decree.

Instances of Definition 4 Contextualized:

“Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath *overcome* (*avaru*), because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness.” (Jeremiah 23:9)

Maimonides says that *avar* expresses “that a person has gone too far, and transgressed the usual limit, in the performance of some act.” It is the word for sin, *transgression* (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, pp. 1038-1040). The experience of prophecy comes to non-Mosaic prophets in a dream or vision. The prophet’s senses are stupefied as though he were drunk. His bones shake: it is an ecstatic yet terrifying state.

Instances of Definition 5 Contextualized:

“And he (Jonathan) said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. [And] as the lad ran, he shot an arrow *beyond him* (*leha’aviro*).” (1 Samuel 20:36)

The context is Jonathan’s famous subterfuge to inform David of Saul’s murderous wrath. Maimonides says, “It is also used figuratively to denote: to abandon one aim, and turn to a different aim and object.” See next quote and essay below.

“And the Lord passed by (*va’ya’avor* יְהוָה) before him (*panav*), and proclaimed (*va-yikra*), The Lord, The Lord (יְהוָה יְהוָה), merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” (Exodus 34:6)

This verse is the classic Torah statement of the divine essential attributes. Just as Jonathan in the prior quote *substituted* his lad’s expected target for another, so God *crossed* Moses’ request, the “vision of the face,” with another, the “vision of the back.” In the course of the chapter, Maimonides gives a variety of interpretations of the passage, eventually saying that we may choose any of them. We may do so, because they end up at the same place. See essays below.

MOSES ON SINAI

“And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth (*ba’avor*) by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts (*akhorai*): but my face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:18-23)

“And the Lord passed by (*va’ya’avor* יְהוָה) before him, and proclaimed (*va-yikra*), The Lord, The Lord (יְהוָה יְהוָה), merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear [the guilty]; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth [generation].” (Exodus 34:6-7)

The Consequences of Divine Action: Moses ascends Sinai, receives his mission to create the species Homo Judaicus, and requests, for his own sake, and for the sake of his mission, to know God, that is, to know His essence. This Maimonides calls, “The apprehension of the face.” This is denied Moses since his physicality prevents his unification with the Divine. However, God instead secures him “The apprehension of the back,” a lower revelation (*hasaga l’mata*). This revelation is of the *consequences* of God’s activity, what we speak of as His “attributes of action.” We know God by what He does. Moses received the revelation of the totality of creation including all its inner relations (see on this Guide 1:54, closely associated with our chapter).

The “vision of the back” includes the term *akhor*, which means “back,” but also “after” and “because” (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, p. 41) leading to the idea of what comes after, i.e., *consequences*. Thus, when God “passes” before Moses, it really means that God “crosses” Moses by *substituting* the lower consequential apprehension for the

higher essential one he aimed at. This is good for Maimonides, since no physical passing has to occur. There is not even a dream of passing in a prophetic trance, since all Moses' prophecies occur while awake.

God Passes Before Himself: Maimonides takes a different interpretive path in this passage and than we might expect, supported, as he notes, by an aggadic statement in the Talmud, *Rosh Ha-Shana*, 17b:

“And ‘the Lord passed by *before him* (*al panav*) and proclaimed’ (Exodus 34:6). R. Johanan said: Were it not written in the text, it would be impossible for us to say such a thing [that God *passed* before any creature]; this verse teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, *drew His robe round Himself* (*sh’nitatef*) like the reader of a congregation and showed Moses the order of prayer. He said to him: Whenever Israel sin, let them carry out this service before Me, and I will forgive them.”

Where it says that God passed “before his face” (*al panav*), Maimonides would capitalize the word “His,” that God passed before *His own face*, not before Moses' face, relying on this Talmud passage for support. In the passage, God teaches Moses the order of his attributes in the same way that the reader leads the synagogue, standing before the Ark of the Torah, *crossing* his own head with his prayer shawl, while Moses is in back listening. Moreover, according to Maimonides, the first word of the Thirteen Attributes, יהוה, God, repeated twice, makes God the subject of the sentence, while only the second is one of the attributes. Thus, where the passage (Exodus 34:6 and 7) reads:

“And the Lord passed by (*va’ya’avor* יהוה) before him (*al panav*: lit., before His face), and proclaimed (*va-yikra*) The Lord, The Lord (יהוה יהוה), merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear [the guilty]; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth [generation].”

Maimonides would read that the Lord (יהוה, initial use in the sentence) “passed” before His own face by crossing or substituting the “apprehension of the back” for the “apprehension of the face”; and then the Lord “proclaimed” (*vayikra* יהוה, second use): ‘the Lord (יהוה, third use), merciful and gracious,’ etc.

MAIMONIDES “CROSSES” US

Maimonides' object in this preceding interpretation is to make the giving of this prophetic vision an entirely intellectual act. The “passing” takes place within God himself as he replaces Moses' desired vision with a lower attainable one. Based on what we already know, this should have been Maimonides' only purpose in this account.

Maimonides begins by distinguishing his account from that of Onkelos (c. 35-120 C.E.), the ancient Aramaic translator of the Bible. Maimonides usually likes Onkelos' *Targum* since it systematically spiritualizes each corporeal reference to God in the Bible. Instead of the hand, eye, nose, or arm of God, the Targum tends to translate using three favorite terms: the “indwelling” (*shekhina*), “the glory” (*ykra*), or “the word” (*memra*).

Onkelos goes further than substituting these three terms for hand or eye. Even when God “passes” or “stands on” something, he assumes that the Torah has *deleted* one of his three substitutional terms. He then adds it back. God does not *pass* by Moses; rather God's *Shekhina* passes by him. This should not be hard to understand. But both English translators introduce the confusing grammar jargon “*nomen regens*,” to explain Onkelos' process of substitution.

So, when the Torah has God *pass* by Moses, Onkelos has the “Indwelling” (*Shekhina*) pass by. Maimonides claims to like this interpretation, and says that God created every such substituted entity.

Maimonides now asserts that these three Targumic substitutions are precedent for him to introduce his own fourth one: *kol*, “voice.” We should understand what Maimonides is getting at here, which is the philosophic problem called Logos. He *substitutes* the problem of Logos for Onkelos’ problem of the anthropomorphic misapplication of physical terms to God.

THE VOICE OF GOD: LOGOS

Maimonides makes his case for *voice, kol*, as a synonym for Shekhina, Glory or Word.

“Should it, however, be considered necessary to assume here an ellipsis, according to the method of Onkelos, who supplies in some instances the term ‘the Glory,’ (*ykra*) in others ‘the Word,’ (*memra*) and in others ‘the Divine Presence,’ (*Shekhina*) as the context may require in each particular case, we may also supply here the word ‘voice,’ (*kol*) and explain the passage, ‘And a voice from the Lord passed (*va-ya’avor*) before him and called.’ We have already shown that the verb *avar*, ‘he passed,’ can be applied to the voice (*kol*), as in ‘and they *caused it to be proclaimed* (*va-ya’aviru kol*) *throughout* the camp,’ (Exodus 36:6). According to this explanation, it was the voice which called. No objection can be raised to applying the verb *kara* (‘call’, as in *vayikra* יְהִי וְיִקְרָא; *vayikra* and *kria* are variants of *kara*) to *kol*, for a similar phrase occurs in the Bible in reference to God’s commands to Moses, ‘He heard the voice speaking unto him’ [Numbers 7:89: ‘And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him (*et ha-kol midaber*) from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony’]; and, in the same manner as it can be said ‘the voice spoke’ (*ha-davor l’kol*) we may also say ‘the voice called’ (*ha-kria l’kol*); indeed, we can even support this application of the verbs ‘to say’ (*ha-amira*), ‘and ‘to call,’ (*ha-kria*) to ‘the voice,’ (*ha-kol*) by parallel passages, as ‘A voice saith Cry, and it (the voice) says What shall I cry?’ (Isa. 40:6, *kol omer kra, v’amar ma ekra*, in both cases a Voice is speaking, not Isaiah). According to this view, the meaning of the passage under discussion would be: ‘A *voice of* the Lord passed before Him and called, ‘The Lord, The Lord, merciful and gracious, longsuffering!’”

This Voice is the Logos.

Philosophy begins when man observes regularity in the world and seeks its cause or principle. Much of the history of philosophy is concerned to discover the rationale of this ordered universe. There are some exceptions. In the ancient world, some started with the premise of denial of order. These could be found among the sophists, the skeptics, perhaps among the epicureans, and the Kalām. In modern times, after Nietzsche, philosophers *assumed* the *lack* of order.

The pre-Socratic Heraclitus had already ascribed universal organization to a concept of Logos, the Greek term that meant “word” or “reason.” A more complicated statement about the order of the universe comes from Plato. His universal forms in-form the variety of matter presented to sense. These Platonic forms or ideas were difficult to locate, sometimes in the mind of God, sometimes in the Good. Sometimes they exist independently. This vagueness was criticized. Philo, in the first century C.E., located the ideas within the Logos, which he called the “only begotten son of God” investing this Logos with personality. By doing this, he integrated various ideas about “The word” of God found in the Bible. The Jews had conceived the Torah itself as the word of God, the “blueprint of the world,” a completely *extra-deical* created Logos (the terminology is Harry A. Wolfson’s).

Parallel to these developments, Onkelos gave personality to the “*Memra*” or “*Ykra*” or “*Shekhina*” (word, glory, presence) as substitutes for anthropomorphic statements about God in the Torah. We know little of this first century sage except that he was not originally Jewish. This Aramaic translator’s name was historically confused with that of Aquila, the Greek translator of the Pentateuch, due to similarity in spelling. Onkelos was probably Syrian, although Aggadic writings seem to make him a relative of the Roman Titus. The main point is that he was not of Jewish culture, and could have been influenced by Hellenistic concepts of Logos. The Christian founder,

John, was also influenced by this concept, and identified Logos with Jesus as a member of the Trinity, i.e., the Logos as *intra-deical*. The Jews, by contrast, saw the Torah as the *extra-deical created* word of God. The Muslims confer this honor on the Qur'an, but make it eternal with Allah, and uncreated.

Maimonides is aware of this history, and as a neo-Platonized Aristotelian does not take a pejorative view of the notion of some kind of Logos. He defined his own position in 1:65, identifying Logos with our human perception of God's *will*:

“We must not suppose that in speaking God employed voice or sound, or that He has a soul in which thoughts reside, and that these thoughts are things superadded to His essence; but we ascribe and attribute to Him thoughts in the same manner as we ascribe to Him any other attributes. The use of these words in the sense of will and desire, is based, as I have explained, on the homonymy of these terms. In addition they are figures borrowed from our common practices, as has been already pointed out. For we cannot, at a first glance, see how anything can be produced by a mere desire: we think that he who wishes to produce a thing, must perform a certain act, or command some one else to perform it. Therefore, the command is figuratively ascribed to God when that takes place which He wishes, and we then say that He commanded that a certain thing should be accomplished. All this has its origin in our comparing the acts of God to our own acts, and also in the use of the term *amar* (he said) in the sense of ‘He desired,’ as we have already explained. The words ‘And He said,’ occurring in the account of the creation, signify ‘He wished,’ or ‘He desired.’ This has already been stated by other authors, and is well known. A proof for this, namely that the phrase ‘God said,’ in the first chapter of Genesis, must be taken in a figurative sense ‘He willed,’ and not in its literal meaning, is found in the circumstance that a command can only be given to a being which exists and is capable of receiving the command.”

Maimonides conditionally approves the use of the concept of a created voice or Logos as a substitute for anthropomorphic mediating entities in the Bible, as a concession to human speech and understanding, for, as he frequently says, “The Torah speaks in the language of men.” We will also see that the created voice has a role in the prophecy of non-Mosaic prophets.

CROSSING OR VOICE?

Maimonides presents an array of interpretations for *va'ya'avur* (and he passed) in Exodus 34:6. He says that we are free to choose whichever interpretation suits us, *v'rashai ata l'bchor eizo deya sh't'ratze*. He says, “You will surely not find it strange that this subject, so profound and difficult, should bear various interpretations; for it will not impair the force of the argument with which we are here concerned.” Compare this statement with a similar question in the previous chapter, which we interpreted as an invocation of the classic Neo-Platonic question, “How do the many come from the One?” It raises the issue to the level of how these many intellectual and sensual manifestations coexist with divine unity. The reason is that these interpretations end up at the same place. There are no real contradictions in the divine science (see my Introduction II).

The various interpretations revolve around the two terms *avar* and *kol*, “crossing” and “voice.”

His *first* interpretive choice for *crossing* is that God substituted knowledge of the divine modes of action for Moses' desire to know God's essence. Taken together, these modes of action constitute the organizing principle of the world, the Logos, the divine attributes taken together. Being all that Moses can know, and the mediating principle by which he knows, they can be understood as the divine indwelling, the Shekhina, or, philosophically, as the active intellect. Knowing these attributes, he can recognize God when he encounters Him, although Moses does not get to see His face. Here is Maimonides' explanation in Mishneh Torah of what Moses got to see:

“Moses, our teacher, himself saw Him...on Sinai as a Congregational Reader wrapped (*k'shaliakh tzibbur atuf*) [in his *talit*]—all indicating that in reality He has no form or figure. These only appeared in a

prophetic vision. But God's essence as it really is, the human mind does not understand and is incapable of grasping or investigating....What was it that Moses sought to comprehend, when he said 'Show me, I beseech thee, Thy glory?' (Exodus 33:18)? He sought to have so clear an apprehension of the truth of God's existence that the knowledge might be like that which one possesses of a human being, whose face one has seen and whose image is imprinted on the mind and whom, therefore, the mind distinguishes from other men. In the same way, Moses, our teacher, asked that the truth of God's existence might be distinguished in his mind from other beings, and that he might thus know the truth of God's existence, as it really is. God replied that it is beyond the mental capacity of a human creature, composed of body and soul, to obtain in this regard clear knowledge of the truth. The Almighty, however, imparted to Moses what has been vouchsafed to no man before or since. Moses attained so much knowledge of the truth of the Divine Existence, that God was, in his mind, distinct from other beings, in the same way as an individual, whose back is seen, whose physical form and apparel are perceived, is distinguished in the observer's mind from the physical form of other individuals. And Scripture hints this in the text (33:23), 'Thou shalt see my back but my face shall not be seen.'" Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah*, 1:9-10

If you take as his *second* interpretive choice this chapter's Definition 2, that what has passed before Moses is a "created *voice*," i.e., the Logos, the same result holds true. That is because we grasp the Logos as the will or word of God: either a created attribute, or, otherwise, our projection of such an attribute upon God to explain his inexplicable action in creation.

He then suggests a *third* possibility, that the entire matter is a dialog occurring in the mind of Moses: his request for the apprehension of the essence, the impossibility of its attainment by a creature of nature, and the substitution of the apprehension of God's actions—all are moments in Moses' philosophical conversation with himself. "You may take...the whole as a mental operation...perceived by the intellect without the use of the senses." Moses' activated intellect mediates between man and God. This is also the Logos.

The *fourth* possibility is that the prophet "sees" or "hears" the Shekhina or the Voice of God in a vision of prophecy, and this vision perfects his intellectual understanding, *asher b'raiito t'hyeh shlemot ha-hasaga ha-sikhlit*. He attributes this interpretation to Onkelos.

Each of these four interpretations of Exodus 34:6 returns to the necessity of a mediating understanding between man and God. The four are then all one, but their differences are differences in the prophets themselves. Each represents a different *level* of prophecy. (Maimonides details the twelve levels of prophecy in Chapter 2:45.)

GUIDE 1:22 DESCENT

This chapter concerns the word *bo*, which means come, arrive, enter (Judeo-Arabic: אַלביאה, Heb.: *beea*). It is situated in a group of lexical chapters devoted to positionality: to pass, to enter, to return, to go. Maimonides also revisits the term *descent*, treated in 1:10 and 1:15 as *yarad*, but now made a meaning of *bo*, and so *bo* carries the characteristics of *descent* enumerated in those chapters. This is because Maimonides uses the Arabic term *ḥulūl* (descent) for *bo* five times in the chapter (obscured in Kafih and Friedlander translations, noted in Pines and Schwarz). He uses it to mean the *descent of the Shekhina*, or God's *descent to visit punishment*. We should recall that these were Definitions 4 and 5 respectively in chapter 1:10. In its most corporeal sense, the term *beea* is a euphemism for the sexual act (Jastrow, 159). Sublimated, it symbolizes the process of divine creation.

Even-Shmuel summarizes this chapter, placing it in the context of the next three chapters (my trans.)

“We see that though we cannot attain the [essential] attributes that are [one] with Him, it is possible to reach Him through His actions, which are considered like attributes (i.e., attributes of action). These many actions are immeasurable, but it is possible to arrange them into four groups. In the *First Rank* stands prophecy. The revelation comes to the superior man in a particular place (the ‘coming of the Shekhina’ to man). This is the closest revelation attainable: the revelation of the existence of God, and of His design (*takhnito*) in the world.”

Even-Shmuel proceeds, in the summaries of the next three chapters, to list the remaining ranks of the divine actions:

Second Rank— His action of continuous renewal in nature, i.e., God as *m'khadesh*, Guide 1:23;

Third Rank—His action of continual providential supervision in nature, i.e., God as *mashgiakh*, 1:24; and

Fourth Rank—His action of continual providential supervision of mankind, i.e., the acts of God manifested in history, 1:25.

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

BO: (TO COME IN)

1. As applied to a living being (*baalei khayim*, animal): its arrival to a certain place, or before a certain person.
2. As applied to a living being, to enter a certain place. Friedlander asks why there is a difference in this Definition 2, “entering” and Definition 1, “arriving” (footnote 1, p. 83, *ad loc.*), Kafih answers (note 4, *ad loc.*); that “even Onkelos” in his Aramaic translation of the Bible “distinguishes between arriving and entering.”
3. Future events, which are “to come.” These are incorporeal, since future events have no present reality.
4. This incorporeal meaning is then extended to *privations*, that is, terms of negation, or exclusion, which do not, according to Maimonides, refer to anything at all.

5. Further metaphorical extension to God—descent of His Shekhina, or descent to visit punishment.

Instance of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, [even] me also, O my father. And he said, Thy brother *came* (*ba*) with subtlety (*b'mirma*), and hath taken away thy blessing.” (Genesis 27:34, 35)

Esau learns of his brother Jacob's coming in disguise to their blind father Isaac to receive the blessing of the first-born. Commentators think that the seer Isaac “saw” through Rachel's plan for her son Jacob to win the blessing. (But see R. Abraham ben Maimonides, *Guide to Serving God*, 385-403, esp. 391, that Isaac could not in any case have been made a divine conduit for blessing Esau, only for blessing Jacob). This and the next two quotes represent the corporeal use of the term *ba*. But the actual physical *arrival* or *entry* seems beside the point. Thus, Jacob's arrival is not important, only his coming *subtly*. The *coming* is just a grammatical connective to that significant point. Jacob comes into his father's house as his intellectual progeny to implement the family purpose of creating the Jewish people. R. Abraham, in his commentary on Genesis (p. 34) agrees with Onkelos that *b'mirma* (“with subtlety”) means “with wisdom,” since Jacob realized that he was the more appropriate recipient of his father's blessing.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“(23) And he (Joseph's steward) said, Peace [be] to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them. (24) And the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave [them] water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender. (25) And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon: for they heard that they should eat bread there. (26) And when Joseph *came* (*va-yavo*) home, they brought him (*va-yaviiu*) the present which [was] in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth.” (Genesis 43:23-26)

Again, the “coming home” of Joseph is incidental to the passage. In fact, he did not come *home*, but rather went from the anteroom to the reception hall of his mansion (Rashi). More important is the brother's present to Joseph, not his coming. This is shown by the second use of a variant of the word *bo* in the same sentence for the *bringing* of the present. The Midrash reads another level into the passage: that the real point of the sentence is not the bringing or the entering, but the *bowing*. This is one of five instances of the brother's bowing to Joseph. These fulfill his youthful prophecy that they would eventually bow to him (*Genesis Rabba*, 84:10, p. 776, accord R. Abraham, *Comm.*, p. 68). By bowing to Joseph they bow to his Torah mission, and then only do they become intellectual progeny of the patriarchs. On still another level, coming home, i.e., coming into the *house*, is a further extension on the sexual euphemism of *beea* (house = wife, Jastrow 168, Zohar 1:22a), so that *form* (Joseph) enters into the “house,” the “place,” *matter* in the process of generation.

“(22) And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip [it] in the blood that [is] in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that [is] in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. (23) For the Lord will pass through (*avar*) to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over (*pasakh*) the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite [you]. (24) And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. (25) And it shall come to pass, when ye *be come* (*ta-vo'u*) to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service.” (Exodus 12:22-25)

The context is the command to hold a Passover service, once in the desert, and then every year in Israel. Here the coming is a *future event*, and so Maimonides should have listed it under Definition 3: it may be a bridge to the next definition. There is another incorporeal positional movement mentioned in line 23: the term *avar*, which Guide 1:21 defined as, “The appearance of the Light and the Divine Presence (Shekhina) which the prophets perceived in their prophetic visions.” There may also be some hint of Definition 5 from that chapter, in that the doorpost service effects a *substitution* whereby God punishes the Egyptians but not the Jews. There is also a

substitution of His direct action for His Shekhina's visitation. See my comments on Exodus 12:23 in the last chapter.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“And Manoah (father of Samson) said unto the angel of the Lord, What [is] thy name, **that when thy sayings come to pass (yavo)** we may do thee honour? And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it [is] secret?” (Judges 13:17-18)

The context is the prophecy of Samson's miracle birth. Since the prophecy is of a *future event* it is not real, certainly not corporeal, for past and future time have no actual existence. Time is the number of motion of matter, not in itself a thing. According to Definition 3 the term *yavo* here “descends” upon future events “which have no corporeality at all,” *v'hushal l'khalot* (Ar.: *hulul*) *ha-davar asher aino guf klal*. Features of this passage interest Maimonides though he does not raise them explicitly here. The first is that the word comes to the wife of Manoah though neither she nor Manoah are prophets. “Also Manoah and his wife were no prophets: for the speech they heard, or imagined they heard, was like the *bat-kol* (prophetic echo), which is so frequently mentioned by our Sages, and is something that may be experienced by men not prepared for prophecy.” (Guide 2:42). In other words, since they were not prophets, the divine emanation produced only a *momentary* illumination of their imaginations. It was a divine emanation, and not merely a hallucination, because of the second interesting feature of this incident: *while in her state of vision* Manoah's wife *draws* Manoah *into her* vision. Only then does he make his request “What is thy name.” Note further that Maimonides places this quote-shard in Definition 3, not in with Definition 5, which is the descent of the Shekhina in prophecy. Is that because the angel speaking to Manoah is not *his* vision but his wife's? If so, the important feature of the vision surely is its *futurity*, since it did not “come” to Manoah himself. In other words, the content of the vision, its prognostication of the future, is more important than its occurrence. Another possible idea suggested by this quote-shard is the meaning of *name*. The name of a thing is its definition, and definition is essence. Neither Moses nor Manoah can learn the essence of their incorporeal visitor, but they can learn from that visitor what God will do.

“(1) Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: [there is] no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate.... (12) Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. (13) Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from [these things] **that shall come upon (yavo 'u)** thee.” (Isaiah 47:1, 12-13)

Babylon was the home of astrological investigation. Maimonides opposed astrology, and wrote a famous letter against it, *Letter to the Jews of Marseilles* (p. 113, Leon Stitskin, *Letters of Maimonides*, Yeshiva, 1977). The context is that Isaiah prophesied bad things for the Babylonians, despite the good tidings they received from their false prophets, the astrologers. Contrast this false prophecy of a good future that will in fact turn bad, against the previous quote from Judges, a true prophecy of good future that really is good. What the astrologers foresee is not just a not-yet-existent future, but a future that will *never* exist. This truly is *nothing*, and prepares us for the next quote from Job.

Instance of Definition 4 Contextualized:

“(25) Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? Was [not] my soul grieved for the poor? (26) When I looked for good, **then evil came (va-yavo)** [unto me]: and when I waited for light, **there came (va-yavo)** darkness.” (Job 30:25, 26)

Maimonides quotes two separate fragments of verse 26. The context is disputable, since on its face it seems as if we should take Job at his word that he had in verse 25 been sympathetic to the oppressed. But the Talmud, *Sotah* 11a, has Job silent in the face of Pharaoh's plan to oppress the Israelites, which, according to the Talmud, is why he was sentenced to suffering. Maimonides has a different explanation for Job's troubles. Maimonides in 3:22 explains that Job's piety was only based on received tradition, not intellectual investigation. These troubles would be dissipated by the acquisition or activation of intellect. Maimonides' interest in quoting from the Job verse is its focus on evil and darkness. See essay below “The Unreality of Evil and Darkness.”

Instances of Definition 5 Contextualized:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I *come* (*ba*) unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. (10) And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, (11) And be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down (*yered*) in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.” (Exodus 19:9-11)

The context is the preparation for the initial giving of the Torah. See essay below on this passage, “The Descent Of The Word Of God.”

“Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it [was] shut. Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath *entered* (*ba*) in by it, therefore it shall be shut. [It is] for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by the way of the porch of [that] gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.” (Ezekiel 44:1-3)

Maimonides says: “In these and all similar passages, the coming (Ar. *ḥulūl*, descent) of the Shechinah is meant,” since God does not physically *come* through gates. The context is a prophetic vision of Ezekiel, in which he is shown part of the future ideal Jerusalem Temple. God’s spirit once came in the Temple through a gate now closed to the exiled Jews. It will be opened for the Shekhina’s descent only when the Messianic prince reinstates the Temple service. The next several lines passionately describe this coming and explain the reason that the gate had to be shut:

“Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord: and I fell upon my face. And the Lord said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the Lord, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary. And thou shalt say to the rebellious, [even] to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, In that ye have brought [into my sanctuary] strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, [even] my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.” (Ezekiel 44:4-7)

How will the Shekhina descend? That is the subject of the next prophetic text.

“(1) Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. (2) For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. (3) Then shall the Lord go forth (*v’yatza*), and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. (4) And his feet (*raglav*) shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which [is] before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, [and there shall be] a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. (5) And ye shall flee [to] the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the Lord my God shall *come* (*u-va*), [and] all the *holy ones* (*k’doshim*) with thee.” (Zechariah 14:1-5, I substituted JPS 1917 “holy ones” for KJV “saints.”)

Maimonides divides this from the previous proof-text for Definition 5. The prior quotation from Ezekiel demonstrated the *descent* of the Shekhina, while this passage from Zechariah describes the *descent* of the visitation of divine punishment. The Shekhina descends upon the “holy ones,” who Maimonides explains are the *prophets*. Maimonides says that the phrase “The Lord my God shall come” is:

“Identical with ‘His word (*pkudato*, His visitation or decree) will come (Ar. *ḥulūl*, descend),’ that is to say, the promises which He made through the *Prophets* (*al ydei nviav*, by means of the prophets) will be fulfilled; therefore Scripture adds ‘all the *holy ones* that are with thee,’ that is to say, ‘The word of the Lord my God will be performed, which has been spoken by all the holy ones who are with thee, who address the Israelites.’” (my emphases. Kafih translates: *k’ilu amar*, “*u’vo davar hashem elohai al yedai kol kedoshim imakh, m’dabber im yisroel.*”)

Even-Shmuel explains what Maimonides is doing with this passage (my trans.): “Here, not only [does Maimonides consider] that there is an ellipsed term in construct state (‘The Lord’ in place of ‘The word of the Lord’) but also an ellipsed preposition (‘all the holy ones’ in place of ‘by means of the holy ones’). The word *imakh* (‘with thee’) does not refer to God, as if it were saying that God comes with the prophets, but, rather, it refers to Israel; and the prophet Zechariah, ‘who address(es) the Israelites’ says to the people, ‘all the words that God promised will be established by means of the prophets (“the holy ones”) that were sent to thee and settled ‘with thee.’”

How will the Shekhina come to visit punishment upon the enemies who destroy Jerusalem? How will the Shekhina cause (*raglav/feet* mean creative cause, Guide 1:28) mountains to move for the Jews? *Through the prophets*. God emanates knowledge through the mediation of his created angel, the active intellect, *descending* upon the potential intellects of the prophets in visions. With that creative causative knowledge they are able to establish the earthly kingdom of heaven.

THE UNREALITY OF EVIL AND DARKNESS

“(25) Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was [not] my soul grieved for the poor? (26) When I looked for good, then evil *came* (*va-yavo*) [unto me]: and when I waited for light, *there came* (*va-yavo*) darkness.” (Job 30:25, 26)

Maimonides’ interest in quoting from this verse is its focus on evil and darkness.

Maimonides will explain in Guide 3:10-12 that evil and darkness are occlusions of the good emanating from God and in themselves have no real existence. In the Maimonidean-Aristotelian philosophical language they are *privations*. Friedlander defines privations (note 2, p 83, *ad loc.*) as “the name applied to that class of terms which do not denote a thing really existing, but merely the absence of their opposite, e.g., darkness, as the absence of light; evil, as the absence of good.” This is a different sense of the term than the *particularized privation* always associated with matter. That particularized privation, while in itself nothing, is nonetheless a potential for a new form to in-form its matter. By contrast, the evil and darkness that come upon Job are in themselves *nothing*, potentially or otherwise. At 3:10 he writes:

“In accordance with this view we explain the following passage of Isaiah: ‘I form the light and create (*borei*) darkness: I make peace, and create (*borei*) evil’ (Isa. 45:7), for darkness and evil are non-existing things. Consider that the prophet does not say, I make (*osei*) darkness, I make (*osei*) evil, because darkness and evil are not things in positive existence to which the verb ‘to make’ would apply; the verb *bara* ‘he created’ is used, because in Hebrew this verb is applied to non-existing things e.g., ‘In the beginning God created’ (*bara*), etc.; here the creation took place from nothing.”

This was a specific criticism that Maimonides had against Muslim theology (see 1:72, Proposition 7) since that theology conceived darkness and evil as real existences. Thus, the word *come* (*bo; va-yavo*) refers to privations as well as future events, neither of which have any present reality.

THE DESCENT OF THE WORD OF GOD

Let’s take a closer look at the key passage in our chapter:

“*And darkness came* (Job 30:26). Since the term had been thus figuratively applied to what is in no way a body, it was also figuratively applied to the Creator..., either to the descent (*hulūl*) of His decree or to ... [the descent] of His indwelling. It is in view of this figurative use that it is said: *Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud* (Exodus 19:9); *For the Lord, the God of Israel, comes through it* (Ezekiel 44:2). All passages similar to these signify the descent of His Indwelling (*shekhina*, Ar. *sakīnah*). The verse, *and the Lord my God shall come, and all the holy ones with thee* (Zechariah 14:5) signifies, on the other hand, the descent of God’s decree or the realization of the promises made by Him through His prophets. This last notion is signified in the dictum: *All the holy ones with thee*. Scripture says, as it were, ‘And the word of the Lord my God shall come through all the holy ones who are with thee;’ the people of *Israel* being the one addressed.” (Guide, Pines translation, p. 52)

Maimonides wants to explain Exodus 19:9, which is about God’s preparation for the giving of Torah on Sinai:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, *Lo, I come (ba) unto thee in a thick cloud*, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. (10) And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, (11) And be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down (*yered*) in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.” (Exodus 19:9-11)

He returns to Exodus 19:9 in two places, Guide 2:33 and 3:9. In 2:33 he says:

“It is clear to me that what Moses experienced at the revelation on Mount Sinai was different from that which was experienced by all the other Israelites, for Moses alone was addressed by God, and for this reason the second person singular is used in the Ten Commandments; Moses then went down to the foot of the mount and told his fellow-men what he had heard. Comp., ‘I stood between the Lord and you at that time to tell you the word of the Lord’ (Deuteronomy 5:5). Again, ‘Moses spake, and God answered him with a loud voice’ (Exodus 19:19). In the *Mechilta* our Sages say distinctly that he brought to them every word as he had heard it. Furthermore, the words, ‘*In order that the people hear when I speak with thee*’ (Exodus 19:9), show that God spoke to Moses, and the people only heard the mighty sound, not distinct words.”

In chapter 2:33, Maimonides continues to explain that though the Jews heard it, what they heard was not the articulation Moses heard, for they had not previously been trained as he had by perfection of intellect, morals, and imagination. Moses heard the commandments and then explained them to the Jews who heard only “the mighty sound,” lacking articulation. Abarbanel and others opposed this view (a brilliant English language exposition of this material, including a translation of Abarbanel and an attempt to resolve the issues is Alvin Reines’ *Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy*, KTAV Publishing, 1971.)

Maimonides returns to our passage with a further explanation of why the people could not hear what Moses heard at Guide 3:9:

“The corporeal element in man is a large screen and partition that prevents him from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals: this would be the case even if the corporeal element were as pure and superior as the substance of the spheres; how much more must this be the case with our dark and opaque body. However great the exertion of our mind may be to comprehend the Divine Being or any of the ideals, we find a screen and partition between Him and ourselves. Thus the prophets frequently hint at the existence of a partition between God and us. They say He is concealed from us in vapours, in darkness, in mist, or in a “*thick cloud*” (Exodus 19:9): or use similar figures to express that on account of our bodies we are unable to comprehend His essence. This is the meaning of the words, ‘Clouds and darkness are round about Him’ (Psalms 97:2). The prophets tell us that the difficulty consists in the grossness of our substance:

they do not imply, as might be gathered from the literal meaning of their words, that God is corporeal, and is invisible because He is surrounded by thick clouds, vapours, darkness, or mist. This figure is also expressed in the passage, ‘He made darkness His secret place’ (Psalms 18:12). The object of God revealing Himself in thick clouds, darkness, vapours, and mist was to teach this lesson; for every prophetic vision contains some lesson by means of allegory; that mighty vision, therefore, though the greatest of all visions, and above all comparison, *viz.*, His revelation in a thick cloud, did not take place without any purpose, it was intended to indicate that we cannot comprehend Him on account of the dark body that surrounds us. It does not surround God, because He is incorporeal.”

In other words, God is not in a “thick cloud,” we are. Because of this, the Jews do not understand the word of God at Sinai. There must be a mediator. Explaining this verse, Exodus 19:9, “I *come (ba)* unto thee in a thick cloud,” Maimonides in our chapter comments *ba* means: “the manifestation (Ar. *ḥulūl*, descent) of His presence (the Shekhina)” and, “In these and all similar passages, the coming (Ar. *ḥulūl*, descent) of the Shechinah is meant.” It is not God who *comes*, but his Shekhina *descending*, mediating between God and man. Man wrapped in his cloud of corporeality cannot ever directly see or hear God, but only through mediation of the Shekhina, the active intellect, which *descends on* his prophets.

Next, Maimonides makes the following important equation which is generally missed by the translators, “Since this term (*bo*) was figuratively applied to incorporeal things (Definition 4, privations) it was figuratively extended to [those non-privative incorporeal things which have real existence, Definition 5, like] God, *either to the descent of His word or to the descent of his Shekhina*” (my translation). Ibn Tibbon’s Hebrew comes closest to the original, especially in the important last clause: *u’l’fi zot ha-hashala asher hushal l’ma sh’aino geshem klal, hushal gam ken l’borei yitromam, im l’vo dvaro o l’vo shekhinato*. (Compare the Judeo-Arabic original of the last clause: סכינתה: לחלול אמרה או לחלול.) It is a clear equation of the Shekhina and the Word of God, the Logos (Torah).

There is yet a further extension of this equation Shekhina = Logos evident in Maimonides’ original text. Commenting on the Zechariah quotation (which he takes as a commentary on Exodus 19:9), he writes (Pines translation) that *bo* “signifies, on the other hand, the descent of God’s decree or the realization of the promises made by Him through His prophets.”

Kafih’s Hebrew translation of this sentence has: *khalot p’kudato (d’varo) o kiyum yiudav asher hiviakh bahem al yadei neviav*. (Compare the Judeo-Arabic original of the last clause: או תבאת מואעידה אלתי ועד בהא עלי יד אנביאיה (חלול אמרה).) If the first passage equated Shekhina and Logos, this language goes further, especially in the original, to extend the equation so that Shekhina = Logos = the fulfillment of prophecy.

The divine emanation (Shekhina) descends upon the active intellect (Logos) acquired by the prophet, who, through his commands, effectuates the divine will in the world, or, through his prognostication, predicts the providential/retributive execution of that will.

GUIDE 1:23 HIDE AND SEEK

This is the lexical chapter on *yatza* (“come out”). Maimonides says that the term is opposite to *bo* (“come in”), last chapter’s lexical term, but it is only opposite in their corporeal senses. Once again, the references to God are all positive, the rest, negative. This chapter also defines *shuv* (to return) but Maimonides buries its definition at the end of the chapter. It is, therefore, his most important concern. The reason he hides it is that though the term is only applied to God, it is always negative in implication, and means “the hiding of the face,” which is the terrible withdrawal of God’s providence.

The Judeo-Arabic terms used for *yatza* are כָּרוּג, which also means “to be actualized” (Efros, *Philosophic terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, pp. 58, 185), and נִפְוֵד, “to propagate, to effectuate” (Pines’ Translation, *ad loc.*, notes 5 and 12, pp. 52-53). Through the actualization of his will God’s reveals His aspect as creator to us. Here is how Even-Shmuel portrays this concept in his brief chapter summary (my translation):

“The Second Rank (see last chapter for the list of his four Ranks) of actions, through which the existence of God is manifested to us, is the rank of Creator (*m’khadesh*). It is His unceasing renewal of nature, the ‘coming out’ (*y’tzia*—our lexical term) of things from nothing to existence. Through all of this, man perceives God as Creator.”

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

YATZA: (COME OUT, EXIT)

See below for: **SHUV (RETURN):**

1. The motion of a body from a place in which it had rested, to another place (whether the body is a living being or not). The opposite of *bo* (“come in”).
2. An incorporeal manifestation. The enunciation or effectuation of a decree. This is the only definition allowed to be used with God.

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And he (Joseph) commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men’s sacks [with] food, as much as they can carry, and put every man’s money in his sack’s mouth. And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack’s mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses. [And] when they were *gone out (yatzu)* of the city, [and] not [yet] far off, Joseph said unto his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good?” (Genesis 44:1-4)

Maimonides returns to Genesis Chapter 44, previously visited in Guide 1:18. See my essay there “The Midrash on *Vayigash*,” which was about Genesis 44:18. The passages above precede that passage. The synagogue reading breaks the chapter in two, making 44:18 the beginning of the weekly reading called *vayigash*. Here Joseph prepares his subterfuge of hiding his divining cup in his brother Benjamin’s sack, so that the brothers will be blamed for theft. Then at 44:18, *vayigash* (“Then Judah came near”), Judah and his brothers are arraigned before Joseph. The confrontation between Joseph and Judah takes place, which I supplied the Midrashic explanation of. As noted there, many issues involved in prophecy occur in *Vayigash*.

In context, the passage is supposed to illustrate the corporeal Definition 1 of *yatza*. But tradition quibbles whether the brothers have “gone out” at all. The Hebrew of the phrase is *hem yatzu et ha-ir*. The general particle *et* is thought to mean *with*, not *of*, and so the brothers are literally “gone out *with* the city,” that is, they have not yet

left its municipal border, for, as the text continues, they were “not yet far off.” We also saw in the last chapter that Maimonides’ quotation illustrating the corporeal definition for *bo* was not particularly apt. Maimonides is saying that we should not be quick to assign a corporeal definition to any word used in prophecy, even if it is a permissible lexical definition. The text is also chosen to remind us that “going out” and “crossing” (*avar*, see Guide 1:21) share a sense of *substitution*, since when the brothers were “gone out” the steward was supposed to ask: “Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good.” But the main theme for *yatza* is the *dissemination and effectuation of a decree*. Joseph is telling his steward what he is to say to the brothers. The superior commands his subordinate to announce or effectuate his decree. God, as we will see in Definition 2, requires no steward to effectuate His will.

“If fire *break out (tetze)*, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed [therewith]; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.” (Exodus 22:5)

This is an unusual citation of a *halakha* in the lexicon. This law makes the property owner responsible for any damage, foreseeable or not, that results from failing to guard burning coals ignited on his property. This quote is a corporeal reference, and a negative one. Recall that in Aristotle’s theory of proper place, fire’s elemental motion is upward, i.e., above the other three elements. It appears in its proper place not as a yellow flame but as the “darkness” (*khoshekh*, Guide 2:30) of the surrounding night sky. When wrenched from its proper place the movement of fire is destructive flame.

Instance of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“Then the king returned (*shav*) out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther [was]. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word *went out (yatza)* of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. (Esther 7:8)

This passage and the next are from Esther. This is from the end of the story, and Maimonides cites it to show that *yatza* is an incorporeal decree. There is much action in the verse. The passage has prurient interest for the King conceives Haman’s evil to include attempted rape of the Queen. This reminds us that matter should cleave to its own true form and not promiscuously engage in the materialism of seeking another form. In context, the *word* that *went out* of the King’s mouth is: “Will he force the Queen also before me in the house?” Maimonides takes this as a *decree* of Haman’s guilt and a verdict of death, which the King’s servants carry out. The general idea is that kings do not do *anything* but sit on thrones. They make their will known by voice: others carry it out. This will be contrasted to God’s way of carrying out His will. The verse also uses the term *shav*, “return,” which Maimonides treats at the end of our chapter. There the “return” of God means His concealment and removal of His providence. In the same way, the King has “hidden his face” from Haman, whose face is therefore covered.

“And Memucan answered before the King and the princes, Vashti the Queen hath not done wrong to the King only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that [are] in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus. For [this] deed (*d’var*) of the Queen *shall come abroad (yetze)* unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the Queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.” (Esther 1:16-17)

Maimonides explains “the deed...shall come abroad,” *yetze d’var*, as “the propagation of the matter” (Pines’ translation). Pines carefully notes the use of the Arabic *nufudh* (נפוד) for “propagation,” but in footnote 5 says that the word can mean “effect.” See also his footnote 12 for Maimonides’ second use of the Arabic root as the effectuation of a decree. KJV and JPS 1917 insist on translating *davar* here as deed, while Judaica Press reads it as Maimonides does: “For the *word* of the queen will spread to all the women.” Compare *yetze d’var* to *va’yaviru kol* (Exodus 36:6) in Guide 1:21. Here the “going forth” of the “word” is similar to the “passing” of the “voice” which took place there. In 1:21 Maimonides used *va’yaviru kol* as his proof-text for the idea that *avar* meant “sound” so that he could take the phrase to mean “the sounding of a sound.” Here, with *yetze d’var*, and in the prior quotation from the Book of Esther, *yetze* also becomes sound, but, more to the point, it becomes the *willed effectuation* of the command sounded, irrespective of whether any real sound is actually heard. You could also read *ki yetze d’var ha-malka al kol ha-nashim* to mean that the Queen’s decree was propagated or effectuated

among the women, “so that they shall despise their husbands.” Vashti, who is not a King, tries to act as one. Note further that this passage is not a description of corporeal action, but rather describes a policy argument by the King’s advisor Memucan. His purpose is to persuade the King to issue a decree to his minions against Vashti. As we see from the prior quotation, King Ahasuerus does not even have to *articulate* a decree, since his minions will interpret his demeanor and his quizzical exclamations as though they were actual decrees.

“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, [that] the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go (*v’alkhu*) and say, Come ye, and let us go (*l’khu*) up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk (*v’nelkha*) in his paths: **for out of Zion shall go forth (*tetze*) the law**, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:1-3)

The Torah is the Word of the Lord, and is therefore the exemplar of decrees. Isaiah prophesies its universal acceptance. The Temple Mount will be to the world what Sinai was to Israel. The next chapter, Guide 1:24, the lexicon on *halakh* (“walk”), quotes line 5 from this Isaiah chapter: “O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk (*l’khu v’nelkha*) in the light of the Lord.” Maimonides says there that, “walk,” in this definition, “concerns only the inner life, and which requires no bodily motion.” The same is true of *yatza*, the *going forth* of the law, which means the universal adoption of God’s decree. It is not that the law “goes forth” but that God actualizes or effectuates His will. No particular action or “going forth” is required. This terminology is merely a concession to human understanding, which cannot conceive of the effectuation of will without some attendant physical activity.

“**The sun was risen (*yatza*) upon the earth** when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” (Genesis 19:23)

From reading Maimonides’ quote-shard alone, it would not be obvious that the context is the destruction of Sodom. Thus Friedlander, note 3, wonders why this passage about the sun is included among examples of *incorporeal* manifestations, and argues that the solutions of commentators have been unsatisfactory. Friedlander is not aware of the Midrashic interpretation of the passage. The answer to his question is that Maimonides thinks that the sun here is a metaphor for divine visitation of punishment. He says (Pines’ translation and emphasis) “I refer to the manifestation of the light. Every *mention of going out* occurring in Scripture with reference to Him, may He be exalted, conforms to this figurative use.” The “light” manifested for Lot is the execution of God’s will to wreak darkness and destruction upon Sodom. Rashi reminds us of the Midrashic context, that the “sun was risen” refers not to its normal daily rise, but rather a particular moment. This particular cosmic moment shows that the punishment came from God, not from any other forces:

“At the rise of dawn, as it is stated (verse 15): ‘And as the dawn rose, [the angels pressed Lot, saying, Get up, take your wife, etc.]’ a time when the moon is in the sky with the sun. Since some of them worshipped the sun and some of them the moon, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, ‘If I punish them by day, the moon worshippers will say, Had it been at night, when the moon rules, we would not have been destroyed.’ And if I punish them at night, the sun worshippers will say, ‘Had it been by day, when the sun rules, we would not have been destroyed.’ Therefore, it is written: ‘And as the dawn rose’: He punished them at a time when the sun and the moon [both] rule. — [from Gen. Rabbah 60:12]”

On the final proof-text for Definition 2, “**For, behold, the Lord cometh out (*yotze*) of his place (*mi’mkomo*)**” Isaiah 26:21, see essay below.

THE LORD COMETH OUT OF HIS PLACE

“(19) Thy dead [men] shall live, [together with] my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew [is as] the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead. (20) Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. (21) **For, behold, the Lord cometh out (*yotze*) of his place**

(mi'mkomo) to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.” (Isaiah 26:19-21)

This last quote for *yatza*, Definition 2, is important for Maimonides since he quotes it here twice. It mentions *makom*, “place,” and contributes to our understanding of that term. See my previous discussion in chapters 1:8 and 1:16, the chapters on *makom* and *tzur* (“rock”). Once again, Maimonides recasts *makom* in his own terms, this time as God’s will.

“‘The word of God, which until now has been in secret, cometh out, and will become manifest,’ i.e., something will come into being which had not existed before: for everything new emanating from God is ascribed to His Word: ‘By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth’ (Psalms 33:6). This is a simile taken from the conduct of kings, who employ the word as the means of carrying their *will* into effect. God, however, requires no instrument wherewith to operate in order to perform anything; the effect is produced solely by His *Will* alone. He does not employ any kind of speech, as will be explained further on (Guide 1:65).” (My emphases)

He begins by changing the phrase. “The Lord cometh out (*yotze*)” becomes “the *word* of the Lord cometh out.” He then argues that the *makom* is God’s creativity seen from man’s point of view, in man’s language. Before creation *ex nihilo*, we *say* that God is hidden; afterward, we *say* that He came out of His secret place and created. Maimonides then employs Psalms 33:6 to compare and contrast God’s action with a king’s. A king just sits on his throne, but in order to govern must *utter* a decree. His minions, who are his instrument, effectuate the decree. By contrast, God requires no action, instrument, word, or Logos to create the universe. Compare Guide 1:1, where we learned that intellectual apprehension requires no physical action. It was therefore “likened unto the apprehension of the deity, which does not require an instrument” (Pines’ translation).

Chapter 1:65, referred above, closely connects with our chapter. There Maimonides explains attributionless divinity. He says that speech as such may not ascribed be to God as an eternal attribute. The “word of God” is Torah, yet that decree is a *divine creation*. This forcefully contrasts with the Muslim attribute of divine speech, the uncreated Qur’an, which is “with” God eternally. This is a dangerous pretension upon divine unity. God needs no “instrument.” God’s will is just Himself.

“A proof for this, namely that the phrase ‘God said,’ in the first chapter of Genesis, must be taken in a figurative sense ‘He willed,’ and not in its literal meaning, is found in the circumstance that a command can only be given to a being which exists and is capable of receiving the command.”

Meaning that the phrase “God said,” in the first chapter of Genesis, must be figurative, since on Day One there is as yet no other being “which exists and is capable of receiving the command.” We only imagine that God is like the king who commands but needs a servant to effect his will. Maimonides develops this at 1:68: some Muslim theologians had denied that God is a “cause” because then there would have to be an “effect” eternally “with” God. He counters that God is the *form* of the universe: through His will *alone*, with no servant, He *causes* the universe to pass from potentiality to actuality. He alone causes it to remain existent. He is the Creator.

Later in our chapter, Maimonides repeats “the Lord cometh out of his place,” (line 21) as a transition to the lexical term *shuv*, “return.” He understands *shuv* to be the withdrawal of providence called “The hiding of the face.” The passage does not actually use the term *shuv*, but its theme is the termination of the “hiding of the face,” when the divine presence returns to Israel. The verse proceeds to tell how God will eventually punish those now killing the Jews, “to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.” The Jews are instructed to return to their synagogues (“enter thou into thy chambers,” line 20) and to “hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast,” that is, till God cometh out of His hidden place, where He has *hidden His face*, withdrawing providence from them. But then He will come out of his *place* to uncover the deeds of the

murderers, and bring the dead back to life, that is, to grant his people power over their oppressors. For this He requires no instrumentality to effect His will.

THE HIDING OF THE FACE

If, as we see above, God needs no instrument to create everything, did He also create evil? The conclusion of our chapter supplies the answer by introducing the new lexical term, *shuv*.

SHUV (RETURN): Maimonides defines this as a figurative term meaning the discontinuance of God's manifestation. In support, he quotes Hosea:

“Therefore [will] I [be] unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah [saw] his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. For I [will be] unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, [even] I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue [him]. I will go (*elekh*) [and] return (*ashuva*) to my place (*mkomi*), till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early.” (Hosea 5:12-15)

Now, only at the end of the chapter, Maimonides reveals the key term and principle point of the chapter: the definition of *shuv*. He writes that this passage means:

“I.e., the Divine presence (Shekhina) which had been in our midst departed from us, the consequence of which has been the absence of Divine protection from amongst us.... Thus the Prophet foretelling misfortune (Pines: ‘by way of threat’) says, ‘I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured’ (Deuteronomy 31:17), for, when man is deprived of Divine protection he is exposed to all dangers, and becomes the butt (Pines: ‘target’) of all fortuitous circumstances: his fortune and misfortune then depend on chance. Alas! How terrible a threat! –This is the idea contained in the words, ‘I will go and return to my place.’”

The Hosea passage refers to God's *place* to which He “returns.” This time God is hidden from the Jews until their suffering causes *them* to *return*. We then *project* their return on God. Their return to God returns them to his unceasing providence: this we *call* His return. The passage mentions Deuteronomy 31:16-18, which is the classic locus of the “hiding of the face:”

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring (*v'zana*) after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go [to be] among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. (17) Then My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face (*v'histarti panai*) from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God [is] not among us? (18) And I will surely hide My face (*astir panai*) in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned (*pana*) unto other gods.”

Here is how Maimonides explains this passage in 3:51:

“If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him; for it is only that intellectual link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents. Hence, it may occur that the perfect man is at times not happy, whilst no evil befalls those who are imperfect; in these cases,

what happens to them is due to chance. This principle I find also expressed in the Law (quoting here, in full, Deuteronomy 31:17), It is clear that *we ourselves* are the cause of this hiding of the face, and that the screen that separates us from God is of our own creation. This is the meaning of the words: "And I will surely hide My face in that day, for all the evils which they shall have wrought" (31:18). There is undoubtedly no difference in this regard between one single person and a whole community. It is now clearly established that the cause of our being exposed to *chance*, and abandoned to destruction like cattle, is to be found in our separation from God. Those who have their God dwelling in their hearts, are not touched by any evil whatever." (My italics)

Recall from the last chapter, 1:22, that when God “comes” in a dark cloud to the Jews in the desert, it is really not God in the cloud but the Jews. Again, it is not God that has hidden His face, but we that have hidden ours by turning (*shuv*, but also *pana*) to other gods. The “right way” of knowledge is intellectual meditation on God, that is, being *present* before him, “I have set the Lord before me always” (Psalm 16:8). It is that eternal now where there is only God and me, the perceiver, with no distracting ego or mediator. There is no “I” left in the flame of that encounter to suffer evil: the perceiver is one with the great chain of being. That is true providence flowing from love of God (See my essay: “Providence and Nature,” on Guide 1:11). When man “does not meditate on God” he is subject to *chance*: as Maimonides says in our chapter, “his fortune and misfortune then depend on chance. Alas! How terrible a threat!” Like the creatures of nature, man is then subject to nature only, and providence does not save: he is “abandoned to destruction like cattle” because of his separation from God. That is the meaning of the “hiding of the face.” The cause of evil is our distance from God.

GUIDE 1:24 WALKING

Maimonides uses Guide chapter 1:24 to expand our understanding of the hiding of the divine face and the visitation of punishment connected to that terrible withdrawal of providence.

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

* * *

HALAKH: (WALK, GO, TRAVEL)

1. Movements performed by living beings.
2. Movements of objects “less solid (finer—*yoter adinim*) than the bodies of living beings.” Maimonides refers to the four elements.
3. Any incorporeal or metaphorical manifestation.
4. Divine action: God, in one action, “hides his face” and visits punishment.
5. Torah observant conduct, living a morally good life.

Instance of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And Jacob *went (halakh)* on his way, and the angels (*malakhei*) of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This [is] God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim. And Jacob sent (*vayishlakh*) messengers (*malakhim*) before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.” (Genesis 32:2-3, KJV numbers are different from other versions)

Maimonides plainly wants us to interpret “went” in this passage corporeally despite Jacob’s mention of angels. See essay below: “The Jacob Exception to the Rule of Abraham.”

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually (*halokh v’khasor—went on*

decreasing) until the tenth month: in the tenth [month], on the first [day] of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen.” (Genesis 8:3-5).

Maimonides means that we can also apply the term *halakh* to corporeal items that border on incorporeality, meaning the four elements, and particularly fire and water. The examples he chooses, this proof-text and the next, show unusual cooperative behavior of water and fire when God uses them to punish mankind. The flood destroyed life because sulfur coals boiled the waters (Rashi on Genesis 6:14, *Genesis Rabba* 28:8).

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt. And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran (*va-tihalakh*) along (down) upon the ground; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 9:22-3)

This passage also shows that God uses cooperative mixtures of the usually uncooperative elements, fire and water, to punish mankind. Rashi, from Midrash *Tanchuma, Va'era* 14:

“This was a miracle within a miracle. The fire and hail intermingled. Although hail is water, to perform the will of their Maker they made peace between themselves (that the hail did not extinguish the fire nor did the fire melt the hail).”

Another feature of this special kind of fire is that it violates the laws of Maimonidean (Aristotelian) motion. Fire should always rise to its “proper place” above air. Fire only “runs” down when God makes it do so. (KJV misunderstands “ran down” as “ran along,” *va-tikhalakh esh artsah*. See Judaica Press and JPS 1917). Abraham ben Maimonides, *ad loc.*, understands that strange elemental cooperation took place. “The element of fire came out, which formerly had been above (*b'tokh—?*) the element of air, and both elements mixed with the elements of water and earth to descend upon the earth” (my translation). Two quotes down, Maimonides quotes Genesis 3:8, about the voice of God “walking” in Eden after the sin. Midrash *Genesis Rabba* 19:7 compares the *traveling* of the voice there to the *traveling* down of the fire in this verse. Maimonides cites both passages to compare God’s hiding His face when Adam turned from Him, and His turning from Egypt to punish it with the plague of hail. Both involve the *traveling, halakh*, of the punishment while God’s “hides” His face. Maimonides elaborates this idea in the next proof-text, using the image of the snake to tie Egypt’s punishment to Adam’s punishment.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“(20) Egypt [is like] a very fair heifer, [but] destruction cometh; it cometh out of the north. (21) Also her hired men [are] in the midst of her like fatted bullocks; for they also are turned back, [and] are fled away together: they did not stand, because the day of their calamity was come upon them, [and] the time of their visitation. (22) The voice thereof *shall go (yelekh)* like a serpent; for they (Babylon) shall march with an army, and come against her with axes, as hewers of wood. (23) They shall cut down her forest, saith the Lord, though it cannot be searched; because they are more than the grasshoppers, and [are] innumerable.” (Jeremiah 46:20-23)

Despite Egypt’s size, Babylon’s “grasshoppers” will destroy its “forest.” Definition 3 includes the purely metaphorical use of *halakh* and its variants. The “voice” walking is the incorporeal manifestation of the soul of serpentine Egypt, slithering from its Babylonian punishment. Providence turns from Egypt because Egypt turned against God. The image of the serpent comes to remind us of the combination of the “hiding of the face” and the visitation of punishment. Rashi, *ad loc.* to Jeremiah, recognized this connection:

“The ‘snake’ comes to teach us about Egypt but ends by learning. For we learn from here that when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the serpent, ‘You shall walk on your belly’ (Genesis 3:14), He severed his feet, and his voice went to the end of the world.”

The Edenic serpent was able to walk, but its legs were cut out, just as Egypt’s forest is cut down by Babylon. When the snake loses its primal limbs its “voice” is exiled to the end of the world, i.e., to Egypt, from whence Israel escaped and to which it is commanded never to return.

Instances of Definition 4 Contextualized:

“And they heard the voice of the Lord God *walking (mithalekh)* in the garden (Eden) in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.” (Genesis 3:8)

This “voice of the Lord” is a created voice, a *kol ha-nivra*. Maimonides explains: “It is ‘the voice’ that is qualified by ‘walking.’” He means it is not God himself walking, but His *presence*, the Shekhina leaving, i.e., the hiding of the divine countenance. The Midrash to our passage ties the traveling of the divine voice to the traveling down of the plague of fire upon the Egyptians (Genesis Rabba 19:7):

“‘And they heard the voice of the Lord God traveling (walking) in the garden toward the cool of the day.’ R. Halapay said: We know [from here] that a voice may travel, but we do not yet know that ‘traveling’ can apply to fire; and whence do we know that? From a verse elsewhere: ‘And the fire traveled down upon the earth’ (Exodus 9:23, two quotes above).”

In both cases, the Egyptian and the Edenic, we witness the simultaneous withdrawal of providence and visitation of punishment of Definition 4 of *halakh*. In Guide 1:2 Maimonides explains what happened when Adam hid from voice of God walking:

“When, however, Scripture says of Adam, ‘He changed his face (*panav*) and thou sentest him forth’ (Job 14:20), it must be understood in the following way: On account of the change of his original aim he was sent away. For *panim*, the Hebrew equivalent of face, is derived from the verb *panah*, ‘he turned,’ and signifies also ‘aim,’ because man generally turns his face towards the thing he desires. In accordance with this interpretation, our text suggests that Adam, as he altered his intention and directed his thoughts to the acquisition of what he was forbidden, he was banished from Paradise: this was his punishment; it was measure for measure.... Reflecting on his condition, the Psalmist says, ‘Adam unable to dwell in dignity, was brought to the level of the dumb beast’ (Psalms 49:13).”

See our discussion of this exchange of *providence for chance* in the last chapter. We learned there that man enjoys providence only when he concentrates his thought on the divine. When man turns to hide his face from God, losing that providence, he then projects the hiding of his own face upon God. The loss of providence subjects man to fate, like the “dumb beast.” As Maimonides says in 3:51: “The cause of our being exposed to chance and abandoned to destruction like cattle, is to be found in our separation from God.” This thought is continued and expanded in the next two quotations.

“When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah [saw] his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. For I [will be] unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, [even] I, will tear and *go (v’elekh)* away; I will take [and *go*] *away (v’elekh)*, and none shall rescue [him]. I will *go (elekh)* [and] return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.” (Hosea 5:13-15)

In the last chapter Maimonides cited this line to introduce the discussion of “Hiding of the Face.” Abraham ben Maimonides discusses this Hosea passage:

“Our Obligation of Reliance (*ha-bitakhon*): The Third Category (of Reliance) is the reliance incumbent upon all of the religious people. That is a firmly planted conviction and a genuine, heartfelt awareness that the natural causes and normal channels are directed by God’s detailed will for each person, in every time and every situation. If He wills a situation will follow nature and its laws, and if He wills, it will veer from the norm and escape nature (R. Abraham then provides several anciently standard prescriptions from diet and pharmacology that he thought followed nature). All these valid natural methods are subservient to God’s desire and will. By His judgment and permission, they work for most people according to the nature of their bodies, each method according to its standard use. But He may judge and desire that they should function in a way quite the opposite of what is expected. If one has rebelled against God’s order and neglected His Torah, His wisdom may decree a punishment of illness in this world. Even if the person will eat the very best foods, they will cultivate in him defective blood and harmful mixtures and bring terrible sicknesses. Even if he takes useful medicines, they will not help and they will not save him from his disease—they ‘could ... not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.’ (Hosea 5:13)”

(*The Guide to Serving God*, Feldheim 2008, trans.: Yaacov Wincelberg, pp. 213-214.)

I provided this large excerpt (R. Abraham continues quite a bit further in this vein) because it well portrays Maimonidean thinking about the action of providence, and pegs the discussion to this passage in Hosea. The seal of its authenticity is R. Abraham's continual recourse to medical analogies, in which we hear the voice of his father and teacher. Notice that R. Abraham's discussion draws together Definitions 4 and 5, that the Jew enjoys providence in direct relation to his Torah observant conduct.

“With him (Moses) will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; *and he departed (va-yelakh)*. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam [became] leprous, [white] as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, [she was] leprous.” (Numbers 12:8-10)

The context is that Miriam defames her brother Moses, who she should have been “afraid” of (12:8). She is punished by biblical leprosy. God departs as he punishes, hiding His face as He visits punishment. See my essay below: “Miriam.”

Instances of Definition 5 Contextualized:

“The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk (*v'halakhta*) in His ways.” (Deuteronomy 28:9)

Maimonides says of this passage and the following two passages, that *walking* is “applied to conduct, which concerns only the inner life, and which requires no bodily motion.” Even-Shmuel says that he means both the duties of the heart and of the limbs (*kiyum khovot ha-evarim v'khovot ha-levavot*). Friedlander, note 3, *ad loc.*, says the Arabic phrase for “conduct—inner life,” *i'l-sira al-fādila*, literally means “the higher walking,” walking in a figurative, moral sense. Maimonides seems to shift his focus in these quotes. He was concerned above with what happens to prophets like Miriam when they turn their focus from God. But these paragons are understood to follow the Torah commandments at all times. The Definition 5 passages, by contrast, focus on the conduct of the Jewish people. If only they remain true to “His ways,” they will receive His providential attentions and not His punishing visitations.

“Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. *Ye shall walk (telekhu)* after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave (*tidbakun*) unto him.” (Deuteronomy 13:3-4)

This passage carries the meaning of the prior passage, but also raises the issue of false prophets. False prophets are a serious problem for Maimonides' system. We need a rational lodestar to distinguish imagined from real prophecy, false from true prophets. There must be a law for false prophets. This law is part of *halakha*, from our lexical term, *halakh*, the “walking” we do when we follow the commands of Torah. Maimonides provides tests for prophets: 1) The prophet must give predictions that come true; 2) he must not change the Torah, 3) neither may he transgress or cause transgression of its commandments; 4) he must not promote idolatry (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei ha-Torah*, 9 and 10).

“(3)And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem....(5) O house of Jacob, come ye, and *let us walk (lekhu v'nelkha)* in the light of the Lord.” (Isaiah 2:3, 2:5).

Maimonides also used this passage in the last Guide chapter. Before the law goes forth from Zion to the world, the people must first determine to live by Torah. As Maimonides says, this “means only the inner life,” not merely practice but wholehearted commitment.

THE JACOB EXCEPTION TO THE RULE OF ABRAHAM

“(2)And Jacob *went (halakh)* on his way, and the angels (*malakhei*) of God met him. (3) And when Jacob saw them, he said, This [is] God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim. (4) And Jacob sent (*vayishlakh*) messengers (*malakhim*) before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.” (Genesis 32:2-4, KJV text, JPS 1917 numbering)

Maimonides’ usual interpretive strategy in the Guide is anti-contextual. This means that given the four possible modes of traditional biblical interpretation: literal, homiletic, metaphoric and esoteric (*pshat, derash, remez, sod*), he usually opts for the latter two. But his citation of Genesis 32:2 for Definition 1 of *halakh* represents an unusual attempt to justify a contextually literal interpretation in the teeth of his own *rule* of anti-contextual reading. What drove him to this pass?

Maimonides wants us to interpret “went” in Genesis 32:2 corporeally despite Jacob’s vision of angels. As we will see, this represents a serious interpretive choice.

According to Maimonides’ own Abraham Rule, all experiences that the Torah relates during a prophetic vision are part of that vision no matter how mundane their description. Maimonides has an exception to the rule, which I call the Jacob Exception. In Guide 2:42 Maimonides first repeats the Abraham rule (“it is one of the great mysteries of the Law”) and then gives the exception:

“The same, I hold, is the case (*v’kakh ani omer gam*) when it is said in reference to Jacob, ‘And a man wrestled with him’ (Gen. 32:25, in the same chapter as our proof-text); this took place in a prophetic vision, since it is expressly stated in the end (32:31) that it was an angel. The circumstances are here exactly the same as those in the vision of Abraham, where the general statement, ‘And the Lord appeared to him,’ etc., is followed by a *detailed description*. Similarly the account of the vision of Jacob begins, ‘And the angels of God met him’ (Gen. 32:2 our verse); *then follows a detailed description how it came to pass that they met him*; namely, Jacob sent messengers (32:4), and after having prepared and done certain things, ‘he was left alone,’ etc., ‘and a man wrestled with him’ (32:25). By this term ‘*man*’ [one of] the angels of God is meant, mentioned in the phrase, ‘And angels of God met him’; the wrestling and speaking was entirely a prophetic vision.” (My italics)

The difference, slightly glossed, is that Abraham’s “detailed description” is his *vision*. Most of Jacob’s “detailed description” is *historical setting* for his vision. When Maimonides asserts that we should treat these two cases “the same,” he conceals his Jacob Exception. Had they been “the same,” he could not have given Genesis 32:2 as his only proof-text for Definition 1, i.e., physical locomotion.

The question is whether verses 32:2 and 32:4 refer to angels or to messengers. The same Hebrew term, *malakh*, can take either interpretation. This problem also troubles the Midrash. *Genesis Rabba* 75:4 expresses the division of opinion, commenting on 32:4: “These were none but human messengers. (But) the Rabbis said: it means literally angels.”

Maimonides agrees with the Midrashic author, not the Rabbis. The Rabbis called the *malakhim* angels conformably to Maimonides’ *usual* rule of Abraham, which identifies all occurrences in dreams and visions of the prophets as part of the prophetic vision, so that if one part of the account is part of the vision, it all is. Since the “angels (*malakhei*) of God” met Jacob in his vision in 32:3, it follows, according to the usual Abraham Rule, that the *malakhim* in the next verse must also be angels, not lowly human messengers. However, on the contrary, like the Midrash, Maimonides repeats in Guide 2:6 that the case of Jacob is an exception: “There is no doubt that the word *angel* is used of a messenger sent by man: e.g., ‘and Jacob sent *malakhim* (Genesis 32:4).” Maimonides holds that the *malakhei* and “God’s host” in 32:2-3 both describe angels, but that the *malakhim* in 32:4 are merely messengers. Why did he come to the Jacob Exception?

According to his interpretation, Genesis employs narrative “flashback.” This flashback supplies important information, even though the Bible presents it out of sequence. Maimonides reads the chapter non-chronologically, according to the Talmudic rule permitting non-chronological interpretation (Talmud, *Pesakhim* 6b): “there is no before or after in the Torah.”

Verse 32:2 begins the account of Jacob’s prophetic dream-vision of wrestling with the angel. That account, which resumes later at 32:25, interrupts itself to provide the setting through the device of narrative flashback. The historical setting is important because this angel is Esau’s guardian angel (*Genesis Rabbah* 77:3, 78:3). Thus at 32:2 we learn that before he met the “angels of God” Jacob “went on his way” to meet Esau. Genesis 32:4 continues the flashback by telling how he sent *messengers* to his brother. This flashback recounts the tense preparations for that dangerous meeting, continuing until 32:24. At 32:25, the account of the vision resumes: “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” Since we are now back to the vision proper, the Rule of Abraham insures that the “man” is one of the angels that Jacob began the story with, specifically Esau’s guardian angel.

The synagogue reading also breaks up the account: Line 2, where Jacob goes “on his way” to meet Esau, and then meets divine angels, is in the preceding reading, called *Vayeitsei* (28:10-32:3). 32:4 begins the reading called *Vayishlakh* (Genesis 32:4-36:43), “and he sent messengers.” When Jacob “went on his way” in verse 2 of *Vayeitsei*, it really describes a bodily movement, conforming to Definition 1. This “detailed description” in *Vayeitsei* begins the account of a historical occurrence.

The “detailed description” in *Vayishlakh*, 32:4, returns to this historical setting after the interruption of Jacob’s vision, that “the angels of God met him: And when Jacob saw them, he said, This [is] God’s host.” *Vayishlakh* continues the historical setting, 32:4 through 32:24, telling of the detailed preparations for meeting Esau. Only after 32:24 in *Vayishlakh* does the “detailed description” resume the vision. So that when Maimonides says that the “detailed description” of Jacob’s vision is “the same” as Abraham’s “detailed description” of his prophetic dream vision in Genesis 9 (where the whole chapter is taken as visionary), he conceals the distinction that he himself has drawn between the two accounts. He can only mean that the detailed descriptions of Jacob’s experience recounted in the second clause of 32:2, all of 32:3, and then 32:25 through 32:30 (where he wrestles the angel) are visionary like Abraham’s. The detailed descriptions of the first clause of 32:2, and then 32:4 through 32:24 are mundane descriptions partially delivered through flashback to provide the historical setting for Jacob’s visionary experiences.

Maimonides has to introduce this exception, since no other permissible use of *halakh* which could justify his making 32:2 the proof-text for Definition 1. Definition 2 applies to elements; Definition 3 to metaphorical manifestations (i.e., the Egyptian “serpent”); Definition 4 to God, and Definition 5 to moral conduct. The proof-text itself demands to be taken literally. Maimonides cannot warp the meaning of Genesis 32 to make Jacob’s energetic preparations occur in a dream. Had he not acknowledged this exception, 32:2 and 32:4 would undermine his controversial Abraham Rule.

MIRIAM

“(8) With him (Moses) will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid (*yeretem*) to speak against my servant Moses? (9) And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and he departed (*va-yelakh*). (10) And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam [became] leprous, [white] as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, [she was] leprous.” (Numbers 12:8-10)

This section of Numbers is very important to Maimonides, for this is where we learn that God’s relationship with Moses is different from that of other prophets. He speaks to Moses “face to face” and “not in riddles” (Numbers

12:8). Yet Miriam defames Moses, who she should be “afraid” of, and is punished with the biblical version of leprosy. Maimonides writes:

“The two meanings of the verb are combined, viz., the withdrawal of the Divine protection, expressed by ‘and he went,’ and the revelation, manifestation, and appearance of something namely, of the anger which went forth and reached them, in consequence of which Miriam became ‘leprous, white as snow.’”

Friedlander wonders, footnote 2, *ad loc.*:

“It is impossible to imagine how the verb *va-yelakh* could be used here as implying two opposite motions at the same time (to come and to go away), each of which is related to a different subject: ‘The Lord (i.e., His protection) went away, and His anger came,’ unless we assume that Maimonides understood by *va-yelakh* ‘He went,’ and that the act manifested itself in two ways: in the withdrawal of the Divine protection and the manifestation of the Divine anger.”

The Aggada notices the difficulty, but resolves it by dividing the two actions in time: God first turns, then punishes (*Sifrei Beha’alothekha* 1:42:10, Midrash, *Tanchuma Tzav* 13). By contrast, Maimonides makes time irrelevant. God neither hides His face nor manifests His anger in the temporal dimension, though *we* suffer it in time. Aristotelian time is an accident of motion, and motion is an affection of matter. Divine incorporeal action is neither affectional nor accidental. The departure of providence and the inception of punishment are, so to speak, simultaneous. They are two aspects, but only as seen by us, of God’s unitary action.

More important is the contrast of Miriam with Moses suggested by our chapter. David Shatz, in an otherwise fine essay on the final chapters of the Guide, negated this contrast. He wrote:

“Maimonides here (Guide 3:51) abandons the idea that Moses was singular, an idea found in scattered places in the Guide and even earlier in 3:51 (Pines, p. 620). Any claims for the uniqueness or near uniqueness of Moses are undermined still more at the end of the chapter, when Aaron and Miriam suddenly surface as individuals who achieved passionate love and secured salvation from death. They seem to rank even above the Patriarchs. By conceding that Moses was not singular, and that even individuals whose achievements as prophets and leaders are surpassed by those of Moses can appropriately be grouped with him, Maimonides is perhaps subtly suggesting that even Moses did not achieve perfection.” (“Worship, Corporeality, and Human Perfection: A Reading of Guide of the Perplexed, 3:51-54,” *The Legacy of Maimonides: Religion, Reason and Community*, ed. Levy and Carmy, Yashar Books, 2006, p. 241)

Here is the passage he refers to, Guide 3:51:

“The more the forces of his body are weakened, and the fire of passion quenched, in the same measure does man’s intellect increase in strength and light; his knowledge becomes purer, and he is happy with his knowledge. When this *perfect man* (my italics: *ha-shalem*, ar. אֱלֵכֶאֱמֶל) is stricken in age and is near death, his knowledge mightily increases, his joy in that knowledge grows greater, and his love for the object of his knowledge more intense, and it is in this great delight that the soul separates from the body. To this state our Sages referred, when in reference to the death of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, they said that death was in these three cases nothing but a kiss. They say thus: We learn from the words, ‘And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab by the mouth of the Lord’ (Deuteronomy 34:5), that his death was a kiss. The same expression is used of Aaron: ‘And Aaron the priest went up into Mount Hor . . . by the mouth of the Lord, and died there’ (Numbers 33:38) Our Sages said that the same was the case with Miriam; but the phrase ‘by the mouth of the Lord’ is not employed, because it was not considered appropriate to use these words in the description of her death as she was a female (Talmud, *Moed Katan* 28b) The meaning of this saying is that these three died in the midst of the pleasure derived from the

knowledge of God and their great love for Him. When our Sages figuratively call the knowledge of God united with intense love for Him a kiss, they follow the well-known poetical diction, ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth’ (Song of Songs 1:2). This kind of death, which in truth is deliverance from death, has been ascribed by our Sages to none but to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. The other prophets and pious men are beneath that degree: but their knowledge of God is strengthened when death approaches.”

This passage is carefully balanced by another passage shortly before it in the same chapter 3:51 also referring to *perfect* (*ha-shalem, ha-shlamim*) men. Again, the idea is that we take our attention from God when we devote it to the material world:

“Hence it appears to me that it is only in times of such neglect that some of the ordinary evils befall a prophet or a *perfect* (my italics: *ha-shlamim*, ar. אֱלֹכֵאֱמֵלִיךְ) and pious man: and the intensity of the evil is proportional to the duration of those moments, or to the character of the things that thus occupy their mind. Such being the case, the great difficulty is removed that led philosophers to assert that Providence does not extend to every individual, and that man is like any other living being in this respect, viz., the argument based on the fact that good and pious men are afflicted with great evils.”

This should answer David Shatz’ question, but our chapter completes the answer. When perfect ones withdraw attention from God, and fail to set Him before them always, even a Miriam is punished with plague. The specific difference between Moses and Miriam is that Moses never withdraws from the presence of God. Moses has a unique quality of steadfastness in meditation (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha Torah* 7:6). On this subject, Professor Shatz is excellent: the supreme difficulty of maintaining concentration (*devekut*).

Nonetheless, Miriam is of the elite. More is expected of the higher types, and so both their punishments and rewards are greater. For a slip of the tongue, she contracts plague: but in the end, she wins immortality.

Even-Shmuel’s chapter summation brilliantly digests these ideas:

“In the Third Rank (see in my notes to Guide 1:22 for the list of Even-Shmuel’s four Ranks of actions, through which the existence of God is manifested to us) the divine actions appear in relation to God’s *creatures*. God is not limited in action to creation alone, but also protects and provides for his creatures. To us it looks as though He removes His providence from them when they pervert their ways. Consequently, divine action appears to us to be at once providential extension and providential removal. Despite this appearance, they both stem from one source, God’s eternal will, and influence of both manifestations is expressed through one term: *halakh*.”

GUIDE 1:25 INDWELLING

According to Friedlander, this chapter concludes the section, begun at 1:8, of lexical chapters on terms referring to space and motion (see his note quoted in my treatment of that chapter). Two chapters follow (1:26 is methodological, 1:27 revisits “descent,” previously treated in 1:10), and then 1:28 starts a new section that continues to 1:44. That section defines terms relating to parts of the bodies of any living being.

Our chapter begins by referring to the Aristotelian/Maimonidean doctrine of general and particular place in nearly the same terms as in 1:8 (see my treatment there). Maimonides’ lexical term *shakhan* carries some sense of physically being in a historical place. Its variant, *Shekhina*, represents divine influence sensed in a historically specific object or place.

One way to look at this historical localization of divine indwelling is from the standpoint of *chosenness*. The proof-texts address negative and positive aspects of what it means when a people, place or prophet is chosen for the local indwelling of the *Shekhina*.

This chapter also renews interest in the doctrine of time. Time is the number of motion, which is an accident of matter. In one major particular, the Aristotelian and Maimonidean accounts of time diverge. Aristotle believes that the universe is eternal and so time is eternal. Matter is not created or destroyed, but assumes new forms forever. Maimonides disagrees because he believes that God creates the universe from nothing. Time then is merely the inevitable byproduct of the creation of matter. Maimonides is more interested in historical time than philosophical time, because it is in historical time that we sense the presence of the divine indwelling.

Consider Even-Shmuel’s chapter summary, which emphasizes the historical character of the divine indwelling as perceived by us (my trans.):

“The fourth rank of the manifestation of divine action (see my notes to Guide 1:22 for the list of Even-Shmuel’s four Ranks of actions), through which we comprehend God’s existence, is His singular revelation in human history. Divine providential supervision appears in [certain] known places and communities more than others. All students of history (*kol mistakel b’historia*) recognize the appearance of this providence or indwelling in particular regions and peoples. Only because of this do we say of this land (Israel) that it is a historic land, or this people, that it is a historic people.”

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

SHAKHAN: (DWELL)

1. To dwell: The continued stay in a place, whether a *general* place or a *particular* place. When a living being dwells long in a place, we say that it stays in that place, although it unquestionably moves about in it. In such a case it is “generally” in that place, while an inanimate object remains in its “particular” place.
2. Applied *metaphorically* to inanimate objects, i.e., to anything which settles and remains fixed on one object, although the object on which the thing remains is not a place, and the thing itself is not a living being. It follows that there can be an entirely figurative sense of *shakhan*.
3. As a further metaphorical extension of Definition 2, *shakhan* applies to God. It denotes the continuance of His presence (*Shekhina*) or of His providence in some place or object where it manifests itself constantly.

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And they took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. And there came *one that had escaped*, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he *dwelt (shokhen)* in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these [were] confederate with Abram.” (Genesis 14:12-13)

This is from the biblical account of the war of the four kings against the five kings. This war was one of the ten tests of Abraham according to Maimonides (*Commentary on the Mishnah, Avot 5:3*). As we have seen, initial lexical definitions are usually corporeal, and Maimonides registers his disapproval of corporeality by choosing citations that are negative in some way. Abraham, still known as Abram, is *dwelling* among idolators, and inevitably caught up in their wars. The Midrash, (*Genesis Rabbah 42:8*) tells us that the escapee who told Abraham of Lot’s capture was Og. Og was the very long lived king of Bashan ultimately slain by Moses. The Midrash states:

“He did not act from a pious motive, but he said to himself: ‘This man Abraham is vindictive: I will apprise him that Lot is captured; then will he go out to battle and be slain, while I will take Sarah.’”

Not only does living in a bad *neighborhood (shkhuna, from shakhan)* involve Abraham in the wars of the idolators, but it also threatens his family. The Midrash continues in this passage to discuss his circumcision:

“On R. Judah’s view a place called Mamre is meant; on R. Nehemiah’s view, it refers to a person called Mamre. And why was he called Mamre? R. ‘Azariah said in the name of R. Judah: Because he rebuked (*himrah*) Abraham. When the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Abraham to circumcise himself he went and took counsel with his three friends. Aner said to him: ‘You are already a hundred years old, yet you would inflict this pain upon yourself?’ Eshcol said to him: ‘Why should you go and make yourself distinguishable to your enemies?’ But Mamre said to him: ‘When did He not stand by you—in the fiery furnace, in famine, and in your war with the kings? Will you not obey Him then in this matter?’ Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: ‘Thou gavest him good advice, to circumcise himself: by thy life! I will reveal Myself to him only in thy palace.’ Hence it is written, ‘And the Lord appeared unto him in the palace of Mamre.’”

Abraham was childless, which he complained of to God (Genesis 15:2). While there is a temporal hiatus between the war and his circumcision (Genesis 17), it is true that he did not father Isaac until after his circumcision. The lack of circumcision obstructed the flow of his creativity. Perhaps this childlessness let Og to think he had some chance of success with Sarah (especially since his childlessness led to his separation from her, see Rashi to Genesis 13:18). Circumcision symbolizes the covenant of loyalty of the Jews to God. Because Abraham lacked the covenant of loyalty to the one true form and “dwelt” with idolators like Og, he is vulnerable to the corporeality of his neighbors.

“And it came to pass, when Israel *dwelt (bishkon)* in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine: and Israel heard [it]. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve.” (Genesis 35:22)

This, too, is a negative sexual reference. Jacob and his family also dwell in a bad neighborhood, where the *Shekhina* does not dwell. The beloved matriarch Rachel has just died; and the family is doing poorly. The Talmud, *Shabbat 55b*, sublimates Reuben’s act: not that he “lay with” his father’s concubine, but that he “disarranged” his father’s bed. The point, however, is that Jacob’s spiritual creativity depended on his relationship with Rachel and he had not found a way to replace her. In both this quote and the prior one, the disruption of the marital relationship allegorizes the disruption of the intellectual connection with God. These are “neighborhoods.”

Instance of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish (*yovad*) wherein I was born, and the night [in which] it was said, There is a man child conceived (*hora*). Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud *dwelt (tishkan)* upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.” (Job 3:2-5)

This is Job bewailing his fate. A calendar date comes once every year forever. Job would have the date of his conception (“there is a man child conceived”) *removed* (“perish”) from the calendar. Rashi explains: “‘Man child

conceived’: That my father impregnated (*iber*) my mother.” Job continues, complaining of the day of this conception (3:10-12):

“Because it shut not up the doors of my [mother's] womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes. Why died I not from the womb? [Why] did I [not] give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? Or why the breasts that I should suck?”

This also suggests disturbance in sexuality. But this quotation moves the focus to the chosen one who regrets the responsibilities of chosenness (compare Jonah), which was probably Maimonides’ real reason for selecting it. However, Maimonides’ *explicit* comment emphasizes his chapter’s apparent themes: “there is no doubt that the cloud is not a living being, and that the day is not a corporeal thing, but a division of time.” That is, clouds do not “dwell” on days, since clouds are not living beings that have an abode, and a day is not a place of abode but a measure of time. This warrants Maimonides’ conclusion that the Bible can use *shakhan* in an entirely figurative sense.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord *abode* (*va’yishkon*) upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord [was] like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.” (Exodus 24:15-18)

When the Bible uses *shakhan* (*va’yishkon*) with God, it does not refer to God himself, but to His *Shekhina*, or to His *Providence*. See essay below on the “Indwelling of the Shekhina.”

“And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will *dwell* (*v’shakhanti*) among the children of Israel, and will be their God.” (Exodus 29:44-45)

This verse is about the historical consecration of Aaron and the Tabernacle. This passage and the previous establish that when used with God *shakhan* means His *indwelling*, i.e., His *Shekhina*. Rashi agrees with Maimonides that God does not “dwell,” and that the passage must refer to His *Shekhina*. The word *Shekhina* derives from our term *shakhan*. Maimonides says that *shakhan*, in the divine context, could also mean God’s providential care for some object (*hashgakha*), especially when this takes place over historical time (*ha-tamida*). R. Abraham ben Maimonides reiterates this teaching of his father, *ad loc.*, “*And I will be their God*: The permanence of providential supervision over them [the Jews] is [directly] connected to the permanence of the [historical] sanctuary” (my trans., p. 86, *Commentary on Exodus—tamidot ha-hashgakha ha-pratit behem sh’hi keshura b’tamidot ha-mikdash*). The permanency of the phenomenon, its staying power, is the carryover from the figurative use of Definition 2. The *historical persistence* of God’s providential care is what we call chosenness. The passage means that God will closely supervise and care for the people, rewarding their actions with miracles like the giving of manna, and immediately punishing their faults. Divine providence *replaces* their *natural* fate. But when God’s providence ceases to “dwell,” they are abandoned to that natural fate.

“And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and [for] the good will of him that *dwelt* (*shokhnei*) in the bush: let [the blessing] come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him [that was] separated from his brethren.” (Deuteronomy 33:16)

This passage is from Moses’ song of praise for each tribe. This mention of a variant of *shakhan* in connection with Moses’ burning bush makes us think of Maimonides’ later discussions of the stages of prophecy (Guide 2:45). The term *shakhan* does not appear in the actual account of the burning bush, Exodus chapter 3, and so he turns to this proof-text from the end of the Torah. Moses begins his career like other prophets. The bush appears to him in a *vision* or *dream*. Since God that does not “dwell” in a bush, it must be the *Shekhina*, or, as Maimonides now says, a created light, or *ha-nivra*, that Moses sees in the bush. It is an intermediary. At 3:45 he says, “Even Moses our Teacher received his first prophecy through an angel: ‘And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flame of fire’ (Exodus 3:2).” That Moses had not yet reached the height of his powers appears also at Guide 1:5, where Moses’ fear to gaze at the light is later rewarded by his receiving a higher level of prophecy,

without an intermediary, such that “The similitude of the Lord shall he behold” (Numbers 12:8). He grows in his prophetic powers. Ultimately, his prophecy does not take place in visions at all, as it does with other prophets, but in a state of complete wakeful awareness. The chosenness of the greatest prophet consists in his being a constant sanctuary for the divine indwelling.

THE INDWELLING OF THE SHEKHINA

“12. And the Lord said unto Moses, *Come up to Me into the mount*, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them. 13. And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God. 14. And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur [are] with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them. 15. And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. 16. *And the glory of the Lord abode (va'yishkon k'vod ha-shem)* upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. 17. And the sight of the glory of the Lord [was] like *devouring fire* on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. 18. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.” (Exodus 24:12-18)

Maimonides says that when the Bible uses *shakhan* with God, it never refers to God, but to either His *Shekhina*, or His *Providence*. Kafih (note 13 *ad loc.*) maintains that the first and third proof-texts under Definition 3 refer to the Shekhina, and the second to divine providence. Munk, the great French translator, divides the three citations as the Shekhina, providence in a particular place, and providence in a certain object. Friedlander, note 2, *ad loc.*, disagrees with both:

“The difference between the last two is not discernible, and still less clear is the distribution of the three instances quoted by our author, between the three kinds of manifestation. In truth, Maimonides does not even seek to decide which of the various explanations is applicable to each instance, but rests satisfied with having shown that a figurative interpretation can be given, by which anthropomorphism may be avoided.”

I tend to agree with him. God’s indwelling with the people after the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the investiture of Aaron is accompanied by visualized manifestations as the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire (Ex. 40:38), which seem like supernatural light. Maimonides sometimes calls the “created light” (*or ha-nivra*) the *Shekhina*, never identifying these corporeal images directly with God.

R. Abraham ben Maimonides agrees, but provides a deeper explanation. All the phenomena associated with the divine indwelling exist for no other purpose than to identify a place where Moses can channel contemplation for mystical contact:

“God said to Moshe, ‘Come up to Me into the mount,’ (Exodus 24:12).... This was to allow total retreat (*hitbodedut ha-shlema*—complete meditation), through which Moshe would achieve the desired Encounter (*ha-pegia*), and God would bestow upon him that which He did. Because Moshe desired *solitude*, he later moved his Tent of Meeting out of the camp, as it says, ‘And Moshe took the Tent and placed it outside the camp, far from the camp [and he called it the Tent of Meeting]’ (Exodus 33:7)” (P.499, *The Guide to Serving God*, trans., Yaacov Wincelberg. Rav Wincelberg comments, note 19: “In his commentary on the Torah, R. Avraham disagrees with those who say that Moshe did this as a reaction to the sin of the golden calf. He explains that it was for the sake of retreat.”)

I think the point of the proof-text is that while the sight of the glory of the Lord was like “a devouring fire...in the eyes of the children of Israel,” Moses, by contrast, is “called to,” and directly engaged with God, a higher level of prophetic experience since non-visual.

DIVINE DESCENT?

H. A. Wolfson noted that Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE – 40 CE), the great Jewish Platonist, had a problem with our proof-text. He notes that the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of scripture, replaces the term “abode,” *v'yishkan*, with a word meaning “came down” (“And the glory of the Lord *came down*” rather than “and the glory of the Lord *abode*.”)

Wolfson notes that the corporeality suggested by God “coming down” upon Sinai troubled Philo (*Crescas Critique of Aristotle*, p. 490). The notion is anthropomorphic because it violates the doctrine of proper place. Only those things made from the four sublunary elements “come down” since vertical motion characterizes only of those elements. Were God to “come down” he would have to be composed of fire, air, water or earth, which is obnoxious to belief. Just as God does not “dwell” neither does he “descend” in any physical sense.

Philo’s problem is that an earlier passage, Exodus 19:20, really does say that *God comes down* on Sinai, *va'yared ha-shem al har sinai* (Guide 1:10 and 1:27 both cite this passage in their discussion of *descent*). This forced Philo to reinterpret the phrase *va'yared ha-shem* to mean that the *kavod*, the “glory” which “comes down” to *dwell* on Sinai is either the “presence of His manifested powers” or “the subjective human apprehension of God.” Wolfson argues that Maimonides could have read this in Philo. In that case, the *kavod* that comes down to dwell is either *what God does* or *what we saw in the vision* at Sinai. This latter vision is the divine emanation received by the imagination in historical time, what Maimonides calls the “created light.”

GUIDE 1:26
THE TORAH SPEAKS IN THE LANGUAGE OF MEN

Friedlander's note on this chapter is a good summary, as far as it goes:

“The remarks on those anthropomorphic expressions which signify motion, or any other relation to space, are in this chapter brought to a conclusion with a discussion on the principle followed in the Bible, by which some terms including corporeality appear to have been applied to God figuratively, while others of an equally material character were excluded. According to Maimonides, all expressions which were believed by the common people to imply some kind of perfection were admitted, such are the terms explained in the preceding chapters. The expressions, on the other hand, which appeared to imply a notion of imperfection, are never used in the Bible with reference to God. Onkelos, in his version, observed a far stricter rule, and thought it necessary to paraphrase all the anthropomorphisms employed in Scripture. As, however, his principal object in paraphrasing such passages was to prevent misinterpretation and inferences leading to the belief that God possesses material properties, he retained the literal rendering where no such fears could be entertained. In Chapter 1:27 this method of Onkelos is fully discussed.”

Maimonides begins by invoking what he claims is a Talmudic principle:

“You, no doubt, know the Talmudical saying, which includes in itself all the various kinds of interpretation connected with our subject. It runs thus: ‘The Torah speaks according to the language of man,’ *dibra tora ki lshon bnei adam*, that is to say, expressions, which can easily be comprehended and understood by all, are applied to the Creator.”

This is an excellent example of Maimonides turning traditional materials to his own purpose, since ‘The Torah speaks according to the language of man,’ does not mean what he says it means in its original setting. Kafih cites twenty instances of the phrase in the Talmud (*ad loc.*, footnote 1, page 40). The phrase is a rule of legal interpretation that a doubled word or other verbal emphasis involving an apparently unnecessary term in the Torah does not extend the commandment or refer to something other than the commandment. The rule preserves *context* from the vagaries of human expression. The rule is the Talmudic sages’ reaction against Rabbi Akiva, who strove to interpret every non-substantive grammatical particle in the law. A fine example of this traditional use of the dictum is from the Talmud, *Baba Metzia* 31b:

“‘Thou shalt furnish (*ha’aneik ta’anik*) him [a freed slave] liberally (Deuteronomy 15:14).’ I know only that if the house [of the master] was blessed for his [the slave’s] sake, a present must be made. Whence do we know it even if the house was not blessed for his sake? Scripture teaches, ‘Thou shalt furnish him liberally’ under all circumstances. But according to R. Eleazar b. ‘Azariah, who maintained: If the house was blessed for his sake, a present is made to him, but *not* otherwise; what is the purpose of [the otherwise superfluous] *ta’anik*? — The Torah employs human phraseology (speaks in the language of men).

‘And thou shalt surely lend (*v’ha-avat t’aviteinu*) him sufficient for his need (15:8).’ I know this only of one (a poor man) who has nought and does not wish to maintain himself (at your expense); then Scripture saith: Give him by way of a loan. Whence do I know it if he possesses his own but does not desire to maintain himself (at his own cost)? From the verse, ‘Thou shalt surely lend him.’ But according to R. Simeon, who maintained: If he has his own but refuses to maintain himself (therewith), we are under no obligation toward him, why state ‘surely?’ — The Torah employs human phraseology.”

If the slave in the first example was a net loss, you do not have to go further into the red with a parting gift despite the emphatic double “give” in the Torah, because Torah merely speaks in the language of men, and R. Eleazar

reads the passage naturalistically. Again, you should “surely” lend to the poor, but R. Simeon does not extend this emphasis to mean that we have to lend to the undeserving poor. (Maimonides rules against R. Eleazer and for R. Simeon: *Mishneh Torah, H. Avadim* 3:14, Rabinowitz note 106 in Mossad Ha-Rav Kook edition; *H. Matanot Aniyim* 7:9, note 35.)

This is a good rule of interpretation in its original context. In the Talmud it always means that we read the passage as it appears without interpreting every word, that is, we read the *pshat* and not the *d'rush*. When Maimonides uses the rule to justify reading biblical anthropomorphisms as metaphors, he is knowingly *reversing* the procedure, reading the verse according to his *d'rush* and *against* the *pshat*. He uses the dictum anti-contextually (Others have noticed the change, see Y. Frank, *The Practical Talmud Dictionary*, p. 66, Feldheim, 1991). Thus, when Maimonides blandly says that *dibra tora ki'lshon bnei adam* means “expressions ... easily ... comprehended and understood by all, are applied to the Creator,” our antennae should rise.

Schwarz, note 2, *ad loc.* to our chapter, assembles references showing that Maimonides followed an early medieval interpretive tradition. Bachya Ibn Pakuda (c. late 11th Cent.) used the phrase as Maimonides does in *Duties of the Heart (Hovot ha-Levavot, Yikhud*:10, p. 112 in the *Lev Tov* edition). Those medieval interpreters used the dictum to mean that the Torah was dressed in language tailored to the broadest spectrum of readers, and, therefore, we must not take it at its apparent meaning. Still, how can Maimonides so smoothly change the meaning of the dictum, especially since as a *halakhist* he ruled in *Mishneh Torah* (e.g., *H. Matanot Aniyim* 7:9) favoring those expressing the dictum in its original context? What is Maimonides getting at?

The point is that this chapter is really about divine attributes. It reflects back on the prior section (1:8—1:25) to question why the Torah attributes motion to God. After all, movement is no more admissible of God than is eating. We never say that God eats. Neither alimentation nor motion is a divine attribute. Maimonides forces us to consider whether God has any attributes at all.

Moreover, he will now begin a section of bodily terms that we can never literally ascribe to God (1:27—1:34: foot, face, back, heart, wing, eye, and so on). The following chapters, through the divine attributes section (1:51—1:60), begin with the grossest ascriptions of corporeality and rise to consider the most subtle ones, as though Maimonides were peeling away the layers of an onion.

The “language of men” rule points to the major problem of Part I of the Guide. God is so far beyond description that any description must fail, yet the Abrahamitic imperative demands that we attempt description. But the Abrahamitic imperative also demands that we comprehend God’s ineffability. It follows that men inevitably resort to the language of anthropomorphism. The conflict between what we can say and what we must say causes perplexity and is the reason for the lexical chapters of the Guide.

ARE SOME ANTHROPOMORPHISMS JUSTIFIABLE?

Maimonides finds a peculiarity in people’s common perception of anthropomorphic attributes:

“But there is not attributed to God anything which the multitude consider a defect or want; thus He is never represented as eating, drinking, sleeping, being ill, using violence, and the like.”

Apparently, some divine ascriptions are too gross even for the most vulgar Jews. This much is the advance of Abraham’s heritage from the Canaanite background. But the Jews do not feel that the language of locomotion, “to descend, to ascend, to walk, to place, to stand, to surround, to sit, to dwell, to depart, to enter, to pass, etc.” implies any defect. People do not hesitate to ascribe such actions to God despite their obvious corporeality, and neither does the sacred text. How can this be justified?

Motion is an accident attendant upon corporeal matter and is therefore divisible in units of measurement of time or distance. Non-corporeal existences are not divisible. Terms of motion therefore should not apply to God. But people do apply these terms to God in order to show that God is *alive*. Since living beings move, people apply this “perfection” of living beings to God: indeed, if they could not apply them to God, they might conclude that God does not exist.

Maimonides also mentions the concept of *rest*, the opposite of *motion*. Surely, if we could say that God moves, we ought to be able to say that He rests. That is why the Torah could employ the word *shakhan* (see the previous chapter) to describe divine action. This despite the fact that motion and rest are only corporeal attributes. The language of men makes both motion and repose divine characteristics.

The Torah was written in this human language. Since the Torah cannot be rewritten, the assumption must be that people will always associate movement with life. Bachya Ibn Pakuda argued that if we were to eliminate all anthropomorphisms, the Torah would be too abstract for anyone to understand. The prophets had to clothe spiritual ideas in the language of tangible things for people who could not grasp purely spiritual concepts. Maimonides’ position runs deeper. Man is a peculiar synthesis of mind and body. Our mind is somewhat corporealized by this synthesis; nonetheless, the Torah was written for our compromised species. The assumption must be that man’s permanent condition is one of corporealized thought requiring a Torah in corporealized language.

We interpret the words as metaphors since we know better—we know that the non-corporeal is indivisible.

MAIMONIDES BETWEEN THE RAAVAD AND SPINOZA

This result ought to trouble the reader, who should not be lulled by Maimonides’ smooth prose. Even if we agree with him, we should recognize the seriousness of his claim that we must actively reinterpret this human-language Torah.

In response, R. Abraham Ben David (the Raavad, c. 1125–1198, Provencal Talmudist and opponent of the Mishneh Torah) had famously written of those who believed in the literal sense of scripture:

“Why does Maimonides call him [who says that God is corporeal] a heretic (*min*)? Many men, even greater and better than Maimonides believed it.”

God gave the Torah and every word comes from God. What gives anyone the right to interpret its words? Indeed, some hold that there can be no metaphors in the Torah. Can Maimonides be saying that the Torah as it stands is not good enough for the educated readers, especially when it seems that its words grossly attribute corporeality to God? How is possible for the Torah to have been written “down” to the level of vulgar?

In radical opposition to the Raavad’s approach, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677, the Dutch pantheist philosopher), held that the Bible *must be interpreted on its own terms*. Interpreting scripture was no different from the study of nature: one proceeds from data to principles, employing legitimate inference to deduce the intent of its authors. Although he thought that some of the Torah was authored by Moses (The Book of the Wars of God, the Book of the Covenant, the Book of the Law of God), he argued that most of the Bible appeared only centuries later. He believed that the scribe Ezra set the text in final form. *Encyclopedia Judaica* notes:

“Insisting that religious tenets should be judged only on the basis of reason, Spinoza...rejected the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and the possibility of genuine prophecy. Spinoza then offered a rationalistic metaphysics within which supernatural events could not occur, and within which the Bible was to be examined as a human document expressing certain human developments of the past. Insisting that miracles were impossible, Spinoza argued that nature is governed by eternal and necessary decrees of

God. Nothing can be contrary to natural laws. If one examined rationally what was meant by ‘God’ and ‘nature’ it would be clear that nothing supernatural was possible, since God determined nature lawfully; and if one applied the same methods to studying Scripture as are employed in studying nature—‘the examination of the history of nature, and from there deducing definitions of natural phenomena on certain fixed axioms,’—one would find nothing mysterious or divine in Scripture. Its moral teachings are compatible with those of reason.”

This most important heretic in Jewish history was familiar with The Guide. How far is it from “Torah is written in the language of men,” the way Maimonides interprets it (quoted in Spinoza’s *Epistolae* 19 and 21), to Spinoza’s principle that Torah must be interpreted on its own terms? Men like the Raavad convinced themselves that very little separated the two positions: this may explain the violence of the historical “Maimonidean Controversy.”

The answer is that there is a difference, and Maimonides succumbs to neither the literalness of Raavad nor the license of Spinoza. Maimonides struggles with the same problem as Abraham: we must articulate the God-idea to people, but how do we articulate the inarticulable? This is a problem for all men, not just the unschooled, as we will see as we advance through the first section of the Guide. It is the primary cause of perplexity. This was the stutter of Moses. No thought of man is free from some degree of corporeality, yet some connection, inexplicable in itself, exists between God and Man. This is the real meaning of “Torah is written in the language of men.”

ACTION VS. PASSION

Another reason for the attribution of motion to God is the closeness of the idea of motion to the idea of *action*. God is the subject whose object is the world. From the viewpoint of that object God is the Creator, that is, the One who is always *active*, acting upon the passive world. Nevertheless, *passion* (passivity, receptivity) can never be a divine attribute.

Moreover, divine action occurs at the level of thought. God’s thought is the ultimate cause of all physical motion, but only through a system of subordinated dependencies. The initial motion of the outermost sphere is the proximate cause of all physical motion. The spheres are moved by their souls, the so-called “souls of the spheres.” God creates the souls of the spheres, which express their desire for their Creator through their motion toward Him. This motion can only be rotational since no physical motion attains Him. Their eternal spin is indeed the ultimate result of divine action, but no physical motion *directly* results from divine action.

Even-Shmuel’s chapter summary grasped this implication of the attribute of motion and its difference from divine action:

“Since man apprehends God’s existence through four ranks of divine action revealed in the world: 1) prophetic emanation (*shefa ha-navua*); 2) creation; 3) providential extension and its removal from individual things; 4) the permanent indwelling of providence in a particular place and people—does this provide any warrant to grasp the divine essence as motion, as uninterrupted process [cf. Heraclitus]? But the Creator of motion is not subject to motion. The source of creation is uncreated. Not only is motion the source of external physical propulsion, but also of the internally willed locomotion of all animals. Motion is an accident of animal existence, because, according to our conception, motion is never essential to a thing but is rather an accident attached to its substance. The purpose of all movements willed by any animal is toward completion (*shlemut*), but since God lacks nothing He does not *strive* for perfection. Perhaps you may assert the contrary, that He manifests an attribute of eternal repose? This cannot be! Our conception holds rest correlative to motion. Only because of our defects do we employ ‘human language’ to relate motion or rest to God.”

GUIDE 1:27 PROPHETIC DREAMS

In the last chapter, we showed that Maimonides does not interpret the dictum “Torah speaks in the language of men,” the way the Talmud does. According to him, it means that the Torah’s language requires interpretation.

This understanding carries certain dangers. Traditional rabbinic thought could only have been suspicious. Before Maimonides can advocate the radical interpretation of the words of Torah, he must find traditional support. In this chapter, he argues that his canonical predecessor was Onkelos, the Aramaic translator of the Bible. He claims that Onkelos usually translates anthropomorphisms as manifestations of divine providence or of the *Shekhina*. Maimonides must therefore explain any *departures* by Onkelos from that practice of radical reinterpretation.

He does so in this chapter, 1:27, and again in 1:48. Here he is concerned with terms suggesting divine “motion,” while in 1:48, somewhat less successfully, he treats inconsistent translations of terms suggesting divine “sensation.”

His fascinating solution here is that biblical anthropomorphisms can sometimes be justified from the subjective viewpoint of the prophet. Prophets other than Moses receive their visions in dreams. From their point of view, the angel who speaks in their dreams in the name of God *is* God. Therefore, Onkelos can unhesitatingly translate dream narrations of divine motion literally, from the point of view of the dreamer. Moreover, when neither text nor translation suggests the intercession of an angelic mediator, Maimonides argues that this is merely an omission, it being “understood” that there must have been such a mediator.

In this chapter he reviews a series of biblical quotations concerning God “going down,” *yarad*. He then considers Onkelos’ translation of them. We contextualized the first three in our treatment of 1:10, where Maimonides defined divine “descent” as either the emanation of “prophetic influence from God” (Definition 4), or the “visitation” of divine punishment (Definition 5). Onkelos translates *yarad* as the manifestation of providence or of the *Shekhina*. However we choose to take it, the term *yarad* is only a metaphor and not divine physical motion. This is Maimonides’ general rule of interpretation. Here he assembles several interpretive strategies to support that rule.

RULES OF INTERPRETATION

First Rule: Translate Dream Narration Literally. Maimonides notices that Onkelos sometimes fails to translate the offensive language with non-corporeal euphemisms. Usually, when Onkelos wants to translate “the Lord came down,” he translates with some variant of “the Lord manifests Himself.” But in the following passage Onkelos departs from this rule: he allows the suggestion of divine motion.

“And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. And God (*elokim*) spake unto Israel in the visions of the night (*mar’ah layil*), and said, *Jacob, Jacob*. And he said, *Here [am] I*. And He said, I [am] God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: *I will go down (yarad) with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up [again]: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.*”
(Genesis 46:1-4).

Onkelos translated “I will go down with thee into Egypt” literally, as though God had actually said that He would physically descend (*ana ekhot imakh l’mitzraim*). Notice, though, that God spoke to Israel (Jacob) “in the visions of the night.” The utterance therefore took place in prophetic dream vision. Onkelos, according to Maimonides, translates literally actual statements when they occur in dream narrative, just as the prophet heard them. It is not that God actually spoke; rather, Jacob *dreamt* that God had said that He would descend to Egypt. It would have been ridiculous of Onkelos to translate the passage euphemistically, as though it had said, “*I will manifest myself*

before thee when you descend into Egypt,” rather than “I will go down with thee into Egypt.” Dream speech is not so nebulous. Thus, we have a rule: we can translate statements about God heard in dreams literally. By translating dream speech literally, Onkelos does not thereby alter objective reality outside the dream.

(Nachmanides opposed Maimonides’ interpretation, while Abarbanel categorically opposed Nachmanides. A lucid account is David Silverberg, “*I Shall Descend to Egypt with You*”: Onkelos’ Translation of Biblical Anthropomorphisms, Maimonides Heritage Center, online PDF; or, alternatively, at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/maimonides/files/>).

Second Rule: Translate *Elokim* as “Angel.” Maimonides now states that “in my opinion” when the text says “And *Elokim* spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, etc,” *Elokim* means *angel*, not God. This is possible because the term *Elokim* is ambiguous. *Elokim* can mean either God, angel or judge in Hebrew. Maimonides holds that an angel spoke the entire passage. The angel relates to Jacob, in his prophetic dream, a promise that God intended for Jacob. Moreover, only the angel descends with Jacob to Egypt. Prophecy, in this view, does not come to non-Mosaic prophets directly from God, but from an agency created by God to inspire them with prophecy.

Maimonides has a persuasive proof for this point of view. He quotes a text, also about Jacob, with closely parallel language:

“And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle [were] ringstraked, speckled, and grisled. *And the angel of God (malakh elokim) spake unto me in a dream (khalom), [saying]: Jacob; and I said, here [am] I. And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle [are] ringstraked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. I [am] the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, [and] where thou vowedst a vow unto Me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred*” (Genesis 31:10-13).

In both cases, Jacob dreams that his name is called, he replies, “Here am I.” In the previous case (Genesis 46:2) he was called by *elokim* who spoke to him in “visions of the night,” and in the second case (Genesis 31:11) by *malakh elokim*, the “angel of God,” who spoke to him “in a dream.” But in this second case, the “angel of God” says that “I am the God” to whom Jacob vowed a vow. Clearly, the angel is not God, no matter what he says. Maimonides brings this latter case to prove that sometimes angels speak to prophets in dreams *as though* they were God, in the grammatical first person.

This is the second rule of interpretation. Whenever possible, we should try to identify the heavenly speaker as an agent or angel (*malakh* can mean either an agent or an angel) speaking for God, quoting God, but not as God himself.

Third Rule: Restore Omitted “Angels.” Maimonides argues, less convincingly, that the text sometimes omits the word “angel” where the reader would expect it. Both English translators confusingly call this the omission of the *nomen regens* (See also Guide 1:21). What they mean is that the Bible regularly omits “angel” of God or “messenger” of God where it should be obvious that God is speaking through a messenger or angel.

In Hebrew, when two words join as a compound, they are in “construct state” (*smikhut*). We do not really have it in English: it would be like compounding “king-throne” instead of “the throne of the king.” “Angel of God” in construct state is *malakh elokim*, not *malakh shel* (of) *elokim*. The first word of the construction is called by Latinate grammar the *nomen regens*, the “ruling term,” since it *governs* the second word (Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, p. 247, 89a). Maimonides claims that the Bible merely omitted the first word of the phrase *malakh elokim* whenever we find *elokim* alone speaking to the prophet in his dream. The “angel of God” and not God Himself descended to Egypt.

Maimonides thus removes the grossly corporeal divine attribution of motion from God, demonstrating several strategies to remove such corporeal attributions. He shows that Onkelos consistently pursued this same project, (explaining away his irregularities) and that he is Onkelos' worthy inheritor. He thus feels that canonical tradition supports his radical reinterpretation of biblical text.

LEVELS OF PROPHECY, LEVELS OF ANGELS

Finally, the last sentence suggests a new idea:

“Prophecy with its various degrees and the nature of angels, will be fully discussed in the sequel, in accordance with the object of this treatise.”

This refers to Guide 2:45, where Maimonides details eleven levels of prophecy. That chapter does not include a twelfth level, which would be Mosaic prophecy. At the beginning of that chapter, he says that the first two levels are not really full blown prophecy but “steps leading to it.” That leaves *ten* levels: nine levels of non-Mosaic prophets plus the unmentioned twelfth level of Mosaic prophecy.

Earlier in our chapter, Maimonides opaquely references these levels from Guide 2:45:

“Through this your attention will be drawn to the fact that there is a great difference between that which is said to happen *in a dream* or *in the visions of the night*, that which is said to happen *in a vision* and *apparition* (vision), and that of which it is said without qualification ‘And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,’ or, ‘And the Lord said unto me.’” (Pines translation, p. 58)

This terminology keys to the list in Guide 2:45:

- 1) “*In a dream, or in the visions of the night*” refers to levels four through seven, in which the prophet hears, speaks to, or is spoken to in a dream-vision, respectively. In those three levels, the speaker is *always* an angel, although in the fourth and fifth levels it is not clear to the prophet that the speaker is an angel, and in the seventh, the prophet thinks that the angel is God.
- 2) “*In a vision and apparition*” (*b'makhazei u'va'mara*) refers to levels eight through eleven, in which the prophet has a vision while awake, perhaps in a trance-state, in which he sees allegorical figures (i.e., the Covenant Between the Parts), hears words, sees a man speaking, or sees an angel speaking, respectively. Again, in all of these cases an angel is speaking, whether the prophet recognizes it or not.
- 3) “That of which it is said without qualification ‘*And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,*’ or, ‘And the Lord said unto me.’” The italicized phrase refers to level three, the lowest class of actual prophets, in which the prophet sees an allegory in a dream. In the dream, the allegory is interpreted, like many of the allegories of Zechariah. The phrase “*And the Lord said unto me*” refers to level two, which is not really a level of prophecy. It is a type of divine *inspiration* received by David and Solomon. When they said that God spoke to them, it meant, according to Maimonides, that they received prophecies through the medium of another prophet, such as Nathan in the case of David, and Ahijah in the case of Solomon.

When “God spake unto Israel *in the visions of the night*, and said, *Jacob, Jacob*. And he said, *Here [am] I*. And He said, I [am] God, the God of thy father...*I will go down (yarad)* with thee into Egypt,” Jacob *dreamt* that God *spoke* to him. This can only occur in level seven:

“(7) In a prophetic dream it appears to the prophet as if God spoke to him. Thus, Isaiah says, ‘And I saw the Lord, and I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ (Isaiah 6:1-8). Micaiah, son of Imla, said likewise, ‘I saw the Lord’ (1 Kings 22:19).”

But even in level seven, the prophet only *thinks* it is God speaking, when it really is an angel:

“You will perhaps ask this question: among the different degrees of prophecy there is one in which prophets, e.g., Isaiah, Micaiah, appear to hear God addressing them (level seven); how can this be reconciled with the principle that all prophets are prophetically addressed through an angel, except Moses our Teacher, in reference to whom Scripture says, ‘Mouth to mouth I speak to him’ (Numbers 12:8)? I answer, this is really the case, the medium here (i.e., with the non-Mosaic prophets) being the imaginative faculty that hears in a prophetic dream God speaking; but Moses heard the voice addressing him ‘from above the covering of the ark from between the two *cherubim*’ (Exodus 25; 22) without the medium of the imaginative faculty.”

Thus, the translator may deploy any of the Maimonides’ interpretive strategies to get to the same result: an angel speaks to Jacob, and the angel descends, not God.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel tries, unsuccessfully, to explain how an incorporeal angel could “descend,” in a commentary note: “an angel, despite being incorporeal, since it is *created*, may possibly be rendered in corporeal terminology” (my translation, p. 116). The truth is that in “the language of men” we are not as concerned with corporeal terminology so long as the prime principle of monotheism remains uncompromised.

HIERARCHICAL CLASSIFICATION

In addition to his list of 10 prophets levels suggested by Guide 2:45, Maimonides also prepared a functional classification of the ten levels of angels (Mishneh Torah, *Yodei Ha-Torah* 2:7). *Elokim* is the fourth angelic rank from the bottom in Guide 2:45. There may not be a direct correspondence between the lists. The main idea of these lists seems to be their denary or base-10 nature. Both lists suggest a parallel with the ten *sephirot* of Cabala. We can also link the idea to the levels of access to the “Palace of the King” in Guide 3:51. The point of the *levels* is their potential accessibility. Man is free to reach for these higher levels. But note that there is no twelfth Mosaic level in this list of human prophets, since only Moses transcended his corporeality.

GUIDE 1:28 FOOT

This chapter begins a new section in the lexicon. Friedlander supplies an introduction to this section, note 2, *ad loc.*:

“The next group of homonyms (1:28-1:45) explained by Maimonides, consists of those which signify part of the body of man or of an animal. He begins with *regel*, ‘foot,’ because it is related to expressions of motion, and after having made some remarks on the necessity of employing figurative language in speaking Of God, and also on the importance of obtaining a correct notion of the incorporeality of God, he continues with ‘face,’ ‘back,’ ‘heart,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘soul,’ ‘life,’ ‘wing,’ (*panim, ahor, lev, ruakh, nefesh, khaim, kanaf*) and concludes with *ayin*, ‘eye.’ It is rather difficult to define what place ch. 29 (*etzev*, pain/anger) and 30 (*akhal*, eat) occupy in this group, and equally difficult to see the reason why the author introduced them here. The reader is probably to be prepared for the theory that any belief involving corporeality of God is equal to idolatry. For this purpose he begins with the explanation of *regel*, and shows the consequence of the insufficient preparation and imperfect conception of the idea of God, in the instance of the nobles (elders) of Israel. According to tradition, as accepted by Maimonides (ch. 5), they were punished without having received any warning. By introducing next (ch. 29) the phrase *va-yit’atzev el libo*, ‘And God was angry’ (because of the wickedness of the generation of the flood, *dor ha-mabul*), ‘without telling the people,’ he tacitly invites the reader to compare the causes of God’s anger in both instances, and to conclude that a misconception of the nature of the Supreme Being is actually a sin. It can be avoided by suitable studies, which are necessary for the mind as food is for the body (ch. 30). According to Abrabanel and others, Maimonides explains in ch. 30, the word occurring in the commandment given to Adam, ‘of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely *eat*, but of the tree of the *knowledge* of good and evil, thou shalt not *eat* of it,’ that the reader is in fact expected to read between the lines (i.e., the necessity of studies leading to the proper interpretation of corporeal terms), has expressly been stated by Maimonides in the Introduction.”

This section, from 1:28 to 1:44 contains eleven lexical and five non-lexical chapters. Chapter 1:45, the lexicon on *sh’ma*, “hearing,” begins a brief section discussing the attribution of sensation to God. *Sh’ma* is the last term in the lexicon proper, although other chapters that I term “late lexical” scatter through the Guide. (See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”)

Definition 3, below, carries with it the most concealed idea in the Guide, which Maimonides only barely hints at, and which reputable commentators do not mention. The reason why foot means cause is that foot is a euphemism for masculine physicality in the male/female metaphor of form and matter. He cites the proof-texts below to assert that foot means cause but *refrains* from naming this phallic significance. His problem is that these texts use *regel* in an ambiguous manner that does not necessarily lead to his asserted equation of foot and cause. We must search beyond his explicit statements for his true meaning. By failing to do so we fail to see the masculine significance of *regel*, and, like Onkelos and Even-Shmuel, confuse it with the feminine principle of hylic matter. (See essay “In-forming Hyle” below.)

REGEL: (FOOT) Homonym

1. The foot of a living being.
2. An object which follows another, i.e. consequentiality.
3. Cause.

Instance of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart [from her], and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges [determine]. And if [any] mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, *foot for foot (regel takhat regel).*” (Exodus 21:22-24).

Maimonides cites this text as an example of the Bible taking the term *regel* literally. He is pulling our leg, pun intended. This quotation is the one anciently given by the rabbis as the ultimate example of *not* taking the Torah literally. It means that the court compensates an injured foot with *money*, not the perpetrator's foot (Abraham ben Maimonides, *ad loc.* to 21:24 *Perush al Shemot*, p. 50, writes, *damei shen takhat shen*, i.e., the *value* of a tooth for a tooth). When Maimonides says that *regel* is a *homonymous* term, he means that the Bible sometimes *properly* employs it in its corporeal sense. But then, only be the second foot in “foot for foot” could be meant; i.e., the injured foot is a physical foot while the second foot is not. In Mishneh Torah, he writes:

“Despite the appearance of these rules (“foot for foot”) in the written Torah, they were *explained (meforshim)* by Moses from Sinai, and [as such] the laws of Moses are our law and so administered in successive courts...and in every court from the time of Moses until now.” (*Nezikin, Hovel u'Mazik* 1:6. my trans.)

That is, we *always* interpret and never take literally the phrase “foot for foot.” In “foot for foot,” a foot is not just a foot. Neither is it anywhere else in this chapter of the Guide. Freud may have said “sometimes a cigar is just a cigar,” but if Maimonides wanted a biblical use of “foot” meaning “foot” he could have found much better ones. This should alert us to read this chapter between the lines to divine his full intent.

Instance of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“And Moses said [to Pharaoh], Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that [is] behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that *follow* thee (that are *at thy feet*, i.e., Pharaoh's feet—*b'raglekha*): and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger.” (Exodus 11:4-8)

Maimonides understands *b'raglekha*, “at thy feet” to mean “those that follow thee” like the KJV. Rashi thinks it a polite phrase: instead of saying to Pharaoh that *Pharaoh* will come, as he in fact did (Ex. 12:31), Moses says Pharaoh's servants, those that are at Pharaoh's feet, will come, begging Moses to leave. Since “following” is close in thought to *consequentiality*, this citation bridges to the idea of *causation*, Definition 3.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, [tarry: for] I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake. And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give [it]. And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. For [it was] little which thou hadst before I [came], and it is [now] increased unto a multitude; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming (v'yvarekh ha-shem otekha l'ragli): and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?” (Genesis 30:27-30)

Maimonides writes, “i.e., for my sake; for that which exists for the sake of another thing has the latter for its final cause.” Still *l'ragli* need not be translated as cause, as the KJV shows, but can be read as “coming,” that is, “since my feet arrived,” which is how other authorities understood it. Rashi has it both ways: “*because* of the *coming* of my foot the blessing came to you” (*bishvil biat ragli*). The point is that the proof-texts, which supposedly express Maimonides' Definition 3, are ambiguous. He needs something more to show that *regel* means “cause.”

“Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as (l'regel) the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure (ul'regel), until I come unto my lord unto

Seir. And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee [some] of the folk that [are] with me. And he said, What needeth it? Let me find grace in the sight of my lord.” (Genesis 33:13-15)

Again, *regel* need not be read causatively. The phrase in question reads *l’regel hamlakha asher l’fanai ul’regel ha-y’ladim*: lit., for the foot of the cattle that go before me and for the foot of the children. It sounds like we are concerned not to damage their tender feet. Rashi translates it as “according to the gait” of the children and animals, which is reasonable; not, as Maimonides takes it, *because* of the children and animals (irrespective of gait). Since *regel* as *cause* is only weakly supported, Maimonides is thinking of a stronger reason for defining *regel* as *cause*, a reason he cannot state explicitly, that *foot* suggests the masculine organ that *causes* procreation. He even tells us that we have to look for another reason beyond those suggested here. He says (Pines trans.), “they are most hidden matters,” (*v’od she’hem devarim n’eilamim me’od*), i.e., things that neither Targum nor Maimonides can publicly explain (see essay below).

“And his *feet* (*raglav*) shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which [is] before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, [and there shall be] a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.” (Zechariah 14:4)

Maimonides writes:

“Consequently, (taking foot as cause) the words... can be explained in the following way: ‘And the things caused by him (*raglav*) on that day upon the Mount of Olives, that is to say, the wonders which will then be seen, and of which God will be the Cause or the Maker, will remain permanently.’ To this explanation does Jonathan ben Uziel incline in paraphrasing the passage, ‘And he will appear *in his might* (*bi’g’virtei*) on that day upon the Mount of Olives.’”

Jonathan (1st century B.C.E.–1st century C.E.) was, like Onkelos, an early Aramaic translator of the Bible, specifically of the prophetic books. He was a pupil of Hillel. His translation generally translates terms denoting those parts of the body by which contact and motion are effected, by “His might,” *g’virtei*. The implication is that such expressions denote acts done by His Will (*g’virtei, ki kulam ha-matara be’hem ha-pa’ulot ha-mufalot al y’dei ratzono*).

Maimonides addressed this passage previously at 1:22. It is a favorite for him, for it shows the great, masculine causative power of God as He splits mountains and destroys the Jerusalem area with his “feet.” In 1:22 he quoted the end of the passage, Zechariah 14:5, “And the Lord my God shall come and all his holy ones with thee,” to refer to the descent of the Shekhina upon the prophets. They then change the world, moving mountains through their prophetic profession. Their prophecy is caused, that is, born of, the power of His “feet” standing on the mount.

“And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled [it] on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words. Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel: and [there was] under *His feet* (*raglav*) as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone (*k’maaseh livnat ha-sapir*), and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.” (Exodus 24:7-11)

The phrase *k’maaseh livnat ha-sapir* can be translated “like the work of the whiteness of sapphire.” *Livnat* can mean brick (“paved”) or white. Key terms in the passage for Maimonides are *k’maaseh*, “like the work” and *livnat* as “whiteness.” Indeed, Even-Shmuel takes them to be more significant than the term *raglav* (“His feet”), despite the fact that the chapter is about this lexical term. To Maimonides the terms *k’maaseh livnat ha-sapir* suggest the primordial state of unformed matter, *hyle* (See below, but I also strongly urge the reader to re-read our lengthy treatment of this passage at 1:5. Maimonides wants us to read these chapters together, and they are an early example of the Guide’s referentialism).

IN-FORMING HYLE

I pointed several times above that the definition of *regel* as cause is neither obvious nor necessary to the understanding of any of the proof-texts provided. Maimonides usually provides either logical or empirical proof for his definitions, especially where they are distant from the meaning of the subject term. Here he has an explanation but refrains from giving it. His reticence comes from his halachic concern to refrain from writing on prurient matters. He takes seriously the rule of the second Mishnah of *Hagigah* not to teach prurient matters (*sitre arayot*) in public. Because our feet stick out in front of us they are an apt euphemism for the male organ, especially since, as Maimonides will later explain, there are no direct terms for genitalia in Hebrew (Talmud, *Berakhot* 22a-b; Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud* 1448; Bakan, *Maimonides on Prophecy*, p. 215, 219 explaining Guide, 1:49, 3:2, 3:8). Human language cannot describe the ultimate act of causation, creation *ex-nihilo*, any better than through the metaphor of procreation. “We have no intellectual cognition of our bringing somebody other than us to existence except through sexual intercourse” (Pines translation, Guide page 99, footnote 8).

Like all metaphors, it fails to completely capture the concept, but it does evoke the mystery of the creation. And, as an extra, the factors of procreation, male and female, are very good stand-ins for matter and form, following the ancient interpretive tradition. Once *foot* becomes *phallus*, it is only another step to sublimate foot as *male causative principle*, and from thence to *cause* generally taken. Of course, I cannot, prove that this is what Maimonides had in mind. However, his frequent recourse to quotations involving *regel*, and his suggestive language surrounding them, are difficult to explain otherwise. Why else criticize Onkelos’ straightforward treatment for failing to explain those concealed “most hidden matters” (*v’od she’hem devarim n’eilamim me’od*) “not grasped by the masses” (*v’lo hasagatam kala al he’hamon*). If foot sometimes just means cause, why should that be a mystery, and what is so hard for the masses to grasp?

Indeed, Onkelos simply translates foot into non-corporeal terminology as “throne.” A throne is sat on; only bodies sit on chairs; but God is not a body. So Maimonides says that Onkelos has to take the Throne to refer to the Shekhina, a created causative agent. He does this by calling this seat the “throne of glory,” *kursa yakria*, and Maimonides takes “glory” to mean the Shekhina. Reduced to essentials, foot equals Shekhina. Onkelos has thus sufficiently saved the masses from divine anthropomorphism.

Maimonides is still dissatisfied with Onkelos. All Onkelos had to do, according to the purpose of his Aramaic translation of the Bible, was to remove the direct threat posed by corporeality to Judaism. Unlike the Guide, Onkelos directed his Targum to a mass audience. But Maimonides has to explain exactly what the Elders of the Jews saw in their vision of God’s Throne of Glory. This is the mission of the Guide, to explain metaphors and contradictions in biblical prophecy to the perplexed few.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel tries to explain all this merely to mean that Onkelos, in Maimonides’ view, did not see the need to do more than translate “feet” as “throne” (and then, as Shekhina). In his interpretation of that view, Onkelos’ fault was not explaining that “the work of the sapphire brick” meant primordial matter.

Even-Shmuel fails to grasp that Maimonides really rejects Onkelos’ translation of feet as throne in the first place. If the work of the sapphire brick represents *hyle*, making feet into Shekhina does not tell us what the *work* of the sapphire brick is. However, if the foot represents the male causative principle we return to Maimonides’ familiar metaphor of the maleness of form and the femaleness of matter. The foot (as phallus) symbolizes God’s will that matter be in-formed. More to the point, by making feet feminine Onkelos defeats the whole purpose of the image: the *masculine* feet are supposed to be upon the *feminine* sapphire of hyle. He emasculates the symbol. If the feet become the feminine throne, they are just part of the symbol for hyle, and we get no sense of form or of causation. But the chapter’s purpose is to define foot as cause, not that which is the subject of causation.

TRANSPARENCY

Maimonides tells us his concept of the work of the sapphire brick. It describes hyle, the primordial matter which has not yet been formed, not really a thing in itself but a *potential* for being. Others before him in traditional texts recognized this metaphorical solution. Maimonides cites the Midrashic account of the vision of Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus (1st and 2d centuries C.E.). In that vision, God takes *snow* from under the Throne of Glory and casts it down to become Earth. Without addressing the vision in detail here, Maimonides, in 2:26, criticizes what he takes as Rabbi Eliezer's implied view that the hyle (i.e, the snow) is eternal with God. But Maimonides accepts his metaphor that something "white" from under the Throne is considered to be hyle, the *prima materia*.

Ben Zoma (1st and 2nd centuries C.E.), one of the four that entered Paradise, had similar visions of hyle:

"Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the 'Garden' (*pardes*), namely, Ben 'Azzai and Ben Zoma, Aher, and R. Akiba. R. Akiba said to them: When ye arrive at the stones of pure marble, say not, *water, water!* For it is said: He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes. Ben 'Azzai cast a look and died. Of him Scripture says: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Ben Zoma looked and was affected (*v'nifga*)." (Talmud *Hagigah* 14a)

A fellow Tanna asks "What and wherefore Ben Zoma?" upon encountering Ben Zoma in deepest meditation. Ben Zoma replies that he is focused on the "space" between the upper and the lower heavens spoken of in the creation account, the *Maaseh Bereshit*. His companion's famous rejoinder: "Ben Zoma is still outside" (15b). The two waters of the "Garden" and the two waters of creation both symbolize matter, hyle, the upper quintessential matter and the lower matter of the earth. In a third passage (15a) he held that bathwater transmits spermatozoa, i.e., that "water" is the medium of creation. Why compare matter to water, snow, marble, and the "work of the whiteness of sapphire"? (*Livnat* can mean "brick" or "white").

Maimonides says that *white* sometimes means *transparent*. We also do this, as the so-called "white" sapphire is not white at all but a colorless rival of the diamond. Transparency implies receptivity to color, as all colors lend the sapphire their color in succession as they pass behind it. Just so, primordial un-informed matter receives each form successively.

Maimonides says that the idea of whiteness as transparency arose when he considered Rabbi Eliezer's snow together with the Elder's vision of the whiteness under the "feet." He understood that by employing images of whiteness both passages spoke of hyle. He recognized that the whiteness stood for the receptivity of a transparent body to various colors. The transparency of the waters of creation in Ben Zoma's visions also symbolizes hyleic receptivity.

Maimonides goes on to show that had the text wanted to give us the color of the sapphire it would not have the unnecessary term *k'maaseh*, "like the work" precede "the whiteness of the sapphire. Since "like the work" is neither the work nor not-the-work, it is like hyle, which is not like matter or form as we know them in their accidental conjugations. The action or "work" of hyle is passive and receptive, i.e., feminine, until an "accident" (*mikra*) causes it to be active. Friedlander, note 3, *ad loc.*, p. 100, writes:

"[Maimonides: 'Because matter, as such, is, as you are well aware, always receptive and passive, active only by some *accident*'] i.e., the combination of matter and form; so long as they are not combined and continue in a free state, the one is active, the other passive; when combined they are considered to participate in both qualities. The combination is an accident to the matter as well as to the form; it endows each with properties essential to it."

Hyle is passive until it receives the action of the “feet” in-forming it. The Elders of Israel, who saw a direct mechanical causative action between ineffable God, his “feet,” and formation, took this conclusion wrongly. Their mistake resulted from the corporeality of their imaginations, symbolized by the statement that they “did eat and drink.” Ezekiel did not make this mistake. Ezekiel also saw “the likeness of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone,” but did not take God Himself as the form of matter. Ezekiel 1:26:

“And above the firmament that [was] over their heads [was] the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne [was] *the likeness as the appearance of a man* above upon it.”

Unlike the Elders, Ezekiel understood that God *wills* the formation of matter. The actual formation is the result of ramified processes stemming ultimately from this initial will. The Will is an undifferentiated aspect of the divine essence as grasped by us. It is not that the will in itself directly forms matter, but that the will is the ultimate cause of whatever processes end in the formation of matter. The “likeness of the appearance of a man” which forms matter is therefore not man but divine will as ultimate cause. Maimonides noted above his preference for Targum Jonathan’s translation of foot over Targum Onkelos’ translation. Jonathan translated foot as “might,” *g’virtei*, which Maimonides grasped as “will,” *ratzon*.

Maimonides says that primordial matter is the first creation subject to *generation* and to *corruption*. When we read that is it under the “feet” of God, it means that God caused it to exist, but, more accurately, the divine will subjects matter to the successive causative actions of the forms it passively receives, in the mystery of creation, as the masculine is received by the feminine.

EVEN-SHMUEL ON HYLE

I criticized Yehuda Even-Shmuel’s commentary on the Guide for failing to explain the meaning of *regel* in our Guide chapter. He thought the chapter’s intent was to explain hyle, not causation/formation. But hyle is a receptive, feminine principle. By making this feminine principle the core of the chapter, he misses its masculine point, the metaphorically phallic action of the formative foot.

Still, I cannot resist quoting his fine summary paragraph dissecting Maimonides’ doctrine of hyle:

“Until now we have examined those things that are subject to generation and corruption, their relation to God, and God’s manifestation through them. Now we ascend to examine hyle, that which is subject to the succession of possible forms. God is the cause of this matter, its Creator, and so we say that it is generated, i.e., that it exists after not having existed. Its function is to receive, successively, the infinity of all possible forms, and so, therefore, this primal matter cannot be destroyed. From the vantage of the future, it is eternal.

“What distinguishes God, its source, from that which is ‘hewn’ from that source? Surely, the nature of the source is in that which is hewn from it (*teva ha-makor b’nekhtzav*). Still, we find this nature more in hyle itself than in the individual [perishable] material things, since prime matter exists eternally. Nonetheless, from the vantage of the past, it is not completely eternal (having been created). Moreover, it is always subject to privation, for it lacks preparation to meet any particular individual form. Not only that, but when its source is entirely *active*, it is entirely emanative, unrecognizable but through its attribute of action. Then that which is hewn from the source is completely passive, receptive and non-emanative.” (My translation. As for “hewn,” see Isaiah 51:1)

GUIDE 1:29 WITHDRAWAL

PREFACE

The word *etzev* presents a range of meaning which the reader should know before addressing Maimonides' definitions of the term. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, p. 1101, derives its meaning from the idea of "cutting, shaping." The Talmud uses the term in this sense to identify the shaping of an infant's body by physical manipulation. Jastrow canvasses the following meanings: "grief"; a "form" (i.e., an "idol") which is *shaped*; "trouble, toil, and that acquired through toil"; "pain." Jastrow does not list "anger" or "provocation." Alkalay, *Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary*, p. 1939, and Even-Shoshan, *Milon Ha-Ivri Ha-Merkaz*, p. 532, are in accord except they add the meaning "nerve" going on to "nervousness" and "neurosis." Matityahu Clark, *Etymological Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew, Based on the Commentaries of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch*, Feldheim, 2000, p. 190, locates the Hirschian *leitwort* as "hold back; renounce" essentially, *withdrawal*.

The translators of this chapter translate Maimonides' definitions according to the system shown below: "pain; anger; provocation." Nonetheless, the English biblical translations for his Definition 2 and 3 proof-texts generally take the term *etzev* as some variant of "grief." Maimonides instead translates them as "anger" or "provocation," the extreme of provocation being *rebellion*.

His problem is that these texts identify God with an *emotion*, whether it is grief, anger or provocation. But God must be beyond all emotion. The idea of "emotion" is from "motion;" cf. "passion" from Latin *passio* rendering the Greek *pathos*, literally: "what befalls one." But God is not moved: He is not the passive object of any subject, neither does anything befall Him. Maimonides must therefore find a way to understand the term in his second and third definitions without these anthropomorphic attributions.

Hirsch's suggestion of "holding back" going on to "withdrawal" is a useful way to grasp Maimonides' outlook in this chapter. The proof-texts suggest a historical pattern from the Edenic expulsion to the Mosaic redemption in which God repeatedly "repents" of His creation and changes the rules of existence. These repentances are withdrawals of providence in which man is left to his natural physical fate. In the first proof-text, the transgression of Eve causes God to repent creating Eden, creating the first *pain*, the inevitable index of corporeality. This is a divine *withdrawal* of providence. In the final proof-text, the growing population of those fallen men (*nefilim*) who are not Adam's intellectual progeny (see 1:7) make God repent creation to cause the flood. This is also a *withdrawal*. The solution to Eve's sin comes with Moses on Sinai, as does the promise never again to destroy the world by flood (since before the Torah, this promise had only been spoken by God "to His heart"). The Torah is the expansion of providence that cures these prior withdrawals of providence.

The last proof-text below, "And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart" (Genesis 6:4-6), focuses the general problem of God's "repentances" (cf.: "hiding of the face," Guide 1:23). Since the Divine world is beyond temporality, we cannot ask why God would, so to speak, change His mind. Change only occurs in time. His creation is a single atemporal act, and Divine thought is atemporal unity. We impose time on the structure of divine creativity because we are accustomed to temporality. Our *perception* of the universal regime is one of temporal expansion and contraction, like breathing: the exhalation and then the *withdrawal* of the divine spirit. Although it is a constant process, a unified system, we experience it as repeated generation and destruction. We *project* our experience of providential withdrawal onto God as divine "anger." (See 1:36 for an explanation of projection in my essay "The Psychology of Idolatry."). The truth is that our rebellion contracted that providential expansion: it contracts against us through our rejection of it. Our state of mind causes the acceptance and rebellion, as Maimonides puts it in 1:54: "The pleasure and the displeasure of God, the approach to Him and the withdrawal from Him are proportional to the amount of man's knowledge or ignorance concerning the Creator."

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

ETZEV: (PAIN, ANGER, PROVOKE) Homonym

1. Pain
2. Anger. With the phrase “grieved in His heart,” *va-yitatzev el libo*: a *determination* (“anger” rather than “grief”) by God to punish man for *idolatry, without warning* (“in His heart”). See essays below.
3. Provoke, cause anger. With the phrase “grieved in his heart,” *va-yitatzev el libo*: provocation or rebellion by man against God’s will, projected back on Him by us. Heart (*lev*) is a homonymous term meaning *will*.

Instance of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy *sorrow* (*itzbonekh*) and thy conception; in *sorrow* (*b’etzev*) thou (Eve) shalt bring forth children; and thy desire [shall be] to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed [is] the ground for thy sake; in *sorrow* (*b’itzabon*) shalt thou eat [of] it all the days of thy life.” (Genesis 3:16-17)

These verses use versions of *etzev* three times. Rashi, *ad loc.*, quoting Talmud, agrees with Maimonides’ definition of *etzev* as “pain” (rather than “sorrow”) citing “the pain of child rearing” and the “pain of pregnancy” (*Eruvin* 109b). With this passage, the Torah recounts the creation of the first *pain*. Pain always comes with physicality. Note that Maimonides identifies the term as *homonymous*. It must be homonymous because the Torah uses *etzev* with God, a purely incorporeal being, who, therefore, cannot experience pain. “Pain” and even “anger” must mean *different* things for man and God. (For more on this proof text, see first essay below).

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. And his father (David) had not *displeased* (*atzavo*) him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? And he also [was a] very goodly [man]; and [his mother] bare him after Absalom.” (1 Kings 1:5-6)

Maimonides says *etzev* “denotes anger” in his two proof-texts grouped under Definition 2. Rashi explains, “he who refrains from rebuking his child brings him to his death.” This recalls the idea of *etzev* as the shaping of an infant’s body by physical manipulation (Jastrow, above), which could be expected to “displease” or “anger” the child. The story reminds us that Solomon and not Adonijah was David’s *intellectual progeny* (Guide 1:7 for this motif).

“So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce *anger* (*b’kharei-af*), and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was *grieved* (*ne’tzav*) for David, because his father had done him shame.” (I Samuel 20:34) Jonathan knows that David should be the next king despite King Saul’s desire that the prince succeed him. Maimonides says Jonathan was “angry for (David’s) sake.” Jonathan recognized David as the true intellectual progeny of the patriarchs, shaped by the prophet Samuel. Although KJV takes *ne’tzav* as “grieved,” Maimonides again takes it as “angered.” *Ne’tzav* could mean anger because of its proximity to the term *b’kharei-af*, which clearly means anger.

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled (*maru*), and *vexed* (*v’itzvu*) His holy spirit: therefore He was *turned to be their enemy*, [and] He fought against them.” (Isaiah 63:10)

The final group of quotes supports the meaning of *provocation*, up to and including *rebellion*. The Jews are the subject of Isaiah’s lament. Divine providence cared for them but their rebellion “turned” that providence into

their “enemy.” This is the basic idea of our chapter: the expansion of divine providence becomes *contraction* when it meets the rebellion of its providential objects. The phrase *maru v’itzvu* (“rebelled and vexed”) is in parallel, and so both terms mean provocation to the point of rebellion. Their divine parent raises the children of Israel, but, like the rebellious son Adonijah, they rebel against His Torah.

“How oft did they provoke (*yamruhu*) Him in the wilderness, [and] grieve (*ya’atzivuhu*) Him in the desert!” (Psalms 78:40)

This text presents the same idea as the prior text, except here the psalmist recalls the Jews’ rebellion against God and Moses in the Sinai desert. It is not that they “grieve” God in the desert, but that they rebel against His will. The text again parallels a form of *etzev* with a form of *maru*, “rebellion,” making *etzev* mean provocation to the point of rebellion.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if [there be any] wicked way (*otzev*) in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalms 139:23-24)

Rashi translates the quoted phrase: “Whether there is a way of vexation (*m’atzva*—provocation) and deterioration (*u’kalkul*) in me.” The psalmist, David, asks God to search David’s heart to see if he really is the intellectual progeny of his patriarchal forebears: Is he a rebel against God? Has he deteriorated from their high level? Surely not! The contrast with real rebels comes in the next quoted verse below.

“In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Every day they *wrest* (*y’atzevu*) my words: all their thoughts [are] against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.” (Psalms 56:4-6)

Not that they “wrest” David’s words, but that they rebel against them. Rashi gives the context of David’s complaint:

“They lurk and lodge in the place they hope I will go, and they watch my steps to spy on me and to lead pursuers there. All this he would complain about the wicked of Israel: that they would lie in wait for him and out of fear of them he had fled to Achish.”

Achish was the monarchy David sought refuge with when he fled Saul (1 Samuel 21:10-15). In general terms, the people of Israel *rebel* against David’s decrees, which are only meant to carry out the Divine will.

Instance combining of Definition 2 and Definition 3 Contextualized:

“There were *giants* (*ha-nefilim*) in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the *sons of God* (*bnei ha-elokim*) came in unto the *daughters of men* (*bnot ha-adam*), and they bare [children] to them, the same [became] mighty men which [were] of old, *men of renown* (*anshei ha-shem*). And God saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every *imagination* (*yetzer*) of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually. And it *repented* (*va-yinakhem*) the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it *grieved Him at His heart* (*va-yitatzev el libo*).” (Genesis 6:4-6)

This is the central passage of the chapter. See essay below, “*Va-Yitatzev El Libo*”

THE CURSE OF EDEN

“Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy *sorrow* (*itzbonekh*) and thy conception; in *sorrow* (*b’etzev*) thou (Eve) shalt bring forth children; and thy desire [shall be] to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed [is] the ground for thy sake; in *sorrow* (*b’itzabon*) shalt thou eat [of] it all the days of thy life.” (Genesis 3:16-17)

Recall Maimonides’ explanation of the Edenic expulsion in Guide 1:2. The loss in Eden is the loss of the intellectual capacity to assess the *truth* of reality. Our exit means that we exchanged our recognition of truth for the mere opinion of the good. We traded intellectual perception for the moral imagination. But intellect is what

we, so to speak, share with God (Guide 1:1), and it is our only path back to God. By contrast, the imagination is, so to speak, the corporeal part of our mental structure. The imagination is the corporealizing part of our mind because it makes pictures out of concepts. It paints an image of reality that is not reality itself.

Having lost the intellectual capacity to discern truth from falsehood, imagination takes over. It combines our sense perceptions through which we experience of the *pain* of physicality. We then *project* this pain in on God in the sublimated guise of the “hiding of the face,” the first *withdrawal*.

The cure will not come until the arrival of Moses at Sinai. In 2:30, Maimonides writes:

“The following is also a remarkable passage (Talmud, *Shabat* 146a), most absurd in its literal sense; but as an allegory it contains wonderful wisdom, and fully agrees with real facts, as will be found by those who understand all the chapters of this treatise. When the serpent came to Eve he infected her with poison; the Israelites, who stood at Mount Sinai, removed that poison; idolaters, who did not stand at Mount Sinai, have not got rid of it. Note this likewise.”

The Torah binds man to his true form, God, through action and thought. The Rabbis inspired by Torah commanded holy and pure conjugal attachment as the way for Jews (Mishneh Torah, *Ishot*, 15:16, 20; *Issurei Bi'ah*, 22:21, but see 21:26). That is because spiritual promiscuity is the reflection of corporeal promiscuity, just as spousal loyalty prefigures divine espousal. The Sinaitic betrothal cures the spiritual promiscuity of Eve. Sinai represents providential expansion following its great withdrawal after Eden.

VA-YITATZEV EL LIBO

“In Genesis 6:6 the word *va-yitatzev* has either the second or the third signification. In the first case, the sense of the Hebrew *va-yitatzev el libo* is ‘God was angry with them on account of the wickedness of their deeds.’ As to the words ‘to his heart’ used here, and also in the history of Noah, ‘And God said in His heart’ (Genesis 8:21: *va-yomer hashem el libo*), I will here explain what they mean. With regard to man, we use the expression ‘he said to himself,’ or ‘he said in his heart,’ in reference to a subject which he did not utter or communicate to any other person. Similarly the phrase ‘And God said in His heart,’ is used in reference to an act which God decreed without mentioning it to any prophet at the time the event took place according to the will of God. And a figure of this kind is admissible, since ‘the Torah speaketh in accordance with the language of man’ (supra 1:26). *This is plain and clear*. In the Pentateuch no distinct mention is made of a message sent to the wicked generation of the flood, cautioning or threatening them with death (but see Friedlander, 103, note 1); therefore, it is said concerning them, that God was angry with them in His heart; likewise when He decreed that no flood should happen again, He did not tell a prophet to communicate it to others, and for that reason the words ‘in his heart’ are added.”

We can take it as a rule that when Maimonides says, “This is plain and clear” it is far from being plain or clear. While not exactly esoteric, its meaning needs to be uncrated.

Maimonides says the “word (*va-yitatzev*) has either the second or the third signification,” i.e., it can mean either anger or provocation/rebellion.

Definition 2—Divine Rage. Definition 2, *anger*, does not seem to fit the context of *va-yitatzev el libo*, especially since it says *el libo*, “to His heart,” which implies that God rages to Himself. But God is impassive, that is to say, always the active subject, never the object of another’s action. Even human rebellion against His will could not make a divine “passion.” Definition 2 therefore presents important problem. Maimonides devotes the major part of this short chapter to it, the paragraph quoted above. He comes to the explanation that this phrase describes an *internal monologue* of divine thought. How does this explanation help him?

Maimonides begins by comparing another statement in the story of Noah with language to similar to *va-yitatzev el libo*:

“And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart (*va-omer ha-shem el libo*), I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart [is] evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.” (Genesis 8:21)

“The Lord said in (to) His heart” he takes analogously to “it grieved Him at (to) His heart.” The surface meaning, *pshat*, would suggest that God changed His mind again; worse, that He engages in *verbal* (*va-omer*) dialogue with Himself. Maimonides turns to the easier question, and explains that “the Lord *said* to His heart” describes an internal train of thought, not a speech. We are reminded of his explanation (Guide 1:65) that when “And God said, Let there be light” in Genesis 1:3, there was no other being for God to speak to, and therefore “said,” *va-omer*, was meant homonymously with God as “thought/will” and not as speech. Similarly, whenever anyone “speaks to His heart,” this just means thought. Since “heart” means “will” (Guide 1:39), speaking to the heart means *the act of willing*. God, furthermore, kept it to Himself. Genesis 8:21 should be interpreted this way, that there was no prophet to whom He revealed His will to no longer curse the ground. God could only have been “speak(ing) to His heart” until Moses received the revelation of Torah, including this account, at Sinai (Talmud *Hullin*, 100b, *et seq.*, as understood in Kafih footnote 14, *ad loc.*).

This was the regime prior to Mosaic prophecy. He says:

“Similarly the phrase ‘And God said in His heart,’ is used in reference to an act which God decreed without mentioning it to any prophet... In the Pentateuch no distinct mention is made of a message sent to the wicked generation of the flood, cautioning or threatening them with death.”

Likewise, “when He decreed that no flood should happen again, He did not tell a prophet to communicate it to others.” This discussion foreshadows his doctrine in 1:63 that until Moses there was no prophet on a *mission* from God to deliver a *law*:

“[Prior to Moses] no one could establish his claim on prophecy, that is to say, on the fact that God had spoken to him, or had entrusted a mission to him: before the days of Moses no such assertion had ever been made. You must not be misled by the statements that God spoke to the Patriarchs, or that He had appeared to them. For you do not find any mention of a prophecy which appealed to others, or which directed them. Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, or any other person before them did not tell the people, ‘God said unto me, you shall do this thing, or you shall not do that thing.’ or ‘God has sent me to you.’ Far from it! for God spoke to them on nothing but of what especially concerned them, i.e., He communicated to them things relating to their perfection, directed them in what they should do, and foretold them what the condition of their descendants would be; nothing beyond this. They guided their fellow-men by means of argument and instruction, as is implied, according to the interpretation generally received amongst us, in the words ‘and the souls that they had gotten in Haran’ (Genesis 12:5)... God appeared to our Teacher Moses, and commanded him to address the people and to bring them the message...”

Before the Mosaic expansion of revelation, God was only “talking” to Himself, that is, His plan for mankind remained locked in divine thought. This partially explains God’s internal monologue. Maimonides now wants us to agree this is the same meaning as “it grieved (angered) Him at (to) His heart.” God has decided again to change the world, but has not told anyone else. He is only angry “to His heart” for there is yet no *prophet*.

Elsewhere (1:36) he explains that anger is a homonymous term for the divine *determination* to punish *idolatry*: “You will not find the term...applied to God except in reference to idolatry.” Though there is yet no prophet, why was none dispatched? Why would God keep this determination to Himself?

The reason that God only speaks His rage about the idolators “to His heart,” is that He does not want any prophet to publicize it to them. The idolators are so far gone that God *prevents their repentance*. This is their just punishment. See Even-Shmuel, *ad loc.* to our chapter, referencing the Commentary on the Mishnah, *Introduction to Avot, Shemona Perakim*, ch. 8, where Maimonides contends that this prevention of repentance explains God’s “hardening” of Pharaoh’s heart. Accordingly, *va-yitatzev el libo* means that God “hardened the hearts” of the adamite idolators so that they could not repent. He hardens their hearts against repentance by keeping His rage, i.e., His determination to extirpate their idolatry, to Himself.

Does God Change His Mind? There is an even bigger problem with Genesis 6:8. Maimonides is quite aware of the larger issue suggested when that verse commences: “And it repented (*va-yinakhem*) the Lord that He had made man on the earth,” resulting in the flood. Tradition had grappled with this suggestion of God changing his mind (*Genesis Rabba* 27:4):

“‘*And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth.*’ R. Judah said: [God declared:] ‘It was a regrettable error on My part to have created him out of earthly elements, for had I created him out of heavenly elements, he would not have rebelled against Me.’ R. Nehemiah interpreted it: I am comforted (*menukham*, same root as *va-yinakhem*) that I created him below, for had I created him above, he would have incited the celestial creatures to revolt, just as he has incited the terrestrial beings to revolt. R. Aibu interpreted: It was a regrettable error on My part to have created an evil urge (*yezer ha-ra*—from ‘*every imagination [yetzer] of the thoughts of his heart was only evil*’) within him, for had I not created an evil urge within him, he would not have rebelled against Me. R. Levi interpreted: I am comforted that I made him from the earth [so as to remain in the earth, i.e. mortal and subject to burial]. ‘*And it grieved him at his heart*’ (*va-yitatzev el libo*). R. Berekiah said: If a king has a palace built by an architect and when he sees it, it displeases him, against whom is he to complain? Surely against the architect! Similarly, ‘*it grieved him at his heart.*’ A certain Gentile asked R. Joshua b. Karhah: ‘Do you not maintain that the Holy One, blessed be He, foresees the future?’ ‘Yes,’ replied he. ‘But it is written, ‘*And it grieved Him at His heart?*’ ‘Has a son ever been born to you?’ inquired he. ‘Yes,’ was the answer. ‘And what did you do?’ —‘I rejoiced and made all others rejoice,’ he answered. ‘Yet did you not know that he would eventually die?’ ‘Gladness at the time of gladness, and mourning at the time of mourning,’ replied he. ‘Even so was it with the Holy One, blessed be He,’ was his rejoinder...”

Thus, we take “It repented the Lord” *in parallel with* “And it grieved (angered) him at heart.” Not that God committed an error, but that creation is all *one*, including its consequences, processes and dynamics. This is the Maimonidean understanding. We read that God “repented,” in Torah language, but we should only take it as divine “gladness at the time of gladness and mourning at the time of mourning.” Though He knows all outcomes, His determination to punish does not represent change of mind. It is all part of the same system, a unified whole. The repenting is the same as the anger, not that God either repents or angers, but that there will be another *contraction*, withdrawal, “hiding of the face,” resulting in punishment of mankind. This removes any thought that God entertains the *passion* of anger.

Definition 3—Projection: Maimonides quoted Isaiah 63:10 and Psalms 78:40, both instances involving God, under Definition 3, rebellion, for man had *provoked* God by his rebellion. Maimonides had said that we could take the phrase “It grieved (angered) Him at (to) His heart” under either Definition 2 *or* Definition 3. Only in the last sentence of the chapter does he discuss Definition 3. For him it means that *we committed acts of provocation* by our rebellion against Him, and *we projected* our provocation upon Him:

“Taking the verb in the third signification, we explain the passage thus: ‘And man rebelled (*va’yimara*) against God’s will concerning Him’; for *lev* (heart) also signifies ‘will.’”

Thus, Maimonides arrives at his preferred reading under Definition 3 for *va-yitatzev el libo*: “And man rebelled (*va’yimara*) against God’s will concerning Him.” It is really a re-write. In this final interpretation, God not only

does not repent or rage; Maimonides twists the phrase so that it describes *human* rebellion. Since God cannot suffer emotion, we must take the provocation/rebellion as a purely human experience projected onto God. Maimonides does this by radically reinterpreting the grammar of the phrase, over-interpreting its reflexive character. Thus, we should *not* take it in parallel with the first part of the verse about God repenting (as opposed to how we took it in Definition 2, above) because Maimonides splits the subjects. Man rebels, God repents. Man projects his own rebellion upon God. In this reading of the whole passage, God “repents,” that is, decides to punish man, not because He is angry or even provoked, but because man has rebelled against God’s will. But this destroys grammatical comprehension. Therefore, Maimonides must radically rewrite the sentence. Not that God “rebelled” to or from His “will,” but that man rebelled against God’s will (*va’yimara ha-adam et ratzon hashem*).

CONCLUSION

The great expansion of Mosaic prophecy cured these withdrawals of providence. We know this for both cases, Eve’s and Noah’s. In the case of Eve, we learn it from Talmud, *Shabat* 146a, and Guide 2:30, quoted above, that at Sinai God removed the poison of the serpent. In the case of Noah, we learn that though God spoke “to his heart”—that He would not again flood the world—He did not publish this news until Sinai. The great change is that after Sinai God has a partner in the plan of creation. Until then the plan was an internal monologue, thereafter a dialogue. His animal creation has achieved spiritual self-recognition. Pain is the punishment for rebellion against our true spiritual nature.

GUIDE 1:30 CONSUME

Maimonides begins his lexical treatment of the root *akhal* by eliminating the possibility that it could mean “eat” in the gross sense of the animal actually chewing and swallowing. He prefers the more abstract notion of “consume.” He frames an animal’s eating upon the Aristotelian notion of *generation* and *corruption*, so that mastication and digestion are mere details of the process. By this means, he avoids having to label *akhal* a homonym, as he had to with *etzev* in the last chapter. God does not eat, but he is the “formal” cause of generation and corruption. Having sublimated the term “consume” from physical eating, he can then make it a purely spiritual process.

He claims his definition is so frequently used and so well known that it *replaced* the primitive meaning of “eating.” At the beginning of the chapter, after mentioning the primitive meaning but giving no examples, he then says, “It was afterwards observed that eating includes two processes (i.e., generation and corruption),” *v’khen clal (sakar) ha-lashon b’musag akhila shnei inianim*. His language assumes that there was a moment when scientific lexicography replaced the primitive meaning with his definition. “The figurative meaning of these expressions has been so general and common, that it was almost considered (i.e., as though it were) its primitive signification,” *u’l’fi sh’nitrava ha-shimush hazei bilshon v’nitpashat ad sh’naaseh c’ilu hu ha-hanakha harishonah*, that is, it replaced the primitive signification.

We will then interpret any instance of *akhal*, and for that matter of eating, drinking, hunger or thirst in the Bible, under the category of generation and corruption. We described this process in our treatment of 1:11 and 1:17, but, briefly, the idea is as follows.

AKHAL: GENERATION AND CORRUPTION

Aristotle had explained that there must be a substance subsisting through all change. This substance is matter. Matter, purely in and of itself, is the *potential* for existence of a thing. That thing comes into existence when matter is *formed*. The capacity for matter to receive form is the *privation* which always accompanies matter and which gives it its resemblance to femininity.

An animate being requires the ingestion of food to maintain its form. The process causes the ingested thing to be corrupted at the same time it is regenerated to become part of the ingesting being’s system. This being is itself *altered*, alteration being the *quantitative* change in a being. By contrast, the food as food is destroyed, a *qualitative* change.

In the process of quantitative change, mere alteration over time goes over to become qualitative change. When the change is qualitative the being changes into another being, its matter loses its former form and gains another form. We call these changes *generation and corruption*. Generation and corruption go together. Man’s death brings the *corruption* that *generates* dust. The matter adopts another form. *Akhal* is the single name for this process, including both its quantitative and qualitative aspects.

We first glimpse *akhal* from the vantage of its destructive power, *corruption*. Foreign enemies, wars and rebellions cause destruction. This definition links with last chapter’s *etzev*—“anger”/“provocation.” The people who rebelled against the Torah thereby caused divine withdrawal and contraction, which they experienced as pain and punishment, the *akhal* of destruction.

The other side of this dialectical process reveals itself in *akhal*’s generative power. By *consuming* knowledge the being generates its true form, acquiring its active intellect. This *generation* comes from the consumption of learning. Intellectualization brings the mind into the dynamic of Torah, the expression of divine will. By this means, we are regenerated, improved, and made permanent.

This is a lexical chapter. See explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

* * *

AKHAL (TO EAT)

1. Consume: Corruption, in the Aristotelian sense. All modes of destruction, or loss of form.
2. Consume: Generation, in the Aristotelian sense. Learning. All modes of intellectual growth or the acquisition of intelligence, including the activation of the passive intellect. Thus, hunger, the precondition of eating, signifies the absence of intellect or knowledge and/or the desire to obtain them. We extend Definition 2 to include drinking, as well as the opposite of eating/drinking: hunger/thirst.

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall *eat* (*v’akhla*) you up.”
(Leviticus 26:38)

This, the first and most corporeal use of *akhal*, is obviously figurative since countries do not eat. See my essay below, *Tokhakha*.

“And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, [is] a land that *eateth up* (*okhelet*) the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it [are] men of a great stature.” (Numbers 13:32)

The verse is from the report of the “spies,” *meraglim*, which Moses sent to survey Israel. They slander the land by bringing a terrifying report of it to the tribes. But there is an element of truth in their report. If the people rebel against Torah, the land will not be their friend. Their withdrawal from God leaves them in a land that “eateth up the inhabitants thereof.”

These first two quotes of Definition 1 are about the land “eating” them, the next two about the “sword” “devouring” them, followed by two quotes about God as a devouring “fire.”

“If ye be willing and obedient (*u’shmatem*), ye shall *eat* (*tokhelu*) the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be *devoured* (*tuklu*) with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken [it]. How is the faithful city become an *harlot*! It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers” (Isaiah 1:19-21)

The same idea as above, that rebellion in the land causes destruction, but this time the land is not doing the eating, the sword of the enemy consumes. This proof-text uses the root *akhal* twice. In the first instance, not quoted by Maimonides, the reward for willing obedience (*u’shmatem*—listening/learning) is “eat(ing) the good of the land.” He would presumably interpret that “eating” as the consumption of Torah that sustains the Jews. The final line in Isaiah reminds us of Maimonides’ interpretation of the Parable of the Married Harlot (Proverbs ch.7). The people, like the troubled young man in the Parable, are “devoured” for their rebellious promiscuousness.

“And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop, and stood on the top of an hill. Then Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword *devour* (*tokhal*) for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? How long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?” (2 Sam. 2:25-26)

Maimonides chose these verses to show the entirely figurative way in which *akhal* is used: swords do not eat. The context is the civil war between David and Saul’s son Ishbosheth, with Joab fighting for David and Abner fighting for Ishbosheth. Joab traps Abner, but Abner falsely sues for peace. Joab falls for the ruse, lets him go, and a “long war” results (3:1). Before this parley took place, Abner had slain Joab’s brother, Asahel. This sets up a cycle of vengeance resulting in Joab’s blameful killing of Abner. David, on his deathbed, orders Joab’s execution. See, generally, *Sanhedrin* 48b-49a for issues involved in the “trial” of Joab which the Talmud claims

Solomon held before executing him. Although Joab was generally a loyal general to David, his decisions were not all sound, nor entirely in David's interest.

“And [when] the people complained, it displeased the Lord: and the Lord heard [it]; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and *consumed* (*va'tokhal*) [them that were] in the uttermost parts of the camp.” (Numbers 11:1)

These next two quotes are central for they call God a devouring fire. This first quote is the better for Maimonides, since it is still possible to consider that the *esh ha-shem*, the “fire of the Lord” is not God but his creation, that is, some angel or force created for the purpose of executing judgment on the Jewish rebels (*Targum* retranslates “fire from God”). “The people complained” at Taberah because the journey to Israel through the Sinai desert was taking too long. Rashi summarizing Midrash, explains the dispute: “They said, Woe is to us! How weary we have become on this journey! For three days we have not rested from the fatigue of walking. —His (God's) anger flared, [He said,] I meant it for your own good—that you should be able to enter the Land immediately.”

“But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over, and possess that good land. Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, [or] the likeness of any [thing], which the Lord thy God hath forbidden thee. For the Lord thy God [he is] a *consuming* fire (*esh okhla hu*), [even] a jealous God.” (Deuteronomy 4:22-24)

The text actually says that God *is* a consuming fire, not, as in the last text, that the fire is *of* God. But God is not the element of fire, nor does God eat (*Targum*: “God's word is a consuming fire”). Maimonides must explain this seeming corporealization. He takes it metaphorically: “that is, He destroys those who rebel against Him, as the fire destroys everything that comes within its reach (Pines: “in its power,” Kafih: *mishtaletet alav*).” He thus reverts to Definition 2 of *etzev* in the last chapter (a *determination* by God to punish man for *idolatry, without warning*), treating the fire of God here as he treated the anger of God there. But recall what he said above. All such destructions are part of the process of formation and loss of form in the generation and corruption of things. This process, of which they are participants, constantly recreates the Jewish people.

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

“Ho, every one that *thirsteth*, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and *eat* (*ve'ekholu*); yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for [that which is] not bread? And your labour for [that which] satisfieth not? *Hearken diligently* unto me, and *eat* (*v'ikhlu*) ye [that which is] good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” (Isaiah 55:1-2)

The rest of Maimonides' quotations take *akhal* as the consumption of Torah through learning. By this means our intellectual form is generated and preserved. Maimonides cites this passage as two separate proof-texts, as shown above. He says that the language of eating gives figurative expression to the process of acquiring knowledge and learning, *l'mada u'l'lmod*. It stands for all intellectual apprehension by which the human form is best preserved, *l'hasagot ha-sikliot asher behem yatmid kiyom ha-tzura ha-enoshit b'ofen ha-yoter shalem*. This “form” is the intellect, preserved through acquisition of the highest intelligibles, not through sense or experiment, but only through pure meditative speculation.

“[It is] not good to *eat* (*akhol*) much honey: so [for men] to search their own glory [is not] glory.” (Proverbs 25:27)

“My son, *eat* (*ekhal*) thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found [it], then there shall be a reward (*akharit*—lit., *future*), and thy expectation shall not be cut off.” (Proverbs 24:13-14).

See essay “A Taste of Honey,” below.

TOKHAKHA

“And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall *eat* (*v'akhla*) you up.”
(Leviticus 26:38)

This proof-text is from the *Tokhakha* (“rebuke”), Leviticus 26:14-41—the harshly detailed prediction of Israel’s punishment when they rebel against God. Rashi explains that this particular line of the *Tokhakha* refers to those Jews who will die in the Diaspora.

This, the first and most corporeal proof-text for *akhal*, is obviously figurative. Countries do not eat. All the quotes for Definition 1 of *akhal* link to Definitions 2 and 3 of *etzev* in the last chapter: the people’s rebellion and provocation are a withdrawal from God. The people trade the rule of divine providence for the rule of corporeal nature. They experience this withdrawal as pain and punishment. They then project their own provocation as *divine* anger.

Abraham Ben Maimonides, commenting on the *Tokhakha*, writes, “This means that the harm of the wicked will only materialize if God removes His providence from the victim” (*Guide to Serving God*, p. 219). The proof-text from the *Tokhakha* personifies this loss of divine providence as the *foreign land’s* assimilation and destruction of the Jews. *Akhal* “consume” extends now to punishment as the destruction of a people: the enemy *consumes* the Jews.

Maimonides introduces the passage with this comment, consistent with his concept of the destructive power of generation/corruption:

“It was afterwards (after we liberated ourselves from the primitive concept of *akhal* as ‘eating’) observed that eating includes *two processes*—(1) the loss of the food, i.e., the destruction (*corruption*) of its form, which first takes place; (2) the growth (*generation*) of animals, the preservation of their strength and their existence, and the support of all the forces of their body, caused by the food they take. The consideration of the first process led to the figurative use of the verb in the sense of ‘consuming,’ i.e., ‘destroying’; hence it includes all modes of depriving a thing of its form”

Definition 1 relates to the first of these two processes, national destruction, while his Definition 2 relates to the second process, growth through increase of wisdom. But these processes are really one since corruption and generation are always concomitant. The idea of the verse would then be that the destruction of the *Tokhakha* is the necessary concomitant of the *generation* that will occur when the Jews cleave to their true form, God, as told in the few brief verses of hope preceding the *Tokhakha*. This is also made clear at the end of the poem, Leviticus 26:41-42: “...if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.”

A TASTE OF HONEY

“[It is] not good to *eat* (*akhol*) much honey: so [for men] to search their own glory [is not] glory.”
(Proverbs 25:27)

“My son, *eat* (*ekhal*) thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found [it], then there shall be a reward (*akharit*—lit., *future*), and thy expectation shall not be cut off.” (Proverbs 24:13-14).

These last two proof-texts about honey qualify each other. The second seems to oppose the first passage, which it actually precedes in Proverbs. Maimonides, following the rule of *ascending in holiness* (see my notes to Guide

1:10), switches the order of the passages so that his first quoted verse tells of the *danger* of the intellectual quest, while the next *ascends* to relate its *sweetness* when pursued properly.

Both passages compare wisdom to honey. We know from Mishneh Torah that honey is dietary trouble:

“(Deot 3:2) A man should direct *all his thoughts* and activities to the knowledge of God....So too, when he eats, drinks, or cohabits, his purpose should not be to secure physical gratification, in which case he would only eat and drink that which was pleasing to the palate, and *cohabit* for the sake of sensual pleasure, but he should have it in mind that he eats and drinks solely to maintain his body and its organs in health and vigour. He will then not partake of everything which the palate craves, like a dog or an ass, but will choose foods that are wholesome to the body, whether these be sweet or bitter and will avoid eating things that are injurious to the body, even though they taste sweet. One, for instance, who is of a hot humour, will not eat...*honey*..., as Solomon said in a metaphorical sense, ‘It is not good to eat much honey.’ Such a person should rather drink an infusion of chicory, even though it is bitter. And so, since life is impossible without eating and drinking, he will be guided in his choice of food and drink by hygienic considerations (*derekh refuah*), to recover and maintain sound health. Thus too, in married life, his purpose in *cohabitation* will be to preserve health or propagate his species. He will consequently not indulge in intercourse whenever the desire seizes him, but only when he is conscious that emission is hygienically necessary or when his purpose is to continue his race. (Deot 4:12) Honey and wine *are bad for young children*, but good for the aged....”

These ideas are at the back of his mind in the discussion of *honey* in our chapter. Notice the close connection between the eating of honey, the direction of “all” thought to the knowledge of God, and cohabitation. Notice also that honey, like the study of *Maaseh Merkava* and forbidden relations, is not for the immature. In 1:32, we will learn that we injure our corporealized intellect when we force it beyond its natural limits, as one is sickened from abusing honey. Nonetheless, Maimonides *does* advocate our pushing those limits. The key is our *humility* in intellectual pursuit, hewing closely to the *rules of learning*, which he explains later.

The key figure who misused the honey of learning was Akher, and we tell his story in our account of 1:32. He is one of a series of figures who approached intellectual activity without humility and got the wrong message, to their detriment. Eve *ate* from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and traded that knowledge for knowledge of truth (1:2). The Elders of Israel (1:5, Exodus 24:10) *feasted* before the vision of the *Merkava* and took the process of divine providence pruriently.

Rashi also understands these Proverbs verses this way. He writes, *ad loc.*: “The topic (eating honey) symbolizes one who [brazenly] expounds on the account of the *Merkavah* and the account of the Creation to the public; the ignoramuses will ridicule the words and ask what is above and what is below.” The rules of learning proscribe the public teaching of divine science, they are limits on the intellectual pursuit. The danger is the desire or *eros* of those who would go beyond their intellectual limits and thereby subject their intellect to their imagination.

In the contrasting second passage, when the student humbly acknowledges his limits, properly qualifies himself and then seeks the rules of learning from the wise he will find the taste of wisdom sweet. Indeed, he shall find his “reward,” (*yesh akharit*—his *future*). Thus, the distinction between the goodness of honey and its dangers resides in the *moral quality* of the student’s intellectual pursuit, that is to say, his *humble* pursuit of esoteric studies.

FURTHER PROOFS THAT AKHAL MEANS “CONSUME LEARNING”

Having made the above extensive presentation Maimonides is not quite satisfied that the reader will accept his Definition 2, that *akhal* means to consume learning as one consumes food, or that it should be generalized to anything similar, such as drinking, together with the hunger and thirst that prompt eating and drinking. He thinks

the point is so important that it bears repeating, especially since the coming chapters, Guide 1:30-35, are about the proper approach to the consumption of knowledge in the divine science.

He provides examples where Talmud and Midrash employed this figurative use of *akhal* as learning.

The Talmud *Baba Bathra* 22a, employs the figure in its account of a certain R. Adda b. Abba who preferred to study with Rava than with Abaye. He said, “Instead of gnawing bones in the school of Abaye, why do you not (come) eat fat meat in the school of Raba?” R. Adda’s presumptuous remark about Abaye reveals his lack of humility in learning, and, according to the Talmud, he may have died for having said this.

Maimonides also cites a Midrashic passage which explains Ecclesiastes 8:15, “So I commended mirth, that a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry, and that this should accompany him in his labor (*amalo*) all the days of his life which God hath given him under the sun.” The Midrash responds in typical fashion, taking eating as learning:

“R. Tanhuma...said: All the eating and drinking mentioned in this Book (Ecclesiastes) refer to Torah and good deeds. R. Jonah said: The most clear proof of them all is, ‘A man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat and to drink, and to be merry, and that this should accompany him in his labor—*amalo*’ (Eccl. 8:15). The last word should be read as *olamo* (his world)—in this world; ‘All the days of his life’ alludes to the grave. Are there, then, food and drink that accompany a man to the grave! But it means the Torah and good deeds which a man does [will endure].” (*Ecclesiastes Rabba* 3:16, with variants at 2:28, 5:23, and 8:16)

Notice that he quotes the part about Ecclesiastes referring to Torah but skips the reference to “good deeds.” He selects only what contributes to his definition of eating as learning. On the other hand, he leaves in the part about “drinking” in order to extend his definition to include drinking. Now eating *and* drinking mean the consumption of learning to regenerate the intellectual soul. It follows that hunger and thirst are the desire for such learning.

Maimonides clarified this metaphor of drinking as Torah learning in Mishneh Torah:

“The words of the Torah have been compared to water, as at is said, ‘Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters’ (Isaiah 55:1); this teaches us that just as water does not accumulate on a slope but flows away, while in a depression it stays, so the words of the Torah are not to be found in the *arrogant or haughty* but only in him who is *contrite and lowly in spirit*, who sits in the dust at the feet of the wise and banishes from his heart lusts and temporal delights; works a little daily, just enough to provide for his needs, if he would otherwise have nothing to eat, and devotes the rest of the day and night to the study of the Torah.” (*Talmud Torah* 3:9)

Thirst and the water that slakes it symbolize the *eros* for wisdom and the Torah that satisfies it. But, as with honey and cohabitation, danger lurks. Humility is the antidote to the dangers of the intellectual quest. We avoid these dangers by taking the proper attitude in learning, which requires *humility* before the subject matter: “him who is contrite and lowly in spirit.”

Similarly, Maimonides quotes Amos 8:11, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a *famine* in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord,” to prove that hunger *and* thirst in the Bible refer to the desire to overcome ignorance. He recalls Psalms 42:1: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” previously treated beautifully in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 2:2, where he wrote about the humble seeker’s thirst for knowledge:

“And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great name even as David said ‘My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.’ And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil affrighted, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge.”

The student thirsts for knowledge but is humbled before the magnitude of the divine science.

He concludes with a meditation on the famous passage, Isaiah 12:3, “Behold, God [is] my salvation...Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). He admires the way the *Targum* of Jonathan Ben Uzziel retranslates the passage: “You will joyfully receive new instruction from the chosen of the righteous.” Jonathan sublimates nearly every word in his translation. The water drawn is new learning to be acquired. He implies that this new learning will come in the future when prophecy returns. This learning will come from “wells,” that is, from the wise who are channels of revelation (see Pines’ notes 24 and 25, p. 64, explaining the derivation). These wise men are called by Jonathan the chosen of the righteous, because, as Maimonides says, “righteousness is the true salvation,” *ha-tzedek hu ha-yeshua ha-amitit*. By this, he means to tie Definition 2 back to Definition 1: these righteous leaders are loyal to Torah and humble before it, and therefore they are prophets who act as channels of revelation, unlike the Elders of Israel (Guide 1:5, Exodus 24:10) who brazenly feasted at the revelation.

GUIDE 1:31 LIMITS OF THE CORPOREALIZED INTELLECT

Friedlander, note 1, sketches the program for the next six chapters:

“The arrangement in chapters 31 to 36 is as follows: man’s intellect is limited (1:31); a transgression of the limit is not only useless, but even dangerous (1:32). The limit is not the same for all. The study of metaphysics, accessible to some, is too difficult for the ordinary capacity of man, and for novices in the study of philosophy (1:33). Metaphysics is not a suitable subject for general instruction (1:34). The doctrine of the incorporeality of God, though part of metaphysics, must not be treated as an esoteric doctrine (1:35). Belief in the corporeality of the Divine Being is equal to idolatry (1:36).”

These six chapters are non-lexical. Together they provide a methodology in the philosophy of the divine things, especially creation and providence, *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkavah*. The *desire* for this knowledge is the link between this chapter and the previous chapter, and was the theme of several quotations there. In 1:30 Maimonides used strong language of hunger and thirst for this desire or *eros*. One quotation is cautionary, “It is not good to eat much honey” (Proverbs 25:27). That passage is infamously linked to the heretic Akher, one of the four who went to Paradise seeking this knowledge. He is an important figure in these chapters.

Our chapter begins to address the dangers in this intellectual quest. There are strict limits to human intelligence. Once we exceed those limits, thought must pass over from intelligence to imagination. The imagination is the opposite of the intellect: the intellect analyzes wholes to find the truth in their elements; the imagination combines even incompatible elements. The intellect seeks truth, but the search for truth is not the purpose of the imagination. At best, the imagination is necessary for the *representation* of incorporeal truths; at worst, the imagination produces idolatry.

WHY IS THE INTELLECT LIMITED?

Here are the steps in Maimonides’ argument. Just as we are not able to lift very heavy weights, and some people can lift more than others can, so intellectual ability is unevenly distributed and has limits. Some students learn readily, while no amount of teaching can bring others to learn. There are, indeed, things that no one can learn, such as whether the total number of stars is odd or even. The sign of these subjects is that we have no *desire* to learn them. “The place where intellectual perception stops, the desire for it also stops” (Even-Shmuel, *ad loc.*, 131). The unstated converse of this proposition would be that where such a desire does exist, intellect might not be barred. Still, Maimonides insists that while “man is able to comprehend certain things, it does not follow that he must be able to comprehend everything” (*v’ayn hiyoto masig, m’khayev sh’yasig kol davar*). This means that even though he may go far in divine science he can not grasp the divine essence.

We should acknowledge our individual and collective limitations. Yet we possess a desire for certain kinds of knowledge. While unnamed, Maimonides has in mind cosmological and divine speculation. The fact that we have a desire to know these things means that they are not entirely beyond the bounds of discovery.

This desire to know the divine truths is unending. Nonetheless, our material intellect is limited to knowledge of things below the orbit of the moon. Just as our sense of sight is limited by distance, so our intellect is limited to the sublunary existences. Our desire forces thought to pass over to imagination, since despite our sublunary limitation we want to know the truth of what is above us. “Everyone thinks that he has found a way by means of which he will know the true reality of the matter.” When mind exceeds its limit and desire replaces thought with imagination, the thinker commits hubris and makes himself a God. This is the special problem of metaphysics, as opposed to physics and mathematics, where proof obtains.

On the other hand, some people who combine ignorance and arrogance reject all speculation. At one point, Maimonides seems to compare these un-teachable individuals to Bedouins who have no desire for the finer things in life. Because of this lack of desire, they never enter the “palace” where these higher things are (cf. 3:51, the Allegory of the Palace).

Maimonides makes a series of pejorative statements regarding such a close-minded individual, who he continually calls an ignoramus (*sikel*). Such a person resists all demonstrative proof, and is uneducable. This is a serious problem because it places the individual beyond the reach of Maimonides’ project, which is to remove corporeality by turning the individual away from the imagination and toward the intellect. Why do people resist this quest?

EDUCATIONAL RESISTANCE

Maimonides turns to Alexander of Aphrodisias, an Aristotle commentator (c. 150-210 CE). Alexander gives three causes for educational resistance. Those causes are intellectual *arrogance*, *complexity* of the subject, and pure *ignorance*. Maimonides then adds a fourth reason for educational resistance, which he clearly meant to be provocative:

“At the present time (*u'bizmanenu*) there is a fourth cause not mentioned by him, because it did not then prevail (*sh'lo hizkiru mipnei sh'lo haya etzlam*), namely, habit and training (*ha-hergul v'ha-khinukh*). We naturally like what we have been accustomed to, and are attracted towards it.”

What is it that “did not then prevail” with Alexander and the other pagan philosophers? The answer, although Maimonides is careful not to state it explicitly, is biblical scripture, together with the Agadah and the Midrash. He says:

“This is likewise one of the causes which prevent men from finding truth, and which make them cling to their habitual opinions. Such is, e.g., the case with the vulgar notions with respect to the corporeality of God, and many other metaphysical questions, as we shall explain.”

Maimonides goes on to say what this cause is that prevents men from finding the truth:

“All this is because of habit and training in texts (*lashonot*) that all agree upon their holiness and truth (*sh'ha-kol modem b'kedushatan v'amitatan*), but whose surface meaning teaches corporeality and other other untrue imaginings.” (My translation)

I abandoned the Friedlander translation here since he broadly translates “texts” as “Bible,” but I agree with him that Maimonides has holy writ in mind.

Does basic biblical education impede learning? Focusing carefully on what Maimonides actually does say and does not say, I think such an interpretation would go too far. He does identify biblical anthropomorphism as a cause of educational resistance to the systematic investigation of divine things. He thinks it necessary to have a teacher like Onkelos who can redirect the reader to an allegorical interpretation of these passages.

This is no problem for Alexander and the philosophers for they have no Torah. I question if they did not also meet resistance due to traditional texts, for Socrates and Aristotle had to respond to Homer and the Hellenic celestial pantheon. Maimonides apparently thinks that if the Greeks had Torah, Alexander would have included resistance due to scripture in his list.

In fact, Aristotle did pronounce habituation to Greek scriptures an impediment to learning:

"The effect which lectures produce on a hearer depends on his habits; for we demand the language we are accustomed to, and that which is different from this seems not in keeping but somewhat unintelligible and foreign because of its unwontedness. For it is the customary that is intelligible. The force of habit is shown by the laws, in which the legendary and childish elements prevail over our knowledge about them, owing to habit. Thus some people do not listen to a speaker unless he...cite[s] a poet (e.g. Homer) as witness." (*Metaphysics* 2:3, 995a)

What Maimonides meant by his remark about what "did not then prevail" with the philosophers was that since they are not bound by *any* tradition in their search for truth, it is all the more remarkable that even they thought our metaphysical grasp limited (See my comments on 1:5 for what Aristotle actually said about these limits). Yehuda Even-Shmuel explains (my translation) why this might be the case: "Men of faith always tend to exaggerate the sphere of the unknown in order that the area of faith will fill the place of the rationally knowable." Thus, by contrast, "Since it is in the interest of philosophers to demonstrate no limits to intelligence," the fact that they encounter a limit to what is knowable makes the similar religious claim impeccable.

However that may be, Maimonides teaches (See my *Introduction II*), the concept of the *educational contradiction*. This is the apparent contradiction between what we must teach early in the educational process, and what we teach later. We must explain some things simply so that the student at the basic level can appreciate them. The complexities can come later. Viewed baldly, the earlier explanation seems to contradict the subsequent complex and accurate explanation. In fact, there is no contradiction. Elementary educational methods familiarize the student with the Torah's surface but later the good teacher with the qualified pupil finds its true inner meaning, transcending the limits of language. Since there is a human desire for spiritual knowledge, there may be a possibility for intellectual transcendence of these limits. The desire is the key that reveals the possibility of transcendence. This desire mobilizes the human *striving* that alone can produce this transcendence.

This erotic striving to transcend the limits of knowledge unshackles the imagination. This is the dark side of desire. The necessary cautions regarding divine speculation were not brought merely because of the rule of the Mishnah *Hagiga*, but were concerns that troubled the philosophers as well. We addressed this in Guide 1:5, where Maimonides contended that Aristotle exercised humility in cosmological speculation. We must be *humble* before our intellectual limits to prevent descent to pure imagination.

LOCKED OR UNLOCKED: A CONTRADICTION?

Humility, as understood by Maimonides, is a set of rules and conditions governing the intellectual quest. We now have the first four. Alexander of Aphrodisius warned against *arrogance*, about the innate *complexity* of the subject matter, as well as most students' *incapacity*. Maimonides' adds his rule against dogmatic attachment to traditional texts whose literal meaning is corporeal. He develops more rules of humility in the next chapter, which should be read with this one. The most important rule is *patience* in the face of apparent *contradictions*.

I wrote above in *Introduction II—Contradictions* that while contradictions seem to proliferate in divine studies these contradictions are only apparent. An actual contradiction must conform to the logical rule of contradiction, and few do. The exercise of patience in the face of contradiction is the *sine qua non* of *humility*. This trait allowed Akiva to enter and emerge from paradisiacal meditation on divine creation and providence. It allowed Aristotle to theorize the existence of animate spheres (Guide 1:5).

Maimonides gives a wonderful example of such an apparent contradiction in these two chapters. At the beginning of our chapter, he writes:

"Know that for the human mind there are certain objects of perception which are within the scope of its nature and capacity; on the other hand, there are, amongst things which actually exist, certain objects

which the mind can in *no* way and by *no* means grasp: the gates of perception are *closed* against it (*shaarei ha-sagatan n'ulim b'fanav*).”

At the end of the next chapter, 1:32, he writes:

“It was not the object of the Prophets and our Sages in these utterances to close the gate of investigation entirely (*neilim shaarei ha-iyun l'gamrei*), and to prevent the mind (*v'hashbatat ha-sekhel*, lit.: lock out the mind) from comprehending what is within its reach (*m'lahasig ma sh'efshar lahasig*)...”

Is the gate locked or can it open? If you thought this is an actual contradiction, he has these strong words for you in concluding the above clause:

“...as is imagined (*sh'mdamim*) by simple and idle people, whom it suits better to put forth their ignorance and incapacity as wisdom and perfection, and to regard the distinction and wisdom of others as irreligion and imperfection, thus taking darkness for light and light for darkness.”

In other words, if you took the statement in our chapter that “the gates of perception are closed” as the rule you would have succumbed to the imagination of fools. These “simple and idle” people are not just the non-philosophic multitude, but include intellectuals who fail to exercise humility before apparent contradictions, of which this is the signal example. These intellectuals (who may even be rabbis) impatiently “put forth their...incapacity as wisdom,” announcing contradictions where there are none. They have not sought to discover what might be within their “reach.” Their striving comes to a halt.

Recall the motto preceding the Guide: “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in” (Isaiah 26:2). The humility of the student directly relates to his ability to transcend the corporeal intellect and open those gates. We only find what is within the mind’s “reach” through patient investigation of the apparent contradictions. The four causes of educational resistance are clearly not insuperable barriers to this quest.

* * *

Yehuda Even-Shmuel’s summary of the chapter provides an especially good review of Maimonides’ argument and its implications:

“Human intellect is limited and has boundaries. The question is: How can our limited perception conceive the unlimited and unbounded spiritual [world]? The answer: By means of man’s natural [intellectual] perception. Man has no interest in things he cannot know; but if we find that he desires to know the source of spirituality and of all spiritual creations, the sign (*siman*) thereof is his ability to *recognize* their existence. You may ask: Why do controversies proliferate in spiritual investigations? The answer: It is precisely here that ordinary science stops and a new science (*shita*) begins. Here the power of proof stops, but in accord with this new perception (the recognition of spirituality) the mind is compelled to discover for itself new ways to recognize these new things.” (My translation)

GUIDE 1:32
TRANSCENDING THE LIMITS OF CORPOREALIZED INTELLECT

The chapter makes two points: first, the material intellect can be injured by traversing its limits; and second, those limits can and should be traversed as the intellect sheds its material connection to become what it truly is, entirely non-corporeal.

This chapter is heavily penetrated by Talmudic material from the second section of Tractate *Hagigah*, the *fons et origo* of Jewish mysticism. Maimonides takes it for granted that his readership is familiar with those passages, and so his fragmentary quotes are more mystifying than necessary to the modern reader. I reproduce the material quoted in this chapter in full with my comments.

THE LAW OF DIVINE STUDIES

There is a law that governs the learning and teaching of divine things. That law is the introduction to the second section of *Hagigah*, from the *Mishna*. You should notice immediately that the law links the forbidden in sexuality to the hidden in divinity:

“*MISHNA*: The [subject of] forbidden relations may not be expounded in the presence of three, nor the work of creation in the presence of two, nor [the work of] the chariot in the presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge. Whosoever speculates upon four things, a pity for him! He is as though he had not come into the world; [to wit:] what is above, what is beneath, what before, what after. And whosoever takes no thought for the honour of his maker, it were a mercy if he had not come into the world.” (Talmud *Hagigah* 11b, Soncino trans. throughout)

“Forbidden relations” (*gilui arayot*) are the Torah’s lists of forbidden conjugations, including incest, adultery and homosexuality. The link between sexuality and divinity is that the metaphor of conjugality is our best image for Creation and the continued involvement of God in the world. Those are the two other two listed subjects, the Creation (*Maaseh Bereshit*) and the Divine Chariot of Ezekiel (*Maaseh Merkavah*). The limitation to three, two, or one student, variously understood by the Talmud’s commentary, for our purposes just means that the subject is not to be taught in the public forum. The Hasidic revolution overturned this rule. Several reasons for the rule against public teaching are given, one commonly accepted is that a gaggle of boys would giggle and thus trivialize the material. Maimonides explains somewhat differently, *Mishneh Torah, Ysodei Ha-Torah* 4:11: “Why is the subject not taught in public? Because not every one possesses the breadth of intellect requisite for obtaining an accurate grasp of the meaning and interpretation of all its contents.”

The phrase “Unless he is a sage (*hakham*—wise) and understands of his own knowledge (*mevin mdaato*),” means that the student must have the intellect and maturity to enter the study, that he have prepared himself in the scholarly prerequisites, and that he can figure things out on his own.

There are strict limits to the study: the “before,” “after,” “above,” “beneath,” which it was death to pursue. These limits are meant to keep us from transgressing the “honor” of the Creator by making ourselves out to be the creators. The Talmud *Hagigah* discusses the nature of these limits:

“And R. Aha b. Jacob said: There is still another Heaven above the heads of the living creatures, for it is written (Ezekiel 1:22): ‘And over the heads of the living creatures there was a likeness of a firmament, like the colour of the terrible ice, stretched forth over their heads above.’ Thus far you have permission to speak, thenceforward (that is, about the ‘above’) you have not permission to speak, for so it is written in the *Book of Ben Sira*: ‘Seek not things that are too hard for thee, and search not things that are hidden from thee. The things that have been permitted thee, think thereupon; thou hast no business with the things that are secret.’” (*Hagigah* 13a)

This is the warning over the lintel. It would seem to be absolute. But the Mishna itself only says not to “expound” the secret things. Nonetheless, there is a legal way to teach the student:

“*Nor [the work of] the chariot in the presence of one.* R. Hiyya taught: But the headings of chapters may be transmitted to him. R. Zera said: The headings of chapters may be transmitted only to the head of a court and to one whose heart is anxious within him (he possesses humility). Others say: Only if his heart is anxious within him. R. Ami said: The mysteries of the Torah may be transmitted only to one who possesses five attributes, [namely], (Isaiah 3:3): ‘The captain of fifty, and the man of rank, and the counsellor, and the cunning charmer, and the skillful enchanter.’” (*Hagigah* 13a)

The most important requirement, one not mentioned in the Mishnah, is the desire or eros for divine knowledge, which we encourage, despite its dangers. Still, the student must be *mevin mdaato*, able to figure things out on his own. He must also possess humility, which, for Maimonides, means to pause before apparent contractions. For safety’s sake, and because of our corporeal limits, we only give him hints on each topic, “chapter headings.” He must extract and connect the truth through his own meditations.

The “captain of fifty” is reinterpreted not as fifty men but as fifty years of age, but exceptions to this are immediately given in the text, so that forty is usually taken as the rule, the age of maturity and calm inquiry. In Chapters of the Fathers (*Pirke Avot* 5:24), forty is the age we understand (*lavina*—compare to *mevin mdaato*) all our teachers taught us, including our divine teacher. The Talmud, *Avoda Zara* 5a-b, relates this idea to the forty years in the Sinai desert and to the redemption of the transgression in Eden:

“Our Rabbis taught: In the verse, ‘O that they had such a heart always’ (Deuteronomy 5:26), Moses said to the Israelites, Ye are an ungrateful people, the offspring of an ungrateful ancestor. When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to you. ‘Who might grant that they had such a heart always?’ (a literal rendering of preceding verse). You should have said: ‘Thou grant!’ [But they proved themselves] ungrateful by saying. ‘Our soul loatheth this light bread’ (Numbers 21:5). ‘The offspring of an ungrateful ancestor’, for it is written, ‘The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the Tree, and I did eat’ (Genesis 3:12, wherein Adam makes Eve an object of complaint.) Yet Moses indicated this to the Israelites only after forty years had passed, as it is said, ‘And I have led you forty years in the wilderness . . . but the Lord hath not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see and ears to hear, unto (until) this day’ (Deuteronomy 29: 3-4). Said Raba: *From this you can learn that it may take one forty years to know the mind of one’s master.*”

THE FOUR WHO WENT TO PARADISE

Maimonides recalls the famous cautionary tale of the dangers of this learning:

“Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the ‘Garden,’ (*pardes*—paradise) namely, Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, Akher, and R. Akiba. R. Akiba said to them: When ye arrive at the stones of pure marble, say not, water, water! For it is said (Psalms 101:7): ‘He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes.’ Ben Azzai cast a look and died. Of him Scripture says (Psalms 116:15): ‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.’ Ben Zoma looked and became demented (affected: *v’pga*). Of him Scripture says: Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. Akher mutilated the shoots. R. Akiba departed unhurt. ” (*Hagigah* 14b)

Paradise is the grove where divine learning is acquired directly from above the heavens. There is some scholarly controversy over when the term itself became an acronym for the four levels of textual interpretation, *PaRDeS*: *peshat* – surface; *remez* – metaphor; *d’rash* – homiletics; *sod* – esoterics. In any event, the sense is that these four sages jointly entered meditation on the *sod* level of scripture, but did not emerge jointly. Maimonides explains

why, Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 4:13: “Although these four were great men of Israel and great sages, they did not all possess the capacity to know and grasp these subjects clearly.” They had not all graduated in the prerequisites to that study. In our chapter, he also suggests that they were not equally humble in the face of an apparent contradiction. That contradiction was their imagination of *hyle* as “water, water.” This corporeal image of transparency reflected a certain feature of this non-corporeal *potentia*, its capacity to take on different forms.

Ben Azzai (a figure sometimes exchanged with or confused with Ben Zoma) does not survive the affair, but may have been the most successful, since he received what is called later the “kiss of death,” that is, the direct translation from corporeality to pure spirituality, like the deathless death of Enoch. Ben Zoma is the figure most closely associated with Jewish esotericism. He later has another experience with *hyle* (previously described by us at Guide 1:5, closely related to this chapter). Rabbi Akiva, because of his humility and scholarly maturity, emerged “in peace.” And then we have the very interesting character known as Akher. “There are three disciples [significant for dreams]. If one sees Ben Azzai in a dream, he may hope for piety; if Ben Zoma, he may hope for wisdom; if Akher, let him fear for punishment” (Talmud, *Berakhot* 57b).

THE STORY OF AKHER

His real name was Elisha ben Abuya, and he is an major figure in the Talmud. He was a great rabbi of Akiva’s generation, who understood Greek and became Hellenized:

“But what of Akher? — Greek song did not cease from his mouth. It is told of Akher that when he used to rise [to go] from the schoolhouse, many heretical books (books of the *minim*—heretics? Christians? Greeks?) used to fall from his lap.” (*Hagigah* 15b)

The chief sin the Greek philosophers were accused of was that they misled the youth.

The *sotto voce* implication was that the Greeks were also considered pedophiles. The statements quoted about him may carry such a double entendre. For instance, the statement that Akher emerged from paradise and “mutilated the shoots.” The “shoots” are the youth, and perhaps their *membra* as well.

“Akher mutilated the shoots. Of him Scripture says: (Ecclesiastes 5:6): ‘Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy body to sin’” (*Hagigah* 15a, see our essay in Guide 1:12 “Metatron”)

The cause of his apostasy is variously given, but most famously as the problem of theodicy, especially as understood during a time of terrible persecution by the Roman authorities. It is a law of the Torah that in taking the egg from the nest you must shoo the mother bird (*shiluakh ha-kan*). Elisha ben Abuya saw a pious man climb a ladder to perform that command, fall and die. Another account has him seeing the sages’ bodies desecrated by Romans. In neither example did God protect the righteous. Akher’s disillusionment led him to side with the authorities and offer up his former fellows to the persecutors.

The very heavens denounced him as beyond repentance:

“There came out a heavenly voice and said (Jeremiah 3:14): ‘Return, O backsliding children’ except Akher He answered him I have already heard from behind the curtain ‘Return, O backsliding children’ except Akher.” (*Hagigah* 15a)

He celebrated atheistic and dualistic heresies:

“Since I have been driven forth from yonder world, let me go forth and enjoy this world (Epicurianism? Hedonism?). So Akher went forth into evil courses. He went forth, found a harlot and demanded her. She said to him: Art thou not Elisha ben Abuyah? [But] when he tore a radish out of its bed on the

Sabbath and gave it to her, she said: It is another [Akher]. After his apostasy, Akher asked R. Meir [a question], saying to him: What is the meaning of the verse: (Ecclesiastes 7:14): ‘Also this hath God made in equal measure with the other’? He replied: It means that for everything that God created He created [also] its counterpart. He created mountains, and created hills; He created seas, and created rivers. Said [Akher] to him (explaining his doctrine of dualism): R. Akiba, thy master, did not explain it thus, but [as follows]: He created righteous, and created wicked; He created the Garden of Eden, and created Gehinnom. Everyone has two portions, one in the Garden of Eden and one in Gehinnom. The righteous man, being meritorious, takes his own portions and his fellow’s portion in the Garden of Eden. The wicked man, being guilty, takes his own portion and his fellow’s portion in Gehinnom. R. Mesharsheya said: What is the Biblical proof for this? In the case of the righteous, it is written: (Isaiah 61:7): ‘Therefore in their hand shall they possess a twofold [portion].’ In the case of the wicked it is written (Jeremiah 17:18): ‘And strike them with a double breach.’” (*Hagigah* 15a)

Even after his public apostasies, he had a devoted student who remained among the Rabbanites, R. Meir:

“Our Rabbis taught: Once Akher was riding on a horse on the Sabbath, and R. Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah at his mouth. Said [Akher] to him: Meir, turn back, for I have already measured by the paces of my horse that thus far extends the Sabbath limit. He replied: Thou, too, go back! [Akher] answered: Have I not already told thee that I have already heard from behind the Veil: ‘Return ye backsliding children’ — except Akher.” (*Hagigah* 15a)

Despite his rebellions, his memory was still cherished:

“Akher’s daughter [once] came before Rabbi (nickname of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi, 135-220 C.E.) and said to him: O master, support me! He asked her: ‘Whose daughter art thou?’ She replied: I am Akher’s daughter. Said he: Are any of his children left in the world? Behold it is written: (Job 18:19): ‘He will have neither son nor grandson among his people, nor any that escapeth in the places of his sojourning’? She answered: Remember his Torah and not his deeds. Forthwith, a fire came down and enveloped Rabbi’s bench. [Thereupon] Rabbi wept and said: If it be so on account of those who dishonour her (Torah), how much more so on account of those who honour her!” (*Hagigah* 15b)

HOW MAIMONIDES USES THE MATERIALS FROM THE TALMUD *HAGIGAH*

Maimonides compares the limits of man’s still material intellect to the limits of our other corporeal faculties. Just as we cannot see the details of distant items, so we cannot understand things beyond our limits. More, we can suffer anaesthesia, i.e., eyestrain, and damage the eye when we try to see too much, so that we cannot even see what we could see before. Similarly, we can so exhaust the mind that we no longer understand what we knew before. Akiva understood these limits. This and only this was the reason Akiva survived paradise:

“If you admit the doubt, and do not persuade yourself to believe that there is a proof for things which cannot be demonstrated, or to try at once to reject and positively to deny an assertion the opposite of which has never been proved, or attempt to perceive things which are beyond your perception, then you have attained the highest degree of human perfection, then you are like R. Akiva, who ‘in peace entered (the study of divine science), and came out in peace.’”

Akiva, like Socrates, knew what he did not know, but also like him, did not refrain from the quest. This epistemological maturity is the “highest degree of human perfection.” Kafih (see his notes 8-9, *ad loc.*) deploys the problem of the *creation* or *eternity* of the universe, thematic to the Guide, as the best example of this epistemological maturity. Do not go beyond the possible, do not try to convince yourself that either position, creation or eternity, is demonstrated when it is not, or that either alternative was proven without its contradictory being disproven. Since perception stops at the lunar sphere, we cannot demonstrate Aristotle’s eternalism nor

reject revelation. I would go further than Kafih. Maimonides wants us to leave the door open to post-scientific or even post-intellectual speculations and meditations, areas that by their nature are beyond the reach of proof.

We noted in the last chapter Maimonides' apparently contradictory statements about the locking of the gates of perception. *Humility* before such an apparent contradiction is the key to this gate. The contrary of this humility is epistemological immaturity, epitomized by Akher:

“If, on the other hand, you attempt to exceed the limit of your intellectual power, or at once to reject things as impossible which have never been proved to be impossible, or which are in fact possible, though their possibility be very remote, then you will be like Elisha Akher; you will not only fail to become perfect, but you will become exceedingly imperfect. Ideas founded on mere imagination will prevail over you, you will incline toward defects, and toward base and degraded habits, on account of the confusion which troubles the mind, and of the dimness of its light, just as weakness of sight causes invalids to see many kinds of unreal images, especially when they have looked for a long time at dazzling or at very minute objects.”

Why? Failure to observe the epistemological limits in a mature fashion forces the mind to go from intellect over to imagination, to become snared in the corporeal images. The result for Akher is not only intellectual but also *moral* failure.

The second lesson is not to take the limits as imperial. Recall the metaphor of honey: eating more than you ought is surely deleterious, but taken with proper caution it is good for you. As Even-Shmuel says (p. 139), the perceptions of wisdom are the food of the mind. The law of *Hagigah* does not ban all esoteric divine investigation:

“It was not the object of the Prophets and our Sages in these utterances to close the gate of investigation entirely, and to prevent the mind from comprehending what is within its reach, as is imagined by simple and idle (*ha-s'khalim v'ha-batlanim*, אלהמהלן אלמתואנון) people, whom it suits better to put forth their ignorance and incapacity as wisdom and perfection, and to regard the distinction and wisdom of others as irreligion and imperfection, thus taking darkness for light and light for darkness.”

Pines translates *ha-s'khalim v'ha-batlanim* as “ignorant and neglectful,” but I am not impressed with his translation or Friedlander's translation, because I do not think the local peasant is the butt of attack. In context I think it was addressed to those who took the rules of the Mishna in *Hagigah* as a prohibition to study anything but the statutory law. The splenetic tone of the passage suggests that Maimonides means to preempt their criticism.

“MATERIAL” INTELLECT?

Finally, Maimonides addresses a concern that we are not treating the subject in its sufficient depth. After all, the Guide is a textbook for prophets, and therefore the object of this curriculum *is* to transcend the limit of the material intellect:

“Do not criticize the words used in this chapter and in others in reference to the mind, for we only intended to give some idea of the subject in view, not to describe the essence of the intellect: for other chapters have been dedicated to this subject.”

Friedlander explains, note 2, *ad loc.*:

“The intellectual perceptions are here called (Ibn Tibon trans.) *ntalot b'khomer*, ‘attached to or connected with matter,’ insofar as the mind is connected with the human body, and is, as it is were, residing in it. The ‘ideas’ of the intellect are generally considered by Maimonides as independent of the body, but he

does not speak here of the intellect in the strictly philosophical sense of the word, as he distinctly states at the end of this chapter.”

We discussed, in the last chapter, the apparent contradiction presented by a mind “attached to” and limited by matter, on the one hand, and the mind whose “gates of investigation” in divine science are not closed. The contradiction is an “educational” contradiction. The first teaching directs the student of divine science on the path of intellectual humility, while the second is for the prophet, the one who has achieved such humility, and whose mind is liberated. The only possible limit for such a mind is true knowledge of the essence of God.

In Guide 1:21, Maimonides addressed this final limit on the intellect. Moses, on Sinai, encountered God but could not unite with Him. He warned of the danger of transgressing the ultimate limit:

“In asserting that God withheld from Moses the higher knowledge I mean to say that this knowledge was unattainable, that by its nature it was inaccessible to Moses; for man, whilst able to gain perfection by applying his reasoning faculties to the attainment of what is within the reach of his intellect, either weakens his reason or loses it altogether as soon as he ventures to seek a higher degree of knowledge--as I shall elucidate in one of the chapters of this work (our chapter, 1:32)—unless he be granted a special aid from heaven, as is described in the words, ‘And I will cover thee with my hand until I pass by.’ (Exodus 33:23)”

The remarkable result, eternally significant, is the miracle of Moses’ revelation. His humble striving receives reward in knowledge beyond the limit of the human intellect: still, he never reaches the level of divinity.

Maimonides does not multiply distinctions like a scholastic, yet he is sensitive to the difference between mind taken generally and mind as dependant upon the individual’s physical existence. In Guide II:Introduction, Proposition XI, he writes:

“Among the things which exist in a body, there are some which participate in the division of that body, and are therefore accidentally divisible, as, e.g., its colour, and all other forces that spread throughout its parts. On the other hand, among the things that constitute the existence of a body, there are some which cannot be divided in any way, as, e.g., the soul and the intellect.”

The material (hylic) intellect has a relation of *inexistence* with the body, i.e., it exists in it, but not a relation of *admixture*, and, therefore it is not divisible with the body. Maimonides’ position is at odds with Aristotle, for whom even this intellect is separate, i.e., neither inexistent nor admixed. Indeed, Aristotle demonstrates the separateness of the intellect by contending that while straining the senses ruins them, stress strengthens thought. Maimonides, by contrast, holds that only the active intellect is entirely separate from the body. Slightly more Aristotelian is Avicenna (980-1037) who held that the intellect is not in matter but possesses a dependence on matter. The position of Albertus Magnus (1200-1280) is perhaps closer to Maimonides. “The soul is intellectual because it operates without using the body and animal because it uses the organic body; but nevertheless its intellectual aspect is overshadowed in that it is inquisitive, not certain like the intellectual aspect of the celestial intellects which are not overshadowed by the disturbances of bodies.” (Avicenna, quoted in Even-Shmuel, *ad loc.*, 136; Albertus in McKeon, Richard, *Selections from Medieval Philosophy*, I, 341, Scribners, 1957; generally, see Wolfson, *Crescas Critique of Aristotle*, 604-8.)

We are only speaking, in our chapter, of the practical realities the human intellect is subject to, not its potential power when liberated from those shackles. But we are too early in the story to reach that prescription for the perplexed.

GUIDE 1:33 BEGINNINGS

Chapter 1:33 furthers the survey of the problems teaching the divine science.

Maimonides says that the divine science concerns parables in the prophetic scriptures, “mysteries (*sodot*), and secrets of the law (*sitre torah*).”

But this chapter is not about the content of the divine science, nor whether to study it, nor how to study. Rather, the chapter is devoted to the *beginning* of the study.

Maimonides says it is “very injurious” to begin the study without first determining if the student is capable of it, and, second, without his completion of certain preparatory studies. Those studies are mathematics, geometry, logic, physics, and astronomy, as Maimonides’ contemporaries understood these disciplines. Torah studies are unmentioned but assumed, since his intended readers are young rabbis (as the Guide’s many unexplained rabbinic references suggest).

The reason the studies are injurious for the unprepared is that the student will “not only become confused in matters of religion, *but will fall into complete infidelity*.” It would be better, following Pines and Schwarz, to translate that last phrase as “but will empty the divine of any content.” The example of such a student was Akher, who rejected divine law and providence. He was too impatient to learn the mysteries and secrets of the law to prepare properly for the study.

As we saw, the unprepared student affirms as proven the unproven. He deprecates ideas as disproven whose contradictories are yet unproven. He rushes to perceive what he cannot perceive. His inevitable disillusionment ends in atheism, emptying the divine of any content. Like Akher, he rejects the religious community.

LIMITATIONS

“It is necessary to initiate the young and to instruct the *less intelligent (mugbalei ha-havana)* according to their comprehension... for it is the object of the Torah to serve as a guide for the instruction of the young, of women, and of the common people; and as all of them are incapable to comprehend the true sense of the words, *tradition (Ar., taqlīd)* was considered sufficient to convey all truths which were to be established and as regards ideals, only such remarks were made as would lead towards a knowledge of their *existence*, though not to a comprehension of their true *essence*.”

I highlighted the words “less intelligent” above, because they probably should be translated “limited understanding” (Pines: “deficient in capacity”; Schwarz: “*kitzrei ha-daat*”). Maimonides is never clear on whether intellectual limitation is due to nature or nurture. He might not have recognized the distinction. We are *all* limited to sublunary knowledge, and there are subjects whose limits we have no desire to overcome, such as whether the number of stars is odd or even. He also recognizes that some are more limited than others, since God did not distribute intellectual capacity equally.

In the last chapter, he said that while “everyone” recognized different physical limitations, only “the wise” recognized the inequality of intellectual limitations. Yet Maimonides always holds out some promise that limits are transcendable. He does say that limits and “causes preventing the study” (*sibot m'niat lamod*) are “requisite and necessary.” However, just because limits preventing study are, in the nature of things, requisite and necessary, does not mean they are insurmountable. Some will never be able to learn, but he grants educational nurture considerable leeway.

WOMEN?

His remarks about women are unremarkable in this historical setting. We should not forget the special influence of Muslim society upon Maimonides. There were Muslim women who were important in culture and history e.g., Sitt al-Mulk, d. 1024 C.E., Fatimid princess and regent. (In culture: *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development, Special Features & Criticism* by Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, Chapter 6, pp. 142-153, Calcutta University, 1961).

Nonetheless, the picture was bleak. By contrast, Europe had many female saints. Christianity's ability to assimilate the memory of pagan goddesses to Christian heroines is well known (*Santa Maria sopra Minerva*). Just before Maimonides' time, Héloïse d'Argenteuil (1101-1162), sadly married to the great philosopher Peter Abelard (1079–1142), was a famous thinker and writer, and other examples come to mind.

While Jewish law protected women in ways unknown to the other dispensations, Maimonides was still a part of the dominant Muslim society. There is no evidence that he knew any female scholars. What we do not know of his marital life massively outweighs what little we do know. He occasionally mentions outstanding women of the traditional and scriptural past, but never any contemporaries.

TAQLĪD AND UŞŪL

What can we teach of divine science to those of "limited" intellect? We teach significant opinions from the Torah, "though not to a comprehension of (their) true essence." Kafih explains that this meant fundamental religious concepts, such as divine unity, creation *ex nihilo*, and the existence of prophecy (note 9, *ad loc.*).

We convey these truths to those of limited intellect by *tradition* (the term Maimonides uses is the Arabic *taqlīd*), "which was considered sufficient to convey all truths which were to be established."

Taqlīd (uncritical emulation), a concept from Islamic legal theology, is the acceptance of authority without questioning its scriptural basis or rationale. Unlike the western legal concept of precedent (*stare decisis*), which approves as authoritative those decisions which are concretized in written appellate cases, *taqlīd* points to the decisor himself, and it means that people must follow such an authoritative judge (*mujtahid*) in all of his rulings. It was debatable whether this norm applied outside of the strictly legal arena to the *fundamentals* of religion, called, in Arabic, *uṣūl* or *uṣūl al-dīn*. Most held, to the contrary, that a Muslim must attain fundamental beliefs through *individual* examination and demonstration, and that *taqlīd* did not apply to *uṣūl*. *Taqlīd* could also mean that those who had not carried out the study of fundamental beliefs should follow the guidance of those who had.

One problem of a fundamental nature in early Islamic history was Qur'anic anthropomorphism. Important interpreters asserted that *taqlīd* demands literalism *bi lā kayfa*, "without asking how," despite this being an area of *uṣūl*.

Jewish authorities converted the concept of *taqlīd* to their own use. Prominent among these theologians was Bakhya Ibn Pakuda (1040 CE), writing in Arabic well before Maimonides' time:

"I asked one of those who are thought to be Torah scholars some of the questions on the science of the inner life (*b'khokhmat ha-matzpun*)...and he answered me that [relying on] tradition can substitute for independent thought in all these matters."

This suggests some rabbinic acceptance of *taqlīd*, in its strongest version. Bakhya rejected the position, originating language that Maimonides carried forward in our chapter:

“My answer to him was that this is acceptable only in the case of women, children and uneducated men (*khasrei ha-daat*, limited intellect) who, because of limited perception and comprehension, cannot reason on their own. But whoever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives [from tradition] and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness, or because he takes lightly God’s commandments and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence.” (*Khovot ha-Levavot, Duties of the Heart*, trans., by Daniel Haberman, with facing Ibn Tibbon Hebrew, Feldheim Publ., 1996, vol. 1, p. 25)

Bakhya makes this investigation a *duty* of the heart. Those who fail not only transgress this duty, but end in a far worse situation:

“The same is true of one who acknowledges God’s unity because he relies on tradition. One cannot be sure that he will not embrace polytheism, for when he hears the statements and arguments of the dualists, his views might change and he might fall into error without being aware of it.” (*ibid.*, 74)

Bakhya argues that only through his personal confrontation with these fundamental concepts will the Jew be armed to resist heresy, quoting Talmud, *Pirkei Avot* 2:14, “know what answer to give a heretic.” For this, *taqlīd* is not enough.

Maimonides agreed that such *taqlīd* was sufficient and even commendable as a means of educating those of limited intellect, but for those who are past that stage, unquestioning acceptance could lead to heresy. *Taqlīd* fails to ground imagination in reason, and so representation transcends intellect. Unrestrained representation is the path to idolatry. (On *taqlīd*, Wolfson, *Kalām*, 32-43; Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 93-106; and especially Michael Schwarz’ scholium on *taqlīd*, *ad loc.* to our chapter, note 7.)

Even when we do teach the fundamentals, we teach them with a difference. We do not teach the “true essence” of the three fundamental doctrines of unity, creation and prophecy, and, indeed, “they were presented in enigmas, clad in riddles, and taught by wise men in the most mysterious way (*v’ha-arim*) that could be devised (*ha-haarema*).” The idea is to teach them skillfully, even shrewdly, but not, as Pines sometimes suggests, deceptively. Even though it is necessary to resort to *educational contradiction*, where what we teach initially is different from what we can teach later, this is not a “ruse,” but, rather, a strategy to overcome normal human limitations.

GRADUALISM IN EDUCATION

The student should be “gradually advanced towards perfection.” A teacher is not necessary, although obviously one is preferred. The student is like an infant fed on adult food. The infant cannot digest it and will die from it. Just so, the student cannot begin the divine science until he graduates in the pre-requisite courses. Without a gradual introduction, these ideas are indigestible and injure the soul. This recalls the metaphor of *honey* in the last chapter. Too much honey causes not just sickening but expulsion, the *emptying* of our conscience of any concept of God.

Educational gradualism is close to the idea of patience in learning. Patience before apparent contradiction is part of the requirement of *humility*. Since the field of divine science is rife with apparent contradiction (see last chapter), we must gradually advance from stage to stage in it.

Maimonides makes it clear that though gradualism is required, there is nothing inherently wrong with teaching the subject of divine science. Although the science is harmful to the unprepared, it is neither inherently evil nor contrary to the tenets of Judaism.

Those who think otherwise are “fools (*ha-ksilim*) who are only philosophers in their own eyes (*dimu sh'kaver higu la'dragat ha-iyun*).” We should not take these “fools” for illiterate bumpkins. Maimonides frequently uses the term “fools” to deride his intellectual opponents. These opponents were rabbis who opposed systematic studies of Creation and Providence. They thought this was the pursuit of gentile philosophy antithetical to Torah. They misinterpreted the reason for the rules of Mishna *Hagigah* which restrict the public teaching of this lore, taking this pursuit as inherently foreign and evil. Maimonides scathingly rejects their view.

The student must meet two requirements to make a *beginning* in the divine science. He must be wise (*hakham*) and understanding (*mevin*). First, the student has to achieve the level of the “wise” by successfully graduating in the study of logic, mathematics, etc., that is, the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* of the scholastic curriculum. We assume that he concluded his rabbinic studies, that is, the mastery of the contents of the Mishneh Torah. Second, he must be “understanding.” This “understanding” refers to the *quality* of the student’s mind. He is *mevin m'daato*, i.e., able to figure things out on his own from strewn hints and lightning-like flashes. The subject matter necessitates this requirement: not only is it rife with apparent contradictions, but its fleeting insights only come through inspiration (see Introduction to the Guide).

WHY IS IT HARMFUL TO BEGIN THIS SCIENCE?

We should push the question further. First, what is this divine science that is so dangerous to begin? There remains considerable debate about its content. In the next chapter, Maimonides provides a précis of its subject matter and of its major themes, which are the themes of the Guide:

“(1) What the heavens are, what is their number and their form; what beings are contained in them; what the angels are; how the creation of the whole world took place; what is its purpose, and what is the relation of its various parts to each other; what is the nature of the soul; how it enters the body; whether it has an independent existence, and if so, how it can exist independently of the body [i.e. after death]; by what means [prayer or speculation?] and to what purpose [to unite with the active intellect or with God?], and similar problems....(2) All these subjects are connected together; for there is nothing else in existence but *God and His works*, the latter including all existing things besides Him: we can only obtain a knowledge of Him through His works; His works give evidence of His existence, and show what must be assumed concerning Him, that is to say, what must be attributed to Him either affirmatively or negatively.”

What is the relation between two parts I numbered? Is this science or is this dogma? The first part sounds like a philosophical pursuit. It assumes that one may *freely* inquire about real problems. The second part is either the end-result of this study or a dogma to which this study must give way, and it is not clear yet which he means.

Though the form of the second statement seems dogmatic, we know from the rest of the Guide that, except on one point, Maimonides contends that it is philosophically demonstrable. That remaining indemonstrable point is the debate over the creation or eternity of the world. He finessed that crucial point *sotto voce* by saying that there is nothing in existence but “God and His works,” since creation is one of those “works.”

Why is creation indemonstrable? There are two kinds of subjects: those above the Moon and those below the Moon. Maimonides, like Aristotle, holds that there is no proof of anything above the Moon. Since the creation of the universe is a superlunary subject, we can prove neither it nor its contrary thesis, eternity. Maimonides argues that in divine science we should advance “conclusive proof, where proof is possible, or by forcible arguments, where argument is admissible.” We can give conclusive proof of sublunary matters. We can even give conclusive proof of the existence, unity and incorporeality of God by extrapolating from His sublunary works. However, we can only make “forcible argument,” as Maimonides does in the Guide, on the critical superlunary issue of creation.

The *harm*, then, is that the student will not be able to disprove the Aristotelian assertion that God is just one existent in an eternal universe. Maimonides believes that this harm can be allayed only by following his program for the perplexed: gradual preparation following the Guide step by step. The path is not in and of itself evil; it will not dethrone God nor uproot the Torah. Moreover, the pursuit of divine science is the one thing needful; since only through it can we reach prophecy, the guidance the world must have. Prophetic revelation is the traditional basis that Maimonides will use to make “forcible arguments” against Aristotelian eternity. Still, until students reach the level of the “wise” and the “understanding” they must accept traditional dogmatic responses to the contradictions of divine science. This educational prudence is part of *humility*.

This study of divine science is not entirely philosophical, in the usual sense of Aristotelian philosophy, but more in line with the type of serious teleological and cosmological engagement of Socrates (or perhaps Pythagoras). Maimonides will later assert that it is a species of esoteric wisdom anciently pursued by the Jews but largely forgotten in our day; precisely the standpoint the cabalists took.

This helps to explain his deprecation of those who reject the divine science as “philosophers in their own eyes.” They have a starved version of philosophy, which they share with Akher, indeed, it is the obverse of his coin. They really are afraid of Aristotle’s contention that the universe is eternal uncreated. They fear that they cannot demonstrate its contradictory, creation *ex nihilo*. That is why they believe that the only result of such study could be the atheism of Akher. They do not know that we can bring “forcible argument” for creation. For those who are not merely “philosophers in their own eyes,” Aristotle’s position is an unproven assumption blocking the recovery of prophecy in Israel.

GUIDE 1:34 TEACHING DIVINE SCIENCE

“There are five reasons why instruction should not begin with Metaphysics (divine studies, *ha-limud ba-elohiut* in Ibn Tibon; Pines: “divine science”; Judeo-Ar: אלתעלים באללאהיאח), but should at first be restricted to pointing out what is fitted for notice and what may be made manifest to the multitude.”

The five P’s for the perplexed, the problems that prevent the public teaching of divine science, are:

1. Profundity and depth of the subject matter;
2. Potential perfection of the student’s initially inactivated intellect;
3. Preliminary preparatory studies are lengthy;
4. Physical constitution and moral disposition of the student may prevent learning;
5. “*Parnasa*,” i.e., the pursuit of profession, acquisitions of possessions, and raising a family.

Maimonides devotes the greatest space to Problem Three above. It is the center of his discussion. It contains more parabolic material than the others do. This, and the fact that he concludes it with one of his trademark gnomic utterances, “On reflection, the truth will become obvious,” signals it as the location of esoteric materials. I save for the end of this chapter my treatment of those parables, particularly The Parable of the Pit.

He carefully states that these five are “causes that prevent the commencement of instruction with divine science...to the multitude” (Pines translation), *ha-sibot ha-monot et petikhat ha-limudim b’inyanei ha-elohut...l’hamon khamesh sibot*. They are not complete impediments, except for the Fourth (when due to bad physical constitution). The problem is the “commencement.” We cannot *commence* the study of divine science before transcending these “causes.” These are all impediments to the activation of the potential intellect and its conjunction with the active intellect, which is the core of the study and practice of the divine science. Maimonides had already said, in the Introduction to the Guide, in his fifth “contradiction,” that all educators, including the guide of the perplexed, must commence “difficult and obscure” subjects “beginning with the easier thing,” in “any manner which he can devise.” Only later, when the student has the capacity, we can teach the subject in its complete truth, which may contradict the first teaching (see my Introduction II: Contradictions).

These impediments to learning divine science are so serious that most people cannot overcome them. This is a major problem for religion. Only the divine science can provide certainty of the essential truths of religion. Religion requires the acceptance of certain major truths, such as Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles (*Commentary on the Mishneh, Sanhedrin*, chapter 10). These include the unity and incorporeality of God with their ramifications. The attainment of these doctrines is an obligation of the heart for adherents. The unfortunate but unavoidable result is that the cognizant must give these truths in the form of dogmas to the multitude. These must substitute for their individual achievement of the certainty of these truths. This recognition made a profound impact on general Western thought when Aquinas adopted the five causes as fundamental to his system. After reciting them nearly verbatim in the name of “Rabbi Moses,” he writes:

“From all this it is clear that, if it were necessary to use a strict demonstration as the only way to reach a knowledge of the things which we must know about God, very few could ever construct such a demonstration and even these could do it only after a long time. From this it is evident that the provision of the way of faith, which gives all easy access to salvation at any time, is beneficial to man” (*De Veritate*, X, Reply). “Therefore in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fully and surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation.” (*Summa Theologiae* 1.1.1)

Maimonides defines the subject matter of the divine science for the first time in this chapter. It is concerned with the subjects of cosmology and metaphysics, but that is not all. The divine science is also about angelology, the nature of the soul and its ascent, the nature of God and His relation to the soul, and similar topics of interest to religion (See previous chapter essay, on Guide 1:33, at the end “Why Is It Harmful To Begin This Science?”) He returns with a somewhat different agenda for the divine science in the next chapter, 1:35.

THE FIRST PROBLEM: PROFUNDITY

It is dangerous for beginners to commence studying the divine science, just because it is so deep, complicated and subtle. Maimonides quotes Ecclesiastes, “Far off and *exceeding deep (amok amok)*, who can find it out?” (7:24).

He relates the Parable of the Pearl-diver, which he attributes to the rabbis, which is about someone who never learned to swim diving deep for pearls. The swimmer gets the pearl; the non-swimmer drowns. This parable is similar to the one quoted in the Guide’s Introduction about the pearl lost on the floor of a darkened room, which can be found when the searcher lights a penny candle. The light of the candle was the intellect. In this case, closer to Maimonides’ purpose here, the swimmer’s knowledge of swimming takes the place of the candle. Without knowledge of the extensive prerequisites to divine science, the student would drown in this sea of learning and never find its pearls of wisdom.

Later, in the Third Cause, he gives us the Parable of the Pit (which is also “deep,” *amok*). It is his central figure in this chapter. That parable shows that the solution to the victim’s problem is not merely the acquisition of knowledge (like knowledge of swimming), but, even more crucially, *the ability to form actual concepts* from potential knowledge (he calls this conceptualizing ability a “device” or “stratagem,” *takhbula*).

Kafih believes that the source of the Parable of the Pearl-diver is the Talmud, *Baba Batra* 74a-b:

“R. Johanan related: Once we were travelling on board a ship and we saw a chest in which were set precious stones and pearls and it was surrounded by a species of fish called *karisa*. There went down a diver to bring [the chest], but [a fish] noticed [him] and was about to wrench his thigh (cf. Genesis 32:26). Thereupon he poured upon it a skin bottle of vinegar and it sank. A *bat kol* (divine voice) came forth, saying unto us: ‘What have you to do with the chest of the wife of R. Hanina b. Dosa who stored in it purple-blue [*tekhelet*: the dye essential to the manufacture of prayer shawls] for the righteous in the world to come.’”

In this case, the diver, though possessing the skill of diving, obviously lacked the ability to swim in the depths of obscurity where the *tekhelet* was. The Artsroll commentary to the Talmud does a fine job of portraying the traditional explanation of the parable:

“The chest represents the wonderful reward that awaits the God-fearing in the World to Come. Only the outside of the chest was visible and it was studded with precious stones; what treasure lay in the chest no one knew. Similarly, a person can only have a very superficial picture of the reward of the World to Come. The chest was surrounded by fish because the wonderful reward is reserved for those who are engrossed in Torah study, and are compared to fish in water...*The diver thought he could devise some method* of reaching the chest, although he was really not deserving of its treasure. Such notions are *damaging* to a person, for he is guilty of ‘doing deeds like Zimri, yet expecting reward like Pinchas (Talmud *Sota*, 22b).’ Indeed, the intended recipients of the reward want to attack this impostor. When he sees that he is being attacked he pours vinegar on his opponents, and curses and vilifies them. When the righteous ones see his low tactics they do not want to engage him in rhetoric. They swim away from him. The wonderful reward is reserved for those, like R. Chanina ben Dosa’s wife, who eschew worldly pleasures. The *Gemara* (Talmud, *Taanit* 25a) relates how she and her husband lived in dire poverty and once they miraculously received a gift from Heaven, but the pious woman refused to receive it. She

prevailed on her husband to pray that the gift be taken back, so that their reward in the World to Come should not be decreased on account of it. This story teaches that there is no shortcut to the reward of the World to Come. Furthermore, one should not enter into dialogue with wicked people whose sole interest is to revile the righteous.”

If this story and its understanding are behind Maimonides’ parable, note the emphasis on the undeserving student too lazy to learn the preliminary sciences, who dives into the most profound subject, and pours vinegar on those who advise him to take the proper path in learning. Note also, “the diver thought he could *devise* some *method* of reaching the chest,” but had no such device, since he could not swim in those depths. He is like the ill-prepared student who dives into the divine science, but lacked the ability to frame an intellectual conception, a *muskal rishon*. All of these ideas recur in Maimonides’ account of the Parable of the Pit, which I explain at the end of this chapter.

THE SECOND PROBLEM: POTENTIALITY

The Second Problem goes deeper. The mind has not yet come into existence at the inception of its studies for “man is born a wild ass” (Job 11:12), as Rashi comments: “like a wild donkey, accustomed to the desert, hasty, without sense.” Recall the “demons” from Guide 1:7, “mere animal(s) in human shape,” which contrast with the “sons of prophets,” *bnai neviim*. Until the merely potential intellect becomes actual by extracting itself from its materiality, it cannot do the work expected of it, which is to learn and practice the complexities of the divine science. The student is not yet *mevin m’daato*, that is, able to think things through for himself. More, he requires leisure to acquire this intellectual power, and must have the physical and moral constitution for it, as will be seen. Just because a man has a potential, nothing guarantees its realization (*v’kol adam sh’yesh lo davar m’suyam b’koakh aino khiyuv b’hekrakh sh’yetze oto ha-davar b’poel*).

Maimonides calls this activation of the potential intellect man’s “ultimate perfection,” *shlemuto ha-sofit*. Connect this with his remark at the end of the chapter, in his account of the Fifth Problem, where he speaks of man’s “first perfection,” *ha-shlemut ha-rishonit*. He explains this pairing of perfections in Guide 3:27:

“For it has already been found that man has a double perfection: the first perfection is that of the body, and the second (ultimate) perfection is that of the soul. The first consists in the most healthy condition of his material relations, and this is only possible when man has all his wants supplied, as they arise; if he has his food, and other things needful for his body, e.g., shelter, bath, and the like. . . . The second perfection of man consists in his becoming an actually intelligent being; i.e., he knows about the things in existence all that a person perfectly developed is capable of knowing. This second perfection certainly does not include any action or good conduct, but only knowledge, which is arrived at by speculation, or established by research.”

THE THIRD PROBLEM: PRELIMINARIES

Maimonides’ Third Problem is the length of the preparatory study. He makes this section the longest of the five to demonstrate this point, for some of its length is repetition. Indeed, throughout this section, methods are ends, since by linking parables (there are three in this section) we reach the purpose of the preparatory study, which is the practice of the divine science (see, in my Introduction I, Section K, about Ben Azzai linking parables in a corona of flame).

What Are the Prerequisites? One cannot embark on the divine science without preliminary training in Torah studies (an unspoken if implied condition, see my comment on the prior chapter). The student must also graduate in mathematics, geometry, logic, astronomy, and physics. The particular usefulness of the preparatory studies should be obvious:

- The mathematical and logical studies prepare the student to handle propositions in abstract thought. For example, in geometry we learn of circular lines, from which we derive that a thing can exist without duplication or division (Crescas, *ad loc*).
- Physics teaches the work of God by which we know His ways;
- Astronomy prepares us for metaphysical cosmology, that is, God’s relation to the universe.

The student learns these sciences as they were understood in Maimonides’ time. The paradigm is their Aristotelian treatment, with the classic Arabic and Jewish translations and commentaries. Ancient astronomy, for example, with its ensouled spheres, was very different from our own. It depended on the concept of *cosmos*, the unified system of the *living* universe, as reflected and paralleled by our world, the *microcosm* (Guide 1:72).

These studies also remove or limit the imagination’s stranglehold on our understanding of the higher things. Maimonides is thinking of the Kalam theologians who made imagination their principle guide. They doubted the usefulness of conceptualization and thereby undermined science. But the sciences could not exist if we could not extract the general notion from the particular instances. It was just this process of abstraction that the Kalam rejected. They also confused the essential with the accidental, betraying neglect of the prerequisite subject of logic.

Maimonides admits that some of these studies may not supply any premises for the divine science, particularly those that the scholastics called *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music—though he never mentions music). Yet they remain necessary for clear thought, free of confusion, which portrays things as they really are (*v’tosig l’adam tekhuna heikh l’mod v’ladaat ha-emet b’dvarim shehem m’masiim*). They are necessary to anyone who wants to achieve human completeness (*ha-shlemut ha-enoshit*). Even though these studies may have nothing to do with the divine science, they bring the mind to maturity (immaturity being the subject of the Fourth Problem).

The Importance of Reflection on Material Reality. There is a truth behind all reality, connecting disparate parts of the divine science (which he lists here), as “you, however, know.” The “you,” mentioned here is Rabbi Joseph, who is in the midst of the preparatory studies, but just because of them, he can already grasp this truth. The fundamental principle is that there are only two existing things, God and His creation. There is no human apprehension of the divine except from God’s own acts, from which we learn of His existence (*v’ayn sham derekh l’hasigo eleh al yeday maasav v’hem ha-morim al mtziuto*). We only learn the basics of God’s existence, what we must affirm and deny of Him, having no access to his essence.

In all of this Maimonides carries forward a tradition of the disciplined *reflection* on existence called *bekhina*. His great predecessor, Bakhya Ibn Pakuda, made *bekhina* one of the “Gates” of his *Duties of the Heart, Hovot Ha-Levavot*:

“The essence of reflection (*bekhina*) is (1) contemplation of the signs of the creator’s wisdom manifested in creation, and (2) the soul’s appreciation of them according to one’s powers of perception.” (Feldheim, vol. 1, p. 168)

Bakhya provides many examples of earthly wonders for us to reflect on, like the mechanism of the eye. He directs us to reflect on the eye’s Creator, though it is one of His smaller miracles. While Maimonides proceeds differently from Bakhya, both regard *bekhina* as a precondition for the divine science.

Maimonides’ *bekhina* differs in that by reflecting on the realities of *our* world, we learn all of the things that we must *deny* of God. Lacking clear concepts of the material universe, the student could not begin the study of Maimonides’ negative theology, since he would not know what he could deny. Negative theology is an important branch of the study and practice of the divine science. So, for example, the negation of *numerical* unity, the

mathematic “one,” provides some apprehension of the divine *non-numerical* unity. This would be inaccessible without some training in mathematics.

The Problem of Educational Resistance. These studies are lengthy. A person could die before completing them. Moreover, man’s desire to reach ultimate truth in his lifetime makes him impatient with troublesome prerequisites. But if they were unnecessary, we could not justly call them “prerequisites,” they would rather be “distractions and futilities.” Although dialog form is clearly not his *métier* (he never gets farther than two or three turns of dialog), Maimonides briefly adopts that form to explain the importance of the prerequisites to an imagined interlocutor. This interlocutor is clearly not Rabbi Joseph, but, more likely, someone like the victim in the Parable of the Pit, who I will soon identify as a typical yeshiva student and would be intellectual. Maimonides asks if the student would like to learn the divine science, but the student’s enthusiasm quickly fades when told he must spend even a week’s time studying the preliminary course, for he is sure that he can conjure any background he needs from his own imagination (*lo yeot l’kakh, eleh yistapek b’dimionot kozvim sh’nafsho ninukhat behem*). The result is that he never possesses a clear notion of God.

In all this, the imagination overwhelms the still weak intellect. What is inaccessible to mind becomes the playground of fancy. When intellectual understanding is impossible, the imagination takes over. The imagination then wants to convince us that the preliminaries are irrelevant, harmful, anti-Torah, and misleading. It exalts itself over truth and deifies itself. Truth is not the imagination’s *raison d’être*. The purpose of the imagination is to connect diverse things beautifully. It is not concerned with the real requirements of the intellectual pursuit. The intellect, by contrast, is concerned with the reality of things as they are. The reality of things as they are merely bores the imagination.

Perhaps the worst educational problem is the tendency of the student beginning any study to imagine that he has grasped it whole just as he is starting, rejecting anything different, or new. The sophomoric imagination throws up every possible question, objection, and contradiction. In the traditional study of Talmudic subjects, this kind of sharp questioning is prized. In divine science, it is an obstacle. Demolishing a conceptual structure is much easier than raising one, for it is easier to raise doubts than to resolve them. When such a student does enter the field of divine science, he falls in a pit with no means to climb out. It would have been better had he never begun. Similarly, because of the dangers of the study (discussed in the last chapter), one must not begin the divine science without graduating in the prerequisites.

Maimonides associated these problems with what he, at first, calls *laziness*, the intellectual inertia derived from the physical inertia of all material bodies. This laziness affects those who style themselves intellectuals but do not graduate in the prerequisites. Their scholarly indolence has left them mired in false imaginings. These self-styled intellectuals wrongly deride the prerequisites as lacking benefit and dangerous to religion.

As we will see, it is not so much that they are lazy, but that they urge themselves toward the wrong objects. This is Maimonides’ remarkable insight into the psychology of education. They fail in their preliminary studies since they do not sublimate these urges toward their studies.

The obstacles to learning flow from the nature of the subject matter itself. They are unavoidable. That is why, as we have seen, the beginning student must be satisfied with traditional dogmas and correct received opinions.

(We treat the three parables in the Third Problem separately at the end of this chapter).

THE FOURTH PROBLEM: PHYSICALITY

The Fourth Problem is that the physical and moral constitution of the student prevents him from learning. These obstacles include inertia or laziness, or there may be impediments that are more intractable. Maimonides makes little attempt to separate nature from nurture in this discussion, which may explain why this section is long, for the

two operate at various levels in his description of the problem. Maimonides' problem is his commitment to the freedom of the will, whereby the student should be free to remedy any natural handicap through education and training. Nonetheless, some people will never be able to enter the divine science.

He explains the physical impediments in the manner of medieval medical thought. The four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile), together with the "heat" and "moisture" of the genitals, form the natural temperamental limitations of the student (Crescas, *ad loc.*, surmises that those whose genitals are overheated lust for the wrong things). These temperaments include the neurological predisposition to agitation, the *shpilkes*, impetuosity and the "flame of youth." Under this heading come anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders. Ultimately, because of these limitations, Maimonides realizes that some are uneducable, and many cannot enter higher learning. He concludes that trying to remedy their defects is a waste of time (*v'hishtadlut imam b'zeh ha-inyan—sh'tut g'mura min ha-mishtadel*).

Still, even these people must acquire some fundamental education. He has lofty expectations for them. Everyone should master certain core dogmas of religion, such as divine unity and simplicity. He thinks most people can learn geometry, and, surprisingly, medicine (that is, medicine of the twelfth century). But the mere fact that even Socrates' slave boy Meno can learn geometry does not necessarily fit him to study theology or metaphysics.

Another core limitation is *immaturity*. The student must attain a certain age, settled character, patience, thoughtfulness and judiciousness without which scholarship is impossible. Maturity connects to morality, ethics, and conduct. These are the subject matters of the section of Mishneh Torah known as *Deot*. *Deot* is similar but broader than what Hebrew usually calls *middot* (conduct) and includes morality, but *deot* also includes health, diet, bathing and exercise. In other words, *deot* concerns physical *and* moral improvement. The student who would enter divine science must first achieve moral virtue. Moral virtues prepare for the intellectual virtues (*ha-maalot ha-midotiut hem ha-tzaot la-maalot ha-hegionot*, cf. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI:13:1144b30). But those whose physical humours result in bad physical "temperament" cannot hope even to attain moral virtue.

Maimonides turns next to several prerequisites to divine science listed in the Talmud *Hagigah*, essential to the student's educational maturity:

"The headings of chapters (of *Maaseh Merkava*) may be transmitted only to the head of a court (Chief Justice: *av bet din*) and to one whose heart is *doeg* (anxious, depressed, humble) within him. Others say (*ika d'amri*): Only if his heart is *doeg* within him. R. Ammi said: The mysteries of the Torah may be transmitted only to one who possesses five attributes, [namely], The captain of fifty (*sar khameshim*), and the man of rank, and the *yoetz* (counselor), and *khakham kharashim* (sharp scholar) and *navon lakhash* (interpreter of parables, see Isaiah 3:3)." (*Hagigah* 13a, and compare to 14a)

These terms establish the Maimonidean prerequisites for the character of a scholar in divine science:

1. *Humility*. I identify in Maimonides' description a stage where the youth is broken hearted over his directionless striving, and, in *perplexity* (*ha-mevikha*), humbly turns to a more directed path. This is *doeg*, the characteristic of one "whose heart is full of care, i.e., in whom wisdom is united with humility, meekness, and a great dread of sin." Humility means that the student can exercise patience before the apparent contradictions rife in divine science. It is the most important characteristic. Maimonides says that the student who "conquers his heart liberates his soul to attain God, meaning, the divine science, which is the *Maaseh Merkava*" (my trans., *yikna'u libotehem...v'az y'romemu et atzmam la-draga zo, v'hi hasagato ytalei, k'lomar ha-mada ha-eloki asher mekhanim b'maaseh ha-merkava*). Note his equation of humility / the attainment of God / divine science / *Maaseh Merkava*. Humility, the conquering of the heart, is the first step to divine illumination of the mind. It is as though he has to kill his heart to have it resurrected—Maimonides quoting Isaiah:

“I dwell in the high and lofty place, with him that is of a humble and contrite spirit: to revive (*l'hakhiot*—resurrect) the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isaiah 57:15)

The Talmud *Hagigah* at first states that the student must attain the office of Chief Justice, *av beit din*. But this higher rabbinic degree is not really a requirement. That is because the clause “others say whose heart is *doeg*” implies that the rank of *av beit din* is not the real requirement but that only *doeg* is. The student should rather have the *qualities* of a Chief Justice: judiciousness, fairness, weighing sides, collegiality, etc.

2. *Political ability*. In *Hagiga* this is called *yoetz*, “counselor.” One who is only a *yoetz* has a highly developed imagination linked to a less developed intellect. He is a leader who retains information and makes good quick decisions, as well as long-term political judgments. One who exemplifies only this trait may not enter philosophic discourse at any level. Maimonides says that this person is unable to understand “first intelligibles,” *muskalot ha-rishonim*. This is probably an exaggeration. What it means is that this person lacks the ability to conceptualize. Schwarz (note 36, *ad loc.*, following Alfarabi), says that a “first intelligible” is a self-evident truth. That “opposites do not unite at the same place and time” is a “first intelligible.” In the moment of recognition of this first intelligible, the *potential intellect* becomes *active intellect* on that point. Maimonides calls these first intelligibles “devices” (Judeo-Arabic חֵילָה, Ibn Tibon: *takhbula*), since they are the necessary tools for the practice of the divine science. One who is merely a *yoetz* “might be very stupid and lacking in *intelligent devices*,” *hu sakhal meod, ayn takhbula imo* (Eng., Pines; Heb., Tibon).

3. *Completion of the preliminary studies*. The “sharp scholar,” *hakham harashim*, according to Maimonides’ understanding, has the above three constitutional requirements, and has also mastered the lengthy preliminary studies, that is, logic, mathematics, geometry, physics, and astronomy.

4. *Insightfulness*. *Navon lakhash* is literally translated “the understanding of whispering.” This is the ability to interpret hints, allusions, and obscure references. It is the *positive* contribution of the imagination to the intellect. This person can simultaneously conceal concepts from the masses while revealing them to the wise. One, however, who is only a *navon lakhash*, cannot achieve wisdom through the sciences. Even-Shmuel calls him a poet who lacks substance, *baal signon v'tokhen dal*.

5. *Age*. This is the *sar khameshim*, the “captain of fifty,” mentioned in *Hagigah*. The term is taken to mean fifty years of age. The traditional understanding of the age requirement of *Maaseh Merkava* and *Maaseh Bereshit* usually takes “fifty” to mean forty. But if the student acquired requisites 1 through 4 above he probably satisfies this requirement despite his actual age in years. Maimonides does not mention any particular age. It is less a requirement than recognition that the candidate has attained the qualities associated with age forty: the ability to conceptualize and comprehend what his teachers taught him (Rashi to *Pirke Avot* 5:21: *l'havin davar m'tokh davar...m'khan l'talmid sh'ayno omed al daat rabo ad sh'hu ben arbaim*). Age also refers to the “flame of youth.” He must overcome youthful nervousness and the unsettled cast of mind that impede learning.

THE FIFTH PROBLEM: PARNASA

Man’s “initial” or “first” perfection is his physical perfection. It is the prerequisite for the “ultimate” or “second” perfection, the perfection of the intellect. The latter is most important, but it comes second in time. The student must acquire the “first perfection,” the necessities of life, before embarking on the tour of the mind. The first perfection includes all the accoutrements of civilized urban life, from reasonably fashionable and clean clothing to decent repasts, community, income, family, etc. The student must also pursue some profession, *parnasa*, if not born wealthy. (On the “perfections,” see above, Second Problem, and Guide 3:27)

Compounding the *parnasa* problem is our inability to identify a standard of living. We become accustomed to unnecessary material attachments or even luxuries. These change with the times. Indoor plumbing was a luxury a century ago but a requirement today, while television is an extravagance many now imagine necessary. The

problem is not so much the type or nature of the material attachment but the desire for it. The growing desire for material things crowds out the desire for the intellectual or spiritual pursuits:

“Even the perfect man to whom we have referred, if too busy with these necessary things, much more so if busy with unnecessary things, and filled with a great desire for them—must weaken or altogether lose his desire for study, to which he will apply himself with interruption, lassitude, and want of attention.”

However we sort this out, one needs leisure and money to support scholarship. The Rabbis described earning a living, *parnasa*, as more difficult than crossing the Red Sea (Talmud, *Pesakhim* 118). This may be the hardest of the five problems, but its solution is an absolute prerequisite to the divine science. The result, uncomfortably for moderns, is that this science is the pursuit of the elite:

“For these reasons it was proper that the study of Metaphysics (Pines: “these matters,” *kol ha-davarim halalu*) should have been exclusively cultivated by privileged persons, and not entrusted to the common people. It is not for the beginner, and he should abstain from it, as the little child has to abstain from taking solid food and from carrying heavy weights.”

We should appreciate Maimonides’ realism. “All men are created equal but differ greatly in the sequel,” as American founding father Fisher Ames said. This realism grows from Maimonides’ medical appreciation of the different treatments required for different diseases. His educational theory parallels his understanding that each patient is unique. Leveling may produce geometricians but never philosophers or prophets.

THE PARABLE OF THE PIT

“There is also a necessity of another kind for achieving knowledge of the preliminary studies. It arises from the fact that when a man seeks to obtain knowledge quickly, many doubts occur to him, and he moreover quickly understands objections—I mean to say the destruction of a particular doctrine, this being similar to the demolition of a building (Friedlander here, ‘the demolition of a building is easier than its erection’). Now the establishment of doctrines as true and the solution of doubts can only be grounded upon many premises taken from these preliminary studies. One engaged in speculation without preliminary study is therefore comparable to someone who walked on his two feet in order to reach a certain place, and, while on his way fell into a deep well (*bor amok*: pit rather than well is meant) without having any device (Judeo-Ar.: תַּחְבּוּלָה, *takhbula* in Ibn Tibon), to get out of there before he perishes. It would have been better for him if he had foregone walking and quietly remained in his own place.” (Pines trans., 75-76)

Maimonides built the third section, about the need to conclude the lengthy preliminaries, around the Parable of the Pit, but this section also contains two other parables. Just before the Parable of the Pit is the Parable of Demolition, followed by the Parable of the Slothful One. Maimonides wrote the Guide to resolve parables in prophetic literature, and their resolution is the practice of divine science. Still, he usually refrains from parables. When he does use allegorical method, it is the means to achieve his desired end. He not only wants to prove the importance of the preliminary studies, but also to give his reader a taste of the practice of divine science.

The Parable of Demolition and the Parable of the Pit appear to be folk parables. The Parable of the Slothful One, is Solomonic, from Proverbs.

He begins with the very brief Parable of Demolition. Maimonides’ context, at this point in the Third Problem, is his discussion of the sophomoric propensity of newly minted intellectuals to raise objections, questions and apparent contradictions. They question both the need for preparatory studies and even the divine science itself. Jewish educational culture, centered in yeshivas, exalts the sharp scholar, the champion of debate (*pilpul*) who overturns mountains when he speaks. This person cannot begin to learn the divine science, for it is penetrated by

apparent contradictions, concepts we grasp fleetingly, like reflections of lightning in amber. He approaches these delicate structures with a wrecking ball, though demolition really requires no great force. When you remove a brick from the foundation of a building, the structure collapses. Just as a building is one interdependent structure, so are the structures of divine science, and the latter are upset with even less difficulty.

But the student has another problem. He has an intense *desire* to learn the secrets of the divine science: he just doesn't want to do the preliminary work. These labors would have equipped him with the ability to think, i.e., the ability to actualize a "first intelligible," *muskal rishon*. Maimonides illustrates this problem with a parable: his student enters the divine science carrying with him nothing but strong desire for it. He proceeds on his way and falls (or perhaps dives?) into a pit. Maimonides does not say that there is any particular problem with his chosen path: he did not take a wrong turn nor did he get lost in the woods. He falls into a pit that is so deep that he cannot get out. This compares to the deep water that the non-swimmer drowned in (at the beginning of our chapter), because he lacked knowledge of swimming. The problem now is that the victim fell in a deep pit (*bor amok*) "without having any *device* to get out of there before he perishes" (Pines translation; Friedlander misleadingly leaves out "device"). What device did he fail to bring? Why did he fail to bring it?

The Judeo-Arabic term is חילה, *hiyala*, which Ibn Tibon consistently translates as *takhbula*/device, stratagem (accord, usually, Schwarz and Pines, Kafih uses *etza*). Efos, *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, p. 122, says that it means "artifices" and locates it in Guide 1:73 where it is the name of a book, *Kitáb al-Hiyal, The Book of Ingenious Devices of the Banu Shakir* (English translation, Springer; 2007). This book listed various inventive contraptions, such as waterclocks, that were based on the principle of *horror vacui*, that nature abhors a vacuum. For Maimonides, the *horror vacui* is an intellectual concept, which, in Guide 1:73 he uses to defeat the Kalam theologians (about which we learn much more later). Since they believed there could be no fixed intellectual concepts, they could have no explanation why these vacuum devices worked. They entered divine science with nothing to guide them but the rule of their imaginations, rejecting the efficacy of all cognition. They also fell into a vacuum, so to speak, with no device to save themselves.

The term חילה appears again in the account of the Fourth Problem, where Maimonides discusses politicians. We learn what he means by an ingenious device (Pines, p. 78):

"...such a one is called *yoetz* (counselor). However, someone of that sort might not understand an intelligible notion even though it were close to being one of the first intelligibles. He might be very stupid (*peti*) and lacking in *ingenious devices* (חילה, *takhbula* in Ibn Tibon)

When Maimonides uses חילה, he makes it the basic *cell* of intellectual activity. This device is the product and practice of thought, the concept as well as its actualization. The educational prerequisites prepare for such thought by removing it from the grip of the imagination. They give thought logical method and real objects for that method to work on. The "device" is just this ability to cognize. Without this device, the journey through divine science must end in the pit, for the imagination substitutes its images for the divine concepts, creating gods in its own material image. Since the victim was without "any device" he cannot "get out of there before he perishes," *sh'ayn takhbula lo latzet mimenu ad sh'yamut* (Ibn Tibon).

What was the device did he neglected to bring? He must have failed to bring the *rope*. With a rope he could have climbed out of the pit. Recall that in the Introduction, Maimonides noted Solomon's advice to make a rope to draw water from a well, and that such a rope was *twined* from different strands. Similarly, by linking concept to concept, device to device, we safely journey through divine science, actualizing the intellect as both practice and end. With no device we "perish" not only from the spiritual life (as Even-Shmuel suggests), but also because we have no recourse but idolatry, which, from Maimonides' standpoint, is death.

Why did the victim neglect to bring the rope? This is the subject of the final parable. Maimonides focuses on the psychology of this victim (in rather modern terms). He begins with its apparent manifestation, the laziness of lazy

people, *ha-atzelim v'atzlutam* (Ibn Tibon), too lazy to seek wisdom: "He speaks thus of a man who *desires* (*ba'teshukat ha-mishtokek*) to know the final results" without the preliminaries, saying in the words of Solomon: "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not" (Proverbs 21:25-26). He responds to this Proverb:

"...He does nothing but desire, and hopes to obtain a thing without using the means to reach it. It would be better for him were he without that desire."

He should have stayed home without venturing into the field of divine science. Maimonides deconstructs the Proverb, subtly emphasizing lust over laziness. He explains that the antithesis for Solomon was not between "righteous" and "slothful," *tzaddik* and *atzel*. The key is that the *atzel* "coveteth greedily," while the *tzaddik* "giveth." *Giveth* means that the *tzaddik* "gives everything its due," *ha-ish ha-tzedek m'bnai adam ha-noten l'kol davar et raui lo* (cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I:9:1367b14). He does this by devoting due time ("all his time") to the preliminary studies. The *atzel*, by contrast, only lusts. He really is not lazy; his problem is his misdirected devotion. It begins to look like the contrast is between "studious" and "lustful." But that is not the solution either.

Watch what Maimonides does next. He rewrites the last part of the Proverb so that instead of "The righteous giveth and spareth not," he has it read, "The righteous man devotes his days to wisdom and is not sparing of them" (Pines). But then he goes further and says that his rewritten Proverb "corresponds to his (Solomon's) saying, 'Give not your strength unto women' (Proverbs 31:3)."

This unusual deconstruction and reconstruction demands our special attention. The first rewrite is about the *tzaddik*, and, in a negative way, the second rewrite is also about him. He not only devotes his time to his studies but he does not allow any other extraneous desire to divide his consciousness. But the real target of the second rewrite, "Give not your strength unto women," is the *atzel*.

Maimonides has a clear concept of what "Give not your strength unto women" means. In *Mishneh Torah, Deot*, 4:19 he writes:

"Semen constitutes the strength of the body, its life and the light of the eyes. Its emission to excess causes decay, debility and diminished vitality. Thus, Solomon, in his wisdom, said 'Give not your strength unto women.'"

The *Treatise on Unity, Maamar Ha-Yikhud*, a short work attributed to Maimonides, refines the concept further: "'Give not your strength unto women'...meaning, do not give the essence of your strength to those who corrupt (cause the loss of) the intelligent" (Fred Rosner, *Three Treatises Attributed to Maimonides*, 83. *Lo titen helekh l'mafsidei haskelim*). The woman who corrupts the intelligent ones could be the "Married Harlot" of Proverbs 7:5 (Guide, Introduction) or it could mean any material or imagined distraction.

Having rewritten the Proverb twice, he briefly summarizes his position:

"Now the majority of the men of knowledge, I mean those generally known as men of knowledge, labor under this disease—I mean that which consists in seeking to achieve the ends and in speaking about them without having engaged in studies preliminary to them. With some of them, their ignorance or their desire to have the first place (desire to rule, *bakashat ha-srara*) goes so far as to cause them to disapprove of these preliminary studies, which they are incapable of grasping or are too lazy to seek to understand. Accordingly, they wish to show that these studies are harmful or useless. However, when one reflects, the truth of the matter is clear and manifest."

What alleged “men of knowledge” was he writing about? What do they seek? What is their disease? What is “clear and manifest?”

Here is my portrayal of the past few paragraphs containing the three parables. The Parables of the Demolition, the Pit, and the Slothful One all depict the same person. He is a novice intellectual in religious studies, probably similar to what we would now call a yeshiva student. We teach him the basics of religion and a considerable amount of other material. Like all sophomores he learns perhaps too quickly (*sophos*/clever; *moros*/fool). Since he already knows it all, he throws up myriad clever problems and contradictions, impatiently demolishing entire structures of subtle speculative knowledge. He has a strong desire to learn the secrets of the Torah, but does not want to engage in the preparatory studies. He has many wonderful reasons why he should not have to do so. Because he thinks that he knows everything he needs, he does not worry about the dangers of entering the divine science. He resolves contradictions in that field by exercising his vibrant imagination on them, but just because of this, he falls into the pit of idolatry, the world of images. It would have been better had he stayed home and memorized the dogmas rather than attempting paradise with no tools but his imagination. Had he learned the preparatory studies he would have known how to think, i.e., how to actualize a first intelligible. He would be able to link them like a rope to form some device to save his soul. Why did he neglect to bring such a device? His *eros* was for the wrong things, either because of ignorance or, more likely, a desire to rule. He engaged in divine science, “seeking to achieve the ends and in speaking about them without having engaged in studies preliminary to them,” perhaps purchasing a popular book on Cabala so that he could discuss it engagingly at a coffee-house. Worse, he actively and loudly “disapprove(s) of these preliminary studies.”

In truth, he was still engaged in a material pursuit, not an intellectual one: he weakened his mind through this lust, like one who, proverbially, weakens his body by giving his strength to women. Solomon’s Proverb should have reminded us of the Parable of the Married Harlot, where we saw other students lust for the Married Harlot to their doom, just as matter absorbs any new form.

On one level, instead of giving his strength to women the student should sublimate that strength in his studies, thereby raising himself to the divine science with a saving device. On another level, by pursuing his material *eros* for the secrets of Torah he dies a spiritual death like the *atzel*, since “The *desire* of the slothful killeth him.”

He should have stayed home with his studies. Solomon’s Book of Proverbs concludes with its thirty-first chapter. That chapter begins at verse three with the admonition not to give thy strength unto women. It concludes at verse ten with the encomium to the “Woman of Valor” whose price is above rubies, whose husband safely trusts in her because she devotes herself only to his household. Just because she stayed and devoted herself to her home, when “she openeth her mouth” she does so “with wisdom,” unlike those “generally known as men of knowledge.” This secret is “clear and manifest,” but only to those who know.

GUIDE 1:34 TEACHING DIVINE SCIENCE

“There are five reasons why instruction should not begin with Metaphysics (divine studies, *ha-limud ba-elohiut* in Ibn Tibon; Pines: “divine science”; Judeo-Ar: אלתעלים באללאהיאח), but should at first be restricted to pointing out what is fitted for notice and what may be made manifest to the multitude.”

The five P’s for the perplexed, the problems that prevent the public teaching of divine science, are:

1. Profundity and depth of the subject matter;
2. Potential perfection of the student’s initially inactivated intellect;
3. Preliminary preparatory studies are lengthy;
4. Physical constitution and moral disposition of the student may prevent learning;
5. “*Parnasa*,” i.e., the pursuit of profession, acquisitions of possessions, and raising a family.

Maimonides devotes the greatest space to Problem Three above. It is the center of his discussion. It contains more parabolic material than the others do. This, and the fact that he concludes it with one of his trademark gnomic utterances, “On reflection, the truth will become obvious,” signals it as the location of esoteric materials. I save for the end of this chapter my treatment of those parables, particularly The Parable of the Pit.

He carefully states that these five are “causes that prevent the commencement of instruction with divine science...to the multitude” (Pines translation), *ha-sibot ha-monot et petikhat ha-limudim b’inyanei ha-elohut...l’hamon khamesh sibot*. They are not complete impediments, except for the Fourth (when due to bad physical constitution). The problem is the “commencement.” We cannot *commence* the study of divine science before transcending these “causes.” These are all impediments to the activation of the potential intellect and its conjunction with the active intellect, which is the core of the study and practice of the divine science. Maimonides had already said, in the Introduction to the Guide, in his fifth “contradiction,” that all educators, including the guide of the perplexed, must commence “difficult and obscure” subjects “beginning with the easier thing,” in “any manner which he can devise.” Only later, when the student has the capacity, we can teach the subject in its complete truth, which may contradict the first teaching (see my Introduction II: Contradictions).

These impediments to learning divine science are so serious that most people cannot overcome them. This is a major problem for religion. Only the divine science can provide certainty of the essential truths of religion. Religion requires the acceptance of certain major truths, such as Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles (*Commentary on the Mishneh, Sanhedrin*, chapter 10). These include the unity and incorporeality of God with their ramifications. The attainment of these doctrines is an obligation of the heart for adherents. The unfortunate but unavoidable result is that the cognizant must give these truths in the form of dogmas to the multitude. These must substitute for their individual achievement of the certainty of these truths. This recognition made a profound impact on general Western thought when Aquinas adopted the five causes as fundamental to his system. After reciting them nearly verbatim in the name of “Rabbi Moses,” he writes:

“From all this it is clear that, if it were necessary to use a strict demonstration as the only way to reach a knowledge of the things which we must know about God, very few could ever construct such a demonstration and even these could do it only after a long time. From this it is evident that the provision of the way of faith, which gives all easy access to salvation at any time, is beneficial to man” (*De Veritate*, X, Reply). “Therefore in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fully and surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation.” (*Summa Theologiae* 1.1.1)

Maimonides defines the subject matter of the divine science for the first time in this chapter. It is concerned with the subjects of cosmology and metaphysics, but that is not all. The divine science is also about angelology, the nature of the soul and its ascent, the nature of God and His relation to the soul, and similar topics of interest to religion (See previous chapter essay, on Guide 1:33, at the end “Why Is It Harmful To Begin This Science?”) He returns with a somewhat different agenda for the divine science in the next chapter, 1:35.

THE FIRST PROBLEM: PROFUNDITY

It is dangerous for beginners to commence studying the divine science, just because it is so deep, complicated and subtle. Maimonides quotes Ecclesiastes, “Far off and *exceeding deep (amok amok)*, who can find it out?” (7:24).

He relates the Parable of the Pearl-diver, which he attributes to the rabbis, which is about someone who never learned to swim diving deep for pearls. The swimmer gets the pearl; the non-swimmer drowns. This parable is similar to the one quoted in the Guide’s Introduction about the pearl lost on the floor of a darkened room, which can be found when the searcher lights a penny candle. The light of the candle was the intellect. In this case, closer to Maimonides’ purpose here, the swimmer’s knowledge of swimming takes the place of the candle. Without knowledge of the extensive prerequisites to divine science, the student would drown in this sea of learning and never find its pearls of wisdom.

Later, in the Third Cause, he gives us the Parable of the Pit (which is also “deep,” *amok*). It is his central figure in this chapter. That parable shows that the solution to the victim’s problem is not merely the acquisition of knowledge (like knowledge of swimming), but, even more crucially, *the ability to form actual concepts* from potential knowledge (he calls this conceptualizing ability a “device” or “stratagem,” *takhbula*).

Kafih believes that the source of the Parable of the Pearl-diver is the Talmud, *Baba Batra* 74a-b:

“R. Johanan related: Once we were travelling on board a ship and we saw a chest in which were set precious stones and pearls and it was surrounded by a species of fish called *karisa*. There went down a diver to bring [the chest], but [a fish] noticed [him] and was about to wrench his thigh (cf. Genesis 32:26). Thereupon he poured upon it a skin bottle of vinegar and it sank. A *bat kol* (divine voice) came forth, saying unto us: ‘What have you to do with the chest of the wife of R. Hanina b. Dosa who stored in it purple-blue [*tekhelet*: the dye essential to the manufacture of prayer shawls] for the righteous in the world to come.’”

In this case, the diver, though possessing the skill of diving, obviously lacked the ability to swim in the depths of obscurity where the *tekhelet* was. The Artsroll commentary to the Talmud does a fine job of portraying the traditional explanation of the parable:

“The chest represents the wonderful reward that awaits the God-fearing in the World to Come. Only the outside of the chest was visible and it was studded with precious stones; what treasure lay in the chest no one knew. Similarly, a person can only have a very superficial picture of the reward of the World to Come. The chest was surrounded by fish because the wonderful reward is reserved for those who are engrossed in Torah study, and are compared to fish in water...*The diver thought he could devise some method* of reaching the chest, although he was really not deserving of its treasure. Such notions are *damaging* to a person, for he is guilty of ‘doing deeds like Zimri, yet expecting reward like Pinchas (Talmud *Sota*, 22b).’ Indeed, the intended recipients of the reward want to attack this impostor. When he sees that he is being attacked he pours vinegar on his opponents, and curses and vilifies them. When the righteous ones see his low tactics they do not want to engage him in rhetoric. They swim away from him. The wonderful reward is reserved for those, like R. Chanina ben Dosa’s wife, who eschew worldly pleasures. The *Gemara* (Talmud, *Taanit* 25a) relates how she and her husband lived in dire poverty and once they miraculously received a gift from Heaven, but the pious woman refused to receive it. She

prevailed on her husband to pray that the gift be taken back, so that their reward in the World to Come should not be decreased on account of it. This story teaches that there is no shortcut to the reward of the World to Come. Furthermore, one should not enter into dialogue with wicked people whose sole interest is to revile the righteous.”

If this story and its understanding are behind Maimonides’ parable, note the emphasis on the undeserving student too lazy to learn the preliminary sciences, who dives into the most profound subject, and pours vinegar on those who advise him to take the proper path in learning. Note also, “the diver thought he could *devise* some *method* of reaching the chest,” but had no such device, since he could not swim in those depths. He is like the ill-prepared student who dives into the divine science, but lacked the ability to frame an intellectual conception, a *muskal rishon*. All of these ideas recur in Maimonides’ account of the Parable of the Pit, which I explain at the end of this chapter.

THE SECOND PROBLEM: POTENTIALITY

The Second Problem goes deeper. The mind has not yet come into existence at the inception of its studies for “man is born a wild ass” (Job 11:12), as Rashi comments: “like a wild donkey, accustomed to the desert, hasty, without sense.” Recall the “demons” from Guide 1:7, “mere animal(s) in human shape,” which contrast with the “sons of prophets,” *bnai neviim*. Until the merely potential intellect becomes actual by extracting itself from its materiality, it cannot do the work expected of it, which is to learn and practice the complexities of the divine science. The student is not yet *mevin m’daato*, that is, able to think things through for himself. More, he requires leisure to acquire this intellectual power, and must have the physical and moral constitution for it, as will be seen. Just because a man has a potential, nothing guarantees its realization (*v’kol adam sh’yesh lo davar m’suyam b’koakh aino khiyuv b’hekrakh sh’yetze oto ha-davar b’poel*).

Maimonides calls this activation of the potential intellect man’s “ultimate perfection,” *shlemuto ha-sofit*. Connect this with his remark at the end of the chapter, in his account of the Fifth Problem, where he speaks of man’s “first perfection,” *ha-shlemut ha-rishonit*. He explains this pairing of perfections in Guide 3:27:

“For it has already been found that man has a double perfection: the first perfection is that of the body, and the second (ultimate) perfection is that of the soul. The first consists in the most healthy condition of his material relations, and this is only possible when man has all his wants supplied, as they arise; if he has his food, and other things needful for his body, e.g., shelter, bath, and the like. . . . The second perfection of man consists in his becoming an actually intelligent being; i.e., he knows about the things in existence all that a person perfectly developed is capable of knowing. This second perfection certainly does not include any action or good conduct, but only knowledge, which is arrived at by speculation, or established by research.”

THE THIRD PROBLEM: PRELIMINARIES

Maimonides’ Third Problem is the length of the preparatory study. He makes this section the longest of the five to demonstrate this point, for some of its length is repetition. Indeed, throughout this section, methods are ends, since by linking parables (there are three in this section) we reach the purpose of the preparatory study, which is the practice of the divine science (see, in my Introduction I, Section K, about Ben Azzai linking parables in a corona of flame).

What Are the Prerequisites? One cannot embark on the divine science without preliminary training in Torah studies (an unspoken if implied condition, see my comment on the prior chapter). The student must also graduate in mathematics, geometry, logic, astronomy, and physics. The particular usefulness of the preparatory studies should be obvious:

- The mathematical and logical studies prepare the student to handle propositions in abstract thought. For example, in geometry we learn of circular lines, from which we derive that a thing can exist without duplication or division (Crescas, *ad loc*).
- Physics teaches the work of God by which we know His ways;
- Astronomy prepares us for metaphysical cosmology, that is, God's relation to the universe.

The student learns these sciences as they were understood in Maimonides' time. The paradigm is their Aristotelian treatment, with the classic Arabic and Jewish translations and commentaries. Ancient astronomy, for example, with its ensouled spheres, was very different from our own. It depended on the concept of *cosmos*, the unified system of the *living* universe, as reflected and paralleled by our world, the *microcosm* (Guide 1:72).

These studies also remove or limit the imagination's stranglehold on our understanding of the higher things. Maimonides is thinking of the Kalam theologians who made imagination their principle guide. They doubted the usefulness of conceptualization and thereby undermined science. But the sciences could not exist if we could not extract the general notion from the particular instances. It was just this process of abstraction that the Kalam rejected. They also confused the essential with the accidental, betraying neglect of the prerequisite subject of logic.

Maimonides admits that some of these studies may not supply any premises for the divine science, particularly those that the scholastics called *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music—though he never mentions music). Yet they remain necessary for clear thought, free of confusion, which portrays things as they really are (*v'tosig l'adam tekhuna heikh l'lmod v'ladaat ha-emet b'dvarim shehem m'masiim*). They are necessary to anyone who wants to achieve human completeness (*ha-shlemut ha-enoshit*). Even though these studies may have nothing to do with the divine science, they bring the mind to maturity (immaturity being the subject of the Fourth Problem).

The Importance of Reflection on Material Reality. There is a truth behind all reality, connecting disparate parts of the divine science (which he lists here), as “you, however, know.” The “you,” mentioned here is Rabbi Joseph, who is in the midst of the preparatory studies, but just because of them, he can already grasp this truth. The fundamental principle is that there are only two existing things, God and His creation. There is no human apprehension of the divine except from God's own acts, from which we learn of His existence (*v'ayn sham derekh l'hasigo eleh al yeday maasav v'hem ha-morim al mtziuto*). We only learn the basics of God's existence, what we must affirm and deny of Him, having no access to his essence.

In all of this Maimonides carries forward a tradition of the disciplined *reflection* on existence called *bekhina*. His great predecessor, Bakhya Ibn Pakuda, made *bekhina* one of the “Gates” of his *Duties of the Heart, Hovot Ha-Levavot*:

“The essence of reflection (*bekhina*) is (1) contemplation of the signs of the creator's wisdom manifested in creation, and (2) the soul's appreciation of them according to one's powers of perception.” (Feldheim, vol. 1, p. 168)

Bakhya provides many examples of earthly wonders for us to reflect on, like the mechanism of the eye. He directs us to reflect on the eye's Creator, though it is one of His smaller miracles. While Maimonides proceeds differently from Bakhya, both regard *bekhina* as a precondition for the divine science.

Maimonides' *bekhina* differs in that by reflecting on the realities of *our* world, we learn all of the things that we must *deny* of God. Lacking clear concepts of the material universe, the student could not begin the study of Maimonides' negative theology, since he would not know what he could deny. Negative theology is an important branch of the study and practice of the divine science. So, for example, the negation of *numerical* unity, the

mathematic “one,” provides some apprehension of the divine *non-numerical* unity. This would be inaccessible without some training in mathematics.

The Problem of Educational Resistance. These studies are lengthy. A person could die before completing them. Moreover, man’s desire to reach ultimate truth in his lifetime makes him impatient with troublesome prerequisites. But if they were unnecessary, we could not justly call them “prerequisites,” they would rather be “distractions and futilities.” Although dialog form is clearly not his *métier* (he never gets farther than two or three turns of dialog), Maimonides briefly adopts that form to explain the importance of the prerequisites to an imagined interlocutor. This interlocutor is clearly not Rabbi Joseph, but, more likely, someone like the victim in the Parable of the Pit, who I will soon identify as a typical yeshiva student and would be intellectual. Maimonides asks if the student would like to learn the divine science, but the student’s enthusiasm quickly fades when told he must spend even a week’s time studying the preliminary course, for he is sure that he can conjure any background he needs from his own imagination (*lo yeot l’kakh, eleh yistapek b’dimionot kozvim sh’nafsho ninukhat behem*). The result is that he never possesses a clear notion of God.

In all this, the imagination overwhelms the still weak intellect. What is inaccessible to mind becomes the playground of fancy. When intellectual understanding is impossible, the imagination takes over. The imagination then wants to convince us that the preliminaries are irrelevant, harmful, anti-Torah, and misleading. It exalts itself over truth and deifies itself. Truth is not the imagination’s *raison d’être*. The purpose of the imagination is to connect diverse things beautifully. It is not concerned with the real requirements of the intellectual pursuit. The intellect, by contrast, is concerned with the reality of things as they are. The reality of things as they are merely bores the imagination.

Perhaps the worst educational problem is the tendency of the student beginning any study to imagine that he has grasped it whole just as he is starting, rejecting anything different, or new. The sophomoric imagination throws up every possible question, objection, and contradiction. In the traditional study of Talmudic subjects, this kind of sharp questioning is prized. In divine science, it is an obstacle. Demolishing a conceptual structure is much easier than raising one, for it is easier to raise doubts than to resolve them. When such a student does enter the field of divine science, he falls in a pit with no means to climb out. It would have been better had he never begun. Similarly, because of the dangers of the study (discussed in the last chapter), one must not begin the divine science without graduating in the prerequisites.

Maimonides associated these problems with what he, at first, calls *laziness*, the intellectual inertia derived from the physical inertia of all material bodies. This laziness affects those who style themselves intellectuals but do not graduate in the prerequisites. Their scholarly indolence has left them mired in false imaginings. These self-styled intellectuals wrongly deride the prerequisites as lacking benefit and dangerous to religion.

As we will see, it is not so much that they are lazy, but that they urge themselves toward the wrong objects. This is Maimonides’ remarkable insight into the psychology of education. They fail in their preliminary studies since they do not sublimate these urges toward their studies.

The obstacles to learning flow from the nature of the subject matter itself. They are unavoidable. That is why, as we have seen, the beginning student must be satisfied with traditional dogmas and correct received opinions.

(We treat the three parables in the Third Problem separately at the end of this chapter).

THE FOURTH PROBLEM: PHYSICALITY

The Fourth Problem is that the physical and moral constitution of the student prevents him from learning. These obstacles include inertia or laziness, or there may be impediments that are more intractable. Maimonides makes little attempt to separate nature from nurture in this discussion, which may explain why this section is long, for the

two operate at various levels in his description of the problem. Maimonides' problem is his commitment to the freedom of the will, whereby the student should be free to remedy any natural handicap through education and training. Nonetheless, some people will never be able to enter the divine science.

He explains the physical impediments in the manner of medieval medical thought. The four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile), together with the "heat" and "moisture" of the genitals, form the natural temperamental limitations of the student (Crescas, *ad loc.*, surmises that those whose genitals are overheated lust for the wrong things). These temperaments include the neurological predisposition to agitation, the *shpilkes*, impetuosity and the "flame of youth." Under this heading come anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders. Ultimately, because of these limitations, Maimonides realizes that some are uneducable, and many cannot enter higher learning. He concludes that trying to remedy their defects is a waste of time (*v'hishtadlut imam b'zeh ha-inyan—sh'tut g'mura min ha-mishtadel*).

Still, even these people must acquire some fundamental education. He has lofty expectations for them. Everyone should master certain core dogmas of religion, such as divine unity and simplicity. He thinks most people can learn geometry, and, surprisingly, medicine (that is, medicine of the twelfth century). But the mere fact that even Socrates' slave boy Meno can learn geometry does not necessarily fit him to study theology or metaphysics.

Another core limitation is *immaturity*. The student must attain a certain age, settled character, patience, thoughtfulness and judiciousness without which scholarship is impossible. Maturity connects to morality, ethics, and conduct. These are the subject matters of the section of Mishneh Torah known as *Deot*. *Deot* is similar but broader than what Hebrew usually calls *middot* (conduct) and includes morality, but *deot* also includes health, diet, bathing and exercise. In other words, *deot* concerns physical *and* moral improvement. The student who would enter divine science must first achieve moral virtue. Moral virtues prepare for the intellectual virtues (*ha-maalot ha-midotiut hem ha-tzaot la-maalot ha-hegionot*, cf. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI:13:1144b30). But those whose physical humours result in bad physical "temperament" cannot hope even to attain moral virtue.

Maimonides turns next to several prerequisites to divine science listed in the Talmud *Hagigah*, essential to the student's educational maturity:

"The headings of chapters (of *Maaseh Merkava*) may be transmitted only to the head of a court (Chief Justice: *av bet din*) and to one whose heart is *doeg* (anxious, depressed, humble) within him. Others say (*ika d'amri*): Only if his heart is *doeg* within him. R. Ammi said: The mysteries of the Torah may be transmitted only to one who possesses five attributes, [namely], The captain of fifty (*sar khameshim*), and the man of rank, and the *yoetz* (counselor), and *khakham kharashim* (sharp scholar) and *navon lakhash* (interpreter of parables, see Isaiah 3:3)." (*Hagigah* 13a, and compare to 14a)

These terms establish the Maimonidean prerequisites for the character of a scholar in divine science:

6. *Humility*. I identify in Maimonides' description a stage where the youth is broken hearted over his directionless striving, and, in *perplexity* (*ha-mevikha*), humbly turns to a more directed path. This is *doeg*, the characteristic of one "whose heart is full of care, i.e., in whom wisdom is united with humility, meekness, and a great dread of sin." Humility means that the student can exercise patience before the apparent contradictions rife in divine science. It is the most important characteristic. Maimonides says that the student who "conquers his heart liberates his soul to attain God, meaning, the divine science, which is the *Maaseh Merkava*" (my trans., *yikna'u libotehem...v'az y'romemu et atzmam la-draga zo, v'hi hasagato ytalei, k'lomar ha-mada ha-eloki asher mekhanim b'maaseh ha-merkava*). Note his equation of humility / the attainment of God / divine science / *Maaseh Merkava*. Humility, the conquering of the heart, is the first step to divine illumination of the mind. It is as though he has to kill his heart to have it resurrected—Maimonides quoting Isaiah:

“I dwell in the high and lofty place, with him that is of a humble and contrite spirit: to revive (*l'hakhiot*—resurrect) the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isaiah 57:15)

The Talmud *Hagigah* at first states that the student must attain the office of Chief Justice, *av beit din*. But this higher rabbinic degree is not really a requirement. That is because the clause “others say whose heart is *doeg*” implies that the rank of *av beit din* is not the real requirement but that only *doeg* is. The student should rather have the *qualities* of a Chief Justice: judiciousness, fairness, weighing sides, collegiality, etc.

7. *Political ability*. In *Hagiga* this is called *yoetz*, “counselor.” One who is only a *yoetz* has a highly developed imagination linked to a less developed intellect. He is a leader who retains information and makes good quick decisions, as well as long-term political judgments. One who exemplifies only this trait may not enter philosophic discourse at any level. Maimonides says that this person is unable to understand “first intelligibles,” *muskalot ha-rishonim*. This is probably an exaggeration. What it means is that this person lacks the ability to conceptualize. Schwarz (note 36, *ad loc.*, following Alfarabi), says that a “first intelligible” is a self-evident truth. That “opposites do not unite at the same place and time” is a “first intelligible.” In the moment of recognition of this first intelligible, the *potential intellect* becomes *active intellect* on that point. Maimonides calls these first intelligibles “devices” (Judeo-Arabic קְיִלָּה, Ibn Tibon: *takhbula*), since they are the necessary tools for the practice of the divine science. One who is merely a *yoetz* “might be very stupid and lacking in *intelligent devices*,” *hu sakhal meod, ayn takhbula imo* (Eng., Pines; Heb., Tibon).

8. *Completion of the preliminary studies*. The “sharp scholar,” *hakham harashim*, according to Maimonides’ understanding, has the above three constitutional requirements, and has also mastered the lengthy preliminary studies, that is, logic, mathematics, geometry, physics, and astronomy.

9. *Insightfulness*. *Navon lakhash* is literally translated “the understanding of whispering.” This is the ability to interpret hints, allusions, and obscure references. It is the *positive* contribution of the imagination to the intellect. This person can simultaneously conceal concepts from the masses while revealing them to the wise. One, however, who is only a *navon lakhash*, cannot achieve wisdom through the sciences. Even-Shmuel calls him a poet who lacks substance, *baal signon v'tokhen dal*.

10. *Age*. This is the *sar khameshim*, the “captain of fifty,” mentioned in *Hagigah*. The term is taken to mean fifty years of age. The traditional understanding of the age requirement of *Maaseh Merkava* and *Maaseh Bereshit* usually takes “fifty” to mean forty. But if the student acquired requisites 1 through 4 above he probably satisfies this requirement despite his actual age in years. Maimonides does not mention any particular age. It is less a requirement than recognition that the candidate has attained the qualities associated with age forty: the ability to conceptualize and comprehend what his teachers taught him (Rashi to *Pirke Avot* 5:21: *l'havin davar m'tokh davar...m'khan l'talmid sh'ayno omed al daat rabo ad sh'hu ben arbaim*). Age also refers to the “flame of youth.” He must overcome youthful nervousness and the unsettled cast of mind that impede learning.

THE FIFTH PROBLEM: PARNASA

Man’s “initial” or “first” perfection is his physical perfection. It is the prerequisite for the “ultimate” or “second” perfection, the perfection of the intellect. The latter is most important, but it comes second in time. The student must acquire the “first perfection,” the necessities of life, before embarking on the tour of the mind. The first perfection includes all the accoutrements of civilized urban life, from reasonably fashionable and clean clothing to decent repasts, community, income, family, etc. The student must also pursue some profession, *parnasa*, if not born wealthy. (On the “perfections,” see above, Second Problem, and Guide 3:27)

Compounding the *parnasa* problem is our inability to identify a standard of living. We become accustomed to unnecessary material attachments or even luxuries. These change with the times. Indoor plumbing was a luxury a century ago but a requirement today, while television is an extravagance many now imagine necessary. The

problem is not so much the type or nature of the material attachment but the desire for it. The growing desire for material things crowds out the desire for the intellectual or spiritual pursuits:

“Even the perfect man to whom we have referred, if too busy with these necessary things, much more so if busy with unnecessary things, and filled with a great desire for them—must weaken or altogether lose his desire for study, to which he will apply himself with interruption, lassitude, and want of attention.”

However we sort this out, one needs leisure and money to support scholarship. The Rabbis described earning a living, *parnasa*, as more difficult than crossing the Red Sea (Talmud, *Pesakhim* 118). This may be the hardest of the five problems, but its solution is an absolute prerequisite to the divine science. The result, uncomfortably for moderns, is that this science is the pursuit of the elite:

“For these reasons it was proper that the study of Metaphysics (Pines: “these matters,” *kol ha-davarim halalu*) should have been exclusively cultivated by privileged persons, and not entrusted to the common people. It is not for the beginner, and he should abstain from it, as the little child has to abstain from taking solid food and from carrying heavy weights.”

We should appreciate Maimonides’ realism. “All men are created equal but differ greatly in the sequel,” as American founding father Fisher Ames said. This realism grows from Maimonides’ medical appreciation of the different treatments required for different diseases. His educational theory parallels his understanding that each patient is unique. Leveling may produce geometricians but never philosophers or prophets.

THE PARABLE OF THE PIT

“There is also a necessity of another kind for achieving knowledge of the preliminary studies. It arises from the fact that when a man seeks to obtain knowledge quickly, many doubts occur to him, and he moreover quickly understands objections—I mean to say the destruction of a particular doctrine, this being similar to the demolition of a building (Friedlander here, ‘the demolition of a building is easier than its erection’). Now the establishment of doctrines as true and the solution of doubts can only be grounded upon many premises taken from these preliminary studies. One engaged in speculation without preliminary study is therefore comparable to someone who walked on his two feet in order to reach a certain place, and, while on his way fell into a deep well (*bor amok*: pit rather than well is meant) without having any device (Judeo-Ar.: תִּבּוּלָה, *takhbula* in Ibn Tibon), to get out of there before he perishes. It would have been better for him if he had foregone walking and quietly remained in his own place.” (Pines trans., 75-76)

Maimonides built the third section, about the need to conclude the lengthy preliminaries, around the Parable of the Pit, but this section also contains two other parables. Just before the Parable of the Pit is the Parable of Demolition, followed by the Parable of the Slothful One. Maimonides wrote the Guide to resolve parables in prophetic literature, and their resolution is the practice of divine science. Still, he usually refrains from parables. When he does use allegorical method, it is the means to achieve his desired end. He not only wants to prove the importance of the preliminary studies, but also to give his reader a taste of the practice of divine science.

The Parable of Demolition and the Parable of the Pit appear to be folk parables. The Parable of the Slothful One, is Solomonic, from Proverbs.

He begins with the very brief Parable of Demolition. Maimonides’ context, at this point in the Third Problem, is his discussion of the sophomoric propensity of newly minted intellectuals to raise objections, questions and apparent contradictions. They question both the need for preparatory studies and even the divine science itself. Jewish educational culture, centered in yeshivas, exalts the sharp scholar, the champion of debate (*pilpul*) who overturns mountains when he speaks. This person cannot begin to learn the divine science, for it is penetrated by

apparent contradictions, concepts we grasp fleetingly, like reflections of lightning in amber. He approaches these delicate structures with a wrecking ball, though demolition really requires no great force. When you remove a brick from the foundation of a building, the structure collapses. Just as a building is one interdependent structure, so are the structures of divine science, and the latter are upset with even less difficulty.

But the student has another problem. He has an intense *desire* to learn the secrets of the divine science: he just doesn't want to do the preliminary work. These labors would have equipped him with the ability to think, i.e., the ability to actualize a "first intelligible," *muskal rishon*. Maimonides illustrates this problem with a parable: his student enters the divine science carrying with him nothing but strong desire for it. He proceeds on his way and falls (or perhaps dives?) into a pit. Maimonides does not say that there is any particular problem with his chosen path: he did not take a wrong turn nor did he get lost in the woods. He falls into a pit that is so deep that he cannot get out. This compares to the deep water that the non-swimmer drowned in (at the beginning of our chapter), because he lacked knowledge of swimming. The problem now is that the victim fell in a deep pit (*bor amok*) "without having any *device* to get out of there before he perishes" (Pines translation; Friedlander misleadingly leaves out "device"). What device did he fail to bring? Why did he fail to bring it?

The Judeo-Arabic term is חיליה, *hiyala*, which Ibn Tibon consistently translates as *takhbula*/device, stratagem (accord, usually, Schwarz and Pines, Kafih uses *etza*). Efos, *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, p. 122, says that it means "artifices" and locates it in Guide 1:73 where it is the name of a book, *Kitáb al-Hiyal, The Book of Ingenious Devices of the Banu Shakir* (English translation, Springer; 2007). This book listed various inventive contraptions, such as waterclocks, that were based on the principle of *horror vacui*, that nature abhors a vacuum. For Maimonides, the *horror vacui* is an intellectual concept, which, in Guide 1:73 he uses to defeat the Kalam theologians (about which we learn much more later). Since they believed there could be no fixed intellectual concepts, they could have no explanation why these vacuum devices worked. They entered divine science with nothing to guide them but the rule of their imaginations, rejecting the efficacy of all cognition. They also fell into a vacuum, so to speak, with no device to save themselves.

The term חיליה appears again in the account of the Fourth Problem, where Maimonides discusses politicians. We learn what he means by an ingenious device (Pines, p. 78):

"...such a one is called *yoetz* (counselor). However, someone of that sort might not understand an intelligible notion even though it were close to being one of the first intelligibles. He might be very stupid (*peti*) and lacking in *ingenious devices* (חיליה, *takhbula* in Ibn Tibon)

When Maimonides uses חיליה, he makes it the basic *cell* of intellectual activity. This device is the product and practice of thought, the concept as well as its actualization. The educational prerequisites prepare for such thought by removing it from the grip of the imagination. They give thought logical method and real objects for that method to work on. The "device" is just this ability to cognize. Without this device, the journey through divine science must end in the pit, for the imagination substitutes its images for the divine concepts, creating gods in its own material image. Since the victim was without "any device" he cannot "get out of there before he perishes," *sh'ayn takhbula lo latzet mimenu ad sh'yamut* (Ibn Tibon).

What was the device did he neglected to bring? He must have failed to bring the *rope*. With a rope he could have climbed out of the pit. Recall that in the Introduction, Maimonides noted Solomon's advice to make a rope to draw water from a well, and that such a rope was *twined* from different strands. Similarly, by linking concept to concept, device to device, we safely journey through divine science, actualizing the intellect as both practice and end. With no device we "perish" not only from the spiritual life (as Even-Shmuel suggests), but also because we have no recourse but idolatry, which, from Maimonides' standpoint, is death.

Why did the victim neglect to bring the rope? This is the subject of the final parable. Maimonides focuses on the psychology of this victim (in rather modern terms). He begins with its apparent manifestation, the laziness of lazy

people, *ha-atzelim v'atzlutam* (Ibn Tibon), too lazy to seek wisdom: "He speaks thus of a man who *desires* (*ba'teshukat ha-mishtokek*) to know the final results" without the preliminaries, saying in the words of Solomon: "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not" (Proverbs 21:25-26). He responds to this Proverb:

"...He does nothing but desire, and hopes to obtain a thing without using the means to reach it. It would be better for him were he without that desire."

He should have stayed home without venturing into the field of divine science. Maimonides deconstructs the Proverb, subtly emphasizing lust over laziness. He explains that the antithesis for Solomon was not between "righteous" and "slothful," *tzaddik* and *atzel*. The key is that the *atzel* "coveteth greedily," while the *tzaddik* "giveth." *Giveth* means that the *tzaddik* "gives everything its due," *ha-ish ha-tzedek m'bnai adam ha-noten l'kol davar et raui lo* (cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I:9:1367b14). He does this by devoting due time ("all his time") to the preliminary studies. The *atzel*, by contrast, only lusts. He really is not lazy; his problem is his misdirected devotion. It begins to look like the contrast is between "studious" and "lustful." But that is not the solution either.

Watch what Maimonides does next. He rewrites the last part of the Proverb so that instead of "The righteous giveth and spareth not," he has it read, "The righteous man devotes his days to wisdom and is not sparing of them" (Pines). But then he goes further and says that his rewritten Proverb "corresponds to his (Solomon's) saying, 'Give not your strength unto women' (Proverbs 31:3)."

This unusual deconstruction and reconstruction demands our special attention. The first rewrite is about the *tzaddik*, and, in a negative way, the second rewrite is also about him. He not only devotes his time to his studies but he does not allow any other extraneous desire to divide his consciousness. But the real target of the second rewrite, "Give not your strength unto women," is the *atzel*.

Maimonides has a clear concept of what "Give not your strength unto women" means. In *Mishneh Torah, Deot*, 4:19 he writes:

"Semen constitutes the strength of the body, its life and the light of the eyes. Its emission to excess causes decay, debility and diminished vitality. Thus, Solomon, in his wisdom, said 'Give not your strength unto women.'"

The *Treatise on Unity, Maamar Ha-Yikhud*, a short work attributed to Maimonides, refines the concept further: "'Give not your strength unto women'...meaning, do not give the essence of your strength to those who corrupt (cause the loss of) the intelligent" (Fred Rosner, *Three Treatises Attributed to Maimonides*, 83. *Lo titen helekh l'mafsidei haskelim*). The woman who corrupts the intelligent ones could be the "Married Harlot" of Proverbs 7:5 (Guide, Introduction) or it could mean any material or imagined distraction.

Having rewritten the Proverb twice, he briefly summarizes his position:

"Now the majority of the men of knowledge, I mean those generally known as men of knowledge, labor under this disease—I mean that which consists in seeking to achieve the ends and in speaking about them without having engaged in studies preliminary to them. With some of them, their ignorance or their desire to have the first place (desire to rule, *bakashat ha-srara*) goes so far as to cause them to disapprove of these preliminary studies, which they are incapable of grasping or are too lazy to seek to understand. Accordingly, they wish to show that these studies are harmful or useless. However, when one reflects, the truth of the matter is clear and manifest."

What alleged “men of knowledge” was he writing about? What do they seek? What is their disease? What is “clear and manifest?”

Here is my portrayal of the past few paragraphs containing the three parables. The Parables of the Demolition, the Pit, and the Slothful One all depict the same person. He is a novice intellectual in religious studies, probably similar to what we would now call a yeshiva student. We teach him the basics of religion and a considerable amount of other material. Like all sophomores he learns perhaps too quickly (*sophos*/clever; *moros*/fool). Since he already knows it all, he throws up myriad clever problems and contradictions, impatiently demolishing entire structures of subtle speculative knowledge. He has a strong desire to learn the secrets of the Torah, but does not want to engage in the preparatory studies. He has many wonderful reasons why he should not have to do so. Because he thinks that he knows everything he needs, he does not worry about the dangers of entering the divine science. He resolves contradictions in that field by exercising his vibrant imagination on them, but just because of this, he falls into the pit of idolatry, the world of images. It would have been better had he stayed home and memorized the dogmas rather than attempting paradise with no tools but his imagination. Had he learned the preparatory studies he would have known how to think, i.e., how to actualize a first intelligible. He would be able to link them like a rope to form some device to save his soul. Why did he neglect to bring such a device? His *eros* was for the wrong things, either because of ignorance or, more likely, a desire to rule. He engaged in divine science, “seeking to achieve the ends and in speaking about them without having engaged in studies preliminary to them,” perhaps purchasing a popular book on Cabala so that he could discuss it engagingly at a coffee-house. Worse, he actively and loudly “disapprove(s) of these preliminary studies.”

In truth, he was still engaged in a material pursuit, not an intellectual one: he weakened his mind through this lust, like one who, proverbially, weakens his body by giving his strength to women. Solomon’s Proverb should have reminded us of the Parable of the Married Harlot, where we saw other students lust for the Married Harlot to their doom, just as matter absorbs any new form.

On one level, instead of giving his strength to women the student should sublimate that strength in his studies, thereby raising himself to the divine science with a saving device. On another level, by pursuing his material *eros* for the secrets of Torah he dies a spiritual death like the *atzel*, since “The *desire* of the slothful killeth him.”

He should have stayed home with his studies. Solomon’s Book of Proverbs concludes with its thirty-first chapter. That chapter begins at verse three with the admonition not to give thy strength unto women. It concludes at verse ten with the encomium to the “Woman of Valor” whose price is above rubies, whose husband safely trusts in her because she devotes herself only to his household. Just because she stayed and devoted herself to her home, when “she openeth her mouth” she does so “with wisdom,” unlike those “generally known as men of knowledge.” This secret is “clear and manifest,” but only to those who know.

GUIDE 1:35
DOGMA

INTRODUCTION

In this frequently misinterpreted chapter, Maimonides complicates the reader's task in two ways. *First*, he tells of two different people, the "perplexed" and the "incapable," shifting back and forth between these accounts three times in this brief chapter. When he returns at the end of the chapter to the "incapable," his presentation, in some translations, leaves doubt whether he might instead be writing about the "perplexed" (Ibn Tibon is the most ambiguous; Friedlander achieves clarity that the last part really is about the "incapable"). This makes a difference because of the *second* complication that Maimonides introduces: the contents of the educational program for the "incapable." He gives four somewhat different accounts of these contents, leaving the reader wondering what this program contains.

I will clarify these ambiguities. The subjects in this discussion are two people, presented as generic representatives, who have difficulty understanding the prophetic writings. The first individual is *incapable* of understanding them because he has the five limitations catalogued in the last chapter: immaturity, lack of appropriate education, bad physical disposition, etc. Some of these defects can be remedied, some not.

The second individual is the right kind of person. He is the one previously described as *doeg, sar khameshim, yoetz, khakham kharashim* and *navon lakhash*, that is, humble, mature, imaginative, scholarly, insightful. Most importantly, he can figure things out on his own, *mevin m'daato*. Having read passages in the prophetic works, he is *perplexed* by their apparent attribution of corporeality to God. The moment of his perplexity is the moment we recognize that he should begin the divine science.

In neither case, however, that of the incapable or that of the perplexed, do we divulge the doctrines of the divine science. We give the incapable the dogmas of belief, while we give the perplexed the "chapter headings" from which he must weave the divine science.

This chapter is about those dogmas of belief, and, therefore, the focus is on the incapable ones. Maimonides brings in the training of the perplexed only to provide contrast. Although the account of those dogmas seems to shift the four times Maimonides recounts it here, his present interest is only in three of those dogmas, namely, *gashmut, hitpaaluyot*, and *dimion*, which are divine freedom from: 1) corporeality, 2) affection /*pathos*, or 3) likeness to any other existent.

We were already familiar with dogmas of belief about God from the first two Commandments, and from the first five of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles, found in *Introduction to Helek* in Commentary on the Mishnah (divine existence, unity, incorporeality, the evil of idolatry and polytheism). Those well-known dogmas are necessary to the *immortality* of each individual Jew. We know this because the main concern of Mishnah *Helek*, which says, "All Israel have a portion in the *world to come*," is what an Israelite must believe if he is to share in immortality (*Sanhedrin* 10:1).

All of these dogmas participate to some extent in the divine science. It follows that there is a necessarily stripped down version of them for the public, against a full account available only to the adept. Maimonides' seeks to *expand* the list of these dogmas to include two that are very largely part of the divine science, *hitpaaluyot* and *dimion*, and he does so on the strength of the fact that the Commandments and *Helek* both included *gashmut*, which, like *hitpaaluyot* and *dimion*, finds its full account in the divine science. We see this because in each of his four lists of dogmas, when he mentions these three, he affirms their dogmatic status *k'mo, just as*, we must believe in the earlier and more familiar dogmas.

The problem for Maimonides, and the reason he needs to contrast the incapable with the perplexed, is the problem of how much lore of *gashmut*, *hitpaaluyot*, and *dimion* we should burden the incapable. Because, as will emerge, the full account of these matters *must not be shared with the incapable*.

Various commentators have been so confused by this chapter that they perversely read it to mean that we *must* share the full meaning of these subjects with the masses. Such an idea is not only un-Maimonidean, but quite overlooks such disasters as allowing the incapable to ponder the apparent contradiction between divine impassivity and the efficacy of prayer, the clarification of which requires absorption of the entire Guide of the Perplexed.

DOGMAS

Having given sufficient warnings of what we should not teach and who we should not teach it to, Maimonides now tells us what we *must* teach.

There are certain dogmas from divine science that we teach forcefully to all. Some clearly derive from scripture. Some involve philosophy. We require the multitudes, including the semi-educated householders, children, the entirely ignorant and the mentally impaired, to assimilate these doctrines. Although these doctrines are clearly part of the divine science, they do not fall into that class of learning prohibited by the law in *Hagigah*. Indeed, it is necessary to teach the multitudes these things from the earliest possible age, and to drill them so no alternative rates serious consideration.

We answer questions by saying that the wise have explained these things and that should be satisfactory.

Maimonides was one of those Rabbis for whom there are laws of belief. These laws of belief are his 13 principles of faith found in Commentary on the Mishna, *Sanhedrin*, 10:1, and in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 2:9-10. (See, generally, Harry A. Wolfson, "Maimonides on the Unity and Incorporeality of God," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, v. 2, 433-457, esp. 449-450). Those doctrines that flow at least partially from scriptural sources are:

- God exists;
- God is one;
- God is perfect;
- God is incorporeal;
- God is above all deficiency;
- He created the universe *ex nihilo*;
- The books of the prophets are true.

The obligation to believe God exists is the denial of atheism. His oneness implies his unique non-numerical unity. The denial of multiplicity implies opposition to polytheism and idolatry.

Arthur Hyman effectively explains how Maimonides sees the connection between these dogmas and the ultimate purpose in all his books:

“Once it has been seen that it is the function of the first five principles (from *Introduction to Helek*) to convey correct conceptual knowledge about God, their purpose becomes clear. It is to make immortality possible for all. Maimonides, it will be recalled, identifies the World to Come with the philosophical notion of the incorporeal existence of the human intellect, which takes place only when this intellect becomes actualized through the understanding of true opinions, primarily those about God. The Law then, by commanding that all Israelites, the masses no less than the intellectual elite, must know certain

true propositions about God, provides the possibility of immortality for all.” (“Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance studies*, ed. A. Altmann, Cambridge, 119-144)

The final dogma is that the “the books of the prophets are true and interpretable,” *divrei ha-navua halelu emet v’yesh la-hem biur*. What Maimonides means is that we indoctrinate the people with our conclusions from the Guide’s lexicon of prophetic terminology, i.e., that we should interpret anthropomorphic terms as ambiguous or homonymous, and interpret parables rather than take them literally. If the people still do not understand, we emphasize that “the wise,” to whom they should apply, know the true interpretation.

HITPAALUYOT, DIMION, AND GASHMUT

Maimonides now argues that just as all are required to subscribe to these biblically derived rules of belief, so it is similarly obligatory to accept as dogmas three core conclusions of the divine science. We cannot derive this material directly from scripture. These conclusions underlie and protect the preceding general rules of belief and so he holds them correlative to those rules. Some of this material derives entirely from philosophy, as he acknowledges (thus, in the discussion below of *relation* he says this doctrine “has been shown in works on natural science” by which he means Aristotle’s *Physics* 7:4, 249a 1-5). There is a minimum version of these doctrines for the public, against a complete version that the capable few grasp only after much study and meditation. These three doctrines of divine science are:

- God has no *affections*, Hebrew: *hitpaaluyot* (Judeo/Arabic: אלאנפּעאלאָת). God’s *perfection* implies that He is not subject to *change*. *That is the limit of what we tell the public*. That He does not change means that no outside occurrence affects Him. The attribution of passivity or potentiality to God is tantamount to the forbidden attribution to Him of a defect. We, therefore, must *interpret* scriptural passages implying change. Moreover, God’s perfection implies that He does not suffer emotions. This last idea can hardly be part of the *public* dogma, although divine impassivity clearly implies His freedom from emotions. The *full* presentation of this material we reserve for the qualified divine science student. In Guide 1:55 we learn that this student must be able to prove that God has no affections, but that this proof requires proficiency in natural science, which the incapable do not have. The student must, ultimately, reconcile God’s impassivity with the efficacy of prayer.

- God has no *likeness, analogy, or comparison*, Hebrew: *dimion*, and is therefore not definable (Schwarz: *damiut*. Jud./Ar. אלוּשְׁבִּיהָ, שְׁבִּיהָ). The Arabic term “Comparers” *Mushabbihs*, which has the same root, names the sect of the “ultra-Hanbalites” in Muslim theology, who held that divine attributes are identical when applied to man (Efros, *Philosophic Terms in Moreh Nebukim*, p.24). But God is *indefinable* because there is none *like* Him, none who *compare* to Him. This dogma of uniqueness flows from God’s unity and non-multiplicity. Since there is nothing like God, He is cannot be part of any species or genus. From philosophy, we learn that every definition consists of a genus and a difference. A genus is a group of *related* species, and the difference (species) identifies which members of that genus are the subjects of the definition. But God’s uniqueness means that He has no *relation* with any other. “No relation exists between two things unless they come under one genus,” *kol yakhas lo y’hei elei beyn shnei dvarim sh’hem takhat min ekhad* (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 7:4, 249a 1-5). Thus, only if there is a relation of greater/fewer, stronger/weaker, etc., then two *relata* group together. But we cannot group God together with anything. He is not just stronger than we are; his strength means something entirely different from our strength. In other words, when we say that God is “strong” and that Samson is “strong,” the description is homonymous, not ambiguous. These homonymous terms when used for Him and us merely sound alike. Even among the “essential attributes,” such as divine intelligence, power, and existence, no definable relation exists with human intelligence, power and existence. If there is no relation, God has no *attributes* as such. The divine “attributes” that we utter mean nothing. This doctrine I term “extreme negative theology.” Surprisingly, we teach this extreme concept to the masses. By contrast, the complex version, which I term “moderate negative theology,” we reserve for the qualified student (See essay below).

- God is *incorporeal*, He has no *gashmut* (Jud./Ar. אֵלֶּזְטִיִּם). While we listed incorporeality with the general commandments of belief above, its derivation from scripture necessarily involves material drawn from philosophy. Mishneh Torah, *Yodei Ha-Torah* 1:8 puts together Deuteronomy 4:39 “The Lord thy God is in heaven above and upon the earth beneath” with Aristotle’s doctrine of *proper place* (*Physics* 4:4 212a, 5-6): since nothing corporeal can occupy two entirely bounded spaces at the same time, God could not be both above and below and be corporeal. Deuteronomy 4:15 “You saw no manner of *figure*” (*temuna*, which Guide 1:3 says means *shape*), he puts together with Aristotle’s doctrine that shape, such as straightness and curvedness, is an *accident* of the category of *quality* that always and only characterizes bodies (*Categories* 8:10a, 11-16). Since we “saw no manner of” shape, therefore, God cannot be a body. Maimonides thinks that God’s uniqueness, “To whom will you liken Me that I should be equal (Isaiah 40:25)?” implies incorporeality since “if God were a body He would be *like* other bodies” but since He is unlike anything He cannot be a body (*Yodei* 1:8; Wolfson, *op.cit.*). *Gashmut* always implies multiplicity since all physical bodies consist of matter and form, and because bodies are *infinitely divisible*. Therefore, since God is one, not multiple or divisible, he cannot be corporeal. (Infinite divisibility of bodies is a concept Maimonides shares with Aristotle, as both oppose atomism: *hu gam mitkhalek v’sovel et ha-khaluka*. Cf. Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 1:1, 268a 5-8; *Physics*, 6:1, 231b, 15-20; *Metaphysics* 5:13, 1020a, 7-10)

THE “PERPLEXED”: MAIMONIDES FURTHER DEFINES DIVINE SCIENCE

In the next movement, about half way into our chapter, Maimonides changes key and relates what we teach to the “perplexed,” that is, the anticipated readers of the Guide. Both the perplexed and the incapable are confounded by the corporeality of language in the books of the prophets. But we know that the perplexed have acquired the five prerequisites listed by the last chapter. Thus, the perplexed may be confounded, but because of their qualifications, they can overcome their perplexity.

What we teach the perplexed is, of course, a longer list than that curriculum provided to the incapable (compare the somewhat different list given in the last chapter). We teach them the divine science:

- The homonymity and ambiguity of figurative expressions in the prophetic works (from the Guide’s Lexicon chapters);
- Which attributes are denied;
- Which attributes are affirmed (*u’ma inyan ha-taarim ha-myukhsim lo*: “what attributes *are* to be attributed to Him”);
- Creation (in Guide 2:13-30);
- Providence (3:16-24);
- Divine will/wisdom (1:68-69, 3:13, 3:17);
- Divine knowledge and its relation to human free will (1:19, 3:8, 3:19-23);
- Prophecy and its gradations (2:32-48);
- The meaning of the multiple names of the one God (1:61-70).

Once the qualified student has learned those first dogmas enjoined by law and become “perplexed,” (*nevukho*, Ar. *hā’ir*) about the terminology and parables in biblical prophecy, his teacher leads him gradually to divine science, divulging the “chapter headings.” He may also learn by himself, using the methodology of the Guide, since he is *mevin m’daato*, that is, able to teach himself. But these are all “secrets of the Torah,” and therefore only for the capable student who meets the conditions previously listed from *Hagigah*.

THE “INCAPABLE”

Some students can only be made to accept that God is a perfect unity, that the teachings of the prophets are true, and nothing more. They will not understand parables and homonymy. They cannot resolve apparent contradictions. We tell them the bare minimum of the three divine science doctrines of *gashmut*, *hitpaaluyot* and *dimion*:

“The scriptural passage [causing perplexity] is clearly understood by the wise, but that they [these incapable ones] should content themselves with knowing that God is *incorporeal*, that He is never subject to external influence, as *passivity* implies a change (*hitpaalot shinui*), while God is entirely free from all change, that He cannot be *compared* (*y’dmei*) to anything besides Himself, [meaning] that no definition includes Him together with any other being, that the words of the Prophets are true, and that difficulties met with may be explained on this principle. This may suffice for that class of persons (lit., we stop at just this much: *v’la-amod imo b’shiur ze*).” (This fine translation is Friedlander’s. Schwarz also gets it right. Ibn Tibbon, Pines and Kafih leave the misimpression that Maimonides directed this paragraph to the qualified capable student)

We indoctrinate the incapable with these dogmas from divine science because we cannot allow them to remain believers in corporeality and affection, just as we could not allow them to neglect the biblically derived commandments of belief. Our concern is *heresy*, the subject of the next chapter. They must be satisfied that “the words of the prophets are true” and any questions they have “may be explained on this principle.” Maimonides’ dogmatic assertion of prophetic truth must not be taken as window dressing. In Mishneh Torah, accessible to all, he established the law that defines a true prophet (*Ysodai Ha-Torah* chapters 7-10, *Avoda Zara* 5:6-9). There is not the slightest doubt that he believed in the truth of prophecy.

The problem for divine science is that the explanation for apparent contradictions in prophetic writings is too complex. They require the entire Guide of the Perplexed to resolve. For example, the reconciliation of the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer with the doctrine of divine impassivity must await the adept’s acquisition of considerable sophistication in the divine science, for it depends on the concept of the active intellect and the possibility of conjunction with it. Still, to protect religion from heresy it seems that we must alert the rest of the adherents of the faith at a minimum that “God is never subject to external influence (*hitpaaluyot*) ... [for] God is entirely free from all change,” while foreclosing any further questions with the dogmatic assertion of the truth of prophecy. (Averroes would not even have allowed us to discuss corporeality with the multitudes, arguing that it would undermine their simple faith in divine unity. *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, trans. G.F. Hourani, 1961, 59-60)

VIA NEGATIVA

Our chapter introduces the Maimonidean doctrine of divine attributes, to which the Guide devotes chapters 1:46-47 and 51-60.

The divine attributes fall into three categories, for our purposes. These are 1) the anthropomorphic attributes, 2) the attributes of action, and 3) the essential attributes.

How do I describe God?

Such grossly corporeal descriptions as the eye of God or hand of God are *anthropomorphic attributes*. Onkelos began the tradition of removing anthropomorphic attributes from the Bible. He substituted the *Shekhina* and other entities created by God in his Aramaic translation of the Bible.

Maimonides takes a different approach. He denies these attributes. He argues that by denying attributes we come

closer to understanding God himself. This is Maimonides' *negative theology*.

The *attributes of action* are known in Judaism as the *yud-gimel midot*, the thirteen descriptions of divine action:

“And the Lord passed by before him (Moses), and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear [the guilty]; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth [generation].” (Exodus 34:6-7):

God had agreed to show Moses His “back,” that is, the *consequences of His actions*. The descriptions given of His mercy, etc. are not descriptions of Him but only attempts to frame those consequences in human language. Thus, just as a mother is merciful to the child in her womb (*rekhem*), God is merciful to man (*rakhum*, from the same root as *rekhem*, womb). Not that God has a womb, or is a mother, or has a child; but His action in preserving man is called “merciful” by metaphoric comparison (*dimion*). Again, as with the anthropomorphic attributes, so with the attributes of divine action: we understand God better by denying these attributes.

The major problem for divine science is the *essential attributes*, which include life, wisdom and knowledge, as opposed to the *action attributes* and the *anthropomorphic attributes*.

EXTREME VS. MODERATE NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

It is possible to interpret Maimonides' negative theology in two ways: either we deny all essential attributes, which I call *extreme negativism*; or we affirm them conditionally, which I call *moderate negativism*.

Extreme negativism denies that God has wisdom or life under any understanding of these terms. The terms are homonymous, that is, they mean completely different things for God and man but only sound the same. If this interpretation were true, whatever we say about God would be exoteric camouflage for a sort of esoteric mystical atheism. It would be something like a Buddhist view: through meditations and ascetic practices, the adept obliterates his persona by assimilating it to the nothingness at the heart of the All. God would just be the *Ayn Sof* (the Endless) of Cabala, but abstracted from all the rest of Cabala, including its grand sefirotic emanations. This would entail the denial of the cosmological macrocosm (Guide 1:72). It is hard to see the Maimonides we know embracing such a doctrine.

Under moderate negativism, there is a difference between human and divine “existence” or “knowledge.” Homonymous attributes used both of man and God are *accidental* with men, but *essential* with God. What this means is that occasionally man understands something, but that God always understands everything; again, man lives and dies, but God's existence is atemporal and essential to Him (Efodi, *ad loc.*: “God's wisdom is absolute and is the cause of the existing things; our wisdom is contingent and acquired from existing things.”)

Herbert Davidson, in *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works*, Oxford 2004, p. 363, argues from moderate negativism. When Maimonides denies the essential attributes of life and existence he does it in a form that is a *non-denial*. That is, Maimonides “negates” divine life and existence by denying that God is *deficient* in life or intelligence. Davidson notes: “with a single exception, the illustrations that Maimonides offers are not negative terms at all but positive terms construed negatively.”

I have seen our chapter cited for extreme negativism. But it should be carefully noticed that the extreme view is only meant for the education of the *many*. We tell them that the essential attributes of life and wisdom are so incomparable to ours that they are as two different genres of life and wisdom, a comparison of apples and oranges. There is no relation, and such comparison is a *category mistake*. The story is different with the elite. We teach them those attributes that *are* related to God: *u'ma inyan ha-taarim ha-myukhasim lo*.

One might well wonder why we teach the hard-line view of extreme negativism to the multitudes.

Jewish law knows of this sort of educational discrimination. The command against homicide is one of seven Noahide commandments obeyed by civilized gentiles. The Noahide laws also apply to the Jews, but, critically, with the many conditions, exceptions, and complications set forth in the Talmud. As applied to the Gentiles, however, the law is absolute, and applied uncompromisingly. So, for example, the law denies abortion under all circumstances to Gentiles, while a Jew can abort to save the life of the mother (*rodef*). We assume Gentiles are beyond the reach of the complexities of Torah law, and it is not lawful to teach the Talmud to them.

Just so, we assume the many are incapable of grasping the complexities of the divine essential attributes, and we do not threaten their belief with that inquiry. Besides, their misinterpretation of the attributes could descend, as we will see, to dangerous results, like the eternal uncreated Qur'an, the Trinity, and even polytheism. It is not lawful to teach them divine science. For them extreme negativism is paradoxically appropriate. For those who can understand more, we teach the complexities of divine science, including moderate negative theology.

GUIDE 1:36 HERESY

The subject of this chapter is the capital offense of heresy. The chapter's difficulty lies in Maimonides' struggle to explain heresy in value free language, the language of facts as opposed to the language of morality. However, law cannot be subject to a purely rational analysis. Can Maimonides overcome the incoherence of a value free analysis of the heresy law? In the course of this essay, I do my best to grasp his resolution of this *problematic*, but remain troubled.

Let's begin at the beginning, with Adam in Eden, beyond good and evil.

“Through the intellect man distinguishes between the true and the false. This faculty Adam possessed perfectly and completely. The right and the wrong are terms employed in the science of apparent truths (morals), not in that of necessary truths...After man's disobedience, however, when he began to give way to desires which had their source in his imagination and to the gratification of his bodily appetites, as it is said, ‘And the wife saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to the eyes’ (Genesis 3:6), he was punished by the loss of part of that intellectual faculty which he had previously possessed...He therefore transgressed a command with which he had been charged on the score of his reason; and having obtained a knowledge of the apparent truths (Judeo-Ar. אֱלֵמִשְׁהוֹרָאֵת, Heb. *ha-m'fursamot*: opinions) he was wholly absorbed in the study of what is proper and what improper (*ha-ra v'ha-tov*). Then he fully understood the magnitude of the loss he had sustained, what he had forfeited, and in what situation he was thereby placed. Hence we read, ‘And ye shall be like Elokim, knowing good and evil,’ and not ‘knowing’ or ‘discerning’ the true and the false.” (Guide 1:2)

This quotation, from the second chapter of the Guide, is Maimonides' classic statement of the distinction between pursuit of the truth and pursuit of the good. His purpose in the Guide is to return man to his prelapsarian state, concerned only with truth and falsity, not moral judgments of good and evil. The pursuit of the truth is not necessarily concerned with moral values, while the pursuit of the good is not necessarily concerned with the true. It is not that the two pursuits are contradictory, but that they are different species. Compare Plato's *Republic* 2:377-383: the founders of the state represent God to the citizens on the one hand as *good*, and on the other as *perfect*. The first is a judgment, while the second is a fact. Though the two accounts are different, they do not necessarily contradict each other.

Maimonides tries to explain capital heresy purely in this truth perspective rather than from a moral perspective. But how can we address the heresy law from that Edenic height? If society executes heretics, it does so because their actions are *bad*, not because they are false. God, in his view, does not make conventional moral judgments, and, therefore, must take heresy as a false doctrine, not an evil one. Perhaps that works at the divine level, but, at our level, how can Maimonides explain the execution of heretics without recourse to moral judgments? To be value-neutral he needs to prove that capital heresy is *false* logically or philosophically. Can he succeed? The charge against monotheism has been that it unleashed inquisitions and religious persecution on the world. The Bible tells of divinely driven religious wars against polytheists and other heretics. How can *falseness* of an idea ever justify extermination?

The *scope* of capital heresy exacerbates his problem. His understanding of the law includes a series of crimes. It includes idol worship, polytheism, dualism, some ascriptions of corporeality, some descriptions of corporeal action, bald imputations of some nonessential attributes, as well as the worship of angels, demons, stars, plants and animals. It includes those who arrive at these notions through a philosophic process. But it also include those raised by their parents to believe these things, as well as the ignorant who are somehow lead to these conclusions. The law not only demands their execution by a Jewish sovereign acting in the land of Israel (not on foreign soil), but it also imposes this duty upon the gentile sovereign acting against idolatrous gentiles (Noahide laws).

Maimonides runs through a range of fairly unsatisfactory solutions. Ultimately, he has only two, though he makes neither explicit here. The first is to deny the moral content of the law and its enforcement by making that moral content our anthropomorphic projection on God. In other words, we take purely instrumental action but we say we are forestalling God's rage. The second is to conceive heresy as an absolute impediment to our conjunction with the active intellect. It prevents our making ourselves the image of God. This answer is his best. We will explain these two solutions in our conclusion to this chapter.

DIVINE RAGE: A FALSE START

The chapter begins with a false start. Maimonides begins to discuss biblical statements of divine favor and divine rage. Then, abruptly, he changes direction: "This (divine attribution) is not the subject of the present chapter (*ayn inyan zeh materet perek ze*); I intend to explain in it what I am now going to say." This is Maimonides' way of telling us to read this on multiple levels. The problem is attribution of the emotion of anger to God, but he says he does not want to discuss the general problem of divine attributes yet. That is because he prefers to begin with the *object* of divine rage, what God is really supposed to be "angry" about, which is always *capital heresy* (*lo lashon kas v'lo lashon kina, ki im b'avoda zara davka*).

Returning briefly to lexical mode, Maimonides interprets biblical language describing God's jealousy, anger or rage, and why the Bible calls someone an enemy, adversary, or hater of Lord. We already know that God is beyond change and therefore also beyond any affect or passion, including the emotion of anger. No one can be His "enemy." We use these terms *equivocally* with respect to God and with respect to man. For God these words always express an ascription of capital heresy, not literal rage (See my note on the exceptions to this rule, below, "Is Divine Rage Always Against Idolatry?"). These terms are just the Torah's *legal* designations for punishable transgressions.

THE SERIOUSNESS OF HERESY

Maimonides' argument is that capital heresy is philosophically or logically *false*, as opposed to *evil*. The first step in the argument is his assumption that Aristotle already proved this. He does not mention it here, but Maimonides elsewhere credits Aristotle with the demonstration of divine existence, unity, and incorporeality, and so it follows that those who hold the contrary positions maintain falsehoods.

Maimonides proceeds in the following curious manner. To make the argument that the law *should* punish heresy, he seeks to prove the logical *seriousness* of capital heresy. We hold our breath as he performs this tightrope walk. He must show that some falsehoods are more serious than others are, and he has five levels of seriousness:

Level 1. False assertions about individuals. It is wrong to assert "Zaid is sitting" when he is standing. The assertion is clearly false but trivial.

Level 2. False assertions about basic Aristotelian physics in the *sublunar* sphere. The examples given are "the element of fire is under air," "the element of water is under earth," or that "the earth is flat." The first two depend on the five-element theory of Aristotle, in which each element eventually ends up in its "proper place." The proper places of the elements, in order of height, are earth, then water, air, fire, and finally the indefinable fifth element of the astronomical heavens. These Level 2 false assertions are apparently more serious than the Level 1 statement above because the first mistake involves one individual only, Zaid, whereas Level 2 errors deal with entire *species* of elements and ultimately to everything beneath the moon.

Level 3. False assertions about the *superlunar* universe and the principles of all *corporeal* things. It is false to assert that "The sun consists of fire," or "the heavens form a hemisphere." The sun, like all heavenly creations, consists of the fifth element, and, so, Aristotelian physics holds it false to say that the sun consists of the fourth element, fire. A "hemisphere" is half a sphere. Since the earth is a sphere, the heavens must be a sphere too, not

a hemisphere. Only someone who believed that the universe just extended out to the horizon (i.e., the earth is flat) would think the heavens are a hemisphere. These level 3 assertions are more serious than level 2 assertions. This is because the heavens and the sun are physically higher than the earth, and are on a higher plane of perfection than the earth. Moreover, their action ultimately controls the movement of all things on earth. Assertions about them are more *serious* than errors about the proper places of the four lowly elements. Level 3 also includes statements of astronomy and geometry. These are principles of the entire physical universe and therefore serious. His examples are “the sun is a (two dimensional) circle” instead of a three dimensional sphere, and that a “geometric cone is a half the volume of a cylinder of the same height” rather than a third the volume. Note that Level 3 is the highest level of *corporeal* falsehoods.

Level 4. False assertions about incorporeal beings. It is false to say, “The angels eat and drink.” To attribute corporeality to non-corporeal intelligences is a *category mistake*. Since the prior three levels of falsehood all deal with the lower level of corporeality, those three levels obviously are less serious than errors about the nature of the perfect incorporeal beings.

Level 5. False assertions about God. It is false to assert that “something besides God is to be worshipped,” because we have proven there is only one God; the worship of anything else beside God means that something beside God deserves worship; and no *creature* of God deserves worship. Whether this really is logically true, Maimonides clearly understands it is, and because it involves the universe’s greatest entity, its Creator, a statement of falsehood of this type is more *serious* than all the others are. Indeed, he tries to convince us that the distinction between 5th level heresy and the other errors is merely a matter of degree. “Nor is the infidelity of him who thinks that the cone of a cylinder is half a cylinder or that the sun is a circle like the infidelity of him who thinks that there are more deities than one,” (Pines’ trans.) *ayn kfirat mi sh’hashev ki shifua ha-istona hetzia, sh’ha-shemesh igula, k’kfirat mi sh’hashev sh’hashem yoter al ekhad.*

Having demonstrated to his satisfaction that heretical statements are more *seriously* false than other statements because they are about the most important Being, and since the Bible, speaking the language of men, does not have a direct way of expressing this philosophical point, it uses metaphorical language which describes God as “angry” with heretics. This only means that they believe in a falsehood. He says that when he uses the term “heresy” it means holding a concept that a thing is different from what it really is, *kvanati b’milat kfira kviat dea al davar heifakh m’kafi sh’hu*. Friedlander, alone among English or Hebrew translators, renders *kfira*, used twice in this paragraph, as “error,” taking Maimonides’ statement at face value. *Kfira*, Arabic *kufr*, in various forms, appears seven times in the chapter, and Friedlander obscures its meaning four times. The other translators consistently take it as “infidelity” and “infidel,” thereby preserving the tension inherent in Maimonides’ formulation.

Clearly, heretics hold a *false* Level 5 thought. But why describe these heretics as *enemies* of God? And why project *anger* against them onto perfect, affectionless God?

ENEMIES

The first problem is that most idolators are not enemies of God. According to Maimonides’ famous explanation in Mishneh Torah, *H. Avodah Zara* 1:1, everyone originally believed in God. God uses agencies and forces to run the world. These agents are merely servants doing his bidding. One honors the Master by honoring His servant. Therefore, they worshipped the angels, the “separate intelligences” which in-form the planetary spheres, and so on. Eventually, they erected temples and icons representing the “servants.” Nevertheless, “No idolater ever did assume that any image made of metal, stone, or wood has created the heavens and the earth, and still governs them.” Should they suffer execution?

The second problem is the *ignorance* of people who commit heresy. They are *ignorant* because they have been brought up with false notions, or because they do not know how to deny divine corporeality. They do not know

how to interpret anthropomorphisms in the Bible. Are they “haters” and “enemies” punishable for their ignorance? Besides, they are victims of the sophistries of the educated heretics. Should the victims suffer like the perpetrators?

Maimonides responds to the problems presented by the first two groups. Even though the *first* group, the idolators who believe in God, have merely made a mistake about honoring God’s servants, their position historically reified into a movement that persuades the masses away from monotheism. Idolatrous ideas are so powerful that they are a “snare.” Therefore, despite their plausible justification, idolators who believe in God end in the same place as hardcore idolators that consciously displace God, and are as culpable.

Judaism never treats the *second* group, the ignorant, as leniently as other religions do, since knowledge of law is the major requirement of a commandment-based religion. An excellent example of this is the Mishnah called *Demot*, the law that treats the kosher kitchens of educated Jews differently than those of ignorant farmers. Besides, they should know better. Maimonides reminds us that Jonathan and Onkelos early on translated the Bible into Aramaic popular editions that nullified anthropomorphisms, and that Jewish education was always devoted to erasing polytheist and corporeal notions. Therefore, the failure of the ignorant heretic to apply to his betters for guidance and instruction is punishable.

The heretics who know what they do constitute a third group. They are clearly dangerous, even though some are also part of the first group who actually believe in God. They are the greatest threat because they *persuade* the masses to follow their false beliefs and present an example to them. While worship is strictly a prerogative of the one God, they ascribe it to other gods as well. This misleads the ignorant who only get the procedure of worship, not its meaning, and do not understand that honoring the servant displaces the Master (*v’haya ze goram l’heder mitziuto ytalei m’todaat he-hamon, l’fi sh’ayn he-hamon makhir ele pa’ulot ha-pulkham, lo inyanam v’lo amitat ha-neeved b’hem, l’khen haya ze sh’hevia l’kakh sh’nitkhayevo k’laya*). For these reasons, that is, the extent of their threat to the community, and the magnitude of their threat to God’s prerogative of worship, the law subjects them to judicial execution.

Thus, Maimonides disposes of the excuses of the heretics. But he has not yet told us what is wrong with the heretical ideas themselves.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF IDOLATRY

At the beginning of the chapter, after his false start, Maimonides asserts that all references in the Bible to divine anger or rage really are about idolatry and polytheism, i.e., *avoda zara*. He lists thirteen instances, mostly from Deuteronomy. The pattern of thirteen quotations reveals that the first (Deut. 11:16-17), last (Deut. 12:31) and middle quotations (Nahum 1:2) link to other parts of the Guide. Leo Strauss always looked for such numerical patterns of concealment in what he called “the art of writing.” Maimonides also thinks that burying a new concept in a series of unexceptional references constitutes an acceptable form of concealment (Guide 3:23; see my notes on Elihu in 1:13).

The first proof-text links to Guide 3:29. He argues there, and in Mishneh Torah, *H. Avoda Zara* 2:2, that *ideas* of *avoda zara* are in themselves dangerous and:

“It is the principal object of the Law and the axis round which it turns, to blot out these opinions from man’s heart and make the existence of idolatry impossible. As regards the former Scripture says: ‘Lest your heart be persuaded,’ etc. (Deut. 11:16)”

In the corresponding Mishneh Torah passage, he rules that the mind should not “roam” in these subjects. He holds it forbidden to read books on the subject or meditate on it (Commentary on the Mishna, *Avot*, 2:17; Guide 3:29-30; Mishneh Torah, *H. Avoda Zara* 3:2. His own case was the exception.). This is the seriously heretical

danger of *avoda zara*: it has enormous psychological power. Allowing the mind to “roam” on *avoda zara* “would cause you to turn after it and do as the idolators do.”

The middle quote, Nahum 1:2, and the last of his quotes, Deuteronomy 12:31, both link to Guide 1:54. 1:54 explains divine rage differently than our chapter does. In that chapter, Maimonides explains divine rage in terms of human psychology. When the Bible ascribes emotion to God, it *projects* on Him our own emotional state. He says:

“Whenever any one of His actions is perceived by us, we ascribe to God that emotion which is the source of the act when performed by ourselves, and call Him by an epithet which is formed from the verb expressing that emotion.”

Projection is the attribution of one’s own attitudes, feelings, or suppositions to others. It is a commonplace of Freudian psychology anticipated by Maimonides. Projection is a defense mechanism, though he would not have understood it as such. God punishes idolators with natural and historical disasters, so we call Him “wrathful”:

“His actions towards mankind also include great calamities, which overtake individuals and bring death to them, or affect whole families and even entire regions, spread death, destroy generation after generation, and spare nothing whatsoever. Hence, there occur inundations, earthquakes, destructive storms, expeditions of one nation against the other for the sake of destroying it with the sword and blotting out its memory, and many other evils of the same kind. Whenever such evils are caused by us to any person, they originate in great anger, violent jealousy, or a desire for revenge. God is therefore called, because of these acts, ‘jealous,’ ‘revengeful,’ ‘wrathful,’ and ‘keeping anger’ (Nah. 1:2) that is to say, He performs acts similar to those which, when performed by us, originate in certain psychical dispositions, in jealousy, desire for retaliation, revenge, or anger: they are in accordance with the guilt of those who are to be punished, and not the result of any emotion: for He is above all defect! The same is the case with all divine acts: though resembling those acts which emanate from our passions and psychical dispositions (*tekhunot nafshiot*), they are not due to anything superadded to His essence.” (Guide 1:54)

He continues, in 1:54, to explain that leaders ought to imitate God in this way. When confronted with crime, particularly the crime of *avoda zara*, they should take swift emotionless action to punish the offense to social order. He mentions the war against the Canaanite nations who committed idolatry in the land of Israel. The leader practiced *imitatio dei*.

Maimonides concealed his concept of the legal mechanism of *avoda zara* in the first, central and last of the brace of thirteen proof-texts. Since heretical ideas contain such psychological power, the political leader must purge them from society. When he does so, he acts in imitation of God, not from the emotion of anger, but, rather, *as though* he acts out of anger. To retain its deterrent effect, the purely instrumental fact of this “anger” must be concealed from the multitude.

THE POLITICS OF HERESY

This political reference to the actions of the leader clarifies Maimonides’ thinking. Heresy is not only *false* logically, but is dangerous to the conduct of society, and so the state exterminates heresy. Maimonides believes that serious falsehoods undermine the government of the society. This political judgment requires the sanction of morality for enforcement.

Later, in chapters 3:27-37, he explains the purposes for these laws. The entire structure of law benefits the soul and the body of man. The laws against heresy “establish true principles and perpetuate them among the people.” He recounts many specific ills deriving from the heretical practice, and he repeats the many exhortations from the Torah on the subject. One purpose for these laws is that they reduce man’s corporeal desires. They make men more pure and holy. Maimonides considers *avoda zara* destructive of this end.

We might add in further explanation that the *source* of law in the Torah system is ultimately divine. To the extent that men come to believe in heresy, that source is undermined and the entire system called into question. Heresy is thus the form that treason takes in the Torah regime.

IS DIVINE RAGE ALWAYS AGAINST IDOLATRY?

As Friedlander and Kafih note, scriptural expressions of divine rage are not always against idolatry. Three such exceptions are Numbers 12:9, Exodus 22:24 and Exodus 4:14. They are about, respectively, Moses, Miriam and the oppression of strangers. The commentators try in various ways to resolve the contradiction. I prefer to note how Maimonides himself treats these passages.

- In Guide 1:24 he explains Numbers 12:9. This is where Miriam is punished with leprosy for slandering Moses. Maimonides explains “anger” there in two related ways. Divine rage is the “hiding of the face,” (*hester panim*) of God from Miriam, that is, the withdrawal of divine protection. Divine rage also refers to the *punishment* she received. Guide 1:24 is really about how God’s withdrawal and our punishment are really the same thing.
- In Guide 3:28 he explains the exception at Exodus 22:23. That passage expresses God’s anger with those who oppress strangers. This “anger” is His *punishment* of the oppressors, which Maimonides says serves the purpose of removing injustice and establishing good morals. Again, this punishment is emotionless but necessary correction, imaginatively projected by us on God as divine rage. Guide 3:28 restates the question of our chapter. “Scripture further demands belief in certain truths, the belief in which is indispensable in regulating our social relations; such is the belief that God is angry with those who disobey Him, for it leads us to the fear and dread of disobedience to the will of God.”
- In Exodus 4:14, Moses, at the burning bush, asks God to send anyone but him on the mission to save the Jews, incurring “the anger of the Lord.” Maimonides does not write about Exodus 4:14 but probably adopts the Talmud’s explanation for God’s anger. That God is angry at Moses’ diffidence means that He *punished* Moses. God punished him by removing his priesthood and granting it to Aaron and his progeny (Talmud *Zevuot* 102a). Somewhat differently, R. Abraham ben Maimonides, invoking his father, writes on this passage:

“*And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses*”: You already understand that all terms for divine anger are metaphors for the *created voice*. God spoke harshly in reply to Moses’ refusal in order to preclude further refusal. But this ‘anger’ is an expression meaning ‘punishment.’ According to my father, Moses was ever after punished with stuttering. The proof is that later in Egypt he said [to God] ‘And how will Pharaoh hear me as I have sealed lips?’ This was the reason the rabbis gave for their statement that at the revelation on Mount Sinai his stuttering was removed.” (*Perush al Shemot* 4:14, my trans.)

All of these ideas of “punishment,” “hiding of the face” and the withdrawal of divine protection come together in Guide 1:54, the chapter on divine rage as *projection*.

Thus, while it is not true, strictly speaking, that all Biblical statements of divine rage are against idolatry, it is true that they are all about the divine *government* of the Jewish people. Heresy undermines that system of government, and so, we tell the people that whenever God is “enraged” He is fighting His war against idolatry and heresy.

This brings us back to the beginning of the chapter. How can *we say* that God is enraged at all? How can we tell the people that God is enraged, when, in our same chapter, Maimonides says we must also tell them that He is beyond *affection*?

CONCLUSION

On balance, I do not think this is one of the more successful of the chapters of the Guide. It operates on too many levels.

When Maimonides protests that the divine attribution of an emotion to God “is not the subject of the present chapter,” he dissembles. Divine anger is the only possible reason for the execution of heretics, especially those who are merely ignorant. God is enraged at them and we do our best to make Him happy. But if that is the premise, how would Maimonides have understood its inner meaning? What it means for God to be enraged is that we project our *distance* from God (and its tragic consequences) back on Him. The defect in our intellectual apprehension of God (i.e., the notion that He is not unique) prevents our conjunction with the active intellect. *Ayn inyan zeh*, “this is not the subject,” means that though it is too early to treat the doctrine of divine attributes, we hazard the explanation that erroneous notions of God disrupt the activation of the intellect. Israel criminalizes these notions precisely because Torah makes it the society that means to preserve the possibility of the active intellect.

Even-Shmuel writes here: “What is the rage producing error that keeps people who could reach God from doing so? ...God ‘favors’ one who strives to reach Him, but is ‘angry’ with those who refuse to allow their thought to reach God.” More precisely, *even* those who strive to reach God fail to do so when heretical thoughts nullify their notion of Him. They no more reach Him than those who refuse to strive to reach God. The defective notion of the highest existence prevents conjunction with the active intellect. Compare Plato, “The true lie, if such an expression be allowed, is hated by gods and men...[it is] that *deception*, or being deceived or uninformed about the *highest realities* in the *highest part* of themselves, which is the soul...that, I say, is what they utterly detest” (*Republic* II:382, Jowett).

Maimonides did not shrink from ruling the extermination of idolatrous heresy. Nevertheless, this must give us pause. Even in the biblical period, when confronted with actual idolators, the Jews repeatedly refrained from this extermination. Their problem is that God always punishes them for this, ultimately, with exile, for having allowed idolatry to thrive in their land.

GUIDE 1:37 FACE TO FACE

The chapter begins the final eight chapter lexical sequence. The terms to be defined in these chapters are: “face,” “back,” “heart,” “spirit,” “soul,” “life/death,” “wing,” “eye,” and “hear.”

Our chapter is devoted to “*panim*” which means *face*, though the term is used in a number of extended and metaphorical ways. The immediate connection to the last chapter is that *panim*, when used of God, can mean rage or anger. We learned that divine “anger” always indicates the presence of heresy or of a disturbance in the conduct of the divine regime. We have that sense in Definition 2, below.

This chapter changes our focus. We had been talking about *intellectual maturity*. In the last four non-lexical chapters, we learned the danger of commencing the divine science, and the qualifications for the student of that science. We also learned of the limits of human intellect, which is why most people must absorb certain dogmas of the divine science in order to combat heresy. We now begin, gently, to enter the divine science itself. There is no sharp break in Maimonides’ thematic interests. Thus, though this chapter still employs the methods and some themes of the previous chapters, it is looking forward. The reader who has reached this point is qualified for the divine science, and there are references to those qualifications in the proof-texts for Definition 6, below.

Maimonides introduces here some of the major themes of divine science: Mosaic prophecy, the “separate intelligences,” divine providence, and time. The emphasis is on the concept of the *presence* of God, or of being in His presence, in definitions 3, 4 and 6 below. Maimonides is most concerned with the phrase, *panim el panim*, *face to face*, contrasting the impact of this *encounter* on Moses and on the Jews. (See, below, on several of these issues, our essays on *Intermediaries* and on the *Separate Intelligences*).

The basic idea of the chapter is that Moses has a direct *relation* with God, but only indirect *knowledge* of His essence. The problem of the chapter is that Maimonides does not believe the Jews at Sinai shared Moses’ relationship with God, and he must still shield the unqualified reader from that recognition.

Maimonides purpose for the chapter, however, is to register disagreement with Onkelos’ conception that the acquisition of pure intellect is impossible for man.

The first line presents a major ambiguity. Pines’ literal translation is: “Face is an equivocal (homonymous) term, its equivocality being mostly with respect to its figurative use,” *panim shem mshutaf, v’rov shitufo hu al derekh ha-hashala*. Kafih suggests this means that there are more homonymous uses in its figurative senses than in its first literal sense as the “face” of a person (*ad loc.*, note 2). Does that mean that the non-figurative use is never homonymous, or that there just are not so many cases of homonymous uses of the literal sense? The first proof-text, for example, presents a *literal* use of *panim*, “all *faces* are turned to paleness,” which occurs in a broadly *metaphorical* context about the messianic redemption. Similar opacity occurs in some of the definitions below, and even in Maimonides’ central focus on God’s relation with Moses. My suggestion is that this ambiguity is his strategy of esotericism in this chapter. It explains his unjustified use of twenty-two proof texts to make a small number of points. The purpose of these strategies is to protect those remaining unqualified students from realizing that the Jews at Sinai only had a mediated relation with God through Moses, despite their having heard “a certain sound” at the Mount (2:33).

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

PANIM (FACE): Homonym.

1. The *face* of a living being.
2. *Anger*, especially when used with God, although God's "anger" is really our projection, see 1:54.
3. The *presence* and existence or "standing" of a person. When in the form of "*panim el panim*," or *face to face*, especially with Moses, it means that there is no *intermediary* between the person actually in God's presentless presence. It is like Abraham ben Maimonides concept of *encounter* (see my essay in chapter 1:18).
4. Adverb of *place*, in the sense of "present" or "before." It is difficult to distinguish this use from Definition 3, and the proof-text or texts are ambiguous. Maimonides uses Definition 4 to mean being in the presence of God, but *with* or *through* an intermediary. This is where he places his dispute with Onkelos.
5. Adverb of *time*, meaning "before" or "anciently." Maimonides uses this definition to discuss creation *ex nihilo*.
6. *Providential* concern and attention. Maimonides uses this definition to remind us of the qualifications for the student of divine science.

Instances of Definition 1, Contextualized:

"And these [are] the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all *faces (panim)* are turned into paleness?" (Jeremiah 30:4-6)

Maimonides understands this passage as "referring to the war of Gog and Magog, which comes sometime after the Messiah is revealed," (Letter to Yemen, Chapter 3). It is also an apt description of prophetic influx, which can seem like sexual invasion. Jeremiah imagines the birth of political change as a *man* giving birth, whose face turns white from the experience. While the entire context is metaphorical, face does mean face. Since it is the *corporeal* face of a person, Maimonides, as usual, presents negative examples in this and the next proof text. While the coming of the Messiah is desirable, the events associated with it are terrifying, "of trembling, of fear, and not of peace."

"And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which [were] bound in the prison. And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they [were] sad. And he asked Pharaoh's officers that [were] with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore *look ye (pnekhem)* [so] sadly (*ra'im*) today?" (Genesis 40:5-7)

The two officers have prophetic dreams, which only Joseph can interpret. Only he has the imagination and the wisdom to discern and understand their symbols. These considerations lead us to Maimonides' fuller discussions of prophecy in Section Two of the Guide. The passage is negatively corporeal in its implication since Joseph comments on the sad faces of the butler and the baker: the dream foretells the death of one of them. It continues the last proof-text's suggestion of the actual pain (*ra'im*) felt by them during the invasion of prophecy.

Instances of Definition 2, Anger, Contextualized:

"Then Eli answered [Hannah] and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant [thee] thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her *countenance (u'faneyah)* was no more [sad]." (1 Samuel 1:17-18—i.e.: "she was no longer angry")

In this instance of Definition 2, the anger is human. In the other four instances, the anger is divine. In all these passages, Maimonides understands “face” as anger, despite Bible translators’ different renderings. Hannah was “angry” because she was barren: her face is no longer “angry” when she receives the prophecy of her miracle birth of Samuel.

“The *anger (penei)* of the Lord hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders.” (Lamentations 4:16)

The traditional understanding of the passage is that because the Jews did not respect their priests God divided them among the nations in exile. We project this *correction* back upon God as His “anger.” Perhaps that is what Maimonides means when he says that the homonymy of *panim* is mostly in its metaphorical sense. When it is a metaphor for God’s “anger,” it is not any divine “emotion” but only human emotion projected upward. Though *panim* is a metaphor for human anger, since it becomes a metaphor for *correction* when used with God, we can say that *panim* is homonymous in its metaphorical sense. The next three proof-texts embody this idea of projected anger.

“The *face (penei)* of the Lord [is] *against* them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” (Psalms 34:16)

Maimonides quoted line 18 of this Psalm in Guide 1:34: “The Lord [is] *nigh unto* them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit,” for his doctrine of *educational humility*, the capacity of the mature scholar to exercise patience before apparent contradictions in divine science. The two lines contrast who God is “against” and who He is “nigh unto.” This antithesis points to his doctrine in Guide 1:54, that “The pleasure and the displeasure of God, the approach to Him and the withdrawal from Him are proportional to the amount of man’s knowledge or ignorance concerning the Creator.” Evil men are willfully ignorant of God, and His “face” is against them; He is “nigh” to the humble who seek knowledge.

“Now therefore, I (Moses) pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation [is] thy people. And He said, My *presence (panai)* shall go [with thee], and I will give thee rest. And he said unto Him, If Thy *presence (panekha)* go not [with me], carry us not up hence.” (Exodus 33:13-15)

Kafih identifies a split in the commentators over whether *panai* here should mean “anger” or “presence/will.” Rashi and most authorities go with the latter. Maimonides, following Talmud, *Berachot* 7a, takes Exodus 33:14 to mean, “My *anger* shall depart and I will give thee rest.” He would therefore understand even line 15 to read, “If thy *anger* depart not, carry us not up hence.” He bases this unfamiliar reading on Exodus 32, the prior chapter, about the heresy of the Golden Calf, which fomented God’s “anger.”

“And if the people of the land do any ways hide their eyes from the man, when he giveth of his seed unto Molech, and kill him not. Then I will set my *face (panai)* against that man, and against his family, and will cut him off, and all that go a whoring after him, to commit whoredom with Molech, from among their people.” (Leviticus 20:4-5)

This quote directly links to the prior chapter in the Guide, about idolatrous heresy, in this case, it is some kind of child sacrifice to the Canaanite deity Molech. Maimonides does not believe this worship called for the actual slaughter of children, but *only* of having them walk through flames, see Mishneh Torah, *Avoda Zara*, 6:3. His real opposition to the practice is that it encourages *superstition*:

“They spread the belief that every child, that was not passed through the fire, must die. There is no doubt that on account of this absurd menace everyone at once obeyed, out of pity and sympathy for the child; especially as it was a trifling and a light thing that was demanded, in passing the child over the fire. We must further take into account that the care of young children is intrusted to women, who are generally weak-minded, and ready to believe everything, as is well known. The Law makes, therefore, an earnest stand against this practice, and uses in reference to it stronger terms than in any other kind of idolatry (quoting our proof-text). The true prophet then declares in the name of God that the very act, which is performed for the purpose of keeping the child alive, will bring death upon him who performs it, and

destruction upon his seed... Know that traces of this practice have survived even to the present day, because it was widespread in the world. You can see how midwives take a young child wrapped in its swaddling-clothes, and after having placed incense of a disagreeable smell on the fire, swing the child in the smoke over that fire. This is certainly a kind of passing children through the fire, and we must not do it. Reflect on the evil cunning of the author of this doctrine; how people continued to adhere to this doctrine, and how, in spite of the opposition of the Law during thousands of years, its name is not blotted out, and its traces are still in existence.” (Guide 3:37)

The punishment for Molech worship is a *correction* designed to eliminate superstition from the community. We feel the stern command to eliminate these customs as “rage,” but since we do not understand the purpose of the command, we project that “rage” on God.

Instances of Definition 3, Presence, Contextualized:

“And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that [is] before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: [and] he [Ishmael] died (*nafal*) in the *presence* (*pnei*) of all his brethren.” (Genesis 25:18)

This next group of quotes stand for “the presence and existence of a person,” *shem nokhakhhot ha-adam u'maamado* (“presence and standing”). The first three quotes are contextually negative. This first text is about the death of Ishmael, Abraham’s wayward son. Even the term used for his demise, *nafal*, “he fell,” the Midrash takes pejoratively (*Genesis Rabba* 62:5). Ishmael symbolizes the corporeal aspect of man, fallen farthest from the presence of God.

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This [is it] that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and *before* (*pnei*) all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.” (Leviticus 10:1-3).

In this verse, the “presence,” *p'nei*, is that of God, who is “present” to the people through His acts. According to Rashi, Aaron’s sons were drunk or “rendering halachic decisions before Moses,” or both. These were culpable acts according to the Midrash, despite their apparent innocuousness. Rashi, taking them as righteous men who erred, explains: “When the Holy One, blessed is He, exacts judgment upon the righteous, He becomes feared, exalted, and praised. Now, if this is so concerning the righteous, how much more is it so concerning the wicked!” This links to the idea in Guide 1:54 that one’s *relation* with God depends on one’s knowledge or ignorance of Him. (Midrash, *Leviticus Rabba* 12:1; Rashi from Talmud, *Zevachim* 115b; Abraham ben Maimonides agrees with Rashi, p. 115, *The Guide to Serving God*, Feldheim, 2008.)

“Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse (lit. “bless”) Thee to Thy *face* (*panekha*).” (Job 1:9-11)

The line contains the most famous euphemism in the Bible. Satan himself cannot utter the words “curse Thee,” but must instead say, “bless Thee.” By contrast, were Job in the very *presence* of God, he would dare to curse Him for his punishment. The book of Job is part of the divine science; Maimonides remarks: “The strange and wonderful Book of Job treats of the same subject as we are discussing; its basis is a fiction, conceived for the purpose of explaining the different opinions which people hold on Divine Providence” (Guide 3:22).

“And the Lord spake unto Moses *face to face* (*panim el panim*), as a man speaketh unto his friend.” (Exodus 33:11)

That is, Moses spoke to God in His *presence*, which means that there was no intermediary. See essay on *Intermediaries* below.

“Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the *face (lkha nitraei panim)*.” (2 Kings 14:8)

In between the two mentions of “face to face” at Sinai, why does Maimonides bring this earthy quotation? I would translate the three Hebrew words as “let’s have a face-off!” The story is from about the middle of the First Commonwealth. Amaziah, King of Judah, has just conquered the Edomites at Sela/Petra, in what is modern Jordan, returning it to the old Davidic Empire. Turning northward, he sees himself as the unifier of the two Jewish kingdoms. He lays down the challenge to Jehoash II of Israel to “have a face-off” by which he does not mean a *tête-à-tête*. Jehoash returns the challenge with a parable: there was a thistle and a cedar in Lebanon. The thistle told the cedar to “Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that [was] in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle.” Rashi explains the parable as a retelling of Genesis 34: the “thistle” was Shekhem, the “cedar” was Jacob and the “wild beast” Jacob’s sons who slaughtered the Shekhemites after their circumcision. Jehoash, the cedar, thereby rejected the hubris of Amaziah, the thistle. Amaziah spurned this diplomatic note. Jehoash responded by invading Judah, breaching the wall of Jerusalem, and taking Amaziah prisoner. “Face to face” is wonderful between Moses and God, but not between kings.

“The Lord talked with you *face to face (panim b’fanim)* in the mount out of the midst of the fire.” (Deuteronomy 5:4)

In this case, the people at Sinai are in God’s *presence* as Moses was, but because they lacked the proper qualifications they could not understand what they heard and required Moses to be their intermediary. See *Intermediaries*, below.

Instance of Definition 3 or 4 Contextualized:

“And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my *face (u’fanai)* shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:21-23)

This passage acts as a bridge between Definitions 3 and 4, and he gives it as an example of both. In this first case, Moses’ *presence* before God, though unmediated, does not allow him to grasp the divine essence. Maimonides repeats this text for Definition 4, presence *with* intermediaries, but only as an opportunity to criticize Onkelos, who takes it in that sense. See *Intermediaries*, below

Instance of Definition 4, Mediated Presence, Contextualized:

“And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter *before the Lord (lifnei hashem)*.” (Genesis 10:8-9)

Lifnei hashem is the only quote-shard that Maimonides gives as an unqualified example of Definition 4. He writes, “It is often used in this sense (Definition 4) with regard to God,” (Pines translation). The problem is that *lifnei hashem* is a phrase occurring in different contexts well over a hundred times in the Bible. Munk (1803–1867, French translator of the Guide), Ibn Tibbon and Pines all related the phrase to its use in Abraham’s prophetic dream (Genesis 18:22). Kafih complains that their choice is arbitrary (Note 23, *ad loc.*). Far more satisfying is Schwarz’ first choice, the one I quote above about the mighty hunter Nimrod. That is a better choice for methodological reasons since it is the first use in the Torah. It is also very good because of Nimrod’s character. Rashi assembles these traditional source comments about Nimrod:

“He began to be a mighty man to cause the entire world to rebel against the Holy One, blessed be He, with the plan of the Generation of the Dispersion (i.e., the Tower of Babel. Talmud, *Eruvin* 53a, *Chullin* 89a). He ensnared people’s minds with his speech and misled them to rebel against the Omnipresent (Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 37:2). He intended to provoke Him (God) to His face (from Sifra Bekhukotai 2:2). Therefore it is said about any man who is brazenly wicked, who recognizes his Master and intends to rebel (*li’mrod*) against Him, it is said, This one is like Nimrod, a mighty hunter.”

This last remark is a pun comparing his name, Nimrod, to the act of rebellion. He created the first great empire after the flood and commissioned the building of the Tower of Babel to challenge the rule of God. Nimrod is a figure who has the capacity to act as a channel from God to man, but who uses that knowledge to make himself a

god over men. He poses as mediator.

It is at this juncture that Maimonides repeats, now for Definition 4, the prior proof-text, “And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my *face* (*u’fanai*) shall not be seen.” He repeats the passage only in order to dispute what he takes to be Onkelos’ view of this passage, that it introduces an ineffable mediating presence, the “souls of the spheres.” See *Intermediaries*, below.

Instances of Definition 5, *The Nature of Time*, Contextualized:

“Now this [was the manner] *in former time* (*l’fanim*) in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave [it] to his neighbour: and this [was] a testimony in Israel. (Ruth 4:7)

Definition 5 is about time, and specifically about cosmic time. Maimonides does not believe that time has any ultimate reality, but is merely the *number* of motion which is an accident of matter. Aristotle asserted that the universe existed before everything, *qadim*, in Arabic, that is, it existed always. Maimonides argues instead that God created the universe *ex nihilo*. He did not cite this passage because he was interested in the legal customs of the time of Ruth and Boaz, but because it mentions the word “shoe” in connection with the phrase, “in former time.” The shoe goes on the foot, and, of course, foot means *cause* (Guide 1:28). Before the beginning of time, God caused everything.

“I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years [are] throughout all generations. *Of old* (*l’fanim*) hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens [are] the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.” (Psalms 102:24-26)

This proof-text is also about creation *ex nihilo*. God creates time by creating the “foundations of the earth,” that is, its elemental matter whose motion is numbered as time. Time is a major issue of the Guide and of the divine science. He says in 1:52, “There is no relation between God and time or space.” In 1:73, he criticizes the Mutakallimun notion of “time-atoms” and their understanding of time generally. In 2:13, he says: “Even time itself is among the things created.” In 2:30, he rejects the theory of some of the rabbinic sages that time existed before creation: “The foundation of our faith is the belief that God created the Universe from nothing; that time did not exist previously, but was created; for it depends on the motion of the sphere, and the sphere has been created.”

Instances of Definition 6, *God’s Special Providence for the Intellectually Mature*, Contextualized:

“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the *person* (*f’nei*) of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: [but] in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.” (Leviticus 19:15)

“For, behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water, The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, The captain of fifty, and the *honourable man* (*u’nsu fanim*), and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.” (Isaiah 3:1-3)

For the Lord your God [is] God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not *persons* (*fanim*), nor taketh reward.” (Deuteronomy 10:17)

“Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them: The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his *countenance* (*panav*) upon thee, and give thee peace.” (Numbers 6:23-26)

Maimonides explains Definition 6 in vague terms. “*Panim* is also a term for ‘concern’ and ‘providential supervision,’” *ha-daaga v’ha-hashgakha* (my trans., based on Schwarz, *ad loc.* note 14 p. 91). These four proof-texts come to remind us of the qualifications of the entrant into divine science. We treated these before in 1:34. Judiciousness is one of the chief qualities, emphasized in the first quote. The second text contains the list of

necessary qualities for the student of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava* (Talmud, *Hagigah* 13a). These quotes remind us again, as a warning over the gate, that it is dangerous for the unqualified to enter there. The third proof-text underscores the point: just as God acts as a fair and unbribable judge, so the qualified student of divine science must conduct himself like God, that is, with judiciousness. The final proof-text yields the promise that the qualified student may yet succeed to prophecy. The prophet can lead the Jews to the level where God's Presence will again be in their midst as on Sinai. Maimonides says here that the verse: "refers to His making providence accompany us," *c'lomar, l'grom l'hashgakha sh'taloveh otanu* (Pines' English trans, Schwarz' Hebrew).

INTERMEDIARIES

"And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood [at] the door of the tabernacle, and [the Lord] talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand [at] the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man [in] his tent door. And the Lord spake unto Moses *face to face (panim el panim)*, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle." (Exodus 33:9-11)

Maimonides interprets this verse:

"I.e., both (Moses and God) being present, without any intervening medium between them. This corresponds to 'There he heard the voice of One speaking unto him (from off the mercy seat that [was] upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and He spake unto him)' (Numbers 7:89). Thus it will be clear to you that the perception of the Divine voice without the intervention of an angel is expressed by 'face to face.'"

This is one of the strongest statements Maimonides makes that there can be a direct relation between God and man. It supports the position that his *negative theology* is moderate rather than absolute. In 2:45, he says, "All prophets are prophetically addressed by an angel, except Moses our teacher, in reference to whom scripture says 'mouth to mouth I speak to him' (Numbers 12:8)." In *Mishneh Torah, Yodei Ha-Torah* 1:10 he explains that Moses received so much direct knowledge of God that, in his mind, he could distinguish Him from all other beings just as a person can distinguish a friend whose back is seen. *Yodei* 7:6 emphasizes that no intermediary came between God and Moses, unlike with all other prophets. There was no angel, spirit or any creation of Moses' imagination. (See Abraham ben Maimonides, *Guide to Serving God*, 583-585, for what may be a contrary view).

My assessment is that Moses did indeed have a direct *relationship* with God, but the *knowledge* he gained of God could not be of God's essence. It could not be of God's essence because that essence, Maimonides holds, is identical with God, and man cannot possess God without being God.

Maimonides quotes a second proof text in which Moses recalls the time God also spoke face to face with the whole people at Sinai:

"And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, [even] us, who [are] all of us here alive this day. The Lord talked with you *face to face (panim b'fanim)* in the mount out of the midst of the fire. I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to shew you the word of the Lord: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount..." (Deuteronomy 5:1-5)

Maimonides mentions this verse twice in the Guide. In 1:13, we learned that Moses “stood” between God and the people means God *caused* him to be the prophetic channel for the revelation of Torah. Rashi extends this idea by saying that the “you” mentioned in the verse is not “with our fathers” but with the Jewish people, down to today. He quotes the following material from Midrash *Pesikta Rabbathi*: “Rabbi Berechiah said, ‘So said Moses: ‘Do not say that I am misleading you about something that does not exist, as an agent does, acting between the seller and the buyer, [because] behold, the Seller Himself is speaking with you.’” Moses “stood” as the channel but we who study that Torah are its direct recipients, without an intermediary.

In 2:33, Maimonides quotes the verse again. He reconsiders what “the Lord talked with *you* face to face” means. Maimonides questions the people’s qualification to receive prophecy, and concludes that they heard *something* directly, but not with Moses’ clarity. “The people did not understand the voice in the same degree as Moses did.” They were, however, able to make out the first two commandments, the existence and unity of God: “The Israelites heard the first and the second commandments from God, i.e., they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moses, and not through Moses.” Nonetheless, Maimonides holds that these two commandments are rationally derivable by anyone.

In other words, the prophetic quality achieved by the people at Sinai did not extend to comprehending most of the sounds they heard. This conclusion forces itself just because of Maimonides’ concept of the intellectual maturity necessarily required to enter divine science, which the multitude lack. “As to the revelation on Mount Sinai, all saw the great fire, and heard the fearful thunderings, that caused such an extraordinary terror; but only those of them who were duly qualified were prophetically inspired, each one according to his capacities” (Guide 2:32). This point is controversial, as we will see, and must be kept from most readers who cannot yet grasp its rationale. He says this is “one of the secrets of the Law” (2:33).

DISPUTE WITH ONKELOS

Some things are even beyond the grasp of Moses, even though he is face to face in the unmediated presence of God:

“And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face (u’fanai) shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:21-23)

Maimonides writes that the passage means “My true existence (i.e., essence, *amitat mtziut*: he uses *amitat* for essence), as it is, cannot be comprehended.” God denies Moses knowledge of his essence. We must understand God is *directly telling* Moses that he cannot access the divine essence. Unmediated presence of God does not imply essential knowledge of God.

This passage acts as a bridge between Definitions 3 and 4, and he gives it as an example of both, quoting it twice, first for *unmediated* presence and secondly for *mediated* presence. Definition 4 stands for *mediated* presence.

Maimonides does not clearly articulate Definition 4. He says (in Pines’ translation) that it means “an adverb of place that is rendered in Arabic by the words: *amāmaka* and *bāna yadāka*.” These two Arabic terms Pines translates “in front of thee” and “in thy presence,” respectively. But Efron thinks that Maimonides’ uses these contrasting Arabic terms to clarify an ambiguity in the term *l’fnei*, “before,” in *l’fnei hashem*. As in Hebrew, so in English, *before/l’fnei* can mean *before in time* or in *place*. Efron explains, “It is used here...because *l’fnei* does not clearly indicate place, as it also signifies temporal priority” (*Dictionary*, p. 14), and Maimonides wants to emphasize that in this case it means place.

He then quotes Onkelos, whose Aramaic translation renders it, “And those *before* me shall not be seen”:

“‘But my *face* (*u’fanai*) shall not be seen,’ according to Onkelos, who renders it, ‘And those *before* me shall not be seen,’ *v’dikadmai lo yitkhazun*. He (Onkelos) finds here an allusion to the fact, that there are also higher created beings of such superiority that their true nature cannot be perceived by man: viz., the ideals, separate intellects, which in their relation to God are described as being constantly before Him (*amāma*), or between His hands (*bān yadāka*), i.e., as enjoying uninterruptedly the closest attention of Divine Providence. He, i.e., Onkelos, considers that the things which are described as completely perceptible are those beings which, as regards existence, are inferior to the ideals, viz., substance (*khomer—matter*) and form: in reference to which we are told, ‘And thou shalt see that which is *behind* me’ (*ibid.*), i.e., beings, from which, as it were, *I turn away*, and which *I leave behind* me. This figure is to represent the utter remoteness of such beings from the Deity.”

Maimonides interprets that “those before” God are the “separate intellects” *siklim nivdalim*. These are the souls/intellects of the planetary spheres in the Aristotelean cosmology, see essay below. Maimonides seems to grant tepid approval to Onkelos, since he also embraces this cosmology, but, the fact is, he disagrees with him. He has his own interpretation of the passage, which is that Moses will know God’s actions, not His divine essence.

Maimonides’ objection to Onkelos is that by making *face* mean *those before Me*, he has removed the immediacy implied by the *presence* of God. Moreover, he objects to the notion that the separate intellects, *those before Me*, are inaccessible to our intellect, and that our intellects only grasp material objects. This has been the whole point of Maimonidean philosophy, that we can and must transcend our materiality to grasp the active intellect, and that there is a *unity of intellect* among these entities at the level of active intellect.

Onkelos seems to Maimonides to emphasize the point when he says that “and thou shalt see my *back*” should translate to “And thou shalt see that which is *behind* me” *v’tekhezei yat d’vatrai*. Maimonides explains “that which is behind me” means that man can only apprehend material objects, a doctrine which is obnoxious to him. In the next chapter, the lexical chapter on *back*, *akhor*, he returns to the passage explaining: “‘And thou shalt see my back (*akhorai*)’; thou shalt perceive that which follows Me, is similar to Me (*v’nitdama li*), and is the result of my will, i.e., all things created by Me.” The things which are similar to God, which are beings created by Him, are human intellects, not material objects. That similarity to Him insures that man can transcend his material state and apprehend purely intellectual objects, including the separate intelligences.

THE SEPARATE INTELLIGENCES

This chapter begins a discussion of the separate intelligences, sometimes called the “souls of the spheres.” In Guide 3:7 Maimonides explains their relation with both God and man:

“God controls the spheres and what they contain: therefore the individual beings in the spheres remain permanently in the same form....where each... individual being has a permanent existence, Providence gives permanency and constancy. From the existence of the spheres other beings derive existence, which are constant in their species but not in their individuals.”

