BY WAY OF TRUTH:
ASPECTS OF NAHMANIDES'
KABBALISTIC HERMENEUTIC

by

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Perhaps no one figure is more responsible for the legitimization of kab-
balah as an authentic esoteric tradition of Judaism than Moses ben Nahman
(1194–1270). Although from the beginnings of its literary history kabbalah
was associated with men of rabbinic standing, such as R. Abraham ben
David of Posquières, no one before Nahmanides had attained a reputation
for excellence in halakhic and mystical matters and had written extensively
in both domains. Nahmanides' involvement with kabbalah, especially in
the context of a commentary on the Torah written for the layman, as the
author plainly states in his introduction,[1] surely lent a stamp of approval to

　　1. *Perush ha-RaMBaN 'al ha-Torah,* ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1959), 1: Introduction, p. 7.

the whole enterprise. R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon in his *Baddei ha-'Aron u-Migdal Ḥananel* gave the following characterization of Naḥmanides' kabbalistic literary activity:

> The great rabbi, Moses ben Naḥman, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote his book [i.e., the commentary on the Torah] and a book [on] Job.[2] He alluded to hidden matters in every place (רמז בנסתרות בכל מקום ומקום) to arouse [people's awareness] as is appropriate and according to what he received.[3] However, he concealed his words to a high degree, for it is written, "Honey and milk are under your tongue" (Song of Songs 4:11).[4]

It is of interest to compare the above passage with a contemporary characterization given by Gershom Scholem:

> Naḥmanides . . . hinted, in greater or lesser detail, at kabbalistic doctrines calculated to whet the reader's appetite for further initiation rather than to veil the mysteries. In this sense, the propagandistic impact of Naḥmanides' writings cannot possibly be overestimated.[5]

Admittedly, Naḥmanides' style is highly allusive and presents great difficulty for the uninitiated. Moreover, he himself urged his readers, in the introduction to the Torah commentary, to concentrate on his new insights regarding the plain meanings and the homiletical explanations (חדושים בפשטים ובמדרשים) and to leave aside the kabbalistic allusions, for in any event, claims Naḥmanides, one can understand the latter only if one has a teacher to expound them and not by means of one's supposition or deduc-

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2. An obvious play on the famous talmudic discussion in b. Bava Batra 14b concerning biblical authorship of various books: משה כתב ספרו . . . ואיוב. My thanks to Prof. David Berger for indicating this reference to me.

3. Cf. the interesting formulation in Shem Tov ibn Gaon's *Keter Shem Tov*, printed in J. Koriat, ed., *Ma'or wa-Shemesh* (Livorno, 1839), fol. 39a, where it is stated that Naḥmanides "also revealed a lot to the enlightened one (משכיל) through an oral transmission going back to Moses, our rabbi, peace be upon him."

4. *Baddei ha-'Aron u-Migdal Ḥananel* (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 29. For the use of this text to explain the inherent necessity of concealing truth in parabolic form, see Maimonides' introduction to his commentary on the mishnaic order of *Zera'im*, in *Mishnah 'im Perush ha-RaMBaM*, ed. Y. Kafiḥ (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 19, and idem, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:12.

5. G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, 1987), p. 385. See also idem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1948), pp. 50–51; *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 51.

tion (סברא).[6] Nevertheless the simple fact that he did incorporate these kab-
balistic ideas and themes in his commentary proved to be monumental, for
it both spurred widespread kabbalistic activity which attempted to explicate
these allusions and it placed in the hands of the nonspecialist a document
that assumed that the hidden meaning of Scripture and the inner dimension
of Jewish tradition consisted of kabbalistic theosophy.[7]

   Despite the central importance of this seminal figure in the history of
both kabbalah and biblical interpretation, there is as yet no comprehensive
treatment of either Naḥmanides' hermeneutics or his kabbalah. To be sure,

6. *Perush,* Introduction, p. 7. See the use made of Naḥmanides' comments in R. Abraham
ben Eliezer ha-Levi, *Masoret Ḥokhmah,* in Scholem, *Qiryat Sefer* 2 (1929): 126: ובדעתי לערוך
טענות בריאות וטובות נגד בעלי סברות הללו ושאר סברות אחרות כי אין הדבר תלוי בסברא רק בקבלה מפה אל פה מקובל
Cf. Ḥayyim. חכם לאוזן מקבל משכיל כאשר כתב בהקדמת פירוש התורה הרב המקובל האמיתי הוא הרמב"ן ז"ל
Vital's introduction to *'Eṣ Ḥayyim* (Jerusalem, 1910), fols. 4c–d: "This wisdom [i.e., kabbalah]
was openly revealed until the death of R. Shimeon b. Yoḥai. . . . From that time all the wise
men who knew this wisdom were occupied with it in great concealment and not openly. And
one would not reveal it except to one student in each generation, and even this only in chapter
headings, from mouth to mouth. . . . This wisdom went on from generation until generation
until the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory, the last of the true kabbalists [אחרון המקובלם האמתיים].
. . . The work [i.e., the Torah commentary] composed by the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory,
is 'true and firm, well-established and existing' [according to the formulation of the prayer
after the *Shema'* in the morning service: אמת ויציב ונכן וקיים] for the one who understands it . . .
One should not come near all the books of the later kabbalists [who lived] after the RaMBaN,
blessed be his memory, for from the RaMBaN and onward the way of his wisdom has been hid-
den from the eyes of all sages, and nothing remains but some of the branches of the introduc-
tions without their roots." On the distinction between קבלה and סברא in Naḥmanides' thought,
see M. Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ram-
ban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity,* ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, 1983),
pp. 58–60. On p. 59, n. 33, Idel has referred to Abraham ibn Ezra and Judah ha-Levi as pos-
sible sources for Naḥmanides. See also *Tosafot,* Soṭah 24b, s.v. ורבי יונתן; and Pseudo-Baḥya,
Torot ha-Nefesh, ed. I. Broydé (Paris, 1896), p. 24. And cf. the words of the R. Meir ha-Levi
Abulafia cited in B. Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 77.
For the supremacy of prophecy (נבואה) or tradition (קבלה) over rational inquiry (חקירה), see
She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA (Jerusalem, 1976) 1:9, and the extended analysis of this text in
D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba" (M.A. thesis,
Yeshiva University, 1986), pp. 8–23. The supremacy of the force of an orally received tradition
to the use of logic in the application of accepted hermeneutical principles is seen clearly in the
famous story of Hillel and the Benei Betera in j. Pesaḥim 6:1, 33a. Cf. R. Loewe, "The 'Plain'
Meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish Exegesis," *Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies London*
1 (1964): 153.

7. See E. Gottlieb, *Meḥqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 88–90;
Scholem, *Origins,* pp. 385–86; I. Twersky, Introduction to *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ram-
ban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity,* p. 3, and other references in the fol-
lowing note.

there have been several important scholarly contributions that have dealt with select aspects of Naḥmanides' thought.[8] In particular, the work of Moshe Idel should be singled out, for he has made the most systematic effort to characterize Naḥmanides' kabbalistic orientation, especially as it compares and contrasts with the subsequent development of kabbalah in late-thirteenth-century Castile.[9] What is still lacking, however, is a thorough understanding of the dynamics of Naḥmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutical stance. The aim of this paper is to analyze some of the key features of this hermeneutic. The analysis will proceed from three vantage points: an examination of (1) the fundamental principle of the twofold nature of the text which informs Naḥmanides' approach to Scripture; (2) the relation between the way of *peshaṭ* (literal-narrative meaning)[10] and that of *sod* (esoteric meaning), most frequently referred to by Naḥmanides as *derekh ha-'emet* (the way of truth);[11] and (3) the function of rabbinic *'agga-*

8. The most important of these are the articles by J. Perles, B. Septimus, D. Berger, and A. Funkenstein mentioned below at various points in my analysis. See also the work of E. Gottlieb cited in the preceding note. Noteworthy as well are the valuable comments of Gershom Scholem scattered through many of his writings, but mostly in *Origins of the Kabbalah*, chap. 4, and *Ha-Qabbalah be-Gerona* (Jerusalem, 1974). Note should also be made of C. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Ḥoqer u-khe-Mequbbal* (Jerusalem, 1978), dealing mostly with Naḥmanides' interpretation of the commandments. Concerning the latter, see also J. Katz, *Halakhah we-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 30–33.

9. See Idel, "We Have No Tradition," pp. 51–73.

10. Definitions of *peshaṭ* are numerous, although it is usually rendered as the "plain," "simple," "literal," or "contextual" sense. For the most recent survey of various scholarly opinions, see S. Kamin, *Rashi's Exegetical Categorization in Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 12–14 [in Hebrew]. On p. 14 the author gives what seems to me to be a most sensible and comprehensive definition of *peshaṭ*, and one that I believe is applicable to Naḥmanides: "The explanation of a verse according to its language, syntactical structure, thematic connection, literary genre and structure, and the mutual relations between these elements." In my hyphenated expression "literal-narrative" I have tried to capture this sense of the term. See J. Rogers and D. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York, 1979), p. 16, who describe the biblical exegesis of John Chrysostom (347–407) and the Antiochene school from which he emerged as the "grammatical-historical interpretation." See also Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time* (London, 1959), 1:90–91, 96. On the Antiochene school's reaction to the allegorism of the Alexandrian school of Christian exegetes, see J. Guillet, "Les Exégèses d'Alexandrie et d'Antioche, conflit ou malentendue?" *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947): 257–302; H. de Lubac, *L'Écriture dans la Tradition* (Paris, 1966), pp. 67–69; J. Pelikan, *The Preaching of Chrysostom: Homilies on the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 14–15.

11. It is of interest that in Isaac of Acre's *'Oṣar Ḥayyim*, *derekh ha-sod* is distinguished from *derekh ha-'emet*. See, e.g., MS Guenzberg 775, fol. 13b, where a particular verse, accord-

dah in Naḥmanides' kabbalistic exposition. Whether or not Naḥmanides was the recipient of authentic ancient traditions, as Idel has forcefully argued,[12] it is only by fully exposing his presentation of kabbalistic doctrine that we will be able to evaluate the innovative or conservative trends in his exegesis and determine the role played by the creative religious imagination in his thought.

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With respect to the question of Naḥmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutic, one finds various views expressed in the scholarly literature. Amos Funkenstein, for instance, characterized Naḥmanides' "kabbalistic reading" of Scripture as a "mystical-theosophical exegesis."[13] Idel reacts to this characterization by stating that such terms "fit the Zoharic perception of the Torah and its exegesis rather than Naḥmanides." Indeed, says Idel, "it seems doubtful whether Naḥmanides had a kabbalistic hermeneutical method of his own,"[14] by which the author means that Naḥmanides did not have a hermeneutic orientation that was unique to him. In his *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* Idel reiterates this view by drawing the following contrast between the hermeneutical assumption of the early period in Catalonia, epitomized by Naḥmanides, and that of the later period in Castile, the generation of the Zohar. For the former kabbalah is "identified with specific traditions concerning limited segments of the Bible," whereas for the latter it "focuses on the results of powerful hermeneutic devices that enable the mystic to discover the many hidden meanings latent in the canon."[15] Hence, Idel bases his claim that Naḥmanides has no hermeneutic method of his own on his view that Naḥmanides had a limited corpus of esoteric truths that he had

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ing to the "way of mystery" (*'al derekh ha-sod*), is said to refer to Meṭaṭron, whereas according to the "way of truth" (*'al derekh ha-'emet*) it is said to refer to *'Aṭarah*, i.e., the *Shekhinah*. From this and other examples one may assume that the exegetical categories have distinct ontological correlates: the *derekh ha-'emet* being reserved for the realm of the divine emanations, the *sefirot*, and *derekh ha-sod* for the angelic realm below the *sefirot*.

12. See also the article of Pines cited below, n. 100.

13. A. Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan and F. Talmage (Cambridge, 1982), p. 134.

14. Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 63, n. 45.

15. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), p. 215.

received. That is, he did not systematically or creatively apply kabbalistic interpretations to Scripture, but only commented in this way where he had an authoritative tradition. Naḥmanides thus leaves one with the impression of lacking a comprehensive hermeneutic.

A careful analysis of this problem is crucial to a correct understanding of Naḥmanides' thought and his contribution to both biblical exegesis and kabbalah. Let me begin by stating what I intend by the expression "hermeneutical method": a theoretical system of beliefs that determines one's understanding of a text and the operations of interpretation by which one applies those beliefs to specific texts.[16] Given this working definition, it seems to me undeniably the case that Naḥmanides does exhibit such a kabbalistic hermeneutical method. The main difference between Naḥmanides and the Zohar—i.e., with respect to the question of hermeneutical methodology and not with respect to particular doctrinal points—lies in the fact that Naḥmanides, as was pointed out by Joseph Perles in an article published in 1858, wanted to integrate better the esoteric interpretation with philological and aggadic concerns.[17] This is not to say that the latter are not present to some degree in the Zohar; on the contrary, as Wilhelm Bacher demonstrated, concern with *peshaṭ* as well as *'aggadah* and/or homiletics is found in the zoharic corpus.[18] The issue is rather that in the Zohar all other exegetical modes are subsumed under the theosophical. The author of the Zohar wanted to create a symbolic work of an independent status, whereas Naḥmanides sought to provide a multidimensional commentary on the scriptural text in which kabbalistic explanations were accorded an important but relatively limited role from a statistical or quantitative point of view. With

16. My formulation is based partially on the definition of hermeneutics offered in Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, 1981), p. 43. I am not arguing that Naḥmanides applies his hermeneutical method in any systematic manner. Indeed, his approach is that of an exegete rather than a philosopher or logician, responding therefore to the needs of the particular moment as determined by a given textual context. Nevertheless I think one can speak legitimately of a "hermeneutical method" in the case of the exegete, even if the underlying principles of interpretation are not stated in a methodical or systematic way.

17. J. Perles, "Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 7 (1858): 118.

18. W. Bacher, "L'exégese biblique dans le Zohar," *Revue des études juives* 22 (1891): 33–46, 219–229.

respect to the specification of scriptural words as symbols for theosophic processes or states, I see no real difference in method between Naḥmanides and the Zohar, but only in range of applicability.[19] That is to say, both Naḥmanides and the author of the Zohar share, in my opinion, a basic hermeneutical assumption about the Torah which enables them, each from his own perspective, to view the text as a *corpus symbolicum* of the divine.[20] For both, the Torah is a theosophical prism imparting to one with proper training esoteric knowledge about God. To be sure, Naḥmanides works with an alternative conception of kabbalah, as may be adduced from his comments in the introduction to the Torah commentary, that involves not theosophy but a knowledge of Torah as consisting of an amalgam of divine names. Such a conception can be traced to much earlier sources and was shared in Naḥmanides' time by the German Pietists and other kabbalists, most notably, Abraham Abulafia.[21] While it is undoubtedly true, as Idel has argued,[22] that this tradition or kabbalah based on the divine names has no explicit theosophical implications, the fact of the matter is that the vast majority of

19. The limited scope of Naḥmanides' kabbalah, as described by Idel (see above, nn. 14–15), seems to me to be beside the point with respect to the issue of the hermeneutical principle that I am describing. After all, even if one accepts at face value that one can reconstruct all of Naḥmanides' kabbalah from his written documents, the fact is that he does make general claims in his writings about the nature of Torah which inform his hermeneutical stance.

20. Kabbalists are rarely interested in commenting on the whole biblical context. This is not to say that context is entirely irrelevant for kabbalistic exegesis, but rather that kabbalists were not intertested in taking the full context into account when offering their theosophic interpretations. In this respect the kabbalists, like the older midrashists, are "verse-centered." Cf. J. Kugel, "Two Interpretations of Midrash," in *Midrash and Literature,* ed. G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven, 1986), pp. 94–95.

21. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), p. 39; Idel, "The Concept of Torah in the Hekhalot Literature and Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 52–53 [in Hebrew].

22. See Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 54, n. 10: "It is worth mentioning that Naḥmanides conceives of Kabbalah as a tradition about the Divine Names having no explicit theosophical implications." See also the formulation of Idel, "Some Conceptions of the Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman,* ed. J. Hackett *et al.* (Washington, 1988), p. 132: "Naḥmanides . . . seemingly disregarded the esoteric nature of such other Kabbalistic topics as the names of the *Sefirot.*" See, however, Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," p. 134, who understands Naḥmanides' statement that the Torah is comprised of divine names as alluding to "constellations within the divine realm," i.e., the *sefirot,* thus interpreting Naḥmanides in a theosophic way.

Naḥmanides' kabbalistic allusions do have theosophical implications and
cannot be understood without the standard kabbalistic symbolism.[23] It is
thus clear that in practice Naḥmanides read words of Scripture in a symbolic
way that could be decoded only by reference to a theosophical kabbalah.
The difference in the scope and variation of applicability of this symbolism
between Naḥmanides and the Zohar is, from the methodological point of
view, insignificant. The fact that Naḥmanides does interpret select words or
expressions of Scripture as symbolic references to the divine colors his over-
all hermeneutical stance vis-à-vis the text, even if this mode of interpreta-
tion is not applied methodically and uniformly. Such a reading of Scripture,
I submit, was equally shared by Naḥmanides and the Castilian kabbalists
who formed the circle of the Zohar, such as Moses de León and Joseph
Gikatilla.

In agreement with Funkenstein,[24] I would maintain that the kabbalistic
hermeneutical method of Naḥmanides is stated by the author himself in the
context of his discussion on creation: "And know that in the truest sense
Scripture speaks of lower matters and alludes to supernal matters," הכתוב יגיד
בתחתונים וירמה בעליונים.[25] Although the statement occurs in the specific context

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23. The precise relationship between the theosophical reading of Torah and this alternative
magical-mystical one is not worked out in Naḥmanides, as far as I can tell. See Joshua ibn
Shuʻaib, *Derashot ʻal ha-Torah* (Cracow, 1573; reprint ed., Jerusalem,1969), fol. 59a, who cites
and explicates Naḥmandies' view about the primordial Torah. Ibn Shuʻaib, based on a close
reading of Naḥmanides' introduction, concludes that this primordial Torah, written in one con-
tinuous manner (כתיבה צרופה), was in fact divided into three parts or aspects, connected exegeti-
cally to the verse, "I wrote down for you a threefold lore," כתבתי לך שלישים (Prov. 22:20): (1) the
names of God; (2) the fifty gates of understanding (בינה) in which are included the account of the
chariot, the account of creation, physiognomy and chiromancy, and all other possible wisdom;
and (3) the Torah as we have it with accentuated marks and divisions of words (בפסוקי טעמים
ובהפסקת מלות). If we assume that theosophic kabbalah is to be included in the second category,
the fifty gates of understanding having a definite theosophic reference, as is clear from Naḥ-
manides himself (see *Perush,* Introduction, pp. 3–4), then perhaps we have here an effort to
combine the two esoteric traditions in some hierarchical fashion. The matter requires further
investigation. Cf. ibn Shuʻaib, fol. 4a, where he offers an alternative threefold division of the
contents of Torah: (1) secrets of the account of the chariot and the account of creation; (2) posi-
tive and negative commandments; and (3) narratives. See below, n. 44. On the conception of
kabbalah as an esoteric tradition involving the divine names, see also Naḥmanides' commen-
tary to Exod. 28:30.

24. Cf. Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," p. 133.

25. *Perush,* Gen. 1:2 (p. 15). That this statement refers to an emanative process in the sefiro-
tic realm that parallels the creation of the lower worlds is clear from the various supercom-
mentaries on Naḥmanides. See Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov,* in *Ma'or wa-Shemesh,*

of the creation story, it seems to me justified to extend its usage and to employ it as a general principle of methodology insofar as it assumes a certain hermeneutical posture vis-à-vis the text that is reflected in the cosmic structure. Interestingly enough, this statement, or paraphrase of it, was already employed as a general hermeneutical principle in other contexts by a number of Naḥmanides' disciples.[26] Unlike Funkenstein, however, I do not understand the implication of this to be that there is a necessary divergence or discrepancy between the literal-narrative (*peshaṭ*) and the mystical-theosophical (*sod*) interpretations. On the contrary, Naḥmanides' hermeneutic is rooted in kabbalistic ontology which recognizes two parallel worlds, the divine and the mundane: what goes on below has a corresponding phenomenon above, just as what goes on above has its reflection below. The point is well-made in the anonymous text that apparently derived from the school of Naḥmanides, *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut.* "In all of the section of Genesis the words have a double meaning (דברים כפולים), revealed and hidden (נגלה ונסתר), and both are true. For just as there are things below, so above there are things similarly called, and these [things above] are the foundation for things below which are in their pattern."[27] The words of this kabbalist

ed. J. Koriat (Livorno, 1839), fols. 27a–b; *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN* (Warsaw, attributed to Meir ibn Sahula [according to Scholem the author is Joshua ibn Shu'aib; for references and counterclaims, see E. Gottlieb, *Ha-Qabbalah be-Khitvei Rabbenu Baḥya ben 'Asher* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 214, n. 1]), fols. 1a–b; Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayim,* ed. A. Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 13 (of critical text); the anonymous commentary in Oxford-Bodleian MS 1645, fols. 81a–b (concerning this text see Gottlieb, op. cit., p. 15, and Goldreich, op. cit., pp. 76–103 [of the introduction]); Joshua ibn Shu'aib, *Derashot,* fol. 3b.

26. Cf. the anonymous supercommentary on Naḥmanides' commentary to Gen. 3:22, apparently from the school of R. Solomon ibn Adret, preserved in MS JTS Mic. 1895, fol. 11b; Shem Tov ibn Gaon's *Baddei ha-'Aron u-Migdal Ḥananel,* p. 32; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim,* p. 234.

27. *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* (Jerusalem, 1963; reprint of Mantua ed., 1558), fol. 90b. And see Baḥya ben Asher's commentary to Gen. 6:2 (ed. Chavel, 1:98): "All the matters of the account of creation are twofold (כפולים) and all is true." Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives,* pp. 207–209, where the author contrasts the hermeneutical stance of what he calls "theosophical" and "ecstatic" kabbalah on the grounds that the former, unlike the latter, knows no antinomy between the exoteric and esoteric, the plain and hidden meanings. Idel perceptively links the hermeneutical stance to the respective positions of the two schools on the question of the role of the body in religious life. That is, for the theosophic kabbalists, just as the body was seen as reflecting the higher structure of God, so the plain meaning was seen as reflecting the esoteric truth; for the ecstatic kabbalists, on the other hand, the body is seen as a hindrance to the mystical goal and, analogously, the plain meaning can be an obstruction to the hidden meaning. Concerning the latter, see also Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abula'fiyah u-Mishnato" (Ph.D.

are based on Naḥmanides' own commentary to Gen. 3:22, as we shall short-
ly see below. It is significant, however, that he has extended Naḥmanides'
hermeneutical principle from the particular case of the narrative about the
Garden of Eden to the whole section of Genesis. It would not be incorrect,
in my opinion, to further extend this principle to Scripture in general, as the
notion of two layers of meaning reflecting two levels of reality is operative in
other contexts in Naḥmanides' commentary as well.

Here it would be beneficial to cite a few examples from Naḥmanides
himself. In his commentary to Gen. 3:22 Naḥmanides maintains that while
the Garden of Eden does literally exist on earth with all the details as
described in the Bible, these matters nonetheless point to supernal realities:
"All these things are twofold (כפולים),[28] the overt and the hidden in them are
true (הגלוי והחתום בהם אמת)."[29] Elaborating on this point in his *Sha'ar ha-*

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diss., Hebrew University, 1976), p. 193, and idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abra-
ham Abulafia* (Albany, N.Y., 1988), pp. 73–74. In my view, Idel's characterization of the her-
meneutics of theosophic kabbalah is a fitting characterization of Naḥmanides as well, and
one is therefore quite justified in speaking of a hermeneutical method in conjunction with the
latter.

28. Naḥmanides' position is brought into focus when one contrasts his sense of the twofold
nature of scripture with that of the eleventh-century Northern French exegete, R. Solomon ben
Isaac of Troyes (Rashi). The latter too employs twofold exegesis, but for him this means only
that the literal-syntactical and homiletic-aggadic meanings exist simultaneously (cf. Naḥman-
ides' commentary to Gen. 8:4). There are no ontological correlates to these exegetical categ-
ories, whereas for Naḥmanides there are. On Rashi's view, see S. Kamin, *Rashi's Exegetical
Categorization*, pp. 158–208.

29. *Perush*, Gen. 3:22 (p. 42). Cf. Baḥya ben Asher, *Be'ur 'al ha-Torah*, Gen. 2:9 (ed.
Chavel, 1:67). See ibid., Gen. 18:8, p. 173, where Baḥya employs the following saying to empha-
size that the literal and esoteric are both true: הגלוי והסתום בהם אמת. See also *Kitvei Ramban*,
1:186, where, after hinting at the esoteric doctrine of transmigration alluded to in Eccles. 1:4,
Naḥmanides writes: כי דברי שלמה כפולים מכופלים בחכמה. See also the anonymous supercommentary
to Naḥmanides' commentary preserved in MS JTS Mic. 1895, fol. 11b: . . . והבין כי גן עדן בארץ
מדמה למטה ורומז למעלה ועץ הדעת הע' ועץ חיים'היא התפא'. The twofold nature of Naḥmanides' interpre-
tation of this biblical episode has already been discussed by B. Safran, "Rabbi Azriel and Naḥ-
manides: Two Views of the Fall of Man," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ramban): Explorations
in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, pp. 88–89. Safran, however, is not careful to distin-
guish between his usage of the terms "allegorical" and "symbolic," and the reader is left with
some confusion as to which term best describes Naḥmanides' hermeneutical stance from his
point of view. He thus writes: "Naḥmanides repeats his contention that the Eden story is
allegorical . . . and goes on to explain that the serpent is *symbolic* of Samael, of Satan. The
allegorical identification of the serpent in Sha'ar ha-Gemul corroborates the reader's sense of
Naḥmanides' direction, הדברים כפולים" (p. 89, my emphasis). By understanding Naḥmanides'
use of the word כפולים in the sense of allegorical versus literal, Safran is led to the conclusion
that for Naḥmanides "there must be a sense in which the serpent is no serpent." In fact,

Gemul (the concluding part of *Torat ha-'Adam*), Naḥmanides notes, with respect to all the matters pertaining to the Garden of Eden, that they are twofold because they are images from which one can understand the secret of deep matters, סוד הענין הזה שדברים כפולים . . . כי הם כציורי דבר להבין סוד ענין עמוק במשל.[30] The realities in the earthly Garden of Eden are "images of the upper secrets," ציורין לסודות העליונים; indeed, for Naḥmanides, the lower realities only take on the names that they have on account of the upper realities, תופסין השם הזה שאלו התחתונים מהם [העליונים].[31] Naḥmanides therefore insists that

however, this interpretation undermines the whole point of Naḥmanides' approach. Naḥ-manides wants to argue that the various elements of the Eden story are true in two senses—כפולים—in the literal sense and in a symbolic one. The symbolic meaning does not, however, undermine the literal. In kabbalistic terms, the serpent was a real serpent, but at the same time the serpent symbolizes the force of evil in the upper world, Samael. That this is the correct interpretation can be proven by a close examination of the context in *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*, for after Naḥmanides cites chapter 21 of *Pirqei Rabbi 'Eli'ezer* wherein the figurative explanations are given, he stresses from chapter 20 of the same work as well as from other rabbinic contexts that it is clear that the Garden of Eden was an actual garden on the earth, שכל האגדות מפורשות הן בגן עדן שהוא גן ממש בארץ (*Kitvei Ramban*, 2:296). See also the citation below at n. 33, and the passage from *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* cited in n. 27. An allegorical reading attributed to Naḥmanides that leads to the denial of the reality of a biblical datum, such as that of Safran, simply misses the mark. See above, n. 25, and below, nn. 56 and 60. Indeed the reading of the biblical episode that Safran attributes to Naḥmanides is the very one adopted by Abraham Abulafia, who openly rejected the literal meaning of the text and proffered in its place an allegorical one; see Idel, "Kitvei 'Avraham 'Abul'afiyah u-Mishnato, p. 223. R. Solomon ibn Adret was much more favorably disposed to the allegorical mode of exegesis, especially when applied to rabbinic aggadah. Cf. C. Horowitz, "'On the Rashba's 'Commentary to the Aggadot'—Between Kab-balah and Philosophy," *Da'at* 18 (1986): 15–25 [in Hebrew]; D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philo-sophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba," pp. 89–118. See, however, *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA* 1:9, where ibn Adret criticizes those philosophers who treat matters in the Torah, such as resurrection of the dead, allegorically when these matters contradict the ways of reason. Ibn Adret's position is that at times verses in the Torah should be taken in an allegorical man-ner, but when there is a received tradition about a certain matter the literal meaning should not be denied even if it contradicts reason. The function of allegorical exegesis is even stronger in Baḥya ben Asher, who incorporated it as one of the four modes of interpretation of Scripture (see below, n. 60). See Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 69. On the kabbalistic aversion to alle-gorization of Scripture, see the comment of Recanati, *Sefer Ṭa'amei ha-Miṣwot* (Basel, 1581), fol. 3a: "In every place in the Torah that you can elevate the event or the commandment to an entity higher than it, you must elevate it . . . provided that you do not say that the matter is not as it is in its literal sense but it alludes to [or symbolizes] the thing above it." Recanati therefore advocates a symbolic reading of the text by means of which a particular narrative or command-ment is understood in terms of a higher process, but he cautions against this symbolic reading leading to a denial of the literal sense of the text.

30. *Kitvei Ramban* 2:296–97.

31. Ibid. 2:297. Cf. Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei 'Orah*, ed. J. Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem 1981), 1:49–51. See also the anonymous commentary on the *sefirot* preserved in MS Paris 770, fol. 62a, where the point is made in language that is close to that of Gikatilla: "Know that man is

one should not merely treat matters pertaining to the lower Garden of Eden allegorically, thereby removing them from reality. On the contrary, he maintains that the mundane realities exist both as entities in themselves and as symbols for the supernal entities in the celestial and divine realms:[32] "For the words of Torah regarding the matter of the Garden of Eden are not parables without [literal] truth, and the words of our rabbis and the tradition of the fathers . . . in these matters are not vain talk or a parable in the figurative sense. Rather everything is true and reliable, the outer and inner, from grade to grade, and from elevation to elevation."[33]

Other examples may be gathered from various places in Naḥmanides' commentary to the Torah. Thus, in Gen. 14:18, after explaining that Shalem refers to Jerusalem, Naḥmanides notes that it was known through a tradition (קבלה) that "Jerusalem corresponds to the upper temple in which is found the *Shekhinah* of the Holy One, blessed be He, who is called *Ṣedeq*."[34] Again, in his commentary to Lev. 23:24 Naḥmanides notes that the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur allude to the ten *sefirot*. More specifically, the dynamic of these days involves the unification and balancing of the attributes of mercy and judgment,[35] the masculine and feminine

made in the image of the upper *sefirot* . . . for there are upper potencies (כחות) that are called hand, foot, eye, head, as you find it written in Scripture in many places. . . . So in man there is an eye, a hand, and [other] limbs. And this is [the import of] the saying of the sages, blessed be their memory, 'The Torah speaks in the language of man.' In any event these [*sefirot*] are potencies and not [physical] limbs. Yet the limbs of man are called by [the names of] these potencies. Therefore the limbs of man and his intellect are like the *sefirot*." And cf. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. R. Margaliot (Jerusalem, 1978), §80 and the interpretation thereof in Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov, *Sefer ha-'Emunot* (Jerusalem, 1969), fol. 19b.

32. For Naḥmanides, there are actually three levels: the earthly Garden of Eden, the heavenly Garden of Eden in the seventh heaven, *'Aravot*, and the upper Eden in the divine realm, the *Shekhinah*, also referred to as the צרור החיים, "bundle of life." See *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:160–161, 2:297–298. This structure is found in the Zohar and in the Hebrew theosophic writings of R. Moses de León as well, expressed in language that is derived from Naḥmanides. For references, see Moses de León, *Shushan 'Edut*, ed. G. Scholem, *Qoveẓ 'al Yad* n.s. 8 (1976): 350, n. 164. See also I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1970), 1:419–421.

33. *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:298–299: שאין דברי תורה בגן עדן וענינו משל שאינו אמת ואין דברי רבותינו וקבלת האבות . . . באלו הענינים דברי הבאי או משל בגדר המליצה אלא הכל אמת ואמונה חיצון ופנימי מין מעלה למעלה ומין רוממות לרוממות. See the extended discussion in n. 29. On the technical terms משל and מליצה, see discussion below.

34. *Perush*, Gen. 14:18 (p. 87).

35. According to the classical *'aggadah*, the purpose of Israel's blowing the shofar is to change the attribute of judgment into that of mercy; see *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, ed. M. Mandelbaum (New York, 1962), pp. 337, 344; *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:3, ed. Margulies, p. 674;

aspects of God: "Rosh Hashanah is the day of judgment in mercy, and Yom
Kippur the day of mercy in judgment." This kabbalistic truth is alluded to,
moreover, by the astrological fact that the sign of this month is Libra,
depicted by the scales of balance.[36] Hence, the cosmic phenomenon struc-
turally parallels or mirrors the theosophic reality. In his commentary to
Num. 23:1 Naḥmanides intimates that the seven altars built by Balak for
Balaam symbolize the seven lower *sefirot,* and by means of the sacrifices
offered on these altars Balaam sought to cleave to the divine will.[37] The
esoteric interpretation of the scriptural reference thus points to an ontologi-
cal realm that parallels the mundane world. To cite one final example: in his
commentary to Gen. 2:20 Naḥmanides alludes to a kabbalistic meaning of
the word זאת in the expression, זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי, "this one at last is bone of
my bones" (Gen. 2:23). He refers the reader to his commentary on Deut.
33:1 whence it becomes clear that the word זאת is a symbol for *Shekhinah:* כי
המלה זאת תרמוז לברכה שהיא התורה והיא הברית[38].[39] Now, Naḥmanides' point is

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Midrash Tehilim 47:2. For the use of this motif in later kabbalistic sources, see references in my
The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon (Atlanta, 1988), p. 144, n. 4
(Hebrew section).

36. *Perush,* 23:24 (pp. 153–154). Cf. the parallel in Naḥmanides' sermon for Rosh Ha-
shanah, printed in *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:221. And cf. the anonymous fragment in MS Vat. 214, fol.
6b: והוא סוד ראש השנה והוא יום דין ברחמים.

37. *Perush,* Num. 23:1 (p. 293). In *Sha'ar ha-Gemul (Kitvei Ramban,* 2:303) Naḥmanides
reiterates this symbolism but adds that the seven *sefirot* comprehended by the sages in this
world are also alluded to in the seven candles of the *menorah.* It is interesting that in his com-
mentary to Num. 23:1 Naḥmanides approvingly notes that ibn Ezra had alluded to the mystical
meaning of the number seven. For other points of contact with ibn Ezra on kabbalistic matters,
see· the references given by B. Septimus, "'Open Rebuke and Concealed Love': Naḥmanides
and the Andalusian Tradition," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His
Religious and Literary Virtuosity,* pp. 23–24, n. 43. See also Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah,*
p. 387. Yet see the historically revealing remark of Isaac of Acre in *Me'irat 'Enayim,* pp. 81–82:
"R. Abraham [א״ר, i.e., R. Abraham ibn Ezra] did not speak in accordance with the way of
kabbalah, which is the way of truth (על דרך הקבלה שהיא דרך האמת), for he was not a kabbalist
(מקובל)." R. Isaac's remarks are based on Naḥmanides' own criticism of ibn Ezra in his com-
mentary to Exod. 13:21. See also Naḥmanides' own comment concerning ibn Ezra in his
commentary to Exod. 33:12 (p. 519): "He could not know the truth, for he did not hear it nor
did he prophesy (לא שמע ולא ינבא)."

38. See also Naḥmanides' commentary to Exod. 25:3, Lev. 16:2. By contrast the word זה is a
symbol for the masculine *Yesod,* the sign of the covenant (אות ברית); cf. Naḥmanides, Exod. 15:2.

39. *Perush,* Gen. 2:20 (p. 39). On the identification of *Shekhinah* and *Torah,* see also Naḥ-
manides' commentary to Gen. 1:1. On the identification of *Shekhinah* and *berit,* cf. commen-
tary to Gen. 9:12, 17:9, Deut. 4:21.

clearly not that the *Shekhinah* is created out of earthly Adam, but rather that
the mundane creation of Eve from the side (or rib) of Adam reflects the pro-
cess above of the emanation of the feminine *Shekhinah* out of the masculine
Tif'eret. As it is expressed in the commentary on Naḥmanides attributed to
Meir ibn Sahula: ורמז הרב בכאן דו פרצופין והבן זה.[40] Elaborating further Shem
Tov ibn Gaon writes in his *Keter Shem Tov:*

> In the word זאת there is a secret. When you understand the matter of the דו
> פרצופין then you will know that man alludes to [the attribute of] mercy and the
> woman to [the attribute of] judgment.[41] The view of the sage [i.e., Naḥ-
> manides] is that from man, which is *Tif'eret,* was taken *'Aṭeret [Shekhinah]*,
> which is זאת.[42]

Lower woman, therefore, reflects and symbolizes the upper woman, *She-
khinah,* and this is the mystical allusion of the biblical expression זאת הפעם.
   This ontological parallelism, or in Naḥmanides' own language, this
duplicity, holds the key to understanding kabbalistic symbolism as well as
the effort of kabbalists, including Naḥmanides, to link their system to the
biblical corpus.[43] Scripture contains, simultaneously, narrative and law, on

   40. *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN,* fol. 3a. See also Menaḥem Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*
(Jerusalem, 1961), Gen. 2:23, fols. 12a–b.
   41. Cf. the "Secret of Du-Parṣufim" attributed to R. Abraham ben David of Posquières,
published by Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1948), p. 79: "Adam and Eve were creat-
ed *du-parṣufim.* . . . it is well-known that two opposites were emanated, one of them judgment
and the other mercy." Cf. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah,* pp. 217–218; I. Twersky, *Rabad of
Posquières* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 291, n. 20; and, most recently, Idel, *Kabbalah: New
Perspectives,* pp. 128–129.
   42. Published in *Ma'or wa-Shemesh,* fol. 29a.
   43. The understanding of symbolism in kabbalah has been dominated by Scholem's view of
the symbol, which, as is well known, was influenced by Romantic conceptions, particularly
those of Goethe. (Cf. D. Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* [Cambridge,
1983], p. 138, n. 108; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives,* p. 218.) According to Scholem, "the
mystical symbol is an expressible representation of something which lies beyond the sphere of
expression and communication" (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [New York, 1956], p. 27).
Similar definitions are to be found in Isaiah Tishby (see *Netivei 'Emunah u-Minut* [Jerusalem,
1964], p. 13) and Joseph Dan (see *The Early Kabbalah* [New York, 1986], pp. 9–12). This con-
ception of the symbol implies an unbridgeable gap separating signifier and that which is signi-
fied, for the latter forever remains something hidden, inexpressible, out of range of phenome-
nological discernment. It strikes me, however, that the force of symbols as they are understood
by the kabbalists consists precisely in the fact that there is a much closer connection—indeed
coincidence—between the *signans* and the *signatum.* The latter are two sides of one coin, the

the one hand, and theosophic truths, on the other.[44] That this is Naḥ-manides' overriding hermeneutical assumption may be ascertained from a telling remark that he makes in the sermon *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*. After

one reflecting and influencing the reality of the other. (See U. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* [Bloomington, 1984], p. 130.) There is no inexpressible *signatum* for the kabbalist; on the contrary, words from Scripture (or even later rabbinic texts) can be transformed into symbols precisely because the reality which they symbolize can be so expressed. In the absence of expression there is no symbol except for symbols that depict the inexpressible, such as *'Ein Sof* (the Infinite), *'Ayin* or *'Efes* (i.e., Nothingness), or *Ḥoshekh* (i.e., Darkness), terms which have the symbolic function of being beyond expressibility and hence beyond symbolization. Where the symbol is something expressible, so too that which is symbolized. In the kabbalistic symbol the gap between abstract and concrete is closed, for there is only one reality with two parallel manifestations. Hence, the choice of particular symbols is not arbitrary but is deter-mined rather by the fact that there is something in the nature of that symbol that informs one about the essential reality of that which is symbolized. For a slightly different formulation, but one which similarly calls into question Scholem's point of view, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 231–232.

44. Here it is worth mentioning again (see above n. 23) that, as is evident from the introduc-tion to the Torah commentary, Naḥmanides has besides the theosophic reading of Scripture another mystical tradition based on reading the text as a fabric of divine names. There too Naḥ-manides upheld the simultaneous veracity of two textual levels, the literal-narrative (דרך קריאתינו בענין התורה והמצוה) and the esoteric-mystical (על דרך השמות). Both ways of reading the text were given to Moses at Sinai, the former in writing and the latter orally. In this case it does not appear that the esoteric reading has anything to do with theosophical symbolism. See, however, Katz, *Halakhah we-Qabbalah*, p. 30, who assumes that Naḥmanides is speaking about theo-sophic truths in his characterization of the Torah as an amalgam of names. What is not suffi-ciently worked out in Naḥmanides is the relationship between the esoteric and exoteric reading with respect to the question of commandments. Interestingly, Abraham Abulafia, who employed Naḥmanides' formulation of the Torah as being a composite of names as a corner-stone for his own hermeneutics (see Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abula'fiyah u-Mishnato," pp. 177–178; and idem, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 46–47) attempts in some passages to link the esoteric and exoteric levels. See, e.g., *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris 774, fol. 119a, where the Written Torah is described as the Torah "understood in its plain meaning, all of its matters and commandments," whereas the Oral Torah is the Torah "in its secret meaning . . . having to do with the secret names and the reasons for the commandments." See Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics*, p. 171, n. 88. And cf. *Sitrei Torah*, fol. 125a, cited in Idel, op. cit., p. 55, where the revealed aspect of Torah is identified as the commandment and the concealed aspect as Torah, "for it refers to the entire body of wisdom of this command-ment, its purpose and its substance." Hence, in contrast to Naḥmanides, at least as one may gather from his writings, Abulafia forges an essential link between the magico-mystical concep-tion of Torah as names and *ṭa'amei ha-miṣwot*. Elsewhere Abulafia's formulation is closer to Naḥmanides and no explicit relationship is established between the two modes of reading; see *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford 1580, fols. 26a–b; *Sefer Mafteaḥ ha-Ḥokhmot*, the first part of the larger commentary on the Pentateuch entitled *Sefer ha-Maftehot* (cf. Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avra-ham 'Abula'fiyah," pp. 20–21) preserved in MS JTS Mic. 1686, fols. 96a, 102a. Cf. ibid., fol. 146a.

stating the view, repeated as well in the introduction to the Torah commentary, that all wisdom is contained in Scripture,[45] Naḥmanides writes:

45. Cf. *Perush,* Introduction, p. 3. See also Jacob ben Sheshet, *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim,* ed. G. Vajda (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 29. And cf. Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem,* MS British Museum 737, fols. 205b–206a: "Why [are there] thirty-two [paths of wisdom according to *Sefer Yeṣirah*]? Because the Torah begins with [the letter] *bet* and ends with *lamed* [the consonants equal thirty-two] to teach you that everything is hinted at in the Torah but it is hidden from people, for the secrets of Torah were not transmitted but 'the secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him' (Ps. 25:14)." The view that all sciences are contained in the Torah is well-attested in the medieval philosophic literature as well; see H. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, 1947), 1:162–163; I. Twersky, "Some Non-Halakhic Aspects of the Mishneh Torah," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 114–115. Cf. Maimonides, *'Iggeret Teiman,* in *'Iggerot ha-RaMBaM,* ed. J. Kafiḥ (Jerusalem, 1987), p. 22. Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 62, notes the similarity between Maimonides' and Naḥmanides' views regarding an ancient esoteric lore in Judaism. The crucial difference between the two, apart from the nature of the content of this lore, is with respect to the question of the remnant of this lore in medieval times. In Idel's mind, according to Maimonides, the tradition was completely lost and thus had to be reconstructed on the basis of philosophic sources; according to Naḥmanides, however, there still are traces of this ancient lore lingering on in the tradition and one cannot therefore freely reconstruct it but rather must preserve the authoritative interpretations that we possess. In point of fact, however, at times Maimonides does speak of the ancient lore (consisting of physics and metaphysics) that was neglected and forgotten (cf. *Guide of the Perplexed,* I, 71 and *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Qiddush ha-Hodesh* 17:24; Altmann, "Das Verhältnis Maimunis zur jüdischen Mystik," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 80 [1936]: 315), but at other times he speaks of a residue of this lore in prophetic and rabbinic literature that can be rediscovered through interpretative techniques (cf. *Guide of the Perplexed,* Introduction; I, 17; II, 3, 11, 30). Cf. I. Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven, 1980), p. 370, who writes that Maimonides' "passion for philosophy is thus in a formal sense restorative rather than innovative." See also S. Rosenberg, "Biblical Exegesis in the *Guide,*" *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 94–95 [in Hebrew]; A. Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in his *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1987), p. 129 and other references given there in n. 151. Cf. J. L. Teicher, "The Mediaeval Mind," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 6 (1955): 11, who writes that Maimonides' feeling "that he is only restoring and recovering the lost sciences of the ancient sages" is "typical, not of the Middle Ages, but of the Renaissance." In truth, however, the tendency to cloak innovation in the garb of traditional authority, and hence to present new insights as a recovery of ancient truth, is very characteristic of the medieval mentality; see the citation from J. Preus given below, n. 156. And cf. L. Berman, "Maimonides, the disciple of Alfarabi," *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 167, n. 44, who describes Maimonides' "back projection" of philosophy into rabbinic texts in light of Alfarabi's thesis that a truly virtuous religion must have been preceded by demonstrative philosophy. Perhaps a more precise way of expressing the difference between Maimonides and Naḥmanides would be with respect to the question of constraint on one's exegetical activity. Whereas Naḥmanides restricts the viability of exegesis as a vehicle to establish kabbalistic lore, for these secrets were transmitted orally from Sinai and one therefore requires a teacher to ascertain them, it would seem that Mai-

In any event I am bothered, for I see that the Torah speaks about the account of creation and the wisdom of formation (במעשה בראשית ובחכמת היצירה), but I do not know where it alludes to the account of the chariot. The upper chariot (מרכבה העליונה), which is the knowledge of the Creator (ידיעת הבורא), is written in the Torah, but I do not know where there is an allusion in the Torah to the chariot of the palaces (מרכבה של היכלות). Perhaps it was an oral tradition (קבלה על פה) until Ezekiel and Isaiah came and gave it [textual] support.[46]

There is little doubt that the cryptic reference to the upper chariot signifies the sefirotic realm, knowledge of which constitutes theosophic knowledge of God.[47] Theosophic gnosis, therefore, is identified as an esoteric discipline

monides allows for much greater exegetical freedom as long as one's interpretative stance accords with what is known from external sources to be rationally sound.

46. *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:163.

47. Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 207. This identification of the upper chariot with the sefirotic realm also underlies the statement of R. Solomon ibn Adret in his letter to the Jews of Provence to the effect that "things alluded to in the commandments of the Torah [i.e., the kabbalistic *ṭa'amei ha-miṣwot*] constitute the *ma'aseh merkavah*." The letter is printed in *'Ein Ya'aqov* to Sukkah 28a, 46b: זהו ענין ריב"ז [ר' יוחנן בן זכאי] שהסתכל בטעמים וזכה להתבונן בהם וזהו ענין המרכבה שהדברים הרמוזים במצות התורה הם הם מעשה מרכבה. Cf. J. Katz, *Halakhah we-Qabbalah*, pp. 73–75; D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba," pp. 87, 121–125. It must be pointed out that in the context of that letter ibn Adret is attacking the rationalists, who neglected the practical fulfillment of commandments such as prayer and phylacteries and instead were given to the study of philosophic and scientific books. Such people, following Maimonides no doubt, viewed the highest goal to be the study of *ma'aseh merkavah*, or metaphysics. Against them ibn Adret is skillfully pointing out that *ma'aseh merkavah* is essentially the study of the reasons for the commandments which are alluded to and contained (הרמוזות ומורכבות) in the actual precepts. (Hence the application of the term מעשה מרכבה to the study of טעמי המצות, for the mystical reasons are comprised—מורכבות—within the particular commandments.) For a discussion of a similar theme in other thirteenth-century kabbalistic sources, see D. Matt, "The Mystic and the Miẓwot," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (New York, 1986), pp. 372–376; and E. Wolfson, "Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988). See also *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-RaSHBA* (Jerusalem, 1976), 1:94, where ibn Adret states that every commandment has a body and a soul, the latter being identified with the mystical reason of that particular commandment. And cf. J. Perles, *R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adereth sein Leben and seine Schriften* (Breslau, 1863), pp. 28–29 (Hebrew section). The centrality of *ṭa'amei ha-miṣwot* in the kabbalah of Naḥmanides has been pointed out by Idel; see "We Have No Tradition," pp. 63, 67. See, in particular, Naḥmanides' comment in his "Derashah 'al Divrei Kohelet," *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:190. In the context of addressing the issues of creation vs. eternity, Naḥmanides writes: "But [with respect to] these matters and others like them one cannot understand their truth from one's own mind (מדעת עצמו) but only through a tradition (טעם המצות בקבלה). This matter is explained in the Torah for whoever has heard the reasons for the commandments through the [mystical], as is fitting. This one receives from

written in the Torah. This metaphysical knowledge is a privilege of the
mystic exegete, who knows how to decode scriptural words and episodes as
symbolic expressions of the divine realm.

Hence, what is ontological parallelism from one point of view is sym-
bolic accommodation from another.[48] That is, just as on the metaphysical
level the divine reality (composed of the dynamic potencies or emanations)
is reflected and expresses itself in the mundane world, so too on the textual
level the divine is reflected and expresses itself in concrete symbols—culled
from Scripture—that are comprehensible to the human mind.[49] The literal
meaning thus corresponds to events in this world and the symbolic to events
in the divine realm; just as the two realms are parallel so too the two levels of
meaning.[50] A classic example of this parallelism *qua* accommodation is to be
found in Naḥmanides' remark in his commentary on Gen. 1:3:

> Know that the days mentioned in the account of creation were in the creation
> of heaven and earth actual days (ימים ממש), composed of hours and minutes,
> and there were six days of activity according to the literal meaning of Scripture
> (כפשוטו של מקרא). According to the inner sense of the matter (ובפנימיות הענין) the
> *sefirot* which emanate from above (הספירות האצולות מעליון) are called days, for
> every utterance that causes existence is called day (כי כל מאמר פועל הויה תקרא

another until Moses, our teacher, who received from God." The centrality of *ṭa'amei ha-miṣwot*
in kabbalah is also evident from the oft-cited quote from Meir ibn Sahula's commentary on
Sefer Yeṣirah to the effect that kabbalah consists of two disciplines, the doctrine of the *sefirot*
and the explication of *ṭa'amei ha-miṣwot*. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1948),
p. 17; Matt, "The Mystic and the Miẓwot," p. 377. See also the definition of kabbalah offered
by Joseph Jabez in his *Commentary on 'Avot* 3:12 and cited by Matt, op. cit., p. 401, n. 28: "the
knowledge of *ṭa'amei ha-miṣwot*."

48. For a description of kabbalistic symbolism, see above, n. 43. On the use of accommoda-
tion as an exegetical technique in early Christian biblical interpretation, cf. F. L. Battler, "God
Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 22–26; Rogers
and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 9–12, 18–19, 27–30, 53–54. For
the use of accommodation in Origen, see also R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event* (Richmond,
Va., 1959), pp. 226–227. For the analogue to the principle of accommodation in Philonic exe-
gesis and some parallels in rabbinic sources, see H. A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious
Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, pp. 115–138.

49. Cf. the passage from the anonymous German Pietistic work, *Sefer ḥa-Ḥayyim*, cited in
Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 182–183: "And it is the same with all the [divine]
middoth, and everything that comes to pass in the lower world takes place through them, and
this is the secret of the whole Torah and the whole Scripture." On the proximity of the theology
of this text to kabbalistic theosophy, see also Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 112; and J. Dan, *Torat
ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut 'Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 143–156.

50. See citation from *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* given above, n. 27.

יום).[51] And there were six [sefirot], [as it says] "Yours, Lord, are *greatness,
might,* [*splendor, triumph,* and *majesty*—yes, *all* that is in heaven and earth]" (1
Chron. 29:11) [i.e., a reference to the lower six *sefirot, Ḥesed, Gevurah, Tif'eret,
Neṣaḥ, Hod,* and *Yesod*]. Yet the utterances were ten, for no day is grasped
with respect to the first three [of the *sefirot, Keter, Ḥokhmah,* and *Binah*].[52]

According to Naḥmanides, then, the literal meaning of the creation story
is preserved, for there were six actual days, yet these days allude to a process
going on in the divine realm.[53] It is not sufficiently clear whether Naḥ-
manides maintained that the creation of the lower world took place con-
comitantly with the emanation of the divine grades or whether he main-
tained that chronologically the divine grades—the upper six days—
emanated first and then at the end of the process the lower six days were
created.[54] Both possibilities were affirmed by thirteenth-century kabbalists,
as was shown by Ephraim Gottlieb.[55] In any event, what is clear is that, for
Naḥmanides, there are two distinct but parallel ontological levels that cor-
respond to two levels of meaning in the text.

In this regard Naḥmanides would have assented in form to Maimonides'

51. The ספירה is thus equated with the מאמר, which causes the existence of the הויה, the latter
term being a technical reference in Naḥmanides for a cosmic cycle; see his commentary to Lev.
25:2. Naḥmanides' terminology is based partially on *Sefer ha-Bahir* § 158. For a slightly differ-
ent interpretation of this passage, see M. Idel, "The Sefirot above the Sefirot," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982):
245–246 (in Hebrew). A similar expression occurs in a kabbalistic explanation of the Sinaitic
theophany found in a collection of materials, apparently from the school of R. Solomon ibn
Adret, extant in several manuscripts, including MSS JTS Mic. 1895, fol. 7a, 1896, fols. 78a–b,
and 8124, fol. 5b; מעמד הר סיני היה בי' ספירות כי י' דברות נבראו מהם כי כל ספירה וספירה פעלה מאמר. See
also MS Oxford 1974, fol. 1a.

52. *Perush,* Gen. 1:3 (p. 16). The six days of creation are interpreted as a symbolic reference
to the *sefirot* already in *Sefer ha-Bahir,* §§ 57, 82.

53. For Naḥmanides the six days of creation also prefigure the six millennia of world
history. Cf. *Perush* to Gen. 2:3; Exod. 20:11, 21:2; Lev. 23:36, 25:2. Cf. Funkenstein, "Naḥ-
manides' Symbolic Reading of History," p. 140. See also *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA* 1:9
and 423. The theosophical and typological interpretations are brought together by Menaḥem
Recanati in the introduction to his *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Miṣwot,* fol. 3a: "The seven last *sefirot* are
the seven days of creation, as is known to the sages of kabbalah. And do not wonder at the fact
that the sages of kabbalah said that the secret of the seven days of creation alludes to what was
and what will be afterward. This can be understood from what the rabbis, blessed be their
memory, said. 'The world exists for six thousand years and is desolate for one thousand' [cf. b.
Sanhedrin 97a]."

54. For the latter view, see *Keter Shem Tov,* fol. 25b. Cf. also Naḥmanides' commentary to
Lev. 18:25 where it is said that the *Shekhinah* (שם הנככד) created everything and placed the force
of the upper realities in the lower ones.

55. Gottlieb, *Meḥqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah,* pp. 18–28.

characterization of scriptural truth as parabolic, for it functions on two
indispensable levels, the external shell and the internal core, to use the
imagery employed by Maimonides himself.[56] (The key difference lies, of
course, in the fact that for Naḥmanides the two layers of meaning have
objective correlates, i.e., they are ontological as well as epistemological or
exegetical categories, whereas for Maimonides they are only the latter.)[57]
Indeed, in the introduction to his "Sermon on the Words of Kohelet," Naḥ-
manides describes the nature of the parable in terms highly reminiscent of
Maimonides' account in the introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In
addition, he refers in positive terms to a statement of Abraham ibn Ezra
from the introduction to his Torah commentary:

> As it is said, "For understanding proverb and epigram, the words of the wise
> and their riddles," להבין משל ומליצה דברי חכמים וחידותם (Prov. 1:6). That is to say,
> they will understand the proverb (משל) and the epigram (מליצה) which is the
> literal sense (פשט), and they will understand the wisdom and the riddle (חכמה
> וחידה), i.e., the secret (סוד) which is forbidden to explain. Thus the chapter, "A
> capable woman who can find?" (Prov. 31:10). The external utterance, which is
> true according to the *peshaṭ* (שהמליצה שהיא כפשוטו אמת), imparts knowledge in
> matters concerning a good and diligent wife. . . . And it alludes to (or symbo-

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56. Cf. *Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction, and I, 71. A clear formulation of the Mai-
monidean perspective is given by R. Levi ben Abraham ben Ḥayyim in his *Liwyat Ḥen*, extant
in MS Oxford 1285, fol. 35a. In this regard Teicher's characterization of R. Solomon ibn Adret
as one who sought a "compromise between the fundamentalist's view and a selection of some
elements of Maimonides' view" is applicable to Naḥmanides as well. See Teicher, "The
Mediaeval Mind," p. 8. That is to say, Naḥmanides employed the Maimonidean esoteric-
exoteric distinction in his hermeneutic, but he wished to maintain a fundamentalist reading of
the text that unequivocally preserved the literal, historical sense. See above, n. 29.

57. Interesting in this regard is a passage in Abraham Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris
774, fol. 115a, wherein he tries to uphold the truth of the revealed aspect of Torah, i.e., the liter-
al sense, as well as the concealed aspect, i.e., the mystical sense. The Torah, says Abulafia,
"operates on two levels of existence . . . the revealed and concealed aspects." Abulafia then
compares the two respectively to the body and the soul. Here it would seem that we have an
instance of trying to connect the Maimonidean hermeneutic with ontic categories, or, in Abula-
fia's terms, "two levels of existence." In fact, however, as Idel has shown, *Language, Torah and
Hermeneutics*, p. 77, the meaning of this passage is that there is only one reality, and the con-
cealed aspect consists of the fact that this world preexisted. That is to say, the esoteric sense is
basically a denial of a traditionalist view of creation. For Maimonides there is one cosmic con-
tinuum with the divine agent outside the world; for the kabbalists, by contrast, the divine and
cosmic are not only parallel worlds but they are intersecting realms that mutually interact and
interpenetrate.

lizes, (תרמו)[58] the act of Torah. . . . And it alludes to (or symbolizes) that attribute called 'Aṭarah [i.e., the Shekhinah]. . . . And thus R. Abraham [ibn Ezra] wrote in his commentary to the Torah, "In the tree of knowledge the secret is tasty, but things are also true according to their literal sense," ובעץ הדעת סוד ינעם גם הדברים הם אמת כמשמעם.[59]

In the above passage Naḥmanides distinguishes three senses, viz., the literal, the midrashic or homiletical, and the kabbalistic.[60] These three, in

58. On the use of the word רמז in Naḥmanides' writings, see below, n. 188.

59. Kitvei Ramban, 1:180. See also ibid. 2:297. For ibn Ezra's passage, see Perushei ha-Torah le-R. 'Avraham ibn 'Ezra, ed. A. Weiser (Jerusalem, 1977), 1:7.

60. It is of interest that the one layer of meaning that Naḥmanides neglects is precisely the one utilized by Maimonides, viz., the allegorical. Cf. Guide of the Perplexed III, 8, where the "capable woman" of Prov. 31:10 is interpreted as an allegorical reference to matter. See also ibid: I, 34, where "Do not give your strength to women" (Prov. 31:3) is interpreted as a reference to material or sensual pursuits. Cf. Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De'ot 4:19. If one were to add the allegorical to Naḥmanides' list, then one would have a striking example of the four levels of meaning that one finds explicitly for the first time in kabbalistic sources from the end of the thirteenth century. See W. Bacher, "L'exégese biblique dans le Zohar," Revue des études juives 22 (1891): 37–39; P. Sandler, "On the Problem of Pardes," Festschrift for E. Auerbach (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 223–235 [in Hebrew]; Scholem, On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism (New York, 1969), pp. 53–61; A. Van der Heide, "Pardes: Methodological Reflections on the Theory of the Four Senses," Journal of Jewish Studies 34 (1983): 147–159; F. Talmage, "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism," in Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages, pp. 319–321. On Naḥmanides' general avoidance of allegory as an exegetical technique, see Scholem, op. cit., p. 53, and idem, Origins of the Kabbalah, p. 386. And see above nn. 29 and 56. Scholem's description of Naḥmanides is, of course, one specific example of his overall position that the medieval kabbalists employed symbols in place of the allegories utilized by the philosophers. See e.g., Scholem, Major Trends, pp. 26–27; Origins, p. 407. Scholem's allegory-symbol schematization, based as it is on the Romantic model of Goethe, has been criticized by several scholars. See E. Schweid, "Mysticism and Judaism according to Gershom Scholem: A Critical Analysis," Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, Supplement 2 (1983): 18–20 [in Hebrew]; M. Saperstein, Decoding the Rabbis (Cambridge, 1980), p. 220, n. 62; Uri Shoham, Ha-Mashma'ut ha-'Aḥeret (Tel Aviv, 1982), pp. 61–64; Talmage, "Apples of Gold," p. 341; and Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives, pp. 218–219. Notwithstanding the need to revise Scholem's oversimplified schema, it seems to me that his characterization is accurate as far as Naḥmanides goes, although this does not imply that Naḥmanides never relies on the mode of allegorical exegesis (see, e.g., Perush, Gen. 6:6, to be discussed below). For an example of Naḥmanides' rejection of allegorical interpretation, see Kitvei Ramban, 1:24. Naḥmanides rejects the philosophers who allegorically explain Satan, the angel of death, or the evil inclination (identified as such by Resh Laqish; see b. Baba Batra 16a) as a reference to the material principle in the world. "The sages of Israel attributed to him [i.e., Satan] all these names because of their conviction that he is an existing angel and not some natural phenomenon or force." For a discussion of some of the sources in which this allegorical conception of Satan is found, see M. Idel, Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah (Albany, 1988), pp.

turn, fall under a twofold classification between the external and internal sense, the literal corresponding to the former, and the homiletical together with the kabbalistic to the latter. It is important here to keep in mind the technical philosophical terminology upon which Naḥmanides is drawing: he is using *mashal* and *meliṣah* synonymously to refer to the external sense or that which is uttered or expressed,[61] whereas *ḥokhmah* and *ḥidah* are used to connote the internal sense and hence the *sod* of the matter. In other contexts,

34–35. See also D. Silver, "Nachmanides' Commentary on the Book of Job," p. 15, who has pointed out that in his comments to Job 1:1 Naḥmanides emphasizes the historicity of this biblical episode and thereby tacitly rejects the allegorical line of interpretation suggested by the rabbis and reinforced by Maimonides. Finally, in *Sha'ar ha-Gemul, Kitvei Ramban,* 2:283, Naḥmanides affirmed the actual existence of Gehenna as a distinct locality. This stands in marked contrast to Maimonides' interpretation of Gehenna as an allegory for an individual's punishment. Maimonides was already attacked for this allegorical interpretation by Meshullam ben Solomon Dapiera; see H. Brody, "Poems of Meshullam ben Solomon Dapiera," *Studies of the Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1938), 4:17. A mediating position between Maimonides and Naḥmanides was attempted by ibn Adret; see discussion in D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba," pp. 105–107. Naḥmanides' upholding of a literal reading of Scripture and his frequent rejection of allegorical interpretations thus has to be seen as a reaction to Jewish rationalistic tendencies. It should be noted that other Jewish exegetes, especially in the Franco-German orbit, e.g., Joseph Bekhor Shor, Solomon ben Meir, David Kimḥi, Meir ben Simeon, and the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Maskil,* reacted to both Jewish and Christian allegorists. See S. Stein, *Jewish-Christian Disputations in Thirteenth-Century Narbonne* (London, 1969), p. 11; F. Talmage, *David Kimhi: The Man and the Commentaries* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 82–83; E. E. Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 135–136; I. Ta-Shema, "*Sefer ha-Maskil*—An Unknown Text from the End of the Thirteenth Century," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1982/83): 416–438 [in Hebrew]; E. Touitou, "Peshaṭ and Apologetics in the RaSHBaM's Commentary on the Biblical Stories of Moses," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 227–238 [in Hebrew]; idem, "The Exegetical Method of RaSHBaM in the Light of the Historical Background of His Time," *'Iyyunim be-Sifrut HaZal ba-Miqra' u-ve-Toledot Yisra'el* (Ramat-Gan, 1982): 51–74 [in Hebrew]; S. Kamin, "The Polemic against Allegory in the Commentary of Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1983/84): 367–392 [in Hebrew]; M. Haran, "Midrashic Exegesis and the Peshaṭ, and the Critical Approach in Bible Research," in *Studies in Judaica,* ed. M. Bar-Asher (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 76–77 [in Hebrew]. For the interchange between Jewish and Christian exegetes in this area and in this period, see especially B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 103 ff.; A Grabois, "The *Hebraica Veritas* and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century," *Speculum* 50 (1975): 619–626.

61. Cf. I. Efros, *Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukhim* (New York: 1924), p. 82, s.v. משל. Efros refers to the *Guide of the Perplexed* II, 29 and 57, where משל ראשון means primary or literal meaning. On the Arabic root underlying the medieval usage of מליצה for the external sense or utterance, cf. H. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1929), p. 639. The usage is also found in a passage in the *Sefer ha-Maskil* cited in I. Ta-Shema, "Sefer ha-Maskil," p. 422, n. 16. See also below, n. 219.

as we shall see below, Naḥmanides follows standard medieval Hebrew usage and distinguishes between *mashal* and *meliṣah*, using them to refer respectively to the parabolic or figurative and literal sense.[62] With respect to the word *ḥidah* Naḥmanides somewhat departs from accepted philosophical convention, according to which *ḥidah* was used interchangeably with *mashal* to refer to allegory.[63] According to Naḥmanides, then, the text contains *mashal* and *meliṣah* on the one hand, and *ḥokhmah* and *ḥidah*, on the other. These are not to be construed as mutually exclusive phenomena. Naḥmanides wants to preserve both the literal and the symbolic as simultaneously valid readings of the text.

Naḥmanides expresses this dual nature in several places in his biblical commentary and other writings, particularly with respect to the relationship between *peshaṭ* and *midrash* or *'aggadah*.[64] That Naḥmanides used these

62. On משל in the sense of allegory or figurative meaning in Naḥmanides, see also citation from *Sha'ar ha-Gemul* above, n. 33. And cf. Efros, *Philosophical Terms*, p. 80, s.v. מרץ. To be sure, although this usage became widespread in medieval Hebrew literature, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the word משל was used in the sense of allegory already in classical midrashic literature; see S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1962), p. 68, and other references given there in n. 170.

63. See, for instance, the introduction of Abraham ibn Ezra to his *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, ed. Weiser, 1:6. On the words *mashal* and *ḥidah* as synonyms for allegory in Maimonides, see *Guide*, Introduction; *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:2, and *Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:1. Cf. Bacher, *Ha-RaMBaM Parshan ha-Miqra'*, pp. 19–20, n. 6. See also the comments of Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 55, n. 2. And cf. Joseph ben Isaac Bekhor Shor, *Perush 'al ha-Torah* (London 1956), Num. 12:8, p. 78 (for a detailed analysis of this passage, see S. Kamin's article mentioned above n. 60). For some kabbalists *mashal* was used in the sense of kabbalistic symbol. See Judah ben Yaqar, *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, ed. S. Yerushalmi (Jerusalem, 1979), pt. 1, p. 98, who comments on the *merkavah* tradition of the image of Jacob inscribed on the Throne in these words: וכל זה דרך משל וסוד; and see *Perush 'al Shir ha-Shirim, Kitvei Ramban*, 2:481, where R. Ezra of Gerona says about the term wine: קבלנו כמו כן כי הוא משל על החכמה (cf. Vajda's French translation, *Le commentaire d'Ezra de Gérone sur le Cantique des Cantiques* [Paris, 1969], p. 48: "symbolisent la Sagesse"). See also R. Ezra's comment in *Perush ha-'Aggadot le-R. 'Azri'el*, ed. I. Tishby (Jerusalem, 1949), p. 12: כי ענין עטרה הוא משל לנשמה. Cf. MS JTS Mic. 1878, fol. 25a. To be sure, in other contexts R. Ezra employs the word משל in the sense of allegory; cf. *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:480: והנשיקה משל לדביקות הנשמה. This latter example has already been noted by Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 219. See also Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-'Eshkol*, ed. J. Kaufman (New York, 1926), p. 143, where משל, מליצה, and חידה refer respectively to allegory, the literal sense, and kabbalistic meaning. It seems to me that this division reflects Naḥmanides' usage.

64. For references, see Perles, "Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch," p. 120, n. 2; