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Maimonides on Maimonides

Loving God Rabbinically and Philosophically

A JURIDICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL SYMBIOSIS ON LOVE

Before embarking on a discussion of the long and continuing history of exegetical engagements with Maimonidean thought, it is fitting to examine the dynamics of Maimonides' own concept of the love of God, a core theological, philosophical, juridical, and Jewish notion. There are three reasons to do so. First, in order to appreciate subsequent engagements with Maimonides' view of the subject, it is necessary to secure a basic grasp of what precisely attracted, inspired, or repulsed later thinkers about Maimonides' thought in the first place. The issue of love bears heavily on many of the positions that would have challenged those who struggled with his thought and were either offended by or attracted to it. Love is also paradigmatic of what I believe is the extreme intellectualist posture that lies at the core of Maimonides' thought, and it evoked such controversy as to cause a virtual schism within Judaism, heatedly drawn along the lines between its advocates and its assailants.[1] Second, love illustrates Maimonides' own exegetical strategies vis-à-vis the canonical Jewish textual tradition that exercised subsequent exegetical encounters to either contend with, subvert, endorse, or recalibrate it, in the process of advancing their own models of Jewish theology. Third, love is the premiere example of what I consider here to be an essential feature of Jewish intellectual history since Maimonides. It illustrates well the ongoing process of reworking and refining, unfolding internally within his own thought and producing works of different

[1] For just the beginnings of this battle, see Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180–1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965). For one dimension of this continuing struggle in the fourteenth century that demonstrates how fierce the Maimonidean war became, see Moshe Halbertal, "R. Menachem ha-Meiri and the Debate Over the Study of Philosophy," in his *Between Torah and Wisdom: Rabbi Menachem ha-Meiri and the Maimonidean Halakhists in Provence* (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), 152–80.

genres that look dialogically to each other – in other words, Maimonides engaging Maimonides.

Though Maimonides did not compose a running commentary on any of the books of the Hebrew Bible, he did cite a myriad of verses throughout his works no matter the genre, be it law, philosophy, commentary on classical rabbinic texts such as the Mishnah, or letters and responsa. As mentioned in the introduction, in good rabbinic form such citation inundates the landscape of his vast literary corpus and at times forms the connective thread between what is often bifurcated as philosophy on the one hand and law on the other.[2] When one lays these different works side by side, inconsistencies or, worse, outright contradictions result that may be variously explained by different aims or disparate audiences,[3] or they may be attributed to the inescapable cost of esoteric writing that intentionally obfuscates what it is claiming to explicate.

As Maimonides himself admits quite explicitly, this is the style he adopts in composing the *Guide of the Perplexed*, which necessitates contradictory and disjointed treatments of its obscure subject matter.[4] Such an apparently evasive style is undertaken on one level, in the interests of good pedagogy (GP, Introduction, pp. 17–18, fifth contradiction). On an entirely different level, the halakhic constraints and inherent demands of secrecy in the transmission of esoterica require conscious subterfuge "to conceal some parts and to disclose others," while at the same time it must be subtle enough to escape the attention of "the vulgar who must in no way be aware of the contradiction" (GP, 18, seventh contradiction).[5] However, the appearance of a common verse intersecting different works, or repeated within the same work, might offer a clue

[2] The *Guide*, with its emphasis on devising new ways of reading biblical parables, cannot easily be described as "philosophical." Likewise, as is the case with the subject matter of this paper, the Mishneh Torah, with its periodic nonlegal digressions, escapes a simple classification as a legal code. See Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), esp. chap. 6, who notes "that the ongoing reciprocity and complementarity of law and philosophy is a key feature of the Code" (357).

[3] For one sophisticated example of this, see Marvin Fox, "Prayer in Maimonides' Thought," in *Prayer in Judaism*, ed. M. Bernard (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 119–41.

[4] A good proponent of this view is again Marvin Fox, "A New View of Maimonides' Method of Contradictions," *Annual of Bar Ilan University* (1987): 19–43, who argues that Maimonides' "contradictions," or rather what he terms "divergences," are much like Kant's antinomies, for when discussing God, "we no longer have the controls which are necessary for philosophic clarity and reliability" (21–22).

[5] On this seventh contradiction, see Yair Lorberbaum, "'The Seventh Cause': On the Contradictions in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed: A Reappraisal" (Heb.), Tarbiz* 69 (1999–2000): 213–37, and "On Contradictions, Rationality, Dialectics, and Esotericism in Maimonides's '*Guide* of the Perplexed,'" *Review of Metaphysics* 55, no. 4 (June 2002): 711–50, who, contra Strauss and Pines, argues that the seventh contradiction necessitates concealment for sociopolitical reasons rather than to hide heterodox Aristotelian philosophical positions. For a stinging critique of Strauss's view, see Herbert Davidson, *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 393–402, where he accuses Strauss of turning the *Guide* into "one of the most grotesque books ever written" (401). He also argues that the search for contradictions

to generating a symbiosis of meaning rather than what appears immediately as a dissonance of one.[6] As I have demonstrated in previous studies (for example, with the subject of leprosy, to whose complex regulatory scheme an entire section in Maimonides' legal code, the Mishneh Torah, is dedicated), many of the verses cited in a lengthy non-halakhic, or homiletic, segment mirror those embedded in various contexts of the philosophical *Guide of the Perplexed*.[7] As such, the full import of his presentation in the code can only be grasped once the two are read via an interlocking hermeneutic that produces a coherent integration of jurisprudence and philosophy.

Although Maimonides' esoteric style has led to endless debate regarding his true positions, in some sense subsequent Jewish intellectual history would have been all the more impoverished without it.[8] His style fueled a rich series of Maimonidean interpretations and appropriations, as well as defenses and assaults. That roiling history shaped the contours of Jewish thought from the medieval to the modern periods, and crossed the boundaries of all learned environments, each worthy of study on their own. These different "houses of study" (*batei midrash*) include traditional rabbinic inquiry (as the chapter on R. Kook demonstrates), scholarly critical debate (as I would categorize the chapter on Spinoza), or philosophically constructive investigation (the chapter on Hermann Cohen). Indeed, this very book could not have been written without Maimonides' enigmatic and provocative style.[9]

may be futile considering that Maimonides wrote his introduction before writing the *Guide* and the contradictions he planned never actually materialized (391). See also Kenneth Seeskin's appendix to his book *Searching for a Distant God: The Legacy of Maimonides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 177–88, which is also dedicated to a sustained critique of Strauss.

[6] For a good example of the interdependence between the *Guide* and the Mishneh Torah, see Josef Stern's novel and convincing treatment of the seemingly contradictory positions on the commandment of "chasing the mother bird from the nest" (*shiluah ha-ken*). See his "On an Alleged Contradiction between Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and *Mishneh Torah*" (Heb.), *Shenaton HaMishpat HaIvri* 14–15, (1989): 283–98, reprinted in English in *Problems and Parables of the Law* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), chap. 3. For some others who have also advocated this homogeneity between Maimonides' legal and philosophical works, see David Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976), and Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Emunato shel HaRambam* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv: Misrad HaBitahon, 1980).

[7] See "Maimonides on Leprosy: Illness as Contemplative Metaphor," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 1 (2006): 95–122.

[8] For such a history, see Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the *Guide of the Perplexed*: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Centuries," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 159–207, who considers it "the most fascinating story in the history of Jewish philosophy" (207).

[9] Maimonides himself considered controversy over his work inevitable since he admits that his treatise is addressed to a "single virtuous man" at the cost of "displeasing ten thousand ignoramuses" (GP, Introduction, p, 16). Even the strictly legal formulations in the Mishneh Torah were shaped often by philosophical considerations. See Jacob Levinger, *Maimonides as Philosopher and Codifier* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989), chap. 4, and Marc Shapiro's detailed review of Maimonides' philosophically driven agenda to cleanse Jewish law of its superstitious tendencies in "Maimonidean Halakhah and Superstition," *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008): 27–53, revised

On the issue of love of God, I am in complete agreement with Howard Kreisel's finding of an "overall consistency" between the *Guide* and the Mishneh Torah. Indeed, the different, though not all that neatly separated, audiences which the two works contemplate, generally divided between a mass readership and the philosophically astute elite, "did not lead him to formulate his views differently on this issue."[10] I likewise argue that such is the case with a primary commandment in Jewish law to love God, but by a different route: I focus in particular on his philosophical transformations of biblical material[11] and exegetical manipulation of the Song of Songs as the biblical epitome of such love, as well as other verses ancillary to the message of the Song. In addition, I trace a rationale for his methodical alternation at crucial junctures between divine appellations. This internal dialogical aspect of his writing reveals Maimonides' ongoing engagement with his own thought throughout his life in the form of revision and refinement rather than outright retraction. Consonant with this maturation process is an ongoing interpretive project, where later refinements often disclose the inherent logic of previous biblical exegetical maneuvers that were consciously left initially opaque or were somehow sensed as appropriate but only fully worked out when his thought matured further.

As is the case with the rest of the Hebrew biblical canon, though no comprehensive commentary on the Song is undertaken, key verses from it arise at critical junctures throughout his various works, including the *Guide of the Perplexed*, the Mishneh Torah, the commentary to the Mishnah, and his letters cum responsa.[12] Aside from the anomalous absence of God from an entire biblical book, one might think that a rigorous medieval rationalist such as Maimonides would avoid the thoroughgoing eroticism and sensuality that suffuses the Song altogether, let alone celebrate its narrative as exemplary of the very highest of religio/intellectual mandates.[13] However, ever since the second-century rabbinic

and expanded in his *Studies in Maimonides and His Interpreters* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 95–150.

[10] Howard Kreisel, "Love and Fear of God in Maimonides' Thought" (Heb.), *Daat* 37 (1996): 127–51, reprinted in English in his *Maimonides' Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law, and the Human Ideal* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999) 225–66, at 264.

[11] See the short bibliography on this by Robert Eisen, "The Hermeneutics of Order in Medieval Jewish Philosophical Exegesis," in *Philosophers and the Jewish Bible*, ed. Charles Harry Manekin and Robert Eisen (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2008), 61–77, at 61n1.

[12] See Joseph Kafih's tally of all citations in Maimonides' corpus in his concordance *The Bible in Maimonides* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1971), 129. Maimonides reports of a commentary he began titled the Book of Prophecy that would include an "elucidation of the parables occurring in the prophetic books," but which he abandoned in favor of presumably the preferable treatment in the *Guide*, which adopted "another manner of explanation" (GP, pp. 10–11). Thus a systematic commentary was replaced by a disjointed erratic treatment that better suited his esoteric project. Further, the Song's parable, as with many other biblical parables, can only be deciphered by combing through Maimonides' corpus for cited verses and excerpted passages and piecing them together.

[13] The literature on the Song is vast, but for one contemporary assessment of its thoroughgoing eroticism, see J. William Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge

master R. Akiva classified the work as the "holy of holies,"[14] possessed of even greater sacredness than the rest of the prophetic corpus, its patent profanity has been co-opted into the service of the religio/spiritual sphere.[15] Its literary pulsating eros was taken to reflect the intensity of a spousal-like relationship between the nation of Israel, or the Jews, and God, best captured by analogy to the romance between a man and a woman. Though the Song's sensual passion had been channeled into spiritual impulse and yearning, setting the pace for much of the history of the Song's exegesis, one would still have expected the obsessive Maimonidean anti-anthropomorphism crusade to eschew any positive deference to the Song's boldly carnal imagery. How could the man who expressed such an aversion to the "bestial" pleasures of sexual relations,[16] or for that matter, the sense of touch altogether, endorsing Aristotle's view of it as a "disgrace" (GP, II:36, p. 371),[17] find anything instructive for man's posture vis-à-vis God in the Song's microscopically adoring gaze over the human anatomy?

Yet Maimonides, in his legal code, promotes the compulsive lover of the Song as the archetype for the lover of knowledge, and of God as the ultimate object of

University Press, 1998), who asserts that "its sublimity most fully realizes itself within the comic rhythms of a cosmos exuberantly alive with the pulsating power of eros" (277).

[14] *M. Yadayim* 3:5. On what the precise meaning of this is in various rabbinic sources, see Shaul Lieberman, "Mishnat Shir HaShirim," in Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), 118–26.

[15] For an excellent modern scholarly biblical commentary on the Song, which also engages the prolific history of Jewish and Christian exegesis, see Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), and the extensive bibliography provided at 233–88. As Maimonides' descendants, beginning with his own son Abraham, turned toward a Sufi-influenced mysticism, it is not surprising to find a commentary on the Song penned by one of them. See Paul Fenton, "A Mystical Commentary on the Song of Songs in the Hand of David Maimonides II," in *Esoteric and Exoteric Aspects in Judeo-Arabic Culture*, ed. Benjamin Hary and Haggai Ben-Shammai (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 19–53. As we shall see, Maimonides' adoption of the Song as an allegory for the love of God lent itself to mystical interpretations. See also S. D. Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides and His Pietist Circle," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 145–64; Shalom Rosenberg, "Philosophical Hermeneutics on the Song of Songs: Introductory Remarks," (Heb.) *Tarbiz* 59 (1990): 133–51; Barry D. Walfish. "Annotated Bibliography of Medieval Jewish Commentaries on Song of Songs" (Heb.), in Sarah Yafet, ed. *Ha-Mikra be-re' i Mefarshav: Sefer Zikkaron leSarah Kamin* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1974), 517–81.

[16] Though it deserves an independent treatment, I believe it is fair to place Maimonides squarely within the history of what Lawrence Osborne termed "sexual pessimism," which views sexual relations, outside of what is necessary for health and propagation, as a cause of estrangement from God. See his *The Poisoned Embrace: A Brief History of Sexual Pessimism* (New York: Pantheon, 1993).

[17] See also MT, Ethical Traits, 3:2, 4:19, and 5:4, which treat sexual relations from clinical medical perspectives, and Warren Zev Harvey's analysis in "Sex and Health in Maimonides," in *Moses Maimonides: Physician, Scientist, and Philosopher*, ed. S. Kottek and F. Rosner, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993), 33–39.

that knowledge. Correspondingly, in the *Guide*, he appropriates the Song's images to capture his supreme ideal of the purely contemplative life. Maimonides thus shifts the traditional interpretation of the Song's love from community to the individual resulting in an allegory of noetic eros between the religious intellectual and God, rather than the covenantal bond between nation and its divine lawgiver.[18] Ironically, it will become clear that the intellectual intensity of Maimonides' archetypal lover supplants the profound offensiveness of its signifiers in the Song. In addition, these philosophically obnoxious sexual metaphors and others drawn from the Song reflect a symbiotically interlocking hermeneutic between his "esoteric" philosophical works and his "popular" legal works.[19] Though the *Guide*'s composition postdated the Mishneh Torah, it is crafted in a way that engages the Mishneh Torah both by building onto it and allowing readers a glimpse into the Mishneh Torah's original intentionality. Thus love's legal parameters are shaped both juridically and philosophically in a tight weave whose warp and woof consist of classical rabbinic exegetical strategies.[20]

LOVE'S MANY FACES IN MAIMONIDES

Maimonides' initial tabulation of all the commandments compiled in the *Book of the Commandments (Sefer HaMitzvot)* first posits the love of God as the third of 613 formal commandments, subsequent to those of knowing

[18] A. S. Halkin asserts that Maimonides was "the spiritual father of the group of commentators who substituted the individual for the nation as the theme of the allegory" of the Song. Halkin, "Ibn Aknin's Commentary on Song of Songs," in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, English section (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950), 389–424, at 396. According to Menachem Kellner, Maimonides is the first to veer from the rabbinic paradigm of an Israel/God relationship, which avoided the individual slant for fear of its vulnerability to misinterpretation and extolling the physical/erotic dimensions over the spiritual/communal one. See Kellner, *Commentary on Song of Songs by Rabbi Levi ben Gershom* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2001), 31.

[19] As Isadore Twersky has argued, Maimonides' code "reveals a vigorous intellectualistic posture usually associated with the *Guide,*" and his image "as a philosopher insisting upon the superiority of the theoretical life . . . is, in fact, fully developed in the pre-*Guide* writings." See "Some Non-Halakhic Aspects of the *Mishneh Torah*," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 95–118 at 95.

[20] In an important but underappreciated essay on Maimonides' incorporation of biblical prooftexts in the *Sefer HaMadda*, Moshe Greenberg identifies fifteen different hermeneutical procedures at play that must be recognized to fully appreciate Maimonides' use of biblical references, which is rarely for mere embellishment. His conclusion is critical for any proper understanding of these prooftexts in the Mishneh Torah, since they "establish the authority of the hermeneutical procedures that the Code's readers must employ in order to reason from the plain sense of scripture to its use in the Code." See "The Use of Scripture in Classical Medieval Judaism: Prooftexts in Maimonides' Code," in *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*, ed. Peter Ochs (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 197–232, at 198.

God's existence and unity.[21] Included under the normative rubric of loving God is an additional mandate to proselytize and propagate monotheistic belief and worship among others – that is, one's private love is so impassioned as to spur the urge to form a community of lovers united by the same object of desire. It is important to note here that this is not a call for conversion to the religion of Judaism but an obligation to foster a global subscription to the universal truth of God's existence. Following its numerical order established in the *Sefer HaMitzvot*, he then elaborates on it within the Mishneh Torah toward the beginning of the Book of Knowledge in the section entitled the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah. A lengthy interregnum ensues dealing with laws governing, among others, such things as martyrdom, ethical traits, *imitatio dei*, the teaching and studying of Torah, idolatry, and finally repentance. The subject of love is sufficiently crucial to warrant revisiting at the very end of the last section in the Laws of Repentance, where it is biblically tethered to the Song, and also acts as the denouement of the entire Book of Knowledge.

In all its contexts, love of God is so tightly bound to knowledge of Him as to virtually collapse any distinction between the two. Its intellectual parameters are established already in the *Sefer HaMitzvot*, which mandates contemplation of God's "commandments" and "works" as the sole means of "attaining a conception of God and reach that stage of joy in which love of Him will follow of necessity."[22] When the subject is first taken up in the Mishneh Torah, its intellectual tenor, with some subtle changes, is essentially preserved. Love's observance as a commandment is fulfilled by "contemplating (שיתבונן) His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtain a glimpse of His wisdom (חכמתו) which is incomparable and infinite." The immediate consequence of this purely noetic activity is "love, praise, and glorification of Him and long with an exceeding longing to know (לידע) His great Name."[23] Since love is conditioned by an understanding of God's creation, Maimonides then logically follows up with a detailed description of the structure of the world, both physically and metaphysically, briefly summarizing the subject matter of those esoteric disciplines rabbinically classified as the Account of the Creation and the Account of the Chariot, equated by Maimonides with the philosophical curriculum of physics and metaphysics.[24] That presentation then concludes with a reiteration of its knowledge as an essential prerequisite to the cultivation of love – "when a man reflects (מתבונן) on all these things... and discerns God's wisdom (חכמתו) in all these creatures and creations, his love for God (המקום) will increase and his soul (נפש) will thirst and his flesh (בשר) will

[21] *The Commandments of Maimonides*, trans. Charles Chavel (London, New York: Soncino Press, 1967).
[22] *Sefer HaMitzvot* (hereafter SM), 3–4.
[23] MT, Foundations of Torah, 2:2
[24] Ibid., 2:11; 4:10.

yearn to love God (המקום ברוך הוא)."[25] Thus, the injunctive formulation of loving God brackets a detailed cosmological exposition of the world's hierarchical composition. In other words, a sophisticated philosophical appreciation of whatever is knowable of the cosmos is the performative staple of the formal command (*mitzvah*) to love God. It is both what Maimonides considers initially in the Mishneh Torah as the "way" (דרך) toward loving God and finally as "augmenting" (מוסיף) it, and supplementing it with a further dimension of some deep existential pursuit of it that involves all the abstract and concrete human faculties ("soul [נפש] will thirst and his flesh [בשר] will yearn").

Maimonides returns to the subject of love and devotes the entire last chapter of the Laws of Repentance to it, seeming to merge knowledge and love even further into an inextricably intertwined unity that renders one virtually synonymous with the other. Such an identity reaches its apex in the ultimate paragraph, where he espouses the "self evident" (דבר ידוע וברור) nature of the proposition that

> love does not become closely knit in a man's heart until he is thoroughly and continuously possessed by it and gives up everything else in the world for it; as God commanded us *with all thy heart and all thy soul* (Deut. 6:5). One only loves God with the knowledge that one knows Him. According to the knowledge will be the love. If the former be little or much so will the latter be little or much.[26]

The uncharacteristic redundancy of a thrice-repeated, one-to-one correspondence between love and knowledge seems to categorically accentuate their coalescence into an indistinguishable unity.

A number of features of Maimonides' juridic structuring of love are enigmatic, including, among others, its interrupted treatment and different expositions and formulations between the *Sefer HaMitzvot* and two sections of the Mishneh Torah regarding love. In addition, the question arises as to whether love and knowledge are so entwined as to render the latter the sole expression of the former. It is my contention that the Song's adoption, in its entirety, as an allegory of the only love that Maimonides considers deserving of its name, the only such "fitting love" (האהבה הראויה),[27] is critical for determining the precise rationale underlying these features and resolving these questions. In particular, those verses shared between disparate works form intertexts that draw them into conversation with each other and generate new meaning. Such meaning can only be deciphered by complicating the common view of Maimonides the philosopher, who rationalizes Judaism's foundational biblical and rabbinic texts, rendering them philosophically palatable, with Maimonides the rabbi, who himself

[25] MT, Foundations of Torah, 4:12.
[26] MT, Repentance, 10:6
[27] Ibid., 10:3, "And all of *Song of Songs* is an allegory to this matter" (וכל שיר השירים משל הוא לענין זה).

engages in his own variation of midrashic discourse. As such, both the *Guide* and the Mishneh Torah intersect in their primary concern with the Hebrew Bible.

The *Guide* fits the classification of biblical exegesis far better than philosophical treatise, especially considering its targeted audience consists of "a religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief" (Introduction, p. 5),[28] and the overarching obsession of the entire *Guide* with equivocal terms or biblical language (Introduction, p. 10).[29] His methodical and ubiquitous citation from the traditional Jewish biblical and rabbinic canon transforms his philosophical and legal compositions into midrashic ones as well, which draw on the biblical cache of verses precisely the way Daniel Boyarin described the manner which midrash drew on them, as a "repertoire of semiotic elements that can be recombined into new discourse, just as words are recombined constantly into new discourse."[30] In this particular context, the midrashic intertextual incorporation of excerpts from the Song as well as other biblical sources embedded in Maimonides' disparate explications of love is the hermeneutical key to disclosing the full import of the love of God within his thought.

DIVINE NAMES AS OBJETS D'AMOUR

There are a number of what I would identify as midrashic markers that distinguish the various treatments of love in the *Sefer HaMitzvot*, the Mishneh Torah, and the *Guide* and to which this chapter will confine itself. First is the biblical personality presented in each instance as the exemplar of love, Abraham being the choice of the *Sefer HaMitzvot*, then turning to a Davidic expression of passionate longing for it excerpted from Psalms in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, and reverting back to Abraham in Laws of Repentance. Though Abraham appears twice, the biblical exemplars in each of the three cases represent entirely different facets of love. The *Sefer HaMitzvot* presents Abraham as the model for the missionary activity that Maimonides considers a second component of the normative realization of love, for "just as Abraham, on account of his loving God, as attested by the verse *Abraham my lover* (Isa. 41:8), and the

[28] As Leo Strauss observed, "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." See his introduction "How to Begin to Study the *Guide of the Perplexed*," GP, p. xiv.

[29] For a recent subscription to this view, see Arthur Hyman, "Maimonides as Biblical Exegete," in *Maimonides and His Heritage*, ed. Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, Lenn Goodman, and James Grady (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 1–12, who finds that the *Guide* and the Mishneh Torah and the *Sefer HaMitzvot* are all in some sense Bible commentaries. Even the Mishneh Torah he considers to be "essentially based on the Bible rather than on the biblical literature" (2).

[30] Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 28. See his extended discussion of the role of biblical citation in rabbinic texts in the "creation of new strings of language out of the pearls of old" (26) at 26–38. I have attenuated the thread of intertextuality that Boyarin traces from the Bible to classical rabbinic texts further to medieval philosophical texts.

strength of his apprehension of God, rallied people to believe as a result of the intensity of his love, so you must love Him to the extent of rallying people to Him." However, in sharp contradistinction, Abraham reappears at the end of the Laws of Repentance as a paragon of love who "worships out of love, occupies himself with the Law and the commandments, and walks in the path of wisdom moved neither by the fear of the bad (רעה) nor to merit the good (טובה), but does what is true simply because it is true (אמת) and ultimately benefit ensues." Rather than the public, socially responsible Abraham of the *Sefer HaMitzvot*, whose love translates outwardly into the conscription of others into his belief system, Abraham's love in the Laws of Repentance is private and self-contained, with no evident communal application. Both Abrahams' distinct sentiments of love are corroborated by the same Isaianic prooftext that singularly characterizes him as God's "lover."[31]

Each term of the cited Davidic prooftext that first illustrates the stirrings of love, *My soul (נפש nefesh) thirsts for God (אלהים elohim), for the living God (אל חי el)* (Ps. 42:3), must be cross-referenced with their lexical denotations as developed in the *Guide* in order to appreciate what precisely it captures and the appropriateness of its citation at this juncture of the Mishneh Torah's normative presentation of love. The verse is cited in the *Guide* as further linguistic support for the use of terms related to eating and drinking as metaphors for the acquisition of knowledge. The propriety of the image is rooted in an analogy of sustenance since, through intellectual apprehension, "the human form endures in the most perfect of states, just as the body endures through food in the finest of its states" (GP, I:30, p. 63). Consistently, therefore, thirst and hunger are "employed to designate lack of knowledge and of apprehension" (64). Thus, the verse as a whole addresses the question posed by the Mishneh Torah that inquires as to the "way toward loving Him," since that "way" always begins in ignorance. At this stage, it is not comprehension that generates love, but rather the simple acknowledgment of one's own ignorance by an awareness, without any probative inquiry, of what immediately presents itself – the boundless expanse of existence which radiates a wisdom that "is incomparable and infinite." The equivocal meaning the *Guide* assigns to "soul" (*nefesh*) that denotes "the rational soul, I mean the form of man" (GP, I:41), is surely the one intended by the verse in the Mishneh Torah. That "rational" form is provoked by its own

[31] Just as the figure of Abraham plays different roles within a treatment of one subject of love, he assumes many other guises in the Maimonidean corpus – as a prophet exemplifying the highest levels of prophecy short of Moses (GP, II:45, pp. 401–02); as a philosopher arriving independently at universal truths and teaching them universally (MT, Idolatry 1:3; GP, II:38; Iggeret Teman, 147); as an ethical model of the golden mean (MT, Ethical Traits, 1:7); of supererogatory nature (MT, Mourning 14:2); and the "father of all nations" and therefore of all converts (MT, First Fruits, 4:3). See Masha Turner's survey of all these Maimonidean variations of Abraham, "The Patriarch Abraham in Maimonidean Thought" (Heb.), in *The Faith of Abraham in Light of Interpretation throughout the Ages*, ed. Moshe Hallamish, Hannnah Kasher, and Yohanan Silman (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2003), 143–54.

"thirst," or ignorance, to aspire toward understanding and the love it automatically inspires. Maimonides' David echoes none other than Plato's Socrates, who famously declares that "philosophy begins in wonder."[32] Thus, the Mishneh Torah's formulation here translates into the proposition that the catalyst for acquiring knowledge is for the intellect to be overwhelmed by its own ignorance.

Since the potential lover at this point is mired in ignorance, Maimonides was very precise in his choice of a prooftext that designates, by its naming, particular conceptions of God which might first present themselves to an uninformed "soul" or intellect. One is signified by the name *elohim*, whose semantic sense the *Guide* extends to both angels and the deity (GP, I:2). Since much of what needs to be studied in the rest of the Mishneh Torah is a comprehensive cosmological schema of the world whose various components are signified by the term "angels,"[33] the divine name *elohim* on one level captures precisely the subjects that form the core curriculum for achieving love. In fact, the *Guide* broadens the semantic range of the term "angels" to such an extent as to encompass every single facet of creation and virtually every causal force or act, whether animate or inanimate, within the world. He appeals to the expansive range of the biblical term *angel* as a metaphor for such disparate items as the separate intellects, animal movements, the elements, human beings, prophets, and psychological impulses, to conclude that all "individual, natural and psychic forces are called *angels*" (GP, II:6, pp. 262–64).[34] As such, on another level, their study will also lead to that God who is designated as the *elohim* of the *elohim* in Deuteronomy 10:17, which, taking it in the sense of judging or governing, means "the deity of the angels" (261).

The other name of God that is the object of the soul's thirst in Psalms is *el*, one that the *Guide* pairs with *elohim* in representing a similar relationship between God and the creation, and "used with respect to His perfection, may He be exalted, and theirs . . . with respect to His rank in being and in relation to theirs. For He is the deity and not they" (GP, II:30, pp. 358–59). This is also a most apt term as the ultimate goal that will quench the thirst of ignorance in the quest for loving God, since in its connotation of contradistinction between the creator and the creation, it safeguards against a confusion of the two. As Maimonides' historical account of the evolution of idolatry demonstrates, observation of the creation's realia can all too easily become a progressive fixation with them as

[32] See *Theaeteus* 155d.

[33] See, for example, MT, Foundations of the Torah, 2:7.

[34] Moshe Idel details how this identification between the name *elohim* and nature was absorbed into kabbalistic terminology and ultimately led to Spinoza's notion of *deus sive natura*. In fact, the prominent thirteenth-century kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, noted the numerical equivalence between *elohim* and the Hebrew word for "the natural" (*hateva*). See his "Deus sive Natura: The Metamorphosis of a Dictum from Maimonides to Spinoza," in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Robert S. Cohen and Hillel Levine (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 87–110. See also Warren Z. Harvey's analysis of Idel's argument in "Idel on Spinoza," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 6, no. 18 (Winter 2007): 88–94, at 88–89.

objects of worship rather than of scientific investigation. Such in fact was the case in Maimonides' historical reconstruction of the world's gradual lapse into an idolatrous theology. The pristine monotheism espoused by Adam and his grandson Enosh, at the beginning of time, deteriorated incrementally over the subsequent years to the point of deification of created entities such as the heavenly bodies. This spiritual and intellectual decline mapped itself along a corresponding loss of cognition of the one authentic deity whose name "was forgotten by mankind, vanished from their lips and hearts, and was no longer known to them."[35]

Once the survey of all the subjects subsumed under the disciplines of physics and metaphysics in chapters 2, 3, and 4 is complete, Maimonides describes an entirely new state of love inspired by "understanding these things and cognizing all the created things from the angel, the sphere, and the human being, and the like, and perceiving God's wisdom in all the formations and creations." At that stage, one would have expected the yearning for love induced by ignorance in the face of the vast expanse of the universe that launched the extensive survey to be satiated, for the "thirst" to have been quenched. Yet in perfect literary and conceptual symmetry, the new informed awareness engenders further "thirst," even more intense than the original catalyst that prompted the painstaking quest for a scientific proficiency in the workings of the cosmos. At the same time that proficiency "increases love for God" (*makom* = the Place), it also ignites an impassioned craving where "his soul (*nefesh*) thirsts and his flesh (*basar*) yearns for the love of God (*makom*) blessed be He." That longing for an object of knowledge motivates the acquisition of knowledge, which, in turn, incites further longing, is no surprise when that object is "incomparable and infinite." Knowledge for Maimonides does not consist of simply a feeling, a sense, or an unreasoned belief but rather "what has been represented in the soul when it has been averred of it that it is in fact just as it has been represented" (GP, I:50, p. 111). An appreciable, scientifically enhanced understanding of the world serves to immeasurably refine that initial crude sense of singularity and infinitude to the point of truly appreciating its nature, transforming mere impression to apprehension. The desire ignited by the initial intuitional sense of infinity, without the systematic follow up, accords perfectly with that desire described in the *Guide* which remains simply unfulfilled, for there is nothing "to allay that desire; he has only an abundance of longing and nothing else"(GP, I:34, p. 76). The goal, then, is not to satisfy longing but, through progressive study, to prod its evolution from brute emotion to an integrated facet of a reasoned life.

What is pertinent to this study is Maimonides' strategic bracketing of his discussion of love with biblical references that are integral to charting the evolution from the rudimentary love/desire to the philosophically sophisticated one. Here, too, the different epithet for God, once knowledge is gained, signals not only a philosophically revitalized longing, but an entirely different

[35] MT, Idolatry, 1:2.

conception of God, the object of that longing. What was a "thirst of the soul" that commenced love's philosophical journey matures to that same soul's thirst, now intensified by a "yearning of the flesh." Knowledge gained by methodical and arduous study becomes assimilated into one's being. As a result, the attraction to God as the ultimate source and object of all knowledge is animated by the entire human constitution, consisting of flesh and soul, or, in the Maimonidean lexicon, the matter of the body and the form of the intellect.[36] The change in divine cognomen from the *el* and *elohim* that are intuited in a precognitive state to the "place" (*makom)* aspired to in a cognitively developed state is surely a conscious one. Both the shift in name and its repetition as an end of both "increased love" and "yearning and longing" suggest something more substantive than merely stylistic.

Here one must resort to the *Guide*'s philosophical layer imposed onto the literal spatial sense of *makom*. When God is its referent, it signifies an ontological singularity and incomparability to anything that is within the human cognitive purview, "there being nothing like or similar to that existence" (GP, I:8, p. 33). More importantly, for our purposes, it is also an allusion to a critical verse within the narrative of Moses' supreme cognitive moment in Exodus 33 – "*Behold there is a place (makom) by Me"* (v. 21) – where he attains a noetic state "that has not been apprehended by anyone before him, nor will it be apprehended by anything after him" (GP, I:54, p. 123). "Place" there is a metaphor for an advanced level of thought, "in theoretical speculation and the contemplation of the intellect" (GP, I:8, p. 34). Mishneh Torah's switch to *makom* as the object of love's desire imports all the other significations associated with Moses' private revelation at the top of Mount Sinai, including the "goodness" (v. 19) and the "back" (v. 23) disclosed to him, as well as his "standing erect upon the rock." (v. 21).

Though a detailed analysis of Maimonides' interpretation of the Mosaic revelation of Exodus 33 is beyond the reach of this chapter, suffice it to focus on one aspect of it that informs the Mishneh Torah's notion of love. God's displaying His "goodness" to Moses was meant to intellectually situate Moses at the very origins of creation, allowing him to survey it all from the divine vantage that assessed it as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Rather than a world that often appears fragmented, consisting of forces and elements that vie with each other, Moses discerns a "goodness" where nature's apparent rivalry and opposition give way to a cooperative whole. He acquires a new perspective of harmony between all existents that appreciates "the way they are mutually connected so that he will know how He governs them in general and in detail" (GP, I:54, p. 124). As a result, Moses achieves both contemplative and political perfection. Since God possesses no attributes, the only possible avenue toward knowing Him is to understand how His actions are manifest within the world, and the sole way of doing that is to investigate all of creation and its working

[36] See GP, I:1, on the term "image" (*tzelem*).

parts. Moses accomplishes that and thus earns internal personal perfection. That very theoretical cognition translates into optimum political leadership since Moses can emulate the kind of governance that enables harmony in nature and, in the biblical Moses' Maimonideanized words, "I need to perform actions that I must seek to make similar to Thy actions in governing them" (125). However, these actions only reflect certain character traits that in human terms are associated with those that generate them, such as mercy, kindness, and compassion. Divine actions, on the other hand, do not stem from any such attribute. Correct conduct mirrors those attributes we associate with the manner in which nature operates – that is, "attributes of action" – and not God's essence itself.[37] Repetitive conduct that is consonant with such traits as mercy, graciousness, and holiness serves to entrench a correct conception of God within the mind. In the language of Herbert Davidson's seminal analysis, the ultimate performance of *imitatio dei* is not the mere cultivation of intermediate character traits as tentatively proposed in the Mishneh Torah. Rather, it is "by performing acts, as God does, not through intermediate, or any other psychological characteristics, but wholly dispassionately."[38]

Once the divine object of desire is signified by *makom*, it bears all these connotations and has radical implications for the commandment to love God. If the creation, understood in its deepest sense as Moses did at the summit of the mountain, reflects a notion of an attributeless, dispassionate deity, then any love inspired by it must emulate that deity in kind to establish some common ground for that love. This love affair is not, as is the anthropological norm, driven by passions, but, on the contrary, by what is reasoned as warranted. It flows naturally from an appreciation of a "mutual interconnectedness" of all existence grounded in reasoned governance untainted by passions or affectations. As such, the commandment of love might offer an ideal for all commandments in its striving to transcend its own normative partialness. What begins as a norm of a Jewish parochial framework evolves synchronically with a steadily developing wisdom edging toward a universal ideal of love that encompasses all of creation as a mirror of its creator. The goal of the command to love God is to overcome its particular normative status as one commandment among the remainder of the traditionally enumerated 613 adapted and redesigned by Maimonides in his *Sefer HaMitzvot*, in order to *become* a lover rather than *perform* love.[39]

[37] See the discussion of divine attributes in GP, I:51–52.

[38] Herbert Davidson, "The Middle Way in Maimonides' Ethics," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987): 31–72.

[39] Maimonides' ultimate collapse of the traditional bifurcation between two categories of commandments, between human beings and between human beings and God into just the one consisting of the latter, becomes clear now since God is designated as *makom* in the phrase "between man and God" (בין אדם למקום). GP, III: 35, p. 538. See Hannah Kasher on the significance of the use of *makom* in this classification in her "Commandments between Man and God [*makom*] in the *Guide of the Perplexed*" (Heb.), *Daat* 12 (1984): 23–28, at 23–25, where she explains the

THE GARDEN OF LOVE

This notion of becoming a lover rather than performing love emerges from an unusual summary of the first four chapters of the Mishneh Torah which immediately follows that last formulation on love discussed here. There Maimonides classifies the subject matter of the four positive commandments promoting knowledge, unity, love, and fear of God, and the one negative injunction against polytheism under the rubric of the most esoteric of fields known rabbinically as *pardes*, or the "garden." Entering the *pardes* must be posterior to familiarizing oneself with all the legal minutiae of the command system of halakhah. Only those who have "filled their bellies with bread and meat which consist of knowing what is permissible and prohibited and the like among all the rest of the commandments" are qualified to graduate to those five that constitute the field of the *pardes*, or the garden of awareness, as opposed to performance. This small subset of *mitzvot* is esteemed as substantively superior (דבר גדול, a major subject) to all others that are subsumed within Talmudic debates generically categorized as "the give and take of Abaye and Rava" which comprise a "minor subject" (דבר קטן).

All of the inferior subject matter have a clear pragmatic rationale, which is "to first settle the mind . . . to placate this world in order to inherit the next world, and it is possible for all to know them including the old, the young, men, women, and those of greater and lesser intellectual capacity."[40] Three features distinguish the overall halakhic/juridic apparatus from the elite subset:

1. emotional/psychological, in that they induce calm and mental equilibrium;
2. social/political, in promoting political stability and social welfare;
3. educational in their universal accessibility.

Like the proverbially blindfolded Lady Justice, in order to nurture peace and stability, the laws are effectively blind to intellect, age, and gender. As such, the commandments, oblivious to these distinctions, move outward, governing relations between human beings, thereby fostering a religious community that forms a cohesive political unit at the same time. However, love, rather than establish community and political organization, cultivates an autonomous existential state of being that defies any heteronomic imposition of law. The love that emerges from assimilating those subjects within the *pardes* thrives beyond the realm of law because it is wholly absent of the three features endemic to the rest of the law.[41]

meaning of the phrase as "between man and his own perfection by which a relationship is formed between him and God" (25).

[40] MT, Foundations of Torah 4:13.

[41] As Warren Z. Harvey notes, "Maimonides' identification of metaphysics with 'a great thing' and the 608 non-metaphysical commandments with 'a small thing' establish the supremacy of the vita

The "meat" of halakha with which one fills one's belly stands in stark contrast to the same Hebrew term, *basar*, coupled with "soul," previously described as being united in their dedicated thirst for love of the "Place." If one remains at the level of the former *basar*, one operates within the realm of the law, of halakhah, where any love attained can only promote the pragmatic political and psychological goals of normative Judaism that affect the *basar*. In the coupling of *basar* with the soul toward the attainment of love, the *basar* transcends its own physicality, devoting itself wholly to the aims of the soul or the intellect. The human physical dimension, in its all-consuming devotion to the intellect in the quest for love, escapes the pragmatic social realm for an inner-directed, self-perfecting one.

When mandating the severe restrictions on the public and explicit teaching of the esoteric material that is the bedrock of love, a key verse from the Song appears, which conveys this very dimension of love that entails the purely theoretical life. In support of maintaining a kind of gag order on the teaching of metaphysics, a verse from Song of Songs, "Honey and milk are under your tongue" (4:11), is cited, using the image of honey as a metaphor for metaphysics and demanding a covert method of pedagogy. The original context of this verse is most apt in its recurring metaphors for secrecy and inaccessibility. The very next verse (12) repeats the terms for "locked" (*na'ul*) and "sealed" (*hatum*) three times ("A garden *shut up* is my sister, my bride; a spring *shut up*, a fountain *sealed*"), while verse 13 imports the rare term *pardes*, the rabbinic metaphor for these esoteric subjects, into its garden imagery ("Thy shoots are a *pardes* of pomegranates, with precious fruits"). The *pardes* is virtually impenetrable, both because of the formidable barriers the philosophical sophomore must overcome and because of the constraints imposed on dissemination of its material.[42]

Aside from its degree of obscurity, there is an additional reason why this material almost naturally becomes trapped under one's tongue. Its attainment is ultimately self-reflexive in purpose. Songs 4:11 is quoted in conjunction with another two verses, mandating the shrouding of these disciplines in strictest confidence. One of them is most revealing for our purposes. Secrecy addresses the esoteric feature of the sciences cultivated in the *pardes*, but it is also a natural consequence of its self-serving function. The verse "They shall be only thine alone, not to be shared with strangers" (Prov 5:17) is cited here with Songs 4:11 to narrowly circumscribe public teachings of these sciences. However, the verse links up with the ultimate chapter of the *Guide*, which expresses its preference for what constitutes the *summum bonum* for humanity. The summit of human perfection is reached intellectually with "the conception of intelligibles." It is considered so because it is purely self-directed, as opposed to the other three listed types of material, physical, and moral perfections: "If you consider each of the three perfections mentioned before, you will find that they pertain to others

contemplativa over the vita activa." In "Aggadah in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah," *Dine Israel* 24 (2007): 197–207, at 201.

[42] See also his comments on Song 4:11 in his Introduction to PM, 35.

than you, not you. . . . The ultimate perfection however, pertains to you alone, no one else being associated in it with you in any way: *They shall be only thine alone and so on* [Prov. 5:17]" (GP, III: 54, p. 635).[43]

The honey imagery of the Song in the Mishneh Torah also directs the reader back to the chapter on eating in the *Guide*, where two of the four prooftexts substantiating the association of eating with acquiring knowledge incorporate the same honey metaphor. Proverbs 25:27 warns against too much of a good thing – "It is not good to eat too much honey" – while Proverbs 24:13 qualifies honey as "good" and recommends its ingestion: "My son eat thou honey for it is good." The verse immediately following is also quoted: "So know thou wisdom to be unto the soul," to perfect the equation between "eating" and "know" and "honey" and "wisdom." As this dietary supplement is absorbed by the soul (*nefesh*), and as "soul" is "a term denoting the rational soul, I mean the form of man," (GP, I:41), the combination of the two verses attests to the assertion that "eating" honey, or the study of the esoteric sciences of physics and metaphysics, contributes to "the permanence of the human form" (GP, I:30, p. 63).

Even the reference to the "discussions of Abaye and Rava" finds its philosophical echo in the *Guide*. In addition to biblical prooftexts, Maimonides also cites rabbinic use of gastronomic terms as metaphors for consuming knowledge, as in the expression "Come eat fat meat at the house of Rava."[44] The amoraic exchanges between Abaye and Rava are emblematic of the halakhic system as a whole with its legalistic, performative, and pragmatic dimensions. Once layered by its philosophical connotations of the *Guide*, it assumes an entirely different role. The philosopher who has attained the supra-legal degree of love continues to perform the commandments, but not in their inferior capacity promoting psychological and political stability. That functional halakhic "meat" (*basar*) merges with the existential *basar* that has become ancillary to the intellect (*nefesh*) in an all-encompassing love of the *Place*. Once one is equipped with the kind of philosophical love charted in these first four chapters of the Mishneh Torah, one is then prepared for the ultimate sacrifice of "sanctification of the Name" mandating martyrdom that is the subject matter of the very next chapter.[45]

[43] See Eliezer Goldman, who sees Maimonides' innovation here not in the downgrading of the three other perfections, which can be found in his predecessors, but in the systematic use of the criterion of *atzmiyut* in "The Worship Peculiar to Those Who Have Apprehended True Reality: Comments on the *Guide* III: 51–54," *Bar Ilan Annual* 6 (1968): 287–315, at 395.

[44] Baba Bathra 22a.

[45] Daniel Lasker argues that Maimonides' commandments of knowledge and love of God are formulated in direct opposition to R. Judah Halevi. He cites this immediate turn to the laws of martyrdom as evidence of that opposition, which implies that for Maimonides "only the philosopher can love God and only the philosopher can truly and sincerely give up his life and sanctify the Name." See "Love of God and Sanctification of the Name according to Rabbi Judah Halevi and Maimonides," in *By the Well: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Halakhic Thought Presented to Gerald J. Blidstein*, ed., Uri Ehrlich, Haim Kreisel and Daniel J. Lasker, The Goldstein-Goren Library of Jewish Thought 8, (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2008), 293–302 (Heb.) at 301.

LOVE TRANSCENDING LAW

This interactive exegesis between the *Guide* and the Mishneh Torah discloses a radical supra-legal conception of the commandment to love God, transcending the law and its avowed social/psychological/political telos. The hermeneutical exercise placing Maimonides in conversation with himself is indispensable in order to ferret out its esoteric message that the ultimate goal of the Law is to overcome itself and to retreat from the public domain into the private contemplative sphere. Planted in the section on the "foundations" of the Law, it informs its entire juridic framework with an Aristotelian formulation on the practical life as "not necessarily directed toward other people, as some think; and it is not the case that practical thoughts are only those which result from action for the sake of what ensues. On the contrary, much more practical are those mental activities [*theoriai*] and reflections which have their goals in themselves and take place for their own sake."[46] Love, commonly understood as the very height of a demeanor that expresses itself for the sake of others, transforms itself in its more developed state into its polar extreme: for the sake of oneself.

In its deepening of this existentially solitary dimension of loving God, the organizational logic of Maimonides' return to the subject of love at the end of the Laws of Repentance becomes more apparent. Because true repentance is instrumental in achieving proximity, or in philosophical terms "conjunction," with the divine,[47] Maimonides proceeds to a discussion of what that ultimate conjunction consists of. Conjunction can only be consummated posthumously, once all physical impediments that could inhibit it are removed, leaving only a disembodied intellect, or *nefesh*.[48] Maimonides then continues with a discussion of the precise nature of that incorporeal intellect that survives death, identifying it with the knowledge gained of all the cosmology detailed in the first section of the Mishneh Torah. Here he explicitly cross-references his discussion of the soul in chapter 4 of that first section:

> Every *nefesh* mentioned associated with this matter does not refer to the "soul" (*neshamah*) that is needed for the body, but rather the form of the *nefesh* which consists of the intellect that apprehends the Creator according to its ability and apprehends incorporeal and other works and it is the form which we explicated in chapter 4 of the *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah* which is referred to as the *nefes*h in this matter.[49]

[46] *Politics*, VII, 3,8,1325b16–20, in *The Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[47] MT, Repentance 7:6.

[48] Dov Schwartz demonstrates that Maimonides "shaped his doctrine of the intellect's or soul's experience in the afterlife in accordance with Avicenna." In "Avicenna and Maimonides on Immortality: A Comparative Study," in *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. Ronald Nettler (Luxemboug: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 185–98, at 188.

[49] MT, Repentance 8:3.

The sequential pattern of his return to the subject of love at this point becomes evident. Once Maimonides establishes what the ultimate destiny of the *nefesh* is, there is an urgency to reattend love since the *nefesh* is instrumental in its cultivation and is the aspect of the human being that is nurtured and developed in proportion to the intellectualized intensity of that love. But it is love's private aims in the enterprise of self-perfection that, as we have seen, are paramount for him, that accounts for its reappearance in this context. Though Maimonides ostensibly maintains a belief in the individual immortality of souls,[50] from a philosophical point of view it seems to me indefensible, considering his tacit accession to a theory of one indivisible eternal soul, or Intellect.[51] When discussing the ultimate fate of "souls" he asserts, "What is separate ... is one thing only" (GP, I:70, p. 174). In addition, he sides with Ibn Bajja, the chief proponent of monopsychism, "and others who were drawn into speaking of these obscure matters" that incorporeal intellects are "one in number" (GP, I:74, p. 221).[52] Even those scholars like Alexander Altmann, who struggle to reconcile such an extreme view with more traditional ones, only manage to salvage a "modicum of individuality" for the immortal soul.[53] Thus love, properly developed along a progressive scale of knowledge, guides the *nefesh* ultimately in the direction of oneness. Its own material journey in the body follows along a parallel scale of interiority and self-perfection that increasingly veers inward and away from the socially interactive realm. The embodied soul strives to achieve a detached oneness, as far as possible given its physical restraints, to enable its transition to the oneness of its disembodied eternal immortality.[54]

Love aims at an internal distancing from community, from which the soul cannot escape temporally, toward the eternal realm where there is no community, which the soul can enjoy. Maimonides' treatment of love, therefore, proceeds from its initial discussion of its performance as one commandment among

[50] See all the Maimonidean references to immortality of the soul listed in Schwartz's edition of the GP, 183n26.

[51] For an insightful discussion on how the inconsistent "religious" and "philosophical" positions on the soul can live together once Maimonides' subscription to Al Farabi's theory of language is considered, see Oliver Leaman, "Maimonides, and the Soul, and the Classical Tradition," in *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections of Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions*, ed. Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth and John M. Dillon (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 163–75. Different ways of speaking, such as religious or theological, help us arrive at the true reality of language that only philosophy can ascertain.

[52] See Alfred Ivry's discussion of this Averroist tendency in Maimonides, concluding that "in this manner Maimonides as much as makes his own position on this issue clear." In "Moses Maimonides: An Averroist Avant La Lettre?" *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008): 121–39, at 123–26.

[53] *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklarung* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 85–91, at 90.

[54] In his PM, vol. 1, Introduction, 22, Maimonides explicitly extends this position to its logical extreme considering it a first principle that "the building of the body entails the destruction of the soul." However, at times Maimonides endorses a balance between the body and soul, as Howard Kreisel argues, that is, for the masses, while "extreme asceticism is the only course for the elite." See his "Asceticism in the Thought of Bahya and Maimonides," *Daat* 21 (1988): v–xxii, at xx.

others within an overall normative framework whose jurisdiction extends to a community. One's obligation to fulfill it arises by virtue of being a member of a particular community. However, its treatment culminates in a discussion of its operation within the parameters of a human being qua human. The *nefesh* perfected by love constitutes the human "form" common to all humanity, and therefore transcends any formal norm, or mitzvah, that situates a Jew within his or her own community. The concluding discussion concerns the type of love that determines the soul's endurance stripped of the body and identity, beyond norms and community, melding eternally with the object of its love. This is the love allegorized by the Song, that hones one's humanity as defined by the intellect rather than one's Jewishness as regulated by halakhah.

Although the last chapter of the Laws of Repentance raises so many issues as to deserve a monograph of its own, I focus here on one feature that is most pertinent to my thesis so far. In its turn from the public to the private, and from the normative to the transnormative spheres, it conducts a systematic diminishment of a life concerned with the mundane and the commandments. Such a deemphasizing of halakhah is strikingly incongruous with a code that purports to be exclusively concerned with digesting everything related to "forbidden and permitted, impure and pure, along with all the rest of the laws of the Torah . . . to the point where all the laws are accessible, to the old and young, the particulars of every commandment, and of every rabbinic and prophetic decree."[55] The first two paragraphs subtly set the stage for that agenda, focusing on command performance while undermining its importance in achieving proximity to God. The "performance of *mitzvot* of the Torah and concern with its wisdom" should not be motivated by expectations, either transitory to earn the "blessings" or avoid the curses "written in the Torah," or timeless, to merit "life in the future world" or escape "being cut off" from it. This mode of religious worship is classified as "fear" based, legitimate only as preliminary training needed to evolve from a state of intellectual impoverishment toward a more accomplished intellectual sophistication. It is meant only as a preparatory stage toward inculcating a "love"-based mode.[56] The initial paragraph thus shifts the focus away from "what is written in the Torah," away from a legalistic mode of obeisance reinforced by juridic sanctions, paving the way for a worship that in fact is not anchored in a traditional conception of Torah as divine command.

The next paragraph not only disengages duty from the Torah but divorces it from any possible causal connection to the material world outside the Torah as well by the following remarkable formulation: "The one who worships out of

[55] Mishneh Torah, Introduction, 4, עד שיהיו כל הדינין גלויין לקטן ולגדול בדין כל מצוה ומצוה ובדין כל הדברים שתיקנו חכמים ונביאים.

[56] אל יאמר אדם הריני עושה מצות התורה ועוסק בחכמתה כדי שאקבל כל הברכות הכתובות בה או כדי שאזכה לחיי העולם הבא ואפרוש מן העבירות שהזהירה תורה מהן כדי שאנצל מן הקללות הכתובות בתורה או כדי שלא אכרת מחיי העולם הבא אין ראוי לעבוד את ה' על הדרך הזה שהעובד על דרך זה הוא עובד מיראה ואינה מעלת הנביאים ולא מעלת החכמים ואין עובדים ה' על דרך זה אלא עמי הארץ והנשים והקטנים שמחנכין אותן לעבוד מיראה עד שתרבה דעתן ויעבדו מאהבה.

love involves himself in Torah and the commandments and walks in the paths of wisdom not because of anything in the world, neither because of the fear of the bad (*ra'*) or in order to earn the good (*tov*), but rather performs the truth because it is the truth (*emet*) and in the end good will come automatically."[57]

Once again the *Guide* must be consulted to appreciate the precise degree and nature of love idealized by the Mishneh Torah. The terminology as well as the thematic link to the exposition of *nefesh* as the intellectual form of man in its previous chapters lands the reader at the very beginning of the *Guide*, where the term "image" (*tzelem*) and its implications for the pristine state of Adam in the Garden is explicated. The very first chapter of the *Guide* establishes the meaning of "image" as the "true reality" of a thing, which, in the case of a human being, is "intellectual apprehension" (GP, I:1, p. 22). In the exercise of intellect, a human being comes closest to *imitatio dei*, and by virtue of which is the "divine intellect conjoined with man" (23). *Nefesh* as human form, which, as we have seen, is the ground of love, is the locus of this conjunction. The second chapter of the *Guide* traces an intellectual decline of Adam signified by eating of the tree of knowledge, which marks a turn from focusing on what is "true and false" to what is "good and bad." For Maimonides this signals a deterioration in man's mental state from things "cognized by the intellect" to those "generally accepted as known" (GP, I:2, pp. 24–25). As an allegory, the commandment not to partake of the tree's fruit symbolizes the human mandate to cognize only universal truths and not matters that are subjective or particular, fluctuating culturally and nationally (26). Commandments, addressed to a particular people and concerning ritualist or ethical performance, by their very nature concern the realm of "good and bad." In fact, when describing what transpired at the Sinaitic revelation, Maimonides draws this same distinction between the first two commandments and all others. The former, dealing with divine existence and unity, are "knowable by human speculation alone" and therefore consist of universal truths accessible to all by way of reason. All others, on the other hand, "belong to the class of generally accepted opinions and those adopted in virtue of tradition, not to the class of the intellecta" (GP, II:33, p. 364).[58]

Maimonides subtly imports these same cognitive categories into the Mishneh Torah by distinguishing between performance driven by "good or bad" and that by "truth." In love's demand of the latter, Maimonides presents an ideal of worship that, while obviously endorsing the ongoing performance of commandments, at the same time demands their overcoming. How can "truth," universal and philosophically demonstrable by reason alone, compel

[57] העובד מאהבה עוסק בתורה ובמצות והולך בנתיבות החכמה לא מפני דבר בעולם ולא מפני יראת הרעה ולא כדי לירש הטובה אלא עושה האמת מפני שהוא אמת וסוף הטובה לבא בגללה

[58] Maimonides' account of this foundational event for Judaism and what precisely transpired is riddled with difficulty and, according to Alfred Ivry, reflects classical neoplatonic thought, exhibiting "multiple layers of meaning, the truth hiding behind various levels of reality." In "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides' Thought," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Historical and Philosophical Studies*, ed. Joel Kraemer (Oxford: Littman Library, 1991), 115–40, at 135–37.

the fulfillment of a particularist command such as the observance of the Sabbath? Not only is its observance confined to one community, there can be no philosophical demonstration that arrives at any truth in abstaining from labor. Love envisions a return, as far as humanly possible, to the pre-sin garden state where Adam cognized exclusively the "truth." Given the evolution of humanity, national identities, Israel, Judaism as a religion, and the exigencies of living in a community whose vast majority are not intellectually qualified to operate in a truth-oriented realm, that can only be accomplished by a partitioning of conduct and cognition.

Here he hints at a kind of commitment to the Law that mirrors its first incarnation at the bitter waters where there occurred a pre-Sinaitic revelation comprising what Maimonides considers solely "first intentions," which included only the establishment of a judicial system and rule of law, and the Sabbath. Virtually all of the rituals legislated at Sinai assume the form they do because of the Law's need to take into account its ancient audience's character and psychology shaped by its pervasively surrounding idolatrous culture. It speaks to that collective mind, by adopting the language and symbols of its host culture, such as sacrifices, and subverts it from within. However, the Law's primary aim, what Maimonides terms its "first intention," is to eradicate all traces of idolatry and inculcate the belief that "there is a deity who is the Creator of all this" (GP, III:29, p. 518), and, in the final analysis, "consists only in your apprehending Me and not worshipping someone other than Me" (GP, III:32, p. 530). The Torah's rituals are largely historically contingent means of achieving that overarching aim.[59] Rabbinic tradition actually offers a glimpse of what a stripped-down law, whose sole concern is "primary intention" with no need to address historical contingencies, might look like. The Midrash provides Maimonides with just such a law that preceded Sinai at Marah, identifying the "*statute* [*hok*] and *judgment* [*mishpat*] revealed there" (Exod. 15:25) as "the Sabbath and civil laws."[60] For Maimonides, this is an illustration of a law that concerns itself exclusively with first intentions: "I mean the belief in correct opinions, namely, in the creation of the world in time. For you already know that the foundation of the law addressed to us concerning the Sabbath is its contribution in fortifying this principle." (GP, III:32, p. 531)[61] Maimonides' formulation of the ideal

[59] See generally his preface to the *ta'ame ha-mitzvot* in III:26–33, where this notion of first and second intentions is fully developed.

[60] The sources are b. Shabbat 87b and b. Sanhedrin 57b, although they add others such as the seven Noahide laws and honoring one's parents. Rashi cites a tradition that adds the law of the red heifer to the list. See also Menachem Kasher's survey of variant traditions concerning what was legislated at Marah in *Torah Shelemah* vol. 14 (Jerusalem, 1949): 168–69n267.

[61] Josef Stern, "The Idea of a Hoq in Maimonides' Explanation of the Law." In *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), 92–130. Stern notes the change in use of first and second intentions from value assessment to chronology (i.e., the first legislation occurred at Marah and the second at Sinai). Maimonides also makes it clear, by conflating *first* and *primary*, that the legislation at Marah is also theoretically superior, since "in the first

love of God in the Mishneh Torah colors the performance of Sinaitic law with its perfect precursor at Marah, which concerns only the truth. Of course, the rule of law ensures the secure environment within which this love affair with the truth can take place. Thus, love dictates that every act conforming to Sinaitic law must overcome its technical origins and strip it of any utilitarian features, and then one must cognitively transport oneself back to its pristine core at Marah.[62] Remarkably, the Mishneh Torah, a legal code anchored in Sinai and its subsequent rabbinic devolution, deconstructs its own legislative origins to revert to its juridic antecedents. In fact, accepting "the truth because it is the truth" distinguishes one's obedience and performance from those "incapable of engaging in such speculation" who must "accept the authority of men who inquire into the truth and are engaged in speculation" (GP, I:36, p. 85).[63] Those "incapable" are the ones whose obedience and knowledge is anchored in Sinai via a chain of transmission from parents to children and teachers to students, while those who independently acquire truth are, in a sense, breaking that chain by anchoring their obedience in their own minds.[64] The former are relegated to the lower end of the palace parable hierarchy, ranking different classes of people in terms of proximity to the ruler (God) who inhabits it, who end up wandering around the palace precinct but never gaining entry to it. Although they are well versed in the "law concerning the practices of divine service," their belief in truth and "the fundamental principles of religion" is based on "traditional authority" (III:51, p. 619). In the language of the thesis developed in this chapter, they are the ones who have mastered the legal code, and the "give and take of Abaye and Rava," lovers of the law, but not of God.

ABRAHAM: LOVING BEFORE AND BEYOND THE LAW

Abraham then is posed as the embodiment of this ideal love, for "God called him his lover for he worshipped only out of love (והיא מעלת אברהם אבינו שקראו הקב"ה אוהבו

legislation there was nothing at all concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices, for, as we have mentioned, these belong to the second intention" (GP, III:32, p. 531).

[62] My interpretation of Maimonides' last chapter on love in the Mishneh Torah is an example of what David Novak considers the gist of Maimonides' jurisprudence, whose "whole approach to the law is teleological which is the transcendent thrust of the law." See his chapter, "Jurisprudence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. Kenneth Seeskin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 221–44, at 239.

[63] See also GP, I:33, p. 71; I:34, p. 75, for the pragmatic necessity of transmitting knowledge by force of authority.

[64] This distinction could also explain the different formulations of the Mishneh Torah and the *Sefer HaMitzvot* on love. Only the *Sefer HaMitzvot* includes "comprehension of His *mitzvot*" as a means of inspiring love, while the Mishneh Torah considers only the creation as such. As Norman Lamm argues, the *Sefer HaMitzvot*'s formulation is geared more toward the masses while the Mishneh Torah is for the learned elite. See his "Maimonides on the Love of God," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992–3): 131–42.

לפי שלא עבד אלא מאהבה). That Abraham is chosen as love's exemplar[65] can now be viewed as eminently appropriate considering that Abraham reasons his way sui generis to universal truths by philosophical speculation alone and does not abide by them as a result of law or received tradition. Abraham antedates Sinai, does not relate to God within the parameters of any formal religion, and subjects no one else to any legal imperatives. In fact, this latter detail concerning Abraham's discovery of monotheism and his subsequent mission to attract adherents to its truths is precisely what Maimonides singles out as unique to Abraham's project in contradistinction to the Mosaic one. While Moses incentivizes by way of law, or legal coercion, Abraham's community is galvanized by a common subscription to universal truths sustained by reasoned debate without any norms or sanctions, for "he never said: God has sent me to you and has given me commandments and prohibitions" (GP, II:39, p. 379). Even the one commandment he seems to have undertaken and imposed was, Maimonides asserts, not by way of "a prophetic call to exhort the people to do this" (379)[66] This defining feature of the Abrahamic calling corresponds precisely to the Mishneh Torah's historical reconstruction of Abraham's nascent monotheistic movement which blossomed into "a nation that knows God." His instruments of persuasion are all pedagogical, and he forms a community dedicated to the "way of truth." Like Socrates, he cajoles by "sowing doubt," "engaging in debate," "informing," "overpowering with demonstration," "accumulating a following," informing each follower "in accordance with his capacity," and ultimately "authoring treatises." Even the one "law" of circumcision, emptied of any legally sanctioned connotations by the *Guide*, is completely ignored in the Mishneh Torah's first account of Abraham's pioneering dissemination of the truths of divine existence and unity. Failure over time to preserve those truths necessitates the Mosaic experience, which introduces law and legal sanction as their new safeguards.[67]

Maimonides then complements Abraham as the human historical exemplar of love with the Mosaic stricture to "love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might" (Deut. 6:5) as its juridic expression. It is noteworthy that previously only the first half of this verse, "And you shall love your God," was cited, while the second half, with its thrice-enhanced phraseology conveying an intensity involving a totality of being, conspicuously enters the scene at this stage. In its normative setting, Maimonides cites only the simple command stripped of the existentially overwhelming level of passion demanded by the second cola of the verse, which is appropriate only in the present context of a

[65] Abraham's characterization as a lover is rooted in both the biblical address to the "seed of Abraham My lover" (Isa. 41:8) and the rabbinic identification of the distinction in Exodus 20:6 between "those who love me" with Abraham and "those who observe my commandments" with "elders and prophets" (*Mechilta, Bahodesh* 6). It is interesting that the line is drawn between a legalistic relationship with God and one that transcends the *mitzvot* or command structure.

[66] See MT, Kings, 9, where he says Abraham was commanded to perform circumcision.

[67] MT, Idolatry, 1:3.

love that extends well beyond the merely prescriptive. The verse's first appearance in the *Guide*, in the chapter dedicated to the term "heart," interprets the enlistment of the heart in loving as a commitment to God "with all the forces of the body" (GP, I:39, p. 89). After self-referencing both the Mishneh Torah and the Commentary on the Mishnah, Maimonides contends that this entails making "His apprehension the end of all your actions." In order to attain this end, any conduct, including that normatively prescribed, must be detached from its immediate consequences or utility to the point that the purely cerebral activity of apprehending usurps any of its social, ethical, or political functionality.

The full verse reappears during Maimonides' preface to his rationale for the commandments, once again as an overarching imperative to examine everything "concerning the whole of being" (GP, III:28, p. 512) – in other words, to be a philosopher. Once more, he self-references his Mishneh Torah as an endorsement of a type of love only realized "through the apprehension of the whole of being as it is and through the consideration of His wisdom as it is manifested in it." Combining this with his previous citation of Deuteronomy 6:5 reinforces the ideal state of love consisting in the dedication of every single "force" of one's existence toward apprehending the world. The activity is pure reason and the object of that activity is the world, bypassing the law altogether. The Law, in effect, calls attention away from itself to the world as its focal center. Finally, it reappears at the *Guide*'s denouement in the context of a stark bifurcation between actions associated with fear and thought associated with love. Most of the chapter is devoted to fear, which repeatedly is the end of the Law – "all the actions prescribed by the Law"; "the end of the actions prescribed by the whole Law"; "the intention of all the words of the Law"; "fear is achieved by means of all actions prescribed by the Law" (GP, III:52, pp. 629–30). Love, however, is achieved through the "opinions taught by the Law, which includes the apprehension of His being as He, may He be exalted, is in truth." The Law cannot teach apprehension; it can only direct one toward it. God's existence, as it is "in truth," can only be arrived at and truly known as far as humanly possible by the methodical and rigorous exercise of reason.[68]

[68] This highly abstracted conception of love is consistently corroborated by the entire verse and, in addition to the *Guide* and Mishneh Torah, the PM reiterates that same message. Once an account of the different faculties of the soul (*nefesh*) is complete, Maimonides emphasizes that the end to which all these faculties must cumulatively aim is "the knowledge of God alone." What that entails is a single-minded concentration on God which veers every act or speech toward that aim captured by loving God "with all your heart, soul, and might" (Introduction to Avot, chap. 5, p. 189, of R. Kook edition). For a different position, see Menachem Kellner, "Is Maimonides' Ideal Person Austerely Rationalist?" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76:1 (2002), 125–43, who, on the basis of this and other key passages cited in this paper, does not see a total identity of love and knowledge bur rather that "we achieve love of God through the apprehension of God's being to the greatest extent possible for humans. This does not mean that loving and apprehending God are the same" (143).

This final context of Deuteronomy 6:5 associates another Deuteronomic message that identifies fear as the purpose of "all the words of this Law that are written in this book" (28:58), and thus points the reader back in the direction of an earlier chapter dedicated to the term "trial." Its premiere biblical illustration is the trial of the binding of Isaac, Abraham's supreme testament to what Maimonides considers the absolute limits of love, and the subject of our chapter on Abarbanel. For the purposes of this discussion, however, Maimonides' analysis of the *akedah*'s lesson is confusing on the subject of love since it inserts fear into the equation and fluctuates between the two without any demarcation, seemingly treating them as synonyms. However, as evident from other assertions already dealt with, the two are entirely separate, in terms of their level of worship, the emotional postures they engender, and the features of the Torah from which they emerge. At every point of extracting the moral of love and fear from the *akedah* narrative, Maimonides does in fact mention them as an inseparable pair four times. However, in conclusion, he reverts to fear as the *akedah*'s sole message, attested to by the angelic verdict proclaiming the trial's success, "For now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12). He then resorts to the same verse cited as a prooftext at the end of the *Guide* for the proposition that fear is "the intention of all the words of the Law": "If you will not take care to observe all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awful Name" (Deut. 28:58). Within the context of the *akedah*, it is cited to extrapolate from the *akedah* to the command structure in its entirety, establishing that "the end of the whole of the Torah, including its commandments, prohibitions, promises, and narratives is one thing only – namely, fear of Him, may He be exalted" (GP, III:24, pp. 500–01).

Relevant to the issue of love here are two puzzling aspects of Maimonides' exposition: why the shift from love and fear to fear alone as the *akedah*'s ultimate lesson, and how does the pre-Law, pre-Sinaitic Abraham exemplify the essential telos of legislation that postdates his life and religious career? The key to the kind of fear Maimonides refers to here lies in his original formulation at the beginning of the Mishneh Torah with which we commenced this study. There, fear is a consequence or, better, a reflex, of the love induced by the awareness of the infinite wisdom that inheres in creation. The quest for that wisdom "immediately" inspires a crushing humility, forcing one to "retreat and fear and tremble and acknowledge that one is a tiny, lowly, dark creature, possessed of puny intelligence in the face of Perfected Knowledge."[69] Fear is then abandoned altogether as a subject of explication with the detailed cosmological and physical outline of the universe that follows, prefaced by a precis that considers all of it relevant to love alone: "For according to these things I will elucidate major principles of the work of the Master of the Universe, in order for them to form an entryway to the one who comprehends to love the

[69] MT, Foundations of Torah 2:2.

Name, for the Sages have said concerning love that *as a result you will become familiar with the one who said and the world came to be*."[70] Since "these things" refer back to the fear and love just defined, and since they will form the "entry-way" or introduction to the means by which love is achieved, the fear noted here is one enveloped by love, or is the intellectual humility that is an integral component of love. Maimonides thus appropriates the fear biblically targeted as the lesson of the *akedah* and transforms it into the love-embodied fear defined at the beginning of the Mishneh Torah and exemplified by Abraham at the end of the Laws of Repentance. Maimonides' understanding of the *akedah* contrasts conspicuously with its traditional reception as a model of supreme submission to arbitrary divine command. Rather, his interpretation of the three-day hiatus between God's command and Abraham's enactment of it transforms it into one of supreme devotion to reason: "For if he had chosen to do this immediately, as soon as the order came to him, it would have been an act of stupefaction and disturbance in the absence of exhaustive reflection. But his doing it days after the command had come to him *shows that the act sprang from thought, correct understanding, consideration of the truth of His command, may he be exalted, love of Him, and fear of Him*" (GP, III:24, p. 501, emphasis mine). Maimonides anchors Abraham's epochal moment of love and fear in a studious, deliberative, methodical, reasoned exercise that distills truth from the command. Deuteronomy 28:58, then, which at the end of the *Guide* seems to bifurcate fear from love, when integrated with its appropriation in the *akedah* analysis, actually envelops fear back into love whose essential expression is reason rather than law.

THE SONG OF SONG'S SLEEPWALKER AND OBSESSIVE LOVER

Maimonides then moves in the final chapter of the Laws of Repentance from Abraham as the biblical character who embodies love to the Song as love's biblical treatise allegorizing the following precise formal definition of love:

He should love God with a great, superlative, intensely powerful love to the point his soul is bound up in the love of God and finds himself constantly focused (*shogeh*, שוגה)[71] on it, as if he were a lovesick person whose attention is not distracted from that woman whom he is focused (*shogeh*) on constantly whether sitting, standing, eating, and drinking. Even more than this should the love of God be in the hearts of His lovers, focusing on him

[70] לפי הדברים האלו אני מבאר כללים גדולים ממעשה רבון העולמים כדי שיהיו פתח למבין לאהוב את השם כמו שאמרו חכמים בענין אהבה שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם.

[71] Warren Z. Harvey translates this term as "ravished" and concludes on the basis of this and other treatments of sex in the Mishneh Torah that there is a place for erotic love within Maimonidean thought when it is performed for the sake of knowing God. As such the sexual act is elevated from a purely clinical act performed, like daily exercise, as part of a healthy regimen, to part of the "ravishing" love for God. See his "Sex and Health," 38–39. I do not see any such place for erotic love, but rather the demand for channeling any such eros away from sexual relations and toward the intellectually erotic attachment to God.

constantly as we were commanded *with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might*. That is what Solomon intended by way of metaphor, *For I am sick with love* (Song 2:5). All of the Song of Songs is a metaphor for this matter.[72]

Here I wish to elaborate on some elements of the Song's allegory as conceived by Maimonides that have not been noted or dealt with adequately in the scholarship to date. However, what others have discussed needs mentioning briefly before proceeding to those elements. The *Guide*, in perfect alignment with the Mishneh Torah, affords a glimpse into how Maimonides might actually read the Song as a parable of spiritual/intellectual love by its allegorization of key verses to the degree of love achieved variously by the Patriarchs, Moses, and his siblings, Aaron and Miriam. They are the biblical exemplars of the Mishneh Torah–formulated hyperintensive love involving a retreat from the world and all things material so extreme as to disengage body from mind. In the Mishneh Torah, the mind of the obsessive lover is exclusively preoccupied with the beloved while carrying on with daily routines of changing physical postures and food consumption. These ordinary, physically sustaining experiences transpire reflexively since the mind, consumed as it is with the beloved, exercises no control over them. The Mishneh Torah indicates that the Song parable doesn't quite capture the extent of the mind's "liberation" from the body, for the love of God is "even more than this." Any vestiges of a mind-body connection that might still remain in the signifier's mundane love-sick psyche are vacated in the signified spiritual realm.

The *Guide* further develops the allegory cursorily alluded to in the Mishneh Torah by its allusions to the very acme of humanly possible spiritual love. In this context, the Mishneh Torah's formulation is drawn out to its logical limit where the mind becomes a virtual disembodied intellect, a state metaphorically captured by the Song's lover, who is so entranced by her beloved that she declares, *I sleep but my heart is awake; the sound of my beloved knocks* (5:2). Within the realm of its spiritual analogue, only Moses and the Patriarchs could echo these sentiments, which reflect a state of being "in which he talks with people and is occupied with his bodily necessities while his intellect is wholly turned toward Him, may he be exalted, so that in his heart he is always in His presence, may He be exalted, while outwardly he is with people" (GP, III:51, p. 623). The role of the "heart" as a metaphor for both the intellect and "all the forces of the body, for the principle of all of them derives from the heart" (GP, I:39, p. 89), explicitly interpreted in that earlier lexicographic chapter by Maimonides as the meaning of "heart" in the command to love God "with all your heart," now crystallizes. If commandments presuppose performance and ritual, the commandment of love

[72] הוא שיאהב את ה' אהבה גדולה יתירה עזה מאוד עד שתהא נפשו קשורה באהבת ה' ונמצא שוגה בה. תמיד כאלו חולה חולי האהבה שאין דעתו פנויה מאהבת אותה אשה והוא שוגה בה תמיד בין בשבתו בין בקומו בין בשעה שהוא אוכל ושותה יתר מזה תהיה אהבת ה' בלב אוהביו שוגים בה תמיד כמו שצונו בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך והוא ששלמה אמר דרך משל כי חולת אהבה אני וכל שיר השירים משל הוא לענין זה.

demands mindless performance for the body but "God intoxicated" mindfulness for the intellect. Ironically, only then are "all the forces of the body" dedicated to the love of God – when those forces are no longer vitalized by the intellect. As the intellect is invigorated, physicality is not only detached but minimized to its Mosaic limit at the mountain's summit where *he neither ate bread nor drank water* (Exod. 34:28), "for his intellect attained such strength that all the gross faculties in the body ceased to function" (GP, III:51, p. 620). In an exquisite extension of food ingestion as a metaphor for acquiring knowledge, there is an inverse relationship between its literal and metaphorical senses – the more one consumes knowledge, the less one consumes food.

Maimonides' scant allusions such as this verse prod a return to its original biblical context to retrieve their full metaphoric thrust. The verse depicting a lover of somnolent body and wakeful heart also has her attend to a "knock" of her beloved. However, the next few verses describe a reticence to respond to the knock and allow entry to the beloved. Procrastination leads to the loss of opportunity, and when the moment is finally seized, the beloved has disappeared, for *I opened the door for my beloved but my beloved had turned and gone* (5:6). The lover's vacillation is because she has already disrobed and bathed her feet in preparation for a night's sleep. The allegory indicates that once achieved, that state of intellectual obsessiveness with God remains tenuous and requires constant nourishment so as not to lapse back into preoccupation with the material world.

The lover's concern for the preparedness of her body for sleep allegorically signifies the intellectual lover's turn from the "wakefulness" of the mind to the "sleepfulness" of the body and thus a regressive state of love. The other feature of love's ideal state conveyed by the Song's imagery here is its realization in the privacy of the home rather than in a public domain. The metaphor entrenches that dimension developed thus far in this chapter and reinforces a proposition earlier in the chapter of the *Guide* that the intellectually suffused love of God "is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence, every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary" (GP, III:51, p. 621). For all intents and purposes, at this level of love, the end goal of commandments is to render commandments otiose. Only an intricate hermeneutical probe can successfully decode the full import of the Song's allegory (*mashal*), which epitomizes a lover, a fulfillment of a paramount religious mandate, that is but for a statistically insignificant elite beyond the purview of virtually all Jews. As such, Maimonides' allegoric construct of the Song is what David Stern classifies as a type of mashal that is "secret speech," or "an interpretive shield guarding a secret meaning," separating "insiders" from "outsiders" and restricting access to comprehension to a select chosen few."[73]

[73] David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 43.

At the very denouement of the *Guide*, Maimonides returns to this theme of solitude, considering it crucial enough to include in its final chapter. Another verse from the Song appears in the passage discussed previously, signifying the exclusively private nature of "true human perfection" that consists solely of "the conception of intelligibles which teach true opinions regarding divine things" (GP, III:54, p. 635). Verse 1:6, "*My mother's sons were incensed against me; they made me keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept,*" corroborates metaphorically the proposition that the "ultimate perfection" of pure contemplation flourishes in isolation. Its instrumental preservative ensuring its permanence is to "not weary and trouble yourself for the sake of others" (635). On the level of metaphor, the verse cited signifies the potential lover, whose communal role inhibits her maturity toward becoming the lovesick intellectual lover of God. She is mired in social/political responsibilities indicated by the duty of maintaining others' vineyards – in this case owned by "brothers," or, in other words, her own particular faith community of Jews. Her communal role causes self-neglect in the pursuit of the true love of God. Once again, the Song emphasizes the supreme religious impulse as a lonely one necessitating withdrawal from rather than participation in the community.[74]

The image of "brothers," as a literary allusion to public impediments to intellectual self-perfection, compounds the metaphor with another allegorical layer. In addition to the withdrawal from civic life, it also conveys an internal struggle between the material and formal dimensions of the human. When analyzing the term "woman" (*ishah*) early on, the *Guide* assigns it a figurative sense of "an object apt for, and fashioned with a view to being in conjunction with another object" (GP, I:6, p. 31).[75] Correspondingly, the terms "brother" and "sister" can also be figurative, as in a verse that relates one to the other in the sense of fastening like objects together: *five curtains should be coupled together, a woman to her sister* (Exod. 26:3). The quarrel with the brothers then signifies the inner struggle of matter caught between its attraction to its like in matter and to its form. Gravitating toward its material counterparts, its "brothers," veers it away from its fidelity to its form and inhibits its evolution toward spiritual love, where its attraction to its like is grounded in a form of detached attachment.

[74] See also, for example, how Maimonides pares down any association with others to the barest necessary to sustain physical subsistence: "If the perfect man who lives in solitude thinks of them at all" it is either to prevent harm or gain advantage (GP, II:36, p. 372). For a concise summary of the extensive debate on whether political activity or individual intellectual perfection is the final end of man, between scholars such as L.V. Berman and S. Pines in favor of the former and M. Galston and Warren Z. Harvey supporting the latter, see Steven Harvey, "Maimonides in the Sultan's Palace," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel Kraemer (Oxford: Littman Library, 1991), 70–73.

[75] See also GP, III:8, pp. 431–34, which draws a lengthy analogy between a spousal relationship between a woman and her husband and that between matter and form.

The other critical Song verse that extends this metaphor of the intellect's progressive disengagement from the body to its uttermost limit depicts the lover's longing for the beloved's kiss: *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth* (1:2). This verse is really the opening clause of the Song, since the very first verse, *Song of Songs by Solomon*, simply provides its title and author. As such, the entire Song is anchored in this sentiment voiced by the lover declaring the ultimate aim of her as-yet unrequited love. This "kiss" signals a death that consummates a perfected state of love where the intellect/soul has become empowered and, conversely, the body has been weakened. The intellect has become so invigorated as to liberate itself from any physical constraints. Those biblical heroes such as Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, who met their end by a divine "kiss of death," expired "in the pleasure of this apprehension due to the intensity of passionate love" (GP, III:51, p. 628). The Song's lover, therefore, aspires for that acme of love where the intellect perfects itself to such an extent as to overpower and dispense with the body. Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, by its reference to the allegory of the Song, therefore holds out physical mortality and intellectual immortality as the goal of religious life. In its allusion to death, the most individualistic of all human experience, the Mishneh Torah once again addresses itself to the private sphere and fixes a goal where its own regulatory concerns of law will become superfluous. As the soul/intellect strengthens, the need for law diminishes.[76]

In order to appreciate fully Maimonides' use of this "kiss of death" metaphor, as always, his original rabbinic source for its application to the deaths of Moses and his siblings must be examined. Though the three are described uniquely as dying a "kiss of death," that type of death is described as one over which the proverbial "Angel of Death" had no prerogative, shared also by the Patriarchs.[77] In his analysis of the Book of Job, Satan's authorization to afflict Job is subject to the restriction of "sparing his soul" (Job 2:6), which, subjected to the Maimonidean lexicon, means that Satan had no power over "the thing that remains of man after death" (GP, III:22, p. 488).[78] This is consistent with the soul (*nefesh*) signifying the intellect, as discussed previously. Maimonides then cites another rabbinic tradition which equates Satan, the

[76] The "kiss" passage, as well as others cited in this chapter, is key to David Blumenthal's thesis, meticulously developed over the course of numerous studies, that Maimonides' subscribed to a philosophical mysticism that sees philosophical inquiry and contemplation as part of a process leading to a final "post-rational, post-cognitive, post-linguistic" stage. These studies have all been collected now in one volume, *Philosophic Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2006). Although I cannot here enter into this complex issue, it is clear from my presentation that I don't see room for anything "post-cognitive" in Maimonides' system. Suffice it here to state that I am in basic agreement with Hannah Kasher's critique, most recently in "Mysticism within the Confines of Reason Alone" (Heb.) in *Maimonides and Mysticism*, ed. A. Elkayam and D. Schwartz, Daat 64–66 (2009): 37–44.

[77] B. Baba Bathra 17a.

[78] For a comprehensive treatment of Satan in the *Guide*, see A. Nuriel, "The Concept of Satan in the *Guide of the Perplexed*" (Heb.), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 5 (1986): 83–91, who identifies three different Satans, all expressing different traits of matter.

evil inclination, and the angel of death as "one and the same,"[79] considering it an extraordinary insight in that it "clarifies all that is obscure, reveals all that is concealed, and renders manifest most of the mysteries of the Torah" (488). Thus, this tradition's philosophical meaning is that the intellect, or the human form, is immune to the exigencies of matter as represented by these various "demonic" powers. The perfected intellects of Moses and others are of course impervious to the angel of death, as a signifier of matter, or that which deteriorates and passes away. Their true selves or their human forms survived their bodies and, therefore, were not subject to the vulnerabilities of matter. In its reference to the kind of death over which the "angel of death" wields no authority, the Song directs the reader to Job and his essential failing of intellectual naiveté. In fact, Maimonides goes as far as to consider Job's ignorance the hermeneutical key to the entire narrative, for "He is not said to be a wise or a comprehending, or an intelligent man. Only moral virtue and righteousness in action are ascribed to him" (GP, III:22, p. 487).[80] The lover the Song contemplates is the antithesis of this initial Job, contrasting antipodal models of obsession – the former with thought and the latter with behavior. The Mishneh Torah, then, in its idealization of the Song's conception of love, demands the transformation of the primitive Jobian worship of God into the spiritually polished lover, to escape the grips of all those "powers" rabbinically associated with matter.[81] In effect, the Jobian fixation with "moral virtue and righteousness in action," the very core concerns of a

[79] B. Baba Bathra 16a.

[80] Maimonides bases this on the fact that among the four characteristics "pure and upright, who feared God, and turned away from evil," wisdom is missing. What is translated by Pines as "extraordinary" is the same term translated as "strange" in the introductory epistle to Joseph. See A. Nuriel, "The Use of the Term *Garib* in the *Guide of the Perplexed:* A Remark on the Esoteric Method in the *Guide*," *Sefunot* 5 (1990): 137–43. These are the types of biblical texts that particularly exercised them during their study sessions.

[81] Every mention of the *evil inclination* within a halakhic context in the Mishneh Torah is associated with the sexual urge. See MT, Women, 24:19; Sexual Prohibitions 1:9; Kings 8:4; related to this last law see GP, III:41, p. 567. Since man is born with this tendency, it needs to be reined in from birth. In light of our analysis, two different rationales offered for circumcision are in effect two sides of the same coin. One is that "it weakens the faculty of sexual excitement . . . for if at birth this member has been made to bleed and has had its covering taken away from it, it must indubitably be weakened" (GP, III:49, p. 609). The other is that it is a mark of a covenant that "imposes the obligation to believe in the unity of God" (GP, III:49, p. 610). The strive for the divine "kiss" consists of acquiring as much knowledge as possible of the existence and unity of God. Proportional to the rise of this knowledge is the decline of material urges, the strongest of which is sex. The love of God, therefore, entails the diminishment of sexuality or, in the language of the Song, the divine "kiss" replaces the human kiss. On circumcision, see Josef Stern, "Maimonides on the Covenant of Circumcision," in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History*, ed. M. Fishbane (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 131–54, and his later reformulation on the same issue in *Problems and Parables of Law: Maimonides and Nahmanides on Reasons for the Commandments* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

Code of Law, is to be superseded by one with pure contemplative thought: The saint must become the philosopher.[82]

Maimonides' commendation of the "kiss of death" explains the only other Mishneh Torah citation of both cola of the love command verse: *and you shall love your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might*. It is cited as a prooftext endorsing martyrdom in certain limited situations, since the love of God demands the commitment of your soul or your life force.[83] Voluntary surrender to death physically mirrors the kiss of death as the supreme expression of love of God. The latter connotes a natural separation of body and intellect, consequent to intellectual perfection, while the former is an embodied expression of the intellect's cardinal preeminence over the soul. Martyrdom is an obligatory choice when confronted with the alternative of death or violation of one of three negative commandments proscribing idolatry, adultery, and murder. Once the verse is quoted as the source for this primary directive, Maimonides continues to provide other rationales for it in the cases of murder and adultery.[84] As such, the verse in and of itself is primarily supportive of the demand for martyrdom in the case of idolatry, or, in other words, the belief in monotheism demands absolute commitment even at the cost of one's life. The verse poses a Mishneh Torah paradigm of the multi-layered hermeneutic that the *Guide* insists must be applied to the Bible, consisting of exterior/silver and interior/gold meanings (GP, I:12). Its exegetical levels of increasingly precious metals is layered by the silver command and, as we have seen, its highly abstract and esoteric gold directives for the intellectual love of God.[85] Martyrdom is the normative external expression of the philosophically internal, engendered kiss of death and, therefore, the primal verse commanding love of God conforms to another essential feature of the gold/silver hermeneutic which requires that "its

[82] Raphael Jospe argues that the Book of Job is a miniature *Guide of the Perplexed* in that its parable mirrors both structurally and conceptually the perplexed and the perplexities addressed by the *Guide*. See "The Book of Job as a Biblical *Guide of the Perplexed*" (Heb.), *Daat* 50 (2003): 83–96. The literature on Job in Maimonides is voluminous, but for an extensive partial bibliography, see Robert Eisen, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 247–48n6.

[83] MT, Foundations of Torah 5:7. On this law see Isadore Twersky, "Sanctifying the Name and Sanctifying Life: New Perspectives of Holiness in Maimonides' Thought," in *Sanctity of Life and Martyrdom: Studies in Memory of Amir Yekutiel*, ed. Isaiah Gafni and Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1992), 167–90.

[84] The rationale is based on b. Pesahim 25a where self-sacrifice in the case of murder is called for on the basis of "logic" while the same in the case of adultery is rationalized by way of biblical textual analogy between it and murder. That leaves the verse alone as the only basis for the same demand in the case of idolatry.

[85] Josef Stern, *Problems and Parables*, discerns a tripartite structure of parables consisting of vulgar, external, and internal meanings corresponding to meaningless, exoteric, and esoteric levels (72–73). For a more recent study, see Y. Lorberbaum, "'The Men of Knowledge and the Sages Are Drawn, As It Were, Toward This Purpose by the Divine Will': On Maimonides' Conception of Parables," *Tarbiz* 71 (2001/02): 86–132, 107–09, who sees this structure as intrinsically indispensable to the communication of esoteric knowledge.

external meaning also ought to contain in it something that indicates to someone considering it what is to be found in the internal meaning, as happens in the case of an apple of gold overlaid with silver filigree work having very small holes" (GP, I:12).[86]

Another verse appears in the *Guide* that is key to piecing together the Maimonidean allegory of the Song. In another prefatory chapter to the sections on the rationale of the commandments, Maimonides dedicates a chapter to one of the purposes of the Law aimed at restraining material impulses and desires. One facet of that restraint is "obedience, acquiescence, and docility." The particular prooftext in support of a corollary of that submissive posture, which is "docility in accepting what ought to be accepted" (GP, III:33, p. 532), is the Israelite expression of it, *And we will hear it and do it* (Deut. 5:24). Cryptically, then, Maimonides links this lesson of acceptance to the Song as integral to its message: "By way of parable, it is said about this *Draw me, we will run after thee*" (Song 1:4). The clue to allegorical significance of this lover's plea is planted, I believe, in the inapposite citation of Deuteronomy 5:24 as an endorsement of unmitigated submission to divine command. First, the rabbinically educated reader would have anticipated another classic rabbinic source for this kind of surrender, which focuses on a verse that echoes these exact two verbs but in reverse order – *We will do and we will hear* (Exod. 24:7) – especially given the copious references to it in the midrashic compilation on the Song, attributing the preciousness of Israel's love to this very declaration of fealty.[87] Preceding "hearing" with "doing" is taken to express an unconditional obedience (doing) regardless of what may be required (hearing).[88]

Once alerted to Maimonides' odd preference for Deuteronomy 5:24 in this setting, its original biblical context, as well as resort to it in other contexts of the *Guide*, calls for closer scrutiny. After hearing the divine voice directly at Sinai, and frightened for their lives in the face of such an overwhelming epiphany, the verse is part of a plea by the Israelites to have Moses act as their intermediary in the future, whose mediation of divine command will be "done and heard." According to Maimonides, the original unmediated divine call consisted only of the first two commandments regarding the existence and unity of God which, as we have seen, are equally accessible to Moses and the people "by human speculation alone" (GP, II:33, p. 364). The petition for Mosaic mediation of Deuteronomy 5:24 is for conveying the rest of the commandments that are

[86] Another example of Josef Stern's argument that the gold/silver hermeneutic applies not only to the narratives but to commandments as well is his "Maimonides on the Covenant of Circumcision and the Unity of God," in *The Midrashic Imagination*, ed. M. Fishbane (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 131–54. See his analysis of circumcision, which "exemplifies a mode of allegorical or parabolic interpretation that he employs not only for the narrative portions of Scripture, but also the commandments" (132 and discussion at 146–50).

[87] *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8. The last reference captures the notion of submission best.

[88] See b. Shabbat 88a for the various extolments of this gesture of blind obedience.

classified as "generally accepted opinions."[89] Thus, the obedience expressed by it is limited to the political/social/moral commandments as opposed to the ones that are constitutive of loving God.[90]

In light of this analysis, Maimonides' enigmatic association of Deuteronomy 5:24 with the esoteric message of Song 1:4 facilitates the deciphering of the Song's allegory. The verse continues with *the king has brought me to his chambers*, a subsequent stage to *draw me*, in advancing a love for God. The two phrases mirror precisely Maimonides' Mishneh Torah distinction noted previously, between the physics and metaphysics that are cultivated in the *pardes* for attaining true love of God and all the other halakhic study that creates the calm and settling environment in which that love can take root. Maimonides' identification of the first phrase, *draw me after you*, with the *doing and hearing* of Deuteronomy 5:24, then associates this stage of the lover's quest for God with the "generally accepted" kind of knowledge the Israelites acquiesced to. This forms the base, the societal framework, from which to launch the theoretical speculation and deep philosophical examination of the world that culminates in the love of God as signified by gaining entry into the privacy of the king's chambers. The two parts of the verse also parallel the two major groups in the previously mentioned palace parable pictured toward the conclusion of the *Guide*. Those who are merely obedient "adherents of the law" and those engaged in the study of the law "concerning the practices of divine service" never actually enter the ruler's palace, while those of varying degrees of sophistication who "plunged into speculation concerning the fundamental principles of religion" advance progressively along the palace's inner precincts toward the "inner part" where the ruler resides (GP, III:51, p. 619). *Draw me*, connoting law, knowledge by tradition, and generally accepted things, is the lover's cry evoked at the very rudimentary level of the first group whose faith is largely defined by law and blind faith, while *the king has brought me to his chambers* is the successful declaration of the mature lover who has progressed beyond the law. That the one who finds himself in the king's "chambers" of the *Guide*'s palace is one and the same as the lover of the Song contemplated by the Mishneh Torah is assured by the parallel language, the Judaeo-Arabic meshing

[89] See also GP, I:18, where the verse that pleas for Moses' "approaching" God from now on does not imply a spatial proximity, but rather "cognitive apprehension" (44).

[90] Maimonides considers Moses a "king" and so sets the stage for future kings who themselves become the embodiment of various religious ideals for their subjects. Apropos an exemplar of the type of love depicted here, Jacob Blidstein notes a fascinating shift from the public persona to the private in the law that mandates a life of abstinence for the king. Though he must not become inebriated as disruptive of a life dedicated to "Torah and the needs of Israel," when it comes to sexual abstinence "the verse conjoined his heart to the Torah more than anyone else." In this public lifestyle which eschews sexual indulgence, the king becomes the living embodiment of the Song's allegory, which also vacates its external eroticism for that internal love that has nothing to do with community. See Blidstein, *Political Concepts in Maimonidean Halakha* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2001), 188–90, and esp. n53. For the king as the living embodiment of Maimonides' ethical standards, see my "Maimonides on Kingship: The Ethics of Imperial Humility," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 34, no. 1 (2006): 89–114.

with the Hebrew – "after apprehension,[91] total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at. *Mostly this is achieved in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary"* (GP, p. 621 emphasis mine).[92] The chapter following the one that commences with the palace parable and concludes with the "kiss" of intellectual immortality clearly identifies the "king" of this highly segmented palace, with whom the intellectual lover becomes intimate, as "the intellect that overflows toward us and is the bond between us and Him" (GP, III:52, p. 629). The Mishneh Torah's designation of the Song as an allegory of intellectualized love of God not only elevates normative love into a metalegal state, but replaces God, as the ultimate object of desire, with the Active Intellect, or the fount of all metaphysics that can possibly be grasped.[93]

There can be no more fitting post-biblical rabbinic exemplar of the Song 1:4 than R. Akiva, whom Maimonides depicted as the very pinnacle of the systematic "theoretical study of these metaphysical matters" and who "achieved human perfection" (GP, I:32, p. 68). Not only is R. Akiva the advocate of the Song's supreme "holiness," he is also the most prominent rabbinic embodiment of verse 1:4, having safely embarked on the engagement with the subject matter that occupies the *pardes*, and ultimately succeeded in securing its knowledge.[94] The very direction of his biography in fact follows the trajectory of the kind of love envisioned by the allegory of the *Guide* encapsulated in verse 1:4, beginning in ignorance and illiteracy, advancing to an almost obsessive engagement with the "jots and tittles" of the Law, and mastering the metaphysical terrain of the *pardes*. That trajectory doesn't simply end there, but reaches its crescendo in the closest a post-biblical figure has come to the "kiss," suffering martyrdom and uttering with his last breath the command to love God *with all your heart, soul, and might*.[95]

[91] David Blumenthal makes much of the term "after" in various places to corroborate his claim of some post-cognitive state in Maimonides. However, the term "after," as in common English parlance may simply indicate the result of study and not another stage that somehow transcends study – as in "After you study all these rules of physics you will permanently grasp them." See Blumenthal, *Philosophic Mysticism*, 132–35.

[92] Steven Harvey also builds a strong case for this identity between the passionate love (*ishk* in Judaeo-Arabic) of the *Guide* and the "fitting love (*ha-ahavah ha-reuyah* in Hebrew) of the Mishneh Torah: "Maimonides in the Sultan's Palace," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. Kraemer, 46–75, at 67.

[93] When speaking about conjunction Gad Freudenthal discerns shifts in Maimonides' language between apprehension of God and apprehension of the Active Intellect, and therefore the question arises as to whether Maimonides believes in the possibility of conjunction with God or only with the Active Intellect. Although I do not think the former is possible, Freudenthal's conclusion is suggestive that in either case, "since the Active Intellect is an emanation of God, closer to Him than anything terrestrial, it remains valid that knowledge (especially of metaphysics), that is, conjunction or unification with Him or with His proximal emanation, the Active Intellect, has religious value." See "The Philosophical Mysticism of Maimonides and Maimon," in *Maimonides and His Heritage*, 113–52, at 124.

[94] b. Hagigah 15b; j. Hagigah 2:1.

[95] This terse biographical sketch can be culled from such sources as b. Berakhot 27a; b. Pesachim 47b; b. Berakhot 61b; and b. Menachot 29b. The last source actually elevates him above Moses in his exegetical skills.

THE FINAL OBJECT OF DESIRE

Finally, we return to the divine name, and the type of divine beloved that the first four paragraphs of this last chapter in the Book of Knowledge contemplates as the desired partner of the "soul" as intellect, of Abraham as its pre-Sinaitic incarnation, and of the Song's allegorical infatuated lover.[96] Here God is referred to by the Tetragrammaton *YHVH*, the four-letter epithet traditionally acknowledged as God's most sacred appellation and the object of the Deuteronomic love that commands the *heart, soul, and might*. The *Guide* singles out *YHVH* as the only divine sobriquet that signifies God's "essence and true reality" (GP, I:64, p. 156). All other names are merely what Maimonides classifies as "derivative," namely those that don't relate to God directly but rather to attributes derived from His actions in the world. In other words, those other names, as representing attributes of action, are not descriptive of God, but rather of things related to the world that are then projected onto Him. The name *YHVH* "gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence, may He be exalted. On the other hand, all the other great names give their indication in an equivocal way being derived from terms signifying actions, the like of which . . . exist as our own actions" (GP, I:61, p. 147).

Thus, the object of desire, as *YHVH*, at this intellectually fixated state of love, mirrors the subject in its interior, isolated, apolitical, asocial, and purely self-referential mode of perfection. All other "derivative" names such as *Judge, Just, the Gracious, the Merciful*, or *Elohim* – names specifically contrasted by Maimonides to the Tetragrammaton (GP, I:61, p. 147) – are actually the ones associated with those ethical and societal mores the Law aims at cultivating and preserving, either horizontally between human beings or vertically between human beings and God, as acts of *imitatio dei*. The Tetragrammaton, however, connotes no "between," no "other," but rather "is indicative of a notion with reference to which there is no association between God, may He be exalted, and what is other than He" (p. 148). Any love that has this being in its sights can only thrive in the kind of environment conjured by such an existence, in some *imitatio dei* that would induce a common ground where there is "no association with what is other," where law has no jurisdiction. No wonder, then, that Maimonides conspicuously omits the missionary activity in his Mishneh Torah account of love that he considered integral to its performance in the *Sefer HaMitzvot*. As Howard Kreisel explains, since love flows exclusively from intellectual apprehension, "only the internal, intellectual dimension is present. He thereby deters his readers from seeing in any external act, no matter how important it may be,

[96] In terms of divine names, it is interesting to note that Maimonides adopts a rabbinic ruling that all the mentions of Solomon except for one are "holy" or, in other words, stand for God. This would be vital to take into account for any reconstruction of the Song's allegory. See MT, Foundations of Torah 6:9.

a fulfillment of the commandment."[97] Consistently, an essential component of Abraham's portrait as a pioneer of monotheism, rather than as a lover of God rendered in the Laws of Idolatry, is his propagation of its ideals because of his role in developing a "nation that knows God."[98]

That austerely intellectual love now presented at the end of the Book of Knowledge, however, is precisely what we have seen is signified by the Song's obsessive lover and sleepwalker. Their heart (read: intellect) is awake while physically asleep, where actions are totally detached from mind that is preoccupied with a divine being that is itself, as denoted by *YHVH*, one that Maimonides locates prior to the world's coming into existence, and therefore "divested and stripped of all actions" (p. 149).[99] Biblical support for the notion that his unique name is the target of Maimonides' obsessive love, can be found in Psalms 91:14, cited by Maimonides in the chapter on the kiss to correlate that type of love with single-minded concentration on knowing God: "Because he hath set his passionate love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known My Name" (GP, III:51, p. 627). The particular term for "passionate love" (חשק) in this verse conveys "an excess of love, so that no thought remains that is directed toward a thing other than the Beloved."[100] That the

[97] Kreisel, "The Love and Fear," 229–30.

[98] Haym Soloveitchik raises a number of vexing problems regarding Maimonides' classifications in the Mishneh Torah, one of them being the placement of laws regarding conversion in the laws governing forbidden sexual relations. Considering the convert as one who rejects idolatry, who independently arrives at the truth of monotheism, and who is explicitly identified as a conceptual "descendant of Abraham," who assumes the Abrahamic mantle of "God's lover" in a famous response, it would have fit perfectly in a number of places in the Book of Knowledge. The primary one would have been at the conclusion of the Laws of Repentance where Abraham is depicted as this lover. Perhaps a solution to this lies precisely in what I mention here about Maimonides' omitting any reference to proselytizing as part of performing the command of love. Mentioning the convert at this point would have disturbed the total interiority of the love he presents here. See "Reflections on Principles of Classification in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah," *Maimonidean Studies* 4 (2000): 107–15, and his discussion at 110–11.

[99] Maimonides cites rabbinical support for this distinction in the midrashic tradition that "before the world was created there were only the Holy One, blessed be He, and his name." *Pirke DeRabbi Eliezer*, chap. 3. Thus *YHVH* captures what David Burrell describes as Maimonides' "radical agnosticism" regarding God since it connotes the absolute singularity of God's existence unlike anything within human experience. At the same time, that agnosticism is attenuated by the name's presentation as a model for *imitatio dei*, which is "the utmost virtue of man" (I:54). See Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Ghazali on Naming God," in *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 223–55.

[100] On this term, see Steven Harvey, "The Meaning of Terms Designating Love in Judaeo-Arabic Thought and Some Remarks on the Judaeo-Arabic Interpretation of Maimonides," in *Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. Norman Golb (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publications, 1997), 175–96. See also Amira Eran, "The Influence of Avicenna and Ghazali on Maimonides' Notion of Intellectual Passion" (Heb.), in *Maimonides: Conservatism, Originality, Revolution*, ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2008), 465–80, who concludes that Maimonides' *cheshek* is thoroughly rooted in Aristotle's view of the intellect.

Name envisioned here as passionate love's aim is *YHVH* can be determined from one of the most prominent of biblical exegetes and medieval exponents of Maimonidean thought, R. David Kimhi, in his comment to the verse which asserts that "knowledge of the articulated name consisting of four characters constitutes the love of God, blessed be He, and is the absolute limit of human cognition while still confined to a body."[101]

The ultimate paragraph of the Book of Knowledge borrows the connotations of the name *YHVH* that is isolated from all worldly actions, and superimposes them on the lover whose love can only perfect itself in kind. It is a love "upon which he must constantly be focused properly *to the point of abandoning everything in the world outside of it*, as commanded by 'with all your heart and all your soul.'"[102] Maimonides conspicuously omits the third term of the verse "with all your might" since he has moved to pure thought, disengaged from the world, and both heart and soul, as we have seen, are terms that signify intellect.

Maimonides' ultimate sentence in this abstruse supralegal excursus on love's ideal incorporates another divine epithet that reflects conscious philosophical design: "Therefore man must dedicate himself to understanding and becoming proficient in the sciences and the wisdom that disclose his Possessor (*kono*, קונו) as far as it is within the human capacity to understand and apprehend as we have explained in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah." Although what *YHVH* represents must always be borne in mind as the most pristine notion of divine existence, "stripped of all actions," or known by negating all attributes, that actual essence cannot be known, as evidenced by God's rejection of Moses' request for knowledge of it.

Maimonides' turn to the divine name of "possessor," is perfectly symmetrical with the graspable God defined in the very opening sentence of the Book of Knowledge, not as a creator, but as "a First Being who brought every existing thing into being."[103] The *Guide* rules out the philosophical demonstrability of *creatio ex nihilo* and sets out to prove God's existence based on the assumption

[101] וידיעת שם המפורש שהוא בן ארבע אותיות היא אהבת האל יתברך והיא ההשגה השלימה שיוכל כל אדם להשיג בעודנו גוף

[102] MT, Repentance, 10:6.

[103] See Leo Strauss, "Notes on Maimonides' Book of Knowledge," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ephraim E. Urbach, R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszubski (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 269–83. See also Bernard Septimus's observation that this opening formulation and its ensuing philosophical explanation in the Mishneh Torah, which is followed by "and knowledge of this matter is a positive commandment," distinguishes it from other instances where he posits the commandment first and then elaborates on it. Septimus concludes that in this type of formulation Maimonides' message is "clear" that we are dealing with "rational principles. The Law requires that we know them, but does not *establish* them – because they have independent epistemological status." See "Literary Structure and Ethical Theory in Maimonides' Book of Knowledge," in *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, ed. Jay Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 307–26, at 309.

of eternality. That first formulation is not of God as a creator but accords with the Aristotelian position of eternality.[104] Maimonides notes in the *Guide* that designating God as a possessor "tends toward the road of the belief in the eternity of a certain matter," a corrective to which other terms such as "create" (ברא) or "make" (עשה) provide (GP, II:30, p. 358). The Laws of the Foundations of the Torah avoid referencing God as a creator or maker, and so, since love's limits are defined by knowledge, Maimonides concludes with a notion of God that lies within those limits, that is inextricably bound with his opening definition of a God of eternality. Remarkably, Maimonides codified a God who is disengaged from a world that He coaxed out of some eternal matter,[105] the love of whom itself can only crystallize out of an empathic disengagement from worldly concerns.

Maimonides' classification of the Song, along with Ecclesiastes, another Solomonic composition, as "words of wisdom" (*hokhmah*),[106] which at first seems to indicate some kind of textual inferiority, now assumes a different texture. Though I cannot enter the debate here as to the ranking of the philosopher vis-à-vis the prophet, it is essential to precisely define in what way *hokhmah* characterizes the Song. Considering our analysis to this point, there is no question that, out of its four semantic senses, the Song's *hokhmah* would consist of "the apprehension of true realities which have for their end the apprehension of Him" (GP, III:54, p. 632). Maimonides specifically distinguishes the "science of Torah" from wisdom as two entirely separate species, the former consisting chiefly of knowledge through tradition and the latter "through correct speculation" (634).[107] By classifying the Song as belonging

[104] The proofs for the first two commandments of belief in divine existence and unity offered at the beginning of the MT, 1: 5–6, 7; 2: 5, are skeletal versions of Aristotle's proofs for the existence of a Prime Mover and its unity and incorporeality in *Metaphysics* 1, 2.8.1074a, 33–37. See Herbert Davidson, "The First Two Positive Commandments in Maimonides' List of the 613 Believed to Have Been Given to Moses at Mt. Sinai," in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought*, ed. R. Elior and P. Schaefer (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), reprinted in his *Maimonides the Rationalist* (Portland: Littman Library, 2011), 15–52. A serious problem arises with Maimonides' anchoring of the primary *mitzvot* in science because science has advanced since the Middle Ages and these proofs are no longer held as credible by any reputable philosophical school. As Davidson notes, Maimonides would have to admit this and "concede that the ground on which he anchored love, fear, and worship of God had turned to sand." (52)

[105] There is a vigorous debate in the scholarship on Maimonides' true position regarding creation, but suffice it for the purposes here to state that I agree with Warren Z. Harvey's convincing argument advocating Aristotle's theory of the eternity of the world. See "A Third Approach to Maimonides' Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle," *Harvard Theological Review*, 74 (1981): 287–301. For a thorough book-length treatment of the question, see Kenneth Seeskin, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) who argues against Harvey and in favor of the "Torah view," which sees the world as "the object of a free and benevolent will." (4)

[106] MT, Other Original Sources of Defilement 9:6, דברי חכמה.

[107] Though I believe this is the sense in which Maimonides meant the Song as "wisdom," he is not entirely consistent in its connotations of philosophical knowledge and includes ethics within its

to the species of "wisdom," then, its very genre indicates the essential facet of love developed so far, which isolates true love from its halakhic parameters, inculcates knowledge independent of tradition, and escapes the Law's parochial orbit into a universal philosophical enterprise.

When Maimonides addressed his constituencies in his capacity as communal leader, politician, halakhic decisor, and consoler, he adopted the traditional rabbinic stance on the Song as an allegory of the profound love between God and His people, the nation of Israel, unlike the very private affair of the Mishneh Torah and the *Guide*. Also, in contradistinction to the one-sided love directed by human beings toward God, when faced with dire existential threats to their spiritual and physical survival, Maimonides portrays Israel as the object of God's love, the "beautiful woman, having a perfect figure, marred by no defect," reflecting Song 4:7: "*Every part of you is fair, my darling. There is no blemish in you.*"[108] In response to the superior claims of other religions, in this case Islam, and to thwart any inducements to convert, Song 7:1 declares "*Turn back, turn back O maid of Shulam! Turn back, turn back that we may gaze upon you. Why will you gaze at the Shulamite in the Mahanayim dance.*" In its wordplay on *shulam* as perfection, and the place *mahanayim* as camps, it presents the inimitable national meeting with God at Sinai, a uniquely all-inclusive revelation like no other, as a mutual encounter "in which the camp of Israel faced the camp of the divine presence."[109] Again, the public communal dimension of Sinai is accentuated by the "camp" dance which expressed "the joy of the revelation at Mt. Sinai that was shared by the camp of Israel." The verse then is raised one more time, in pointed critique of the private Quranic revelation in which Islam is rooted, to highlight the public nature of Sinai, which was not contingent on one man's prophecy, but rather "because we, like him [Moses], witnessed the theophany at Mt. Sinai."[110] And, in a climax of its public message, Song 2:7 is invoked as a reminder of an oath taken not to "*waken or rouse love until it pleases,*" to ward off any premature messianic expectations. In the allegory of the Mishneh Torah and *Guide*, this verse would surely translate into a warning against hasty intellectual advancement toward achieving personal love of God

ambit as well. For a detailed analysis of all the different contexts where both the "wise" person (*hakham*) and the conceptual term "wisdom" (*hokhmah*) appears in the Maimonidean corpus, see Hannah Kasher, "Hakham, Hasid, and Tov in Maimonides' Writings: A Study in Terms and Their Reference," (Heb.) *Maimonidean Studies* 4 (2000).

[108] *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership*, trans. Abraham Halkin, discussion, David Hartman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), "The Epistle to Yemen," 104. On its historical context and meaning, see Joel Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 233–42. However, even this public "letter" bears Maimonides' signature writing style, which, according to Ralph Lerner, even when we, "expect Maimonides to be at his most lucid, he is indeed that – but not without leaving a trail of ambiguous and mixed signals." See "Winged Words to Yemen," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, No. 4, *Philosophies Juives Médiévales* (1998): 479–93, at 481.

[109] *Epistle*, 105.

[110] Ibid., 113.

without the prerequisite philosophical qualifications. However, it now assumes a public admonishment against an untimely prodding of what is to be a historic period of universal knowledge of God.[111]

Thus Maimonides' very different allegorization of the Song in his letters actually substantiates the thesis developed in this chapter. When addressing community as a spiritual practitioner, he communalized Song's eros as a component of his rhetorical appeal in confronting political and spiritual crisis. When promoting his ideal philosophical construct of a lover as a jurisprudential theoretician within his Mishneh Torah, a text detached from concrete existential circumstance, he turned inward and upward toward the mind.[112] The letters, the Mishneh Torah, and the *Guide* all reflect the penmanship of a single author possessed of a particular talent for presenting Judaism's foundational texts in a multivocal register.

LOOKING FORWARD

We return to a direct confrontational reading of the Song of Songs when we arrive at the nineteenth century in the chapter dedicated to R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin. In the meantime, as stated at the outset of this chapter, many of Maimonides' positions on various issues dealt with in relation to the Song reappear in the subsequent chapters either to be challenged or attacked, or as theologies to be embraced, or as targets of subversion for reintegration into a new theology distinct from its Maimonidean original. First and foremost among the sources to be encountered in this book along the historical route of seminal Jewish theologians and philosophers is the intricate importation of biblical and rabbinic material into the fabric of Maimonides' thought. The reader must not only be attuned to this facet of Maimonides' own thought but to that of the various thinkers to be discussed. Without being sensitive to this feature, it is not only Maimonides' thought that will be misunderstood but that of all those who engaged it.

Other themes, philosophical issues, and theological stances that have been addressed in this chapter and which resurface in those that follow are:

[111] The Epistle on Martyrdom (Iggeret HaShemad) appeals to the first half of this same verse as evidence of God's appreciation for martyrdom for His sake. See *Epistles*, 28, and Kraemer, *Maimonides*, supra, 104–13.

[112] See the debate between David Hartman and Haym Soloveitchik, and others dealing with inconsistencies between Maimonides' responsa and his code and whether the latter can be considered works of rhetoric rather than strictly halakhic. See H. Soloveitchik, "Maimonides' 'Iggeret ha-Shemad': Law and Rhetoric," in *Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume*, ed. L. Landman (New York, 1980), 281–319; D. Hartman, "The Epistle on Martyrdom: Discussion," in *Crisis and Leadership*, supra, 46–90. For an incisive recent reassessment of this debate, see Yair Lorberbaum and Haim Shapira, "Maimonides' Epistle on Martyrdom in Light of Legal Philosophy," *Dine Israel* (2008): 123–69. In this case I believe that Soloveitchik's characterization of the Iggeret HaShemad as a rhetorical work is equally apt for the letter to Yemen.

1. Intellectual perfection as the *summum bonum* of the religious life;
2. the construction, or reconstruction, of biblical personalities such as Abraham and Moses in a Maimonidean mold that often must be deconstructed to fit other molds;
3. the place of history and its value within Jewish thought and philosophy, a subject that features prominently in the next chapter on Nahmanides;
4. the various names of God, denoting philosophical conceptions of God in Maimonidean thought, and which convey very different notions in both rabbinic thought and within the kabbalistic schema of the divinity;
5. the rationale for the commandments and the resistance to Maimonides' collapse of the distinction between rational (*mishpatim*) and nonrational (*hukim*) *mitzvot*;
6. Maimonides' biblical lexicography, which is instrumental to his exegesis and stabilizes the Maimonidean sense of a biblical verse or phrase;
7. the isolated and highly individualistic religious life of contemplation advocated as ideal by Maimonides versus others that either promote the life of communal responsibility as supreme or one that maintains a balance between the public and private spiritual life;
8. the notion of divine hypostases and in particular of angels, which Maimonides drains of any ontological reality and substitutes for simply nature and natural causation.