Michael Schwarz takes the opportunity of this chapter’s mention of the “separate intelligences,” *siklim nivdalim*, to assemble the doctrine of these intelligences in a note to his Hebrew translation (note 10, *ad loc.*, on pages 89-90). He reviews the doctrine in Maimonides and as it emerged in the work of the great Muslim philosophers Alfarabi (870-950) and Avicenna (980-1037). I briefly summarize his note, worth studying in the original.

The doctrine emerges from some remarks of Aristotle as developed by the Neo-Platonic emanationist tradition. Muslim philosophy absorbed this tradition. The intelligences are called “separate” because they are non-corporeal. God, as “the first cause,” emanates the first separate intelligence. That intelligence emanates a second,

the second emanates a third, on down to the tenth intelligence. Each intelligence emanates “within it” a sphere in the cosmological heavens, which sphere bears its stars and planets. The first intelligence is the cause establishing the upper heavens and all they govern. The second governs the fixed stars; the third governs the sphere bearing Saturn; the fourth Jupiter; the fifth Mars; the sixth governs the Sun; the seventh Venus; the eighth Mercury; the ninth governs the Moon. The tenth intelligence is the *active intellect*, which does not emanate a sphere.

Schwarz divides the work of the active intellect in four parts:

1. The active intellect causes the potential intellect that is natural to man to become an actual intellect, that is, it conducts the human intellect to true knowledge.
2. The active intellect gives form to the corporeal things in our universe, that is, it makes them *actual*. By in-forming matter, it causes the existence of material things.
3. It causes the divine emanation to enter the mind of the philosopher, and the mind *and* imagination of the prophet. In this category, Schwarz includes the inspiration that actualizes the infant’s potential to speak, *koakh m’daber*. The infant’s potential only becomes actual when the active intellect helps the infant speak.
4. The active intellect channels the providential action that maintains all things below the moon.

Aristotle recognized the existence of intelligences separate from matter, including the active intellect mentioned in *De Anima* 3:5. But the system of ten intelligences is a Neo-Platonic development in later Muslim philosophy. Note its similarity to the system of the *sefirot* in Jewish esoteric thought. (See, Wolfson, Harry A., “The Plurality of Immovable Movers in Aristotle and Averroës,” *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, 1973, v. 1, p.1).

GUIDE 1:38 RECEPTIVITY

OVERVIEW

This chapter is short enough that we can include it all here:

“The Hebrew term *akhor* is a homonym. It is a noun, signifying *back*. Comp., ‘Behind (*akharei*) the tabernacle’ (Exod. 26:12); ‘The spear came out behind him (*akharav*)’ (2 Sam. 2:23). It is next used in reference to time, signifying *after*: ‘Neither after him (*akharav*) arose there any like him’ (2 Kings 23:25), ‘After (*akhar*) these things’ (Gen. 15:1). In this sense, the word occurs frequently. The term includes also the idea of following a thing and of conforming with the moral principles of some other being. Comp., ‘Ye shall walk after (*akharei*) the Lord, your God’ (Deut. 13:5); ‘They shall walk after (*akharei*) the Lord’ (Hos. 11:10), i. e., follow His will, walk in the way of His actions, and imitate His virtues: ‘He walked after (*akharei*) the commandment’ (*ib.* 5:11). In this sense the word occurs in Exodus 33:20, ‘And thou shalt see My back (*akhorai*)’; thou shalt perceive that which follows Me, is similar to Me, and is the result of My will, i.e., all things created by Me, as will be explained in the course of this treatise.”

On its surface, the chapter defines *akhor* as: 1) the *back* of a person or thing; 2) *after*, an adverb of time; or 3) imitating another’s moral conduct. The first two senses would only be homonymous with God since He has no physical back and no relation to time.

Otherwise, the surface of the chapter is murky. The shorter chapters of the Guide are the hardest to understand.

The *first real* purpose of the chapter is to test the imagination of the student of the divine science. We previously learned the intellectual qualifications for the science. In addition to the acquisition of a perfected mind, Maimonides also expects the student to possess a perfect imagination. We can train the imagination. The student should be able to canvass the proof-texts in this chapter and rapidly assemble the meanings that Maimonides wants to convey. This is necessary because the student of divine science must be able to connect disparate hints on his own.

The *second real* purpose of the chapter is to convey that the student must be perfectly *receptive* to the messages he will receive from God. These messages may come through emanations, from angels or from other channels of divine inspiration, including the Guide. *Receptivity* implies both an imaginative and a moral dimension. In addition to the perfectly attuned imagination, the student must be morally receptive. This implies that he always practice *imitatio dei*. He must not just do what he thinks is right, or what he is told is right, but what really is right. He must always embrace that which is intrinsically good.

A few students of divine science become prophets. Those students that will not become prophets will be the elite leaders and teachers of the people. They have immense responsibility. God corrects their shortcomings, sometimes brutally. The greater they are the harder they fall.

Akhor, “back,” is obviously the opposite of last chapter’s *panim*, “face.” If *panim* represents the *presence* of God, *akhor* must represent His *absence*, the “withdrawal of the face.” Maimonides does not explicitly list this meaning here. Nonetheless, divine absence haunts the chapter, especially the Hosea quotations. This should be apparent to the imaginative student who can canvass the implications of the proof-texts: the elite will experience the harsh correction of their errors as divine absence.

This chapter stands as one more warning. If the student is not prepared to be perfectly receptive, he should not enter the gate.

The chapter also returns to the dispute with Onkelos discussed in our last chapter. Onkelos' interprets "And thou shalt see My *back*" to mean that men only perceive material things, i.e., those things that God *rejects*, "beings, from which, as it were, *I turn away*, and which *I leave behind* me." Maimonides retorts, "And thou shalt see My *back*" means "Thou shalt perceive that which *follows* me, is *similar* to me..." i.e., that you *can* perceive purely intellectual existents. The italicized last part of the phrase "Thou shalt perceive that which follows Me, *is similar to Me...*," receives a better translation from Pines: "has come to be like Me" (*nitdama*, Judeo-Arabic תשבה). Maimonides' point is that we can raise ourselves above materiality through *imitatio dei* (cf. Guide 1:21, 1:54).

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, "Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide."

AHKOR (BACK): Homonym.

1. A noun meaning the *back* of a person or thing. We cannot use *akhor* with God in this sense.
2. An adverb of time meaning *after*. It is possible that as *akhor* it means "immediately after," but as *akhorei* it means "a long time after." It is the reverse durational sense of *before* in Definition 5 from the last chapter.
3. Following and *conforming* to the moral principles of some other being. This means imitating the conduct or virtues of another. *Ahor* also means *what God does*.

Instances of Definition 1, Contextualized:

"And thou shalt make fifty taches (attachments) of brass, and put the taches into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one. And the remnant that remaineth of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remaineth, shall hang over the *backside* (*akharei*) of the tabernacle." (Exodus 26:11)

The passage is about the construction of the Tabernacle, the place of God's indwelling among the Jews in the Sinai desert. Maimonides quoted Exodus 26:3 before in Guide 1:6. Guide 1:6, about *man* and *woman* (*ish* and *isha*), is also short, the second shortest in the Guide. (The shortest chapter is the chapter on *man* (*ish*) Guide 1:14.) Maimonides' interest in Guide 1:6 was solely in the feminine side of this sexual equation, and his single non-corporeal proof-text was Exodus 26:3: "The five curtains shall be coupled together *one to another* (*isha el akhota*); and [other] five curtains [shall be] coupled *one to another* (*isha el akhota*)." *Isha* was there defined as a principle of *receptivity*, i. e., that which is prepared to receive something else. The idea is that since the curtains were neither male nor female, calling them female, *isha el akhota*, "woman to her sister," figuratively connotes their mutual receptivity. Moreover, in our proof-text, the placing of the "taches into the loops, and couple (*v'khibarta*) the tent together," continues the thought of the parts of the tent *receiving* each other. The lesson is that student of the divine science should always be *receptive* to divine messages so he can be a Tabernacle for the divine indwelling. The back of the Tabernacle corresponds to the western wall of the Temple, which is the part receptive to the divine indwelling (Ezekiel 43:7).

"And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother? Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the *hinder end* (*b'akharei*) of the spear smote him under the fifth (*khomesh*) [rib], that the spear came out *behind* (*mei'akharav*) him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, [that] as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still."
(2 Samuel 2:22-23)

The *khomesh* is variously defined as "the fifth rib, where liver and gall bladder are joined"; the hip or thigh; the groin (perhaps because *fifth* member is there); or the belly (see Rashi, Targum Jonathan, Koehler-Baumgartner, and Even-Shoshan). This quote leads into a series of proof-texts in the Lexicon about Joab. The point of these texts is that a good general is not merely loyal but does the right thing. Joab, however, lacked complete

receptivity to David's desires and welfare. See essay on Joab below.

Instances of Definition 2, After, Contextualized:

“And like unto him was there no king before him [Josiah], that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after (*v'akharav*) him arose there [any] like him.” (2 Kings 23:25)

The tragedy of Josiah illustrates that God holds the elite to the highest standard of receptivity. See essay on Josiah below.

“After (*akhar*) these things (The War Of The Five Against The Four) the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I [am] thy shield, [and] thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house [is] this Eliezer of Damascus?” (Genesis 15:1-2)

The surface meaning is that the word *akhar* is an adverb of time. The context is that Abraham has been victorious in a war. Killing is dangerous moral business, as Joab learned. By contrast, Abraham was wonderfully *receptive* to divine messages and was always able to distinguish the right course of action. He even is willing to debate God on the subject of morality: “And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” (Genesis 18:23). Rashi explains the meaning of Abraham's question above, about his childlessness, summarizing Midrashic material:

“*After these things*: Wherever the term *akhar* is used, it signifies immediately afterwards; *akharei* signifies a long time afterwards (*Gen. Rabbah* 44:5). *After* this miracle had been wrought for him, that he slew the kings, he was worried and said, ‘Perhaps I have received reward for all my righteous deeds.’ Therefore, the Omnipresent said to him, ‘Fear not Abram, I am your Shield’ from punishment, that you will not be punished for all those souls that you have slain, and as far as your being worried about receiving reward, your reward is exceedingly great. (from *Aggadat Bereishit* 16:2; *Tan. Buber, Lech Lecha* 15; *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, Ch. 27)”

The concept implied here is the ancient notion that God rewards the good deeds of sinners immediately but their punishment comes later. Abraham is concerned that his miraculous victory *now* will cut him off from any further reward *later*, that is, that he will remain childless. That is not the case. God will not punish Abraham for his killings because he has been both a good general *and* has done what is intrinsically good. Maimonides discusses this proof-text again in *Guide* 3:18. He cites it there for his special doctrine of providence:

“Consider how the action of Divine Providence is described in reference to every incident in the lives of the patriarchs, to their occupations, and even to their passions, and how God promised to direct His attention to them. Thus God said to Abraham, ‘I am thy shield’ (*Gen.15:1*); . . . (listing other cases). It is clear that in all these cases the action of Providence has been proportional to man's perfection. . . . When we see that some men escape plagues and mishaps, whilst others perish by them, we must not attribute this to a difference in the properties of their bodies, or in their physical constitution, ‘for by strength shall no man prevail’; but it must be attributed to their different degrees of perfection, some approaching God, whilst others moving away from Him. Those who approach Him are best protected, and ‘He will keep the feet of his saints’; but those who keep far away from Him are left exposed to what may befall them; there is nothing that could protect them from what might happen; they are like those who walk in darkness, and are certain to stumble. . . . There are in Scripture many more passages expressing the principle that men enjoy Divine protection in proportion to their perfection and piety. . . . every person has his individual share of Divine Providence in proportion to his perfection.”

Providence is God's reciprocation for the receptivity of the student of the divine science, as it was for Abraham. The providential protection Abraham received, in the phrase “I am thy shield,” is, according to Abraham ben Maimonides, the same protection that Moses receives in the final passage quoted in our chapter, “I...will cover thee with My hand” (*Guide to Serving God*, p. 523).

Instances of Definition 3, Contextualized:

“Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. **Ye shall walk after (*akharei*) the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.**” (Deuteronomy 13:4-5)

This announces the doctrine of *imitatio dei*. See essay below where we review some Maimonidean and Platonic materials on this doctrine.

“I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I [am] God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. **They shall walk after (*akharei*) the Lord: He shall roar like a lion: when He shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.**” (Hosea 11:9-10)

Obviously, when the Bible says that God roars like a lion, it is speaking figuratively. Maimonides says this quote illustrates that we should “follow His will, walk in the way of His actions, and imitate His virtues.” I explain its real purpose after the next quote, also from Hosea.

“11: Ephraim [is] oppressed [and] broken in judgment, because he willingly **walked after (*akharei*) the commandment.** 12: Therefore [will] I [be] unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. 13: When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah [saw] his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. 14: For I [will be] unto Ephraim as a *lion*, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, [even] I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue [him]. 15: *I will go [and] return to My place*, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early.” (Hosea 5:11-15)

Maimonides brings these two quotes from Hosea ostensibly for the doctrine of *imitatio dei*, but they are unnecessary for that purpose. They are significant because he referred twice to Hosea 5:15, italicized above, in Guide 1:23 and 1:24. See my essay on 1:23 “The Hiding of the Face.” We explained there that the Hosea passage stands for the *withdrawal* of divine providence. The student of divine science who *fails* to practice *imitatio dei* and who is not always receptive to the divine message will face harsh correction: “the Hiding of the Face.” In this proof-text, “Ephraim” did not follow the divine law but rather, as Rashi says, followed the new commands of the prophets of Baal, with the result that God “will go and return to My place.” We saw in 1:29 that divine governance of the world is of one piece but perceived in history as a series of expansions and contractions of providence, like respiration. In 1:30, we saw that in the mode of contraction, when God withdraws His face, the people are *consumed*, (*akhhal*). Just so, these two Hosea quotes portray God as a lion, who, through harsh correction, will *consume* the people. Moreover, *hiding of the face* may result in illness beyond even Maimonides’ medical help: “He could not heal you, nor cure you of your wound” (line 13, above. Abraham ben Maimonides, *Guide to Serving God*, 215).

“And he said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, [there is] a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: And I will take away Mine hand, **and thou shalt see My back parts (*akhorai*):** but My face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:20-21)

Students of Maimonides should by now be familiar with this passage. He says here: “Thou shalt perceive that which follows me, is similar to me, and is the result of my will, i.e., all things created by me.” In 1:21, he explained that Moses sought to know the essence of God, but instead received knowledge of those *consequences* of God’s acts, that is, what God *does*. *Akhorai* can mean consequences. These consequences are the Thirteen *Middot* (Exodus 34:6-7), the actions of God that we understand as moral attributes (Guide 1:54). We are supposed to make ourselves like God by adopting those moral virtues. Failure to do so results in punishment such as inflicted on Ephraim, above.

JOAB

Maimonides uses the example of Joab to illustrate that the agent of God must not only be loyal, but good. In our proof-text (2 Samuel 2:22-23), Joab's brother Asahel dies when Abner jabs him fatally in his *homesh*. In Guide 1:30, the chapter on the *consumption* of man by divine punishment, we see the immediate result of Asahel's death, a long war resulting from Joab's gullibility (2:25-26). Joab revenges himself in the next chapter of Samuel, 3:27 by smiting Abner in his *homesh*. In the following Guide chapter, 1:39, we learn that Joab thrust three darts through the Absalom's heart. In Guide 1:29, the chapter on the *expansion and contraction* of divine providence, we learned of Joab's betrayal of David's chosen successor, Solomon

This, briefly, is the story. Joab was David's general and Abner was Saul's general. After Saul died, civil war broke out between Saul's son Ishbosheth and David. Asahel, Joab's headstrong brother, pursued Abner to kill him, hoping to end the war with one stroke. Abner knew Asahel was no match for him, and warned him away, hoping to avoid a cycle of vengeance with Joab. Asahel was not dissuaded. Perhaps only hoping to wound him, Abner struck Asahel in the *homesh* with the back end of his spear, killing Asahel. Two lines later, Abner, cornered, proposed peace, which Joab naively accepted, but the result was a "long war." Then, following good-faith peace talks between Abner and David, Joab captures Abner. He then fatally smote Abner in his *homesh*, though David had not desired Abner's death. This compromised David. David publicly cursed Joab's descendants with leprosy, lameness, starvation and death by sword (2 Samuel 3:29). Later, pursuing David's rebel son Absalom, Joab found Absalom accidentally caught swinging by his hair from an oak. Joab then wounded Absalom meaning to kill him, but his troops finish the job. When David's other son Adonijah rebels, Joab supports him against David's chosen successor Solomon.

On his deathbed, David charges Solomon to execute Joab for his misdeeds in the royal service. The Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 48b-49a, wonderfully imagines Solomon's trial of Joab. Solomon accuses Joab of wrongly killing Abner, Absalom and Amassa (2 Samuel 20:4-12, David's nephew), and of supporting Adonijah. Joab persuasively defends himself. He adds that if Solomon kills him, the curse that David pronounced on Joab's descendants will transfer to Solomon's descendants. Not persuaded, he has Joab executed. The result is that Solomon's descendants did inherit David's ancestral curse.

The message of the story of Joab is that he was loyal but did not do what was intrinsically right. This was a disservice to his master. The student of divine science must be zealous in his pursuit, but must also conduct himself rightly. He must imitate God's virtues expressed in the Thirteen *Middot*. He should be perfectly receptive to the divine message.

The curse on Solomon's house leads us to consider the tragedy of a king in Jerusalem who tried to pursue the will of God: Josiah.

JOSIAH

Maimonides mentions the tragedy of Josiah in connection with the word *after*. "Neither *after* him (*v'akharav*) arose there any like him." The key incidents of Josiah's life link with the word *after*, which we expect the student of divine science to realize. Second Kings 23:25 teaches that before Josiah no king arose like him who turned to God with all his heart, soul and power, "according to the law of Moses," and not *after* him either. Similar language is used of Hezekiah: "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that *after* him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor [any] that were before him (2 Kings 18:5)." But God rewarded Hezekiah with the great miracle of the destruction of Sennacherib's invading force. The difference in outcomes is that Hezekiah "trusted" God. Why did Josiah not receive such a reward?

Upon the discovery of a Torah scroll hidden away from his idolatrous ancestors, Josiah began his great monotheistic reform. He destroyed all *open* idolatry in the kingdom. He caused the people to celebrate the greatest Passover since Samuel's time. 2 Chronicles 35:19 recites: "In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah

was this Passover kept.” The next line collapses thirteen years, since the text itself (2 Chronicles 34:1) says he reigned thirty-one years:

“20: *After (akharei)* all this, when Josiah had prepared the Temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him.”

If Rashi (on Genesis 15:1) is right, *akharei* here means “long after” and not just “after.”

Pharaoh Necho merely wanted to cross the land to get at his enemy, Assyria. The Talmud, *Taanith* 22b, comments: “For there could be no more friendly army than that of Pharaoh-Necho.” But Josiah, the religious reformer, is sure that he has been doing the will of God. He responds by boldly quoting Torah to Pharaoh: “a sword will not pass through your land” (Lev. 26:6), i.e., God will prevent Pharaoh’s advance through Judah. Necho responds (line 21) “forbear thee from [meddling with] God, who [is] with me, that he destroy thee not.” Necho’s interpretation of the will of God is better than Josiah’s interpretation, as Josiah ends up perforated with three hundred arrows from Pharaoh’s men. Where did Josiah go wrong?

We learn the reason from Isaiah 57:8: “And *behind (v’akhar)* the doors and the posts hast thou set up thy symbol...” Midrash *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:18 explains this to mean that the idolators would inscribe their idols on the insides of their divided doors. Even when seen from inside, only half an idol would appear on the *back* of each door, but when closed, the whole idol would appear to those inside. Prophet Jeremiah pleaded with Josiah to let Necho pass to attack the Assyrian enemy, prophesying that the Egyptians would themselves descend to civil war (“I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians,” Isaiah 19:2). Jeremiah knew the Jews were not as righteous as Josiah imagined, and warned Josiah not to test God. Josiah ignored the advice, to his fatal end. The great poet Eleazar Ha-Kalir (6th?—8th? cent.), who Maimonides was likely familiar with, wrote a famous *kinnah*: “And Jeremiah lamented over Josiah.” using the word *akhar* significantly (*Artscroll Complete Tisha B’av Service*, Feuer and Gold, 183-185):

“The sin of that generation’s scorners clung to him—
those who stood [idols] *behind (akhar)* the door...
As iniquity increased He *withdrew (akhor)* His right hand
and He has not yet returned His hand through the *opening (ha-khor)*—cf. Song of Songs 5:4)”

Unlike Hezekiah, who trusted the Lord, Josiah trusted himself and his text. He did not receive the prophet’s message. His hubris prevented the humility that would have made him *receptive*. The correction of the elite is harsh, as though God withdrew His hand and hid His face. This is Josiah’s terrible lesson for the would-be student of divine science.

IMITATIO DEI

Maimonides quoted Deuteronomy 13:4-5, “Ye shall walk *after* the Lord...” to remind us that *akhor* means we should conduct ourselves as God conducts himself. Kafih assembles a group of materials to establish the doctrine (*ad loc.*, Note 7). He recalls that Maimonides mentions it in his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*:

“By this injunction we are commanded to be like God...as far as it is in our power...the Sages comment as follows (from *Sota* 14a): ‘Just as the Holy One...is called Merciful, so shouldst thou be merciful; just as He is called Gracious, so shouldst thou be gracious; just as He is called Righteous, so shouldst thou be righteous; just as He is called *Khasid* [a term bespeaking kindness, goodness, etc.] so shouldst thou be a *khasid*.’ This injunction has already appeared in another form in His words, ‘Ye shall walk *after* the Lord’ (our proof-text), which the Sages explain as meaning that we are to imitate the good deeds and lofty attributes by which the Lord...is described in a figurative way—He being indeed immeasurably exalted above all such description.” (Positive Commandments 8, Chavel translation, 11-12, the Talmudic source in *Sota* 14a)

Kafih next mentions Mishneh Torah, *Deot* 1:5. That passage contains Maimonides' extension of Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105-1107. Maimonides holds that the one who chooses a particular virtue and *exceeds* the mean we call a *khasid*. He expects the student of divine science to go beyond the mean, *lifanim m'shurat ha-din*, in his imitation of divine conduct.

Finally, Kafih shows that the Platonic version of the doctrine of imitation of God is similar to the Maimonidean conception, in a fine passage from the *Theatetus*, 176a-c (Fowler):

“But it is impossible that evils should be done away with, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good; and they cannot have their place among the gods, but must inevitably hover about mortal nature and this earth. Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise.... Let us give the true reason. God is in no wise and in no manner unrighteous, but utterly and perfectly righteous, and there is nothing so like Him as that one of us who in turn becomes most nearly perfect in righteousness. It is herein that the true cleverness of a man is found and also his worthlessness and cowardice; for the knowledge of this is wisdom or true virtue, and ignorance of it is folly or manifest wickedness; and all the other kinds of seeming cleverness and wisdom are paltry when they appear in public affairs and vulgar in the arts.”

GUIDE 1:39 HEART

The first problem with *lev, heart*, is that we do not think about the *heart* the way the ancients did. We associate thought, mind, will, and so on, with the area around the top of the head, with the brain. The ancients associated these things with the heart.

The *heart* as the place of the mind or soul has some justification; after all, it pumps the blood. “The blood is the life” (Deut. 12:23). The heart is over the diaphragm, the seat of breath, which is spirit. The blood and the diaphragm pump life through the body. The heart as the center of the body is the source of life itself. All meditation traditions focus on the heart/diaphragm area.

The second problem is the proliferation of terms for the higher activities. Thought, counsel, idea, will, understanding, opinion, intellect, knowledge: all in some sense mean the same thing, and each quite definitely has its own meaning. It is no better in Hebrew or Arabic, which have their own versions of these slippery terms. I expand my lexical entry on this term *lev* to include what I think Maimonides meant by these terms and canvass the views of the translators. I abbreviate them as follows: *English*: F-Friedlander, P-Pines; *Hebrew*: K-Kafih, S-Schwarz, T-Ibn Tibon, H-Al Harizi. The original term is in its Judeo-Arabic script.

Diagramming Maimonides’ definitions reveals a result that is not readily apparent from bare reading. What we find is a ladder of notions, starting with the most material, the actual heart muscle, then to the metaphor of “center,” and up through the mental state of fancy, then opinion, will, and finally intellect at the apex.

There is a little trick at the end. After reaching the state of actual knowledge, the final definition given for *lev* is “the powers of the body.” In this return to the body, *lev* means that the active intellect commits the “the powers of the body” to devotion to God, just as the prophet must go back down the ladder to the people, and as Socrates must go back down into the cave.

The chapter is almost entirely made up of proof-texts, with little commentary. Maimonides wants his student to supply that commentary. The core of the chapter is Job’s *turn* from opinion to truth. Maimonides takes the Book of Job as a sort of forerunner to the Guide, about how Job’s *heart* turns from Aristotle’s opinions about the philosophic godhead to the truth of the God’s miraculous providence.

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

LEV (HEART) Homonym.

1. *The heart muscle.*
2. *Middle.* Maimonides says: “This organ being in the middle of the body, the word has been figuratively applied to express ‘the middle part of a thing.’” Analysis yields: “mediation.”
3. *Imagination, fancy* (אלפכרה, thought-P, F; *makhshava*-K, T, S, H; possibly *hirhorei*, K, footnote 8. Even-Shmuel, *ad loc.*: *mekhshav*). I am following Kafih’s suggestion in footnote 8 since in our usage it more closely fits Maimonides’ quotes. Kafih there justifies *makhshava* (thought) over *hirhorei* (fancy) due to its use in Mishneh Torah, *Avoda Zara* 2:3, but the meaning in both locations is nearly the same. In any event, Maimonides also uses *hirhorei* there. Efron reserves *makhshava* for *intellection* only in the phrase *makhshava sikhlit*, taking it as its opposite, as in *makhshava b’dimionot*/imagination. See his excellent long note, pp. 72-73, and 25, *Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*.

4. *Opinion* (אֵלֶּרֶא, opinion-P; counsel-F; *dea*/knowledge-K, S; *etza*/counsel-T, H; *haskamat he-hamon*/mass agreement-A). The translators are in complete disarray. Harizi starts out with “mass agreement,” like “opinion,” but ends up using “counsel,” as Tibon and Friedlander do. Schwarz and Kafih go with *dea*, “idea,” and then include *daat*, “knowledge.” “Knowledge” is incorrect because opinion is not real knowledge, knowledge produced by the active intellect. Pines has it right with “opinion.” Friedlander’s “counsel” seems furthest off, following Ibn Tibon too literally. While *dea* is usually knowledge, it can mean opinion, which is how Efras takes אֵלֶּרֶא, *ibid.*, p. 25.
5. *Will* (אֵלֶּרֶאדָה, will-P, F. *ratzon*- K, T, S, H; *hefetz*-H).
6. *Intellect/Knowledge* (אֵלֶּעֶקֶל, intellect-P; understanding-F; *sekhel*-K, T, S, H).
7. *The powers of the body*. The heart is the source of bodily powers; indeed, Maimonides saw it as the channel from soul to brain. See discussion in Abraham ben Maimonides, *Guide to Serving God*, 437-441. In this sense it is distinguished from the heart *muscle*, Definition 1. See Rosner, *Medical Legacy of Moses Maimonides*, Ch. 10; also, Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, trans. and notes, L. E. Goodman, 1966, 106-8.

Instance of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart (*b'lev*) of Absalom, while he [was] yet alive in the *midst* (*b'lev*) of the oak.” (2 Samuel 18:14)

See my essay “Joab” in the last chapter. King David’s general Joab is at war with the rebel prince Absalom. Absalom’s hair gets caught in an oak as he rides under it. David’s soldiers see Absalom hanging but do not kill him since David had said to deal “gently” with him. Joab comes to the scene and takes it upon himself to finish the prince off. He fails, since he only spears him in the *middle*, not in the *heart*, and in the next line, Joab’s bearers finish Absalom off. The verse uses the word *lev* twice. The second time it must mean the *middle* of the oak, since an oak does not have a “heart.” Since it means *middle* there, it should also mean *middle* the first time, that is, the middle or abdomen of Absalom, and not his heart. Furthermore, if Absalom really did have three darts thrust through his heart he should have died. Rashi agrees that *lev* here means the *middle* of Absalom. Why does Maimonides put this under Definition 1, *heart* instead of under *middle* in Definition 2? He chose this particular quote (ignoring every other line in the Bible using *lev* for the heart muscle) to show that in real prophetic discourse *lev* should never mean “heart.” This marginalizes the corporeal definition. Note his return to the corporeal heart in Definition 7, at the end of our chapter, when he enjoins us to devote to God all the “powers of the body” which flow from the heart.

Instances of Definition 2, Middle, Contextualized:

“And ye came near and stood under the mountain (Sinai); and the mountain burned with fire unto the *midst* (*lev*) of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.” (Deuteronomy 4:11)

“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him (Moses) in a flame (*b'labat*) of fire out of the *midst* (*mitokh*) of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush [was] not consumed.” (Exodus 3:2)

In the first proof-text, since heaven has no heart, *lev* must mean “middle.” Similarly, in the second, the angel is not in the “heart” or “flame” of the fire, but in the middle of the fire. In both, the “middle” is really the mediating channel. For these two passages, see notes below on “Mediation.”

Instances of Definition 3, *Imagination*, Contextualized:

“But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, whence [comest thou], Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart (*libi*) [with thee], when the man (Naaman) turned again from his chariot to meet thee? [Is it] a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? ” (2 Kings 5:26-27)

Definition 3 makes *lev* the imagination. In this proof-text, it is the *prophetic* imagination of the prophet Elisha.

“And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart (*levavkhem*) and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a *whoring*: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.” (Numbers 15:39)

The passage is about *tzitzit*, the sacred fringes Jews wear on the four corners of their garments. Their purpose is to stimulate the imagination toward the prophetic experience. But Abraham ben Maimonides repeatedly connects “seek not after your own heart” with prurience and thoughts of “procreation” (*ibid.*, 451, 457, 477): “You must restrain your imagination from invoking images harmful to observance and conducive to sin, such as images of beautiful women and the details of their jewelry and clothing.”

“And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which [were] among them: Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose (*l'vavo*) heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go [and] serve the Gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood. And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his *heart*, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the *imagination* of mine *heart* (*b'shrirut libi elekh*), to add drunkenness to thirst: The Lord will not spare him.” (Deuteronomy 29:17-18)

Opposite to the *tzitzit*, which stimulate the prophetic imagination, the pagan abominations stimulate the idolatrous imagination. On these three passages for Definition 3, see essay below, “Imagination: Toward Prophecy or Idolatry.”

Instances of Definition 4, *Opinion*, Contextualized:

“All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect *heart* to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel [were] of one *heart* (*lev*) to make David king.” (1 Chronicles 12:38)

The people agree to make David king. The agreement is like a social compact, as in Harizi’s translation, “mass agreement,” *haskamat he-hamon*, i.e., public opinion. In verse 12:33 we learn that the people were *not* of “two hearts,” *lev va-lev*, in their opinion of David. Pines correctly translates *lev* throughout this section of our chapter as “opinion.” Opinion is the concern of politicians. Morality is also subject to opinion. Opinion can be good or bad, but it cannot reach the level of truth, since opinion is not fact. Philosophy is the work of raising opinion to the level of truth. Thus, Aristotle always considers all previous opinions on a question, finding some good in all of them, while sifting them with criticism to arrive at the truth. Moral opinions are what we are left with after Eden, as explained in Guide 1:2. The path back to Torah is the path back to the truth perspective, that is, to knowledge, not to opinion.

“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips [is] wise. The tongue of the just [is as] choice silver: the *heart* of the wicked [is] little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of *wisdom* (*lev*).” (Proverbs 10:19-21)

“The *heart* of the wicked [is] little worth,” is about Jeroboam (Rashi, quoting Midrash *Tankhuma* on *Ki Tissa* 6). The story is from First Kings chapter 13. Jeroboam was the first King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He established centers of idolatry. He built an incense altar to God on a “high place” (that is, not in Jerusalem). A

prophet, identified as Iddo, says the altar will be “rent,” which happens immediately, and the King’s hand becomes paralyzed. Iddo also predicts that Jeroboam will eventually be succeeded by a more worthy king, Josiah (13:2). The King begs Iddo to restore his hand. Once recovered he offers but Iddo refuses gifts. This trope should call to mind the story of Naaman and Gehazi, above (see essay below, “Imagination: Toward Prophecy or Idolatry”). According to the Midrash, the King begged, “entreat now the Lord *your* God,” not, “*my* God,” nonetheless, “the King’s hand was restored him again, and [he] became *as before*.” That is, explains the Midrash, “just *as before*, he was standing and burning sacrifices to idols, so was it in the end.” Jeroboam was *in the end* defeated in war despite superior numbers and strategy. He represents the mere politician for Maimonides: he deals in public opinion, not wisdom, to his great loss.

“Moreover Job continued his parable, and said....My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: **my heart** (*lvavi*) shall not *reproach* (*yekheraf*) [me] so long as I live.” (Job 27:1-6)

Job is the man whose *opinion* changed. He appears twice in this chapter. The term *yekheraf*, as we show below, was about *turning* the imagination from idolatrous adultery to monotheistic betrothal. It is the key to our chapter. See below: “Job’s Turn.”

Instances of Definition 5, Will, Contextualized:

“Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am *married* unto you: and I will take you *one of a city, and two of a family*, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you pastors according to mine *heart* (*k’libi*), which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit [it]; neither shall [that] be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the *imagination* of their evil *heart*.” (Jeremiah 3:14-17)

This quote is transitional from the prior Job quote. Jeremiah says: “for I am married to You.” The passage emphasizes marriage as well as to the notion of *turning*. Note the two uses of “*heart*.” The first is Maimonides’ proof-text for Definition 5 of *lev*: “will,” i.e., I will give you shepherds that do My will. The second is “the imagination of their evil *heart*” at the end of the passage, which refers back to Definition 3. Maimonides mentioned this passage in 1:34 with the gloss that most people need to accept dogmas generated by divine science, since most cannot begin the actual study. Those special students who can are the “one of a city, and two of a family.” God has appointed these “pastors,” (shepherds) who will “feed” the people with dogmas from “knowledge and understanding.” Dogma saves the masses from following the “*imagination* of their evil heart,” *shrirut libam ha-ra*. Compare (Deut. 29:18) “I shall have peace, though I walk in the *imagination* of mine *heart*,” *b’shrirut libi elekh*, Deuteronomy 29:17-20 (above, for Definition 3).

And when he [Jehu], was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechav [coming] to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine *heart* (*levavkha*) right, as my *heart* (*levavi*) [is] with thy *heart* (*levavekha*)? And Jehonadab answered, it is. If it be, give [me] thine hand. And he gave [him] his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot (*ha-merkava*). And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord. So they made him ride in his chariot (*v’yarkivu oto b’rikhbo*). And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the Lord, which he spake to Elijah. (2 Kings 10:15-17)

Maimonides restates the passage: “i.e., is thy will right as my will is? In this sense the word has been figuratively applied to God.” The passage is about Jehu, soon to be King of the northern kingdom, Israel, after he massacred the Ahabites and just before crushing the Baalites. Important priestly and devout groups supported him, including the ascetic Rechavites. The verse plays on the word “chariot,” *merkava*, and *rekhav*, which have the same consonantal roots. Maimonides will later anagrammatically relate *merkava*, the divine chariot, to *kheruv*, the cherubs of Ezekiel’s vision, and the river *kvar* where he had his vision. Those who do the *will* of God are his *chariot*.

“And this [shall be] a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons [of Eli], on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise Me up a faithful priest, [that] shall do according to [that] which [is] in Mine *heart* and in My mind (*b’levavi u’b’nafshi*): and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before Mine anointed for ever.” (1 Samuel 2:34-35)

Maimonides explains “according to...Mine *heart*,” means “according to My will.” The passage is about the High Priest Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who fornicated before the altar. They were not his real intellectual progeny (see my discussion of this concept in 1:7). Samuel inherited that mantle (although the actual office went to Zadok). Samuel acts according to God’s *will*. Maimonides mentions this proof-text in the same sense in Guide 1:41, the lexicon on *nefesh*, “soul,” which can also mean “will.” In that sense *nefesh* pairs with *lev*, which he takes as “will” here: *b’levavi u’b’nafshi*. Maimonides says in our chapter that the senses of “will” and “intellect” both frequently define *lev*, Definitions 5 and 6, and it is up to the reader to sort out which is appropriate (cf. 1:29, end, for similar language, and see on “Job’s *Turn*,” below). Maimonides clearly prefers intellection as the best description of divine activity but does not rule out divine will. This distinction becomes important later because his Muslim theological antagonists, the Kalām, reduce *all* divine activity to will. They deny any cognizable dimension of reality.

“And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the Lord, and the king’s house, and all Solomon’s desire which he was pleased to do, That the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared unto him at Gibeon. And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put My name there forever; and Mine eyes and Mine *heart* (*v’libi*) shall be there perpetually.” (1 Kings 9:1-3)

Maimonides retranslates the quoted phase as “My providence and My will.” He interprets it the same way in 1:44, the lexical chapter on *ayin*, the “eye.” Rashi interprets the phrase to mean, “My Shekhina.” The context here is that moment when the Temple takes the place of the Tabernacle as the place of the indwelling of the Shekhina.

Instances of Definition 6, *Intellect*, Contextualized:

“Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said For vain man would be *wise* (*yilavev*), though man be born [like] a wild ass’s colt. If thou prepare thine *heart*, and stretch out thine hands toward Him; If iniquity [be] in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.” (Job 11:1-14)

The passage continues the dialogue with Job begun above, about Job’s *turn* from imagination to intellect. The passage is an interesting choice to begin the treatment of *lev* as intellect since Maimonides usually takes Zophar as the partisan of the will. See “Job’s *Turn*” below.

“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: [so doth] a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom [and] honour. A wise man’s *heart* (*lev*) [is] at his right hand; but a fool’s *heart* at his left. Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth [him], and he saith to every one [that] he [is] a fool.” (Ecclesiastes 10:1-3)

Maimonides rephrases the quotation: “i.e., his understanding is engaged in perfect thoughts, the highest problems.” The idea that the good inclination is on the right and the evil on the left is also suggested in Maimonides’ account of Job, where he holds that Satan is identical to the evil inclination. They represent the material aspect of man in battle with his intellectual aspect. Man defeats his materiality by continually engaging in “perfect thoughts,” i.e., intellection in the divine science.

“Know (*v’yadata*) therefore this day, and consider (*ha-shevota*) [it] in thine *heart* (*levavekha*), that the Lord He [is] God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: [there is] none else.” (Deuteronomy 4:39)

This passage is from Moses’ speech before the Jordan River. It is about pure intellectual meditation as the basis for man’s relation with God. Maimonides here foreshadows a discussion in Guide 3:32 about the types of divine service man is capable of performing. Man would have the best relationship with God if he could always be

“engaged in perfect thoughts, the highest problems.” But since man remains in thrall to his material aspect, this intellectual meditation is not yet available:

“It is, namely, impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other: it is therefore according to the nature of man *impossible* for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed. Now God sent Moses to make [the Israelites] a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:6) by means of the knowledge of God ... ‘Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord is God.’” (Guide 3:32)

But, he continues there, since men were trapped by their imaginations in idolatrous forms of worship, sacrificial worship was retained to attenuate such an impossible transition to the pure meditation. He describes that meditation in Guide 3:51:

“The true worship of God is only possible when correct notions of Him have previously been conceived. When you have arrived by way of intellectual research at a knowledge of God and His works, then commence to devote yourselves to Him, try to approach Him and strengthen the intellect, which is the link that joins you to Him. Thus Scripture says ... ‘Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord He is God’”

It is the purpose of the Guide to bring the student to the level of such pure worship.

“He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth [himself], and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a God, [even] his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth [it], and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou [art] my God, they have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; [and] their *hearts*, that they cannot understand. *And none considereth (yashiv) in his heart (libo)*, neither [is there] knowledge nor understanding (*v'lo daat v'lo tevuna*) to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten [it]: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?” (Isaiah 44:16-19)

Taking the problem the other way, if man fails to use his intellect he falls victim to his idolatrous imagination. Isaiah’s examples ridicule the illogic of idolatry. Note that this passage reverses the language of the prior proof-text.

“These [are] the words of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb. And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles: *Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.*” (Deuteronomy 29:1-3)

Maimonides says: “It is identical in its meaning with ‘Unto thee it was shown that thou mightest know’ (Deuteronomy 4:35. *Ata hareta l'daat*). Maimonides’ linkage to Deuteronomy 4:35 repeats at Guide 3:32, where, as mentioned, he discussed the need for gradualism in intellectual attainment. Few men are capable of the highest prophetic relationship with God, but most can understand certain core intellectual principles, such as divine existence and unity. In 2:33 he explains these universal ideas were what “was shown that thou mightest know” at Sinai. Guide 3:51 also links Deuteronomy 4:35 with 4:39 (quoted above), about the “true worship of God” being intellectual meditation. This train of associations depicts a *ladder of attainment*: a process of gradualism by which we expose everyone to universally true dogmas, from which they may be able to move to higher levels of understanding. Even-Shmuel explains from the opposite direction, looking down from atop the ladder, “The intent of these two latter passages is to portray the emanation from the divine intellect upon man” (my trans.).

Instance of Definition 7, “The Powers of the Body,” Contextualized:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God [is] one Lord: *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine Heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

Maimonides says: “I explain ‘with all thine *heart*’ to mean ‘with all the powers of thine *heart*,’ that is, with all the powers of the body (*b’kol kokhot ha-guf*), for they all have their origin in the *heart*: and the sense of the entire passage is : make the knowledge of God the aim of all thy actions, as we have stated in our Commentary on the Mishnah (*Avot*, ch. 5), and in our Mishneh Torah (*Yesodei Hatorah* 2:2).” He thus returns to the physical standpoint of Definition 1. Instead of regarding the heart merely as a muscle, as in Definition 1, he emphasizes the connection of the physical heart to the entirety of the physical being. Put another way, loving the Lord with all the powers of the heart means that the *mind* directs all the actions of the body to imitate the divine actions perceived in the world. Just as the prophet must descend to the physical after reaching the heights of prophecy and devote the physical world to God, so must we always devote “all the powers of the heart” to the service of God, no matter what level of spiritual attainment we reach. He takes it somewhat differently in 3:28 (and in the Mishneh Torah passage) where “thou shalt love” is only possible when we “comprehend the real nature of things, and understand the divine wisdom displayed therein.” This is nothing less than the comprehension of God’s works in the world. In this sense, he means that we can only devote all of our powers to God once we recognize his wonderful organization of all things. Again, in 3:53 he says:

“But the truths which the Law teaches us—the knowledge of God’s existence and unity—create in us love of God, as we have shown repeatedly... The love is the result of the truths taught in the Law, including the true knowledge of the existence of God”

We are commanded to devote “all the powers of the heart” to the true path of intellectual meditation, thereby attaining the level of love.

DEFINITION 2: MEDIATION

The proof-texts for Maimonides’ Definition 2, *middle*, come from the two transfiguring events in Moses’ life, Sinai and the Burning Bush.

“[Specially] the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and [that] they may teach their children. And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the *midst (lev)* of heaven, with *darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.*” (Deuteronomy 4:10-11)

Moses portrays the scene of the revelation at Sinai. In Guide 3:9, Maimonides interprets this vision of God enshrouded in clouds and darkness. Since God is incorporeal, the clouds and darkness must be in the people’s minds:

“His revelation in a thick cloud, did not take place without any purpose, it was intended to indicate that we cannot comprehend Him on account of the dark body that surrounds us. It does not surround God, because He is incorporeal... The phrase does not denote that darkness surrounds God, for with Him there is no darkness, but the great, strong, and permanent light, which, emanating from Him, illuminates all darkness...”

The Jews projected their own darkness onto God. The only appropriate metaphor, and it is only a metaphor, is that God emanates a great “light,” which is the fire in “the midst of heaven.” What the masses apprehended without understanding at Sinai was not God but His mediating creation darkly appearing in prophetic vision. *Lev*, “middle,” thus comes to mean “mediation” or “intermediary.” Only Moses obtained the direct revelation, “face to face,” and he became the mediating channel for that revelation to the people. But Moses did not always enjoy a direct relationship with God.

“And the *angel* of the Lord appeared unto him (Moses) in a *flame (b’labat)* of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush [was] not consumed.” (Exodus 3:2)

The angel in the heart of the fire was Moses' channel before he became the channel. I find interesting Rashi's note on this passage. In explaining *b'labat* as the *middle* of the fire, he quotes two examples, both of which Maimonides cited in this chapter: the passage about Sinai and the passage about the death of Absalom from Second Samuel. He writes:

“*In a flame of fire*: Heb. *b'labat esh*, in a flame of fire, (that is) the *heart (lev)* of fire, like “The *heart (lev)* of the heavens” (Deut. 4:11), “In the *heart (b'lev)* of the oak” (2 Sam. 18:14).”

Rashi was not reading Maimonides, or *vice versa*, so they probably drew on the same interpretive tradition. It makes the angel appearing in the *middle* of the fire as the *mediating* channel between God and man.

Maimonides mentions the Burning Bush passage in two other places, Guide 2:6 and 3:4, about the appearance of an angel to a prophet. The angel is the same as the active intellect. Sometimes this angel appears as fire. Even though Maimonides usually takes Moses' prophetic relation with God as *direct*, he notes (3:45):

“Naturally the fundamental belief in prophecy precedes the belief in the Law, for without the belief in prophecy there can be no belief in the Law. But a prophet only receives divine inspiration through the agency of an angel.... Even Moses our Teacher received his *first* prophecy through an angel. ‘And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire.’ It is therefore clear that the belief in the existence of angels precedes the belief in prophecy, and the latter precedes the belief in the Law.”

In other words, universally, the mind in its primitive pre-Torah and pre-philosophic state already accepts the existence of such mediating forces as angels. It is therefore ready to receive prophecy, to channel the emanations of those mediating forces. This is the meaning of Moses at the burning bush.

Philosophers like Aristotle and Plato also accept the existence of angels, though they called them gods. Maimonides explains in Mishneh Torah (*Avoda Zara* 1:1), that pagans wrongly call “gods” the *agencies* created by God to serve Him. In both of these quotes under Definition 2, Maimonides' real concern is with these *intermediaries* of prophecy, that is, those flaming forces in the *middle* between man and God, which appear in man's “heart,” even before thought appears. The problem becomes the uses to which the imagination puts these primordial mediating forces.

DEFINITION 3: IMAGINATION— TOWARD PROPHECY OR IDOLATRY?

Maimonides' discussion of the different uses of the imagination begins with Elisha's wonderful contrast of the conniving servant Gehazi with the righteous convert Naaman:

“But he (Gehazi) went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, whence [comest thou], Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, **Went not mine heart (libi) [with thee]**, when the man (Naaman) turned again from his chariot to meet thee? [Is it] a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he (Gehazi) went out from his presence a leper [as white] as snow.” (2 Kings 5:25-27)

Maimonides' Definition 3 makes *lev* the imagination. In this proof-text, *libi* is the *prophetic* imagination of the prophet Elisha. Naaman, the Syrian general, has leprosy, which Elisha cures by bathing Naaman seven times in the Jordan. Naaman offers rewards to Elisha, who refuses them. Naaman takes his leave with sacks of earth from Israel, so that he can pray to God on Israeli soil even in Syria. Elisha's servant Gehazi is greedy for reward. He

pursues Naaman and persuades several talents of silver and a wardrobe from him. In this proof-text, Elisha lets Gehazi understand that Elisha “saw” it all.

Maimonides retranslates Elisha’s statement: “I was with thee in my *thought* when a certain event happened.” *Thought* should be understood as Efros explained it, as *imaginative thought* (*makhshava b’dimionot*) rather than *intellectual thought* (*makhshava sikhlit*), i.e., Definition 3. Elisha prophetically *imagined* Gehazi’s actions.

God punished Gehazi for his greed by transferring Naaman’s leprosy to Gehazi. All three put their imaginations to different uses. Gehazi’s imagination led him astray after material possessions. Naaman’s imagination (through the sacks of Israeli soil) becomes his path to higher meditation. Elisha’s imagination is the prophetic imagination, which is the highest level, where imagination transcends its limitations.

Imagination is a necessary part of human psychology. It represents those spiritual and intellectual forces that can only operate through images. In general, Maimonides regards the imagination as a material or materializing part of the mind. It is necessary for the process of prophecy, but can be as dangerous to the spirit as any other force of matter. Continuing to draw these contrasts with his proof-texts, he depicts the Jewish way with images to set it against the pagan way:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own *heart* (*levavkhem*) and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.” (Numbers 15:38-40)

The passage is about *tzitzit*, the sacred fringes Jews wear on the four corners of their garments, which had a thread of blue. Talmud, *Khullin* 89a:

“Blue resembles the colour of the sea, and the sea resembles the colour of the sky, and the sky resembles the colour of a sapphire, and a sapphire resembles the colour of the Throne of Glory, as it is said: And they saw the God of Israel and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone (Exodus 24:10).”

Rashi explains that “It is called *tzitzit* because of the [command], *ye may look upon it* (verse 39), as in, *peering* (*metzitz*) *from the lattices* (Song of Songs 2:9).” This should remind us of the golden apple in the filigree of silver, Maimonides’ metaphor for the prophetic experience, and to the King peering through his window at Isaac and Rebecca “sporting” (see Introduction I). It is also like peering through a casement at the youths running to the married harlot (Proverbs 7:6), since our proof-text says of our undisciplined “eyes,” that is, our *imagination*, “ye use to go a whoring (*zonim*).” Imagination is necessary for prophecy, but also for transgression, specifically idolatry, which is like adultery toward God. Maimonides’ next proof-text examines the relation between the imagination and the idol:

“And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which [were] among them: Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose (*l’vavo*) *heart* turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go [and] serve the Gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his *heart*, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the *imagination* of mine *heart* (*b’shrirut libi elekh*), to add drunkenness to thirst: The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. (Deuteronomy 29:17-20)

Rashi interprets *b'shrirut libi* as "I follow what my heart beholds," which helps to explain why KJV translates "imagination of my heart." This is the basic idea of Definition 3: following one's fancy or imagination, which can lead to the prophetic imagination of Elisha above, or to the base imagination of Gehazi. Maimonides explains this passage in 3:29. His subject is idolatry, and why we need scientific knowledge about this disease of the mind:

"The knowledge of these theories and practices (of the idolators) is of great importance in explaining the reasons of the precepts. For it is the principal object of the Law and the axis round which it turns, to blot out these opinions from man's heart and make the existence of idolatry impossible. As regards the former Scripture says:...'Whose heart turneth away this day.'"

In Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah, Avoda Zara*, 2:3, he expands on this theme, turning from the overt "theories and practices" of the idolators, to the subtle workings of their imaginations:

"All these prohibitions come under one category—not to turn to idolatry. Whoever turns towards it, by an *overt* act, is punished with stripes. It is not only idolatry to which we must not turn in thought. We are likewise warned not to permit any thought to enter our minds, that might cause one to reject a fundamental principle of the Torah. We must not *turn* our minds to such a thought and thus be drawn after the *imagination of our hearts*. For the mind is limited; not every mind is capable of attaining knowledge of the truth in its purity. If every man were to follow after the vagaries of his heart, the result would be universal ruin, ensuing from the limitations of the human intellect. How so? Sometimes one will be drawn to idolatry. Sometimes he will waver in his mind concerning the Unity of God, as to whether He is One or He is not One. He will speculate on what is above, what below it, what existed before the Creation, what will exist after the world comes to an end. Sometimes he will muse concerning Prophecy, and say to himself 'Perhaps it is true, perhaps it is not'. Sometimes he will harbor similar doubts concerning the Torah as to whether it is of divine origin, or not. And such a person, being ignorant of the logical principles which need to be applied in order to attain positive truth, will lapse into heresy. In this regard, the Torah exhorted us 'And that ye go not about after your heart nor after your eyes, after which ye use to go astray' (Num. 15:39). This means 'You shall not allow yourselves to be drawn, each one after his own limited intelligence, and imagine that his mind is attaining truth.' The sages thus explained the text quoted above (Num. 15:39); '*After your heart* refers to heresy. *After your eyes* refers to lechery.' Although the violation of this prohibition may result in forfeiture of life hereafter, it is not punished with stripes. This is in accordance with the principle that an infraction which does not involve a physical act does not render one liable to that penalty."

Sharpening the contrast between the idolatrous imagination and the intellect's acceptance of Torah, he notes (again in Guide 3:29), the dictum of Talmud, *Kiddushin* 40a: idolators *ipso facto* reject the entire Torah, while those who reject idolatry accept the Torah in its entirety.

JOB'S TURN

"Moreover Job continued his parable, and said, [As] God liveth, [who] hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, [who] hath vexed my soul; All the while my breath [is] in me, and the spirit of God [is] in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: *my heart (levavi) shall not reproach (yekheraf) [me] so long as I live.*" (Job 27:1-6)

Job is the man who changed his *opinion* about divine providence. He appears twice in this chapter and makes appearances in the next several chapters. Maimonides makes the following odd comment about this passage:

“This sentence is preceded by the words, ‘My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go’: and then follows, ‘my *heart* shall never *turn away* (*yekheraf*) from this.’ – As regards the expression *yekheraf*, I think that it may be compared with the same verb in the form *nekherafet*, ‘a handmaid *betrouthed* (*nekherafet*) to a man’ (Lev. 19:20), where *nekherafet* is similar in meaning to the Arabic *munkharifat* ‘turning away,’ and signifies ‘turning from the state of slavery (*avdut*) to that of marriage (*ishut*).’”

What does Maimonides mean by this?

Maimonides discusses his unique view of Job at length in Guide 3:22-23. His heroes in the story are God, Job, and Elihu. (Elihu, we discussed previously, represents the prophetic process, as well as the prophetic method of hiding secrets in texts.) God is not the author of Job’s sufferings, Satan is. Satan represents matter, the cause of all suffering. Job, at first, represents Aristotle (or perhaps Plato), arguing that God forms the world and abandons it, like a watchmaker. Job is not wise, for had he realized God’s providential conduct of the universe, and His closeness to those who strive to approach Him intellectually, he could have no such doubts. But Job, who is “perplexed,” will come to change his mind.

The Book of Job is the forerunner of the Guide of the Perplexed. In the sequence from the end of Job chapter 26 through 27:1-6 (our proof-text), Job begins to see the light, but is not yet convinced. Chapter 26 contains some lovely lyrics foreshadowing Job’s later conversion:

“He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, [and] hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in His thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. He holdeth back the face of His throne, [and] spreadeth His cloud upon it. He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at His reproof. He divideth the sea with His power, and by His understanding He smiteth through the proud. By His spirit He hath garnished the heavens; His hand hath formed the crooked serpent. Lo, these [are] parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?”

But then, returning to his old ways at 27:1, he continues to justify his Aristotelian conception that God forgot him, “My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my *heart* shall not *reproach* me (*yekheraf*) so long as I live.” Then Maimonides starts to talk about the related term *nekherafet*. What he does not say is that this word’s root is an *anagram* of *merakhefet*, “hover,” found in the first proof-text of the next Guide chapter, Genesis 1:2:

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness [was] upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God *moved* (JPS 1917: *hovered*) upon the face of the waters.”

We know of Maimonides’ fondness for anagrams from the end of Guide 2:44 (see my note “On the Interpretation of Dreams” in 1:12). Maimonides’ anagrams are a tool for sounding the prophetic imagination, especially, its unconscious level (David Bakan, *Maimonides on Prophecy*, 25-26). The language above from Job 26 about the creation of the world and the incomprehensible power of God suggests *hovering*, *merakhefet*.

When Maimonides translates *yekheraf* in Job 27:6 as “turning away,” he really means that Job *turned away* from the wisdom of Job 26 (recognizing the hovering of providence) back to the unwise opinion expressed in Job 27 (Job’s abandonment by God). Maimonides contrasts Job with the “handmaid” who wisely *turns away* from *avdut*, idolatry, to *ishut*, betrothal. She is the *shifkha nekherafet*, a Canaanite maidservant whose owner marries her to his Hebrew manservant (Mishneh Torah, *Kedusha, Issurei Beea*, 3:13; Leviticus 19:20). Maimonides understands *avdut* here as *avoda zara*, the “strange service” of idolatry. The turn from *avdut* to *ishut* is the turn from opinion to intellectual *betrothal* to God.

Job’s internal dialog continues in Maimonides’ proof-texts in the voice of his adversary Zophar:

“Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed? for thou hast said, My doctrine [is] pure, and I am clean in thine eyes. But oh that God would speak, and open His lips against thee; and that He would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that [they are] double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee [less] than thine iniquity [deserveth]. Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? [it is] as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof [is] longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. If He cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder Him? For He knoweth vain men: He seeth wickedness also; will He not then consider [it]? For vain man would be *wise (yilavev)*, though man be born [like] a *wild ass’s colt*. If thou prepare thine *heart*, and stretch out thine hands toward Him; if iniquity [be] in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.” (Job 11:1-14)

Maimonides makes *yilavev* mean “will be wise,” for his outward lexical purpose here. But in Guide 1:34 he quoted the line with emphasis on the “wild ass’s colt,” which represents for him the uneducated youth, that is, youth’s material or potential intellect. Youth may be capable of intellection but has not yet done so. Zophar rightly says that Job is like a child who has not begun to exercise his intellect. Maimonides’ Job does not complete his turn to wisdom until the end of the Book of Job.

The Guide previews these themes in 1:29 (see my notes there). That was the lexical chapter on *etzev* (pain, anger, provocation) but its focus was on *lev*, in the passage “and it grieved Him at His heart (*va-yitatzev el libo*)” (Genesis 6:4-6). That chapter also makes *lev* mean both intellect and will. *Lev* also signaled an internal dialog prefiguring a perceived turn in outward behavior. There, the change was in God’s will or mind, an inherently problematic change. But the emphasis there was on the withdrawal of providence called “the hiding of the face,” which we projected on God. In our chapter, the concern is with the way in which we provoke or remedy that withdrawal through the uses we make of our imagination.

It is interesting that Maimonides cites Zophar here for Definition 6, where *lev* is “intellect,” instead of under Definition 5, where *lev* is “will,” since he portrays Zophar as the representative of the Asharites who took *will* as God’s defining characteristic (2:33). Asharism is a type of Islamic theology (Kalām) that in some forms remains authoritative. They held a completely transcendental view of God. Allah is so unlike us that we can know nothing of Him. We cannot even make sense of His actions in this world: they are willful, not logical. That is because the Asharites did not think that Nature is real. Everything is miraculous and any thought of natural cause and effect is false. Maimonides battles the Asharite theologians in chapters 1:71-76. Job eventually transcends Zophar’s Asharite view. Though he does not understand everything God does, he realizes that God acts with purpose and rationality. Zophar, by contrast, argues that we can understand nothing of God’s willful actions. When Zophar accuses *Job* of “vanity” (“for vain man would be wise”), he really unconsciously calls *God’s acts* vain and pointless. This is the slashing argument Maimonides will later wield against the Kalām theologians.

GUIDE 1:40
SPIRIT

OVERVIEW: HUMILITY AND AWE

Maimonides' ostensible purpose in this chapter is to define *ruakh*. He says it has six meanings: air, wind, breath, intellectual soul, prophetic flow, and will. It is homonymous because we may only use the last two definitions with God: the *emanation* of prophecy onto a prophet, and the divine *will*.

His real purpose is to link the Job complex of ideas with the complex of ideas surrounding the entry into divine science. Job haunts this chapter, although no word from Job appears in it. What links the Job ideas to the mystery of creation is the anagram of the terms *yekheraf* and *merakhefet*. The former is the key to the last chapter and the latter is the key to this one.

Yekheraf, from Job 27:6, signals Job's *turn* from imagination to intellect. It is his turn from Aristotle's eternal universe, in which nature rules and there is no divine providence. He moves from a false and unwarranted certainty to humility. This humility is the most important prerequisite for the student entering the divine science. Job 27:6 links to the *Maaseh Bereshit* complex of ideas, precisely because of Job's awe at God's wondrous *creation*. Job's *yekheraf* finds its anagrammatic counterpart in God's *merakhefet*, "hovering," in the first sentence of our chapter, its first proof-text, Genesis 1:1-2, which emphasizes God's ongoing role in creation.

Maimonides follows, in Definitions 3 and 4, with proof-texts for the distinction between the mortal *breath* of life and the enduring human intellectual *spirit*. They point to his thoughts on corporal resurrection. Job, who was not wise, believed that there is no *spirit* beyond human *breath* and thus no enduring soul. Beyond death, we can expect nothing. Under his materialist view, we can hope for no miracle, resurrection or divine providence.

Job, lacking humility, confronted with the contradictions of existence, including the punishment of the righteous, rails against God. He cannot enter the divine science until he pauses humbly before such contradictions, a point Maimonides makes with the three quotations he brings for Definition 5 of *ruakh*, about the humility required for the entry level of prophecy.

Humility is necessary because God's purposes are *masked*. When we think we can understand God's purposes, we speak of His intellect; but when we do not, we speak of His will. This is the point of Definition 6, which considers humility in connection with the divine *will*. Job "turns" (*yekheraf*), acquires humility, and begins to acquire wisdom. His mask falls away. Job's eyes open to God's providential "hovering" (*merakhefet*) over His awesome creation.

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, "Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide."

***RUAKH* (AIR) Homonym**

1. Air, one of the four elements.
2. Wind.
3. Breath.
4. Human intellectual soul. "That which remains of man after his death, and is not subject to destruction."

5. The lowest level of prophecy. The emanation of prophecy: “The divine inspiration of the prophets whereby they prophesy.” “Generally used with God,” in the sense that it is divinely caused.
6. Intention, will. “Generally used with God.”

Instance of Definition 1, Elemental Air, Contextualized:

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void (*tohu v'vohu*); and darkness (*khoshekh*) [was] upon the face of the deep. **And the spirit of God (*ruakh elokim*) moved (*merakhefet*) upon the face of the waters.**” (Genesis 1:1-2)

One might expect Maimonides to *deny* that the “spirit” of *God* moving on the waters was the corporeal element of air. *Rashi* does deny it in his poetic comment: “The Throne of Glory was suspended in the air and hovered over the face of the water with the breath of the mouth of the Holy One.” *Rashi* exalts to the mystic realm this “breath of the mouth,” far above physical or cosmological concerns. Maimonides takes a different road in Guide 2:30, his explanation of the stages of *Maaseh Bereshit*, the process of creation. In that chapter, he interprets these verses in what seem to be Aristotelian fashion. One obvious exception is that he invests this cosmology with creation *ex nihilo*, which is the signal that un-Aristotelian miracles will figure significantly in the Guide’s cosmology. Having willed this miraculous creation, God creates the “heaven and the earth” in all their constituent *matter*. The Bible’s first use of the word “earth” refers not to elemental “earth” but to the formless sublunar hyleic matter. The contrast of the “heaven” to the “earth” is that the *matter* of “heaven” is the uniquely unchanging *fifth element*, eternal *a parte post*. Since that sublunar matter does not include this fifth element, but only the four lower ones, the earth *cries*: *tohu v'vohu* (usually translated “unformed and void” but he relies, in Guide 2:5, on a Midrash that interprets *vohu* as crying, onomatopoeically, like “boohoo”). In its first division, this lower hyle is formed into “darkness,” *khoshekh*. “Darkness” is actually elemental *fire* when seen in its natural proper place above elemental *air*, otherwise we should expect to see the sky surrounded with flame and we do not (Guide 2:30). The elemental “fire” in its proper place is transparent. Rather than flames, what we see is a transparent sphere of elemental fire, which is called “darkness.” This elemental fire is above the *ruakh elokim*, “spirit of God,” which is the elemental *air*. This elemental air then moves upon the face of the elemental *waters*. These waters are above *elemental earth*, which appears for the first time in Genesis 1:10. Genesis only then distinguishes this elemental earth from the more generalized sense of “earth” as *matter*, since “earth” in its first use in line 1:2 was the general hyleic matrix. Actually, these elements when isolated in their proper place, unmixed with each other, do not exist *for us*. It is only when they form mixtures, which they have not yet done in this account, that they exist for us and are visible to us. This is also true of hyle, unformed matter. It exists, but not for us, until it is *in-formed*. The reason the text couples *ruakh* with the name of God, *elokim*, is that the movement of the air (i.e., its “hovering,” *merakhefet*), is ultimately caused by God. The spheres rotate out of love of God, who they cannot reach though they constantly try. This rotation produces the diurnal solar alternation that engenders *wind*, which is Definition 2 of *ruakh*. Moreover, the wind forces the elements into each other’s “proper places” so that they collide and combine to provide substance, upon which God emanates the *forms* of the things that only then exist for us. Thus, the meaning of *v'ruakh elokim merakhefet* is the miraculous and ongoing instantiation by which God makes the universal reality present to us.

Instances of Definition 2, Wind, Contextualized:

“And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all [that] night; [and] when it was morning, **the east wind (*v'ruakh*) brought the locusts.**” (Exodus 10:13)

“And the Lord turned a mighty strong **west wind (*ruakh*)**, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt.” (Exodus 10:19)

Maimonides considers *wind* separately from *air*, although the elemental air in the first proof-text becomes a hovering wind blowing from the spinning cosmos. Definition 1 is about *what makes up* God’s creation: the created elements. Definition 2 is about the dynamic creative *action* of the elements themselves. The wind causes this action by pushing the four elements from their “proper places.” The elements must return to their proper

places, by the most direct path, and this to-and-fro movement causes the elemental mixtures from which all corporeal things are created. Maimonides quotes the latter passage in Guide 2:30, in which he explains each step of the mystery of creation, and particularly the hovering of the *ruakh elokim*:

“It was here necessary to use the term *ruakh elokim* (in Genesis 1:2), because air is described here as in motion (*merakhefet*), and the motion of the air is, as a rule, ascribed to God (*tanuat ha-ruakh tamid m'yukheset l'hashem*); compare... ‘And the Lord turned a mighty strong west wind.’”

R. Abraham, quoting both our proof-texts in the context of his exposition of the natural system of cause and effect, echoes his father: “The wind depends on God’s will and desire” (*Guide to Serving God*, 229, and the section from 229-237). Our two proof texts from Exodus chapter 10 tell the story of the plague of locusts that God inflicted upon Egypt. Following divine instruction, Moses raised his staff over Egypt, and the Lord caused a wind from the east to cover the land with locusts. Pharaoh begs Moses to pray that God remove the plague, which He does, with a west wind. Divine punishment and providence are always miraculous since they disrupt natural order.

Instances of Definition 3, *Breath*, Contextualized:

“But he, [being] full of compassion, forgave [their] iniquity, and destroyed [them] not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they [were but] flesh; a *wind (ruakh)* that passeth away, and cometh not again.” (Psalms 78:38-39)

This proof-text for Definition 3 contradicts the proof-text for Definition 4. This *ruakh* departs at death and does not return, but that latter *ruakh* returns unto God who gave it. The distinction is between breath and spirit. Both quotations appear in Maimonides’ *Treatise on Resurrection*, chapter 8, Maimonides’ last treatise, which is like an appendix to the Guide. Maimonides there rebuts allegations that he did not believe in corporal resurrection. This charge was unfair, since, in other works, he made statements supporting resurrection, and it is one of his thirteen dogmas of faith (Commentary on the Mishnah: Introduction to *Helek*). His argument for resurrection has three steps. *First*, he admits that the majority of biblical statements say there is no life after death. He quotes our proof-text, that the breath departs and does not return. *Second*, he quotes the contradictory Ecclesiastes proof-text, below, Definition 4, that the spirit returns to God. The explanation of the contradiction is that the Bible uses the term equivocally, in the first case it refers to the respiration of animal life, and in the second to the intellectual soul that joins with the unitary intellect when severed from its bodily anchor. This soul is not subject to generation/corruption, for its creation is miraculous. Still its eternal persistence is *natural*:

“This is something which is part of nature and this is what the books of prophecy call the soul or the spirit in partnership with God... This is the law of nature. (Lit. this is what is in nature).” (Translation: Fred Rosner, *Moses Maimonides’ Treatise on Resurrection*, Jason Aronson Publ., 1997, p. 43)

The *third* step of his argument is to acknowledge two quotes from Daniel that do seem to argue for resurrection: 12:2 and 12:13. His explanation for these is that resurrection is a *miracle*, and, since it is a miracle, it is inexplicable. Job had not understood this. While the natural course is that our breath passes away and does not come again, it is also natural that our miraculous human soul shall return to God. And, furthermore, the natural course cannot exclude the miracle of bodily resurrection. Moreover, the *Treatise*, ch. 10, concludes that even greater than resurrection is the greatest miracle of all: the divine providence that rewards the Jews’ compliance and punishes their transgressions, wholly apart from whatever their natural fate would be.

“And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein [is] the breath (*ruakh*) of life.” (Genesis 7:15)

This proof-text is included to eliminate any ambiguity: the subject of Definition 3 is the respiratory process we share with the animal kingdom.

Instance of Definition 4, *Intellectual Soul*, Contextualized:

“Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the *spirit (v'ha-ruakh)* shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all [is] vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 12:6-8)

Here we distinguish the *spirit* from the *breath* of Definition 3, which “passes away and does not come again.” For the *spirit*, in this sense, is the acquired intellect man has made of his potential intellect. This intellect will lose its bodily trappings and unify with *intellect* as a whole, returning “unto God who gave it.” While the text of Ecclesiastes seems despondent, Maimonides takes it as hopeful, and contrasts it to the animal breath in Definition 3, doomed not to persist beyond the grave.

Instances of Definition 5, Prophetic Inspiration, Contextualized:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the *spirit* (*ha-ruakh*) which [is] upon thee, and will put [it] upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear [it] not thyself alone.” (Numbers 11:16-17)

“And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that [was] upon him, and gave [it] unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, [that], when the *spirit* (*ha-ruakh*) rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease (*v'yitnabu v'lo yisafu*).” (Numbers 11:25)

“Now these [be] the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man [who was] raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The *spirit* (*ruakh*) of the Lord spake by me, and his word [was] in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men [must be] just, ruling in the fear of God.” (2 Samuel 23:1-3)

The first two passages from Numbers 11, about the first Sanhedrin, go together. They refer to several significant issues in prophecy. The most important point for Maimonides here is the humility that must accompany the true prophet and is necessary for all students of divine science. The third passage features David, who exemplified humility, as did the members of the Sanhedrin. Because of this they both participated in the *ruakh ha-kodesh* of prophetic inspiration. See essay below, “The New Elders.”

Instances of Definition 6, Intention/Will, Contextualized:

“A fool uttereth all his *mind* (*rukho*): but a wise [man] keepeth it in till afterwards.” (Proverbs 29:11)

Maimonides understands the *ruakh* the fool utters as “his intention and will.” He quotes this passage because he wants to portray the cause of the fool’s foolishness, which he does in Guide 3:12:

“Men frequently think that the evils in the world are more numerous than the good things; many sayings and songs of the nations dwell on this idea. They say that a good thing is found only exceptionally, whilst evil things are numerous and lasting....The origin of the error is to be found in the circumstance that this ignorant man...judge(s) the whole universe by examining one single person. For an ignorant man believes that the whole universe only exists for him; as if nothing else required any consideration. If, therefore, anything happens to him contrary to his expectation, he at once concludes that the whole universe is evil. If, however, he would take into consideration the whole universe, form an idea of it, and comprehend what a small portion he is of the universe, he will find the truth.”

Job, who was a fool, comes to this illumination only after turning from his self-centered outlook. Maimonides continues:

“They wonder that a person, who became leprous in consequence of bad food, should be afflicted with so great an illness and suffer such a misfortune; or that he who indulges so much in sensuality as to weaken his sight, should be struck with blindness! and the like. What we have, in truth, to consider is this: —the whole mankind at present in existence, and *a fortiori*, every other species of animals, form an infinitesimal portion of the permanent universe. Comp. ‘Man is like to vanity’ (Psalms 144:4); ‘How much less man, that is a worm; and the son of man, which is a worm’ (Job 25:6); ‘How much less in them who dwell in houses of clay’ (Job 4:19); ‘Behold, the nations are as a drop of the bucket’ (Isaiah 40:15). ...It is of great advantage that man should know his station, and not erroneously imagine that the whole universe exists only for him. We hold that the universe exists because the Creator wills it so; mankind is low in rank as compared with the uppermost portion of the universe, viz., with the spheres and the star.”

Note the pairing of the Job quotes with the Isaiah passage (our final proof-text). Humility is the realization that the universe does not turn about me. Job complained that bad things happen to him for no reason. But it is not so.

Maimonides lists three explanations for these evils. Evils occur because men possess a physical body; because they hurt each other; and because they fail to prevent these evils. God does not cause them. His purposes in all this are to some extent discernible, but only to the humble “who keepeth it in till afterwards.” They are not apparent to the fool who is too full of himself to notice them. The wise realize that they are “a drop” in the cosmic “bucket.” They patiently pursue whatever knowledge they can attain, not complaining of what they do not yet understand.

“And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, [and] kingdom against kingdom. And the *spirit* (*ruakh*-intention, will) of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards.” (Isaiah 19:2-3)

Maimonides retranslates “The spirit of Egypt shall fail” to mean, “Her *intentions* will be frustrated, and her plans will be obscured.” Isaiah prophesied that the Egyptians would destroy themselves in civil war. Knowing this, Josiah thought his righteousness would allow him to prevail over these Egyptians (see my essay on Josiah, Guide 1:38, and Rashi on 2d Chron., 35:22). The connection between this Isaiah passage and Josiah is made most clearly in a *Kinnah* of Elazar ha-Kalir (7th cent. poet). Jeremiah had warned Josiah to let the Egyptians pass through the land. It was not Josiah’s destiny to stop them. They would only be defeated by themselves, “Egyptians against the Egyptians,” as Isaiah prophesied. Josiah foolishly relied on the Leviticus 26:6, “And the sword shall not go through your land,” not realizing that the Jews hid idols behind their doors.

“[But] he [Josiah] stopped his [Pharaoh’s] hordes from marching to Mesopotamia

So that ‘no sword should pass through’ Ephraim

He failed to heed the seer [Jeremiah] who said to turn back (*lashuv akhuraim*)

For it was divinely revealed that ‘I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians...

They trapped him and made him a target for their arrows

And shot three hundred arrows into him...

The breath of his lips burst forth from his mouth:

‘It is HaShem who is righteous for I have disobeyed His utterance.’ (*Complete Artscroll Tisha B’av Service*, p. 185)

Both Josiah and the Egyptians are like the fool in the prior quote: they blurt out their own righteousness, but fail to heed the true voice of prophecy. This is because they have set their will and intention before God’s will and intention. The will and intentions of God are *masked*. The mask is theirs, not His. Their self-centered imaginations prevent their seeing anything else.

“Who hath directed the *spirit* (*ruakh*) of the Lord, or [being] his counsellor hath taught him?” With whom took he counsel, and [who] instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? *Behold, the nations [are] as a drop of a bucket*, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.” (Isaiah 40:13-15)

Maimonides retranslates this proof-text: “Who knows the *order* fixed by His *will*, or perceives the system of His Providence in the existing world, that he may tell us?” The whole passage should remind us of the divine rebuke to Job. In Guide 3:15, he continues this thought:

“You must not be mistaken and think that the spheres and the angels were created for our sake. Our position has already been pointed out to us, ‘Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket.’ Now compare your own essence with that of the spheres, the stars, and the Intelligences, and you will comprehend the truth, and understand that man is superior to everything formed of earthly matter, but not to other beings; he is found exceedingly inferior when his existence is compared with that of the spheres, and *a fortiori* when compared with that of the Intelligences. Comp. ‘Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants: and his messengers he charged with folly: how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?’ (Job 4:18, 19)...The ‘servants’ referred to in this place are the angels; whilst by the term ‘his messengers’ the spheres are undoubtedly meant. Eliphaz

himself, who uttered the above words, explains this...saying, ‘Behold, he putteth no trust in his holy ones; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight, how much more abominable and filthy is man, who drinketh iniquity like water’ (Job 15:15, 16)...Their meaning is this: How much less in man who is abominable and filthy, in whose person crookedness or corporeality is mixed up and spread through all his parts.”

The three Definition 6 proof-texts for *ruakh* as “will” and “intention” compare human to divine will. Job, who represents human will, could not recognize the divine will, being too concerned with his own. God’s will seems masked. Once Job achieved humility, the mask fell away. He could begin to recognize the divine will. He could enter the ranks of David and the new elders. He could then begin serious inquiry into life, death, eternal life, and the miracles of creation, providence and resurrection, the *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*.

THE NEW ELDERS

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. *And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit (ha-ruakh) which [is] upon thee, and will put [it] upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear [it] not thyself alone.*” (Numbers 11:16-17)

“And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that [was] upon him, and gave [it] unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, [that], when the *spirit (ha-ruakh)* rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease (*v’yitnabu v’lo yisafu*).” (Numbers 11:25)

“Now these [be] the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man [who was] raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, *The spirit (ruakh)* of the Lord spake by me, and his word [was] in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men [must be] just, ruling in the fear of God.” (2 Samuel 23:1-3)

These passages introduce the lowest level of prophecy, *ruakh ha-kodesh*, i.e., *divine inspiration*, Definition 5. They feature the new Elders of Israel and King David, both exemplars of this level of prophecy.

Because Moses is the most humble of men, he has a special direct relationship with God. He represents the *intermediary* in prophecy. That is why God directs him to create the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the body of seventy-one elders who judged and legislated for Israel. The Midrash (Rashi, *ad loc.*) explains that like a candle kindling other candles, Moses inspires these men without diminishing his own prophetic light, as their intermediary. God talks with Moses, not with the elders, “And I will come down and talk with thee there” (i.e., not with them. See my notes at Guide 1:10).

The reason these elders merit this revelation is that now they too are humble. These are not the same elders of Israel who banqueted while perceiving the vision of the Throne of Glory (Exodus 24:11, see my note on the Elders, Guide 1:5). God delayed the punishment of those elders until the “burning” at Taverah (Numbers 11:3), just before the inauguration of the Sanhedrin. The surviving elders were the most distinguished of a group of very distinguished men. Pharaoh appointed them supervisors of the Hebrew slaves, but since they had mercy on the slaves, the Egyptians beat them: as it says, “the officers of the children of Israel were beaten” (Exodus 5:14). The Midrash comments, “Now they shall be chosen in their greatness, just as they had suffered in their [Israel’s] distress” (*Sifrei Beha’alotekha* 1:42:16).

Maimonides notes that the historic members of the Sanhedrin possessed the intellectual and moral attainments required of the student of divine science. They were wise, judicious and humble. As David said in the proof-text above, which was his last prophecy: “He that ruleth over men [must be] just, ruling in the fear of God.” The Sanhedrin’s members must also know Torah and the learned sciences (Mishneh Torah, *Sanhedrin*, 2:1). They are true legislators and not mere politicians

Maimonides focuses on the *quality* of the elders' prophecy. In the Introduction to the Guide, he quotes the last three words of the verse above (KJV version): "they prophesied, and did not cease (*v'yitnabu v'lo yisafu*)." The words *lo yisafu* can be translated two contradictory ways: either they prophesied once only, or they prophesied ceaselessly. Maimonides agrees with Rashi and Midrash that they prophesied once, not with *Targum* and KJV that they "did not cease." At the lowest level of prophecy, the initiate obtains a single flash of insight rarely:

"Some perceive the prophetic flash at long intervals; this is the degree of most prophets. By others only once during the whole night is a flash of lightning perceived. This is the case with those of whom we are informed, 'They prophesied, *but they did so no more*' (Numbers 11:25, JPS 1917. "Flash" is a common Sufic term)."

Guide 2:45 is Maimonides' taxonomy of the eleven levels of non-Mosaic prophecy. He quotes this proof-text to represent the lowest level of actual prophecy, the divine inspiration of *ruakh ha-kodesh*:

"(2) The second degree is this: A person feels as if something came upon him, and as if he had received a new power that encourages him to speak. He treats of science, or composes hymns, exhorts his fellow-men, discusses political and theological problems; all this he does while awake, and in the full possession of his senses. Such a person is said to speak by the *holy spirit (ruakh ha-kodesh)*. David composed the Psalms, and Solomon the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon by this spirit; also Daniel, Job, Chronicles, and the rest of the Hagiographa were written in this holy spirit; therefore they are called *ketuvim* (Writings), i.e., written by men inspired by the holy spirit. Our Sages mention this expressly concerning the Book of Esther. In reference to such holy spirit, David says: 'The spirit of the Lord spoke in me, and his word is on my tongue' (2 Sam. 33:2, the third proof-text of Definition 5); i.e., the spirit of the Lord caused him to utter these words. This class includes the seventy elders of whom it is said, 'And it came to pass when the spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, *but they did so no more*' (Num. 11:25, the second proof-text for Definition 5)."

David is the exemplar of the new Elders of Israel. He is a "second degree" prophet (Guide 2:45—the first degree involves inspired acts, not words). This means that on rare occasions the *ruakh ha-kodesh* prophetically inspired him. Maimonides links David to the Sanhedrin in his Commentary on *Pirkei Avot*, 4:4, a chapter about the virtue of humility, which quotes this proof-text. He considers David to be one of the Sanhedrin's historic leaders. The key is that, like Moses, David is humble:

"Thus in the instance of David, 'the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel;' he is an honored king whose kingdom became great...he is the star which stepped forth out of Jacob...and he is a prophet and the greatest of the seventy elders, as it was said (2 Sam. 23:8) 'who sits as the counselor at the academy.' Nevertheless, David said (Psalms 51:190), 'a broken and contrite heart God will not despise.' There are many of these virtues which denote the ultimate of modesty." (Trans. Arthur David, *Commentary to Mishnah Aboth*, Bloch Publ., NY, 1968, p. 67-68.)

The point is that the student of divine science might expect to attain such prophetic inspiration, the *ruakh ha-kodesh*, but only if he exercises, as Job finally did, humility before contradictions in divine science. The humble student of divine science will merit the descent of divine inspiration and, perhaps, prophecy.

Note that in our proof-text, David's connection to God is not direct, but mediated by the *ruakh ha-shem*, that speaks through him: "The spirit of the Lord spake through me" *ruakh hashem diber bi*. Maimonides understands the *ruakh* as an intermediary created by God. It is the active intellect.

GUIDE 1:43 ANGEL WINGS / CONCEALMENT

By turning to the divine science, the student brings himself under the wings of divine providence.

Providence is the subject of *Maaseh Merkava*, one of the concealed subjects of Jewish lore. Its key is the relationship between God, man and the mediators between them. These mediating presences are angels, *malakhim*.

OVERVIEW

Any incorporeal causative force apart from God is an angel. That definition includes the Platonic forms and the Aristotelian formal causes. They are the *pamalia* that God “consults” before acting (Guide 2:6, Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 38b). This definition of angel includes the “separate intellects,” *sikhlim ha-nivdalim*, the minds moving the cosmic spheres. It also includes all natural forces. Nature is the divine stamp, *teva*, which God places on His creation. These natural forces are all “good,” that is, they are fit for their intended purposes and *permanent*. The active intellect is a very special angel, the “Prince of the world,” *sar ha-olam* (Guide 2:6). The prophets meet this force in their visions. It actualizes potentials and in-forms matter. It is our true form. We seek to achieve the active intellect in our capacity as potential intellects.

The *wing* biblically associated with angels serves several metaphorical functions, concealed by our chapter but revealed in Guide 1:49. The wing represents praise and immediateness. Men dream of flight, and therefore desire wings: such positive, desired attributes become metaphors of *praise*. We praise angels by attributing wings to them. Man sometimes praises God with positive corporeal attributes. Maimonides gives limited approval to those homonyms that express our praise. Winged flight is a positive corporeal quality metaphorically projected on incorporeal angels in praise of their *speed* (Guide 1:49). What we really praise is their *immediateness*. The angels cause effects immediately, i.e., non-temporally and without any mediating entity. We may not praise God with “wings” because they are too material for His praise. However, since the angelic forces are beneath Him, we may attribute wings to them.

The wing also symbolizes *concealment*. The angelic forces are the unobservable truth concealed behind all appearance. Because of their concealment, the student needs great training to perceive them. Winged beings flit in and out of sight. Similarly, the angelic forces never completely reveal themselves to consciousness. We are too corporeal to grasp the true nature of these incorporeal forces. Our perception is too weak to take in their great light. The prophets sometimes briefly recognize these forces. Nonetheless, they immediately conceal them beneath wings of metaphor and verbal devices, like anagrams and puns (On all of this: Guide 1:49, 2:5, 2:6, and 2:29, and the Ibn Janāḥ reference in our chapter). It is necessary to conceal the apparent contradictions of divine science from those ill prepared to resolve them.

Maimonides wants us to meditate on the metaphorical extension of *wing* to *garment*, then to the furthestmost concealed *ends* of the world, subsequently to *concealment* itself, and, ultimately, to the concealed acts of divine providence in the world.

He employs several strategies of concealment in this chapter, particularly the concealment of *Targum*'s interpretation of several of his proof-texts. *Targum* consistently interprets “wing” as a symbol of providence in the mediating form of the Shekhina, the Temple, or mystical matrimony. Maimonides takes two proof-texts from Isaiah, apparently chosen at random, to illustrate his Definitions 3 and 4. However, in my essay below, “Isaiah’s Two Secrets,” I show that *Targum* grasped these two prophecies as a secret prognostication of doom for the Assyrian host. The well prepared student of divine science would know this. He would recognize that the Jews, by aligning their will with God’s will in prayer, receive this special miraculous providence.

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

KANAF (WING) Homonym

1. The wing of a flying creature.
2. The corners of garments, especially garments to which *tzitzit* are attached.
3. The farthest ends of the inhabited part of the earth.
4. Concealment.

Instance of Definition 1, *The wing of a flying creature*, Contextualized:

“Lest ye corrupt [yourselves], and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female. The likeness of any beast that [is] on the earth, the *likeness* of any winged (*kanaf*) fowl that flieth in the air... And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, [even] all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.”

(Deuteronomy 4:16-17, 19)

This is not the first use of *kanaf* in the Torah. That would be Genesis 1:21, which tells of the creation of birds. Maimonides has no interest in birds as birds. The concern in this passage is the deification of intermediary powers. Maimonides quotes “(the likeness of) any winged fowl” not for the fowl but for the *likeness: tavnit*. The root letters of *tavnit* connote construction and imagination. The imagination builds structures of false belief. It causes us to trust images thought to channel power. In Mishneh Torah, *Avoda Zara* 1:1, he explains that the idolators did not really worship the idols of birds or stars. These were just channels by which they imagined they could influence the incorporeal powers serving God. They honored the Master by praising His servants. This is precisely the false consciousness that is *bad*, i.e., unfit. The fit or proper use of consciousness is its devotion to the true divine cause of all things. In Guide 2:5, he explains that:

“The opinion of Aristotle, that the spheres are capable of comprehension and conception, is in accordance with the words of our prophets and our theologians or Sages. The philosophers further agree that this world below is governed by influences emanating from the spheres, and that the latter comprehend and have knowledge of the things which they influence. This theory is also met with in Scripture: comp. ‘The stars, even all the host of heaven which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations’ (4:19), that is to say, the stars, which God appointed to be the means of governing His creatures, *are not the objects of man’s worship*. It has therefore been stated clearly: ‘And to rule over the day and over the night’ (Genesis 1:18). The term ‘ruling’ here refers to the power which the spheres possess of governing the earth, in addition to the property of giving light and darkness. The latter property is the direct cause of genesis and destruction; it is described in the words, ‘And to divide the light from the darkness’ (*ibid.*). It is impossible to assume that those who rule a thing are ignorant of that very thing which they rule, if we take ‘to rule’ in its proper sense.”

In other words, the incorporeal causative powers are real rulers, but God nonetheless forbids our worship of any intermediary.

Instance of Definition 2, *The corners of garments*, Contextualized:

“Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four *quarters (kanfot)* of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest [thyself].” (Deuteronomy 22:12)

This particular iteration of the law of *tzitzit* interests commentators because it comes after the law of *sha’atnez*, which is the prohibition of linsey-woolsey garb. Maimonides considers *sha’atnez* a prohibition stemming from the historical idolatry of the pagans (Guide 3:35). He explains many otherwise inexplicable laws of the Torah this way. His special theory of inexplicable laws (*khukim*) holds that they prohibit ancient idolatrous practices. This links the prior proof-text prohibiting idolatry. He only mentions *tzitzit* specifically in Guide 3:32, the important

chapter about the continuing role of sacrifice in Jewish law. Sacrifice was an idolatrous practice employing physical objects. Judaism retained it in a very restricted way so that we can come to intellectual worship. *Tzitzit* are also physical objects retained for meditation, although they do not stem from idolatry. He contrasts *tzitzit* with animal sacrifices, in Guide 3:32:

“All these restrictions served to limit this (sacrificial) kind of worship, and keep it within those bounds within which God did not think it necessary to abolish sacrificial service altogether. *But* prayer and supplication can be offered everywhere and by every person. The *same* is the case with the commandment of *zizit* (Num. 15:38); *mezuzah* (Deut. 4:9; 9:20); *tefillin* (Exod. 13:9, 16); and similar kinds of divine service.”

These latter are entirely kosher and unrestricted. Talmud, *Khullin* 89a explains the meditational use of *tzitzit*: its *blue* thread causes us to meditate on the *blue* sky, and from thence ultimately to the *sapphire* throne of glory, the seat of the *merkava*. Similarly, *kanaf*, wing, extends metaphorically to the four corners of a *tzitzit*-bearing garment, from thence to the *garment* itself, and ultimately to what the garment *conceals*. Maimonides says that most of the meanings of *kanaf* are metaphorical extensions, suggesting that metaphorical extension is the means of concealing topics of divine science. The wing as *garment* also recalls the Midrash, *Pirke d'R. Eliezer* 3, “He covereth Himself with light as a garment, He stretches the heavens like a curtain,” quoted in Guide 2:27, where Maimonides relates this garment to the sapphire throne and to unformed hyllic matter.

Instances of Definition 3, *Ends of the earth*, Contextualized:

“Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; [and] caused the dayspring to know his place; that it might take hold of the *ends (b'kanfot)* of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it?” (Job 38:12-13)

This is the metaphorical extension of wing/corner/garment to the terrestrial “garment.” God asks Job if he could grasp the “wings” of the earth and shake as God did, when He drowned the wicked in Noah’s flood. Job learns from this that God’s providential intervention in history continues, which Job’s Aristotelianism had denied.

* * *

Maimonides uses the next two parallel Isaiah proof-texts (despite that they are made to stand for two different definitions of *kanaf*), and the first Ruth proof-text, in a concealing fashion. He does this by emphasizing the *pshat*, surface meaning, at the expense of the real meaning. He thus suits his means to his end. Since he wants us to use *kanaf* to mean “conceal,” he employs a methodology of concealment. In these cases, the *pshat* is different from the explanation given by the Aramaic *Targum* to these passages. He is unquestionably aware of this difference since, in a parallel case, he commends the *Targum*’s interpretation (Guide 2:29, and, see essay below, “Isaiah’s Two Secrets”). In each case, the concealed *Targum* is about the mystical marriage of the Jews and the Shekhina in the holy Temple. They are thus really concealing the subject of providence, the *Maaseh Merkava*.

* * *

“From the *uttermost part* (wing: *mi'knaf*) of the earth have we heard songs, [even] glory to the righteous. But I said, *My leanness, my leanness, (razi li razi li)* woe unto me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.” (Isaiah 24:16)

Maimonides wants the un-inquiring to take this quote-shard on its face this as a song of universal praise to God, heard from the farthest corners of the inhabited earth. But see essay below, “Isaiah’s Two Secrets.”

Instances of Definition 4, *Concealment*, Contextualized:

“And [though] the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, *yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner* (lit.: be winged) any more (*v'lo ykanaf od morekh*), but thine eyes shall see thy teachers” (Isaiah 30:20)

Once again, Maimonides’ seems to interpret the passage on its face: no longer will your teacher be concealed. However, see essay below, “Isaiah’s Two Secrets.”

“A man shall not take his father’s wife, nor discover his father’s *skirt (kanaf)*.” (Deuteronomy 23:1: but JPS 1917 and most others have Deuteronomy 22:30)

This is a classic metaphorical extension from *wing to skirt to concealment*. Father’s skirt reveals what is concealed beneath, his genitals, and by further metaphorical understanding, his marital relationship. The Talmud explains the verse as a law of Levirate marriage (marriage of a widow to the husband’s brother). A man may not marry the widow of his father’s brother who died childless, since the law intends the man’s father to marry her (Talmud, *Yevamot* 49a). This relates thematically to the next two passages from Ruth.

“And it came to pass at midnight, that the man [Boaz] was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his *feet (marglotav)*. And he said, Who [art] thou? And she answered, I [am] Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy *skirt (kh’nafekha)* over thine handmaid; for thou [art] a near kinsman.” (Ruth 3:8-9)

Critically, Ruth reveals Boaz’ feet. *Feet*, Maimonides explicitly reminds us in our chapter (but in connection with his final proof-text, Isaiah 6:2), are the incorporeal *causes*. That is because they point out, like the male organ, which *causes* the production of children. Procreation is the only metaphor in the human language for divine creation (Guide 1:28). Thus, the *kanaf* conceals the incorporeal causes. But here, again, he conceals that *Targum* takes *kanaf* differently. While Maimonides emphasizes the surface meaning (that Boaz is to conceal her with his garment), *Targum*, by contrast, translates this quote-shard “call thy name over thine maidservant, to take me to wife,” *v’yitkarei shemekha al amatekha l’misvei l’intosh*. Rashi explains: “*spread therefore thy skirt*: the skirt of your garments to cover me with your cloak, and this is a term connoting marriage.” What Rashi means is that Boaz’ *tallit*, which he spreads over Ruth, is like a marriage canopy. The *tallit* is the *tzitzit*-bearing cape that forms a marriage canopy (*khupa*), symbolizing the *Shekhina*’s marriage to the Jews. It also symbolizes creation’s marriage of form and matter.

“(11) And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and [how] thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. (12) The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings (knafav) thou art come to trust (*l’khasot*: for protection).” (Ruth 2:11-12)

This is from Ruth’s first meeting with Boaz in his field. Here Maimonides aligns his interpretation with *Targum*’s general approach to *kanaf*. *Targum* expansively translates line 12:

“May you receive full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, in the world to come, because you have come to be a proselyte and to seek shelter under the shadow of His glorious Presence (*shekhinat yakria*). Through that merit you will be saved from the punishment of *Gehinom*, so that your portion will be with Sarah and Rebecca and Rachel and Leah.” (Trans. Samson H. Levey)

Maimonides says, in our chapter:

“In this sense, I think, the word (*kanaf*) is figuratively applied to God (as in our proof-text) and to angels, for angels are not corporeal, according to my opinion, as I shall explain. Ruth 2:12 must therefore be translated ‘Under whose concealment (*knafav*) thou art come to trust’; and wherever the word occurs in reference to angels, it means concealment.”

Not that she came under the “wings” of God, for He has no wings, but under His concealing protection. That is, as a proselyte, she comes under the “concealment” of the providence of the divine *Shekhina*, no longer subject to natural fate. Ruth, David’s ancestress, is a special heroine of Maimonides because of his interest in proselytes. Since they choose Torah, they are closer to it intellectually than those merely born to it, a position directly contrary to that of Yehuda Ha-Levy (c.1075–1141) in his *Kuzari* (*Letter to Obadiah the Proselyte*, P. 475, *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. I. Twersky, Behrman House, 1975).

TWAIN

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the *seraphims*: each one had six wings (*shesh knafaim shesh knafaim l'ekhad*); with twain he covered his face (*panav*), and with twain he covered his feet (*raglav*), and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] the Lord of hosts: the whole earth [is] full of his glory.” (Isaiah 6:1-3)

This passage is the Isaiah version of the *Maaseh Merkava* vision found in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

A form of the term *kanaf* appears just *before* the quote-shard, but not *in* it. That is because Maimonides' emphasis here is on the terms “face” and “feet” (See Guide 1:37 and 1:28), not on “wings.” The “face” hidden by “wings” means concealment of the *origin* of mediating causes. The “feet” hidden by “wings” means the concealment of the *effect* of mediating causes. “Face” means the separate intellects, *ha-sikhlim ha-nivdalim* (*Targum Onkelos* to Exodus 33:23, interpreted in Guide 1:37).

Thus, when God tells Moses that He will hide him in a cleft, so that he will see what God does (“My back parts”), but “My face shall not be seen,” *Targum* translates: “Those *before* Me shall not be seen,” and those “*before* Me” are the separate intellects. We see the action of the spheres but the incorporeal intelligences animating them “shall not be seen.” The “face,” these separate intellects, are the hidden causes that turn the spheres. The turning spheres *cause* the mixing of the elements that creates all physical bodies. By *causing* the mixing, the “souls of the spheres” are the hidden “feet.” Both because of our material limitations and the subtlety of the incorporeal essences we do not get to see the causative power (the *face* hidden by the *wing*). Similarly, the effects (the *feet* hidden by the *wing*), we barely comprehend.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel (*ad loc.*) explains this slightly differently, but well:

“*The cause of his existence (that of the angel) is hidden and concealed*: The first concealment is the relation of the incorporeal entity's (the angel's) existence to the Source of that existence, which relation is symbolized as ‘face’ (*panav*) in the sense of that which came before (*l'fanav*) His face. The second concealment is the relation of the entity to the things necessarily caused from it, which the proof-text calls ‘feet,’ meaning the effects brought forth by this entity. The first concealment is more hidden, but not completely beyond the comprehension of men possessing the highest powers of apprehension. The second concealment is overcome through intellectual investigation (‘*after long study*’). ‘*The actions of the intelligences are not...understood, for two reasons*’: We are unable to apprehend the ways of their action from the appearances of the surface of things, as, for example, the ways the active intellect introduces form into matter, and how it actualizes man's potential intellect. This is due to two reasons, one from their standpoint, and one from ours. From ours, because our intellectual apprehension does not employ all its powers. From the vantage of the incorporeal intellects, man cannot grasp their essence until he has overcome the barriers to his intellectual apprehension. These two secrets are the two wings concealing each of the two concealments [those of the *face* and those of the *feet*].” (My trans.)

Maimonides' doubling rationale of the actions of providence leads us back to reconsider the previous two passages from Isaiah and the doubled secret they conceal. See essay below.

Note that Maimonides says here that the sense of concealment is the only sense of *kanaf* applicable both “to God and to angels.” This is due to their status as concealed entities. Still, he never gives an instance of it applied to God *directly* in the form of visible *wings*. Here, the wings adorn the *seraphim*, not God. In the previous proof-text, it was clear that God's “wing,” which providentially concealed Ruth, was a mere metaphorical wing, not a wing visible to either sight or to prophecy. That is because, as he explains in Guide 1:49, we do not apply to God imagery drawn from species below man.

The choice of the account of the *merkava* vision from Isaiah rather than the vision from Ezekiel, requires explanation. The Ezekiel version reads: “And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings,” where, in the Isaiah version it says: “each one had six wings.” Why was Ezekiel two wings short? Talmud *Hagigah* 13b, suggests that those missing wings hid the seraphim’s feet, i.e., the effects of the causes, but also cleverly conveying the sense that the feet represent the male sexual organ:

“One verse says: *Each one had six wings*; and another verse says: *And every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings!* — There is no contradiction: the one refers to the time when the Temple was no longer standing, [when] as it were, the wings of the living creatures were diminished. Which of them were taken away? —....our Rabbis said: Those with which they cover their feet, for it is said: *And their feet were straight feet* (Ezek. I, 7), and if [these wings] had not been taken away, whence could he have known! (i.e., that their feet were straight)— Perhaps, [the feet] were exposed and he saw them. For if you do not say so, [then from the words], *As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of man*, [one might infer] likewise that [the wings covering them] were taken away! They (i.e., their faces) must therefore have been exposed, and he saw them; similarly here, they (i.e., their feet) were exposed, and he saw them. But how can they be compared? Granted that it is customary to expose one’s face before one’s master, but it is not customary to expose one’s feet before one’s master!”

In other words, Maimonides chose the wings of the Isaiah vision because, unlike the wings of the Ezekiel vision, they *concealed* the effects of the causes, and did so by concealing the sexual content of the vision, which one did not customarily expose before one’s master. (I am indebted to David Bakan, who reminds me of this connection in his posthumous volume, *Maimonides’ Cure of Souls*, 102, Bakan, Merkur, Weiss, SUNY 2009)

At the end of our chapter, Maimonides promises another explanation of why we attribute flight to angels. That chapter is 1:49. As detailed in our opening notes, he explains there that we praise angels with the symbol of flight because of the immediacy of the incorporeal causes, and the flitting quality of our perception of them.

ISAIAH’S TWO SECRETS

Maimonides employs two proof-texts from Isaiah in our chapter, and does so in a way that conceals *Targum’s* recognition that they foretell the coming destruction of the Assyrian army, a celebrated historical miracle. The seer’s real secret is that when Jews align their will with God’s will they escape natural fate. It can happen suddenly.

This is the first passage, in its contextual surroundings, from Isaiah chapter 24:

“(12) In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction....(14) They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, *they shall cry aloud from the sea*. (15) Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires, [even] the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea. (16) From the *uttermost part* (wing: *mi’knaf*) of the earth have we heard songs, [even] glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, (*razi li razi li*) woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.... (23) *Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed*, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.” (Isaiah 24:12, 15-16, 23)

From the way he truncated this quote-shard, Maimonides would like the incurious to take it at face value that the song praising God coming from the farthest ends of the earth is a song of universal praise. The preceding line does speak of “the isles of the sea.” He includes it under Definition 3, which metaphorically extends *kanaf* to mean *the ends of the inhabited portion of the earth*. The problem is that the whole context of the Isaiah chapter makes line 15 depart from the prevailing tone of Isaiah’s dirge. The poem is really about the coming disasters of the Jewish people. The “isles of the sea” means the diaspora of Jewish exiles. Clearly, Maimonides knows this

and conceals it. He addresses this passage in Guide 2:29 where he recognizes that it concerns the Assyrian monarch Sennacherib and King Hezekiah of Judah. The context is set at 24:12: “In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction.” He writes:

“He speaks in a similar manner when he describes the poverty and humiliation of the people of Israel (the northern kingdom), their captivity and their defeat, the continuous misfortunes caused by the wicked Sennacherib when he ruled over all the fortified places of Judah (the southern kingdom), or the loss of the entire land of Israel when it came into the possession of Sennacherib.”

Targum interprets that God is glorified “in the isles of the sea,” to mean that Isaiah foretold the song the scattered *exiles* will sing after the destruction of their land (see *Targum* to line 13, with Malbim). The second part of the prophecy, according to *Targum*, at line 16, is that the Jews will return and rebuild the Temple. *Targum* translates “wing of the earth” as *beit mak’desha*, the Jerusalem Temple. *Targum’s* metaphor points to divine providence, the “wing” covering the Temple, which is the protection afforded by the divine indwelling, the *Shekhina*. The divine indwelling represents God’s providential concern for the covenantal people. The *Shekhina* takes them from the rigors of fate and reposes them in blessing.

Targum thus takes the verse as a prophecy in which the chorus of the scattered exile hears the future chorus of the returned remnant. Even though the whole context of the chapter is the history of Sennacherib, this particular clause is a prophecy of the longer future, in which Jews must make themselves a sanctuary for the indwelling of the *Shekhina*.

However, *Targum* proceeds in the latter clauses of line 16 to spell out the meaning of this prophecy for Sennacherib. First, *Targum* takes the words which KJV renders “my leanness, my leanness” (also JPS 1917: “I waste away, I waste away”) completely differently, to mean “my secret” (as does Judaica Press). The *Targum* notices that the statement is repeated, and thus it takes the latter part of the line to mean:

“The prophet said: A secret! A reward to the righteous is shown to me; A secret! A punishment for the wicked is revealed to me. Woe to the oppressors, for they shall be oppressed; and to those who spoil, for behold, they shall be spoiled” (*amar navi rav agar l’tzadikia itkhazi li raz puranut l’rashia it’glei li lanusya d’mitansin ulbilzuz baz’zin d’ha mibazin*. Trans., C.W.H. Pauli).

Rashi captures the sense when he says, “Woe is to me that these *two secrets* have been revealed to me, the secret of the retribution (*Targum’s* second secret) and the secret of the salvation (the first secret), for the salvation will be far off until the enemies come” (Judaica Press translation).

Targum continues the idea in line 23, as Maimonides notes in Guide 2:29, taking “the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed” to mean that the *worshippers* of the moon and sun, the Assyrians, shall be confounded and ashamed (the second secret), while the people shall enjoy years of prosperity (the first secret):

“At the end of the same prophecy, when Isaiah describes how God will punish Sennacherib, destroy his mighty empire, and reduce him to disgrace, he uses the following figure (24:23): ‘*Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign,*’ etc. This verse is beautifully explained by Jonathan, the son of Uzziel (*Targum*); he says that when Sennacherib will meet with his fate because of Jerusalem, the idolaters will understand that this is the work of God; they will faint and be confounded. He therefore translates the verse thus: ‘Those who worship the moon will be ashamed, and those who bow down to the sun will be humbled, when the kingdom of God shall reveal itself,’ etc. The prophet then pictures the peace of the children of Israel after the death of Sennacherib, the fertility and the cultivation of their land, and the increasing power of their kingdom through Hezekiah. He employs here the figure of the increase of the light of the sun and moon. When speaking of the defeated, he says that for them the light of the sun and moon will be diminished and darkened: in the same sense their light is

said to increase for the victorious. We can frequently notice the correctness of this figure of speech. When great troubles befall us, our eyes become dim, and we cannot see clearly because the *spiritus visus* is made turbid by the prevailing vapours, and is weakened and diminished by great anxiety and straits of the soul: whilst in a state of gladness and comfort of the soul the *spiritus visus* becomes clear, and man feels as if the light had increased. Thus the good tidings that the people shall dwell in Zion, and in Jerusalem, and shall weep no more, etc., conclude in the following manner: ‘*Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound*’ (Isaiah 30:26); that is to say, when God will raise them up again after they had fallen through the wicked Sennacherib.”

In other words, do not interpret the verse literally to mean that the moon and the sun will change their everlasting nature.

This paragraph from Guide 2:29 links both of Maimonides’ references in our chapter (the second one, 30:20, precedes by a few lines 30:26 quoted immediately above). In Isaiah 24 the sun and moon were “confounded,” while in Isaiah 30, the light of the sun and moon multiplied. Isaiah 30:20 was the first proof-text he gave for Definition 4, *concealment*. Here is that quote shard seen in its context:

“(19) For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee. (20) And [though] the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers *be removed into a corner* (lit.: be winged) any more (*v’lo ykanaf od morekh*), but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: (21) And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This [is] the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left... (23) Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures. (25) And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers [and] streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter, when the *towers (migdalim)* fall. (26) *Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun*, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.” (Isaiah 30:19-22, 23, 25, 26)

Once again, by the way he truncated his quote-shard, Maimonides wants the general run of his readers to take it on its face that your teacher will no longer be concealed, whoever this “enlightener” (מוריד / מאוריד) may be.

Since he likes the *Targum* on Isaiah 24:23, about the confounding of the sun and moon, he should also like the *Targum* on our proof-text 30:20. But he *conceals* it, just as he concealed the *Targum* to the first Isaiah proof text, 24:15, about the song from the wings of the earth. And this is no surprise, since Definition 4 is *concealment*, and he fits the method to the matter. The *Targum* translates the text “yet shall not thy teachers *be removed into a corner*” as *v’lo ysalek od shkhintei b’beit makdsha*: “no longer shall the *Shekhina* be removed from the Temple.” It takes “wing” as the Temple, and *morekh*, “your teacher,” as the *Shekhina*. The meaning is that after Hezekiah’s great *teshuva*, providence returns, and will not “be removed.”

The previous line, 30:19, “He shall be very gracious at the voice of thy cry, when He shall hear it, He will answer thee” is given a broad reading by *Targum*, in line with his doctrine of the two secrets, as two prayers, both of which will be granted. “He will assuredly shew thee compassion: the voice of thy prayer (*tzalotakh*) He will hear, and He will answer thy supplication (*ba’otakh*).” He takes the clause (in 30:20), “And [though] the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction,” surprisingly opposite to its *pshat*, rewriting it: “And the Lord shall give unto you the treasures of the enemy, and the spoil of the oppressor” (*vihav l’khon ha-shem nikhsei san’a ubizat m’ika*). In other words, according to his reading of 30:19-20, the God would answer their two

prayers with two acts: He would smash the enemy (the second secret), and return the Shekhina/providence (the first secret).

The prophet gives further murmurings of these secrets in this same chapter 30, for at 30:23 he tells us, “Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures.” This was news, because the expectation was that Sennacherib’s destruction would continue and that the Judahites would be exiled from their fertile land like the tribes of the northern kingdom had been in 722 BCE, 21 years before. (This may be Maimonides’ hidden reference from Ibn Janāḥ’s *Book of Roots*: that the “teachers” who are concealed means the fertilizing “rain” concealed from the demoralized Jews who did not expect to see it again. See Joel 2:23, where *moreh*, usually “teacher,” can mean “rain”).

But the return of rain was a consequence of the other great secret, which Isaiah alludes to in 30:25, “...in the day of the great slaughter, when the *towers (migdalim)* fall,” which *Targum* makes explicit: “*at the time of the ruin of the kings and their armies, in the day of the great slaughter, at the falling of the princes.*”

What was this great secret?

In 701, Sennacherib besieged hapless Jerusalem with a vast army. That *Passover* eve, Hezekiah and the Jews chanted Psalms to God (Midrash, *Exodus Rabba*, 18:5). Then, according to Isaiah 37:36, “The angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand (185,000): and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they [were] all dead corpses” (see parallel accounts: 2 Kings 19:35, 2 Chron. 32:21). The account is confirmed by Herodotus (plague of rats), Berosus (3d C. BCE Hellenistic Babylonian historian), but with silence in Sennacherib’s *Prism* (“[Hezekiah] himself, like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. I threw up earthworks against him—”). The parallel with the first Passover must have struck Maimonides as it did *Targum* in his rewrite of Isaiah 24:14: “they shall rejoice as they rejoiced on account of the mighty works which were done for them by the sea.” Just as the Angel of Death destroyed the Egyptian first-born while passing over the houses of the Jews, so the Angel destroyed the camp of the Assyrians but passed over Jerusalem.

This miracle of historic dimensions was the secret (*razi li*) concealed by the *wing* in the Isaiah accounts, as Maimonides knew. The prayers of the Jews had the power to destroy whole armies and return the Shekhina to Jerusalem. Why did he conceal it? Because the student of divine science must come to this meditation on his own.

That Maimonides would engage in this clever concealment should not surprise us, since he also engages in *jocular* concealment, in his treatment of Ibn Janāḥ.

IBN JANĀḤ

Jonah Ibn Janāḥ (Abu al-Walid Marwan) was a Jewish lexicographer and grammarian of the first half of the 11th century. He may have been born in Maimonides’ hometown of Cordova. He quoted the dictum, “Truth and Plato strove. Both of them are friends of ours, but truth is closer to us.” Maimonides would have sympathized with this sentiment.

Why does Maimonides mention him? He names no other rabbis of the post-classical period in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The only Jews cited are historic figures, and only through the Talmudic era. He names and quotes only Muslim, Christian and Pagan philosophers. In general, he assumes his audience would know the Jewish figures but might not be familiar with the gentile ones. Since he assumed the authoritative Jewish voice he did not feel the need to mention Jewish contemporaries.

Maimonides could have made the point he quotes Ibn Janāḥ for *without naming him*. Kafih, alone of the modern commentators, identifies the reference as a joke. Unfortunately, he smothers the joke in his pompous footnote 7, laboriously listing a dozen Talmudic puns. *Janāḥ* is Arabic for “wing,” Jonah is Hebrew for “dove.” His name would mean Dove son of Wing. It might have been a pseudonym, for he refers to himself in his writings in various ways (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, “Ibn Janāḥ, Jonah”).

The point Maimonides drew from Ibn Janāḥ was that *wing* means concealment. His Arabic speaking audience would recognize that his authority was the *son of wing*. He could hardly have found a better authority!

GUIDE 1:44 A VISION OF PROVIDENCE

The term *ayin* is homonymous in two large ways. 1) It is homonymous because it means both “fountain” and “eye.” These two are further complicated since “fountain” is understood both as a spring of water and also as a prophetic channel; while “eye” is both the organ of sight and the symbol of insight. 2) It is homonymous because when used with men it functions as the organ of the sense of sight; while with God it symbolizes both his special providential care as well as his being entirely *active*, by which we mean He is not passive or subject to passion. This second homonymity is a contrast between the *passivity* of human sensation, on the one hand, and God’s entirely *active* impassivity.

One path of interpretation, especially useful in this extremely compressed chapter, seeks where Maimonides used his proof-texts elsewhere in the Guide. From this examination, we see him deepening his understanding of divine providence, the *Maaseh Merkava*. Cross-references of this kind, together with certain other indications, lead to the following principles:

- **Preparation for prophecy:** Prophecy is a form of providence visited only upon those who are prepared intellectually to receive it, but divine will can prevent it. It does not rest upon the ignorant (Guide 2:42, 2:32).
- **Lesser versions of prophetic inspiration:** Nonetheless, the miracle of providence is that God does bestow lesser versions of prophetic inspiration upon the imaginations of the ignorant. (e.g., Hagar, Manoah, the Jewish masses at Sinai. Guide 2:42, 2:32)
- **Metaphor of praise:** To speak of God’s eyes is a metaphorical statement of providence, for God has no eyes. The Bible speaks in the “language of men.” Men use certain corporeal metaphors to praise God. It is appropriate to *interpret* such statements. Generally, they mean that God perceives or has knowledge of actions in our world. (Mishneh Torah, *Yesodei Ha-Torah* 1:9, Guide 1:46)
- **Metaphor of action:** The biblical language of prophecy uses expressions such as “His eyes behold, His eyelids try,” and “the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro,” to indicate a specific praise of God. We praise Him for always being *active*, in the sense that He is never *passive* or that anything about Him is *potential*. Potentiality “always implies non-existence.” God always acts upon, He is never acted upon. (1:46, 1:55).
- **The divine former:** A corollary of this *active* state is that God does not need senses to create sensation in His creatures. God manifests the idea of sight in thought, and from such a concept or *form* creates the miracle of sight, through His providential power to instantiate form. God also designs the “intellect which is the means of our comprehension” and endows us with it. It follows that there is “necessarily design in nature,” i.e., nature is the work of an intellectual being (3:19).

- **Universality of providence:** God’s providence extends over everything on earth. The expression “the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth” voices this *active* characteristic. This aspect of providence results in *justice*, extending to all beings generally subject to nature, but is constrained by *love*, when met with the intellectual devotion of men. (3:17)
- **Selectivity of providence:** Despite Aristotle, who (per Maimonides) held that God only concerns Himself with universals, God can select individuals for special providential care, and individuals can, through love, increase their measure of providential blessing (3:17).
- **Love defined as post-intellectual worship:** Man brings himself under the providential wings of the *Shekhina* through *love*. Love is service man performs *after* he has arrived at “knowledge of God and His works.” One will then “try to approach Him and strengthen the intellect, which is the link that joins you to Him.” This “highest kind of worship” is a “service of the heart” where a man “concentrates all his thoughts on the First Intellect, and is absorbed in these thoughts as much as possible.” This post-intellectual meditation results in special providential selection (2:51).

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

AYIN (EYE, FOUNTAIN) Homonym

1. Fountain, well
2. Eye
3. Providence, especially when used with God
4. Perception of the mind, not that of the senses

Instance of Definition 1 Contextualized:

“But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid [is] in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face. And the angel of the Lord found her by a *fountain* (*ayn*) of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, Sarai’s maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.” (Genesis 16:6-8)

Maimonides places well/fountain as Definition 1 of *ayin*. He does not want the bodily “eye” as the first and most material of his definitions, for he prefers progress toward the lexically more spiritual. This is so because Maimonides identifies “eye” as a popularly acceptable praise for God in Torah. By contrast, the fountain/well involves grossly physical earth and water. However, note that the Midrashic tradition makes *well* a divine channel (Midrash *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:9). Recall the Introduction to the Guide, where “well” was a symbol for Solomonic prophecy.

Maimonides first addresses the power of *sight* lexically in Guide 1:4. His first proof-text there, Genesis 29:2, also involved a fountain, when Jacob *looked* and *beheld* a well in the field, and met Rachel, who was a divine channel. She is his “well.” Similarly, Hagar’s encounter with the well connects to the appearance of the “angel of the Lord.” How does Maimonides interpret this prophetic encounter? He does not consider Hagar prepared for prophecy: she was “was not a prophetess” (Guide 2:42). He states the reason in Guide 2:32:

“[It is a] principle that it depends chiefly on the will of God who is to prophesy, and at what time; and that He only selects the best and the wisest. We hold that fools and ignorant people are unfit for this distinction. It is as impossible for any one of these to prophesy as it is for an ass or a frog; for prophecy is

impossible without study and training; when these have created the possibility, then it depends on the will of God whether the possibility is to be turned into reality.”

The speech she heard, or “imagined (*ala b’raionam*) [she] heard, was like the *bat kol*, so frequently mentioned by our Sages, and is something that may be experienced by men not prepared for prophecy” (2:42). Talmud, *Yoma* 9b, says of the *bat kol*: “After the later prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi had died, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel, but they still availed themselves of the *bat kol*” (lit., “daughter of a voice”). It is not prophecy, but, rather, a lesser form of inspiration that comes in sleep or trance, even to those unprepared intellectually for prophecy. It is an echo of the divine “once removed.” Talmud, *Baba Metzia* 59b, in the famous case of the “oven of Aknin” ruled that a *bat kol* does not override the normal process of legislation. The point is that prophecy manifests itself differently along a continuum. The Guide, at 2:45, catalogues eleven degrees of prophecy, though it seems that the *bat kol* is a degree below the first actual degree that he lists there. That Hagar, who is not a prophet, should receive a *bat kol*, is entirely a miracle of divine providence, which *selects* individuals for reward.

Instance of Definition 2, Eye, Contextualized:

“If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart [from her], and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman’s husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges [determine]. And if [any] mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, *Eye for eye* (*ayin takhat ayin*), tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (*regel takhat regel*).” (Exodus 21:22-24).

This proof-text is a clever choice, since Maimonides has no interest in *ayin* as a physical “eye.” Educated Jews recognize here that eye clearly does *not* mean eye. Compare Guide 1:28, “foot for foot,” where Maimonides similarly used this proof-text ostensibly to portray the physical meaning of *regel*, “foot.” In Mishneh Torah, *Nezikin, Hovel u’Mazik* 1:6, Maimonides rules that “eye for eye” is always interpreted, never taken literally, drawing on Talmud, *Baba Kama* 83b-84a, that it means an exchange (*takhat*) of monetary compensation. The conclusion is that we must exchange “eye for eye” when reading prophecy, by exchanging *sight* for *vision*. One understanding of “sight” unmentioned in this chapter is as a name for prophets: “seers.” In our comment to Guide 1:4, we noted a text omitted there: “Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the *seer* (*raah*): for [he that is] now [called] a prophet was beforetime called a *seer* (*raah*)” (1 Samuel 9:9). We see with our eyes, but the *seer* sees with prophetic *vision*. He does not mention this meaning because it distracts from his focus, which is providence. His focus here is on the *giver* of providential dispensation, not the *recipient* of prophecy.

Instances of Definition 3, Providence, Contextualized:

“Now Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him (Jeremiah), and look (*v’ayneikha*) well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee.” (Jeremiah 39:11-12)

Maimonides uses this proof-text to extend the corporeal eye metaphorically to the idea of providential care. Nebuzaradan keeps his providential “eye” on Jeremiah, not that he is actually looking at him. This is an interesting case of the evil gentile treating the prophet with more consideration than he got from his ostensible audience. The Midrash has it that Jeremiah refused this special favor. He chose to march in chains with his fellow Jews, until Nebuzaradan found out and restored him to privileged treatment. Observe how the ruler’s providence *selects* its special object from among the rest left to “natural” justice.

“And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the Lord, and the king’s house, and all Solomon’s desire which he was pleased to do, that the Lord appeared to Solomon *the second time* (*sheinit*), as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon. And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart (*aynai v’libi*) shall be there perpetually.” (1 Kings 9:1-3)

Maimonides says here that whenever *ayin* is used with God it is always figurative (*u’l’fi ha-shala zo neemar clapei ha-shem*). Specifically, this passage is the *divine* figurative extension from the previous *human* expression

of the providence of Nebuzaradan. In Mishneh Torah, *Yesodai Ha-Torah* 1:9, He explains that the phrase “eyes of the Lord” must be figurative, since God has no form or shape. He appears differently in every prophetic vision, a phenomenon that is “beyond Man’s intellect to investigate or comprehend.” Thus, it is not that God’s has physical “eyes” and “heart” on the Temple, but, as Maimonides retranslates, “My providence and My will” are on the Temple (*hashgakhti v’rtzoni*; *Targum* has “My Shekhina and My will”). These are, indeed, “beyond Man’s intellect.” When the people aligned their mind with the divine mind as much as they could, they prophetically perceived the architectural form of the Temple. They then built this Temple. Because of this act of *love*, providential care showered on them. Maimonides always pairs providential preferment with intellectual alignment. The Temple is associated with Solomon, who, in the Midrash, linked concepts together to draw knowledge hidden deep in prophetic *wells*. Because he had aligned his mind with God’s will he was vouchsafed prophecy “the second time.”

“But the land, whither ye go to possess it, [is] a land of hills and valleys, [and] drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes (aynei) of the Lord thy God [are] always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, *to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul*, that I will give [you] the rain of your land in its due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.” (Deuteronomy 11:11-14)

On one level the passage is about the difference in the nature of rainfall and irrigation in Israel, as contrasted with the regimes of oriental despotism in Mesopotamia and Egypt, reliant as they were on government run irrigation. However, the passage extends the idea of the previous proof-text. Now Maimonides turns from the special providence of those who worship God in *love*, to the *selective* providence for the *land* of Israel. The rule is that God rewards devotion with rain, but punishes rebellion with exile. “The eyes of the Lord, your God, are always upon it” to see what it requires and to make for it new decrees, sometimes for good and sometimes for bad (Talmud, *Rosh Hashanah* 17b). The connection between God’s providence and men’s action in the land is *love*. If you love the Lord, the land gets rain. He explains the concept of love in Guide 3:51, his famous “palace” allegory, as post-intellectual meditation:

“Those, however, who think of God, and frequently mention His name, without any correct notion of Him, but merely following some imagination, or some theory received from another person, are, in my opinion, like those who remain outside the palace and distant from it. They do not mention the name of God in truth, nor do they reflect on it. That which they imagine and mention does not correspond to any being in existence: it is a thing invented by their imagination....The true worship of God is only possible when correct notions of Him have previously been conceived. When you have arrived by way of intellectual research at a knowledge of God and His works, then commence to devote yourselves to Him, try to approach Him and strengthen the intellect, which is the link that joins you to Him....The Law distinctly states that the highest kind of worship, to which we refer in this chapter, is only possible after the acquisition of the knowledge of God. For it is said, ‘*To love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul*,’ and, as we have shown several times, man’s love of God is *identical* with his knowledge of Him (*ha-ahava k’fi erekh ha-hasaga*). The Divine service enjoined in these words must, accordingly, be *preceded* by the love of God. Our Sages have pointed out to us that it is a service in the heart, which explanation I understand to mean this: man concentrates all his thoughts on the First Intellect, and is absorbed in these thoughts as much as possible.”

(David Blumenthal coined the term “post-intellectual” in this context. See his excellent essay on the subject at <http://www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL/PM2.5.html>.)

“For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel [with] those seven [menorah lights]; they [are] the eyes of the Lord (eynei ha-shem), which run to and fro (*mshotetim*) through the whole earth.” (Zechariah 4:10)

See essay on Zerubbabel below.

Instances of Definition 4, *Mental Perception*, Contextualized:

“And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest [between] the cherubims, Thou art the God, [even] Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Thou hast made heaven and earth. Lord, bow down Thine ear, and hear: *open, Lord, Thine eyes, and see (pkakh ha-shem aynekha u'rei)*: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, And have cast their gods into the fire: for they [were] no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech Thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou [art] the Lord God, [even] Thou only.” (2 Kings 19:15-19)

Maimonides says that when the words “sight,” *raia*, and “vision,” *khazia*, (defined in Guide 1:4), are joined with *ayin*, the combination denotes non-sensible mental perception. Nonetheless, this is *not* a prayer for God to “see” since he already knows all, but for divine providential *selection*. The idea is that God should “see” that Sennacherib destroys the “gods” in the lands he conquers. Let him *not* be able to boast that he destroyed the God of the Jews by destroying the Jewish kingdom. It is an argument for selective providence, invoking God’s own point of view, an excellent example of intellectual alignment.

Schwarz and Even-Shmuel assign this quote-shard to a different verse, Daniel 9:18: “O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; *open thine eyes, and behold* our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.” They are the minority. They may have been led to this result because the proof-text is not identical to our received text of 2 Kings 19:16 (see Kafih note 11). The quote-shard appears again in 1:45 and 1:46, in similar contexts.

“To the chief Musician, [A Psalm] of David. In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee [as] a bird to your mountain? For, lo, the wicked bend [their] bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord [is] in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne [is] in heaven: *his eyes behold (aynav yekhezu)*, his eyelids try (*afapav yivkhanu*), the children of men. (Psalms 11:1-4)

The purpose of this passage is to show that we praise God metaphorically by attributing to Him the *activity* of sight, including even the motion of eyelids. We praise Him because He is entirely active, not the passive recipient of outside impulse from a being greater than He:

“...Everything that implies corporeality or passiveness, is to be negated in reference to God, for all passiveness implies change: and the agent producing that state is undoubtedly different from the object affected by it; and if God could be affected in any way whatever, another being beside Him would act on Him and cause change in Him. All kinds of non-existence must likewise be negated in reference to Him: no perfection whatever can therefore be imagined to be at one time absent from Him, and at another present in Him: for if this were the case, He would [at a certain time] only be potentially perfect. Potentiality always implies non-existence, and when anything has to pass from potentiality into reality, another thing that exists in reality is required to effect that transition. Hence it follows that *all perfections must really (actually) exist in God, (v'l'fikakh khiyuvi sh'yhu kol shlemuyotav mtzaim b'poel)* and none of them must in any way be a mere potentiality.” (Guide 1:55)

Maimonides goes on to say that all of the proof-texts in Definition 4 express intellectual apprehension, not sensory perception (*eynav elei culam ha-hasaga hasiklit, lo hasaga khushit*).

ZERUBBABEL

“Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying: The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house [the second Temple]; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel [with] those seven [menorah lights]; they [are] *the eyes of the Lord (eynei ha-shem)*, which run to and fro (*mshotetim*) through the whole earth.” (Zechariah 4:8-10)

This is a special passage for Maimonides. It reveals the nature of God's universal cosmological providence, both in its natural regime, where it governs all creatures, as well as in its special concern for some of those endowed with intellect.

Maimonides wants to remind us of Amos' vision of the plumb-line, which was significant in interpreting Guide 1:12. See our essay "On the Interpretation of Dreams" in that chapter. We showed there that the plumb-line is an allegory of strict justice. He makes the connection to our proof-text explicitly in 2:43:

"You must further know that the prophets see things shown to them allegorically, such as the candlesticks...of Zechariah (4:2-10)...the wall made by a plumb-line (Amos 7:7), which Amos saw...and similar allegorical objects shown to represent certain ideas."

Both the lights of Zechariah and the plummet represent specific ideas. We know that the plumb-line stands for justice. What is the allegorical idea represented by the seven menorah lights which are the "eyes of the Lord"? We learn from Maimonides' ancient commentators that they represent the seven planetary spheres. The subject of the proof-text then is the relation of the cosmological spheres to universal *general* providence. With the plumb-line of strict justice God emanates the natural regime through his angels, which are the minds behind the seven planets. He explains, in his *Letter on Astrology*, that general providence acts through the planetary intelligences (*sikhlim nvdalim*) to administer the natural order. (On the menorah representing planetary spheres: Josephus *Ant.* Ch. 3, 144-145. Also, Shem Tov, Efodi and Narboni *ad loc.*, pp. 62-63 of the Ibn Tibbon translation of the Guide. Abarbanel agrees, but disputes that by referring to the spheres, which control the species, it means to exclude individuals, for by *hasgakha kolelet* Maimonides means to include all forms of providence, not making it the opposite of *hashgakha pratit*).

In 3:17, he explains that, by contrast, *selective* providence extends to mankind, because only mankind is intellectual, and "Divine providence is connected with divine intellectual influence." Otherwise, all natural beings, including men acting without intelligence, are subject to the plumb-line of nature's justice, as the planetary eyes of providence run to and fro through the earth. Even bad things, such as maritime disasters (Maimonides' brother died in one) are not due to chance but to judgment, "the method of which our mind is incapable of understanding."

Then, in 3:19, he argues against the view he attributes to Aristotle that God has abandoned the earth, taking no notice of particular individuals, who are subject to chance. In response, he argues for God's special providential rule. The argument, a variant of the *a priori* proof for God's existence, runs as follows. To create sight in man, God need not experience sight. He conceives the form of sight, and instantiates that form. The wonder of sight expresses "design in nature." Nature is not an intellectual being: it must be ruled by an intelligent being, which is God:

"If this intellect were incapable of perceiving or knowing any of the actions of earthly beings, how could He have created, or, according to the other theory, caused to emanate from Himself, properties that bring about those actions of which He is supposed to have no knowledge?"

Thus, He has knowledge of individuals (see also Maimonides' tenth fundamental of faith in *Introduction to Helek*). God endowed men not only with sight but also with insight, i.e., intellectual perception. He designed us so that we can strive to comprehend Him. We, thus, bring ourselves under the special selection of providence, and thereby remove ourselves from the general dispensation of nature.

The Zerubbabel proof-text tells of those who thought that the rebuilt Temple was not impressive architecturally. They despised the "day of small things" (*l'yom ktanot*), that is, they despised the good because it was not the best.

However, when they saw the plumb-line of the architect Zerubbabel, they perceived a vision of divine providence that changed their view.

This vision implies another argument advanced for the theory of forms: how could the architect, with his plumb-line, produce the Temple unless he had a *vision* of what it was to be? Zerubbabel's vision was prophetic. Just as God instantiates the form of sight in men, so Zerubbabel substantiates the Temple from the form shown him in vision.

The name of this shadowy figure, Zerubbabel, means "scion" or "seed" from Babylon. He was an authentic prince of the Davidic line in exile. There is a tradition that he was wise, for he won a contest to determine what was mightiest in the world. He said: "women are the mightiest in the world but truth prevails over all" (Enc. Judaica, *Zerubbabel*). He obtained from Darius of Persia a license to rebuild the Temple. He was the subject of messianic hope. There are no negative accounts of him. Maimonides identifies him as a member of the Sanhedrin (*anshei knesset ha-gedola*) in the Introduction to Mishneh Torah. This makes him one of the new "Elders of Israel" (essay, Guide 1:40).

He was, thus, a good prince who accomplished his vision of building the Temple, the place for the indwelling of the *Shekhina*. When the people saw Zerubbabel rebuilding the Temple, they perceived the vision of God's universal providence. It is the plumb-line of justice administered by the "eyes of the Lord," His system of cosmological emanation.

OFANIM

Explaining the Zechariah quote-shard, "They are the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth," Maimonides says, "that is, His providence *is extended over everything that is on the earth*, as will be explained in the chapters in which we shall treat of providence." Friedlander thinks that he means Guide 3:12, where Maimonides catalogues five theories on providence. This is where he asserts that special providential care aligns relative to the actualization of the human intellect.

But by saying "His providence is extended over everything that is on the earth" *kolelet gam kol ma sh'b'aretz* (Kafih), *mekifa et kol asher b'aretz* (Schwarz), he suggests a sense in which the "eyes" surround the earth, like a sphere.

When Maimonides said, "as will be explained in the chapters in which we shall treat of providence," he also means those chapters in which he discusses the *Maaseh Merkava*, explaining the entire esoteric treatment of providence. In the Ezekiel vision that is the center of that treatment, the term "eyes" appears, but Maimonides defined it differently. Our chapter seemingly ignored the brace of meanings he gives the term in his chapters on providence, particularly Guide 3:2 and 3:3, where he interprets Ezekiel's two visions of the *ofanim*:

"And they had backs and were tall and fearsome, and their *backs* were full of *eyes* surrounding the four of them" (Ezek. 1:18),

"And *their whole body*, their back, their hands, their wings, and their *ofanim* were full of *eyes* all around for the four of them their *ofanim*" (Ezek. 10:12).

In Guide 3:2, he defines the *eyes* of the *ofanim* as (1) "real eyes," (2) "different colors," (3) "likenesses," and (4) "different properties and qualities."

Friedlander hazards the explanation that the *ofanim* represent unformed matter within the sublunary sphere, and that the four faces of the *ofanim* are the four elements (in their perfect unmixed state). He tries to explain Maimonides' opaque statement, "It is possible that a body covered with real eyes is here meant." He says it

means “the *materia prima* [which] contained the substance for the formation of the living beings,” i.e., that the *ofan* contained the hylic matter from which the creatures were formed.

Friedlander interprets Maimonides’ definitions for the *eyes* of the *ofanim*, Definitions (2), (3) and (4) above, as applying “to the different colors, forms and properties of the things formed out of the four elements.” I would go further to interpret “different colors” as *colorlessness*, meaning the ability of transparency to take on all colors as matter takes on all forms (Guide 1:28). The “likenesses” are the images of the supernal forms when cast into the material objects in-formed by them. On the “different properties and qualities,” *matzavim v’taarim*, Friedlander may be right that these are the specific characteristics of the actual material substances themselves. However, it is more likely that these *eyes* are the universal characteristics shared by individuals of the same sort flowing from their particular form, as, e.g., all known triangles have their characteristic three sides.

In Guide 3:3, Maimonides discusses the differences between Ezekiel’s first vision of the *ofanim* and the second. He uses the second version to establish that the *ofanim* are the spheres of the four elements below the moon. (He seems to deny, that the *ofanim* are themselves planetary spheres, attributing that view to *Targum Jonathan*, in Guide 3:4). Since the motion of the spheres causes the mixing of the elements, the motion of those elements provides both the ground and the event of the instantiation of forms emanated into matter. He says, in 3:3, about the second vision:

“A fourth point is added concerning the *ofanim*, namely, *and the four ofanim were full of eyes round about even to their four ofanim*. This has not been mentioned before.”

In other words, in the first version, the eyes were on the “backs” of the *ofanim* surrounding the four of them, while here the “whole body” of the “*ofanim were full of eyes round about*.” Friedlander takes the difference to mean that in the first vision “the prophet only perceived the variety of forms produced by the different relations each point of the sphere of the elements has to the heavenly spheres,” i.e., the relation of the spheres’ movements to the forms of the particular elemental admixtures flowing therefrom. These then are immediately instantiated by the emanated forms, which, he says, “is expressed by attributing eyes only to ‘their outside’ (their ‘back’), the side exposed to the influences of the heavenly bodies.” By contrast, in the second vision, Friedlander thinks that the location of the *eyes filling* the whole body of the *ofanim*, not just external to them, means, “the great variety of forms produced by the combination of the elements and their contents.” The better interpretation is that the eyes filling the *ofan* are the actual forms *prior* to their instantiation in matter, in the soul of the sphere, in the sense that Philo called *logos*, the storehouse of forms. They could also be all the souls, like monads, in the world (On all the above, Friedlander translation of the Guide, 3:3, note 2, p. 8; note 1 and note 2, page 9. The Ezekiel translations are those he used.)

Another way Maimonides uses “eye” is in his account of the *Maaseh Merkava* when he quotes “eye of *khashmal*.” (Ezek. 1:4, 27; 8:2; Guide 3:5). As we will show in the appropriate place, *khashmal* has approximately the same meaning as “feet.” Both begin as phallic euphemisms but sublimate to become divine causation. The “eye” of the *khashmal* would be the form that divine causation instantiates in the material object, its “likeness.” This takes “eye” metaphorically as the medium of vision, what Friedlander calls the *spiritus visus* (Guide 2:29), a liquid medium in the eye which transmits motion generated by colors to the optical organ, creating images from things seen. This notion metaphorically extends to become the *process* by which the form instantiates the material object. Maimonides takes this concept to be “The ultimate perception and highest of all,” in Pines’ translation.

(On *spiritus visus*, Friedlander on Guide 1:32, note 3, p. 112; and on 1:72, note 5, pp. 289-290; and Schwarz, on 1:32, note 9, p. 73. Maimonides discusses the *spiritus* again at 3:25. Maimonides wrote a “revision” of *The Perfection, Al Istikmal*, of Yusuf Al-Mutamin, 11th C., a mathematical work, which included a treatise on optics by the revolutionary optical philosopher, Abu Al-Haytham, known as Alhazen to the Latins, who married conic geometry to Aristotelian optical intromission theory in new and profound ways that transformed optics, and was

enormously important to Renaissance opticians. See *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds*, by Joel L. Kraemer, 74-75, Doubleday 2008).

The difference between the definitions for *ayin* in our chapter and those in the *Maaseh Merkava* chapters is that in the former the term metaphorically extends to providence and intellectual perception, while in the latter it focuses on the *process* by which providence instantiates the form in the material object. The difference comes from the level the student has reached. Here, he learns to identify the subject matter of providence in cryptic utterances; there, he works through its metaphysical mechanics.

One major issue about forms is whether they are real existences or mere names we confer on characteristics universally shared by all individual instances of a thing. Returning to our previous example, many different triangles share the characteristics of triangularity; but is “triangularity” merely a name we give to those shared characteristics? By recognizing the esoteric meaning of the eyes of the *ofanim* and the *khashmal*, Maimonides reveals that there is a process by which real forms are instantiated in matter. Maimonides holds to some vague version of emanationism, and therefore does not adopt the nominalism of the hard Aristotelians.

GUIDE 1:45 *SH'MA*

This is the last chapter of the lexical section of the Guide. Even so, there will be other lexical chapters. Maimonides defines words throughout the book. The organization of the Guide thus defies classification. Maimonides now turns to the larger issue of why the lexical chapters were necessary, and the closely allied question of the divine attributes.

These last few chapters have really been about providence. The great question of this chapter is whether God answers individual prayers, which is part of that subject. The answer to the question turns closely on the meaning of the terms used, but, ultimately, must transcend the strictures of human language

This chapter employs a method unique in the lexical chapters. In the lexical breakdown below, Maimonides provides three standard definitions for *sh'ma*: 1) to hear, 2) to accept, 3) to know. Then he tells us that wherever we encounter the term or its root derivatives in relation to God we must first decide what the literal meaning of the passage, the "*pshat*," would be. If the passage literally suggests Definition 1, that God "hears," we must retranslate the passage according to Definition 3, "to know," which is what we have come to expect. However, if the *pshat* is Definition 2, that God "accepts" what he "hears," then we retranslate that God *answered* and fulfilled the prayer, or, if the passage is negative, that God *denied* the prayer.

DOUBLE-TRUTH?

Since Maimonides is telling us to translate such passages as God granting prayer, he seems to endorse the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer. Yet Herbert Davidson and others recognize an incongruity (p. 390-391, *Maimonides, The Man and His Works*, Oxford 2005).

In general, providence follows the ways of nature and does not tamper with the natural order. But God's miraculous response to personal prayer does not sit well with the Aristotelian view that nature does not change. Some Straussians assume Maimonides' silent acceptance of that view, suggesting that his affirmation of prayer was a public concession to pietism. Davidson strongly opposes Leo Strauss. Still, he attempts a moderate solution, asserting mere *inconsistency* on Maimonides' part, not willful contradiction of the seventh kind (see my Introduction II: this was the esoteric contradiction, where the author conceals his private view beneath a false exoteric explanation). He claims that the Guide is not a particularly well-constructed book. My assessment is that in the current stage of scholarship it is better to take Maimonides at his word. In the Introduction to the Guide, he says (Pines' trans.): "The diction of this treatise has been chosen not haphazardly but with great exactness and exceeding precision." Thus, we should try to understand him as he understood himself and not explain away apparent contradictions as examples of inconsistency.

The most extreme position is that Maimonides did not believe God answers prayers, and when he wrote otherwise he committed what came to be called Averroism. Although the term is associated with the great Islamic philosopher, Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198), it actually emerged in interpretations of Averroes by medieval European scholastics. Siger of Brabant (c. 1240-1280s) was branded, perhaps unfairly, with Averroism for teaching "double-truth": on the one hand, the real truth of science and philosophy, and on the other, a completely separate "religious truth." This idea was that the worlds of philosophy and religion are so disparate that no relation exists between their teachings. The Catholic Church branded this doctrine heresy in 1270. In this view, providence does not exist and human fate is completely determined. Prayer has no efficacy in this system.

The problem arises when we compare two statements of Maimonides. The first, in our chapter, is that "...God responded (*ana*) to the prayer of man and fulfilled his wish." He says this regarding several proof-texts from Exodus 22 (contextualized below) that God "hears" the prayers of widows, orphans and the poor. Compare and contrast this with his second statement. This is his doctrine of True and Necessary Belief announced in

Guide 3:28. The doctrine of True and Necessary Belief holds that the belief in God is intrinsically *true*, while the belief in prayer is *necessary* for the public good. The question is whether this doctrine is a “double-truth” and if his statements in our chapter are merely exoteric productions for public consumption:

“It is necessary to bear in mind that Scripture only teaches the chief points of those true principles which lead to the true perfection of man, and only demands in general terms faith in them. Thus Scripture teaches the Existence, the Unity, the Omniscience, the Omnipotence, the Will, and the Eternity of God. All this is given in the form of final results, but they cannot be understood fully and accurately except after the acquisition of many kinds of knowledge. Scripture further demands belief in certain truths, the belief in which is indispensable (“Necessary” –Pines trans.) in regulating our social relations: such is the belief that God is angry with those who disobey Him, for it leads us to the fear and dread of disobedience [to the will of God]. ...Consider what we said of the opinions [implied in the laws]; in some cases the law contains a truth which is itself the only object of that law, as e.g., the truth of the Unity, Eternity, and Incorporeality of God; in other cases, *that truth is only the means of securing the removal of injustice, or the acquisition of good morals* (v’yesh sh’tehei ota ha-dea ha-krakhit b’saluk aval o ha-kanit mida naala—the word “only” should not appear in Friedlander’s translation); such is the belief that God is angry with those who oppress their fellow-men. As it is said, ‘My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill,’ etc. (Exodus 22:23); or the belief that God hears (Pines: “responds instantaneously to”) the crying of the oppressed and vexed (*ytalei ona l’tzaakat he-ashuk o hamitana miyad*), to deliver them out of the hands of the oppressor and tyrant, as it is written, ‘And it shall come to pass, when he cryeth unto me, that I will hear, for I am gracious (Exodus 22:27).’”

Maimonides neither says nor implies that True beliefs contradict Necessary beliefs. I think it over-interpretive to assert that the Necessary beliefs are merely a “noble lie” constructed for political and social purposes.

What is true is that statements of Necessary beliefs require complex and lengthy amplification to bring out their truth. Thus, the Torah asserts that God “hears” the cries of the widow and orphan. If we ignore them, our wives shall be widows, and our children fatherless. This is the exemplary statement of the Jewish belief in the miraculous providence of God (Principle 11 from the 13 Principles of Faith, Maimonides’ *Commentary on the Mishna*, at the end of *Sanhedrin*). Maimonides is by no means ready to abandon this belief. Punishments and rewards all come as retribution from God: “All that is mentioned of the history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a perfect proof that Divine Providence extends to every man individually” (Guide 3:17).

Maimonides also holds that we cannot fathom the mechanism of divine providence, or of miracles. He believes in bodily resurrection, and says that the special providence attendant upon the Jews is an even greater miracle than resurrection. This miraculous providence appears in the salvation of Hezekiah cited again in our chapter. It is Elihu’s contribution in the story of Job, when he asserts angelic intervention in human dramas. While our intellectual alignment with the active intellect prepares these providential blessings, the manner of their production is a miracle beyond our limited understanding.

Taken together, Maimonides has an extensive and complex understanding of the True belief in providence as well as of prayer. Nonetheless, in its plain and unadorned assertion, the Necessary belief in prayer must be pounded into the minds of the public before it can be understood by a few in its fullness. It “cannot be understood fully and accurately except after the acquisition of many kinds of knowledge,” including knowledge glimpsed in prophecy. This is not the assertion of an “Averroist” double truth in which the efficacy of prayer is at once useful but untrue, but, rather, a nuanced and subtle comprehension that both the natural and supernatural exist as different levels of the same reality.

* * *

This is a lexical chapter. See the explanation in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”

SH'MA (LISTEN) Homonym

1. To hear
2. To accept, obey, receive
3. To know, understand: mental perception

TWO SPECIAL RULES WHEN SH'MA IS USED WITH GOD:

- When the literal interpretation indicates that Definition 1, to “hear,” is used with God, retranslate as *to know*, Definition 3.
- When the literal interpretation indicates that Definition 2, to “accept,” is used with God, retranslate that God *answered* the prayer. Conversely, if it indicates non-acceptance, retranslate that God *denied* the prayer.

Instances of Definition 1, *Hear*, Contextualized:

In neither of the two proof-texts for Definition 1 does actual corporeal hearing take place:

“And in all [things] that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other Gods, **neither let it be heard** out of thy mouth (*lo yishma al pikha*).” (Exodus 23:13)

The text tells us what we should *not* hear. The traditional interpretation divides “neither let it be heard” from “out of thy mouth”: “neither let it (idolatry) be heard,” from *gentiles*, “out of thy mouth,” due to the Jew’s social integration with them. The idea is that by doing business with idolators, litigation might ensue forcing them to swear to evidentiary truth by their own god. Such an oath constitutes the offense of idolatry, which would not have occurred but for the Jew enmeshing himself in their business. That is a punishable offence for the Jew (see Rashi *ad loc.*, Talmud *Sanhedrin* 63b, Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Negative 14).

“And the fame thereof [The reuniting of Joseph and his brothers] was **heard** in Pharaoh’s house (*v’ha-kol nishma beit paro*), saying, Joseph’s brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants.” (Genesis 45:16)

In the original Hebrew “in” does not appear “in Pharaoh’s house” but only “was heard Pharaoh’s house,” i.e., that the *house* itself “heard” it. The Midrash takes it to mean that Judah’s cry shook the walls of the palace. Even apart from the Midrash, the passage is clearly not about hearing but about notoriety.

Instances of Definition 2, *Accept/Obey*, Contextualized:

“And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: **but they hearkened** (*shamu*) not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.” (Exodus 6:9)

It’s not that the Jews did not listen Moses, but that they did not *obey*. The passage comes early in Moses’ prophetic career. Because the Egyptians deprived the Jews of straw to make their brick quota, they were too tired and depressed to respond to his call. The Midrash asserts that had they obeyed they could then have made their exodus successfully without the ten plagues and the forty-year Sinai detour.

“**If they obey** (*yishmu*) and serve [God], they shall spend their days in prosperity (*ykhalu ymeihem batov*), and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without *knowledge* (*da’at*).” (Job 36:11-12)

Elihu delivers this speech. He is Maimonides’ hero in the Book of Job (See our essay on Elihu in 1:13). His hermeneutic principle is to repeat what others have said so that readers miss his own unique contribution (just as Maimonides buried it here). This is a method of concealment. Elihu’s new ideas subtly connect prophecy to providence. If men “hear” God’s commands and obey them, all their days will be good (*ykhalu ymeihem ba’tov*,

“They shall spend their days in prosperity”), and they will eventually die with “knowledge,” as much as to say that they will not die at all. He also thought that when an angel intercedes for a dying man the intercession is sometimes accepted and he revives. In Job 33:14-16, Elihu says: “For God speaketh *once*, yea *twice*, [yet men] perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.” The word comes *once* to the imagination in the dream, *then* to the intellect. God opens the dreamer’s ears so he can hear the voice of the angel, which is the active intellect. His intellectual alignment produces the providential result that saves the dreamer from death and makes all his days good.

“In those days also saw I (Nehemiah) Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, [and] of Moab. And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, [saying], Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then *hearken* (*ha-nishma*) unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? And [one] of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, [was] son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.” (Nehemiah 13:23-28)

Not that we should not listen, but rather, we should not *obey* those who called for intermarriage. Nehemiah was the Persian King Artaxerxes’ Jewish governor for the returned exiles. He was charged with rebuilding the Temple. He is a Maimonidean hero because he is a righteous leader who accomplishes God’s will. He famously inveighed against intermarriage. Joiada’s son married the daughter of the chief of the enemy Samaritans who fought the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Nehemiah ejected Joiada’s son from the priesthood because of his intermarriage. Maimonides discusses the incident in Mishneh Torah, *Tefila*, 1:4 as the reason for composing the central Jewish prayer in Hebrew, rather than in the vernaculars of exile:

“When the people of Israel went into exile in the days of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, they mingled with the Persians, Greeks and other nations. In those foreign countries, children were born to them, whose language was confused. Everyone’s speech was a mixture of many tongues. No one was able, when he spoke, to express his thoughts adequately in any one language, otherwise than incoherently, as it is said, ‘and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people.’”

Not knowing how to speak means that they did not know how to pray. If they could not coherently pray, their prayer could not be *answered*. They were outside special divine providence.

“And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses. Whosoever [he be] that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not *hearken* (*yishma*) unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage.” (Joshua 1:16-18)

The people should *obey* their leader. This passage comes at the beginning of Joshua’s leadership. He reminds the two and a half tribes that wanted to live east of the Jordan of their promise to Moses to be in the vanguard of the fight for Israel. Here they affirm their loyalty. Joshua is another Maimonidean hero. Maimonides quotes this passage in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Positive 173 (trans. Charles B. Chavel), authorizing the death penalty for disobeying a good king:

“The Talmud says explicitly: ‘the King takes precedence over the prophet (*Horiot* 13a),’ and when this King gives an order which is not in conflict with a Commandment of the Torah, we must obey his behest, and he has the right to put to death by the sword anyone who disobeys him. This our ancestors took upon themselves when they said: ‘Whosoever [he be] that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not *hearken* unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death.’ The life of anyone

who rebels against the kingly authority, be he who he may, is forfeit to the king duly appointed in accordance with the Torah.”

Instance of Definition 3, Know, Contextualized:

“The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, [as swift] as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not *understand (tishma)*.” (Deuteronomy 28:49)

This passage comes from the *Tokhekha*, the terrifying list of punishments the Jews will receive when they do not *obey* the commandments. In this case, it is not that they do not “hear” the foreigner’s language but that they do not *know* it. This passage pairs with Nehemiah’s complaint against the mongrelization of the holy tongue. Exile amidst a *unknown* tongue is a horrible punishment because there is no way to improve the situation of exile through business or social ascension. Worse, it leads to the loss of prayer, which makes it impossible to attain intellectual alignment with God. These passages also suggest that without Maimonides’ Lexicon the language of prophecy remains unheard and unknown.

PROOF-TEXTS WHERE GOD IS THE SUBJECT OF THE VERB *SH’MA*

Maimonides has three special rules when the text tells us that God “hears.” When the literal meaning of the text (*pshat*) is that God “hears,” interpret as God *knows*. If the *pshat* is that God “accepts” or “receives” a prayer, interpret that God *grants* it, in the sense that He effectuates the prayer (this distinction between *hear* and *accept* is difficult to make in context, so we must rely on these cases where Maimonides makes it). If the sense is that God did not “accept” the prayer, then He *denied* it. The point of all this is that while God does not actually “hear” or even “receive” prayers, He knows them and grants them.

The terminology is significant. Divine subjection to sensory input is an obvious anthropopathism. It is harder to recognize that God is not a passive recipient of non-sensory data. This helps to explain Maimonides’ basic criticism of the Targumic project. The effort to translate anthropomorphism out of the Bible is doomed because of the nature of human language. Instead, what we need are readers who know how to *interpret* the text, and who can understand, in some sense, the linguistically inexpressible.

Even-Shmuel, in his commentary, tried to reduce the distinction between *hear* and *accept* by showing that one conjugation of *sh’ma*: i.e. *hishamut (nishma)*, means “accept.” This is true, but Hebrew translations preserve the distinction by using some variant of *kibul*, accept/receive, for Definition 2, as does the Judeo-Arabic original, אלקבול.

Instances of the First *pshat*, Hear, Contextualized:

“And [when] the people complained, it *displeased* the Lord (*ra b’aznei ha-shem*—literally, it was bad in the ear of God): and the Lord *heard* [it]; (*va’yishma*) and His anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed [them that were] in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the Lord burnt among them. ... (They said,) But now our soul [is] dried away: [there is] nothing at all (to eat), beside this manna, [before] our eyes.” (Numbers 11:1-3, 6)

“And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that He *heareth (b’shamo)* your murmurings against the Lord: and what [are] we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, [This shall be], when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the Lord *heareth (bi’shmoa)* your murmurings which ye murmur against Him: and what [are] we? Your murmurings [are] not against us, but against the Lord.... And when the children of Israel saw [it], they said one to another, It [is] manna.” (Exodus 16:7-8, 15)

These two passages tell of the manna in the Sinai desert. The first is about the “burning” at Taberah, where the people despised the manna; the second, which occurred first, is the original arrival of the manna. Manna exemplifies the idea of God’s miraculous providential supervision of the Jewish people. Since the *pshat* of the passage is that God actually “heard” the people complain with His “ears,” i.e., Definition 1, we must retranslate that God *knew*, i.e., Definition 3. Divine *knowledge* and punishment through divine *will* are simultaneous, really, atemporal. Similarly, when the people repent, God blesses them instantly with manna.

Each Jew receives an equal allotment of manna. Maimonides, in Guide 3:12, therefore makes manna symbolize the *general* distribution of natural justice, distinguishing it from *individualized* providence. All members of species generally have the same physical constitution and enjoy the same essential goods. We usually possess four limbs and enjoy enough water, air and vegetation to live: any more is superfluous. Similarly:

“It is no wrong or injustice that one has many bags of finest myrrh and garments embroidered with gold, while another has not those things, which are not necessary for our maintenance; he who has them has not thereby obtained control over anything that could be an essential addition to his nature, but has only obtained something illusory or deceptive. The other, who does not possess that which is not wanted for his maintenance, does not miss anything indispensable: ‘He that gathered much (manna) had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack: they gathered every man according to his eating’ (Exodus 26:18). This is the rule at all times and in all places; *no notice should be taken of exceptional cases*, as we have explained. In these two ways you will see the mercy of God toward His creatures, how He has provided that which is required, in proper proportions, and treated all individual beings of the same species with perfect *equality*. In accordance with this correct reflection the chief of the wise men says, ‘*All his ways are judgment*’ (Deuteronomy 32:4).”

Having touched on the general providential regime, Maimonides, in the Second *pshat*, turns to God’s special response to individual prayer.

Instances of the Second *pshat*, *Accept*, Contextualized:

“Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will *surely hear (shamoa eshma)* their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. If thou lend money to [any of] my people [that is] poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that [is] his covering only, it [is] his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will *hear (v’shamati)*; for I [am] gracious.” (Exodus 22:22-27)

“Lord, bow down thine *ear, and hear (aznkha u-shma)*; open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and *hear (u’shma)* the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.” (2 Kings 19:16)

Maimonides assigns these three quote-shards a *pshat* of *acceptance* (Definition 2) of what is “heard.” He apparently assumed that any reader of these sentences would realize that the literal meaning of “heard” was that God “accepts.” It is not obvious to this reader. Perhaps the real distinction is that unlike the cases involving manna, which involved the prayers of the Jews as a group, these proof-texts feature the prayer of the individual Jew. God does not merely *know* these prayers, He *grants* them.

Since *pshat* on both Exodus proof-texts (the first two immediately above), is supposed to be that God *accepts* the prayer of the widow, orphan and poor, then, according to the second rule, we must retranslate that God *answered* their prayer. Maimonides is not satisfied with interpreting “hear” as “accept” because God does not “accept” or “receive” anything (God is not a *mkubal*).

In Guide 1:48 he notes the Targumic system of paraphrasing “to hear” when applied to God. *Targum* retranslates as either “*It was heard before* the Lord,” which does not dispense with physical sensation; or, as “He *accepted*” prayer, which makes God an object of the praying subject. It is clear from our chapter that Maimonides does not agree with *Targum*. To accept or receive prayer implies change or passivity on the part of God, but God does not change and is impassive.

Since this is a doctrine of *Maaseh Merkava*, and the law in *Hagigah* proscribes publishing such doctrines, he presents it in camouflaged form here. The public must not be allowed to read the bald statement that God is *not* a being who *receives* prayer, at least without many preambles. What happens is that God knows the circumstances of the widow and grants her prayer in a unified, simultaneous, atemporal manner as part of His thought, which thought is identical to Himself. Nonetheless, he says in Guide 3:28 that “the belief that God hears the crying of the oppressed and vexed, to deliver them,” is a *necessary* truth that the public must be made to learn to secure the good of society. As I explained above, when understood fully, the doctrine of providence is not only a *necessary* belief but a *true* one as well.

The last proof-text above is part of Hezekiah’s Prayer. Hezekiah is dying and Jerusalem is about to be invaded. Sennacherib boasted that he always destroyed the local deities by conquering their domains. The first “hear,” which is part of the quote-shard, literally means that God should *accept* his prayer, and so we retranslate that God should *grant* the prayer. God does grant the prayer. Simultaneously and miraculously, God revives Hezekiah as He destroys Assyrians army. The second “hear” literally means that God should physically *listen* to Sennacherib (Definition 1), and so must be retranslated that God should *know* Sennacherib’s boast (Definition 3). Hezekiah argues from God’s point of view to God: Sennacherib destroys the local gods of his victims, therefore let him not “destroy” our God by obliterating the Temple, the place of His *Shekhina*.

Instances of the Third *pshat*, *Non-acceptance*, Contextualized:

The next three quotations are opposite to the preceding. In these, since the *pshat* is that God did not accept the prayer, we must retranslate that He *denied* it.

“And ye returned (*tashuvu*) and wept before the Lord; but the Lord would not *hearken* (*shama*) to your voice, nor give *ear* (*he’ezin*) unto you.” (Deuteronomy 1:45)

Here God denies the Jews’ belated repentance after the incident of the spies (*meraglim*), when the people decided to go back over the Amorite hills into Israel, though commanded not to. Their lack of intellectual alignment results in their slaughter by the Amorites.

“Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; [it is] iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear [them]. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: *yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear* (*shomea*): your hands are full of blood.” (Isaiah 1:13-15)

“Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not *hear* (*shomea*) thee.” (Jeremiah 7:16)

Since the people combine idolatry with worship of God, He *denies* their services and prayers. It is not just that he does not “accept” them. Mishneh Torah, *Teshuva* 7:7, movingly explains, quoting from both of these scriptural chapters, Isaiah 1, and Jeremiah 7:

“How exalted is the degree of repentance? But last night a certain individual was separated from the Lord, God of Israel...He cries aloud and is not answered, as it is said, *yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear*. He fulfills religious precepts and they are flung back in his face, as it is said, *who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?* (Isaiah 1:12); and, *Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh.* (Jeremiah 7:21). Today the same individual, (having properly repented) is closely attached to the Divine Presence...he cries and is immediately answered...he fulfills religious precepts and they are accepted with pleasure and with joy..., yet more, they are eagerly desired.”

Maimonides pairs these passages again in Guide 3:32, where he explained the meaning of the sacrificial service. Maimonides minimizes sacrifice, that it was a means to eliminate idolatry and was never the original object of the law (but see my interpretation there that sacrifice remains on the books as long as man remains corporeal). The main idea of these commandments was not to encourage empty ritual but to prompt the meditation that aligns our mind with His. Only then does providence, miraculously, overleap nature to bless individual men.

MISSING PROOF-TEXTS

The reader should ask why Maimonides omits two obvious proof-texts for *sh'ma*.

The motto “*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One,*” (Deuteronomy 6:4), *sh'ma yisrael ha-shem elohenu ha-shem ekhad*, is, for Jews, the most familiar passage in the Bible. In Mishneh Torah, he makes this passage a True Belief, not just a Necessary one (*Yesodai Ha-Torah* 1-7, Guide 3:45). It is the doctrine of divine unity. Our acceptance of it (Definition 2) requires our knowledge of it (Definition 3). If we do not know this, but, rather, profess dualism or atheism, our minds hold falsehoods that prevent their achieving active intellect. This is a veil separating most men from God, preventing their prayers from being answered. Maimonides could have included the *Sh'ma* in the chapter. However, since the passage is such an obvious choice, he wants the reader to supply it together with its interpretation as a kind of final exam for the lexical section of the Guide.

Maimonides also omits the first use in Torah of *sh'ma*. That use is Genesis 3:8:

“And they *heard* (*va-yishmu*) the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.”

He did include the verse in the lexical chapter 1:24 to illustrate the lexical term *walking*. Significantly, Onkelos' *Targum* substitutes for “voice” the word “*memra*,” his Aramaism for “Word.” He translates “And they heard the voice of the *Word* of the Lord walking,” *u'shma'u yat kal memra d'hashem elohim mehalekh*. The *Word* is the *Logos*, an entity created by God, like “*Shekhina*.” Adam and Eve “hear,” i.e., *know* of the presence of God, so the verse could also have been included in our chapter. Moreover, the passage exemplifies Maimonides' understanding of “the hiding of the face” as human *projection*, since, as we explained in 1:24, the “walking” of God is a walking *away*, a “hiding of the face” which is the *denial* of individual providence.

GUIDE 1:46 BOLD DESCRIPTION

SYNOPSIS

When we tell another of the existence of a thing, as opposed to defining its essence, we describe its appearance, actions, circumstances, and effects. We can even legitimately point to God's existence in this manner. We employ metaphors drawn from the physical attributes of His creatures. That is how the prophets established the existence of God in the minds of the people.

Because God is indefinable, we can only say *that* He is, not what He is. Still, we can boldly suggest much about Him through imaginative description. The prophets freely used descriptions of human perfections to suggest divine perfections, even though from God's standpoint these "perfections" really are defects. The prophets strove to establish God's perfect existence as far as human language would permit, according to the principle that Torah is written in the language of men. They must use physical imagery, because most people are incapable of abstract thought.

Thus, physical movement suggests God's existence, sight suggests His knowledge, and speech suggests that He inspires prophecy. There is a three-step process to interpret these physical metaphors, for example, when the prophet writes that God has "eyes," we mean that He "sees," which really means that He *knows*. These three steps, taken at a higher level, attribute "eyes" to mean that God shares certain perfections with men, by which we mean that these perfections are in God a special kind of unity, but we then recognize that those "perfections" have *no identity* with those attributes as they exist in men:

"We shall explain, when we come to speak of the *inadmissibility* of Divine attributes, that all these various attributes convey but *one* notion, viz., that of the essence of God. The sole object of this chapter is to explain in what sense physical organs are ascribed to the Most Perfect Being, namely, that they are mere indications of the actions generally performed by means of these organs. Such actions being perfections respecting ourselves, are predicated of God, because we wish to express that He is most perfect in every respect, as we remarked above in explaining the Rabbinical phrase, *The language of the Torah is like the language of man.*"

The Rabbis frequently used such language. They even constructed elaborate parables likening a flesh and blood king and his subjects to God and his creatures. They knew that these parables concerned corporeal beings and could not truly tell us about an incorporeal being. Nonetheless, they freely used such expressions unafraid that the intent would be mistaken. The Rabbis commended the prophets for their bold, even shocking, descriptions. We should not criticize the Rabbis for using this method.

The purpose of this chapter is not only to summarize this governing principle of the Lexicon, but also to prepare us to read the coming chapters on divine attributes in the proper light.

COMPARING THE CREATOR TO HIS CREATURES

Maimonides commends the prophets for comparing the Creator to his creatures, so that they could establish the existence of God in the public mind. But how can it be legitimate to compare any thing to God? Would not such a comparison inevitably attribute imperfection to Him?

That is the underlying problem of the chapter. Maimonides' response, if not his reasoning, is clear. He is favorably disposed to metaphorical, figurative and parabolic descriptions. He makes this point throughout the Guide. Maimonides expects us to recognize the limitations of such corporeal descriptions and to sublimate them in our understanding.

At the conclusion of the chapter, he mentions those who find this approach offensive. He condemns those people for their ignorance, which harms only themselves and not the wise.

Who finds this parabolic approach offensive? It is not clear whom he might be attacking in this final sentence. I could conceive of a philosophical gentile arguing that the Torah is a poor instrument to demonstrate the existence of an ineffable God, inferior to, say, the *Enneads* of Plotinus (known then as the *Theology of Aristotle*), since the Torah describes God as a being who gets angry, speaks, has feet, etc. The philosophical gentile might be a Muslim, such as the convert Samuel ibn Abbas al-Maghribī and (died c. 1170) author of *Iḥām al-Yahud* (*Silencing the Jews*), which criticized biblical anthropomorphism.

Maimonides can respond to such an attack because of his expansive conception of God.

THE MAIMONIDEAN CONCEPTION OF GOD

Maimonides explains that we distinguish the essential divine attributes, such as will, existence, intelligence, and creativity, in our imagination only. The attributes are nothing but God Himself, and they are all one in Him. They coalesce in His non-numerical unity. They are atemporal and immediate to Him.

Divine Personality. In this conception, we see that God is not an *Ayn Sof*, a *Tao*, a negativity, the Plotinian One, etc. Unlike these concepts, He does somehow seem to have characteristics, though we cannot comprehend how these many can be one. That is not the Rabbis' concern. They do not need to construct a philosophically rigorous definition. If the concept is adequate to indicate God's *existence*, then they can describe Him by this agglomeration of perfections. Such description does not beggar God because, according to Maimonides, they recognized the inadequacy of those figures. Thus, we can truly say of God that He exists. This, despite that we know nothing but that He is *not* nonexistent. We can say that He creates. Still, how He creates something from nothing without a moment of creation is imponderable. And so on.

The contrary posture is not one that Maimonides would endorse, for if God were negativity, lacking any characteristics, we could not make these positive statements about his existence and actions. It would reduce God to a principle, like privation, or nothingness. This, clearly, is not Maimonides' idea of God, and it is not what he means by negative theology. The Maimonidean God is a being who exists and acts. "The object of all these indications (metaphors) is to establish in our minds the notion of the existence of a living being, the Maker of everything, who also possesses a knowledge of the things which He has made."

God of Miracles. The question then becomes whether this conception of God's existence and action is legitimate from a logical or philosophical point of view. Maimonides would certainly have thought so, but it is doubtful that Aristotle would have. From philosophy's point of view, there could be no creation *ex nihilo*, or providence, or prayer. Maimonides' responded that there was a limit to our knowledge: Aristotle could not prove that the universe was eternal and uncreated. Neither could he disprove the existence of miracles, including the miracle of creation. Even so, Maimonides still has to show that creation *ex nihilo* is a legitimate alternative account of creation. We will see later if he can.

Assuming, *arguendo*, that creation *ex nihilo* is a legitimately possible, it is a miraculous single event and not a natural eternal emanation from God. The miracle of creation is the basis for the possibility of all other miracles, for there could be no greater one. To be sure, miracles would be rare. That is because of the Talmudic principle that natural explanations should be our first resort. Miracles are those events that we cannot explain naturally. Though miracles are, by definition, not natural, Maimonides does not think they are inexplicable, only that we cannot explain them. We must distinguish *natural* explanation from *rational* explanation. Miracles conform to some form of rationality, even if not the reason of nature. If Maimonides can assert some possible divine logic behind miracles, he can narrowly avoid the assertion that his theology is irrational.

Maimonides does not need to prove that God exists, since he can rely on Aristotle's proof. Aristotle was able to prove that God exists merely from the existence of motion, and the need to reach the ultimate cause of motion. His proof did not require an ultimate creator, only an ultimate mover. Since, then, even for Aristotle, who denies creation, God exists, all Maimonides has to do is show that his more expansive conception of God's existence is a *possible* conception. His concept is enriched by the claims that God is the Creator, that He is provident, and revives the dead bodily. All of these are possible. Maimonides can make room in his system for these and several other miracles.

Since this notion of God is broader than the Aristotelian notion, he can say more about God than is possible under the Aristotelian system. Thus, God can possess the "essential" attributes, such as life, wisdom, will and power, though His possession of these perfections and our possession of these perfections are so different as to be homonymous. To put it more accurately, these perfections are substantial, essential, and unified in God where they are merely accidental to man. Therefore, since the mission of the prophets is to bring knowledge of God's existence to the people, we justifiably commend them for describing those divine attributes in bold figurative language that people would immediately grasp.

BOLD DESCRIPTION

This is even true when they use extreme appellations. The two examples given are the bowels and the feet. Using several exegetical methods, Maimonides demonstrates that when the prophets say that the "bowels" of God are "troubled" they can only be referring to the heart, not literally to the bowels. The heart, as we have seen, was an organ of intelligence in ancient Hebrew. Thus, they mean that God's *mind* is "troubled" by human transgression, though, really, the sinner only projects his own "trouble" onto God. When we say His "bowels" are "troubled," we really mean that He *knows* His creations (*v'nimtza tadrikh kol otan ha-hashaalot lkvoa etzleinu sh'yesh sham mtzui khai, osei l'kol ma sh'zulato v'gam masig maasav*).

More interesting is how Maimonides gets *feet* into the discussion. He suggests *feet* in the first of a list of twenty scriptural quotations, allowing that people do not consider a being to be living, i.e., animate, unless it *moves*, and it cannot move without feet. It moves to acquire its needs. But the identification of life with movement is mistaken. We already know that movement is not part of Maimonides' definition of life, which is sensate growth, *tsomeakh margish* (Guide 1:42). He says, in our chapter, "Motion is not part of the definition of life, but an accident connected with it."

On the other hand, we already know that *foot* means *cause* because of its phallic suggestiveness. Since the topic is *bold description*, we should expect Maimonides to make the ascription of divine feet the boldest description of all. The divine *foot* means that God created the world.

Maimonides and Aristotle share the thought that God is intelligent, though Aristotle would not refer to God's "bowels," even if he could have been persuaded that "bowels" were a metaphor for the mind. Where they would surely part company is on "feet." The Aristotelian deity does nothing but think, it is "thought thinking itself." But it could have no *foot* since it did not create the world.

Maimonides makes the *foot* connection in a strange Aggadic interlude near the conclusion of the chapter. He quotes a Midrash that says that the prophets were "bold" (*gadol kokho*) to use figurative language to describe God, for they likened the Creator to His creature (Genesis *Rabba* 27:1). Maimonides then turns to the Talmud to show that the Aramaism for "bold" used by the Talmud in an arguably similar instance has the same meaning of "bold" used in the Midrash. But this is unnecessary support, especially since the Talmudic portion he quotes, *Yevamot* 104A, is not about bold description.

The *Yevamot* reference is sort of about *feet*, or at least socks, or perhaps shoes. It is possible to take it pruriently. Here is the passage as Maimonides gives it from *Yevamot* (I translate literally in the form that he supplies it. Others question his text, and he is probably responsible for changing the two Rabbi's names to "Ploni"):

"Rabbi Ploni did it at night alone in a sock (*mok*). [Another] Rabbi Ploni said *how bold* [*rav guvrea=gadol kokho*] was he that he did it alone." (*R. Ploni avad uvda b'mok bi'ykhidi u'va-laila. Amar R. Ploni: kama rav guvrei di'avad k'ykhidaa.*)

To be sure, we can take the passage non-pruriently, and, in context, Talmud does take it non-pruriently. Still, why did Maimonides cite it?

The passage is not about bold description, but, rather, about bold rabbinic action in the face of contrary rabbinic opinion. The argument is an obscure legal point in the procedure of rejecting levirate marriage (*yivum*). Upon the death of a husband, his brother must marry the widow unless he rejects her by symbolically handing over his shoe (*halitza*). In the Book of Ruth, Ploni Almoni (The name humorously suggests anonymity) rejects the levirate marriage to Ruth, clearing the way for Boaz to marry her. This rejection ceremony took place before a court during the day, so it is not obvious how one could do it in private at night. The Talmud agrees with Rabbi Akiva who ruled that it could be done in private at night. When the first Rabbi in the passage does it alone at night with a sock (instead of a shoe) the Talmud calls it a "bold" move. His boldness is bold legal interpretation. Though this Rabbi Ploni has a real name, Bar Hayya of Ctesiphon, he is called Rabbi Ploni, suggesting the original Ploni from Ruth. The second Ploni is R. Shmuel. Some translate "sandal" or "small shoe" rather than "sock."

All well and good, but the legal point is so irrelevant to the figurative language of prophets that we must conclude Maimonides wants us to look at the passage pruriently. He suggests this by saying of the phrase, *how bold*, that the sages "always speak in this way when they express their appreciation of the greatness of something said or done, but whose appearance is *shocking*" (This is Pines' translation. For "shocking," Kafih has: *zarut*; Schwarz: *ganai*; Ibn Tibbon: *ganut*; Jud.Ar.: שגאעו). While one might question R. Ploni's act, it could hardly be said to be *shocking*. By changing the name of Bar Hayya of Ctesiphon to R. Ploni, Maimonides wants us to recall the rejection of the *yivum* in the Book of Ruth. He wants us to recall that Ruth uncovered the feet of the sleeping Boaz, and to recall that *foot* is a euphemism for the male organ. The prurient suggestion of the *Yevamot* passage might be that Ploni rejected the *yivum* because he preferred his own company. (This could be a humorous reading of Midrash, *Ruth Rabba* 7:7: which has Ploni Almoni say "The first [husband of Ruth and Orpah] died because they took them as wives; shall I then take her? I will not contaminate [*m'arbev*] my seed...")

This reminds us of the principle of Rabbi Akiva that we sublimate prurient passages in prophetic revelation to learn about divine creativity, since man has no better figure to use than procreation to describe divine creation (see my Introduction). Maimonides actually mentions this concept in our chapter. On page 99 of the Pines' translation of the Guide, he says:

"Again, as we have no intellectual cognition of our bringing somebody other than us to existence except through a *direct act* (footnote 8), He is described as active."

Pines' Footnote 8 reads: "The [Arabic] word *mubāshara* used here also means 'an act accomplished through contact' and 'sexual intercourse.'"

Moreover, we know that Maimonides frequently refers to male and female when he wants to symbolize the union of form and matter. The divine "foot," so understood, is really the limit case justifying all lesser figurative descriptions. It is also the most dangerous; for even though we know we are only speaking metaphorically, it is most upsetting to imagine God in the act of procreation. "Bold," indeed! In addition, it directly implicates the two categories the Mishnah *Hagigah* rules we may not discuss in public, to wit, *Maaseh Bereshit*/creation, and

gilui arayot/forbidden couplings. Maimonides must cloak it in what we call esotericism. Nonetheless, *esoteric* is not the same as secret. Maimonides wants *us*, ultimately, to get the idea.

Thus, while Maimonides distracts us with a mere translational expansion on *gadol kokho*/boldness (that it is identical to the Aramaic *rav guvrea*), he really wants to show us how far the Rabbis would go in making even luridly physical comparisons to God. If I am right that this is a case of Maimonidean esotericism, we see that his esotericism is not a cover for Aristotelianism (as some argue). Rather, he conforms precisely to the law from *Hagigah* proscribing the *public* teaching of creation and forbidden couplings.

ABARBANEL VS. NARBONI ON THE MEANING OF “BOLD DESCRIPTION”

Two early commentators debate what Maimonides meant by quoting Midrashic language involving this phrase, “bold description,” *gadol kokhan*, when it comments on Ezekiel’s description of the *Merkava*, the divine “chariot.” The Midrash, Genesis *Rabba* 27:1, says:

“Great was the power of the Prophets; they compared the creature to its Creator (*gadol kokhan shel nivium, shehem m’damin et ha-tzura l’yotzra*); comp. ‘And over the resemblance (likeness, *d’mut*) of the throne was a resemblance like the appearance of man’ (Ezekiel 1:26).”

The reason that Maimonides gives for considering this passage together with the problem of Rabbi Ploni’s sock is that the phrase there, *rav guvrei* is the Aramaic for *gadol kokho*. He then comments,

“They have thus plainly stated that all those images which the Prophets perceived, i.e. in prophetic visions, are images created by God. This is perfectly correct; *for every image in our imagination has been created*. How pregnant is the expression, ‘Great is their boldness!’ They indicated by it, that they themselves found it very remarkable; for whenever they perceived a word or act difficult to explain, or apparently objectionable, they used that phrase. (Here he quotes the story of R. Ploni’s sock, and the translational link between the two versions of the phrase). Hence, in the preceding quotation, the sense is, How remarkable is the language which the Prophets were obliged to use when they speak of God the Creator in terms signifying properties of beings created by Him. This deserves attention (*v’haven et zei heitav*). Our Sages have thus stated in distinct and plain terms that they are far from believing in the corporeality of God; and in the figures and forms seen in a prophetic vision, though belonging to created beings, the Prophets, to use the words of our Sages, ‘compared the creature to its Creator.’”

The italicized words prompt Narboni (Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne, d. 1362), a commentator of the Averroist school, to claim that the “likeness of the throne” is really the active intellect, symbolized as a great angel (perhaps Metatron), while the “appearance of the likeness of a man” is the first cause, God. Since, as we learn from Guide 1:49, wings are attributed to angels but not God, since they are a grossly physical appendage associated with a lower life form, they indicate that angels are on a lower level in the great chain of being. Maimonides says there, “It was thereby shown, that the existence of God is more perfect than that of angels, as much as man is more perfect than the lower animals.” Thus, according to Narboni, the bold comparison in Ezekiel is his comparison of God to the angel, and when Maimonides says *for every image in our imagination has been created*, i.e., that the angel in the prophet’s imagination was created, he meant that the forms appearing in the prophetic vision are wholly imaginary, created by the visionary. This makes the bold description even bolder, since it relates God to a purely imaginary corporeal form.

This is Abarbanel’s reading of Narboni. It is based on two words in Narboni’s comment: after quoting Maimonides’ statement that “all those images (forms) which the Prophets perceived, i.e., in prophetic visions, are images created by God,” Narboni interjects: “*in the soul of the prophet (b’nefesh ha-navi)*.” Other commentators, including Even-Shmuel, took Narboni to mean that those images *in the soul of the prophet* were *created by God*. The problem is that *Narboni* did not say they were created by God, *Maimonides* said it. Focusing on the two-

word comment only, Abarbanel thought Narboni meant that the forms in the vision are *only* in the soul of the prophet, and have no external referent. Since he knew that Narboni believed in the God of the philosophers, who never concerns Himself with particular individuals, Abarbanel could not see how Narboni's deity could have created the forms in a particular prophet's vision. So, for Abarbanel, it seemed to follow that Narboni's prophet's vision was entirely imaginary. That is why Narboni, the strict Aristotelian, was forced to say that the particular vision was only "in the soul of the prophet."

Abarbanel complained that Narboni's interpretation was unnecessarily "indirect," "strange," and even "worthless." When Maimonides says *for every image in our imagination has been created*, he really means that the forms appearing in the imagination of the prophet reflect real *created* entities in this world, not imagined entities. These real entities were ultimately created by God, not by the imagination, *brua lo b'dimion*. What the sages meant by *bold description* is the metaphorical relation of created physical things to The Creator. According to Abarbanel, the great doctrine intended by the phrase is that "every form that a man portrays in his imagination is a real physical existent," *rotze lomar, sh'kol tzura sh'yakhol ha-adam l'tzair oto b'dimiono hi brua b'mitziot*. To prove that this was Maimonides' intent, he quotes him saying here, "How remarkable is the language which the Prophets were obliged to use when they speak of God the Creator in terms signifying properties of *beings* created by Him; this deserves attention." Beings, not figments.

Abarbanel does not here attempt to explain the meaning of the terms used by Ezekiel, and is probably right not to do so, since, as he repeatedly points out, this is not the purpose of the chapter. Maimonides addresses those issues early in section three of the Guide, especially 3:7, although he does so in bafflingly cloaked language. Abarbanel believes that the purpose of our chapter is to explain corporeal terms appearing in prophecy that had not been treated in the Lexicon. This chapter, then, grants us license to boldly interpret such terms without having to fall back on the Lexicon for justification.

THE PARABLE OF THE BANKER AND THE BEGGAR

To explain how we may use indirect descriptions to portray the existence of God without saying anything definitive about Him, Maimonides gives us an extended parable about the king of a country:

"If you wish to describe the king of a country to one of his subjects who does not know him, you can give a description and an account of his existence in many ways. You will either say to him, the tall man with a fair complexion and grey hair is the king, thus describing him by his accidents; or you will say, the king is the person round whom are seen a great multitude of men on horse and on foot, and soldiers with drawn swords, over whose head banners are waving, and before whom trumpets are sounded; or it is the person living in the palace in a particular region of a certain country: or it is the person who ordered the building of that wall, or the construction of that bridge; or by some other similar acts and things relating to him. His existence can be demonstrated in a still more indirect way, e.g., if you are asked whether this land has a king, you will undoubtedly answer in the affirmative. 'What proof have you?' 'The fact that this banker here, a weak and little person, stands before this large mass of gold pieces, and that poor man, tall and strong, who stands before him asking in vain for alms of the weight of a carob-grain, is rebuked and is compelled to go away by the mere force of words: for had he not feared the king, he would, without hesitation, have killed the banker, or pushed him away and taken as much of the money as he could.' Consequently, this is a proof that this country has a ruler and his existence is proved by the well-regulated affairs of the country, on account of which the king is respected and the punishments decreed by him are feared. In this whole example nothing is mentioned that indicated his characteristics, and his essential properties, by virtue of which he is king."

The aggadists frequently used parables about a flesh and blood king to refer to God. Maimonides' first version, which describes the king by his physical appearance only, shows that we may point to another without having to define him. Apart from that, the example is irrelevant to God who has no physical description. Nonetheless,

there are such examples of physical descriptions in text and liturgy, the most striking of which is the *Shir ha-Kavod (anim zmirot)* of R. Yehuda ha-Khasid (12th C.), an awe-inspiring catalogue of such descriptions. But even R. Yehuda recognized that physical descriptions fail:

“By the hand of Your prophets or alone to Your servants, You portrayed in images the splendid glory of Your power, Your greatness, Your strength. They described You according to Your deeds. They imagined You, but not as You really are, but only from your deeds. They made parables about You in many visions, yet here You are One, for all of their imagined forms.” (my trans.)

The second example, the king surrounded by his host, frequently appears as the *pamalia* of the divine angelic host which chants ‘holy holy holy’ before God. The third example locates the king in a particular place, but though we say that God is ‘in heaven,’ we do not take this to be a discrete location. While God is said to be the place of the world, the world is not His place (Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 68:5). The fourth example shows that the king is the author of certain public edifices, but though God showed the Jews through prophecy the plan for the Tabernacle, He was in no sense its builder. Nonetheless, we may indicate God’s existence by way of his creations.

The last and most striking example seems to come closest to what Maimonides has in mind when he says we know of God by His actions in the world. Just as God creates a natural law for all things, and a Torah law to govern all Jews, so we know the king by his imposition of a system of lawful justice upon his realm. It was one of the Noahide prescriptions that the gentiles shall have a system of law (Genesis 9).

The problem is that the king only distantly governed the Jewish community, whether in Egypt or in Europe, and such a king would not have paid much heed to a violent beggar in the Jewish quarter. But the fact that the Jewish banker would not have been attacked by the Jewish beggar hardly reveals the existence of a distant gentile monarch (a Jewish one being out of the question), but rather the existence of Torah law administered by a community of rabbis.

The banker clearly failed the obligation of *tzedaka* (charity). As for the beggar, when Maimonides says, “...for had he not feared the king, he would, without hesitation, have killed the banker,” it really would mean that had a Jewish beggar not feared the King of kings he would have killed the banker.

Still, assuming that this parable is set in the gentile bazaar, we admit that Maimonides’ portrayal of the weak banker and the strong beggar is strikingly realistic, typical of the realistic views of medical men. But we should be careful here, since he had a negative view of the philosophic capabilities of other physicians (*Letter to Ibn Tibbon*). While this realistic portrayal of the state of nature has some affinities with Hobbes, the purpose of the Maimonidean *melekh*, unlike Hobbes’ Leviathan, was not to bring peace, except tangentially. Peace should already have been established by the acceptance of Torah.

Indeed, while the term “king” appears once in the parable, the more frequent appellation is “sultan” (Jud. Ar.: אַלסַלְטָאן). He does not use the word “caliph.” The distinction is important. In Maimonides’ own case, he did not serve Saladin himself, but his viceroy, who would only have qualified as the sultan, the “authority” who brings order.

We do not lack clarity on Maimonides’ conception of the purpose of the Jewish king. His *melekh* is more like the Muslim caliph, rather than a sultan.

The first purpose of the king, in Mishneh Torah, is to wipe out Amelek (*Melakhim* 1:1). Since, apart from the odd Haman or Hitler this seems to have been accomplished, the question is why would Maimonides make this the very first purpose of a Jewish king? The Torah tells us that the Amelekite problem was their mode of war, i.e., ambush. Still, it seems hard to condemn a whole race for its adherence to a standard military doctrine. Maimonides answers the question in Guide 3:41: “As Amalek was the first to attack Israel with the sword, it was

commanded to blot out his name by means of the sword,” in other words, this command has to do with the original establishment of Israel, and was meant as a lesson to deter others who would destroy the covenant nation.

The main purpose of the king is to establish the religion: “His purpose and intent shall be to elevate the true faith and fill the world with justice, destroying the power of the wicked and waging the wars of God” (*Melakhim*, 4:10). Some of these wars are obligatory, as with Amalek and the seven Canaanite nations, but others need not be. “He may wage a *milkhemet hareshut*, i.e., a war fought with other nations, in order to expand the borders of Israel or magnify its greatness and reputation” (5:1).

The king’s religious role is clear: “If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its *mitzvot* as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law, as David, his ancestor did, and will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of God, we may, with assurance, consider him *Mashiakh*” (Messiah. *Ibid.* 11:4). He continues, emphasizing the king’s universal mission, “He will then improve the entire world, motivating all the nations to serve God together.”

Compare the purpose of the caliph. The word *khalifa* means “successor.” He is the representative of Muhammad himself. He is called *Amīr al-Mu’minīn*, commander of the faithful. Every man is, in a sense, just such a successor, charged to be a *khalifa* to Allah. But there could only be one caliph, since the caliphate represents the political unity of the Muslim *umma*. How this leader was to be chosen became the focus of the great dispute between the *Shia* and the *Sunna*. That there would be order under the rule of the caliph was a tangential benefit, not the true purpose of the institution. The purpose of the Caliphate was to conduct *jihad* against obstacles in the path of Islamic expansion.

Sarah Stroumsa grasped Maimonides’ absorption and transmutation of certain Islamic and specifically Almohadic values in her illuminating monograph, “The Politico-Religious Context of Maimonides.” She writes: “Maimonides’ depiction of the messiah is characterized by an overwhelming insistence on the messiah’s military role. One suspects that the frequent military campaigns of the Almohads, in which they were accompanied by a magnificent copy of the Qur’an and advancing under the banner of the Mahdi, offered Maimonides a messianic model that went well with his reading of the *Laws of Kings*, both in Deuteronomy and in the Talmud.” (*Nuremberg Essays on Maimonides, Die Trias des Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic, And Ancient Culture of Knowledge (Studia Judaica)* Georges Tamer, ed., 263-265).

Maimonides’ parable perhaps answers the question of how we know that there is law and order in a gentile country. That their people have a king who maintains the law shows that they are Noahides. But the existence of order does not establish the existence of a Jewish king in a Jewish polity, it only reveals the community’s commitment to Torah law.

GUIDE 1:47 AND 1:48 HOW TO REWRITE THE TORAH

OVERVIEW

It is useful to consider chapters 47 and 48 together.

The Torah is for the whole people. Because of that, it is “written in the language of men.”

The message of the Bible must reach the greatest number of people, despite the risk that we might have to reinterpret some of its statements. Some problems flow from this universality. Nonetheless, law must ignore individual preferences and individual needs to secure the greater legislative good (3:34). Every nation faces this problem.

Scripture must reach the largest number of people with the most urgent message about God, even at the risk of creating the *educational* contradiction Maimonides mentioned in his Introduction to the Guide. The teacher gives the students one explanation at the inception of their studies. This account is not in itself untrue, but is certainly incomplete. Therefore, the teacher later teaches a different but necessarily deeper account that brings the sharpest students closer to the sublime truth.

What are we to do about the anthropomorphic attributions in the Bible? There are three approaches. The first is the popular approach. Even the lowest class of the people senses the problem of divine corporeality. Still, they are satisfied as long as the Bible does not make gross attributions to God. The second approach is Onkelos’ Aramaic translation of the Torah, the “*Targum*.” Onkelos generally uses distancing and sublimating language to avoid divine corporeality. He does not stop at merely gross attributions, as in the first approach. The third approach is Maimonides’ way. He disapproves of rewriting the Torah to avoid anthropomorphism. Instead, we must *actively interpret* the text using the method of his lexical chapters. He disapproves of Onkelos’ project of translating the Torah precisely because of its public nature. It cannot reach the deepest true understanding. This true understanding is only for the mind of the properly trained interpreter.

Ultimately, we cannot verbalize the deeper message of Torah. In this, Maimonides is in the same situation as the mystic. In *The Heart and the Fountain*, (Oxford, 2002, pp. 3-6) Joseph Dan, the great scholar of Jewish mystical experience, explains, “Mysticism is that which cannot be expressed in words, period.” He goes on to say, “A non-mystic is someone who believes that when truth is explained to him in words, he should understand the truth. The mystic is someone who knows that real truth, meaningful truth, can never be fully expressed in words....*the mystics and the religious are two kinds of believers who are separated by a common language*” (his italics). While we can reach some understanding of this truth, we can never reach God’s essential nature. The Bible is the best expression of these truths available to us in writing. Our responsibility is to seek out these truths beyond the letter of the text.

THE EXTERNAL SENSES

The Torah attributes certain senses to God, the so-called “internal” and “external” senses. It was common in ancient thought to refer to the internal and the external senses (see, e.g., the excellent glossary of scholasticism in *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*, Richard McKeon, editor, Scribner, 1958, vol. 2, p. 494, “*sensus externi*” and “*sensus interni*”). The external senses are the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, in that order of descent. The internal “senses” are the faculties of thought, understanding, and imagination. The internal senses are no more properly attributable to God than the more obviously corporeal external senses. All are means of perception.

The public has an untutored idea of what senses they can appropriately attribute to God. We attribute only what we regard as excellent to God. We regard only certain senses as perfections. Since sight, sound and smell are excellent senses, and operate at a distance, we accept these as divine attributions. This is praise of God, and so He sees all, hears all, and enjoys the odor of subtle scent, all very good things for us. Still, it seems too gross to consider God touching or tasting as we touch or taste (but see Guide 1:18, which featured two such scriptural passages). Besides, we never saw God touching or tasting anything (*sh'harei einam ro-im oto*). Elsewhere, Maimonides said that touch (and, presumably, he would include taste) is a “disgrace” for us (Guide 2:36), and, therefore, could never be attributed to God.

The truth, of course, is that all of these senses are corporeal. To include one is to include all, to deny one is to deny all. But the “Torah speaks in the language of men,” (Guide 1:26), and so we end up with a seeing and hearing God who enjoys the odor of the sacrifice but never touches or tastes it. This language of Torah was a concession so that the people could grasp a more sublime idea of divinity than their neighbors had. This language is merely figurative, since human senses are subject to passion, change and pain, but God does not suffer these affections. Still, we project sensory perception on God in order to praise His omniscience.

The Bible says that God sees, hears and smells. Here is Maimonides’ explanation: we should read all of these statements as meaning that God *knows* the acts and speeches of men. Obviously, a non-corporeal being does not perceive corporeal things *through* corporeal senses. God knows all, immediately, with a knowledge that is not separate in Him, for He is the knowledge, the knower and known. He knows, but His knowledge is different from our knowledge. Furthermore, when the text says that God “hears” prayer, we must actively reinterpret the text to mean that He *answers* the prayer (1:45). The activity that we call “God hearing prayer” is a unified divine essential activity combining the knowledge of God with his creative providential *response* or *denial*.

THE INTERNAL SENSES

Divine “Imagination” in Scripture. While making this proof, Maimonides casually mentions that scripture never joins imagination to God as an attributive term, in the same way and for the same reason that people do not think of God touching or tasting. That is, they consider it too gross to imagine that God imagines.

Commentators have replied with two such *damiti* (“I imagined”) passages in Numbers and Isaiah: “...Surely *as I have imagined*, so it will be...,” and, “...*as I imagined* to do to them, so will I do to you.” They defend Maimonides for omitting these passages for two reasons. Either those were speeches of prophets rather than speeches of God; or they are about thought and not imagination (my trans. of Isaiah 14:24 and Numbers 33:56; Friedlander on 1:47, note 1, p. 164; Kafih, note 18, p. 71).

Abarbanel, Shem Tov, and Efodi, among the ancient commentators, justify the term *damiti* appearing in these scriptures by reference to another passage, Hosea 12:11, “...by means of the prophets have I used images,” (my trans. of *bi'yad ha-neviim admah*). They argue that in these two instances, *damiti* is a *conclusory statement*, a *paal yotze*, i.e., it expresses a prophetic conclusion, since it is, literally, “by the hand of the prophets” that God “imagines.”

Maimonides then says that just as the five external senses are equally corporeal from the divine point of view, we can say the same of the internal senses: imagination, thought, and understanding. The mind, it would appear, is in no better or worse position than the imagination. Of course, the Bible attributes knowledge to God frequently. Still, it is no more consistent to grant God sight and deny Him touch, than to grant Him knowledge but deny Him imagination. Maimonides leaves it at that, for he will come to these points again, but let’s consider this idea.

Imagination Cannot be Attributed to God. The problem with imagination is that it is always either fantasy or representation or both. Fantasy and representation both imply falsity. Fantasy is obviously an account at odds with truth. Representation portrays the likeness of truth, but truth is truth and the portrayal merely a portrayal.

God makes apples, not paintings of them. If the painting were a *true* portrayal of the true apple it would not be a painting of an apple, but the apple itself. Thus, the attribution of imagination to God is the attribution of falsity to God, which is not allowable.

Maimonides apparently thinks that all men have this profound insight, which is why they felt it too gross to attribute imagination to God. That is why Torah refrains from the attribution of imagination. The Torah does not make attributions unless people think of them as perfections because “Torah speaks in the language of men.”

Can Knowledge be Attributed to God? On the other hand, knowledge and understanding are great perfections of men, and easily attributed by men to God. Maimonides will argue to the contrary that knowledge and understanding are *homonymous* terms used one way by men, differently for God. “God knows but *not* through knowledge,” is the special formula Maimonides will use. The homonymy of these terms could mean that they are so different as to share nothing but the sound and spelling. It is more likely that he means that thought is essential to God but accidental for man. This means that in God, it is always active, while in men it is usually potential, and always subject to passion, affection, suffering and change.

Active Interpretation. The result is that we must do more as active interpreters. It makes no more or less sense to say “God sees all” than to say, “God knows all”: both, according to Maimonides, have equal status as internal and external senses, that is, as means of perception. Not only must we abstract from statements like “God sees all” to understand “God knows all,” but we must go further and understand “God knows all” with a knowledge that is different from human knowledge.

This far literate writing cannot go. Writing is itself a corporeal reifying expression. We must ascend to a higher spiritual understanding of the text. Ultimately, then, there is no benefit in rewriting the Torah. We have reached the stage where language breaks down and cannot communicate the incommunicable.

CRITICISM OF ONKELOS

Maimonides, in our chapter 1:48, studies Onkelos’ attempt to rewrite the language of Torah (see also 1:27).

In general, Maimonides finds consistency and high-mindedness in *Targum*. Wherever Onkelos finds corporeal attribution, he sublimates it. Still, Maimonides has a divided opinion of Onkelos. On the one hand, he needs Onkelos as his canonized predecessor for the right to interpret the Torah systematically. In this vein, he must resolve any inconsistencies that crop up in the *Targum*, which would weaken its authority as the Torah’s interpretation. On the other hand, no public rewrite can reach its true meaning. Only the individual’s active reinterpretation according to the method of the Lexicon approaches that meaning.

Onkelos on Hearing. When it comes to sensual attribution, meaning here only the external senses, Onkelos maintains his sublimating mode. Thus, he translates “hearing” consistently in two ways; either that God intellectually *perceives* the audible statements without audibly hearing them, or, in the case of prayer, that He *accepts* or does not accept them. The famous instance is Exodus 22:

“Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely *hear* their cry (*Targum* from ‘and they cry...’: *im mikval yikval kadamay kabala ekbal k’vilteh*—!); And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.” (Exodus 22:22-24)

Onkelos’ translates God’s “hearing” as God’s accepting the cry of the widows and orphans. Maimonides quoted this passage with approval in 1:45, the lexical chapter on hearing. He believes that God miraculously provides for the widow and orphan. His only problem was with the sensual corporeality of God’s “hearing” their cry, not with

God accepting their prayer or answering it. Maimonides had explained how we must reinterpret the figure of God's "hearing" and when the literal interpretation indicates, "God accepts the prayer," as in the proof-text, we interpret that God *answered* the prayer. Conversely, if it indicates that God does not "hear," we interpret that God *denied* the prayer. He expects us to remember this method of active reinterpretation and contrast it with Onkelos' method of rewriting. Onkelos does not go this far. Because of the public nature of his project, he cannot go far enough.

Onkelos on Sight. At least, in the case of hearing, Onkelos is consistent. By contrast, he translates sight inconsistently.

This initiates Maimonides' critique. He maintains the critique on two levels, the explicit level and the implicit level. Explicitly, Maimonides needs to resolve inconsistencies so that Onkelos can remain his precedent for actively reinterpreting Torah. This explains his concern with the state of Targumic manuscript evidence. On the implicit level, Maimonides wants us to compare what we have already learned from the Lexicon about active interpretation and contrast that with Onkelos' public translation, to Onkelos' detriment

The problem with "sight" is that *Targum* usually translates it by *khaza*, but does not do so always. *Khaza* appears in both Hebrew and Aramaic, with, apparently, the same meaning. Maimonides included the *Hebrew* version of *khaza* in the lexical chapter on sight, 1:4. He defined it there to mean optical perception or intellectual perception, with only the latter meaning attributed to God. He did not call it homonymous, which means that even when the term means "optical perception" its meaning can slide over to plain "perception." If it were a homonym, then the physical meaning could not be suppressed, and, therefore, could never be attached to God, even metaphorically.

Now, since *khaza* was not homonymous, at least in Hebrew, there would be no reason to avoid using it for God, since we could always say it only meant "perception," not "physical sight." Jastrow's *Dictionary*, similarly, p. 445, translates it as "to see, to recognize." Nevertheless, *Targum* is not consistent, and frequently substitutes the reflexive formulation that "it was revealed before Me," *glei kadam hashem*, instead of *khaza*, "recognize (know)."

Maimonides spends about half of our chapter 1:48 canvassing nine exceptions where Targum gives some variant of the Aramaic *glei kadam hashem* instead of *khaza*. But Maimonides' explicit concern is with the meaning of *khaza*. He strives to explain why Targum would avoid using *khaza* when "there is sufficient evidence that ... (it) is homonymous, and that it denotes mental perception as well as the sensation of sight." This comes as a surprise, since he never said it was homonymous in Guide 1:4. Shem Tov rushes to explain that it is homonymous only in Aramaic! Maimonides' dubious explanation of its Aramaic homonymity is that *khaza* not only means to know/recognize, but to *assent to* and *fix in one's mind* without cavil (Kafih note 6, and Friedlander's *scholia* canvassing the Judeo-Arabic original, Munk, Al-Kharizi, and Ibn Tibbon, note 2). Essentially, Maimonides thinks the *Aramaic khaza* (in contrast to the *Hebrew khaza*) means that God *identifies* with the perception.

Based on his readings of the manuscript evidence, Maimonides conjectures that Onkelos avoids *khaza* when "seeing" is coupled with "wrong." This is so whether wrong means injustice, evil, injury, oppression, or violence. Onkelos avoids linking wrong to the *khaza*-perception of God, because that would mean that God is *identified* with wrong. The rationale is a passage in Habakkuk:

"[Art] thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. [Thou art] of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, [and] holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth [the man that is] more righteous than he?" (Habakkuk 1:12-13)

God "canst not look on iniquity." Arguably, Maimonides wrenches the phrase from context to establish his nearly Manichean grammatical principle. Nonetheless, he says that *Targum* strives to avoid attributing sight to God

when the sight beholds iniquity because then He would be *identified* with iniquity. Therefore, when “God sees,” and when seeing is linked with iniquity, *Targum* translates “it was revealed before Him,” a sufficient distancing to make the point.

Critique of *Targum*. Maimonides now wants us critique *Targum* by going through each of these nine proof-texts linking the name of God with iniquity. As it happens, we already know how Maimonides would actively reinterpret these passages. It is obvious that in none of them did God identify with the objects of His knowledge, so Onkelos need not have distanced God from those objects.

We skip the first one about Leah for the moment. The passage about “seeing” Laban’s oppression of Jacob only links iniquity in the speech of Jacob’s *angel*, not of God, and for Onkelos to further distance that iniquity is overkill. There follow four linkages of God and iniquity from the beginning of Exodus. In Exodus 2:25 God “saw” the Jews enslaved, but the verse goes on to say that He “knew,” so that “saw” really does mean “knew,” not that God identified with the slave-masters. Exodus 3:7 and 3:9 both involve the mediation of the angel of the burning bush, and we interpret it the way we did with Jacob’s angel. In Exodus 32:19, the Jews knew that the Lord had “seen” the iniquity of their slavery because their mediating “angels” Moses and Aaron told them. In these passages, translation is unnecessary to the mind of the active interpreter.

The rest of the passages are about the iniquity of idol worship. In these cases, there is *nothing* to see optically because no matter what *physical* ritual occurs idolatry is always in the heart. In these cases, God knows and visits punishment upon the transgressors in the same kind of unified action as when He answers prayer. So Exodus 32:9 is about the Golden Calf, and Deuteronomy 32:19 and 36 are from Moses’ song at the end of Torah, where he prophesies the Jews’ slide into idolatry and their inevitable punishment. Deuteronomy 32:19 says that God “saw” this iniquity and abhorred them. Maimonides treated this passage in Guide 1:36. There he said that expressions of divine anger and abhorrence are figures “exclusively used with reference to idolatry” and involve projecting our experience of God’s resultant punishment back on Him as anger. Again, it is obvious that God does not identify with idolatry, and further distancing is superfluous.

The result is that Onkelos’ “it was revealed before him” is in each case unnecessary and may even confuse or deter our own active reinterpretation. By rewriting these passages, we lose the starkness of sensual attribution whose purpose is to force our rethinking.

Targumic Inconsistency. Still, even if we are not impressed with this principle of distancing God from “iniquity,” at least, in these nine examples, Onkelos applied it consistently.

Maimonides now notes three cases where *Targum* does not consistently couple “it was revealed before God” with iniquity statements. In these cases, *Targum* inexplicably returns to the unreflexive *khaza*/recognize/identify translation, making God “look upon iniquity,” and, presumably, identify with it. This is a problem, because if Maimonides’ theory of iniquitous distancing is wrong, then there is no explanation to account for Onkelos’ arbitrary interpretational preferences, ruining him as canonical precedent for Maimonides’ project. Maimonides is not one who appreciates the beauty of inconsistency.

Maimonides claims to be unable to find a pattern that would account for all three instances and demands review of all Targumic manuscripts for copyist error. The first two are from the run-up to Noah’s flood and concern God “seeing” the idolatry and evil of the Noahide generation. Onkelos translated “seeing” as *khaza* despite the iniquity thus linked to divine perception. We could explain this Maimonideanly by saying that God *knew their hearts* and immediately and unifiedly punished them with the flood. The fourth case (skipping the third) is inconsistent the other way, that when “God will see for himself the ram” (Genesis 22:8) Onkelos returns to the reflexive *kadam hashem gli imra*, the “ram is revealed before God” despite there being no iniquity involved in a ram. Maimonides conjectures either 1) that *Targum* would not link dumb animals to God, or 2) that God does not perceive individuals of the animal kingdom but only individual intellectual souls, or 3) that God does not allow

himself to be *directly* petitioned in Abraham's prayer to cause a ram *to exist now*. Again, we know how Maimonides had previously interpreted the passage. In Commentary on the Mishnah, *Pirke Avot 5:6*, at an early stage of his career, Maimonides followed the Mishnah's notion that the ram at Isaac's binding was a miracle ram created by God on the evening of the sixth day with a number of other miraculous objects. He argued that God *seeded* certain miracles into nature at the creation of nature (he developed a richer notion of providential miracles later).

The third and more interesting case is in two lines about Leah, one of which we skipped at the beginning of the first nine texts. Maimonides has *concealed* this gross inconsistency by splitting the lines between a full page of other material. The inconsistency is between two *consecutive verses* in the *Targum*. Maimonides quotes both but does not put them next to each other the way I shall to emphasize his point:

“And when the Lord *saw* (*va'yar*) [*Targum: khaza*—‘recognized/identified’] that Leah [was] hated (*snuah*), he opened her womb: but Rachel [was] barren. And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the Lord hath *looked upon* (*raah*) [*Targum: arei gli kadam hashem*—‘it was revealed before the Lord’] my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.” (Genesis 29:31-32)

There is unexplained inconsistency between the two verses, for in each God is said to *look* upon iniquity, but Onkelos translates the concept in two different ways. Maimonides is prepared to pass *Targum's* inconsistency off to bad copyists, a problem he also suffered from. One possible rabbinic solution, unmentioned and thus probably not approved by Maimonides, was to say that when you have four wives, wife number one is called “loved” while wives numbers two through four were technically called “hated,” and no iniquity is meant by it. The better and more Maimonidean approach is to notice that in the first line hatred is not something seen but *known*, as a fact, and not identified with. Thus, *khaza*, in the sense of “recognized” would be appropriate. Moreover, in the second line, Leah is only *poetically* saying that “surely the Lord hath *looked upon*” her affliction, by which she meant that God *answered* her prayer, not that He opened divine eyelids in her direction or identified with her affliction. Again, none of these rewrites is necessary and Onkelos is really impeding the active interpreter.

The broad point remains. We cannot satisfactorily attribute any of the senses to God without doing violence to language. Because truth is incorporeal, corporeal communication is dumb before it and there is no way to articulate this directly in public print. The only access possible occurs when human intellect strives to align itself with divine intellect in the process of active reinterpretation. This is a form of meditation.

GUIDE 1:49
ANGELS, PROVIDENCE AND THE ETERNAL FEMININE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, Maimonides sketches his views on angels. We learn how they fit into his scheme of providence and into his conception of the Work of the Chariot, the *Maaseh Merkava*. The key is this: in prophecy, a feminine angel can represent unformed matter.

Maimonides presumes our familiarity with passages from his Mishneh Torah on the subject of angels, where he displays a lively interest in angelology. These angels are not mere impersonal physical forces. These angels are intelligent beings. Here is the relevant material from M.T. *Ysodai HaTorah* 2:3-8 (translation is by Moses Hyamson, 1976, Feldheim):

- “3. All that the Holy God blessed be He, created in His universe falls into three divisions.... (Thirdly,) are creatures that consist of form without substance (*tsura b'lo golem*). These are the angels. For the angels are not material bodies, but only forms distinguished from each other.
4. What then is meant when the prophets say that they saw an angel of fire, possessing wings? Such descriptions are to be understood as prophetic visions and are to be taken in an allegorical sense. They are meant to indicate that the angel is not corporeal and has no gravity like bodies that have weight. Thus too, it is said, “For the Lord, thy God, is a devouring fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24). Yet God is not fire. The expression is a metaphor. Similarly, it is said “He makes his angels winds” (Psalms 104:4).
5. In what way are these forms different from each other, seeing that they are incorporeal? The answer is that, in their essential being, they are not equal. Each of them is below another and exists by the other’s energy, and so, throughout, one angel being above the other. And all exist by the power and goodness of the Holy God, blessed be He. Solomon, in his wisdom, alludes to this in the text, ‘For higher than the high, One watcheth’ (Ecclesiastes 5:7).
6. When we say that one angel is below another, this does not refer to position in space as when we think of an individual who occupies a higher seat than another, but to superiority of rank, as when one says in reference to two scholars, one of whom has more wisdom than the other, that he is the higher in degree, or when one says of the cause that it is higher than the effect.
7. The variety of names that the angels bear has reference to the difference in their rank. They are called *Hayoth Hakodesh*—these are the highest; *Ophanim*, *Erelim*, *Hashmalim*, *Seraphim*, *Malakhim*, *Bene Elokim*, *Cherubim*, and *Ishim*. These ten names, by which the angels are called, correspond to their ten degrees [compare the *sefirot*, and the ten emanative hypostases in Avicenna]. The highest rank, above which there is no degree higher than that of God, blessed be He, is that of the form called *Hayoth (khayot)*. In the prophetic literature, it is therefore said that the *Hayoth* are beneath the Throne of Glory. To the tenth degree, belongs the form of those termed *Ishim*. They are the angels that commune with the prophets and appear to them in the prophetic vision. They are called *Ishim* (individuals, men), because their rank approximates to that of the intelligence of human beings.
8. All these forms live, realize the Creator, and possess a knowledge of Him that is exceedingly great—a knowledge corresponding with the rank of each but having no relation to the infinite greatness of the Creator. Even the highest class of angels, cannot attain to a knowledge of the truth concerning God as He really is. For this, their capacities are insufficient. But the highest angelic form apprehends and knows more than the one below it; and so on, through all the degrees down to the tenth. This, too, knows God with knowledge, to the like of which, human beings, consisting of matter as well as form, cannot attain, but none of them knows the Creator as He knows himself.”

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTER 1:49

The angels are incorporeal beings. God creates them. By saying this, Maimonides opposes the Aristotelian concept that incorporeal beings are uncreated.

The angels are the “separate intellects” (*s’khalim nivdalim*): those minds that cause the spheres to rotate eternally. In addition, any incorporeal force or entity apart from God is an angel. We will see that this includes unformed hyllic matter, figured in the books of prophecy by female angels. On the other hand, forces *in* physical bodies are not angels (but see Guide 2:6, specifically about forces in wombs).

The changeability of shape revealed by the angels in the prophetic writings means that they have no shape outside of the prophetic imagination. They could not, because they are “separate intellects,” meaning that they are separate from any shape, shape being a property of matter. The forms of angels glimpsed in prophecy are imagined forms: images, not reality. When the Bible mentions an angel, we can be sure that prophecy took place, and that the vision in the prophet’s imagination persists throughout that specific biblical account.

The prophets wrote using imaginative corporeal metaphors, because men cannot accept the reality of the incorporeal without serious training. Even-Shmuel suggests that people find it difficult to perceive ideas abstracted from form since we require everything to be located in time and place. For the most part, our imagination rules, to the exclusion of intellect. This imagination is a false, reified representation of reality. Imagination governs even most intellectuals (*hem rov ha-maynim*). The intellectuals believed that anything imagined was real and that which is unimaginable cannot be real. This is contrary to the truth, for though the incorporeal is unimaginable, it is real. Here Maimonides’ critique aims at the anti-scientific theology of the Muslim Kalām (for more on them see 1:71-76) and their Jewish followers. They rejected the veracity of sense data or nature, presaging Berkeley and Hume.

“Wings” and their Rules. Prophets imaginatively ascribe to incorporeal beings those natural powers men take as perfections. Thus, they grant God the attribute of sight, which men consider a perfection. There is one difference between metaphoric descriptions of God and of the angels. The Bible only ascribes to God attributes appropriate to men, including the very form of man, but never attributes of animals. Therefore, to distinguish between God and angels, prophets describe angels as “winged,” an attribute of birds, not of men. They also describe them as “flying,” for the same reason. Maimonides asserts that they would never apply “winged” or “flying” to God. On the other hand, they do not apply any other animal characteristics to the angels.

Efodi clarifies an ambiguity in these rules by explaining that when Maimonides said that flight does not occur without wings, he means that we never see flight without wings in nature, not that wingless flight never occurs in the Bible, for it does (Psalms 18:11, Zechariah 5:1, Isaiah 60:8).

Kheruvim and Khayot. Maimonides proceeds to distinguish misleading cases that might seem to be exceptions to these rules. Most of these exceptions have to do with cherubs and *khayot*. Although he applies these two terms to levels of angels in Mishneh Torah, Ysodai HaTorah 2:7, in the Guide he applies other meanings to these words. God’s “riding” the cherub (Psalms 18:11) does not mean He is flying but that the cherub flies and God is superior to it. As we will see, the cherub that God “rides” is just a metaphor for the relationship of God with the soul of the outer sphere of the cosmos, described in 1:70 by the phrase “riding on the *aravot*,” *rokhev ba’aravot* (bearing in mind the important fact that *rokhev* is an anagram of *kherub*—cherub. See my essay in 1:12 “On the Interpretation of Dreams” explaining Maimonidean anagrams).

The *khayot* (“the Living Creatures” in Ezekiel’s vision), on the other hand, have feet and faces, as well as wings. Some of these are animal faces, which would violate Maimonides’ rule against animal ascriptions other than “wings,” e.g., ascription of the face of a lion, an ox, or an eagle. Maimonides responds that these faces did not really represent animal faces, but that sometimes men’s faces resemble animal faces (Guide 3:1). Moreover, he

suggests a distinction between *khayot* and angels, taking them out of the rule. While they seem to be of the ten levels of angels in Mishneh Torah, he also says of them there that they are exalted over all other angels, implying that they are a different species or genus than the angelic host.

In Guide 3:1-2, Maimonides explains that the “faces” of the *hayot* express their dual nature, representing the harmony between the four divisions of the cosmos and the four ages of man. Its “feet” express the causative power of the spheres (on “foot” as cause 1:28, and my essay there).

There is a major exception to these “wing” rules, which Maimonides himself mentioned in Guide 1:43, the parallel chapter to ours. We learned there that one of the meanings of the lexical term “wing” was “to conceal.” We also saw that he delights in concealing this meaning, as he does here. In that chapter we discussed the passage cited, “...under Whose *wings* thou art come to trust,” from Ruth 2:12. This passage seems to violate his rule against attaching animal symbols to God. Recall that in 1:43 he also cited Ruth 3:9, “spread therefore thy *skirt* (wing) over thine handmaid,” which *conceals* a sexual reference about the *uncovering* of Boaz’ *feet*. See my more extensive discussion there. The point is that when the Bible ascribes “wing” to God it always means concealment. Indeed, *kanaf*, in these instances, is a metaphorical extension from “garment” and not “wing.” Guide 1:43 calls *kanaf* a homonym, and gave “garment” or “corner of a garment” as the homonymous alternatives to the ornithological appendage. Therefore, the ascription to God is really a concealing “garment” and not an animal “wing.”

Nevertheless, Shem Tov interjects that since, according to Maimonides, God himself does not move the outer sphere but only inspires the soul of the sphere to move the sphere, we therefore should never ascribe animal motion to God.

Angelic Flight. “Wing,” symbolizes *flight*, itself a metaphor for the unmediated immediate accomplishment of an act. Flight is the specific metaphor for angelic perfection for the following reasons:

1. Birds fly back and forth, appearing and disappearing in the blink of an eye. This should remind us that prophecy comes to non-Mosaic prophets intermittently at best, like lightning or its reflection in the glow of amber (See Introduction to the Guide).
2. Men envy the birds their flight in a way they do not envy other animals, because they wish they too could fly from danger or fly to their desires. This makes flight a perfection in men’s eyes, and so they attribute flight to the angels, to show that the angels are perfect beings.
3. Birds fly with great velocity, just as angels accomplish tasks immediately, at the velocity of thought.
4. Flight implies motion, and motion implies life. Thus, the angel’s “wings” mean that the angels are not merely impersonal forces but living beings.
5. Their wings *cause* their flight, and thus the number of their wings expresses the number of causes in the Aristotelian system. Ezekiel’s angels have four wings (Ezek.1:6) for the four causes: the formal, material, proximate and final causes. Thus, the angels are causes, and their *fourness* suggests the basic fourness of the universe (four humors, winds, elements, cosmological levels, etc.). They especially suggest the four causes of the motion of the spheres: their spherical shapes, their souls, their minds and their desire for God (Guide 2:10, which discusses Maimonides’ notion of fourness).

See the beginning of my treatment of Guide 1:43 for an extensive explanation of angels. See also the end of 1:15 for my essay, “What is the Subject of Jacob’s Ladder” for its discussion of a letter attributed to Maimonides. The author of that letter, probably Joseph Ibn Akin, explained how Maimonides could say in one place that an angel could be a prophet, and in another that an angel could be one of the four physical elements. He did this by

showing the harmonic concordance between the levels of prophecy and the levels of the elements, their effects on the four humors, etc., expressing their *dual nature*.

ANGELS IN THE MIDRASH

“[‘Gen. 3:24: *So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east (mi’kedem) of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*’] *Mi’kedem* (from the east, i.e., of Eden), teaches that the angels were created before (*kodem*) the Garden of Eden as it is written, ‘This is the living creature (*ha-khaya*) that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar [an anagram of cherub]; and I knew that they were *cherubim*’ (Ezekiel 10:20). ‘And a flaming sword’ (the angels are so called) in accordance with the verse ‘His ministers are as flaming fire’ (Psalm 104:4). ‘Which turns every way’: they (the angels) change [turn about]: sometimes they appear as men, sometimes as women, sometimes as spirits, sometimes as angels.” (Midrash *Genesis Rabba*, 21:9)

To illustrate the point that the prophets expressed their concept of angels in images, Maimonides provides an obscure Midrash, and then an even more obscure passage from the prophet Zechariah.

The Midrash says that the prophets imagined the angels sometimes as spirits (*rukhot*-also means winds), sometimes as men and sometimes as women. “Spirits,” suggest both the four winds and the four elements, one of which is wind or air. The passage quoted from Psalms connects angels not only to the element of fire but also elemental air, “Who maketh his *angels spirits (malakhav rukhot)*; his *ministers (m’shartav)* a flaming fire,” and proceeds in the next two verses to mention the remaining elements of earth and water.

Rukhot also calls to mind the *ruakh hakodesh* (“holy spirit”), which is the name for the basic level of prophetic inspiration. There is, thus, a link between the physical/cosmological meaning (elements) and the prophetic meaning (inspiration) of “spirits.” This *dual nature* exists in each aspect of the metaphors for angels. Angels also represent the mechanism of prophetic inspiration: see Guide 2:10, where the angel is the seer’s imagination and the cherub is his intellect.

When the Midrash says that the angels “sometimes appear as men,” it refers to the three “men” who visited Abraham in his tent (Genesis 18:2). Maimonides understands this passage to mean that (with few exceptions) when we meet an angel in a chapter of the Bible, even if the angel is not called an angel, the entire section occurs in a prophetic dream or trance.

We treat below the Midrash’s statement that sometimes the angels appear as women. It is Maimonides’ central concern in our chapter.

An interesting feature of this Midrash is the part that Maimonides does not quote (the quoted part, as usual, is in greyscale above). The Midrash says that the angel placed to the east of Eden with the flaming sword existed “before Eden” (*kedem* = east, before). This suggests one of the major problems of the *Maaseh Bereshit*: When were the angels created? The question comes down to whether they were created at all or whether they are eternal. For Aristotle, the “separate intelligences” are eternal and uncreated. Maimonides will argue that God created the angels before Eden, but not before the creation of the universe.

What are the angels? The Midrash (*Genesis Rabba* 8:4, 8:8), the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 38b) and, later, the Guide all focus on the statement of God: “Let us create man” and ask who the “us” referred to are? They are the angels. The Midrash supposes God to be in consultation with the angels in the creation of man, just as any good architect consults others, but ultimately chooses his own way, even over their opposition. Still, “Let *us* create man” seems to open the door to polytheism. The Midrash actually imagines a discussion with Moses about the writing of “Let us create man.” The Midrash raises the possibility of misinterpretation, that is, that some might think there were *other gods* involved in the creation of man, and, worse, in the creation of the universe. In the Midrash, Moses

responds dismissively that “whoever wishes to err may err.” By this, he means that we understand the passage refers to *created* angels, not to gods. The point is that the tradition was aware of the polytheistic threat of an angelic host of servants, but understood that a supernal God uses immanent incorporeal powers to effect His will in the corporeal universe.

ZECHARIAH’S FEMALE ANGELS

Still, to articulate this concept requires imagination and the prophets were “bold” in their use of imagery (Guide 1:46). This shocking boldness sometimes seems like prurience. Maimonides seizes on the statement from this Midrash that the angels “appear as women” to illustrate just how bold they were.

Since women were thought to be weaker than men, why would the prophet, seeking to portray the angels in metaphors of human *perfection*, choose the image of woman?

The occasion for the image is a passage in Zechariah. Zechariah is one of the last three prophets prior to the close of prophecy, and just because he represents the waning of prophecy, his visions are more floridly imaginative than those of his predecessors. While this makes him inferior to Isaiah in Maimonides’ eyes, his openness allows us to go “under the hood” of prophecy to see the works. Here is the Zechariah material, in full, 5:1-11. I also include the first sentence of Zechariah’s next chapter, 6:1, which is critical to the rest of the argument, but which Maimonides conceals here:

“1. And I returned, and I lifted my eyes and saw—and behold!—there was a flying scroll.
2. And he said to me, ‘What do you see?’ and I said, ‘I see a flying scroll, twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide.’ 3. And he said to me; This is the curse that comes forth upon the face of the entire land; for, whoever stole was cleared from such as this, and whoever swore was cleared from such as this. 4. I have brought it forth, says the Lord of Hosts, and it shall come into the house of the thief and into the house of him that swears in My Name falsely. And it shall lodge in the midst of his house and destroy him, and his wood, and his stones. 5. And the angel who was speaking to me came forth, and he said to me, ‘Now lift up your eyes and see what this is that is coming forth.’ 6. And I said, ‘What is it?’ And he said, ‘This is the ephah that is going forth.’ And he said, ‘This is [the punishment of those] whose eye [gazes] over the entire land.’ 7. And behold! A talent of lead was being lifted, and this one woman was sitting in the midst of the ephah. 8. And he said, ‘This is *Wickedness*’ (*zot ha-risha*). And he cast her into the midst of the ephah, and he cast the lead weight into her mouth. 9. And I lifted my eyes, and I saw—and behold!—two women were coming forth with wind in their wings, and they had wings like the wings of the stork. And they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. 10. And I said to the angel who spoke to me, ‘Where are they taking the *ephah*?’ 11. And he said to me, ‘To build a house for it in the land of Shinar, and it will be prepared, and they shall place it there on its base.’”

“6:1. And I returned and lifted my eyes and saw - and behold! - four *chariots* (*markavot*, anagram of cherub) were coming forth from between the two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of brass (*nekhoshet*).”

Here is the traditional rabbinic explanation. The flying scroll (5:1-4) is a “scroll of retribution”: it is both a book of malediction and a book of lamentation. The scroll is the size of the door of the Temple in Jerusalem, from which it goes forth. The curse in the scroll comes upon those who transgressed the commandments of the Torah, particularly those who swore falsely. Because of the destruction and the exile, the Jews were “cleared from such as this” by the scroll, just as the *Kol Nidre* prayer releases oaths. The scroll is flying because it will settle those released sins upon the wicked nations who made themselves the instrument to inflict exile. The *ephah* (1 bushel in volume—35 liters) is like a bushel basket. It also flies in the air. It “measures” the punishment of those whose eyes gazed over the land to rob and oppress, especially through false measurement, “measure for measure.” The woman in the *ephah* is the angel of wickedness. She rises, but is cast back in the *ephah*. A talent of lead (56 lbs.)

seals her in the *ephah* to weigh her down so that the poor and needy will no longer be robbed. The other two female angels, helpers of Wickedness, are the national angels of Babylon and Chaldea. They fly down upon the *ephah* and save the angel of wickedness by carrying her to Babylon, where she will feel at home. The next vision, in 6:1, concerns a team of four divine chariots sent to visit punishment on the enemies of Israel: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The mountains of brass represent the power of these empires. The whole vision is about the transfer of the punished Jews' transgression onto the account of their punishers.

The first point is that the tradition was unhappy with the idea of women as angels, and so it interpreted them as Wickedness, or as the national angels of the oppressor nations (angelology includes the concept of national guardian angels).

Mountains of Brass. Our interest is in the very end of the quote above, the reference to “mountains of brass.” Brass is *nekhoshet*, a term that figures in Ezekiel's Vision of the Chariot (Ezekiel 1:7), the vision of the *Maaseh Merkava*, which is the locus of Jewish esoteric lore on Providence.

David Bakan, in *Maimonides On Prophecy*, connects the term *nekhoshet* with female genitals (p. 220; see also Guide 2:29, Pines trans. 348; Ezekiel 1:7; *nekhoshet* from *nekhushtekh*, Ezekiel 16:36— “...because thy [the harlot's] filthiness [*nekhushtekh*] was poured out and thy nakedness uncovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers”).

In Ezekiel's vision (1:7) the Living Creatures (*khayot*) are as “brilliant as a fountain of burnished brass,” *nekhoshet kalal*. Maimonides links up these two passages from Ezekiel and Zechariah as examples of the way the prophetic imagination works (Guide 2:29, Pines trans. p. 348):

“With regard to the same principle, in reference to the *Merkava* there occurs the word *hashmal*, as they have explained, and also *regel egel* [calf foot, and we know what “foot” stands for], and *nekhoshet kalal* [all from Ezek. 1:4-7]. The same applies to other words. In a similar way, Zechariah says (6:1): ‘and the mountains were mountains of *nekhoshet*.’” [*Hashmal* is modernly the term for “lightning,” but Maimonides probably took it as a phallic reference: see the two mentions of the boy who spontaneously combusted contemplating *hashmal*, Talmud *Hagigah*, second chapter]

While Maimonides will never come out and explain these esotericisms because of the rule against public teaching of Jewish esoterics in *Hagigah*, he has strewn enough clues for Bakan to make his very plausible case about their meaning. Especially since Maimonides uses a slight excuse to bring the associated Zechariah material into our chapter on the angels. After having argued that “wing” is only predicated of angels but never of God, and that we ascribe to him only wings and no other animal parts, he explains some exceptions, all of which come from Ezekiel's Vision: “cherub,” faces of “ox,” “lion,” “eagle,” and the “sole of the calf's foot.” He says of all of these that he will explain them later: “by means of hints, as far as is necessary, to awake your attention to their true nature.” For his interest in “wings” is just an excuse to provoke interest in the Vision of Ezekiel. Still, the public explanation of that vision is precisely what *Hagigah* forbids. That is why the student must learn to sublimate these images before he can contemplate the metaphor of the mountains of brass.

Sublimation. Bakan explains that the adept must apply the “principle of Rabbi Akiva.” He explains (*op. cit.* pp 31-33) that this means he must recognize the sexual imagery in Scripture and *sublimate* it as metaphorical. Bakan learns this principle from *Hagigah*:

“One passage says: ‘His *throne* was fiery flames’; and another passage says: ‘Till *thrones* were placed’ [both singular and plural in the same verse from Daniel 7:9], and ‘One that was ancient of days did sit!’ [same verse] — There is no contradiction: one [throne] for Him, and one for [his] *beloved* [*dod*], this is the view of R. Akiba. Said R. Jose the Galilean to him: Akiba, how long wilt thou treat the Divine

Presence as profane! Rather, [he replied, it must mean] one for justice and one for grace.” (Talmud, *Hagigah* 14a)

Thus, Akiva sublimates the uncomfortable reference to the *Shekhina* as God’s beloved female throne-mate. He removes its prurient suggestiveness by making “thrones” refer to the qualities (hypostases/*sefirot*) of “justice” and “grace.”

Here is what Maimonides wants *us* to sublimate in his cryptic references to *nekhoshet*. Providence is the word we use for God’s continual mysterious intervention in life, emanating form into new creations. We have no words to understand this process of creation but the image of human procreation, though it is *only* an image. The prophets were bold to imagine this as the sexual union of God and His Presence, the *Shekhina*, the eternal female principle. We must conceal this metaphor at all costs until the student can apply Rabbi Akiva’s principle to the text. The student’s sublimation is prerequisite to the recovery of the true meaning behind the imaginative text, because the image is not the reality.

Nekhoshet is one of the words that Maimonides wants us to reinterpret anagrammatically. The word can produce *nakhash* (snake, as in the snake in Eden), *shakhata* (corruption, i.e., what happens to matter), and, perhaps, as female genitalia (*nekhushtekh*). All of these turn us back to the thought that matter is subject successively to privation of form and impression of form, and remind us that Maimonides compared matter to the married harlot of Proverbs, chapter 7 (see Introduction to the Guide). Maimonides also considers matter the source of wickedness (Guide 3:8). On the other hand, matter is necessary for the creation of the universe.

Guide 3:22 returns to Zechariah, chapter 6, in the famous passage where Maimonides claims his own episode of *ruakh hakodesh* inspiration. Comparing Zechariah’s statement in 6:5 about four winds of heaven (which the angel tells him are the same as the four chariots) with statements from Job about Satan, Maimonides contrasts the permanence of cosmological fourness to the impermanence of “Satanic” matter. Knowing what we now know, we understand that this “Satanic” impermanency, contrasted against the permanent forms, is the *nekhoshet* of Zechariah 6:1, while the four winds are the four *markavot*/chariots. The four chariots are the permanent forms that go into and come out of the mountains of ever-changing *nekhoshet*/matter. Moreover, this ever-changing matter is the angel of wickedness whose mouth is crammed with lead, the heaviest common matter, suggesting the deadweight of the earth element.

Taken by itself without the admixture of form, matter is pure potential. This *potentia* is solely a conceptual entity, and, so, like all purely intellectual entities below God, it is an angel. As form emanates onto matter, matter becomes the means of creation and vehicle for its providential continuance. That is why she sits nearest God.

GUIDE 1:50 TRUE FAITH?

OVERVIEW

Suppose I ask what you believe about God. Perhaps you will reply *Ani Maamin*: “I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is One.” Very well, I reply, but what do you believe about this One God? In other words, what is the specific content of your belief? You might say that God is wise, for He created this wonderful world and its perfect Torah; that He is powerful, since He created this world from nothing; that He exists, since only a living being could have done these things. I ask, the things that you tell me about, that He has wisdom, power, and existence, did God just acquire them or did He always have them? Surely, you reply, He always had them. I ask, the things you tell me He always had, are these things just words, or, are these things real? You retort that they must be real.

Obviously, it is easy to succumb to a belief in real eternal divine attributes. Maimonides diagnoses the germ of this disease in our loose talk of belief and knowledge, including the opposition we make between them. He explains that if belief does not correspond to reality it is empty. It is empty because it violates the Law of Contradiction: just as *A* cannot equal not-*A*, so God cannot be One and have many real eternal attributes.

For the past forty-nine chapters Maimonides patiently excluded the belief that any of the forty-nine levels of corporeality touch God. This chapter shows the way to true convictions about God, and reveals the meaning of such convictions. It is, therefore, an apt introduction to his textbook on attributes, Guide 1:51-60.

(The *Ani Maamin* is a daily recital of anonymous authorship based on Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles of Faith found at the end of *Helek*, from Commentary on the Mishnah).

INTRODUCTION TO ATTRIBUTES

Chapter 1:50 of the Guide unveils a dense interplay of epistemological and metaphysical issues. At the outset, Maimonides defines an untranslatable term, the Arabic *i’tiqad*. The translators and commentators struggle to grasp its meaning. Even in Arabic we learn that Averroes, discussing the same issues, uses a different term, *tatzdiq*, and that the Arabic *iman* could also be appropriate. The Hebrew and English translators split over *emunah*/faith and *dea*/knowledge as proper translations for *i’tiqad*. Kafih’s footnote 1 is a strong argument for *dea*/knowledge, while Schwarz’ note 15 to page 10 advances the case for *emunah*/faith. In the historical collision between faith and reason, Maimonides sculpted a principled position that is neither mere faith nor pure reason. He needed to do this because true belief in God, *i’tiqad*, requires negation of divine attributes.

I’TIQAD: FAITH OR KNOWLEDGE?

The problem is not translation. Rather, Maimonides is packing the term *i’tiqad* with an epistemological and theological tradition going back to Aristotle. For this essay, I use the actual term *i’tiqad*, since it carries no English baggage whatsoever. I hazard a definition: *i’tiqad* is the judgment the mind makes on information obtained from good sources. Essentially, it is properly justified assent. My definition leaves several matters open and uses none of the foregoing terminological candidates. Note that the definition is primarily applicable to the things of religion. The key is that Maimonides wants to release “belief” from the grip of the imagination. (I am indebted to Harry Austryn Wolfson’s “The Double Faith Theory of Saadia, Averroes and St. Thomas” in Vol. 1, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, Harvard, 1973.)

SAADIA'S *I'TIQAD*

Saadia Gaon (882-942 CE) is the first to address the problem of *i'tiqad* among the Arabic Jewish commentators. The title of his book *Emunot v'Deot (Amânât wal-'I'tiqâdât)*, *Faith and Knowledge*, includes both ideas of *i'tiqad*. Saadia's *i'tiqad* is the assent the mind makes on knowledge derived from *immediate* or *deductive* sources.

He carries forward the Aristotelian tradition with this definition. *Immediate* knowledge includes 1) sense data and 2) knowledge of "primary premises." *Deductive* knowledge comes from *syllogisms* whose first premise is one of the two "immediate" sources of knowledge, that is, sense data and "primary premises."

In the case of *sense data*, Saadia, like Aristotle, privileges sight as a most reliable source of knowledge. If vision is unobstructed and healthy, it gets true knowledge of the perceived object. This is because the elemental composition of the object, i.e., its formula of water, air, earth and fire, is impressed upon the eye by means of the *spiritus visus* (or what Galen called *pneuma*). This somehow modifies the eye by same ratio of elements comprising the object of vision (Wolfson, p. 589; Aristotle, *De Anima* 3:2). Either because of this modification of the elemental ratio of the eye, or by the actual impress of the object's visual image through the intervening medium, the eye *becomes* like the perceived object.

This is hard to take scientifically, but it was basic to the outlook of the period. There is some general physical correspondence between sense data and its object. Such thinkers acknowledge the existence of sense data skepticism, but reject it. Saadia and Maimonides know about mirages and how straight sticks appear bent in water, but they do not let these optical anomalies disturb their high view of sense data.

The "*primary premises*" include such apriorisms as "truth is good and falsehood horrid." If our mind is unobstructed and healthy, these concepts naturally arise. Saadia's "primary premises" also include the results of properly derived syllogisms that start from other previously derived or aprioristically known premises. An example is "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." While not known *a priori* or from sense data, it is so axiomatic and so strongly derived from other primary premises that it is judged to be a primary premise itself.

Thus, we can derive *deductive* knowledge syllogistically from: A) sense data, B) *a priori* natural and moral "primary premises," and C) syllogistically derived "primary premises." Again, given that the organs employed are healthy and unobstructed, and that we properly deploy logic, the mind should assent to the information obtained. This assent is Saadia's *i'tiqad*.

MAIMONIDES' *I'TIQAD*

Maimonides, in our chapter, says that *i'tiqad* is the correspondence of a representation in the mind to its object in the world:

"For belief (*i'tiqad*) is only possible after the apprehension of a thing; it consists in the conviction that the thing apprehended has its existence beyond the mind [in reality] exactly as it is conceived in the mind."

With this statement, Maimonides adopts the correspondence or realist sense-data theory of Aristotle, and like him means to extend it to other items of immediate and deductive knowledge. He primarily wants us to confer *i'tiqad* on the concepts of Divine singularity, unity, and freedom from attributes. Like Aristotle, he clearly views knowledge under the paradigm of sight: Just as the eye produces reliable sense data when sound and unobstructed, so, when the primary premises, *a priori* premises, or deductive premises are sound, the knowledge derived is worthy of *i'tiqad*.

In the next chapter, 1:51, he returns to *i'tiqad* by adopting Saadia's definition without explaining it in detail:

“There exist several simply clear things, which are primary principles, sense data, and things that are close to them.” (*yesh b'mziot devarim rabim berurim u'pashutim, mehem muskalim rishonim, u'mukhashim, u'mehem shehem karovim le-elu.*)

In this formulation appear Saadia's primary premises (“primary principles”), and sense data. The “things that are close to them” are syllogistically derived axioms like “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” where the derivation is from an original primary premise or a chain of them.

We first meet with *i'tiqad* at the beginning of Maimonides' Introduction to the Guide. Writing about difficult passages in the prophetic books, he states:

“It is not here intended to explain all these expressions to the unlettered or to mere tyros, a previous knowledge of Logic and Natural Philosophy being indispensable, or to those who confine their attention to the study of our holy Law, I mean the study of the canonical law alone; for the true [inner] knowledge of the Torah is the special aim of this and similar works. The object of this treatise is to enlighten a religious man who has been trained to *believe (i'tiqad)* in the truth of our holy Law, who conscientiously fulfils his moral and religious duties, and at the same time has been successful in his philosophical studies. Human reason has attracted him to abide within its sphere; and he finds it difficult to accept as correct the teaching based on the literal interpretation of the Law, and especially that which he himself or others derived from those homonymous, metaphorical, or hybrid expressions. Hence, he is lost in perplexity and anxiety.”

Friedlander, above, translates *i'tiqad* as belief, as does Schwartz (*b'emunato*), while Kafih translates it as knowledge (*b'daato*). Pines has “...a religious man for whom the validity of our Law *has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief*” which, though verbose, gives the essential idea of *i'tiqad* as a term for well-founded religious conviction. We should not miss the significance of the use here, since in this crucial paragraph *i'tiqad* links to *perplexity*. This religious man is perplexed despite his *i'tiqad*, because we have not yet persuaded him that the Bible uses expressions that he must interpret. Our chapter, by contrast, addresses one of his primary perplexities, the need to achieve *i'tiqad* on the central dogma of divine unity

I'tiqad is not opinion. The fools (*ha-petaim*), accept mere opinion without introspection. Their belief is not *i'tiqad*. Out of sheer laziness, the fool prizes his belief in his opinions over what he can see or work out for himself. Maimonides says to him, “You have a very easy task as...many ignorant people profess... articles of faith without connecting any idea with them...” These fools include the great mass of the public. However, as we will see, they also include most intellectuals. (See grandson 'Obadyāh Maimonides' disdain for “him who passively accepteth belief,” employing the Mutazilite epithet *taqlīd*, meaning unconsidered traditions. *Treatise of the Pool*, Paul Fenton, trans. and notes, p. 78, and note 21. This could also be a critique, not just of *taqlīd*, but of the verbal piety elevated to a principle by the Muslim *Karramiyya*, and even in the profession of the *Shahada*.)

The wise person is the one who strives reasonably to eliminate reasonable objections to his conclusions, and therefore has the right to have *i'tiqad* in them. Those who do not achieve *i'tiqad* do not have anything corresponding to their opinions in the real world. Worse, their opinions of the divine reality are *empty* since they correspond to nothing. If their opinion of God is merely derived and does not correspond to anything, they are unwitting atheists despite their verbal piety.

Abarbanel asks whether this definition of “belief” is tautologous (neither he nor the other ancient commentators knew that Ibn Tibbon's *emuna*/faith/belief masked the original's *i'tiqad*). His question is whether our belief is merely in what we *believe* are good sources of information. He answers, “This faith is a strong representation in the [subject's] mind which appears to reflect reality and be beyond contradiction. Accordingly, this representation is not merely believed in, but is the essence of true belief, a strong representation and belief in the

mind” (*ad loc.*, my translation). False *i'tiqad* is also possible, since in the area of divine science we cannot derive demonstrable proofs.

CAN THERE BE *I'TIQAD* OF PROPHECY?

There is one type of knowledge not included in this list, or anywhere in chapter 1:50, the knowledge derived from prophecy. Can we confer *i'tiqad* on knowledge derived from prophecy or revelation? We know from later chapters, as well as from an explicit statement at the beginning of Maimonides' *Letter on Astrology*, that while sight is on Maimonides' list of reliable sources of information, prophecy/revelation is also on the list. He writes there (the original is in Hebrew, using *emunah*/faith-belief, where in Arabic he probably would have used *i'tiqad*):

“Know my masters that no man should believe (*l'ha-amin*) anything unless attested by one of three principles. *First*, rational proof as in mathematical sciences; *secondly*, the perception by one of the five senses; for instance, the detection of color by one's eyes, taste by the tongue, touch to distinguish between hot and cold, hearing between clear and confused sounds and smell between that which is distasteful or pleasant; and *thirdly*, tradition derived from the prophets and the righteous. It is accordingly incumbent upon every wise person to investigate his doctrinal beliefs (*emunat*) and classify them according to one of the three basic sources from which they are drawn, namely, tradition (from the prophets), sensation or rational insights. One, however, who grounds his belief in any other but one of those guiding principles, Scripture refers to him as ‘the simple believeth every word.’” (Proverbs 14:15. Translation: Leon Stitskin, *Letters of Maimonides*, 119).

Being third on the list, we assume he means that prophecy is not our prime source of knowledge. Still, it is crucial that prophecy made the list at all.

The basic prerequisite of prophecy is that we must *validate* the prophet. We validate prophets according to rules in Mishneh Torah, *Laws of Prophecy* (e.g., his prophecies come true; he must not permanently abrogate Torah laws). We must follow the commands of the validated prophet even if beyond the ambit of the Torah (but never against the Torah). The unvalidated prophet risks committing a capital offense if he prophesizes at all and particularly if he prophesizes against the Torah. Thus, once the prophet has submitted to the prophetic validation process of the Mishneh Torah, his information is also worthy of *i'tiqad*. So, when Moses, greatest of prophets, tells me to take that first muddy step into the Red Sea I would be entitled to have *i'tiqad* over his command. I also conclude that if Aristotle really does *not* have a proof for the eternity of the universe, then I could have *i'tiqad* on the prophetic announcement that creation is *ex nihilo*.

DOES GOD HAVE PARTS?

The big problem for both fools and non-fools is the problem of divine attribution. The reason the intellectuals are fools, as we will see, is that by their belief in divine attributes they *ipso facto* reject divine unity.

Our chapter is the introduction to the section on the divine attributes. Friedlander's note 1 sets forth the program of the next ten chapters:

“Before commencing his interpretation of the attributes of God (ch. 51 to 60), he discusses what faith is, and states that he who declares God to be one, and at the same time believes Him to be *baal taarim*, to possess attributes, believes in the unity of God only in words, but not in reality. In ch. 51, the reason is given why the rejection of the attributes of God is proved here (in the Guide). The author then proceeds to show the nature of attributes (1:52); and that the so-called attributes of God are qualifications of the *actions* of God (1:53-54); comparison between God and His creatures is impossible (1:55); attributes imply a comparison between all individual beings possessing the same attribute (1:56); even such [essential] attributes as *khai*—‘living,’ *yakhol*—‘mighty,’ *rotze*—‘willing,’ *khakham*—‘wise,’ *ekhad*—

'one,' are, as attributes, inadmissible (1:57); only negative attributes are admissible (1:58); and the more negative attributes man applies correctly to God, the nearer he comes to truth (1:59 and 60)."

Schwarz, note 7, p. 113, explains why we call this group of divine predications "essential" attributes. He says that the term emerges from the history of Muslim philosophy. The early Mutazilite theologians, who took a more "rationalist" view of theology, argued that logic teaches that the world must have a creator, and that no creator exists that does not have *power* to make things. Since the world features many perfect things, that creator also devoted *wisdom* to his work. Therefore, the creator has the attributes of power, and wisdom. If so, he must *live*. Furthermore, the *Q'uran* teaches that Creator *hears* and *sees*. Thus, we have the attributes of power, wisdom, life, sight and hearing. If the creator were a *man*, we would say that he is powerful through ("in virtue of") his attribute of power, knowing through his attribute of knowledge, etc. But since the Creator is *God*, they were only willing to admit that He is powerful in virtue of His *essence*, wise in virtue of his *essence*, etc. Thus, these five to seven attributes came to be called "essential." The opponents of the Mutazilites, the Asharites (who won the battle), had no problem with multiple divine attributes, especially since they facilitate the existence of a divine attribute of knowledge (*logos*) *eternally inlibrated* in the *Q'uran*. The Asharites were perfectly happy to say that God knows in virtue of his attribute of knowledge, which is a real eternal attribute *with* Him, not "essential" *in* Him. ("Inlibration" is H. A. Wolfson's coinage, as the Islamic contrast to Christian "incarnation").

The Mutazilites knew that the existence of divine attributes threatened divine unity, to which they were committed. But by holding to the real existence of essential attributes, even if they exist only in virtue of God's *essence*, they effectively denied unity. Maimonides writes, in our chapter: "Those who believe that God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume plurality in their thoughts," comparing them invidiously to the Christian trinitarians who maintain that three are one.

Logic, for Maimonides, compels the conclusion that God is a non-numerical unity, without corporeality and without composition. Thus, God does not even possess the "essential attributes" of life, knowledge, and power. Maimonides goes so far as to advocate the formula "God knows, but *not* in virtue of knowledge" to stress that "knowledge" is merely a word we use to describe an undifferentiated aspect of that non-numerical unity. Indeed, to say God is wise is merely to say that God is God.

The reason that the essentialists fail to have *i'tiqad* in God is that they violate the law of the *excluded middle*. They argue that God has many attributes, but that these many *real* attributes unite in the divine essence. But God either has attributes, as the Asharites said, or He does not, and the law of the excluded middle makes the formulation "God knows in virtue of His essence" *meaningless*. It is a pious verbal accommodation of two exclusive opposites. It is only to be something that is *said*, since intellect could not assent to such a contradiction.

The response to this argument was the theory of modes, mentioned by Maimonides in our chapter. He writes: "God has no essential attribute in any form (Arabic: *wajh*) or in any sense (Arabic: *ḥal*) whatever." Wolfson explains that *wajh* and *ḥal* are technical terms for *modes* (Pines translates *ḥal* as "mode"). That is, attributes could perhaps be *conceptual* modes, not real existences or merely nominal ones. Instead of saying that they were meaningless names, on the one hand, or, as the Asharites held, real eternal entities, we could say that they were ideas (modes) in the mind of God. (*Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy*, Harvard, 1979, p. 31. See our essay on modalism, next chapter). There are three groups of attributists: 1) those for whom attributes are "essential" (Mutazilites), 2) those for whom they are real independent hypostases (Asharites), and 3) those Modalists for whom they were neither essential nor non-essential (Shem Tov, *ad loc*, p. 69).

Although Maimonides accepts the modal existence of universals (i.e., the "cupness" that instantiates all real cups), he does not accept the modal existence of attributes. This is because anything relating to God is real and *active*. The ideas of God, if they have any identifiable existence at all, must be real and active. Therefore, modes turn out to be mere verbal camouflage for the real attributes of the Asharites. This is precisely Maimonides' complaint: "Those who believe that God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume

plurality in their thoughts... *as if our object were to seek forms of expression, not subjects of belief.*" They violate the law of the excluded middle, but conceal the violation in casuistic expressions. They have no *i'tiqad* in God because their thoughts fail to *correspond* to anything.

As a result, it looks like we can say nothing about God. Were this all that Maimonides says on the subject, we might conclude that God had no content at all, and was an *Ayn Sof*, or like the negativity at the core of some Buddhist visions.

Fortunately, Maimonides clarifies what he means with an example of bad attribution. God is the knower, the knowledge and the known, in an undifferentiated unity (Guide 1:68). However, in the Christian Trinity, these three real attributes are at once separate and unified, three in one, and capable of personification, even incarnation. In opposing this concept, Maimonides aligns himself with the Muslims who regard Christians as polytheists. Thus, at the beginning of his *Letter on Resurrection* he ridicules a Christian reading of the three divine names in the *Sh'ma*: "Hear O Israel, the *Lord* is our *God*, the *Lord* is *one*," where they take it as a proof-text for the trinitarianism. However, Maimonides also deplores those Muslims who make the uncreated *Quran* eternal with God.

The Jews, too, are not immune to the attributive temptation, just as they were not immune to anthropomorphism. (The Muslims, curiously, despite anthropomorphisms in the *Q'uran*, used to charge the Jews with anthropomorphism. See Wolfson, *ibid*, 41-46).

Anthropomorphism is the application of human-like *corporeal* attributes to God. Abarbanel, *ad loc.*, explains that the denial of corporeality in God implies the denial of multiple attributes, since multiplicity is itself characteristic of corporeality.

Maimonides now says that just as we must deny all corporeal attributes, so we must deny the noncorporeal essential attributes, like life, intelligence, and power. What he means is that we *interpret* these terms homonymously, so that while applicable to both God and man, they have different meanings in each case. Those meanings are not contradictory, only contrary, so that God always has these characteristics in an absolute, undifferentiated manner, while man only sometimes possesses them as accidents. Thus, God is indeed the knower, the knowledge and the known, but without capital letters, as these are not hypostases in Him. The terms are only our meager attempt to understand God. *Sometimes* we think we know things. God, by contrast, *always* knows all, by knowing Himself.

This concept of God is precisely the knowledge of which we must have *i'tiqad*. *I'tiqad*, but not proof; for we cannot prove anything beyond the lunar sphere. One cannot achieve such *i'tiqad* in divine unity without serious training. One must learn how to deny the real existence of divine attributes, by disposing of doubts and counter-arguments. *I'tiqad* is the judgment of assent to divine unity rendered on knowledge acquired from good sources, either those immediate to us or those resulting from deductive confirmation. Prophecy is a source of that knowledge.

RELIGION'S NEED FOR PHILOSOPHY

What emerges from these considerations is that before we address the question of whether God exists, we must clarify what we mean by God. This clarification entails questions about His definability, His attributes and the meaning of divine unity. Since haphazard conceptualization of divine identity results in an empty, non-correspondent, conception of God; and since *i'tiqad* in divine unity is a religious requirement, it follows that the student must be prepared to refute all possible misconceptions of that unity. But this requires a process which, at the very least, entails working through something like the Guide's next nine chapters negating attributes. If that is the case, and since these chapters require a thorough grounding in logic, as well as such Aristotelian subjects as *categories*, not to mention later developments like *modes*, it follows that philosophy is required by religion. If

that is so, we must make some accommodation between religion's laws, which are for everyone, and philosophy's demand for the individual's pursuit of truth.

Maimonides addresses this collision, which is really the ancient collision of reason and revelation, by his definition of *i'tiqad*. Where the former demands knowledge and the latter demands faith, he takes a principled position that is neither one nor the other. *I'tiqad* is the mind's reasonable conviction on a matter of faith. The sources of that conviction include sense data, apriorisms, deductions and prophecy, although he studiously avoids mention of prophecy here. He avoids it because in this instance he wants to come down harder on the individual quest for truth even to the exclusion of traditional knowledge, when that lore has not been subjected to analysis.

Because this demand is so difficult of achievement, and because each individual's achievement is uniquely his, the demand for *i'tiqad* cannot rise to the level of halakhic law, despite the importance of reaching conviction on the meaning of divine unity. Looking closely at his actual words here and in other chapters, as Wolfson first pointed out, Maimonides comes as close as he possibly can to calling lack of such clear conviction idolatry or atheism without quite saying so. He says such people are fools and ignoramuses who substitute words for belief. He says their ideas are empty. But he pointedly never makes them guilty of a transgression, except against their own souls.

BE STILL!

In concluding the chapter, Maimonides writes:

“Renounce desires and habits, follow your reason, and study what I am going to say in the chapters which follow on the rejection of the attributes; you will then be fully convinced of what we have said: you will be of those who truly conceive the Unity of God, not of those who utter it with their lips without thought, like men of whom it has been said, ‘Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins’ (Jeremiah 12:2). It is right that a man should belong to that class of men who have a conception of truth and understand it, though they do not speak of it. Thus, *the pious are advised (sh'ntztavoo ha-khasidim)* and addressed, ‘Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still. *Selah.*’” (Psalms 4:5)

Pines translates the last line better than does Friedlander, that the pious are “commanded” rather than “advised” (Schwarz and Kafih agree). The pious do not attempt to articulate the inarticulable. This does not mean that just because you may say nothing, you know nothing. Quite the contrary. The pious have *i'tiqad*. They *know* that God is one. Their achievement is that they overcame their perplexity at being unable to *articulate* His oneness. They realized that their own corporeal nature, and the corporeal nature of all utterance, limits their expression of the truth. Still, the knowledge that they possess is “close to their reins” even though they cannot utter it. They must enter the divine palace (Guide 3:51) through their post-intellectual meditations (the formulation is David Blumenthal's). They should not be like those “outside the palace”:

“Those, however, who think of God, and frequently mention His name, without any correct notion of Him, but merely following some imagination, or some theory received from another person, are, in my opinion, like those who remain outside the palace and distant from it. They do not mention the name of God in truth, nor do they reflect on it. That which they imagine and mention does not correspond to any being in existence: it is a thing invented by their imagination.” (Guide 3:51)

Since speech cannot adequately represent the mind's conviction of divine unity, we must be prepared to systematically negate all such speech. Better to say nothing, because that is all you can say.

As Joseph Dan said (see 1:47-48, above) “Mysticism is that which cannot be expressed in words, period,” and “*the mystics and the religious are two kinds of believers who are separated by a common language.*” Even-Shmuel, similarly, wrote, “Words act as a barrier (*mekhitza*) between man and his thought” (*ad loc.*, my trans., p. 225).

GUIDE 1:51 SELF EVIDENT TRUTHS

Maimonides makes three main points in this chapter for us to keep track of, so as not to lose our way.

1. It is a self-evident axiom that God does not have “essential” attributes.
2. It is the work of philosophers to refute those who deny this axiom.
3. The denial of this axiom is due to the power the imagination holds over the mind.

With this outline, we can address the difficulties of the chapter.

1. GOD’S ATTRIBUTIONLESS EXISTENCE IS KNOWN TO ALL MEN

Our chapter continues the train of thought of the previous chapter. Maimonides returns to the concept of the Arabic term *i'tiqad* (justified belief) in the first line of the chapter, but does not use the term itself there. He only uses the term about half way through the chapter (Kafih, note 19), where the object of *i'tiqad* is divine unity. Since the whole point of our chapter is belief/knowledge (*i'tiqad*) of divine unity, it therefore follows that what he defines in the first line is *i'tiqad*. His explanation, though brief and sketchy, follows Saadia’s definition, explained in my last chapter:

“There exist several simply clear things, which are primary premises, sense data, and things that are close to them.” (My translation. *Yesh b'mitziot devarim rabim berurim u'pshutim; mehem muskalim rishonim u'mukhashim, u'mehem sh'hem krovim l'elu.*)

Stated more clearly, we all know three things:

- 1) *Primary premises*, that is, primary self-evident concepts;
- 2) *Sense-data*; and
- 3) *Some* axiomatic results of proper syllogistic deductions from the first two.

Examples of *primary premises* are “The whole is greater than the part,” “Two is an even number,” and “things equal to the very same thing equal each other.” They also include such judgments as “Truth is good and falsehood horrid,” and “Murder is evil.” Efron defines the *muskal rishon*/מעקלאת אורל as an “innate idea” (*Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, 71).

Sense data statements, like “fire is hot,” are generally reliable, since, as explained last chapter, Maimonides believes in the general correspondence of sense data to the sensed object.

What Maimonides says about these reliable items of *i'tiqad* is that they are pre-philosophic—we need no proof of them. Left without education, and the misleading falsehoods of sophists, we should still readily conclude that “Fire is hot,” “Water is cool,” “Man exists,” “Man has free will,” and “A man has the power to move his hand” (see Friedlander, note 3 *ad loc.*, on the denial of these truths by sophists and Asharites). Maimonides is thus in the great tradition of philosophers who have a robust trust in our basic understanding of the world.

The third item, in his list of “several simply clear things” worthy of belief, he fudges in his telling: “And things that are close to them.” This group includes some elementary axiomatic deductions. It suits his purpose to fudge the point so that he can address sentences that are only dubiously known to common men. “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” is not immediately self-evident. Kafih calls these “secondary premises,” *muskalot sheniot*, following Maimonides’ Book of Logic/*Millot Ha-Higayon* 8:2. But that is not exactly what Maimonides means, because secondary premises also include much of geometry. By “things that are close to them,” he means

some properly derived axioms whose integrity is so strong that they immediately impress themselves on the mind. The proposition that God is indefinable, i.e., that he has no “essential attributes” of life, mercy or power is not obvious, but “God is one” might be, and God’s indefinability may follow from divine unity as a “thing...close” to it. Here is Maimonides’ argument that we should know this truth to be self-evident:

“To the same *class* [of ‘several simply clear things,’ i.e., worthy of *i’tiqad*] belongs the rejection of essential attributes in reference to God. For it is a *self-evident* truth (*muskal rishon*—primary intelligible, innate idea) that the attribute is not inherent in the object to which it is ascribed, but it is superadded to its essence, and is consequently an accident: if the attribute denoted the essence of the object, it would be either mere tautology, as if, e.g., one would say ‘man is man,’ or the explanation (definition) of a name, as, e.g., ‘man is a speaking animal’: for the words ‘speaking animal’ (*khai ha-huga*, ultimately from Gr., *zoon logikon*, “discoursing animal”) include the true essence (definition) of man, and there is no third element besides life [as an animal] and speech in the definition of man; when he, therefore, is described by the attributes of life and speech, these are nothing but an explanation of the name ‘man,’ that is to say, that the thing which is called man, consists of life and speech. It will now be clear that the attribute must be one of two things, either the essence of the object described—in that case it is a mere explanation (definition) of a name,...—or the attribute is something different from the object described, some extraneous superadded element; in that case the attribute would be an accident, and he who merely rejects the appellation ‘accidents’ in reference to the attributes of God, does not thereby alter their character: for everything superadded to the essence of an object joins it without forming part of its essential properties, and that constitutes an accident. Add to this the logical consequence of admitting many attributes, viz., the existence of many eternal beings. There cannot be any *belief* (*i’tiqad*) in the unity of God except by admitting that He is one simple substance, without any composition or plurality of elements: One from whatever side you view it, and by whatever test you examine it: not divisible into two parts in any way and by any cause, nor capable of any form of plurality either objectively or subjectively, as will be proved in this treatise.”

Let us give Maimonides the benefit of the doubt about the “self-evident” character of all this. He says in the first sentence of our chapter, “...they (the class of ‘several simply clear things’) would require no proof if man had been left in his primitive state,” *v’ilu hunakh l’adam k’fi sh’hu lo haya tzarikh aleihem hokhakra*. This reminds us of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, the philosophical Robinson Crusoe, of Ibn Tufayl’s popular work of Maimonides’ time. The main character, *Hayy*, growing up isolated on an island, figures out philosophy, and reaches the pinnacle of neo-Platonized Aristotelianism.

Working backwards through Maimonides’ argument: there is a justified belief (*i’tiqad*) that God is “one simple substance,” without plurality or composition, and “self-evidently” any addition is only an *accident* or a *definition*: but God bears no accident and has no definition.

God has no *accidents* because accidents are non-necessary attachments to a substance. A substance is something existing on its own. You, God, and a rock are all substances, though God’s substantiality is absolute while the others are not. Aristotle defines accidents: “An accident is a specific or definite property attached to a substance. It inheres in it but not necessarily, nor for the most part” (*Metaphysics* 4:30, 1025a14-15). Abarbanel emphasizes that only corporeal substances have accidents.

Examples of accidents are particular skin color or fingernail length: neither is necessary. I could have another skin color and still be human, and my fingernail length will be different next week. There are two types of accidents, permanent and impermanent. In *Millot Ha-Higayon* 10:2, Maimonides says that the whiteness of snow is a “permanent accident” which is, nonetheless, unnecessary to its definition. Reuven’s standing or sitting is called an “impermanent accident”; but Reuven remains Reuven either sitting or standing. Accidents never affect essence.

God, by contrast, has no characteristics beyond His substantial simplicity. He is not subject to permanent or impermanent accidents. He is not subject to anything outside of Himself. For this reason, the proponents of divine attributes were careful to call them “essential” (i.e., substantial) attributes, to emphasize that they were not accidents (Schwarz, *ad loc.*, note 6). For Maimonides this was mere terminological camouflage by which the attributists sought to avoid criticism that they subjected God to accidents.

God is also not subject to *definition*. A definition consists of a genus and a difference. I am a discoursing animal, *zoon logicon*—*genus*: animal; *difference*: possessing the power of discourse (*logos*: speech/rationality). God is not a member of any genus, but is unique. He is thus undefinable. Since definitions attribute nothing additional to a subject, and are not accidents, they could be allowed, *v’anakhnu lo nimna oto klapei ha-shem b’ofen ze*. Maimonides still rejects divine definitional attributes, even though he would allow them for non-divine substances, because the parts of a definition are regarded as Aristotelian “causes,” and “God has no prior causes” (Efodi, *ad loc.*).

Any “essential” attributes therefore reduce to either accidents or definitions. Since the common understanding arrives at God’s substantial simplicity without proofs, all men therefore innately know that God could not have accidents or definition. It follows that “left in his primitive state” man knows that God has no essential attributes.

I do not find this argument convincing, but Maimonides thinks it is. As we will see, it suits his purpose to think so. His purpose is essentially polemical.

2. IT IS THE WORK OF PHILOSOPHERS TO REFUTE THOSE WHO WOULD DENY THIS AXIOM

Sophistry. Left alone, man would require no proof of the axiom that God is attributionless. Like the Maimonidean Adam, pre-philosophic man possesses dependable knowledge, but like Adam after the sin, he can no longer distinguish truth from falsity (Guide 1:2). The door is open to error, but worse, it is open to sophistry.

Would-be intellectuals, seeking credit for intelligence they do not have, delude their unsuspecting audience with false imaginings for money and power. They are like the corrupted priesthood, who, in Maimonides’ telling, took the reasonable but erroneous proposition: “Honor God by honoring his servants” and made it into worship of the stars (Mishneh Torah, *Avoda Zara*, 1:2). Similarly, these sophists cause the citizens to deny the reliability of their senses. (On sophistry: *Millot Ha-Higayon*, ch. 8. Efros, p. 74, says that there were five arts: logic, dialectic, rhetoric, sophistic, poetic. Rhetoric based proofs not on logical but on “traditional” premises. Sophistry based proofs on erroneous or false premises).

Of course, Maimonides’ targets are no longer the sophists of ancient Athens. He aims at the theologians of the Islamic Asharite Kalām and their Jewish epigones, who were the post-modern subjectivists of his day (Shem Tov wrote, “The basis of the Kalām is sophistry”). They argued all the following propositions: The world is made of indivisible atoms, including matter-atoms and time-atoms (even atoms of destruction). What we see is merely the occasional momentary constellation of these atoms. I only think a table is before me, but it could disappear in a moment, for it is a mere agglomeration of unseen ever-changing atoms, not a table. My thinking it a table is a prejudice based on the unwarranted assumption that those atoms will come together as a table in each successive moment. Similarly, my arm does not really cross the table, but like Zeno’s arrow, appears here at one moment, appears there at another, and so the sense of continuous motion is another mental prejudice. Neither does an animal naturally course from birth to death. Our sense of nature is just a habitual expectation that things will persist, that effects will follow causes. Rather, God miraculously intervenes recreating every existent in the universe at every instant. Similarly, we choose nothing; God does all the choosing for us. He compels all our actions.

These claims sound, at first, vaguely plausible. Their purpose is to make us doubt the objective reality that we thought we knew: i.e., that fire is hot, tables are solid, my arm moves, animals live and die, and that we make choices.

The philosophers were called on to uphold our common sense by refuting the sophists. They had to demonstrate that nature is a usually reliable source of information, that we can generally believe what we see, and that we can make choices. They also refuted the primitive version of atomism, which we should not confuse with modern particle physics.

Essential Attributes as the New Sophistry. Similarly, Maimonides must refute those who said that God has attributes. He suggests that they were the sophists of his day. His polemical *subtext* is that both types of sophists resemble the priests of idolatry in the Mishneh Torah. He asserts God's substantial simplicity against those who mislead us from this self-evident truth. Just as the philosophers saved nature from the sophists, now The Guide for the Perplexed comes to save our untutored belief in the oneness of God from the attributionists.

The Kalām theologians and their followers said that God has attributes like power and wisdom. Wisdom is the *logos*, which is *inlibrated* in the eternal uncreated Qur'an. This Word is a hypostasized eternal entity existing alongside God. ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" John 1:1. "Inlibrated" is Wolfson's term, as opposed to *incarnated*: see *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, Harvard, 1976, p. 248).

These ideas lead to the destruction of the idea of God in the people's minds, since God's uniqueness is His utter simplicity. Maimonides' mission is to prevent these opponents from perverting the people's innate understanding. He validates what the people *originally* knew, God's unity, by showing that God cannot be subject to accident or definition. He shows that the existence of multiple essential attributes leads to the heresy of multiple eternal beings existing with God, *nosaf l' ma sh' mkhayav havayat devarim rabim kadomim im hayav ha-taarim rabim*. This follows because God is eternal, and since any "essential" attribute would necessarily be part of God's definition, it, too, would have to be eternal.

Maimonides argued that these Kalām notions were so illogical that they could only be products of the imagination. They have no objective or subjective reality. They evaporate when subjected to the power of the intellect. Maimonides says that the Kalām could only support them with invective and logic-chopping. Worse, the Kalām had asserted as *principle* a great falsehood: whatever we can imagine is real (Guide 1:73, Proposition 10).

Modalism. Sensitive to these arguments of the scholars, the Kalām fell back to defensive positions, but those positions were also figments of the imagination. One of these doctrines was called "modalism." Thus, the Asharite Kalām, the dominant trend in Muslim theology (named after Abu al-Hasan al-'Ash'arī, d.945), made the following statements, designed to stun and stupefy the minds of their philosophical opponents:

- God has no essential attributes but neither does he lack attributes;
- The universals are neither existent nor nonexistent;
- The atom fills no definite place but occupies an atom of space;
- Man has no freedom, but is free to choose to adopt his actions and their consequences.

These ideas are strange and require explanation. Maimonides reveals the purpose of the Kalām "modal" statements: they wanted to have it both ways. They wanted to acknowledge both sides of the great debates on attributes, universals, etc., hinting that only they knew the truth secluded between the antinomies.

There are two kinds of “modes,” of which Maimonides approves one and disapproves the other (See generally, H. A. Wolfson’s essays: *Jewish Repercussions of the Kalām*, Harvard, 1979, pp 31-40; *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 2, 195-230, 249-271; and “Maimonides on Modes and Universals,” in *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Buijs ed., 1998, 166).

The first, which he approves, has to do with the “universals.” My coffee cup is a particular instance of the universal basic “cupness.” What is this “cupness”? Is it a real substantial existent or merely a word? Medieval philosophy called belief in former “realism,” and the latter “nominalism.” A third way, called modalism or conceptualism, may exist. Without getting too deeply into this, Maimonides does support the idea that “cupness” is *mental reality* or “mode” (*ḥāl*). Nonetheless, He would object to the formulation that, for instance, “The universal cupness exists and is non-existent.” This formula means that the universal “exists,” i.e., it is not a mere name; but it is “non-existent,” i.e., it exists as a concept. Still, the *form* of the sentence violates of the *law of the excluded middle* (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7, 1011b-23), which states that there is no middle choice between A and not-A. It also violates the law of contradiction. The *formula* tells us *nothing*. Maimonides would prefer to just assert that “cupness” is a mental reality, a concept (*ma ‘ānī dhihniyyah/devarim s’khalim*/conceptual thing, Guide 3:18).

The problem arose when the Kalām extended this idea to the divine attributes. This second type of modalism Maimonides disapproves. Some Kalām theorists claimed that the divine attributes are neither real attributes or mere names, but modes (esp. Abū Hāshim ibn al Jubbai, d. 993). Their formula was that “God has no essential attributes but neither does He lack attributes.” When they said, “God has no essential attributes,” they meant that *real* “essential” attributes do not exist. When they said, “He does not lack attributes” they meant that the existence of the attributes was not merely *nominal*. Their solution was that the attributes had a modal, i.e., conceptual, existence in the divine mind.

How could they have only a conceptual existence in God’s mind? God’s mind, unlike our minds, cannot “contain” modes. Everything about God is *active* and *real*, so that if the modes were to have notional existence in God’s mind this must be a real independent existence. But then they would be real attributes, and not merely modes.

Even the concept of God’s “mind” is homonymous. God’s “mind” is only Himself. Thus, if God has real mental attributes they are *additional* to Him and are therefore accidents, since anything additional to a substance is an accident, *l’fi sh’kol inyan nosaf al ha-atzmut, harei hu n’safakh la bilti mashlim l’amtata, v’zehu inyan ha-mikra*. But God is not a substrate for accidents. So, when Maimonides writes, “...the denial [of essential attributes] is a primary intelligible, inasmuch as an attribute is not the essence of the thing of which it is predicated, but is a certain mode (*ḥāl*) of the essence, and hence an accident,” (Pines’ trans., 112), his point is that even “modes” are accidents, and therefore not essential. Since God has no accidents, He has no modes either.

That leaves the stark alternative of accepting or rejecting divine attributes, excluding any imagined middle position. The modal existence of attributes, like all claims of the sophists who want it both ways, violates the law of the excluded middle. There is no middle ground between existence and non-existence, and between attribute and substance. Exceptions exist in the imagination, not in reality. Even to the limited extent Maimonides does allow attributes, he only does so when they are tautologous names or logical definitions (and, with respect to God, he rejects definitions). But such predicates add nothing to their substantial subject.

The other choices listed above by Maimonides also violate the law of the excluded middle. Either an atom has a place in space or it does not. Putting the contradictory propositions together in a “dialectical” formulation does not advance knowledge. Similarly, man either has freedom of action or not. The Kalām had said that a man could choose to adopt the action forced on him by God and accept its consequences, that is, to “acquire” it. The doctrine of “acquisition” thus, illogically, maintains that man has no freedom to act, yet freely “acquires” his acts.

But that “acquisition” is itself an *act*, chosen by a free will. (On atoms and “acquisition,” see Friedlander, notes 2 and 3 on 176; Wolfson, *Repercussions*, 164 on atoms and 201-2 on acquisition).

These sentences were all products of the imagination, advanced by Kalām theologians who exalted the imagination.

3. THE DENIAL OF GOD’S SIMPLICITY IS CAUSED BY THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION OVER THE MIND

How can the imagination so easily mislead us from what we should know? The answer is that we work from our experiences, and when we meet something new, we fall back on those experiences. Thus, every being we ever saw we could define: it has a genus but is different from other members of that genus. That is why Adam could name the animals (Guide 2:30). We know what nature leads us to expect.

God is different. We know that God is simple substance, yet we are uncomfortable when told we cannot define Him. We define everything else. We fit everything else into the natural order. Why shouldn’t we be able to define Him? Besides, didn’t the poets and the prophets give Him affirmative attributes?

We now know, by this fifty-first chapter of the Guide, that these descriptions were not to be taken literally. They were imaginative compositions that had a different purpose, to impress on men gripped by imagination the reality of the God of Israel. Still, even some Rabbis said that those descriptions were true, i.e., that God has a physical body and real attributes. They did so because they strongly adhered to the literal reading of prophetic texts, *kol ze havaya ha-halikha akhar pashtei sifre ha-navua*. Other thinkers maintained the attributes but denied their physicality or reality by calling them modes. None of this could possibly be true. These ideas were born of the anxiety that we could no longer treat the unknown as we would treat the known. They are the reifying projections of our imagination. Since God is incorporeal, He is beyond the power of the imagination to grasp. Maimonides explains this (1:73):

“Nor can imagination in any way obtain a purely immaterial image of an object (*ayn ha-dimion yakhol klal l’hishtakhrer b’musagav min ha-khomer*), however abstract the form of the image may be (*afilu yafshit tzura msuyamet b’takhlit ha-hafshata*). Imagination yields therefore no test for the reality of a thing.”

Man’s *nature* explains why his imagination does not grasp abstract concepts. Man is the “discoursing animal,” an integral combination of mind and matter. The imagination is the animal “mind,” i.e., it is that higher process which combines sensory images. The animal’s imagination combines these images in order to acquire the animal’s needs, i.e., food, shelter, etc., and to escape danger. No animal process can attain purely abstract concepts. We can only conceive divine *unity* when our “discoursing” mental part liberates itself from the animal’s clasp.

The imagination, by contrast, always seeks to bring divine simplicity back down to the mirror world of images, where any single simple thing finds its multiple reflections.

This drive to find multiplicity where there is only unity is understandable. God manifests Himself as active, ordering and providential. Still, this apparent division of God from His actions is non-existent, since God and His actions are one. The desire to explain the existence of multiplicity cannot come from multiplicity itself. Only the existence of an original unity can explain the existence of multiplicity (Even-Shmuel, 234; Mishneh Torah, *Yesodai* 1:1). Indeed, the existence of the many things flows from God’s absolute existence as (in Maimonides’ formula) the “Soul of the universe” that instantiates and preserves the individual existences.

PHILOSOPHIC AND PRE-PHILOSOPHIC RELIGION

In this opening to the chapters on attributes, which are entirely philosophical, Maimonides must clarify the role of philosophy in religion, and its contrast to the pre-philosophic views of most Jews. He does this by making clear, in the first instance, the general reliability of Jewish pre-philosophic views. Indeed, they must be reliable, because he requires all Jews to possess a reasonably clear conception of the thirteen articles of faith (from *Helek*, in his Commentary on the Mishnah), and especially those regarding divine existence, unity, incorporeality and eternity, and he could not require this if philosophic demonstration were necessary to the possession of these beliefs.

On the other hand, the refutation of divine attributes is one the major demonstrations sought by those who seek relief from perplexity. Their ability to make this demonstration is necessary for the system to work. That is because those Jews unable to formulate these beliefs for themselves must apply to those more knowledgeable for guidance (Guide 1:35). But those are the very leaders who must be able to demonstrate to themselves clear and convincing conceptions of those beliefs, free from the admixture of those false products of the imagination that are the curse of our semi-corporeal existence.

There must be, therefore, a bridge between these two approaches to religion, the philosophic and the pre-philosophic. Maimonides rather dramatically portrays it as a religious need to refute sophists who turned the imaginations of the public from pure monotheism. In this way, he preserves the usual picture of the Torah world as a self-generating organism free from philosophic admixture, while retaining philosophy for its ultimate preservation.

GUIDE 1:52

MAIMONIDES' "AFFIRMATIVE ATTRIBUTES": A NEW ORDERING

PREFACE

Maimonides uses this chapter to do two things: to deny most affirmative attributes of God, and to defeat theologians who agreed that God had no accidents while asserting that He possessed attributes.

To accomplish this he must deny any attributive predication or description of God. He does this by examining every possible logical predicative category. Simply put, he must test every possible statement we make about God. He has developed a unique and effective scheme to include all these statements. To appreciate this scheme we will need to review Aristotelian logic.

Maimonides tells us the object of this chapter only at the end:

“What we have explained in the present chapter is this: That God is one in every respect, containing no plurality or any element superadded to His essence: and that the many attributes of different significations applied in Scripture to God, originate in the multitude of His actions, not in a plurality existing in His essence, and are partly employed with the object of conveying to us some notion of His perfection, in accordance with what we consider perfection, as has been explained by us.”

This is a large program. Reduced to its elements, he holds that:

- 1) God is simple substance;
- 2) The only plurality predicable of Him is the plurality of His many *acts*;
- 3) The only other reason why scripture predicates many things of God is to suggest His perfection.

In these chapters on *attribution* (1:51—1:60), Maimonides wants to purify our idea of God, each chapter in a different way. Each chapter is a scalpel removing large classes of error in our thought, error that could lead to idolatry. Now, though, he turns to surgical instruments supplied by philosophy, rather than by religion. Compare his similar statement from the last chapter, where, on the contrary, the simple recognition of the religious Jew supplied his tools:

“There cannot be any *belief (i'tiqad)* in the unity of God except by admitting that He is one simple substance, without any composition or plurality of elements: One from whatever side you view it, and by whatever test you examine it: not divisible into two parts in any way and by any cause, nor capable of any form of plurality either objectively or subjectively, as will be proved in this treatise.”

He suggests, “as will be proved in this treatise,” that the religious tools must be supplemented. His focus is now more analytical, and directed with particularity to the divine attributes themselves. Apparently, the self-evident truths that alerted us to the sins of divine pluralism could not save us from the same errors appearing under the guise of the divine attributes.

ARISTOTELIAN PREDICABLES

Maimonides directs us to focus on all the words that we use to describe things. These terms are “predicates,” and what they refer to is the “subject” of any proposition. If there are rules about all the predicates in any sentence, including rules *against* divine predication, then we are in a good position to say what God is *not*. This may help

us to understand what He *is*.

First, some terminology.

Maimonides provides a unique historical synthesis in which he combines and improves upon elements from:

- 1) Aristotle's *ten* Categories (*kategoriai*=predicates) of being,
- 2) Aristotle's *four* Predicables (*kategoramata*) of logical relations,
- 3) The use by Porphyry of the number "*five*" in reference to the Predicables, and
- 4) Avicenna's ideas on predication.

The history of this synthesis will not be given here as it would lengthen my account, and because it is excellently told by Harry Austryn Wolfson in "The Aristotelian Predicables and Maimonides' Division of Attributes," in *Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Religion*, v.2, p. 161. We limit ourselves to explaining Maimonides' synthesis of these elements.

There are two ways things *are*: in reality, and in speech.

From the logical or grammatical point of view, predication *is* existence: the predicate tells me what the subject of the sentence *is*.

When we speak of what things are, these statements all have predicates. These predicates reduce to general classes of predicates. For example, man is a rational animal; but all rational animals are *substances*, that is, things existing through themselves. Substance is a truly general predicate to which many predicates reduce, a *genus generalissimus*.

Aristotle suggests there might be ten such general predicates, which he calls "Categories," but does not insist on the number ten. His medieval followers take his ten categories as doctrinal. These ten, which ultimately answer the question "What is it?" about anything, are Substance, Quantity, Quality, Relation, Place, Time, Position, Property, Passion, and Action. The latter nine categories are all *accidents* of a substance.

Another way of asking about a thing is to ask what its *cause* is. Recall the four causes of Aristotle, the formal, material, efficient and final causes. The definition of a thing is an account of its "formal" causes. If nothing *caused* an existent to exist, i.e., it always was, we say it exists *a se*, and is, therefore, indefinable. If caused, but it exists through itself, i.e., as a substance rather than an accident, it exists *per se*. If it exists as an accident, it exists *per accidens*.

God is the *aseity*, man is a *perseity*, whiteness is attributed *per accidens*. The key to God's indefinable aseity is that His uncaused existence is identical with His essence.

Viewing predication as an account of causation diminished the number of truly general predicates. Thus, Aristotle reduced his ten categories of all the possible predicable attributes of a subject to *four* "predicables": *definition*, *genus*, *peculiar property* and *accident*. Porphyry added *differentia* (difference). They were able to reduce them from ten to five because, viewed from the vantage of causation, they either define the essence of a thing or they do not define the essence of a thing. Those two can be divided again: the first into the terms of a definition (i.e., definition, genus, difference), and the second by the way they modify the essence of the thing (i.e., by a peculiar property or an accident).

The distinction between the Categories and the Predicables is that the Categories are the *ontological* classification of *what* things are, while the Predicables are the *grammatical/logical* classification of the way we *say* they are. The latter are important in scholastic philosophy because the scholastics conducted their ontological battles on the

field of grammar.

THE CATEGORICAL PROBLEMATIC

Before we begin to survey Maimonides' reaction to this Aristotelian/Porphyrion legacy, there is an important *caveat* to bear in mind. On one level, he simply takes the ancient classification and subjects it to his own new classification. It should then be relatively easy to drop the old elements into the new slots, and then determine which may be predicated of God and which may not. This would constitute a mere logical problem and not a philosophical problematic (*aporia*). But our relationship with the ineffable is one that necessarily generates new problems. As Maimonides says in the Introduction to the Guide:

“Do not imagine that these most difficult problems can be thoroughly understood by any one of us. This is not the case. At times, the truth shines so brilliantly that we perceive it as clear as day. Our nature and habit then draw a veil over our perception, and we return to a darkness almost as dense as before. We are like those who, though beholding frequent flashes of lightning, still find themselves in the thickest darkness of the night.”

To a certain extent, it is merely a logical problem. Indeed, Wolfson asserts that Maimonides' departure from the philosophical tradition was to move the categories from the sphere of ontology to that of logical propositions, especially since he could then use them to address statements in the prophetic literature. The result should be that we could just plug certain obvious conclusions into our propositional logic. Maimonides calls such conclusions “primary intelligibles.” An example of such a major premise would be the obvious conclusion that God is not definable (because He is not a member of any genus or species). Similarly, God cannot be subject to material categories such as time, place, quantity or affection.

But we should not deceive ourselves. At the fuzzy, shifting, expanding margins of *quality*, *relation*, and *action*, there are no neat classifications. This opacity flows from the broader problematic of how anything relates to God, whether we speak of attributes, of people generally, or of Jews in particular. Denying that there are essential attributes in God, conceived as real incorporeal beings is easy, but it does not tell us where we stand in the cosmic scheme, or even if there is a scheme.

Yet we cannot abandon the quest. Only atheists can be comfortable with the denial of any ultimate relation between God and man. We want to know more, but at this higher level the utility of *logical* classification breaks down, irrespective of whether we call these groupings categories, predicates, predicables or attributes. Ontology keeps breaking through Maimonides' schema of logical propositions. That is why our relation to the divine remains an eternal philosophical problem of the highest order.

MAIMONIDES' PREDICABLES: “AFFIRMATIVE ATTRIBUTES”

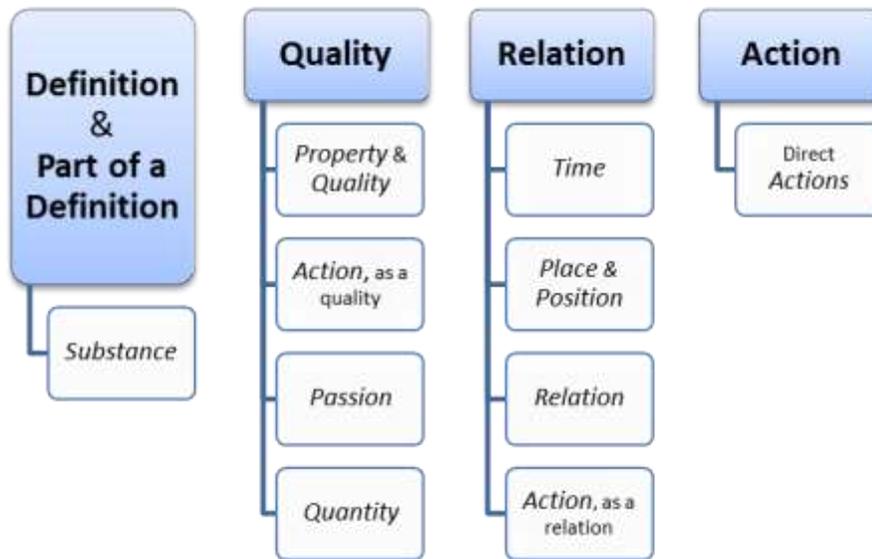
What is everything?

Maimonides introduced a new approach to description. To distinguish it from Aristotle's and Porphyry's, he calls his list “Affirmative Attributes,” *ha-taarim ha-hayuvim*, צפאת אלהיגאב, of which there are *five*, thereby preserving Porphyry's now orthodox numbering, but not his content. Maimonides' five “Affirmative Attributes” do not include the class of “Negative Attributes” which he introduces later. (He referred to them obliquely here when he said, “...and are partly employed with the object of conveying some notion of His perfection,” since the negations are supposed to suggest perfections).

In his version, Genus, Definition and Differentia reduce to two: *Definition* and *Part of a Definition*. Peculiar Property becomes *Quality*, which includes the *category* Property. Maimonides divides the rest of the predicables between *quality* and *relation*. He then introduces a new predicable, *Direct Actions*. This gives him five

“Affirmative Attributes,” which form the structure of the chapter. By Wolfson’s count, all ten Aristotelian categories are included within these five. He regards Maimonides’ Affirmative Attributes as a breakthrough: “Consequently, histories of philosophy or of logic, which hitherto had assumed that nothing new had happened in the classification of predicables from the time of Porphyry to that of Kant may now report that a new list of predicables was introduced in the twelfth century by Maimonides” (*ibid.*, p. 194).

*The Relation of Maimonides’ Affirmative Attributes to Aristotle’s Categories
According To Wolfson*



These five Affirmative Attributes are:

I. Definition: example: “Man is a rational animal” (*ha-khai ha-medaber*, Gr.: *zoon logikon*). Definitions are made from causes (rational and animal are the *formal* causes), but there can be no definition predicable of God. He is uncaused, an *aseity*. He is indefinable. Many commentators object, following Averroes, that there is a second possible way of defining, “*per prius et posterius*.” The first type of definition of God is impossible, but a definition relating God as *prior* to other *posterior* existences is possible. It is possible because God’s absolute “existence” is prior analogically to the possible existence of His creatures. Maimonides, however, deals with this type of linkage under his fourth Affirmative Attribute, *relations* (Averroes, *Tahafut al Tahafut*, trans., Van Den Bergh, p. 222. See below, “Loose Relations”).

II. Part of a Definition: examples: “Man is rational,” “Man is an animal.” Either rational or animal will do, as both are necessary parts of the definition. God, however, does not have parts. The significant point is that either part *necessarily* connects in each and every instance with the subject. They differ from accidents, which have no necessary connection with the subject.

Abarbanel asks why we need the second Affirmative Attribute if we already have the first. The simple answer is that “part of a definition,” can stand either for Aristotle’s second predicable, *genus*, or for Porphyry’s additional predicable, *difference*. All definitions require two parts, a genus and a difference. Abarbanel suggests two other reasons for the theologians to retain a second category of definition. First, we must deny “part of a definition” in the case of God, to clarify that God is not composite. Secondly, “part of a definition” is precisely the form in which we encounter the “essential” attributes, such as Wisdom (*logos*), that we must deny of God (like, “God is love”).

These first two Affirmative Attributes define the *substance* of any non-divine thing. The next two classes of predicables are both *accidents* of a substance. Definition and Part of a Definition are Maimonides' reclassification of Aristotle's category of substance.

III. *Quality*. These are things that a substance *has* that are not necessary to it. Qualities "go beyond" definition (Pines' translation). Quality was the third of the Aristotelian Categories. It answers the question, "How?" in the sense of "How does the person exist?" i.e., as a carpenter, a pious man, sick, or tall, etc. It tells us the nature of an object. Qualities describe but do not define.

There are four Maimonidean *qualities* (each of the four is also an Aristotelian category). The qualities are: 1) *property* (mental *disposition*), 2) *natural power* (physical *disposition*), 3) *passion* and 4) *figure* (quantitative *disposition*).

Maimonides briefly explains these four qualities, providing examples:

1) *Property*. Properties are mental dispositions, including moral dispositions. (Pines confusingly uses the archaic term "habitus" when he means "property"). Examples: a man is a carpenter, a sage; or he is merciful, pious, cruel, irreligious. In all of these possibilities, the predicate connects to the subject by the copula "is." Properties are accidents that are permanent or deeply rooted. The man who is a carpenter will always know how to do carpentry so long as he retains his memory. It is that by which he plans and performs woodwork. This intellectual disposition, in Greek, *techne*, is a learned ability requiring knowledge of some general principles, universals and causes. Being a carpenter is strictly an accidental mental property. It is "accidental" since it is not necessary to a person's existence as a member of the human race.

God has no such accidents. There is no difference logically between "God is merciful" or "God is a carpenter," if the latter is illogical, so is the former, and for the same reason. Both are accidental mental dispositions. If God, who never changes, is part of these sentences, then He is eternally subject to an accidental property.

In the history of philosophy we call such relations "propositions of the *third* adjacent," referring thus to the threeness of sentences which contain three elements, a subject, a predicate, and the copula "is" (Israel Efron, in his translation of *Millot ha-Higayon*, calls them "trinary"). God cannot be part of a "proposition of the third adjacent." He can only be part of a "proposition of the *second* adjacent," i.e., one that does not use the word "is." Such binary propositions are attributions of actions, not of qualities. The key is that in the first case the word "is" attaches the subject to the predicate. In actions, the predicate connects through an uncopulated *verb*. God creates. He creates the world, but the "world" here is the object of the verb, not a description of God. "Creates" is an action, not an attribute of the Creator.

With respect to Aristotle's categories, the affirmative attribute of *property* combines his category *quality* (how a thing is) with his category *property* (the result of being acted upon, e.g., "shod," "armed"). Wolfson also suggests that it includes the original Aristotelian version of the category of action, which was the ability to do something easily, as suggested by Maimonides' example of the *techne* "carpenter." Further on, Maimonides carves out a new attribute of *direct action*, distinguishing it by his examples from *action* falling under the attributes of *quality* and *relation*. See chart above.

2) *Natural Power* (physical disposition): example: a thing is soft, hard, strong or weak. Though these "dispositions" are also deeply rooted, here they are natural physical dispositions. Men are strong, rocks are hard, but both descriptions are equally physical descriptions. Hardness could apply to men, since some men have harder or softer skin. The point is that both "strong" and "hard," spoken of about a man, are not qualifications of man *qua* man, but man as part of the *natural* kingdom. The opposite of *techne* is

phusis, which is such a natural disposition. Thus, if we say, “God is strong,” we falsely attribute a *phusis* to Him, as though we said, “God is hard.”

Wolfson says that this attribute of a *natural power* rephrases Aristotle’s category of *action*, again, as a “natural power...of doing something easily,” where the term “doing” reflects the category of action. To repeat, *action* taken as a *quality* (in the sense of a physical power), must be distinguished from *direct actions*. At this margin of actions as qualities, Maimonides’ division of the attribute *quality* between *properties* and *natural powers* seems to cloud over, since both can be called “actions.”

3) *Passion* (including non-permanent emotional dispositions). A passion is a state in which an external agent changes the passive subject. Example: man is irritable, timid, merciful, hot, cold, dry, or moist. There is a distinction between mercifulness when it is a deeply rooted characteristic, in which case it is a *property*, as in 1) above, and its appearance here as an occasional *passion*. The object of a passion is the *patient*. All passions indicate change in the patient, from outside the patient. God is not a passive patient subject to change. Maimonides’ attribute of passion is identical to Aristotle’s category of passion.

4) *Figure*: (a type of quantity): for example, long, short, curved, straight. Figures are limited by the boundaries of their *place*. Since God is not limited in any way, He has no such bounded shape or figure. Also, all quantities are multiple in nature, but God is one, in the sense of a non-mathematical unity. Maimonides’ attribute of figure is Aristotle’s category of quantity.

All qualities are accidents. God has no qualities because God is not a substrate for accidents. He has no non-necessary attachments to His substance. Nor does He have dispositions, passions, physical nature or figure: these are all accidents pertaining to corporeal substances. The possession of any quality also implies composition, but God is not composed of parts.

IV. *Relation* is the fourth Affirmative Attribute of Maimonides. His treatment of relations is the longest and most difficult part of this chapter. Relations are of four kinds, all of which stand for Aristotelian categories:

1) Relation to *time*: Reuven was born in a certain year. Time is the numbering of motion, which is an accident of material bodies. Time is composed of parts, some of which are non-existent: part of time was, but is no more; part will be, but is not yet (Aristotle, *Physics* 4:10). This type of relation is identical to Aristotle’s category of time.

2) Relation to *place*: Reuven dwells in a certain house in a certain place. Place is an accident of bodies. Place or space is the physical boundary of any object. This relation is identical to Aristotle’s category of place. According to Wolfson, it also includes his category of *position*, in the sense that your position is your relationship to your place, or in the sense of the relative position of the parts of an object.

3) *Reciprocal* Relation: Reuven is the father of Shimon, who is the son of Reuven. Such relations as master/slave, long/short, before/after are reciprocal relations (*Millot Ha-Higayon*, ch. 11). Included, by virtue of Maimonides’ example of father and son, is the relation of causation or creation. This latter species of relation would include the relation *per prius et posterius*, even though it might not always be reciprocal.

4) *Comparative* Relations: Reuven is a partner (Heb: *shituf*) of another. Maimonides loosely includes in this division any relation that does not imply reciprocity.

All four divisions constitute a more expansive classification of Aristotle’s category *relation*. The broadness of *relation* bespeaks the difficulty of pinning it down. Avicenna and Averroes included all the other Aristotelian categories under *relation*. These include *action* taken as a relation, particularly in the

sense of the *actions* of causation or creation, which, before Maimonides, were assumed to be predicable of God. (See Wolfson, “Maimonides on Negative Attributes,” *Studies, ibid.*, v. 2, 230; and, also, below, my “Loose Relations”).

Relations are also accidents, but these accidents differ from the *qualities* in that they exist only in the relationship. Thus, the accident of relation exists only if the *relata* exist in that relation. Therefore, if it turns out that Reuven is not the father of Shimon, then neither is Shimon the son of Reuven.

Time is the enumeration of the successive moments of before and after in the movement of a physical body. It is classically understood as the moments of the movement of the sun. In and of itself time does not exist, and apart from its relationship to motion, it does not attach to Reuven as a quality describing him. So even though “relation to time” is an accident, the time of Reuven’s birth is not a real existence, because time and motion do not exist apart from their interdependent relationship. It does not describe him the way his skin color, a quality, does.

Similarly, we determine Reuven’s *place* by his body’s relative position with respect to a particular space, place being the physical boundary of any object. It does not exist in its own right, but only insofar as the relation exists. Obviously, place does not apply to an unlimited or incorporeal being.

Generally, relations require a basis, called a *fundamentum*. This basis establishes reciprocity. Since God’s existence is absolute, and ours is only a necessary existence, there can be no reciprocal basis and hence no direct relation between our contingent and His absolute existence (cf. Mishneh Torah, *Yesodai ha Torah* 1:2-3). Even-Shmuel asserts that God is master, even without a servant. Solomon Ibn Gabirol expressed this absolute existence poetically, “Master of the universe *before* any creature was created,... and *after* all has ceased to be, the awesome One reigns alone,” *adon olam b’terem kol yetzir nivra...v’akharei kikhlot hakol levado yimlokh nora*.

Interesting is Maimonides’ suggestion of a fourth kind of relation, the *Comparative*, what he vaguely calls “some relation” (*ktzat yakhas*). The example of *partnership* may characterize it. The *comparative* is actually a *quantitative* relation since we say that the *relata* are greater, smaller or equal to each other. Thus, partners are equal or unequal partners in a partnership. Their *fundamentum* is the partnership itself and their relative quantitative comparability.

Is there a comparative relation between God’s absolute existence and our contingent existence? Not in this sense of quantitative comparability. Maimonides, however, suggests that, in a loosely metaphorical or analogical sense, there may be (see below, “Loose Relations”). Strictly speaking, though, the term “existence” in the two cases is too homonymous to warrant our affirming a relation. It is as though we used two different terms pronounced the same way. For that reason, he seems to reject the relation *per prius et posterius*, in which the prior existence is the necessary ground for the emanation of the posterior existence. My assessment, however, is that while there may be no relationship as such, this is not homonymy in the strong sense of “apples and oranges” equivocality.

The Heresy of *Shirk*. Is God a *relata* in partnership with anything?

Wolfson reminds us that the term for “partnership” used here, *shituf*, and its Arabic equivalent, *shirk* (*sharik*), also mean *homonymy* (*ishtarāk*). When we make a statement about God relative to man, The term relating both does so in a homonymous sense, differently for each *relata*. Thus with the term “existence.” God’s existence is absolute but man’s existence depends on divine will. Existence has a different meaning for both.

Were we to assert any comparative relationship with God we would commit the heresy of establishing a “partnership” between that *relata* and God. Such a relation would suggest that God and man share a substance, quantity or quality in equal or unequal proportions.

For this reason, *shirk* becomes the Arabic term for heresy. Obviously, if Aristotle is right to assert the eternity of the universe (which Maimonides denies), there might be a relation of absolute eternal existence between the universe and God. When Maimonides says, “The term *existence* is applied to Him and other things, according to our opinion, only by way of pure homonymity,” Friedlander comments, dubiously, “[This is] according to the opinion of those who believe in *creation ex nihilo*. Those who believe in the eternity of the universe need not consider the term existence as homonymous when applied to God and to the Universe” (note 2, *ad loc.*, 183; he follows Crescas here). Abarbanel disagrees. He explains that eternity is a relation of time, which is an accident of the movement of matter, and therefore *fundamentally* unrelated to God’s absolute existence. God’s existence is really time-less: it has nothing to do with time. Moreover, he quotes Aristotle himself that there can be no relationship between time and the unformed matter of the universe, even if it were eternal, because unformed matter is only a potential for existence. (See “Loose Relations,” below). Wolfson emphasizes the religious consequence of Maimonides’ rejection of *relation* as *shirk*, even when this is called a “relation” of *action*:

“...That part of his discussion of relation, in which Maimonides tries to show that relations such as that of father to son cannot be predicated of God, ...is a direct criticism of all his predecessors, Jewish, Moslem and Christian, ever since Philo, who invariably admitted such a kind of relation, i.e., the relation of agent and patient, as an attribute of God, which kind of relation,...is also to be called action.”

Apples and Oranges. Only things that are both in the same species *and* “necessarily close” are relatable as comparisons. Even things of the same type may not be correlative, as, for instance, a sentence asserting that “This red is as intense as that green.” This sentence commits a mistake, even though both red and green are of the genus of colors, since they are different species of colors, and species do not directly *compare*. It is worse between items of different genres, as in the attempted comparison between sweetness and intelligence. More obviously erroneous is comparing 100 cubits to the sharpness of pepper, since the former is in the category of quantity while the latter is in the category of quality. Therefore, since the difference in kind between the “existence” of man and the “existence” of God is larger than any other category or genus difference, they can have no relation in any comprehensible sense. (I rearranged the ascent of Maimonides’ comparisons here to add force to the original, which, Friedlander says, suffers from “confusion” due to multiple “corrections and alterations in the text,” note 3, 183, and note 1, 184).

In general, however, relations are less objectionable attributions than definitions or qualities since they add nothing to the divine essence. Narboni argues that relations do not exist in themselves but are only mental constructs. Shem-Tov ben Joseph ibn Falaquera (1225 – c. 1290) says that relations are “only words.”

ACTION: THE NEW AFFIRMATIVE ATTRIBUTE

V. Action is the fifth Maimonidean Affirmative Attribute. These are *direct actions*: “Reuven made a door; built a wall; wove a garment.” These kinds of attributions *are* appropriate to God because they do not affect His essence, and are not qualities or relations with Him. This is Maimonides’ innovation in the historical classification of predicables. It is important because it does not imply change in or partnership with God. It is grammatically and logically distinct from the quality of *property* given above. The examples in that class all bore predicates connected by the the copula “is.” The copula, in logic, is the link between the subject and predicate terms of a categorical proposition, like the verb “are” in *all men are mortal*. That sentence is a “propositions of the third adjacent” because it displays three parts: the subject, the predicate, and the copula “is.” By contrast, attributions of direct action, like “Reuven made a door,” link through a verb uncopulated by “is.”

This is a major distinction, though grammatical, which typifies scholasticism’s use of grammar to conduct ontological debates. Thus, the sentence “God is merciful” formally violates the rule, since it implies that God possesses a *property*—just because its predicate ties to God with the copula “is.” It really means that God possesses an eternal attribute of mercifulness, a thing in partnership with Him. The sentence has a form that implies either *definition* of God, who is indefinable, or, on the other hand, *qualification* of God with an accidental

property. By contrast, a sentence in the form of “God loves the righteous” does not have such a copula. “Loves” is an action, not a copula. Even though it has a direct object, “the righteous,” the direct object is not defining or qualifying God. This is not a “proposition of the third adjacent.” Whatever “God loves the righteous” might mean, its *form* as a logical proposition does not imply change or plurality in God. It is a “proposition of the second adjacent” because it involves two parts, an uncopulated subject and predicate (Efros calls it “binary”).

Maimonides admits this class of predication. Such sentences are about *actions*, not *properties*. We can usefully discuss what God does, not what He is. With this in mind, we may attribute the action of creation to God, in the sentence, “In the beginning God creates,” *bereshit bara elokim*. We can do this insofar as He is “always” creating, especially as time (“beginning”) is not a relevant factor for God; and so long as we recognize that there is no eternal attribute of creativity in partnership with Him.

Since the other four affirmative attributes clearly derive from the Aristotle’s classification, does Maimonides’ attribute of action come from Aristotle’s category called action? Wolfson does not think so:

“In view of this, it is quite natural for us to inquire whether [Maimonides’] fifth attribute, which he calls action, has a similar origin [as Aristotle’s category], or whether it is something of his own device, dictated by the exigency of the problem of divine attributes, in which action had to be separated from all the other attributes, inasmuch as it is the only attribute which according to him can be predicated of God affirmatively.”

That is why Maimonides, by way of the examples he gives here, strongly distinguishes direct actions both from actions predicated as qualities, such as “carpenter,” and actions predicated as relations, such as “father/son”:

“I mean the action the latter has performed--we speak, e.g., of Zaid, who made this door, built that wall, wove that garment. This kind of attribute is separate from the essences of the thing described, and, therefore, appropriate to be employed in describing the Creator, especially since we know that these different actions do not imply that different elements must be contained in the substance of the agent, by which the different actions are produced, as will be explained [in the next chapter]. On the contrary, all the actions of God emanate from His essence, not from any extraneous thing superadded to His essence...(kulam b’atzmuto lo b’inyan nosef).”

Maimonides also demonstrates, in the next chapter, that the performance of many different actions does not imply multiplicity in the actor.

REJECTION OF THEOLOGICAL ATTRIBUTIONISM: WHO IS LIKE YOU?

In the midst of his discussion of the *four qualities*, Maimonides interrupts with a critique of contemporary theologians. He complains that those theologians deny that God has accidents while maintaining that He has attributes. They fail to see that by asserting attribution, they admit composition in God. These theologians are the Kalām, together with anyone else who would say, “God is powerful,” etc., without realizing that the quality *powerful* is both an attribute and an accident. He says of them, in the next chapter, 1:53:

“...It is then believed that God possesses attributes: as if He were to be exalted above corporeality, and not above things connected with corporeality, i.e., the accidents, I mean psychical dispositions, all of which are qualities [and all qualities are accidents connected with corporeality].”

And so, in reaction, these thinkers piously denied that God had qualities but continued to assert that He had attributes. What could it mean for them to say that they accepted attribution but rejected qualification? It is easy to deny that God has a beard, wears a white cloak, reclines upon a golden throne, radiates light, and has a voice of thunder. All of these are accidental physical qualities that God, who is not subject to accidents, could not possibly

have. Prophets used such language of God equivocally; others use it through ignorance, or to spice up a legend, and so on. Any clear thinker knows that these kinds of descriptions cannot really describe God. We know it is nothing but a metaphor to call God the “potter”: God does not spin clay. But saying God is “merciful” is no improvement, because mercifulness is a “settled habit,” i.e., a non-necessary human *quality*. You can be a rational animal without having to be merciful, and even if the merciful Reuven were usually merciful, he would still be Reuven were he suddenly to become cruel. In other words, mercifulness in Reuven is an accidental quality and not part of the definition of Reuven. Nor can it be an essential attribute pertaining to God.

If we reject the statement “God is merciful,” must we reject scriptural passages portraying Him as wise, intelligent, knowing, strong, just, kindly, etc? All of the *Sefirot* are such attributed qualities. All descriptions of God found in prayer and praise fall into this group. There are wonderful prayers that rise above this limit, like the “*Nishmat Kol Khai*”: “Who is like unto Thee, who is equal to Thee, who can be compared unto Thee?” Usually, though, prayer is not so abstract.

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT GOD?

Maimonides does not mean to jettison all God talk, but we must know that all such talk is equivocal, a homonymy, spoken in the tongue of men since we have no other tongue to express the inexpressible. We do not say that God *lacks* mercy, justice, kindness, intelligence, wisdom; for He has no defect. These things describe what He does, not what He is. By contrast, the assertion that God possesses attributes of mercy, justice, intelligence and wisdom is inappropriate, for these define or qualify Him with the effects of His actions. If the attributes have a real and not merely nominal existence, they suggest a real *partnership* with God. The notion that God is in partnership with any other eternal being implies plurality in eternity.

This is confusing, because we do identify humans by their actions, i.e., I am writing so I am a writer, but that does not work with the radically different simple substance that is God. When we attribute to God an accidental human quality, we assert a defect in Him. God performs merciful acts, but if we say He possesses the attribute of mercy, we have to be able to say what that mercy is. It cannot be a part of His definition for He has none, and if it were *part* of His definition, it would imply that He is composed of parts, inevitably resulting in the proliferation of real eternal things beside Him.

We employ language like “God is merciful,” to humanly describe God’s perfection, realizing that God ultimately beggars all such description. Sometimes Maimonides understands these statements as negations of privations (“negative attributes”), as we will see. He is moderately indulgent of the practice. Moreover, Maimonides authorizes us to speak of what God does, and, in this limited sense, he allows the ascription of those actions to Him. While we need not rewrite these predicables, we must actively interpret them to ourselves as we read them.

I would add that we should also distinguish prayers and praise from statements and propositions. Thus, a prayer employing the copula “is” might not really be a “proposition of the third adjacent” that we must deny of God, simply because it is not a proposition. As for *sefirot*, we would have to know what they are to determine if they really are attributes, since what they are is usually left unexplained. They also are probably projections back from the results of divine *actions*.

HOMONYMY?

Maimonides makes one more statement about God in this chapter. He argues against *relation* by asserting that there is no relation between God’s *absolute* existence and our *contingent* existence. He thus admits that God has *existence*. This would be a positive statement about God, even though it is in trinary form. Maimonides suggested the same thing in the first paragraph of the Mishneh Torah:

“It is the most basic of basic principles and a support for wisdom to know that there is something (namely

God), that this is a first existence (*mtzui rishon*), and that He created everything that there is. Everything in the skies, on the ground and in between exists only through the truth of His existence (*m'amatat hemtzu*).”

Again, as he said in *Helek, Commentary on the Mishnah*:

“*The First Fundamental Principle* (of his famous list of thirteen): To believe in the existence of the Creator; that there is an Existent complete in all the senses of the word ‘existence.’”

This “existence” is very different from ours, as though they were two different things. However, insofar as this homonymy goes, we intuit that the difference between absolute and contingent existence as a weak sort of homonymy, unlike the strong homonymy of a term bearing two possible “apples and oranges” meanings, like the “bark” of a tree and the “bark” of a dog. He admits, in our chapter, “...the same sort of *existence* is common to both” referring to the existence shared by both accidents and substances, an even fainter sense of homonymy. We intuit that there must be some kind of loose relation between our existence and God’s existence.

LOOSE RELATIONS

The discussion of comparative relations, e.g., partnerships, in which the members have a quantitative relation of less or more, included a possible set of non-quantitative relations that are uncategorizable, but which we recognize intuitively. Maimonides writes:

“Now, as God has absolute existence, while all other beings have only possible existence, as we shall show, there consequently cannot be any correlation [between God and His creatures]. That a certain kind of relation (*yakhas m'suyam*; Ibn Tibbon has *ktzat yakhas*—‘some relation’) does exist between them is, by some, considered possible, but wrongly. It is impossible to imagine a relation between intellect and sight (Pines translates, literally, ‘color,’ Jud. Ar., אצללן), although, as we believe, the same kind of *existence* is common to both (*v'shneihem kollelet otam m'tziut akhida b'shitateinu*); how, then, could a relation be imagined between any creature and God, who has nothing in common with any other being; for even the term *existence* is applied to Him and other things, according to our opinion, only by way of pure homonymity.... Besides, if any relation existed between them, God would be subject to the accident of relation; and although that would not be an accident to the essence of God, it would still be, to some extent, a kind of accident (*b'kol ofen mikrei m'suyam*; Ibn Tibbon has *b'klal k'tzat mikrei*). You would, therefore, be wrong if you applied affirmative attributes in their literal sense to God, though they contained only relations: these, however, are the most appropriate of all attributes, to be employed, in a less strict sense (*asher ravi sh'lo l'hafkid*), in reference to God, because they do not imply that a plurality of eternal things exists, or that any change takes place in the essence of God, when those things change (*shinui*) to which God is in relation.”

I quoted extensively to reveal Maimonides’ struggle with *indirect relationships*. These are relationships that we cannot logically or philosophically define, but which we believe exist. Is this a well-founded belief (*itiqad*) or merely a product of the imagination?

In the sentences that I purposely elided from the above quotation, he contrasts these indirect relations against direct relations, i.e., those which are *reciprocal*, as well as against those that are quantitatively *comparative* direct relations (“more, or less, or equally intense”). That leaves him Maimonides with just that catch-all of indirect relations.

This vague or loose kind of relationship of “some relation,” *ktzat yakhas*, Abarbanel calls a “metaphorical” or “analogical” indirect relation, *derekh haavara*. Maimonides specifically refers to the relation of *existence* between two things. He provides the odd sounding example of an alleged relation between “intellect and color,”

by which he means the *existence* of intellect and the *existence* of color, saying, "...as we believe, the same kind of existence is common to both," but which he yet denies, for it is "impossible to imagine." The point is that even with different categories, as of color and intellect, we readily concede that they both exist, so that *some relation* of existence pertains to both. (Friedlander has "intellect and sight," but the Hebrew *marei*, given by both Ibn Tibbon and Kafih can mean either sight or color; Pines correctly translates the original Judeo-Arabic as "color" as does Schwarz, *tzava*).

Abarbanel explains these *relata*, intellect and color. First, he notes that intellect can be taken as a *substance* existing through itself, by which he means the human intellect that survives death, or the active intellect, or the separate intellects that we call angels. Color, however, is purely an *accident* pertaining to a substance. Thus, the attempted comparison of intellect and color seems to commit the category mistake of relating a substance (essence) to an accident.

Nonetheless, he continues, existence itself is an accident of all existing things, whether we speak of the existence of an essence or the existence of an accident pertaining to that essence. Existence is accidental because, while I exist today, I will not exist forever; and because my existence forms no part of my definition as a rational animal. Still, existence is not an accident of God, for He is the unique being whose essence is identical with His existence. Therefore, on this first of Abarbanel's analyses, the *existence* of any creature is only accidental and does not compare to the *existence* of God, which is essential (substantial); just as the accident "color" does not compare with the substance "intellect"

Approaching the question a second time, Abarbanel considers the objection of R. Hasdai Crescas (c.1340 – 1410/1411). Crescas says that if Aristotle is right that there is no creation *ex nihilo*, so that the universe is eternal, then God and the world would share a relation of infinite existence. Abarbanel responds by noting that even Aristotle denies any attempted relation between the unformed matter (*hyle*) of the universe and time, even though both would then be eternal, because *hyle* is only a potentiality for existence and time is an accident on an accident. Just so, there is no relation between the *possible* existence even of an eternal universe and God's *absolute* existence.

But, Crescas demands, what about the fact that God is the first cause and abiding principle of existence ("the soul of the universe"), without which nothing exists? How can we deny a relationship of *existence* between God as cause and principle and the *existence* of the effect of His causation and providence, the universe?

Now that Crescas has elevated the issue to its most sublimely profound level, Abarbanel proceeds analytically. First, he rejects that such a comparison could be a *direct* relation since it lacks reciprocity, like the relations of father/son and master/slave. God's existence is absolute and therefore non-reciprocal with any merely possible existence.

He then notes that Maimonides had suggested and rejected existence as an *indirect* relation, *ktzat yakhas*, as "impossible to imagine" despite both God and man being existents. Abarbanel calls this language "difficult" (*zeh ha-lashon kashei meod*), and reiterates his suggestion that existence is an accident pertaining to both color and intellect. Still, at this higher level, the term is homonymous, since God's existence is identical with His essence, not accidental to it.

Crescas' rejoinder is to reject the homonymy. He replies that the term "existence" is not a homonymous term (*shem m'shutaf*) but an ambiguous term (*shem m'supak*). Abarbanel denies this. He responds that ambiguous terms are terms that are characterized by a relation of "more or less." Relations of more or less are the quantitatively *comparative* relations, like partnerships. He stumbles here, confusing terms with relations, i.e., ambiguous terms with ambiguous relations. The ambiguity that Crescas is trying to get at is the ambiguity of indirect relations, not the relatively clear issue of quantitatively comparative relations. This relation of God's existence to man's existence could be called a relation of "prior and posterior," in which case there is an

analogical relation showing the dependence of an effect upon its cause, or of a copy on its “formal” exemplar. Maimonides does admit these ambiguous relations when they involve other things besides God. That is because ambiguity implies some similarity between terms connecting members of genres or species, in a relation of “more or less.” Since God is not similar to anything, Maimonides rejects this analogical predication at the divine level. His rejection of the relation “*prius et posterius*” separates him from all major Arabic philosophers, since they still thought that such divine predications could be taken ambiguously. (See Wolfson’s important article on “*prius et posterius*” relations, and Gersonides’ four marvelous arguments against Maimonides’ rejection of them: “Maimonides and Gersonides on Divine Attributes as Ambiguous Terms,” *Studies, ibid.*, v. 2, esp. 231-233. Unfortunately, this story is beyond the scope of my essay).

More to the point, all relations, are, at bottom, intellectual constructs (*b’sekhel*). Abarbanel explains that relations are subject to change, and any change in any *relata* destroys the relationship, as when your son turns out to be the Prince of Sweden, then you are no longer his father. Relation must always be conceptual. Since any change in the ever-corruptible individual changes the *relata*, the relation no longer has any real “existence,” if it ever did. For “a master whose servant died” the relation of mastery is obviously conceptual, since he is no longer the master he was. All relations are, in some sense, relations of denial and absence, where our mind bridges the gaps.

Abarbanel quotes Psalm 29:10, “The Lord sat enthroned over the flood (yea, the Lord sitteth as King forever),” but says that this passage does not portray a relation between two existences. Rather, the relation of God to his creatures is a relation with “the species that exist always, not to their *members* who are subject to corruption,” citing Guide 1:11 (but see my qualifications there). Once again, a relation between the Creator and the universals, such as species, can be only a conceptual relation, an intellectual *mode*.

Now Abarbanel is finally ready to consider the default case of “some relation,” meaning, a loose analogical or metaphorical affiliation. Although all relations are accidents, Maimonides had called such a loose relation only a “sort of accident,” *ktzat mikrei*. Such an accident is purely conceptual (i.e., modal), and therefore not a real accident pertaining to corporeal substances, like color. It is, nonetheless, a permissible relation which people readily attribute to God, although it is metaphorical (*zeh m’ha-makhshava v’lo ha-mtziut b’atzmo, sh’yakelu al hamon l’taaro ytalei b’taarei ha-yakhusim, k’ele lo al derekh ha-emet ki im al derekh haavara*).

The only other possibility is to call it an attribute of action, which is also permissible.

Others comment that, boiled down, actions themselves are a kind of relation. Thus existence, seen from the aspect of the *action* of the Creator, may be characterized as “some relation.”

But are all these vague intimations of relations merely imaginary?

Wolfson answered that while Maimonides rejected divine attributes as modal existences, he could accept universals and perhaps other categories as intellectual modes. That is to say, relation is a kind of existence that is not real, but not imaginary either, and so our intuition that we share a relation may be such an intellectual mode. Moreover, the level of our relation to God as His “image” is precisely at the level of the intellect (Guide 1:1).

GUIDE 1:53
DOES GOD CREATE HIMSELF?

PREFACE

In Guide 1:53, Maimonides argues that attributism is foreign to Judaism, “the congregation of the true monotheists,” and therefore the Jews should resist the temptation to assign attributes to God. This is an *ad hominem* argument designed to sway his primary audience to his side. He coupled this with a second *ad hominem* argument. He claims that the attributists do not actually think through their position. They adopt it wholesale from the traditional literal reading of the scriptural divine attributes. In this, he asserts, they are “close to” (*karov l’*) the corporealists who take physical descriptions in scripture literally. While the attributists seem to rise above the gross corporealists by limiting their literalism to descriptions of divine qualities, they still make God the bearer of accidents.

At no point in his argument does he concede that the attributists’ position is philosophically respectable. Neither is their argument religiously respectable. Though his opponents, who are quite clearly Muslim theologians, portray themselves as the most consistent monotheists (Ar. *almohadin*), they compromise monotheism with their assertion that God has attributes. The Jews, as the most radically consistent monotheists, should instead uncompromisingly reject any form of attributism.

Still, despite Maimonides’ deprecations, the attributists did raise an important philosophic question. They asked what relation the simple unique divine essence could possibly have with the multifarious universe of His creation. We will give our interpretation of their response and Maimonides’ answer, and then look at Abarbanel’s different, but inspired interpretation.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTER 1:53

The attributists claim a justified belief (Arabic: *itikad*, Kafih: *l’savarta*) in divine attributes, but their justification does not come from reason. It comes from literal interpretation of scripture, just like the corporealist position does. The difference is that the attributists restricted their literalism to scriptural attributions of mental dispositions. Their essential attributes are, at best, mental dispositions, all of which are qualities, which Maimonides has shown to be accidents. Since, as we saw in the last chapter, God is exalted above all qualities, He is therefore above accidents. Abarbanel frequently reminds us that accidents only affect physical entities, and God is not such an entity.

Maimonides is not now interested in all the four qualities detailed in 1:52, but only the first group of mental dispositions. This includes the class of moral qualities, like kindness or cruelty, and the class of qualities called *techne*, like the ability to be a carpenter or doctor. These are all well-settled mental dispositions.

However, the four essential attributes, i.e., life, knowledge, will, power, do not really sound like they should be included with the qualities of mental dispositions. They sound more like definitions or parts of definitions, that is to say, part of God’s essence. This is why the attributists call them essential. It is Maimonides’ argument that since they are not necessary to divine existence, they are not definitional. Put another way, the essential attributes are not essential at all, but only accidental. Since we cannot regard them as definitional, then, at best, they could only be qualities of mental dispositions, like kindness or the capacity to be a carpenter. As such, they never rise above the level of the accidents, and God is not a passive substrate bearing accidents.

Since we cannot view the four attributes as qualities of mental disposition or as definitions, there are only two other alternative accounts remaining. They are:

1) Action attributes. That is, they are human descriptions of what God does, not what He is. In our chapter, Maimonides frequently calls them relational (*hityakhasuyot*). He means that in human language we *conceive a relation* between God and the objects of His action, and describe that relationship with attributes drawn from our experience of human activity. He does not mean to say that they *are* relations, because he has already shown that there is no basis for a relationship between God and His creations. It is true that some theorists classed actions with relations, and they sometimes grouped them with qualities (as we showed in Guide 1:52). It was Maimonides' innovation to make action its own special category in his list of Affirmative Attributes.

2) Perfection attributes. When we seek to describe God's perfection, we do so using familiar human perfections. Since these human perfections would really be defects from the divine point of view, this usage is only metaphorical.

Maimonides is interested in the action attributes. He wants to show how they account for all the phenomena that the attributists seek to explain by their four essential attributes. His argument is that the multiplicity of actions does not require multiplicity in God. How does God, a single simple essence, do all these things? Maimonides provides examples from our experience. Fire melts, hardens, whitens, and blackens: each of these is opposite the other, and yet fire does all this through heat, not through a different power for each different action (but see "The Key: Abarbanel on the Action of Fire," below). The action of fire is the *phusis* type of action, that is, the natural power "to do something easily" that even non-sentient things possess. Even those non-sentient things, like fire, use one power to do many different actions. He then argues from this lesser example to greater examples. If we can show that one power accomplishes many actions also with the human intellect, then it follows that we can certainly make the same assertion with God, the most perfect of all powers. Thus, the intellect makes us weave, carve, and govern, which are all different, though the intellect is a single simple faculty. How much more must this be true of God, for through His unitary essence He performs various acts of thought, will, and power.

When someone who does not know the nature of fire conceives that fire has a whitening agent that is different from its blackening power, and a hardening capacity different from its melting property, he invests fire with his own notion of its *relationship* to its effects, all of which actually result from its single natural quality of heat. Similarly, those who conceive that God has an attribute of power through which He accomplishes creation, and an attribute of will through which He determines the nature of that creation, merely project their conceptions of His relation to his creatures back upon Him as multiple attributes. They do not understand that He accomplishes all of His work, in some incomprehensible way, through His single simple essence.

Some of the attributists (the *Asharriyah*) openly expressed their belief in divine attributes, and only disagreed over their number, which was derived from the literal terms of "some book" (*sefer msuyam*), i.e., the Qur'an, and from "a prophet" (*divrei navi*), i.e., Muhammad. Others camouflaged their concepts in obscure formulations which accommodated opposing schools of attributists. Thus the nominalists, realists and modalists were all able to say that God "has power in virtue of His essence, lives in virtue of His essence, wills in virtue of His essence" (Kafih: *yakhol l'atzmo, khai l'atzmo, rotze l'atzmo*. Schwarz: *yakhol b'tokef atzmuto, khai b'tokef atzmuto, rotze b'tokef atzmuto*). They could do this because they poured their opposing doctrines into the vague "in virtue of His essence." Thus, though one school held that the attributes were real; another held that they were only names; while another argued they were modal notions in the divine intellect, not exactly real, but not just names either. All used the same formula.

DOES THE CREATOR CREATE HIMSELF?

What drove the best of the theologians to believe that God has attributes?

Maimonides concedes that some attributists said that one power could accomplish many actions. Still, they claimed that their essential attributes were not action attributes. They could not regard life, wisdom, power and will as action attributes. They thought these attributes were inseparable from God, and perhaps defined his

divinity. Maimonides explains this, but in a manner that Salomon Munk (1803-1867), his French translator, called “truncated and obscure”:

“Those who assert the existence of the attributes do not found their opinion on the variety of God’s actions: they say it is true that one substance can be the source of various effects, but His essential attributes cannot be qualifications of His actions, *because it is impossible to imagine that the Creator created Himself*” (*l’fi sh’lo ytakhen l’khashuv ki hashem bara et atzmo*).

What did this mean? Among the commentators, Friedlander has a lucid, if all too brief, explanation (note 2, p. 189):

“The essential attributes are closely connected with the *essence*, and are opposed to attributes which are qualifications of *actions*; the arguments in favour of their existence appear to be as follows: these four attributes (life, power, wisdom, will) are inseparable from the idea of God; to think of God without them, would be the same as to think of Him without existence. Hence, if these attributes were mere qualifications of actions, *they could not have existed before the respective actions*, and the Creator would by His actions produce them, which amounts, in the opinion of those philosophers, to saying that God created Himself or His own essence.”

The problem has two parts. The first is that the argument hopelessly involves us in irrelevant temporal considerations. Since time is a quantification of motion, and motion an accident of matter, any terms such as “before” or even “create” are located in a temporal continuum and therefore mislead. The second is a more serious consideration, which is the relation of the single simple divine power to the universe of its creations: How do the many come from the One? This problem drove even the best of the Muslim theologians to believe that there must be multiple essential attributes eternally with God, to produce multiplicity. Wolfson explains (*The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 145-146):

“In God, according to them, there is an eternal power (*kudrah*) to create, as well as to do all the other things which He does in the world. This eternal power to create is also called creativeness (*halkiyyah*), and so is also His eternal power to do all the other things He does in the world similarly expressed by an appropriate abstract noun. It is because of this eternal power to create that God had been a Creator even before anything was created, that is to say God is called eternal Creator proleptically (anticipatorily). In contrast to the mere power to create which existed from eternity, the act-of-creation (*al-halk*), as well as any other act-of-doing, originates in God through that eternal power, and it subsists in God. By the act-of-creation is meant God’s utterance (*kaul*) of the word “Be” (*kun*), which is His command to anything not merely to come into existence but to come into existence according to a certain manner preconceived by God. This utterance of the word “Be,” a word which in Arabic consists of two consonants, *kāf* and *nūn*, constitutes two of the five attributes which are created in the essence of God by that eternal power of His whenever He creates a body or an accident in the world.”

We might recognize a repercussion of this last move in the first chapter of Zohar, which hypostatizes the letter *bet* in *bereshit* (“In the Beginning”) as an original creation of *Ayn Sof* after the *tzimtzum* withdrawal. This problem of the origin of multiplicity is the same problem that drove the Neoplatonists to conceive the emanation of ten hypostases from the One. Post-creation, Maimonides accepts the general idea of emanation of God’s providential sustenance of the forms in this world. He does not accept it as an explanation of creation itself. While he has no explanation of creation *ex nihilo* because no human can explain it, he does have a response to the alleged absurdity of the Creator creating Himself.

THE ACTUALITY OF THOUGHT IS LIFE

Maimonides' solution to the conundrum is to identify life, thought, and the process of self-apprehension:

“But you must know that wisdom and life in reference to God are not different from each other: for in every being that is conscious of itself, *life and wisdom are the same thing*, that is to say, if by wisdom we understand the consciousness of self. Besides, the subject and the object of that consciousness are undoubtedly identical [as regards God]: for according to our opinion, He is not composed of an element that apprehends, and another that does not apprehend; He is not like man, who is a combination of a conscious soul and an unconscious body. If, therefore, by “wisdom” we mean the faculty of *self-consciousness*, wisdom and life are one and the same thing.... There is also no doubt that power and will do not exist in God in reference to Himself: for He cannot have power or will as regards Himself: we cannot imagine such a thing.”

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 12:7, 1072b:26, puts it this way:

“And life also belongs to God; for the actuality (*energeia*) of thought is life, and God is that actuality (*energeia*); and God's self-dependent actuality (*energeia*) is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.”

Energeia is the work, operation or activity of anything. It characterizes any substance's actuality (activity) toward some end, in contrast to its mere potential to accomplish that activity. In other words, not only is life synonymous with thought (Guide 1:42), but the incessant, atemporal activity of self-apprehension constantly creates divine life by means of divine thought thinking itself. Therefore, when the theologians of the Kalām advanced the absurdity that “it is impossible to imagine that the Creator created Himself,” Maimonides answers to the contrary that this is precisely what always is happening. (See, below, “Abarbanel's Interpretation,” and my notes following it, for a completely different take on Kalām's conundrum).

The question is whether this solves the real problem of the relation of the Creator to His multiple creations. It was not a problem for Aristotle, who did not think God created the universe. For Aristotle, the universe always existed, and God relates to the universe as the cause of its motion. This is insufficient for Maimonides since he does not accept its eternality. God is not only Mover but also Creator. The great conceptual hurdle of creation *ex nihilo* is to conceive how it could have happened atemporally, since that is the only way God does anything. That mystery remains insoluble, but you do not solve it, as the attributists try to do, by multiplying entities where only one is necessary.

OBSCURE MODALIST FORMULATIONS

“God wills in virtue of His essence” or “through His essence” presents in camouflaged form the concept that God wills himself. For Maimonides this is true, but only in the sense that the divine atemporal process of self-actualization results in the divine thoughts and actions. What we imagine as His “will” is what little we perceive of His imponderable “solid-state” mechanics. Therefore, Maimonides rejects the notion of an independent attribute of will exercised by God over Himself. He says:

“There is also no doubt that power and will do not exist in God in reference to Himself: for He cannot have power or will as regards Himself: we cannot imagine such a thing.”

In addition to the other problems with the attributist formula “God wills in virtue of His essence,” there is the syntactical problem. Does God arouse or will Himself to take certain actions to punish or reward his creatures? What is the syntactical content of that proposition? If God wills Himself, we have a sentence in trinary form, in

which God is both the subject and the predicate object, and “will” is the copula. The sentence violates Maimonides’ rule against propositions of the third adjacent (Guide 1:52). Since God is single, simple, and noncomposite, there is no passive or potential “Himself” for God to act as subject upon. Or, to put it in philosophical parlance, God is always “*in actu*.” It is impossible to speak of attributes without falling into trinary language. Maimonides uses this discovery to destroy the concept of divine essential attributes.

THE *ETERNAL* QUR’AN?

More significantly, Maimonides has a fulcrum he can leverage against the fundamental Muslim doctrine of the divine, eternal Qur’an. This doctrine derives from Islamic acceptance of an essential attribute of wisdom, the word of God, as an independent eternal power.

There is evidence early in its history that Islam regarded the Qur’an as Judaism regards the Torah, i.e., that God *created* it. Nevertheless, early in Islamic history, the Qur’an as a divine, eternal, uncreated existence (*bilā kayfa*) became dogma. The Word of God, the Logos, is the Book, a hypostatization that Wolfson calls “inlibration” (compare “incarnation,” and see Wolfson’s fascinating discussion of the two terms: *Philosophy of the Kalām*, 244-248). This came about after early contacts with Christians. It may have been a repercussion of their Trinitarian idea of the eternal “son.”

Some theologians of the Kalām were aware of Maimonides’ arguments, yet had to find some way to save the uncreated Qur’an as the attribute of wisdom. Thus, they employed modalism, in which the attributes “exist” but as concepts in divine thought. They used the formula, “God wills by (or ‘through’ or ‘in virtue of’) His essence,” by which they meant that God exercises the conception of will as regards Himself, but that attribute of will was neither a real existence nor a mere name. The problem is that any such modality in the mind of God must always be actual and real: nothing is potential or merely conceptual in God.

Still, in and of itself, the formula does not sound offensive. It can also mean that the will is merely another name for God Himself, when we conceive the relationship of God and His creatures. In this understanding (Narboni, Shem Tov) God alone creates the diverse things, “through His essence,” which means that He creates them by Himself, without attributes. Nonetheless, Maimonides recognized that this formula had become the last refuge of the attributists. He castigates the modalists among them for dishonestly denying Divine composition (Arabic: *shirk*, Hebrew: *shituf*) while yet maintaining the existence of modal essential attributes: “For in not admitting the *term* ‘compound’ they do not reject the *idea* of a compound when they admit a substance with attributes.” Maimonides would prefer to say “God wills but *not* through His essence” to force us to focus on the actions, and to leave no space for a separate Logos.

GOD’S MODAL RELATIONS WITH HIMSELF AND WITH OTHERS

Can God know Himself, will Himself or create Himself? That would not be possible. I have to will myself to act, but God does not have a passive ‘Himself’ that is willed. Knowledge in God is no different from existence. Indeed, his existence is self-knowledge. There is no differentiation in His essence for it is always *in actu*.

The modalists could verbally assent to this but still reply that His will, power, and so on are existents *in relation to His creatures*: “They, however, do not speak of wisdom in this sense, but of His power to apprehend His creatures.” Thus, they said that He has wisdom in relation to the creatures. Maimonides replies this is the same as saying that fire had the attribute of blackening in relation to some objects, and bleaching in relation to others. But then fire would have two different opposite attributes, when we instead know that these different things are results of the quality of heat. Moreover, *relation* implies a similar *fundamentum* between the *relata*, but there is no *fundamentum* between God and His creatures by which we could say that one is equal to, greater or less than the other, or in which each is dependent upon the other (Guide 1:52).

Maimonides' argument is devastating. It may not have been clear on reading the chapter that his object is the Kalām and its Hebrew followers, but he carefully drops broad hints to that effect. He says that the various theologians develop their different numbers of essential attributes (from four to seven) based on passages from “a prophet” and “some book,” referring obliquely but dismissively to the Qur’an and Muhammad (cf. note 25 in Kafih; note 3, p. 189, Friedlander). By contrast, the “congregation of true monotheists” that is, the Jews, should not, according to Maimonides, unilaterally disarm themselves by succumbing to attributism, since the argument against it is their most effective weapon in debates with Islam. (For the “congregation of true monotheists,” Kafih translates *kahal ha'myakhadim be'emet*: the Arabic original for *ha'myakhadim*, is, significantly, *almohadin*, the name taken by the people who conquered the Andalusia of Maimonides' youth).

ABARBANEL'S INTERPRETATION

The crux of our chapter is the following “truncated and obscure” statement of Maimonides:

“There still remains one difficulty which led them to that error, and which I am now going to mention. Those who assert the existence of the attributes do not found their opinion on the variety of God's actions: they say it is true that one substance can be the source of various effects, but His essential attributes cannot be qualifications of His actions, *because it is impossible to imagine that the Creator created Himself*. They vary with regard to the so-called essential attributes—I mean as regards their number—according to the text of the Scripture which each of them follows. I will enumerate those on which all agree, and the knowledge of which they believe that they have derived from reasoning, not from some words of the Prophets, namely, the following four: —life, power, wisdom, and will. They believe that these are four different things, and such perfections as cannot possibly be absent from the Creator, and that these cannot be qualifications of His actions. This is their opinion. But you must know that wisdom and life in reference to God are not different from each other: for in every being that is conscious of itself, life and wisdom are the same thing, that is to say, if by wisdom we understand the consciousness of self. Besides, the subject and the object of that consciousness are undoubtedly identical [as regards God]: for according to our opinion, He is not composed of an element that apprehends, and another that does not apprehend; He is not like man, who is a combination of a conscious soul and an unconscious body. If, therefore, by ‘wisdom’ we mean the faculty of self-consciousness, wisdom and life are one and the same thing. They, however, do not speak of wisdom in this sense, but of His power to apprehend His creatures. *There is also no doubt that power and will do not exist in God in reference to Himself: for He cannot have power or will as regards Himself: we cannot imagine such a thing.*”

The interpretation that I gave for this passage follows Wolfson, Friedlander and Even-Shmuel, and is probably the most common way of grasping Maimonides. What was the subject of “*it is impossible to imagine that the Creator created Himself*”? The underlying premise of my interpretation was that the Kalām thought that the subject of the conundrum was an essential attribute, not an action attribute; that it was either “life,” “power,” or, perhaps, “creativeness” (*borei*) taken as a necessary partner of God.

Abarbanel, followed by Michael Schwarz (*ad loc.*, note 24), takes a completely different approach, using a different system and starting from different premises. Nonetheless, it has merit, and opens up the text usefully. He starts from the fundamental premise that the subject of the conundrum is the attribute “Creator,” but argues that the Kalām does *not* take it as an essential attribute.

Abarbanel focuses on the word “The Creator,” *borei*, in “because it is impossible to imagine that the *Creator created Himself*.” One of the attributes of God is His aspect as Creator: but what kind of attribute was it?

When I reflected on the possibility that the subject was *borei*, I understood the conundrum to be an *argumentum ad absurdum* attacking Maimonides' view that *borei* is an action attribute. This was not one of the four essential attributes that Maimonides consistently recites in our chapter (life, wisdom, will, power), but I relied on his

statement that “They vary with regard to the so-called essential attributes—I mean as regards their number—according to the text of the Scripture which each of them follows,” to support a Kalām view of *borei* as an additional essential attribute. Wolfson also understood that the Kalām made *borei* an essential eternal attribute (*halkiyyah*) with God. The Kalām’s argument, then, would be that if *borei* were an action attribute, not a static essential attribute, and since God created everything, then it must follow that God would have created Himself. Since this seems absurd, *borei* must be an essential attribute, not an action attribute.

Abarbanel proceeded in precisely the opposite fashion.

Abarbanel looks at *borei* and sees that it is not in the list of four attributes, and so he assumes that the attributists concurred that it was an action attribute. This was possible, because, from the standpoint of creation *ex nihilo*, where scripture uses a variant of *borei* for the initial creation (*bereshit bara elokim*, “In the beginning God created”), *borei* is not eternal instrumentality, but expresses a particular divine action. In other words, *borei* is not a tool God uses to create the universe; rather, it is a term that expresses this action or this action-relation.

So when Maimonides says, “Those who assert the existence of the attributes do not found their opinion on the variety of God’s actions: they say it is true that one substance can be the source of various effects,” he means that the attributists accepted Maimonides’ claim that one willing entity causes different actions, since they agreed that this was what happened when God created this manifold universe. They would even go further to argue that *borei* had to be an action attribute rather than an essential attribute, since if *borei* was one of the essential attributes with God when He created the “all,” then He himself would have been subject to it. But it is absurd to consider that God had created Himself.

Nonetheless, the Kalām retained the four attributes that they considered essential. The attributists believed that life, wisdom, will and power were *attributes of repose* (Even-Shmuel’s formulation: *taarei menukha*), and that they were “such perfections as cannot possibly be absent from the Creator, and these cannot be qualifications of His actions.”

For Abarbanel, then, the issue is joined. Maimonides proceeds to use the same argument from absurdity that the attributists had just used to disqualify *borei* as an essential attribute to demolish will and power, *ratzon* and *yakhol*, as essential attributes. He says, “There is also no doubt that power and will do not exist in God in reference to Himself: for *He cannot have power or will as regards Himself: we cannot imagine such a thing*” (Friedlander translation). Pines’ translation shows the force of the remark better: “Similarly, without any doubt, neither power nor will exists in and belongs to the *Creator (borei; Jud.Ar.: ללבאר)* in respect to his own essence; for He does not exercise His *power* on His own essence, nor can it be predicated of Him that He *wills* his own essence. And nobody represents this to himself.” Italics are mine. Discounting Pines’ usual prolixity, notice that Maimonides uses the term *borei* here instead of one of his usual words for God, to express his intent to class *ratzon* and *yakhol* with *borei* as action attributes. By adapting the formula to apply to the attributes of will and power, that it is impossible to imagine that the *borei* willed Himself or had power over Himself, Maimonides uses the attributists’ method against them. *Will* and *power* are attributes that express other-directed actions. As we perceive the effects, we foolishly project them back upon God as essential powers with Him.

He could do the same for wisdom/intellect, for ever since Aristotle, philosophers regarded intelligence as an activity. The problem is *life*. Life seems to be the perfect example of an attribute of repose. It is impossible to imagine God without it. Maimonides’ wonderful solution is to make life dependent on wisdom, through the ongoing activity of divine self-consciousness.

In all of this, Abarbanel teases out a non-explicit Maimonidean commitment to the proposition that values are not equal. By arraying the four essential attributes together, the attributists seem to weigh them equally. But what emerges is that wisdom is more important than the other three. Maimonides reveals this when he recognizes the value of self-consciousness, reminding us that philosophers regarded God as thought thinking itself.

“...for in every being that is conscious of itself, life and wisdom are the same thing, that is to say, if by wisdom we understand the consciousness of self. Besides, the subject and the object of that consciousness are undoubtedly identical [as regards God]: for according to our opinion, He is not composed of an element that apprehends, and another that does not apprehend; He is not like man, who is a combination of a conscious soul and an unconscious body. If, therefore, by ‘wisdom’ we mean the faculty of self-consciousness, wisdom and life are one and the same thing.”

In other words, in God, life is the product of the activity of consciousness. As such, *life* is an action, perhaps even a reaction, but not an essence defining God. In showing that life is subsumed in the action of intelligence, Maimonides demolishes the last remaining essential attribute.

THE KEY: ABARBANEL ON THE ACTION OF FIRE

Abarbanel may have come to his conclusions because he recognized an apparent contradiction earlier in the chapter, the example of the action of fire. I think that this contradiction throws light on Maimonides’ wonderful insight that life depends on consciousness.

Maimonides says:

“Fire melts certain things and makes others hard, it boils and burns, it bleaches and blackens. If we described the fire as bleaching, blackening, burning, boiling, hardening and melting, we should be correct, and yet he who does not know the nature of fire, would think that it included six different elements, one by which it blackens, another by which it bleaches, a third by which it boils, a fourth by which it consumes, a fifth by which it melts, a sixth by which it hardens things—actions which are opposed to one another, and of which each has its peculiar property. He, however, who knows the nature of fire, will know that by virtue of one quality in action, namely, by *heat*, it produces all these effects.”

Abarbanel knew that this was not the position taken by the scientific tradition. Aristotle (*Generation and Corruption*, 2:4:331A19, *Sense and Sensibility*, 4:441b10) holds that the different and contradictory actions of fire come from *two* elements, heat and dryness (Saadia agrees, *Emunot v’Deot*, Rosenblatt ed. 177, 237; Landauer ed. 143, 190). In fact, Maimonides knows this and repeats it in Guide 2:22, quoting a paraphrase of Aristotle. The issue arose, he explained there, because:

“Aristotle and all philosophers assume as an axiom that a simple element can only produce one simple thing, whilst a compound can produce as many things as it contains simple elements; e.g., fire combines in itself *two* properties, heat and dryness: it gives heat by the one property, and produces dryness by the other: an object composed of matter and form produces certain things on account of its matter, and others on account of its form, if [both matter and form] consist of several elements. In accordance with this axiom, Aristotle holds that the direct emanation from God must be one simple Intelligence, and nothing else.” (He makes Aristotle into Avicenna here, based on whichever paraphrase of Aristotle he had access to.)

This really goes to the heart of what Maimonides says is the problem he intended to solve in this chapter, which is whether anything other than what is one and simple can come from something which is one and simple. Since Aristotle never accepted creation *ex nihilo* it is no problem for him. He does not need a creator at all, only an unmoved mover. But to the neo-Platonized Aristotelians of Andalusia, it was a very large problem, and they looked to Avicenna’s solution which involved a system of ten emanated hypostases beginning with just one simple intelligence (which Maimonides explains in Guide 2:22). Maimonides’ simpler solution was to agree that from one thing one thing comes, but that the universe as a whole is just that one thing, “Know that this Universe, in its entirety, is nothing else but one individual being” (Guide 1:72).

Returning to the action of fire, note that Maimonides had just said in the name of Aristotle that “a simple element can only produce one simple thing” but then brings the contrasting example of fire as a compound of the forces of heat and dryness. But he knew it was one of the four simple elements. Considering these apparent contradictions between whether fire acts with one action of heat or two actions including dryness, and whether it is an element or a compound, Abarbanel tells us what he takes to be Maimonides’ solution. Dryness, he says, comes from heat: Heat is the action, dryness is the *reaction* to excessive heat, *ki hinei ha-khom hu ha-eikhot ha-poel, v’ain ha-yovesh poel, ki im mitpael...ki ha-yovesh b’esh yimshakh m’ha-khom*. This is just like the way in which life is produced by self-consciousness. The apparent contradiction between Maimonides’ two accounts of the elements of fire’s action should have presaged his unification of life and wisdom at the high level of the essential attributes. Or, to put it the other way, his solution of the problem of the essential attributes throws light on the apparent contradiction of his two accounts of the action of fire. Especially since fire in its aspect of light represents wisdom. Just as intellect produced life through the action of self-consciousness, so heat produced dryness through the action of fire. Fire is not like the compound material causes because it is one of the four elements. Fire seems to share an elemental simplicity with God, and, rather like God, accomplishes many things thru one single force.

The obvious result is that the attributes are not equal. Life is not the equal of wisdom, since mind precedes being, i.e., essence precedes existence. Maimonides is no existentialist (i.e., he does not believe that existence precedes essence), nor does he hold that all values are equal.

FROM ONE SINGLE SIMPLE THING ONLY ONE THING COMES?

Abarbanel proceeds to address the origin of multiplicity. While God through His unitary essence does do many things, which we recognize under the aspect of the four attributes, that is only after creation. After creation, these forces act on objects that are prepared to receive that action (*mekablim*). However, in His aspect as Creator, *borei*, there are as yet no such recipients. Matter had not come into existence, either in its gross form that we encounter, or in its ultimate hyllic state of pure potentiality. The difference between creation and formation is that the Creator had nothing to work on before creation. The Creation is the unconditioned act of the One creating the single universe, which Maimonides recognizes as a single sentient being.

However, at this point, Abarbanel explains, we are not yet ready to address whether the universe is created or eternal. Any answer that Maimonides gives in the first section of the Guide must assume both possibilities. He addresses this in the second section of the Guide. The question, then, is whether Maimonides can show that the emergence of multiplicity is possible, even under Aristotle’s assumption that the universe is eternal and uncreated.

Maimonides, in Guide 2:18, shows how incorporeal power works differently from fire and other physical forces:

“...it is not impossible that such a being acts at one time and does not act at another. This does not imply a change in the incorporeal being itself nor a transition from potentiality to actuality. The Active Intellect may be taken as an illustration. According to Aristotle and his school, the Active Intellect, an incorporeal being, acts at one time and does not act at another, as has been shown by Abu-nasr (Al-Farabi) in his treatise on the Intellect. He says there quite correctly as follows: ‘It is an evident fact that the Active Intellect does not act continually, but only at times.’ And yet he does not say that the Active Intellect is changeable, or passes from a state of potentiality to that of actuality, *although it produces at one time something which it has not produced before*. For there is no relation or comparison whatever between corporeal and incorporeal beings, neither in the moment of action nor in that of inaction. It is only by homonymy that the term ‘action’ is used in reference to the forms residing in bodies, and also in reference to absolutely spiritual beings.”

The intermittent action of the active intellect can produce many things, because “it produces at one time something which it has not produced before.” Maimonides’ purpose in 2:18 was to explain how creation could

occur after a period of inaction, but now Abarbanel takes this notion to explain the production of different things from one simple thing after creation. Intermittent action does not imply alteration or composition. Maimonides claims that the intermittent action of the active intellect is the fault of the intended recipients of that action. God, or the active intellect, emanates form into matter, but no formation can take place unless the matter is prepared to receive its appropriate form:

“...it is not due to anything contained in the Active Intellect itself, but to the absence of substances sufficiently prepared for its action, that at times it does not act: it does act always when substances sufficiently prepared are present, and, when the action does not continue, it is owing to the absence of substance sufficiently prepared, and not to any change in the Intellect.”

Moreover, in 2:22, he quotes an Aristotle paraphrase, which may show that even for Aristotle a single simple willful actor can indeed perform different actions. This willful ensouled actor is not like an unsouled natural force, which does diverse things because it is compound:

“Aristotle and all philosophers assume as an axiom that a simple element can only produce one simple thing, whilst a compound can produce as many things as it contains simple elements...[but] A third axiom is this: A single agent that acts with design and will, and not merely by the force of the laws of Nature, can produce different objects.” (Maimonides’ language is tricky, it may well be that he is reading this into Aristotle, but this analysis will have to come later)

Abarbanel takes this “third axiom” to mean that the single willful actor can produce many effects irrespective of the state of the recipients! (*v’sh’ha-poel b’ratzon im hioto aleph kavav yipal paoool mitkhalafot b’avur ritzono lo mifat ha-mekablim*). This shows that God, even before the beginning, even before the existence of hyle, through His simple essence, wills the production of many things (*u’mizei ha-tzad b’tehilat ha-bria b’hiot ha-poel v’ha-borei yitborakh ekhad pashut m’kol tzad, u’mbilti hiot she’mah mekabel klal hayu hapaoolot rabot u’mitkhalafot k’fi ritzono v’yakhulato she’hem atzmo*).

The intermittent emanatory action of the active intellect only explains multiplicity in creation after the creation of hyllic matter. This remains important, because Maimonides is committed to the concept of the continual action, post-creation, of emanatory *formation*. In this way, one does produce many. But this is not the same as divine action prior to the creation of matter. At the level of *creation*, what Abarbanel identifies as the crux of our chapter is Maimonides’ assertion of God’s unconditioned ability to produce diversity *ex nihilo* and *de novo*. This position adds to and presents a deeper understanding of his statement in 1:72 that the universe is one organic being, a single *complex* thing created by the One.

The example of fire, then, seemed to portray apparent multiplicity in the actor, for though we had good reason to think that the nature of fire’s elemental action was a complex of two forces, we learned that it is actually simple: the action of heat alone. All the more so for the intellect, since its self-conscious activity creates life, together with many new and intermittently emanated things, all dependent on the existence of a material recipient. All the more so and so much more so in the case of the Actor who, entirely and undividedly willing, doing, thinking and living, creates diversity from nothing.

But we will never know how.

* * *

As justification for the difference between my interpretation and Abarbanel’s, the reader should understand that the Kalām’s grasp of the essential attributes was by no means monolithic. The theologians counted the attributes differently, and, as Wolfson showed, some of them added “creativity,” *halkiyyah*, to the list. It may be true that those who kept the list down to the four usual suspects may have, as Abarbanel thinks, advanced the *argumentum*

ad absurdum to show that *halkiyyah* should not be added to the list, and that they considered it only an action attribute. Whether you follow my interpretation or Abarbanel's, it seems clear that Maimonides saw nothing absurd in saying that God creates Himself, and that He does so continually.

GUIDE 1:54
THE THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL PROBLEM

PREFACE

The previous three chapters were an introductory course in the philosophy of divine attributes. The theme and conclusion of the course was that the attributes were all attributes of action. Following this chapter come six chapters that are the advanced course in attribute philosophy, the theme of which is Maimonides' famous doctrine of negative attributes. Our chapter is a kind of conclusion for the introductory course. Here Maimonides shows that the philosophy of action attributes is a natural outgrowth of Judaism.

He claims that this is his only purpose in this chapter, but the most important parts of the chapter are not about the philosophy of action attributes at all.

This chapter is about the relationship between the attributes of God and the political governance of the city. On a deeper level, the subject is the intellectual connection the ruler must make with God to govern the city rightly. The purpose of this government is to produce more people who can make that intellectual connection with God. The subject of this intellectual connection erupts at several places in the chapter, especially where Maimonides claims he digressed from his intended purpose.

Maimonides comes to this discussion of political philosophy because of the linked problems of idolatry and civil war. When the nation of God flirts with idolatry, it undermines the reason for its existence. The nation needs an inspired leader, perhaps a prophet, to end idolatry's threat to the nation. What caused Moses to understand this was the civil war over the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:27-28).

COMMENTARY MODE

This chapter is a commentary on a section of the Torah. This is remarkable, since commentary is not Maimonides' usual mode of expression. He differs from most rabbinic writers, who prefer commentary. The only commentary among his major works is his *Perush al HaMishnah*, the Commentary on the Mishnah, his first great work (There was a commentary on some of the Talmud, most of which is lost, written in his twenties. See Davidson, *Maimonides The Man and His Work*, p. 140-146). We should pay attention to Maimonides' departure from his usual essay mode. He uses commentary persuasively to ground his theory of attributes in Jewish tradition. The passages he comments will be easier to follow if we see the unbroken text from Exodus 33-34:

Exodus 33:

“12) And Moses said unto the Lord, See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Yet Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight. 13) Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight, *shew me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight: and consider that this nation is Thy people.* 14) And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. 15) And he said unto Him, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. 16) For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? is it not in that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. 17) And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken (to forgive the people): for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name. 18) And [only then] he said, I beseech Thee, *shew me Thy glory.* 19) And He said, *I will make all My goodness pass before thee*, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. 20) And He said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. 21) And the Lord said, Behold, there is a *place* by Me, and thou shalt *stand* upon a *rock*: 22) And it shall come to pass, while My *glory* passeth by, that I will put thee in a *clift of the rock*, and will *cover* thee with

My hand while I pass by: 23) And I will take away Mine hand, and *thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen.*

Exodus 34:

1) And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest. 2) And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai, and present thyself there to Me in the top of the mount. 3) And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount; neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount. 4) And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone. 5) And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6) And the Lord *passed by before him*, and proclaimed, *The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7) Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*”

Maimonides begins our chapter:

“The wisest man (*rabban shel hakhamim*—‘the master of the wise’), our Teacher Moses,”

Maimonides calls Moses the “master of the wise.” Usually, Maimonides calls Moses the “master of the prophets.” He chooses the former designation because what Moses learned about God’s attributes did not require prophecy. However, as we will see, the entire encounter occurs in prophecy and is about the “governor of a country, if he is a prophet.”

MOSES’ REQUEST

Maimonides explains what Moses was seeking from God in *Mishneh Torah, Ysodei Ha-Torah* 1:10, where he wrote (M. Hyamson, trans.):

“What was it that Moses sought to comprehend, when he said ‘Show me, I beseech Thee, Thy glory?’ He sought to have so clear an apprehension of the truth of God’s existence that the knowledge might be like that which one possesses of a human being, whose face one has seen and whose image is imprinted on the mind and whom, therefore, the mind distinguishes from other men. In the same way, Moses, our teacher, asked that the truth of God’s existence might be distinguished in his mind from other beings, and that he might thus know the truth of God’s existence, as it really is. God replied that it is *beyond the mental capacity* of a human creature, composed of body and soul, to obtain in this regard clear knowledge of the truth. The Almighty, however, imparted to Moses, what has been vouchsafed to no man before or since. Moses attained so much knowledge of the truth of the Divine Existence, that God was, in his mind, distinct from other beings, in the same way as an individual, whose back is seen, whose physical form and apparel are perceived, is distinguished in the observer’s mind from the physical form of other individuals. And Scripture hints this in the text ‘Thou shalt see My back parts but My face shall not be seen.’”

The point of Maimonides’ argument in *Mishneh Torah* is that while divinity is intellectual and rational, we cannot comprehend its rationality. We know His actions, not what caused them. In the same vein, Maimonides begins our Chapter 1:54:

“Moses asked two things of God, and received a reply respecting both. The one thing he asked was, that God should let him know His true essence; the other, which in fact he asked first, that God should let him know His attributes. In answer to both these petitions God promised that He would let him know all His attributes, and that these were nothing but His actions. He also told him that His true essence could not

be perceived, and pointed out a *method* (*makom iyun*), by which he could obtain the utmost knowledge of God possible for man to acquire. The knowledge obtained by Moses has not been possessed by any human being before him or after him.”

(*Makom iyun*, Jud.Ar. מוֹצֵעַ נֹתֵר, a *place of meditation/ understanding/ speculation*, Friedlander’s translation following Ibn Tibon, as does Schwarz’ Hebrew. Kafih translates as *mabet, to see*, that is, God showed Moses a place to see from; however, his footnote endorses the Ibn Tibon translation).

As we read this encounter in the Torah, we should apply what we learned in the lexical chapters. When God stands Moses on a rock to see all His goodness pass before him, we retranslate all of the key words: place, stand, rock, see, goodness— according to Maimonides’ rules. Thus, “place” is a level of intellectual attainment; the “rock” is the source we derive knowledge from; to “see” means to understand; “goodness” is the panoply of God’s creations and their noetic interrelations. These abstractions clarify that the encounter is at the highest level of intellect, i.e., the prophetic level.

ABARBANEL ON MOSES’ THIRD REVELATION

Abarbanel understands Maimonides to mean that God granted Moses three revelations on Sinai. The first two revelations followed his two requests. When he asked to know God’s ways in order to better govern the people, God revealed His actions in the world, which Moses grasps as the Thirteen Attributes (see below). When he asked to see God’s glory, God revealed that Moses could not see it, since Moses’ corporeality and God’s ineffability combined to prevent this “vision of the face.”

God granted Moses a third revelation, but not in response to any request. This is significant, for the following reason. There is a difference of opinion between Maimonides and Abarbanel about the nature of prophecy. Maimonides held that the adept with perfected intellect and imagination would receive prophetic emanations from God, unless God chooses to cut off this flow. Abarbanel strongly maintained that the prophetic state requires the help of God from the start. He thought he proved his point here. Abarbanel contended, from Maimonides’ own words here and elsewhere, that this third revelation was entirely due to divine assistance, not any preparation by the prophet.

Thus, “the wisest man, our Teacher Moses,” *rabban shel khakhamim, moshe rabeinu*, could know the first two revelations purely through intellectual speculation. Moses “the master of the prophets,” *rabban shel n’viim*, as the Guide names him elsewhere, was not needed. The first revelation, of the actions of God, particularly those actions necessary to govern a country, could have come to a non-inspired philosopher; we will see, however, that they actually did come to Moses in his prophetic role (see “Why a Prophet is Needed” below). The second revelation, that no man would ever grasp the indefinable essence of God, was, according to Abarbanel, one that any tyro in philosophy would know. He questioned why Moses would have even asked it, *v’eikh lo yada adon ha-khakhamim raban shel nviim ma sh’hagia elav ha-katan sh’b’filosofim*. Abarbanel eventually answers that this question might not have been beyond the bounds of prophecy. The limits of prophecy are not the limits of philosophy, even assuming that there are limits to prophecy. Abarbanel also explains that both requests are one, since Moses really wanted to know which aspect God would permit: the divine actions or the divine essence (paralleling the distinction between action and essential attributes).

The third revelation, which comes entirely through prophecy, and with divine aid, is suggested by Maimonides’ statement that:

“He (God) also told him that His true essence could not be perceived, and pointed out (*ha-iru*) a *method* (*makom iyun*, מוֹצֵעַ נֹתֵר) by which he could obtain the utmost knowledge of God possible for man to acquire. The knowledge obtained by Moses has not been possessed by any human being before him or after him.”

What was this *method* or *place of revelatory understanding* that was vouchsafed to Moses? Let's look back at the text of Exodus 33:21-23:

And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me (*hinei makom iti*), and thou shalt stand upon a *rock* (*nitzavta al ha-tzur*): And it shall come to pass, while My glory (*kavod*) passeth by (*b'avor*), that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock (*b'nikrat ha-tzur*), and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by (*v'sakoti khapi aleikha ad avri*): And I will take away Mine hand (*v'hasiroti et kapi*), and thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen.

Abarbanel explains that we cannot understand this passage without checking its key terms in the Guide's Lexicon. His first point is that Maimonides' *makom iyun*, i.e., place of revelation, was none other than "there is a *place* by me," *hinei makom iti*. *Place*, according to Guide 1:8, which quotes this passage, is a level of attainment of perfection, especially regarding God. *Makom*, as we showed in 1:16, becomes a stand-in for the eternal feminine principle, the Presence, *Shekhina*. It is the *place* of His *glory*, as we learned from Maimonides' retranslation of Ezekiel 3:12 "Blessed [be] the glory (*kavod*) of the Lord from His place (*mekomo*)" should be taken as "Blessed be His glory *as to the exalted degree of his existence*," *k'l'omar maalato v'romamut kvodo b'mtziut*. In 1:64 *glory* becomes the *created emanation* of God, the active intellect, that divine emanated intelligence which is our mediator with God.

In Guide 1:8, *tzur* becomes, the "mountain which was pointed out to Moses for *seclusion* and for the *attainment of perfection*," (*nosef al ha-makom ha-hityakhadut v'hasagat ha'shlemut*). Kafih says that he could translate the Arabic term for seclusion as *hitbodedut* / meditation. This prophetically meditative "seclusion" brings Moses to the degree "attainment of perfection," whereby he became God's intellectual progeny (see my essay in 1:8). *Tzur*, in 1:16, means "cause," or "source," as in, "the rock when ye are hewn" (Isaiah 51:1), because the intellectual "properties contained in the quarry (i.e., God) should be found in those things which are formed and hewn out of it."

Tzur also has the meaning of "form," as in Maimonides' concept of the *tzur olamim*, that God is the "form of the world" without which it no longer persists. In 1:16, taking all these ideas together, Maimonides promises that divine knowledge comes from standing on this rock:

"And thou shalt stand upon the Rock' (Exodus 33:21), i.e., be firm and steadfast in the conviction that God is the *source* of all things, for this will lead you towards the knowledge of the Divine Being. We have shown (1:8) that the words: 'Behold, a place is with me' (Exodus 33:21) contain the same idea."

Next, in Guide 1:21, we learned that the terms *avor* and *avri*, from Exodus 31:22, "My glory *passeth* by...while I *pass* by," cannot mean that God Himself passed in any spatial sense. When "The Lord *passed* by before him and proclaimed" the Thirteen *Middot*, the Midrash takes it to mean that He wrapped Himself in a prayer shawl ("passing" it over Himself), to show Moses this order of divine praise. Pushing the text a step further, Maimonides contends that God *exchanged* or *crossed* the vision that Moses sought of His essence for the vision of His actions.

Now we can begin to understand how Abarbanel distills Maimonides' account of Moses' third revelation (my translation):

"He [God] pointed out a *method* (*makom iyun*): Maimonides already said that our master Moses sought two requests, the revelation of the divine essence, and the revelation of the divine actions. God acknowledged the prior request about the actions, but also revealed that the latter request about the essence was impossible of fulfillment. God, instead, on His own initiative, revealed to Moses the *makom iyun*, i.e., an unsought for level of understanding, by which he could know of what was possible for a human *qua* human to know. What Moses would apprehend on this level no man before or after him could

apprehend. We learned about this level in Guide 1:16, on the homonymous term *tzur*, as it appears in the phrase, ‘thou shalt *stand* upon a *rock* (*nitzavta al ha-tzur*),’ meaning that God supported and stood Moses on the understanding that He is the origin of all things. This is the highest level that God revealed to Moses, the level of ‘behold, a place is with me (*hinei makom iti*).’ As explained in Guide 1:8, this is a level of understanding and a divine intellectual emanation. ‘Thou shalt *stand* upon a *rock*’ means that Moses will understand how God is the origin of the world, the cause of all action, and the renewer of all things: it is the revelation of God’s relationship with the world. It is not the apprehension of the divine essence nor of the divine actions of His creations, rather, this third revelation reveals how everything in the world is necessarily dependent upon God. God revealed this third revelation, but not because Moses sought it. We know that this *makom iyun* is implied when he was told *hinei makom iti*, ‘a place is with Me...’”

Abarbanel next explains the most significant subject of Moses’ third revelation, that God is the necessary ongoing renewer of the world and formal cause of all things:

“‘Thou shalt *stand* upon a *rock* (*tzur*)’ refers to God who is the *form of the world* (*tzur olamim*). The *tzur* mentioned in *b’nikrat ha-tzur*, ‘in the cleft of the rock,’ is a homonymous usage meaning mountain or stone, in which latter sense it suggests unformed matter, ...and that God is the first cause of all things [formed of matter]. In this manner all of nature is related to Him (Guide 2:48).”

Now Abarbanel explains how divine aid is the precondition of this level of prophecy:

“In this chapter Maimonides gives us three revelations. The first is impossible to attain in itself, the second is possible to attain in itself. The third revelation is impossible in one way but possible in another, since it is only possible with the help of God, and this was precisely what God revealed to Moses. That is why, at the conclusion of this vision God tells Moses that I ‘will *cover* thee with my hand while I pass by,’ where the term ‘cover’ represents the divine accompaniment that Maimonides defines as ‘a special aid from heaven’ (Guide 1:21). Respecting the second revelation, which was possible in itself, that Moses will know the ways of God, the text of Exodus next says ‘And I will *take away* Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts,’ i.e., without divine aid he can observe the divine actions which are the “ways.” Moses will know, through the prophetic light within him, all of the existences that it is within his nature to grasp, due to the greatness of his intellect and the depth of his perception. However, the third revelation will not be due to any amount of preparation (*hakhanato*) but purely through the miracle of divine aid.”

Abarbanel misinterprets Maimonides in Guide 1:21. Maimonides does not say there that preparation is unnecessary to prophets. He says:

“In asserting that God withheld from Moses (the higher knowledge) I mean to say that this knowledge was unattainable, that by its nature it was inaccessible to Moses; for man, whilst able to gain perfection by applying his reasoning faculties to the attainment of what is within the reach of his intellect, either weakens his reason or loses it altogether as soon as he ventures to seek a higher degree of knowledge--as I shall elucidate in one of the chapters of this work--*unless he be granted a special aid from heaven*, as is described in the words, ‘And I will cover thee with my hand until I pass by.’”

At the back of Maimonides’ mind is his discussion in Guide 1:32 of the four who went to Paradise, three of whom lost their wits because they were unprepared for the revelation. They failed to exercise intellectual and moral humility. The fourth, Akiva, was prepared and therefore merited the special aid of heaven. He was able to achieve the higher degree of knowledge beyond the normal reach of human intellect: the revelation of the Merkava.

God did not grant this third revelation to just anyone. He granted it only to Moses, because Moses was the master of the wise and the master of the prophets. He displayed intellectual humility. God revealed it only to the man who ascended the mountain and attained the first two revelations.

The important point that Abarbanel did recognize was that beyond the revelation of God's action in the world, and the revelation of His ineffability, was this third revelation, the revelation of divine providence. This is the revelation of God's ongoing sustenance of all creatures. Moses sees that just as his prophetic nature was hewn from the rock of his Creator, so the existence of all things depends on the *tzur ha-olamim*, the form of the world.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER—AN ASIDE

Moses now asks the appropriate question: how should we approach God? Maimonides writes:

“His [Moses] petition to know the attributes of God is contained in the following words: ‘Show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight’ (Exod. 33:13). Consider how many excellent ideas found expression in the words, ‘Show me Thy way, that I may know Thee.’ We learn from them that God is known by His attributes, for Moses believed that he knew Him, when he was shown the way of God. The words ‘That I may find grace in Thy sight,’ imply that he who knows God finds grace in His eyes. *Not only is he acceptable and welcome to God who fasts and prays, but everyone who knows Him.*”

There is a problem in the last sentence. Friedlander's English translation above provides a generous reading including fasting and prayer as means to intellectual unification with God (he justifies his translation, note 2, p. 192). Unfortunately for Friedlander (and Abarbanel), what Maimonides probably means is: “He who only fasts and prays is not acceptable.”

The Arabic is *la men sam wa sala feqata*, (لا من صام وصلى فقط), which Kafih Hebraizes: *lo mi sh'tsam v'hitpalel b'lvad*. I believe it reads like Pines' English translation: “...He who knows God... (is) *not* he who merely fasts and prays, but everyone who has knowledge of Him”, because the text forces Kafih, in footnote 6, to provide the following irrelevant apologia for Maimonides (my trans.):

“Maimonides' intent in referring to prayer as such here is to castigate those whose prayer is mere words but no thought to God's true essential unity. He is generally referring to those whose leaving the synagogue is no different from their entering, continuing to gossip and slander (*rchilut* and *lashon hara*), coming on as argumentative big shots, it were better they were in their grave than alive and praying.”

Kafih would not have written this had he thought he could interpret the Arabic as Friedlander does. His defense, though, is unnecessary. Maimonides demonstrated his exaltation of prayer in Mishneh Torah, *Tefila*. He invests real prayer with considerable intellectual preparation and meditation—about three hours for each prayer service (nine hours a day!). At *Tefila* 1:1 he called prayer “intellectual devotion” (*avoda sh'b'lev*).

What Maimonides meant was that prayer is a meditational framework to prepare the mind for unification of the active intellect, not the end in itself. As for fasting, it has no particular role in meditation. Fasting has merit in reversing a temperament of gluttony, but Maimonides rejects fasting as an ascetic practice (*Shemona Perakim*, Ch. 4).

Elsewhere, he maintains that fasting is the response to “distress,” *tzarot*. What is this *tzarot*? He lists twelve types of communal distress, ranging from invasion to drought. He lists four types of personal *tzarot* going from bad dreams to the imprisonment of a friend. He includes the calendrical fasts, which recall communal disasters, as well as Yom Kippur. What is our concern in these situations of *tzarot*? Our transgressions are the underlying cause of these distresses. They prevent devotion to God and, consequently, conjunction with the intellect we

share. “Our wicked conduct...brought these calamities upon us,” *maasinu ha-ra'im...sh'garam...lanu otam ha-tzarot*. We fast to “arouse our hearts” to these *tzarot*, and to cause us to turn in repentance (*teshuva*). The process of repentance resolves the *tzarot*, realigning us with God. The fast plays this important role: nourishment links body and soul, therefore, its removal is a punishment for the soul. It functions like any other punishment designed by Torah to rehabilitate the sinner. (Mishneh Torah, *H. Taaniyot* 1:4, 9, 12, 14, 2:1, 5:1, 19; Commentary on the Mishnah, *Yoma* 8:1; Guide 1:43).

THE GOOD

Now follows Maimonides' commentary on Exodus 33:16-34:16. Why not just provide the text but dispense with commentary? Because Maimonides uses the text to support his understanding of divine attributes as actions:

“Moses prayed to God to grant him knowledge of His attributes, and also pardon for His people (Ex. 33:16: ‘For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight?’); when the latter had been granted (33:17), he continued to pray for the knowledge of God’s essence in the words, ‘Show me Thy glory’ (33:18), and then received, respecting his first request, ‘Show me Thy way,’ the following favorable reply, ‘I will make all My *goodness* to pass before thee’ (33:19); as regards the second request, however, he was told, ‘Thou canst not see My face’ (33:20). The words ‘all My goodness’ imply that God promised to show him the whole creation, concerning which it has been stated, ‘And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very *good (tov meod)*’ (Gen. 1:31).”

Note that Maimonides adopts the rabbinic understanding of the good. It comes from Genesis 1:31, where God reviewed His creations and pronounced them “good.” The creations that are “good” are those that God established forever. While the Good is the whole of creation, it is also the Platonic Good:

“When I say ‘to show him the whole creation,’ I mean to imply that God promised to make him comprehend the nature of all things, their relation to each other, and the way they are governed by God both in reference to the universe as a whole and to each creature in particular. This knowledge is referred to when we are told of Moses, ‘he is firmly established in all Mine house’ (Num. 12:7); that is, ‘his knowledge of all the creatures in My universe is correct and firmly established’; for *false opinions are not firmly established.*”

The Good is the true formal reality of creatures and creation. Kafih, note 18, *ad loc.*, comments: “It connects the noetic world to the world of the spheres, and the emanation from the world of the spheres upon the lower world.” This noetic reality is the only one that is “established,” i.e., the only one that is true. Corporeality is not “established” because it is transitory. Moses is “firmly established in all Mine house,” because he has that knowledge of the permanent things.

“Consequently the knowledge of the works of God is the knowledge of His attributes, by which *He can be known.*”

Now Maimonides pulls it all together. Knowledge of the Good is knowledge of His works, by which we learn His attributes. The best part is his optimistic claim that thus “He can be known.”

“The fact that God promised Moses to give him a knowledge of His works, may be inferred from the circumstance that God taught him such attributes as refer exclusively to His works, viz., ‘merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness,’ etc. (Exod. 34:6). It is therefore clear that the ways which Moses wished to know, and which God taught him, are the actions emanating from God. Our Sages call them *middot* (qualities), and speak of the thirteen *middot* of God.”

He has a good source for this last claim in the Midrash. *Tanna d’Bei Eliahu Zuta* explains that when the Torah

says that God will make all of His “goodness” pass before Moses, God means by His “goodness” the Thirteen Attributes. Maimonides says that the ways (*derachim*) of God and the *middot* of men are “identical” (*ki ha-derachim v’ha-middot davar akhad*).

MIDDOT OF GOD AND MAN

The Thirteen Attributes (*middot*) are at Exodus 34:6-7:

“And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.”

The term “*middot*” is elastic. It includes the attribute of *quality*, i.e., mental disposition (Guide 1:52), which also includes the moral characteristics. When a person performs a good or an evil deed it flows from the good or evil dispositional quality rooted in him. In 1:52 we learned not to attribute such qualities to God.

Maimonides makes brief reference to a couple of typical passages from Tannaitic literature to demonstrate the term *middot*. Here are those passages in full (Mishna, *Pirke Avot*, 5:12, 13—numbers vary by edition):

“There are four different *middot* (characteristics) among those who go to the house of learning; One who goes but does not do receives reward for the going. One who does but does not go receives reward for the doing. One who goes and does is pious. One who does not go and does not do is wicked.

“There are four different *middot* among those who give charity. One who wants to give but that others not give - has an evil eye towards others. One who wants others to give but not to give himself - has an evil eye towards himself. One who gives and wants others to give is pious. One who does not give and does not want others to give is wicked.”

These Mishnaic passages excellently support his doctrine of action attributes since they only speak of the individual’s actions, not his mental state. Maimonides continues:

“They do not mean to say that God really possesses *middot* (qualities), but that He performs actions similar to such of our actions as originate in certain qualities, i.e., in certain psychical dispositions; not that God has really such dispositions.”

The *material* intellect is such a disposition of our mortal being. Though we imitate God, our actions still come from our material intellect. God is neither mortal nor physical, and therefore not subject to dispositions. Our mercifulness is in no way comparable to the source of what we homonymously term His mercifulness, even though Maimonides had called them “identical.”

THE REAL THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL PROBLEM

The above was prologue to the main point of the chapter. Maimonides’ expressed concern so far had been to show how his theory of divine attributes fits into the Jewish thought. That is only the first step. He now says:

“Although Moses was shown ‘all His goodness,’ i.e., all His works, only the thirteen *middot* are mentioned, because they include those acts of God which refer to the creation and the government of mankind, and to know these acts was the principal object of the prayer of Moses.”

Moses needs these specific attributes to govern. God has done many other things, including the creation of plants and animals, but they are not relevant to Moses' problem, which is the Golden Calf and its bloody aftermath. Maimonides wants to show why the governor of a state needs to know the divine attributes.

Straussians have been interested to find Maimonides' thinking on political philosophy. I find it curious that they fail to pay more attention to our chapter, the first chapter in the Guide devoted to the subject of political philosophy.

That Maimonides finds this urgent is not obvious, for he buried his serious concern in an innocuous reference containing only two words.

About the middle of the chapter, he explains again that the attributes are divine acts seen through our accustomed perspective, this time focusing on the attribute of grace. The term *khen* means grace, kindness, but, specifically for Maimonides, it stands for *free unobligated giving*. He provides three scriptural quotations to support this, two from Jacob's speech on his final meeting with Esau, and one from Judges 21:22: "Be favourable unto them," *khanenu otam*, where *khanenu* is a variant of *khen*, "grace."

It is no wonder that he leaves us with just those two words from the last chapter of Judges ("*khanenu otam*"), for this is the incident of the concubine of Giv'ah, one of the most horrible stories in the Bible.

**“IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL;
EVERY MAN DID WHAT WAS RIGHT IN HIS EYES.”**

Idolatry, the worst transgression, was rampant in the Jewish tribes (Judges 17 and 18). Without a central government, there was no way to rid themselves of it. The immoral and grossly material influence of idolatry had corrupted some, but not all, of the people.

A Levite dwelling in Ephraim took a concubine (*pilegesh*: considerably less than a wife. See: Mishneh Torah, *Malakhim*, 4:4; *Ishut* 1:4). She was unfaithful to him, and ran away to her father's house. The man still wanted her and followed her. Her father entertained him for some time, and then the Levite left with the concubine. To return home to Ephraim he had to pass the Benjamite fortress at Giv'ah, overlooking Jerusalem, which was then in the hands of the pagan Jebusites. He could have stopped at Jerusalem but thought it better to lodge among Jews. A wealthy man, he could have paid the Givahites to lodge him for the night, but they inhospitably ignored him. A kind Ephraimite farmer coming late from the field agreed to put him up. They shared a merry repast which was shattered when the local mob pounded the farmer's door. They demanded the guest be brought out, intending gang-rape (*v'neda'aynu*). The Levite man brought forth his concubine and gave her to them instead. When they finished with her, she dragged back to the farmer's threshold, where they found her dead at morning light. The Levite took her corpse back to his home in Ephraim, and cut her into twelve pieces. He sent the pieces to each tribe, calling for retribution. The tribes demanded that the Benjamites give up her killers, but they refused. The tribes vowed never to marry Benjamites, and declared war. Initially, the Benjamites prevailed, because the tribes had not rid themselves of idolatry (Rashi on Judges 20:21). The tribes then turned to God in *teshuva*, and He encouraged them to continue fighting. The tribes ambushed and slaughtered the tribe of Benjamin, killing twenty five thousand. Only six hundred men remained, and no women. The Benjamites could only perpetuate themselves by marrying gentile idolators because the Jews had rejected them. The tribes repented because they did not want a tribe "blotted from Israel" (21:6). They arranged for the Benjamite males to lie in wait and "catch" Jewish girls dancing at the divine festival (*Tu b'Av*) at the Shiloh Tabernacle. The Jews could then say they had not "given" their daughters to Benjamin. They "took pity on them," (Judaica Press translation of *khanenu otam*, 21:22), meaning that the Jews let the Benjamite remnant take their daughters *though not obliged to*. Saul descended from one of these marriages. The Book of Judges ends at the conclusion of this terrible story, with the statement: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his eyes" (21:25).

What should the leader do when his own people act like Sodomites? What is worse than having to face civil war, a war to destroy one's own brethren?

Maimonides recognized that if the nation could not resolve this ultimate question, it would lose its reason for being, either as a political or a religious entity. Moses confronted the same question.

MOSES ASKS FOR GOD'S "WAYS"

Faced with the the civil war following the incident of the Golden Calf, Moses asked God to show him His "ways":

"This is shown by the conclusion of his prayer, 'that I may know Thee, that I may find grace (*khen*) in Thy sight, and consider that this nation is Thy people' (Exod. 33:16), that is to say, the people whom I have to rule by certain acts in the performance of which I must be guided by Thy own acts in governing them. We have thus shown that 'the ways' used in the Bible, and '*middot*' used in the Mishnah, are identical, denoting the acts emanating from God in reference to the universe (*v'hem ha-pa'ulot ha-ba'ot me'ito ytalei ba-olam*)."

What a remarkable formulation. I, Moses, need to derive my political rule of the Hebrews from Your rule of the cosmos! Can this be the resolution of his theological-political problem?

Maimonides gives us examples which illustrate the nature of divine governance. God provides for the welfare of embryos of living beings. He creates dispositions in their parents that serve to protect their offspring from the dangers of birth and infancy. We call these dispositions "mercy" and "grace." We notice similar divine actions, so we say that God, like a human parent, is merciful and kind. But God just does what He does. He "feels" nothing. He is not subject to emotions or change of any kind. He is, therefore, not "kind" or "merciful." He knows and does what will best advance His "pious men" (*hasidim*). We can make this statement about God, though it sounds strange to say that He feels nothing, because God is not a passive object of emotions. He never changes because of feelings, qualities or *middot*. When catastrophic earthquakes and storms occur, we think that God must be enraged, but He is not wrathful. His acts produce His desired results.

WHY A PROPHET IS NEEDED

Maimonides then says:

"—the governor of a country, if he is a prophet, should conform to these attributes."

In other words, the governor should perform acts of kindness and severity for the greater good, not out of emotional passion. But why the clause "If he is a prophet"? I would have thought it good advice even if he were no prophet. Wouldn't this be good conduct for any political leader?

The nation does not always need a prophet to be its leader. Since there are so few prophets, and fewer prophets who are leaders, that is a very good thing. In Maimonides' political philosophy, only the prophet gives law, and since Moses gave the unchanging law of Torah, we should not need a new prophet.

Prophets are rare. They must be trained. According to Maimonides, three types of people go to three different schools. The very intelligent should go to philosophy school; the very imaginative go to political school; and the few with an excellent intellect wedded to fine imagination go to prophecy school.

The politician does not need profound intelligence, but he does need great imagination to lead the people in the law. As long as there is law, a good politician is sufficient to govern the city.

There is a law for the Jewish city that turns to idol-worship, the law of the *ir ha-nidakha*, the city that *strays* after idolatry (Mishneh Torah, *Avoda Zara*, ch. 4). It sternly requires the political leadership to destroy the city and its inhabitants. It derives from Deuteronomy 13:15: “Destroy it utterly, and all that is therein,” “And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this among you” (13:11). The law has its explicit limit, for, as Maimonides says in our chapter, “When it is said that God is visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, this refers exclusively to the sin of idolatry, and to no other sin.”

The law commands the removal of idolatrous temptations, even violently. The people shall “hear and fear.”

But since the law is clear, a strong leader, a product of the school of politics, will take the steps necessary to enforce it, and will explain his actions persuasively to the people. He need not be a prophet.

The terrible acts of the Benjamite citizens of Giv’ah fell outside of the bounds of the law. The morality prevailing among the tribes had sunk considerably below Torah standards. The tribal divisions prevented them from enforcing the law. Nonetheless, scripture does not say that idolatry *caused* of the acts of Giv’ah. For these reasons, God at first did not approve the war against Giv’ah.

The Benjamites argued that they could enforce their own law, but they failed to do so. When the Ephraimite went forth to tell what had happened to his concubine, the Jews as a whole knew they had to avenge her. Nonetheless, the law had no provision to punish the guilty except by the Benjamite court.

A real prophet, certified under Torah law detailed in *Mishneh Torah*, may not rewrite the Torah. He can only make emergency legislation, (*horaat sha’a*, temporary decrees; see Kafih, note 45). The idea is that the ordinary judicial course is comparable to nature, while temporary decrees are like miraculous divine interventions. In exigent circumstances, the ruler who is a prophet makes rulings that are not part of the normal course of justice. It is only in this sense that the prophet-king, Moses-like, legislates. But no one is Moses-like for long, for prophecy comes in flashes (Introduction to the Guide. “Flash” is a common Sufic term). Therefore, the prophet is restricted to legislating emergency decrees, and may not change Torah.

It is not just that there was no king in Israel, for even a king would have no legal support to decree the destruction of Giv’ah, as it was not an “*ir hanidakha*,” an idolatrous city. When there is no law, the nation needs a leader who is also a prophet. He must destroy and punish for the welfare of the community. He acts, but not out of emotional passion. He does not lead a mob but a nation.

Furthermore, Maimonides says that the king should only rarely punish and destroy, since of the Thirteen Attributes, twelve are about mercy. Even the one that is not about mercy is restricted. Maimonides’ has a unique understanding of the last of the Thirteen *Middot*. At Exodus 34:7, it says that God “*v-nakkeh lo yenakkeh*” (Lit: “And clears but will not clear”) which the rabbis usually take to mean “He will by no means clear the guilty” treating *nakkeh* as “to clean,” i.e., He clears but never *entirely* clears the guilty. The rabbis say this means that if the guilty repent they are cleared, but if not they are never cleared. Maimonides has a different understanding of the passage. First, he restricts it to those guilty of idolatry. Next, He defines *nakkeh* not as “to clean” but “to clean out” in the sense of “to destroy,” so that the guilty will be destroyed, but not completely. Beyond “the fourth generation” a remnant will remain, who God will mercifully allow to live. Similarly, in the story of Giv’ah, the Jews, perhaps acting prophetically, do not completely destroy the city, using strange unlegislated means to save the tribe. The Jews, having no prophet-king, stumble upon these solutions; but because they turned to God in repentance, He showed the way, which was to imitate His acts of mercy.

Moses faced the most terrible situation a leader could face. The people strayed after a golden calf, and Moses had to purge them in civil war. He found the means to do so when God revealed to him the Thirteen *Middot*, which

lay down the pattern for his successful, if severe, rule. Yom Kippur commemorates this atonement for the sin of the golden calf.

SUMMARY

What have we learned? Moses sought the ways of God so that he could govern the people in a God-like fashion. This means that he could show mercy or wrath without experiencing these passions, for “all emotions are bad,” *ki kol hitpaalut ra’a*. This, according to Maimonides, proves that his philosophical doctrine of action attributes comes from ancient Jewish lore and practice.

To reach this level required Moses to “know God,” that is, to achieve intellectual unity, so far as humanly possible, with God. He attains the knowledge of the “good,” which is the comprehension of creation at the noetic level. As a result, he learns the Thirteen Attributes of God, the foundation of our ethics, which we strive to imitate. This is the way of kings and prophets, who must resolve the political crisis of the people. When the way is not clear from Torah, and the circumstances are exigent, the prophet-king, who knows God best, acts at God’s command, striving to emulate His actions.

At the highest prophetic level, Moses received a third revelation, the revelation of God’s role in relation to the universe as its form and sustainer.

Maimonides says that the only purpose of this chapter is to show that the doctrine of action attributes comes from Torah. He says twice that all of these other things digress from his purpose. We should not be misled by these protestations. Their purpose is to shield the unqualified reader from a discussion of *Maaseh Merkava*. All of these digressions are parts of that curriculum: the political need for prophecy, the prophetic process, Moses’ vision, and the nature of providence.

What he reveals by these alleged digressions is the relationship between the philosophy of attributes and the divine science, particularly regarding prophecy and providence. The most significant digression is his solution to the fundamental problem in political philosophy, the problem of civil war, which is the problem of what makes a government legitimate. Ultimately, this legitimacy flows from the lawgiver, the divinely inspired prophet.

GUIDE 1:55
FOUR PHYSICAL THINGS WE CANNOT PREDICATE OF GOD

PREFACE

Guide 1:55 is, with one exception, philosophical. It comes exactly half way through the section of the Guide on the denial of divine attributes. Maimonides' strategy in this chapter is to use physical science, that is, Aristotelian physics, to show why we must deny four types of physical attributes.

The basic concepts of Aristotle's philosophical physics are as follows. All corporeal beings are composed of three elements: form, matter and privation. None of these three is by itself corporeal, for even matter, considered apart from form, cannot be seen or touched. *Privation* is a special way of looking at potentiality. Potentiality is the capacity to achieve perfection, i.e., "actuality," the opposite of potentiality. Since the being still lacks that perfection, we say it is subject to privation. *Matter* always comes with privation, since even formed matter contains potentiality, that is, privation, toward other perfections. *Form* is an active subject that imposes itself upon the inferior and defective material object, toward a resultant perfection. Since matter is the *passive* object of formation, we say that it is subject to "passion." All passion implies change in the object of passion. Finally, in Aristotelian physics, every real thing is in motion, and therefore existence is always *active*, so we use the term "actuality" instead of and in place of "reality."

The four types of divine attributes that we must deny under this analysis are corporeality, passion, non-existence (privation), and similarity. These ideas are integrally related, and are essentially physical. Examples would be, respectively: "The hand of God"; "The wrath of God"; "The desire of God"; and, "The family of God." We must take these statements metaphorically, for otherwise they imply divine corporeality, passivity, privation and likeness.

Josef Stern points out that these attributes are negative attributes, but different from the negative attributes that Maimonides will introduce in Guide 1:58. In our chapter, the negativity of the attributes is their *content*. The ideas of corporeality, passivity, privation and similarity all imply some negative content or property in God himself, i.e., a defect. Maimonides' famous doctrine of negative attributes introduced in 1:58, on the other hand, is about *syntactic* negativity. It constructs sentences that deny positive attributes (Stern, "Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language, in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, R. S. Cohen and H. Levine, editors, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000, p. 205). Since only three of the ten attribute chapters address the syntactical negative attributes, it follows that they are not the center of Maimonides' interest.

CORPOREALITY

Maimonides does not make the case against divine corporeality in our chapter (instead see Guide 1:76, 2:1-2).

Corporeality is the combination of matter and form, activity and passivity. We can, metaphorically, view matter as the active male principle and form as the passive female principle. All corporeal beings combine matter and form. Matter is the passive object of form, while form is the active subject.

Aristotelian physics shows that God is not corporeal, and bears no relation to corporeality. That is because God is always active, *actual*. Since God is always existent and actual, perfect in every way, lacking nothing, there is no *potential* perfection for Him to attain. Matter, by contrast, is the passive principle of the universe, receiving the impress of form, always seeking to attain a new form.

Because privation and potentiality are necessary adjuncts to matter, it must always seek a new form. But since God is *actual* and without potentiality, it follows that God must be non-corporeal, for He contains no mixture of matter and form. He must also be incorporeal because only an incorporeal being can be the first cause of all

motion (2:1). In Guide 3:8, Maimonides explains that all defects come from matter. Since God is perfect (3:19), lacking any defect, he must be incorporeal. We, therefore, deny any attribute in the form of “The hand of God” because it implies divine corporeality and thus violates the laws of Aristotelian physics.

PASSION

Although we use the term differently today, the word “passion” originally came from passivity. Passion describes the process of change in the passive object. “All passiveness implies change,” *kol ha-hitpaaluyot mkhayevot shinui*. Similarly, “affection,” however we use it now, means that the possessor of the affection has been affected, i.e., changed, by some other thing. The Hebrew *hitpaal* (affection, affected) denotes this passivity well, because it is the reflexive of *paal*, the word for “verb” or “does.”

Affection occurs when the active subject effects change in the affected object. In order for this to occur two beings are needed: the subject (the agent), and the object (patient). But no agent affects God, for God is not the passive subject of any other’s action. Were this otherwise, there would be an entity equal to or greater than God that could change Him.

All emotions are passions. All passions are qualities. Maimonides explained in Guide 1:52 that God does not possess qualities, including ascriptions of divine emotion. We should not take this to mean that God does not care about his people, but only that our sense of caring and His are not the same.

Emotion/passion always implies change in the affected object. Change implies a defect in perfection, because the patient must change to acquire the perfection it does not yet possess. It receives the action of a superior agent. But nothing that receives the action of another can be said to be perfect. God is subject to neither defect nor change because “all perfections must really (actually) exist in God,” *khiuvi shihu kol shlemuyotav mtsuyam b’paal*.

Since God is not subject to passion, a phrase like the “wrath of God” incorrectly attributes passion to God. We only use such language metaphorically, homonymously, to describe a divine action in human terms.

NON-EXISTENCE/PRIVATION

Potentiality implies non-existence or privation in the being having that potential, the potential to acquire a perfection it does not yet have. Potential perfection is non-existent perfection.

There is a cycle in which the agent of change (subject) effects a change in the patient (object). In this cycle, the patient lacked perfection but had the potential to attain it. The change effected by the agent upon the patient produces the resultant perfection. This perfection is its goal (Gr.: *telos*) and its actualization. The patient now is an agent who can change another patient and begin the cycle anew. The Greek terms for the stages of this cycle of potentiality, change and actualization are *dunamis—kinesis—entelecheia*.

In that cycle, the patient is inferior (*garoa*) to the active agent, which is itself inferior to the resultant actual perfection. The “inferiority” is its lack of perfection. The usual example is the learning student whose learning is inferior to one who mastered the subject. He is also inferior in learning to his teacher, who brought about the student’s change. Were God subject to any similar potentiality or privation, then another power superior to God could change Him to a more perfect state, which is absurd.

These ideas emerge from pre-Socratic physics, which conceived motion as the essential element of life. See my comments on the pre-Socratics, in 1:11 (“Generation and Corruption”) and 1:17. The notion of this cycle of active agent and passive patient begins with Plato:

“Nothing exists in itself, but all things of all sorts arise out of motion by intercourse with each other; for it is, as they say, impossible to form a firm conception of the active or the passive element as being anything separately; for there is no active element until there is a union with the passive element, nor is there a passive element until there is a union with the active; and that which unites with one thing is active and appears again as passive when it comes in contact with something else. And so it results from all this, as we said in the beginning, that nothing exists as invariably one, itself by itself, but everything is always becoming in relation to something.” (*Theatetus*, 157b, Fowler translation)

Aristotle develops Plato’s doctrine in chapter nine of his *Metaphysics*. The term “potentiality” comes from potency, which is the power to change. The agent has the power to effect the change that was potential in the patient. The first power (active) is in the agent, the second power (potential) is in the patient. The agent acts upon this passive potency in the patient because the patient lacks some perfection, which lack we call “privation.” By contrast, the agent has no privation in respect of this patient. But since there is potentiality and actuality involved, every movement is an act of becoming, and therefore incomplete. The actuality is complete. When the patient attains actualization, and possesses the perfection it lacked, it then becomes an agent, because the process of change never ends.

Change takes place because of the four causes that change all things. Those causes are 1) the *matter* from which the product is made, 2) the *form* by which it is informed, 3) the goal or *telos*, which is the product in view, and 4) the *efficient* cause that really molds it into that product.

Aristotelian science shows that God is not subject to any privation. God contains no element of non-existence, and therefore *is*. His existence is absolute, eternal and unchanging. It must be, because the first mover in the great chain of motion has to be fundamentally different and superior to any other movers. The non-existence of any perfection is a defect possessed by all merely potentially perfect beings. But since God is without defect He has no potentiality. Since God has no potentiality, He has no privation, and therefore lacks nothing and desires nothing. It follows that we must deny any implication that God has a privation, as in the statement “God desires...”

Maimonides does not subject Aristotle’s physics to criticism. Jewish thinkers, including critics of philosophy like Yehuda Ha-Levi (c.1075–1141), still broadly accepted it, until Hasdai Crescas broke away. Abravanel’s son, Don Judah Abravanel, agreed with Crescas, but failed to persuade his father to break with Aristotelian physical theory (Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, 103-104, 119-120, 261, 594-598).

SIMILARITY

This is where Maimonides departs from his strategy in the rest of this chapter. The attribution of similarity implies the existence of other Gods, or, at least, other eternal independent entities. But Maimonides, in previous chapters, has qualified the intended audience of the Guide as monotheists who need no proof of divine uniqueness. Maimonides, however, could not change the fact that Aristotle was pagan, so he would not call upon Aristotelian physics to negate the existence of other gods.

The problem goes to the polytheism at the heart of the Hellenic philosophical project, undermining any attempt to use its tools for monotheistic ends. We already knew from 1:52 that similarity implies a basis for quantifiable comparison, and there can be no such *fundamentum* with the perfect being. Maimonides reprises this argument in the next chapter, but it only works when we try to compare God and man. We could hazard a proof in the spirit of the others already given above: all other beings are only potentially perfect; but God has all perfections and is actually perfect. Therefore, God has no similars. The problem with these arguments is that they beg the question of whether there could be two perfect unmoved movers moving two different universes (as Maimonides suggests in 1:75).

Therefore, in our chapter, he refrains from disproving similarity with God through philosophical proof. Otherwise, he would have to explain why the pagan progenitors of philosophy thought there were other gods. Rather than advance his own excellent proof here, he quotes three biblical passages, two from Isaiah and one from Jeremiah, that there is no being *like* God, i.e., there is nothing similar to God.

It is because of that prophetic insistence alone that we must deny a statement like “the family of God.”

Since Maimonides does not bring his own proof here, he relies on these biblical assertions of divine uniqueness, trusting that the evidence of prophecy should suffice for his audience. Otherwise, he would have to explain why Aristotle did not abandon paganism, but he never explores that question explicitly.

WHY DIDN'T MAIMONIDES ARGUE HIS PHILOSOPHICAL PROOF FOR MONOTHEISM HERE?

In our chapter, Maimonides maintains that we must not merely reject divine corporeality, passion, privation and similarity, but that we must know the details of the proofs.

“He who knows these things, but without their proofs, does not know the details which logically result from these general propositions: and therefore he cannot prove that God exists, or that the [four] things mentioned above are inadmissible in reference to God.”

We have seen that he provides, in shorthand form, the proofs for the rejection of passion and privation. He previously demonstrated the rejection of corporeality in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodai* 1:7, as he does again in Guide chapters 1:76 and 2:1-2. He had already provided us with his Lexicon, which is a practical tool for the removal of corporeality from Judaism.

But when he gets to the rejection of divine likeness and similarity, which rejection is the very basis for monotheism, he merely says “this has been generally accepted,” *v'zeh davar sh'kol ekhad khashav*, i.e., it has been generally accepted that we must reject terminology which suggests the existence of other gods or other eternal entities. This almost sounds like a first intelligible, something that everyone already knows or should know. His commentators did not question this, taking it as given. Abravanel says, “there is no need for further discussion,” *v'dvarav m'boarim*; Even-Shmuel says that to accept divine likeness, “is mere error,” *aino eleh mtatea*. Others are silent. You may inspect Maimonides' entire statement rejecting divine similarity:

“Another thing likewise to be denied in reference to God, is similarity to any existing being. This has been generally accepted, and is also mentioned in the books of the Prophets: e.g., ‘To whom, then, will you liken me?’ (Isa. 11:25); ‘To whom, then, will you liken God?’ (*ib.* 18); ‘There is none like unto Thee’ (Jer. 10:6). Instances of this kind are frequent.”

He includes no explicit proofs to support the rejection of divine similarity. Since, however, it is a religious duty to prove the rejection of corporeality, passion and privation, to the point where we “know the details which logically result from these general propositions (in the proofs),” *yada et ha-pratim sh'hem khiuviim min ha-hakdamot ha-klalot halelu khiuvi ha-khrekhi*, wouldn't we have an even greater duty to demonstrate the lack of similarity of any entity to God? For both the divine attributes and the gods of the pagans seem to be similar to God in some way.

In fact, Maimonides does assemble serious arguments against divine similarity later in the Guide, in 1:56, 1:75 and 2:1. Here he seems content to leave his readers with three quotations from the prophetic scriptures. Why?

His first problem, as we observed, is Aristotle. We see that Maimonides builds his proofs against divine passion and privation on a philosophical physics directly derived from The Philosopher. He does this because he wants to register as many agreements in his ledger so that he can later dispute core peripatetic claims with integrity. But he

cannot make Aristotle an advocate for monotheism. Indeed, as we show in the next chapter, Aristotle could conceive of an ambiguous likeness between the god and a dog (which Maimonides probably knew but conceals). Worse yet, in Guide 1:75, Maimonides makes Aristotelian science the platform for his devil's advocacy of dualism, which he uses to smash the lame Kalām arguments for monotheism (see my essay there, "Maimonides' Aristotelianized Version Of Manichaeism").

When, in 1:75, he concludes his attack on the Kalām doctors' "proofs," he wearily says that they would have been better off to rely on simple religious faith. It is to that simple faith that he appeals, at this stage of the Guide, thereby avoiding Aristotle's paganism.

MAIMONIDES' PROOF

Maimonides does not articulate own post-Aristotelian proof until after his polemic against the Kalām in 1:73-76 and after his summation of the principles of Aristotelian science in the Introduction to Book Two of the Guide. It would have required too many explanatory prefaces to put it in our chapter.

So, for example, in the next chapter, 1:56, he returns to the problem of divine similarity, but confines himself to syntactical arguments and rules, rather than philosophical proofs. In 1:75, in the Kalām's second argument for monotheism, the argument of "specific difference," he subtly signals his preference for a version of that argument, but does not detail it.

It is only in Guide 2:1 that he carefully reveals enough of his argument for us to reconstruct it. He is careful not to attribute the argument to Aristotle, since it is the work of Maimonides' monotheist philosophical predecessors among the Jews, Christians and Muslims. The proof does hark back, though, in much altered form, to Aristotle, who argued that there could be only one heaven or universe (*ouranos*). This was because the moving principle of the universe had to be incorporeal (2:1, First Philosophical Argument), and since corporeality is the source of multiplicity, it followed that if its mover was incorporeal and single, then the universe it moved could not be multiple. For Aristotle's monotheist successors, including Maimonides, this was an obvious opening, and they merely traded God for Aristotle's *ouranos* (Guide 2:1, p. 22).

The argument of "specific difference," then, is that if there were two gods they must share some element (divinity) and differ in some other element (the separate realm that each separately ruled). In other words, each god would be defined by its shared genus and specific difference, as in any definition. But since the unmoved mover must be incorporeal, there could not conceivably exist the multiplicity or composition which such genus and difference imply (Propositions VII and XVI, Introduction to Part Two of the Guide). It follows that there must be only one God, not two or more, and there can be no such thing as a "genus" of divinity. (Maimonides' proof can be found in Friedlander's translation of Guide 2:1, page 20. See my essay in 1:75, "The Second Argument: Maimonides' Own Argument For Unity")

Also, to the extent that there could be said to be multiple intelligences, as in the case of angels, their multiplicity resides merely in their role as cause and effect to each other (Prop. XVI). At bottom, there is no real multiplicity in intellect, except in its engagement with matter. Therefore, no thing or principle resembles God, except in a homonymous metaphorical sense.

Until Maimonides had completely explained his stance on the Kalām and on Aristotle, it was too early to make this case. It was more prudent at this juncture, especially in view of the *Hagigah* rule against public teaching of the *Merkava*, to leave his student with simple faith in the existence of only one God.

DOES MAIMONIDES SIGNAL HIS PROOF AGAINST DIVINE SIMILARITY HERE?

There is, though, a way in which Maimonides signals these ideas in his proof-texts. He cites Isaiah 40:25, “To whom then will ye liken Me, that I should be equal” in two earlier works, *Mishneh Torah*, *Ysodai* 1:8, and in Principle Three of his Thirteen Fundamental Principles of Faith (Commentary on the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 10:1). In both places, he quotes the Isaiah passage with the identical tagline following it: “if He were a body, He would be like other bodies,” *v’ilu haya guf haya domei l’shaar gufim*.

The Isaiah passage and this tagline seem to form an inseparable link in Maimonides’ mind. The tagline is a shorthand version of the proof of specific difference. “If He were a body”...but He is not a body, since the prime mover must be incorporeal; “He would be *like* other bodies,” in that all corporeal entities are multiple and composite, being members of some genus individuated by some specific difference. But just in virtue of God’s incorporeality He must be non-multiple and non-composite, a member of no genus, and, therefore like no other being. He is therefore absolutely unique, the one God. (This same argument in a different form appears in *Mishneh Torah*, *Ysodai* 1:7).

Maimonides quoted Jeremiah chapter 10 in *Mishneh Torah*, *Avoda Zara* 1:1, though, instead of quoting Jeremiah 10:6 he quotes 10:7, but both verses repeat the phrase “there is none like unto Thee,” *me’ein kamokha*. 10:7 reads, “Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations? For to Thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise [men] of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, [there is] none like unto Thee.” *Mishneh Torah* explains the passage, emphasizing the phrase “all the wise of the nations”:

“This means that all know that Thou art alone are God; their error and folly consists in imagining that this vain worship (idolatry) is Thy desire.”

In Maimonides’ mind, there is an indissoluble link between the Jeremiah passage and the notion that wise idolators know the true unique status of God.

What Maimonides means by citing these passages together is that even if the pagan Aristotle never could bring himself to admit the truth of monotheism, he must have realized it from the necessary lack of a specific difference in an incorporeal first mover.

CONCLUSION

Philosophy shows that God is beyond any attributes or descriptions. It does not matter whether these are corporeal descriptions, attributions of passion, or ascriptions of privation. Prophecy maintains that no being bears a likeness to God.

Maimonides begins to accumulate agreements between revelation and philosophy so that he can later address their disagreements. Only when coming to the denial of divine likeness does he abandon philosophy. In the next chapter, he focuses entirely on the attribution of similarity to God, arguing his syntactic case against it.

GUIDE 1:56 A MEDITATION ON SIMILARITY

In this chapter, Maimonides strives for a deeper meditation on the divine essence.

His method is strange. Usually we meditate on a simple concept. There is nothing simple about this chapter. Maimonides prefers to use theoretical means to achieve a more exalted state of consciousness. His goal is to foster a state of total intellection, from which post-intellectual meditation begins. I support these assertions not only with the content of this chapter but by the last pregnant sentences of it (Pines 131):

“The conception is of immense sublimity to those who know (*v’hinei inyan ze naaleh meod etzel ha-yodaim*). Keep it in memory, and realize its true meaning so that it be ready to hand (*me’uted*) with a view to what we wish to make you understand

The transcendent force of the statement overcomes the apparently theoretical intent of the chapter itself. Philosophy did much to purify our idea of God. But philosophy takes us only to the beginning of the path, not to its end.

The topic is similarity (*dimui, dimion*). It seems unnecessary to return to this topic since he treated it in the last chapter. He had marshaled three quotations from scripture to show that nothing is similar to God. This biblical method stood out in that otherwise philosophical chapter. One reason that he had to abandon Aristotelian philosophy there was that Aristotle was a pagan. How could Maimonides use that philosophy to show that there is none like God when Aristotle thought otherwise? Moreover, Maimonides thought he did not need to prove to his monotheist audience that there was nothing like God.

Since, according to Aristotle, it is the nature of man to know, nature drives us to find whether there is any similarity between God and us. Is God like us in any way?

In this discussion of the notion of similarity, Maimonides’ antagonist is the *Kalām* (pl.: *Mutakallimūn*), i.e., the school of Muslim theologians and their Jewish followers. They thought that God’s existence, power, will and wisdom were in some way like our existence, power, will and wisdom. Nonetheless, they continued to maintain that God was unlike any of His creatures. Indeed, the Arabic term for such likeness, *shirk*, becomes the usual term for heresy (Heb. *shutaf*, partner).

The term “*Kalām*” is difficult to define. It means “word” or “thought,” but becomes the name of the main stream of Islamic theology. This is the first mention of the *Kalām* in the Guide, except in the Introduction, where Maimonides promised to respond to Rabbi Joseph’s concerns about the *Kalām* of their day.

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

We can divide *similar* terms into three types: 1) homonymous (equivocal) terms; 2) univocal (synonymous) terms; and 3) amphibolous (ambiguous) terms, including what the scholastics termed *analogia*. Terms that actually are similar fall into the latter two categories only. That is because homonymous terms are completely different in meaning from each other, sharing only the same sound. Real univocal (*haskama*, Jud.Ar.: תראטו) similarity requires *relation*. There is no relation without some *fundamentum* between the *relata*. There must exist comparability in quantifiable terms, i.e., larger, fewer, stronger, hotter, etc. This can occur if both are closely related members of the same species. Despite the *Mutakallimūn* claim that there are divine essential attributes like existence, power, etc., these terms cannot be used synonymously for both God and man. Thus, His power is not “greater” than our power because there is no sense of power that could relate the two. Were this not so, the difference between His power and ours would merely be quantitative, not absolute.

The attributists piously admit this truth, yet do not act on that admission. Somehow, they still hold that these attributes describe both divine and human power.

Perhaps they thought that the similarity was ambiguous (amphibolous) rather than synonymous. In other words, instead of saying that the term existence has the same definition for man and God, perhaps it only means that they share some element which yields some minimal resemblance between them.

Maimonides defines amphiboly (*m'supak*, Arabic: *mushtarakah*) as a *similarity of accidents* between two beings. But since the Kalām admit that God cannot be a bearer of accidents, there can be no amphibolous similarity between God and man. It follows that apparently similar statements about God and man bear no commonality in any respect, for they are neither synonymous nor amphibolous. The only “similarity” they share is the sound of their names, i.e., homonymy (Kafih: *meshutaf gamur*; Even-Shmuel is better: *shituf-hashem b'l'vad*).

God’s “life” or “will” are just Himself, i.e., these terms are tautologies. They are identical with His essence, not added to it. When, by contrast, we speak of existence, life, will and wisdom in man, these attributes are added on to man’s essential nature as a rational animal (*ha-khai ha-medaber*, Gr.: *zoon logikon*).

UNIVOCALITY?

(For the following discussion, see Wolfson, “The Amphibolous Terms in Aristotle, Arabic Philosophy and Maimonides,” in Vol. 1 of *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, pp 455-475. See also *The Treatise on Logic/Sefer Milot HaHigayon* Ch. 13:4).

If the attributes were to carry a univocal or synonymous meaning when used of men and God, then the only possible interpretation would be that they would apply to God *more than* to us. That could be the case if the synonymy were essential or definitional, as when we say that Shimon and Reuven are both men. They share the same definitional essence as rational animals. We can compare them, and say that one is taller than the other. But Maimonides is interested in a broader sense of comparability which could encompass not only Shimon and Reuven, but God.

Before listing his examples of univocality, Maimonides mentions that the *relata* are members of the same “species,” *min*, Ar. *naw*, but see Pines note 1, p. 130, that the term is brought in a “rather loose sense.” When Maimonides writes about species here, he refers only to members closely related by the same species, in order to exclude such dissimilarities as this “greenness is as intense as that redness.” His other cases, such as the heat shared by melted wax and fire cannot be classified in terms of genus and species.

He gives examples of shared relations between similar things. But, on analysis, his examples of univocality are not really univocal. They are between *qualities*, i.e., those well-settled accidents that are characteristic of a thing but do not define it (Guide 1:53). Still, some of these qualities seem close to being essential and definitional, so much so, that even Aristotle sometimes calls them essential (Wolfson, 469-470).

His first example is the heat of a fire and of a glob of wax melting in the sun. Fire exhibits the extremity of heat while wax is merely warm. The shared quality of heat relates them, so that it is correct to describe the fire as quantitatively more hot than the wax. It is hard to envision fire without heat, and perhaps heat is close to being essential to fire. However, in this case, Aristotle holds that the heat of fire is an accidental quality manifested only when the pure element of fire mixes with the other three elements.

Another example Maimonides gives, presenting a similar problem, is the likeness between a grain of mustard seed and the outer celestial sphere. In this case, the shared quality is their dimensionality (*ha-mamadim*), although the mustard seed represents the extremity of smallness (*b'takhlit ha-koten*) and the sphere the extreme of size. Some

medieval philosophers held that *form*, especially what they called *corporeal form*, is just dimensionality, another way of looking at size (see, Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard, 1929, pp. 582-590; cf. Spinoza's "extension"). Thus, size and dimensionality characterize all corporeal things.

Nonetheless, size is not part of the definition of either the seed or the sphere, but is a quality of both. It is a well-settled accident that attaches but does not define.

Maimonides does not, in our chapter, try to prove God's lack (*m'sulak*) of any quality shared with men, but instead calls on his opponents to admit it. According to him, the Mutakallimūn verbally agree that the attributes of God and man are completely distinct (*bilti domim*). Still, we see that "as they practically believe" (Friedlander's helpful addition to the translation) there is a relation of "more than" (*yoter m...*) between God's power, will, knowledge, existence and ours, being *more* permanent, more perfect, or greater in the particular case. In other words, they still think there is a relationship even though it is less than a univocal/synonymous relationship.

A *caveat* is necessary here. Kafih refuses to use the Hebrew for "univocal," *haskama*, to translate the Jud.Ar. תואטו, see notes 14 and 23, but substitutes terms that indicate a looser kind of sub-univocality, verging on amphibolity. Wolfson, "The Amphibolous Terms," pp. 471-475, identifies serious semantic drift in all the Arabic terms for similarity, univocality, amphibolity, and homonymity.

AMPHIBOLITY?

It is difficult to disambiguate ambiguity. Still, this is what Maimonides needs to do in order to reject the vague similarity between divine and human attributes.

The *Treatise on Logic/Sefer Milot HaHigayon*, attributed to Maimonides, has an important definition of *msupak*/amphibolity (my trans. from Ibn Tibon, 96-97, chapter 13):

"The term 'amphibolous' (*m'supak*) is a term employed when two substances possess a similarity. This similarity is not an element of the definition of either term [and therefore must be an accident]. Thus in the case of 'man' the term is used to portray Rueben because he is a 'discouring animal,' (*ha-khai ha-medaber*) but it also portrays a dead man, as well as the human form displayed in wood, stone or any other means of portrayal. Evidently the term 'man' is said for all these because of the single similarity shared by them, viz., they all look like man, but the image of man is no part of the definition of 'man.' On the one hand, amphibolity is like a synonym (*b'haskama* = univocal) because it is applied to two substances called 'man.' On the other hand, it is like a homonym (*m'shutaf ha-gmur*) because one is essentially different from the other. Therefore it is called 'doubtful' (This is the core meaning of *m'supak*)."

Their similarity is "doubtful" because they share something that is not essential to their natures. In our own chapter, he says, along the same lines:

"Do not deem that they are used amphibolously [when applied to God and man]. For when terms are used amphibolously they are predicated of two things between which there is a likeness in respect to some notion, which notion is an accident attached to both of them and not a constituent element of the essence of each one of them." (Pines trans.)

The problem arises because of the contradictory position taken by the Kalām that there is no similarity between God and His creatures, but that they have similarly defined attributes. "They hold that one definition (relation) may include them, and that, nevertheless, there is no similarity between them," *khoshvim ki ha-gedera akhat koleltam, v'sh'ayn dimion bineihem*. He announces his categorical rejection of their position in his opening line:

“Similarity is based on a certain relation between two things: if between two things no relation can be found, there can be no similarity between them, and there is no relation between two things that have no similarity to each other.”

The only remaining possibility would be that an ambiguous relation exists between them, a relation of amphiboly. But Maimonides denies this also, “Do not deem that they are used amphibolously,” since they would then have to share at least an accidental element, and God is free of accidental attachments.

Both Efodi and Shem Tov try to explain the assumed definition of God supposedly shared with his creatures. According to them, the attributists could have a general genus comprising all existents, paired with a divine difference—the lack of any similarity whatsoever. Thus, you could define the attribute “existence” so that God exists like other beings, but is different from the rest in that He is not like any of them. Such an attempted pairing of genus and difference bursts the very notion of “definition.”

Was it appropriate to quote the *Treatise on Logic* as Maimonides’ statement of this issue? The *Treatise* has till recently been treated by scholars as the work of Maimonides. Herbert Davidson in *Maimonides, the Man and His Works*, now denies Maimonidean authorship. The *Treatise* does use language close to Maimonides’ style. It well represents the way logic would have been taught in his time. If Maimonides had not written it, he probably was familiar with it. Wolfson, who held that Maimonides wrote it, shows that it is based on the solid philosophical fundamentals accepted as elementary in Maimonides’ milieu. I do not think Davidson would deny this, indeed, he says that Maimonides would have nothing to be ashamed of had he written it. (Among scholars recently holding that Maimonides wrote it are Schwarz in his translation of the Guide, and Joel Kraemer, *Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, pp. 20, 51).

THE HISTORY OF AMPHIBOLITY

The trouble with Maimonides’ account of ambiguity or amphiboly as only involving the accidental *relata* is that he deprives us of the richness in the accounts of these terms developed by Aristotle, Porphyry and the Muslim philosophers. Aristotle, for instance, gives an important example that Maimonides and the Muslim philosophers pointedly do not quote:

“If there is a different definition for each separate soul, as for horse and dog, man and god; [then the term] ‘animal,’ as the universal, is to be regarded either: A) as *nothing*, or B) as *posterior*.” (*De Anima*, 1:1, 402b, 6-8)

What this means is that we use the term ‘animal,’ i.e., animate, for all four beings either: A) equivocally, or B) as some kind of moderation of the idea of animacy. That moderation is amphiboly. It is striking that Aristotle puts these four together this way, including “god,” and Maimonides likely knew that he did.

We do not completely understand Aristotle’s view of divinity, but it was very different from Maimonides’ view. The universe precedes this god, and the god functions as the desirable end that sets it in motion. Aristotle posited an ambiguous similarity between god, dog, horse and man, all of which live in this world, unlike the God of Maimonides, who, because He was outside the world, could create it from nothing.

Wolfson gives us the history of the philosophic development of amphiboly. He notes different kinds of amphibolous relationships, which are difficult to distinguish. I have reorganized his several lists in order to give a sense of the range of the relationships that philosophers had at one time or another called amphibolous:

- 1) *Primitive terms*, like “being” in its application to “substance,” “quality” and the other categories (a thing or a feeling both “exist”). Another example given by some is “heat” as applied to both “fire” and other warm objects, though Maimonides assigned it to similarity rather than amphiboly. This would also include terms proceeding from one source.
- 2) *Derivative terms*. For example, “healthy” as applied to both gymnastics and symptoms, both of which have some derived relation to health.
- 3) *Priority and posteriority*. For example, as “essence” is prior “in its application to [the existence of] many of the categories and their species.” This group also includes the relation of primacy and subsequency, as well as substance/accident (which could also be in category 1 above). This group is perhaps the most significant of the amphibolities. It is what Aristotle meant by saying that the term “animal,” as applied to dog and god, was a “posterior” relation.
- 4) Terms applied to things in the same order or genus;
- 5) Terms applied *analogously* as “heart” to both the heart of an animal, the heart of a palm, and the heart of a city. (I replaced an untranslatable example noted by Wolfson).
- 6) Relationships of *difference*. For example, the relation of “vinaceous” both to grapes and to the color of a face. Another example given is the whiteness of ivory to whiteness of an ivory crown. This category is close to the category of analogy, and both are instances of priority/posteriority. This group may also include terms applied to *contraries*, for example, we call both prohibitions and commands “laws.”

Following a discussion of these types of ambiguous comparatives, Wolfson seems to conclude that Maimonides’ definition distills this history.

Though Maimonides introduces the category of amphibolous terms in our chapter, he gives no examples. He did achieve the insight that amphibolous *relata* share an *accidental* characteristic. This characteristic is a *quality* in one of the amphiboles, and either a quality or some other type of accident in the other. This supports his larger point that since God has no accidental qualities, He is not similar to any of his creatures, all of whose qualities are accidental.

As I suggested above, the examples Maimonides gave under univocality, (mustard seed, wax, etc.) verge onto amphiboly and any of the other philosophers Wolfson lists could have used them as examples of amphiboly.

Working on the example in the *Treatise on Logic* (man, corpse, statue), Wolfson argues that it really fits the priority/posteriority or analogy type of ambiguity, which goes back to Aristotle (god, man, dog, horse). The image transferred from the live man to the dead man and then to the stone man is an accident they share, fixed as a *quality* in the live man and the dead man, but only subsequently copied onto the stone. Wolfson argues even further that it really expresses an equivocality, since the word “man” signifies a completely different thing in each instance. He explains this collapse of equivocality into amphiboly by noting that the actual Arabic terms for similarity changed their meaning over time.

I think that based on the terminological history of amphiboly, and with what we know of Maimonides’ position, we can say that the term “power,” for instance, is *tautologically identical* (not definitional) with God but *accidental* with man. In other words, to say that God is powerful is only to say that God is God, without telling us anything essential about Him. To say that man is powerful is to say that he accomplished some small thing once or twice, and his coming into power is just something that happened to him.

Thus, the same word has two completely different meanings, although we seem to grasp what each connotes. This similarity can appear without denial of the absolute difference between the two. Maimonides never says that we should deny that God is powerful; he only says that our power is absolutely different from God’s power. Denying the attribute of power is not the same thing as denying the existence of power (1:57). Noting this distinction seems to be sufficient, and there is no need to change our language.

Still, according to Josef Stern, this “power” may only be “a ‘placeholder’ for the predicate—if we could ever know it—that *would* univocally express the ‘mysterious’ attribute apparently attributed to God” (“Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language,” p. 206, in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, Cohen and Levine, editors). Once again, language is an insurmountable obstacle, and, as we previously quoted from Joseph Dan: “Mysticism is that which cannot be expressed in words, period...*the mystics and the religious are two kinds of believers who are separated by a common language.*”

CONCLUSION

The not particularly remarkable conclusion that Maimonides comes to at the end of our chapter is that:

“...it is not proper to believe, on account of the use of the same attributes, that there is in God something additional to His essence, in the same way as attributes are joined to our essence.”

But then he says this concept is of “immense sublimity” to those who know it. We are to “Keep it in memory, and realize its true meaning.” He means it not merely to deny attributes of God, purifying our idea of God from all attempts to make it resemble us, but as a meditation leading to a higher consciousness of the divine.

GUIDE 1:57 ABOUT ATTRIBUTES BUT DEEPER

Chapters 57 and 58 are preceded by curious captions: the former reads “About Attributes, But Deeper than before,” the latter: “Deeper than what preceded.” By “deeper than before” Maimonides could mean that this chapter is deeper than the prior chapter. More likely, it means that this chapter goes deeper into what we may say about God than anything in the preceding fifty-six chapters of the book.

These chapters possess deep content and underlying structure. In the thirty-nine compact lines of text printed in the Judeo-Arabic edition, Maimonides grapples with the most difficult issues of the divine science: the existence, unity and eternity of God.

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Existence is an accident that happens to beings. This rule applies to all beings that are subject to causation, i.e., all created beings. For example, the name Jacob refers to a particular person before his birth, after he is born, and after he dies. He exists as a living being between the time that he is born and his death. Existence, so to speak, “happens” to the being called “Jacob.” It is an accident to Jacob’s essential nature as a rational animal. His existence is something separate from his definition as a rational animal.

The exception to the rule is God. God is uncaused in any of the four senses of cause, particularly the formal or definitional cause. While humans have as their formal cause their definition as rational animals, there are no *definiens* for God. When human beings happen to come into existence, that occurrence is accidental to them, not essential or definitional. But no accident occurs to the being that is truly simple, God. The statement “God exists” can only mean that existence is identical to whatever God is. God’s existence is identical with His essence and vice versa. Therefore, the term “existence” is an equivocal term, since it is essential to God but accidental with us.

Believers in the attributes of God were comfortable saying that “God exists through (in virtue of) existence.” By this they meant that God exists through or because of the attribute of existence. Maimonides, in opposition, insists on strict terminological purity by saying, “God exists but *not* through existence.” His formula means that God exists but that His existence is not like existence known to us.

Maimonides treats God’s unity and timelessness the same way he treats divine existence. We loosely (*ee hakpeda*, Ar.—*tasāmuḥ*) say “God is one” to mean He is not many. The problem is that unity and plurality are both relations of *quantity*. God is not subject to the category of quantity: He is unquantifiable and His unity is non-numerical. It is just as false to say of God that He is many as to say that He is one, *harei k’shem sh’mukhkhah bo mikra ha-ribui, kakh mukhkhah bo mikra ha-akhdut*. To preserve the idea of non-numerical unity and to eliminate Asharite and Modalist misunderstanding, Maimonides prefers “God is one, but not through oneness.”

To affirm His timelessness, we call God *kadmon*, “first,” meaning “none before.” But to say that God is “first” implies that God comes under the category of *time*. Time is the number of motion, which is an accident of bodies. Since God is not a body, He is beyond reach of the category of time. When Isaiah says that God “is the first and the last,” his statement is intentionally contradictory. It means that God was not created. He used the contradiction as a way to get us to think of God beyond the ambit of time.

By contrast, when we are first or last, it is a temporal accident. These terms describe a relation with others coming before us or after us in some time continuum. It is completely different for God, who is not subject to relation or to time. Maimonides says that first and last are to God as crooked or straight are to taste. When we apply these terms to God, we commit a category mistake. The result is that we only loosely (*ee hakpeda*) say of

God that he is “first.” Although Maimonides does not say it here, it would follow that we should direct the mind correctly to God’s uncreated timelessness by saying that He is “first, but not through firstness,” or, perhaps, “eternal, but not through eternity or time.”

Maimonides admits that the formulation of a statement and its denial, as “God is living but not through life,” is difficult to conceive, but insists that it has meaning to those who know how to think abstractly. “God is living but not through life” denies that God’s life is anything other than identical with His essence. Divine life is not life as we know it, because life is not an accident added to God’s essence. To speak of God’s life and our life in the same breath is a category mistake.

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

Maimonides formulates his doctrine of essence and existence in the following language:

“It is known that existence (*ha-mtziot*) is an accident appertaining (*mikra hu sh’kara*) to all [existing] things (*l’nimtza*), and therefore an element (*inyan*) superadded to their essence (*nosef al mahut ha-nimtza*). This must evidently be the case as regards everything the existence of which is due to some cause: its existence is an element superadded to its essence. But as regards a being whose existence is not due to any cause—God alone is that being, for His existence, as we have said, is absolute (*mkhuyav ha-mtziot* = necessary of existence)—existence and essence are perfectly identical; He is not a substance to which existence is joined as an accident, as an additional element. His existence is always absolute, and has never been a new element or an accident in Him.”

Alexander Altmann explained many of the concepts of this chapter in his 1953 essay “Essence and Existence in Maimonides,” now in *Maimonides, a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Joseph Buijs, U. of Notre Dame Press, 1998, p. 148. Maimonides’ language, especially in the first sentence above, closely tracks the doctrine of essence and existence originally announced by Avicenna (Ibn Sina, 980-1037). Altmann argues that Maimonides is closer to Avicenna’s real doctrine than Avicenna’s successors and critics. Avicenna argued that there are two kinds of existing things: those that are caused and those that are uncaused. Those that are caused are distinguished by their essences, because those essences are their definitions. Their definitions display their formal causes.

Thus, the essence of man is the definition of man, *zoon logicon*, rational animal. Rationality and animality are also the formal causes of man. The definition, i.e., the essence, is instantiated in the existing thing when existence happens (*sh’kara*) to it. That “happening” is the *accident* of existence. Maimonides is careful to show that the accident does not happen to the essence itself, but to the existing being (he thereby follows Aristotle’s great reversal of the Platonic ideas). When the being is existent, the accident of existence is “superadded” to the essence. Nonetheless, in themselves, the essences are neutral respecting existence and non-existence. They are just definitions. By contrast, God is beyond definition. His essence is uniquely one with His essence, for He has no causes, formal or otherwise.

Friedlander, note 1, locates the underlying thought that resulted in this Avicennian distinction of essence and existence:

“Of all the things we notice in the universe, we predicate that they exist; we also speak of the things before they come into existence, or after they have ceased to exist, and say that they did not or that they do not exist. We have, therefore, in our mind two separate ideas: the idea of the thing itself and the idea of existence, which we can imagine as being combined, or separate.”

The theory turns on the notion that the being, in some sense, must have some *potential* existence to which the accident of existence happens. This potential of existence made the Avicennian theory controversial. The theory seemed to introduce neo-Platonic elements into the Aristotelian structure of existence. Aristotle had up-ended the

Platonic forms by arguing that universals exist only in the existing being. Existence characterizes the concrete thing, not the essence. There is no “world” of essences. The essences appear only in the existing being. What distinguishes one being from another is their degree of permanence. The process of corruption and generation causes the existing being to change, to appear and disappear; but the essence, i.e., the definition, is eternal.

OPPOSITION TO THE DISTINCTION OF ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE: AVERROES

Since Aristotle’s essences do not possess a world of their own, critics attacked Avicenna’s theory of separate essences on the ground that it resurrected Plato’s noetic world. The principle critic was the great philosopher Averroes (Ibn Roshd, 1126-1198), followed by all of Maimonides’ ancient commentators (See, esp. Shem Tov). He argued that there could be no separation of the existing being’s essence from its existence.

Maimonides approved of some of the work of Averroes (Altmann, 163, note 3). They were alike in some ways. Both were philosophers and jurists of the same generation from Cordova. Still, according to Altmann, Maimonides did not learn of Averroes’ attack on Avicenna while writing the Guide. When Maimonides says, “It is known,” in the first sentence of our chapter, he means that Andalusian intellectuals of his generation treated the Avicennian concept of existence as orthodox Aristotelian theory. The reason for this could have been that those intellectuals only knew the Aristotelian materials in heavily neo-Platonized paraphrases and summarizations.

Yehudah Even-Shmuel disagreed with this reading. Writing about Averroes’ rejection of the essence/existence dichotomy, he says, *ad loc.*, “If Maimonides knew about this, he did not accept it, but rather viewed all existences, apart from the one Absolute Existence, as accidental attachments to those beings.” (My translation. Friedlander: “Maimonides follows Ibn Sina in this point,” note 1, 204. Kafih: “He is not concerned with Ibn Roshd and others,” *rabeinu lo khash lehem*, note 1. Harry Wolfson seems to be in accord: *Crescas on Divine Attributes*, Ch. 2, in *Studies*, Vol. II).

Altmann and Wolfson both argue that Averroes might not have entirely grasped Avicenna’s true doctrine, because of linguistic and bibliographical drift. Averroes and Avicenna agreed on the identity of essence and existence in God. The problem is what happens to these terms in the world of creation. Existence and oneness are not substances existing in themselves as things that we can literally “find” in the world (*find* is the core meaning of the Hebrew for “existence”—*mitsiut*), and so we might be justified in thinking that they are accidents. But existence and oneness are different from other accidents.

The issue is whether the “accident” of existence is a different type of occurrence from, for example, the accident of whiteness to the substance of cloth. We call the cloth a substance because it exists through itself, while whiteness is an accident since it only exists through the cloth. The cloth could have been red or black instead of white. This is not the same as saying that the cloth could have existed or not, or that it could have been many rather than one. We can find the cloth irrespective of its color, but where would we find the cloth before it is woven or after it is burned, before or after its “accident” of existence? We must deny that the disembodied cloth has any sort of real existence as an idea in a noetic netherworld. This is the force of Averroes argument that the essence and existence of the cloth are identical in the concrete cloth itself.

Nevertheless, we can say what a cloth is if we need to convey a clear idea of it, indeed, we can even find terms that define it. While that definition is not an existence found in any world but the artificial world of a dictionary, nonetheless, it is always the same definition, the “what-ness,” *mahut*, or essence of the thing. The definition does not palpably exist in the world, but it is an object of knowledge. Thus, the essence is knowledge, entirely incorporeal, which instantiates the matter of the cloth once the weaver, who possesses that concept, in-forms it in the woven material. Therefore, the existence of the cloth is something that “happens,” though in a more fundamental sense than when the already existing cloth happens to be dyed red or green.

If this is true with the humble shred of cloth, how much more so in man, the image of God. There was a particular time in history when we could find Jacob in his tent mourning the disappearance of Joseph. Yet, in a different sense, Jacob is always with us, as concept, as goal, as genetic/spiritual inheritance, as supernal principle, as guide, as inspirer. We still call by the name of Jacob a tray of bones brought back to the land that eternally bears his name Israel. When he attached himself to God in moments of prophecy, he transcended his corporeality and existed beyond temporality. There are all of these Jacobs, and yet we use the same name for all of them. Maimonides forcefully asserts that a distinction remains between the eternal Jacob and the Jacob who once ate and studied with his sons,

So, we can understand why Shem Tov wants to object, following Averroes, that “the existence that man portrays in his mind is not the existence outside of it, but rather that existence and essence are one...not super-added on to that man.” And we do want to be careful not to reify our mental portrayals into hypostases and gods. But we, nevertheless, recognize a distinction between our Jacob and the Jacob grieving in his tent. If we accept with Maimonides that the mind is not of our body, and that it has infinite potential, we make a comprehensible statement when we say that it becomes instantiated in a corporeal existence whose physical flesh we can find for a moment in our world.

It is probably the case that even Shem Tov would have accepted this account. According to Wolfson, the European scholastic successors of Averroes also probably would have, because they changed the terms of the debate.

“In its origin, among the Arabs and Jews, the problem of essence and existence was much simpler than in its later development among the Schoolmen. To the latter the problem presented itself in the following form. *Assuming the presence of a distinction between essence and existence within actual beings, they ask, What does this distinction consist in? The various answers given to the question ran parallel to the solutions offered to the problem of universals, real, conceptual or nominal*” (my emphasis; *ibid.* 302).

The reason that they could assume the same presence of a distinction between essence and was that they all believed, unlike modern-day existentialists, that essence preceded existence. Only one who believes that existence precedes essence, denying the soul, could totally obliterate the distinction between man’s essence and his existence.

While it is admittedly difficult to think of individuals without thinking of them existing, when viewed both before and after their existence we can, perhaps, grasp the instantiation of their being as a *special type* of accident. Schwarz translates the actual Judeo-Arabic term given here for “accident,” עֲאָרֵץ, as “occurrence” (*eiroom*), instead of using the technical term “accident/*mikra*” (unlike Ibn Tibon, Kafih, Friedlander, and Pines). In this he follows Altmann, who says:

“The term ‘accident’ (עֲאָרֵץ) merely expresses the fact that things ‘happen’ to exist. In a certain sense it also means that the essence ‘happens’ to appear in this particular matter. It does not indicate that a non-existent or ideal essence has become ‘existent’ by the grace of the additional attribute of existence [which would correspond to the technical meaning of ‘accident’]. Nor does it obliterate the recognition of concrete substances as having existence in a primary and absolute sense. It merely defines existence as being due to factors outside the essence, and for this reason uses the term ‘accident’...Avicenna employed the same term in a similar sense, and it is not unlikely that this is the way Maimonides understood Avicenna.”

Aristotle also recognized that existence and unity are different from other accidents in that they are “the most universal of all predicates” (*Metaphysics*, X:2:1050b21). It is for these reasons that Maimonides might have recognized, even in the face of the Averroist attack on Avicenna, the distinction of essence and existence in God’s creatures.

OPPOSITION TO THE DISTINCTION OF ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE: THE KALĀM

The theory of essences was also controversial for the Asharite Kalām. This was especially true of the writings of Averroes' great earlier opponent, Al-Ghazali (1058-1111). The Kalām theologians, as we will see in chapters 1:71-76, denied the existence of nature. They held that all existing beings and all of their changes were nothing but miraculous interventions of God in a chaos of atoms. They denied that there were any other causes other than the miraculous divine will in everyday life.

Part of their program meant the elimination of essences entirely. They denied that there were formal definitional causes of existing beings. Definitions implied that these things were out of Allah's minute control. They argued that He could change each definition as He pleased. They complained that the necessary *natural* generation of things from causes implied the absence of divine will in the generation of those things.

Maimonides' response was to agree that the role of divine will was paramount in the creation of the superlunary beings and in their influence on the sublunary world. He also held that divine will is the cause of the instantiation of form in the creatures. Nonetheless, he never denied the natures of things, holding instead that nature reveals God's wisdom.

Altmann says, "Maimonides related essence to the Wisdom and existence to the Will of God" (*ibid.* 154). He describes Maimonides' theology of will and wisdom as a "compromise solution" in the battle between the will-theology of the Asharites and the wisdom-theology of the more philosophically oriented Mutazilite branch of the early Kalām. It would be better to say that Maimonides just describes things as they are. Generation and corruption is a natural process, begun by God, and, in some incomprehensible way, providentially maintained by Him. Its entirety reflects the identity of His will and wisdom, as Maimonides explains in Guide 1:72.

"GOD IS LIVING BUT NOT THROUGH LIFE"

The formula that "God is living but *not* through (in virtue of) life" plays an important role in Maimonidean thought.

To begin with, it controverts the compromise formulas that the Muslim theologians deployed to conceal their differences.

The Asharite attributists could say, "God is living in virtue of His essence" because they took a position resembling the familiar one of the Christian Trinitarians. Their divine *logos* ("inlibrated" in the Qur'an), as well as divine power and will, were all real attributes with real independent existence united obscurely in the divine essence.

By contrast, those Mutazilite anti-attributists who held that the attributes were mere names taught that all these attributional concepts were nothing but God's essence. When they used the formula "God is living in virtue of His essence," they meant to express the unity of the divine essence, thereby rejecting the addition of anything to it.

A third group, the Modalists, held that the attributes were *concepts* in the divine mind, neither mere names nor real beings. They understood the formula "God is living in virtue of His essence" to express their position perfectly, for they meant that God's life is a *concept* expressed in His essence, neither a real attribute nor merely a name.

To clear the field, Maimonides said that “God is living but *not* through life” in order to reject both Modalist and Asharite positions, and to remove ambiguity from the nominalists’ assertion that attributes are only actions or mere names. (He did not invent the rare formula, see Wolfson, *Repercussions*, 74, and *Kalām*, 230).

The problem is that his formula seems self-contradictory. Maimonides’ tries to resolve this problem by appealing to the intransigency of language. None of the world’s languages, including Hebrew, possesses sufficient terms for the ineffable. Our language is inevitably subject to corporeality. It cannot express concepts free of this dross. He expressed this through his interpretation of the dictum that “Torah speaks in the language of men,” i.e., it speaks of the unspeakable in only a loose sense (*ee hakpeda*).

A MITZVA OF INTERPRETATION?

The Maimonidean solution is to appeal to the mind. He uses his contradictory formulation as shorthand to lead the mind to the truth of his complicated message (*v'l'fikakh niskam et ha-inyan v'nadrikh et ha-makhshava al amitat ha-inyan*). So, for example, we say that God is one or that He is first (*kadmon*). But oneness is a relation of the accident of *quantity*; while firstness is a relation of the accident of *time*. God is absolutely independent of all considerations of time or quantity, and subject to no relations. To lead the mind to this doctrine that is so deep it eludes thought (*ha-amukim halelu ha-alulim l'heialem min ha-makhshavot*), we stun the mind with this self-contradictory formula that God is one but not through oneness. We expect the student to examine this conception critically and abstract its truth (*u'bekhinam ba-hasagat ha-sekhel otam v'ha-pashatuto otam*) from its customary verbiage (*b'btuim ha-ragilim*). Maimonides does not forbid the customary verbiage, like “one” or “first,” but teaches us to interpret it.

Maimonides never quite says that there is a commandment of interpretation incumbent on all Jews. He apparently does require those capable of abstract thought to interpret statements about divine existence, unity and eternity along something like the lines enunciated in this chapter. It may be an obligation of the heart (cf. Bakhya Ibn Pakuda, *Hovot Ha-Levavot* 1:8-9). The Thirteen Fundamentals of faith clearly require that all Jews believe in the existence, unity and eternity of God. But it is also clear from statements in *Helek* and elsewhere (e.g., Guide 1:35, see my comments there) that he expected at least some Jews, especially those admitted to the study of the divine science, to advance to this feat of interpretation.

What this is leading up to is his famous doctrine of the negative attributes. The significant core of the formula “God is living but not through life” is the word “not.” In the next chapter Maimonides finally unveils his version of the *via negativa*.

But how to describe God by negation, who so positively exists, and who so positively embodies perfection? Since we never really get away from positive statements, we must strongly interpret them. As we learn in the next chapter, we must interpret divine “existence” so that it only has these three meanings: 1) the term is meant *tautologously*, ie, God is God; 2) it is meant *negatively* to deny that His existence is like our existence; or, 3) it is interpreted as a *proposition of the second adjacent* rather than the third adjacent (“God lives” rather than “God is living”) and would therefore only tell us about what God *does*, not what He is. He did not mean by negative theology to negate the existence of God.

GUIDE 1:59 SILENCE

OVERVIEW: THE PROBLEMATIC

“The following question might perhaps be asked : Since there is no possibility of obtaining a knowledge of the true essence of God, and since it has also been proved that the only thing that man can apprehend of Him is the fact that He exists, and that all positive attributes are inadmissible, as has been shown, what is the difference among those who have obtained a knowledge of God? Must not the knowledge obtained by our teacher Moses, and by Solomon, be the same as that obtained by any one of the lowest class of [students], since there can be no addition to this knowledge?”

A provocative question, indeed! If Moses attained no higher level than the worst student, what could possibly have been the point of his travails? Why reach for higher consciousness if there is none?

Two answers are given. The first, which is unsatisfactory, is the surface meaning of this chapter. Maimonides responds that there are certainly grades of higher consciousness, and that “everyone,” rabbis and philosophers, “those in the past and those in the future,” agree that this is true. We reach higher consciousness by finding one more thing we can provably deny of God. Thus, the seeker masters a particular science, through which he learns that a common or likely predication is impossible to make about God. A man’s “*khasidut*” or pious quest could be through mastering particle physics, in order to show in one more way that God is not corporeal.

This explanation is unsatisfactory from Maimonides’ own view because there is then no reason why rabbinics would be superior to the more important work of science. That he is willing to leave this possibility on the table, as he does, should provoke his religious audience to pursue the question.

On looking at this again, we find a second message, the message of silence.

After portraying the dangers of affirmative attributes once more, he turns his critical eye toward his own community. While, the last chapter’s target was Islamic attributism, including the inlibrated *Logos* of the uncreated Qur’an, he now criticizes his own Jewish community for its attributism. They must realize that praise of God in terms of human perfections is just an insult to Him. It is almost better to say nothing at all. In support, Maimonides invokes several famous passages from the Bible about the virtues of silence.

By silence, he means meditative contemplation. In this *hitbodedut* state, we bring our intelligence into contact (Ar. *ittiṣal*, *wuṣul*, see in Guide 1:18) with the divine intelligence by removing impediments to the flow of His intelligence into ours. We do this by removing the corporealizing limitations of imagination and individuality. The real message of the *via negativa* is the stripping away of the physicality blocking our access to the active intellect. The active intellect is the “form and likeness” we share, in some unutterable way, with God (Guide 1:1). The true positive aspect of God is intelligence (1:68).

In this regard, Moses is the exemplar. Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights on Sinai, ascending from the cave-like darkness of the human condition to the sunlight of clarity, from whence to bring prophecy back to the Jews. A death is involved, whether it is the death of the body, the death of individuality, or the death of that incessant imaginative engine pushing to make everything like us (see Guide 3:51, “the kiss of death”). The people recognize and fear this, for in the sequel they demand that the transfigured Moses intercede so they might not die from meeting God.

This is the meaning of Maimonides’ problematic. Not that Moses was a scientist who discovered new ways to deny common descriptions of God. Rather, he found the nerve of the *via negativa*: to silence that imaging engine making God like us rather than unique unto Himself. We will never understand what it means for God’s

attributes to be identical to His essence. On its surface, it seems tautological, and it is, in a sense, for all true statements about God are reducible to the statement that God is God. Still, the *via negativa* dissolves the tautology by allowing the *positive* flow of divine intellect to the prophet. This flow is so overpowering that without this method the seer could not see it:

“He has overpowered us by His grace, and is *invisible* to us through the intensity of His light," like the sun which cannot be perceived by eyes which are too weak to bear its rays.”

THE FIRST ANSWER

The question that Maimonides raised, whether there are distinctions among those who seek knowledge of the divine science, is the question of what, if anything, can be known about God. Since, for Maimonides, we need knowledge to approach God, but since the divine essence is unknowable, it is hard to see a distinction between the levels of Moses or Solomon or any other person. The question is more than a problem, it is a problematic, the type of eternal philosophical concern where we learn much, but which we do not really solve, because the question continues to produce more problems.

The first answer that Maimonides gives is that there are indeed distinctions, for there are levels of understanding according to the number of negations we intelligently make. Shem Tov recites “Moses is a level unto himself, Aaron is a level unto himself,” *moshe m'khitza bifnai atzmo, aharon m'khitza bifnai atzmo*, by which he means that not only does Moses know more than Aaron, but that Aaron could not reach his level. Moses was able to negate more predications.

Maimonides maintains that the negative attributes explain why each student can reach for a greater understanding of God. First, each negation specifies something about its object, to some extent, whether that object is another person or thing, or whether that object is God. In this respect, it is like an affirmation. However, unlike affirmations, the negations do not actually name anything about the divine nature. In my view, the negations are positive attributes taken in negative sense (Alexander Altmann and Diana Lobel agree, see her “Silence is Praise to You: Maimonides on Negative Theology, Looseness of Expression, and Religious Experience,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 76:1, Winter 2002, pp. 32-33).

Secondly, each negation that you make brings you closer to God than someone who does not negate, so long as each negation results from prior scientific inquiry proving that the thing negated cannot be predicated of God.

Maimonides then shows how the distinctions among perceivers emerge, first giving a three level paradigm, and then working through five examples. The paradigm is that there is first a person who can negate one thing of God. That person is on a higher level of perception than another person who harbors doubts whether he can negate that property from God. Both are higher than someone who not only fails to negate but also affirms some property that God could not possess. His five-step example illustrating this paradigm is as follows:

1. Maimonides can negate, through proof, corporeality from God;
2. A second person doubts whether corporeality can be negated or not;
3. A third one affirms corporeality; worse yet, he prays to God believing that God is corporeal;
4. The fourth proves that we must negate both passion *and* corporeality from God;

5. The fifth negates more than just two properties.

In this example, 1 is better than 2, who is much better than 3. 4 is better than 1, and 5 is better than 4.

But is it really true? Isn't this a purely mechanical and quantitative response to a problem that cannot be solved in a mechanical and quantitative manner? And in the end, haven't you returned to affirmations, affirming, in a roundabout manner, that God is purely intellectual (incorporeal) and actual (*in actu*, the opposite of passivity)?

THE PROBLEM WITH ALL AFFIRMATIONS

Why is it that affirmations distance you from God? There are two reasons. First, by affirming properties of God you attempt to add to the perfectly simple and single divine essence. Second, any perfection you would add is only a perfection for us, by no means a perfection for God.

Maimonides says of these affirmations,

“The perfections are all to some extent acquired properties (Kafih: *tekhunot m'suyamot*, note 22, ad loc.; Ibn Tibon: *ktzat kinyanim*), and a property which must be acquired does not exist in everything capable of making such acquisition.”

By this important statement, he makes several claims, the first of which is that the affirmations or perfections are members of the category of properties. Properties are all accidents attaching to a substance, and therefore we can conceive and define the substance independently of its accidentally acquired properties. God is the ultimate substance, in that He is not subject to any other powers, properties or accidents.

When Maimonides says that a property “does not exist in everything capable of making such an acquisition,” there are several reasons why this should be so (see, generally, Efodi, ad loc., Friedlander, note 2, p. 215).

One reason is that not all properties are perfections. Shem Tov explains, “Every perfection is a property, but not all properties are perfections,” *sh'kol shlemut hu kinyan, v'lo kol kinyan shlemut*. All properties manifest as contradictories, and one cannot have both contradictory properties at once. Thus, a person can be either merciful or cruel, but, according to this theory, not both at the same time (perhaps a clearer example would be between hairy and bald). The point, though, is that one of the contradictories is conceived as a perfection and the other a defect. This is one reason why these acquisitions are *ktzat kinyanim*, “to some extent...properties”: sometimes we have them, and sometimes not. It follows that they are only properties “to some extent” and which “do not exist in everything...” Some properties men never acquire, such as unaided flight (Efodi, Shem Tov). Clearly, God is not subject to properties, for if He were, we would have to say that He was subject to defects and contradictions.

Moreover, men do not naturally have perfections—they have to acquire them. All created beings acquire whatever properties they have. This means that the properties must first exist in potential. Men change and are subject to change, such that these properties pass from the state of potentiality to the state of acquired actuality. In this regard, we can distinguish a property from a characteristic (*kinyan* vs. *tekhuna*) due to the impermanence of the former and the relative permanence of the latter (so says Even-

Shmuel, explaining Ibn Tibon's translation of "properties" as *kinyanim* not *tekhunot*). Even so, both characteristics and properties are accidents to a substance, which can be conceived independently of them. Again, since God is never in a state of potentiality or change, He is not subject to properties, nor is His simple essence subject to accidental characteristics. These are only perfections in our eyes: God is completely apart from this system. Even-Shmuel says, "God is perfection, not subject to perfections" *ha-eloah hu ha-shlemut, lo baal ha-shlemut*. This is because everything about God is *in actu*, unlike with us, since with us most everything is *in potentia*, and left for us to acquire.

One final point. Since God "is perfection," He possesses all possible perfections in the obscure unity of His essence. There are, therefore, no further properties for Him to acquire (Efodi).

All of this comes to undermine the mechanical attribution of "negative" versions of positive attributes to God, which was Maimonides' first answer to his problematic.

A SECOND SAILING? MAIMONIDES RETURNS TO THE PROBLEMATIC

Since he has not really answered the question, but only brought it into higher relief, Maimonides returns to his initial problematic. He now reveals, in our chapter, the practical result of his negative theology, which we need to read back into the previous chapters to grasp his real theory and its intended purpose.

Inasmuch as we only achieve knowledge thru negation, and since negation tells us nothing about the essence, he repeats that God cannot be the object of human comprehension. None but God Himself comprehends what He is, *v'lo yasig ma hu ki im hu*. Our knowledge consists in knowing that we are unable truly to comprehend Him, *v'sh'hasagato hi ee ha-yakholet l'hagia l'khaker hasagato*.

He does not really mean us to take this as the hard version of negative theology, as when Aristotle says that the god has neither vice nor virtue. An even harder version is the double negativism of the Ismā'īlī theologian Sijistānī (c. 932 - c. 1000 CE). Sijistānī rejected the moderate version of negative theology (as later expressed by Maimonides) as "hidden anthropomorphism." He said that we must first negate corporeality, and then even negate "association with the spiritual or intelligible" (Lobel, 46).

Nor is Maimonides suggesting that God is *Ayn Sof*, at least as the term is frequently taken. His position on that would have been ambivalent. He would have agreed with the application of the literal meaning of the term, which is that God is *infinite* (*ayn sof* = without end). He would not have taken it with emphasis on *ayn*, as is frequently done, to make God is pure negativity or emptiness (Ar. *ta 'īl*, void). Neither would he have accepted the suggestion of a kind of bilevel nature to God, whereby God is unknowably transcendent, with a kind of lower version (or, *khas v'shalom*, a second deity) accessible to our understanding (with its suggestion of theurgical possibilities). Rather, God's positivity is limitless.

HERE COMES THE SUN

This leads him, surprisingly, away from purely deductive philosophy back to metaphor. That is because, even from as early as the Introduction to the Guide, he stressed that the divine science does not work the way other sciences do. We are not going to come to apodictic propositions about this science. What we dimly grasp in a flash is gone the next moment. We must return to the imagination if we wish to portray things beyond the lunar sphere: "Put forth a riddle and speak a parable," (Ez. 17:2).

Thus, we come to solar metaphors. Maimonides wants to talk about the ubiquity of the divine manifestation. Divine positivity is so strong that we cannot comprehend it, it overwhelms the mind just as the sun's light blinds the eyes.

“All philosophers say, ‘He has overpowered us by His grace, and is invisible to us through the intensity of His light,’ like the sun which cannot be perceived by eyes which are too weak to bear its rays.”

Recall that solar metaphors were the tools that the Neo-Platonists used to portray divine power and providence. Maimonides is a descendant of the Iberian school of Neo-Platonized Aristotelians which included Bahya Ibn Pakuda (11th C.), who said, in a similar vein, using an image to warn against imaginary affirmations:

“He who tries to perceive the sun by observing its orb and focuses his gaze straight on the sun, his eyes will be weakened and his sight lost and he will be unable to benefit from the sun...If, however we strain our minds to perceive the meaning of the essence of His glory, and represent Him in our minds in a form or a likeness, we will lose our powers of mind and perception and not even be able to grasp what is already known to us, as would happen to our eyesight if we gazed straight at the sun” (*Khovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10, 151, Feldheim, Daniel Haberman, trans.).

Divine positivity blinds us because God's existence is manifest in everything. “To be everywhere primarily and absolutely, is proper to God” (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, v. 1, q. 8). Narboni explains why we speak of divine positivity (my trans.):

“God manifests Himself through all existence: He is the prime mover, the form and the goal of all things. Because God is ultimately simple and first, He is, therefore, the commencement and providence of all existence.”

My interpretation. Maimonides' second answer to the problematic tries to explain why we can approach God through negations. It is a yes answer, because we recognize that God is not too distant from us, but that his positive presence is too strong, overwhelming our ability to grasp it. Since by these negations we comprehend some truths in divine science, I would compare the expression of affirmations by way of negations to our ability to watch a solar eclipse through special filters or mirroring devices.

THE VIRTUES OF SILENCE

If God's overwhelming positivity makes us unable to say anything about Him, being “overpowered by His grace,” perhaps we should not try to say anything at all.

These thoughts lead Maimonides to recite several scriptural statements on the virtue of silence.

“*To You, silence is praise,*” Psalms 65:2. According to Rashi, “Silence is praise to You; because there is no end to Your praise, the more one praises, the more one detracts,” which sums up Maimonides' own doctrine of silent praise. Even-Shmuel says, even more succinctly, “In relation to you, silence is itself praise (*b'yakhas elekha, hi hi ha-shavuakh atsmo*).

“Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still,” Psalms 4:4. Having recognized that silence is itself praise, Maimonides moves the discussion over to the practice of silence, i.e, the silent meditation:

“For of whatever we say intending to magnify and exalt, on the one hand we find that it can have some application to Him..., and on the other we perceive in it some deficiency. It is therefore more becoming to be silent, and to be content with intellectual reflection, as has been recommended by men of the highest culture, in the words ‘Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.’” (I modified Friedlander’s translation).

In silent meditation, using the technique of negations, we do learn about God, but verbalization of those perceptions leads to the improper attribution of properties to God. Recognizing this, Even-Shmuel comments, “do not strive to translate to yourself your thoughts into words,” *v’af l’atsmekhem al t’nasu l’targem et makhshavotekhem l’milim*.

This raises the question of why we have verbal prayer at all, and why those prayers are so overwhelmingly made of affirmative praises. The lengthy morning recitation *Pesukei d’Zimra* is nothing but page after page of praises. Maimonides responds that, “if we had only to follow our reason, we should never have composed these prayers, and we should not have uttered any of them.” Our reason tells us that the verbalization of affirmative praise is not praise at all, since these are only affirmations of human qualities that would be defects to God. “The more one praises, the more one detracts.”

The answer is similar to the one he will give in Guide 3:32, explaining the nature of the sacrificial system. The divine goal in both 3:32 and in our chapter was to lay the groundwork for intellectual communion with the divine. But you cannot start there. In the case of sacrifice, in 3:32, He quotes the Torah’s explanation for leading the people the longest way through the Sinai from Egypt to Israel, “God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt; but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea,” etc. (Ex. 13:17). *He took them by another road in order to obtain thereby His original object.*”

The original object, in both cases, that of sacrifice and of verbal prayer, is the direct silent communion with God, but God had to take them by another road to obtain that object. We could not even conceive of this level had not the Bible used a limited number of affirmations. We must have them, though we may not add to them, as he says in our chapter:

“It has, however, become necessary to address men in words that should leave some idea in their minds, and, in accordance with the saying of our Sages, ‘The Torah speaks in the language of men,’ the Creator has been described to us in terms of our own perfections.”

POETRY

Opposite of silence is poetry. Maimonides came from Moorish Andalusia, where it seemed as though every Jew was a poet. Ibn Ezra (1092/3-1167) found enough material to compose a history of Jewish Andalusian poets (see also: *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950–1492*, by Peter Cole, Princeton, 2007). The most famous example among Maimonides’ forbears was Yehuda Ha-Levi (c.1075–1141),

never mentioned by Maimonides, but casting a long shadow over his thought. The exception is Maimonides himself (and even he is guilty of poetry). It is correct to say that he was in revolt against these verbal torrents.

The tsunami of Spanish poetry found its formidable antagonist in Spain's greatest son. His lengthy gloss to *Pirkei Avot* 1:17, in *Commentary on the Mishnah*, rejects the suggestion that Hebrew poetry is more worthwhile than Arabic poetry. Indeed, Hebrew poetry is worse than Arabic poetry if it is not strictly religious in intent (see also Guide 3:9). The *Avot* passage contains an interesting denunciation of the poetry readings at drinking parties. Jose Faur explains several Maimonidean *responsas* on post-biblical *piyutim* as disapproval of metricality and rhyme, i.e., the lulling musical structure of poetry as opposed to its intellectual content (*Homo Mysticus*, Syracuse, 1999, p.66).

The aim of poetry is beauty, with truth sometimes falling by the wayside, Keats to the contrary notwithstanding. Worse, poetry enshrines attributism. A once controversial example in Jewish liturgy might be the lovely *Shir Ha-kavod* (*anim zmirot*; see my comments on the *Shir* at Guide 1:46) ascribed to Judah Ha-Hasid (d. 1217), whose praises of God could suggest anthropomorphism and associationism.

Maimonides tells the famous Talmudic story of Rabbi Hanina (*Berakhot* 33b). It was time to say the "Amida," (standing) prayer recited thrice daily:

"Blessed art thou God, our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, The Lord, the great, the powerful, the awesome..."

When a novice launched an extended improvisation:

"The Lord, the great, mighty, terrible, majestic, powerful, awful, strong, fearless, sure and honored.' – He (Hanina) waited till he had finished, and when he had finished he said to him, 'Have you concluded all the praise of your Master? Why do we want all this?'"

R. Hanina explained: Had not Moses said the first three praises we would have no right to say them. Moreover, we could not have said them in prayer had not the prophets of the Great Assembly ("*Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*" - 410 BCE and 310 BCE) legislated their inclusion. Maimonides thinks that we have no right to improvise and elaborate, for even these words define God in terms that are perfections only with us. Since God's perfections are identical to Himself, they cannot be like human perfections. R. Hanina brings a parable, close in language and meaning to the parable of the golden apple in fretworks of silver in the Guide's Introduction (see my "Introduction I," above, for the key to its symbols):

"It is as if an earthly king had a million *denarii* of gold, and someone praised him as possessing silver ones. Would it not be an insult to him?"

Maimonides explains why this parable demonstrates the crassness of our praises:

"He does not employ any such simile as: A king who possesses millions of gold *denarii*, and is praised as having hundreds (of gold *denarii*)...but,The excellence of the simile consists in the words: who possesses golden *denarii*, and is praised as having silver *denarii*."

For our praises only reach the level of silver. They are homonymous, bearing one meaning with us, purely accidental, and one with Him, tautologically essential. Put another way, our silver praise is the fretwork concealing the golden object of our praise. It is not even that good. The fretwork was itself a jewel, but our praises are only words that predicate deficiency in Him. The best that can be said of them is that they "loosely" portray sufficient indications of the truth to those who can think past them.

Therefore, we are told to be silent: that silence is the only praise of Him; that we should commune upon our beds and be silent. At the end of the last chapter, we were left sputtering, stuttering. In this verbose chapter of over two thousand words, he tells us silence is golden. We have reached the very end of speech.

SILENT MEDITATION

Now that we know that the *via negativa* is a method of silent meditation, we return to the original problematic.

In this direct silent contemplation, there are levels of distinction between the perceivers that Maimonides cited, though we cannot hear them. Moses' highest moment was the silence atop the mount, achieved in post-intellectual elevation, after climbing the Sinai of negations.

Shem Tov brilliantly links Maimonides' naming of Moses and Solomon at the beginning of our chapter with the technique of meditation on the negations:

“Indeed this is the way of negations which scripture obliquely implies in saying that ‘Moses drew near unto the thick darkness (*ha-arafel*) where God was’ (Ex. 20:21), the idea in this is that he approached God with negations rather than affirmations, and therefore it was as though He was in the darkness, and this is what Solomon also said, ‘Then spake Solomon, The Lord said that He would dwell in the thick darkness,’ (1 Kings 8:12). That is why Maimonides joined Moses and Solomon together here...so that the both prophetic and philosophical knowledge agree in respect of the way of negations,” (*ad loc.*, my trans., 87b).

That this silence is the apt response to God's positivity, Moses knew when he said, “The Lord will fight for you, but you shall remain silent,” (Ex. 14:14, Judaica Press trans., *ha-shem yilakhem lakhem v'atem takharishun*).

A DIFFERENT MESSAGE FOR THE MASSES?

Why do we, halakhically, even allow such affirmations as “the great, the mighty, the awesome” *ha-gadol ha-gibbor v'ha-nora* in our central, thrice-daily prayer? Rabbi Hanina had explained that were it not for the fact that the Torah used them, and that the prophets of the Great Assembly made them our liturgy, we could not say them.

Both of these requisites together allow these praises, but not either one alone (on the *Amida* prayer and its composition, Friedlander, 216, note 7; Schwarz, 150, note 22). But this still does not tell us what their purpose is.

These approved affirmations are merely a “loose expression” (Ar.—*tasāmuḥ*, see 1:57) allowing us to lightly sketch in the very basic knowledge that all men must have of God and His providential design:

“It has, however, become necessary to address men in words that *should leave some idea in their minds*, and, in accordance with the saying of our Sages, ‘The Torah speaks in the language of men,’ the Creator has been described to us in terms of our own perfections; but we should not on that account have uttered any other than the three above-mentioned attributes, and we should not have used them as names of God except when meeting with them in reading the Law.”

So that, for hermeneutical purposes, we may engage in such loose expressions, in the “language of men.” We cannot eliminate them from prayer and Torah reading. Otherwise, apart from those sanctioned expressions, we should not speak them, but should be silent. Once again, we seem to have reached the end of speech.

Or have we? At the very end of our chapter, Maimonides returns to the wise Solomon. Had he reached a higher level of consciousness? Maimonides quotes Solomon from Ecclesiastes 5:2: “God [is] in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.” “Few” is not the same as silence. A few words are necessary, and perhaps

not just for hermeneutical purposes but also as the stimulus for deeper meditation on the real meaning of those words. Still,

“There is no necessity at all for you to use positive attributes of God with the view of magnifying Him in your thoughts, or to go beyond the limits which the men of the Great [Assembly] have introduced in the prayers and in the blessings, for this is sufficient for all purposes, and even more than sufficient, as Rabbi Hanina said. Other attributes, such as occur in the books of the Prophets, may be uttered when we meet with them in reading those books; but we must bear in mind what has already been explained, that they are either attributes of God’s actions, or expressions implying the negation of the opposite (*shlilat ha-edran*). *This likewise should not be divulged to the multitude; but a reflection of this kind is fitted for the few only who believe that the glorification of God does not consist in uttering that which is not to be uttered, but in reflecting on that on which man should reflect.*”

The secret of silent interpretative meditation we keep for ourselves, but we also keep it from the vulgar masses, who will always misunderstand what we do. The remark might justify the Straussian project of seeking an esoteric level of the Guide. But there is no secret, only a necessarily more complex way of grasping the reality.

A better understanding is that Maimonides has a multilevel understanding of texts. This is like his therapeutic model. Since no two patients are alike, the doctor prescribes different medicines for different diseases. Similarly, no two readers are alike, either in their preparation, or in their understanding. In this, Maimonides follows the traditional path, which always recognized different levels of interpretation. These different prescriptions lead each individual to his highest possible level.

Clearly, we must lead the people to believe in God and follow the law. For this they need leaders, and, as we shall see, prophetic leaders. No such leaders will rise unless they find truth about God, through the path of silent meditation through the negations. But for this they must start with the inspired words.

THE HALACHIC AND MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF COMPOSING NEW PRAYERS AND PRAYERBOOKS.

But not just any words.

“This license is frequently met with in the compositions of the singers, preachers, and others who imagine themselves to be able to compose a poem. Such authors write things which partly are real heresy, partly contain such folly and absurdity that they naturally cause those who hear them to laugh, but also to feel grieved at the thought that such things can be uttered in reference to God.....You must consider it, and think thus: If slander and libel (*lashon ha-ra v’hotzat shem ra*) is a great sin, how much greater is the sin of those who speak with looseness of tongue in reference to God, and describe Him by attributes which are far below Him.”

We discussed poets above. Maimonides’ particular concern in these passages and the many more like them in our chapter is with poets who create new prayers and prayerbooks. Rabbi Hanina is a strong voice of protest against changing the words that Moses uttered and the Men of the Great Assembly codified. Maimonides tries in several ways to show how close this activity comes to defamation and heresy but pulls back from saying that these poets violate the law. Still, his condemnation is harsh:

“I shall not say that this is an act of disobedience, but rather that it constitutes *unintended obloquy and vituperation* (*kheruf v’giduf*) on the part of the multitude who listen to these utterances, and on the part of the ignoramus who pronounces them.” (Pines trans, p. 142, his ital.).

It is immoral, but it does not violate a negative commandment. That is because Maimonides assumes that the speaker (or listener) would be ignorant, for had he recognized the defects in this mode of expression he would not so express himself.

The moral issue arises because these are “words (*devarim*) that were not right (*lo khen*) against the Lord,” and because they “utter error (*toeh*) against the Lord” (2 Kings 17:9, Isaiah 32:6, translations are the ones Friedlander uses). The immoral act here is one of uttering falsehoods, which is slander and blasphemy, or thinking falsehood, in which the unbridled imagination approaches heresy. The meaning of his statement is that while the speaker or listener may, in the usual case, avoid transgression, a person who seeks a higher level of religious performance, should shun anything like this. The point is not that these innovations are heretical, though they lead that way, but that they are morally repulsive. One who strives to be righteous, a *khasid*, avoids them. And the community should also strive to maintain the sanctity of the established liturgy.

The reason why these new prayers are so troubling is the same reason why any non-canonized praise is troubling. These praises are built on the affirmation of divine attributes that demonstrably distort our picture of God. They are therefore offensive, just as if we so distortedly spoke of men. Those who multiply affirmations thus make God subject to defects, and thereby make God a “doormat for their tongues” (My trans. Kafih, note 48, Schwarz, note 31, Ibn Tibon: *midras l'lshonotam*).

Worse, they use these terms for theurgical purposes: “they eloquently continue to praise Him in that manner, and believe that they can thereby influence Him and produce an effect on Him.” In their minds they think they affect God in some way, but if that were the case God would be subject to passion and change, the very things we should negate of God. We do not get to change God. The notion that we could devise invocations to influence God leads people grossly to misunderstand how providence actually works. This is another reason why we could not reveal the Cabalistic pursuits of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava* to the public.

When R. Hanina calls the proliferation of affirmative attributes “repulsive and annoying,” Maimonides restates this as “blasphemy and profanity.” The same cannot be said of the entirely commendable activity of multiplying negative attributes. According Even-Shmuel, if the novice had instead multiplied negations, R. Hanina would not have rebuked him, *lu harbei ze b'taarim shliliim, lo haya R. Hanina goar bo*. In Maimonides’ even stricter view, while we should multiply negations in silent meditation, the *khasid* should avoid multiplying even these negations in speech.

The adept should recognize that the approved affirmations in the standard liturgy are action attributes or negations of privations, actively interpreting those words as he meditates on the prayer. Nonetheless, he must not divulge this method to the general readers who have not educated themselves in *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava* through the tutelage of the Guide:

“This likewise should not be divulged to the multitude; but a reflection of this kind is fitted for the few only who believe that the glorification of God does not consist in *uttering* that which is not to be uttered, but in *reflecting* (*sh'maskilim*) on that on which man should reflect.” (Italics are Friedlander’s)

Otherwise, they would lend themselves to “perverse imaginings” (Pines’ trans), that is, that the unlearned will use them for theurgical purposes, if not outright sorcery. For this reason, you may only read over these attributes in the prayers and in the scriptures, and only because they originally appeared in scriptures. The aware individual, on the contrary, “who believes that the glorification of God does not consist in uttering that which is not to be uttered, but in reflecting on that on which man should reflect,” should, in reading them, convert them to action attributes or negations. Having taken that step he can rise to the next higher level in communion with God.

Returning to R. Hanina's parable one last time, Maimonides explains that by praising God for silver when He is so positively golden, we disparage God and shortchange ourselves. The offensiveness of the practice returns Maimonides to Solomon's admonition of silence "let thy words be few," whose real, positively golden, meaning is expressed in Moses' double-edged admonition, *The Lord will fight for you, but you shall remain silent.* (Ex. 14:14, Judaica Press).

* * *

Yehuda Even-Shmuel captures the meaning of the chapter better than other commentators do in his brief initial summation, which I translate here:

"If the negative attributes (i.e., the absolute attributes) specify, meaning that by use of the negative attributes we come closer to understanding God, it follows that there is a difference in the levels of understanding, according to the number of negations that we negate from God. For example, the negation of corporeality leads to the recognition of God's absolute intellectuality; but, if we failed to negate passion our level of apprehension would be lower than someone who denied both corporeality and passion from God. On the other hand, every affirmation that a person affirms of God results in a lower level of apprehension, because he thereby attributes human perfections to God, and because every affirmation that we make of God makes Him a possessor of such attributes (i.e., perfections), though God is not a possessor of anything other than Himself. *He indeed does have infinite perfections* [in the sense of a non-numerical infinite, and not super-added to His essence], but they are of an entirely different kind than those known to men, so that we have no means of apprehending or expressing them. The little that we do grasp, by means of the *via negativa*, is left to our limited understanding as a specifying property, but when we try to express this in words it comes out as mere 'profanity and blasphemy.' It was for this reason that the wise commanded us to be silent ('Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still,' Ps. 4:4). This was also the reason why the Rabbis opposed the multiplication of divine attributes by the liturgical poets. According to the wonderful *aggada* of R. Hanina, with which all philosophers and scholars of the divine attributes agree, the rejection of the affirmative attributes results from the recognition that the perfections of God are different from the 'perfections' of man not in quantity but quality. When such attributes appear in the books of the prophets they are a necessary concession to the general reader who is insufficiently prepared to comprehend these concerns."

GUIDE 1:60 NEGATION ABUSERS

This chapter concludes Maimonides' treatment of the divine attributes, chapters 1:50 to 1:60. He summarizes his conclusions, and provides parables (*mashalim*) to further clarify his negative theology. He also discovers a new target: attributists who use negations to support their theology.

SUMMARY

Recognizing that he has still not made himself clear, he returns with imaginative examples. His purely philosophical articulation apparently requires poetic enhancement. But these examples do not achieve his declared purpose, the justification of negative theology.

A real negative theology implies an unknowable and unapproachable God. Maimonides, on the contrary, strongly asserts that the student can approach God and attain knowledge. I take these statements, not his appeals to negative theology, as his true message. The negations are the means to achieve this end.

This chapter introduces two new ideas. The first new idea is about logic. The affirmative attributes, he argues, are neither mistaken nor heretical; rather, they crowd out all belief in God. This logic of attributism results in the attributist unconsciously excluding God from his thought. This idea arose from Maimonides' recognition that theologians could misuse negative theology while still approving affirmative attributes.

The second new idea is about grammar. Affirmations about God make Him the subject of a sentence in which the affirmation is the predicate. However, God is not a grammatical subject that would support a predicate. Such a sentence says nothing since the subject refers to nothing.

Our chapter bridges into a series of chapters on the names of God, 1:61 to 1:64. We study the attributes in order to understand these names. The name of God is the core subject of Jewish mysticism. In these chapters, Maimonides identifies his own mystical path and derides vulgar competitors.

As we conclude the subject of attributism, keep his real understanding of the meaning of negative theology in mind. It is the *interpretational meditation* on the attributes found in the Bible. This meditation is the path to unification with the intellect we somehow share with God.

THE LAW OF THE EXCLUDED MIDDLE

Maimonides makes the following argument. The positive "essential" attributes carry different meaning for God and for us. But since human language cannot voice what they mean for God, the result is that we do not *know* what we mean when we attach attributes to God. Our statements about God appear to be meaningless.

In logic, a meaningless sentence has no value in a syllogism. "God is wise" could be such a meaningless sentence because it is essentially tautologous. It is tautologous because God's wisdom is identical to His essence: "God is wise" only means "God is God." By saying "God is wise," all I can possibly mean is that *He is wise but not with wisdom as we know it*. This way we can draw meaning from the tautology. The result is the formula, "God is wise, but not through wisdom." Until now, it was Maimonides' approved dictum. He now takes a radical step past this position.

Now he argues that the formula "God is wise but not with wisdom" is contradictory. He mentioned this contradiction before, but only to conclude wearily that language left us in the lurch. This time he argues that the sentence violates the *Law of Contradiction* and therefore says nothing at all. The *Law of the Excluded Middle* then removes any possible lingering sense that there may yet be meaning in "God is wise but not with wisdom"

since there is no mean between wisdom and the denial of wisdom. Either God has an eternal essential attribute of wisdom as His partner or He does not. As we will see, the attributists could use even this negative formula to articulate their affirmative attributes.

ABUSE OF NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

By this turn, by rejecting his own formula “God is wise but not through wisdom,” Maimonides means to forestall both Kalām and Jewish abuse of the *via negativa*. H. A. Wolfson brilliantly states the problem:

“It is not at all certain, he (Maimonides) argues, that the understanding of affirmative predicates as negations will safeguard one against the misconception that such predicates signify the existence of real attributes in God, *for one may take such predicates to mean negations and still believe that they express real attributes* in God. Take, for instance, ‘those who believe in attributes,’ that is to say, the Ash’arites [the mainstream Muslim theologians of the *Kalām*]. According to their belief, the attributes are all eternal like God himself. From this Maimonides infers that, according to the Ash’arites, too, every perfection predicated of God affirmatively ‘is not of the same kind of perfection as that imagined by us, but is used only as an equivocal term,’ just as Maimonides himself has said about his own conception of predicates, and hence, again, as in Maimonides’ own conception of predicates, each affirmative predicate, in the Ash’arite theory, ‘does necessarily amount to a negation.’ Consequently, when the Ash’arites say that ‘God is knowing according to knowledge,’ inasmuch as the knowledge which they predicate of God is *an eternal attribute and hence unlike our own knowledge*, they really mean, says Maimonides, that ‘God is knowing *not* according to a knowledge that is like our own.’ Thus, if you are an Ash’arite, ‘you necessarily arrive at negations, and, while you do not obtain a true knowledge of an essential attribute, you are led to the establishment of a *plurality* in God and to the belief that He is one essence which has unknown attributes.’ The point which Maimonides wishes to establish by this argument is that *the use of affirmative predicates, even when understood as negations, might lead one to a belief in the existence of real attributes* like those maintained by the Ash’arites, and consequently he warns his reader that ‘in the description of God by affirmative predicates there is a great danger.’” (“Maimonides on Negative Attributes,” *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, v. 1, 225-5; my emphases. Wolfson shows that even Jewish theologians could misuse negations: *Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy*, Harvard, 1979, 61-74)

The difference appears to be this: Maimonides held wisdom to be absolute and *identical* with God. By contrast, the *Kalām* held wisdom to be *eternal* with God. They did not hold it to be identical with God. They were thus able to argue that God had an eternal partner in the affirmative attribute of wisdom, which they identified with the uncreated eternal *Qur’an*.

UNCONSCIOUS ATHEISM

What are we left with? Maimonides now says that any affirmative predicate applied to God not only means nothing, but also refers to nothing, and removes God entirely from our thoughts. He thrice dramatically emphasizes that the speaker who says “God is wise but not with wisdom” is not erroneous, not contradicting himself, and not committing the heresy of associationism (*shirk: shiṭuf*); rather, the speaker knows *nothing* about God. He has unconsciously removed God from his mind (see below, “Three Parables,” for more on unconscious atheism).

On this subject, Wolfson’s comment is indispensable to understanding:

“The criticism...of both the belief in attributes and the belief in the Trinity, as I have tried to explain elsewhere, is not that these beliefs are polytheistic but rather that they introduce into God a distinction which is logically contradictory to the conception of His unity as meaning absolute simplicity. In another

place (our chapter), trying to define exactly what is wrong with the belief in attributes, he says that he who affirms real attributes of God is not an ‘associator’ (*mushrik: meshattef*), that is, a polytheist, for an associator, he says, is one who takes what is true of one essence and affirms it also of another essence, ‘but the attributes, according to those who believe in them, are not the essence of God but things superadded to His essence,’ that is to say, the attributes are not regarded by them as gods. What is really wrong with the belief in attributes, he then says, is that ‘he who affirms that God has real attributes...has unwittingly denied his belief in the existence of God.’ What he means by this, as may be gathered from his subsequent statements, is that to affirm of God that He has real attributes is a violation of the Law of Contradiction, for it is contradictory to His unity in the sense of absolute simplicity, and, hence, for a believer in the unity of God to affirm that God has real attributes is tantamount to the affirmation that God is both one and not one. Now, according to a view expressed by Maimonides elsewhere, the conception of anything that is in violation of the Law of Contradiction is the conception of an impossibility which has no existence. Consequently, to conceive of God as having attributes is to conceive of an impossibility which has no existence.” (*Repercussions*, 30.)

Although Maimonides seems pleased to advance this position here, what can he mean? For he *does* express positive statements about God, even in this chapter (“necessarily existent,” “absolutely simple,” “knowing with a knowledge that is ever fresh but never changing”), without, apparently, committing unconscious atheism.

Far from being a *deus absconditus* God is blindingly apparent, but we blinded ourselves to Him by the constructions of our imaginations. It is the purpose of the negations to remove these constructions, but the misuse of the negations returns us to the country of the blind.

SUBJECT AND PREDICATE

The other new idea in our chapter is that when we predicate anything of God, we make Him the grammatical subject of a sentence. In the sentence, “God is wise,” “God” is the subject and “is wise” is the predicate. Any time we say something about a thing, that thing is a subject, and what we have said about it is a predicate. Maimonides fights the battle over attributes on the terrain of grammar.

The problem is that if God were a grammatical subject, He would be a member of a class, the class of all grammatical subjects. This is impossible: God is unique and any “class” He is in would be a class of one. “God is wise” is meaningless because it has no subject, or, better put, the subject refers to nothing, and, therefore, the words do not form a sentence.

Furthermore, if God were a subject bearing a predicate He would be *two* things. All definitions combine at least two things, a genus and species, as in the statement that man is a rational animal, *zoon logicon*. But God is indefinable and non-numerically single. When we try to define God, we say *nothing*, for there is no possible thing that can be predicated of Him. This is a lesser corollary of the Law of the Excluded Middle, for that was a claim about logic while this is a claim about language. It fits with Maimonides’ conclusion that language cannot give us truth about God.

UNPACKING A DIFFICULT PARAGRAPH

Wolfson referred, in his two statements above, to an unusually dense and obscure paragraph that forms the dark core of this chapter. He noted, “The argument of this chapter is not clear,” (*Studies*, 224, note 88) referring to this section. Maimonides’ paragraph challenged all of its translators. Still, with what we now know, we can see what bothers him here, though it is subtle.

He begins by stating that there is a “great danger in applying positive attributes to God,” but what he really has in mind is the danger of the attributist misusing negations to apply positive attributes. It is what Wolfson meant

when he said, “one may take such predicates to mean negations and still believe that they express real attributes in God,” which is the very greatest danger, for it undermines Maimonides’ entire project:

“On the other hand, there is a great danger in applying positive attributes to God. For it has been shown that every perfection we could imagine, even if existing in God in accordance with the opinion of those who assert the existence of attributes (the Ash’arite Kalām, but also any other attributists), would in reality not be of the same kind (species, *min*) as that imagined by us, but would only be called by the same name (homonymously, *b’shituf ha-shem*), according to our explanation; it would in fact amount (*ky b’hekhrahk tetze*, you are necessarily brought) to a negation. Suppose, e.g., you say: ‘*He has knowledge, and that knowledge, which admits of no change and of no plurality, embraces many changeable things; His knowledge remains unaltered, while new things are constantly formed; and His knowledge of a thing before it exists, while it exists, and when it has ceased to exist, is the same without the least change,*’ you would thereby declare that ‘His knowledge is not like ours’: and similarly that ‘His existence is not like ours.’ You thus necessarily arrive at some negation (in lieu of affirmations), without obtaining a true conception of an essential attribute (that it is not really an “attribute” but identical with God): on the contrary, you are led to assume that there is a plurality in God, and to believe that He, though one essence, has several unknown attributes (*taarim bilti yaduim*). For if you intend to affirm them, you cannot compare them with those attributes known by us, and they are consequently not of the same kind (species). You are, as it were, brought by the belief in the reality of the attributes, to say that God is one subject of which several things are predicated: though the subject is not like ordinary subjects, and the predicates are not like ordinary predicates. This belief would ultimately lead us to associate other things with God, and not to believe that He is One (*takhlit hasagateinu l’fi dea zu shituf, lo yoter*—Kafih, note 8). For of every subject certain things can undoubtedly be predicated, and although in reality subject and predicate are combined in one thing, by the actual definition they consist of two elements, the notion contained in the subject not being the same as that contained in the predicate. In the course of this treatise it will be proved to you that God cannot be a compound, and that He is simple in the strictest sense of the word. I do not merely declare that he who affirms attributes of God has not sufficient knowledge concerning the Creator, admits some association with God (i.e., that he is an associator, *mshatef*), or conceives Him to be different from what He is: but I say that he unconsciously loses his belief in God.” (Friedlander’s translation, with my parenthetical expansions and italic emphases)

By “associator” he does not mean an attributist, but someone who carries his attributism to the point where he believes that God is in association with some other eternal being or eternal principle, in combination or partnership. It is almost, but not quite, a euphemism for polytheism, such that Pines translates the Arabic *alshirk* (Heb.: *shituf*) as “polytheism” in the second use of the term above.

Maimonides uses the term three times in the above passage, but he uses it ambiguously. In both Hebrew and Arabic *shituf/shirk* carries three possible meanings: a partnership, a homonym, or the heresy of associationism. Maimonides purposely deployed the ambiguity, since the first usage, as I showed in parentheses, certainly means “homonym.” Taking that usage as their starting point, the ancient commentators, Efodi and Shem-Tov, and Even-Shmuel among the moderns, understand the term in all three instances to mean “homonym.” They therefore take the whole paragraph to be a warning about the “great danger” of the homonymous use of affirmations.

This is a possible reading, but Pines, Kafih, Friedlander and Schwarz all take *shituf/shirk* to mean “associator” in the second and third uses. This seems the better reading, given the surrounding verbiage: *takhlit hasagateinu l’fi dea zu shituf, lo yoter*—Pines renders: “the utmost of our apprehension would be, on the basis of this belief, polytheism, and nothing else” (Jud.Ar.: פִּיכּוֹ גֵאִיָּה דְרַכְנָא בְהִדָּה אֲלֶעֱקִירָהּ אֲלֶשְׂרָק לֹא גִיד). Granted that Pines went too far here in translating “associationism” as “polytheism,” the typically acerbic Maimonidean touch of *lo yoter*, “nothing else,” together with surrounding remarks point to the more modern reading of “associationism” for the latter two instances of *shirk/shituf*.

Since Maimonides saw negation abuse as a dagger to the heart of his entire ideology, he wanted to distinguish it from the merely erroneous use of homonyms. He had spent most of the first section of the Guide teaching us about the necessity of interpreting biblical language homonymously. Now it appears that attributists could nod their smiling faces in agreement with him, all the while maintaining that, *of course*, God comes equipped with an eternal attribute of wisdom inliterated in the Qur'an or incarnated in Jesus, it's just not like other attributes and predicates. When Maimonides calls this "associationism, and nothing else," it is his angry reaction to this abuse of homonyms.

This would not really be so bad if we were only talking about the Qur'an and Jesus. The problem is that rabbis could, and perhaps were, doing the same thing: reading the biblical attributes as homonyms without eliminating these predications from their thoughts of God. For that reason, Maimonides subtly made the point (that Pines bashes over our heads), that there is a danger of personal heresy that flows from the misuse of negations. He pointedly does not raise it here as a halachic prohibition, which he would have to had he meant to say "polytheism" unambiguously. He is purposely ambiguous. He does not want to dump the traditional biblical terminology, nor does he think it possible to do so. He trusts that the wise will understand, and those not so wise will apply to the wise for guidance.

Even though the attributist concedes that divine wisdom is not like wisdom with us, he is forced to concede that it is not merely different, but of a completely different species. That is why, the first time Maimonides uses the word *shirk* here, it means "homonymous." Therefore, in the case of God, the word "wisdom" refers to something completely different than it does with us, sharing, in both cases, only the same sound. The attributist thus agrees with what Maimonides had said of traditional terminology in the lexical chapters of the Guide.

Maimonides then imagines a declaration on this subject by a firm believer in the predication of affirmative attributes of God, the long sentence in italics above. Maimonides intentionally makes this sound as close as he can to his own doctrine. Try to see if you can pick out what is missing. "Suppose, e.g., you say: 'He has knowledge, and that knowledge, which admits of no change and of no plurality, embraces many changeable things; His knowledge remains unaltered, while new things are constantly formed, and His knowledge of a thing before it exists, while it exists, and when it has ceased to exist, is the same without the least change.'"

What is missing, as we will see, is that God is identical with His wisdom. This makes all the difference in the world. Let's take a closer look at the attributist's statement.

Everything the attributist just said we can agree with. He not only says that divine knowledge and human knowledge are different but he tells us why: divine knowledge is eternal, unchanging, and unitary, while human knowledge is temporary, mutable, and multiple. This fits the attributist's theology well: for the *Qur'an*, the *Logos*, and the *personae* of the Trinity are also eternal, immutable and unified in themselves. Therefore, the attributist can say next that "His knowledge is not like ours": and similarly that "His existence is not like ours," virtually similar to Maimonides' preferred formula, "God is wise but not through wisdom" like ours.

For these reasons Maimonides says, "You thus necessarily arrive at some negation (in lieu of affirmations), without obtaining a true conception of an essential attribute: on the contrary, you are led to assume that there is a plurality in God, and to believe that He, though one essence, has several *unknown* attributes (*taarim bilti yaduum*)." Because the attributist means to differentiate his divine attribute of wisdom from human wisdom, that very act of differentiation constitutes a negation. Thus, the attributist believes that there really is an eternal attribute of wisdom combined with or in partnership with God, but since it is different from human wisdom, he knows nothing about it. Since the attributist admits that he does not know the content of the divine attribute of wisdom, he is prepared to believe that God has "several unknown attributes," which are not of the "same species" familiar to us.

Maimonides then begins to move closer to the nub of the problem, its grammatical nature, “You are, as it were, brought by the belief in the reality of the attributes, to say that God is one subject of which several things are predicated: though the subject is not like ordinary subjects, and the predicates are not like ordinary predicates.” God’s simple unity forces the attributist to make the extreme claim that these predications must also be different from any other predications: that the words do not mean what they say.

Maimonides then suddenly, and without warning, turns around and slams the attributist: “This belief would ultimately lead us to associate other things with God, and not to believe that He is One (*takhlit hasagateinu l’fi dea zu shituf, lo yoter*),” or, as I translate, that he is an “associator, and nothing more.” These are fighting words. No longer does he use the term *shirk / shituf* merely to say that the words mean one thing to God and another to the attributist, as he did the first time he used the term in the quoted paragraph. Now he changes the context so he can charge the attributist with the heresy of associationism, the notion that God relies upon another equally eternal and powerful force to create and run the world. This was the charge that some elements of the Mu’tazilites used to attack the Ash’arites.

What the attributist failed to say in the long italicized sentence is that God’s wisdom is identical to God. His wisdom is not just eternal and immutable. What Maimonides really meant by the formula “God is wise but not through wisdom” is that “God is wise but not through the *attribute* of wisdom.” It is not only that our wisdom is different from His, but that it is another thing altogether, another *species*. The wisdom that we know of is something that we can predicate of a subject. But God’s wisdom is not a predicate. His wisdom is Himself, a tautology, and no effective predication can be tautologous. This gets to the heart of the matter, which expresses itself in grammar: our sentences cannot grasp the divine.

Thus, returning to the grammatical, he says: “For of every subject certain things can undoubtedly be predicated, and although in reality subject and predicate are combined in one thing, by the actual definition they consist of two elements, the notion contained in the subject not being the same as that contained in the predicate.” What he means to say here is that even when I am talking about one thing, e.g., Socrates, a single unitary being, there is a duality. Socrates and his wisdom are, conceptually, two different things, even to a naturalist like Aristotle. While Socrates’ wisdom may not be some otherworldly *eidōs* tangentially connected with his person, we can still distinguish, at least grammatically, between Socrates and his wisdom. When we say that Socrates is wise, we mean that Socrates is a subject whose predicate is wisdom. The wisdom is not the same as Socrates, if only because Socrates is the subject and his wisdom is not a subject.

The situation is completely different in this most basic way with God: “God cannot be a compound, and ... He is simple in the strictest sense of the word.” It is not true that He is a subject unlike any other with predicates unlike any other. He is not a subject at all. He has no predicates at all. All that He is, He is Himself.

Coming back to the idea that the attributist believes in “unknown” attributes, Maimonides finds that the situation is even worse. For the unknown attributes that the attributist believes in are not attributes at all. He is not merely wrong about God, he is completely ignorant of God, and quite unconscious of his own ignorance. Thus Maimonides says, going further than he had before, “I do not merely declare that he who affirms attributes of God has not sufficient knowledge concerning the Creator, admits some association with God (i.e, that he is an associator, *mshatef*), or conceives Him to be different from what He is: but I say that he unconsciously loses his belief in God.” It is not just that the attributist could be accused of associationism, now Maimonides calls the attributist an unconscious atheist, as I explain below.

THREE PARABLES

In this final attempt in the Guide to clarify his version of negative theology, Maimonides leaves the plane of intellect for the imagination, producing three imaginative examples, one about a boat, one about the sense of taste, and one about an elephant.

The Boat Parable: Maimonides' first example supposedly demonstrates how we can learn from negations. There is a boat, but we are only told that there is a boat, not what a boat is. Each successive listener learns a single negative fact about the boat: it is *not* an accident attaching to a substance; *not* animal, mineral or vegetable; *not* existing naturally in nature; *not* a geometric shape; and *not* solid through. Maimonides claims that the last respondent's knowledge is the same as the knowledge of another who is told in positive terms that it is a long, hollow thing made of wooden boards.

This is a dubious claim, at least without quite a few more negations. The listener still would not know a ship from any other thing of boards, like a house. It is true, however, that each successive listener knows more than the prior one. From this, Maimonides concludes that with each successive negation the adept advances one more level to knowledge of God. His knowledge is asymptotic, i.e., he keeps approaching, but never actually knows God as God knows Himself. What Maimonides really means is that with each successive interpretational meditation, the seeker comes closer to God.

Even-Shmuel asks, if the one who multiplies negations reaches the result that the other who used the affirmative description achieved, as in the boat example, why not cut to the chase by going straight to the affirmations. His answer is that "great danger" results from using affirmations, in that all affirmations, to some extent, define their object. The result, in the case of God, would be qualitatively worse than with the boat, since you would come to portray the Indefinable with affirmations that *eo ipso* define (*lama lo n'taar af anaknu et ha-eloa b'taarim khayuvim v'nekatzer aleinu et ha-derekh...k'sh'anu ba'im l'taar b'taarei hagbala et ha-bilti mugbal*).

The Taste Parable: Maimonides gives a second example. This example illustrates how the Law of the Excluded Middle leaves the attributist *devoid* of an idea of God. If someone says, "taste is a quantity," he not merely errs, he says nothing at all. He commits a category mistake. Taste is a quality, not a quantity. All statements about God are like category mistakes. Thus, when I state a predication of God, that God is this or that, since I cannot add anything to Him, what have I said? Whatever I have predicated I mean so homonymously with God as to refer to nothing at all, as though I described taste as a quantity. I have said nothing; indeed, I have removed from my mind the very idea of taste. So, when I say God is X, I have said *nothing* and referred to *nothing*—I exclude God from my thought.

Maimonides now makes an important, if scholastic, distinction between being wrong and being ignorant. Someone who is merely *wrong* makes an erroneous or even false claim about something, where the claim is at least of the same species as the thing he gets wrong. Thus, a sick person might describe a sweet food, like candy, as sour. At least he knows that the object of his description is a food, and he describes it with a predicate from the species of taste. Thus: "He, who conceives an incorrect notion of an object, must necessarily have a correct idea of the object to some extent." When he recovers from his illness, he will return to calling candy sweet.

On the other hand, one who is *ignorant* of the object applies a predicate that has nothing whatsoever to do with it. He simply does not know what he is talking about. This person says that taste is a quantity. While we can cure the one who is merely wrong of his disease, the one who continues to ignorantly discuss an object of which he knows nothing has a void where the subject of his sentence should be. The danger is that when the subject is God, the speaker violates both the First Commandment as well as Maimonides' First Fundamental Principle of Faith (from *Perek Helek*), for God has come to have no existence in the speaker's mind. He becomes an unconscious atheist, *h'adir mtziut ha-shem m'daato b'li sh'yargish b'kakh*.

We had said that man grasps the existence of God but not His essence. However, in seeking to predicate God's essence man loses his grasp of God's existence. This is not merely a danger, but a disaster, for he does not recognize God as absolute positivity (*khiuv ha-mtziut*) but as absolute negativity, i.e., the void. There is no there there.

This example, “taste is a quantity,” only refers to a sentence that has no meaning. Tautologies also are meaningless. Still, the case of God might be different. In any homonymous expression, the predicate is identical with God, but only accidental with us. Thus, God is wise, and you are wise. God is wise in the sense that He is identical with His wisdom; His wisdom is not anything added to Him, as it is to you. I have, thus, *interpreted* “God is wise” such that I have learned something of God that is not merely tautologous. I have learned He is not like you in the category of wisdom, and I have a sense of why He is different from you in that category. The tautology is not meaningless.

The Elephant Parable: The problem with this path of interpretation was that it ended up with the same formula that the attributists accepted: “God is wise, but not through wisdom.” Maimonides’ ultimate answer to this conundrum is that we must pursue the path of interpretation with *intellectual integrity*. The attributist had maintained that God is wise with wisdom not like ours, since ours is transitory and His eternal, purposely not mentioning its identity with God. He thereby adds an affirmative eternal attribute of wisdom to the divine essence. But this is absurd. Such abuse of the *via negativa* crowds out God from our thought. Saying, “God is wise with the eternal attribute of wisdom, but not wisdom as we know it” is no different than saying “taste is a quantity.” Attributes are qualities, and all qualities are accidents. But God is not subject to accidents. Worse, it subjects God to the predicate of wisdom. The statement is devoid of meaning because it refers to nothing. The speaker is not merely wrong: he uttered a nonsense statement about God.

His third example, the parable of the elephant, extends the boat parable to include the case of these attribute abusers. In the boat parable, a succession of negative or positive facts brought the listener closer to the true idea of the boat. In the case of the elephant, the situation is reversed: instead of facts, the questioner is given errors or lies. We are told, in this third example, of a man who has heard of an elephant from an erroneous or mendacious informant (*ha-toeh o ha-mtoeh*—recall that Maimonides thought the priests of idolatry *intentionally* fomented error, see Mishneh Torah, *Avoda Zara* 1:2). This informant tells the listener a succession of falsehoods about the elephant. The elephant is a one legged animal that looks and talks like a man, but is transparent, has three wings, sometimes flies and sometimes swims. These things do not go together. Its not that the listener has the wrong idea of “elephant.” Rather, this listener has *no idea* about it. The term “elephant” has no content for him because it refers to nothing. It is nonexistent and impossible. Similarly, by affirming impossible attributes of God, our conception of God becomes nonexistent and impossible.

HOW SHOULD WE INTERPRET MAIMONIDES’ NEGATIVE THEOLOGY?

After relating the elephant parable, Maimonides wrote that he would, in subsequent chapters, prove that God is necessarily existent, and, further, that His necessary existence implies that He must be absolutely simple. These two positive statements show that we can indeed know something about God. This would fly in the face of his previous seeming implication that knowledge of God would violate the *Law of the Excluded Middle*. But there is more that shows us that God is not unknowable or unapproachable.

Maimonides exhorts the student to follow the path of negations, know it, and rise through it (*haven ze heitav v’deahu v’haya sogeh bo*—not *sameakh bo*, see Kafih note 10). The adept should follow this path if he wants to *approach* God, should that be his desire (*ha-derekh asher im telekh ba titkarav elav ytaleh, v’lakhen lekha ba im tirtzeh.*)

So it is not impossible to approach God, even though it would be impossible to reach Him. We cannot define Him but we know that He exists. We can learn things about God.

I note that Charles E. Manekin also defends a “philosophically optimistic reading” of Maimonides’ *via negativa*, (as against Josef Stern’s far more pessimistic reading). Manekin tries to explain what we can learn about God. He distinguishes between *properties*, which God cannot be assigned, and “*states of existence*,” a lesser order of things we can know of God:

“It should be emphasized that the existence, necessity and uniqueness of God are not properties in the sense that they characterize His essence. Rather, they are what we may call ‘states of His existence.’ In Guide 1:46, Maimonides distinguishes between ‘guidance leading to a knowledge of the existence of a thing,’ and ‘an investigation of the true reality of the essence and substance of that thing;’ the former is possible with respect to God, the latter is not....At the end of the journey, the student is vouchsafed a representation of God.” (“Belief, Certainty and Divine Attributes in the Guide,” *Maimonidean Studies*, I:135-137, A. Hyman, editor, Yeshiva, 1990. Compare, J. Stern, “Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language,” *Maimonides and the Sciences*, Cohen and Levine, editors, Springer, 2000).

Manekin’s “states of existence” remind us of Maimonides’ adherence to modal as opposed to real or nominal universals. But we should be careful, because Maimonides specifically opposed modalism in divine attributes.

I understand Maimonides’ “negative theology” this way: whatever propositions we employ (whether negative in form, positive but understood negatively, positive with negative prefixes, infixes or suffixes, privative, and so on) the main teaching is that all propositions about God have to be *interpreted*. What work does the interpretation do to the proposition? The interpretation removes the imagination’s deceptions. The correct use and understanding of the proposition combats erroneous notions about God concealed in the innocuous sounding formulations of *Kalām* theologians.

The problem is always the imagination. The imagination is the corporealizing part of our mind because it makes pictures out of concepts. It makes an image of reality that is not the reality itself. Still, we need the imagination to gain some idea of the ineffable. We need the imagination because language cannot voice what is real yet indefinable. What is demanded is a meditation, in which all possible understandings of God, however produced, whether in liturgy, scripture, poetry or imagination, are subjected to interpretation. The *interpretation* sheds the reifying imaginative element from these understandings of God. What remains in the mind is truth, even if we cannot utter it. The truth is that God is readily apparent, and the interpretation removes our blinders.

IMPACT ON THIRTEENTH CENTURY JEWISH THOUGHT

The Thirteenth Century Kabbalists knew and were obsessed with the negative theology of Maimonides. His ideas had unforeseen repercussions in their thought.

Already in the Mishnah *Pirke Avot* and in Talmud *Hagigah* a list of ten Attributes of God was commonplace, though the names of the members of the list shifted. In the course of time the ten attributes collided with, became identified with, and ultimately replaced the ten spheres of the outmoded Aristotelian cosmology. Though called *sfirot*, these ten dynamics no longer retain sphericity. But they are considered real. (On the fortunate etymological confusion of *sfira* and σφῆρα, see Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1014; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 99; Idel, *Kabbalah, New Perspectives*, 62-67. For the history of *sfirot*, Idel, *ibid.*, chapter 6.)

After Maimonides, how did God, indefinable and unpredicable, relate to the unspherical *sfirot*?

The name *Ayn-Sof*, the infinite, first emerges with the 12th century Spanish Cabalist Isaac the Blind, son of the Raavad (Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 12). This term preserves an unapproachable, ineffable level of deity (*Ayn Sof*: without limit). *Ayn-Sof* is important in the *Zohar*. It is God without any attributes, indeed, without any content at all. Cabala invests *Ayn-Sof* with a unique history: it is in dynamic tension with biblical God and with man, mediated by the attributes of the *sfirot*. Its highest literary depiction is the first chapter of the *Zohar*, which appears as a Midrashic meditation upon the white space found *before* the first letter of the first word of Genesis 1:1 (the *bet* in *bereshit*).

The *Zohar* relates that the *Ayn-Sof* was originally the unmanifested totality of being. It reduced itself (*tsimtsum*) to a point “that was not a point.” This concentrated energy emerges in a “lamp,” but the lamp cannot contain the energy. As soon as the lamp appears, it shatters. The energy snaps through and emanates in a new form as the life of the *sfirot*, and then the primal consonant *Bet* (= the house, a sexual euphemism) at last emerges. The meaning of this mystical mythos is that the indefinable God is radically *other* than the attributes. These attributes portray the dynamics by which divine intelligence creates from nothing. They are the name of God.

All of this significant, for the next five chapters concern the esoteric subject of the *name* of God.

GUIDE 1:61 TETRAGRAMMATON

OVERVIEW

Turning now to the names of God found in Jewish tradition, Maimonides explains how these names square with his strict position on attributes. He begins by saying that no other divine name is secret but the Tetragrammaton, the unique four-letter name of God: “All the (other) names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter” (Pines trans. Kafih: *v'zeh ma sh'ain bo neelam*). Lately some have interpreted “secret” to mean “holy” and to take the statement as a declaration of the arbitrariness or conventionality of Hebrew, but this is unnecessary. What he means appears from the entire context of our chapter, which is that these other names have no secret, esoteric or magical meaning. Maimonides’ views on the nature of language are complex, but they do not place him in opposition to its divine origin. Since all other divine names derive from actions (i.e., the Merciful One, *khanun*, from acts of mercy), they cannot be essential attributes eternal with God. They therefore lack any supposed power they might have over God. The one underived name, the Tetragrammaton, is such a direct referent to the divine essence that it cannot be, and, indeed, must not be, invoked as a separate power.

IS LANGUAGE CONVENTIONAL OR NATURAL? MAN-MADE OR DIVINE?

In the medieval period, two distinctly different debates about language entwine and entangle, a philosophical debate and a religious debate. (On all of this in much greater detail, see Josef Stern, “Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language,” in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, R. S. Cohen and H. Levine, editors, 2000, 173-226; Harry A. Wolfson, “The Veracity of Scripture from Philo to Spinoza,” *Religious Philosophy, a Group of Essays*, Harvard, 1961, 216-245).

The philosophical debate is whether language is natural or conventional. Do names express something significant about the things they name, or are they assigned to things by agreement of men irrespective of the nature of the thing, as Aristotle suggested (*De Interpretatione* 2, 16a19-29)? On the surface, at least, Maimonides agrees with Aristotle. In one very loaded line in the chapter on *Maaseh Bereshit*, Guide 2:30, he says of Adam giving names (Gen. 2:20): “languages are conventional, and...not natural (*heskemim lo tivim*) as has been assumed by some.” As we will see, this sentence conceals Maimonides’ complex view of the notion of “conventional” that he inherits from the Muslim philosopher Al-Farabi (872-951).

The religious debate is whether God or man creates language. This is not at all the same question as the division over the natural or conventional origin of language. All religious thinkers agreed that God endowed man with the tongue and the physical potential for language. Nonetheless, since “Adam gave names” the Bible itself seems to endorse human creation of the actual languages we use. Already R. Yehuda Ha-Levi in the *Kuzari* denies that words derive from sounds of nature (the Epicurean view), and therefore admits that language is “conventional.” But what does he mean? Ha-Levi denies that any one person could have created language. Therefore, God must have invented it and taught it to Adam, though the divine inventor intended that words in some way express the nature of the things they name. Thus, when Ha-Levi asserts that language is an invention (*muskam*, convention, synthesis, Gr: συνθήκη) and not natural, but invented by God, he thereby answers the question of its conventionality and its divine origin at once. However, Hebrew is different from other languages, which do not express the nature of things as well (*Kuzari*, 1:55, 4:25). Ha-Levi was nothing if not clever, but his response will not suffice for Maimonides.

Maimonides does not produce a sustained essay on this subject. However, Josef Stern argues convincingly that he follows in the steps of Al-Farabi. Al-Farabi understands the Aristotelian conventionality of language to imply a

two-stage complexity. In the first stage, concepts in what Stern calls “internal speech,” i.e., thought, do in fact express the essence of things. That accounts for the observation that all speakers of all languages think of the things of the world with the same thoughts, whether these thoughts are forms, ideas, or pictures in the mind. Internal speech is thus *natural* and *universal*. The laws of logic, not the laws of grammar, rule internal speech.

In the second stage, men assign words in their respective languages to refer to these ideas, just as we tie a string on a finger to remember something. The assignment of these terms is purely conventional, even if, in a few cases, they happen to be onomatopoeic. Thus, *tzipur* is the Hebrew for bird, and the word seems to derive from the “tzip-tzip” sound that a bird makes. Still, according to the Farabian/Maimonidean account, we first get a notion of the bird, a notion shared universally, and only later, and then only in Hebrew, we assign it this name that sounds like a birdsong, as a verbal mnemonic indicator of the universal notion of bird-ness. The term *tzipur* does not “express” bird-ness, rather, it *reminds* us of bird-ness.

Thus, typically, for medieval philosophy, Platonic and Aristotelian accounts converge. Religion is comfortable with this convergence, since notional referentiality is part of that mental life that we in some un-nameable way share with God. Harry Wolfson explains, linking this Maimonidean expansion to Yehuda Ha-Levi’s account:

“The term ‘conventional,’ as we have seen, may mean not only ‘arbitrary’ but also ‘man-made’ or ‘God-made’ and the term ‘natural’ may mean not only to be expressive of the nature of things but also to be grown up spontaneously without a founder. Accordingly, what Maimonides may mean by his statement here (‘*And Adam gave names...*’ this teaches us that languages are conventional, and that they are not natural, as has been assumed by some,’ Guide 2:30) is merely the assertion that languages are ‘conventional’ in the sense that they are founded by somebody, that is, Adam, who was taught by God; and are ‘not natural’ in the sense that they have not grown up spontaneously without a founder. The ‘some’ in the expression ‘as has been assumed by some,’ would thus refer to the Epicureans [who held that languages are natural in the sense that they arose without a founder].” (Wolfson, *ibid.*, 235).

But to what does the unique name of God refer?

THE CONVENTIONALITY OF NAMES

There are two ways of looking at Adam’s naming of the animal species, even if we view those names as conventional markers of universal concepts. Either the names remind us of something true about the animal itself, or, conversely, the name is merely a conventional “handle” with no intrinsic or organic connection to the animal. We do note the many ways we use names, on a continuum, with close organic reference at one end, and pure referential sound at the other.

Thus, originally, names of men told you something about them. Yaakov and Yitzhak, deriving from *ekev* and *tzakhek*, that is, “heel” and “laughter,” tell you about their unusual birth stories, as recounted in Genesis. By the middle ages, your being named Yaakov or Yitzhak meant nothing other than that perhaps a grandfather or other relative had the same name, depending on the custom. When Jews began to integrate into modern European life in the 18th century they shed or shelved their Jewish style names, such as Yaakov ben Yitzhak, and frequently took on last names that referred to their work or their place. Diamond or Gold conveyed that the bearer was a jeweler; Rothschild recalled the red shield that decorated the ancestral home. Into the 19th and 20th centuries, parents chose names just because they were popular and sounded pleasing. Thus, I am called Scott, *despite* my Scottish gentile ancestry within distant history. Had my parents wished to refer to that ancestry they would not have spelled it with two “t”s. They told me that they chose it because it was popular and had only one syllable (to balance my tri-syllabic last name). Thus, my name tells you nothing about me.

NAMING GOD

Naming God is another matter altogether. Does the name of God tell us anything about Him? If it does, then Maimonides has a problem with predication and attributes, as the last ten chapters made clear.

Maimonides might want us here to think of the name of God as an empty referent, or at least as unreferential, just as in modern naming practice the name tells nothing about the person named. This would take it out of the magical sphere. Also, in this way, the name of God functions like the negative attributes in the preceding chapters. In 1:58 he said that negative attributes “do not give us knowledge in any respect whatever of the essence the knowledge of which is sought” (Pines’ translation). In the same way, the name of God, the Tetragrammaton, is entirely underived from any other entity or action, and, therefore, gives us no knowledge in any respect whatever of the essence of God. This is the position ably argued by R. Shem Tov in his commentary to our chapter.

This raises a deeper question. Why does God have a name at all? If names are in some intrinsic way linked to the subject, then it follows that the name is a power in connection with the subject, and perhaps a power over the subject. Maimonides strongly attacks the magical misuse of the names of God, partly because it implies that the magician has power to compel God. While the theurgical abuse of these names is not quite the same thing as polytheism, it is the thin edge of the wedge.

The problem for Jewish intellectual history is that shortly after Maimonides’ time comes the publication of the *Zohar*. Mostly avoiding the magical use of names, The *Zohar* reminds us of an important sense that these names sublimate the almost inevitable appearance of dualism and even triadism and decadism in the discussion of divinity. The very notion of creation by an ineffable God wholly other than His creation tends to move to some sort of division whereby this *Ayn Sof* can create without being Itself a creator. Shem Tov claims that this is the reason we do not utter the name. He writes, “the greatness of this name means that it teaches many secrets of existence, therefore, because of this greatness we refrain from pronouncing it,” (my trans. *ad loc.*, 92a: *v’gedulat ze ha-shem yorei al inyanim rabim b’sitrei ha-mitziut, v’lakhen raui l’gadli v’l’hashamer m’likroa oto*).

Maimonides’ answer to the problem of origin is creation *ex nihilo*. When you ask how that is supposed to work, he says that it is a miracle that passes understanding. He thereby preserves the unity of God as the omnipotent willing creator. The Zoharic reaction was to conceive of the divine names as hypostatized states in the mind of God Himself (a Philonic theory). As we have seen, such states or “modes” are not consistent with Maimonides’ sternly unitary understanding of God. At best, they are projections of what we barely grasp in momentary flashes of inspiration.

SHEM HA-MEFORASH

The most significant name is the Tetragrammaton, *y*h*v*h*. The term anciently applied to this name is “*shem ha-meforash*.” *Shem ha-meforash* is the tag used universally in Hebrew for the Tetragrammaton, but we do not understand its meaning well. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* says: “The exact meaning of the term is somewhat obscure.” It goes back at least to the Mishnah (see, in general, Talmud, *Sota* 38a). *Shem ha-meforash* is usually translated as the “articulated” name, from the term *meforash*, “to explain, to express” like the *meforshim*, who are the rabbinic commentators, or explainers. Differently, Friedlander, note 3 to Guide 1:61, argues that it means “to make clear or to separate, i.e., *shem ha-meforash* “clearly” indicates the name that is “separated” from all others, “distinctly indicating the special object of our thought.” Kafih may have the right answer (note 3, p. 101). Reading the Aramaic *Targums* of Onkelos and Jonathan on various biblical passages, he discovers that they translate *ha-meforash* as *ha-mufla*, or *ha-peli*, i.e., “the wonder/secret/miracle” (see Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1181), so that *shem ha-meforash* is the wonderful name, name of wonder. This may accord with Rashi’s take on the Tetragrammaton itself. He says it is the “concealed name,” (*ad loc.* to Exodus 3:15). It is a name concealed and revealed, for what it expresses is inexpressible.

Maimonides takes a somewhat different approach. He argues that *meforash* means “underived,” in that it directly *expresses* the divine essence to which it refers. It names that essence without linking to any other entity, state or action. Here is his definition of *shem ha-meforash* at the beginning of our chapter:

“... one name: namely, *Yod, He, Vav, He*. This is the name of God, may He be exalted, that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason is called the articulated name (*shem ha-meforash*). This means that this name gives a *clear unequivocal indication of His essence*, may He be exalted (in which there is no associationism, i.e., *shituf*). On the other hand, all the other great (*kedusha*) names give their indication *in an equivocal way (b’shituf)*, being derived from terms signifying actions...which...exist as our own actions.” (Pines’ translation, my emphases and my parentheticals. The translation is difficult, but I prefer Pines’ “clear unequivocal indication of His essence” over Friedlander. Kafih translates the passage as: *...shem ekhad v’hu yud he vav he, sh’hu shem m’yukhad lo yitalei, u’lefikakh nikra shem meforash, inyano sh’hu morei al atzmo ytalei horaa brura sh’ain bo shituf. Aval shaar shemotav ha-kedusha morim b’shituf...*).

Shem Tov reads Maimonides very closely and discovers two different meanings expressed in Maimonides’ statement, (my two italicizations) the first of which he criticizes. The first meaning for *meforash* is that the Tetragrammaton gives a *clear unequivocal indication of His essence*. Shem Tov correctly understands this to mean that God’s existence is absolute, i.e., that His existence is identical with His essence. There is no doubt that this is Maimonides’ view, although his diffidence about expressing it in our chapter accounts for the difficult language.

His second meaning for *meforash* is “underived,” which Maimonides emphasizes in this chapter. Unlike the other names, which, like attributes, derive from human actions, the divine name is underived, just as the divine identity is unreferential. In this way, the name of God is like the essence of God.

Shem Tov is happy with the second meaning since “underived” is a negation, and fits with Maimonides’ negative theology. He is unhappy with the first meaning because it is an affirmation of divine *existence*, and since that existence is completely unlike our existence, Maimonides should have expressed it as a negation. Shem Tov suggests ways of saying this negatively that Maimonides could have used. He goes further, saying that everywhere else Maimonides uses *meforash* he means ‘underived’, using such negative language in order to obviate attempts to justify attributism.

I agree that Maimonides does use the term *meforash* as one more club to beat up the attributists and those who use names for theurgical purposes, but he now begins to turn from concern with negation to other philosophical interests. Moreover, as I have repeatedly shown, his negativism is moderate, not radical, and for the most part limited to the negative expression of affirmations. We should not view his affirmation of divine existence several times in our chapter as a departure from his larger theological program.

ADONAI: THE METONYM

By the term *shem hameforash* we also mean that the Tetragrammaton is read but not spoken, that is, its expression is internal, in internal speech. It is well established in Talmud that the utterance of the Tetragrammaton is prohibited except in the Priestly Benediction, (Numbers 6:23-27), and by the high priest in the Temple on Yom Kippur (Talmud, *Sota* 38a, *Yoma* 39b, *Mishnah Yoma* 6:2, *Sifre Numbers* 6:23-27).

Even today in the synagogue, we read the name *y*h*v*h* silently but pronounce it as *Adonai*. There are two reasons Maimonides gives to explain why we use this name *Adonai* as the metonym for the Tetragrammaton. First, the name *Adonai* lost its derived meaning as “Lord” *because* we always substitute it for the Tetragrammaton. Secondly, *Adonai* is more specific to God than the other derived names. Another reason is the

tradition that maintains the vocalization of *Adonai* is the same as the actual ancient vocalization of the Tetragrammaton. Maimonides does not give this reason because he maintains that we have lost the knowledge of Hebrew vocalization. Kafih (notes 4 and 16) explains that the vocalizations were changed and mixed up (and then lost) in order to confound those who would seek the derivations of the divine names and use them for magical purposes (also see Schwarz' note 12, *ad loc.*).

ADONAI: THE MYSTERY

Genesis 18:1-4: “And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw [them], he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, *My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant (vayomer adonai im na matzati khi b'einekha al na ta'avor me'al avdekha)*: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.”

Guide 1:61 (our chapter): “Even the name *adonay*, ‘Lord,’ which has been substituted for the Tetragrammaton, is derived from the appellative ‘lord’....

“*An angel* is also addressed as *adonai*; e.g. Gen. 18:3: ‘*adonay*... pass not away, I pray thee...’ I have restricted my explanation to the term *adonay*, the substitute for the Tetragrammaton, because it is more commonly applied to God than any of the other names which are in frequent use.”

Guide 2:42: “This important principle was adopted by one of our Sages, one of the most distinguished among them, R. Hiya the Great (*Bereshit Rabba*, xlviii.), in the exposition of the Scriptural passage commencing, ‘And the Lord appeared unto him in the plain of Mamre’ (Genesis 18:1). The general statement that the Lord appeared to Abraham is followed by the description in what manner that appearance of the Lord took place; namely, Abraham saw first three men; he ran and spoke to them. R. Hiya, the author of the explanation, holds that the words of Abraham (18:3), ‘My Lord, *adonai*, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant,’ were spoken by him in a prophetic vision *to one of the men*; for he says that Abraham addressed these words to the *chief* of these men. Note this well, for it is one of the great mysteries [of the Law].” (...*ki hu sod min ha-sodot.*)

Mishneh Torah, Ysodei Ha-Torah, 6:9: “All the names [of God] written in [the passage concerning] Abraham [and the angels] are *sacred*. Even [the name of God in Genesis 18:3]: ‘My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight...’”

Maimonides' brief statement in our chapter about the meaning of *Adonai* in Genesis 18:3 conceals his entire lore of angelology in relation to prophecy.

He first claims that this substitute for the Tetragrammaton derives from *adonut*, “lordship.” He then uses the example of the two names given Abraham's wife, *Sara* and *Sarai*, to show that the *ai* sound at the end *Sarai* and *Adonai* implies plurality and honor, in the sense of the “royal we.”

Next he says that in Genesis 18:3, ‘My lord (*adonai*)... pass not away,’ Abraham is no longer talking to God “who appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre,” but to one of the three men/angels standing by him in his tent. In other words, he is asking this guest on behalf of the other two not to leave before he could demonstrate his hospitality.

Finally, Maimonides says, “However, I have only told you that *adonai* is the metonym for the name that is the most specific of the known names of God” (my trans). The point of this statement is that while Maimonides is

not reticent to call *adonai* a derivative of *adonut*, yet the name is now so specifically identified in the public mind as the substitute for the Tetragrammaton that it has lost its derivative nature.

The most interesting thing about his statement is its beginning, that in Gen. 18:3 Abraham addressed the angel, rather than God. Maimonides does this to show that not only was the name *adonai* derivative of lordship, in the sense that the angel is a ruler, but also that it was in the past not always exclusively used as a name of God, as it is now.

This statement conceals a large difference of opinion about who Abraham addressed, a difference of opinion appearing even in Maimonides' own Mishneh Torah, quoted above. The possibilities are that Abraham could be addressing God, or one angel of the three, or all three angels. We will see that there is a sense in which Maimonides agrees with all three positions at once, but we require some background.

The problem is in the grammar as well as with the context of 18:3. Grammatically, *adonai* could be a contraction of *adonai sheli*, "my lords." Abraham would then be addressing all three travelers. However, the text shifts into singular with *b'einekha, al na taavor, avdekha* ("in your sight," "please do not pass," "your servant") setting up the possibility that he is only talking to one person. Rashi's first interpretation of 18:3 is that Abraham began by addressing all of the men with the plural *adonai*, but then directed his request to one of them, their leader (Rashi's second interpretation is that Abraham spoke only to God). Maimonides, in our chapter, disagrees. Abraham expressed the royal "we" when he called the leader of the men *adonai*, so that the whole line read singular. *Adonai*, then, refers to their chief.

But Maimonides had advocated the opposite position, that *adonai* in 18:3 refers to God. In Mishneh Torah, in the halakhic context, he ruled that *adonai* in 18:3 was "sacred," (*kodesh*), that it represents the divine name.

If Abraham directed his plea, "My Lord ... pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant," to the travellers (or one of them) it meant that he did not want them to leave before he had an opportunity to serve them. If, on the other hand, he directed it to God, it meant that he did not want God to depart from his prophetic vision while he served the travellers. The tradition phrases this division by asking whether *adonai*, in 18:3 is "sacred" or not (*khol*). The *halakha* asks whether it was a capital offense for a scribe to erase this name. If "sacred" it must not be erased, and if not, it could. Maimonides is capable of calling it "sacred" in a halakhic context, as he does in Mishneh Torah, but with a broader meaning in the general religious context, as he does in the Guide.

In Mishneh Torah, in the halakhic context, ruling that the term is sacred, he wrote,

"All the names [of God] written in [the passage concerning] Abraham [and the angels] are sacred. Even [*adonai* in]: 'My Lord, if I have found favor in Your eyes' is also sacred" (Touger trans.).

Maimonides means that it refers to God and must not be erased. Support for this comes from *Midrash Rabbah - Leviticus* 11:5: "When he (Abraham) acted with special courtesy, the Holy One, blessed be He, acted towards him with special courtesy.... On which occasion did he act with special courtesy?—When he said: My Lord... pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant..." (Soncino). In other words, he asked God to wait, and God did. This is supported by *Targum Onkelos*, which translates *adonai* as *y*h*v*h* at 18:3. Strong support also comes from Talmud, *Shabbat* 127a and *Shevu'ot* 35b.

However, in our chapter, he argues (but does not rule), that *adonai* in 18:3 is not sacred. In Guide 2:42, also quoted in full above, he supports our chapter's conclusion:

"R. Hiya, the author of the explanation, holds that the words of Abraham... were spoken by him in a prophetic vision to one of the men; for he says that Abraham addressed these words to the chief of these

men (citing a competing Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* - 48:10). Note this well, for it is one of the great mysteries [of the Law].”

What R. Khiya actually said was, “He (Abraham) said this to the greatest of them, viz. Michael,” that is, the *adonai* in Genesis 18:3 was the archangel Michael, chief over the other two angels. This supports the minority view that the term is not “sacred” in a halakhic context. Nonetheless, it is profoundly holy in any other context. *Genesis Rabbah* 48:9, also supports this conclusion, stating that Abraham saw the *Shekhina* and the angels Michael, Rafael, and Gabriel, probably identifying Michael here with the *Shekhina*. This would elevate “my lord” from a traveler, to an archangelic chieftain, to the “presence” of God, which is the *Shekhina*. (The *Zohar* also took it as *Shekhina*, 1:100b, Soncino trans., 1:326).

But even if we were willing to concede, along with most of the modern commentators (Friedlander, Kafih, Schwarz), that the Mishneh Torah can be reconciled to the two statements in the Guide, that does not explain why in 2:42 he said “Note this well, for it is one of the great mysteries.” What is the mystery?

He answers this by his remarkable chapter on angelology, Guide 2:6, read in the light his of theory of the prophetic process. His answer, never explicitly stated, is that in Genesis 18 God teaches Abraham the process of prophecy.

Guide 2:6 does not mention Genesis 18:3, but it does discuss the term *adonai* to explain the phrase *adonei ha-adonim* (Deut. 10:17). Maimonides says that the phrase means that God is the lord of all the angels, as well as of all intelligent forces, especially the separate intellects that guide the spheres. This works well for understanding Genesis 18:3. God had wanted Abraham to come out of his tent of astrological reflections in order to appreciate the real celestial forces God had put in motion (see Rashi to Gen. 15:5). It also relates his speech to the angelic chief back to God, who is the ultimate chief of the angels, *adonei ha-adonim*. It could be that *adonai* is a contraction of *adonei ha-adonim*, which would explain why it is the only metonym for the Tetragrammaton. But there is more.

He proceeds in Guide 2:6 to explain that angels are intellectual forces, even the very “natural” forces that effect change in our world. He then pushes this notion to the point where he identifies the angelic host with the nomic world of the Platonic forms:

“Our Sages explain this in the following manner: God, as it were, does nothing without contemplating the host above. I wonder at the expression *contemplating*, which is the very expression used by Plato: God, as it were, ‘contemplates the world of ideals, and thus produces the existing beings’” (see Friedlander note 1, p. 39, on the difficulty of locating this language in rabbinic literature).

He then goes on to say, “All forms are the result of the influence of the Active Intellect, and that latter is the angel, the ‘Prince of the World.’” This assimilates the active intellect to Michael, but also to Metatron, who are both called Prince of the World (*sar ha-olam*, also sometimes *sar ha-panim*; see my notes, Guide 1:12, 1:64). He also says that our cognitive faculties are angels. Becoming more excited about this, he writes, citing another Midrash:

“In *Midrash-Koheleth* (on Eccles. 10:7) the following passage occurs: ‘When man sleeps, his soul speaks to the angel, the angel to the cherub.’ The intelligent reader will find here a clear statement that man’s imaginative faculty is also called ‘angel,’ and that ‘cherub’ is used for man’s intellectual faculty. How beautiful must this appear to him who understands it; how absurd to the ignorant!”

The “beauty” of the passage would not be obvious if we did not recall his definition of the system of prophecy in Guide 2:36: “Prophecy is, in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man’s rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty...”

Now we start to see what is on Maimonides' mind. As far as I know, Efodi was the only commentator who grasped it. According to him, Maimonides meant that while Abraham met three angels, he only addressed one as *adonai* because:

“It is the active intellect, while the two other angels are the human intellect and the human imagination, since these three angels are necessary for every prophet.” *V'hu ha-sekheh ha-poel u'shnei ha-malakhim ha-akherim hem koakh ha-divri v'koakh ha-dimioni ki elu shloshe malakhim m'khayuvim sh'yihiu b'khal navi.* (Efodi, pen name of R. Profiat Duran, c. 1350 – c. 1415; *ad loc.*, at 91b in the standard Ibn Tibon translation of the Guide).

I did not quote Efodi at first because I was concerned that the reader would take this as a typical bad example of the allegorization of scripture, which, I confess, was how I took it the first time I read it. But having all the above background it appears like Efodi understood the great mystery of Genesis 18, which is that God appeared to Abraham and taught him the system of prophecy. Thus the name *Adonai* in 18:3 is certainly sacred and must not be erased, because it represents the intercession of the active intellect with God in the process of prophecy.

DERIVED NAMES OF GOD

Unlike the Tetragrammaton, however, all other names of God are derivative.

Under “derived names” of God (*shemot ngzarim*) Maimonides lists the following: *Dayan, Tzadik, Khannun, Rakhum*, (meaning, respectively, Judge, Righteous, Merciful, Kind) and, dubiously, *Elohim* (Ruler – Guide 1:2; Judge – Guide 2:6). These names derive from actions of God thought to be like actions of men. In other words, they are human projections, and completely conventional. They express a state or action and predicate it of an unstated subject (*kol shem ngzar sh'hu morei al inyan v'al munakh sh'lo porash b'shmo sh'bo oto ha-inyan nasu*). This unstated subject is God. So, for example, the name *Tzadik/Righteous* shortens a sentence that says “X is righteous,” where X is understood to be God, imputing, as it were, the attribute of righteousness to God. (Compare the unstated *nomen regens* of Guide 1:27, and my comments there. This seems more like an ellipsed *nomen rectum*. These two Latin terms denote the two members of the “construct state” in Hebrew, *smikhut*, see Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar* [1910 Kautzsch-Cowley edition], 413, 414.)

None of these derivative names has the status of the Tetragrammaton, or of *Adonai* when used as its metonym. This distinction has legal consequences. In *Mishneh Torah, Avoda Zara 2:7*, Maimonides rules that taking these two names in vain is a capital offence, while vain use of the merely derived names only results in corporal punishment.

If the Tetragrammaton has no act or state from which it derives it is an excellent name for God. With this name we cannot confuse God with any attributes. The underived character of the name can express no essential attribute but only the divine essence itself, and only by way of negation.

Nonetheless, Maimonides does, hesitantly, say that the name could mean “necessary existence.” The oblique construction of his sentence reflects his ambivalence about saying this here, where he emphasizes the unique name's underived nature:

“Perhaps the meaning of the name, though we have little knowledge of Hebrew language now, or of its proper pronunciation, is ‘necessary existence.’” (My trans. *shmo hu morei k'fi ha-lashon, sh'aino b'yadeinu hayom mimena ki im me'at, v'gam k'fi sh'mivtaim oto, al inyan khiuv ha-metziut.*)

Obviously deriving it from *hoveh*, “is,” i.e., existence. *Hoveh* shares its three consonants with *y*h*v'h*. This would be good for Maimonides, meaning that God is the *necessary existent*. It is probably what he believed. But

he hesitates to say this so as not to complicate his teaching its underived character. Instead, he says that the fund of ancient Hebrew left to us with is small, and we know little of the vocalizations of what terms we do have. While the ancients may have known its derivation, we lack sufficient knowledge to make this judgment. He, thus, explicitly, denies any known connection between the Tetragrammaton and any existing word or root.

Maimonides suggests, however, that this name could mean “necessary existence.” Nonetheless, he is concerned that people will *derive* it from our term for existence as known to us, and then project that existence on God as an attribute. Derivation implies attribution.

Just as in the attribute chapters, Maimonides could not avoid saying that God is an existent, the necessary unique existent that exhausts the “class” of such existents, whose existence is identical to His essence. Divine “life” is not an essential attribute. By applying the admittedly self-contradictory formula “living but not through (the attribute of) life,” which expresses the concealed and inexpressible meaning of the Tetragrammaton, he protects his concept of God from predication by the dreaded attribute.

THE DAY OF THE MESSIAH

Somewhat more effectively, Maimonides cites a Midrash, *Pirke d'R. Eliezer*, 3, which identifies the Tetragrammaton with the Day of Creation: “Before the world was created, there was only the Holy One, and his Name,” which itself refers to Zechariah 14:6-9:

“And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] the light shall not be clear, [nor] dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, [that] at evening time it shall be light. And it shall be in that day, [that] living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: *in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one.*”

As interpreted by Rashi: “They will be the days of the Messiah, and there shall be no subjugation during these days. Before the thousand years are up there shall be a splendrous light, and all the good promised to Israel [will come].” For Rashi the day of the one name is the messianic era, while the Midrash of Rabbi Eliezer assigned it to the day of creation. Maimonides recognized the link between the two traditions. Before creation, there was nothing from which to derive a name, since there were no actions. There was only the Tetragrammaton. The world returns to this entirely spiritual state when the Messiah comes.

After quoting the Midrash, Maimonides says, “This is correct, for all these [other] names have been laid down (*sh'hunakho*) so as to correspond to the actions existing in the world” (Pines’ translation). That is, these other names are conventional corporealized attributions projected on God. However, on the day of the Messiah, Zechariah prophesies, according to the Midrash, that we shall return to the pre-lapsarian state, when there were no derivative names. These other names found in scripture leave some people with the notion that God could possess multiple attributes (*nidma l'miktzat bnai adam sh'yesh lo mispar taarim k'mispar ha-pa'ulot nigzaro mehem*). Zechariah’s great prophecy makes clear that the original and final understanding denies such predication.

Once again, this process requires that we free our minds from the grip of imagination, which locks onto the actions of the material world. “When you contemplate (*t'tbonen*) His essence abstracted and stripped (*m'ortelet u'mupashtet*) from all actions, there are no derived names at all” (my translation). There is only God and the one unique underived name that in some unknown way expresses the divine essence.

Thus, on the prophesied day to come, people will renounce all other names and attributes predicated of God. The world returns to its Edenic state, where truth, not convention, reigns.

AMULETS

Maimonides writes scathingly, here and elsewhere, about the use of holy names in amulets and for other magical purposes. He was reacting to popular folkloric practices among the *Hasidei Askhenaz* in Europe and the messianic excitements in the Sephardic lands (to which he devoted several epistles). In those troubling times superstition gained ground. He despairs of the decline in contemporary Jewish society, comparing its standards with those of the elite Andalusian circles of his youth.

Maimonides links amulet practices to paganism in Guide 3:37. The Talmud, *Shabbat* 61a-b, and 67a, had also disapproved of amulets unless a particular amulet had thrice proven medically useful. The proliferation of allegedly holy names for healing and protective purposes is associated with these amulets. Just as in 18th century Hasidism, in Maimonides' time there were among the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* "Masters of the Holy Name"—*baalei shem*: non-rabbis who could be consulted for healing abracadabras.

Maimonides wants to separate this popular magic from Jewish esoteric tradition. Jewish esotericism had been an elite and private pursuit. The Guide itself continues the tradition of teaching these materials in an elite and private way.

In Maimonides' time and just after, partially as a reaction to these historical trends, and as a repercussion of the Guide itself, Jewish esotericism sought to recover its elite standing in the work of Spanish Cabalists such as R. Moses De Leon (c. 1250 – 1305) and R. Abraham Abulafia (1240 – c. 1291). In the theosophical Cabala of Moses De Leon we rise above lesser magic to engage the forces of *sefirot* in "unifications." By performing the commandments of the Torah these unifications trigger redemption. Abulafia, by contrast, proliferates names, not for magic, but to nullify mental barriers to prophetic influx. Both De Leon and Abulafia were devoted Maimonideans. (For brief background on all of this, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, entries for *baal shem*, Moses Ben Shem Tov De Leon, and index entries for Abulafia, particularly 53-54. For Egyptian and Sefardic mystical trends, 35-36.)

It is by no means clear how Maimonides would have reacted to these developments, especially since his own descendants advocated mystical disciplines, especially meditation. What we know is that he opposed the vulgar reduction of Jewish esoteric tradition to formulas and amulets. We also know that he opposed any practice or conception that promoted multiplicity within divine unity. He advocated an intellectual practice culminating in a post-intellectual approach to or encounter with the divine: the portal for prophecy.

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 mtziot*, 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-mitziot 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 Speigel 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-Sarraj 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.: מפיזין, 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 (13th 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*).

GUIDE 1:63
MOSAIC PROPHECY AND MAIMONIDEAN ESOTERICISM

This chapter is part of Maimonides' discussion of divine names and divine attributes. He connects these ideas with his investigation of prophecy, particularly the uniqueness of Mosaic prophecy. We will review R. Hasdai Crescas' critique of Maimonides' claims. We will also demonstrate Maimonides' own approach to Jewish esotericism, following several chapters in which he had disparaged contemporary shamanism and talisman makers.

QUESTIONS

Maimonides begins with an older style of rabbinic exegesis, the method of propounding questions which he answers later. This is hard to follow, so I will unravel the significant questions followed by the answers. His questions relate to the third and fourth chapters of Exodus, about Moses' first prophetic experience at the burning bush. He quotes very selectively within these passages. I have arranged Maimonides' quote-shards in textual order:

“3:13: And Moses said unto God, Behold, [when] I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What [is] His name? What shall I say unto them?

3:14: And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM (*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*)....:

3:16: Go, and gather the elders of Israel together....:

3:18: And they shall hearken to thy voice....:

4:1: And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.

4:2: And the Lord said unto him, What [is] that in thine hand? And he said, a rod.”

First Question: Moses asks for God's name:
Was the question appropriate?

According to Maimonides, most Jews were ignorant of the existence of an acosmic or supercosmic God. The reason for this was that Sabeian idolatry dominated the world (See note below on the Sabeans). The Sabeans believed that the gods functioned within the universe as a whole and were not radically distinct from it. Thus, since Zeus was the son of the siblings Kronos and Rhea, who were the son and daughter of earth and sky, Zeus was very much a part of the universe. Aristotle's god was also in this cosmos, and eternal with it. Maimonides would have regarded Aristotle as a type of Sabeian.

Moses told the elders of the Jews that he was on a mission from a different kind of God, whose existence was radically other than the universe. They might have reacted with disbelief, as Pharaoh did:

“5:2: And Pharaoh said, Who [is] the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go.”

It is not courteous to speak like this to God. It would be improper to deny that you knew of this supercosmic God, even if it were true. Rather than boorishly admitting that they knew of no such God, Moses suggested that the elders would ask for His “name.” That is because this name would reveal as much of the divine essence as they could humanly grasp. Moreover, this name would reveal to them that unlike all the other deities, God exists absolutely and necessarily. Unlike them, His existence does not depend on the universe or anything in it. Moses’ plea for the name of God was an oblique request to learn this great difference. His question expressed man’s desire to transcend the cosmic limitations of knowledge.

***Second Question: Moses asks for God’s name:
What does the name have to do with his status as a prophet?***

According to the law, a prophet’s validity must be tested (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 10:1). He must perform miracles or at least predict the future. A false prophet is liable to the death penalty. Conversely, a Jew who fails to follow the command of a true prophet is also liable to the death penalty.

The elders were right to test Moses’ claim of prophecy. But how could giving them a name prove that he was a prophet? It is not as though the name was a password or abracadabra whose mere utterance would open doors. Maimonides does not mention the story of the ageless daughter of Asher, Serakh bat Asher, who did know the secret password of the redemption from Egypt. Her password, however, was the phrase “I have indeed remembered,” *pakod pakadti*, from Exodus 3:16, not *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*. This was not one of the statements from Exodus chapter three that Maimonides quoted. (On Serakh bat Asher, see *Exodus Rabbah* 5:13. Thanks to Sheila Segall for this reference).

The name as name was not the important thing: If the elders already knew the name, Moses told them nothing that they did not already know; if they did not know it, it could prove nothing.

Moses used the *meaning* of the name to prove that he was a prophet. Still, why would that demonstrate that he was one of the prophets?

The answer is that the name was his prophetic certification. It is the name that is not a name. *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* is the concept that God exists unto Himself, and through Himself, requiring no cause. Part of Moses’ mission was to spread this concept. Its uniqueness was his prophetic certification. Once Moses taught it to the elders, they accepted his prophetic status.

***Third Question: Why does Moses need reassurance that the elders will listen?
Why does God then say, “What is that in thy hand? And he said: A rod”?***

God had told Moses at Exodus 3:18, “And they will hearken to thy voice,” but at 4:1 Moses complains, “Behold, they will not believe me nor hearken unto my voice.” God’s statement should have been enough to assure Moses that he would be spared the usual judicial verification of his prophetic status. But no name or promise would have convinced *Moses* that the elders would accept a new type of prophetic mission that they had never seen before, especially since Moses had seen nothing like this either.

Maimonides deploys several historical arguments to show why the elders would know nothing of a uniquely transcendent God who sends a prophet on a mission to give law to the world. Mosaic prophecy was unlike any prophecy that came before. Moses was on a mission from God to bring the law to humanity (*bnei adam*). Before Moses, the prophets Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, “and those who preceded them” only prophesied for themselves or their immediate family (See also Guide 2:39). The Patriarchs did not claim a prophetic mission from God to lay down law. The public profession of the Patriarchs was to get converts by teaching (Genesis 12:5. See Rashi, *ad*

loc.). They also received personal and tribal guidance, and tidings of the future of their families. Noah and Joseph are not exceptions. Noah gave the Noakhide Laws just to his children; Moses with the Torah made those laws universal. Joseph, the prophet king of Egypt, gave laws for Egypt only, not the world. Mosaic prophecy was unique, and the elders needed a unique means to verify it.

In those days, Maimonides alleges, few recognized a transcendent entirely non-material God over and beyond the powers of the spheres (Crescas vociferously disagrees: see below). Moreover, even after Moses confirmed God's absolute existence through the teaching of the name, he remained unconvinced that the elders would accept his universal prophetic mission. He needed to show them a miracle. After all, though Maimonides does not mention this, Moses was asking the children of Israel to risk their lives for the sake of an idea.

This is why he needed to reveal the miracle of the staff. But more than that, we will see that the staff that became a snake was also part of the education that the elders and Moses received in the subject of *Maaseh Bereshit* (below, "The Uniqueness of the Name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*").

CRESCAS VS. MAIMONIDES

R. Hasdai Crescas' (c. 1340 – c. 1410) response to these claims of Maimonides was aggressive and passionate, but, on reflection, seem merely quarrelsome. As is frequently the case with the rabbinic anti-Maimonideans, he, almost willfully, chooses to ignore Maimonides' real argument in order to substitute his own sensationalized version of it (on the anti-Maimonideans, see Jose Faur, "Anti-Maimonidean Demons," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6, 2003, pp. 3–52, and <http://www.chayas.com/antirambam.pdf>).

Crescas begins with an ominous salute, only to launch his catalogue of horrors (*ad loc.*, my translations):

"All the words of Maimonides are 'apples of gold in settings of silver,' weighing in the scale of justice as momentous and perfect, and so it is strange that he would say that Israel was drawn to the Sabeian faith, and did not conceive of the existence of God, or, worse, that they did not conceive that the [early] prophets were inspired by the divine word, or, as appears from Maimonides' words, that the wise men of Israel had forgotten the existence of God, such that Moses would have to prove it to them by teaching them the proofs for God's absolute existence."

Crescas then proceeds to demonstrate, through biblical quotations, that even in the depths of Egyptian oppression the Jews remembered God and His name (according to Crescas, that name was the Tetragrammaton, not *Ehyeh*), that they had sufficient faith to undergo mass circumcision at the first Passover (*Sifri* on Ex. 12:6; *Targum* to Ezek. 14:5 – 6; *Artscroll Ezekiel* 241 – 246); that Aaron, Miriam, and several of the Elders were themselves prophets; and that the Levites never succumbed to idolatry. He goes on to quote several passages from Exodus to show that the Jews cried out to God in their oppression, never having forgotten God. He rounds this all out with several citations showing that the Jews and their leaders knew the Tetragrammaton.

He then, bewilderingly, supports all of this with some selective quotations from Ezekiel 20:4-9, to show that God sent the prophet Aaron to them, completely ignoring the context there that in Egypt the Jews had indeed largely fallen into idolatry (a good general overview is *Artscroll Ezekiel*, 317 – 320). He does not mention the story of Serakh bat Asher, which would have shown how much they had forgotten.

His charges, however, are baseless. Though Maimonides does use words like those that Crescas complained of, Crescas fails to give the full sentence that those words appear in, let alone their general context. Maimonides had never said that the Jews in Egypt had entirely succumbed to idolatry or to the "faith of the Sabians." Nor did he say that they all failed to conceive the existence of God. Compare Maimonides' comprehensive summation of the matter in *Mishneh Torah*, *Avoda Zara* 1:3 (Touger trans.):

“When the Jews extended their stay in Egypt, however, they learned from the [Egyptians’] deeds and began worshipping the stars as they did, with the exception of the tribe of Levi, who clung to the mitzvot of the patriarchs - the tribe of Levi never served false gods. Within a short time, the fundamental principle that Abraham had planted would have been uprooted, and the descendants of Jacob would have returned to the errors of the world and their crookedness. Because of God's love for us, and to uphold the oath He made to Abraham, our patriarch, He brought forth Moses, our teacher, the master of all prophets, and sent him [to redeem the Jews]. After Moses, our teacher, prophesied, and God chose Israel as His inheritance; He crowned them with mitzvot and informed them of the path to serve Him, [teaching them] the judgment prescribed for idol worship and all those who stray after it.”

This does not materially differ from what he says in our chapter, nor does it depart in any significant way from the traditional understanding. The tradition accepted that the Jews had sunk to the “forty-ninth level of impurity” in Egypt. Had they reached the fiftieth level they would have been unredeemable, even by Moses (*Zohar Khadash, Yitro* 11:51a; Malbim to *Yitro*).

Moreover, the issue, intentionally ignored by Crescas, was not whether the people still could conceive the existence of God, *m'shaarim b'mitziuto*, but whether they recognized God in his super-cosmic aspect.

Regarding the uniqueness of Mosaic prophecy, Crescas disregarded the reason that Maimonides gave, that Moses was the first prophet on a mission from God to bring law to the world. Crescas lamely repeats that there were other prophets, which Maimonides never denied.

Crescas' argument that the Jews already knew the Tetragrammaton is a hopeless confusion. Maimonides' claim was not that they were ignorant of the Tetragrammaton, but that they did not know the meaning of the name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*.

Maimonides claimed that Moses taught the elders how the form of *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* demonstrated God's absolute existence. The elders then accepted Moses' general claim to prophecy. The elders, or at least Serakh bat Asher, probably accepted his general prophetic status just because they remembered this Abrahamitic teaching. One way to interpret Maimonides' position harmoniously with this would be to say that the Jews knew about God's absolute existence from Abraham, but that the universal Sabeian influence caused most to forget about this, the bad coinage driving out the good.

What the Elders did not know was that God would ever have sent anyone on a mission to bring law to the world, and, as the obvious corollary, that they should risk their necks for this notion. Maimonides wrote:

“You must not be misled by the statements that God spoke to the Patriarchs, or that He had appeared to them. For you do not find any mention of a prophecy which appealed to others (that is, to all humans, *bnai adam*), or which directed them. Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, or any other person before them did not tell the people, ‘God said unto me, you shall do this thing, or you shall not do that thing’ (*asoo o al tasoo*, i.e., positive and negative commandments), or ‘God has sent me to you.’ Far from it!”

In order to convince the elders that this absolutely existent God sent Moses on this unique universal mission the sign of the staff was needed, since it taught what had been concealed by Sabian ideology, the existence of a single super-cosmic provident God (see below on the meaning of the staff: “The Uniqueness of the Name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*”).

Near the end of his commentary, Crescas raised a further issue, about Abraham's proofs for God's existence. If those proofs were merely logical, anyone could have figured them out. Why had Moses not done so?

“Furthermore, how could anyone think that a great and wise man like Moses, who was worthy of prophecy, and to whom no other prophet could compare, who spoke with God ‘face to face,’ and ‘the similitude of the Lord doth he behold,’ that such a one as he did not know the proofs for God’s existence? Had not the wise men of the [gentile] nations developed proofs for His existence..., and even though they had not received the Torah, yet, as children of Abraham they believed with complete faith in God, for we believe that Abraham advanced many proofs for the existence of God, and for the creation of the world (*Genesis Rabbah* 38:13, 39:1; Guide 2:13), and wrote books, which contained the arguments for God’s existence, so that Aristotle did not arrive at this level on his own...”

This was Crescas' best argument. He was correct when he said that Aristotle and Abraham both believed in God's existence, and both developed proofs for it. He was also right to say that if they could do so, Moses would certainly have been able to do the same. Maimonides' claim, however, was that Moses learned of God's super-cosmic existence, for which no Aristotelian proof would have prepared him. The miracle of the staff was the proof that God created the universe and continuously provided for it.

Shem Tov (flourished c. 1461-89) neatly responded to Crescas' criticisms, without mentioning him:

“When God appeared to Moses and commanded him to tell the people what no one had told them till that time, he first said that they would ask me to verify for them that there exists a God in the universe, and then I would tell them that He sent me. This was [necessary] because all the people other than a few among them, like the tribe of Levi, and a few others, did not [any longer] conceive of God’s [super-cosmic] existence nor did they believe in Him, because the extent of their knowledge did not go beyond the cosmic sphere, its forces and its powers. They were not able to extricate themselves from *sensibilia*, considering that nothing existed but matter. The early philosophy of those times was limited to the knowledge of the sensible things and did not rise to the perfection of the intellect [beyond the sense-data of the material universe]. (My trans.)

Yehuda Even-Shmuel takes this one step further, tying it into the need for the name and the need for the staff:

“Since the people of those ages had not risen above the apprehensions of the sense, they had not arrived to the first intellectual perfection. Because of this they were given over to materialism, since they viewed the cosmic sphere as the foundation of all things, as the highest manifestation of matter. But this manifestation was from the world of experience, from sensation. Thus, when Moses came to teach them [about the super-cosmic God], since there was nothing like this in the world of experience, he sought from God a new ‘name’ for this new idea....

“Thereupon God gave him the sign’: of the staff, a tangible witness to his mission, but not to its missionary, since [the elders] recognized the man of mission from his intellectual demonstration [of *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*].” (My trans.)

Thus, according to Even-Shmuel, the first step was for Moses to verify his general prophetic status by giving the elders the “new name for a new idea,” the absolute existence of God. The second step was to prove that he was a new kind of prophet by showing them a new kind of miracle, the staff that became a snake.

THE SABEANS

Maimonides contends that few men knew the truth about God before Moses because they were under the influence of Sabeanism. The word “Sabean” is difficult to derive (it has nothing to do with the “Sabeans” from Sheba, that is, from the southern rim of Arabia). The term usually refers to a religion that arose in Haran, in present-day Turkey, and occurs in the Qur’an in that context. Scholars generally understand Sabeanism to be a syncretism of Christian, Gnostic, Magian and Pythagorean elements, which is sometimes related to the Mandaean religion.

The Muslims claim that there are two kinds of Sabeans, the *sābi’ūna hunafāh* and the *sābi’ūna mushrukūn*, and that the former are “people of the Book” and therefore can be *dhimmi* living in peace with the Muslim community though subject to their special *jizya* tax and other signs of subservience. The latter are regarded as polytheists and treated as such. The term *mushrukūn* derives from *shirk*, which, as we have seen, is the heresy that Allah requires a *partner* (Heb.: *shituf*).

Maimonides uses the term to designate polytheists exclusively, and thus understands *all* Sabeans, contrary to the Islamic doctrine, as *sābi’ūna mushrukūn*. He states elsewhere that he had read all the extant works of the idolatrous Sabeans. The work he frequently refers to is the book *Nabatean Agriculture* attributed to Ibn Wahshiyya (c. 904). Jaakko Hameen-Anttila of the University of Helsinki translated and analyzed large parts of it in his book, *The Last Pagans of Iraq*, Brill 2006, which excludes the agricultural passages and concentrates on the religious, philosophical and folkloristic aspects of this huge text (about 1400 large printed pages). According to some, the *Nabatean Agriculture* may just have been Muslim anti-pagan propaganda; others say that it actually was a volume of ancient Mesopotamian lore.

The important point for our purposes is that Maimonides thought he found in the *Nabatean Agriculture* a rationale for the explanation of obscure matters in Jewish doctrine. He argued that many otherwise inexplicable laws and practices could be explained, at least on one level, as reactions to the practices of the idolators, during Israel’s long struggle against the pagans. See Guide 3:29, where he says:

“Those who were able to think, and were philosophers in those days, could only raise themselves to the idea that God is the spirit of the spheres: the spheres with their stars being the body, and God the spirit. ...All the Sabeans thus believed in the eternity of the Universe, the heavens being in their opinion God. ...The great book on this subject is the book, *On the Nabatean Agriculture*, translated by Ibn Wahshiyya. In a succeeding chapter, I shall explain why the Sabeans had their religious doctrines written in a work on agriculture. The book is full of the absurdities of idolatrous people, and with those things to which the minds of the multitude easily turn and adhere [perseveringly]; it speaks of talismans, the means of directing the influence [of the stars]; witchcraft, spirits, and demons that dwell in the wilderness. There occur also in this book great absurdities, which are ridiculous in the eyes of intelligent people. They were intended as a criticism and an attack on the evident miracles by which all people learnt that there exists a God who is judge over all people.”

By the last sentence above he meant that the proliferation of this worldly sorcery blinded men to the “evident miracles” of creation and ongoing divine providence. This latter teaching was the very heart of Moses’ prophetic mission.

THE UNIQUENESS OF MOSAIC PROPHECY

In Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei HaTorah*, 7:6 we learn of nine ways in which Mosaic prophecy was superior to that of all other prophets:

1. *Wakefulness*: All others prophesied by means of dreams and visions.
2. *Directness*: All others received it from a messenger.
3. *Actuality*: All others received it in the form of a parable or allegory.
4. *Clarity*: His prophecy is clear without mystery; he saw with clear vision.
5. *Fearlessness*: He communed with God without fear: ‘As a man speaketh to his friend.’
6. *Willfulness*: He prophesized at will, all others prophesize only when the occasion supervened.
7. *Readiness*: He did not need to prepare himself or prophecy, for he was always prepared.
8. *Constancy*: He prophesied at all times.
9. *Marital Separation*: Moses did not return to his ‘tent’ but separated forever from his wife.

Additionally, in this chapter, we learn why his prophecy was superior to that of the Patriarchs “and those who preceded them”: he alone was on a mission from God to bring law to the world (*bnei adam*, the people of the world, not just the Jews; Jud. Ar.: אֱלֹהִים, “humans;” Kafih note 20; Joseph Blau, *Dictionary of Medieval Judeo-Arabic Texts*, Jerusalem, 2006). No one, in this telling, had ever done this. Anyone “who made claims” about God fell into two categories: he was either like Abraham, who showed by logical demonstration that there is one God for the world; or he was like the Sabeian priests who claimed to bring down emanations from the gods of the spheres through magic. Neither Abraham nor the pagan priests brought law to the world. Because Moses was a lawgiver, he was also the first prophet-king, and since Maimonides understands all prophets to be philosophers, he was a philosopher-king as well.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE NAME *EHYEH ASHER EHYEH*

The name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* is variously translated “I am that I am” or “I will be what I will be.” The justification for the latter translation is that *Ehyeh* is in the imperfect tense. The imperfect tense is the usual way the ancients expressed the concept of futurity.

In prior chapters, Maimonides had remarked that any attributive or predicative statement about God is nearly tautologous, for whatever term we describe God with is really just Himself. Thus ‘He is wise’ only means that His wisdom is identical with His essence, so that ‘He is wise’ just means ‘He is Himself.’ But when *we* speak of wisdom, we only speak of wisdom as we know it, as an accident of our existence. Sometimes we possess this attribute and sometimes not. Divine wisdom, by contrast, is an unanalyzable aspect of divine unity. We have no words to describe this absolute and simple unity in our grossly physical language. It is beyond words.

But this tautologous pointer to God’s non-numerical unity is not the whole story behind the name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*. Maimonides, in our chapter, supplies a series of hints pointing to its hidden meaning.

First, He explains that *Ehyeh* is a predicating term looking for another predicate: not just ‘I am,’ but ‘I am’ something. This is highlighted by the significant use of the copulative *asher* which means “that/which/who.” But now Maimonides’ argument takes a strange turn.

Maimonides reminds his Judeo-Arabic audience of the otherwise irrelevant information that the Hebrew *asher* is translated into Arabic as *alladhi* and *allati*. But Maimonides’ intended audience for the Guide already knows this. Why did he do this?

The answer is that the Hebrew copulative term *asher* is neuter. The twin Arabic terms are male and female. The implication should be obvious. An imaginative reference to sexuality is intended. As David Bakan has shown in

Maimonides On Prophecy, Maimonides' sexual suggestions esoterically suggest the process of creation *ex nihilo*. These must be concealed from the uninitiated. Maimonides says in Guide 1:46: "We have no intellectual cognition of our bringing somebody other than us to existence except through sexual intercourse" (Arabic: *mubashara*. Pines' translation, p. 99, note 8). Since men know that birth is the creation of something "new," procreation becomes the metaphor for divine creation. Maimonides has on several occasions rendered form and matter as male and female. Moreover, just as a parent passes something of himself to his child, so God endows man with mind.

The staff of Moses suggests the same idea, procreation as metaphor of divine creation. The staff which becomes a snake suggests the snake in Eden (*Genesis Rabbah* 20:11: "The serpent was thy [Eve's] serpent [i.e. seducer], and thou art Adam's serpent").

The snake thus reminds us of Maimonides' treatment of the Eden account in Chapter 1:2 of the Guide, where he argued that Adam exchanged the truth dimension of life for the moral dimension. The snake thus suggests Moses' recovery of the truth. Its return to the form of a staff suggests the tree of life, which is the Torah, the truth that Moses brought to the world.

Maimonides uses these grammatical and metaphorical hints to communicate the lore forbidden to be taught in public by the second Mishnah in Talmudic tractate *Hagigah*. I think he purposely meant to contrast his esoteric method with that of the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, as well as the shamans and the talisman makers criticized in the prior chapter. To summarize these hints, the name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* is unique as a *conceptual* description of God: 1) because the name displays His essential unity with His existence; 2) because it suggests God's power of creation from nothing; and 3) because Moses' acquisition of the name represents the recovery of the lost Edenic truth dimension, unveiling God's super-cosmic dimension. These aspects of God's transcendence were hidden from the Sabeian stargazers. Moses' unique prophetic mission included the revelation of these secrets to the elders of Israel.

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

Another hint about the name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* is Maimonides' unnecessary translation of *Ehyeh* into two Arabic words, "*kaan*," being/essence, and "*wajad*," existence (This feature does not appear clearly in the English translations. Kafih purposely left them untranslated, see his footnotes 29 and 30). Thus, the essence of God and His existence are identical. Friedlander translates the passage:

...in Hebrew no difference is made between the verbs 'to be' and 'to exist.'... This (*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*) is, therefore, the expression of the idea that God exists, but not in the ordinary sense of the term (*sh'hu mitzui sh'lo b'mitziut*, He exists but not through existence); or, in other words, He is 'the existing Being which is the existing Being,' that is to say, the Being whose existence is absolute. The proof which he was to give consisted in demonstrating that there is a Being of absolute existence, that has never been and never will be without existence. This I will clearly prove (Guide 2:Introduction, Prop. 20, and 2:1).

Shem Tov recognized here a terse summation of the debate over essence and existence in Arabic philosophy. Avicenna had argued that essences do not exist until the accident of existence happens to them. In other words, essence precedes existence. The great exception was God, whose essence and existence are the indissoluble non-composite unity.

This flew in the face of the generally recognized Aristotelian doctrine that the definition of a thing was its essence. Averroes took up that doctrine in opposition to Avicenna (see, for example, *Tahafut al Tahafut*, Van Den Bergh trans., v. 2, 237-239). If the definition of things constitutes their essence, then their definitions must always include existence, even if this is not expressly stated. In infinite time, what could exist will exist, and existence is not an added accidental attribute. For example, the definition of man, *zoon logikon*, the thinking

animal, necessarily implies that such a thinking animal exists, and its existence is not extrinsic to this definition. To put Averroes' point differently, definitions do not define things that cannot exist.

Shem Tov takes up his challenge and defends the Maimonidean/Avicennian position, that existence happens to essences, in his commentary to our chapter (my trans.). He begins by explaining this position:

“The explanation of the idea that ‘He exists, but not through existence,’ is that existence is His essence, not like with the rest of the existent things in which their essence is something other than their existence. For those things only exist because of an agent, while God’s existence is not through [the agency] of existence. His existence and His essence are one. This follows the thinking of Avicenna that existence is an accident occurring to essences in the moment of their origination, the origination that existence produces in their essences. By contrast, God’s existence is His essence. He is the existent that is existent. Since [in *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*] the predicate is its own object and its existence is its own essence, it will be the necessary existent. If the predicate were separate from its object it would not have necessary existence.

Next, Shem Tov turns to deflect Averroes' critique, reminding us that, apart from God, everything is created. So, even if all definable things must exist, they still require a cause for their existence:

“Even according to the true understanding of Aristotle, who conceives that existence and essence are always identical [even in material things], that existent things do not exist because of another, nor do they exist because of any part of those things, nor are they dependent upon any other, [yet] those material beings subject to generation and corruption still have their existence dependent upon various things, such as their form and matter. Their agents necessarily combined with the separate heavenly causes, which are the cause of the whole. And even if the prior cause never comes into direct contact, yet that cause confers life, and is the cause of their sustained existence, such that they do not exist by themselves. The separate intellects preceded them. The separate intellects are the cause that grants existence to the beings and they are their first cause, while the First Cause exists only because of Itself, not because of any other. Were it otherwise, and were there no First Cause existent in Itself, there would be an infinity of causes and effects, which [Maimonides] will later prove to be false. There must therefore be something which has absolute existence, ‘that has never been and never will be without existence.’”

In other words, even those who take a naturalistic view of definitional essences must explain the particular existence of things. They can only do so by virtue of the causes that confer their existence upon them. This is true whether we take “existence” as an accident or explain it without reference to the theory of substance and accident. Existence, therefore, *whatever* it is, is separate from essence in created beings, just because the creatures are separate from their causes. The antinomy of essence and existence is the necessary characteristic of all creatures.

Yehuda Even-Shmuel takes this one step further in his explanation. He points to the way in which the name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* combines essence and existence, in order to explain the difference between this name and the Tetragrammaton. The *Ehyeh* is what we might call an “analytical” name, at least in form, since it somehow still combines two things that we somehow must analyze. By contrast, the Tetragrammaton is by its nature unanalyzable. This, he says, points to the greater distinction between the two names, that the Tetragrammaton expresses what God truly is, while *Ehyeh* is the best possible way that we can understand that expression. In other words, the latter is of our world, while the former is beyond it.

OTHER NAMES OF GOD: YAH, SHADAI, KHASIN, TZUR

In this spirit Maimonides gives us more hints. These are a series of alternate names of God, which illuminate the esoteric aspect of name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*. These alternate names are *Yah*, *Shadai*, *Khasin*, and *Tzur*.

Yah. The name *Yah* refers to the eternity of divine existence, to its *timelessness*. Maimonides' statement in our chapter is quite brief: "The name *Yah* likewise implies eternal existence." When he says "likewise," he means that the name is likewise derivative, tying it to what he said just above this, that "*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*, [is] a name derived from the verb *hayah*..." This emphasizes the derivative character of both *Ehyeh* and *Yah*. *Yah* as a name derives from a syllable of the Tetragrammaton, according to Mishneh Torah (*Ysodai* 6:4). Efodi, by contrast, says that this name is part of *Ehyeh*, "I will be," a concept derived from the notion of futurity, which is why Maimonides says here that "it likewise implies eternal existence."

Even-Shmuel sees a contradiction between Maimonides' account here of derivative nature of *Yah* and his statement in Mishneh Torah that it is part of Y*H*V*H. I did not see the alleged discrepancy that Even-Shmuel claimed to see here, since even if this name is a syllable of the Tetragrammaton, it remains derivative in some sense. But Even-Shmuel's larger point is well taken, which is that all these names, including *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*, are, unlike the Tetragrammaton, second-order names. These are the lesser names by which men refer to attributes wholly within the sphere of the cosmos, though they point beyond it. They are derived from those attributes.

Shadai and Maimonidean Anagrams. The name *Shadai* suggests God's *sufficiency*. He is the uncaused cause of all things: sufficient unto Himself.

In the midst of Maimonides' short discussion of the name *Shadai* another odd element intrudes, again connected to the Hebrew relative pronoun *asher*. He says that the letter *shin*, the "sh" sound at the beginning of *Shadai*, is taken from the *shin* in *asher*, which we saw means "that" (or "which" or "who") as in *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*. When used as a prefix, the "sh" sound carries that meaning of "that/which/who." Thus, *Shadai* is a combination of "sh" and "dai," meaning "the one *that/who* is *sufficient*."

Maimonides had already over-defined this copulative *asher* with its Arabic masculine and feminine forms. Here he returned with a further explanation of this term! Moreover, he took as his paradigm for *Shadai* the word *shekvar*, although no paradigm was needed.

In *shekvar* the characteristically copulative "sh" sound from *asher* is tied to *kevar*, "already," so that the combination reads "that is already." This *shekvar* comes from Ecclesiastes 4:2:

"Wherefore I praised the dead *which are already dead* (*ha-metim shekvar metoo*) more than the living which are yet alive."

The Hebrew phrase is, in its *form*, virtually the reverse of *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*: i.e., the life that is life *versus* the dead that are dead.

The *Me'am Loez* (*Kohelet*, Aryeh Kaplan trans., *ad loc.*, p. 93), contends that the initials of the words *Ha-metim Shekvar ha-Metoo* spell *Moshe* backwards: "This explains why *shekvar* appears in this part of the verse instead of *asher kvar*, in order to convey an allusion to Moses." *Me'am Loez* thereby imaginatively alludes to the Talmud, *Shabbat* 30a, which explained that the dead righteous intercede to assist our prayers on behalf of the living, as Moses' prayers were answered through the merit of the Patriarchs (Exodus 32:13). Rashi explains:

"(The dead) who have already died before the evil inclination overwhelmed them to repel them from the Holy One, blessed be He, like the early Patriarchs, for Moses was not answered except through them."

This explains why Maimonides sees a link to Moses in *shekvar*, but it is still unclear why he introduced *shekvar*.

I believe the answer is that *shekvar* (שכבר) contains an anagram for cherub (כרוב).

Maimonides uses anagrams in his interpretations of esoteric prophetic terms (Guide 2:43):

“Accordingly, the word *khobelim* has the same meaning [viz., destroying] as the root *khabal* has in *mekhabbelim keramim*, ‘destroying vineyards’ (Song of Songs 2:15). But the prophet found also in this name *khobelim* the indication that the people despised God, and that God despised them. This is, however, not expressed by the word *khabal*, but by a transposition of the letters *Khet*, *Bet*, and *Lamed*, the meaning of despising and rejecting is obtained. ‘My soul loathed them, and their soul also *abhorred* me’ [*bakhalah*] (Zechariah 11:8). The prophet had therefore to change the order of the letters in *khabal* (destruction) into that of *bakhal* (repugnance). In this way we find very strange things and also mysteries (*sodot*) in the words *nehoshet*, *kalal*, *regel*, *egel*, and *hashmal* of the *Merkava*, and in other terms in other passages.”

Kevar (כבר) is also the name of the river in Babylon where prophecy comes to Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1). That particular prophecy is the *Maaseh Merkava*. *Merkava* and its root *rokev* (rider) are anagrams of *kevar* and *cherub*. A significant feature of *Merkava* prophecy is the role of the cherub. As we will develop in its place, the cherub in the *Maaseh Merkava* represents God’s ongoing creation of living souls that are genuinely new beings. Thus, God is the One “who cherubs”: He is *va’yinafash*, the maker of souls (Exodus 31:17, Guide 1:67).

The *khayot* in the first *Merkava* vision of Ezekiel chapter one become the *cheruvim* of the second *Merkava* vision of Ezekiel chapter ten, but on a lower level, for the *Shekhina* in Ezekiel ten departed from the Temple. “This is the *khaya* which I saw beneath the God of Israel at the river *Kevar*, and I knew they (the *khayot*) were *cheruvim*” (Ezek. 10:20). That the cherub is a lower level of the *khayot*, despite that Ezekiel identified them with the *cheruvim*, is attested in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodai* 2:1, where of the ten angelic levels *khayot* are the first and *cheruvim* are the ninth. They are just above *ishim*, the active intellect, which the *cheruvim* engender.

Thus, *Shadai*, containing the *shin* from *asher* as in the paradigm *shekvar*, suggests that God is ‘sufficient’ for the investment of the living with souls, i.e., the living that are (already) living, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, as Ezekiel saw at the *Kevar*.

If my reading of cherub into *shekvar* seems forced, ask yourself why else would Maimonides keep returning to the rather shallow well of *asher* to tell his audience things that they already knew? Why would he introduce the irrelevance of grammatical gender into this discussion? Did he not invite readers to look for anagrams in the key terms of *Maaseh Merkava*, of which there is no more significant term than *Merkava* itself, an anagram of the *kevar* and *cherub*? How else to explain his esoteric tagline at the end, “Note well the result at which we have arrived in this chapter?” The same tagline shows up in more or less the same form in Guide 2:10, 2:40, and 3:52, which concern prophecy and providence, the subjects of the *Maaseh Merkava* (Michael Schwarz’ translation of the Guide provides an index of Maimonides’ remarkable taglines). All in all, it does not seem to me farfetched to read Maimonides’ explanation of *Shadai* using *shekvar* as an obvious case where Maimonides invites us to find anagrams.

Khasin and Tzur. Another name of God, *Khasin*, is also difficult. Maimonides says that the word derives from the notion of *power*, from Amos 2:9:

“And I destroyed the Amorites from before them, whose height is as the height of the cedar trees, and they are as strong (*khason*) as oaks, and I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from below.”

The thought-complex of the name *Khasin* suggested to Maimonides by this passage is the creation of fruit below by drawing on the strength of the Root above. This thought is strengthened by the next term Maimonides mentions, *Tzur*, “rock.” *Tzur* means root or source, as Maimonides teaches in 1:16. He defined *Tzur* there as “Figuratively, the root and origin of anything. Also the cause of anything, particularly with respect to God.”

The hints in this group of four names point to God’s ongoing creative activity. God’s providential action is timeless (*Yah*). He is “sufficient” for the creation of men’s souls (*Shadai*). He is the upper root of the tree of life (*Khasin/Tzur*).

CONCLUSION

This chapter is, therefore, a comprehensive but veiled introduction to the subjects of Mosaic prophecy and *Maaseh Merkava*. We learned that Mosaic prophecy differs from all other prophecies for the following reasons: Moses was on a mission to bring the law to the world. He conveyed those names of God that teach God’s eternal, uncaused, absolute, and necessary existence. He learned the subjects of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*: both teach that God is the “root” of the world. He is the root of the world because He creates it from nothing and is the cause of the continual production of souls.

Maimonides’ way of making these matters known to the reader is non-discursive and suggestive. The reader must teach himself. This method is very far from the gross and vulgar teachings of the shamans and the talisman makers.

GUIDE 1:64 ESSENCE AND EMANATION

This is a late lexical chapter defining the words *shem*, “name,” and *kavod*, “glory, greatness, heaviness.” By “late,” I mean that Maimonides did not place it in the Guide’s Lexicon, which ended at 1:45. He places lexical chapters at different points throughout the rest of the book. The late lexical chapters usually camouflage the esoteric subjects of creation and ongoing providence, *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*.

The chapter’s lexical format conceals an ancient discussion: Does the “Glory of God” mean God’s essence or an emanation of that essence? This provides us the opportunity to discuss the role of emanation in Maimonides’ thought. (On essence vs. emanation, see Harry A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, pp. 458-462, and my note below on Crescas).

For Maimonides the terms *shem* and *kavod* are for the most part both synonymous and homonymous; that is, they both can mean either essence or emanation.

***SHEM* (NAME) Homonym**

1. The name of someone or something
2. The essence or being of the person or thing named; the divine essence
3. The emanation of God: here concealed as a *command* of God placed in a person who is thereby made God’s instrument (the *dibbur ha-nivra* discussed in the next chapter, 1:65)

***KAVOD* (GLORY, GREATNESS, HEAVINESS) Homonym**

1. The emanation of God: here concealed as the “created light” (*or ha-nivra*) that descends to rest upon a particular person or place
2. The divine essence
3. Praise of God: this is also a concealed reference to the emanation of God

A NAME IS NOT JUST A NAME AND PRAISE IS NOT JUST PRAISE

Maimonides’ lexical chapters usually give both a common, “material” definition of each term as well as a special “spiritual” definition. Both name and glory have such a “material” definition (the first definition of *shem* and the last definition of *kavod*). He typically treats this definition pejoratively, as he does here in his proof-texts for *shem*. His proof-text for the material definition of *kavod*, by contrast, is not really negative in character, since it conceals a “spiritual” variant of its first definition, emanation.

Maimonides begins by telling us that sometimes “name” just means name. As examples he quotes Exodus 40:7—not taking The Name in vain, and Leviticus 24:16—the capital consequences of blasphemy. Both choices for this definition of *shem* are rather negative in character.

We also use “glory” in a “material” way when we *praise* God. Many quotes and most of the chapter are devoted to this use, in which lowly stones and bones “praise” God, but this material is not what is most important to Maimonides. Once again, Maimonides intentionally diverts our attention from his real object, the relation between essence and emanation. He thereby follows the law in Mishnah *Hagigah* against the public teaching of Jewish esotericism.

“Glory,” in this third sense, is the praise we utter to make known the extent of our cognition of God. It is good to do this, because it helps others to recognize God. Even animals, vegetables and minerals “praise” God, for the evidence of their nature expresses the truth of their Creator, and we praise their Creator when we learn their nature. Maimonides writes:

“Things which have no comprehension are therefore said to give utterance to praise, e.g., ‘All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto Thee?’ (Psalms 35:10). Because a consideration of the properties of the bones leads to the discovery of that truth, and it is through them that it became known, they are represented as having uttered the divine praise.”

Yehuda Even-Shmuel explains Maimonides’ choice of this Psalm as his proof-text by noting that our bones “praise” God in our physical actions of prayer, i.e., bowing, genuflection, prostration, and utterance. He continues in this vein, recalling the turning of flowers to the sun, *etc.* The great chain of being becomes a great ladder of praise.

Kafih’s approach is better. He invests this definition of *kavod* as praise with more significance by relating it to one of its other meanings, emanation (note 24, *ad loc.*). He does this by reading “All my bones (*atsmotai*) shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee” as “All my *being*...,” since *etsem* can mean either “bone” or “essence/being.” Thus all my being, all my humanity, praise God. Kafih next quotes Maimonides’ *Commentary on the Mishnah, Hagigah* 2:1 (my trans.):

“Anyone who fails to have consideration for (*khas al*) his Maker’ [the Mishnah continues: ‘it were a mercy if he had not come into the world’] means one who has no consideration for his *intellect*, because the intellect is the Glory of God (*ki ha-sekel hu kavod hashem*).”

In other words, when man recognizes his own intellectual nature placed in him by God he thereby “praises” the Glory of God. His “praise” is his recognition of the divine emanation within himself. In our chapter Maimonides similarly says that “...the true glorification (תעֲבִימָה) of the Lord consists in the comprehension of His greatness (עֲבָמָה),” *ki romemutu ha-amitit hi hakheret gadulato*. By this important remark, he equates praise with knowledge, as if to say that the true praise, i.e. the acquisition of knowledge, is the movement from potential to active intellect. We merely give expression to this activity of cognition in our verbal prayer and praise, which is just the public expression of private recognition. One excels in such prayer only to the extent he frequently engages in such active intellectual meditation. Moses was apparently able to achieve this state on a permanent basis. (on Jud-Ar. עֲבָמָה, see Pines’ note 17, p. 157; Blau, *Dictionary Of Medieval Judeo-Arabic Texts*, 444).

On another level, the active intellect is the emanation that connects us to God, for it is through the active intellect that He made us in His image. When that intellect is realized in ourselves, we “praise” God. Thus, “praise,” in definition 3, is both the act of a corporeal being (its “material” sense) and, simultaneously, evidence of the incorporeal emanation of the active intellect.

ESSENCE

The second meaning of *shem* and the second meaning of *kavod* is “essence,” *etsem*. The essence of God is just God himself.

Sometimes we use “name” and “glory” as courteous euphemisms when what we mean to refer to is the divine essence. In the last chapter, Moses suggested that the elders would politely ask what God’s *name* is, instead of demanding *what* He is. Similarly, Moses asked: “Show me, I pray Thee, Thy *glory*” (Exodus 33:18-20), to which the reply was given, “Man shall not see *Me* and live.” If he was only asking for “glory” this reply would have been inappropriate. Death does not come from seeing “glory,” only from trying to grasp God’s ungraspable essence, as we saw in the story of the four who went to paradise. “Glory,” then, was Moses’ euphemism for that essence. Asking to see the glory was a courteous way of saying, “show me Yourself.”

When we recognize that God has no attributes, we express our understanding of His essence without poetry and myth. Reality appears without the veil of corporealizing imagination. This is the domain of truth. Maimonides frequently couples the term “essence” with the term “truth.” He does this several times here: “essence of God and His truth” (*atsmo ytaaleh v’amitato* = Arabic, *dhaata taali w’khakikata*). We ask to know His essence, but the truth is that He is just Himself, unitary and simple. This unity and simplicity is unlike any we will ever know. We cannot see this and live.

EMANATION

The third meaning of *shem*, and the first meaning of *kavod*, is emanation. Maimonides does not clearly state this meaning in either case, but does so through camouflage. In the case of *shem* it is camouflaged as the command that God places in a person to make him God’s instrument. We know, however, from many other statements, that this command comes as an emanation from the active intellect upon the prepared mind of the illuminant.

In the first meaning of *kavod*, the emanation is concealed as the indwelling *Shekhina*. God *created* this *emanated* being, just as He created the emanated command in the heart of the prophet.

The problem is that the philosophers usually thought of *emanation* and *creation* as contradictory. Emanation was usually understood to be an inevitable process, in which the will played no role. It was, so to speak, natural. The usual example given for emanation was the action of the sun. The sun does not choose to shine on us. Maimonides’ own example is of a fountain overflowing on all sides (Guide 2:12). But the doctrine of emanation could not be reduced to such simple metaphors.

Emanation was originally a philosophic solution to a number of related problems in Platonic philosophy. The problems all arise from the Hellenic conclusion that all mind is one.

This was the concept of the unity of intellect. Multiplicity and difference are products of matter, not of mind. Whatever distinctions we conceive in the noetic world come from our own projections, not from that world itself. The world of the mind is entirely free of material distinctions.

This conclusion of the unity of intellect gave rise to the problems that emanation was supposed to solve. If “the One” is pure thought and thus entirely single, how, then, do the many come from the one? Moreover, how do the corporeal things emerge from their purely intellectual source?

Emanation was philosophy’s answer to these related problems. The emanatory source was conceived as a being so fully complete (“the One”) that its perfection overflowed its source to bestow being outside of it, on the paradigm of the life-giving rays of sunlight and warmth, or of the rejuvenating waters pouring from the fountain. These sources of life are complete yet inexhaustible, just as the divine source of life is complete yet inexhaustible. Ibn Tufayl wrote that what God “Himself possess must be greater and more perfect, fuller, better, and more lasting out of all proportion than what He gives,” (*Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, L.E. Goodman trans., 134).

Although these images were apt, they were only images, since these examples are themselves *physical* results of the divine emanatory outpouring, an entirely intellectual phenomenon. The ultimate cause of the overflow is God’s cognition of his own intellectual nature, triggering the production of mind, which reflects on itself to produce soul, *etc.* Of course, an important aspect of this intellectual overflow is the notion of indeterminacy, which eventually finds its expression in the indeterminacy of matter, both in its hylic state and, eventually, in the form that we experience it.

This philosophic solution to the problems of the noetic creation produced as many problems as it solved. Some ridiculed it, while others took it seriously. Theology took over the scheme and expanded it to the point that it superimposed itself on the strictly religious doctrine of ongoing providence. This “providence” had been a scandal for rationalism, but now it received philosophic coloration and support. Thus, emanation came to be responsible for many things: for the ongoing creation of souls, for prophecy, for the appearance of *a priori* truths in the minds of men, and for the support of all natural processes through the installation of forms in matter.

In the form that Maimonides received it, emanation was ineluctably meshed with the ancient cosmological system and its physical counterpart, with its interplay of ensouled spheres and their five elements, and with constant generation and corruption following the cycle of form/matter/privation. It is precisely this conceptual matrix that marks Maimonides as an *ancient* rather than a modern, however some might otherwise prefer. It is only with the Zohar that emanation was explicitly detached from this apparatus and removed entirely to the spiritual world.

VOLITIONAL EMANATION

The seeming contradiction of a created willed emanation was not new with Maimonides. Maimonides shares it with several likeminded medieval thinkers. Some Muslim thinkers made emanation the process by which God creates the many things. They kept the process, more or less as the ancient Neo-Platonists conceived it, but emphasized the concept of God’s will as the originating force behind the process. The result is that God wills the creation of the emanated being. (This concept of a created, willed emanation appears in Valentinus and the Gnostics, also see Wolfson, *Studies*, v. 1, 199, “The Identification of *Ex Nihilo* with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa,” and v. 2, p. 493. Even in Plotinus, however, “the One” wills the emanation it creates; see Alfred Ivry, “NeoPlatonic Currents in Maimonides’ Thought,” in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. Kraemer, Littman 1991.)

In Avicenna it was clear that the process of emanation was a divine creation, although not so clear that it was willed. His schema is very important, even if only as a backdrop to the way people thought about the world and

its origins. For those not familiar with Avicenna's portrait of emanation, this will seem very strange indeed. First, God thinks of himself. This act of self-recognition produces an emanation: the first mind. A triadic realization occurs with each subsequent emanation, 1) of God as necessary cause, 2) of mind as a necessary product in relation to God, and 3) of mind's existence as contingent in itself. This triadic realization produces another mind, a soul, and a sphere. When that mind considers itself (in similar triadic fashion) as caused, another mind, soul and sphere are created; up to ten times, and then the process stops.

Yehudah Ha-Levi ridicules cosmological emanationism in the *Kuzari*. He is sketchy on the details, but the picture is clear enough, and his jibes are funny (4:25 end, H. Hirschfeld, trans., my comments in parentheses):

“Philosophers speculating on these things arrived at the conclusion that from one only one can issue. They conjectured an angel (mind), standing near to God, and having emanated from the Prime Cause. To this angel they attributed two characteristics; firstly, his consciousness of his own existence by his very essence; secondly, his consciousness of having a cause. Two things resulted from this, viz. an angel and the sphere of fixed stars (Ha-Levi uses the older dyadic scheme rather than the triadic version). From his recognition of the Prime Cause a second angel emanated, and from his consciousness of his existence emanated the sphere of Saturnus, and so forth to the moon, and the Creative Intellect. People accepted this theory, and were deceived by it to such an extent, that they looked upon it as conclusive, because it was attributed to Greek philosophers. It is, however, a mere assertion without convincing power, and open to various objections. Firstly, for what reason did this emanation cease (at its tenth iteration); did the Prime Cause become impotent? Secondly, it might be asked: Why, from Saturnus' recognition of what was above, did not one thing arise, and from his recognition of the first angel another thing, so that the Saturnine emanations counted four? Whence do we know altogether that if a being became conscious of its essence a sphere must arise, and from the recognition of the Prime [Cause], an angel must arise? When Aristotle asserts that he was conscious of his existence, one may consistently expect that a sphere should emanate from him, and when he asserts that he recognized the Prime Cause, an angel should emanate.”

Despite Ha-Levi, many of his successors continued to take emanation seriously. But which version? Avicennian emanation remained an accepted explanation for the existence of the cosmos, but most also accepted the broader, more diffuse, theological/providential version.

How much of medieval emanationism Maimonides accepts is not clear. As we will see in later chapters, Maimonides agrees that willed emanation explains the ongoing providential creation of souls in the world, but that it does not explain the creation of the universe, which for him is creation *ex nihilo* and *de novo*. This is something like the Church Fathers' distinction between the creation of the world and the emanation of the word (Wolfson, *Studies*, v. 1, 207, “The Meaning of *Ex Nihilo* in the Church Fathers, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophy, and St. Thomas”). These are two different accounts, two different *maasim*.

The willed aspect of the emanation is the subject of the next chapter, Guide 1:65. God makes His will known to man, by a created voice (or, as here, a “created light”) or through some other kind of inspiration, “and there is no difference” whether man learns of that will by one of these means or another (*beyn sh'noda b'kol nivra o sh'noda b'derekh m'darkhei ha-navua asher n'varam*). The reason “there is no difference” (Pines: “it is indifferent”) is that through each of those metaphors what becomes known is an emanation from the supernal mind upon man's intellect.

ANGELS?

Maimonides' second definition of *shem* is “command.” When this command is placed in someone, God makes His will known to him. He says:

“Sometimes it (the term *shem*) stands for ‘the word of God,’ so that ‘the name of God,’ ‘the word of God,’ and ‘the command of God,’ are identical phrases; comp. ‘*For My name is in him*’ (Exodus 23:21), that is, My word or My command is in him; i.e., he is the instrument of My desire and will. I shall explain this fully in treating of the homonymity of the term *malakh*, ‘angel.’”

It is not obvious from his context why Maimonides suddenly mentioned angels. His readers, however, would have recalled that the subject of “For My name is in him” was an angel. He emphasized that angel in order to both suggest and conceal the panoply of meanings he attached to the doctrine of emanation.

The chapters he means by saying “I shall explain this fully,” are 2:7 and 2:34 (see, also, my notes on 1:49 “Angels, Providence and the Eternal Feminine” for a full discussion). In both chapters, he comes on to Exodus 23:21, “for My name is in him,” i.e., in a particular angel. Guide 2:7 relates that any *agent* is an angel, whether it is a mind, a sphere, or even one of the four elements. In 2:34, he extends this explanation to include all prophets. The prophet’s inspiration, that emanation that pours out upon his mind and his imagination, is an angel:

“This is the explanation of the words, ‘for My name is in him.’ The object of all this is to say to the Israelites, This great sight witnessed by you, the revelation on Mount Sinai, will not continue for ever, nor will it ever be repeated. Fire and cloud will not continually rest over the tabernacle, as they are resting now on it: but the towns will be conquered for you, peace will be secured for you in the land, and you will be informed of what you have to do, by an angel whom I will send to your prophets; he will thus teach you what to do, and what not to do. Here a principle is laid down which I have constantly expounded, viz., that all prophets except Moses *receive the prophecy through an angel*. Note it.” (Guide 2:34)

THE ANGEL METATRON

Who was this angel? Maimonides knew very well who this angel was. It was the angel Metatron.

Here is the full passage from Exodus about “My name is in him”:

“Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and hearken unto his voice; be not *rebellious* against him (*al tamer bo*); for he will not pardon your transgression; *for My name is in him*. But if thou shalt indeed hearken unto his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For Mine angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Canaanite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite; and I will cut them off.” (Exodus 23:20-23, in JPS 1917)

That passage comes during the revelation on Sinai. After Moses departs, an angel will lead the Jews, and God’s name is in him, which is why he must be obeyed. The Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 38b, tells us who this angel was:

“R. Nahman said: He who is as skilled in refuting the *minim* (heretics), as is R. Idith, let him do so; but not otherwise. Once a *min* said to R. Idith: It is written (Exodus 24:1), ‘And unto Moses He said, Come up to the Lord (*alei el ha-shem*).’ But, surely, it should have stated, ‘Come up unto Me’! — It was *Metatron* [who said that], he (R. Idith) replied, *whose name is similar* to that of his Master, for it is written, ‘For My name is in him.’ But if so, [the *min* retorted,] we should worship him! The same passage, however, — replied R. Idith — says: ‘Be not *rebellious* against him (*al tamer bo*),’ i.e., *exchange* Me not for him (a play on the homonymity of the Hebrew, *tamer*, for both ‘exchange’ and ‘rebellious’). But, if so, why is it stated: ‘He will not pardon your transgression’? He (R. Idith) answered: By our troth, we would not accept him even as a messenger, for it is written, ‘And he (Moses)

said unto Him, If Thy [personal] presence go not, carry us not up hence.’ (Exodus 33:15. *Soncino* footnote: The *min* was a believer in the doctrine of two rulers and he sought support for this belief from Exodus 24:1. R. Idith met his argument by showing that even Metatron was accepted by Jews only as guide, and in no sense a second god.)”

Rashi on Exodus 23:21 compresses the Aggadic tradition on this material, and explains why Metatron’s name is “similar’ to God’s name:

“‘*For My Name is within him*’: [This clause] is connected to the beginning of the verse: ‘Beware of him’ because My Name is associated with him. Our Sages said, This is [the angel] Metatron, ‘whose name is similar to that of his Master’ (*Sanhedrin* 38b). The numerical value of Metatron [314] equals that of *Shadai* [314].”

Metatron represents the active intellect, which is a divine emanation. The Talmud tells of Metatron three times, most significantly in *Hagigah* 15b where the apostate Akher (Elisha Ben Avuya) suggests that Metatron is exalted sufficiently that he can sit in the presence of God. He is the *meta thronos*, the one whose throne is behind God. Metatron is the primary archangel, who bears the name of God *within* him. Since the name is within him, the mention of that name can *refer* to Metatron, this created emanation, rather than to the divine essence. In another important account, Enoch, the mystical hero of Genesis who rose to heaven to become an angel of fire, became Metatron, thus giving license to generations of adepts to emulate this ascension. (See my discussion of Metatron in chapter 1:12, and, cf. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 67-70; with Idel, *Kabbalah New Perspectives*, 67, at ft. 67. Can 67 be a magic number for these two scholars of mysticism?).

Maimonides has all this in mind when he quotes “For My Name is within him,” ostensibly discussing his definition of *shem* as “command” but then lurching momentarily into angelogy (“I shall explain this fully in treating...the term *malakh*, ‘angel.’”)

OR HANIVRA: THE CREATED LIGHT

Another poetic notion of the created emanation is the *or ha-nivra*, the “created light.” Maimonides began his account of the created light when he said that definition 1 of “glory” was the same as definition 3 of “name,” and then gave the definition of “glory” as this created emanation:

“Similarly, the *glory of Y*H*V*H* is sometimes intended to signify the created light (*or ha-nivra*) that God causes to descend in a particular place to confer honor upon it in a miraculous way.” (Pines’ trans.)

The created light is the light created on the first day, the light of wisdom, by which you can see the universe entire. Only the light of the mind can conceivably accomplish this. This light was removed and stored (*or ha-ganuz*) by God for the righteous in the world to come (See my essay on the created light, Guide 1:19). Saadia Gaon, in the *Book of Knowledge and Belief* (2:3b end), says that the created light is the Shekhina.

The discussion of this created emanation flourishes in the domain of imagination, poetry and myth more than in the sobriety of philosophic discourse. Emanation differs from essence, which resides exclusively in the domain of truth. That explains these imaginative references for the *kavod* and *shem* as created emanation: angels, created light, created word, Metatron, Shekhina. All of these are ready at hand, and the first two Maimonides explicitly mentions in our chapter. “And there is no difference” whether man learns of the created emanation by one of these imaginative means or another.

The last line of the chapter ties this all together, but in an obscure way. Referring to *kavod*, but clearly also to *shem*, since we already know that they have the same definitions (essence or emanation), he says:

“Consider well the homonymity of this term, and explain it in each instance in accordance with the context: you will thus escape great embarrassment.”

What embarrassment would he be saving us from? Schwarz (*ad loc.*, note 17) points us to Guide 3:7 for the answer, where Maimonides writes about Ezekiel’s vision of the *Maaseh Merkava*, the Subject of the Chariot:

“The prophet likewise says, ‘that is the likeness of the glory of the Lord’ (Ezekiel 1:28): but ‘the glory of the Lord’ is different from ‘the Lord’ Himself, as has been shown by us several times. All the figures in this vision refer to the glory of the Lord, to the chariot, and not to Him who rides upon the chariot; for God cannot be compared to anything. Note this.”

Our chapter comes precisely to prevent the confusion of God’s created emanation with His essence, that is, Himself. Such confusion could result in our worshipping those creations arising in prophecy, to the exclusion of their Creator.

KAVOD: CRESCAS’ INTERPRETATION OF MAIMONIDES

Continuing his discussion of *kavod*, “the Glory of the Lord,” Maimonides quotes a significant passage from Exodus concerning its action:

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

It is bad enough that the text has God *abide* in a physical place. The Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Bible is worse. It gives us “came down” (κατέβη) instead of “abode,” which opens up whether God can “come down.” Harry A. Wolfson (*Crescas*, 460-462) explains the philosophic history of this passage as follows: Philo (c. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.), who knew the Septuagint as well if not better than the Hebrew, was troubled by this implication of spatial descent. He, therefore, taught that “glory” was either: a) the presence of God’s manifested powers; or, b) the subjective human apprehension of God. In neither case could it mean God or His essence. Wolfson then shows that Saadia, Ha-Levi, and other Jewish medievals translated *kavod* as *Shekhina*. They, thus, followed, perhaps consciously, this Philonic tradition. However, the Hebrew verb *vayishkan* translated as “abode” or κατέβη, does share the root of *Shekhina*.

According to Wolfson, this Philonic interpretation parallels Maimonides’ definitions 1 (indwelling/emanation) and 3 (praise) of *kavod*. He argues that Maimonides could have read Philo. Thus, Maimonides is able to translate glory (*ibid.* 461): “in two ways, one taking the term *kavod* to mean the essence of God (definition 2, unlike Philo) and the other to mean an emanation” (definitions 1 and 3, like Philo).

Wolfson then proceeds to show how Crescas identified glory with the Sefirot, so that there are likewise two ways of taking the Sefirot, either as essence or as emanation. Similarly, Wolfson quotes Abraham Shalom (d. 1492), who compared this Cabalist dilemma to the question whether the prime mover was God or an emanation from Him. Crescas acknowledges his dilemma by showing how to translate the “glory” in Ezekiel 3:12 either way: as essence or as emanation. The passage from Ezekiel reads, “Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, [saying], Blessed [be] the glory of the Lord from his place,” *barukh kavod y*h*v*h mimekomo*. Wolfson writes (*ibid.*, p. 462):

“What Crescas is trying to do...is to transfer Maimonides’ discussion of the term *kavod* as he understood it to the term *kavod* as it was understood by the Cabalists in the sense of the Sefirot,”

Either taking the Sefirot as essence:

A) ““The blessedness (*barukh*) of the glory of the Lord (*kavod ha-shem*)’ i.e., of the Sefirot, ‘is from glory’s place (*mimekomo*),’ i.e., from God’s essence, inasmuch as the glory or Sefirot are [understood to be] identical with God’s essence.” (Crescas wrote, p. 203: “The pronominal suffix *his* in *from his place*,” i.e., the final *o* in *mimekomo*, refers to *glory’s place*, “that is to say, from God’s own essence and not from something outside Himself,” since the suffix *o* can mean *his* or *its*).

Or, as emanation:

B) ““Blessed (*barukh*) is the glory of God (*kavod ha-shem*)’ i.e., of the Sefirot [as emanation], ‘from His place (*mimekomo*),’ i.e., from God’s essence.” (Crescas: “The pronominal suffix refers to God, the meaning of the verse being the *glory of God* is *blessed* and is poured forth in abundance *from the place of God*, i.e., from His essence, as it is an emanation.”)

Crescas preferred, however, to understand that the *kavod* was formative, and, therefore, emanational, for he wrote, ““The whole earth is full (*malei*) of His glory’ (Isaiah 6:3), which is an allusion to the element of *impregnation*, which is one of the elements of glory” (*sh’hu ysod ha-ibbur sh’b’ysodot kavodo*, cf., Guide 1:19, the lexical chapter on *malei*). He meant that the *kavod* was the willed created emanation born of the copulation of the *sefirot* called *ysod* and *malkhut* (“foundation” and “sovereignty”).

Given Maimonides’ acknowledgment that both definitions are possible, we are to recall “the homonymity of this term, and explain it in each instance in accordance with the context: you will thus escape great embarrassment.’ He does not deny the existence of a created emanation. However, we should worship the essence of the Lord, not His created emanation.

GUIDE 1:65 THE WORD OF GOD

This chapter, like the last, is a late lexical chapter. The terms under consideration are “saying” and “speaking,” *omer* and *dibbur*. The terms are synonymous and homonymous, since they are interchangeable, and since both possess the same set of three entirely different meanings. Michael Friedlander explains the purpose of this lexical chapter in the current sequence of Guide chapters:

“That is, if a person is convinced that even the attributes of existence and unity are not predicated of God, in the ordinary sense of these terms, because every notion of a real attribute is inadmissible in reference to Him, he need not be told that speech, as an attribute, is inadmissible; for many would admit the attribute of existence and unity, and would still reject that of speech. Some of the Mohammedan Theologians considered the Word of God as an attribute co-existing with Him from eternity to eternity. According to the theory of some Jewish philosophers, [by contrast] the Word of God emanated from Him, as all His other acts, and on that account it cannot be considered as an [eternal] attribute of God. Although the Divine Word, or the Torah, is said in the Talmud and the Midrash to have existed two thousand years anterior to the creation of the universe, it was believed to be a thing created and limited in time.” (note 1, *ad loc.*)

The Arabic for “word” or “speech” is *Kalām*. *Kalām* came to be the name generally applied to Muslim theology. In the last six chapters of this section of the Guide, Maimonides systematically attacks *Kalām* theology. It is precisely on the issue of the *word* of God, and how the *Kalām* understood it, that Maimonides directed his strongest criticism. This issue is also the target of his *attribution* chapters (Guide 1:51-60. See my notes below on *Wolfson* and on *The Uncreated Qur’an*).

SYNOPSIS OF THE CHAPTER

Since, in the chapters devoted to the rejection of the divine attributes, we had gone so far as to reject existence and unity as eternal attributes of God in their ordinary significations, it is no stretch to realize that the divine word cannot be an eternal Logos. That is to say, the divine word does not exist as an eternal separate soul imbued with the forms of all things, which God needs as an instrument to effectuate creation (See my essay on Logos, Guide 1:21). Maimonides then shows that the words for speech, *amar* and *dibbur*, both carry three meanings: verbal speech, thought, and will. Only the two latter meanings apply when *amar* and *dibbur* occur in the divine context in scripture. He then produces a plethora of proof-texts for these definitions, more than would be needed to support them. He employs these citations to show us the difference between Mosaic prophecy and the prophecies of other seers, and to show how divine thought differs from human thought. The point is that we ascribe thought and will to God only because we borrow them from human experience. We have no experience of direct unmediated creation by our thoughts and volitions alone, and so we say that God “commands” these things, in the same way that a person commands an action. Conversely, from our vantage, it is through such “words” that the divine “voice” inspires us. Nonetheless, ultimately, it does not matter whether this inspiration comes from a voice that we actually heard or from a sound that emerged in our prophetic dreams and trances.

* * *

See explanation of my methodology in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide”.

OMER, DIBBUR (SAYING, SPEAKING) HOMONYM

1. Verbal speech
2. Thought
3. Will

Of these three definitions, only the last is attributable to God in any sense. I come to this because only the last two citations for “will” relate to God. All the rest of Maimonides’ proof-tests relate to human speech, thought or will. Whenever the Bible says that God “speaks,” we must discover the metaphorical meaning for that term. That meaning is *will*. God wills things to exist, but in doing so, His will is only Himself, not a separate entity. Even when *dibbur* is supposed to represent divine thought, Definition 2, Maimonides frequently maintains that for God, thought and will are synonyms (See, A. Ivry, “Providence, Divine Omniscience, and Possibility,” 184, note 32, in *Maimonides, a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Buijs, 1998).

When revelation brings speech to the prophets, God creates this utterance. This is the *dibbur ha-nivra*, the counterpart to the created light, the *or ha-nivra* (See my comments to the last chapter). Maimonides shares this notion of a *created utterance* with Saadia Gaon (*Book of Knowledge and Belief*, 2:12). It is their version of the Logos, except that God creates it. This *created utterance* is the intermediary, the active intellect, which brings revelation to the prophets. The active intellect as created emanation is the unique doctrine of medieval neo-Platonized Aristotelianism. This created word is the Torah. Since God creates the revelation (*haskama umateinu sh’hatora brua, ha-kavana b’kakh ki divaro ha-myukhas lo nivra*), it follows that the prophecy is not merely from the prophet’s own imagination (*m’et ha-shem hem, lo m’hekra daatam v’raionam*), but has a peculiar existence of its own.

Maimonides contrasts his Logos with the Logos of Islam, which is the Qur’an. The Qur’an is the “inlibrated” eternal uncreated word of God (See my comments on 1:21. “Inlibrated” is Wolfson’s coinage meant to contrast with the *incarnated* Logos of Christianity in John 1:1). Even though God *expresses* his will in the Torah, the Torah, by contrast, is not eternal. It is a divine creation.

When God creates anything, whether it is the world, or man, or the created word, He does it by “willing” it. Thus, if God wants something it automatically exists. The “wanting” part of the sentence is merely a verbal concession to human experience, for God does not change as man does when He wants to make something. We understand this by saying that God *commands* something to exist. Maimonides demonstrates that when God “commands” there really is no speech or command involved. His proof is that when God said, “Let there be light,” He *said nothing*, because speech must have an audience and none had been created yet. “God said, Let there be light” really means, “God *willed*, Let there be light.” Indeed, as *Pirkei Avot* 5:1 already pointed out, the ten utterances of creation are really just one divine will (which, according to *Avot*, the Torah divides into ten to create a system of reward and punishment). Unlike human will, divine will is itself the divine action.

Instances of Definition 1 Contextualized:

Maimonides usually does not quote just for his ostensible point. These quotes tell a more complex story. Thus, the first two quotes tell us more than that *omer* and *dibbur* mean verbal speech. They intimate the difference between the prophecy of Moses and that of other prophets.

“And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, *Moses spake* (*yedabber*), and God answered him by a *voice* (*kol*).” (Exodus 19:19)

In Guide 2:33, Maimonides says that at Sinai, “Moses alone was addressed by God.” According to him, the *kol* contained the undifferentiated noise that the people at Sinai heard, as well as the clear message to Moses from God Himself. Moses, the one who carries the word, is the *intermediary*. By contrast, Maimonides’ second quote is about all the other prophets:

“And Pharaoh *said (va-yomer)* unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and [there is] none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, [that] thou canst *understand a dream (ti’shma khalom)* to interpret it.” (Genesis 41:15)

(Pines, Friedlander and Schwarz all say that “And Pharaoh said” refers to Exodus 5:5, but I follow Kafih who says the proof-text is Genesis 41:15, which is the prior, and therefore preferable quotation.) The KJV has Pharaoh saying to Joseph “thou canst *understand* a dream.” The KJV is already an elucidation, since the word translated as “understand” is *ti’shma*, meaning, “you can hear” a dream to *interpret* it. The point is that what is “spoken” and “heard” is the prophetic “communication,” the *dibbur ha-shem*, not a corporeal utterance that men can hear. Non-Mosaic prophets all require an *intermediary* to transmit the divine revelation to them. In this case, Pharaoh’s *dream* is the intermediary between God and Joseph, once it had passed through Joseph’s mind. It is a created “word,” not something Pharaoh dreamed up himself. His revelation came via the active intellect, which sometimes favors far lesser men with the lowest level of inspiration (Guide 2:45). This intermediary is the same notion as the *sefira malchut* in Jewish esotericism, i.e. the tenth emanation. Maimonides calls this intermediary the “created voice,” “created light,” “angel,” “*ishim*,” etc. He says that “there is no difference” whether man learns of that will by one of these means or another (*beyn sh’noda b’kol nivra o sh’noda b’derekh m’darkhei hanavua asher n’varam*).

Instances of Definition 2 Contextualized:

Definition 2 is *thought* in the mind of man. Maimonides subtly sends a negative message through the next four proof-texts. The train of ideas in these passages is that *human thought* begins as “vanity,” which leads to “perversity,” resulting in God’s abandonment, and, ultimately, to thoughts of murder. I recall the Yom Kippur prayer *Maaseh Eloheinu*, which contrasts the will of God with the thought of man: “The work of God! He saves from the grave, those borne by him;...The work of man! His thoughts are of mischief (*m’zima*).”

“Then *said (v’amarti)* I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I *said (v’dibbarti)* in my heart, that this also [is] vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 2:15)

Maimonides begins with two quotations from the same verse in Ecclesiastes. The ostensible point is that “I said” means “I thought.” This passage employs forms of both *omer* and *dibbur* to mean thought. Such thought of men, when devoid of God, is pointless *vanity*.

“Thine eyes shall behold *strange women (zarot)*, and *thine heart shall utter (v’livekh ydabber)* perverse things (*tahpukhot*).” (Proverbs 23:33)

Rashi explains, “When you will become drunk, it will burn in you and entice you to ogle harlots.” *Zarot* is the feminine plural of “strange” or “stranger,” but rabbinic tradition took it as synonymous with *zonot*, the usual word for harlots in Proverbs. Prurient references in Maimonides support his understanding that we cannot express creation *ex nihilo* except through the metaphor of procreation. It is also possible to understand *zarot* as a reference to idolatry, *avoda zara*, i.e., “strange service.” Maimonides quotes this passage to show that our reliance on the creative power of our unaided thought leads us to deify our imaginings.

“[When thou saidst], Seek ye My face; *my heart said (amar)* unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not Thy face (*al ta’ster panekha*) [far] from me; put not Thy servant away in anger: Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” (Psalms 27:8-9)

The Psalmist refers back to Sinaitic revelation, when the people, terrified by what they saw and heard, begged Moses to receive the revelation in their stead. The Psalmist also recalls that Moses sought God’s face, “Thy face, Lord, will I seek,” but was only given the revelation of the “back” (cf. my comments on Guide 1:21). Thus, even Moses only *learns* of the work of God—He cannot achieve knowledge of or unity with the essence of God. What troubles the Psalmist is the irresistible desire of the human heart for the essence of God, which it can never know. This desire leads (in verse 9) to *hester panim*, the “hiding of the face,” which is the abandonment of man by God (*al ta’ster panekha*). The message, once again, is that unaided human thought displaces God.

“And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: **and Esau said (va-yomer) in his heart**, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob: And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebecca...” (Genesis 27:41-42)

Since Esau only *thought* about killing Jacob, the Rabbis ask who told Rebecca his plans. Rashi, following the Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 67:9, explains that divine inspiration told her what Esau was thinking “in his heart,” i.e., she got the information through prophecy. Nevertheless, this prophecy was “told” to her, which means that it came to her through an intermediary, the active intellect. What Esau “said in his heart” connects to the previous proof-texts. The vain perversity of man’s unaided thought leads to God hiding His face when man plots murder. This bridges to the next group of three proof-texts for Definition 3, where the human *will* leads in each case to thoughts of murder:

Instances of Definition 3 Contextualized:

“And Ishbibenob, which [was] of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear [weighed] three hundred [shekels] of brass in weight, he being girded with a new [sword], **thought (lit., said—va-yomer) to have slain David.**” (2 Samuel 21:16)

The Bible never again mentions Ishbibenob. He was Goliath’s brother (Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 95b). The quote shows that “saying” sometimes means “willing.” His *will* is to *murder* David. Similarly:

“And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? **Intendest (sayest—omer) thou to kill me**, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and **said (va-omar)**, Surely this thing is known.” (Exodus 2:14)

Rashi thinks “sayest thou,” implies that Moses slew *by speech*, that is, by verbally invoking the Tetragrammaton (Midrash *Tanchuma*, *Shemoth* 10). Maimonides would not favor this interpretation since we do not invoke the name for our own purposes. Rather, “saying” means intending, willing. “Sayest thou to kill me” means: is it Moses’ will to kill the Jew? Note also that when Moses “*said*, Surely this thing is known,” he is really only thinking, not speaking.

“**But all the congregation bade (said—va-yomru) stone them** with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.” (Numbers 14:10)

This comes after the spies have returned with their terrifying report of giants in the land of Israel. “Said” to stone them, means *intended* to stone them. They would have stoned the spies Joshua and Caleb had the glory of the Lord not appeared in the Tabernacle before all of the Jews. The appearance of the glory of the Lord alerts us to the question of whether this was a *physical* manifestation (see last essay, below).

At the end of the chapter, there are two more proof-texts for Definition 3, “will,” but now they concern the “speech” of God, not of man. Note that no proof-text for “thought” is about divine thought.

“**By the word (bidvar) of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth (u’v’ruakh piv).**” (Psalms 33:6)

Maimonides quotes the entire verse but breaks it into two quote-shards by inserting the word *kmo*, i.e., “like” in the middle, meaning that the first clause of the verse is “like” the second clause. He explains:

“‘His mouth,’ and ‘the breath of his mouth,’ are undoubtedly figurative expressions, and the same is the case with ‘His word’ and ‘His speech.’ The meaning of the verse is therefore that they [the heavens and all their host] exist through His will and desire.”

The point is that God does not require a *creative word* or any other intermediary to effectuate His creative will. See my note below, *Wolfson on the Word of God*.

“And Joshua *wrote* these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that [was] by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the *words (imrei)* of the Lord which He *spake (dibber)* unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.” (Joshua 24:26-27)

These are Joshua’s last words. Since the verse uses both the words (*imrei*) and the speech (*dibber*) of God in the same context, they are synonymous. The word of God that Joshua refers to is the actual revelation given to Moses at Sinai. There were no verbalized words since God willed the prophecy in thought to Moses. Moreover, that part which Joshua *wrote* was “witnessed” by a stone that “heard” the words. Obviously, no stone witnesses or hears a speech. The passage means that God communicated His will as a command to the people so clearly that even a stone “understands” it. This command is God’s *created communicative word*. See note below.

In summary, we learn from these quotes that the words “speaking” and “saying” mean intending and willing, especially when used by God. Additionally, we learn that Moses prophesied without mediation, while all other prophets received their revelation from an intermediary. Sometimes the prophet’s intermediary is in the form of a created voice. Whatever the form, it is the active intellect emanated from God. This same emanation is the ongoing source of the creation of souls and the emanation of forms into unformed matter, and the Bible represents this process by images of procreation. We do not explain this publicly due to the law of Mishnah *Hagiga*. One reason for this law is that our unaided thought leads to “perverse things.”

WOLFSON ON THE WORD OF GOD

In the following compressed sentence, Harry Austryn Wolfson sums up a thousand years of lore on the *dibbur hashem*, but it needs to be unpacked:

“A view like that of Saadia and Halevi, consisting of a denial of an *uncreated word*, an affirmation of a *created communicative word*, and a denial of *created creative word*, is to be found in Maimonides.” (*Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy*, Harvard, 1979, p. 111, my emph.)

What he means is that the main tradition in Jewish philosophy had a unified view of the meaning of divine speech in its threefold manifestation in medieval thought.

The problem, he explains, arose when Jews in the Middle East learned that the Christians and the Muslims entertained the concept of an eternal *word*, and that this word manifested itself as the pre-existent uncreated Christ or Qur’an, respectively. This reminded them of their rabbinic tradition that the word of God, in the sense of the Torah, was also pre-existent, but, by contrast, God created this word. According to Wolfson, Midrash *Konen*, a late minor Midrash, (cited in *Repercussions*, p. 86 from Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*) expresses the concept of a Torah that precedes the world, in terms that could be a repercussion of a contemporary Muslim account. The Midrash (elaborating on Jerusalem Talmud *Shekalim* 6:1 49d) states:

“Should you say it (the Torah) was written down on a book, the answer is: no animal and beast were as yet created from whose skin a parchment could be made upon which to write. Should you say it was written on silver or gold or any other metals, the answer is: none of these was yet created or smelted or mined. Should you say it was written on wood, the answer is: no trees were yet created in the world. On what, then, was it written? It was written with black fire upon white fire and it was tied to the arm of God, for it is said, ‘At His right hand was a fiery law unto them’ (Deuteronomy 32:2).”

Wolfson says, “If we assume that the Midrash *Konen* was composed in Palestine when it was already under Muslim rule, then its elaboration on what the pre-existent Torah could not be may taken to be aimed at a conception of the pre-existent Qur’an...held by a certain Muslim sect.” That Muslim sect’s commentary stated, “the separate letters, and the bodies written upon, and the colors in which the writing is executed, and everything between the two covers, are pre-existent *eternal*.” (*Repercussions*, p.86)

With this background in mind, Wolfson says that when Saadia, Ha-Levi and Maimonides agreed on the “denial of an *uncreated word*,” it meant that the Torah is not a Logos pre-existently eternal with God, like this concept of the existence of the Qur’an. They denied this because it would have meant that God was in partnership with another power worthy of worship. As for the appearance of an eternal uncreated Torah in Midrash *Konen* and a few other places, Wolfson reviews the outstanding Jewish spokesmen of the early middle ages up through Maimonides and finds that none of them take this assertion literally.

When Wolfson says that they agreed on “an affirmation of a *created communicative word*,” this means that God created a supernal Torah that communicates law to the prophets in their prophetic state. This supernal Torah is the active intellect. Later, Maimonides will explain this process of prophecy (Guide 2:36). This *created communicative word* may also be the created emanation that “communicates,” so to speak, souls into ensouled beings.

When Wolfson says that they agreed on the “denial of a *created creative word*,” he refers to the belief of some Muslims in “the word of God in the sense of the word ‘Be’ (Ar.: *kun*) with which God created the world” (*Repercussions*, 91; *Kalām*, 145; Tufayl, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, trans., L.E. Goodman, 134). The supposition of a “created creative word” was their answer to how the completely incorporeal God created a corporeal world. By contrast, the Jewish philosophers all held to the miracle of *ex nihilo* creation, dispensing with the need for any other power. Instead of the creative word “Be,” they posited the divine will, understanding that the will could not be a separately subsisting entity from God.

Thus, in our chapter, Maimonides explains that God did not utter such a *creative word* since speech requires an audience, and there was none at the time of creation. Apparently, even the creative word “Be” would have required an audience to hear it.

Still, we fail to understand how just *wanting* something could bring it to be without some intermediate action or command. But this is just a shortcoming of our corporealized imaginations. God has the power to create just by *wanting* something to occur. His will is itself His action.

THE UNCREATED WORD IN THE QUR’AN

The notion of the Qur’an as the uncreated word of God was controversial in early Islam. The controversy began as an academic dispute but became a violent political struggle (Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, Columbia Univ., 1970, 78-79, and see Schwarz, footnotes 3, 4 and 15 *ad loc.*). Both sides thought of the Qur’an as the “preserved tablet” (*al-lawh 'l-mahfuz*) kept in heaven before its revelation to Muhammad (see next chapter, Guide 1:66). The dispute turned on whether the theologians took the divine attribute of speech as an “essential” attribute or merely an “action” attribute. The essentialist theologians understood the divine word to be eternal with God, while their opponents took it as a non-eternal creation. The Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma’mūn, who was part of the latter group, made the doctrine of *created* Qur’an the law for his empire. In 833, he instituted an inquisition, the *Mihnah*, to enforce that law. The violence of this inquisition led to a reaction. Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780 – 855), who suffered physically under this inquisition, led this reaction. He opposed every attempt to make intellectual sense of Islamic dogma. Majid Fakhry tells of one unsuccessful but paradigmatic attempt to introduce a moderate approach to Ibn Hanbal:

“Ibn Hanbal’s stand on this question is illustrated by his reaction to the otherwise moderate approach to the question of the creation of the Koran of a leading theologian of the period, al-Hussain al-Karābīsī (d. 859), who, despite his accredited sound learning, we are significantly told, inclined toward scholastic theology. Having declared on one occasion that whereas the Koran, as the speech of God, is uncreated, its words, as recited by readers, are created, he submitted his view to Ibn Hanbal for his verdict. Ibn Hanbal declared it to be a heresy (*bid’ah*). Perfectly willing to modify his stand, al-Karābīsī then

declared both the Koran and its written and spoken words uncreated. Incapable of being appeased by such latitude, Ibn Hanbal declared the latter view equally heretical, thereby underscoring the futility and perniciousness of the very inquiry into the nature of the Koran, that the ancients, he maintained, had so piously avoided.” (p. 79)

In our chapter, Maimonides makes an important statement about God relative to this Muslim controversy. While explaining that God does not employ voice or sound, he proceeds to elaborate that neither does He have:

“...a soul in which the thoughts reside, and that these thoughts are things superadded to His essence (*v'lo sh'hu italei baal nefesh sh'khakako ha-inyanim b'nafsho*); but we ascribe and attribute to Him thoughts in the same manner as we ascribe to Him any other attributes.”

Schwarz, note 15, explains this statement as a denial of one theory of the uncreated Qur'an as “intellectual speech” subsisting in the mind of God:

“Perhaps Maimonides' purpose here is to deny the position of the Muslim theologian Al-Baqillani (d. 1013). The *Mutazila* (the sect of theologians who accepted the Qur'an as created) was opposed by those who held that it was eternal and uncreated (the *Ashariya*). Some of them exaggerated to the point of absurdity that the voice of the Muslim reading the Qur'an was also uncreated, and even the paper and the ink on which it was written were eternal and uncreated. To resolve the apparent absurdity, Al-Baqillani produced the Asharite solution that the Qur'an was the “intellectual speech” (*dibbur ha-nefesh*) of God which was *eternal*, and these thoughts were *conceived* (*hitgalmutam*) in the *created* form of the actual book of the Qur'an.” (My trans.)

This view of the Qur'an as an eternal “intellectual speech,” is just a camouflaged version of the eternal Logos as partner with God. That is why Maimonides so strongly opposed the concept, denying that God had such a “soul” in which “thoughts reside.”

IS THERE A PHYSICAL “CREATED VOICE” OR A “CREATED LIGHT”?

The major Jewish intellectual leaders rejected this attributist notion of an eternal word of God inliterated in the Torah, since they understood that God has no partners.

However, the prophetic works frequently feature what seems like a real word or a real light, and these statements could neither be ignored nor explained away as metaphors. (On all of this, including most of the quoted material below, see Wolfson, *Kalām*, 274-276, and *Repercussions*, 87-113.)

This interpretive tradition goes back, at least, to Philo, who read the statement in Exodus 19:19 about God's “voice” to mean that “At that time God wrought a miracle of a truly holy kind by bidding an invisible sound to be created in the air,” by which he meant an audible, articulate voice. But by “invisible” he meant that this voice was incorporeal. Nonetheless, the Mutazilites of the early *Kalām*, like Nazzam (c. 775 – c. 845), who were, perhaps influenced by Philo, made his incorporeal “voice” into a physical body. As a Mutazilite, Nazzam argued that this voice was created rather than eternal, thereby distinguishing it from the incarnated “Word” of the Christians. He wrote, stressing both the physicality and the createdness of this voice, that “The Word of the Creator is a body, and this body is a sound which is articulate, composite, audible, and it is the work of God and His creation” (*Kalām*, 274).

This was precisely the view of Saadia Gaon (882-942), who said, “The real meaning of the term ‘speech’ (*al kaul : ha-dibbur*) implied in this expression (‘The Lord spoke’) is that God created a word (*kalām : dibbur*) which he conveyed through the medium of the air to the hearing of the prophet and the people” (*Emunot v'Deot*, 2:12, 128, Rosenblatt, Yale 1976, cf., *Comm. on Sefer Yetzira*, 4:1). Saadia claimed that when this voice is

created, a corporeal light is also created:

“God has a special light which He creates and makes manifest to the prophets in order that they may infer therefrom that it is a prophetic communication emanating from God that they hear. When one of them sees this light he says, ‘I have seen the Glory of the Lord’...When they beheld this light they were unable to look upon it on account of its power and brilliance...”

Moses asked for divine aid to see this light (“the Glory”), but God covered him “until the first rays of this light had passed, because the greatest strength of every radiant body is contained in its initial approach.” After that, according to Saadia, God removed the covering so that Moses could see “the back of the light” (Rosenblatt, 130).

Yehuda Halevi (1075-1141) agreed, though he entertained a slight reservation. Still, he refused to make the “word” a symbol for will or intention, but accepted that it was a real word or sound. “We do not know how the [divine] intention became corporealized so that it became a word which struck our ear....so that the air which touched the prophet’s ear assumed the form of sounds which conveyed the matters to be communicated by God to the prophet and the people.” He immediately covers himself by making this reservation, “I do not maintain that this is exactly how these things occurred; the problem is, no doubt, too deep for me to fathom” (*Kuzari*, 1:89 and 1:91, p. 63, Hirschfeld trans., Schocken 1971). But this reservation did not stop him from saying that God “adapted the air to giving the sound of the Ten Commandments and formed the writing engraved on the tables” (2:6, p. 87). He even dresses it in scientific language, “The Glory of God is that *fine substance* (*ha-guf ha-dak*) which follows the will of God, assuming any form God wishes to show the prophet....including the Glory which the prophet’s eye could bear” (4:3, p. 211).

Bakhyia ibn Pakuda (c. 1050- c. 1120) wisely steered clear of this discussion, merely referring his readers to Saadia’s writings (*Hovot*, 1:10, v.1, 129, Feldheim 1996). Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1164) rejects the whole idea. He explains that the “voice” does not refer to a corporeal voice but to “the true speech of which the speech of the mouth is a likeness.” Ibn Ezra’s *dibbur* is not a created word in the air, but an intellectual “true speech.” It is an entirely internal realization, which God causes the prophet to discover by his own reason (*Repercussions*, 106-107. Strongly *contra*: Isaac Husic, *A History of Jewish Philosophy*, 191, JPS, 1944).

Maimonides made a number of statements more or less directed to this subject, some of which I have canvassed below, though there are undoubtedly more. They replicate the positions of his predecessors, but it is hard to say which he adopts.

In Mishna Torah, *Ysodei* 8:3, Maimonides makes a statement that appears to support the idea of a created word heard by physical ears. Attacking false prophets who would change the Torah, he said:

“But with our eyes we saw, and with our ears we heard the divine voice even as he (the claimant to prophecy) also heard it (*ele b’eineinu raionua u’v’azinu shmanua kmo sh’shma hu*). To what may this be compared? To persons testifying in the presence of a man concerning an incident, which he saw with his own eyes, and [they are] denying that it took place as he saw it. He will surely not accept their statement, but will be convinced that they are false witnesses.” (This is essentially the same result as in Guide 2:33: “The Israelites heard, on that occasion, a certain sound...” In Commentary on the Mishnah, *Sota*, 7:42, 8:41, the “voice” is in Hebrew.)

Despite all this, while Maimonides’ statement in our chapter carefully acknowledges the positions of his great rabbinic predecessors, he does not commit to any of them. He says:

“The two terms (*amar* and *dibbur*), when applied to God, can only have one of the two last-mentioned significations, viz., he wills and he desires, or he thinks, and there is no difference whether the divine thought became known to man by means of an actual voice (*b’kol nivra*), or by one of those kinds of

inspiration (*m'darkhei navua*) which I shall explain further on (Guide 2:38). We must not suppose that in speaking God employed voice or sound (*b'otot v'kol*), or that He has a soul (*baal nefesh*) in which the thoughts reside (*sh'ykhaku ha-inyanim b'nafsho*), and that these thoughts are things superadded to His essence (*nosef al atzmuto*); but we ascribe and attribute to Him thoughts in the same manner as we ascribe to Him any other attributes (*k'yakhas kol ha-pa'ulot*)."

When Maimonides said "there is no difference" whether the created voice or some other kind of prophetic inspiration made the divine will known to the prophet, he countenances both the Saadia/Halevi created voice and ibn Ezra's opposed "true" intellectual "speech" without deciding against either well established position. God, evidently, could do either, and since Maimonides did not have scientific proof against the notion of the physical *dibbur*, he was unwilling to deny its existence. His main concern, in any event, was to destroy the notion that this "word" is a pre-eternal Logos existing with God ("that He has a soul in which the thoughts reside" as forms inscribed therein).

Obviously, God, who is incorporeal, had not "employed (physical) voice or sound," but that statement should not be taken as a rejection of Saadia's claim that He could create such a physical voice or light, which the prophets call "Glory." On several previous occasions, Maimonides says that if you believe this, it is an acceptable belief, which I do not interpret as a note of disapproval. I think he meant exactly what he says: he acknowledges the views of his sophisticated predecessors but does not declare his own mind on the subject.

Still, in Guide 2:45, where he carefully distinguishes the forms of non-Mosaic prophecy into eleven categories, all of the visionary and auditory phenomena he lists are dreams and visions, not physical sense data.

The strongest statement of Maimonides' view on the issue may be in Guide 1:5, but even this is not very clear.

Guide 1:5 is the continuation of 1:4, which is the lexical chapter for several words meaning "sight," *ra'a*, *hibit*, and *khaza*. He held that these words have a literal meaning of visual sight, as well as a figurative meaning of intellectual comprehension. In 1:5, he condemned the Elders of Israel for interpreting a vision of the throne of God in a corporeal manner, when they should have recognized it as a purely intellectual demonstration of the noetic forces behind creation (the sapphire bricks should have been taken as the *materia prima*). His conclusion was that "wherever, in a similar connection, any one of the three verbs mentioned above occurs, it has reference to intellectual perception, not to the sensation of sight by the eye: for God is not a being to be perceived by the eye."

Nonetheless:

"It will do no harm (*ayn nizek b'kakh*), however, if those who fall short of attaining that degree toward which we endeavor to raise him (Friedlander note 2, p. 47; *ekhad m'meuti ha-hasaga sh'lo l'hagia l'draga zu sh'anu rotzim l'alot elea*) should refer all the words in question to sensuous perception (*hasagot hushim*), to seeing lights created [for the purpose], angels, or similar beings."

On its face, Maimonides' "those who fall short" seems like a direct condemnation of the Saadia/Halevi view of the created light and the created voice. Kafih comments:

"This (passage) refers to the high intellectual level which merits seeing this vision, where the seer abstracts the content of the vision from that which was visually sensed, recognizing that the sensual content was the created light, which he merited to see. It appears to me that Maimonides' intent in these remarks (when he referred to 'those who fall short...') was directed to what Saadia Gaon had written in *Emunot* 2:10 and 2:12.... but that this was no defect in belief since (by lights and angels) there is no physicality conceived about God (*sh'ayn ha-gashma klapei maala*); nonetheless, we understand more than those on this lower level." (Notes 31-32, p. 24, my trans.)

I think Kafih's interpretation is correct as far as it goes, but to better understand Maimonides we have to recognize that he is really saying two things. The first is that it is impermissible to relate any sensation or sense object to God. Second, we may take literally any sensual description of angels or created lights in scripture, since they are not directly about God. We, who have read the Guide to this point, should be able to understand that these created entities represent the action of the active intellect as translated by our imagination. Additionally, we should grasp that certain types of apparently sensed phenomena, such as the people "seeing" "thunder" at Sinai (Exodus 20:18) must obviously refer to intellectual perception, since sound cannot be seen (Guide 1:46).

Nonetheless, in Guide 1:21, which I have described as the hidden lexical chapter on *kol* (voice/sound), Maimonides does note the possible existence of a physical *kol ha-nivra* in carefully reserved language:

"Or, again, you may believe that there was, in addition, an apprehension due to the (physical) sense of hearing; that which 'passed before his face' (Exodus 34:6) being the voice which is likewise indubitably a created thing. *Choose whatever opinion you wish*, inasmuch as our *only* purpose is....(to show that) God...is not a body and it is not permitted to ascribe motion to Him." (Pines' trans., p. 51, my emph.)

Thus, again, Maimonides carefully avoids affirming a physical *dibbur ha-nivra*. He does this because it is a distraction from the point he wants to make about the created character of the imaginative visions of the prophets, that those visions should be understood on the abstract level. Nonetheless, he does not entirely reject that such a miracle as a physical created utterance could have occurred, just as he refuses to reject the miracle of resurrection (*Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead*), or the miracle of creation *ex nihilo*.

A remarkable confirmation of his conservatism on this issue comes from his son, R. Abraham. Commenting on Exodus 19:19, "Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice (*b'kol*)":

"Our sages have concurred that this voice was created, but it is associated with Him, like the divine glory....Others have challenged this, saying, 'You believe that God spoke to Moshe without an intermediary (*emtsai*), and that this was the distinction between him and other prophets, as it says, *mouth to mouth* (Numbers 12:8) and *face to face* (Deuteronomy 5:4). But if the sound and words He used for communication were created, they certainly cannot stand alone; they need a physical entity to convey them, such as wind (*al yedei geshem nosei lo o ruakh o zulato*). If so, that physical entity (*ha-geshem nosei la-dibbur*) carrying the speech is a medium between God and Moshe, like the angel that mediates between God and the other prophets!' To answer this, I would need to enter a 'narrow strait' and boldly advance to a complex matter in which I am truly inadequate; it is a secret of the Torah. However, I cannot avoid providing some general principles (*rashei p'rakim*) about this: You should understand that when the message comes to a living being (i.e., an angel), it receives it in its spirit (*b'nafsho*) and then explains it to another (i.e., the prophet).... When we say that God spoke to Moshe without an intermediary, it means that although He spoke through a [created physical] medium (*bara oto ytalei bi'shat ha-dibbur b'geshem nosei lo*)...the [physical] medium (*she'oto ha-geshem*) does not possess its own spirit or intellect like an angel does. This explanation should suffice for a thoughtful person, but not for a fool, who should not be taught such a secret in any case." (*The Guide to Serving God*, 583-585, trans. Y. Wincelberg, with facing page Hebrew from Jud. Arabic. English parentheses are the translator's, brackets are mine, to emphasize how Rabbi Wincelberg softens the physicality of the "voice," which is readily apparent in the Hebrew. R. Abraham's main intent was to retain the notion of an un-ensouled "intermediary," to affirm that Moses had no "intermediary," all the while admitting that there had to be some miracle wind which brought the "voice" to him, a position he could not conceivably have taken had his father had a strong secret contrary position on this major passage from Exodus.)

In this period, before the *Zohar* sundered the unity of spiritual and cosmological perspectives, Maimonides shows, once again, that he remains an ancient rather than a modern thinker, not completely allegorizing the *dibbur ha-nivra* in the manner of Abraham Ibn Ezra's "true intellectual speech."

GUIDE 1:66 WHAT IS THE MIRACLE OF TORAH?

OVERVIEW: THE NATURAL LAW

““And the tables (tablets) were the work of God’ (Exodus 32:16), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called ‘the work of the Lord.’” (Guide 1:66)

This chapter is about the first set of tablets that Moses received on Sinai. More generally, the question should be, “What is the miracle of Torah?” This chapter explains what natural law is for Maimonides, and how he relates miracles and nature. In the course of our treatment, we will look at how Maimonides’ doctrine develops through his writings. We will also review some reactions to this doctrine, from his earliest students, through his ancient commentators, and conclude with Spinoza’s pantheistic departure from normative Judaism’s understanding of nature.

This chapter follows several chapters on the names of God and the word of God. In the last chapter, 1:65, Maimonides showed that when scripture refers to the “word” of God it means the divine will, by which God creates directly, without intermediaries. In our chapter, he takes this a step further, by showing that God also created the Torah by this divine will. The will is not a separate entity apart from God Himself.

The chapter is short, and, therefore, complicated. He announces at the outset that the tablets, which contain the Torah, are natural and not conventional, “the product of nature, not of art.” For Jews the distinction sounds odd. That is because Maimonides subjects the law of the Torah to philosophical categories, asking whether that law is man-made. If law is man-made, it is said to be *conventional (nomos)*, in that men legislate it. But religion denies that the Torah is made by man. Since it was not made by man, philosophers called it *natural law (dikaion physikon, δικαιοον φυσικον, ius or lex naturale)*, to distinguish it from conventional law.

This doctrine does not sit well with the Jewish view of Torah, since natural law is a doctrine that emerges from other nations’ consideration of their own law. Thomas Aquinas represents the situation well when he says that the natural law is “nothing else than the rational creature’s participation in the eternal law.” (*Summa Theologica, Prima Secundae Partis, Q91, Art.2, Obj. 3*) Natural law is the way other nations *conform* their laws to the positive inheritance that man and beast have from nature: i.e., self-preservation, parental affection, and so on. Biblical statements also influenced natural law theorists when they formed their idea of what nature wants from law. Nonetheless, natural law is uniquely the province of the “rational creature,” that is, it is the self-imposition of an autonomously determined standard.

The difference for the Jewish nation is that its source of law is prophetic revelation, not legislative or judicial decision. Specifically, it is Mosaic revelation. In general, there is no need to produce new law. Developments in Jewish law are interpretive or specific to local circumstance. The only exception is a later prophet’s extraordinary command, but even this “*horaat shaa*” is only an *emergency* decree. The prophet cannot change the Torah. The Rabbis never sought to produce new legislation in *conformance* with nature and nature’s God. So the natural law project struck Jews as irrelevant.

THE TORAH IS NATURAL?

Given this situation, and the fact that there was never a more accomplished student of Jewish law than Maimonides was, we must assess what he could mean by saying that the Torah is natural. The first point is clear; he denies that the Torah is the product of conventional human legislation or agreement.

The next point is not so clear. He seeks to prove, on biblical textual grounds alone, that when the Bible says something is “made” by God, it is a product of “nature.” He does this by employing the rule of “*gezera shaveh*,” an interpretive technique that proves the meaning of a word used in one place by the way it is used in another. Just as the “tables were the work of God,” so the plants, the animals, the winds, the rains, the cedars of Lebanon, and the heavens, are all called “the work of God.” Indeed, he stresses that the text says that God “planted” the cedars (Psalm 104:16), though everyone knows that the cedars were “planted” by dropping their own seed-cones (Shem Tov). For Maimonides it means that men did not plant the cedars. The implication is that the tablets are as much a divine creation as these commonalities of nature are. They all emerge from the nature of the world God created.

Maimonides then reminds us that when the Bible describes these creations as the “work” of God, it means the same thing as when it says that the “speech” of God creates them. We saw, in the last chapter, that ‘created by speech’ means created by the *will* of God. This will is just God himself, that is, God created them just by wanting them created. However, the Bible says that the “finger of God” carved the letters in the first set of tablets (Exodus 31:18). The Psalmist also states that the universe was created by the “finger” (Psalm 8:4), but he also says that it were created by the “word” (Psalm 33:6). This *gezera shaveh* proves that the “finger” is the same as the “word,” and it follows that God *willed* the creation of both. The upshot is that natural creation is willed creation.

DISPUTE WITH ONKELOS

Onkelos, who usually strives to avoid corporeal attribution to God, relents, and translates ‘finger of God’ into Aramaic (*ktivin b’etzbaa d’hashem*) literally. Maimonides disapprovingly interprets Onkelos to mean that this finger was a miraculously created instrument that God used to carve the stone. (Thus, Rashi to Talmud *Pesachim* 54a, referring to *Kiddushin* 21b, “the great awl,” *martzea ha-gadol*, see explanation of Mordechai Dov Rabinowitz, note 10, p. 184, in *Rambam L’am, Avot*, Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1995).

It is a beautiful picture. But it cannot be the reality, because God needs no instrument to create. It posits two miracles where only one is necessary.

Maimonides highlights two places where Onkelos instead translates to remove physical instrumentalities from God: Moses’ first encounter with Mount Moriah, and the account of his miraculous staff. In the case of Mount Moriah, Onkelos translates “mountain of God” as “the mountain where the glory of the Lord was revealed.” (Exodus 3:1). By replacing “mountain of God” with “glory of the Lord,” he obviates the need for God to have a mountain. This works, because (according to Maimonides), Moses did not begin to have unmediated, face to face, discussion with God until after the burning bush. The “glory” is, to use Wolfson’s phrase (see last chapter), a *created communicative word*, which mediates Moses’ encounter. Onkelos translates the “staff of God” (Exodus 4:20) as “the rod through which Moses did miracles *from before (min kedem)* the Lord.” This translation removes the need for God to have a staff. God did not need a miracle mountain or a miracle staff to produce His miracles.

Maimonides protests against Onkelos that, as he has shown, the ‘finger of God’ must mean the will of God. He then argues that since the creation of the cosmos is clearly a greater miracle than inscribing a stone, and since God did not need any instrument to create the cosmos, why would He need an instrument to create the lesser miracle of the tablets of the law? Onkelos should have translated ‘finger’ as ‘word’ (*memra*), as he did with the creation of the cosmos, to show that God produced neither the one nor the other with an intermediary. God creates by willing. It is only because Onkelos is confused about what the natural miracle of Torah is that he ascribes a ‘finger’ to God.

DISPUTE WITH CRESCAS

“I cannot see why Onkelos preferred this explanation (that God needed a miracle finger to engrave the tablets). It would have been more reasonable to say ‘written by the word of the Lord,’ in imitation of the verse ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.’ Or was the creation of the writing on the tables more difficult than the creation of the stars in the spheres? *ha'im nirei lakh mtziut ha-katav b'lukhot mufla yoter m'mitziut ha-kokhavim b'galgalim?*” (Guide 1:66)

Maimonides' attempted deduction from the spheres to the tablets is a form of Talmudic argument called *kal v'khomer*, i.e., “easy to hard.” Logicians call these *a fortiori* (“even more so”) or *a maiore ad minus* (“greater to lesser”) arguments.

I have always had difficulty with *kal v'khomer* arguments since I never know which is supposed to be the easy part. They rarely state what criterion they use. These are informal arguments because they are enthymematic, that is to say, incomplete arguments. For these reasons, Jewish law rejects the use of *kal v'khomer* arguments to secure criminal convictions (*ayn onshin min ha-din*). Maimonides brief and sketchily drawn assertion provides an excellent example of the pitfalls of this kind of logic.

His claim seems to be that the miracle of the creation of the universe was more difficult and miraculous than the divine carving of the tablets, and, so, since God used no instrument to fashion the universe, why would He need one to carve the tablets? Especially since the latter was a one-time local small-scale event irrespective of how wonderful it clearly was.

Crescas disputes the claim, contending that the miracle of the Torah was the greater miracle. He writes:

“It would be better to say that the writing on the tablets was more miraculous, since, before the encounter at Mount Sinai, few believed in the divine word. However, after hearing the word from God (at Sinai), according to His will, which [expressed itself through] the created voice (*dibbur ha-nivra*), it verified this belief. Thus this great conception was established, for on hearing the sound they (the Jews) understood His word, ‘When the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder’ (Exodus 19:19), and ‘The mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven’ (Deut. 4:11). For nothing like this could be possible without divine will, upon which God acted, as He desired, at the moment He desired. Moreover, it says ‘We have seen this day that God doth speak with man and he liveth’ (Deut. 5:19). This means that we grasped the true conception. In a similarly [miraculous] manner was the creation of the script on the tablets, which, it follows, we consider to be a greater miracle than the creation of the stars in the heavens. That is because the tablets came as a result of divine will and intent (in the moment), while, as we believe, the divine will and intent created the stars and the spheres in advance (*l'mafrea*).” (My trans.)

Crescas means that the cosmic creations, which are naturally regular, are less miraculous than the specific sudden occurrence type of miracle, such as the giving of the tables of the testimony. He wisely refrains, however, from drawing Onkelos' conclusion (according to Maimonides' *kal v'khomer*), that, being more miraculous, God required special means to create the writing, such as a miracle finger or awl.

Whatever the merits of both positions (which are quite unclear to me), our real question is how to judge the “natural” miracles as against the “unnatural” miracles. The answer is that we must first understand who Maimonides' real adversary was.

Consider that our chapter, Guide 1:66, is five chapters away from Maimonides' small treatise against the Kalām theology, 1:71-1:76. The Kalām had an atomistic, “occasionalist” conception of the universe, in which, at every moment, Allah miraculously recreated every atom. This dangerous but influential notion destroyed nature and

any possibility of a science of nature. His intent, therefore, was to refute Kalām theology by showing that even the “unnatural” miracles were in some sense natural. Crescas, by contrast, represents the conservative rabbinic reaction to Maimonides, which sought to escape foreign rationalistic doctrines that could lead believers astray.

For all of his naturalism, Maimonides never rejects “unnatural” miracles. Still, he always seeks to push even those miracles back to the creation week, to the Sabbath twilight (*beyn ha-shamashot*), in order to flee the notion that God changes at particular historical moments (Shem Tov).

Maimonides says, “This shows how generally it was assumed by our forefathers that the writing of the tables was produced in the same manner as the rest of the creation,” *k’shaar kol maaseh bereshit*. Just as the “heavens are the work of Your fingers,” that is, of the divine will, so the tablets written “with the finger of God” were created by the divine will.

By interesting contrast, Narboni, Efodi, and Shem Tov retreat to a reprehensibly scientific position, as follows. There allegedly exists on Sinai a type of agate, which, when split, displays the appearance of a bush, in Hebrew, *sneh*, and therefore this mountain on which Moses saw the burning bush is called *Sinai*. These stones can be split many times and continue to display the same image. I have also seen such stones, but I would not argue, as these ancient commentators do, that such stones can change to reveal different letters and come together naturally in the form of tablets of engraved testimony, as a miracle prepared, in advance, at the creation of the world.

THE SCIENCE OF MIRACLES

It still sounds strange to call the Torah “natural.” We generally understand the giving of the tablets and the Torah to be miracles. Does that contradict their being natural?

The question is how to categorize miracles. Maimonides wrote on the subject throughout his life. He refers at the end of our chapter to his early work, *Commentary on the Mishna, Avot* 5:6. Later, in *Guide* 2:29, he returns to the issue. Finally, in the *Letter on Resurrection*, his last work, he proposes his taxonomy of miracles. At each stage his understanding deepens, but his basic premises remain the same.

In the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides interprets the following Mishnaic text from *Avot*:

“Ten things were created on the eve of the Sabbath [of the first week of creation] at twilight, and these are they: [i] the mouth of the earth, [ii] the mouth of the well, [iii] the mouth of the donkey, [iv] the rainbow, [v] the manna, [vi] the rod [of Moses], [vii] the *shamir*, [viii] the letters (*ha-ketav*), [ix] the writing (*ha-mikhtav*), and [x] the tablets (*ha-lukhot*). Some say also the evil spirits, the grave of Moses, and the ram of Abraham our father. Some say also the tongs too, made with tongs.” (*Avot* 5:6, some editions 5:5)

Maimonides comments:

“The sages did not believe in the periodic change of the Divine Will. Rather, they believed that at the beginning of the fashioning of the phenomena, He instituted into nature (*sam ba’teva*) that through it there would be fashioned all that would be fashioned. Whether the phenomenon which would be fashioned would be frequent, namely, a natural phenomenon, or would be an infrequent change, namely, a sign (a miracle, “*nes*,” “*mofet*”), they are all equal. Therefore, they said that [at twilight] on the sixth day He instituted into the nature of the earth that Korakh and his company would sink [into it], and concerning the well, that it would bring forth the water, and concerning the donkey, that it would speak, and similarly for the rest. The *letters* (*ha-ketav*) refer to the Torah which was written before Him, may He be blessed...; and it was not made known how this was accomplished (*v’ain anakhnu yodiim heikh*), as it was said, ‘...and I will give you the tablets of stone...and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them’ (Exodus 24:2). The *writing* (*ha-mikhtav*) refers to the script that

was upon the tablets, as it said, ‘...and the writing was the writing of God engraved upon the tablets’ (Exodus 32:16). Perhaps you will say that since all the wonders *were instituted into the nature of those phenomena* (*husmoo b’tivei ha-davarim hem*) after the six days of creation, why then did He single out these ten? Know that He did not single them out in order to say that there is no other sign (miracle) which was instituted into the nature of the phenomena except these [on the eve of Sabbath]. However...the rest of the wonders and signs were instituted into the nature of the phenomena through which they were fashioned at the time they were fashioned [during the six days]. They stated, by way of illustration, that when the waters were parted on the second day, it was instituted into [their] nature that the Red Sea would be parted for Moses, and the Jordan for Joshua....When the sun was created on the fourth day, it was instituted into its nature that it would stand still at that certain time when Joshua would address it. Similarly for the rest of the wonders, except for these ten which were instituted into the nature of those phenomena [on the eve of Sabbath] at twilight.” (Trans. by Arthur David, *The Commentary to Mishnah Aboth* 5:6, New York, 1968, p. 100-101)

Neither God nor nature, His creation, ever will change. The miracles, which are extraordinary changes in nature, were already programmed into the system. The Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 5:5, supports his interpretation. It states that God made “a stipulation” (*tennai*) with the Red Sea at creation to divide before the Israelites, and further stipulations with nature to support the other miracles that Maimonides listed. Indeed, the Midrash indulges expansive language to support subsequent miracles, saying, “Not with the sea alone did God make a stipulation, but with everything which was created in the six days of creation” (*lo im ha-yam b’levad ha-tana hkb”h, ele im kol ma sh’nivra b’sheset ymei bereshit*).

What is the distinction between these two types of miracles inserted by God in nature? R. Yosef ibn Aknin (c. 1150–1220, philosopher, poet, younger contemporary and likely student of Maimonides) explains:

“The distinction between these ten miracles created on the [eve of the Sabbath] at twilight of the first week of creation, from the rest of the nature altering miracles that [were inserted in nature] at the time of creation [during the first six days], is that the latter were accomplished through *the intercession of an intermediary* (*shaliakh*). Examples are the plagues of Egypt and the division of the Red Sea at the hand of Moses. The same is the case with the rest of the miracles performed by the prophets in order to foster belief in God and in the prophecy of the prophets that He has sent. Not so these ten that God created at twilight. And, specifically, why at twilight? To increase their importance (*l’godel khashivotam*).” (My trans. from *Sefer Musar*, of Ibn Aknin, 154, quoted by Rabinowitz, in *Rambam L’am, Perush L’Masekhet Avot*, 175, note 2)

He distinguishes the two types of miracles based on whether God accomplished them directly, not on whether one is, in any sense, more natural than another is.

In Guide 2:29 Maimonides states his doctrine, as he understood it from the Midrash:

“When I, however, said that ‘no prophet ever announced a permanent change of any of Nature’s properties,’ *I intended to except miracles* (Kafih: *mtokh zhirut b’nisim*, Schwarz: *zeh kdei l’hishamer mpnei nisim*; Pines: “merely to be cautious with regard to miracles.” the meaning is uncertain). For although the rod was turned into a serpent, the water into blood, the pure and noble hand into a leprous one, without the existence of any natural cause that could effect these or similar phenomena, these changes were *not permanent*, they have not become a physical property. On the contrary [our sages say], *‘the Universe since continues its regular course’* (*olam k’minhago holekh*, Talmud, *Avoda Zara* 54b). This is my opinion; this should be our belief. Our Sages, however, said very strange things as regards miracles: they are found in *Bereshit Rabba*, and in *Midrash Koheleth*, namely, that the miracles are to some extent also natural: for they say, when God created the universe with its present physical properties, He made it part of these properties, that they should produce certain miracles at certain times. The sign of

a prophet consisted in the fact that God told him to declare when a certain thing will take place, but the thing itself was effected according to the fixed laws of Nature... [It is] impossible that there should be a change in the laws of Nature, or a change in the will of God [as regards the physical properties of things] after they have once been established.” (He then quotes in full the section from *Genesis Rabbah* 5:5 about God’s “stipulation” with nature.)

Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, New York, 1964 (orig. 1933 German), p. 170, thinks that when Maimonides says “I intended to except miracles” that “Maimonides no longer seems to maintain this extreme position, which would exclude any interference of God in the order of nature.” Still, he admits, these “eruptions, however, are not conceived as a subsequent suspension of the natural order but as part of the overall divine plan...” In a footnote, he admits it is “difficult to determine ...whether Maimonides maintains his view.”

With due respect to this great teacher, I cannot see the Guide passage as other than a deepening of Maimonides’ views, since apart from the “except” clause, he still maintains that God willed the miracles in the original creation plan. The critical point is that God is so radically independent of time that it is an irrelevant consideration for Him. God wants the world as it is, sown, so to speak, with its miracles and its prophets who learn from God when they will occur.

LETTER ON RESURRECTION

Maimonides had not yet revealed his science of miracles, although he began to lay the foundation for it in these works. He completed his account in the *Letter on Resurrection*. His taxonomy of miracles in the *Letter* is one of his most important and interesting statements. In chapter 10, he works out the rules for the two types of miracles, the supernatural miracles and the natural miracles:

1. SUPERNATURAL MIRACLES

- These occurrences are not possible in the normal course of nature, and so Maimonides classified them as “supernatural miracles.”
- *Impermanency*: The touchstone of their non-natural character is that they are impermanent. In Guide 2:29 Maimonides interprets “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) to mean that all things under the sun, that is, all the things of nature, are permanent. An occurrence out of the normal course of nature is impermanent, and is a supernatural miracle. God placed these supernatural miracles in nature at creation, and so they are, in that sense “natural,” although he called them “supernatural” (*ha-nimnaim ba-teva*, see *Rambam L’am, Iggerot*, 389).
- Examples: The writing on the first set of tablets, Moses staff; Korakh’s ingestion by the earth.

2. NATURAL (POSSIBLE) MIRACLES

- All of these are occurrences that are possible (*efsharim*) within the normal course of nature.
- *Despite their being “possible,” there must also be one of three specific conditions to qualify as “natural miracles:”*
 1. They occur at a specific time; or,
 2. They are rare, since they occur in connection with a specific place, nation or severity (“rare” is not the same as “impermanent”: the supernatural miracles are one-off events); or,
 3. They are permanent.
- Examples:
 - Splitting of the altar of Jeroboam. Kings 1:13:3. (example of 1 above.)
 - Plagues of locusts, hail and pestilence (together) in Egypt. (example of 2)
 - Samuel’s rainmaking. Samuel 1:12:17-18. (example of 2)
 - The greatest miracle: The blessings and curses of the Jews. Lev. 26, and Deut. 28. (example of 3)

The context of this discussion is the future miracle of the bodily resurrection of the dead. Some had accused Maimonides of abandoning this belief, despite his clear ruling in *Commentary on the Mishnah (Sanhedrin, in The Thirteen Principles of Judaism)*, to the contrary. He proceeds in the *Letter on Resurrection* to reject the misreadings of these critics, heaping scorn on them. Still, he admits, despite his belief in resurrection, that he has no idea how it will occur. Nobody knows. Resurrection is a *supernatural* miracle; therefore, it is *impermanent*. It will occur once, and that is all anyone will ever know of it.

There is a greater miracle than the miracle of resurrection. The Torah prescribes the very life of the Jew. It sets forth the blessings and curses which will occur in nature if he performs the commandments or violates them. It is the *permanent* fact of his life, and is therefore the greatest miracle of all. It is the explanation for history's unique treatment of the Jews.

How does this fit with Ibn Aknin's distinction, above, between miracles of the twilight of the first Sabbath that God directly creates, and those of the six other days of creation that require an intermediary? God directly creates the first tablets of the Torah, a one-time manifestation, a supernatural miracle of the twilight. Despite the fact that Moses broke them, the supernal Torah endures. Moses then becomes the intermediary for the natural miracle, the *permanent* miracle of the second set of tablets. It is permanent because the Torah permanently imposes its special providence for the Jewish people, including its blessings and curses. This natural miracle, according to Maimonides in the *Letter on Resurrection* and elsewhere, is more important than the supernatural miracles.

What we should learn is that the *natural* miracles are the most important ones. While everyone else and everything else proceeds according to their nature, history absolutely changes for the Jew in accord with his fidelity to Torah, for Torah is his nature. It is a *natural miracle* since the facts of Jewish history are indeed *possible*, therefore natural. Because the iron logic of that history's connection to the *mitzvah* system links his personal and historical fate to his choices, it is miraculous. It is miraculous despite its being natural, since science will never discover its hidden mechanism.

The *natural* miracle of the Torah is greater than the *supernatural* miracle of the resurrection. My knowledge or ignorance of the details of the resurrection, a *supernatural impermanent* event, a new thing under the sun, may bear some relation to how I live my life. Nonetheless, my knowledge of the Torah is knowledge of my own nature, and I act against that nature at my risk.

DEUS SIVE NATURA

A danger lurks in this rational systematization of God's miraculous work.

The identification of God and nature allusively suggested by Maimonides' opening sentence, "all natural things are called 'the work of the Lord,'" reflected Midrashic and Talmudic trends, and also follows from such hints in Genesis as the multiple recurrence of the name *Elohim* in the creation of nature. It is a commonplace of Jewish tradition to gematrically identify nature and God, *ha-teva* and *elohim* (the letters of each term add to 86). *Teva* means "to sink.... to coin (in which the impression is sunk in metal), shape," semantically moving from "stamp" to "nature" (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 518, 519). Jews terminologically resolved their discomfort with the Greek notion of a lawful independent nature (*physis*, φύσις) by viewing nature as something that God shaped. "Nature" bears His stamp.

Moshe Idel, in "*Deus Sive Natura*—The Metamorphosis of a Dictum from Maimonides to Spinoza" (p. 87, in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Cohen and Levine, Kluwer, 2000), argues that our chapter is one of the links that led Spinoza to his notorious pantheistic identification of God and nature. If he is right, history ironically brought the concept of nature back to this Hellenic notion that Judaism had sought to escape.

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), argued that there was no distinction between God and the totality of real phenomena. By rejecting the idea that God is over and above a universe that He creates or moves, Spinoza thereby rejected divine transcendence. He goes so far as to make God a *material* cause. (Wolfson, *Spinoza*, 1924, ch. 9, 303. However, Wolfson modifies Spinoza’s anti-transcendentalism, calling it “transcendent immanent,” 323).

Spinoza makes the famously controversial claim that the whole is “God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*)”, essentially identifying them: “...the eternal and infinite Being, which we call God or Nature...” (*Ethica IV, Praef*). Idel charts the course of this transition from the Maimonidean position, which strongly emphasized divine transcendence, to Spinoza’s obliteration of transcendence:

“The Maimonidean understanding of the natural and the divine as two related and overlapping categories was engendered by the penetration of the Greek notion of spirituality, in our case, the source of the forms that represent the spiritual dimension of any creature. By applying the notion of total spirituality to God, and by envisioning the spiritual element in the natural realm as coming from above (In medieval Aristotelianism it was considered to stem from the Agent Intellect), the gap between the divine and the created was at least, in principle, bridged. Maimonides subscribed to the concept of the intermediary spiritual chain of the separate intellects that transmits the divine flow to the lower world, the last of these intellects functioning as the vicar of God in the mundane realm. Our emphasis on the affinity between the two realms, the divine and the natural, complicates the well-known assumption of the Maimonidean theology regarding the incomparability of God to any other being. This problem, which cannot be neglected, complicates the understanding of the topic divine-natural [*sic*] in Maimonides’ thought... Without wishing to minimize this crucial question, I will nevertheless present the texts that seem to follow the path alluded to by the hints of ‘the great eagle.’ It seems that the ultimate conclusion regarding this quandary was drawn by Spinoza in rejecting the principle of emanation that was so important for the medievals, thus allowing a simpler relationship between the natural and the divine. This daring idea of Spinoza was not presented in a clear fashion by any of his Jewish predecessors, no matter how they formulated the gematria which links God and nature.” (*ibid.*, 89, 90, parentheses are Idel’s)

I imagine that Maimonides’ astonished reaction to learning of “this daring idea of Spinoza” would have been to remind us sharply that when men substitute their own unguided thought for divine revelation they make themselves gods, which is precisely what the men of the enlightenment did.

GUIDE 1:67 AND HE RESTED

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY IS THIS CHAPTER HERE?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOD “RESTS” IN BIBLICAL TEXT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I REST MY CASE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE GRAMMATICAL ISSUE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maimonides decides to move beyond grammar.

PHILOSOPHY TRUMPS GRAMMAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yehuda Even-Shmuel explains this well:

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

GOD MADE SOULS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GUIDE 1:68 GOD'S MIND AND MAN'S MIND

God's way of thinking is no different from man's, except that God never stops thinking.

This radical doctrine is the core lesson of our chapter, Guide 1:68. It is the real meaning of the Torah's statement that God created man in His image. It overturns the extreme version of negative theology, which portrayed an unbridgeable distance between man and God, a position at odds with Maimonides' moderate negativism.

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, Maimonides teaches the philosophy of mind, as received by him from Aristotle through the Arabic philosophers Al-Fārābī (c.870-950), Avicenna (980-1037) and Ibn Bājjā (Latin: Avempage, 1095-1138). The material in Aristotle comes from the *Metaphysics* 12:7-9 and *De Anima* 3:4-7.

He had already treated the subject summarily in the *Mishneh Torah*:

“10. The Holy One, blessed be He, realizes His true being, and knows it as it is, not with a knowledge external to himself, as is our knowledge. For our knowledge and ourselves are separate. But, as for the Creator, blessed be He, His knowledge and His life are One, in all aspects, from every point of view, and however we conceive Unity. If the Creator lived as other living creatures live, and His knowledge were external to Himself, there would be a plurality of deities, namely, He Himself, His life, and His knowledge. This however, is not so. He is One in every aspect, from every angle, and in all ways in which unity is conceived. Hence the conclusion that God is the One who knows, is known, and is the knowledge of Himself (*hu ha-yodea v'hu ha-yadua v'hu ha-dea atzma*)—all these being One. This is beyond the power of speech to express, beyond the capacity of the ear to hear, and of the human mind to apprehend clearly. Scripture, accordingly says ‘By the life (*khey*) of Pharaoh’ (Genesis 42:15) and ‘By the life (*khey*) of thy soul’ (I Samuel 25:26), but *not* ‘By the life (*khey*) of the Lord.’ The phrase employed (by 1 Sam. 25:26) is ‘As the Lord liveth’ (*khay*; the passage reads: ‘as the Lord liveth, and by the life of thy soul,’ *khay ha-shem v'khey nafshekha*); because the Creator and His life are not dual, as is the case with the life of living bodies or of angels. Hence, too, God does not apprehend creatures and

know them because of them, as we know them, but He knows them because of Himself. Knowing Himself, He knows everything, for everything is attached to Him, in His Being.

11. What has been said on this topic in these two chapters is but a drop in the ocean, compared with what has to be elucidated on this subject. The exposition of all the principles alluded to in these two chapters forms the so-called *Maaseh Mercabah*, ‘Account of the Divine Chariot,’ *hu ha-nikra maaseh merkava.*” (*Ysodei Ha-Torah*, 2:10–11, Moses Hyamson translation, Yale, 1937.)

All of these themes occur in our chapter, except that he does not mention the hidden *Maaseh Merkava* character of this material. I will explain his daring esoteric notion in the course of this essay.

THE KNOWLEDGE, THE KNOWER, AND THE KNOWN

The divine mind is constantly in the act of comprehension, which is what it means to call it an “active intellect.” It is “active” or “actual” in that it is not potential with respect to any object of comprehension. There is nothing that it does not yet know.

We learned from Aristotle that the divine mind is thought thinking itself, and therefore it is the knowledge, the knower and the known (I prefer Kapakh’s *ha-dea*, *ha-yodea*, *ha-yadua* for the Judeo-Arabic אֵלֶּעֶקֶל וְאֵלֶּעֶאֶקֶל וְאֵלֶּמֶעֶקֶל; he explains in footnote 3 that it is from Maimonides’ own Hebrew in *Mishneh Torah*, quoted above.)

Since the divine mind must be one, without plurality, it follows that in God the knowledge, the knower and the known are one. There is no time when the divine mind is not in the act of comprehension. Or, to put it differently, the divine mind is the constant process of cognition.

In the *Mishneh Torah* extract quoted above, Maimonides noted how difficult it is to understand this. He therefore repeats it many times in our chapter, in many ways. At the end of the chapter, he acknowledges, “We have reiterated this idea in the present chapter because it is exceedingly abstruse.” Some think it is beyond the limits of human knowledge: “Even amongst those who imagine that they are wise, many find this subject difficult, and are of the opinion that it is impossible for the mind to grasp the truth of this proposition.”

He responds to this epistemological concern by reminding his reader that the subject was explained by the books of the “philosophers of religion” (*ha-filosofim ha-elohiim*), by which he probably means Aristotle, Al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja. These books are readily available, and he expects the reader to know them. These philosophers produced proofs for the unity of mind in its active state. Maimonides reprises several of those proofs here. It is, therefore, unacceptable “for those who imagine they are wise” to say that our limited intellects cannot comprehend the subject.

Another kind of response comes from “fools.” They think the phases of mind are just like corporeal things. They think the knowledge, the knower and the known are not different from “the white, the whitener, and the whitened.” Since the “the white, the whitener, and the whitened” cannot possibly be one thing, they contend that neither can the knowledge, the knower and the known be one thing. But these fools have failed to understand that division only occurs in corporeal bodies. The knowledge, the knower and the known are incorporeal, and cannot be multiple.

I wonder at the cleverness of the men that Maimonides calls fools. He probably had in mind the Muslim theologians of the Kalām, who thought that there was an independent Logos inliterated in the *Q’uran*. They contended that the Knower and His attribute of knowledge (Logos) were two separate beings. Most believed in the real existence of separate divine attributes. (See my treatment of Guide 1:9 for “inliteration”).

Yehuda Even-Shmuel portrays a more sophisticated version of the fools' argument. Since the material objects of the world are concrete and the process of cognition is abstract, the attempt to equate the concrete and the abstract in cognition is absurd. He writes, explaining:

“Since the cognition is purely abstract, it is difficult to conceive the identity of cognition and the object of cognition, since the object is a concrete existence and the cognition is merely an abstraction (*ha-sekheh ha-pashta b'alma*). When we tell a person who thinks this way that God is the knowledge, the knower and the known, he will take this as though you had said that the whitened, the whitener and the white were identical, by which he would mean that no unity exists with the abstract mind. For these fools rush to contradict the unity of knowledge, knower and known by this comparison to the whitened, the whitener and the white, and similar comparisons. They mean by this that if we were to accept the concept of the identity of the *whole* in the intellect, we would then have to reject it in concrete reality, and to see the whole as abstract [since the whole could only be abstract or concrete, and if it is entirely abstract, there would remain no concrete existences in the world].” (My trans. from Even-Shmuel's commentary on Guide 1:68, p. 358, brackets added).

This is typical of the sophistical arguments for which the Kalām were famous. Shem Tov examines a couple of similar fallacies and finds that they contain the same defect, which is the failure to grasp the process of abstraction (Shem Tov commentary, *ad loc.*, p. 102, column B). For example, I cognize Reuven's brown hair rather than Reuven himself. Rather than cognizing a substance, I have cognized one of its accidents, that is, not Reuven, but the color of his hair. Hair color is an accident, in that it is not a permanent defining requisite of Reuven. If, according to the doctrine of unity of mind, the intellect must identify with its object, the absurd result would be that an immaterial substance would become a corporeal accident. A similar argument has us cognizing things that go through the strictly corporeal process of generation and corruption. But would not the constantly active incorporeal intellect then become mortal; i.e., would it not become death, life, and death again? A better version of this argument, which Averroes attributed to a lost work of Al-Fārābī, goes as follows. Anything generated is corruptible. The human intellect is generated and therefore corruptible. But the active intellect is incorruptible, and anything which is incorruptible cannot be made corruptible. Therefore the active intellect cannot unite with the human intellect since it would then be made corruptible (reported by Herbert A. Davidson, “Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge, *Maimonidean Studies*, v. 3, 60).

As for the latter argument, Maimonides would not disagree insofar as the “human intellect” refers to the *potential* intellect, but would disagree insofar as the *acquired* intellect is concerned (See below, “The Debate on the Nature of the Potential Intellect”). As to the Kalām arguments, Shem Tov replies that their sophistries come from ignoring that the act of cognition is the *abstraction* of the universal form from the concrete individual object. The mind does not unite with hair color or corpses, but with the universal notions it abstracts from those concrete objects. It is only the abstraction that the intellect unites itself with, not the accidents or transient events in the life cycle of corporeal objects.

It is precisely in this way that our minds are like God's mind.

DIVINE AND HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

Maimonides proves the unity of the knowledge, the knower and the known in God by showing how that same unity exists in the mind of man. This is a *kal v'khomer (ad minori)* argument, proving the greater from the lesser. The man, Zaid (“Rueven” in Hebrew translations) has not yet “comprehended” a piece of wood. At this point, Zaid only potentially has the idea of the wood. With respect to the wood, his mind is “hylic,” that is, in a state of potentiality with respect to comprehension of the wood. The term “hylic” comes from a Greek word that at bottom means wood, signifying a matter which is not yet shaped. This mind, still in a state of potency, is only the *material* of a mind, the “material mind” or “hylic mind” (*ha-sekheh ha-hayulit*, אלעקל אלהיולאני).

The next step will be difficult. In the ancient philosophy, when I “comprehend” a chair, the idea I have of it is the chair itself, less its materiality. My mind becomes the chair. Or, more accurately, it becomes the formal notion of the chair. This commonplace of the ancient philosophy, was, apparently, no more obvious in Maimonides’ time than now, for he repeatedly explains it here.

Mental comprehension is similar to the “comprehension” of the imagination and of the sensory faculties. In this worldview, the formal notion of the chair, its “act,” was more real than your own chair. Your chair is not eternal, while the idea of it is.

The same is true of the work of the senses and of the imagination. The visual impression of the chair is more abstract, and, therefore, more real than the particular chair. Its image in your imagination is even more real than its visual image, since it can be more enduring than the visual impression left by the momentary sight of the chair.

At the top of this ladder of actualization is the formal notion of the chair, its universal chair-ness. Just as the cognition of the chair constitutes the mind, so also the sensory apprehension of the chair constitutes the sense of vision. The chair that we see is the chair itself existing in the sense faculty, for “the act of the sensible object and the act of the sensation are one and the same act” (*De Anima* 3:2 425b 25-26).

It is therefore no surprise that sense-data receives strong epistemological approval from Maimonides and the Aristotelians. They are not sense-data skeptics. Similarly, they are not skeptics, in the Kantian sense, of our ability to know the objects of knowledge. Maimonides’ doctrine, as announced in our chapter, had an impact on the history of philosophy when Solomon Maimon (1753-1800) used it to refute Kant’s principle that we could not know the thing-in-itself. He argued that the object of thoughts could not be outside consciousness unless they were unreal. (Kant responded that Maimon was the only one of his critics who really understood him).

The difference in what the mind comprehends and what the other senses comprehend is that the mind abstracts the *essence* of the object in the act of comprehension. By contrast, the imagination and the senses receive and abstract only the *image* of the chair, not its essential form.

We are what we do, therefore the mind is comprehension. This is because “whatever exists of necessity is in act” (*De Anima* 1:13 23a 21-26), meaning that the mind exists when it is comprehending. When Zaid comprehends the chair, his mind is the comprehension, the comprehension is the chair, and the mind is the chair. Three things become one in comprehension: 1) the knower, Zaid; 2) the knowledge, i.e., the idea of the chair; and 3) that which is known, i.e., the chair. At the moment of comprehension, the mind actualizes itself through the act of comprehension. The three are then one: the knowledge, the knower and the known. The material aspect of the chair is its least important aspect: it is its accidental, fluctuating and corruptible aspect. The real is the conjunction of idea, mind and essence: the knowledge, the knower and the known.

We could understand this by saying that the content of the mind is its store of comprehended essences, but it would be more accurate to say that these acquisitions *constitute* the mind, as it engages in its process of cognizing them.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAN’S MIND AND GOD’S MIND

In humans, “accidents” from outside the mind obstruct the move toward the oneness of the knowledge, the knower and the known. These frequent hindrances to comprehension leave the human mind in a state of potential comprehension only. These are accidents like sleep, confusion, lack of education, and so on. We call them accidents because they are not essential to the human mind and only characterize it from time to time. As the mind moves from potential cognition to actual cognition, it removes these external hindrances and recreates itself as the active intellect.

The difference between the human mind and the divine mind is that the divine mind is not affected by accidents. It is always active, never potential, and constantly comprehending. The divine mind is the constant unity of the knowledge, the knower and the known. The knowledge would appear to include the forms of all things, the totality that the philosophers call the Logos. But that Logos is merely an aspect of this unity of mind, not an eternal independent entity. There is nothing prior (*kodem*) to God. Nothing interferes with His unity.

The fascinating point is that this is the only difference that Maimonides finds between the structure of the mind of God and the structure of the mind of man. Only purely external accidents deprive human psychology of its equation to divine psychology.

Maimonides, surprisingly, does not assert the homonymity or equivocality of the term “intellect” when used in discussions of both divine and human psychology. Shlomo Pines, in the introduction to his translation of the Guide, *xcvii-xcviii*, noticed this, and also noticed that Maimonides was the first to put together Aristotelian material from the *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*, thereby identifying human with divine psychology:

“...It is evident that the statement that God cognizes, and the consequent assertions that He cognizes Himself, or Himself and the forms or essences assimilated to Himself, are positive statements and as such in contradiction with the spirit and tendency of negative theology. In the face of such statements any attempt to make out a case for God’s cognition having nothing except homonymy in common with man’s cognition may easily seem mere quibbling; and yet only such an attempt can satisfy negative theology. Avicenna tacitly leaves the question open, for he does not make a comparison and indicate an essential similarity between God’s knowledge and man’s. Other Arabic philosophers do not, as far as I am aware, do this either. Maimonides, on the other hand, goes out of his way to point out the similarity. In order to drive this home he shows the relatedness of two Aristotelian doctrines, which, as far as I know, nobody beforehand had regarded as closely connected. Nevertheless, Maimonides may be said to make his point.

“...Thus, as Maimonides explicitly states, man’s intellect manifests when actualized exactly the same kind of threefold identity as God’s. Obviously, this goes counter to negative theology. It may be recalled in this connection that in his Introduction to the Guide Maimonides states that for reasons given by him he deliberately inserted into this work contradictory theses (one false and one correct). Is this an instance of this didactic method, and if so, which of the two doctrines represents Maimonides’ real opinion? *Prima facie* either of them is admissible.

“I should add that, while it is pretty clear that these are the evident consequences of Maimonides’ view, it may be argued that he may have been guilty of that inconsistency of not having drawn these conclusions. In this particular case this point of view would amount to a grave and, in my opinion, very implausible accusation of muddle-headedness against Maimonides.”

I sympathize more with Marvin Fox’ *Interpreting Maimonides*, which discounts the frequent Straussian discovery of contradictions in the Guide (University Of Chicago Press, 1995). I do not think that Maimonides’ negative theology was so radical. I have frequently highlighted passages where he departs from negative theology. Maimonides only uses the negative theology to destroy anthropomorphic references in scripture, not for its own sake. It is true that there are passages in the Guide where the *via negativa* is taken by itself as a meditational technique to advance the understanding of God’s incorporeality, but Maimonides almost always qualified those passages with material tending away from divine nothingness or *Ayn Sof*. The truth is that, for him, there was no unbridgeable gap between man and God.

In this case, far from being a contradiction, I think it is the point of the chapter to declare the essential identity of divine and human psychology. But for the hindrances of the material world, mind is always just that—mind. That is what the unity of mind means. Perhaps we needed negative theology to clear obstructions that kept us from seeing this clearly.

HALAKHICALLY DRIVEN ESOTERICISM

More typically exemplary of Maimonides' esoteric strategy is his interjection:

“It is not our present intention to explain this subject (human psychology), but we will merely show that God alone, and none besides Him, is an intellect constantly in action...”

As though the whole point of the introduction of human psychology (about half the chapter!) was merely to act as an *ad minori* argument for the unity of divine psychology. But it was surely his “present intention” to discuss our minds. The demonstration of divine psychological unity was, after all, a well-known Aristotelian position, while the juxtaposition with human psychology was, as Pines rightly observes, unique. It was, therefore, of profound importance. Why would Maimonides want to conceal it, and why would he do so in such a transparent manner?

There is a hint of his thinking in the material quoted above from the *Mishneh Torah* 2:11, where he asserts the esoteric or *Maaseh Merkava* aspect of this material. This suggests that mass publication posed a halakhic problem: the problem of the prohibition of the public teaching of *Maaseh Merkava*, as expressed halakhically in the second chapter of Mishnah *Hagigah* (See my *Introduction I*, K, “The Flame of Knowledge.”)

What is importantly esoteric must be kept from the less inquiring student by the patent diversion that “It is not our present intention to explain this subject.” The more searching and therefore the more qualified student should notice the conflict between mental unity and hardcore negative theology.

The result, then, is almost the opposite of what Maimonides actually says. When he asserts that “it is not our present intention to explain” human psychology, it is, in fact, his entire intention. By demonstrating the unity of mind he points to a state of illumination which may be higher than that of “conjunction” (*ittiṣal*) with the active intellect. We must conceal this from the multitude who would take this to mean that each one of them is God. (But see my essay on Guide 1:21, Maimonides' cautious distinction between *ittiḥad* and *ittiṣal*).

An excellent brief discussion of this problematic is in *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, the very popular philosophic Robinson Crusoe of Abu Bakr Ibn Tufayl (c. 1105 – 1185; in Lenn Evan Goodman's masterful trans. and notes, Los Angeles, 1996). Ibn Tufayl's immediate predecessor, Ibn Bājja, famously asserted the doctrine of unity of mind, was himself criticized by his student for not taking the mystical consequences of the doctrine as far as they could go. Indeed, Ibn Bājja “censured...the pursuit of this joy.” But Ibn Tufayl saw no reason for living if he was to be prevented from pursuing this joy. Nonetheless, Ibn Tufayl recognized the danger that troubled his teacher, for he opens his fable with these cautions:

“If he be the sort whose mind has not been sharpened by intellectual pursuits, he may speak unwisely. Thus, in this state one said ‘Praise be to me, great am I!’ Another said, ‘I am the Truth’; another, ‘There is within this robe nothing but God!’”

Those concerns were serious enough to warrant concealment. Nonetheless, thinkers, including Maimonides and Ibn Tufayl, held out hope of a higher encounter. This goal inspired their labors.

(Ibn Bājja was Ibn Tufayl's teacher only in a sense, since he never met him, *Hayy*, 100. See on all the foregoing, *Hayy*, 95-98. Maimonides probably knew this famous contemporary Andalusian work. He, arguably, makes subtle reference to it at the beginning of Guide 1:51. He explicitly cites Ibn Bājja in Guide 1:74 as the source of the doctrine of unity of mind.)

The stage of negative theology clearly does not complete the journey of the seeker. Up to a point, we let the student stay at the level of negative theology. However, he must at last surpass it, since the reality of the divine realm is absolute positivity. But Maimonides demands that his student approach the palace with the intellectual

humility that Ibn Tufayl's unwise speakers did not possess. (On intellectual or educational humility, see Guide 1:33 and my treatment).

The *Maaseh Merkava* is the esoteric discussion of the work of providence, in which human and divine creativity coincide. They coincide because the structures of the human and divine mind are identical when the human mind is active. At that moment, it is in conjunction with the divine intellect, because thought is one. This is the radical message of the chapter.

THE DEBATE ON THE NATURE OF THE POTENTIAL INTELLECT

“Thus every intellect in *potentia* (*dea b'koakh*) and potential cognizable objects (*v'yadua b'koakh*) are two things. Moreover, everything that is in *potentia* must undoubtedly have a substratum supporting this potentiality (*hehkrakhi sh'yehei lo nosei ha-nusa oto ha-koakh*), such a substratum (*nosei*) as, for instance, man (*k'adam*). Thus there are three things: the man who supports that potentiality and who is the intellectually cognizing subject in *potentia*; the potentiality that is the intellect in *potentia*; and the thing apt to be intellectually cognized, which is the potentially cognizable object. In the example in question, this would be as if you said: the man, the hylic intellect (*v'ha-dea ha-hayulit*), and the form of the piece of wood, these being three separate notions. When, however, the intellect is realized in *actu* (*husga ha-dea b'poel*), the three notions become one.” (Pines' translation, Guide 1:68, p. 165)

Maimonides' commentators were attracted to his statement: “everything that is in *potentia* must undoubtedly have a substratum supporting this potentiality, such a substratum as, for instance, man.”

His view harkens back to one of the earliest of Aristotle's commentators, Alexander of Aphrodisias (c. 200 CE). Aristotle had said that the passive intellect (*nous pathetikos*) “is what it is by becoming all things” (*De Anima*, 3:5, 430 a10-25). Alexander understood this potential or hylic intellect as somehow mixed in or embodied in the person. Maimonides' assertion that the potential intellect requires a human substratum restates Alexander's view. It requires a human substratum because there can be no free-standing potentiality. Things may be potentially cognizable, but potentiality itself is not cognizable. The potential intellect, therefore, must be what Alexander would call a disposition of the body.

This was not a view commonly accepted by medieval intellectuals. Harry Wolfson explains how the problem arose:

“This general insistence among medieval philosophers upon the separability of soul from body, or at least upon the separability of certain faculties of the soul from body, irrespective of their views as to the nature of the soul itself, had its origin, I believe, in three sources: first, the Biblical account of the origin of the soul as an inbreathing from God in the human body, which in post-Biblical Judaism, and hence in Christianity, whether independently or under the influence of foreign ideas, developed into a dichotomy of soul and body; second, the Platonic view of the soul as something immaterial and eternal and distinct from body; third, the various attempts on the part of the commentators of Aristotle to make the rational faculty of the soul something separable from body—attempts which probably took rise in Aristotle's own statement that while ‘the soul . . . cannot be separated from the body . . . there is, however, no reason why some parts should not be separated’ (*De Anima* 2:1, 413a3-7). This attempt started with Themistius (c.390 CE), who considered the Aristotelian passive intellect (*nous pathetikos*) as something separable from body. An essentially similar, though much modified, view was held also by Averroes. It is against the latter [and like that of Alexander] that Thomas Aquinas maintains ‘that the possible intellect of man is not a separate substance’ (*Contra Gentiles*, 2:59). Even those [like Aquinas and Maimonides] who rejected this interpretation of the passive intellect [as wholly separate] have introduced between it and the active intellect the so-called acquired intellect ‘which is not a power inherent in the body but is separated from the body with a true separation’ (Guide 1:72). Though this acquired intellect is not mentioned in

Aristotle, it was used in medieval expositions of the Aristotelian psychology as an interpretation of his views, and it may be considered as an outgrowth of Aristotle's actual intellect (*nous energeia* or *entelecheia*), to which Spinoza has referred ... by the term *intellectus actu*. It would seem that it was in accordance with the general line of the development of discussions of this kind that among the Renaissance philosophers a distinction grew up between *spiritus* and *animus* or *mens* and that those who denied the separability of *spiritus* from body admitted the separability of *animus* or *mens* from body, the latter two terms corresponding on the whole to the Aristotelian rational faculty of the soul.

“Now, all these views as to the separability of the soul or of the intellect come into play in almost any discussions of the nature of the soul by mediaeval philosophers, whether writing in Arabic, Hebrew, or in Latin, and irrespective of what the formal definition of the soul may be. The insistence upon the separability of the soul was essential for them, if they wanted to give a rational explanation of immortality.” (*The Philosophy of Spinoza*, II, p. 54, Harvard, 1983. Brackets added.)

Wolfson's general point is that the medievals mostly accepted something like Themistius' view in order to save the notion of the immortality of the soul from Alexandrian push to make the soul a disposition of the body. However, Maimonides and Aquinas remained Alexandrians with respect to the nature of the potential intellect. This requires explanation.

The view of Themistius that Wolfson cited was itself a reaction against the view of Alexander. Alexander proposed a strict dichotomy between the active intellect, which he identified with God, and the potential intellect, which was a disposition of the body. Divine illumination causes the potential intellect to become an acquired intellect when actualized in the process of cognition. But this divine intervention must cease at death, because after the dissolution of the body, no intellect remains which could still become actualized. As Wolfson says, this Alexandrian view had to be opposed if the medieval philosophers wanted to provide an account of immortality. It is then all the more remarkable that Maimonides did not oppose his conception of the hylic intellect as a disposition of the body.

Themistius opposed Alexander's view by proposing a three-soul theory that kept faith with both his Socratic and Aristotelian heritages. On the one hand, he brought the active intellect down from heaven and made it part of the human soul, just as Aristotle had famously relocated the Plato's forms in the earthy universals. Themistius' *active* intellect was the perfect expression of the human form. Yet, for him, the merely potential intellect was also entirely separate and unmixed. Like any of the entirely intellectual existents in the noetic world of the Socratics, it could not be part of any material body. It was human, but not any particular human. Themistius' *potential* intellect was, therefore, unlike Alexander's, imperishable. Finally, there remained for Themistius what might be called a Cartesian soul, which manifests its individuality as it reflects upon its own ability to think. This was his third intellect, the *common* intellect (*koinon nous*). It was “mixed with the body, and perishable with it.”

These, then, were Themistius' three intellects: the actual, the potential, and the common. He relocated Alexander's potential intellect above the dispositions of the mortal body and left in its place a common intellect that was truly individual. He thereby saved the immortal soul, although this immortal soul was by no means an individual immortal soul.

Maimonides rejected Themistius' attempt to remove the potential intellect from its individual human substrate. The individual must be the necessary substrate for the potential intellect because there could be no such thing as an unattached potentiality.

The question then arises whether he subscribed to Alexander's rejection of any hope for the soul's immortality. Maimonides accepts the intermediate conception, the acquired intellect (*sekhel ha-nikna*, אלמסתפאד; see Guide 1:72; Friedlander note 3, p. 307; Efos, *Philosophic Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, 114). The acquired

intellect is a rung between his embodied potential intellect, and the wholly disembodied active intellect. The acquired intellect is immortal.

When one acquires his intellect, he breaks free of temporal constraints. His moment of illumination seems eternal and boundless. And it is his own personal illumination. This universal experience of inspiration in learning is the source of Maimonides' conception of our intellectual path.

WHAT ABOUT INDIVIDUAL IMMORTALITY?

If this account of Maimonides' psychology is correct, and his purpose was to bring man to this illumination, the question then arises whether this "moment" of immortality is itself individuated. Is there immortality for the individual soul?

While Maimonides does not directly discuss this point, his answer may flow from his assertion of the unity of mind when actualized. There is only one important exception to this doctrine: the divine intellect is always actualized, while our minds meet external material hindrances. The individual soul must work to defeat those hindrances. The result, as we will see, is that the individual soul labors in life to make itself more real after death.

On the one hand, Maimonides conceives a tighter relationship between the divine and human intellect than does either Alexander or Themistius. On the other, the material hindrances to their conjunction individuate the acquired intellect. Zaid may, therefore, be able to reach a higher level than Amr.

In this vein, in Guide 2:4, Maimonides calls our attention to the sense we have of our own illuminations:

"The existence of the [active intellect] is proved by the transition of our intellect from a state of potentiality to that of actuality, and by the same transition in the case of the forms of all transient beings. For whatever passes from potentiality into actuality, requires for that transition an external agent of the same kind as itself."

Here he begins with our own experience of actualization when we acquire our intellect. He then reasons that a separate active intellect must be the emanatory agent of that actualization of this intellectual potential. Every effect requires a more powerful cause of the same kind as itself. Who or what are these causes? Maimonides wants to reveal these intellectual mediators, and to determine how the soul can merge with them.

Maimonides discusses the existence of intellectual mediators in his next chapter, Guide 1:70, which begins the discussion of angelology. Read together with Guide 2:4 and Mishneh Torah, *Yodei Ha-Torah 2:7*, we learn that the active intellect is indeed an angel, the tenth level of angels (*ishim*).

What happens to the individual after death? *Some* individual souls rise to something approximating the level of this angel. Mishneh Torah, *Teshuva*, 8:2, maintains that the souls of the righteous exist in the "world to come" without their corporeal bodies, "like the ministering angels," *ha-olam ha-ba ain bo guf v'gvia ele nafshot ha-tzadikim b'lvad b'lo guf k'malakhei ha-sharet*. Sinners do not receive this reward. This distinction between saints and sinners shows that some individuation must occur among souls.

Maimonides expands on this in *Teshuva*, 8:3, explaining that this righteous soul is unaffected by death because death only affects physical things. Finally, in 8:8 he explains that this world-to-come exists in our world of life as much as it does in our world after death, since this bliss is not subject to temporality (*hu mitsui v'omed*).

What emerges is a doctrine of individuation in the acquisition of intellect by means of the individual struggle for righteousness.

At the very highest level of that ascent, when there is conjunction between active intellect and the living soul, this individuation itself falls away. This can happen in this world, in the living individual. For a moment, which appears to him as though it were timeless, he finds his world-to-come in this world. The limit case is the “kiss of death,” where the blissful soul shakes off its bodily restraint (see Guide 3:51). In the moment that he acquires his world-to-come his shard of a soul transforms into that which really is soul. “For the soul that remains after the death of man, is not the soul that lives in a man when he is born; the latter is a mere faculty, while that which has a separate existence after death, is a reality” (Guide 1:70).

Indeed, in Guide 1:74, Seventh Argument, he states that, at this lofty level, it is absurd to conceive of distinctions:

“You must bear in mind that those abstract beings which are neither bodies nor forces dwelling in bodies, and which in fact are ideals—are altogether incapable of being represented as a plurality unless some ideals be the cause of the existence of others, and can be distinguished from each other by the specific difference that some are the efficient cause and others the effect [see Mishneh Torah, *Ysodai* 2:6]: but that which remains of Zaid [after his death] is neither the cause nor the effect of that which is left of Amr, and therefore the souls of all the departed form only one being (*v'l'fikakh yehieh ha-kol ekhad b'mispar*) as has been explained by Ibn Bekr Ibn Al-Zaig (Ibn Bājja), and others who ventured to speak on these profound subjects.” (He refers to Ibn Bājja’s doctrine of the unity of mind. See Friedlander note 1, p. 353; Pines notes 10 and 11, p. 221, and his “Translator’s Introduction” *ciii – civ; Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, 95 – 98.)

In this passage Maimonides begins by invoking his principle that the only distinction among intellectual entities is that some are causes and some effects, but otherwise the souls of the righteous departed “are altogether incapable of being represented as a plurality,” because of Ibn Bājja’s principle of unity of mind. Otherwise, all distinctions flow from matter. When the soul abandons its earthen abode it returns to its home in this higher unity. The return to unity is the meaning of bliss. Nonetheless, it is a reward for the righteous individual who chooses to align his thought with divine thought.

Where does the individual bodily resurrection of the dead, Maimonides’ Thirteenth Principle of Faith, fit into this structure? He views this stage as a miraculous moment *prior* to the soul’s absorption into the “world to come.” Since it is miraculous, no explanation was required; “it is not obscure, nor difficult to comprehend.” It will be whatever it will be, and we will only know it when we see it. It is impossible to bring a proof to verify the truth of that impending miracle. Still, resurrection is not the ultimate stage in the soul’s journey, only a way-station (*Maamar Tehiyat ha-Metim, Treatise on Resurrection*, Ch. 7. The Principles of Faith in Commentary on the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 10:1).

Connecting all of this back to the debate between Alexander and Themistius on the nature of the potential intellect, we see that Maimonides arrays a number of stages as rungs on a ladder between the hylic embodied intellect and the fully separate active intellect. Perhaps each stage is a type of actualization (entelechy) of the one below it. We see something like this emerging in his eleven stages of non-Mosaic prophecy (Guide 2:45) and his ten levels of angels (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 2:7). Because of the ultimate unity of the structures of the divine and human mind, the individual human mind, in principle, can choose to ascend that ladder.

AGAINST THE MUTAKALLIMŪN

At the end of the chapter, Maimonides warns his student, against confusing intellection with imagination:

“I do not apprehend that the reader will confound intellectual comprehension with the representative faculty—with the reproduction of the material image in our imagination, since this work is designed only for those who have studied philosophy, and who know what has already been said on the soul and its faculties.”

In his *Eight Chapters*, he explains the problem of confounding thought with imagination, and its connection to the Kalām, to which he will devote chapters 1:71-76 of the Guide:

“The imagination is that faculty which retains impressions of things perceptible to the mind, after they have ceased to affect directly the senses which conceived them. This faculty, combining some of these impressions and differentiating among others, can construct new ideas which it has in fact never perceived, and which it could not possibly have perceived. For instance, one may imagine an iron ship floating in the air, or a man whose head reaches the heaven and whose feet rest on the earth, or an animal with a thousand eyes and many other similar impossibilities which the imagination may construct and endow with an existence that is fanciful. In this regard the *Mutakallimūn* (the Kalām) have fallen into grievous and pernicious error, as a result of which their false theories form the cornerstone of a sophisticated system which divides things into the necessary, the possible, the impossible; so that they believe, and have led others to believe, that all creations of the imagination are possible, not having in mind, as we have stated, that this faculty may attribute existence to that which cannot possibly exist.” (*Eight Chapters, Shemona Perakim*, ch. 2, in Twersky, *Maimonides Reader*, p. 364. I particularly like the part about the iron ship.)

As explained above, the senses, the imagination, and the mind are alike in that they comprehend, and in the act of comprehension, they become the object of comprehension. The difference between imagination and mind is the way they abstract objects from corporeality. The imagination retains the sensual image of the object perceived, not the essence of the object. Only the mind actualizes itself by abstracting the universal concept of that particular object. The difference between the act of the mind and the act of the imagination is the very greatest of differences. It can be the difference between truth and fantasy.

The reason that the Kalām confuse the act of the mind with the act of the imagination is that they believe God can make impossible things possible. For them, there was no impossible thing that the divine could not accomplish. But the impossible exists as a possibility only in the imagination, not in the mind, as Maimonides will prove in the upcoming chapters on the Kalām.

The structure of the comprehending mind of man is identical to the structure of the mind of God, but this does not mean that man may foist his imaginative fantasies upon the mind of God.

GUIDE 1:69 LIFE OF THE WORLDS

Overview

Maimonides' object in this group of chapters is to seize as much Aristotelian ground as possible. By showing how much of Aristotle's philosophy he agrees with, he reveals himself as an insider when, in Section Two of the Guide, he turns against Aristotle on the crux issue of creation.

He also takes this opportunity to contrast his sophisticated, effective approach with the creaky dogmatics of the Kalām theology. The upcoming chapters on Kalām theology fulfill a promise that Maimonides made to Rabbi Joseph in his prefatory epistle to the Guide:

“I noticed that you desired additional explanation, urging me to expound some metaphysical problems; to teach you the system of the *Mutakallemim* (the Kalām theologians); to tell you whether their arguments were based on logical proof; and if not, what their method was. I perceived that you had acquired some knowledge in those matters from others, and that you were perplexed and bewildered; yet you sought to find out a solution to your difficulty.”

Shem Tov and Narboni view our chapter in the context of the preceding chapter. Both chapters establish a kind of unified field theory; 1:68 announced the unity of mind, while 1:69 sets up the unity of divine causation, whereby God is the soul, cause and form of the world. All of this leads to the microcosmic/macrocosmic convergence of 1:72, such that, as we explain there, from The One only one thing comes.

Maimonides does not make the task of his readers easy in Chapter 69. He begins with an obscure discussion of distinctions that the Kalām made in the terminology of causation. He then sketches a rather abstract presentation of Aristotelian causation. He provides some relief with three simple examples that make the abstract account comprehensible. His last parable throws light on Maimonidean political philosophy.

Perhaps the reader should read the chapter inside out, starting with those examples, moving to the Aristotelian account, and then finally to the Kalām debate. But before we get to that debate we need some historical contextualization, so that we can put ourselves back in the 12th century with Maimonides and his Kalām opponents.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.”
—G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (1820), “Preface”

Philosophy makes its appearance in the Arab world upon the translation into Arabic of Greek and Roman texts. It reaches its fruition in the work of Ghazali (1058-1111) and Averroes (1126–1198) at a time when Arab civilization enters its decline.

An important part of that decline is the defeat of the philosophic impulse by the Asharite Kalām. In this latter period, we find Islam's mood more defensive and conservative than it was at the height of the Baghdad Abbasid and the Cordovan Umayyad Caliphates. It was a time of breakup and reconstitution of the several Caliphates of Maimonides' youth. New pressures arose from the Christians in the north and the Mongols to the east. New forces, like Saladin's Ayyubids, in the 1170's and 80's, displaced the Fatimids in Egypt. In this era of upheaval, Muslim traditionalists feared incipient heresy with the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy.

The Kalām theologians reacted against Aristotle’s rejection of divine volitional creation of the world by defending creation *ex nihilo*. Recognizing that philosophy based its position on its own logic, the Kalām rejected that logic. In the process, they also rejected Aristotelian physics. In its place, they substituted the weird mélange of atomism and incessant miraculous intervention that we now call “occasionalism.” It turned the miracle of creation from a unique event into the normal state of the universe.

It is important to keep this historical backdrop in mind when reading the next eight chapters.

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

1. CAUSATION IN GENERAL

Both Jerusalem and Athens recognized that there was regularity in the universe and sought an adequate explanation for it. The result, after many false starts, was the general theory of causation by means of four “causes.” We may better grasp these as four “because,” that is, four sciences that we still use to explain this regularity.

What they called the “material” cause is what we still use when we practice material science and particle physics: they tell us what makes up the things around us. The “efficient” cause is what we use when we try to discover the art or process that produced the regular phenomena we experience. The “formal” cause tells us what the thing becomes after its change, which we classify with various systems such as taxonomy or phylogenetics. Aristotle sometimes identifies that formal cause with the “final” cause, which is what the change was for, which we also try to explain when we engage in debates over evolution.

It is critical for us to recognize that the ancient philosophers believed in God as well as in the comprehensibility of the world. This religiously directed optimism is hard for us to recognize in our largely atheistic philosophers, who speak a different language than philosophers did in the classical period. At the end of my treatment of this chapter, I consider the direction this discussion takes in modern philosophy and its continuing relevance.

Three general terms for causation also apply to divine causation: *illa*, *siba*, and *poel*. The actual Arabic terms that Maimonides uses are Semitic cognates of these Hebrew terms. The philosophers called God “cause” and “principle,” *illa* and *siba*. These two terms, in context, meant the same thing. The philosophers preferred those terms because they *generically* represented the four Aristotelian causes.

These four causes were called the material, formal, efficient and purposive (teleological/final) causes, *ha-khomer*, *ha-tzur*, *ha-poel*, *v’ha-takhlit*. The philosophers thought that God was the ultimate cause, but insisted that He was also the ultimate formal, efficient and final cause. Maimonides emphatically agreed, *u’mahashkafoteihem asher aini kholek aleikhem*, identifying himself with them against the Kalām. The philosophers only refrained from calling God the material cause, *ha-khomer*, since they agreed with Maimonides that God is incorporeal.

Kalām Opposition to General Causation. When the philosophers used the term *poel*, they meant “effective cause,” which was the Aristotelian cause closest to what we modernly mean by “cause.” By contrast, the Kalām only called God “actualizer,” *poel*, by which they meant “creator.”

Since the Kalām only accepted direct causes, they eliminated teleological causation, which is the idea that anything actually has a purpose beyond the blind will of Allah. Since they did not believe in the potential/actual distinction, they deleted formal and material causes as well.

The Kalām chose not to understand the philosophers’ actual use of these three terms. They worried that calling God the *illa* and *siba* necessarily implied Aristotelian eternalism. They divided sharply between causation, which they did not accept, and divine creation. Their argument was that a cause must be simultaneous with its effect,

and that the effect is the necessary result or production of the cause (modern philosophers also commit this Kalām error).

Thus, if God “caused” the universe, it must exist *with* Him, necessarily and simultaneously. They thought that the philosophers chose their terminology to express that all things necessarily emanate eternally from God, on the analogy of light from the sun. This was the claim of medieval neo-Platonism. The Kalām believed that the Aristotelian quaternary causal structure necessarily led to the heresy of an eternal universe existing with God. They suspected that the philosophers’ insisted on using *siba* and *illa* (general causation), rather than *poel* (direct causation), in order to smuggle eternity and necessity into the account of creation.

The Kalām, by contrast, preferred using the term *poel* to express miraculous creation *ex nihilo*, on the assumption that the *poel* (unlike the *illa* and *siba*) always precedes its creation in existence. Their peculiar occasionalist physics eliminates all the Aristotelian causes except for the direct cause, which is God. God is the single effective cause of every existence in their universe, who miraculously recreates the existence of everything at every instant, *ex nihilo*.

Maimonides responded that we do not need to begin the debate over eternity or creation yet. He addresses this issue in Section Two of the Guide. This chapter, like the last, is really about *Maaseh ha-Merkavah*, i.e., providence; not about creation, but about the divine sustenance of the universe. That this chapter becomes involved in issues of creation is due only to Kalām confusion.

Causes Without Effects. Maimonides explains that *illa*, *siba*, and *poel* are equivalent in their use, in that none of these terms demands the simultaneity of cause and effect. These causes could precede their effects despite of what the Kalām otherwise imagined.

Causes precede their effects in two ways. First, a cause can be a potential cause. Thus, when the cause is still a potential cause it exists without its effect yet existing *in actu*. Second, an effect may be lacking, or non-existent, but if its cause is unhindered, it can produce the effect at any time.

The first instance, the case of the potential cause, cannot involve God since there is no potentiality associated with Him. The second instance, the non-existent effect, does involve God. Since God can at any moment do anything, He can always produce the universe, even from nothing. Nothing hinders or impedes His power to effectuate His will. Thus, in neither the first nor the second case is the effect simultaneous with its cause. This is true of the *illa* and *siba* as well as the *poel*, as it is true across all four of the Aristotelian causes.

To make the first case less abstract, he provides the down-to-earth example of a carpenter who has not yet built a house. At that point the pile of wood is only a potential house and he is only its potential builder, although he holds in mind the form of the house. When he has imposed that form on its matter, the house becomes *actual*, and he is the builder *in actu*. Only through the *action* of building does the material become an *actual* house. In this case, the builder is at different times a potential and an actual *poel*, as well as being both a potential and actual *illa* and *siba* (in that he also imposes the formal and final causes upon the house). In the state of actuality, the builder and the house exist *simultaneously* despite his being a *poel*, thus there is no advantage in that respect to the use of *poel* over *illa* and *siba* (*v'im khen lo hirvakhnu meiuma b'ha-adafet shem poel al shem illa v'siba*).

Crescas discusses this example in terms of the second case, that of the non-existent effect. The builder is not really the true creator of the house because he did not produce its originally non-existent materials. God, the remote cause, in whom nothing is *in potentia*, is its true creator, since even though the house and its materials were at one time non-existent, nothing hindered Him from creating them. Again, this is true whether we speak of the form (*tzur*) or purpose (*takhlit*) of those materials or whether we speak of them generically, as *illa* and *siba*.

The Kalām Reject Nature as an Illusion. Since the Kalām only believed in the direct effective cause (*poel*), they had no concept of potential and actual causes. Moreover, since they refused to accept the distinction between proximate and remote causation, they rejected the existence of intermediate causes. This led them to reject God’s system of nature, which is about such deferred intermediary processes.

In opposition to all this, the Kalām insisted that God is the only direct effective cause of each of the occasional occurrences in the universe, *at each moment*. These creations only last one moment (one “time-atom”). God miraculously reproduces and re-creates all effects from nothing. It only seems as if events are connected. Nature was, therefore, an illusion.

They rejected any effects that were simultaneous with their causes, fearing that, otherwise, they would have to admit that the world existed simultaneously with God as an eternal partner with Him. This “partnership” (*shirk, shituf*) was the very name of heresy. Such “partnership” excluded creation *ex nihilo*, and since they thought that general causation implied “partnership” they denied that God is a “cause” (*illa, siba*) but only “creator” (*poel*).

Indeed, as Shem Tov points out, they could not conceive of an eternal *poel*, since each direct action, even from God, was independent of every other action. This is the basic tenet of occasionalism: each action is a different occasion. They, therefore, would not have called the sun the efficient cause of its sunlight. (*ki mi sh’yipal tamid aino raui sh’yikra poel, ele mi sh’lo haya poel v’shav poel....ki ha-shemesh lo yikra poel ha-or l’fi daat elu.* Shem Tov, *ad loc.*, p. 102b). The Kalām would have it that God as *poel* recreated the sun’s rays *ex nihilo* in every moment. They suspected that the emanationists called God *illa* or *siba* rather than *poel* to make God an eternal involuntary source of emanation, just as the sun is an eternal involuntary source of light. The Kalām replied that Allah freely recreates the world at every moment *ex nihilo* as *poel*, not eternally emanating it out of hylic matter within Himself. (But see below, “The Convergence of Emanation and Creation Theories”.)

Responding to them, Maimonides explained that the terms *illa, siba*, and *poel* are equivalent. They imply nothing about the order of creation.

God is a special case. Suppose the universe is non-existent. Since no internal or external thing *hinders* or *predisposes* God’s creating it, He can create it *ex nihilo* (*v’shkhmo sh’anu korim oto poel, v’af al pi sh’paalo ne’eder, ho’il v’ain m’nia v’ain m’atzur l’fanav m’l’poel matai sh’yirtza*).

Schwarz, note 7, *ad loc.*, supposes that Maimonides’ statement here was an intentional “contradiction,” since by juxtaposing the example of the homebuilder with God’s creation, Maimonides implied that prior to creation the universe was only a *potential* universe. I do not agree. Maimonides had frequently rejected this emanationist idea elsewhere, since there is no potentiality in God. The point of the homebuilder example was not to show that the universe, like the house, was potential before creation. The point was to show that causes need not be simultaneous, and, further, that causes do not always necessitate their effects. Crescas saw this more clearly than Schwarz, when he suggested that God had to create the matter from which the house was constructed, not that this matter stood for some sort of hylic potentiality from which God constructed the universe.

We will see, however, as Maimonides examines the meaning each of the causes, that God is not precisely a “cause” in any of the senses described. In other words, when we say that God is the *effective* cause (*poel*), the *formal* cause (*tsur*), and the *final* cause (*takhlit*), this is only on the analogical level. He could not be the form or the efficient or even the final cause of His creations since He is so radically different from them; *nonetheless*, He is the cause of them all, in these three senses, since His creation would be nonexistent if He, as its ultimate cause, in all senses of the term, did not exist.

The inevitable conclusion is that this is another “late” lexical chapter, and “cause” is another homonymous term, different in meaning for God than for us. We might even call God the “fifth” cause, like Aristotle’s indefinable “fifth element.” Through His existence, all things exist (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei ha-Torah*, 1:1).

The point is that when we examine *any* of the terms used for causation, they are only *sometimes* simultaneous with their effects (*ki ha-poel efshar sh'ykadem et paalo*). That is why the terms “create” and “cause” are equivalent (*l'hashvot*) in their generality.

* * *

Having condemned the Kalām blunders in causation, Maimonides explains each of these three causes, *ha-poel*, *ha-tzur*, and *ha-takhlit*, beginning with the analogical sense in which we call God an effective or efficient cause.

2. EFFICIENT CAUSE (*POEL*)

The first of the four causes is the *poel*, the “creator, actualizer.” It is the one that philosophy termed the *efficient* cause.

All causes are either *proximate* or *remote*. The efficient cause we are most familiar with is the one proximate to its effect. These causes have causes, but this cannot go on indefinitely. The reason they do not go on indefinitely is that *an infinite causal series cannot be traversed*, *v'zei ma sh'lo ya'avur ad l'lo takhlit*. The explanation for this Aristotelian notion is that since the last effect in the chain had a specific cause, there must be a specific cause at the beginning of the chain. A cause must contain everything that comes about in its effect in the same or higher form. But if the chain is infinite, there is no possibility of ever reaching that ultimate cause (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1:2, 994a, 12:3 1070a1-5; *Physics* 8:5, 256a, 11-20; Descartes *Third Meditation*).

If you found this difficult, you are in good company. Herbert Davidson calls it “legerdemain.” Crescas argued against it. But we should try to grasp it, because of its centrality to the scientific thought of Maimonides' time. A brilliant modern Thomist, Peter Kreeft, provides a series of persuasive arguments for nontraversability (“The First Cause Argument,” available online). His strongest states:

“It is often asked why there can't be infinite regress, with no first being. Infinite regress is perfectly acceptable in mathematics: negative numbers go on to infinity just as positive numbers do. So why can't time be like the number series, with no highest number either negatively (no first in the past) or positively (no last in the future)? The answer is that real beings are not like numbers: they need causes, for the chain of real beings moves in one direction only, from past to future, and the future is caused by the past. Positive numbers are not caused by negative numbers. There is, in fact, a parallel in the number series for a first cause: the number one. If there were no first positive integer, no unit one, there could be no subsequent addition of units. Two is two ones, three is three ones, and so on. If there were no first, there could be no second or third.”

The variant I admire most is Kreeft's Book of Existence argument, which is also an argument for God:

“Suppose I tell you there is a book that explains everything you want explained. You want that book very much. You ask me whether I have it. I say no, I have to get it from my wife. Does she have it? No, she has to get it from a neighbor. Does he have it? No, he has to get it from his teacher, who has to get it. . . *et cetera, et cetera, ad infinitum*. No one actually has the book. In that case, you will never get it. However long or short the chain of book borrowers may be, you will get the book only if someone actually has it and does not have to borrow it. Well, existence is like that book. Existence is handed down the chain of causes, from cause to effect. If there is no first cause, no being who is eternal and self-sufficient, no being who has existence by his own nature and does not have to borrow it from someone else, then the gift of existence can never be passed down the chain to others, and no one will ever get it. But we did get it. We exist. We got the gift of existence from our causes, down the chain, and so did

every actual being in the universe, from atoms to archangels. Therefore there must be a first cause of existence, a God.”

The untraversability of the infinite was the sole reason that Aristotle needed God, the unmoved mover, at the beginning of all chains of causation. For this reason the major medieval spokesmen repeated the principle, including Saadia, Ibn Pakuda, Ha-Levi, Maimonides and, in Islam, Averroes. (Davidson, *Maimonides, The Man and His Works*, p. 358; Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, p. 492-493. Note, however, that both Maimonides and Aristotle would accept the possibility of an infinite succession as opposed to an infinite causation, see explanation in my essay on Guide 1:74).

At the apex of the chain of all causes is God, the ultimate cause. Maimonides now provides the second of his simple examples, in this case to depict the action of remote causes (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 8:5, 258a). If A causes B, and B causes C, this series cannot go on infinitely but must end at some point H. Under that analysis, it is correct to call A the effective cause of *both* B and H. We, therefore, call God the *cause* of all things, despite His being the remote or ultimate cause.

When Friedlander translates this last idea, he placed the word “cause” in quotes, registering the analogical sense that Maimonides meant. To say that A is the remote cause of H is not quite the same as saying that God is the effective cause of each of those effects. He is the effective cause of them in the analogical sense that He is the remote cause of them, as the unmoved mover who *wills* the effects of all causes. We cannot understand exactly how God is the *poel*, the effective cause of all the things in the world, since it is something that we are unable to see. *Poel* is, thus, a homonymous term.

This differs strikingly from the Kalām analysis: for them God was, at each and every moment, the direct cause of every effect. Since they did not believe in remote causes, they, therefore, did not believe that God created natural processes: nature was an illusion (as it is for modern philosophy in its empiricist or its post-modern modes).

3. FORMAL CAUSE (*TSUR*)

The problem presented by this section is the great variety of senses in which medieval thinkers understood the term “form.” Combing out these tangled strands of meaning is even harder. These include Platonic and Aristotelian form; corporeal and incorporeal form; and what I will call, respectively, “preparatory,” “existential,” “intellectual” and “emanational” form.

Preparatory Form. God is the *formal cause* of the universe. Every being subject to life and death is a combination of matter and form. Each being’s matter must be *prepared* to receive its form by a prior form, preceded by yet another form, but not indefinitely, since there could be no infinite regress. I call this sense “preparatory form.” At the end of the chain of preparatory forms, God is the ultimate sustaining principle of being.

There is a difference between the tight bonding of cause and effect when we spoke about agent-chains (*poel* chains) above, and, below, when we come to discuss teleological-chains (*takhlit* chains), which also seem tight. In the case of agent-chains, if there is any break in the chain, if there is no “b” between “a” and “c,” the last effect will not occur. Similarly, with teleological-chains, we can always proceed up the chain asking the purpose for each effect and the purpose for that purpose.

But with formal-chains (*tzur* chains) there seems to be a looser connection, a greater possibility for the chain to go in a different direction. That is because of this notion of *preparation* (*ha-meutedet, takhin*), by which the prior form prepares the matter of the composite object to receive a future form.

In other words, according to this account, the human form prepares the composite matter of Reuven through his life cycle to death and ultimately to dust. This dust is itself a new form, which will become the matter of yet a new composite form for which it has been “prepared.” The interplay of elemental forces may result in this dust preparing one type of body rather than another, a bird rather than a brick. In formal-chains the intermediate causes seem merely successive, not necessary.

Existential Form. There is, however, another way to look at form. Form is not just that which combines with matter. In another sense, form is the life giving principle of all things, just like the soul is the life giving principle, and we use the terms soul and form synonymously. Aristotle states that the soul is the first perfection of a material body, through which it lives as it does (*De Anima* 2:1, 412a29). The soul is thus the first form of the living being.

At the peak of the formal-chain, God is the form of all forms, not like the form of a physical body, but in the same analogical relation as a form to a body. Just as the body cannot exist without its form, so the universe cannot continue to exist without God. In this sense, the formal chain is tight, and to the extent that God designed it so, it is determinative and not merely successive. I call this sense of form the “existential form” to distinguish it from the “preparatory” form. The existential form maintains life, while the preparatory form looks beyond death to a new life.

Nothing endures without its form. This is true of any form, corporeal or incorporeal, and it is this that I mean by calling it the existential form. The cup would not survive the removal of its cylindrical shape (its “corporeal” form, below). Even with incorporeal forms, if you could extract the universal of cup-ness from the cup, there would be no cup. The analogical sense in which God is the existential form of the world is that without God the world ceases to exist, but God does not cease if the world ceases (*Mishneh Torah, Ysodei Ha-Torah* 1:1-3). That is precisely what Maimonides means when he calls God the *tsurat ha-turot*, i.e., the form of all forms, and *khey ha-olamim*, life of the worlds, that God as existential form of the world, is that “form” without which it could not endure. It is in this analogical sense of God as sustainer that we call God the formal cause of the universe.

In all this, Maimonides reminds us that his interest here is only in how God sustains the universe, not how He created it, “You need not trouble yourself now with the question whether the universe has been created by God, or whether, as the philosophers have assumed, it is eternal, co-existing with Him. You will find [in the pages of this treatise] full and instructive information on the subject.”

Corporeal and incorporeal form. The complication, not very clearly stated (and poorly understood by the commentators), is in the different historically generated senses of the term “form.” These senses derive from Aristotle’s debate with Plato. Aristotle took the Platonic forms from their noetic perch as the ideal patterns of their particular instances and instantiated them as the normal characteristics of those things, like the cylindrical shape of a cup. He distinguished “form” from his own term, “universal,” which is the essential definition of a thing. Thus, my “form” is my shape, while my “universal” is “rational animal,” *zoon logikon*.

Nonetheless, the Platonic forms as ideal patterns survived into medieval neo-Platonized Aristotelianism, assuming a new identity as the “incorporeal” forms (sometimes they are called “metaphysical forms”). The Aristotelian version, forms as shapes or characteristics, became the “corporeal” forms.

Maimonides states the difference between the *corporeal* forms, and the idea of God as *existential* form of the universe:

“...for he (Aristotle) treats of a form which is a physical, and not a purely intellectual one...When we call God the ultimate form of the universe, we do not use this term in the sense of form connected with substance, namely, as the form of that substance, as though God were the form of a material being.”

Moreover, God is not even the *incorporeal* form of things in the Platonic sense of their noetic pattern. In his system, Maimonides conferred that role upon the angels, not God. God is the form of the universe in the existential sense that He sustains all things in existence, not as their corporeal or incorporeal form, as those terms were understood.

The Muslim *falsifa* (philosophers) Avicenna, Algazali, and Averroes, took up the discussion of corporeal form as shapes or particular characteristics. Their debate concerned whether corporeal form refers to the bulk of a thing or to the dimensions of a thing. Avicenna, holding the view that it has to do with bulk or mass, wrote that it was a *predisposition to cohesion* (*hitdevekut*). Algazali called it *cohesion* itself (*devekut*). Averroes propounded the view, that became popular with successors such as Descartes, that incorporeal form was *dimensionality* as such, but not the particular dimensions of the particular object itself (*rakhakim* in Crescas and others, not *memadim*; Efron, *Phil. Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, 110. On all of this see Wolfson, *Crescas*, 579-590).

Nowadays, perhaps matter as mass fits our Einsteinian equation of mass and energy better than dimensionality, although in “string theory” we see dimensionality reemerging.

Tselem: the Intellectual Form. In Guide 1:1, Maimonides called this incorporeal form *tselem*, as in *b'tselem elokim bana oto*, man made in the “image” of God, to distinguish it from *toar*, the shape of a thing.

“This term (*toar*) is not at all applicable to God. The term *tselem*, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, viz., that which constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is; the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being. In man the ‘form’ is that constituent which gives him human perception: and on account of this intellectual perception the term *tselem* is employed in the sentences ‘In the *tselem* of God He created him’ (Gen. 1:27)... On this account, i.e., 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, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form.”

Here, by calling the intellect shared by man and God the true form of man, he said considerably more than that it provides man his existence. This *tselem* is a higher level than mere existential form. I call this “intellectual form.”

The intellectual form also seems to me to be different from and higher than the Aristotelian universal definition. While it is true that the term “rational” appears in the universal of man (“rational animal”), it is only what Maimonides elsewhere categorizes as “part of a definition” (Guide 1:52). Now he pushes beyond mere definition, treating man differently than other subjects of definitions, making him the “form and likeness of the Almighty.”

The form that he called Aristotelian, the *toar* (shape) is not the true form of man, just as in our chapter he says that the divine form of forms, *tsurat ha-tsurot*, is not a figure or shape. Read together with the previous chapter (Guide 1:68), we come to see that while God is the existential form of man, He has a special connection to man through the *tselem*, the incorporeal intellectual form that they share through the unity of mind. This is the intellectual form, also called the active intellect.

God and man are fundamentally different from all other things. Just as we cannot define God, man is ultimately not the subject of any definition or “part of a definition.” To put it another way, man can transcend all limits. That is why I think that this strand of meaning should have its own name, the “intellectual form.” Beyond being a rational animal, man can realize his intellect and conjoin with the active intellect, the mind he shares with God, *b'tselem elohim bara oto*.

Emanational Form. Maimonides’ interesting move is his concept that the *formal* sustenance of the universe (as opposed to its *ex nihilo* creation) is emanational. For that reason, I think it is appropriate to call this the

“emanational form” so that we can consider it separately from the other meanings of “form.” Thus, God is the ultimate form, and all *flows* from Him:

“It is through the existence of God that all things exist, and it is He who maintains their existence by that process which is called emanation (*v’hu kiumo b’inyan sh’mkhunim oto shefa*)....On that account God is called, in the sacred language, *khei ha-olamim*, ‘the life of the Universe.’”

Maimonides’ unique position is that God creates the universe from nothing, while its continued existence depends on divine emanation (See below, “The Convergence of Emanation and Creation Theories”). He does not explain exactly what is emanated, but the context seems to demand something like the Platonic instantiation of the noetic forms in their particular corporeal manifestations, which takes us back to where we started, the Platonic form.

“All things created have an order in themselves, and this begets the form that lets the universe resemble God.” (Dante, *Paradiso* 1:103, Robert and Jean Hollander trans.)

4. TELEOLOGICAL CAUSE OR PURPOSE (*TAKHLIT*)

Lastly, he regards God as the *final cause* or purpose of creation. All things have their purpose, but in the final analysis, they exist because God wants them to exist. Every purpose ultimately refers back to God’s will or intelligence at the apex of all the intermediate stages. This will or intelligence is nothing but God himself.

Teleological Chains. At every stage, we must ask the purpose of each purpose. They do not go on indefinitely. Maimonides gives his famous example of the purpose of a throne (*kisei*, אֵלֶּכְרֵס; cf. my treatment of 1:9, the lexical chapter on “throne”). Unsurprisingly, the next chapter, 1:70, is about the *Merkava*, the moving throne that moves all.

His example employs every child’s first intellectual game, but he pushes it to the sublime level. At first, we learn that the purpose of a throne is to elevate one above the ground. Why? To instill awe among the groundlings. Why? To obtain their obedience. Why? To keep them from hurting each other. Why? To maintain their best existence. Why? Because that is what God wants.

This is the ultimate answer. It is in this homonymous sense that God is the ultimate cause endowing the whole with purpose (*ha-takhlit ha-sofit shel ha-kol*).

Notice, once again, the difference when it comes to God. The answer to every other “why” in the throne example was specific, e.g., elevation, awe, obedience, and so on. But the ultimate teleological cause was just whatever God wanted, willed or decided. That, however, is an algebraic expression, a variable we will never know how to resolve.

Imitatio Dei. Maimonides now strongly contrasts the purpose for things from Aristotle’s view in a way he will not do in Guide 3:13, which is devoted to that issue. Aristotle held that each creature’s purpose is to achieve whatever perfection is attainable (entelechy), and, specifically for man, to achieve the happiness of the fulfillment of that perfection (eudemonia). In Guide 3:13, Maimonides replies that the purpose of God’s creatures is whatever He wants of them, as we said above. However, in a brief aside, he now says, differently, “it is the aim of everything to become, according to its faculties, *similar to God in perfection*” (*v’gam takhlit ha-kol l’hitdamut b’shlemuto k’fi ha-yakholet*).

Straussians should take note that Maimonides provides an explicit view of his political philosophy here, although it is one they might not view with sympathy. In the parable of the throne, we do see that the purpose of a ruler is to establish order so as to prevent the war of all against all. You could see this presaging a Hobbesian social contract to promote self-preservation, but Maimonides is clear that you must continue seeking the purpose at each stage, and that this is just a stage in that teleological chain. In other words, you must ask why self-preservation is

important and why we need order. Notice that self-preservation is not his highest level, however important that may be as an intermediate purpose. Above that is the preservation of the existents, *l'hatmid tekinot mtziutam*, which is more general and exalted than mere self-preservation. Nonetheless, the summit of all purposes is always what God wants.

Now we learn, in addition, that “it is the aim of everything” to imitate the ways of God. The result seems to be that the entire political order serves as a backdrop for man’s reach toward God. *Imitatio Dei* is intended not only on the level of the actions of the ruler, but even in the ethical conduct of the ruled; and, indeed, in every dimension of human existence our purpose must be to transcend whatever limits our encounter with God. Tracing back the teleological chain we not only find that God is the ultimate purpose of all the other purposes, but that, in the sense that we must imitate God, we find our own purpose as well.

The purpose of religion, then, is not to support politics; rather, the purpose of politics must be to support religion, since it is only through religion that we discover how to imitate God. Ultimately this imitation reaches its apex in our conjunction with the active intellect, *b'tselem elohim*.

DID GOD ABANDON THE UNIVERSE?

Maimonides’ analysis of causation shows that the philosophers combined the notions of creator, form and end in their account, which was, therefore, more complete than that of the Kalām theologians.

Maimonides provides a historical illustration for this. He points to an unnamed Kalām theologian, who was most radical in advancing God as creator (*poel*) but not cause (*illa/siba*). In his account, God created the universe, but it sustains itself naturally without His help: God is not the sustaining cause of the world. This is like the carpenter who dies but whose cabinet sustains itself without the carpenter’s help. God, according to this scholar, created the world but left it to develop on its own. Maimonides says that he:

“Would be right, if God were only the maker (*poel*) of the Universe, and if its permanent existence were not dependent on Him...(since) God, however, is Himself the form of the Universe (*tsurat ha-olam*), as we have already shown,...it is He who causes its continuance and permanency.”

Maimonides bases his argument on the premise that a being cannot exist without its form. This scholar, by contrast, only knows God as effective cause (*poel*), but not God as formal cause (*tsur*). The carpenter is only the effective cause of the cabinet, not its sustaining formal cause, which is either its shape or its cabinet-ness. Remove the form of the cabinet from the material of the cabinet and we have only unformed hylic matter and no cabinet. Since Maimonides’ Islamic scholar did not accept formal causes, he was forced to conclude that the existence of God was irrelevant to the continued existence of the world, as though God were like a carpenter. In the same way, for this scholar, after God created the universe it no longer required divine providence. God was not its existential form.

Wolfson identified this theologian as Mu’ammār b. ‘Abbad (d. 825. See: *Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy*, Harvard, 1979, pp. 188-189; *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 560-561). We could only call Mu’ammār a “Mutakallimūn” in its broadest definition as a religious thinker. Actually, he was one of the early Mutazilites, who contended that reason was supreme over faith. Of them, C. A. Qadir writes:

“Through their rationalistic attempts, they were successful to some extent in clearing the Augean stable of superstitious and misconceived ideas that were prevalent among the Muslim community of their time. But due to the extreme views of some Mutazilites [like Mu’ammār] and the folly of some Muslim rulers who enforced Mutazilite doctrines by force and punished severely those who deviated from them, the rationalistic tendency advocated and exhibited by the Mutazilites in their thinking did not transform itself

into a movement, and soon a powerful reaction set in—in the form of Asharism—which is continued today in the Islamic world.” (p. 54, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World*, London, 1988)

According to Wolfson, Mu’ammār was an early critic of Kalām occasionalism and its rejection of natural processes. For them “nature” was an illusory string of seemingly similar miraculous divine creations. Their rejection of nature went hand in hand with their rejection of causality for “the denial of causality is tantamount to a denial that things have a nature” (Wolfson, *Kalām*, 559).

Mu’ammār jettisoned Kalām’s belief in the continuous re-creation of the world, but failed to embrace the Aristotelian causal structure. He believed in the reality of nature, but not in formal and final causes. He taught that God implanted causality in the world at creation (cf. Maimonides’ own similar declaration, *Commentary on Avot* 5:6). Mu’ammār agreed with the Kalām that God is only the effective cause (*poel*), but argued that creation took place just once, in all of its details and implanted processes (cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 29e-30a, 30b, 48a, 41e). The universe proceeds on its natural course, without God ever having to intervene and grossly involve Himself in it.

Pushing the concept of nature to its limit, Mu’ammār concluded that God abandoned His creation. Consequently, God was no longer responsible for evil, but there was also no possibility of miracles. Miracles constitute a change in the divine will to create nature as it is, and he rejected any such change in God. Mu’ammār’s Kalām opponents interpreted this lack of divine responsibility as divine impotence and declared him a heretic (Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, Columbia Univ. 1970, p. 65-67).

Maimonides, like Mu’ammār, rejected the Kalām’s occasionalist doctrine of continuous Divine creation of all things at every moment. But if it is rejected, and Aristotelian causation is not accepted, then we can no longer explain God’s continued relation to the world. Divinity is, indeed, rendered powerless, and, à la Mu’ammār, the world is abandoned.

Maimonides takes Mu’ammār’s radicalism as the necessary result of the Kalām inability to consider philosophic causation. He says, “Now you understand the greatness of the error into which they have fallen through their assumption that God is only the *Agens* (*poel*), and not the End or the Form,”

THE CONVERGENCE OF EMANATION AND CREATION THEORIES

We have seen that the real Kalām discomfort with this term, “cause,” was that they thought God’s “causation” of the universe implied the philosopher’s theory of the necessary eternal generation or *emanation* of the universe, and God’s concomitant loss of freedom.

At this point in the history of philosophy, however, competing theories of creation began to converge. Plato had been credited, correctly or not, with the theory that God created the universe from existing potential (unformed) matter as a potter molds clay, the potter and the clay existing simultaneously. Aristotle held that the universe and God were both eternal and essentially changeless. There was some confusion of Aristotle’s position with Plato’s because Plotinus’ neo-Platonic doctrine of the eternal emanation of the universe had been circulated pseudonymously as the “*Theology of Aristotle*” (it is a paraphrase of parts of Plotinus’ *Enneads*). Thus, Alfarabi (d. 950) was able to hold that in the *Aristotelian* universe God produces the world out of Himself.

Philosophers usually conceived emanation as automatic, unwilled, and eternal, always utilizing the analogy of the emanation of light from the sun (or water from a spring). But at the furthest edges of this theory creationism joined emanationism. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, Harvard, 1973, v.1, pp. 199-249, shows how this convergence developed in the thinking of Gregory of Nyssa (d. 386), John Scotus Erigena (c. 810-c. 877) and Isaac Israeli (c. 855-c. 955). These scholars combined emanationism with divine will. They invested the language of *ex nihilo* with the notion that there are material ideas (Gr: *hule noete*) in God, an

intelligible “matter” from which God willed the emanation of the universe. According to them, God freely chooses to “cause” the universe to *be* from potentiality to actuality.

All of this would have been anathema to the real *ex nihilo* school, men like Augustine, Saadia, and the majority of Kalām theologians. The Kalām pointed to the following problem. In those theories, God was no longer omnipotent. A universe *with* God could mean that there was another power with God. A universe *from* God meant that there was some aspect of God that was potential, or worse, corporeal.

Maimonides was also ambivalent toward emanationism in its usual guises (see Alfred Ivry, “Maimonides and Neoplatonism: Challenge and Response,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, Lenn Goodman, editor, SUNY, 1992). He resolved the issue by dividing between creation and providence. Creation is from nothing, and although he calls it “from non-existence” (*akhar ha-eder*), he does so only in order to negate any possible emanationist interpretation of *ex nihilo* (Wolfson, *Studies*, p. 215).

Creation *ex nihilo* is important to Maimonides for several reasons, not the least of which is that it provides him a precedent for miracles. Without a miracle, nothing comes from nothing, *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

On the other hand, he reserves for emanation the providential sustenance of the universe. “It is through the existence of God that all things exist, and it is He who maintains their existence by that process which is called emanation (*shefa*).”

Maimonides’ division between emanation and creation takes emanation completely out of the discussion of creation, allowing Aristotle to be Aristotle without the complications of neo-Platonized Aristotelianism. To put it differently, emanation is a problem of *Maaseh Merkavah*, not *Maaseh Bereshit*.

CAUSATION AND US

Does any of this really matter? Of what possible relevance is Maimonides’ defense of an antique causal structure against a dreary school of Muslim pedants?

First, since the Asharite Kalām won their battle, Islam as a religious culture came to reject the connection between cause and effect, essentially throwing out any notion of causality. The consequence, that we still live with, was their rejection of science. (Regarding the dearth of printing and patenting in the Muslim world, see Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong*, Oxford, 2002; and Hillel Ofek, “Why the Arabic World Turned Away from Science,” *New Atlantis*, Winter 2011.)

Secondly, the modern world has adopted a kind of atheistic Kalām by turning from the general account of causation. Good examples of critical incoherence and crisis in Anglo-American analytic philosophy are the articles on causation by Richard Taylor, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2:55-66, MacMillan, 1967; Penelope Mackie, *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995; Jaegwon Kim, *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1995. Fortunately, there are reasonably responsible accounts of the history of causality (Andrea Falcon, “Aristotle on Causality,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online; Menno Hulswit, “A Short History of Causation,” online, both with bibliographies).

Rather than employing a historical-developmental model, I take a different, perhaps idiosyncratic, approach to the ebb and flow of causal investigations.

On the one hand, there are times when men have a positive and hopeful view of their ability to come to know God and the world around them. At other times, they become skeptical that anything can be known. These two moods seem intrinsic to the human condition, reminiscent of the forces of the *yetser ha-tov* and the *yetser ha-ra*, that is, the good and evil inclinations that work in each person.

We are in a skeptical and nihilistic period that has persisted for about 150 years, most eloquently expressed by Nietzsche and most incoherently by our post-modernists. Their atheist account of causation jettisoned all causes except the efficient cause, and is in the process of denying the efficacy of even the efficient cause (as the encyclopedia articles above show).

Maimonides believed that to come to know God we must know his creation, implying that such knowledge is within our grasp. We have been through many scientific revolutions in the decades since the early twentieth century. Perhaps our mood will again be positive and hopeful, as we explain a world beyond the few things we can actually see. Aristotelian causation recognized that our explanations must include a dimension beyond the tangible, even accepting that there may be purposiveness in evolution. The academics of our day may not see it, but as Hamlet said to an academic of his day, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

GUIDE 1:70 ARAVOT

In the last chapter, we saw that Maimonides' knowledge of philosophy armed him for the battle against its pagan elements better than the creaky theology of Kalām did. Now he claims that his version of Aristotelianism is friendly to monotheistic religion.

The purportedly intended student of our chapter was a philosophic intellectual (but see "Intended Audience," below). It is supposed to persuade him that religion anticipated philosophy. To that end, Maimonides culled Biblical, Talmudic and Midrashic texts for passages that articulated its cosmological doctrines.

His approach differed from the modern one, from either side of the divide between Jerusalem and Athens. Now both sides reject each other. The philosophers champion a value-free worldview which is either noisily atheist or more quietly agnostic. The religious orthodox resist contact with philosophy for fear of atheist contamination. The result is that they both practice bad philosophy. The term "Kalām" has come (*via* the writings of Leo Strauss) to stand for bad religious philosophy.

Maimonides took an entirely different approach. He scrutinized the philosophy of his day, neo-Platonized Aristotelianism, and discarded its pagan ("Sabean") components. In the last chapter we showed how he adopted such planks as four cause theory, in-formed matter, corporeal and incorporeal form, remote causation, teleological causation, the untraversability of the infinite causal series, and providential (but not eternal) emanation. There is nothing obviously irreligious in these ideas. Now, and in the next chapter, he will claim that they were Jewish all along.

THRONE AND CHARIOT

This is all a backdrop for a close discussion of the *Maaseh Merkava*, i.e., the chariot, the Jewish name for providence. There were three ways of dealing with this concept: anthropomorphically, cosmologically or as an incorporeal entity.

The Qur'an has passages that show Allah mounting or seated on a pre-existent throne borne by four angels. H. A. Wolfson explains, in *Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy*, that the Jews, in their early encounters with Islam, learned of these anthropomorphic passages in the Qur'an. This brought them to recall similar material about thrones and chariots in the Bible and Talmud. They also learned of Muslim scholars who opposed the literal interpretation of these Qur'anic verses. Those scholars contended that the throne signified the outermost cosmic sphere rather than a physical "throne." A similar tradition developed with Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164) who rejected the literal interpretation of throne and chariot, in favor of cosmological interpretation. (*Repercussions*, Harvard, 1979, 113-116; Qur'an, 7.52, 20:4; Biblical and Talmudic sources: 1 Kings 22:19, Ezekiel 1:5, *Pesakhim* 54a;).

Maimonides apparently joined that tradition, due to his opposition to anthropomorphism. The problem, however, was that the Sabeans thought of the outer sphere as their god's chariot. Their gods were the souls of the spheres. As such, they were part of the spheres and subject to their nature. His concern was

that if the Rabbis accepted the cosmological definition of *Merkava* as the outer sphere, they would thereby join the Sabean philosophers who subjected God to nature. (See my note “The Sabeans,” Guide 1:63).

Maimonides resolves the issue here, but in an obscure way. On the one hand, he does not reprove the philosophers for making the *Merkava* the outer sphere, merely noticing that our scriptures show God “over” the sphere rather than “in” it. His second, obscure, response took the *Merkava* entirely out of the cosmological realm.

A LATE-LEXICAL CHAPTER WITH A HIDDEN LEXICAL TERM

Our chapter is what I call a late-lexical chapter, in that it comes after the conclusion of the Lexicon proper, Guide 1:45.

It deals explicitly with two related terms: *rakhav* (“ride”), and *merkava*, (“that which is ridden”). As usual, Maimonides follows a regular format. He tells us *his* definitions for each word. He then determines whether those definitions are homonymous. If they are homonymous, they have nothing in common but their sound. Typically, his first definition is corporeal in nature, while the latter ones are not, and may apply to God. I schematize his treatment to look more like a dictionary, and contextualize his proof-texts (See the explanation of my methodology in Chapter 1:1, “Introduction to the Lexical Chapters of the Guide.”).

Nonetheless, the bulk of the chapter, four-fifths of it by my count, deal with a third term, *aravot*. Nowhere does he hint that it deserves full lexical treatment. To the contrary, he states, rather flatly, in the first paragraph, that *aravot* is “the uppermost, all-encompassing sphere.” This seems to concede the interpretation of Ibn Ezra and the Muslim scholars. Further on, without the slightest suggestion that there is a problem, he produces material that contradicts their position.

The only way to solve the problem is to include *aravot* in the Lexicon with two definitions. Maimonides expected his student to make this leap, but the commentators I have seen do not. We can easily show that there are two meanings for *aravot*, 1) the outer sphere, and 2) the source of all forms. *Merkava* has essentially the same meanings. One is corporeal, the other is not.

The difficult question is whether those definitions would be homonymous. If they are, then there could be no possible way of discussing them together. The answer is that neither his treatment of these definitions, nor the underlying texts, particularly the Talmudic text, treated them homonymously. This conclusion makes possible man’s reach from the first corporeal definition to the divine level.

We first apply ourselves to the explicitly defined terms *rakhav* and *merkava*. Maimonides’ proof-texts for his definitions teach the rules that Jews must apply to the entire subject of this chapter, which is how Jerusalem and Athens differently view the cosmos.

* * *

RAKHAV (RIDE) Homonym

1. To ride, as on a horse.
2. To dominate, rule, govern.

The first proof-text, about Balaam and his ass, is very corporeal in nature, as is typical for Maimonides' initial definitions. It presents a negative and cautionary message, as corporeality always does for him. This passage also suggests the themes that he will emphasize in the rest of his assembled proof-texts.

Maimonides' frequently uses his scriptural citations to tell a different story than the apparent intent of his own text. Why else would he use eleven proof-texts when he needed only three, especially if we are to admit his claim that he never used more words than necessary? (On his claimed purity of writing see *Treatise on Resurrection*,

Rosner trans., 7:35, p.40; Guide, *Introduction*, "Directions for Study," Friedlander trans., v. 1, p. 20; Herbert A.

Davidson, *Maimonides: The Man and His Works*, scoffs at his claims).

Part of this goes to who his real audience is (see below, "Who Is the Intended Audience for Guide 1:70?"). The Rabbis, not the philosophers, were the intended audience for his scriptural citations. He uses them to signal a cautionary message to the Rabbis. Ancient rabbinic culture favored memorization more than we do. He expected the Rabbis to recall not just his quote-shards but their context and traditional interpretation (he never tells where they are from). I place in grey-scale the few words he actually quoted.

Instance of Definition 1, *Riding a beast*, Contextualized:

"And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was *riding (rokhev)* upon his ass, and his two servants [were] with him. And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way." (Numbers 22:21-23)

Balaam was the great prophet of the Sabeans. We should recognize that, for Maimonides, Aristotle was also a Sabean, indeed, the highest representative of Sabean philosophy. It was natural for Maimonides to view Balaam as Aristotle's precursor, especially since tradition regarded Balaam as the best of philosophers (*Eikha Rabba*, 2). Both Balaam and Aristotle believed, as Sabeans, in a nature-bound god who did not create the universe. What happened to Balaam stood as a warning of what could happen to Aristotelians. It should come as no surprise that Balaam saw only his ass when the acosmic angel stood before him. The seer could not see what he could not understand.

The theme, then, here, and throughout the proof-texts, is how God bars access to prophecy to those who fail to recognize Him as Creator. This is strikingly different from our chapter's ostensible cosmological account. The philosophers did not have the tools to recognize this theme, but the Rabbis should have grasped it instinctively.

Instances of Definition 2, *Dominant, Rule, Govern*, Contextualized:

“*He made him ride (yarkivehu) on the high places of the earth*, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.”
(Deuteronomy 32:13)

The tradition is virtually unanimous in insisting that the “high places of the earth” can only mean the land of Israel (*Sifrei, Rashi, Radak, Ibn Ezra*). This passage is part of a *tokhekha*, i.e., a dirge of rebuke against the Jewish people for abandoning God. The *tokhekha* pattern is a brief series of promises and lovely descriptions, swiftly becoming a torrent of abuse. It begins with this rhapsodic verse, but, as soon as we reach line 15, “Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked,” it plunges downhill. The surface message was that “riding” has no necessary connection to horses, but Maimonides’ real message was that we ride high only when we recognize the Creator’s dominion. Otherwise, we become the ridden.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, [from] doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking [thine own] words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; *and I will cause thee to ride (v’ hi rkavtikha) upon the high places of the earth*, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken [it].” (Isaiah 58:13-14)

Maimonides’ brief comment here: “that is, you shall have dominion over the highest (people) on earth.” But he knew that the language of the previous Deuteronomy passage inspired the parallel lyrics of Isaiah’s *tokhekha*.

Once again, the “high places of the earth” refers to Israel. Israel is “high” *because* its inhabitants “feed” from “the heritage of Jacob,” by keeping the Sabbath. The tone turns black at 59:2 (two lines later), when we hear that their “iniquities have separated” them from their God. Their “hands are defiled with blood” and their “lips have spoken lies,” perverting justice. The result is that they “hatch basilisk’s eggs and weave the spider’s web.” They perform the commandments by rote and without kindness, especially when it comes to the poor. “Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness,[but] we walk in darkness: we grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if [we had] no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night,” blind and ridden, like Balaam.

“[As for] *Samaria*, her king is *cut off* as the foam upon the water....

[It is] in My desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows.

And Ephraim [is as] an heifer [that is] taught, [and] loveth to tread out [the corn]; but I passed over upon her fair neck: *I will make Ephraim to ride (arkiv ephraim)*; Judah shall plow, [and] Jacob shall break his clods. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for [it is] time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.

Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst

trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.” (Hosea 10:7, 10-13)

Maimonides explains: “I (God) shall give him (Ephraim) rule and dominion; in this same sense it (“ride”) is said of God,” that is, just as Ephraim’s riding means rule and dominion, whenever God “rides,” it must be taken to mean rule and dominion.

That would all be fine, except that this could not be Maimonides’ point. While translators usually make *arkiv ephraim* mean, “I will cause Ephraim to ride,” the passage should read, “I will cause Ephraim to be ridden.” That is how R. Aryeh Kaplan translated it in *Me’am Lo’ez*, following its author, R. Yaakov Culi (agreed: *Metsudat David, Radak, Kara, Malbim*). Leeser translated, “Now I will make Ephraim draw the wagon.” Rashi seems to read it literally, but only because he takes it as a condition that, “if you wish that I (God) should make Ephraim to ride upon the nations, then Judah must plow and break up his clods with the doing of good deeds,” *im tirtzu sh’arkiv ephraim al aku”m, yekhoresh yehuda v’ysaded lo l’atzmo kharisha shel maasim tovim*. This passage does not teach that Ephraim (Samaria, the Northern Kingdom

of Israel) has dominion. It teaches that since the Ephraimites worshipped idols in their “high places,” the Ephraimites “shall be destroyed,” and their dominion shall be “cut off.”

The Rabbinic reader would realize that Maimonides knew this or he would not have quoted it with the prior two proof-texts, all of which concern Israel’s punishment. He would have recognized the reward and punishment trope, and wondered how it fit Maimonides’ declared theme (that traditional scriptures reflect contemporary cosmological postulates in metaphorical language), grasping it, instead, for the warning that it was.

Maimonides changed direction in the next several proof-texts, for now God is the rider.

“[There is] none like unto the God of Jeshurun, [who] *rideth (rokhev)* upon the heaven (*shamaim*) in thy help, and in His excellency (*gaavato*) on the sky (*shekhakim*). The eternal God [is thy] refuge, and underneath [are] the *everlasting arms*.” (Deuteronomy 33:26-27; *ayn k’el yeshurun rokhev shamaim b’ezrekh u’gaavato sh’khakim m’ona elokei kedem u’mitakhat zro’ot olam.*)

According to Maimonides, the meaning of “rideth upon the heaven” is that God “rules the heaven.” The “excellency on the sky” (*gaavato shekhakim*) describes the process by which God causes the revolution of the outer sphere merely by being the object of its love. It follows that, on one level, the Maaseh Merkava is about the link between divine psychology and cosmological physics, i.e., God’s world and our world. Maimonides also emphasized the transcendence of divine rule: that God “rideth” over the heavens, not as part of them, thus denying the core of Aristotelian/Ptolemaic cosmological doctrine. This cannot be overstressed: it is the reason for the last three proof-texts.

“Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: *extol him that rideth (la-rokhev)* upon the heavens (*ba’aravot*) by his name J-H, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, [is] God in his holy habitation....

The chariots (*rekhev*) of God [are] twenty thousand, [even] thousands of angels: the Lord [is] among them, [as in] Sinai, in the holy [place]....

To him that rideth (*la’rokhev*) upon the heavens of heavens, [which were] of old; lo, he doth send out his voice, [and that] a mighty voice. Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency (*gaavato*) [is] over Israel, and his strength [is] in the clouds (*ba’shekhakim*).” (Psalms 68:4-5, 17, 33-34)

Since *rokhev*, ride, occurs in both Psalms and Deuteronomy texts, the Talmud, *Hagiga* 12b, derives that the “heaven” in Deuteronomy is identical to the *aravot* in this passage. The Psalm also repeats the term *gaavato*, which is that “excellency” which draws the highest sphere to Him in love. The Talmud in *Hagiga* proceeds to teach that the *aravot* is one of the seven heavens. Maimonides explained the relationship between the contemporary cosmological doctrine and that page from *Hagiga*:

“(God) rules the *aravot*, the uppermost, all-encompassing sphere. It has also been repeatedly stated by our Sages that there are seven *rekiim* (firmaments, heavens), and that the uppermost of them, the all-surrounding, is called *aravot*. Do not object to the number seven given by them, although there are more *reki’im* (heavens), for there are spheres which contain several circles (*gilgallim*), and are counted as one; this is clear to those who have studied that subject, and I shall also explain it (Guide 2:4); here I wish merely to point out that our Sages always assumed that *aravot* is the uppermost sphere. The *aravot* is also referred to in the words, ‘who rideth upon the heaven in thy help.’ Thus we read in Talmud *Hagigah*, 12b, ‘The high and exalted dwelleth on *aravot*, as it is said, ‘Extol Him that rideth upon *aravot*.’”

As we will see (“The Meaning of *Aravot*,” below), these seven heavens are not necessarily the same thing as the spheres, despite his saying that it was what “our Sages always assumed.” The Talmud page sometimes refers to them as astronomical entities, but mostly as incorporeal forces, preserving both meanings along a continuum, not as homonyms.

“I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: [and] the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? [was] thine anger against the rivers? [was] thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride (*tirkav*) upon thine horses [and] thy chariots (*markvotekha*) of salvation?”
(Habakkuk 3:7-8)

Maimonides quotes *Bereshit Rabba* 68:9 in explanation: “He is the dwelling of His world, the world is not His dwelling....the horse is secondary to the rider, the rider is not subservient to the horse; this is meant by ‘Thou didst ride upon Thy horses.’” Maimonides concludes: “Consider and learn how they described the relation of God to the sphere, asserting that the latter is His instrument, by means of which He rules the universe.” In Guide 2:29 Maimonides, in a different vein, quoted Habakkuk’s question “Was the Lord displeased against the rivers?” He called this “figurative language...referring to the death of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.” This links to the discussion of the Lexical term *merkava*, particularly in connection with the story of Pharaoh’s chariots, which will be the hidden core of that lexical discussion.

MERKAVA (CHARIOT)

1. The collective noun denoting animals used for riding, a collection of animals.
2. Four horses; four single animals; and, by extension (but unmentioned in our chapter), *fourness*, the peculiar fourfold nature of all the basic forces and elements of the universe.

Instances of Definition 1, a Team of Animals, Contextualized:

“And Joseph made ready his chariot (*va’ ye’ esor yos ef merkavto*), and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.” (Genesis 46:29)

Ye’esor, from *asar* or *asara*, means “to harness,” (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 98). Maimonides wants us to conclude that harnessing is something done only to the horses, not the chariot. Even-Shmuel dubiously claims that we only harness the beast (*ain osrim ele et ha-behema l’keli o davar*), i.e., we tie the horse to the cart, not the cart to the horse. But none of that is as interesting as the link to Pharaoh’s amazing chariots that Maimonides made by placing his proof-text about Joseph just before our next two proof-texts about Pharaoh.

“And he (Pharaoh) made him (Joseph) to ride in the second chariot (*mirkevet ha-mishneh*) which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him [ruler] over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:43)

Yehuda Even-Shmuel says the *mirkevet ha-mishneh* was “a chariot of two horses,” *b’merkevet shel shnei susim*. From whom did he learn this? Commentators follow either Rashi, who said it was Pharaoh’s second best chariot, or Nachmanides, who said it was the chariot of the second-in-command. The only apparent purpose for Maimonides’ otherwise irrelevant citation was to call to mind *Midrashim* about Pharaoh and Joseph, and then, with the next passage, about Pharaoh and Moses.

“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: *the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.... Pharaoh’s chariots (markevat)* and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea.” (Exodus 15:1, 4)

Maimonides knew that the Midrash connected the chariots of Joseph and the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Here is Louis Ginzberg’s beautiful rendering:

“In his joy in anticipation of seeing his father, Joseph made ready his chariot with his own hands (eager to honor his father), without waiting for his servants to minister to him, and this loving action redounded later to the benefit of the Israelites, for it rendered of no effect Pharaoh’s zeal in making ready his chariot himself, with his own hands, to pursue after the Israelites.” (*Legends of*

the Jews, v. 2, p.120, note 312; *Bereshit Rabba* 55:8; *Mekhilta Beshalakh* 2, in JPS 1933, v. 1, 198-199).

Talmud noted that Abraham also saddled his donkey in the binding of Isaac, rather than having others do it, because “love causes disregard of normal conduct.” Conversely, “hate, likewise, causes disregard of normal conduct,” since Balaam saddled his own donkey out of hate for the Jews (*Sanhedrin* 105b). Maimonides had these *Aggadot* at the back of his mind when he gathered proof-texts about Joseph, Pharaoh and Balaam, to make the point, for those who knew these connections, that when we “harness” the *Maaseh Merkava* in humility, we avoid the disasters that befell those magicians, Pharaoh and Balaam. The Rabbis would also recall that the *merkava* in these accounts was *not* the horses, contrary to Maimonides. The Midrash shows that the *merkava* was the chariot itself, apart from its horses. Pharaoh’s chariots were unusual: they go where their beasts do not! Ginzberg tells the story:

“Now the Egyptians tried to flee to their land in their chariots drawn by she-mules. As they had treated the children of Israel in a way contrary to nature, so the Lord treated them now. Not the she-mules pulled the chariots but the chariots, though fire from heaven had consumed their wheels, dragged the men and the beasts into the water (“The chariots kept running ahead even in spite of the drivers.... now the chariots pulled the mules”). The chariots were laden with silver, gold....It was the wish of God that these treasures should come into the possession of Israel, and for this reason He caused the chariots to roll down into the sea, and the sea in turn to cast them out on the opposite shore, at the feet of the Israelites. And the Lord fought against the Egyptians also with the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. The former made the soil miry, and the mire was heated to the boiling point by the latter so that the hoofs of the horses dropped from their feet, and they could not budge from the spot.” (*Legends* v.3, 27; *Mekhilta Beshallakh* 5, 32a; my parenthetical interpolation is from Lauterbach’s *Mekhilta* trans., JPS 1933, v. 1, 240-241).

Moreover, why would Maimonides cite Exodus 15:4 to show that the horses are the *merkava*, when “horse and rider” had already been “thrown into the sea” in Exodus 15:1? The answer comes from another tradition about Pharaoh’s *markevoth* brought down by the Baal ha-Turim (Jacob ben Asher, c. 1269 – c. 1343). When King Josiah destroyed the idolatrous chariots dedicated to sun-worship, “He burned the chariots of the sun in fire,” *v’et markevoth ha-shemesh saraf ba’esh* (2 Kings 23:11). “The chariots of the sun” were chariots which raced eastward each morning to greet the rising sun, halting to worship at a shrine dedicated to that deity. Similarly, by having idols imprinted on his chariots, Pharaoh devoted them to idolatry (R. Avie Gold, *Artscroll Baal HaTurim Chumash*, 2004). Pharaoh, in Sabeian fashion, made the god of the chariot a force that he could theurgically manipulate. Pharaoh tried to defeat divine providence with Egyptian magic, unlike Joseph, who harnessed his chariot in humility, a clear warning to all students of *Maaseh Merkava*. Pharaoh’s failed exploit recalls the ancient myth of the boy who tried to ride the *Merkava*: “Here Phaëthon lies who drove the Sun-god’s car: greatly he failed, greatly he dared.”

Instances of Definition 2, a Team of Four Beasts, Contextualized:

“And a chariot (*merkava*) came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred [shekels] of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring [them] out by their means.” (1 Kings 10:29)

Maimonides says, “Hence we may learn that *merkava* denotes here four horses (600 divided by 150 = 4); therefore I think that when it was stated, according to the literal sense of the words, that four *khayot* (beasts) carry the Throne of Glory, our Sages called this ‘*merkava*’ on account of its similarity with the *merkava* consisting of four single animals.” Rashi also concludes that a *merkava* is four horses. Since this one quotation would have made Maimonides’ case, that a *merkava* is a quartet of beasts, why weaken the case with the other citations, which conjure opposed meanings? His objective was the same in the other proof-texts, which was to secure our understanding of *Maaseh Merkava* from the philosopher’s astrophysical concept of it.

MERKAVA AND THE REVELATION OF FOUR-NESS

At the end of the chapter, Maimonides relates the Throne of Glory to the Merkava. As we have seen, his merkava was not the chariot, but the horses. His conclusion that a merkava is four horses supported his nearly Pythagorean interest in the number four. Four khayot also held the Throne aloft in the vision of Ezekiel, which was why the Throne was called Merkava.

In Guide 2:10, he identified the Merkava's four beasts with the four Aristotelian causes, also highlighting the four-ness of:

- The four Aristotelian elements;
- The four causes of the motion of the sphere (the sphere's soul, intellect, desire, and God);
- The four basic forces derived from the spheres (the nature of minerals, plants, animals and the intellect); and
- The four parts of the whole (the angelic intellects; the matter of the spheres; the sub-lunary matter; God who created them).

He notes, "As to the number four, it is strange, and demands our attention." Four is the number of perfection, the square. He related it to several scriptural images: the four steps of Jacob's ladder; the four chariots of Zechariah 6:1; the four heavenly spirits of Zechariah 6:5. As to the four spirits of heaven, he openly affirms, "By these four spirits the causes are meant which will produce all changes in the universe." In Guide 3:22, Maimonides said that these ideas "came to me through something similar to prophetic revelation." Maimonides' prophetic revelation was that four-ness was the link between Aristotelian physics and the Jewish account of the Merkava. Just because there was that link, these two accounts are neither homonymous nor unbridgeable. ("Prophetic revelation" is Pines' translation. Kafih: raa heikh husago li inyanim elu k'ayin khazon. Schwarz has hashra'a, or, alternatively, hitgalut, instead of khazon for the Judeo-Arabic מַרְכָּבָה).

THE MEANING OF ARAVOT

If we were to treat *aravot* as a Maimonidean lexical term with his lexical methodology, our first step would be to notice his quote-shard for that term, from Psalms 68:4. Then, based on his treatment, which includes Talmud *Hagiga* 12b, and his comments, we would ask whether there were more than the one meaning he disclosed, i.e., that *aravot* is "the uppermost, all-encompassing sphere." We would find that sometimes it is entirely incorporeal. This incorporeal entity qualifies as his second definition, although he does not say so. He expected his reader to puzzle that out.

Definition 1—*Aravot* as Outer Sphere: Maimonides cited the "Sages" for the proposition that *aravot* is the name of the outermost sphere, the largest corporeal entity in the universe. *Aravot*, either as sphere, or, more likely, heaven, is an unusual word. Variants of the root *arava*, "arid region, desert," occur sixty-one times in the Bible, but only once as a heavenly entity. It may suggest *erev*, evening, since the diurnal rotation of the sphere brings on evening, and evening begins the day: "And the evening and the morning were the first day" (Genesis 1:5).

God governs the outermost sphere and, indirectly, causes it to move. This movement causes all the other spheres and everything in them to move. Maimonides here followed Aristotle, except in the number of spheres. He disagreed with the Talmud (seven), Aristotle (fifty-five) and Alfarabi (nine), advancing his version of the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic hybrid model, with eighteen outer spheres and eight spheres that do not revolve the earth (see excellent animation of the classic cycle, Astronomy Education

at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, <http://astro.unl.edu/naap/ssm/animations/ptolemaic.swf>). He left open whether these spheres are epicyclical or eccentric. He summarized his cosmological doctrine in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah*, ch. 3:

“1)...There are nine spheres. The one nearest to us is the lunar sphere. The second above it is the sphere which contains the star called Mercury. Above this is the third sphere, in which Venus moves. The fourth sphere is that to which the Sun belongs. The fifth, that of Mars; the sixth, that of Jupiter. The seventh, that of Saturn; the eighth, that in which move all the other stars that are visible in the sky, the ninth is the sphere which revolves daily from east to west. It includes and encircles all things...

2) Every one of the eight spheres in which the stars move is divisible into numerous spheres (*‘for there are spheres which contain several circles, and are counted as one’*), one above the other, like the several layers of onions. Some spheres revolve from west to east; others from east to west, as for instance, the ninth sphere, which moves from east to west. And between the spheres, no vacuum intervenes. 5) The number of all the spheres that revolve round the world is eighteen. The number of the small spheres that do not so revolve is eight...” (18 great spheres + 8 small spheres = 26 spheres. My parenthetical interpolation is from our chapter.)

His main point about the *aravot* is that God “rides” *upon* this sphere, not *in* it, like the Sabeian gods. Maimonides learned this from a Midrash, only partially quoted, though the entire quote is good for his doctrine (including Definition 2). The entire quote is:

“...The Lord is the dwelling-place of His world but His world is not His dwelling-place. R. Abba b. Judan said: He is like a warrior riding a horse, his robes flowing over on both sides; the horse is subsidiary to the rider, but the rider is not subsidiary to the horse. Thus it says, ‘That Thou dost ride upon Thy horses.’” (Habakkuk 3:8; *Genesis Rabba* 68:9, Soncino translation)

“Place” yields to placelessness. God rules and causes movement without any physical connection, as remote cause. Just as in the relation of horse and rider, the rider controls the horse and is superior to it. Still, the concept of superiority is imprecise (ee *hakpeda*) since God cannot be compared with any other being.

Definition 2—Aravot as Incorporeal Entity: The part of this Midrash that he did not include was about the warrior’s flowing robe. The flowing robe could be taken to refer to the providential emanation of forms. *Aravot*, Definition 2, would then be the source of the forms in-forming all matter. Maimonides found this in the Talmud, *Hagiga* 12b:

“The *aravot*, in which there are justice, charity, right, treasures of life and peace, treasures of blessing, of the souls of the righteous, of the souls and the spirits of those to be born, and the dew by which God will at some future time revive the dead, etc.” (After these ten items, it adds, five lines later, “There too are the *ofanim*, the *serafim*, the ministering angels, the *throne* of God.”)

These are not material things. They are the forces that cause those things to exist in their proper order. Without these sustaining forms, things would revert to their unformed matter. There are ten of these in

the quoted sentence. This is one of the several lists of ten in *Hagiga*, suggesting the ten *sefirot* of the later Cabalists.

The *aravot* was the place of the Throne, and we have seen that the Throne of Ezekiel's vision was the *Merkava*. What Maimonides did not say here, but removes to Chapter 2:26, is that "Throne" means "feet." He drew this from Onkelos' rendering of "feet" as "throne" in the vision of the elders at Exodus 24:10: "And under His feet (*raglaim*), as the work of the whiteness of sapphire." He defined "feet" as "cause" in Guide 1:28. We have frequently pointed out that "feet" is a euphemism for the male organ. We also learn that under the Throne is "snow," which he identified in Guide 2:26 as hyllic unformed matter.

These are critical ideas in the *Maaseh Merkava*. They show that the souls of men are generated through a process we only comprehend through the metaphor of procreation (see 1:7, on *yalad*, procreate/create). They also show that *aravot* is the locus of those forces of four-ness that in-form unformed matter. Thus, *aravot* in Definition 2 is like the Philonic *logos*, the "place" which was source of the emanation of forms, and therefore, not something spherical, as in Definition 1.

Especially important for *Maaseh Merkava* is the location in *aravot* of the "treasures of life." These "treasures of life" are the forces generating the souls of men. It will turn out that the *khayot*, the four "living creatures" in Ezekiel 1:5, are the prophetic figure for this process of soul generation. These *khayot* are also the four cherubs of Ezekiel 10, cherub being the anagram of the consonants of *merkava*, a team of four "living creatures." Maimonides only alludes to these ideas here (see Guide 3:1-7). They represent the emanative process of soul creation.

Aravot vs. Shekhakim: Yehuda Even-Shmuel argues that we should interpret the last paragraph of our chapter such that *aravot* represents the highest sphere, which moves the rest, while *shekhakim* represents the rest of the physical cosmos. He wrote:

"The Psalmist used the word *rakhiva*, 'riding,' in connection with *aravot* to mean dominion by means of divine power and will. In connection to the rest of the spheres, he used the term *gaava*, "excellency," which teaches about power only. In the movement of the inner spheres the *will* of God is not involved, but only the *prior will* of God which created the fixed (*ha-kavua*) natural lawfulness (*ha-khokiot*) of this motion. Every time the highest sphere moves in its diurnal motion (*tenuato ha-yomit*) it is responsible for setting everything in motion, the movement of the parts and the movement of the whole." (My trans., p. 388)

Even-Shmuel draws an excellent opposition between *aravot* and *shekhakim*, on the one hand, and between *will* and *power*, on the other. I would take it further. *Aravot* is a non-homonymous term with a second meaning unacknowledged by Even-Shmuel: it is the emanator of the forms of all things willed by God. If *aravot* is this *logos*, the *shekhakim* would be the physical cosmos. Even-Shmuel's distinction would still apply, whereby the *aravot* is the realm of divine will *and* power, while *shekhakim* becomes the realm usually ruled by power and not will. The lawfulness of this natural order is the *gaava* of the *shekhakim*, "His excellency on the sky." Even if we, unlike Even-Shmuel, read *gaava* as the source of the sphere's motion (i.e., its desire for God), he was right to call it part of natural law, established by God's "prior will."

THE SOUL AND THE MIND

More or less parenthetically, Maimonides inserts an important discussion about the “souls and spirits” of men mentioned in the *Hagiga* passage. He argues that Jewish tradition anticipated the philosophic distinction between the vitalizing spirit and the mind. The soul (*ruakh, neshama*) born to men is the animating soul. Without it, the body does not endure. When the bodily elements dissipate, this animating soul perishes with them. The enduring spirit, *nefesh*, by contrast, is the intellect that man acquires in the course of his life (see my discussion of Alexander of Aphrodisias in 1:68). This is the intellect acquired when potential knowledge of truth becomes actual knowledge. He announces the doctrine in Mishneh Torah, *H. Teshuva* 8:3-4:

“3) The ‘soul’ (*nefesh*), whenever mentioned in this connection, is not the ‘vital element’ (spirit—*neshama*) requisite for bodily existence (*tsrikha la-guf*) but that form of soul which is identical with the ‘intelligence’ (mind—*ha-dea*) which apprehends the Creator, as far as it is able, and apprehends other abstract concepts (*ha-deot ha-nifradot*) and other things (actualities—*maasim*). It is the psychic form, which we expounded in the Fourth Chapter of the laws concerning the fundamental principles of the Torah (, quoted below). And it is this which, in this connection, is called Soul (*nefesh*). That life, as it is immortal,—death being only incidental to the body, which does not exist in the hereafter—is called ‘the bond of life,’ as it is said, ‘The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bond of life [with the Lord thy God]’ (1 Samuel 25:29). And this is a recompense than which there is none higher; a bliss (*ha-tova*) beyond which there is nothing more blissful. And for this, all the prophets yearned. 4) How many names have been metaphorically applied to it: ‘The mountain of the Lord,’ ‘His holy place,’ ‘the way of holiness,’ ‘the holy way,’ ‘the courtyards of the Lord,’ ‘the tent of the Lord,’ ‘the beauty of the Lord,’ ‘the temple of the lord,’ ‘the house of the Lord,’ ‘the gate of the Lord.’ The sages metaphorically call this bliss, destined for the righteous, ‘the banquet’ (*la-tova zu ha-mezumenet la-tsadikim seuda*). Its general name is ‘the World to Come.’”

The passage asserts that the immortal soul is the active intellect, for which there are a series of biblical epithets or euphemisms, which are a key to many prophetic passages. Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah*, 4:8-9, explains the relation between the human soul and that intellect:

“8) *The vital principle (nefesh) of all flesh (basar—*as opposed to vegetation) is the form which God has given it. The superior intelligence in the human soul is *the specific form of the mentally normal human being (tsurat ha-adam ha-shalem b'daato)*. To this form, the Torah refers in the text ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’ (Genesis 1:26). This means that man should have a form that knows

as the angels which are forms without substance (*tsura b'lo golem*), so that (intellectually) man is like the angels.... It does not refer to the vital principle (*nefesh khayah*) in every animal by which it eats, drinks, reproduces, feels and broods. It is the intellect (*ha-dea*) which is the *human soul's specific form (tsurat ha-nefesh)*. To this specific form of the soul, the Scriptural phrase ‘in our image, after our likeness’ alludes. This form is frequently called *nefesh, ruakh* (soul, spirit). One must therefore, in order to avoid mistakes, pay special attention to the meaning of these terms which, in each case, has to be ascertained from the context. 9) This form of the Soul (*tsurat ha-nefesh*) is not compounded of elements into which it would again dissolve. Nor does it exist by the energy of the vital principle (*ha-*

neshama) so that the latter would be necessary to its existence, in the way that the vital principle requires a physical body, for its existence. But it comes directly from God in Heaven. Hence, when the material portion (*ha-golem*) of our being dissolves into its component elements, and physical life perishes (*v'tovad ha-neshama*) —since that only exists in association with the body and needs the body for its functions, this form of the [incorporeal] Soul, is not destroyed, as it does not require physical life for its activities. It knows and apprehends the Intelligences that exist without material substance (*ha-deot ha-prudot min ha-glamim*); it knows the Creator of all things; and it endures forever. Solomon, in his wisdom, said (Ecclesiastes 12:7): ‘And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.’”

This doctrine provoked opposition because its emphasis on the immortality of the *incorporeal* soul seemed to contradict the doctrine of *bodily* resurrection of the dead. But Maimonides had committed himself to the doctrine of resurrection in his Thirteen Articles of Faith (*Perush Ha-Mishnah, Sanhedrin*). He even mentioned resurrection in our chapter, reciting that the “dew” that revives the dead is in *aravot*. His answer to his opponents, in the *Letter on the Resurrection of the Dead*, his final writing, was that resurrection will be a miracle. It will occur but no one knows how. It can no more be explained than the creation of the world or the special providence of the Jewish people. What we can explain and must understand is the immortality of that intellect which comes from the *aravot*, Definition 2.

WHO IS THE INTENDED AUDIENCE FOR GUIDE 1:70?

Concluding, Maimonides tells us to remember one point about *aravot* as the outer sphere, Definition 1. The best proof for the existence of God is proof from the diurnal movement of this outer cosmological sphere, which causes all other movement. Aristotle argued that we must trace all movement, back to a single unmoved mover, since an infinite causal series is untraversable. Maimonides prefers this proof to the proofs of the Kalām, which he debunks in the next few chapters. This puts him on sufficient common ground with Aristotle to justify his assault on the Aristotle’s doctrine of the eternal uncreated universe in Book Two of the Guide.

This is his message to the Rabbis, who are the real intended audience targeted by our chapter: we should welcome the Aristotelian recognition of the necessity for the existence of one God.

Ostensibly, however, he seemed to direct his lecture to the cosmopolitan intellectuals, asserting that Judaism anticipated their philosophy. For example, he speaks disparagingly of intellectuals who scoff at the Midrash:

“Consider how these excellent and true ideas, comprehended only by the greatest philosophers, are found scattered in the *Midrashim*. When a student who disavows truth reads them, he will at first sight deride them, as being contrary to the real state of things.”

The “student who disavows truth” is the intellectual who rejects Midrash as mere legend. Similarly, when Maimonides recounts the rabbinic cosmology from *Hagiga*, he warned the intellectuals:

“It has also been repeatedly stated by our Sages that there are seven *rekiim* (firmaments, heavens), and that the uppermost of them, the all-surrounding, is called *aravot*. Do not object to the number seven given by them, although there are more *rekiim*, for there are spheres which contain several circles.”

But the intellectuals are not his real audience. He employed this mild subterfuge to dispose the Rabbis favorably to his message, as well as for the following reasons. If he were to tell them directly that philosophy is natively Jewish, he would fail to persuade. By this method of indirection, he hopes to make them pause to consider those necessary philosophic doctrines that strengthen the Rabbis' case against the most dangerous philosophic idea, the eternity of the universe, with its nature-bound god. This is the point he pounds home to the Rabbis in his proof- texts: God is the rider, not the ridden; do not fail to defend that truth or you become the ridden.

It may be too much to say, as Leo Strauss does of the Guide: "...it is not a philosophic book—a book written by a philosopher for philosophers—but a Jewish book; a book written by a Jew for Jews." But if it is a book written by a Jew for Jews, not a philosophic book, it seems odd that the Guide's actual audience divides almost evenly between the two camps. Historically, the strongest opposition to the Guide actually came from within the rabbinic camp.

It is fairer to say that Maimonides did not consider the question in our light. After all, the philosophers of Strauss' acquaintance are a much different breed than those of Maimonides' world. Atheist philosophers were non-existent in that Judeo-Islamic universe, unlike twentieth century Berlin or Chicago. Besides, Maimonides did not consider such atheists to be part of respectable dialogue.

In those days, there was no significant Jewish lay audience for the Guide. The intended audience was rabbinic. Maimonides hoped that the Rabbis' interests were broad enough to make the sciences their own. The Guide, therefore, is, in a sense, both a Jewish and a philosophic book. He thought that this study could make the Rabbis better exponents of religious truths. His ultimate aim was for few of them to become prophets, and this study was indispensable to their prophetic mission.

GUIDE 1:71 INTRODUCTION TO THE KALĀM

In the last chapter, Maimonides reviewed the traditional Jewish view of the cosmos, and explained how it related to the philosophic view. The philosophers proved the existence of God from the motion of the spheres, indeed, “This constitutes the greatest proof by which the existence of God can be known...as I shall demonstrate.” He was then ready to proceed to Part II of the Guide, which begins with this proof. Why didn’t he do so?

He had said that many ideas emerging from the Midrash and Talmud make sense as explanations of cosmology and science, when understood rightly. Nevertheless, there was a serious limitation. This ancient Jewish lore had few clear explanations of creation and the nature of God. The many volumes the Muslims wrote on those subjects would have made up for this limitation, if they had any validity. It was, therefore, necessary to examine what they had said, especially since they directed most of their arguments against Aristotelian philosophy.

The key to the chapter is Maimonides’ assertion that there are commandments of belief. He shares this notion with Bakhya Ibn Pakuda, whose book’s title, *Hovot Ha-Levavot*, means commandments of belief. We can properly call the exploration of this subject theology, although Maimonides did not use this term. There are four of those critical commandments: we are to believe in God’s existence, unity, incorporeality, and that He created the universe. We perform the commandments of belief by *convincing* ourselves of their truth (Arabic: *i’tiqad* — see Guide 1:50).

SYNOPSIS OF GUIDE 1:71

Where are the books that contain the convincing arguments for these truths? In fact, only a few passages remain in the Aggadic literature, mostly mixed with other materials that make it difficult to extract the Jewish doctrine. Why is this? Because the lore was lost (*da ki ha-mdaiim ha-rabim sh’hayu b’umateinu b’amitat devarim halelu avdu*). Maimonides surveys reasons for this loss. There are many, but they reduce to four: 1) problems connected with books and writing; 2) laws prohibiting dissemination of this material, including laws against writing the Oral Torah and against public teaching of *maaseh bereshit* and *maaseh merkavah*; 3) problems caused by the long exile among the gentiles; and, 4) the fact that most students are unqualified to pursue this lore (see Guide 1:34, and my comments).

The result is that we have few books on the subject in comparison to the many produced by the Muslims. Those books, especially those from the early *Mutazila* Kalām, had a major impact on Jewish thought. The problem was that the Muslims drew many of these ideas from Christian sources. These sources of Christian “Kalām” were a *mélange* of antique pre-Socratic notions recycled to vanquish the philosophic pagans in debate.

The core problem with the Kalām method was that it made the proof for God’s existence depend upon the proof of creation *ex nihilo*. In other words, if the world was created then there must have been a Creator. But if we even begin to doubt creation *ex nihilo*, their structure collapses. The Kalām cannot show us that there is a God, since they have also rejected the philosophic arguments for His existence. The result is that we cannot perform the commandments of belief (*ikru...ha-makhala me’ikra*, like: “they threw out the baby with the bathwater”).

At bottom, the Kalām dogmatically impose their theological requirements upon reality. In order to prove the miraculous creation of everything they ended up rejecting nature itself. By contrast, Maimonides’ method accepts the philosophic argument for God, and postpones the debate over creation. This way he can prove the existence of God acceptably for both camps, fulfilling the religious requirement, without destroying the nature of perceptible reality.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JEWISH LORE ON THE FOUR TOPICS?

The most important topics are divine existence, unity, incorporeality and creation. In Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha Torah*, 1:6 he states: “It is a positive commandment to know these matters, for it is written, ‘I am the Lord your God.’”

Some of the arguments devoted to these matters in Mishneh Torah are clearly Aristotelian. Nonetheless, Maimonides now says that there was once a significant Jewish lore on these topics, different in nature and methodology from Aristotelianism. This lore, “Once cultivated by our forefathers” of the tribe of Issakhar, in some respects came to similar conclusions as Greek works on these subjects, particularly on astronomy. It did not matter which books these conclusions came from if they were true, and therefore the Jewish books became redundant. (*ayn hosheshim l’mekhaber beyn sh’khabero otam nviim beyn sh’khabero otam ha’umot, sh’kol davar sh’nitgaleh taimo v’nodaa amitato b’raiot sh’ayn b’hem dofi anu somkhim al zeh. Mishneh Torah, Kiddush Ha-Khodesh 17:24*).

Thus, in the last chapter, he said that the Jewish lore on cosmology came to some of the same conclusions as the Greek science. Now, by contrast, when discussing the lost lore on the four topics, he does not suggest any similarity with Greek lore. He might have said, as he does elsewhere, that Israel produced its own philosophers; he could even have said that the Jews started philosophy. He pointedly refrains from doing so. He neither says nor believes that this lost lore was Aristotelianism. He says it is part of the Oral Torah, *torah sh’baal pei*, which is the entire unwritten tradition passed down from Moses, i.e., *cabala*, which means “tradition.” All that we do know of this lost lore is that it dealt with the four topics.

Why was this knowledge lost? Maimonides begins by saying that the Jews were ruled by foolish (Kafih: *hasikhlim*, Schwarz: *haboorot*) foreign rulers. He does not explain this, but I take it he is summing up the entire Jewish experience of foreign rule and exile from the Babylonian empire to his day. Shem Tov has an interesting comment on this. He argues that the Jews have an obligation to study what positive learning the Gentiles possess. But since we were slaves ruled by fools, this was impossible. Learning stagnated from lack of dialogue. (*ki im hayu hem hakhamim, y’huyav aleinu sh’nada m’hem ktzat m’ha-dvarim, aval anu avadim v’hem sikhlim, lo neshaar lanu takuma.*)

PROBLEMS WITH WRITING

The more important cause of loss was the problem of writing itself. There is a Talmudic prohibition of writing down the Oral Torah, only partially quoted by Maimonides:

“R. Eleazar said: The greater portion of the Torah is contained in the written Law and only the smaller portion was transmitted orally, as it says, ‘Though I wrote for him the major portion of [the precepts of] my law, they were counted a strange thing’ (Hosea 8:12). R. Johanan, on the other hand, said that the greater part was transmitted orally and only the smaller part is contained in the written law, as it says, ‘For according to the mouth of these words’ (Exodus 34:27) . . . R. Judah b. Nahmani, the public orator of R. Simeon b. Lakish, discoursed as follows: It is written, ‘Write that these words’ (Ex. 34:27), and it is written, ‘For according to the mouth of these words.’ What are we to make of this? — It means: The words which are written thou art not at liberty to say by heart, and the words transmitted orally thou art not at liberty to recite from writing. A *Tanna* of the school of R. Ishmael taught: [It is written] ‘These’: these thou mayest write, but *thou mayest not write halachoth*. R. Johanan said: God made a covenant with Israel only for the sake of that which was transmitted orally, as it says, ‘For by the mouth of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.’” (Talmud, *Gittin* 60b,)

Thus, the Talmud derives the prohibition against writing the Oral Torah from the Torah itself. Maimonides tells us why writing the *halakhot*, i.e., the rabbinically derived law of Israel, was forbidden. The Rabbis had

anticipated that writing the law would lead to the multiplication of opinions, sects and controversies, resulting in bad practice. While the law was still oral, this had not been the case. In those days, the judiciary in Jerusalem elaborated and enforced the commands of Torah:

“The great court in Jerusalem developed the roots of the Oral Torah, and set up this legal tradition, and from them these statutes and judgments flowed to the rest of Israel. On them rested the preservation (*havtikha*: trust, security) of the Torah, since it says in Deuteronomy 17:11, ‘According to the sentence of the law which *they* shall teach thee.’” (Mishneh Torah, *H. Mamrim*, 1:1, my trans.)

Since all legal decisions came through the great court in Jerusalem, there was no occasion for dispute. It is worth comparing this rationale with Plato’s statement of the ancient concern with writing:

“SOCRATES: I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. And the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer. And when they have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves.” (*Phaedrus* 275, Jowett trans.)

Oral transmission is unitary and authoritative, written transmission becomes fragmentary and anarchic. Once written, the tradition is “tumbled about anywhere.”

If these problems arose when writing practical laws, they multiply for *maaseh bereshit* and *maaseh merkava*. This Jewish tradition included the discussion of the four topics. In addition to the rule against writing the Oral Law, Talmud particularly restricts the students of this lore:

R. Ami said: The mysteries of the Torah may be transmitted only to one who possesses five attributes, [namely], ‘The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator’ [*u’navon lakhash*, one who is able to understand secrets] (Isaiah 3:3).” (*Hagigah* 13a—see Guide 1:34 for my comment on this passage).

Therefore, since the law forbade writing this material in books available to all, and for all the other reasons given:

“The natural effect of this practice [of not writing] was that our nation lost the knowledge of those important disciplines. Nothing but a few remarks and allusions are to be found in the Talmud and the *Midrashim*, like a few kernels enveloped in such a quantity of husk, that the reader is generally occupied with the husk, and forgets that it encloses a kernel.”

This knowledge was submerged in general halachic material. What writing we have from authentic Jewish sources on the four topics is miniscule. Worse yet, the Jewish lore was overwhelmed by the volume of influential books composed on these topics by the Muslims.

WHAT IS KALĀM?

Kalām is the Muslim theology. Kalām means “word” in its many senses. It can mean Logos, scripture, prophecy, theology, dialectics, or dogma. The term Kalām, in the sense of “word,” reflects, according to Maimonides, a dogmatic concern for verbalized doctrine over the facts of existence itself. This exaltation of doctrine over reality was not confined to Islam, for we will come to speak of a Christian “Kalām,” and even a Jewish “Kalām.” In order to understand what Kalām is, and how it came to be more involved with speeches than with reality, we need

to review its history. (Hebrew translations do not use the terms Kalām and Mutakallimūn/Mutakallemim, which are the English transliterations, but, directly translate to *Dibur* and *Medabrim*, i.e., “Speech/Word” and “Speakers.”)

Fortunately, Maimonides is a dependable reporter of this history. Despite doubts registered by Pines and others, mentioned below (on Ibn Adi), his review is generally reliable (H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, Harvard, 1976, 43-58).

The Rise of Christian Theology: The story begins early, when Christians became numerous in Syria and Greece, where philosophy “flourished” (Kafih: *nitpatkha* / נִשְׁאַחַח, not “was born,” like Ibn Tibbon’s *nolda*.; see Blau, *Dict. of Med. Jud.-Ar. Texts*, 693, نَشَأَ not نَاشَأَ). Once there, they met pagan philosophers who disputed the major Christian doctrines on the four topics, particularly creation *ex nihilo*. In response, a Christian apologetic and polemic literature appeared in Greek. Once Roman emperors became converts, after Constantine (272–337), and particularly under Theodosian II (401–450) and Justinian (483-565), there were “kings intent upon the defense of religion.” They persecuted the philosophers and encouraged anti-philosophical literature.

After the Muslim ascendancy in Damascus and Baghdad, these Christian works caught the attention of Islam. Translations began to appear under Caliph Ma’mun (813-833). The works of the philosophers and their refutations by the Christians were, according to Maimonides, “transmitted” to the Muslims, by which Maimonides means that some were translated and that others were known by reference or paraphrase.

One of the earliest Christian disputants they learned of was John Philoponus (c. 500), author of commentaries on Aristotle. He deployed Aristotelian arguments against the philosophers’ doctrine of the eternity of the universe. Aristotle had said that an infinite series cannot be traversed, and John said this was proof against the eternity of the universe, which also, allegedly, could not be traversed. He noted the philosophers’ claim that the spheres of the sun and moon orbit infinitely, but have different size orbits. It followed that one orbit must be more infinite than the other, which is absurd. This is very type of the Kalām proof, a ham-handed use of philosophical dialectics to support dogma and vanquish the philosophers. Georg Cantor’s (1845-1918) theory of *transfinite sets* eventually solved the problem of different infinities. Simplicius, the defender of the philosophic tradition, rejected Philoponus’ arguments in his own day, demonstrating that Philoponus’ grasp of Aristotelian logic was weak. Nonetheless, the Kalām adopted his arguments.

Kalām Appropriation of the Pre-Socratics: The Kalām also resuscitated pre-Socratic theories of being that Plato and Aristotle had rejected, especially atomism, and its attendant concept of the vacuum. The atom is the indivisible smallest unit of matter, and the vacuum or void is the space between these indivisible units. The pre-Socratic Democritus (c. 460 BCE – c. 370 BCE) argued that there had to be irreducibly small things (*atom* = “uncuttable”) making up the big things or everything would fall through, and that these atoms would require empty space to move in. The great Athenian philosophers argued, to the contrary, that there was no end to divisibility, and thus no ultimately small things, and no unfilled space. Our modern particle physics seems closer to their opinion.

Atomism was important to the Kalām because it explained being without requiring cosmology or natural science. In the Kalām version, the properties of the atoms do not endure more than an instant. God miraculously creates new ones at every moment to replace the old ones. This Kalām “occasionalism” is its characteristic doctrine. It means that every aspect of reality has its own separate “occasion” completely independent of anything else, except from God who creates it. By this means, the Kalām championed the entirely miraculous and non-natural character of existence. Their atomism also featured time-atoms and other strange types of atoms.

The “Kalām” of the Trinity and the Qur’an: The Kalām dealt with problems shared by the three great religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, such as the four topics of divine existence, unity, incorporeality, and creation. The Christian “Kalām” was also concerned with its own special doctrines, like trinitarianism. Similarly, the

Muslim Kalām “descended” (*hitdardaro*) to other strange doctrines and methods suggested by peculiarities of their own belief, like the eternal Qur’an, eternal attributes, and anthropomorphic divine descriptions in the Qur’an. Subsequently, when Islamic sects proliferated, they advanced their special Kalām arguments to persuade the others of the truth of their doctrines. Maimonides says that he is only interested in those Kalām arguments that touch on the four supreme topics.

The Problem of Old Books: One problem with books, dealt with by Maimonides in his Introduction to the Guide, is that they freeze authority. The reader encountering old books accepts their doctrines without questioning their provenance. This is especially true if they reach any kind of canonical status. The *later* Muslims accepted the authority of the Greek and Syrian arguments, as well as the tomes the *early* Muslims produced in their first battles with the Christians and the philosophers. The demands of those conflicts were unknown to latter day students of this lore. They thought that the doctrines were uncontroversial, that they arose from pure academic inquiry, and that there was no need to examine their premises or their sources.

MUTAZILISM AND ASHARISM

There are two major trends in the history of the Islamic Kalām. The first of these is Mutazilism, from an Arabic word that refers to ascetics or separatists. Their founder was Wasil Ibn Ata (700 - 748), who may have been an ascetic. They argued, against the orthodox Salafists (“predecessors”), that divine unity implies the denial of attributes. They also rejected the Salafist’s fatalism by asserting that men had free will: i.e., justice was only just because of our free choices. Because they frequently sounded these twin themes, the Mutazilites became known as the “men of unity and justice.”

Mutazilite arguments were also “taken up by kings,” the Abbasid Baghdadi Caliphs al-Ma’mun (786 - 833) and al-Mu’tasim (833 - 842). Mutazila doctrines became law under the Caliphate. The Caliphate instituted the *Mikhnah*, an inquisition, to suppress the orthodox. Perhaps the caliphs found theological liberalism to be more elastic and accommodating than orthodoxy. In any event, the liberal’s reign of terror was worse than anything that occurred under the orthodox, who returned to power under a victim of that reign, Ibn Hanbal (780-855), during the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (821 - 861).

Afterward, the orthodox, according to I. Goldziher, “grew insatiable,” arguing that the corporeal paper and ink Qur’an *was* the eternal uncreated Qur’an. In response to Hanbalite extremism, the second major trend in Kalām arose: Asharism, named for Abu’l-Hasan al-Ashari (d. 935). These “mediators” made concessions to the orthodox on their principal issue, agreeing that divine “speech” was indeed eternal, but that this divine speech is spiritual, not corporeal. On the other hand, they disputed the Mutazila from the orthodox side, upholding the dogmas of the “essential” divine attributes and predestination. (Goldziher: *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. by Andras and Hamori, Princeton, 1981, from German, 1910, p. 99.)

JEWISH KALĀM

Maimonides, reporting the Jewish response, says that the *Geonim* and the Karaites partly adopted Kalām methods. By *Geonim* he means the non-Andalusian Sefardic authorities, especially Saadia Gaon (882–942). The Karaite sectarians went even further than the *Geonim* in their commitment to Mutazilite arguments. Maimonides’ deep interest in the Kalām ideology partly stems from his own historic battle with the Karaites in Egypt, since they embraced Mutazilite Kalām.

Insofar as the Jews followed any school, they followed the Mutazila. Their universal aversion to Asharism was not due to any critique of Asharite doctrines, but only to their acceptance of the previously established authority of the Mutazila. This is another case of the tyranny of old books, for the Asharites had defeated the Mutazila over a century before Maimonides’ time. The Jews were interested in those old Mutazilite doctrines because they had produced little of their own systematic writing on the four theological topics, in comparison with the many books

of the Muslims. (On Jewish interest in Kalām, note that Rabbi Joseph, in the Guide’s *Preface*, asked for an account of the Kalām, as did R.Yehuda Ha-Levi’s Khazar king.)

By contrast, the Jews of *Andalusia* did not subscribe to the Kalām. That was because the Muslims of pre-Almohadic Spain favored the philosophers over the Kalām. Among those Muslims that Maimonides considered philosophers were Al-Farabi (870–950), Avicenna (980 - 1037), Ibn Bajj (d.1138), and Averroes (1126–1198). Their counterparts among the Spanish Jews were, according to Kafih (note 27, p 121, *ad loc.*), Bakhya Ibn Pakuda (second half of 11th c.), Ibn Gabirol (c.1020–c.1057), and Moshe Ibn Ezra (c. 1055–after 1135). Maimonides states that the later members of this group, especially, I would say, Abraham Ibn Daud (c.1110–1180), came close to doctrines of the Guide.

The inclusion of Bakhya by Kafih is questionable since Bakhya does use the Kalām argument for the proof of God’s existence, as well as other Mutazilite methods, in his otherwise authentically Jewish system. Wolfson explains that Maimonides’ reference was to the *later* members of the Andalusian intelligentsia, not including Bakhya. Bakhya’s famous *Hovot Ha-Levavot*, (*Duties of the Heart*), employs the Kalām method in the first section, *Shaar Ha-Yikhud*. In Chapter 7 of that section, Bakhya writes:

“The demonstration of God’s Unity is as follows: It having been logically demonstrated that the World has a Creator, it becomes now our duty to institute an enquiry as to whether He is One or more than One.” (M. Hyamson trans.)

In other words, prove the creation of the world first, and from that deduce divine existence and unity.

Wolfson noticed the problem with Maimonides’ claim that the Spanish rabbis did not follow the Kalām method:

“...While it is true that some of the Jewish philosophers in Spain abandoned the Kalām method of proving the creation of the world and the existence of God, two of them, Bahya Ibn Pakuda and Joseph Ibn Tsadik, like Saadia of the East, used the modified form of the Kalām arguments for the creation of the world and hence also for the existence of God. Undoubtedly his (Maimonides’) generalization was meant to refer only to those whom he includes in what he describes as “their recent authors” and evidently Bahya Ibn Pakuda and Joseph Ibn Tsadik were not included among them.” (*Kalām*, p. 85.)

BASING GOD ON THE WORLD

The worst fault of the Kalām was that they made dogma prevail over reality. Maimonides’ indictment was that if reality did not confirm their doctrine, they re-imagined reality so that it would confirm the doctrine. They held that anything imagined could be real, which Maimonides found abhorrent. The nerve of our chapter is this crucial line from the pagan Aristotelian commentator Themistius (317–c. 388), not very clearly rendered by either English translation: We must not think that reality follows theory; rather, theory must follow reality.

The core of Kalām occasionalism is its claim that observed reality is just a “habit” (*noheg*), which could have happened differently. They therefore denied the existence of natural order. Each occurrence is a separate “atom” of reality, unconnected to any other atom. God recreates everything every moment. Our perception of the continued existence of objects is merely a projection from what we encounter *habitually* now (cf. Humian empiricism).

Not all Kalām theorists shared in occasionalism, especially the non-Muslim ones. Philoponus did not view reality through the prism of atomism, and neither do the Jewish theorists Saadia and Bakhya. They all, however, share a method. Maimonides sketches their method for us:

“They set forth the propositions which I shall describe to you, and demonstrate by their peculiar mode of arguing that the Universe had a beginning. The theory of the *creatio ex nihilo* being thus established, they asserted, as a logical consequence, that undoubtedly there must be a Maker who created the Universe. Next, they showed that this Maker is One, and from the Unity of the Creator they deduced His Incorporeality. This method was adopted by every Mohammedan *Mutakallem* in the discussion of this subject, and by those of our co-religionists who imitated them and walked in their footsteps. Although the *Mutakallemim* disagree in the methods of their proofs, and employ different propositions in demonstrating the act of creation or in rejecting the eternity of the Universe, they invariably begin with proving the *creatio ex nihilo*, and establish on that proof the existence of God.”

First prove the creation of the world, then derive that it has a Creator. This method proves the higher by making it depend on the lower. Worse, it undermines the belief in God’s existence, enjoined in the First Commandment. The reason it undermines God’s existence is the implication that if the universe was created, it must have a creator who is God, but if it is eternal, *there is no God (v'im kadum hu harei ayn eloa)*.

Even the Jewish Kalām exposed itself to this pitfall. Saadia’s *Emunot v’Deot* and Bachya’s *Hovot Ha-Levavot* energetically address the creation issue, but if their arguments for creation fall flat, they leave the Creator in the lurch.

Moreover, Maimonides continues, the philosophers debated the creation or eternity of the universe for “three thousand years,” that is, since the first philosopher, Abraham (see Kafih, note 63 *ad loc.*). The question is insoluble because the “mind stops” (*sh’ha-sekhel n’atzer etzlo*) at the boundary of the lunar sphere, beyond which we can prove nothing. The best a religiously oriented thinker (*ish ha-emet m’baalei ha-daat*) can hope to do is to cast doubt on the philosophers’ arguments for eternity. Neither reason nor revelation can disprove the other.

In any event, the Kalām arguments for creation are all subject to doubt, and some destroy the nature of observed reality. People who only consider their sophistries will come to think that the existence of God has no theoretical support (*v’akher ykhashuv ki lo n’vnei m’olam klal*). If the Kalām persuade any readers that they proved creation, it could only be because those readers do not know the distinction between proof, rhetoric and sophistry.

Demonstrative proof derives from syllogisms based on verified premises; *dialectic* (rhetoric) derives from probable premises; *sophistry* bases itself on one or more false premises (*Treatise on Logic*, ch. 8). As we will see, there is no demonstrative proof for the creation or the eternity of the universe. The Kalām “proofs” are sophistries, since they flow from their falsified view of reality. Maimonides’ arguments for creation are *dialectical*, in that they are the most persuasive arguments available due to the epistemological unavailability of demonstrative proof.

A WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

These Kalām arguments are an “*upsetting of the world*,” *m’hefukh ha-olam*, and a “*change in the order established at the time of creation*,” *shinui seder bereshit*. The italics are from the Pines translation, but not otherwise footnoted. He italicized these phrases because they are Aggadic. See Kafih notes 73 and 74, p. 124, which locate them in the Talmud, *Pesakhim* 50a, *Baba Batra* 10b, and *Shabat* 53b. The citations to *Pesakhim* and *Baba Batra* are identical accounts of the bad dream of one of the rabbis:

“Joseph the son of R. Joshua had been ill and fell in a trance. [After he recovered], his father said to him, ‘What vision did you have?’ He replied, ‘I saw a *world upside down (olam hafukh)*, the upper below and the lower above.’”

The citation to *Shabat* discussed an open miracle:

“Our Rabbis taught: It once happened that a man’s wife died and left a child to be suckled, and he could not afford to pay a wet-nurse, whereupon a miracle was performed for him and his teats opened like the two teats of a woman and he suckled his son. R. Joseph observed, Come and see how great was this man, that such a miracle was performed on his account! Said Abaye to him, On the contrary: how *lowly* was this man, that the *order of the Creation was changed* (*sh’nishtanu seder bereshit*) on his account! R. Judah observed, Come and see how difficult are men’s wants [of being satisfied], that the order of the Creation had to be altered for him! R. Nahman said: The proof is that miracles do occur, whereas food is [rarely] created miraculously.”

The rabbis are, generally, unhappy with miraculous intrusions into nature. In the first story, R. Joseph’s trance was the outcome of *illness*. In the second, R. Abaye says that if the male wet-nurse been “great” instead of “lowly” he would not need the miracle. In any event, it is clear that these things happen only in extraordinary situations. By contrast, the Kalām make everything a miracle, and expressly refuse to accept that there is an “*order established at the time of creation*,” (*seder bereshit*). But, as Daniel Webster used to say, “Miracles do not cluster.”

Nonetheless, the Kalām avowed that their “proofs” for God’s existence were solid and certain. If you did not agree, they “smote with the sword” of argument to *force* your agreement (see, on this formulation, Pines, note 23, p. 180; Kafih, note 67, p. 124). Maimonides reacts viscerally to these follies of the Kalām: “When I understood their method I was disgusted, deeply disgusted, and justifiably disgusted...” (*v’kaasher hitbonanti b’derekh hazu nakaa nafshi mimenu nakia raba meod, u’b’tsedek nakaa*).

PROPHECY AND CREATION

A religious thinker could still believe in creation because the prophets revealed it, even though he rejected Kalām arguments for creation. “There is no harm in this,” Maimonides says, meaning that it is a reasonable position, one that he himself comes to. (M. Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides*, p. 287).

But Maimonides asks: If we reject the Kalām proofs for creation, the case for eternity might look stronger—but can anyone believe in *prophets* if the eternal universe has no *Creator*? In other words, if the philosophers could prove that there was no miracle of creation, would they thereby undermine belief in other miracles, such as prophecy? Can anyone believe in the miracle of prophecy if creation *ex nihilo*, the paradigm miracle, did not occur?

He refrains from answering here, promising to do so later. He lays the groundwork for an answer in Chapter 2:32. There he identifies three positions on prophecy. The *Kalām* believe God can make anyone a prophet despite his ignorance (regarding Muhammad’s illiteracy: Qur’an 29:48; *Al-Bukhari Hadith* 1:3). The *philosophers* believe anyone with a good intellect and imagination could be a prophet if properly trained and educated. *Maimonides* agrees with the philosophers, except God could still withhold prophecy from the properly trained candidate.

The point is that the philosophers, who do not believe that God is *Creator* of the universe, still hold that there are *prophets*. Al-Farabi, for example, maintained that a prophet is a philosopher whose excellent imagination creates and processes symbols.

Maimonides had also privileged prophecy as one of the three sources of good information (1:50). Thus, he can bring back prophecy to tip the close balance over to the side of creation. We may believe in the prophetic revelation of creation even under the philosophers’ version of prophecy (which is somewhat more expansive than Maimonides’ version). This works, because, as we will later see, the philosophic claim that the universe is eternal is not free from doubt. Because it is not free from doubt, there is no *demonstrative* proof for eternity, and

Maimonides could therefore advance *dialectical* arguments for creation, having laid a basis for the use of prophetic revelation as one of those privileged arguments.

MAIMONIDES' METHOD

Maimonides contrasts his own method with the Kalām method.

First, the universe must be either eternal or created from nothing. There is no other alternative.

Leo Strauss, in his introduction to the Pines translation of the Guide, p. *liv*, finds this division difficult, since he is committed to Plato's third alternative: creation from unformed matter. Maimonides probably considered this theory a subset of the philosophers' eternal universe, since the Aristotelianism he knew was neo-Platonized. The universe is thus an eternal emanation from the endless potentiality of the good—where *potentiality* is another way of understanding *hyle*. The universe is eternally generated. It follows that under Plato's third "alternative" the disjunction remains: the universe must be either eternal or created.

Nonetheless, on either account, creation or eternity, we can prove that God exists. If created, there must be a Creator. If it is eternal, there must be an unmoved prime Mover behind all causes and effects. Either way, God exists. Having reviewed the alternatives, Maimonides asserts that the proof for the existence of God should begin with the *provisional* assumption of the eternity of the world, for this way the "demonstration (of God's existence) is perfect, both if the world is eternal and if it is created."

He thus reaches the same conclusion as the Kalām, without resort to their doubtful arguments, by starting from the conclusions of the philosophers. He does not do this because he agrees with the philosophers, but because this achieves proof of the existence of God uncontested by either side. The objective, remember, is that the believer be *convinced* of God's existence.

In recent decades, some have doubted Maimonides' support for creation *ex nihilo* (Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, I. Twersky, ed. Harvard, 1979, p. 16-40; W. Z. Harvey, "Why Maimonides was not a *Mutakallim*," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, p. 112, ed. Joel L. Kraemer, Oxford, 1991). They claim that he covertly opposed creationism. In his recent book, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World* (Cambridge, 2006), Kenneth Seeskin systematically refutes this claim of esoteric eternalism. Seeskin shows that there is no good reason not to take Maimonides at his word that he believes in creation *ex nihilo*.

Maimonides says that he will refrain from addressing the issue of the creation of the universe until he has first proven the existence of God perfectly from both contending perspectives. This is the exact reverse of the Kalām method, which was to prove creation first and then deduce a Creator. He can later examine the solidity of the philosopher's argument for eternity, and array against it the strongest arguments for creation. He will not find a decisive proof, for this is unavailable to the mind. Still, he will give good reasons to accept prophetic revelation's account of creation.

THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

At the end of the chapter, Maimonides makes a remarkable statement, given his times:

"I have already told you that nothing exists except God and this universe (1:34), and that there is no other evidence for His Existence but this universe in its entirety and in its several parts. Consequently, the universe must be examined as it is: the propositions must be derived from those properties of the universe that are clearly perceived, and hence you must know its visible form and its nature. Then only will you find in the universe evidence for the existence of a Being not included therein."

Contrast the Kalām method. Starting with the need to prove the dogma of creation *ex nihilo*, they assemble as many arguments as necessary, “even up to a hundred,” irrespective if the world really is as they depict it. By contrast, Maimonides tells us to look at our world, this observed, empirical reality. Learn what the world’s nature really is. Only in this way can the existence of One *not* part of this reality ever be found. How liberating for science. It is the way of the good physician that Maimonides was.

Warren Zev Harvey (*ibid.*) portrays Maimonides’ stance excellently:

“If however, someone should examine the question of creation in time vs. eternity *a parte ante* with an eye to supporting creation in time, his tendentiousness will blind him to the truth. Now it is also a principle of Maimonides that only the truth (*al-haqq*) pleases God, and only falsehood angers him (Guide 2:47). It follows necessarily that the *mutakallim* who exerts himself to prove the creation of the world in time may imagine that he is serving God, but according to Maimonides, he is in reality angering God! For Maimonides, therefore, the difference between the philosopher and the *mutakallim* is the difference between someone who pleases God and someone who angers him; and anger, Maimonides teaches us (1:36, 1:54), is attributed to God only with regard to idolatry and unbelief (*kufir*). Maimonides’ critique of the Kalām is thus not only a philosophic critique, but also a religious one. The tendentiousness and sophistry of the Kalām are obnoxious to Maimonides’ religious sensibility. Both as philosopher and as religionist, Maimonides rejected the Kalām. Surely, Maimonides himself would say that he was not a *mutakallim* not only because he was a committed philosopher, but also—and no less—because he was a committed Jew. All this coheres with Maimonides’ view that the bond between man and God is the intellect.”

Maimonides promises to show in the next chapter what this world really looks like, according to accepted science of his day, and what the world’s relationship to God is.

The Problem of Intuition: If we take Warren Zev Harvey’s view, that the touchstone of inquiry must be the disinterested pursuit of truth, this works well for Maimonides.

There is, however, a major problem lurking in Maimonides’ statements. We could, perhaps, read them as a demand for direct optical perception alone, i.e., that what you see is what you get. That is how Yehuda Even-Shmuel reads these passages. We previously quoted Maimonides saying: “Consequently, the universe must be examined as it is: the propositions must be derived from those properties of the universe which are *clearly perceived* (*k’fi sh’hu*), and hence you must know its *visible form and its nature* (*sh’ro’im b’teva*).” Earlier in the chapter he had said, “We merely maintain that the earlier Theologians, both of the Greek Christians and of the Mohammedans, when they laid down their propositions, did not investigate the *real properties of things* (*ha-gilui ha-nirei m’iniane ha-mitziot*—lit: the properties of existence *revealed visibly*).”

Even-Shmuel says that these statements mean that the properties of the universe must be derived from “intuition” (*derekh ha-intuitzia*, p. 397, *ad loc.*), “simple intuition,” (*ha-intuitivit ha-pashut*, p. 405) or “intuition and science” (*riitanu ha-intuitivit v’ha-mdait*, p. 408—this formulation is better than the other two).

This use of the term “intuition” struck me as odd, until I checked my *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 1967, which defines as follows: “1) Direct perception of truth, fact, etc., independent of any reasoning process: immediate apprehension,” and “5) PHILOS.: An immediate cognition of an object not inferred or determined by a previous cognition of the same object.” A direct optical perception would be an “intuition.”

Even-Shmuel’s restriction of knowledge to that which is “clearly perceived” as “intuited” means that our eyes should perceive this reality unmediated by prior conceptions. While this works well to exclude Kalām

dogmatism, but is not the same as Warren Zev Harvey's criterion, which was the disinterested pursuit of truth (although Even-Shmuel stumbles to this in his final formulation).

The problem with intuition is that I perceive the sun rotating around the earth. This is an unmediated perception, i.e., an intuition. But I know, through my conditioning, as well as through my own pursuit of truth, that the earth rotates the sun. Intuition may mislead, and the empiricist skeptics make the most of well-known examples, like mirages, where it does mislead. Maimonides, as physician, was well aware that what we glimpse on the surface of the human body does not truly reflect the hidden processes within it, which we can only know through the study of medicine, not by intuition. The point is that something more than direct perception is required. It may be necessary to have a working hypothesis in order to make any progress. (We should not deceive ourselves however: Maimonides would probably not have accepted solar-centrism, no matter how well articulated—but this had nothing to do with intuition, and everything to do with the state of the sciences in the 12th century; see Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1962).

What Maimonides meant when he said that we must base our investigation on what we clearly perceive was best captured in Even-Shmuel's final formulation, which embraced Maimonides' strong commitment to sense-data correspondence, taken in the light of scientific method. This once again illustrates Maimonides' optimistic attitude toward the acquisition of knowledge.

ANACHRONISM? THE PROBLEM OF YAHYA IBN ADI

In recalling those Christians whose ideas came to the Kalām, Maimonides mentions John Philoponus and Yahya Ibn Adi. In context, it may seem like Maimonides is saying these were the *earliest* of the Christian polemicists. However, all Maimonides was saying was that they best represented the flow of these ideas to Islam down to his own day.

H.A. Wolfson (*The Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 55, fn. 64) takes critical note of students of this chapter who find the reference to Ibn Adi anachronistic. Those critics include all its modern translators, from Munk, to Friedlander, Weiss, and Pines, and, I might add, Schwarz in his recent Hebrew translation (fn. 21, p. 188). Schwarz' long footnote cites these critics but does not seem to notice Wolfson's defense of Maimonides.

Ibn Adi was a Christian Monophysite who lived in Iraq from 873 to 974 C.E., four centuries after John Philoponus. He wrote and translated philosophic works as well as Christian works, especially on divine unity and divine knowledge of particulars. Wolfson says, (p. 54, 58):

“Undoubtedly Maimonides considered him as one of the main sources of the Muslims' knowledge of what he calls the Christian Kalām. Thus John Philoponus and Yahya Ibn Adi are mentioned by Maimonides not as examples of those who were responsible for the rise of the Kalām but rather as examples of those whose influence helped to shape some of the arguments for the four beliefs which he was going to deal with....

“As an example of a Christian Greek author whose work came to be known to Muslims through translation he mentions John Philoponus, and as an example of a Christian author who wrote his work originally in Arabic he mentions Yahya Ibn Adi. These two authors were selected by him as illustrative not only because he thought they were each most outstanding in his field but also because they were sources of arguments which he had in mind later to present as characteristic of the Mutakallimūn. Finally, alluding to certain beliefs peculiar to Islam, he remarks that even in connection with these beliefs the Muslims employed the method of argumentation which they had learned from the Christians.”

This last, from the point of view of Islam, is the most damning thing Maimonides can say about the Kalām.

WAS MAIMONIDES A THEOLOGIAN?

It is after Rosh Hashana, the shofar still ringing in my ears, calling to mind Maimonides' account of the shofar's "deep meaning" (*remez*): "Awake! Awake! O sleepers from your sleep; O slumberers, arouse ye from your slumbers, and examine your deeds, return in repentance and remember your Creator (*boreikhem*)." For reasons that shall remain my own, I am convinced that there is a Creator who revealed truth in His Torah. I have been blessed with moments of inspiration (*ruakh ha-kodesh*) verging on prophecy (*navua*). I know of those whose experiences were more intense than mine were. You may call me delusional, but I know that the greater delusion is to reduce the whole to corporeality. You may say that the Muslim or Buddhist would not accept my account, but I know how to answer them. I take it that this was also Maimonides' view.

It is clear to me that the Creator and His creations are part of the whole. We call the inquiry into the truth of the whole philosophy. Maimonides calls the inquiry into the divine matters in this whole the "divine science."

Leo Strauss famously argued that there is an esoteric and exoteric face to Maimonides' writing. We also accept that Strauss' writing possesses two faces.

In his *exoteric* presentation, Strauss argues that the Guide was a species of Kalām and that Maimonides was not a philosopher, but, at most, a theologian. Since the purpose of the Guide was, in his view, to defend religion by showing the compatibility of Judaism and philosophy, just for that reason alone it was not philosophy but Kalām. He qualifies this, somewhat, by saying that Maimonides built his Kalām on reason rather than imagination. This fits into Strauss' general schema that Judaism and philosophy are eternal antagonists, as are theology and philosophy, for theology is his other name for Kalām.

In Strauss' *esoteric* presentation, the Guide, a masterpiece of esoteric writing, conceals a hard Aristotelian view (or, in some interpretations, a Platonic view), including, crucially, the eternity of the universe, i.e., that it was not created. That is because, according to W. Z. Harvey (in the above quoted article), "The Aristotelian notion of eternity *a parte ante* best conforms to the *nature of what exists*" (his ital.). Since Maimonides' secret doctrine conforms to the nature of what exists, Harvey says that it cannot be Kalām, because only that is Kalām which fails Themistius' test of conforming to what exists. Harvey agrees with Strauss that the hidden doctrine is eternalism, and just for that reason denies that the Guide is, on the esoteric level at least, a species of Kalām. (For what seems like the contrary view, expressed by the young Strauss, see *Philosophy and Law*, 1987, p. 85).

Now the key to all this is Harvey's statement that eternalism best conforms to what is. He evidently felt he had no need to attach an explanation of why this should be so. Perhaps we could call this a species of "philosophic" Kalām, inasmuch as it reflects modernist atheist prejudice, which, I feel it is safe to say, also characterizes Strauss' esoteric face. Harvey does criticize Strauss for arguing that Judaism and philosophy are incompatible, but that is only because Harvey's radical Maimonideanism accepts that the Guide discovered Judaism's true inner Aristotelianism. In other words, for Harvey, reason and revelation are compatible because the Guide made revelation comport with "what exists."

Strauss comes closer, grudgingly, to truth, by his admission that philosophy must recognize that it cannot disprove revelation, and that it must remain "open to the challenge of theology." There is a vague sense in which "Philosophy must admit the possibility of revelation" (which is further than Harvey goes in his article). But Strauss' grudging admission could also mean the opposite, that philosophy must also remain open to "the challenge" of atheism. In such statements as these Strauss patronizes religion for its political benefits.

But I do not want to be patronized by such a "noble lie" since, as I am convinced, the Creator is clearly part of the whole. Moreover, I do not accept the incompatibility of reason and revelation, nor did Maimonides (and not *à la* Harvey, that revelation was reason's disguise). I also would not accept Strauss' statement that the Guide's

primary purpose was to show the compatibility of Judaism and philosophy, but, rather, that its primary purpose was to train future prophets.

I would agree with Harvey that by pursuing “uncompromised objectivity” the Guide is not a work of Kalām. It is, therefore, philosophy or theology. Philosophy and theology are not categories but activities: Maimonides was a philosopher and a theologian because he did philosophy and theology, not because a particular doctrine locked him into some category. I do not assume that all theology, the act of studying the divine things, is a kind of tendentious Kalām. The inquiry into divine things is an inquiry, as far as I am concerned, into part of that which exists.

(Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chicago, 1952; Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” Vol. III, 1979, which is the English original of the Hebrew translation in *Iyyun Hebrew Philosophical Quarterly*, Jerusalem, V, no. 1, Jan. 1954, pp 110-126; English version at the Deakin Philosophical Society website. Harvey’s article, “Why Maimonides was not a *Mutakallim*,” *ibid.*, is a quick decoder ring for Strauss’ *Persecution*; but Harvey receives necessary correction, especially for his radical eternalism, from Herbert A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides the Man and His Works*, Oxford, 2005, 398-402; and from Seeskin, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World*, Cambridge, 2005. See also Joseph Buijs, “The Philosophic Character of Maimonides’ Guide—A Critique of Strauss’ Interpretation,” in *Maimonides, A Collection of Critical Essays*, Buijs, ed., Notre Dame, Indiana, 1998).

The Strauss Problem: Strauss shares a problem with many secular thinkers. It is their failure to appreciate the brilliance of the divine creation, what physicist Brian Greene calls the “Elegant Universe.” This leads them to see only contradictions and faults in that creation. So it was with Strauss. He has contradictions upon contradictions. Not only does Maimonides, in his telling, use contradictions to hide an infernal Spinozism (or high-toned Aristotelianism) from the pious, but he also made reason and revelation irreconcilable, so that philosophy and theology could never reach synthesis.

How foreign all this would have been to Maimonides, who sought to reconcile our perplexities. And how foreign to the nature of the divine, whose science he sought to teach, to create a structure with so many locked gates and startling landslides. The truth is that there are no contradictions in the divine science. It might even have been the case that Maimonides intended the section on contradictions in the Guide’s Introduction to steer away secular thinkers. Those who know Maimonides’ method recognize how he built levels of understanding into the Guide’s design, and that those seemingly irreconcilable contradictions usually reduce to those levels of understanding. Not every pill cures every disease.

Strauss was by no means the first to discover that there were problematic knots in Maimonides’ writing. Centuries of halakhic scholars had learned to identify a *shvere Rambam*. They found that the hard work of reconciliation acted like nuclear fusion to produce enormous insights. This was not “hagiography” as one modern called it, but a recognition by all deeply religious thinkers that reality itself is ultimately one, together with our trust that Maimonides only sought to reveal that unity.

(Fundamental to understanding the development of the modern philosophical debate: Eliezer Schweid, “Religion and Philosophy: The Scholarly-Theological Debate Between Julius Guttman and Leo Strauss,” in *Maimonidean Studies*, vol. 1, 163. Further reading: *Philosophers and Scholars: Wolfson, Guttman and Strauss on the History of Jewish Philosophy*, Jonathan Cohen, Lexington, 2007; chapters 3 and 4, *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy*, Marvin Fox, Chicago, 1995. Haunting all of this, though only barely mentioned, is Rudolph Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*.)

Theology vs. Kalām: Theology need not be the same thing as Kalām. The distinction here is that the forerunners of the Kalām used philosophical technique as a tool to defend the dogmas of faith. That is what prompted Themistius’ condemnation of dogmatism.

Theology also need not follow the Kalām method of basing God’s existence on proof of creation. This methodology grounded the higher in the terms of the lower, and was therefore opposed to the type of inquiry demanded by what Maimonides called the “divine science.”

Maimonides probably would have nodded his head to the scholastic *credo ut intelligam*, “I believe in order that I may understand” (Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1). The opening of the Mishneh Torah, “The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence; all the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being,” is a statement of belief in which the *intelligibilia* clearly follow the *credo*. While he does develop proofs for these primary intelligibles, the force of the pronouncement is to establish the commandments of belief.

But those same intelligibles must be analyzed by criteria intrinsic to their reality. Indeed, there are only two things in existence, God and the universe (he says this in our chapter and in 1:33). Since we cannot analyze God, we can only learn of Him through the study of His creation. This rejection of dogmatism was a gauntlet cast before the Kalām.

What of the notion that “philosophy is the handmaiden of theology,” *philosophia ancilla theologiae*? This notion became the banner under which the church fathers constructed the dogmas that later grew into the Kalām. The sense of it was that philosophy was, so to speak, a tool to help make the dogma credible, even if “philosophy” only became the rationalization for that dogma. Aquinas reinterpreted the principle in the light of our religious duty to comprehend revelation. Reason then becomes the necessary companion of any faith, *philosophia ancilla theologiae*, an entirely different approach from that of the Kalām.

Maimonides’ “Divine Science”: Maimonides resisted the use of either the terms “theology” or “metaphysics.” When he does use the term “metaphysics,” *akher ha-teva* / בעד אלטביעה, as in our chapter, he refers to the Aristotelian book of that name, or at least to its world of commentary, not to a distinct discipline. The term he invariably uses is *mdai ha-elohut*, אלעלמ אלאלאהי, “divine science” (usually mistranslated as “metaphysics”). He gives a reasonably clear précis of that discipline in Guide 1:35 and 1:34. Divine science concerns parables in the prophetic scriptures, “mysteries (*sodot*) and secrets of the law (*sitrei torah*)”:

“The attributes of God, their inadmissibility, and the meaning of those attributes which are ascribed to Him; concerning the Creation, His Providence, in providing for everything; concerning His will, His perception, His knowledge of everything; concerning prophecy and its various degrees: concerning the meaning of His names...” (Guide 1:35)

“(1) What the heavens are, what is their number and their form; what beings are contained in them; what the angels are; how the creation of the whole world took place; what is its purpose, and what is the relation of its various parts to each other; what is the nature of the soul; how it enters the body; whether it has an independent existence, and if so, how it can exist independently of the body [i.e, after death]; by what means [prayer or speculation?] and to what purpose [to unite with the active intellect or with God?], and similar problems... (2) All these subjects are connected together; for there is nothing else in existence but *God and His works*, the latter including all existing things besides Him: we can only obtain a knowledge of Him through His works; His works give evidence of His existence, and show what must be assumed concerning Him, that is to say, what must be attributed to Him either affirmatively or negatively.” (Guide 1:34; compare both with Commentary on the Mishnah, *Hagigah* 2:1)

As I explain in 1:33, “Why it is Harmful to Begin this Science,” the relation in the second passage (from 1:34) of the (2) to (1) is not the relation of dogma to science, but rather to the demonstrable truths that follow from the investigation of the objects of divine science. As I also show there, this program was not cognate to metaphysics.

His concern in both 1:34 and 1:35, however, was not metaphysics or theology, but the defense of this inquiry itself. Maimonides condemned those who rejected it as if it “contain(ed) some secret evil, or (was) contrary to the fundamental principles of the Law, as fools think who are only philosophers in their own eyes.”

If we want to say that theology is the same thing as divine science, meaning the examination of the nature of the divine things enumerated by Maimonides in these passages, then it would be appropriate to say, that in addition to his many other mantles, Maimonides was a theologian of the highest order.

In another sense, he was also a Cabalist (or, strictly speaking, a proto-Cabalist), though his Cabala was not like that of his famous students, R. Moshe De Leon’s theosophic Cabala or R. Abraham Abulafia’s ecstatic Cabala. Neither was it like the vulgar magicians of his day, with their amulets, abracadabras, and magic bowls.

It was his desire to remove the corporeal and the imaginary from Cabala that ironically earned him the false reputation as an anti-Cabalist.

GUIDE 1:72 COSMOS AND MICROCOSMOS

“What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?” *Hamlet*

INTRODUCTION

The ancients, including the ancient Jews, looked upon man as a microcosm of the universe. This means that there is a system of correspondences and affinities between the organs and elements of man, his mind, the universe and God. They opposed this notion against the irrational Epicurean universe of random accidental atomic events. In the medieval period, they used it against the Kalām occasionalism of random miraculous atomic events. (On the Jewish microcosm, the *olam katan*, see *Pirkei d'R. Natan* ch. 31; Halevi, *Kuzari* 2:26; Yosef Ibn Tzadik, *Olam Katan*. See note on R. Yosef below.)

The theory of the microcosm was a type of organicism, which viewed all things as part of an organic whole. Organicism, then and now, comes to answer the randomness that science frequently urges. (The idea of the microcosm is in Plato: *Timaeus*, 47b. Henri Bergson, in our day, revived organicism).

By accepting the concept of the microcosm we justify scientific inquiry, for then we assume that the correspondences are not random or accidental but comprehensible and systematic. If those correspondences really exist then science should be able to reveal them. God knew what He was doing when He made the universe, and, therefore, we can, at least in principle, come to understand what He was doing.

This optimistic view provides science the promise that its researches will succeed. Man lives in a friendly universe in which his place is central, with a loving God in control.

Maimonides subscribes to this doctrine. In this chapter, he reviews what his contemporaries knew of the system of correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm.

Our method will be to provide a brief portrayal of the system. We will then identify those aspects of it which are clearly outmoded, followed by those which may have some force nowadays, and, finally, those that we still can agree with and profitably assimilate. We will reflect on the nature of this grand analogy. We will then survey those aspects of the life of the macrocosm and the microcosm that Maimonides said could not be analogized to one another. We will then discuss whether we are asking the right questions when we debate the contemporary relevance of this grand analogy. This will lead us to how Maimonides changed the subject from the physical analogy to a purely intellectual analogy, at the end of the chapter. The analogy becomes, then, a spiritual exercise or meditational pathway. This presages a development in Jewish religious consciousness toward a more inward and mystical practice. We will close with brief discussions of the pervasive idea of eternal recurrence, and of Maimonides' predecessors who stressed the grand microcosmic analogy.

ANCIENTS AND MODERNS

We should not view this chapter in sepia-toned nostalgia. The educated of Maimonides' day considered it to be conventional wisdom. Moreover, these ideas are so interrelated that we cannot remove any of them without causing the structure to collapse.

We have a larger problem. We cannot merely remove some of these ideas and correct others. A very large part of this lore is simply wrong, seen in the light of contemporary understanding. With the coming of the enlightenment moderns merely laughed off this ancient baggage.

But having laughed off the whole system, what have we gained? Our modern thought project has left us with the carnage of Heideggerian irrationalism, with all its existentialist and postmodern progeny. It reduced man to Hamlet's mere quintessence of dust. The crisis of modern thought drives our reexamination of ancient rationalism.

What we most need now is to return to the ancients, to understand them as they understood themselves, and to reintegrate their positive contributions without doing violence to ourselves or to them (Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 8-9, Chicago, 1950, 1965). Is this possible?

It is possible only if we recognize our frailties. We are not immune to dubious unified field theories. Santayana said that "Unity somehow exercises an evil spell over metaphysicians" (*Some Turns of Thought in Modern Philosophy*, ch. 4). Not just metaphysicians. We spend hundreds of millions each year because some are convinced that free radicals explain all disease and degeneration. Global warming and its older cousin, global cooling, are the new religions of the irreligious. And what have we gained in our flight from religion but a flight to its totalitarian substitutes, the gods that failed? It is hard to laugh at the ancients when we contemplate our follies.

Perhaps we should take a second look at Maimonides' ideas of elemental and psychical balance.

HOW SHOULD WE ACCEPT MAIMONIDES' GRAND ANALOGY?

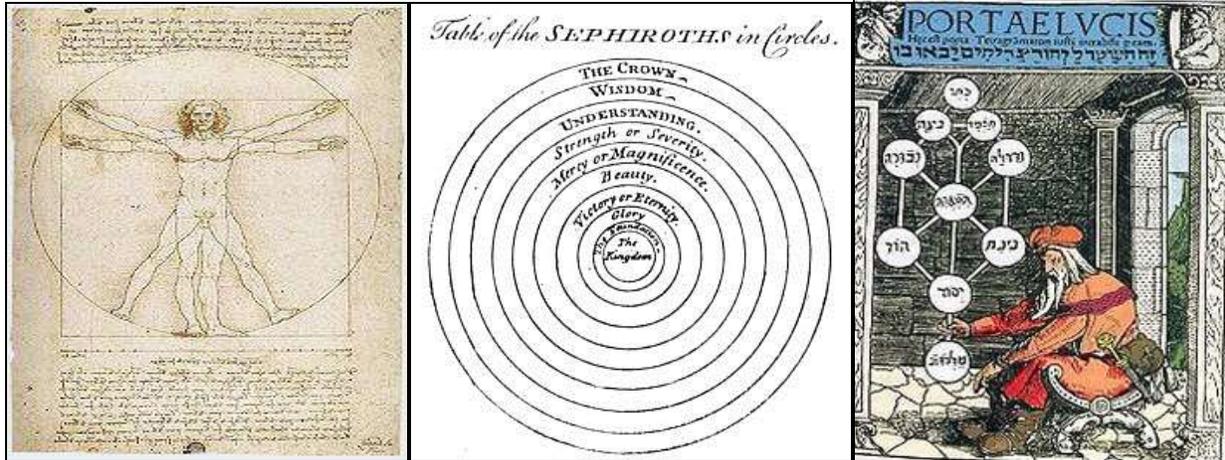
In examining this chapter, I think some of Maimonides' scientific points, a small number, to be sure, retain their force, especially those of a more general nature. Some others might work in an intuitional or poetic sense. We nod approvingly of other ideas. Some seem timeless, especially his commitment to organicism and design in nature.

Maimonides called the universal macrocosm an individual living being, like you or me. On a higher level, this implies that man himself is, primordially, the universe. This is the idea of the *adam kadmon*, primordial man, suggested, but not explicitly articulated, throughout the chapter. It is also the *shiuur koma*, i.e., the contemplation of "the dimensions of divine stature." Both are systems of correspondences between man and the universe, which portray man as somehow holding the levers of this universe. (Shem Tov reports that his contemporaries called this chapter the *Shiuur Koma*. See, on this idea, Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 67, *et seq.*, and below "Judaism after the Collapse of the Cosmos.")

From what is one and simple only one can come to be, that is, from one God comes one universe. Man corresponds to that universe.

If that is true, the reverse could also be true. Consider the power of that notion: that we could, in principle, retrace the path back from man to the universe to God. (See my essay in 1:53 "From One Single Simple Thing Only One Thing Comes?" and the one just before it. Also, my notes below on the "Grand Analogy as Grand Meditation").

God creates only one thing, the universe, and in some unutterable way man is that universe. Think of the images of Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* as related to the tree of life, the *sefirot* of Jewish esotericism. The *sefirot*, were, in one view, nothing other than the powers behind Maimonides' cosmic spheres.



R. Yosef Gikatilla, 1248 –c.1325, an important bridge figure between Maimonides and Zoharic Cabala, defined the *sefirot* as “intelligences.” The *sefirot* were originally regarded intradecidally. Later they were linked to the spheres, but after Maimonides, they were only viewed as modes of divine unfolding.

(On sefirot, Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 96 – 116, esp. 109; Idel, *Kabbalah, New Perspectives*, ch. 6. For Maimonides’ list of ten intelligences, “Angels,” with no obvious connection to spheres, *Mishneh Torah, Ysodei Ha-Torah* 2:7.)

What can it all mean for us? We are not random alienated accidents lost in meaningless space, but significantly related to the very purpose of being.

Let’s take look at Maimonides’ world.

THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

This universe is dense with substance, containing no spaces and no vacuum. Shem Tov, at 110b, explains that if there were a vacuum the world would not be solid through. The world would just be an agglomeration of things, and therefore could not be a single being, “like Said and Omar.” It follows that if there were a vacuum, in either man or the world, there could be no analogy between the unity of the microcosm and the macrocosm.

The cosmos is a series of spheres, at least nine in number. These are like ever turning crystal globes successively surrounding us, one contiguous to the other, a glass onion. The planets and stars do not move, but adhere to the surface of these spheres.

There are two types of matter in this universe: 1) the hylic matter that forms the four basic elements of earth, air, fire and water; and, 2) the mysterious matter that forms the bodies in outer space, called aether or quintessence (fifth element).

The four sublunar non-intelligent elements in the cosmic macrocosm correspond to the four humours in the human microcosm, and to a series of other forces and arrays that come in fours.

The five elements come from the two eternal substances, matter and form (eternal *a parte post*). They have their “proper places,” one above the other, the earth at the bottom or center, surrounded by the sphere of water, then air, then fire, and above that the aether. The lower four elements remain in their places until forced to move by the rotating spheres above them. After having been displaced, those four elements return to their proper places in a straight line, up in the case of air and fire, down in the case of earth and water. The proper place, or rather, position, of the fifth element is in the cosmos, above the sublunar elements of earth, water, air and fire. This

quintessence constantly rotates, at unvarying speed (although each sphere has its own unchanging speed and rotational path).

The lower four elements lack intelligence. Maimonides actually says that the elements are “dead bodies” (*nakhim metim* / אנגסומ מִיִּתֵּה), which means that, in and of themselves, they have no life force. They have only a sort of natural gravity that makes them return to their proper places. Since they have no principle of independent movement, they have no life. By contrast, the spheres made of ever-turning aether have souls, for only an intelligent soul produces circular motion (Guide 2:4). The soul of the outer sphere *rules* the rest of the universe, giving each entity its properties. It is the ultimate cause of every motion. It is also the ultimate cause of souls.

The soul that enlivens every living being, including animals and vegetables, derives its origin from the soul that moves the outer sphere. It is also the ultimate source of the human soul, called the rational faculty, *koakh ha-divri*, a natural human attribute. Without it, man could not prepare his food, nor could he organize communities. He needs to form communities to divide the work required to make the tools, clothes and lodging that he, unlike other animals, needs. (See below, “Three Disharmonies” and “Maimonides Changes the Subject.”)

Superior to all is God, the “soul” of the universe, without whom nothing could endure.

Once every cosmic year all the stars return to their places in the night sky. This also has its analogue in the sublunar world and the microcosm. According to the same principle of eternal recurrence, all things subject to generation and corruption cycle through the successive forms of their elemental matter to the form that they once had (See “The Eternal Recurrence,” below).

Certain types of creatures in the universe change by way of alteration, not through the process of generation and corruption, and their alteration follows no fixed rule, but is necessarily dependent upon their elemental blend of substance. This is the case in both the microcosm and the macrocosm. These include creatures that Maimonides thought were spontaneously generated in rotting organic matter. Likewise, the stomach supposedly generates such worms and parasites. These all correspond to the various patterns of the constellations, which also follow no discernible rule. The only explanation for such stellar anomalies is the divine *will*.

WHY WAS THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES SILENCED?

The march of science destroyed Maimonides’ charming picture of the universe. The spheres are now merely orbiting planets. They are composed of the same type of matter we have on earth, not a radically different aether.

If there are no spheres, ensouled or otherwise, the souls of living creatures could not have stemmed from them.

While there are elements, the periodic table shows that they are more numerous than the magic number four.

Our sense of stellar motion is now more mechanical, so that while there could hypothetically be an ensouled something somehow stirring the pot, or giving an initial push, any galactic motion we are aware of is just the result of cause and effect, not due to souls.

Maimonides and his predecessors knew that their elegant picture of the cosmos did not conform to observation. (See below: “Judaism after the Collapse of the Cosmos” on the crisis caused by Ptolemaic cosmology).

The Talmud turns out to be more right than Maimonides when it says that the spheres are stationary and the stars move. (*Pesakhim*, 94b, but see Guide 2:8, where Maimonides’ version of that Talmudic text has the Rabbis admitting defeat by gentile astronomy, as also related by Shem Tov, 111a).

Even the ancients realized that the cosmic year was much longer than the apparent return of the stars. That is because through minute positional shifts, the whole sky moving over great periods reveals stars that we could not see before (equinoctial precession). Though there seems to be a cycle to this, the truth is that over eons there is drift and entropy, not recurrence.

There are no spontaneously generated living creatures in rotting organic matter or anywhere else, with the possible exception of mitotic generation in the very simplest creatures (not really an exception, since there is no spontaneity involved).

Where is the harmonious music of the spheres?

We lost Maimonides' beautiful cosmos, but we retain a sense of order. To the extent that there is a rational natural order in man, there is correspondence between the orderliness of the microcosm and the macrocosm. Indeed, by junking the aethereal spheres we see that the elemental composition of the universe and man is closer than was thought. But this universal order seems to lack the animating soul that concerned Maimonides. Could this be the *élan vital*, as in Henri Bergson?

Man does have soul and mind, and we do want to accept that the universe has a God, but we seem to have abandoned the quest to discover any specific physical mechanism relating them.

SOMEWHAT LESS DUBIOUS

While the idea of spontaneously generated worms is ridiculous, it is true that there are substances that have no purpose. This class has expanded since we no longer retain much sense of the Aristotelian belief that all things have a purposive cause, that is to say, a *telos*.

The idea of an initial cause of motion shows promise. In a universe generated from an initial big bang, it is possible that there was one great motion that got all the other motions going, keeping all the elements moving and combining. Still, at the end of this inertial movement we know that there is entropic dissipation, over immense time. There are no eternally rotating spheres.

Perhaps we can put the big bang together with the old idea that every effect must be contained in its cause, with all that might imply of design in nature and the necessity for a designer.

One notion that we should consider is the Aristotelian four forces doctrine, comprised of the combinative, vegetative, animative and intellective forces. The (a) combinative force composes and mixes the elements, which then combine into minerals; (b) the vegetative force makes plants grow; (c) the animative force gives life to all animals, including us; and (d) the intellective force is responsible for our thought. All of these creative and enlivening operations require causes, and these forces supposedly ultimately flow from the soul of the outer sphere. None of that holds except the intuition that there are forces behind life and the creation of all things.

Four is a magic number dear to Maimonides, representing society's lingering attachment to Pythagoreanism, which allowed him to find affinity among the four forces, the four elements, the four humours, the four causes, and so on. Indeed, he rhapsodizes that his view of fourness as a unified field theory came to him in prophetic inspiration (Guide 3:22, 2:10). But insofar as science is now concerned, he is way off the reservation. I suppose we should admit fourness as an idea of balance. To be sure, balance and equipoise are critical to all systems (but now we like fiveness more, cf. the Golden Ratio and the Fibonacci series). In our mathematization of the cosmos, we do find a balancing beauty in the theories of physicists and astronomers.

Following Aristotle, all changes in the universe, especially among creatures subject to generation and corruption, trace to the diurnal action of the sun, through the alternation of light and darkness. It is certainly true that this

alternation affects all living beings on earth. Still, the contention that diurnality causes all change goes too far. The point is important to Maimonides because he will compare this diurnal alternation of the outer sphere to the beating of the heart, and assert that just as the stopping of the heart causes the death of the person, so the cessation of the motion of the sphere would cause the death of the universe.

But this idea the idea flows from the false doctrine of the spheres. The idea also depends on the notion of the terracentric universe. While the cessation of diurnal alternation may lead to the death of life on earth, it would not affect the sun itself, or the rest of the universe, for only the earth would need to stop turning. Taken as an intuition of the importance of diurnality, the idea is interesting, but difficult to extricate from its baggage.

On the other hand, if motion, as such, were to stop, the universe would cease; but since there is no single persisting physical cause of motion, like the outer sphere, there is no way to apply this idea. We can certainly assert that without God the universe would not persist, but this does not involve any cognizable physical mechanism, and would only be a result of the direct exercise of divine will. Pure will, volition, by definition, is scientifically unanalyzable.

MORE LIKELY

Some Maimonidean ideas are making a comeback, such as his opposition to the concepts of atom and vacuum, and his claim that matter is infinitely divisible.

Particle physics for the past half century has made amazing progress smashing the atom, finding a growing array of sub-atomic matter. We also know of places where atoms cannot exist, like plasmas and neutron stars. The response could be that the atom is still the smallest particle of sustained material existence, since the sub-particulate matter and the electric charge into which it devolves may not have independent existence over time. Yet the translatability of matter and energy, in our age of quantum mechanics, seems to doom the atom as the basic unit of physics. Without going further out of my depth, it seems fair to say with Maimonides that the universe now looks filled.

He also opposed the vacuum, which was the space in which the atoms moved. If there was no atom there was no vacuum, and *vice versa*. Maimonides had contended that the universe was solid through (*ayn bo khalel reykh klal*), just like you or me. The payoff is that there is no place free of God or His influence, for God does not create his own vacuous demise. This is, of course, a stab to the heart of the atomic occasionalism of Kalām, since the paradoxical result of their super omnipotent deity would be its ability to negate itself entirely.

Maimonides also believes (with Aristotle) that substances, including elements, transform into one another. This transformative activity is fundamental to the four-element theory of Maimonides. It means that under certain circumstances, earth becomes water, water becomes air, and so on (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 4:5). The basic idea behind the transformation of elements is that “one substance is common to all,” *khomer ha-kol ekhad*. Chemists now say that you cannot transform elements by ordinary chemical means. Perhaps, in the origin of the planet, when non-ordinary chemical events occurred, some kind of elemental transformation took place.

Maimonides advocated a correspondence between the two material substances, the matter of the microcosm below and the matter of the macrocosmic aether above. The general idea of unity of substance compels. Despite the fact that there really is no aether above, it seems that there is one material reality beneath all appearances. (Averroes abandoned the aether, holding that the spheres are pure form. See Shem Tov, page 111a; Wolfson, *Crescas*, 607).

In Maimonides’ account, there were originally varieties of vapours, *ha-edim*: then, due to three of the four basic forces, all the minerals, plants and animals arose according to their elemental proportions (see on this

Friedlander's fascinating note 5 on 289). The concept of some kind of original condensation of minerals from vapours is interesting.

He also says that generated and corruptible beings arise from their constituent elements. The disintegration of those elemental compounds is itself the cause of their corruption. Those elements will return to be compounded again in another form. This is true, even though we reject his cycle of eternal recurrence.

Putting this all together, Maimonides asserts a parallel between the transformativeness of the elements and the transformativeness of the forces, resulting in the idea of a single force (*koakh ha-m'kesher*) behind all things, maintaining their harmony. Sometimes he calls it "nature." Even-Shmuel terms this force "self-preservation" (*shmirat ha-kiyum*).

But there are also disharmonious forces. The rotating sphere forces imbalance in those four static sublunar elements. This causes meteorological and geological disturbances, including catastrophes like hurricanes and earthquakes. This goes beyond what we know. He says that if nature were intelligent these disasters would not happen. This could be true, and it does undergird his distinction between mind and nature. Though there may be such a thing as the wisdom of nature, Maimonides reminds us that nature's wisdom is of a general character, a natural law, not at all like the application of mind to specific instances.

I was amused and fascinated by the following quotation about the harmonious transformativeness of elements and forces from the anonymous but all-knowing *Wikipedia.org*, on the subject of "Fundamental Interaction," for what it's worth:

"Traditionally, modern physicists have counted four interactions: gravity, electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force, and the strong nuclear force. Their magnitude and behavior vary greatly, as can be seen in the table below (omitted). Yet, it is strongly believed that three of these interactions are manifestations of a single, more fundamental, interaction, just as electricity and magnetism are now understood as two aspects of the electromagnetic interaction."

Whatever we should make of this, it does not seem ridiculous to assert, as Maimonides does, that nature unites the forces of the universe. The Hebrew *teva*, for "nature" has a root meaning of "stamp" or "impress," i.e., the stamp of God (compare Ibn Tibbon's glossary of strange words in the Guide). He says, believably, if unfalsifiably, that "There also exists in the Universe a certain force which controls the whole...That force is God."

The difference is that we do not argue that spherical motion requires the existence of God, the unmoved mover who keeps it going. That proof was the main casualty of the exhaustion of spherical cosmology. (In the Guide, Maimonides no longer places his full reliance on Aristotle's proof for the unmoved mover. Instead, he moves toward the Kalām proof of the existence of God from the particularization of stellar oddities.)

BIOLOGICAL IDEAS

The correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm depends upon the existence of some similarity between the physical systems we have just reviewed and the biological system in man. Maimonides' ideas about human biology held up better than his ideas about cosmology and physics. After all, physicians earn their keep when they cure people. Still, his general ideas endure better than his specific prescriptions. As a doctor he was no innovator, but was famous for restating and summarizing what was known. He was what we would today call a holistic practitioner, calling for dietary balance, exercise, bathing, and so on (a good brief introduction is Mishneh Torah, *Deot*, ch. 4).

Most troubling for us today, but unexceptional then, was his commitment to the four humours theory of disease. It parallels the four forces theory of biology. According to the four forces theory, every being is subject to four

non-intelligent natural forces: attraction, retention, digestion, and secretion. The cause of disease is the very lack of intelligence in these sustaining forces, for they do not attract just what the body needs, but whatever is available. Thus, instead of a fine balance between the four humours of blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm (corresponding to the four physical elements), the body thoughtlessly absorbs foods whose humours are:

“...Too warm, too cold, too thick, or too thin, or that too much humour is absorbed, and thus the veins are choked, obstruction and decay ensue, the quality of the humour is deteriorated, its quantities altered, diseases are originated, such as scurvy, leprosy, abscess, or a dangerous illness, such as cancer, elephantiasis, gangrene, and at last the organ or organs are destroyed.”

Accordingly, Maimonides sees correspondence between human illnesses and terrestrial catastrophes, like hurricanes and landslides. Both come from the non-intelligent nature of matter. Disasters occur when spherical motion thoughtlessly displaces the elements, just as illnesses come from thoughtless absorption of inappropriate quantities and qualities of humours.

His medicine displays purposiveness that ours lacks, just as his physics does, due in both cases to the Aristotelian notion of teleological cause. Thus, his view of the heart is unexceptional, but for that purposive element. It is the “principal part in the human body” and is always in motion like the spheres. It rules all the other motions of the body, distributing forces throughout. (He follows Aristotle, not Galen, who had said that the ruler was the brain: see *scholia* of Goodman, L. E., and MacGregor, R. *The Case of the Animals against Man before the King of the Jinn*, Oxford, 2009, 81 – 83, notes 52 – 55.)

He observes that no organ of the body, e.g., the liver, can exist apart from the body. However, he pairs this to his misconception that the cosmic bodies, i.e., the stars, could not exist independently of their spheres.

Nature unites the bodily forces in orderly action, just as it does in the cosmos. He maintains that nature harmonizes the microcosm and the macrocosm, in opposition to those, like the Kalām, who rejected nature.

His final and most important harmony is this: if we were only speaking of bodies we could say that a donkey or a horse is the microcosm, analogous to the macrocosm. But it is only due to man’s mind that he can live, since the provision of his food, dwelling and clothing require the intellect to master crafts and organize communities. This faculty is what makes man the only true microcosm, a “small world,” governed by a God-like principle, the mind.

Notice that by making this claim he has shifted the guiding principle of the microcosm from the heart to the mind.

THREE DISHARMONIES

Maimonides admits elements of disharmony, which undermine the grand analogy between the macrocosm and the microcosm. He had subtly suggested at the outset that the analogy was a parable, not a demonstration (i.e., the double iteration in his opening sentences of *derekh mashal* / מִתְּלָא, i.e., “parable”). These disharmonies highlight the distinction between Aristotle’s god of the philosophers and Maimonides’ Torah view of the nature of divinity. The god of the philosophers is *in* the universe, not completely separate from it.

He lists three disharmonies:

1. *Who Benefits?* The guiding principle of the body, the heart, derives a benefit from the external body parts, which protect it. The harder bones and skin, outside the center of the body, secure the soft organs within the body. He asserts this important principle of organicism significantly at the beginning of chapter 3:32 (his famous chapter on the meaning of the sacrificial system). By contrast, God and the outer sphere receive no benefit from the other parts of the universe. The macrocosmic ruler gets no direct benefit from the world, unlike the heart, the ruler of the microcosm, which does benefit from its rule of its small world.

2. *The Principle of Proximity.* The inner and outer parts of man and universe have opposite functions. Man's indispensable parts are within him. They rule the outer, subservient, parts of his body. The opposite is true in the macrocosm. The outer sphere of the macrocosm is indispensable, for it rules the inner part, i.e., the earth. The earth does not affect or influence the outer sphere the way that the heart affects and influences the outer parts of the human body. On the other hand, there is a similarity. *Matter* predominates as we move farther from the rulers of the macrocosm and the microcosm. In the universe the inner parts, *farthest* from the ruling sphere, are more turbid, solid, inert, dim and dark, as they are further from the outer light. The same is true of the body, whose more solid parts are *farthest* from the heart. The most rarified "simplest" parts of the physical cosmos are closest to the ruling sphere. Maimonides thinks this is true in the human body, i.e., that the softer, finer and more delicate parts are closer to the heart, their ruler (Guide 3:32).

3. *Embodied or Disembodied?* "The faculty of thinking is a force inherent in the body, and is not separated from it." By contrast, in the macrocosm, God is completely separate from the universe. By "faculty of thinking," Maimonides refers not to the active or acquired intellect, but only to the "rational faculty," *koakh ha-divri*. He explains that he restricted his grand analogy to this hylic intellect for heuristic purposes, since the proofs for the *separate* intellects of the spheres and of man were too complicated for this chapter's portrayal, although they would eliminate these three disharmonies (see below, "Maimonides Changes the Subject").

Thus, in his third disharmony, the world relates to God differently than man relates to his material intellect. Unlike this rational faculty, which governs man from within, God is radically other than the universe He governs.

Yet He does govern it. Maimonides firmly maintains that in some fashion God remains involved in His creation, despite His absolute otherness. He is both perfectly immanent and perfectly transcendent. How He rules the universe, and how His providence extends to "all parts," is a "complete mystery" which elicits an outburst of feeling, captured in the Pines translation: "May He whose perfection has dazzled us be glorified!"

(L. E. Goodman translates, "Glory, then to Him whose perfection dazzles us." Prof. Goodman kindly provided me this from his forthcoming translation of the Guide. Kafih: *ytalei mi sh'ha-eiratenu shlemuto*. Schwarz: *hashva l'mi sh'shlemuto m'sanveret et eineinu*.)

Narboni wants to know why Maimonides was dazzled (81a). He argued that God's emanations readily explain both creation and providence. Maimonides did not agree. Neither emanation nor anything else known to us can explain creation *ex nihilo*, the work of utter transcendence.

WHAT IS LEFT OF THE MICROCOSM?

What remains of Maimonides' science? Does anything endure in his grand analogy of the microcosm and the macrocosm?

We must doubt his assertion of the similarity in the substances of the universe with the substances in man; i.e., where he claims that the orbs and elemental combinations in the macrocosm correspond to the organs and humoral combinations in man. There can be no comparison between the heart and the outer sphere because there is no sphere. Humors do not govern our physical health, nor do the four elements comprise all compounds.

On the other hand, the comparison of human intelligence to the intelligence behind the universe is wonderful, though unfalsifiable and unprovable. The same is true when he says that man could not live without mind, just as the universe could not exist without God. Again, the generalization that there are balancing affinities in the universe and man has uses in alternative medicine and spirituality generally that it no longer has in our reified science. This may be a fault of that science.

The more general and poetic statements survive eight hundred years of scientific advance. Thus, when he says that the universe is but one individual it is an assertion that retains force, although it is just as unprovable now as it was then. Perhaps piling on more harmonious items between man and the universe helps his case, although this is no apodictic proof in the spirit of the *Posterior Analytics*. As we noted, he had already suggested that his portrayal was a parable, a *mashal*, not a demonstration. He tells us, only at the end of the chapter, that the analogy would have been perfect had we compared the separate intelligences guiding the sphere to the active intellect guiding man.

The truly grand analogy turns out to be the recognition of the unity of mind.

ARE WE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

It is certainly reasonable to question the enduring quality of Maimonides' science. It is the question of medieval science versus modern science. We could ask the same questions of Aquinas and Averroes.

A student asked me whether Maimonides would have changed his mind in the light of the developments in science. My conclusion was not encouraging. The last paragraph of the chapter, in which he castigates anyone who would question any part of his picture, is rather sad. There are examples of Jewish thinkers who continued to defend the Ptolemaic cosmology *after* and *against* the Copernican revolution (i.e., the astronomer R. David Gans, 1541-1613), and it is quite possible Maimonides would have done the same. This is, however, the paradoxical way of scientific revolutions. (See, *the Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn. On Maimonides' resistance to science, see Gad Freudenthal, "Maimonides' Philosophy of Science," *Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. Seeskin, 2005, 149-150).

Maimonides' commitment to experimentalism was questionable, as in his belief that spontaneously generated creatures emerge when we slit open cancers. (*Pirkei Moshe* 24:11. See also his peony cure for epilepsy, his dog excrement prescription for throat swelling, *ibid.* p. 153, notes 60-62. For many more risible prescriptions, see Herbert Davidson, *Maimonides, the Man and His Works*, Oxford, 2005, 438-439, 449-450).

Still, the battle between his science and our science is our battle, not his battle. His battle was between rationality and irrationality. The important question of his time was whether the universe and man could be studied at all. That was the point of his microcosm/macrocosm lesson in his time, and we see the consequence of that battle.

The Kalām declared Aristotelian science off-limits to belief. It was a form of heresy. For the Kalām dogmatists, Allah miraculously recreates the universe at every moment. Our existence from moment to moment is an illusion. We have no will. Only the creator has will, and only will, for there is no discernible rationality in His action. There is no microcosm, macrocosm or nature, and assertions about anything at all are worthless, except for the dogmas of Islam. Our mind is of no consequence for we have no choice. When they answered the question of how the many come from the One, they did not respond, as Maimonides does, that God creates a single universe containing all variety in an organic whole. They responded that God creates miracles: a congeries of atoms with no rational connection between them, followed by another, and then another. They made no explanation of the apparent patterns in the universe, for there is no explanation for the illusory, but that it is illusory. All perceived relations are illusions. (On the Kalām, and the accuracy of Maimonides' portrayal of it, see next chapter).

How deadly this has been for the state of science and culture in the Middle East. And, taken apart from the particular Muslim context, how deadly modern (or rather, postmodern) this all sounds.

Despite the crisis of the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic system (see immediately below), Maimonides' science was an advance over Kalām fantasy. He contended that the universe is ultimately rational and comprehensible. Just by maintaining this, he left room for the development of new speculative and experimental ventures. He saved

Judaism from descent into this seductive Kalām irrationality, as his student Aquinas preserved Christianity, but as Averroes, his Cordovan contemporary, failed to do for Islam.

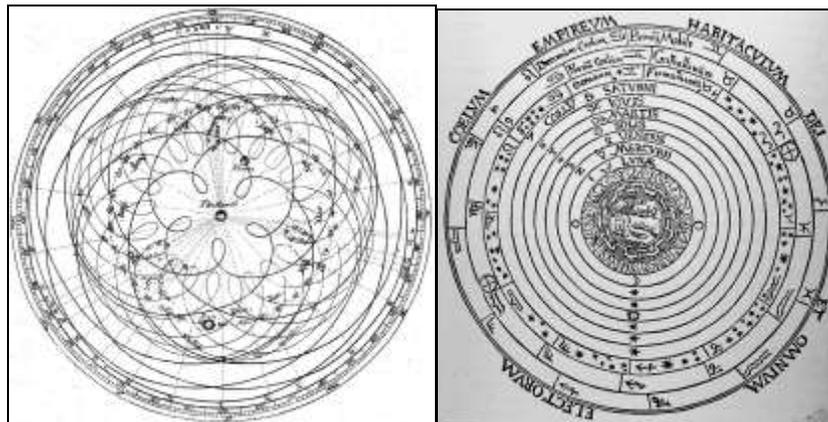
The attack on Aristotelian science began shortly thereafter in Europe. Maimonides’ great rabbinic opponent, R. Hasdai Crescas, was one of the originators of that critique. But that attack was usually not directed against rationalism itself, unlike the Kalām’s attack on science, which denied man’s ability to learn anything.

Overall, though the hypothesis of the macrocosmic correspondence has lost force, we retain its assertion that man can know that which he has not directly experienced.

JUDAISM AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE COSMOS

Maimonides knew that cosmology was in crisis. Guide 2:24 reveals the extent of that crisis. The cosmos was not the perfect Aristotelian geometry of nested spheres. The cosmology must assume the existence of the eccentric and epicyclic spheres proposed by Ptolemy (2nd Cent. C.E.). Only the messy multiplication of epicycles could fill the crevasse between the Aristotelian scheme and the evidence of observation.

These theories conflict with what Aristotelian science had ruled about the two forms of natural motion. Natural motion could only be vertical or circular: the four elements move vertically, while the cosmic quintessential matter circled a fixed center. But Ptolemaic spheres have centers that move. These are the epicycles. There are also eccentric spheres that surround us but circle a point that is off-center with respect to the earth. Both violate the laws of Aristotelian motion.



Ptolemaic Cosmos

Aristotelian Cosmos

Maimonides seems to have accepted the eccentric spheres but not the epicycles. This, however, did not resolve the dilemma. He responded, in Guide 2:24, by concluding that it was not the job of the astronomer to discover the truth of the universe. We can only expect the astronomer to create elegant mathematical models of our perception of celestial order:

“These difficulties do not concern the astronomer: for he does not profess to tell us the existing properties of the spheres, but to suggest, whether correctly or not, a theory in which the motion of the stars is circular and uniform, and yet in agreement with our observation.”

As a result, Maimonides denies that the extra-lunar cosmos is humanly knowable, for “Man’s faculties are too deficient,” because science just could not reach that high. He says:

“This is all I can say on this question; another person may perhaps be able to establish by proof what appears doubtful to me. It is on account of my great love of truth that I have shown my embarrassment in these matters and I have not heard, nor do I know that any of these theories have been established by proof.”

This is so. He does not express unreserved acceptance of either of the contending cosmologies.

Nonetheless, he claims, in our chapter, that non-acceptance of his peculiar version of this science comes from ignorance or dogmatism:

“Opposition can only emanate either from an ignorant man, who contradicts truths even if they are perfectly obvious, just as a person unacquainted with geometry rejects elementary propositions which have been clearly demonstrated, or from the prejudiced man who deceives himself.”

How should we assess his position, and what are its consequences?

Maimonides was able to accept the perplexities of cosmology because he accepted the Kalām proof of God from “determination” or “particularization” (Guide 1:74, fifth argument). This proof explains celestial oddities as expressions of divine will. No other explanation sufficed. The lawfulness of nature would not have allowed these aberrations to exist but for divine volition, the force beyond nature. God wanted it to be that way, and that is how we know that He is God. Nonetheless, by preserving those astronomical perplexities Maimonides left the door open for Crescas to dismantle the entire Aristotelian/Ptolemaic cosmology (H. A. Wolfson: *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*. On particularization, see Freudenthal, above, p. 141).

The inevitable result was revolt against physical cosmology. Since the Guide opened the yawning chasm between what was seen and what could be known about the universe, the natural reaction was to escape the chasm by internalizing the spheres, exactly as accomplished by the Zohar.

Moshe de Leon (c. 1240-1305), the man most associated with the publication of the Zohar, was a sophisticated student of the Guide, who would have known how bad the scientific crisis had become.

In the Zohar the spheres become *sefirot*, hypostases, or at least moments of divine thought, modes, with no physical properties (which was probably what the decad originally was, see Idel, *op. cit.*). In this way, Judaism was able to realize the implicit esoterism of our chapter.

One of Maimonides’ early commentators, Shem Tov Ben Joseph (c. 1461-89) calls this chapter the *shiur koma* “dimensions of divine stature” 110b. Shem Tov probably knew that Maimonides had rejected the authenticity of the actual book called *Shiur Koma* (*Responso*, 1-201, Blau). Shem Tov seems to be saying that our chapter was the true *Shiur Koma*. (On *shiur koma*, Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 16-17).

The *shiur koma* was a Cabalistic parable of the immense size of the primordial *anthropos* (*adam kadmon*), which represented the human microcosm’s grasp on the levers of the universe. Shem Tov solidifies his point, suggestively, when he says, “Understand that everything Maimonides says in this chapter comes to explain *Maaseh Bereshit*, and to explain *Maaseh Merkava*, and to explain providence, Torah, and *mitzvoit*” (113b).

THE GRAND ANALOGY AS GRAND MEDITATION

We saw that Maimonides subtly suggested that he had not meant this chapter to be a scientific account, but rather a parable, due to his double use of the word *mashal* at the beginning of the chapter.

His grand analogy represents a certain type of stepwise meditation pattern that he seems to favor. The paradigm for this is the meditation on the fringes, *tzitzit*, which a Jew wears on his garment, and which display a blue thread in a group of white threads. The meditation is upon that blue thread. It comes from the Talmud, *Khullin* 89a:

“Blue resembles the colour of the sea, and the sea resembles the colour of the sky, and the sky resembles the colour of a sapphire, and a sapphire resembles the colour of the Throne of Glory, as it is said: And they saw the God of Israel and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone (Exodus 24:10).”

He does something like this in his brace of chapters on the essential attributes of God (1:51-60). His doctrine of negative attributes, as we have shown, is a meditation that also proceeds step-by-step. He first asks his student to conceive of God in the light of any one of these attributes. Then the student must deny that attribute. He does this systematically with each of the attributes, asking the student to produce every possible reason why he must deny that attribute. As the student advances in each step of this meditation, he develops a more sublime view of divine sanctity.

I think that something like that is involved here. Once the student has developed the grand microcosmic analogy as Maimonides developed it here, he must then recognize the three exceptions to that analogy. He then appreciates the need to change the subject to an analogy between God and the active intellect, the “image” of God in which the student was made. He sees that the analogy produces a system of correspondences and affinities working down from God to man. He then achieves the illumination that he can, in principle, work his way back up through those analogies to God. He realizes, deeply within himself, his role in the divine purpose.

Of course, he has to be the right student, who has the basic learning, and who can work out the rest for himself. The student is able to find the metaphysical truth behind all the lore about the physics and cosmology. Maimonides does make a claim to infallibility for his physical science, but he directed that diatribe to his larger audience, which was not prepared to enter his *pardes*.

MAIMONIDES CHANGES THE SUBJECT: THE SOULS OF THE SPHERES

The entire direction of our chapter’s discussion changes at the point where Maimonides asserts that the only real microcosm is man, and only because of his unique mind:

“Bear in mind, however, that in all that we have noticed about the similarity between the Universe and the human being, nothing would warrant us to assert that man is a microcosm; for although the comparison in all its parts applies to the Universe and any living being in its normal state, we never heard that any ancient author called the ass or the horse a microcosm. This attribute has been given to man alone on account of his peculiar faculty of thinking, I mean the intellect, viz., the hylic intellect (*ha-koakh ha-hoga, k’lomar ha-sekhel, sh’hu ha-sekhel ha-hayuli*) which appertains to no other living being.”

Note that the intellectual faculty spoken of here is the hylic intellect, which he terms the *sekhel*, and more frequently in this chapter, *ha-koakh ha-hoga* (Schwarz: *koakh ha-m’daber*, Judeo-Arabic: אלקוה אלנאטקה, the rational faculty, Gr.: *logike/logistike dunamis*). This is not merely the *potential* intellect, that is, the possibility for thought that all men are born with. We know this because he immediately describes the necessary benefits we derive from this *koakh ha-hoga*, the benefits that accrue only to man through his intellectual organization of commerce, exchange and politics.

When I say that Maimonides changes the direction of the chapter, he is, after this point, no longer concerned with the purely physical correspondences between the spheres and man. He presages the turn that Judaism itself will make. He seems to relapse to physicality when he returns to the three disharmonies, but this is a subtle misdirection, since only the first two of those disharmonies had to do with the physical heart. Had he focused on the mind there would have been no disharmonies.

The problem is the third disharmony, that between the *koakh ha-hoga* which is *in* the human body (*sh'ha-koakh ha-hoga ha-zeh hu koakh b'guf u'bilti nifrad mimenu*), and God who is totally *other* than the universe. Raising the level of complexity, he tells us that even the soul of the sphere is *in* the sphere, but that were we to contemplate the *separate intelligences*, *ha-sikhlim ha-nivdalim*, we would find correspondence between them and the *active* or *acquired* intellect in man, *ha-sekhel ha-nikna*. To sort this out we need to introduce some distinctions.

There are three ways an entity can have a relationship with a physical body:

- 1) There can be a *nexus of distribution*. This means that the soul or other entity distributes through the body, mixing with it. Thus, slicing a worm leaves each part wriggling, so that, by this theory, its animal soul divides with the worm. It also means that when the worm moves its soul travels with it by *accidental motion*, like a nail in a boat moves with the boat (as opposed to *essential motion*, which describes the movement of the boat itself directly caused by the wind or waves).
- 2) There can be a *nexus of admixture*. Here the entity is in the body, and moves with it, but is *not* distributed through it. Maimonides holds that the rational faculty, responsible for the preparation of man's necessities, relates to the body of its human owner by a nexus of admixture. It is *undistributed* through the body, but moves *accidentally* with it. Thus, it is not distributed through the body like the life of the worm, but travels with the body and dies with it. It is, therefore, a material intellect.
- 3) There can be a *nexus of inexistence*. This Latinate term (*inesse*) does not mean "nonexistence," nor does it mean "existing in," but more like "existing with." It is a relation of intention or direction to its object, a relation of immanent objectivity. This is the relationship of the active intellect with the body, whereby the active intellect is wholly separate from the body, emanates its influence upon it, and persists after its death. (For all these distinctions: Wolfson, *Crescas*, 602-612)

Maimonides thought that the intelligence in the sphere was like the rational faculty in man, in that both relate to their respective bodies by a nexus of admixture. The intelligence or soul of the sphere is *in* the sphere, but undistributed, and *moves with* the sphere. To this extent, there is correspondence between the spherical macrocosm and the human microcosm, i.e., between the soul in the sphere and the rational faculty in man.

Nonetheless, the final cause of the motion of the sphere is the separate intellect, *ha-sekhel ha-nivdal*, which rules the soul in the sphere.

Why do we need the separate intellect in addition to the soul in the sphere? Since the sphere is in infinite motion, the cause of its motion cannot be finite. That is because the effect can possess nothing that the cause did not give it. If the motion is infinite, its cause must also be infinite. But an intelligence *in* the sphere is by definition finite, limited by the form of the sphere. There must be an eternal infinite force producing the sphere's eternal motion. That cause cannot be limited in the sphere and must be separate from it. Therefore, there must exist separate intelligences, *ha-sikhlim ha-nivdalim*, which govern the spheres. This has its analogue in the microcosm. The separate active intellect is the final cause of the motion and life of man. (The active intellect, *sekhel ha-poel*, he calls here the "acquired intellect," *sekhel ha-nikna*. See Friedlander note 3, 307, and my essay "The Debate on the Nature of the Potential Intellect," Guide 1:68).

Maimonides, at the end of the chapter, suggests that had he been talking about the separate intelligences in the macrocosm and the microcosm there would have been no disharmonies, but he had to postpone that discussion because the proofs for the separate intellects were too complex for this chapter. He says that he had to portray the macrocosmic correspondence in a “concise” (*tamtziti*) manner so that it would be instantly accepted by any reader who was not ignorant or dogmatic (*sikel...l'ha-khazik hashkafa msuyemet sh'kadma lo*).

Shem Tov suggests a different reason for Maimonides' diffidence: he wanted to avoid the question of the existence of individual minds, that is, whether there is really only one mind, the unity of intellect. Thus he avoids, according to Shem Tov, the question of whether individual souls survived the destruction of the body (115b). In my view, however, the real reason he begins with the basics of physical science is that he wants this to be a real step by step meditation, in which the student develops himself to the point of experiencing the wholly intellectualized cosmic consciousness, the goal of Maimonides' version of *shiur koma*.

THE ETERNAL RECURRENCE

One of the more interesting ideas in the chapter is the notion of the eternal recurrence. It began its life in ancient Stoicism, and it recurs in Nietzsche's new Stoicism. (Nietzsche: *The Gay Science*, §285 and §341; “Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism” by Martha C. Nussbaum, in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's “On the Genealogy of Morals”* ed. Richard Schacht, U. of California Press, 1994). I would explain it in the following way.

First, the ancient Athenian philosophers held that the universe was eternal. They saw that the stars moved in the night sky, but eventually returned to their original positions. That this was not strictly true, because of equinoctial precession, which they knew, did not change their sense that recurrence was a feature of the cosmic system.

Secondly, the Greeks believed that the objects of our material world were composed of form and matter. There could only be a finite number of such forms. This was due to Aristotle's principle, *infinitum actu non datur*, “there is no actual infinite” (Physics 3:7, 207b10-12). He meant that it was contradictory to assert the existence of a *definite* set of an infinite number of actual objects, because the term “infinity” implies indefiniteness.

Third, the infinity of time eludes the rule of *infinitum actu non datur* since time manifests itself as the definite present moment only. Matter is also infinite, because it is, in itself, only a potential, an infinite formless potency. The finite number of forms in-forms hyllic matter to produce the material objects, over infinite time. Different combinations of elements form the objects, but these combinations eventually break apart, decay, and then the underlying material substrate adopts another form.

Since the number of forms is finite, while the process proceeds in infinite time, it must follow that there will be an eternal recurrence of each form in the material substrate. Thus, a dead man will die, become dust, then perhaps a worm, and so forth, but eventually the matter will be in-formed as that particular man again. Every form that can be realized will be realized, over and over again.

There is, then, a correspondence of the principle of eternal recurrence in both the stellar cycle and in our sublunar sphere. The idea appears in Judaism in Ecclesiastes (1:9, 3:15, 6:10) and in the Midrash, *Genesis Rabba* 3:7: *sh'haya borei olamot u'makhrivin ad sh'bara et elu*, “God created worlds and destroyed them until this one.”

Maimonides rejected the notion in this Midrashic/Stoic form because it contradicted creation *ex nihilo*, but he accepted the recurrence within this present universe, the only one God created.

YOSEF IBN TSADIK AND THE *OLAM KATAN*

R. Yosef ibn Tsadik (d. 1149), noted at the beginning of this chapter, wrote *Olam Katan (The Microcosm)*. This work, which predates the Guide, elaborated the microcosm's correspondence with the macrocosm.

Yosef is an important bridge figure. He is one of the exceptions to Maimonides' rule that all the Andalusian Jewish authorities, especially the later ones, rejected the Kalām. Yosef was close to Maimonides in some ways yet represented a Jewish Kalām. He is more neo-Platonic than Maimonides was, though both are part of the general neo-Platonized Aristotelianism of the era. He may have been one of Maimonides' earliest teachers, and perhaps sat with Maimonides' father as a judge of the Jewish court in Cordova.

Maimonides claims that he was familiar with *Olam Katan's* doctrines but never read the book (*Letter to Shmuel Ibn Tibbon*). This amazes me. I can only interpret it two ways. 1) He did read it but did not want to admit it, for then he would have to criticize one of his teachers. By denying that he read it, he avoided the engagement; or 2) he really did not read it, knowing what it would say, since it would force him to criticize one of his teachers.

The doctrine of *Olam Katan* anticipates in many ways the microcosm/macrocosm of our chapter. Still, it employs much stronger neo-Platonic language than Maimonides approved. According to Alexander Altmann, "The work as a whole thus reflects the two then prevailing trends, neo-Platonism and Kalām." Among its major neo-Platonist influences were the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, which is really from the *Enneads* of Plotinus; and the *Ikhwan Al Safa*, the "Brethren of Purity," the neo-Platonic encyclopedists of 10th Century Baghdad.

(See p. 274, *The Case of the Animals*, op. cit., Goodman and MacGregor, which discusses the *Ikhwan* approach to the microcosm-macrocosm analogy; Alexander Altmann from Encyclopedia Judaica on R. Yosef).

GUIDE 1:73
THE TWELVE PROPOSITIONS OF KALĀM THEOLOGY

PREFACE TO THE KALĀM SECTION OF THE GUIDE

In the “Dedicatory Letter” preceding his Introduction to the Guide, we hear that Maimonides’ pupil, Rabbi Joseph, had asked to learn the theological system of the Kalām, its method, and whether it was a philosophical method. Besides this, Maimonides had his own reasons to guide his rabbinic audience through a close study of Muslim theology.

Maimonides had to prove, as best he could, four necessary beliefs: the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God, and His creation of the universe from nothing (1:71). This creed crystallizes the first four of the thirteen principles of true belief (as found in later editions of his early work, *Commentary on the Mishnah*). One who seeks to attain active intellect must be able to articulate his conviction of the truth of these four principles. They are the keys to the divine science (אלאלם אלאלאה).

The problem was that the Aristotelians accepted only the first three. The Mutakallimūn (Kalām theologians), accepted all four, but in the wrong order. They tried to prove that the world could not be eternal, in order to show that God must have created it. Maimonides felt that their methodology was fundamentally flawed, and not just because no one could prove that the world was created. Their method made the existence of God depend on the creation of the world.

The following four chapters carry out Maimonides’ program by exposing the flaws in the Kalām system. This set the stage for his grand debate with the philosophers over creation and providence, *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*, in Book 2 of the Guide.

In Guide 1:73, he portrayed the Twelve Propositions that undergird Kalām theology. In 1:74 he attacked their “proofs” for creation. In 1:75 and 1:76, he did the same, very reluctantly, for their demonstrations of divine unity and incorporeality. Reluctantly, because he agreed with their conclusions, but understood that their proofs undermined those very conclusions.

INTRODUCTION: THE KALĀM’S PARADOXICAL WORLD

The last chapter portrayed Maimonides’ unfamiliar world. This chapter contrasts the even stranger world of the Kalām.

We do not know why Zeno of Elea, the fifth century pre-Socratic philosopher, devised his famous paradoxes, for we do not have his writings. Perhaps he meant them as an argument *ad absurdum* to establish the Parmenidean conclusion that everything is indivisibly and unchangeably one. These were typical concerns of pre-Socratic physics: was the *all* one or many? Can something change or even move without negating itself? Zeno’s paradoxes seem to demonstrate the absurdity of divisibility, multiplicity, and change across the dimensions of time, space and motion.

Zeno’s Achilles is faster than the stolid tortoise, so we give the tortoise a head start; Achilles must catch up, but the tortoise keeps going; Achilles runs, quickly covering the distance, but the tortoise, never stopping, stays ahead, no matter how fast Achilles runs. An arrow must always take up its own space as it flies. Therefore, it cannot move in that moment or it will not be in its own space. Thus, it never actually moves.

Aristotle responded by proving, in *Physics* 6:1-3; that time, space and motion must all be either ultimately divisible, or ultimately indivisible. Either way, motion, time and space are correlative, a continuum. Zeno's paradoxes disrupt the continuum.

If all things were composed of indivisible atoms separated by equal spaces, as in Kalām physics, motion becomes the movement of one atom to another in one undivided moment of undivided motion, and all at the same speed. No runner could ever outrun another, nor could any motions actually cross more than one atom's length of space.

The Kalām created a physics that adopted the absurdity of Zeno's paradoxes as reality.

What went wrong?

The Kalām doctors were driven to prove God's miraculous creation and maintenance of the universe. They were perplexed by Aristotle's assertion that the universe always existed and that God was just a part of it. The Kalām responded by exaggerating divine omnipotence until reason was stunned silent. Allah's creativity is always miraculous, unpredictable, beyond understanding. It is capable of realizing anything imaginable, irrespective of whether it is actually possible. This omnipotence even comes to self-denial and destruction, as in the creation of the vacuum, a place without God or His creations. Maimonides' unstated concern was that the Kalām propositions had already had an impact on Jewish thought, and would continue to do so (Wolfson, *Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy*, Harvard, 1979).

A HISTORICAL NOTE

H. A. Wolfson, in his two books on the Kalām, held that Maimonides' understanding of the Kalām was generally good. Several recent commentators, including Alfred Ivry, Herbert A. Davidson, and, especially, Michael Schwarz, do not share this view. They believe that when Maimonides portrays Kalām thinkers, and describes particular Kalām notions, he frequently errs. They base their view on Kalām texts that we have before us today. Full treatment of this question is beyond the scope of this chapter. Schwarz' scholarship is impressive, but Wolfson anticipated many of his claims. My assessment is that we should exercise caution when dealing with what Maimonides had before him and what was actually current in his circle. The type of texts that survived may distort our view. (Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalām*, Harvard, 1976, pp. 43-58, 59, 470; Schwarz, "Who Were Maimonides' Mutakallimūn," *Maimonidean Studies*, v. 2, 159 *et seq.*, and v. 3, 143 *et seq.*).

Sarah Stroumsa recently reappraised the issue, saying, broadly, "Maimonides' outline is, on the whole, strikingly perceptive," that he was "well-versed in Muslim theological literature," and "attended debates of the Mutakallimūn in Egypt," though she acknowledged that he streamlined his Kalām presentation to support his polemical objectives (*Maimonides in His World*, Princeton, 2009, pp. 26-38).

I note at the end of Proposition XII, below, "Maimonides Criticizes the Attempt by the Later Kalām to Drop Atomism," that Maimonides responded to major changes taking place in Kalām ideology that challenged his summary. It seems to me that this response demonstrates his thorough awareness of Kalām trends. What we have before us is a masterful distillation of an entire school of thought, what amounts to a Mishneh Torah of medieval Islamic theology.

THE TWELVE PROPOSITIONS

Shlomo Pines did not render the Twelve Propositions of the Kalām clearly in his English translation of the Guide. For example, he translates Proposition VII: "It consists in their belief that privations of *habitus* are things that exist in a body, being superadded to its substances." There is much worse in his translation of this chapter. That a "habitus" is a *property* possessed by a thing is none too clear either from standard dictionaries or Latin ones. It helps to be in on the Pines/Strauss code. As a service to readers, here is Friedlander's readable translation of the

initial summary statement with my bracketed comments. The reader needs a handy list, since Maimonides' generally sequential exposition sometimes mentions the propositions out of order. Maimonides recognized this, which is why he placed this table of contents at the beginning of his chapter.

- I. All things are composed of atoms.
- II. There is a vacuum.
- III. Time is composed of time-atoms.
- IV. Substance cannot exist without numerous accidents.
- V. Each atom is completely furnished with the accidents, and cannot exist without them.
- VI. Accidents do not continue in existence during two time-atoms.
- VII. Both positive and negative properties have a real existence, and are accidents which owe their existence to some *causa efficiens*. [The issue was whether *negative* characteristics have real existence.]
- VIII. All existing things, i.e., all creatures, consist of substance [atoms] and of accidents, and the physical form of a thing is likewise an accident. [There are only atoms and accidents, not matter and form]
- IX. No accident can form the substratum for another accident. [That is, no accident depends on another accident].
- X. The test for the possibility [admissibility] of an imagined object does not consist in its conformity with the existing laws of nature. [Imagination trumps intellect and even perceived reality].
- XI. The idea of the infinite is equally inadmissible, whether the infinite be actual, potential, or accidental, i.e., there is no difference whether the infinite be formed by a number of co-existing things, or by a series of things, of which one part comes into existence when another has ceased to exist, in which case it is called accidental infinite. In both cases, the infinite is rejected by the Mutakallimūn as fallacious. [They deny the existence of an infinite, even in the sense of a divisible infinite or of a successive infinite, as explained below].
- XII. The senses mislead, and are in many cases inefficient; their perceptions, therefore, cannot form the basis of any law, or yield data for any proof."

PROPOSITION I: ATOMS

The First Kalām Proposition is atomism. Long before the Kalām accepted atomism, the philosophers had abandoned it. The early Greek atomists held that atomic combinations occurred entirely by chance. This was anathema to the Aristotelian causal system, which is why Aristotle strongly opposed atomism. When Arabic translations of philosophic works began to appear, Muslims heard of this debate.

Learning that the Aristotelians held that God was not creator of the universe, the Muslims tried to replace the philosophers' causal system with its implication of necessary natural order. They wanted to show that God acts without any intermediary or any discernable or predictable principle. In this, they accepted the early atomists' conclusion that the atomic combinations occur according to no rule. They found it easier to adapt atomism to the Qur'an than to adapt the Qur'an to general causality. They merely exchanged the atomists' "chance" for Allah's continuous unpredictable miraculous interventions (Wolfson, *Kalām*, 467-469).

The difference was that the theologians, unlike the Democritean and Epicurean atomists, made the atoms massless particles with only momentary, not eternal, existence (Friedlander, *ad loc.*, note 4, 311-312 and note 4, 312-313). Kalām atoms were indivisible (Gr. *atomos*=uncuttable), unquantifiable (unextended) and indistinguishable from one another. When the atoms clumped to form a whole body, that whole was not greater than the sum of its atomic parts, for it only was these parts (Efodi). The conjunction of their atoms was one of nexus, not admixture (Shem Tov). This meant that their relation was a relation of contiguity only, not an organic relation.

The Arabic term Maimonides used for "atom," *jawhar*, is ambiguous. It means both "atom" and "substance." How do these terms differ?

The philosophic term “substance” refers to an entity that exists through itself, as opposed to an “accident,” which subsists on or through a substance. The philosophers had no problem saying that God is substance, since God exists independent of anything else.

The Kalām doctors used *jawhar* to mean “atom.” Some of their later adepts were shocked to hear the term *jawhar* as “substance” when applied to God. Maimonides revels in the double-entendre, at their expense (Schwarz, “Mutakallimūn,” 163-164). At bottom, both use *jawhar* to mean “being.” For the philosophers this designated an organic being, while the Kalām ground up all existence into discrete, identical, irreducible atomic beings.

Divine creativity, according to the Kalam, expresses itself in the moment-to-moment creation and recreation of everything as disparate, discrete and unconnected moments of being. This very granulation of reality prevents the mind from generalizing. But generalization is the first step to rationality.

They would reply that though we think we perceive regularity in nature, those perceptions depend on unreliable sense data (Proposition XII). The Kalām must deny the existence of such regularity; they thought that natural regularity would limit divine power (*Kalām*, 468, 559).

PROPOSITION II: VACUUM

The Second Proposition, the vacuum, flows from the First Proposition. The movement of atoms requires the existence of the vacuum.

Why must the atoms move? The answer was that this was the only way things could be produced in the Kalāmīc system. They rejected the notion of organic change, of growth and production of bodies, through the process of generation and corruption. They reduced organic growth to mere variation of atoms and spaces. The generation and corruption of beings that we perceive, was, for them, the result of purely mechanical atomic movement: when atoms clump together, there is physical body; when they move apart, the body is no more. (On organic generation: see, generally, Aristotle, *Generation and Corruption*; and my account of it, Guide 1:11, 1:30).

By itself, each atom takes up no space, but has *position*. It is only when paired that the atoms become quantities and bodies. They can only pair with one another by crossing the space separating them. This space is the void or vacuum.

This vacuum disperses through the pores of bodies. It allows for motion. Since atoms cannot penetrate each other, motion could not occur without space to move in. The vacuum provided that space.

The movement by which the atoms combine and separate was like that of Zeno’s tortoise, a movement from atom to atom across the space between them. That space must be empty, otherwise it would be another atom, but since the atom is indivisible, another atom cannot pass through it.

These atoms do not mix, enter, or dissolve into one another (Shem Tov). Crescas said that if it were otherwise, all of existence could conceivably enter into a grain of mustard seed (*ad loc.* to Guide 1:73, on page 116b). There must be room for the two atoms and at least one empty space to accommodate movement (Kafih, n. 28, p. 134). The vacuum is the cause, or, at least, the condition for motion.

Aristotle rejected all of this. Moreover, he had also shown in the *Physics* that change could be qualitative (i.e., organic growth) as well as quantitative, so that atomists did not need spatial vacuums to accommodate change. (On all this see Wolfson, *Crescas*, 141, 181 and see 54, 55 and 60).

A space empty of atoms is empty of body, being, and physicality: this is the vacuum, a void empty of God and His creations.

The notion of the void in religion is interesting, since mystical systems emphasize the concept of nothingness. But this emptiness, withdrawal, *tsimtsum*, is not the same as vacuum. In Jewish esotericism, the withdrawal of God to provide space for creation is by no means a vacuum. Some kind of divine residue remains, the *reshimu*, which supports the development of all the things of the world.

PROPOSITION III: TIME

The Third Proposition, the atomization of time, is a further corollary of the First Proposition. The first three Propositions form a unit. Maimonides, therefore, expanded his account of Proposition III to include here a general critique of atomic theory.

Correlativity: Aristotle had shown (*Physics* 6:1-3) that the three *continua* of space, time and motion are correlative, even to an atomist. This means that if one of those *continua* is infinitely divisible, then all are; and if one is made of indivisible atoms, then they all must be. “If length and motion are thus indivisible, it is neither more nor less necessary that time also is indivisible” (*Physics*, 6:1, 232a19–22 and see 232a1–20). In other words, if all things in space are made of indivisible atoms, correlativity demands that time also have indivisible parts.

The Kalām was forced by this demonstration to hold that time was made of indivisible moments, “nows,” time-atoms. The Kalām had to atomize time just as they had atomized matter. They divided seconds into sixty smaller parts, repeating this division ten or more times over, until they arrived at what they claimed was the smallest indivisible moment. Maimonides scoffed that the Kalām had no understanding of time, unsurprisingly, since they paid no attention to the way things really are (*kol sh'khen elei sh'einam samim lev l'teva davar min ha-davarim*).

All Motion is Miraculous: Since they had atomized matter and time, correlativity demanded the same of motion. By atomizing time, they thereby divided motion into atomic chunks, eliminating the concepts of “faster” or “slower. An atom traverses the vacuum between itself and another atom in one moment. Since it moves across a vacuum, there is no speed difference due to any density of the medium (Crescas). Nothing ever goes faster or slower, neither the tortoise nor Achilles. The perception that they do so is illusory.

The Kalām theory creates absurd results. The arrow’s movement seems continuous, but is interrupted by a succession of halts as it moves from space to space to space. They claimed that a point on the edge of a rotating millstone moves at the same speed as a point near the center, though it covers more distance in the same time. That is because the millstone *disintegrates* as it moves, with fewer interruptions at the circumference than closer to the center. But we do not see this because the millstone miraculously *reintegrates* when it comes to rest.

The mill was the ancient symbol of the zodiac and of our daily bread, grinding out time and life. Maimonides’ use of this particular image suggests that the Kalām cosmos shatters every moment. This reminds us of Maimonides’ terrible indictment of the Kalām in Guide 1:71. Their arguments are an “upsetting of the world” and a “change in the order established at the time of creation.” (Pines’ trans. 181; Talmud, *Pesakhim* 50a, *Baba Batra* 10b, and *Shabat* 53b; see my treatment of these epithets at 1:71. For an extensive discussion of the symbol of the mill, see *Hamlet’s Mill*, Giorgio De Santillana, David R. Godine Publishing, 1992).

Atomism vs. Geometry: Kalām atomism undermined geometry. It made geometry impossible, since we build geometry on the potentially infinite divisibility of lines. If a line were made of an odd number of atoms, we could not divide it into equal divisions. Lines must be capable of fractional division. Atomism would also make irrational numbers impossible, for if a line were made of indivisible atoms it could not evenly divide into unit fractions.

The Kalam had problems with simple geometrical concepts, like the diagonal of a square, since diagonal of a square is such an irrational number. In relation to its side taken as a unit it is 2 squared, the Pythagorean Constant: $\sqrt{2} = 1.4142135623\dots$. This is a non-repeating decimal expansion. Such irrational numbers could not exist in an atomic universe of indivisible points, but they are fundamental to geometry.

The Kalām denied the existence of squares altogether, or they said that the diagonal *was the same size* as the side of a square, appearances to the contrary be damned. Otherwise they would have had to admit that the diagonal contained a fraction of what they believed was an indivisible atom (Efodi). It followed that they denied the *incommensurability* of the diagonal with the sides of its square. There could be no such incommensurability if the world were made of indivisible atoms. But incommensurability is also integral to geometry.

Another way the Kalam explained diagonals, according to Shem Tov, was to say that each side of the square has the same number of atoms as the diagonal, except that the atoms of the diagonal have more spaces between them. This is rather like the way they postulated that there were more pauses in the motion at the hub of the turning millstone.

Plato believed that the reality of geometry was higher and more enduring than that of everyday matter. In the *Meno* he demonstrated the *a priori* existence of geometrical knowledge (83c-86a). One reason that Plato and Aristotle scorned atomism was that they recognized its incompatibility with geometry.

Does It Matter? What is the practical result? What if atomism were true and geometry false? Even if it is not false, does geometry exist outside of our minds? After all, geometric points and lines exist only in thought. Perhaps Maimonides should have pointed to the practicality of geometry in the architecture of the Romans and the Muslims, but he did not. To demonstrate the impracticality of atomism he moved to his next argument, based on hydraulic mechanics.

Maimonides points to a ninth century compendium of over a hundred water devices, which he claimed were all built. They were grounded on the principle that nature abhors a vacuum. The Kalām embrace of the vacuum would have made it impossible to build these hydraulic devices. He complained, “The refutation of such propositions is a mere waste of time” (*balu y’meihem*). His point was that the atomism of the theologians would have prevented the life enhancing achievements of engineering (*The Book of Ingenious Devices: Kitáb al-Hiyal*, by the Banú Músà bin Shákir, trans. P. Hill, Springer, 2007).

Why did Maimonides think that the principle of the vacuum would make hydraulic devices impossible? Shem Tov cites an example to demonstrate the problem. You can make a water sprinkler from a bottle with small holes drilled in the bottom. With the top firmly covered, if you carry the sprinkler to the garden it will not lose water through the bottom holes. When you uncover it, water will sprinkle from the bottom. The flow stops when you cover the top, due to the balance of the air pressure outside against the gravity and lack of air pressure within, which cancel each other out. Uncovering the bottle lets the air in so that gravity can do its work. (The Mishnah, *Kelim* 2:6, called such a sprinkler a *titros*).

The point of the demonstration is simple. If there were interstitial vacuum spaces between the atoms of the bottle, there would be nothing to keep air from rushing in to balance out the pressure above and below, because nature abhors a vacuum. All hydraulic devices depend on such a balance between water and air pressure, and could not work if their casings were porous.

The premise shared by Shem Tov and Maimonides was that the pores would let air in, but that would not occur if they were tiny enough to block the passage of air atoms. Maimonides would be right, however, according to the Kalām conception, since their interstitial voids had to be large enough to allow movement of atoms.

PROPOSITIONS IV AND V: ACCIDENTS

The next three propositions (IV, V, and VI) establish the Kalām theory of accidents. Accidents are those things that have no independent existence, unlike the substances to which they attach. The Mutakallimūn regarded all characteristics of things as accidents. Kalām accidents replace the substantial forms in Aristotelian physics. The Kalām reality included only atoms, accidents and God.

All atoms must have accidents. This means that every atom receives one of each pair of opposed accidental characteristics that its embodiment will require. Proposition IV states that no atom can exist without at least one accident. Indeed, God has no power to create an atom without an accident (*ain l'taaro yitalei b'yakholet al briat etzem bli mikra, ki zeh nimna*). According to Proposition V, the atom is furnished with all the accidents it needs.

Atoms Require Accidents: The atoms may endure for more than one time-atom, as long as they are furnished with accidents. But no accident endures more than one time-atom (Proposition VI). Without accidents the atoms cannot endure. That is because of Proposition X, that anything imaginable can be real—the converse is that the *unimaginable*, though logically possible, cannot exist. The Kalām cannot imagine that an atom could exist without accidents. Why? Because the Kalām atom has no mass or magnitude. It is that smallest item of being, having position but not extension, i.e. *being there*. The imagination cannot produce a picture of it. We can only imagine an atom if it has an accident to know it by. Why does the atom have no mass or magnitude? If it had such physical properties it would be divisible, like other masses and magnitudes. If the atom were divisible it could, at least potentially, be infinitely divided. The Kalām, however, could not imagine an infinite (Proposition XI). At bottom, there had to be some irreducible minimum of being.

By contrast, the Aristotelians held that things are made of formed matter. Matter without form is an intellectual possibility, a conceptual existence, despite being unimaginable. The Kalām did not accept intellectual possibility as the touchstone of what can be, but only imaginable possibilities. Neither un-formed matter nor Kalām atoms are imaginable, since we only imagine (make images of) bodies. The mass-less atom lacking any identifiable characteristics is not an imaginable body.

The atom cannot imaginably exist without its accidents. Allah must refurnish it with replacement accidents at every moment.

The Atom Has All Its Necessary Accidents: Consider the variety of items that fall into the basket of Kalām accidents. Since anything not an atom is an accident, this is a large group. It includes such likely candidates as, color, shape, smell, and taste, but also such surprising ones as intelligence, soul, knowledge, sense, rest, death, life and possibly destruction. Anything that can be a property, characteristic or description of a thing they would call an accident. Of course, Maimonides is appalled that anyone would consider intellectual and spiritual features to be physical accidents attached to bodies.

Generation vs. Alteration: All this led to the Kalām replacing Aristotelian form/matter theory with atoms and accidents. The difference is the dynamism of the Aristotelian system, which produces beings through qualitative and quantitative change resulting from generation and corruption. By contrast, for the Kalām, all change is merely alteration. There is nothing but the movement of atoms in the vacuum, and the replacement of accidents at every moment.

The Creation of Negation. But how can an accident be removed (*ma hu ha-davar sh'ha-adiru*) and replaced by its privation? Does God have the power to destroy? Can destruction be created? It was axiomatic that an agent could not create a privation since a privation needs no agent (*ki ha-oseh aino oseh et ha-heider, ki ha-heider aino zekuk l'oseh*). Because the accident only lasts a moment, God just stops re-creating it.

A minority among the Kalām contended that some accidents had duration. But how could their duration ever end? They argued that when God wanted to remove those durable accidents He created a separate accident of destruction. The peculiarity of this accident of destruction is that it is free-standing, not attached to an atom, (*mikra ha-kilion lo b'nosei*). This accident becomes the agency of the destruction that the believers supposed preceded the judgment day (*v'yihieh ha-kilion ha-hu k'neged mitziut ha-olam*). God does not personally have to destroy anything.

Shem Tov explained that the accident of destruction could not have an atom as its subject because the privation of an attribute (existence) cannot itself be an attribute subsisting in a subject. Restated: an atom cannot carry the accident of its own destruction.

The Illusion of Individual Characteristics: Maimonides ridiculed Proposition V: that each atom has all its necessary characteristics. This would mean that a body has no accidental characteristics *as a body*. Whatever looks like the *form* of the body is merely the aggregate of each of its many atomic accidents.

He provides several examples to mock this doctrine. It might seem reasonable to assert that the whiteness of snow is in each piece, not in the lump, until we realize that the Kalām not only mean each flake or crystal of snow, but each individual atom. The individual atoms of snow all carry the accident of whiteness. The atoms themselves, however, are all exactly alike, not differentiated into oxygen or hydrogen. Each carries whiteness as its characteristic for the moment we see it, not necessarily the next, for no characteristic lasts more than one time-atom, unless God recreates it. In another example, when a body moves, every atom moves, not only leg muscle atoms, but also bone atoms. It is not that the muscles carry along the bones. The bone atoms move on their own accord. Worse yet, each atom of the body carries *knowledge* as an accident: that is, what you know now is whatever you know, and you know it in each atom of your body. What you know is not the same knowledge you had a moment ago, because God recreates knowledge each moment in each atom of your body. The ugly result is the reduction of spiritual and intellectual characteristics to physical atomization.

Obviously, the Kalām had problems with the mind, intellect, and soul. Maimonides records a minority Kalām view that these faculties were accidents found in only one atom of the body. In yet another minority view, the soul was made of a different kind of atom, perhaps a very fine (*adinut*) type of atom diffused through the body. But the majority of the Kalām held that these spiritual accidents appear in each atom of the body. The result, with all these theories, is that they corporealized the mind, knowledge and soul as atomic accidents, (*hinei einam mishtakhreirim m'ha-dea sh'inyan ha-nefesh mikra msuyam*). Since all accidents are, strictly speaking, interchangeable, there seems to be no reason why an ant could not possess the genius of an Einstein.

By contrast, Maimonides believed that the *body as a whole* manifests its characteristics, not the individual atoms. He notes that emeralds smash to a white powder. This shows that greenness emerges from the emerald as a whole, not from its parts. Similarly, life endures in the whole of a living being, not its amputated limb. The Mutakallimūn reply, with Proposition VI, that no accident lasts more than one time-atom. We cannot go by the greenness momentarily seen in the emerald or the life momentarily exhibited by a living being. At any moment, the emerald could be white or the animal could be dead.

Oppose All Systems: The Aristotelian system was a system, i.e., a generalization about what *is*, an organic explanation for the regularity seen in the universe. The Kalām concept, derived from literal reading of the Qur'an, was that only God has power. The interposition of any other agency, rule, law, generalization, nature, mediator or system would mean that God has a partner. This would be tantamount to the denial of God's plenary power and heretical by definition. The result was the granulation of reality. Reality is an array of identical pieces moved about the vacuum by the inscrutable will of Allah, showing characteristics that cannot last a moment, in which no part has any influence or effect on any other part. This system we now call "Occasionalism," since each occasion is a new creation.

Were the Kalām Atomists Right? Did the atomists have a point? How well does Aristotle's theory of form and matter hold up today? Werner Heisenberg, the pathbreaking 20th century physicist famous for the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, thought that Aristotle explained quantum physics better than atomism did. He liked the potentiality and dynamism of the Aristotelian concept of matter.

He wrote that atoms were "not as real" as we had been led to think.

"In the experiments about atomic events we have to do with things and facts, with phenomena that are just as real as any phenomena in daily life. But atoms and the elementary particles themselves are *not as real*; they form a world of potentialities or possibilities rather than one of the things or facts...The probability wave of Bohr, Kramers, Slater...means a tendency *for* something. It's a quantitative version of the old concept of '*potentia*' from Aristotle's philosophy. It introduces something standing in the middle, between the idea of an event and the actual event, a strange kind of physical reality just in the middle between possibility and reality." (p.41). And: 'If we compare this situation with the Aristotelian concepts of matter and form, we can say that the matter of Aristotle, which is mere '*potentia*,' should be compared to our concept of energy, which gets into '*actuality*' by means of the form, when the elementary particle is created," (*Physics and Philosophy*, New York, 1958, 1999, pp. 134, 160).

Against this Aristotelian potentialism, Maimonides' critics, like R. Hasdai Crescas, defended Kalām atomism. They removed the potentiality from matter, reducing it to a single type of material extension. This encouraged the successes of science up to just before the era of quantum mechanics (Wolfson, *Crescas*, 119-124). Werner Heisenberg shows us that in the quantum physics era we have reached the limits of this reductionism.

PROPOSITION VI: ACCIDENTS DO NOT LAST TWO TIME-ATOMS

Churchill jokingly described history as just one damn thing after another. That is essentially the Kalām view of physics. God creates an accident in an atom and replaces it with another similar accident, and another, and this goes on as long as He wills it, and for no other reason. When He wants to change the characteristic, He does. When He stops creating replacements, neither the characteristic nor its atom endures. It only lasts one time-atom. The atom cannot endure unless God constantly renews its attendant accidents, since God had no power to create atoms lacking accidents (*ayn l'taaro ytalei b'yakholet al briat etzem b'li mikra*).

Shem Tov produced a clever critique: if the atom is dependent upon the existence of an accident, and the accident is dependent on the existence of its atom, it would follow that the atom is dependent on the existence of the atom, an absurd tautology (119a).

Accidents have no duration. It follows that the accident cannot pass from one atom to another, nor attach one to another, for in either case it would have to last more than a moment. Accidents are, to use Friedlander's term, intransitive.

Maimonides records, however, that a Mutakallimūn minority did confer duration upon a few accidents. He says that their own sect's dogmas forced them to this position, while the rest rejected their views. The majority rejected duration since it implied belief in nature.

Kalām Opposition to Nature. Nature is the perception that characteristics of things endure. If things were to endure, God would not always have to renew the moment-to-moment existence of the natural things. But this leads to the heresy of "partnership," i.e., *shirk*, since nature would then be God's partner.

Moreover, if things could endure, they would never end. That is because God could not create their annihilation, as God does not create negative things (but see Proposition VII), and, more generally, because privation requires no agent (*ki ha-heider aino zekuk l'oseh*). The accident ends when the agent stops producing it. The agent must

go on reproducing that characteristic at every moment for it to appear as though it endured. The only real agent is God, for no other substance or substantial entity could be the agent effectuating change. These commitments flowed from the Kalam opposition to nature.

The Jewish view was different. God created nature because He wanted to contrast its endurance with the rare eruption of miracles, and because God wanted to endow man with a free will to dominate nature.

(Guide 1:66 and my comment there; *Genesis Rabba* 5:5; Commentary on the Mishnah, *Avot*, 5:6; Wolfson, *Repercussions*, 172 – 178. Lenn Evan Goodman argued that nature is an attribute of God, in the Maimonidean sense of the term “attribute,” in his “Matter and Form As Attributes of God in Maimonides’ Philosophy,” *In a Straight Path: Studies in Modern Philosophy and Culture in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, Catholic University, 1988, 86 – 97, and especially 92; also, crucially, Goodman’s “Maimonidean Naturalism,” *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Cohen and Levine, Kluwer Acad. Publ., 2000).

The Doctrine of Custom. Maimonides provided further examples revealing the absurdity of the momentary existence of accidents. A white cloth blackens when dipped in indigo (black, not blue? see Kafih, p. 138, note 81; the Kalām have only five colors, per Friedlander p. 323, note 3). According to Kalām doctrine, whenever white cloth contacts indigo God “customarily” (*hanhig ha-shem noheg*) replaces the white accident with a black accident in each atom, and then continues to recreate black accidents as long as it pleases Him to do so. “Custom” was their explanation for the apparent persistence of the natural order. Otherwise, our perception that the indigo changed anything is an illusion caused by misleading sense-data (Proposition XII). Whatever we call nature, they would call custom.

Similarly, every minute an ensouled being lives, his soul is recreated, in each atom, a “hundred thousand” times or as many time-atoms are in a minute, since accidents lack duration. In another example, the pen seems to move because of the action of my hand. The reality is that the pen’s motion, my hand’s motion, my will to move the hand, and my power to move it are all independent accidents, recreated moment to moment by Allah. Each is intransitive, for no accident depends on another. No one actually “writes” a Qur’an. Appearances to the contrary are an illusion.

The Doctrine of Acquisition. Maimonides registered a minority view from among the Mutazila, the earlier version of the Kalām, which still believed in human free will. In this portrayal, God creates the various possible outcomes, from which the human actor may make his choice. The writer could then *decide* to move his hand once Allah created the *power* to move it. In this minority view, although God creates the momentary power to move the hand, He also provides the writer with the momentary choice to move it in the manner that the writer does move it.

The Asharite fatalists rejected this view, replacing free will with their notorious doctrine of “acquisition” (*kasb*). Maimonides explained it in Guide 1:51, as follows. The writer, who finds his pen moving across the page, chooses to accept this fated action. By morally conforming himself to his divinely ordained fate, he thereby “acquires” God’s action as his own.

Maimonides dismissed “acquisition,” writing in Guide 1:51, “Such things are only said: they exist only in words, not in thought, much less in reality.”

One Asharite attempted a compromise. Maimonides records: “Some of the *Asha’ariyah* assert that the power created in man *participates* in the act (“has some influence,” *hashpaah msuyema*) and is connected (*kesher*) with it, an opinion which has been rejected by the majority of them.” Wolfson identified this view with Abu Bakr Al-Baqillani (d. 1013; *Philosophy of the Kalām*, 692), who thought that one who “acquires” his fated action might influence its outcome. The fatalists rejected even this vague assertion of free choice. God creates the will by which the writer allegedly acquired his action. God *made* him acquire it.

There is nothing for man to “acquire.” God is the only actor in the Kalām universe. Anyone who fails to accept that God recreates everything at every moment has succumbed to the heresy of “partnership,” as though Allah needed a partner (*u’mi sh’ayno b’dea sh’kakh poel hashem kevar kafar sh’hashem poel*). Maimonides mocks this absurd result, which overturns everything we know about the world. He quoted Job 13:9, “Will you mock Him as you mock a man?” as this is “indeed nothing but mockery.”

PROPOSITION VII: THE REALITY OF NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Since God directly creates every event every moment in the Kalām world, He is also the creator of negative events, from which Proposition VII follows: all negative characteristics are real. This is confusing, since we already heard that God does not create privations. This was in fact an area of dispute.

There are only two things in this world, atoms and accidents (Proposition VIII), and so such negativities as rest, death, and destruction must be accidents, not the absence of their positive counterparts, i.e., movement, life, and creation. Maimonides contended that the majority of the Mutakallimūn believed that what he called the absence of a property was actually a real property, i.e., an accident. What we think of as the absence of a property was for them the binary opposite of that property, e.g., death as the accident opposite the accident of life. Since an accident only lasts a moment, God must continually re-create it as long as the substance is at rest, destroyed, or dead. Maimonides ridicules this position. Since people have discovered two thousand year old teeth, how long must God repeatedly re-create death in a corpse?

Maimonides notices two types of negative characteristics, “privations” and “contraries.” Failure to distinguish these two types of negative characteristics led the Kalam astray.

Those that Maimonides regarded as merely the absence of their positive counterpart, he called by the philosophic term “privations” (*heder*; Ar. *‘adam*, Gr. *steresis*). A privation is not a thing in itself, but only the lack of something. The doctrine of privation has theological implications: it *removes* dualism by refusing to confer on darkness, death and evil independent existence. These privations are just the absence of light, life and darkness. Maimonides calls the other kind of characteristics “contraries,” e.g., hot and cold, which display a continuum between them. Contraries are different characteristics of the same genus or series. The contraries cannot be true at the same time, but a mean between them may exist.

The Kalām change contraries to contradictories, i.e. binary alternatives, by removing the continuum between them. They also made privations into just such contradictories. Death is no longer the absence of life but a real characteristic. They made death and life into contradictory accidents, just as they did with hot and cold.

By transforming privations into contradictories, the Kalām majority fostered dualism. Dualism is the belief that negations are real, i.e., that evil is not just the absence of good. An atom can be one or the other only, alive or dead, hot or cold, bitter or sweet. Accidental characteristics are alternative, discontinuous binary realities. (See my *Introduction II* for an explanation of the distinction between contradictories and contraries; also Wolfson, “The Kalām Problem of Nonexistence and Saadia’s Second Theory of Creation,” in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, v. 2, 340-341, Harvard, 1972).

Minority Report. Maimonides then proceeds to explain the position of those Mutazilites who inconsistently made some accidents durable. The examples he gives of such special accidents are darkness, and rest, both of which are negative characteristics. He classifies some as “existing” (*n’mtzaim*) while some are “privations of properties,” (*ha-kheder kinyan*). The “existing” properties would be those whose duration they asserted. By “privations of properties,” the minority apparently agreed with the philosophers, at least with respect to a small number of characteristics, that their negation was caused by their absence and not by their replacement with an opposite characteristic.

Shem Tov had a different and perhaps more satisfying explanation of the minority's positions and of Maimonides' criticism. He classified negative characteristics either as absolute privations (*ha-heder ha-mukhlal*) or as non-absolute privations. Non-absolute privations are those "privations that normally exist" (*ha-heder asher m'darkho sh'yimtza*).

The distinction lies in their frequency of occurrence. Those that occur frequently and do not last long are "non-absolute," while death and destruction are absolute privations. When the minority maintained that privations cannot be produced by an agent (God), what they meant was that an agent does not produce "absolute privation," such as death or destruction. But with the privation of a frequent non-absolute property, like hotness, God just keeps re-creating the accident of hotness until He stops, and then He creates cold, which God then has to re-create as long as it lasts.

Therefore, when Maimonides claimed that they believed that the "absence of a property is in itself a property that exists in a body," (*hem ha-inyanim n'mtzaim b'guf*) what he meant, according to Shem Tov, was that this "absence" was a frequent non-absolute property in a body. In this case, it was not so much that God creates a negative property, but that he replaces it at that moment with its binary contradictory, which functions like a positive characteristic. Thus, when God replaces motion with rest He is not creating a negation, but replacing the positive accident of motion with its "positive" contradictory, rest.

On the other hand, with absolute privations, like death and destruction, the minority conferred duration on those privations so that God would not have to keep re-creating them. This occurs either by creating a durable negative characteristic or because of the "accident of destruction." (Shem Tov, 120a).

The Discontinuity of Death and Destruction. The majority rejected all of this. According to Maimonides, the majority maintained that even "absolute" privations are not the absence of their positive counterparts, but real binary alternatives.

Thus, they held that one accident of rest replaces another at every moment. This would then be true of life and death. A moment of death replaces a moment of life, and God has to replace that moment of death every moment an animal remains dead.

Shem Tov castigated the absurdity of all these "deaths" repeated in every atom in a corpse. How can we possibly attribute repeated death-accidents to the same continuously existing atom? (120b, lines 20 – 21).

The Kalām had a problem with negative *events*, such as destruction, in addition to negative *states*, like death. Some hesitated to make God a destroyer. The minority that thought there were some durable characteristics had to have an accident of destruction to end them. The majority rejected this accident of destruction, since non-existence requires no agent.

Theory Must Follow Reality. Surveying these variations among the sects, Maimonides concluded, "their sole object is to fashion the universe according to their peculiar opinions and beliefs." This recalls Themistius' retort that theory should always follow reality (Guide 1:71).

Maimonides, reflecting the Talmudic tradition, understands that God purposely created the natural order and only rarely upsets it. The corruption of corporeal things is part of nature.

His problem was explaining the tenet of bodily resurrection. Bodily resurrection would have to be something completely outside the course of nature. If, as he believed, death was the absence of life and not a momentary accident, then how would he explain resurrection? Since the Kalām held that death "exists" only so long as God desires, resurrection was not a problem. God just stops re-creating death and goes back to creating the

characteristics of life in that dead individual. Maimonides could not accept this. In his *Treatise on Resurrection*, he explained that the revival of the dead really is a miracle, completely beyond explanation or even description. We won't know it until we see it.

Since the Kalām held knowledge to be an accident, it follows that ignorance must also be an accident. They held that ignorance was a real negative characteristic, and not merely the absence of intelligence. English translations fail to convey Maimonides' subtle joke that God must recreate ignorance in the ignoramuses, by which he meant the ignoramuses of the Kalām, at every moment. (See Kafih's reading of *etzlam* page 139, note 99).

PROPOSITION VIII: SUBSTANCE AND FORM BECOME ATOM AND ACCIDENT

The Eighth Proposition is that there is nothing but atoms and accidents. What we call form is only an accident, while matter is nothing but atoms. Kalām atomism was a clear rejection of Aristotelian hylomorphism. Aristotle had revamped the Platonic form by moving it from the world of the ideas to the species qualities of the thing itself. Thus, the form became the essence, the definition and the qualitative aspect of the species of each thing. The Kalām flattened this organic conception by recasting substantial form as an array of unrelated accidents.

This is a category mistake, as Maimonides demonstrates. Examples of category mistakes are that “five is hot” or “apples are tardy.” Aristotle theorized that all things are in the categories of substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, or passion. In 1:52, Maimonides created a new system reducing these ten categories to five: 1) definition, 2) part of a definition, 3) quality, 4) relation, and 5) direct action. Of these, only the last three are accidents. *Definition* and *part of a definition*, i.e., the formal aspects of things, are not accidents. The formal distinctions between genus and species fall under these first two categories.

In the Kalām scheme, where all accidents are interchangeable, category errors are rife. That is because all accidents bear exactly the same direct relation to their respective atom for the moment that it is their substrate. Such categorically different things as animality, humanity, sensation, intelligence, hot, cold, bitter and sweet, are precisely comparable to one another, and any atom could take any one of these accidents. A bug is just as likely as a man to have intelligence, and that same bug is only accidentally different from the angels and from the throne of glory.

The Kalām doctors even assert that the difference between two different species is the same as the difference between two individuals of the same species (*ad sh'yehei hevdel yikhidi min zeh m'yikhidi min akher, k'hevdlei prat m'prat m'min ekhad*), that is, these are accidental, not essential differences. In other words, the difference between Socrates and Fido is the same as the difference between Lassie and Fido.

An interesting feature is the note about the throne of glory, which the Kalām apparently regarded as physical, atomic. Maimonides had written about the throne in the Lexicon section, Guide 1:9. He defined “chair” (*kisse*), giving four definitions, none of which were physical chairs. Thus, the “throne” represents 1) divine dignity, manifesting His kingship; 2) God's “place” which is not a place; 3) a manifestation of divine glory, i.e., the providential order; and, 4) the essence of God. By contrast, to Maimonides' horror, the Kalām held that the angels, the heavens and the throne of glory were physical, were all made of identical atoms.

PROPOSITION IX: NO ACCIDENT IS THE SUBJECT OF ANOTHER ACCIDENT

The Kalām argued that no accident was *dependent* upon any other accident. All accidents have a direct relationship with their underlying atom. The atom is furnished with its accidents, with each accident independent of any other. Maimonides opposed this view. Since nature was a continuous organic stream of physical events, he accepted its complexity, including the development of dependent characteristics.

The Kalām collapsed those complexities to the simple relation between an atom and its accidents. These accidents do not depend on anything other than their own atom. No accident could endure long enough to support the dependent accident (*tsarikh sh'yhei yatziv tamid b'meshekh zman m'suyam*).

This proposition negates an important example of a dependent accident. Aristotle understood time as the number by which we measure the motion of a moving object from where it started to where it ends up. It is an accident dependent upon the motion of matter. By contrast, the Kalām imagine that time and motion are separate accidents. As we saw in the example of the pen, time bore no relation to the motion of the arm. Rather, the motion of the arm was the motion of its individual atoms, while time was the interval that it took one arm-atom to cross one equal space at the equal interval of one time-atom. It never takes two time-atoms, since God must recreate the motion separately each moment. There is nothing to count, and, therefore, no passage of time.

PROPOSITION X: ADMISSIBILITY

“Timaeus: First then, in my judgment, we must make a distinction and ask, What is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and never is? That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state; but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is always in the process of becoming and perishing and never really is.” (Plato, *Timaeus* 28a, Jowett trans.)

Introduction

Maimonides' Tenth Kalām Proposition is not only the most important of their Propositions, but this section, including its *Note* on the imagination, is central to the message of the Guide. He introduces the topic this way:

“This proposition concerns the theory of ‘admissibility,’ which is mentioned by the Mutakallemim, and forms the principal support of their doctrine. Mark its purport: they observe that everything conceived by the imagination is admitted by the intellect as possible...”

Three key terms are involved, “admissibility,” “imagination,” and “intellect.” Strictly speaking, the doctrine of admissibility (*hitakhnut* / תְּחִינָה) tells us that the *possible* is that which we cannot prove to be impossible. It is a proposition that we cannot disprove. If it passes that test, it is admissible, although it may not necessarily be true. Maimonides' used this doctrine of logical admissibility as a tool to establish the possibility of creation *ex nihilo*, arguing that Aristotle was unable to prove its impossibility.

This rather restricted use of admissibility is not what the Kalām had in mind. In their hands, it was a license for the free exercise of imagination (although there were some “impossibilities,” as we will see). It provided them the justification for their rejection of scientific methodology. For them “everything conceived by the imagination is admitted...”

Maimonides diagnosed the Kalām problem as their restriction of admissibility to the imagination, unlike his restriction of admissibility to the intellect. To explain why imagination cannot be the criterion for admissibility, he appends to this section a *Note* on the imagination, which catalogs its uses and abuses.

In the course of his discussion of admissibility, Maimonides wields Kalām tools and terminology against them. One way he does this is by producing many examples where he contrasted the action of the imagination with the action of the intellect. But examples, no matter how absurd, could not constitute logical proof against the Kalām, since the proliferation of examples is the very way of dialectic, non-demonstrative polemic. Perhaps it was his way of meeting them on their own rhetorical field.

Thus, to demonstrate the absurdity of their principle that anything imaginable is admissible, Maimonides provided several examples. Having at the back of his mind his previous chapters on cosmology and physics, he begins at the highest level, saying that the Kalām could imagine that the outermost sphere of the universe might conceivably exchange places with the earth. Proceeding to the sublunar sphere, he suggests that admissibility would destroy the theory of the proper places of the elements, since one could imagine the highest sphere of fire exchanging its place with the lowest sphere of earth. He then moves to animate substances, suggesting the admissibility of a man the size of a mountain flying in the air, or an insect the size of an elephant. They do this with the whole universe, for things could take one form as well as another, inasmuch as “one form is not more possible than the other; they do not ask whether *existing things* conform to their assumption.” (*ytakhen sh ’yihyeh kakh, v’efshar sh ’yihyeh kakh, v’ain hiot davar ploni kakh tov m’hioto kakh, m’vli l’habit l’tioum ha-mitziot*).

As we will see, “existing things” is not the sole criterion of real intellectual admissibility, but it is a good starting point (see below, “Maimonides Turns Against the Philosophers”).

Maimonides suggested another type of impossibility when he portrayed the fantasy of a man with a horse’s head and wings. He called this an “impossible falsehood,” (*ha-mutzar ha-kozev*; Jud.-Ar. אַלמכּהרע אלכּאדב) suggesting Aristotle’s statement: “For the false and the impossible are not the same; that you are standing is false, but that you could be is not.” Hybrid fantasies such as centaurs do not exist, since genus mixtures are impossible. (*Metaphysics*, IX:4, 1047b, 12-14; Wolfson, Crescas, 343 note 47).

Nature As Custom. Things tend to stay the way they are. The Kalām rejected the idea that this permanence was due to a law of nature. We saw above that they clung to their doctrine of “custom” or “habit” (*minhag* / עֲדוּה). To explain this doctrine, Maimonides proposed a parable, very much in the Hebrew tradition of such *mashalim*. In this tradition, the main character is usually a king, who acts as a stand-in for God. In this case, the king never walks through the city, but has always ridden. Obviously, the king is bound to no law, since he is the source of law, and he could choose to walk if he wanted to. It was merely his custom or habit to ride through the city. In the same way, God is bound to no law of nature. He could exchange the places and properties of the element of fire with those of the element of water, though we have never seen it happen.

The Kalām doctrine of custom completed the foundation for the Kalām doctrine of admissibility, since they thought that it explained apparent regularities of nature. These regularities were only apparent, since, as we will see in Proposition XII, the senses can never be trusted.

How Do We Determine What Is Impossible? Since, for the Kalām, there was nothing making one state better than another (*ayn hiot davar ploni kakh tov m’hioto kakh*), they determined possibility and impossibility by what was admissible to the imagination.

The Kalām did admit that some intellectually impossible things were in fact impossible, but they were unsystematic. They admitted the law of contradiction, in the form of the premise that two opposites cannot coexist in the same place. They believed in other impossibilities: no substance could exist without its accident, or vice versa; that a substance could become an accident, or vice versa; or that any substance could penetrate another substance. But by “substances,” they meant atoms. While it may be impossible for a physical substance to exist without manifesting certain characteristics, e.g. “accidents,” it is not obviously impossible for a substantial body to penetrate another body, inasmuch as that is what happens whenever we consume food.

The Kalām also acknowledge that it would be impossible for God to be corporeal. Although the imagination only features corporeal things, divine corporeality was too obnoxious for most Mutakallimūn, although some thinkers could accept scriptural verses about Allah “sitting” literally (e.g. Ibn Hanbal, 780–855 CE). Most Mutakallimūn, according to Maimonides, would term such impossibilities, “a phantom and a fancy” (Friedlander, 338 note 1; *ha-hashaarut v’dimion* / וההמא וכיאלא; see Wolfson’s discussion under the heading “Impossibilities” in *Repercussions*, 192 – 198).

There did not seem to be any system in this list of impossibilities, merely a reaction to opinions that seemed most scandalous to entertain.

In any event, it is clear that we need a criterion to determine what is possible (admissible), impossible, or necessary. Despite the exceptions above, the touchstone for the Kalām was still the imagination, or sometimes, opinion, but they concealed this by calling the imagination the “intellect.” To explain this, Maimonides turns to Abū Nasr al-Fārābī (c.870-950), a Muslim philosopher he admired, who showed that what the Kalām call “intellect” was merely opinion:

“As for the intellect that the Mutakallimūn are always talking about, ... they mean thereby something that is universally accepted by the first [reflections] of the opinion of everybody. For they designate as intellect the first [reflections] of common opinion [professed] by everybody or by most people. ...If, however, you examine the premises they make use of, you will find that all of these without exception are derived from the first [reflections] of common opinion. Accordingly, they point out one thing and make use of another.” (*Risala Fi'l-'Aql, Epistle on the Intellect*, Pines’ translation, in *Guide of the Perplexed*, “Translator’s Introduction,” lxxxiii; and 207, note 23; Kafih, note 30)

Of course, the whole point of philosophy was to raise thought from common opinion to the level of truth. Indulgence of opinion is sophistry.

Maimonides also had a problem choosing the right criterion. By making Aristotelian science, even to a limited extent, his criterion, Maimonides unfortunately took the terracentric universe as not only admissible, but also undeniable, just as he did with the now outmoded Aristotelian theory of the “proper place” of elements.

The Dialogue of the Mutakallimūn and the Philosopher

Maimonides’ complaint about the theory of admissibility was that it privileged imagination over intellect. To depict this, he conceived a dialogue between a philosopher and a Mutakallim. Maimonides was not a dramatist like Plato; he does not sustain dialogue for more than a few turns. Like Aristotle, he was primarily an essayist. Nonetheless, the dialogue format allows him to demonstrate the seriousness of the problematic of admissibility.

He shows how the Kalām destroy any concept of natural order. The Kalām theologian asks the philosopher to explain why iron is black and hard, and butter is white and soft. In other words, he is asking why things are the way they are, rather than otherwise. It is the core question of admissibility, because it asks whether things could be different from the way that nature always presents them to us. What “particularizes” (*hityakhadut* / תכצ״י) the iron and the butter to be the way we always find them?

The Philosopher’s Statement. The philosopher’s wholly Aristotelian hylomorphic response turns on his understanding that the Arabic *jawhar* meant substance, not atoms. He says that in its ultimate composition the substance can end up as metal or butter, depending on how its matter was formed. This is its *ultimate matter*, the resulting material substance that we see.

Some things are more complex than others are, the most complex being man. The matter that ends up as man or as a bar of iron does so after the complicated process of generation. At the end of this process, the ultimate substance is different in each species and even in each individual. Some accidents flow from the ultimate matter, such as the color of iron and of butter. Other accidents flow from the form. Maimonides mentions laughter and astonishment as accidents dependent on man’s sapient form, which he calls “soul.”

The Kalām Reply. The Kalām doctor replies that the problem is not so complicated as the philosopher makes it. You simply plug in the Propositions as needed. (He assumes but does not mention Propositions IV, VII, and XI,

but includes XII, their rejection of sense-data). He explains that what the philosopher calls “form” does not exist. There is no form, as such, that differentiates things. Any appearance of form is merely an array of accidents. There is also no “matter,” just atoms and groups of atoms. These atoms are identical to one another. All perceived formal distinctions are merely accidents that attach to individual atoms. The assemblage of all of those atoms with their individual accidents is the thing that we see, whether it is iron or butter, at least for that moment.

This, apparently, silences the philosopher. Maimonides picks up the gauntlet, reverting to essay form for his response to the Mutakallem, in his *Note* on imagination.

The Importance of Distinctions. The Kalam destruction of distinctions will be the key to Maimonides’ response. The Jewish view, emerging first in Genesis, and characteristic of every major text and rabbinic figure, is the primary importance of distinctions. Judaism sanctifies distinctions. Not only are distinctions holy, but holiness—*kedushah*— means distinction or separation. Understanding itself, *binah*, comes from a word meaning “between,” and the identification of that between-ness is what we call the making of distinctions. Even in the first moments of creation, God creates distinctions, divisions and lines of demarcation between light, dark, heaven, earth, man, animal, land and water. “The intellect (*ha-sekhel*) analyzes and divides the component parts of things.”

The Kalām cannot abide such complexity. With but few exceptions, the Mutakallimūn turn biological processes into mechanical variations. No atom is better fitted to receive an accident than another. This table is just as capable of locomotion as I am, for movement is just another possible accident that can attach to any atom. In this world, a man left his book at home and returned to find it still there, not realizing that, in his absence, it had briefly become a boy.

(The example is from Al-Ghazali, quoted in Averroes’ *Tahafut al Tahafut*, p. 323, Van den Bergh trans., Cambridge, 1987; note Saadia’s previous use of a similar example to demonstrate its absurdity, *Book of Opinions and Beliefs*, Rosenblatt trans., 148).

THE NOTE ON IMAGINATION

1. *The Significance of Imagination*

The Tenth Proposition, of admissibility, is really about the imagination. This is so important to Maimonides that he inserts a *Note* on imagination at the end of his discussion of the Proposition. It is a little chapter to itself and one of the most important sections in the Guide. (Pines styles it “A Call Upon the Reader’s Attention,” page 209; Friedlander just calls it “Note,” page 334; Kafih and Schwarz translations have *he’ara*).

The Relation Between the Dialogue and the Note on Imagination: Maimonides let the Mutakallem win the argument with the philosopher. He portrayed the philosopher trying to explain something complicated to a dogmatist. Many of us been in this position, so we sympathize with the philosopher.

The dialogue gave Maimonides an opportunity to display the force of the Kalām proposition of admissibility in the context of the previous nine Propositions. He says of Proposition X: “It is the best means for proving anything they like.”

The Positive Uses of the Imagination: Imagination is a necessary part of the Maimonidean doctrine of prophecy. He must save it from the Kalām.

Imagination closely connects to what Arabic Aristotelian tradition called “common sense.” Common sense is that faculty which combines data from the five senses and presents it as a unified image to the understanding (Wolfson, “Maimonides on the Internal Senses,” in *Studies*, v. 1, 250-314). The imagination retains and protects these sensory images.

Maimonides had a generally positive view of the trustworthiness of sense-data. It is only through the evidence of the senses, properly understood, that science advances. Nonetheless, we do not use the common sense or the imagination to do the work of intelligence.

This the “Chapter of Admissibility” (Pines trans.; Kafih: *inyan ha-hitakhnut hazeh*). The Kalām assert, according to Maimonides:

1. Everything that may be imagined is an admissible notion for the intellect, and;
2. The *possible*, according to the Kalām, is possible only from the point of view of the imagination, not from the intellect.

Maimonides wants to demolish the imagination as the sole touchstone of reality. Nonetheless, the imagination possesses several positive roles, which he articulates in various places: 1) *logical* admissibility, which depends to some extent on imagination, remains Maimonides’ strongest argument for the respectability of creation *ex nihilo*; 2) imagination is the critical factor in the processing of prophetic messages, and; 3) imagination is necessary for the superior politician or prince.

2. *Intellect vs. Imagination*

In the first paragraph of his *Note* on imagination, Maimonides hints where he is going. Consider this odd language (p. 209 Pines):

“Know, thou who studieth this Treatise: if you are of those who know the soul and its powers and acquired true knowledge of everything as it really is, you already know that imagination exists in most living beings.”

Kafih suggests that any animal capable of Pavlovian response has imagination. If you hit it, and ring a bell, it will jump when you raise the stick again, or even if you just ring the bell. The animal imagination identifies the bell with the stick. The scholastics called this faculty the “estimative sense.” (Kafih, footnote 39, *ad loc.*; *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*, R. McKeon, glossary, 2:428; *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, B. Wuellner, page 42).

Beyond that, the language of this opening sentence is mystifying. It uses stylistic turns that Maimonides characteristically uses to signal his esoteric interests. Did I really need to “know the soul and its powers and (have) acquired true knowledge of everything as it really is” (*v’nitbarer lo kol davar kfi amitat mtziuto*) to grasp that a frog recognizes a worm? Why do we need such qualifications to study imagination? The reason is that imagination is a foundation of prophecy, and, thus, subjects Maimonides to the rule against public teaching of *Maaseh Merkava* (Mishnah *Hagigah* 2:1). Moreover, he did not want to leave something as important as imagination in the hands of the Kalām, especially since he planned to use it in the battle with Aristotle.

He begins with a typical discussion of the difference between the intellect and the imagination, linking the latter with animal physicality. Animals combine and retain the evidence of the senses in the “common sense,” which supplies this product to their imagination (Wolfson, *op. cit.* 345). Rabbits recognize wolves before it is too late to run, just as we do. Maimonides’ point was that this sense is not our highest possession.

A Soul without Knowledge Is Not Good. In *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides catalogued the various parts of the soul, including the imagination (Introduction to *Avot*, *Shemona Perakim*, ch. 1). The imagination preserves and stores sense impressions from the common or estimative sense and combines them with others, sometimes producing fancies that do not exist in nature, like unicorns.

Already, in this early work, Maimonides criticized the Kalām for making the imagination the touchstone for the real: “They thought, or made people fancy, that everything that can be imagined is possible... [despite that the imagination] combines things whose existence is impossible...” The intellect, by contrast, perceives ideas, develops sciences, and makes ethical decisions. Only by the light of the mind do we arrive at definitions, whereby we apprehend the essences of things. The imagination combines; the intellect distinguishes.

“For the intellect analyses and divides the component parts of things, it forms abstract ideas of them, represents them in their true form as well as in their causal relations, derives from one object a great many facts, which—for the intellect—totally differ from each other, just as two human individuals appear different to the imagination...”

Maimonides next makes a powerful moral statement, which we should keep in mind when we meet a Maimonidean discussion of the contrast between the imagination and the intellect. In this statement, he subtly moves to the subject of the *active intellect*:

“Know that this single soul, whose powers or parts are described above, is like matter, and the intellect is its form. If it does not attain its form [the active intellect], the existence of its capacity to receive this form is for nought and is, as it were, futile. This is the meaning of his [Solomon’s] statement: *Indeed, without knowledge a soul is not good* (Psalms 19:8). He means that the existence of a soul that does not attain its form, but is rather *a soul without knowledge, is not good.*” (Commentary on the Mishnah, *Avot 1, Shemona Perakim, Eight Chapters*, trans., Weiss and Butterworth, p. 64, *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*).

The worst part of a soul not being “good,” that is, a soul in thrall to the imagination, is that since the imagination only portrays corporeal images drawn from the senses, it could never *imagine* the incorporeal attribute-less God. Imagination is the true source of the worship of the imaged gods. Maimonides, in the *Note*, wants to rouse us from the darkness of imagination toward the purely abstract conception of God. He exults (Pines trans. 211), “how excellent is this speculation and how great its utility for him who wishes to awake from this dormancy (*ha-alata*—darkness), I mean the state of following the imagination!” (*kama hashuv iyun zeh v’kama gadolo tovato l’mi sh’ratza l’hitronen min ha-alata ha-zu, k’lomar ha-hemshekhut akher ha-dimyon*).

3. *Two Proofs Against the Imagination*

In his *Note*, Maimonides propounded an interesting proof for the superiority of the intellect over the imagination, about men standing on opposite sides on the globe.

“Now it has been demonstrated that the earth is spherical in form and that portions of the inhabited part of it lie at both extremes of its diameter. Thus, the head of every individual from among the inhabitants of the two extremities is near heaven while his feet are near the feet of another individual who is opposite to him. It is thus impossible in every way that either of them would fall. This cannot even be represented to oneself; for one of them is not placed above and other below, but each of them is both above and below in relation to each other.”

Maimonides could not yet have known about gravity. Gravity is the mutual action between masses of matter, by virtue of which every such mass tends toward every other, with a force varying directly as the product of the masses and inversely as the square of their distances apart. The ancients recognized that there was a force tending toward the center of the earth that not only kept bodies upon its surface, but in some way upheld the order of the universe. This was an intellectual conclusion, not the work of the imagination.

That is only the beginning of the story. “Now it has been demonstrated that the earth is spherical in form and that portions of the inhabited part of it lie at both extremes of its diameter.”

This was also an intellectual conclusion. The imagination assumes that the *terra firma* is flat because that is what we see. Nevertheless, two men standing on opposite edges do not fall off as they would if it were flat. Scholars had already proven the sphericity of the earth many times. Still, the imagination cannot portray two men somehow adhering to the round edges of the globe's diameter. As he said,

“It is thus impossible in every way that either of them would fall. This cannot even be represented to oneself; for one of them is not placed above and other below, but each of them is both above and below in relation to each other.”

Each of them is both above and below in relation to each other. To my imagination, the Chinese should fall off the earth; to theirs, I should fall. The imagination is baffled. Maimonides announces the principle:

“Accordingly it has been demonstrated that something that the imagination cannot imagine or apprehend and that is impossible from its point of view, can exist.”

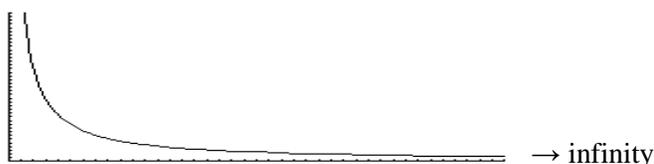
This is the critical step in the demolition of the Kalām's version of admissibility. The unimaginable is indeed that which “can exist.” And the corollary:

“It has similarly been demonstrated that something the imagination considers as necessary is impossible—namely, that God, may He be exalted, should be a body or a force in a body. For according to the imagination, there are no existents except bodies or things in bodies.”

The imagination cannot portray incorporeality. Any frog can recognize a worm, but no frog can imagine God.

Maimonides has a second wonderful proof that we cannot rely on imagination. He draws on the principle of the asymptote.

Think of it this way. My brother is ten years my junior, and so, at first, I was ten times older than him; but when I turned twenty, he was only half my age; at thirty, he was two-thirds my age; at forty he was three-quarters my age; and so on. He continually approaches my age in infinite time but never attains it. If you graph this relation, you produce the asymptotic curve:



But the Kalām cannot imagine infinity of any kind (Proposition XII). The imagination cannot portray a curve infinitely approaching the straight line without ever touching. Only the intellect can produce such a real curve. This curve also expresses Aristotle's time/space/motion continuum, because the diminishing area between the parabola and the reference line divides infinitely.

This curve aptly portrays the Maimonidean concept of the relation of man to God. As the good soul “attains its form” by acquiring intellect, it approaches infinitely close to God but never touches Him.

(The asymptote is from Apollonius of Perga c. 262 BCE—c. 190 BCE. Maimonides cites his famous book, the *Conic Sections*, by name, referring to section 2:13, p. 53 in T.L Heath's trans., Cambridge, 1896. Apollonius was a successor of Euclid and an important predecessor of Ptolemy.)

4. Maimonides Turns Against the Philosophers

Now comes the final step in the argument of the *Note*. Maimonides reminds us (Pines' translation): "This is the Chapter of Admissibility...It is not something one hastens to reject in its entirety with nonchalance." Will he now turn to defend the Kalām's proposition of admissibility?

The problematic appeared when some Kalām spokesmen admitted the intellectual impossibility of some things, without abandoning the criterion of imaginative admissibility. The philosopher responded, but not, as you might have expected, by asserting that the criterion must be the intellect.

"For if the philosopher says, as he does: That which exists (*ki ha-mtziut edi*) is my witness and by means of it we discern the necessary, the possible, and the impossible; the adherent of the Law (*ish daat / אלמתשרע*) says to him: The dispute between us is with regard to this point. For we claim that that which exists was made in virtue of will and was not a necessary consequence. Now if it was made in this fashion, it is admissible that it should be made in a different way, unless intellectual representation decides, as you think it decides, that something different from what exists at present is not admissible." (Pines' trans., 211)

The "adherent of the Law" wins this argument. This "religionist," as Friedlander called him, is really a third voice in the dialogue, the voice of Maimonides himself, although he mildly camouflages himself as this *ish daat*. He rejects the philosopher's assertion of causal necessity in favor of divine choice.

The methodological stakes are high. "We wish consequently to find something that would enable us to distinguish the things cognized intellectually from those imagined." A philosopher's stone? Perhaps. We must distinguish things *admissible* to the imagination from things *admissible* by the intellect. The most important of these things are the two most necessary to religion: divine existence and divine creation.

The philosopher limited the reach of the mind when he said "*That which exists* is my witness (*ki ha-mitziut edi*) and by means of it we discern the necessary, the possible, and the impossible." The Aristotelian accepted a plenitude of corporeal "gods," that is, a cosmos of powerful *natural* agents. His philosopher's stone is the reality of nature, "*that which exists*," the necessitous spinning out of the natural order. He says that the alleged creation *ex nihilo* is fantasy, for matter is neither created nor destroyed. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, from nothing nothing comes. However, by making "that which exists" the test for what exists, the philosopher commits the logical fallacy of *petitio principii*, "begging the question," assuming the conclusion he seeks.

Maimonides contested this because he recognized the real limits of this knowledge. The philosophers based their conclusions only on what they knew. But the nature of the universe is unknown.

Logical Admissibility. Still, Maimonides was not about to destroy "that which exists" just to defend the doctrine of divine creation. Man must be able to stand on the globe without falling off. The undermining of "that which exists" had been the goal of Kalām, their way of defending divine creation. But this demeaned the seriousness of the Jerusalem/Athens debate. If we destroy the natural order of "that which exists," then God did not create our world, but only a meaningless array of atoms.

We can recover the seriousness of that debate, if we can discover some criterion for admissibility. This he does not yet provide. "And about that I have something to say, which you will learn in various passages of this Treatise." His real doctrine on "admissibility" is scattered through the Guide for the qualified student to find on his own. I reconstruct it in the following manner.

The student first must recognize that Maimonidean admissibility is a *logical* doctrine, not a basis for the liberation of the imagination.

Maimonidean admissibility questions the [Avicennan] philosophers' assertion of the necessary emanation of the universe. If the universe were necessarily emanated, it must be the way it is. Religion, by contrast, argues that God *wills* the creation of our world as it is, but could have willed it otherwise. The philosopher replies that its basic nature never changes.

But how does he know? There is no deductive argument to prove that God could not have created the world from nothing. *Ex nihilo nihil fit* is a good rule for men, but it does not tell us what God could do. It holds sway only in the sublunar sphere. Logical admissibility became Maimonides' argument for the respectability of creationism.

Some critics assert that in the final paragraph of the *Note*, Maimonides created a new Jewish Kalām. Leo Strauss once called him an enlightened *mutakallem* (*Persecution*, 41). I think this goes too far, since it neglects his restriction of admissibility to logic. Consider what Maimonides said, in the name of the "adherent of the Law":

"That which actually exists, has, according to my view, been produced by the will of the Creator, not by necessity; just as it has been created with that special property, it might [admissibly] have been created with any other property, *unless the impossibility which you postulate be proved by a logical demonstration.*" (Friedlander trans.; Kafih: *ele im khen yakhlit ha-tziur ha-sikhli sh'lo ytakhen*).

Restated: The universe, according to Maimonides, is by divine will created from nothing rather than by necessary eternal emanation from God. This is an admissible assertion, unless the philosophical opponents prove that God could not have willed creation. But they cannot deduce this unless they can show that creation is a divine impossibility.

Examples of divine impossibility are that God can neither square circles nor eliminate Himself, both of which involve tampering with essential definitions. It is not a definitional impossibility for God to create the universe from nothing. The philosopher merely projected upon God our inability to make something from nothing. But this is the projection of his imagination, not his reason. God is not constrained by the habitual nature of reality. Thus "that which exists" is no criterion for God, who can do what He wants, just as the Sultan could walk rather than ride through town.

What does constrain God is the fixed nature of the impossible, which is to say, essential or definitional impossibility. If the admissible is not logically impossible, then God could will its existence.

For Maimonides, miracles, including creation, are not figments of the imagination, but logically admissible. Maimonides carefully expressed the point this way, "it is perfectly true that no notion whatever can be formed of those things which they (the Kalām) describe as the impossible (i.e., definitionally impossible), whilst a notion can be formed of what they consider as possible." Nonetheless, we cannot look to the imagination to supply the proof that the possible really is possible.

PROPOSITION XI: NO INFINITE

Muslim and Greek Opposition to the Infinite: The Eleventh proposition is that there is no infinite. The Kalām opposed all conceptions of infinity because of the Qur'an's statement that "He counteth all things by number" (72:28). That is, Allah counts the set of all numbered things, a *finite* set. 'Abd al Qāhir Baghdādī, (d. 1037), a Kalām figure, held that believing in an infinite "would force us to conclude that its parts are not limited in God's knowledge, but this involves a rejection of the Prophet's saying 'He counteth all things by number'" (quoted in Wolfson, *Kalām*, 470).

A deeper reason is that although Muslims believe that the universe was created *ex nihilo*, they also believe that it will be destroyed. The *qayāmah*, judgment day (literally: resurrection) is the day on which all creations will be

destroyed, even angels, followed by the resurrection of the believers. The Qur'anic universe is finite, both from its creation (*a parte ante*) to its destruction (*a parte post*). We have already seen that these considerations drove the Kalām to debate how God could cause destruction; that is, whether destruction comes when God stops creating, or whether there is a free-standing accident of destruction.

Apart from Qur'anic considerations, how can we explain the ancient prejudice against the infinite? Why did medievals accept its alleged untraversability? Herbert Davidson suggested that the principle of untraversability was “legerdemain.” Moderns are much more comfortable with infinity. “As a mere fact of anthropology one may mention that it is now virtually impossible to instill a general skepticism about infinite numbers among freshmen in philosophy or mathematics who have had a good high school education.” (James Thomson in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, v. 4, 186, Macmillan, NY 1967; Davidson, *Maimonides, The Man and His Works*, 358; see my explanation of untraversability at Guide 1:69).

Perhaps the horizons of ancient thinkers were narrower than our horizons. Their universe was large, but only a little more so than the immensity they could see with the unaided eye in the night sky. We now know that what we see, even with a standard telescope, is only the tiniest part of the known universe.

The ancient Greeks explained the prejudice against the infinite differently: they understood “infinity” as *apeiron*, from *peras*, which means “limit.” A tradition (Anaximander, Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus) developed the “limit” to mean form, number, the numerable, the idea, the good, and ultimately the divine. “Unlimited” implied disorder, chaos, the mob, matter, and, ultimately, evil. Plato’s divinity, the demiurge, is the craftsman who imposes order on matter to make it good; but, like any craftsman, the demiurge is *limited* by the nature of his materials, i.e., necessity. The gods could not be infinite without being evil.

It is also true that Aristotle needed God, the unmoved mover, at the beginning of all causal chains, because there could be no infinite regress of causes. It had to start somewhere. Similarly, the major medieval religious philosophers rejected the possibility of an infinite causal regress, including Rabbis Saadia, Ibn Pakuda, Ha-Levi, Maimonides, and, in Islam, Averroes. (Davidson, *ibid.*, p. 358; Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, p. 492-493.)

Maimonides was aware that philosophical developments had brought new subtlety to the discourse on infinities. Especially with Avicenna (980 – 1037) we start to hear a critical attitude toward untraversability, together with a readiness to accept the existence of an actual infinite, or at least to confine its impossibility to a small number of allegedly demonstrable cases. (For a brief clear survey, see Jon McGinnis, “Avicenna and Infinity: a Select History of the Infinite through Avicenna,” *Documenti e Studi*, 21:199–222, 2010, www.umsl.edu/~philo/People/Faculty/McGinnis%20Works/Avicennan%20infinity.pdf.)

The Four Infinities: Maimonides classifies four types of infinite. The first three are impossible, while the fourth is, at least, intellectually conceivable. These are: 1) An infinite body; 2) An infinite number of finite bodies together; 3) an infinite succession of causes, (known as the “essential” infinite, *ha-atzmi*). 4) The fourth type includes the “potential” and the “accidental” infinite (*b’koakh o b’mikra*).

Maimonides agreed with the Kalām that the first three types of infinite must be rejected. He discusses this more in the next chapter, but the basic idea of the first two types is that an actual infinite body or group of bodies would have to be something definite, but if it is definite, it cannot be infinite. The reason for the rejection of the third type is untraversability.

The “potential” infinite of the fourth group is the possible infinite division of a body. It is a corollary of the space/time/motion continuum, as in the case of the asymptote, which is an infinite division. It is called “potential” since we cannot actually complete this infinite division. If we could, it would not be infinite. It is conceptual, something we can only potentially do. Maimonides believed that matter and time are potentially

infinitely divisible, as did all Aristotelians. The existence of potentially infinitely divisible magnitudes was integral to his rejection of indivisible physical atoms and time atoms.

The “*accidental*” infinite describes the succession of accidents in matter, one after another into infinity, as moment follows moment in time. We call it “accidental” because it describes the infinite replacement of “accidental” forms in matter. It would be “essential” and not “accidental” if those successions *caused* each other. Every time a substance and its attendant accident is established, it must be preceded by the removal of the previous set of accidents in that material substrate, *b’vo zeh akher sur zeh*. This kind of infinite by succession works, so long as this succession is not a causal succession. The rule against untraversability only applies to *causal* chains.

Maimonides believed in the “potential” infinite, and that the “accidental” was theoretically possible.

Time was just such an accidental non-causal succession. If, as the Aristotelians assert, the universe is eternal, then the succession of present moments, “nows,” could proceed infinitely. Each “now” disappears as it passes. It is not the cause of the next “now.”

Avicenna had established that there was no proof against the existence of infinities, unless its members all existed together at the same time, or unless they succeeded each other, in something closely resembling numerical order. Jon McGinnis calls these two necessary conditions for the rejection of an infinity the “wholeness” and “ordering” conditions. Infinities like time, motion, generational successions, and collections of immortal souls do not satisfy these conditions, and, so, are not demonstrably impossible infinities. If we assume, *arguendo*, as Maimonides says we must, the existence of an eternal universe (as Avicenna did), then we should allow for the potential existence of these accidental infinities, even if we will come to reject the actual existence of some of them.

The Problem of the Accidental/Successive Infinite. Maimonides only conditionally accepts the “accidental” successive infinite. He accepts it only *a parte post*, i.e., into the future, not *a parte ante*, from the past.

Maimonides believed that God created the universe from nothing as a perfect creation, with an eternal future. It must be eternal in its future because God’s work is a perfect work, which He will never destroy. This contradicted the Kalām conception of the universe, which was finite in both directions, from creation to destruction.

Some Mutakallimūn maintained that the denial of the accidental infinity by succession was *self-evident* (*v’yesh mehem sh’amar ki zeh muskal m’atzmo u-moven b’iyun rishon v’ayn tzarikh l’hokhikho*). Maimonides replied that if a succession of accidents in matter were self-evidently false you would need nothing more than Proposition XI to disprove the eternity of the world. But the philosopher could reasonably respond that if an eternal emanator kept up its emanations forever there would be no end to the succession of accidents in matter, or to the succession of moments in time (Wolfson, *Kalām*, 428-429).

We see this more clearly in the next chapter, Guide 1:74, where Maimonides portrayed the seven Kalām arguments against the eternity of the universe. Some of those arguments specifically array themselves against the existence of any kind of infinity. One example was that any list of generations always goes back to Adam. It is like the argument that if we find a Swiss watch on the moon, someone must have put it there. While true of the timepiece, it does not get at the problem of the succession of generations.

Generational succession looks like a causal chain, but was not one. Aristotle had based his eternalism on the idea that forms *succeed* each other in matter infinitely (Wolfson called this “eternal rectilinear succession”). They do not cause each other, but only replace each other.

This includes the eternal succession of moments in time. Maimonides rather carefully says of this infinity of time that it is “not necessarily erroneous,” and of the infinity of temporal succession: “Nor is it absolutely wrong.” Clearly, it is not self-evidently wrong. He shows that the infinite by succession is not “absolutely wrong” in several ways.

First, he points out that each of the items in the succession, say, of the succession of the Patriarchs and their seed, is itself finite. While it assumes an original member, i.e., Abraham, we know nothing about his eventual progeny. The Kalām made such succession into a defined set, i.e., a succession until now, and then claimed such a set could not possibly be infinite. But why couldn’t there be infinite future members?

In Guide 1:74, Maimonides makes the case: “For they count their nonexistent individuals and act in imagination as if they were existent (now), and as if they had some beginning, and, therefore, add to the objects of fantasy or subtract from them.” (Pines’ trans., 222). This applies to most of their proofs. They would count the dead and departed together with the living, and then reject an infinite regress of their souls. If the Kalām were right, the generational succession would meet Avicenna’s “wholeness” requirement, in which impossible infinities always constitute a definite whole. But generational successions are not causal arrays or defined sets.

Time also is not an impossible causal infinite, since one moment does not cause the next moment. In the next chapter, Maimonides adds another example: the spheres rotate eternally, and we should expect them to do so, since circular motion does not require a limit, as does straight-line motion.

Maimonides hints that some members of the Kalām thought they had a good argument against the infinity of time. He did not give that argument until the next chapter (7th Argument). They claimed that “no infinite can be greater than another.” The argument is that different infinities exist, which is absurd, and therefore any infinite is absurd.

The typical example is that two different planets revolve eternally at different speeds, but then one infinite must be longer than another. Avicenna’s answer was that the Mutakallimūn were not properly comparing these “different” infinities, since they failed to distinguish between “infinities” and “wholes” (see our account in the next chapter). We now reject the alleged absurdity by saying that there can be different kinds of infinite sets, thanks to the discovery of transfinite sets by Georg Cantor (1848-1914).

PROPOSITION XII: THE UNRELIABILITY OF SENSE DATA

The Twelfth Proposition is that the senses are not trustworthy. The Mutakallimūn revived the sense-data skepticism of the ancient sophists, anticipating the eighteenth century British empiricists Hume and Berkeley. This revival of systematic skepticism finds its modern reflection in post-modernist perspectivism. The Aristotelians, very much including Maimonides, opposed this radical skepticism.

Maimonides recapitulates the skeptical arguments nicely. They state that the senses do not correctly perceive remote objects, and are subject to sickness and illusion. But Maimonides thought that when the senses are healthy, they are a good source of evidence (*Letter on Astrology*). He held that they are the second most trustworthy source of evidence, the first being mathematics, and the third being revelation.

His position encouraged scientific development, for we must rely on our senses, within their known capacities, to draw conclusions about existence. We can see the bad effect of systematic skepticism on Islamic science. The Arab world is no longer known for scientific inquiry.

(Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong*, Harper, 2003. Prof. Peter Adamson, in his excellent history of philosophy podcasts, disagrees. In written colloquy to podcast 171, “Eastern Promises,” he blames the Industrial Revolution for the retardation of the Muslim scientific endeavour, but this merely pushes off the question of why some philosophical worldviews support capitalist revolutions while others do not.)

Maimonides argues that sense-data skepticism is nothing but sophistry (*sofistanion*, Jud.Ar.: אלסופיסטאנין). The sophists were orators for hire who were able to increase their fees by advancing extreme and even contradictory opinions. They were the opponents of Socrates. Sense-data skepticism was a staple of their diatribes.

In the *Treatise on Logic*, Maimonides defined the sophistic argument:

“There is also a kind of syllogism used for deception and falsehood, where one or both premises are such wherewith or wherein a man errs or falsifies in any one of the syllogistic moods. Such syllogisms are called sophistic, and the making thereof and the knowledge of the ways in which people deceive and utter falsehoods constitute what is called sophism.”

The pagan priests used such arguments to twist people from honoring God’s celestial servants to worshipping the stone images of those servants (Mishneh Torah, *Avoda Zara* 1:1-2). The sophists had a bad reputation with the philosophers, from Socrates to Maimonides.

Maimonides placed this Proposition in the final position in his list because the Mutakallimūn found it so necessary (*hekhrahit meod*). They hurled the unreliability of sense-data in the face of anyone who asserted that reality contradicted their dogma. It was readily available whenever anyone doubted, that, for instance, millstones shatter and reassemble from moment to moment, though no one had ever seen this happen. They would simply respond that the evidence was withheld from our misleading senses.

The doctrine of the unreliability of the senses is not as important as the doctrine of admissibility, which Maimonides placed at the all-important tenth position. Unlike Proposition XII, Proposition X, admissibility, is the one that Maimonides must take seriously, for logical admissibility was the core of his retort to Aristotle’s eternalism.

MAIMONIDES CRITICIZES THE ATTEMPT BY THE LATER KALĀM TO DROP ATOMISM

There is a difficult passage in this section:

“Do not think that agreement of the Mutakallimūn in affirming this premise is gratuitous. That would be similar to the belief of the majority of the later Mutakallimūn that the wish of their predecessors to establish the existence of the indivisible particle did not correspond to a need (*ayn lo tzorekh*). In fact, all their assertions that we have set forth in the foregoing passages are necessary; and if one premise were to be destroyed, the whole purpose would be destroyed. Indeed this last of the premises is most necessary.” (Pines trans., 214)

Maimonides distinguished between the early and later Mutakallimūn, that the latter thought that the work of the former to establish atomism was unnecessary work (*ayn lo tzorekh*). These later Asharite theologians had objected to their Mutazila predecessors’ appropriation of foreign ideas. Wolfson explains: “Of the Orthodox, Ibn Kullab...was opposed to atomism...Orthodox thinkers, who were disinclined to commit themselves to atomism were Ghazālī and Fakr Al-Din Rāzi” (*Kalām*, 495, note 1). Regarding Ghazālī’s ambivalence, “He once refrained from using atomism as an argument for a certain religious belief, on the pretext that atomism involved difficulties which would take too long to solve.”

Along these lines Even-Shmuel wrote (my trans.):

“The later Mutakallimūn did not acknowledge atomism, despite their agreement with the other propositions. The striving of the early Mutakallimūn to establish atomism was unnecessary [in their

view]. To the contrary, all the propositions were necessary. If it were to appear that any were unnecessary, that would necessarily result in the nullification of the entire system, just as Maimonides proved above (at the end of Proposition X, before the *Note* on Imagination).”

In other words, the later theologians, such as Ghazālī, who were willing to use philosophic methods to establish demonstrative rather than merely rhetorical arguments for Kalām positions, even going so far as to drop the first several Propositions, stumbled, since without those Propositions the entire Kalām project would fail.

MAIMONIDES’ INFLUENCE ON LEIBNIZ— THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES

Lenn Evan Goodman has shown that Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716), famous for his monadology, developed the central notion of his philosophy under the influence of the Guide of the Perplexed, and, specifically, of our chapter.

Leibniz resolved the antinomy of natural necessity and divine volition by positing a universe of “compossible” worlds, i.e. monads. These monads are unextended beings, each of whose predicates spin out naturally, but God selects only the best possible monad among them. His choice may be motivated by the promptings of morality, but never by logical necessity.

Thus, the monad’s own nature is given, but the choice among those monads is not given. God’s choice is free. Goodman explains:

“This idea of Maimonides, that the world may contain necessities of its own, relative to the system of its interaction, while not containing any necessity of existence, is the foundation of Leibniz’ idea of God’s selection of the best of all possible worlds. Many worlds are conceivable which do not violate the laws of logic.... The difference God made, which Maimonides sought from the Philosophers, is given by Leibniz as the free selection of the best.” (L. E. Goodman, “Maimonides and Leibniz,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 31, 1980, page 221; the essay develops the impact of Guide 1:73 in intellectual history.)

This reminds me of the Midrash:

“The Holy One, blessed be He, went on creating worlds and destroying them until He created this one and declared, this one pleases Me; those did not please Me.... : This is R. Abbahu’s reason: ‘And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good’ (Gen. 1:31): this pleases Me, but those did not please Me.” (*Genesis Rabbah*, 3:7)

Maimonides maintained the existence of miracles against the Aristotelian assertion of necessity in nature, and against the Kalām collapse of reality as a whole into the purely miraculous. In this, Leibniz follows and builds upon the Maimonidean foundation. While nature, as given in the particular monad’s universe, is as it always is, what is always is not the same as what is necessary.

Leibniz said “miracles...cannot be accounted for by the natures of created things” (*Theodicy*, trans. E. M. Huggard, London, 1951, p. 207). Miracles are not explainable from the nature of God’s creations, from “that which exists.”

God is not compelled by any subordinate laws of the universe, “but acts, as it were, by a private miracle” when He makes His choices. (Leibniz, “Clarification of Bayle’s Difficulties,” in *Leibniz’s ‘New System’ and Associated Contemporary Texts*, Woolhouse and Francks, Oxford, 1997, 205).

The miracle comes from God and not from finite substances, such that there is nothing in the nature of a staff to make it become a snake, or for the snake to revert to being a staff. Only God's choice explains such a miraculous breach of the natural order. God makes His choice within the plenitude of infinite realizable possibilities.

CONCLUSIONS

Maimonides essentially accused the Kalām theologians of constructing their physics to support their ideology. Atomism, the liberation of the imagination, and the denial of our senses, together removed the need for them to debate the philosophers.

Their victory was hollow. An enormous job of reconstruction was necessary to get back to what was needed, the articulation of the twin miracles of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*, creation and providence.

This is what forced Maimonides, in this chapter and the succeeding chapters of the first book of the Guide of the Perplexed, to act as the defense attorney for the philosophers, despite that he would eventually have to become their prosecutor.

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GUIDE 1:74 THE SEVEN KALĀM ARGUMENTS FOR CREATION *EX NIHILO*

INTRODUCTION

There Is No Deductive Proof For Divine Creation. Chapters 74-76 summarize and review the Muslim (Kalām) theologians' arguments for the four doctrines that Maimonides says are necessary to religion:

1. There is a God;
2. He created the world from nothing;
3. He is one;
4. He is not corporeal.

Our chapter, Guide 1:74, is about the Kalām proof for God's existence, but it is also about creation *ex nihilo*, since their proof for the existence of God depends on their proof for creation. Chapter 1:75 will be about the Kalām arguments for divine unity. 1:76 contains their arguments for divine incorporeality.

Since monotheistic religion requires belief in the existence of God, 1:74 is the most important of those three chapters.

Maimonides agrees that we should establish our belief in God. But the Kalām based their proof of God's existence on the creation of the world. If they could show that it was created, then there must have been a Creator. But if it turned out that the world was not created, then there would be no Creator. If there really is no deductive argument for creation then the proof for God's existence would fall flat.

Maimonides must prevent this consequence, even if he has to destroy Islamic theology to do it.

Maimonides will solve the problem by decoupling divine existence from creation (in Part Two of the Guide). He will argue that we must secure our belief in God first, because it is the essential religious demand. By putting proof of creation first, the Kalām exalted the lower over the higher, leaving the belief in God on a tottering foundation.

The so-called Jewish Kalām also made their proof for the existence of God depend on creation. Maimonides never mentions them, but they cannot be far from his thoughts. For example, R. Bakhya Ibn Pakuda, *Hovot Ha-Levavot (Duties of the Heart)* says, “One must first investigate whether or not the world has a Creator... Who created it and brought it into existence from nonexistence.”

First, prove that the world was created, then show that God must have created it. The fundamental flaw is that we cannot prove that the world was created.

The strong, though unarticulated, implication of this chapter was that there is no deductive proof for the divine creation of the world *ex nihilo*.

Maimonides turned the argument back to where it should have been: first establish the existence of God, talk about the world later. We will briefly address, at the end of this essay, the modern impact of this conclusion.

Maimonides had his own argument for the existence of God, satisfactory to both sides, Athens and Jerusalem, which did not entirely depend on the premise of creation. He argued that the world was either created or eternal. If created, there must have been a Creator. If it is eternal, Aristotle shows that there must be an unmoved mover, the original cause of the untraversable chain of causes for the continued rotation of the eternal outer sphere. In either case, God exists. It was a good argument for his time, as we will explain.

In our chapter, Maimonides portrayed the weakness of each Kalām argument for creation, not because he doubted creation, but because the very weakness of those arguments undermined religion’s best case for the respectability of creation. (On his commitment to creation *de novo* and *ex nihilo*, see Kenneth Seeskin, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World*, Cambridge, 2006).

RHETORIC AND SOPHISTRY

We learn from Aristotle that there are three kinds of arguments: deductive arguments, rhetorical arguments, and sophistical arguments. Maimonides explains that deductive arguments are syllogisms constructed with at least two true propositions. Rhetorical arguments contain two propositions, at least one of which is based on convention or tradition. A sophistical argument is a deceptive argument where at least one proposition is false. (*Treatise on Logic* 8:3).

Since the Kalām case for the existence of God depended entirely on their proof for creation, they had to deploy the most powerful deductive arguments available to refute Aristotelian eternalism.

But we have no deductive proof for the creation of the world. This is a limitation on human knowledge. No one knew what was above the lunar sphere.

The best anyone could do was to hazard persuasive rhetorical arguments about the nature of the cosmos. But by dressing their rhetorical arguments in deductive cloth, the Kalām paradoxically reduced those “deductive” arguments to the sophistical level, the lowest of the three types of argument. They then hoped to “startle” and “astonish” (*l’havhil...u’l’haflia*) their listeners and readers with rhythm and rhyme, prolixity and dogmatic diatribe.

By contrast, you could never accuse the master logician, Aristotle, of writing poetry or exciting prose.

Maimonides signals that, at best, the Kalām had only rhetorical arguments, in the first sentence of 1:74: “In this chapter I shall include accounts, *akhbaar*, of the proofs, *dala’il*, of the Mutakallimun.”

The Arabic *akhbaar* was the classic term for narrations of Muhammad’s life. *Dala’il* are signs or indications, including proofs, and is part of the Arabic title of the Guide of the Perplexed, *Dalaalat al-Ha’irin*.

The subtle point was that despite the Kalām assertion that these arguments were deductive, they were only rhetorical or persuasive accounts and narrations. *To premise the existence of God on a merely rhetorical proof for the creation of the world is to premise His existence on a base easily shaken.*

Maimonides tells us that when we boil down their massive works, the Kalām had seven arguments for creation *ex nihilo*. H.A.Wolfson has given names to these seven arguments (but not in this order: *Philosophy of the Kalām*, Harvard 1976, p. 374, and see pp. 373-455):

1. Argument from the Analogy of Things in the World;
2. Argument from the Impossibility of an Infinite by Succession;
3. Argument from the Aggregation and Segregation of Atoms;
4. Argument from the Createdness of the Accidents of the Component Parts of the World;
5. Argument from Particularization;
6. Argument from Preponderation;
7. Argument from Immortal Souls.

We can reduce the seven arguments to three types:

- I. The argument from the analogy with the things of this world (Arguments 1 and 4);
- II. The argument from Particularization (Arguments 3, 5, and 6);
- III. The argument against an infinite by succession (Arguments 2 and 7).

The classical Hebrew term for the Aristotelian concept that the universe is eternal was *kadmut ha-olam*. It literally means the temporal precedence of the world, i.e., that it comes before God. Michael Schwarz explains the phrase *kadmut ha-olam* as: “the belief that the universe is eternal and without beginning, existing forever, uncreated” (Note 3, to Guide 1:69, vol. 1, p. 177, my translation).

I. ANALOGY WITH THINGS OF THIS WORLD (Arguments 1 and 4)

The Kalām’s first and fourth arguments are the most common but least persuasive proofs that God created the world.

The First Argument. All the things we see in the world have been created. These cups, my brother, this office, etc., have not existed forever. Since they are not eternal, they must have been created, and nothing creates itself. Since everything we see was created, the world must also have been created.

Maimonides cites a slightly stronger version of the argument: Reuven was originally a drop of sperm. This drop progressed from stage to stage, from amnion to fetus to embryo to infant (Kafih, note 6*, *ad loc.*), but could not have changed itself. There must be an external agent of change. By analogy, the same should hold true for the universe as a whole.

This is an analogy, not a deductive argument: it was, at best, a rhetorical argument. Its basic weakness is its assumption that a law discovered in one thing is applicable to all (...*sh'kol ikaron sh'nmtza ba-guf m'suyam, tzarikh l'hakhilo al kol guf*).

Moreover, the Kalām argument missed its mark. Neither version proves the need for creation *ex nihilo*, only for an agent of change. Aristotle's unmoved mover of the eternally moving cosmos could be this divine agent. Plato's demiurge, the craftsman who works on unformed hyllic matter, would also fit this description.

The analogical argument is ancient. It is based on the axiom that nothing creates itself. In the *Timaeus*, Plato argues, "Now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by someone, for without a cause nothing can be created" (28a, p. 12, Jowett trans.). H. A. Wolfson demurred, calling this "an unproved assumption" (*Kalām*, p. 382). It may be true in our world, but how would we know that it's universally true?

Maimonides observes that "A palm-tree or any other object might equally be selected to illustrate this idea: the whole universe, they argue, is analogous to these instances—thus you see how they (the Kalām) believe that a law discovered in one thing may equally be applied to everything."

The Fourth Argument. "The Argument from the Createdness of the Accidents of the Component Parts of the World" was the most sophisticated version of the analogical argument. Its complexity masked its weakness.

Here is the Fourth Argument. According to the Kalām, no atom is without its accident. We do not see an atom before it has its accident, or an accident before it has its atom. Atoms and accidents actualize when they link with one another. The Kalām's accidents do not exist for more than two time-atoms (Guide 1:73, Proposition VI). Since the accidents have only momentary duration, they cannot be eternal. If the accidents are not eternal then they must have been created. The atoms must also be created, for anything that combines with a created object and cannot exist without it must itself be created (*l'fi sh'kol ha-tzimud l'mekhudashim, v'aino mishtakhrer mehem harei mekhudash*). This is because created and eternal things are opposites, and opposites cannot join as one (Shem Tov, 126a). But they do join as one. Since they do join as one, the atoms, like their accidents, could not be eternal. They both must have been created, or they could not link together.

We are now asked to apply the analogy just as in the First Argument: since the atoms and their accidents are created, all substances must be created; therefore, the world was created. This is especially so since the world is a whole, comprised of substances, that is, atoms, and the whole does not precede its parts. If the parts were created then the whole would also have been created. There must be a Creator since they did not create themselves.

The Kalām judged this their best argument: "This argument is considered by them the best and safest, and has been accepted by many of them as strict proof." Nevertheless, the philosophers recognized its wheezing mechanism through the rhetorical camouflage (*sh'hen drushot l'ma sh'lo ne'elam m'eini baalei ha-iyun*). Averroes called the argument logically unintelligible: "The method which they followed in proving of the atom... is a method so difficult that it eludes many people trained in the art of logical reasoning" (*Kashf*, II:19-21, in Wolfson, *Kalām*, 401).

This argument collapses under Maimonides' powerful blows.

It flows from the four propositions that he demolished in the previous chapter. Proposition IV was the contention that an atom must have accidental characteristics. Proposition V said that each atom is completely furnished with its accidents and could not exist without them. Proposition VI was that accidents do not continue in existence during two time-atoms. Finally, Proposition VIII held that all existing things consist of atoms and of accidents, and the physical form of a thing is likewise an accident.

Playing devil's advocate, Maimonides takes up the philosophers' case against the Kalām theorists. First, the Aristotelians were not atomists. Second, the original Greek atomism required no Creator. Third, even if created, the accidents would just recycle forever in eternal uncreated matter, irrespective of whether that matter was hylic or atomic.

The Aristotelian opponent avoided the Kalām argument because he never accepted the atomic theory. His whole was not just made of atoms and accidents. It contained incorporeal things, including potential things. Unlike the Mutakallimun, the philosopher conceives of unformed matter, i.e., matter with no accidents attached. He would argue that even if the things we see in the world are created, this does not prove that things we do not see were created, such as this unformed matter or the invisible heavenly spheres.

The philosopher could admit, for the sake of argument, that atoms exist, but only in the original Democritean sense that those atoms are eternal and uncreated (*v'im yomar adam, v'shema ha-etzem aino mekhudash...*). He could even admit that the accidents were created, but he would assert that they follow upon each other successively and eternally, in a cycle (*v'toan sh'hem nirdafim al bilti mekhudash ba'sibuv*). The Kalām would argue that such a successive infinite cycle would be an impossible untraversable infinite, but the philosophers held that such an infinite was possible, as we explain later in this essay ("The Kalām Arguments against the Successive Infinite").

This "cycle" (*sibuv*) alludes to the notorious doctrine of the Eternal Return of the Same. The idea was that with a finite number of forms and an infinite quantity of matter, the forms must cycle through repeatedly in eternal time. Everything that happened before will happen again. (see Shem Tov, *ad loc* to 126b, and Friedlander, 347, note 2. Also my discussion "The Eternal Recurrence" in Guide 1:72).

This Stoic teaching obliterated the Kalām analogy from the createdness of accidents, simply by making it irrelevant. The philosopher could argue that even if our world were created, it would repeat itself forever in an eternal uncreated universe of such worlds.

The Uncreated Spheres. Maimonides sharpens his critique. The philosophers could grant, *arguendo*, that accidents must be created. But they would make one particular exception, the unlimited circular motion of the spheres. Nothing suggests that they were created.

Circular motion is not subject to the limits of straight-line motion. Recall that in the Aristotelian theory of *proper place* all four material (sublunar) elements forced out of their places must return to their places in a straight line and stop (above for air, below for earth). The elements must stop, at least at the edge of the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic outer sphere, beyond which nothing passes. But the philosophers denied that this limit of motion applied to the spheres themselves. They never stop. There is no edge at which they must halt.

The spheres were not comprised of material elements, but, rather, of the fifth element, quintessence (aether), whose motion is eternally circular. They do not return to their "place" in a straight line because they are always in place, i.e., their place is the place of their rotation.

Since the spheres were not compounded from either the four material elements or from atoms, they were not subject to corruption and dissolution, like every other compound of atoms or elements. Therefore, there was no reason to suppose that the spheres were, like earthly substances, created.

If the Kalām were serious about their analogical argument, Maimonides reasons, they should have devoted special effort to the investigation of the problem of the sphere, as well as to the problem of the eternal succession of forms in matter. Rather than do this they merely rejected the existence of both.

II. PARTICULARIZATION

(Arguments 3, 5 and 6)

“Faith, here’s an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven.” (Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 3)

Introduction: the Kalām equivocation on the meaning of “possible existence.” Arguments Three, Five and Six go by different names but each uses the same basic method of Particularization. The argument rests on Kalām Proposition X of the last chapter, that anything imaginable is possible. Since any possible thing could be both the way it is and another imaginable possible way, what made it the way it is? There must be a *particularizer* to determine that it would be this way and not another imaginable way. The sun is round but could equally possibly be square; therefore, a particularizer must have determined that it should be round.

We need to mention several points at the outset. The Kalām argument that there is a Particularizer, God, does not prove that He creates the world *ex nihilo*. These arguments are useful in establishing the first doctrine of religion, that there is a God, but they do not prove creation, which was their declared purpose.

These arguments commit the *fallacy of equivocation*, since we can understand them in two different ways. The first time this occurs is with the term “particularize” itself. Maimonides writes that the Kalām mashed together terms, each of which had a specific meaning:

“For there is no difference which of the following expressions is used: to determine (particularize), to make, to create, to produce, to originate, or to intend (*m'yakhad o osei o borei o mamtzi o m'hadash o m'khevan*): these verbs have all one and the same meaning [for the Kalām].”

The Kalām held that since anything could “possibly exist” in any imaginable way, a particularizer must have chosen how it would exist, as, for instance, that the sun would be round rather than square. But philosophers understood the term “possible existence” differently from the Kalām:

“Our opponent (Aristotle) who assumes the eternity of the Universe, employs the term ‘possible,’ and says, ‘the existence of the Universe is possible’ in a sense different from that in which the Mutakallem applies it...”

The philosophers did not agree that things could “possibly” be different.

When the Avicennan Aristotelians spoke of the “possible,” they meant it to be the antithesis of the “necessary.” None of the things of this world exists necessarily. God is the only necessary existent. The things of the world are, therefore, only possibly existent in their relation to God. In other words, when the philosophers called the things of the world “possible existences” they meant that the things of the world were not God, the only necessary existence. They did not mean that those things could manifest themselves in any way imaginable. It only meant that their existence was not, like God’s existence, necessary.

Maimonides agreed with the Avicennans that God confers actual existence on everything other than Himself. Their existence was only possible because of Him (Mishneh Torah 1:1). He says that this means that God is the “form of the world,” for without Him it could not continue to exist.

This is quite different from the Kalām assertion that God is the efficient cause who particularizes every accident in every atom every second. In the philosophers’ version, God actualized substances by causing the spheres to emanate form upon their unformed matter. But the Kalām rejected the existence of such indirect causation.

All of this discussion about “possibility” is really about why anything other than God can exist, not about the specific shape its actual existence takes.

To come back to our example, for the philosophers, the sun's "possibility of existence" was not that it could be another shape, but that it could *be* at all (Shem Tov, 127b). The actualization of the possibility of its existence required the will of God. The sun was necessarily existent with respect to other existent beings, while remaining only a possible existence with respect to God.

R. Efodi comments, "When the Mutakallem says of the universe as a whole that it could possibly exist or not exist, the philosopher replies that this is false, arguing that the universe exists necessarily from God," *sh'hu sheker, ki ha-olam b'klalo, yomar ha-filosof, sh'hu m'khuyav mimenu ytalei*. R. Crescas added that, according to the philosophers, a thing is "necessary with respect to its cause, possible with respect to itself," *v'hi m'khuyav b'bekhinat sibato, v'efshar b'bekhinat atzmo*. (Efodi and Crescas, *ad loc.*, 127b, my translation).

Thus, Maimonides says that the Kalām "err or cause others to err" when they assert of the universe that it is equally possible of existence or nonexistence (*v'ha-taa otanu o taa b'inyan... 'ha-olam efshari ha-mitziot'*). The difference between God and the world is that the necessity of His existence is in Himself, while the necessity of the world's existence is due to another (Shem Tov, 127b). This would be true both for the Avicennan philosophers and for Judaism.

The Third Argument. "The Argument from the Aggregation and Segregation of Atoms," applies Particularization to the Kalām atomic theory. Substances only come about because two or more atoms clump together. Clumping or separation is possible, as is the possibility that they will clump, unclump and then clump again. Since these likelihoods are equally possible, a particularizer must have made each choice.

The key to the Kalām argument was their claim that the prior natures of things had no bearing on their ultimate manifestation. There is nothing in the prior nature of a group of atoms (and no "form" as such) that requires that they must cluster. Only an external force, Allah, determines their final state.

It is another version of the argument from design. Until they combine, the individual atoms have no "accidental" properties, and, therefore, no actual existence. The atoms must have a combiner. By extension, the world, which is made of atoms, requires a combiner. The philosophers rejected the entire argument.

The whole trend of thought begs the question of what the nature of matter is. The philosophers argued for some kind of pre-existent eternal matter. In the Democritean/Epicurean version of atomism, the uncreated atoms clump and unclump *eternally*, with mere chance, not God, as their "particularizer." Nothing in the original theory of atomism required the existence of a divine assembler.

The "proof" from clumping and unclumping turns out to be just as good for atheism as the Kalām imagined it to be for monotheism.

The Fifth Argument. The "Argument from Particularization," moves from the atoms of things to their particular appearances. Things appear a certain way, that is, a certain color, shape, size, place, time, and so on. Since they could imaginably take another equally possible aspect, a Particularizer must have determined how they would be. In the example of flowers, there was nothing in the prior nature of a patch of flowers, or in their particular soil, which makes one red and another yellow. God could only have made that choice.

The philosophers would retort that things could not have been different from the way they are. Nature does nothing in vain, *natura nihil agit frustra*.

Maimonides would not have agreed with the flower example. In Guide 1:73, Proposition X, he shows that the distinct characteristics of iron and butter flow from their specific natural compounds of form and matter. It would

follow that something about their composition must cause the color differentiation of the flowers. He did not, of course, know about differentiation at the genetic level.

Volitional eternalism. Nonetheless, Maimonides noticed that some recent philosophers thought that God willed the particularities of things in the eternal universe. This represents a change, since eternalists had hitherto held that things flowed necessarily from a volitionless supreme being. He, therefore, says “The theory of Particularization is...adopted by some of those who assume the eternity of the Universe.”

Maimonides supports this in Guide 2:21: “Some of the recent philosophers who adhere to the theory of the Eternity of the Universe hold that God *produces* the Universe, that He by His will designs and determines its existence and form: they reject, however, the theory that this act took place at one certain time, and *assume that this always has been the case, and will always be so.*”

In other words, some philosophers could accept the Fifth Argument *in toto*, up to and including a divine volitional particularizer, but still reject creation.

Thus, the Kalām Particularization theory once again failed to unseat their eternalist adversaries.

(Perhaps, by ‘recent philosophers’ he meant Alfarabi and R. Shlomo Ibn Gabirol; H. A. Wolfson, *Studies* vol. 1, 210 – 211; Sara Pessin, “Solomon Ibn Gabirol [Avicebron]” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online. Perhaps also Averroes, who says of God’s atemporal will acting upon an eternal universe: “the knowledge of the Creator acts on existents, and the existents receive the activities of His knowledge,” at 269, 446:8, *Tahafut al Tahafut*, trans. Van Den Bergh. Cf. R. Yehuda Halevi, *Kuzari*, Hirschfeld, ch. 5:18, Axiom 9, p. 278)

Maimonides also saw something useful in this argument: “In conclusion, I consider this to be the best argument: and in another part I shall more fully acquaint you with the opinion I have formed concerning the theory of Particularization.”

Maimonides’ Own Version of the Argument of Particularization. Maimonides returns to this “best argument” in Guide 2:19, where he uses Particularization as a rhetorical weapon against the philosophic eternalists. But he differentiates himself from the Mutakallimun who use the argument:

“Do not think that they have also said what I shall say. On the other hand, there is no doubt that they wished what I wish.... They have established Particularization, by means of their premises, which you already know [from Guide 1:73]. I, on the other hand, shall establish Particularization regarding the things to which it ought to be established, by means of philosophic premises derived from the nature of that which exists.” (Guide 2:19, Pines translation, p. 303.)

The difference is that he first admits that there are no deductive proofs on either side of the creation/eternity question. Maimonides explains that even Aristotle admitted he had no proof of the eternity of the universe. Only rhetorical arguments exist.

Having laid this groundwork, he denies that the stars and the spheres have prior natures that could explain their anomalies, which only God could have chosen.

“What determined that the one small part [of the heavenly sphere] should have ten stars, and the other portion should be without any star? and the whole body of the sphere being uniform throughout, why should a particular star occupy the one place and not another?” (Guide 2:19)

A rational natural law would seem to demand a uniform astral distribution, but that is not what we find. Moreover, why do the inner spheres move faster than the outer, which is not what we would expect. All of this must come from the volition of an external particularizer, God, since there could be no better explanation.

I will consider his version of Particularization in more detail in Guide 2:19, but it has the same weakness as the Kalām argument. While it may show that God determines particularities in the universe, it does not prove that He created it from nothing.

The Sixth Argument is the “Argument from Preponderation.” This is the only Kalām version of Particularization specifically directed to creation *ex nihilo*. They asserted that if the world were necessary of existence it would be God, because only God necessarily exists. Therefore, the world is only possible. Its existence is not by nature preferable to its non-existence. There must be an external agent preponderating those chances for existence, and that agent is God.

In response, the philosophers denied that the world could ever be non-existent.

In this argument, the Kalām replaced the term “Particularization,” with “preponderation” (*he-halif teivat miyakhad b'makhria*). Instead of God “particularizing” the specific possible characteristics of a thing, He “preponderates” its existence over its likelihood of non-existence. In other words, the focus is on the existence of a thing, not on the *states* it assumes (*v'he'khalif matzavi ha-mtziot, b'mtziot ha-mtziot atzma*).

The possibilities we must judge are existence and non-existence: being and nothingness. Unlike the Particularization argument, which was about the found nature of the substance itself, the preponderation argument treats the status of existence *before* it comes to be.

The Aristotelian eternalists could reject this preponderation because they did not accept the alternatives of existence and nonexistence. Aristotle does not seem to entertain a category of absolute non-existence. Being always existed and always will exist. The Aristotelian responds that “non-existence” was just as much a figment of the imagination as any other imagined impossibility (*ki ma sh'anu m'damim hedaro k'mo sh'anu m'damim kol nmtza sh'hu hava*).

What Happened Before the Beginning? Wolfson explains why the Kalām made this change from Particularization to preponderation. Avicenna innovated the use of the term “preponderation” in an interesting argument, ultimately stemming from Parmenides, *for* the eternity of the universe. Let’s assume, for a moment, that the world really is only possible of existence:

“In order to make it necessary for existence to proceed from God or to give preponderance to the procession of existence from Him [over its continuing in its nonexistence] there must inevitably appear a distinction [change] occasioned by the occurrence in the *meantime* of something which did not exist when there was a preponderance of nonexistence [over the procession of existence from Him] and He was in a state of inactivity.” (Avicenna, *Najat* p. 416 II:7-8; in Wolfson *Kalām*, p. 445).

That is, we have to ask what changed in the *meantime* before God could have preponderated the existence of the universe over its non-existence. The moment of creation is a moment of *change*. But Avicenna rejects change in God or in His will. Neither God nor His perfect volition ever changes, because change would be a defect in a perfect being. If there were a moment of creation *ex nihilo*, then God would change from a state of inactivity to activity. We must explain such a change in God. Since there is no reason why this change occurred then and not another time, the world could not have been created “in time.” The emanation of the universe must be eternal.

The Kalām co-opted Avicenna’s argument and linked to it their proposition that no infinite is possible, Proposition XI from the last chapter. (See below, “Kalām Arguments against the Successive Infinite”).

They argued that a preponderator is necessary, who preponderates the chances of existence over the chances of non-existence. This preponderator could not have preponderated itself. This preponderator must be preceded by another, and another, eternally. But this would be, for the Kalām, an impossible infinite regress. Rather, the eternal Divine Will made a choice from eternity to create the world at this particular time, preponderating its existence over its chances of nonexistence.

The Kalām thereby converted Avicenna’s eternalist argument into an argument *for* creation *ex nihilo*. This was precisely the opposite of his conclusion. It was a clever twist, but merely clever. First, it assumed that this chain of preponderators would be an untraversable infinite, which the philosophers would reject. Second, there is no reason why one Preponderator could not preponderate everything, eternally, through the emanations from His perfect being.

Once again, the Kalām equivocates regarding the “possible” by saying that the world is just a possible existence. The Avicennan philosophers would not only deny this, but would urge that there could not have been a “possibility of existence” before anything actually existed. To make such a possibility exist, God would have had to change from a “state of inactivity.” Maimonides succinctly states their position, *arguendo*, in Guide 2:19:

“...the nature of everything remains constant, nothing changes its nature in any way, and such a change is impossible in any existing thing. It would also follow that the Universe is not the result of design, choice, and desire; for if this were the case, they (the design, the choice, and the desire) would have been non-existing before the design had been conceived (implying change in God).”

The world’s “possibility” does not refer to the universe *before* creation, because there is no “before.” It only indicates the world’s relation to God, the “necessary of existence.”

Two Different Kinds of Possibility. There is another way to look at this Fallacy of Equivocation. Maimonides explains that there is a great difference between the “possibility of existence” of ordinary things and the “possible” existence of the universe. Ordinary things could have existed different ways. A lump of copper could end up as either a kettle or a menorah. There is nothing in the prior nature of the metal that compels either result. Either outcome is a chance among possible chances, before a preponderator caused that chance to preponderate over another (*shtei ha-hitkaniyot ha-mityakhasot elav ne’ederot mimenu lifnei hakhra’at ha-makhria*).

But what works for kettles and menorahs will not work for existence itself:

“...this argument is inadmissible; for it cannot be asked who decided in favor of the existence of a thing, and rejected its non-existence, except when it has been *admitted* that it *has* passed from non-existence into existence (*ele l’akher ha-hoda’a sh’hu nmtza akher ha-heder*); in the present case this is just the point under discussion (*lo ytztaer bo clal inyan ze*, i.e., it begs the question).”

In the case of the kettle or the menorah, there is no question of the prior existence of the lump of copper. But where the alternatives are eternity or creation, the assertion that these are equal possibilities, like the kettle or the menorah, commits the fallacy of equivocation. It assumes the possibility of nonbeing, which the Aristotelians rejected.

Maimonides calls this preponderation argument “very persuasive” (Arabic: *mukni*; Kafih: *msapeket*; Shwarz: *m’shakhneat*) by which he means that it is only a rhetorical argument (Crescas thinks he is being sarcastic, *ad loc.*, 127b; Kafih agrees, *ad loc.*, note 40). But the Kalām only persuaded themselves.

When Maimonides did employ this type of argument, he did not use it in the form of the Sixth Argument from preponderation, but, rather, in the form of the Fifth Argument from Particularization, limited to specific astronomical anomalies. He never considered it to be a deductive proof for creation.

III. KALĀM ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE SUCCESSIVE INFINITE (Arguments 2 and 7)

Introduction. In the Second and Seventh Arguments, the Kalām applied Proposition XI from the last chapter, which was that an infinite by succession could not exist. The reader should recall that Maimonides demurred, arguing that such an infinite was at least theoretically possible.

The successive infinite refers to a succession of individual beings, succeeding each other over eternity. This succession is not a causal chain.

Aristotle thought that the chain of causes of *motion* in our world must terminate with a mover greater than any one of those causes, or all of them together: the unmoved mover, God. Nonetheless, the Aristotelians eternalists thought that a *succession of accidents* in matter required no inception or termination. No creator was required.

The Kalām, by contrast, hoping to prove that God created the universe from nothing, rejected the existence of a successive infinite. If they were right, the world could not be eternal, and must have been created.

Maimonides recognized the weakness of this argument for God’s existence. He knew that the philosophers could easily show that a successive infinite was possible. They could do this by demonstrating that the Kalām failed to distinguish between causal and non-causal infinities (see below).

The Second Argument attacked the infinite by succession in the following manner. A succession of individuals begot one another: Isaac begot Jacob who begot Reuven. Since the final individual, Reuven, exists, then there must have been an original progenitor, Adam. Then, by analogy, the universe also had a first father, God.

In Maimonides’ reconstruction of the Kalām argument, Adam, having no earthly father, issues from dust, the elemental earth, which comes from elemental water. The elements transform from one to another. According to the Kalām, this elemental transformation could not go on to infinity, since, for them, no infinite was traversable. Since they could not be eternal, the elements and the products of their combinations had to have been created. They could not create themselves, so they must have a Creator. In the same way, the universe must have a Creator. (H. A. Wolfson could find no source for Maimonides’ version of their Second Argument; *Kalām* 426. On elemental transformation in the old four-element system, see my account in Guide 1:72, “More Likely.”)

Untraversability, Again. The key to the argument was the alleged untraversability of the infinite. The problem was that the philosophers could only accept the untraversability of causal chains.

The untraversability of a causal succession explained, for the Aristotelians, the need for an unmoved mover. But the medieval neo-Platonized Aristotelians, especially Avicenna, also understood God to be the eternal *indirect* cause Who emanates intelligences.

These emanated intelligences themselves emanate forms onto matter. This type of indirect eternal emanation eludes the universally accepted untraversability of a *direct* causal series. It could be a real infinite succession, contrary to the claims of the Kalām.

The idea of the untraversability of an infinite series of causes is both difficult to articulate or understand. It comes from Aristotle (*Physics* 263a:6 and 265a:19-20). The idea was that without a first cause there could be no series of caused effects ending in a specific effect at a certain time. Here is how R. Saadia Gaon put it:

“I find myself existent, [therefore] I know that the process of generation has traversed the whole length of time until it reached me, and that, if it were not for the fact that time is finite [in the past], the process of generation would not have traversed it.” (*Emunot v’Deot*, I:1:4, p. 36, Landauer; page 44, Rosenblatt. Wolfson, *Kalām*, 419)

Rabbi Saadia’s steps are as follows. All effects have causes and I know I am an effect. Therefore, there must have been a first cause that brought forth all of my preceding causes; otherwise, you could never reach the cause that brought me forth. Herbert A. Davidson called the argument “legerdemain,” but it persuaded the many ancient thinkers.

The problem of applying the concept of untraversability to a non-causal successive series was best illustrated by Averroes (*Kashf*, p. 36, II:3-8, quoted in Wolfson, *Kalām* p 425):

“I will not give you this dinar until I have given you before it infinite dinars. In that case it would be never be possible for him to give to that other man the indicated dinar.”

In other words, without a first dinar you could never traverse “infinite dinars,” and, thus, would never get any dinars. That which has no first cannot arrive at any end (Wolfson, *Kalām*, 416)

Aristotle accepted untraversability only in the case of a true chain of effective direct causes, like the toppling of a row of dominoes. But the case of the gift of the dinar is not a case involving a causal chain, because one dinar did not cause another dinar to exist. In the case of an infinite row of dominoes, the last one would never topple unless somebody pushed a first one, and unless each and every successive domino caused the following domino to fall. In such a chain of causes, the end does imply its beginning.

The philosophers asserted that the succession of human generations was more like the dinars than the dominoes. The end did not imply any beginning.

Potential and Accidental Infinites. There were several types of non-causal series. With the “potential” infinite, for instance, were it not for your mortality you could keep dividing a line indefinitely. That is why it is only a “potentially” infinite division. Another was the so-called “accidental” infinite. This term described the succession of accidents in matter. It could refer to the succession of forms in matter. Both the potential and the accidental infinites are non-causal successions. They could conceivably go on forever because they do not need to be traversed. But the *Kalām* made no distinction between causal and non-causal successions.

Created, but Eternal. The Islamic conception of time was consistent with their absolute rejection of all infinites. Since the untraversability of any succession would mean that all successions must have beginnings and endings, it followed that just as Allah created the world He will also surely destroy it.

Maimonides opposed this doctrine of the “Judgment Day” (*qayama*), that Allah would destroy the world He created. He held that God created the world, and would never destroy it. God’s work is perfect, and since it is perfect, there could be no reason why it should not endure. (Guide 2:27 – 2:29; Seeskin, *Origin*, chapter 6).

But wouldn’t Maimonides’ position be inconsistent with the principle that a beginning implies its end? Averroes suggests that the logic of untraversability demanded a day of destruction if there was a day of creation. (*Tahafut al Tahafut*, Van Den Bergh, p. 13, lines 8–10).

Maimonides’ could reply that the beginning of a non-causative succession did not imply its end. Untraversability did not apply to such successions. What could stop God from creating a perfect world that would persist forever?

The reason why he could elude Averroes' trap was that, unlike the Kalām, Maimonides never used untraversability to prove creation. Since absolute untraversability was the basis of the Kalām's Second and Seventh Arguments for creation, the Mutakallimūn were locked into the logic that a beginning implies its end. As Averroes saw, they could never agree that God created a perfect universe.

The Seventh Argument introduces what I call the *argument of numerability*. It is a *reductio ad absurdum* applied to any numerable thing. If the universe were eternal, then an infinite number of substances must have existed to *this* date. *Next* year there will be more. At the end of the next year, that infinite number would be greater than the previous infinite number, which is absurd. Therefore, the universe could not have existed for infinite time and must have been created.

The Kalām used fantastic examples to demonstrate this. An infinite number of souls of the departed existed from eternity up to a particular date. A thousand years later those souls would be more numerous. The second infinite would be larger than the first, an absurdity. Therefore, they could not have existed from infinite time, but only from the creation of the world.

They applied this argument to the rotations of the spheres (in the old geocentric system). The "spheres" of the Sun and Saturn had allegedly rotated the Earth forever. However, while the Sun rotates the Earth only once a day, Saturn's path takes 30 years (10,755 days). Thus, the infinite number of the Sun's rotations would be 30 times more than the infinite number of Saturn's rotations. But the notion that one infinite could be 30 times larger than another infinite is an impossible absurdity. Therefore, those spheres had not existed forever and must have been created. Since they could not have created themselves, God must have created them.

Maimonides says that this argument comes from "one of the moderns" (*he-hadashim*) of the Kalām. Wolfson identifies this individual as Shahrastani (1076 or 1086–1153). He argued that if the universe were eternal, then the surviving souls of all the departed would exist at the same time. But an infinite number of numerable things cannot exist at the same time (an impossible finite infinite). Therefore, the universe could not be eternal.

Since the existence of these different numerable infinities would be absurd, the Kalām urged that any infinite would be absurd.

Maimonides regards the entire Kalām argument, especially the part about the infinite souls, as "strange" (*derekh mufלא*). Even their explanations require explanations (*arvekha arva tzarikh*). He attacks it in a variety of ways.

Maimonides' Arguments against the Case of the Departed Souls. Maimonides raised several questions about the nature of immortal souls, e.g., whether they exist in the way that the Kalām imagine, and how they exist.

First, the philosophers had rejected any kind of corporeality attaching to souls. Since they are incorporeal, taking up no space, there is no reason why an infinity of them could not be together. It was only an infinite number of *corporeal* things that could not exist within the confines of the outer heavenly sphere. But why couldn't there be an incorporeal infinite, since only corporeals were numerable?

Second, Maimonides and some philosophers could accept the numerability of some incorporeal entities, on the condition that they represented causes and effects of each other. The best example of this was the chain of ten incorporeal hypostases of Avicenna, each of which is the result of its predecessor. But there was no reason to think that the individual souls of Reuben and Shimon were in any sense each other's causes or effects. The problem of the increased "number" of all the departed souls 1000 years after a given date simply dissolves if those souls are non-numerable.

Third, as we explain more fully below, another group of philosophers thought that it was absolutely impossible for souls to be numerable, even as causes and effects. Maimonides carefully sidesteps this particular debate by arguing that the human mind is incapable of comprehending the nature of surviving souls.

Maimonides hints at another argument the philosophers might have, which Shem Tov articulates (*ad loc.* 128a). Suppose the Kalām succeeded in convincing the philosophers that incorporeal entities were a numerable set. In fact, the philosophers did accept that there was a limit to the number of *forms*. But since the universe was, in their portrayal, eternal, and the quantity of matter infinite, each of those forms must be instantiated in infinite time, and then cycled through again. This is the perennial doctrine of the eternal recurrence, revived modernly by Nietzsche.

Thus, even if the Kalām proved that there could be no eternal infinite of numerable souls, this would not be proof of creation. All it would show is that a finite number of souls recur, one after another, in the uncreated everlasting universe.

Maimonides' argument against the Sun/Saturn example: Infinites vs. Wholes. Averroes produced the definitive refutation of these arguments. He argued that in all these cases the Kalām confused “infinities” with “wholes.” In the Sun/Saturn problem, the ratio of rotations is 1 to 30 only when we speak of a *finite* number of rotations completed by both, say, in a year. In other words, infinites are not wholes. There can be no such thing as a ratio between two infinite numbers.

The same is true in the case of the infinite dinars. The Kalām treated the infinite number of dinars rhetorically as though it were a *whole* number of dinars. It is impossible to give you infinite dinars, even if we admit that the infinite is a reality, because I can only *give* you something that is a *whole*.

Aristotle explained that a “whole is that which has a beginning and middle and end” (*Physics* III, 6, 207a 7-9), while the infinite, by definition, has no limits. Averroes puts the distinction this way: “The infinite is that which, however much one has taken, there is always more to take, whereas that of which there is nothing more to take is complete and whole.”

“This” dinar was, thus, a whole, while there is “always more to take” of the “infinite number of dinars,” and so the two could not be compared. The problem dissolves. The same point destroys the Sun/Saturn comparison: ratios only exist between whole numbers, i.e., numbers “of which there is nothing more to take.”

(Averroes, *Tahafut al Tahafut*, Van Den Bergh translation, 1, 27, p. 18, l. 7—p. 19, l. 5, quoted in Wolfson, *Kalām*, 431. Maimonides says that this argument comes from Alfarabi's book, *The Changeable Beings*. Rabbi Narboni, d. 1362, Maimonides' commentator, said that this book was lost before his time, but that it “undoubtedly” inspired Averroes; see Wolfson *Kalām*, 434).

Does Untraversability Tell Us Anything about Creation? While an infinite number of numerable things cannot exist at the same time, Maimonides agrees with Avicenna that a *potential* infinite or an *accidental* infinite are possible.

Only actual (as opposed to potential) or essential (as opposed to accidental) infinites are untraversable, and each member of those causal chains must be causative, like toppling dominoes. But the succession of accidents in eternal time need not be traversable. The eternalists can thus easily dismiss the Second and the Seventh Kalām arguments.

The outcome of this exercise, from Maimonides' perspective, was that arguments about the untraversability of the infinite could never resolve the debate over creation *ex nihilo*.

Ibn Bājja's Doctrine of the Unity of Intellect. Maimonides complains that these fantastic Kalām examples are things that exist in imagination, not in reality. They compared no longer existing infinities as though they now exist (*sh'hem monim y'hidei hem ha-ne'edarim u-mdamim k'ilu hem n'mtzaim*). The infinite past rotations of Sun and Saturn only exist in the imagination, because they cannot be cognized intellectually as wholes. Similarly, the set of the infinite souls of the departed only existed in the Kalām imagination.

The issue confronting Maimonides was whether souls are numerable at all.

The philosophers replied that numerability always implies corporeal distinction. Material things are numerable, while intelligibles, strictly speaking, are not, except when they are causes. We saw above that in the very limited case of the ten emanated hypostases (angels) Maimonides was prepared to admit to the numerability of incorporeal things.

Maimonides was not entirely clear on this point. He also thought that one soul might differ from another in view of the quantity and quality of its intellectual attainments (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei ha-Torah* 2:6; Shem Tov to Guide 1:74, p. 128b). On the other hand, in our chapter, Maimonides admitted that Abū Bekr Ibn Bājja (Latinized: Avempace, d. 1138) may have been right in asserting the unity of intellect.

“The immortal souls are not substances which occupy a locality or a space, and their existence in an infinite number is therefore not impossible. You must bear in mind that those abstract beings which are neither bodies nor forces dwelling in bodies, and which in fact are ideals—are altogether incapable of being represented as a plurality unless some ideals be the cause of the existence of others, and can be distinguished from each other by the specific difference that some are the efficient cause and others the effect: but that which remains of Zaid [after his death] is neither the cause nor the effect of that which is left of Amr, and therefore the souls of all the departed form only one being, as has been explained by Ibn Bekr Ibn Al-Zaig (Ibn Bājja), and others who ventured to speak on these profound subjects.”

Ibn Bājja's theory that all souls are one was a controversial point for orthodox religion. (This was especially true as developed in Averroes. On the other hand, Rabbi Shem Tov, b. 1461, surprisingly claimed that the proto-Kabalist *Shiur Koma* anticipated the Bajjian theory, *ad loc.*, 128b, line 12; see Moshe Idel's discussion of the *Shiur Koma* in *Kabbalah, New Perspectives*, Yale, 1988, 191-197).

Shlomo Pines argued that Maimonides accepted this doctrine of the unity of intellect. This reads too much into Maimonides' brief remarks. Pines admits that Maimonides “does not wholly commit himself” on the issue (note 11 *ad loc.*, p. 221; and see “Introduction” pp. ciii-civ).

The better interpretation is that Maimonides did not think it was knowable, since our corporeality prevents us from completely comprehending the intellect. The problem of the unity or numerability of souls transcends human understanding.

For that reason, Maimonides says that one should not try to frame arguments based on “such intricate disciplines, which our mind can scarcely comprehend, [and which] cannot furnish any principles for the explanation of other subjects” (*ayn l'kakhhat hakdamot mi-kayotze b'davarim halelu ha-amukim—asher t'la'eina ha-makhshavot l'tzairim—k'dei l'baer v'hem inyanim akherim*).

CONCLUSION

Maimonides concludes his demolition of the Kalām arguments against the eternity of the universe with a deadpan recitation of what they thought they had accomplished:

“These are the principal arguments of the Mutakallemim in seeking to establish the *creatio ex nihilo*. Having thus ‘proved’ that the Universe is not eternal, they necessarily infer that there is an *Agens* who created it in accordance with His intention, desire and will.”

The Mutakallimūn minimized the difficulty of proving creation *ex nihilo*. Had they been able to prove it they would have done a great service for religion, but they could not do so with their threadbare arguments. No one knows how the world came into being. The Kalām thought that by proving creation they had, *Q.E.D.*, demonstrated the existence of a Creator, i.e., the existence of God. Having done so, they thought they could go on to prove that God is one.

Maimonides next surveys their blunderings in the important field of God’s divine nature, beginning with the Kalām proofs for divine unity.

Maimonides returns to this debate over creation in Part Two of the Guide, to show what reason can accomplish, even using the Particularization argument, restructured along rational lines.

* * *

All of this may strike the modern reader as odd.

Who now ever hears anyone seriously trying to propound logical proofs for God’s existence? The most anyone attempts is to provide reasons for faith, even for that strong faith implied by the Hebrew term *emunah* and the Arabic *i’tiqad* (See my chapter on Guide 1:50). But before Maimonides’ time, it was common to see such proofs for the existence of God, as in the works of R. Saadia Gaon and R. Bakhya Ibn Pakuda.

I contend that our chapter ended this theological quest for deductive proofs.

Had there been deductive proofs of God’s existence, beyond what Maimonides found among the Kalām and in Aristotle, he would certainly have articulated them, given his stress on the importance of the four necessary doctrines of religion.

The inescapable conclusion, for anyone who does not accept the Kalām proofs or the need for the unmoved mover of the Aristotelian sphere, was that there remains no deductive proof for the existence of God.

Maimonides did his best to destroy the notion that you could use proofs for creation to establish the existence of God. While he clearly thought that Aristotle’s proof for the existence of an unmoved mover of the spheres established God’s existence, we, who live in the shadow of the Copernican heliocentric revolution, cannot. Even if we did think, post-Copernicus, that there had to be a first mover at the beginning of all motions, this still feels like speculation, not proof.

Maimonides’ alternative argument, the sophisticated version of Particularization, based on astronomical anomalies, was, at best, an allegorical argument, not a deductive proof.

The two conclusions link: we cannot prove creation and we cannot prove God’s existence.

The corollary, which Maimonides did adopt, is that we must approach these great questions modestly. We still strive to show why we should believe in the four necessary doctrines of religion, i.e., in God, the One Incorporeal Creator. Nonetheless, we recognize that as mortals we cannot perceive the entire truth.

But the Guide’s purpose was never to prove the existence of God or of creation *ex nihilo*. Its purpose, as I have argued, was to reestablish prophecy in Israel. The book is a school for prophets. Judaism always linked return to

its homeland with the reestablishment of prophecy. The ultimate goal of all Maimonides' writing was the reestablishment of the sovereignty of Temple and Torah in the Promised Land. The renewal of prophecy is a step on that ladder.

The precondition for the reestablishment of prophecy was the education of an elite who could clearly cognize the intelligibles of the divine science, up to and including conjunction with the active intellect.

So while it was crucial to recognize the problematic created by the four doctrines of religion, it was not Maimonides' job to solve those problems. We cannot attain those truths while subject to our corporeal bonds. Only those who reach the highest levels of prophecy, up to and including Moses, who transcended his mortal shell at Sinai, could hope to gain that vision.

GUIDE 1:75

THE FIVE KALĀM ARGUMENTS FOR THE UNITY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

This brief, allusive chapter requires explanation (that Maimonides does not provide) to understand the five arguments against Polytheism used by Muslim Kalām theologians.

Why is Maimonides reticent? Because he has to make the argument he hates to make.

Divine oneness is one of his four necessary doctrines of religion (the others are creation *ex nihilo*, divine existence and divine incorporeality). The program he outlined for himself required that he show the weakness of the Kalām arguments for these four necessary doctrines of religion. This forced him to argue *against* divine unity, in order to attack the Kalām arguments *for* it. In other words, since the Kalām case for Monotheism is case against Polytheism, Maimonides reluctantly stands in for their Polytheist opponent.

Maimonides plays devil's advocate to reveal the flaws in the Kalām arguments for Monotheism.

Since the Kalām failed to make their case for Monotheism, he will have to make the case for it himself later (Guide 2:1). We will take an anticipatory look at his proofs at the end of this chapter.

MANICHAEISM

The important form of Polytheism remaining in Maimonides' time was Dualism. Its significant expression was Manichaeism, though by then it had few adherents. Christian emperors and Muslim Caliphs had suppressed the doctrine of Mani, its founder (210–276 CE). Nonetheless, this attractive doctrine persisted in secret or obscure cults. Its anti-biblical mysticism blamed the God of the Bible for the horrors of everyday life.

In its first several centuries, Manichaeism surged through the civilized world. Manichaeism competed with Christianity for the heart of the Roman Empire. There were Manichaean versions of Christianity. Augustine was a Manichaean *auditor* for nine years, and Mani's father was in an early Judeo-Christian baptizing sect. The spread of Mani's doctrine was partly due to its syncretism, featuring roles for Buddha, Zarathustra and Christ. In the world of Islam, the Abbasid Caliphs persecuted Muslim Manichaeans. While popular in the West, a major synthesis of Buddhism and Manichaeism rose in China and Tibet.

Mani grew up in Iraq, in the world of Christian Gnosticism. People sought a biblical religion without the rules and moral concerns of the Hebrew Bible. Mani translated those desires into a new biblical mythology that identified the moral things with the natural things.

All things exist in two mutually exclusive realms, the upper and lower. The upper world of light, goodness, excellent weather, intelligence and truth was entirely separate from and opposed to the lower world of darkness, evil, terrible weather, ignorance and duplicity. The god of upper world was utterly transcendent, having nothing to do with the lower world.

There is what we could call an anti-biblical aspect to their account of the lower god. The god of the lower world is the God of the Bible, reconceived as the demiurge, culpable for the ills of the corporeal world he formed (Gr.: *dēmiourgos*, the “craftsman” of pre-existent matter). Manicheans practiced inverse interpretation of the Bible, making God this evil deity.

“Now he who spoke with Moses, the Jews and the priests... is the archont of darkness... he is not the God of truth.”

“Moses, a faithful servant, was a laughing-stock, having been named ‘the friend,’ since they perversely bore witness concerning him who never knew me.”

The great scholar Hans Jonas recognized Gnostic/Manichaean use of biblical material, but asked:

“What is the spirit of this use? Why, it is the spirit of vilification, of parody and caricature, of conscious perversion of meaning, wholesale reversal of value-signs, savage degrading of the sacred— of gleeful shocking blasphemy...” And, “It is defined by anti-Jewish animus with which it is saturated.”

According to the Manichaean account, the realm of evil, always in a state of war with the good, attacked the realm of the good. In reprisal, the good deity created primordial man. But primordial man was kidnapped by evil, which stole his soul and corporealized it in Adam. Eve, who was even more physical, procreates with evil to produce Cain and Abel. But even with Adam she produces more people, that is, more *matter*, and therefore more evil. Heaven sends forth Buddha, several versions of Jesus, and, finally, Mani, to save men by teaching them the *gnosis*, i.e., the knowledge, so they can recognize the evil in all worldly things.

Manichaean discipline sought to liberate the soul from this darkness of corporeality. Man, who joins the spiritual and the corporeal, has the power to choose one over the other. He must free himself from matter through ascetic practices, including vegetarianism and celibacy.

The doctrine answered the moralists’ theodicy (why bad things happen to good people). Since the moral things are of a piece with the natural things, all moral problems resolve when we come to know and reject the world’s evil physicality. There would appear to be no need for a book of Job because the good deity did not cause Job’s afflictions. The two gods are only powerful in their own spheres. No complicated justifications for the good allowing evil to exist are necessary, for the complete explanation is that the good is not omnipotent.

People chose the simplistic morality of Mani to avoid dealing with the real complexities of man’s culpability for sin.

Manichaean Dualism has always been the easy answer to the problem of evil.

(What Little We Know. It is frustratingly difficult to grasp the alleged species “Manichaeans,” of the alleged genus “Gnostics.” What little we know is from three sources. *First*, are the critiques penned by the Church fathers against “Christian” Gnostics and Manichaeans. These are antagonistic, often unfair, but necessarily form

our consciousness of these phenomena over the past two millennia. For a similar Jewish response compare R. Abraham Bar Hiyya, 12th Century, in *Megillat Ha-Megilla*, 138:6-30, translated in *Abraham Bar Hiyya On Time, History, Exile and Redemption*, by Hannu Töyrylä, Brill, 2014. *Second*, the documents discovered in the last hundred years at Nag Hammadi, Turfan and Fayum. These are mostly myths, ritual materials, and poetry. They, however, tell little about who made them, when their scribal antecedents were produced, or why they came to be. *Third*, are the living traditions of the Mandaeans, a small sect under pressure due to the disintegration of Middle East polity. They are allegedly direct descendants of Gnostics and Manichaeans, but some scholars now doubt this. Quotations, above, in order, are from *Acta Archilai Mani*, fas.harvard.edu, PDF document, p. 68, a questionable early Christian source; *2nd Treatise of Seth*, gnosis.org/naghamm/2seth.html, a Gnostic source; the Hans Jonas' quotes are from "Response to G. Quispel," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. Hyatt, Nashville, 1965. On the Church fathers: Augustine, *Confessions*, especially Books III and V; Paula Fredrickson, "*Secundum Carnem: History and Israel in the Theology of St. Augustine*," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays in Honor of R.A. Markus*, eds. Klipshirn and Vessey, and Arbor, 1990; David Nirenberg *Anti-Judaism, the Western Tradition*, especially Chapter 3, Norton 2013. In General: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 1958, Beacon Press, is the classic typological/phenomenological study, placing Gnosticism and Manichaeism in existentialist context, as moments in the world history of alienation. Karen L. King attacks Jonas in *What is Gnosticism?* Harvard, 2003, a postmodern deconstructionist study. I am not favorable to existentialism or postmodernism, however the subject of Gnosticism/Manichaeism fairly screams for deconstructionism, since, based on the three types of sources that we have, our factual knowledge is small. Prof. King reviews past historians' approaches, including that of Jonas, his predecessors and successors, in the ambiguous light of recent discoveries. Her first chapter bears out the problem in its title, "Why is Gnosticism So Hard to Define?" Her answer is that it is nothing but an academic construct. Also see Andrew Philip Smith, *The Gnostics*, London, 2008, a frankly "New Age" rehabilitation of Gnosticism and Manichaeism, but this enthusiast does present much useful information clearly, particularly Chapter 7. Also see the long articles on Manichaeism in *Encyclopedia of Religion* and *Catholic Encyclopedia*.)

MAIMONIDES' ARISTOTELIANIZED VERSION OF MANICHAISM

The Muslim world and its Kalām theology responded to the Dualist challenge with the arguments for Monotheism that Maimonides summarized in this chapter.

To show that their arguments were (with one possible exception) ineffective, Maimonides put forward his own heavily Aristotelianized version of Manichaeism. He created his Dualist to debate the Kalām proofs for Monotheism. I have not been able to identify his source, if any, for his Dualist.

Maimonides' Dualist scheme emphasizes the world's physical/cosmic aspect, thereby avoiding Manichaeism's moral challenge to Monotheism. This allows him to avoid explaining here why God seems to permit the existence of evil (but see Guide 3:10). His problem, after all, was the Kalām, not this decaying remnant of Paganism, and he did not want to revive that corpse.

In his sanitized Dualism, the two deities possess completely separate powers and realms. The upper deity rules the outer sphere, including its eternally rotating quintessent substance. The lower deity controls the sublunar universe, including the vertically moving four elements of matter: earth, air, fire and water.

This version of Dualism rejects the physical uniformity of the universe. The Kalām had insisted on the uniform atomic structure of everything. Maimonides, however, held it *proven* that the universe was made of two kinds of substances. The substance of the upper world acts differently than the substance of the lower world. He explained this in Guide 1:72:

"The entire substance of this revolving fifth element is unlike the substance of those bodies which consist of the other four elements.... The spherical bodies, on the other hand, have life, possess a soul by which

they move spontaneously; they have no properties by which they could at any time come to a state of rest: in their perpetual rotations they are not subject to any change, except that of position.”

By contrast, the four lower hylic elements do not revolve, have no soul, always come to a state of rest, and continually change. This division of the elements of the universe becomes the basis for his Dualist’s scheme.

Notice Maimonides’ reticence in articulating his Dualist’s position. He refrains from referring to “god” or “gods,” instead relying on pronominal substitutes like “this one,” “that one,” “one,” “the other” (this is particularly noticeable in the Kafih Hebrew translation: *zeh, ekhad, sheni*, etc., I counted 38 instances). Rarely is he more explicit (four times). His account of each set of arguments and counter-arguments is slim, guarded, and allusive.

He is obviously uncomfortable playing devil’s advocate, since by making Dualism’s best case he might also be doing the devil’s work.

THE FIRST ARGUMENT: MUTUAL HINDERING

Maimonides groups the five Kalām arguments for divine unity and against Dualism in two basic types. The first type he calls “mutual hindering” (*ha-akhuv l’khalufin*) and the second type he calls “mutual difference” or “specific difference” (*derekh ha-shuni*). In the first group, he places all the arguments except the Second Argument, which is the argument for “specific difference” (with which he sympathizes).

The First Argument of mutual hindering sets the framework and mood of the other three mutual hindering arguments, Arguments Three, Four and Five. Wolfson traces the argument of “mutual hindering” to the Christian scholar John of Damascus (c. 676-749 C.E; see H.A.Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, Harvard, 1976, pages 49-50). It was the Kalām’s favorite argument for Monotheism.

Maimonides gives two examples. Hot and cold are contradictory accidents with the Kalām (they apparently did not regard *warm* as a continuum between hot and cold). One god commands the atom to be “Hot!” The other commands “Cold!” Their commands cancel out and there is *no* result. The substance does not come into existence, since it has no accidental characteristic. In his next example, motion and rest also cancel each other. Kafih explains that the lack of *duration* of the accident is the basis for mutual hindering. If two gods command, *at every moment*, in contradiction to each other: “Exist!” and “Perish!” the commands would cancel each other and nothing would ever happen (Kafih, note 5, p. 151, *ad loc.*). We conclude that only one God can create.

The basic format of the mutual hindering argument looks like this:

1. Any substance (atom) must take at least one of two possible contradictory accidents (e.g., rest vs. motion, hot versus cold);
2. Two deities are distinguished from each other because each creates one of the two contradictory accidental characteristics;
3. They must be equally powerful, otherwise only one is really God;
4. If substance takes neither of the contradictory accidents, then it cannot exist, since all substance must have at least one accident;
5. Substance cannot have two contradictory accidents in one place and time;
6. If the two deities create two contradictory accidents in one place and time, the accidents cancel out and they create nothing;
7. Therefore, only one God creates the particular accident attached to the atom.

Friedlander provides the following useful explanation of how this first Kalām argument for unity depends on the Kalām Propositions I, VI, and VII, from Chapter 1:73:

“If Prop. I, viz., that *all things consist of equal constituent atoms*, were not admitted, two Creators or more might be assumed for the different classes of things, as, e.g., for the sublunar world and for the heavenly spheres. Without Prop. VI, viz., that *the accidents are constantly renewed*, it could not be shown that the existence of two Gods would lead to mutual neutralization in the creation of accidents [since some would have duration]. In the same manner, Prop. VII, viz., that *the negative property is not merely absence of the positive, but a real property requiring an agent*, is indispensable; for without it, the negative property would only require non-creation; and two Gods being assumed, they would not neutralize each other, even if one desired an object to have a positive quality, the other a negative; the positive would be created.” (Note 2, page 356, *ad loc.* My emphasis and bracketed comment)

Division Of Labor. The problem for the Kalām is that Maimonides’ Dualist does not accept atomism. The Kalām argument fails to address a universe made of two different kinds of matter, a conclusion Maimonides deems demonstrated. They, therefore, failed to take the Dualist opponent seriously.

Maimonides’ Dualist would explain that each god is restricted by its own definition. Each god is omnipotent only in its sphere. The upper power controls the super-lunar universe, dissociated from matter. The lower power controls our own material world.

This vaguely corresponds to Aristotle’s cosmological motive powers. In his cosmos, the god of the universe, the unmoved mover, is the ultimate indirect cause of all motion, but the souls of the spheres are independent movers as well. Maimonides’ Dualist *collapses* the souls of the spheres into a single god of the lower sphere. The upper god could not cause the accidents of matter because that god is completely divorced from matter. The two gods have a kind of division of labor. (Souls of the spheres: see H. A. Wolfson, “The Plurality of Immovable Movers in Aristotle, Averroes, and St. Thomas,” *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, v.1, Harvard, 1973.)

The Permanent Nature of the Impossible. The upper god of the Dualist has no influence over what happens to matter. The Kalām object that this makes the upper deity *weak*. Since God must be omnipotent, the Dualist’s impotent deity cannot be God.

Maimonides replies that God is not weak simply because He cannot do the impossible. This is Maimonides’ doctrine of the *permanent nature of the impossible*. At the end of the chapter, he gives several examples of actions that are impossible even for God to perform. God cannot create another God like Himself, for there is nothing like Himself. God cannot corporealize His perfectly incorporeal self. He cannot make the diagonal of a square equal its side.

Maimonides’ final example is the most telling: according to Kalām physics, atoms and accidents make up the universe, not matter and form. It follows that, for them, God Himself could not make things out of matter and form. Thus, even the Kalām must accept that there are things impossible for God that would not betray weakness or defect.

Heresy? There is an interesting feature in Friedlander’s translation of this counter-argument. In his first edition, he translates:

“Thus we, Monotheists, do not consider it a defect in God, that He does not combine two opposites in one object, nor do we test his omnipotence by the accomplishment of any *sinister* impossibility.” (My emphasis, p. 357.)

In subsequent versions he replaces *sinister* with *similar* (Kafih: *haduma*, Schwarz: *hadumim*.) The latter appears to be the correct translation, but the former is an inspired translation.

Friedlander meant that it is not *heretical* to say that God cannot do the impossible. R. Shlomo Ibn Adret (Rashba, 1235-1310) complained that Maimonides' doctrine was the doctrine of heretics (*kofrim*). Others accepted it with conditions, such as R. Chaim Vital (1542-1620), who distinguished logical impossibility from other kinds of powerlessness that could not be associated with God.

The foregoing examples of impossibility involved such logical definitional impossibility. A thing cannot be other than it is: God is God, never not-God; squares are squares, with all that entails about their diagonals.

(On Rashba: *Teshuvot Ha-Rashba* 1:9 36-4a; See R. Jose Faur, "Anti-Maimonidean Demons," note 57, p.16; note 11, p. 5, *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 6:1, Leiden, 2003. On Vital: *Etz Khayim*, 64; cited in Friedlander, note 1, p. 360, *ad loc*. In Guide 3:15, Maimonides returns to the subject of impossibility.)

The Problem with Maimonides' Rejection of Mutual Hinderling. Maimonides' division of labor counter-argument does not really respond to the Kalām's contention of mutual hinderling in the accidents of the atom. Just as the Kalām failed to take a Dualist universe of matter and form seriously, Maimonides failed to take seriously the possibility that the universe is made of one atomic substance. In a structurally uniform atomic universe where the gods are active in the *same* sphere, they would mutually cancel each other's acts. In other words, the argument of mutual hinderling could work in a world of Kalām physics where two gods compete to create contradictory accidents in each atom. Friedlander makes the same subtle point in criticism of Maimonides:

"The proof [of mutual hinderling] holds good for the Mutakallimūn, who believe that the spheres above and the things below consist of the same kind of atoms, and that, therefore, there is no reason to assume two creators." (Note 2, p. 357).

Mutual hinderling depends on the belief in a single uniform atomic substance of the universe. Such a universe seems to have a built-in bias against the possibility of Dualism, which is not the case in a universe composed of matter and form. Maimonides seems to acknowledge this in his final comment on the Kalām argument that it "had some apparent support," *af al fi sh'ha'hekhrahkheviam l'kakh*.

Real Manichaeism Concealed. Maimonides' argument also conceals the Manichaean position. Let's change the example, and in place of Maimonides' Dualist we substitute a real Manichaean. Have him accept atomism (they did believe in light particles), but also Maimonides' division of labor. In this case, the Manichaean could still argue that the division of labor prevents mutual hinderling.

In this scheme, the upper god controls the positive side of all contrary sets of atomic accidents but not the negative side. Thus, the upper god is always responsible for all good, positive, bright things; the lower god is always responsible for their contraries, the evil, negative, dark things. Neither god affects the other's "sphere," but man can choose which sphere to live in. In the face of a real Manichaean, the Kalām's mutual hinderling argument collapses, even assuming a world made of atoms.

This system works without cancellation, especially since both the Kalām and the Manichaeans believe that evil is real, not merely the absence of good, as Maimonides believed. Despite the fact that this argument would be devastating to the Kalam's mutual hinderling proof, Maimonides would not even suggest it. That would be carrying devil's advocacy too far.

In fact, there was a Mutakallim with a position only slightly altered from this. Ibrahim al-Nazzam (d. 845) had been a Dualist in his early life, and carried some of these thoughts with him into his own Monotheist Kalām. Nazzam reportedly said:

“There must needs be *hatirani* (motive forces) of which one bids *advancing* and the other *desisting*, so that one’s choice between them may be a genuine choice...(he had said that) the *hatir* of disobedience is from God except that God produced it for the sake of causing just action and not in order to stir up disobedience.” (in Wolfson, *Kalām*, 628, and, generally, 624 – 644)

Nazzam’s successors believed he absorbed influences foreign to Islam. H.A. Wolfson reviewed several possible sources of influence (including the Jewish *yetzer ha-ra*), but thinks that since Nazzam was once in the “sect of Dualists,” he was most likely under Zoroastrian influence. What Nazzam accomplished with his *hatirani* was to remove the Dualists’ straightforward absolutism of the upper deity as the cause of evil. In its stead, he substituted a complex theodicy to explain the divine creation of the evil *hatir*.

(See *Kalām*, 632, 66, where Wolfson briefly considers a report that Nazzam’s Dualism was Manichaean. Muslims were aware of Manichaeism from and after the time of R. Saadia Gaon (d. 942), and Manichaeans “were to them still an object of vital discussion,” see Wolfson, “Saadia on the Trinity and Incarnation,” page 373, vol. 2, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*.)

THE THIRD ARGUMENT: MUTUAL HINDERING IN THE INDEPENDENT WILL

I will reproduce the Second Argument at the end: it requires different treatment because it is one of Maimonides’ own arguments.

The Third Argument involves a concept of the Divine Will peculiar to the Mutazilite early Muslim theologians, particularly Abu Hudhayl (d. between 842 and 850 CE). These Mutazilites strongly objected to the real existence of divine attributes *within* God, who is simple and non-composite. But if God is simple, where did the universe come from?

In order to explain the creation of the universe, Abu Hudhayl said that God created at a particular time a Will, which decides for creation. That Will is not in God or in anything. It is not eternal, for otherwise it would be another god. This should call to mind the contention of some Mutazilites that there is a single free-floating accident of Destruction (Guide 1:73, Proposition VII). They advanced that doctrine to explain how God could create destruction and then be completely separate from it. Similarly, God creates an accident of Will entirely separate from Himself or from any material substrate (Abu Hudhayl’s Will: see Wolfson, *Kalām*, p. 140).

The Third Argument is a version of mutual hindering: this one freestanding Will cannot determine two opposing characteristics in one atom without each canceling the other out. Maimonides’ reaction was that the Mutazilites exchanged one incomprehensibility for a greater one, raising innumerable additional problems, such as: why God needs a Will to create; why this Will is created at a particular time; why not two Wills for two creators, and so on.

The key sentence in Maimonides’ statement of the *Kalām* argument is nearly impossible to translate: with respect to this single unmoored Will “one cause cannot be the source of two laws for two essences,” *lo t’hiyei illa akhat ha-mkhayevet shnei mishpatim l’shnei etzanim* (where *etzanim* can mean “essences” or “atoms”). But why couldn’t one Will command “move” to one atom and “rest” to another atom? My guess is that the sentence should read: “one cause cannot be the source of two laws for two states *in one atom*.” In other words, one Will cannot accommodate the opposing commands of two gods (see Michael Shwarz’ trans. of the Guide, v. 1, p. 237, note 19).

Differentiation. The explanation I just hazarded for Maimonides’ cryptic sentence pushes the problem back one stage, to the opposing commands of two gods that funnel through the single freestanding will. But that would be

the same as the First Argument: we are really back to the basic issue of two gods mutually hindering each other's contradictory determinations for one atom.

The problem the sentence masks is this. How can it be "mutual" hindering if there is only one Will? Others have wrestled with this sentence to discover why two gods could not impose contradictory determinations through one Will. Efodi (c. 1350 – c. 1415) and R. Shem Tov ben Yosef (b. 1461), *ad loc.*, explain it based on an argument which Herbert Davidson calls "differentiation."

The *differentiation* of two determinations (volitions) in *one* Will is impossible, for three reasons. 1) These determinations are incorporeal, but if they were differentiated, they would *be* in different places and times, like the separate Wills of Reuven and Shimon. There would no longer be a single freestanding Will. 2) Since any differentiation would add an element to the Will, this element would have the status of accident, but this incorporeal free-standing Will could not have added accidents without being corporealized. 3) Such an added element makes a composite, but an incorporeal Will could not be a composite.

Their point was that no distinction or differentiation could exist in a freestanding incorporeal Will. This Will cannot be *numerable* or *composite*. Numerosity implies corporeality, as does composition, but the Mutazilites' single freestanding Will could not be a composite of numerable determinations while remaining incorporeal.

(See Efodi and Shem Tov's commentaries, *ad loc.*, in the standard Ibn Tibbon Hebrew translations of the Guide; Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 170-171. Cf. the 5th century Christian Monothelitism controversy, over whether one Will could accommodate Christ's several natures.)

Maimonides notes that the majority of the Kalām opposed this concept of a single freestanding Will. That was because the Asharite Kalām of his day rejected the earlier Mutazilite anti-attributism. The Asharites accepted the will as just one more of the essential attributes of God, like wisdom or power. There was no need for them to make it separate and freestanding.

THE FOURTH ARGUMENT: CAUSATIVE AGENCY

The question that the Fourth Argument seeks to answer is: How many causes produce an effect? The argument has three steps, a three-part dialogue.

1) Sufficient Causation. All actions must have a cause. The causes cannot go on to infinity because an infinite regress is impossible. A single action results from *one* efficient cause. But if two agents acted together, should we treat them as the single efficient cause of that action, or, otherwise, as two separate causes?

The Kalam contended that the first option was true, that if two causes for the universe exist, we must consider them together as its single, sufficient cause. They contended that there was no reason to consider them separately.

2) The "Possibility" of Multiple Causes. The Dualist replied that more than one cause may *possibly* be necessary for the existence of the universe. Maimonides writes, "[Step I of the] argument does not seem to prove the nonexistence of a multitude of deities; it only shows that their number is unknown; the deity may [possibly] be one sole being, but may also include several divine beings."

3) The Rejection of "Possibility". The Kalām replied with the third stage of their argument, rejecting this *possibility* of plurality. They asserted that since God's existence is *absolute* and not contingent, there cannot be multiple *possible* deities.

The steps of this argument need to be unpacked.

Explanation of Step 1. Why would the Kalām consider two causes of one action as one unified cause?

Richard Taylor explained the point: “*A was the cause of B*, means that A was that set of conditions, among those and only those that occurred, which were individually necessary and jointly sufficient for B....From this point of view there is *never any plurality* of causes or of effects for things that actually occur.” The reason this works was stated by Richard McKeon: “Every effect is convertible with the principle or cause from which it proceeds.” Think of the case of two billiard balls, one from the northwest and the other from the northeast, that together as one strike a third ball and force it to the south. We treat the two moving balls together as the single combined cause of the third ball’s reaction. (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Causation,” Richard Taylor, v. 2, p. 63, McMillan 1967, emphasis added. Richard McKeon, *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*, Glossary, “*Effectus*,” 2:449, Scribners, 1958)

Maimonides restates this point: “The existence of an action is necessarily positive evidence (*mora*) of the existence of an *agens*, but does not prove the existence of more than one *agens*.” He means that an *effect* proves the existence of an efficient cause and only one efficient cause.

The Kalām wants us to accept that if there is only one cause, there must only be one God. Davidson sums up the Kalām argument in Step 1 in the following terms. Every effect must have a cause. Therefore, there must be a Creator: “The requirement is satisfied as soon as a single creator is acknowledged; hence a single creator is all that should be posited” (Davidson, *Proofs*, p. 170).

This argument recalls “Ockham’s Razor,” of William of Ockham (c. 1285-1347). Ockham’s doctrine, that “plurality is not to be assumed without necessity” actually goes back to Aristotle (*De Incessu Animalium*, 2:711a, 17-19; 2:704b, 15-17). If there must be a cause for every effect, and there is no plurality of causes, nor any infinite regress, then there must be a creator. Once we posit a single creator we need no more, therefore, only *one* exists. It is a principle of parsimony.

Explanation of Step 2. But in the Dualist’s divided world wouldn’t it be possible for there to be two causes, one for action above and the other for action below? Maimonides’ Dualist replied that it is just as *possible* that there are many deities as it is *possible* that there is one. The existence of a single ultimate cause is not a proof against multiple gods. They could still *possibly* exist.

The Dualist thus asserts the classic reply to Ockham’s razor. We need as many causes as are necessary. Where fewer entities are not possible, we must posit more. It is just as possible that multiple gods are necessary to the proper functioning of the universe. Maimonides writes: “...It being possible that there is only one, and it being possible that there are many...” (Pines’ translation).

Explanation of Step 3. In Step 3, the Kalām rejected such “possibility” in divine existence. God’s existence is, by definition, absolute, not contingent. On this basis, they denied the assertion that there could be several possible deities. If they were “possible,” they could not be necessary. But God is the necessary existence, who confers existence upon the contingent existents. In the minds of the Kalām doctors, this was the clinching argument.

Maimonides’ protests that the Kalām use of the term “possible” commits the fallacy of equivocation, i.e., “possible” has two meanings: intellectual possibility and existential possibility. An *intellectual possibility* is not the same thing as *possible existence*. Our *ideas* of the different possibilities of what may be the true existence of divinity should not predispose us to one of those possibilities. Nothing that we actually *know* of divine existence disposes us for or against Dualism. The commentator Yehuda Even-Shmuel asked, “Who will guarantee that our knowledge corresponds to reality?” The notional likelihood of Monotheism is no proof against the existence of

multiple gods. Indeed, Maimonides surprisingly admits that Trinitarianism is just as *intellectually possible* as Monotheism. The possibilities we *think* of do not decide what *actually* exists.

The answer to Ockham's Razor is that there have to be as many gods as are necessary. (Some call this last rejoinder "Kant's Shaving Bowl." *Entium varietate non temere esse minuendas*, the variety of beings should not be rashly diminished. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans., N.K. Smith, 1950, p. 541: A656, B684).

THE FIFTH ARGUMENT: NEED

The Fifth Kalām argument for divine unity seems like a direct response to this last riposte, that there have to be as many gods as necessary. It tries to show that if there were more than one God, those "gods" would not qualify as true gods, just because of that "necessity." Bound by necessity, these "gods" are too weak to be God.

Wolfson attributed this argument to Shahrastani (d. 1153). It has two steps. 1) If it would only take one god to create the world, it is superfluous to posit the existence of two gods without necessity. 2) But if it did require two beings to create the world, one must need the other. Neither, therefore, can be God, because, by definition, God does not "need" anything. He is complete in Himself. (The argument also appears in R. Saadia Gaon, *Book of Opinions and Beliefs, Emunot v'Deot*, Rosenblatt, 2:2, 97-98; and R. Bakhya Ibn Pakuda, *Duties of the Hearts, Khovot ha-Levavot*, Feldheim, 1:7:7, 104-107).

We considered this contrast between need and necessity in the First Argument when we discussed the doctrine of the permanent nature of the impossible. Maimonides replied that impossibility does not imply weakness, nor does necessity imply need. Since, according to the Dualist, neither god alone could affect *both* the corporeal and non-corporeal parts of creation, we must have both gods.

The first step of the argument is another application of Ockham's Razor. Why posit two when one will do? Maimonides, speaking for his Dualist, replied with an "anti-razor." Where one entity does not suffice, posit more. In a world of strict bifurcation of matter and mind, Dualism might not be an unwarranted assumption. In such a divided world, each god is powerful in its own sphere, but cannot be thought "weak" in the other sphere.

THE SECOND ARGUMENT: SPECIFIC DIFFERENCE, AN ARGUMENT THAT MAIMONIDES FAVORS

The Second Kalām Argument is the argument of "specific" or "mutual difference," which Maimonides conditionally approves. He barely sketches this argument:

"If there were two Gods, there would necessarily be some element common to both, whilst some element present in the one would be absent in the other, and constitute the specific difference between them."

That constitutes his entire statement. Here is what he meant. The "element common to both" would be divinity, *elohut*. The "specific difference" would be that one is the god of the heavens and the other the god of the sublunary sphere. Still, he leaves out the final term of the argument. That is, there must only be one God, since otherwise God would be subject to *composition*. Friedlander explained:

"The conclusion can easily be supplied, namely, that neither of the two gods could be the Primal Cause, because each of them is a combination of several forces or properties and thus requires again a cause for that combination." (Note 3, p. 357, *ad loc.*)

In this case, the combination of the *genus*: “divinity” with the *difference*: “of the sublunar sphere,” requires a higher combiner. But then that combiner would require another combiner. At some point, to avoid infinite regress, you must come to the ultimate combiner, God.

The meaning of the “elements common to both” and the “specific difference” is that these are the required terms in any definition. According to Aristotelian logic (explained by Maimonides in *Treatise on Logic*, chapter 10), *definitions* require a genus and a difference. In the Aristotelian scheme, the definition is the essential form of an entity. The parts of any definition (the genus and specific difference) constitute the *formal causes* of the entity.

The critical idea, however, is that we cannot define God: He belongs to no genus from which anything else could be differentiated. Clearly, just because they are definable, the Dualist’s deities cannot be God.

The very duality of Dualism, therefore, seems to imply corporeality, because the deities are composite. But God is incorporeal, neither numerable nor composite. It follows that God is one.

The power of the argument is its grasp of the essential nature of such putative gods.

This is one of Maimonides’ minor arguments for divine unity in Guide 2:1, but it does not rise to the level of his four major arguments announced in that chapter. (See below, “Maimonides’ Arguments for Divine Unity”)

The Hypocrisy of the Kalām Attributists. The Kalām used this *differentiation* (or *composition*) argument against Dualism. Maimonides objects to their use of this argument. Since the (Asharite) Kalām believed in the real existence of essential attributes in God, like wisdom and power, their deity would be subject to composition:

“For according to their opinion, the Primal Cause includes many different elements (attributes). They represent its wisdom and its omnipotence as two different things, and, again, the omnipotence as different from the will. Consequently it would not be impossible that either of the two divine beings possessed several properties, some of which would be common to both, and some peculiar to only one of them.”

Being subject to composition, it follows that Allah would be subject to matter, number, and the existence of some other who composed that composition. These are the very defects the Kalām hypocritically saddle on the Dualist’s gods.

Maimonides argued in the attribute chapters (Guide 1:51-1:60) that since terms like wisdom and power are homonymous, no one actually shares God’s unique wisdom or power except in the mere sound of those terms. If the Kalām’s deity possessed real non-homonymous attributes, like wisdom and power, that deity would participate in those classes of attributes. Thus, God’s wisdom would be just another sort of wisdom, part of God’s definition as the supreme member of the genus of wise beings. The Kalām, therefore, had no right to apply the differentiation argument against the Dualists. They should not have been heard to object that the Dualists’ gods were definable, corporeal, numerable and composite, and therefore not God, since they have themselves committed the same offenses against the one true undefinable God.

(We must qualify all of this by the fact that Kalām theology, despite Maimonides’ portrayal of it, was by no means uniform. The early Mutazilite Kalām never agreed to the doctrine of attributes adopted by the later Asharite Kalām. However, by Maimonides’ time, Asharism was dominant, which is why we can accept his Asharite caricature of “Kalām.” Wolfson objected that for the Asharites the attributes were “neither God nor other than God,” i.e., that they were “modes,” not essences, *Kalām*, 211-214. Yehuda Even-Shmuel said that Asharites themselves actually denied that multiple attributes required composition, see his note, *ad loc.* to his commentary, page 510. However, Wolfson noted the debate in later Kalām between neo-orthodoxy and paleo-orthodoxy on whether Ashari changed his views on this after his conversion to orthodoxy. The best conclusion to this murky issue is that Maimonides provides a snapshot of the dominant sect of Kalam Asharites that he knew.)

Why the Kalām's Second Argument Was Not One of Maimonides' Principal Arguments for Unity.

Let's take another look at Kalām's Second Argument of divine undefinability, ignoring for the moment the Asharite embrace of divine attributes. Maimonides admits here that the Second Argument is a "philosophic and sound argument."

However, in Guide 2:1, Maimonides outlines four proofs for the unity of God that he explicitly calls "philosophic." He did not include the Second Kalām Argument as a philosophic argument. In that chapter, immediately following his account of his four "philosophic" proofs, he lists three arguments that he calls "demonstrative," but which he does not call "philosophic." Friedlander calls attention to this distinction in footnotes to Guide 2:1 (note 3, page 11 and note 1, page 22). One of those non-philosophical demonstrations is the Kalām's Second Argument.

The likely reason that Maimonides did not list this as a philosophic argument in Guide 2:1 was because he recognized its flaw (later pointed out by both R. Shem Tov and Efodi, page 130a, *ad loc.*).

If we take the Dualist position seriously, we have to admit that two completely separate universes could exist. Now recall Maimonides' account of the Second Argument. He had said, "if there were two gods there would necessarily be some element common to both..." We had identified that shared element as divinity. But in a pure Dualism there would be no shared element. The upper god shares no definitional element with the lower god. The term *elokut* would be a homonymous term, meaning something completely different in each universe. Each god would have a different way of conducting his own different sphere. There would be no "element common to both." The demonstration of the Second Kalām Argument must fail, since each god would be undefinable in its own special way.

Now if R. Shem Tov and Efodi both recognized this flaw (that the gods would share no definitional element), there is no reason to suppose that Maimonides overlooked it here. He had suggested that they shared no genus in his previous paragraph when he wrote, "As the Dualists assert, there are two divine beings, one of whom rules this world without influencing the spheres, whilst the other governs the world above without interfering with this world..." Even the sense that they are both "rulers," and share in "rulership," would merely be our subjective conception of their different systems. The two gods would each, in its own way, be undefinable, and thus elude the Second Argument for Monotheism. (Cf. the stark division reported in the Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 39a, "a Magi once said...from the middle of thy body upwards thou belongest to Ormuzd, from the middle downwards, to Ahriman.")

However, for Maimonides, as long as no one looked too closely at the problem posed by real Manichaean Dualism, the Kalām Second Argument of Differentiation or Composition remained a good rhetorical "demonstration" for divine unity, if not an airtight philosophical proof.

MAIMONIDES' OWN ARGUMENTS FOR DIVINE UNITY

Having demolished the Kalam's proofs for the existence of only one God, it is fair to ask what Maimonides' proofs were. They come from philosophic sources, unlike the Kalam's ineffective arguments, which came ultimately from early Christian theologians. Maimonides listed his arguments in Guide 2:1, but I preview them here.

He explicitly calls his first four arguments for unity "philosophic," by which he means that they are logical proofs. Here are their basic ideas (stripped of their intricacies):

I. *The cosmological argument for a single unmoved mover.* Given a Ptolemaic/Aristotelian cosmos, in which a sphere made up of the fifth element continually churns the four material elements of the sublunar sphere, there must exist a single unmoved mover with a greater motive force than the things that are eternally moved. This argument would not survive the Copernican destruction of the earth-centered universe. The next three philosophic arguments could conceivably endure that paradigm shift.

II. *The physical argument for a single mover.* This is the infinite regress argument. We recognize that since we see a final action at the end of the causal chain, there must be a series of intermediate actions preceding it. The final cause presupposes the existence of an initial, non-intermediate, cause. Since this initial actor could not be subject to any other movers, it must follow that it is unmoved, and, being unmoved, must be incorporeal and indivisibly single.

III. *The metaphysical argument for divine unity, from necessary and contingent existences.* Things exist either necessarily or contingently. If all things were contingent in their moment to moment existence, like the Kalām atoms, and if there were no God to maintain them, then nothing could continue to exist. This is due to the all-important proposition XXIII of Maimonides' 26 Aristotelian Propositions (Introduction to Book II of the Guide), which states "everything that exists potentially and whose essence includes a certain state of possibility may at some time be without actual existence." There must be a necessary existent to create and preserve the contingent existences. Such a necessary existent must, for various reasons, be single and incorporeal. (See Maimonides' Aristotelian Propositions XX, XXI, and XXII).

IV. *The argument for divine unity from dynamism.* Since no entity can be its own agent, it requires another agent to actualize its potentiality (Greek: *dunamis*), and since there is no infinite regress of agents, there must be a single incorporeal God at the inception of that chain of actualizers. This is a more abstract version of Argument II. Maimonides drew that argument from physics, while this one, its metaphysical reflection, comes from the Aristotelian division between the potential and the actual in all things.

Maimonides then includes three "demonstrative proofs," that do not rise to the philosophic level.

A). *Differentiation.* The first of these rhetorical arguments is the Kalām Second Argument for divine unity in our chapter. As we showed above, that argument would collapse in the face of completely dichotomous Dualistic universes.

B). *Organicism.* The second of these purely rhetorical proofs follows from Maimonides' assertion, in Guide 1:72, that the world is one organic unity (see my discussion there). The argument is that one God only would produce one organically interconnected world. Again, this argument would fail if there were two different universes.

C). *Enumeration.* The third rhetorical argument was a sub-argument of all the other arguments. Since incorporeal things are never subject to plurality or number, and since God is incorporeal, there can be but one God. It follows from Ibn Bajja's postulate of the unity of mind (see Guide 1:68). We call this the argument from *enumeration*.

Maimonides sums up the argument in Guide 2:Introduction, Prop. XVI: "Incorporeal bodies can only be numbered when they are forces situated in a body; the several forces must then be counted together with [corporeal] substances."

Here is the original version of the argument of *enumeration* from Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. The argument of this passage is that numerosity is always a feature of matter:

"Evidently there is but one heaven (Gr. *ouranos*—universe). For if there are many heavens as there are many men, the moving principles, of which each heaven will have one, will be one in form but in number

many. But *all things that are many in number have matter*; for one and the same definition, e.g., that of man, applies to many things [and is therefore incorporeal], while Socrates is one [and therefore a particular materialization of that universal]. But the primary essence has not matter [and therefore no potentiality]; for it is complete reality [in *actu*]. So the unmovable first mover is one both in definition and in number; so too, therefore, is that which is moved always and continuously; therefore there is one heaven alone.” (W.D. Ross, trans., 1074a 33-37, my bracketed comments and emphasis.)

In other words, the “oneness” of the cosmos is due to the incorporeality of its mover. Though Aristotle’s objective was to show that there is just one cosmos, his successors usually took this passage to show that there is only one first unmoved mover. The necessarily incorporeal first cause must be one, but “one” taken in the sense of a *non-numerical* unity, i.e. it is un-enumerated because it is non-numerable.

WEARINESS

At the end of our chapter, Maimonides complains that the Kalām had so destroyed our concept of the physical nature of the world that we could draw no conclusions from our study of the world. This was because they rejected the very process of drawing conclusions from natural cause and effect. They considered causation to be merely our subjective interpretation of apparent patterns in random atomic collisions. Kafih comments that the Mutakallimūn called any scientific observations optical illusions (Note 38, p. 153, *ad loc.*). If you believe that the world is irrational, you cannot learn anything from it (Guide 1:73). Note the troubling parallels in existentialism and postmodernism.

Maimonides had shown that the Muslim theologians were not the paragons of monotheism that they claimed to be. The Kalām doctors consigned religious man to permanent perplexity. Their arguments were so bad, and their outlook so destructive to science, that the only rational recourse was to rely on faith, and to cede the ground of thought to the secular philosophers. Under the circumstances, should we criticize faithful adherents of the law who avoided rational inquiry? Maimonides declared:

“Some of the Mutakallimūn, *weary (ayef)* of these arguments (Pines: ‘tricks’), declared that the Unity of God is a doctrine which must be received as a matter of faith, but most of them rejected this theory, and reviled its authors. I, however, hold, that those who accept this theory are right-minded (*tamim ha-makhshava*; Jud.Ar.: מַסְדֵּד אֱלֹדִיִּן), and shrink from admitting an erroneous opinion; when they do not perceive any cogency in the arguments, and find that the proofs advanced in favor of the doctrine are inconclusive, they prefer to assume that it could only be received as a matter of faith.”

These simple men of faith may be right-minded, but Maimonides still calls them Mutakallimūn. He does not call them wise. They left the four necessary doctrines of religion unsupported. This is a disastrous outcome, and quite unnecessary. Having abandoned rationality, nothing restrains the perplexed imagination from multiplying gods. Rejecting Kalām arguments, but seeing no alternatives, they let the Dualists win the argument by default. He sighs:

“We can only appeal to the Almighty and to those intelligent persons who confess their error when they discover it.”

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Dare I say that Maimonides suffers weariness? The outline of his program demanded that he have three chapters exposing the weakness of the Kalām proofs of the four necessary doctrines of religion, but after Chapter 1:75, I think his heart went out of the project, and he was eager to proceed to his Aristotelian controversy.

First, he needed to bring his audience up to the level of Book II, which required many preliminaries. He also had to respond to his student, Rabbi Joseph, who had asked for Maimonides' opinion on the dominant Muslim trend of their day, the Kalām. But these requirements forced him to act as the devil's advocate for Dualism (and, in the last chapter, for Eternalism), and this has made him "weary."

Living in the historical moment when the Asharite Kalām conquered Islamic philosophy, he wearily resigned himself to all the consequences of that climactic change.

GUIDE 1:76 THE THREE KALĀM ARGUMENTS AGAINST DIVINE CORPOREALITY

INTRODUCTION: INCORPOREALITY AS THE THEME OF THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE GUIDE

The rejection of divine corporeality is the central doctrine of the first book of the Guide of the Perplexed.

In this chapter, Maimonides assaults the arguments that the Kalām (the Muslim theologians) leveled against those who believed in divine corporeality. He agreed with the Kalām that God has no physical body, but thought that their "proofs" were dangerously ineffective.

To show this he plays devil's advocate again, as he did in the last chapter. This forces him to argue for the corporealists, a job he abhors. But he saw that the Kalām had failed to prove that God is incorporeal. This was especially disastrous because the Kalām arguments were theology's best arguments. Maimonides must resort to philosophy to resolve the crisis in theology.

Maimonides' Corporealist is sophisticated. This invented Corporealist is a committed monotheist whose god has a finite body, even though this body is invisible, unique, incomparably subtle, and indivisible.

Why must we dispose of this peculiar conception of God? A Jew must be able to contend against this strongest version of corporealism, because divine incorporeality is a pillar of Judaism.

We may not minimize the importance of establishing God's incorporeality. According to Maimonides, corporealists are heretics: "Five classes are termed heretics (*minim*);...(including) he who says there is one ruler, but that He is a body and has form" (Mishneh Torah, *Teshuva* 3:15). Corporealism leads to idolatry for "the thought of the heretic turns toward idolatry" (*u'makhshavat min l'avoda zara*; *ibid*, *Avoda Zara* 2:5).

He uses the term "thought" here, meaning the "thought" that emerges from the heretic's imagination. Maimonides' equation of imagination with idolatry is a constant theme of the Guide.

He had always stressed the priority of intellect over imagination, precisely because the imagination only registers corporeality. To put it another way, the imagination reifies everything, making even the incorporeal a physical thing.

The argument against divine corporeality and religious anthropomorphism dominates the first book of the Guide. It is the reason for the first forty-five mostly lexical chapters of biblical terms susceptible of anthropomorphic misinterpretation. It is Maimonides' real purpose for his chapters against the existence of numerous essential divine attributes (Guide 1:51-1:60), inasmuch as numerosity is the marker for the corporeal, as we will show. His chapters on the names of God (1:61-64) oppose vulgar "Masters of the Holy Name" who are like corporealists: by using the divine name as a magical tool, they made God a thing (*baalei Shem*: 1:61, my notes on "Amulets").

WHO WAS MAIMONIDES' CORPOREALIST?

To act as devil's advocate Maimonides must stand in for the best partisan for divine corporeality.

It is not clear who are the models for his Corporealist. They are not the Manichaeic Dualists, whom I wrote about in the last chapter, since he makes it clear that his Corporealist is a strict Monotheist. Instead, it looks like Maimonides combined certain features of Aristotle's god with Kalām conceptions. By allying his Corporealist with Aristotle, he eludes the force of the Kalām's atomistic physics. By employing Muslim attributist conceptions of God, he embarrasses the Kalām, which embraced the idea that Allah possesses multiple real eternal attributes like wisdom and power.

His Corporealist is not a Christian, although Maimonides did think that Christians were corporealists. His Corporealist's deity differs from Jesus in several respects. The usual concept of Jesus, i.e. Luke 24:39, has his material substance like that of other humans. By contrast, the Corporealist's deity is not like any other thing, as we will see. (Christians as corporealists or polytheists in Maimonides: *Mishneh Torah, Avoda Zara* 9:4: *notzrim ovdei avoda zara hen*; *ibid.*, *Ma'akhalot Asurot* 11:7; Commentary on the Mishnah, *Avoda Zara* 1:3; Guide 1:50).

Maimonides' Corporealist is a monotheist who believes that his god exists within our universe. It is corporeal but unique, yet its body resembles ours in some vague analogical way. His god exists eternally and necessarily, but has a specific shape.

Let's take a look at this constructed deity and why it would pose such a threat to the theologians.

In and Of The Universe. Maimonides' Corporealist's deity is part and parcel of an eternal universe, just like the philosophical god of Aristotle or Spinoza. Aristotle's philosophical deity differs from Maimonides' religious conception of God in several ways, the principle difference being that Aristotle's incorporeal god is *in* the universe, while the God of Abraham is *outside* and *other* than the universe.

The Corporealist's god could not have created the universe from nothing without simultaneously creating itself, which would seem to be absurd. The point is that their god neither transcends the universe nor creates it *ex nihilo*.

A Sixth Element? Maimonides' Corporealist adopts Aristotle's notion that there are radically different kinds of matter. The matter of the world, with its four elements of fire, air, water and earth, is different from the Fifth Element matter of the celestial spheres. This quintessent matter is dimensional but invisible. Thus, gazing at the night sky, we could not have seen the enveloping Aristotelian spheres, but only the planets suspended on them. Nonetheless, the spheres have a definite shape.

The ethereal matter of the spheres is wholly different from terrestrial matter, i.e., it is more subtle, it rotates infinitely, etc. The Corporealist asserts that there is divine matter which is more sublime than even Fifth

Element matter (*v'lo guf ha-shekhina o amud ha-anan ha-nivra hu guf ha-eloa ytalei l'daato*). Though Aristotle never conceived of it, Maimonides' Corporealist's deity is made of such subtle stuff, perhaps a Sixth Element. Still, no matter how different its matter, this god is corporeal, as we are.

Possession of Attributes. The Kalām were vulnerable on the related issue of divine attributes. They maintained that the so-called “essential” attributes (life, will, wisdom, power, knowledge) were real eternal elements with or in Allah. That implies composition, which implies physicality.

“Composition” means that different elements combined to make up an entity or substance. All physical bodies are subject to composition. Composition also entails *number*, and, therefore, only physical things are numerable. But God is perfect unity, not subject to composition. It would have been hypocritical for the Kalām attributists to reject the corporealism of Maimonides' Corporealist on the grounds of composition or numerability, since they agreed with the Corporealist that God possesses numerous real attributes. Maimonides, therefore, disqualified the Kalām from raising the argument of composition against his Corporealist.

Absolute Existence. This Corporealist's god is physical, but nonetheless *necessary*; that is, its bodily existence is absolute, not contingent.

Recall Avicenna's distinction between necessary and contingent being: contingent beings only exist because the one necessary existent, God, willed their existence. The *necessary* existence of God means that you cannot ask who could have created Him, or who “preponderated” His chances of existence over His chances of non-existence.

Similarly, Maimonides' Corporealist maintained that his god's body was necessary. It was the commencement of all causal chains. Yet its absolute existence would not contradict its existence as a physical body.

(See my note under the Kalām Third Argument, “Particularization and Preponderation,” below;; Guide 1:47, Arguments Five and Six; compare Mishneh Torah, *Ysodai ha-Torah* 1:1)

Finite Shape. Maimonides' Corporealist does not deny his divinity shape, size, or figure.

The Corporealist's god is *dimensional* (*m'madim* / אֵלֵאֲבָעָדָה). Maimonides notes that dimensionality alone does not define matter (*ain etzem ha-m'madim he ha-guf*). Others thought that dimensionality was part of the definition of matter: e.g., Averroes, Alfarabi, Rabbis Yosef ibn Aknin, Avraham ibn Daud, Yosef Ibn Tzadik, and especially R. Hasdai Crescas, whose statement on this may have led to the Spinoza's identification of God with dimensional extension. (See Harry Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard, 1929, pp. 123, 201, 261, 579-590, 594; Efros, Israel, *Space in Jewish Medieval Philosophy*, 36-46, AMS Press, New York, 1966; and my note on “Dimensionality,” below)

In sum, Maimonides' Corporealist's deity is necessary, eternal, one, unique, invisible, unchanging and powerful. This divinity is also dimensional, corporeal, possessed of attributes and of a definite permanent figure.

THE FIRST ARGUMENT: ATOMISM

Maimonides' Corporealist contends that his god has a physical body. The Kalām replies with their first argument for divine incorporeality, in the form of a dilemma, as follows. They allege that all bodies are atomic in structure. They are composed of discrete, indivisible atoms (*a-tom* means uncuttable in Greek). If

God is a body, He must *exist* (*meytzav, ykayem*) in either one atom of the body or in all atoms of the body. But both alternatives are impossible, for the following reasons.

1) If God were in *one* atom, the other atoms of the body would be superfluous (*ma toelet yeter otam ha-khalakim, v'ain inyan l'mtziut kol ha-guf ha-zeh*). But they cannot be superfluous because you need at least two Kalām atoms to constitute a body (Proposition I, Guide 1:73). Since bodies require at least two atoms, God's atom would have to unite with another atom to exist, which is absurd. Therefore, God could not have a physical body.

2) If divinity manifested in *all* the atoms of the body, and each atom is independent, then it would manifest independently in each and every atom of the body (*kol etzem yakhid m'hem*). This would be true even if there were the minimum of only two atoms in the body. Since bodily features exist independently in each atom (Proposition V, *ibid.*), then each atom would manifest a different god. However, both sides had agreed to the premise of one God. Therefore, God could not have a physical body.

This is clever but moot since Maimonides' Corporealist does not believe in atomism. His god has a physical body that is coherent, continuous (*m'khubar, ratzuf, m'duvak*), indivisible and, therefore, not made up of atoms.

The reason that the Kalām assert the atomic divisibility of heavenly bodies is that they only know divisible terrestrial bodies. But invisible non-terrestrial bodies, like the cosmic spheres, the angelic hosts, and the Corporealist's god are not to be *imagined* as being like visible terrestrial bodies. Maimonides criticizes the Kalām imagination for projecting what they know on what they do not, so that they even “tear and cut up heaven” (*m'dama sh'guf ha-shamaim sovel hikria v'hivkia*).

The Unified Field Theory of the Theologians. Others, however, also sought to unify the physics of heaven and earth. R. Saadia Gaon agreed with the Kalām that the heavens were not made of a different “fifth” element. He argued for the uniformity of terrestrial and celestial matter. In this respect, he foreshadowed R. Hasdai Crescas' drive to eliminate this disruptive cosmic division introduced by Aristotle. R. Saadia, however, was no atomist. He contended that the heavens were made of the terrestrial element of fire. (*Book of Opinions and Beliefs*, I:3, 8th theory, page 70 – 72)

On this point, the modern Hebrew commentator, Yehuda Even-Shmuel, writing on our chapter of the Guide, says that “the existence of a continuous indivisible body was already a stone of contention” between philosophy and theology, since theology “portrayed the cosmos as a divisible body, like any other body” (my trans.). So that you could, in their unified field theory, “tear and cut up heaven” into its constituent atoms, just as you could chop up anything on earth.

By contrast, the philosophers thought that the cosmos was an eternal whirling mass of continuous matter, which could not be divided into indivisible atoms. They argued that the theologians were led astray by their imagination's projection of what they thought they knew from the earth upon the unknowable heavens. Maimonides says that they “assumed a similarity and an analogy between the visible i.e., the bodies which exist among us, and the invisible” (*v'ha filosof omer ki zeh pa'ulat ha'dimion m'tokh hashavvah min ha-nokhaki—hem ha-gufim ha-mitzuyam etzlenu—al ha-neelam*).

Who was right? On the one hand, we long ago abandoned the five-element theory in physics, which will not be resurrected. But the atomic theory, as revived in the science of the Age of Enlightenment, looks threadbare in our day. Now we split the atom into innumerable parts. Quantum theory, and its recent cousin,

string theory, seem to work better with a theory of universal matter and form than with the indivisible atoms of the pre-Socratic Greeks and the Kalām (as I argued in Guide 1:73).

So, whatever the world is made from, Maimonides' point holds, that the Kalām could hardly expect any serious corporealist to accept their sophistry that God's body would, absurdly, have to exist in either one or many atoms, if it were to exist at all.

Crescas Destroys Atomism. R. Hasdai Crescas, commenting on this paragraph in the Guide, cuts to the nerve of the Kalām First Argument. They had argued the dilemma that if God were corporeal, his divinity would manifest either in one of the atoms of that body or in all of them. But how could divine corporeality manifest itself in any atom, since an atom is indivisible, and therefore not a corporeal body? Crescas' argument flows from the fact that individual Kalām atoms do not possess *extension*, which is the capacity to fill space. If they were extended, they could be divided, but then they would not be indivisible Kalām atoms. Kalām atoms only become extended bodies when two of them clump together (Propositions I and II, 1:73).

Here is the real dilemma for the Kalām. The atoms are either extended or not extended. If not extended they cannot combine to form a body, for Aristotle had already shown that a magnitude cannot arise from a combination of non-magnitudinous points (*Generation and Corruption*, I:2, 316a, 29-31). On the other hand, if extended, they would then be divisible bodies, not indivisible atoms. It follows that atomism is impossible, and can form no proof for God's incorporeality.

THE SECOND ARGUMENT: IMPOSSIBILITY OF COMPARISON

The second Kalām argument builds on the premise of God's uniqueness: that we cannot compare God to His creatures. The Corporealist responds that his god is also unique inasmuch as it is "a body *unlike* other bodies."

The Kalām answers this challenge with their Second Argument for divine incorporeality. If God were physically embodied He would have to be *like* other bodies in respect of corporeality. The Corporealist's deity would then not be unique, and would therefore not be God.

Maimonides' Corporealist makes three excellent (though not particularly consistent) responses:

1. Who says God must be unique? It is only books of revelation, like the Qur'an, that claim we cannot compare God to His creatures (Qur'an 42:9, 112:4; cf. Isaiah 40:25). Thus, the Kalām drew their premise of incomparability from tradition and not from demonstration (*mkubelet lo muskelet*), but they meant this to be a *demonstrative proof* against corporeality. In other words, their argument was a rhetorical argument, not a demonstrative argument. A rhetorical argument contains a premise based on received opinion rather than on fact. There is nothing particularly bad about rhetorical arguments. They are superior to sophistical arguments, i.e., those in which one of the premises is false. Maimonides uses rhetorical arguments himself, but only when forced to admit that a proposition has no demonstrative proof, as when he argues the case for creation *ex nihilo*. Since the Kalām had framed this as a demonstrative proof but *falsely concealed* its rhetorical reality, they in fact committed sophistry. (On the three types of arguments: Maimonides, *Book of Logic*, ch. 8).

2. Who says God must be *totally* unique? Even though the Corporealist accepts the premise of uniqueness, he replies that "uniqueness" is an *equivocal* term. His corporeal god is unique, but still resembles corporeal creatures *analogically*, that is, it is unlike them in *most* respects. For, as Maimonides says: "He who admits the corporeality of God does not deny the existence of properties in the divine Being." He meant that the

Corporealists, like the Asharite Kalām, had no problem believing in the existence of real divine attributes, like wisdom or power. Uniqueness did not have to mean complete incomparability. Here Maimonides deployed Kalām arguments against the Kalām: they themselves used this argument of analogy to explain away anthropomorphic elements in the Qur’an and in support of their claim that God has real attributes. In other words, when the Kalām said that God is “wise in virtue of wisdom” they meant that in some respects man and God share in the attribute of wisdom. But if God has real attributes which are only analogically distinct from those attributes of humans, then even the Mutakallimūn must admit that God is comparable to His creatures in some way. By attacking the Corporealist for the sin of comparison, they revealed their own hypocrisy.

3. Who says that a material body could not be unique? Maimonides’ Corporealist could use the term “body” *homonymously*. Thus, the word “body” sounds the same for his god’s “body” and his creatures’ “body,” but would mean something completely different. Maimonides mentions that there were some “bodies unlike other bodies,” including, the “created light” (*or hanivra*), Moses’ pillar of cloud, and the *Shekhina*. These were made of some kind of matter, more sublime than terrestrial matter or even Fifth Element celestial matter, but completely different from both. His Corporealist could argue that his god was made of finer stuff unlike even those sublime entities. Kalām physics, however, had insisted that all matter was uniformly made of identical atoms. Maimonides’ Corporealist rejected this.

In defense of his claim that there are different kinds of matter, the Corporealist argued that it would be absurd to say that “the substance of dung” and the invisible celestial spheres are made of the same kind of matter. Completely different kinds of matter exist above and below, sharing nothing but the sound of the word “matter.” His god’s matter is completely unlike Earth’s matter.

A god in the World and of the World. These last arguments are hard for us to take, since they again contrast *passé* Kalām atomism with the antique Fifth Element. Nonetheless, the point remains that the Corporealist’s deity could be a body unlike other bodies. In what would this unlikeness consist? It is unlike other bodies because it is invisible, eternal, necessary, and, therefore, not similar to any other being.

My first thought would be that the Corporealist is just giving incorporeality the *name* of “body.” But the Corporealist is serious that his god is a real body and not a body in name only, because this deity is *in the world*. He can even quote Scripture for support.

Take Isaiah 45:7, “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I am the Lord that doeth all these things.” The Corporealist would say that no deity could create matter and evil without being material or evil (so to speak) itself. A mutual relation between creator and created generally exists, as Maimonides noted (Guide 1:16), “The properties contained in the quarry should be found again in those things which are formed and hewn out of it.” (He was referring to Isaiah 51:3: “...Look onto the rock from which ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged; look unto Abraham your father and unto Sarah that bore you...”)

Being corporeal, this deity could create the world *from itself* without having to create it *ex nihilo*. This avoids the old theological scandal of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, that nothing can come from nothing. The creator, according to our philosophical Corporealist, must be material to create the material world. Since the Kalām failed to grasp the significance of this point, they failed to engage the Corporealist’s claim that god must have a body. Perhaps they could have asked how grossly physical bodies could possibly have come from such a subtle divine body, but this would be easier for a Neoplatonist corporealist to explain than that God

creates from absolute nothingness. All of this helps to explain why, despite the onslaught from the Kalām, the Corporealist refuses to abandon his position.

The uniqueness argument is the best Kalām argument against corporeality. The Corporealist's responses are his most serious rejoinders, since they challenge the very notion of divine transcendence. The Kalām's atomism was its overreaction to this challenge. In its quest to emphasize absolute divine transcendence, by making each moment a miraculous re-creation, the Kalām end up destroying divine transcendence. Their deity must involve itself in the momentary granular existence of all things. Maimonides jokes (Guide 1:73, Proposition VII) that since people have discovered 2000-year-old teeth in the dirt, God must continually re-create the death of each their tooth-atoms in every moment of that eon.

Later Neoplatonic creationist philosophers held that being comes from *potentiality*, not from absolute nothingness. In philosophic terminology, this is called creation *de novo* as opposed to creation *ex nihilo*. By contrast, Maimonides will respond to the Corporealist's challenge to divine transcendence by asserting the completely *miraculous* (and hence inexplicable) nature of *ex nihilo* creation.

(Miraculous creation: Guide 2:25 and *Treatise on Resurrection*, 8:42, p. 44-45, Fred Rosner trans., Jason Aronson Inc., 1997. *De novo* creation: *Maimonides on the Origin of the World*, 54-56, Kenneth Seeskin, Cambridge, 2005.)

Analogy vs. Homonymy. The Qur'an contributes to Maimonides' Corporealist's idea of god. It recounts Allah's possession of physical features and movements. Allah stands and sits (Qur'an 10:3).

The earliest Kalām discussions of this issue borrowed a Muslim legal concept, *analogy*, to explain such anthropomorphisms. Analogies differ from homonyms in that analogies compare things that are *not completely unlike*. Thus, Allah's physical features are analogous to ours, and, therefore, not completely unlike ours. It is never explained how this is manifested (Wolfson, *Kalām*, 14-15). Analogy leaves the door open for corporeality.

Maimonides, by contrast, held that we must interpret the attributes of God *homonymously*, so that these terms have a *completely* different meaning for us and for God. In Guide 1:47 he even admits that we could say that God has a physical body, if we were to speak of "physical body" in a homonymous sense. We must *not* do so, only because:

"The prophetic books have never applied to God even metaphorically anything that is considered by ordinary people as an *imperfection* or that is conceived by one as being incompatible with God, though such a term is not different from those other terms which are used in those books as descriptions of God.... we do not meet with the expressions, 'And God tasted,' 'And God touched.' According to our opinion, the reason for this is to be found in the idea, which has a firm hold in the minds of all men, that God does not come into *contact* with a body in the same manner as one body comes into contact with another, since He is not even seen by the eye."

(My emph. See also Guide 1:26; but see Guide 1:18 and my discussion of two possible exceptions that Maimonides himself raised.)

Judaism would never use such anthropomorphisms because they always suggest physical contact. Even if we were to interpret "tasted" or "touched" to mean something completely different from physical contact, since they were "considered by ordinary people as an imperfection," we would not use them that way. Elsewhere, Maimonides said that touch is a "disgrace" for us (Guide 2:36), and, therefore, could never be attributed to God, no matter how homonymously we choose to interpret it.

Muslim analogists, by contrast, would defend the literal meaning of the Qur'an, even with regard to such disgraceful "imperfections." Some Muslims, including, surprisingly, the fundamentalist Hanbalites, could even accept a homonymous interpretation. Harry Wolfson explained:

"Then, as in Christianity, there arose in orthodox Islam a difference of opinion, perhaps a difference of opinion which is only verbal, as to whether God can be described as being corporeal or even as having a body. There were those among the Orthodox who assumed that on the mere basis of the Koranic injunction against likening God to created beings (42:9; 112:4), it is permissible to conceive of God as corporeal or even as having a body, provided His corporeality or His body is taken to be *unlike* that of anything else. Thus Averroes, speaking of 'many Muslims,' such as 'the Hanbalites and their many followers,' says that they believed that 'God is a body which is unlike other bodies.' Ibn Haldūn, referring to certain Muslims, whom he describes as 'corporealists' (*mujassimah*), says that 'they affirm the corporeality [of God], but not like [that of] bodies,' and Ibn Hazm, who himself believed in the incorporeality of God, argues that 'if a Koranic text was shown to us in which God was called a body, it would be our duty to profess this belief, but then to qualify it by saying that He is a body not like other bodies.' Reference to this view in Islam is to be found also in the works of Jewish philosophers writing in Arabic. Joseph al-Basir (early 11th c.), referring to some Mutakallimūn, says: 'Their statement that God is a body not like all other bodies is unsustainable,' and Maimonides refers to this view in quoting some other Mutakallimūn, who were opposed to it, as arguing: 'If you say that God is a body not like other bodies, you are self-contradictory.'" (Quoting from our chapter: *im ne'emar guf lo k'gufim, k'var sateret et atzmekha*. Wolfson, *Studies in the Hist. of Phil. and Rel.*, p. 445. Hanbalites: from Ahmad bin Hanbal, 780 – 855 CE. Compare the Raavad, 1125 – 1198, whose *Hasagot* criticized Mishneh Torah, *Teshuva* 3:7, where Maimonides ruled that a monotheist corporealist is a heretic. The Raavad famously objected: "Why did he call him a heretic? Several greater and better than he [i.e., better than Maimonides!] followed this way.")

It turns out that Maimonides' Corporealist had good Orthodox company when he claimed, "God is a body unlike other bodies." This would be very embarrassing for the Kalām, as well as for theology generally.

An Important Tangent: Dimensionality. Maimonides, in voicing one of the Corporealist's responses, said that things were embodied in different ways and with different types of matter. The doctrine asserts that the celestial spheres and the terrestrial elements are made of different kinds of matter. But what, precisely, is this "matter" that they allegedly share?

Here is Maimonides' short statement: "Although there is no doubt that the spheres have, like the things below, three dimensions, they are corporeal because they consist of matter and form, not because they have dimensions," *v'af al fi sh'ha-galgel bli sofek baal m'madim, ain etzem ha-m'madim hu ha-guf, ele ha-davar ha-murkav m'khomev v'tzura*.

The commentariat spilled much ink over this line, because what Maimonides obliquely referred to was a debate over Aristotle's claims about the nature of material substance. In the purely Aristotelian view, substances are dynamic composites of matter and form, and this would be true even of the celestial spheres. But if the spheres were eternal and unchangeable, how could they be like material substances that were all subject to generation and corruption?

Averroës' (Ibn Rushd, 1126 – 1196) revolutionary answer was to remove *matter* from the spheres entirely. He reminded the Aristotelians that their eternal spheres could not be subject to the law of generation and corruption. There would then be no reason why we should assume that they are composed of matter and

form. He replaced the matter of the spheres with dimensionality. Matter as dimensionality, and its more abstract sense as extension, or extensity, has a long subsequent history coming down to Descartes and Spinoza.

R. Hasdai Crescas (1340 – 1411), famously expanded on Averroës’ dimensionality of the spheres. Why stop at the spheres? Crescas argued that all things, celestial or terrestrial, were a composite of dimensionality, on the one hand, and their natural form or shape, on the other. Even while agreeing with Maimonides that all corporeal substance “consists of matter and form,” he redefined the notion of “matter” so that it was no longer a mere potentiality but was always actual, just as dimensions are always actual.

Here is Crescas’ remarkable statement, commenting directly on Maimonides’ sentence:

“Maimonides meant that dimensions existing in actuality (*b’poel*) are, indeed, accidents of the substance of the composite entity, since the length and width are in the category of quantity. But we call *dimensionality* the form of all matter because all matter is capable of *receiving* dimensions, not that those quantified dimensions will define matter that actually has dimensions.” (My translation.)

This conception turns the mysterious hylic matter of Plato from the vagaries of “potentiality” and of the “unlimited” to the real dimensionality embodied in existing things. Crescas differentiated this substantial dimensionality from the accidental dimensions themselves. He thereby sought to remove the Aristotelians’ objection that the actual dimensions were merely accidental quantities attaching to substance.

Taking this a step further toward a unified field theory in physics and cosmology, Crescas, in his masterpiece, *Or Adonai*, completely removed matter from the equation. He replaced it with his new definition of “corporeal form” as dimensionality.

“As a result of this (new) view, it would follow that even without its specific form, matter would be in place and would have actual existence. Behold, my witness is in heaven, for the heavenly sphere, which [according to Averroës], is body without any matter, has actual existence. This theory would remove many a difficulty, strong and perplexing, which exists with regard to the nature of matter as it is generally understood... The corporeal form, which we now propose as the substratum, always has actual existence...” (H. A. Wolfson’s translation, page 263, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*.)

In other words, the dimensions and dimensionality constitute the “material” substance of all things. The dimensions are real, actual, and not just potentialities. They are the same in heaven and on earth.

The Aristotelians responded to this challenge by re-asserting that dimensions were a *quantity*, not a *substance*. They always classified quantity as one of the nine categories of accidents attaching to a substance. Matter is such a substance. A substance is that which exists through itself and not through another. By contrast, accidents always subsist in or upon substances. Accidents do not define substances. It follows that while matter is always extended, dimensional extensity is not the essence of matter, but only an accident attaching to substantial matter. This was the view of Maimonides, as well as R. Saadia Gaon, Abravanel, Efodi, and Shem Tov.

What we are witnessing is the historic clash between the purely Aristotelian view that space is just the finite contiguous place of a body, and the new paradigm that saw space in itself as infinite dimensionality or extensity. This new concept of endless void broke through the artificial wall of the Aristotelian outer sphere.

For Maimonides and the Aristotelians, substantial matter could never be defined by its extension or by its dimensions, for these only attached to things as a finite quantity, and, therefore, as accident, and are only attachable insofar as they are quantifiable. Crescas had not solved the problem of the split between the Fifth Element and the other Four by changing “dimensions” to “dimensionality,” that is, from a quantity to a quality. The reason that this failed to resolve the problem was that quality, exactly like quantity, was also one of the nine categories of accidents in the Aristotelian system. In that system there is no way to make extension substantial. “Extension” included nothing more than an object’s place.

For Maimonides it was incontestable that while actual matter is always extended, extensity could not be the essence of matter. Space was just the finite measurable area surrounding physical bodies in a tightly packed universe. He could not conceive space as infinite void.

THE THIRD ARGUMENT: PARTICULARIZATION

The argument of particularization derives from the Christian “Kalām” of Gregory of Nazianzus, Archbishop of Constantinople (325-389 CE, see Wolfson, *Kalām*, p. 50).

The Kalām argued that if God were corporeal then He must have a shape, and since that shape could possibly have been different, someone must have *particularized* the actual shape. That particularizer (*myakhed*) would have to be a second god, but that contradicts the stipulated premise of one God. Therefore, God is incorporeal.

This familiar argument (1:74, Argument Five) fails because the Corporealist insists that his god has absolute eternal existence in its manifest shape. This means that his god needs no particularizer, because it could not possibly have a different shape.

Particularization and Preponderation. Maimonides pushes the Kalām position further. He reminds us that the argument of particularization is of the same *type* as their argument of preponderation (1:74, the Kalām's Sixth Argument for creation and against eternalism).

The preponderation argument turns on the presumed contrast between God’s necessary existence as against the possible existence of everything else. According to that argument, there must be One who preponderates (*makhria*) the existence of all creatures over their *possible imagined* non-existence. They might exist or they might not. It is only God who can make that choice, by preponderating their chances of existence over their chances of nonexistence, when both alternatives are equally possible. This was Avicenna’s argument for the existence of God, which the Kalām adopted (Ibn Sina, 980-1037).

Maimonides’ Corporealist flips this preponderation claim back on the Kalām, to gut their particularization proof. Why not apply preponderation to God Himself? Thus, God exists, but were His prior non-existence a possibility, there would have to have been a second deity who preponderated His existence over His chances of non-existence. The Kalām would retort that this would result in an absurd infinite regress of preponderators, unless we presume God’s *absolute* existence at the start of the causal chain. But that is precisely what Maimonides’ Corporealist will maintain: his god’s absolute existence, including its absolute bodily existence in its permanent eternal shape prior to all causal chains.

The parallel that Maimonides identified between particularization and preponderation arguments is that in the former the particular possible shape of a body requires a particularizer, while in the latter, its very existence as a contingently existing being requires a preponderator. The flaw in these types of claims is that the Kalām exalted their imagination of what things could admissibly be over what they actually are.

Admissibility. Maimonides' point was that particularization/preponderation arguments produce absurd results whether used by the Kalām or against them. They produce absurd results because they depend on Proposition X of Kalām physics (1:73), the proposition of *admissibility* (*hitakhnut*), which is that anything imaginable could exist. He retorted that "Imagination yields...no test for the reality of a thing." The imagination projects its fancies on existent things irrespective of whether their actual natures would allow for them (*b'yakhas l'shaar ha-nmtzaot im ntaaram sh'lo k'fi tevaam*). Thus snakes could conceivably have feet.

If that is a grievous fault with normal things like snakes, it is far worse when those dubious imaginations are projected upon God, such as the notion that God might not have existed (*asher kvar be'ernu shi'ur ma sh'yesh ba min ha-sfekot...kol sh'khen b'yakhas l'eloa*). The Kalām's imaginative projections nullified the nature of existence by changing the natural characteristics of the heavens and the earth (*sh'hem batlu teva ha-mtziot, v'shanu ha-t'khuna ha-teviot*).

Nature Does Nothing in Vain. The problem with admissibility, i.e., the notion that a thing could have been different or that it might not have been at all, is that natural things really could not have been different. Aristotle wrote that nature does nothing in vain (*natura nihil agit frustra / Φύση δεν κάνει τίποτα μάταια*). To the contrary, things must be as they are. A thing cannot be different from its nature because its nature is its essence. "Nature does nothing in vain, but with a view to that which is better." "For snakes, the cause of why they are footless is that nature does nothing in vain, but always, from among the possibilities, does what is best for each thing." Nature "gives to everything that which it is capable of receiving, and preserves its particular essence and characteristic property." In sum, "nature always makes the best of possible things." Maimonides accepts the doctrine that things cannot be different from their nature, *im ntaaram sh'lo k'fi tevaam*. (Aristotle quotations: *De Incessu Animalium*, 12.711a 17-19, 8.708a 9-12. Also see *Metaphysics*, 6.4.1030a 3, 6-7; *De Caelo* 2.5.288a 2-3.)

The Kalām tried to ape Avicenna's famous preponderation argument while (purposefully) neglecting that on this precise point Avicenna agreed with Aristotle. Things do not possess the possibility of nonexistence nor of existing differently. The very *existence* of natural things, including their particular shapes, partakes of natural permanency. The truth is that the existence of things is only contingent with respect to God, but their existence is necessary with respect to themselves. The existence of things, as experienced by us and as manifested in the world, is natural. They are what they are and they will remain as they are until natural entropy dissipates them, or until countervailing natural forces destroy them. God's creations are contingent only with respect to His absolute existence; they are not contingent with respect to themselves.

(See my more developed argument on this point in Guide 1:74, Sixth Method, including discussion of Avicennian preponderation, which is really an argument for the existence of God, not an argument against the existence of nature. Miracles, which disrupt natural order, are a special case, see my discussions at Guide 1:46 "God of Miracles"; 1:66 "Science of Miracles"; and 1:73, "Maimonides' Influence on Leibniz: The Possibility of Miracles").

Theologians Defeated! So, when the Kalām replied that a particularizer must determine the shape of the Corporealist's god, the Corporealist could reply that its shape is not contingent, but necessary, since it is divine. Its permanent shape is included in the necessity of its existence. There need be neither particularizer nor preponderator.

The disastrous result is that the Corporealist won all three arguments against the Kalām! 1) His god's bodily structure is not *atomic*; 2) its matter is *incomparable*, i.e., unlike any other; and 3) its existence and shape are

absolute, requiring no particularizer/preponderator. Theology had no good argument against divine corporeality, just as, in the last chapter, it failed to defeat the Dualists.

Maimonides' Own Use of Particularization. In Guide 1:73, Maimonides used the particularization argument in certain restricted circumstances (he never used the preponderation argument). He used it only as a rhetorical support for creationism, not a demonstrative proof. In this form, it resembles the Argument for Creation from Design, i.e., that God must have designed the splendid structures of the heavens.

Opposing the philosophers who held that strict eternal necessity held sway not only in sub-lunar nature but also in the constellations of the super-lunar cosmos, Maimonides replied:

“This is exactly the difference between us; that which actually exists, has, according to my view, been produced by the will of the Creator, not by necessity; just as it has been created with that special property, *it might have been* created with any other property, unless the impossibility which you postulate be proved by a logical demonstration.” (My emph.)

By “that special property,” he referred to the curious patterns seen among the stars, such as the Big and Little Dipper. What he meant was that when you apply particularization to those super-lunar existents, it works as an argument for the *existence* of a creator. Those patterns do not seem to follow any rational purpose. Since they appear to be purposeless, it is *admissible* that they could have been arranged in a different pattern. The decision to particularize them in their particular pattern required a particularizer, and that particularizer is God (Guide 2:19). This only works because we cannot know, as we could know of all sub-lunar patterns, what their *natural* role is. Thus, it was not merely imaginative to conceive that a Designer particularized these stellar patterns.

MAIMONIDES' ARGUMENT AGAINST CORPOREALITY

Maimonides' own proof of divine incorporeality was the argument against *composition*. This is an argument the Corporealist cannot elude. Maimonides finds it ridiculous that the Kalām could ever invoke the argument against composition, since they believed that God possessed real essential attributes. He therefore refused to include it in his list of the Kalām arguments:

“Those who maintain that God is incorporeal because a corporeal object consists of substance and form—a combination (*harkava*: composition) known to be impossible in the Divine Being, are not in my opinion Mutakallimūn (*ain ze l'daati 'mutakallem'*), and such an argument is not founded on the propositions of the Kalām...”

He only briefly sketches the composition argument here. He will not say more because this chapter is about the Kalām arguments, not his arguments. He gives his argument in Chapter 2:1 of the Guide, as follows. All bodies are *composed* of two things, matter and form. God, however, is simple unity, and therefore cannot be subject to composition. It follows that God is not a body. This argument disposes of the Corporealist's embodied deity, which, like all bodies, is composed of two things, matter and form.

Why must bodies be composed of at least two things? R. Hasdai Crescas succinctly explained:

“Among the ancients there were some who held that body has no composition in any sense whatsoever, but that it is one in essence and in definition [he refers to the atomists' conception of the indivisible body of the atom]...Aristotle...knocked this view on the head (*haku al kadkod*) by demonstrating conclusively that every body must inevitably consist of two essential parts, matter and

form. For we observe that all mundane bodies (*geshamim sh'bkhan*) are subject to generation and corruption; and, as that which no longer is cannot be the recipient of that which is coming to be, it is necessary to posit the existence of a substratum. That substratum is matter, the so-called hyle. That matter must be essential to that which comes to be, is self-evident, inasmuch as it is its substratum. But still the recipient (*mkabel*) must be something distinct from that which is received (*mkubel*). It follows, therefore, that in every body there must be two principles.” (*Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, H.A. Wolfson's translation of *Or Adonai*, 257-259, with facing Hebrew, Harvard, 1929, and my bracketed comments)

Maimonides said that his composition argument against divine corporeality is a philosophic argument (*v'zo shita filosofit*). It is essentially the same argument he made in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 1:7:

“(7) This God is One. He is not two nor more than two, but One; so that none of the things existing in the universe to which the term *one* is applied is like unto His Unity; neither such a unit as a species which comprises many units, nor such a unit as a physical body which consists of parts and dimensions. His Unity is such that there is no other Unity like it in the world. If there were plural deities, these would be physical bodies; because entities that can be *enumerated* and are equal in their essence, are only distinguishable from each other by the accidents that happen to physical bodies.”

Here is the explanation he gave at the end of Guide 2:1:

“*Another argument concerning the Incorporeality of God.*—Every corporeal object is composed of matter and form; every compound of these two elements requires an agent for effecting their combination. Besides, it is evident that a body is divisible and has dimensions: a body is thus undoubtedly subject to accidents. Consequently nothing corporeal can be a unity, either because everything corporeal is divisible or because it is a compound; that is to say, it can logically be analysed into two elements; because a body can only be said to be a certain body when the distinguishing element is added to the corporeal substratum, and must therefore include two elements: but it has been proved that the Absolute admits of no dualism whatever.”

*** REFLECTIONS ON THE GUIDE'S KALĀM CHAPTERS ***
WHY DID MAIMONIDES DEVOTE A SECTION OF THE GUIDE TO THE KALĀM?

Apart from the fact that his student asked him to discuss the Kalām, and the fact that it was so influential in his time, there is a deeper reason why Maimonides devotes all this ink to the Kalām.

Maimonides had ruled that any monotheistic religion worthy of the name had to secure the four necessary doctrines of religion: God's existence, oneness, incorporeality, and creation of the world *ex nihilo*. All religious people, particularly Jews, must acknowledge the four necessary doctrines of religion. If possible, each must do so based on his own true understanding of these concepts.

The problem was that Judaism lacked the native resources to secure these doctrines by proof. This was because the knowledge of their proofs had been lost. In Guide 1:71, he wrote:

“Know that many branches of science relating to the correct solution of these problems, were once cultivated by our forefathers, but were in the course of time neglected, especially in consequence of the tyranny which barbarous nations exercised over us....our nation lost the knowledge of those important disciplines. Nothing but a few remarks and allusions are to be found in the Talmud and the *Midrashim*, like a few kernels enveloped in such a quantity of husk, that the reader is generally

occupied with the husk, and forgets that it encloses a kernel. In addition you will find that in the few works composed by the *Geonim* and the Karaites on the unity of God and on such matter as is connected with this doctrine, they followed the lead of the Mohammedan Mutakallimūn, and what they wrote is insignificant in comparison with the kindred works of the Mohammedans.”

The point is that when Maimonides went looking for *theological* works on the subject of the four necessary doctrines, he found the Jewish library lacking except to the extent they followed the Kalām lead. He does not name names, but is probably thinking of the initial chapters of the great works of Rabbis Saadia Gaon and Bahya Ibn Pakuda. There was also no point in pursuing Christian theological works because the Kalām absorbed their teachings (Guide 1:71).

Since, according to the Kalām, for a variety of reasons, the world must have been created, then it obviously followed that it had to have a Creator, *Q.E.D.* All of their works sought to prove the existence of the Creator from the disputed premise of creation. That is why the Kalām failed to make convincing arguments. They strove to prove creation, at all costs, irrespective of the fact that no such proof exists. That was a fault of theology as a whole:

“We merely maintain that the earlier theologians, both of the Greek Christians and of the Mohammedans, when they laid down their propositions, did not investigate *the real properties of things*: first of all they considered what must be the properties of the things which should yield proof for or against a certain creed; and when this was found they asserted that the thing must be endowed with those properties; then they employed the same assertion as a proof for the identical arguments which had led to the assertion, and by which they either supported or refuted a certain opinion.”
(Guide 1:71)

In other words, the theologians argued in favor of their preconceived notions. Of them, Themistius scoffed: “the properties of things do not adapt themselves to our opinions, but our opinions must be adapted to the existing properties.” Instead, by making “the properties of things” reflect their dogmas, theology had cut itself off from reality. This was precisely what the Kalām had done, and why it had left the four necessary doctrines of religion unsupported. (Themistius, 317-387 CE, see Guide 1:71 and my discussion there).

Yehuda Even-Shmuel makes the same point in a slightly different way. The reason the Kalām, and theology generally, failed to prove the incorporeality of God, was their desire to establish God as Creator (*kdei l'hishair makom l'borei*, in order to leave room for the Creator). Their insistence was prior to what we might actually learn about creation, and, if necessary, in spite of that evidence. But their proofs could not succeed, since all proof presumes a lawfully ordered world, in which the human intellect is competent (*s'mukhot*) to draw conclusions from the evidence of the senses. Besides, had they proceeded in a scientific manner, they would have found that it was really rather easy (*n'kala*) to make this proof, i.e., the proof that since God could not be composite He could not be corporeal. (Even-Shmuel's Hebrew commentary to the Guide, p. 515).

These last three chapters revealed the impotence of the theologians. In our own chapter, Maimonides shockingly let his Corporealist beat the theologians, shattering the strongest “proofs” that they had against divine corporeality.

Most of Maimonides' proofs, by contrast, came from the philosophers. Unlike the theologians, the philosophers rejected preconceived notions and received opinion. By disputing everything, they left only the individual pursuit of truth.

Can religion turn to philosophy to secure its own foundational doctrines?

THE HALACHIC AUTHORIZATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Maimonides' argument for the incorporeality of God quoted above is a philosophic argument. Its source is clearly Aristotelian. That raises the question of whether the Guide is a book of philosophy.

Leo Strauss, in his introductory essay to the Pines translation, said that the Guide was a Jewish book, not a philosophic book. His statement was, perhaps, intentionally paradoxical, since Strauss certainly regarded it either as a work of political philosophy or as secretly Aristotelian. (For the former, see Strauss' *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chicago, 1988, page 91; for the latter, see my note at the end of the chapter essay on Guide 1:71, "Was Maimonides a Theologian?")

I prefer the formulation in Strauss' early work, *Philosophie und Gesetz (Philosophy and Law*, SUNY, 1995, Ch. 2, esp. 89-92), where he had Maimonides making the case that Jewish law authorized philosophy, just because of this need for solid arguments against corporealism and dualism. Since we must make those arguments, the Guide is undeniably philosophical, even if not primarily philosophical (as I have emphasized in these essays). Strauss wrote, "Philosophy is commanded by the law, philosophy is authorized by the law."

But is philosophy antithetical to religion? Is it dangerous? Its portal bears this admonition:

"If you wish to go in search of truth, cast aside your passions (*hitravravut* = vanities, conceits; Judeo-Ar.: אלהרי), your tradition, and your fondness of things you have been accustomed to cherish, if you wish to guard yourself against error..." (Guide 1:76)

His sentence concludes with a warning not to follow the path of the Kalām, but the point is that you must cast aside passion and even *tradition* if you want to find the true case against divine corporeality. This is so important that one must dare to enter the realm of philosophy. If you conceive a prejudice against doing so and take up the Kalām type of argument instead, you could end up as a corporealist heretic, since you would be unable to counter the Corporealist's argument.

Rabbi Shem Tov's explanation of the problem of tradition is worth reviewing at length:

"OBSERVE, you seekers after truth, how Maimonides destroyed the arguments of the Kalām whereby they sought to prove creation *ex nihilo*, and their arguments that there must perforce be a Creator, one, and incorporeal. Observe, also, that people are accustomed from childhood to believe in creation. That is why Kalām thinking is so popular, since they would always start from the 'proof' of creation and only then use that to 'prove' the other three requirements of all religion: divine existence, unity, and incorporeality. Therefore, Maimonides demanded that you turn away from the tents of these evildoers, for any man who considers himself a seeker should withdraw from dwelling in their company, rather should you seek truth, abandoning passionate desires, especially desires for those things you considered great while you were growing up. For there is nothing so injurious as that to which we have become accustomed. The seeker should not turn to received opinion, for it is easy to accept, requiring no thought. You should have no inclination but to know truth *qua* truth, inclining neither to passion nor to opinions merely accepted from childhood. Do not cause your soul to err by following these theologians, for they 'leapt from the frying pan into the fire.' By this remark, Maimonides referred to their inveterate but failed attempts to establish creation *ex nihilo*, which only ended when they destroyed the [natural] basis for the real proofs for divine existence, unity and incorporeality. For the Kalām rejected the actual natures of existent beings. They altered

the creation of heaven and earth with their propositions, which they meant to prove creation, but which never succeeded. Creation cannot be established by proof. But, by contrast, the proofs of divine existence, unity and incorporeality all follow from the natures of existing things, known and apprehensible by sense and intellect.” (My trans., from his commentary on our Guide chapter, *ad loc*, 133a-133b.)

A TALMUDIC AUTHORIZATION FOR PHILOSOPHY?

The law may authorize the pursuit of philosophy to secure the necessary doctrines of religion. There is precedent in the Talmud, *Shabbat 75A*. Accurate calendrical calculation is so important that it might be illegal for a judge to ignore or put aside his Hellenic astronomical knowledge, due to its pagan origin. Maimonides wrote a *Responsa* (no. 61) explaining the breadth of this doctrine:

“Question: Where the Talmud says, ‘Someone who knows how to compute cosmic cycles and planetary courses but does not make these computations, one may hold no discussion with him...[And] of him Scripture saith, *They regard not the work of the Lord, neither have they considered the operation of His hands.*’ (*Shabbat 75a*, quoting Isa. 5:12). How should we think about this? Does it make a difference whether we should consider that this is or is not a commandment? (This question was prompted by the appearance of the word *mitzvah* in the subsequent Talmud passage, ‘How do we know that one is *commanded* to compute cosmic cycles and planetary courses?’).

Answer: When it says ‘Someone who knows how to compute cosmic cycles and planetary courses,’ this would include knowledge of astronomy, intercalation, and mathematics, in all of their details. And when it says, ‘Someone who knows... but does not make these computations,’ it refers to someone who has the ability to do so. These disciplines are keys of wisdom, and it refers to someone who knows their axioms and does not put them to use to make these computations. The question is, in such a case, what would be the benefit of this knowledge. Already Rabbi Meir in the *Baraita* declaimed: *Contemplate God’s works through which you can recognize He who spoke and the world came to be.*” (My trans.)

Maimonides meant that he was prepared to give the Talmud’s somewhat limited authorization of Hellenic learning a very broad construction. We are to “contemplate God’s works” in earthy nature and the heavenly cosmos. If we fail, we have lost an opportunity to acknowledge divine power.

If true for calendrical calculations confronting the Jewish court, how much more must this be true for the four necessary doctrines of religion. That same Talmudic section permits study of pagan doctrine “in order to understand and instruct.” The *Kalām* refused to do so.

The pursuit of philosophy is the individual pursuit of the truth. In the wrong hands, it could undermine religion’s *communal* reliance on revealed law. The solution is Maimonides’ program for his student. The student, who has already mastered the law, prepares, “casting aside...passions.” He engages in serious unprejudiced study of these matters, and when properly directed emerges from perplexity. He is then *qualified* for the important philosophic demonstration that God is not a body, a demonstration that the law itself demands.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Islam saw the danger and rejected philosophy. We can date the closing of the Muslim mind from the last decade of the 12th century, when Islamic fundamentalists murdered the Illuminist philosopher Suhrawardi and exiled the Aristotelian Averroës (1192 and 1195, respectively; note that the Guide was completed in

1190). The result was that the Muslim world committed itself to the fatalist outlook that man could learn nothing from nature. Thus followed the decline of Muslim intellectual life. Bernard Lewis dates this decline from the Ottoman period in his *What Went Wrong?*, but had not gone back far enough. Maimonides, in these last few Guide chapters, revealed why their thinking went wrong.

The contrast of the Christian world with the Muslim is compelling. Thomas Aquinas adopts Maimonides and saves Christendom from the Kalāmīc impulse. At the same time, the Muslim world ignored Maimonides and persecuted its great thinkers, Averroës and Suhrawardi.

(*What Went Wrong*, Oxford, 2001. For the contrary view, see Peter Adamson interview: <http://fivebooks.com/interview/peter-adamson-philosophy-islamic-world/>. Recently, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, Robert Reilly, Barnes and Noble 2010 is in general agreement with Lewis, but dates the decline from before Maimonides time, from the rise of Asharism. It is a popularization based on secondary sources, but his assembly of Arabic-speaking contemporary critics is impressive).

THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST VOLUME

With this preface, Maimonides promises, in Book Two, to turn his attention to philosophy proper, and to show how it provides strong support for three of the four most important doctrines of religion: Divine existence, unity, and incorporeality. He adopts (*sh'naniakh*), for the sake of argument, the philosophers' eternalism, i.e., that the world was not created. He immediately says, convincingly, that he does not believe in that premise (*im ki ain anu b'dea zo*), but that he assumes it, provisionally, to secure the proofs of those other three doctrines. Having secured that needful thing, he turns to the fourth necessary doctrine of religion to dissect Aristotle's case against God's creation of the world.

The downfall of the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic earth-centered cosmology removed the major philosophical proof for the existence of God, i.e., the need for a greater force to impel the infinite motion of the cosmic sphere. Maimonides had other arguments, as we will see, but to our modern way of thinking, the whole procedure seems flawed. Others, including Aquinas, took up the search for proofs of God, but since they already possessed unshakable faith, it is hard to see why they did so. We no longer find rabbis and theologians propounding proofs for God's existence. So why did the medieval scholastics continue to fabricate such demonstrations, which mostly fail to convince?

The entire issue of the provability of the divine opens its own problematic. On the one hand, there is an urge to support objectively what we subjectively believe. If something is real we should be able to show it. But we must recognize that there is no deductive proof of God's existence or of creation *ex nihilo*. Probably the best attempt was Anselm's Ontological Proof, in its many versions, but it is fair to ask if that "proof" ever convinced anyone of God's existence. (Anselm 1033 – 1109. The proof: It is better to exist in reality than in the mind only. It would therefore be contradictory for God, defined as the being than which none greater can be conceived, to exist only in the mind. Therefore, God exists. Congratulations to Mr. Chris Hallquist for this welcome simplification of the proof.)

The answer is that it was never Maimonides' purpose to come up with such proofs. He mostly just reviews arguments of others. His purpose, rather, was to reestablish prophecy, as I have maintained. The reason we already believe in God is twofold: 1) we recognize the reality of the dimension of the sacred in our lives (see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*), and, 2) precisely, because we have the testimony of prophecy, which Maimonides and many ancient philosophers accepted as a reliable basis for belief (See my discussion at Guide 1:50: "Can there be *I'tiqad* of Prophecy?").

The turn to philosophy is not the final objective of the Maimonidean project. The center of the book, from the thirty-second chapter of Volume Two until the end of that volume, is prophecy. We will later discuss why this should be so. My point now is to emphasize that Maimonides' goal is the return of prophecy to Israel.

Prophecy resembles philosophy somewhat, but the resemblance only goes so far. Prophecy requires prophets. The prophet is a religious hero who, *at minimum*, can secure these four religious foundations, using the tools of philosophy.

Philosophy is part of the training of prophets for two reasons. *First*, because philosophy is the individual pursuit of truth, the philosopher must learn to sort things out for himself. That is also a fundamental requirement of the prophetic pursuit:

“The *Maaseh Merkava* must not be fully expounded even in the presence of a single student, unless he be wise and *able to reason for himself*, and even then you should merely acquaint him with the heads of the different sections (chapter headings) of the subject’ (Talmud, *Hagigah* 11b). You must, therefore, not expect from me more than such heads.” (Guide: Introduction)

There are many reasons for this peculiar method of teaching, some of which we have addressed. At the deepest level of the religious pursuit, the attempt to achieve the special divine contact called prophecy, the student must think things through like a philosopher, by having an honest dialogue with himself. Prophets can be trained, to some extent, but, ultimately, they are unique individuals who must educate themselves. They are students who have mastered the law and the sciences, and who pick up hints from their teachers. These hints are the chapter headings of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*, the mystery of Creation and the mystery of Providence. By *linking* heading to heading, and parable to parable, those students transform themselves, becoming channels of the divine emanation.

Secondly, both philosophy and prophecy are solitary meditative pursuits. While Judaism generally opposes the solitary pursuits in favor of the communal ones, this is not true in the case of prophecy. The prophet's solitary pursuit resembles that of the philosopher. Solitary contemplation is the necessary preparation for prophecy. In a fascinating essay on meditation, *hitbodedut*, Maimonides' son, R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam, explained that the biblical patriarchs' inveterate pursuit of shepherding was really about their commitment to such solitary contemplation. R. Avraham Ibn Ezra clarified: “The sons [students] of the prophets would isolate themselves, in the hopes that each would receive power, each according to his own capacities.” It is what Maimonides meant by his frequent quotation of Psalms 4:4: “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still: *Selah*.”

The divine contact occurs on that lonely field. The prophet prepares for it, with his investigations and his meditations, but only God controls the process.

That is the significant difference between philosophy and prophecy. In philosophy, God may provide the philosopher's inspired moment, the problem-solving breakthrough, but otherwise plays no role in the process. The reverse is the case in prophecy. The solution of problems and penetration of problematics is not the prophet's primary concern. His deepest desire, expressed in his awed mystical love, is contact, mind to mind, the transforming moment when the limited meets the transcendent, and attains transcendence. He needs this contact for its own sake, not for any other purpose, however communally or personally beneficial the result may prove to be.

The first volume of the Guide represents the first stage of the prophet's training. Through it he achieves liberation from the grip of the imagination, the corporeal unconsciousness which substitutes for thought and leads to idolatry.

(On "linking" as a higher type of meditation, see my *Introduction I*. On R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam, see his work *The Guide to Serving God*, trans. R. Yaakov Wincelberg, p. 497, Feldheim 2008. R. Avraham Ibn Ezra in his Torah Commentary, in the translation and discussion of Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, Princeton 2007, p. 46. See recent corroboration of my conclusions in Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's newly transcribed 1951 lectures on the Guide, *Maimonides – Between Philosophy and Halachah*, KTAV Publishing, 2016, especially in chapters I, IV, VI, and Introduction, pp. 31-43).

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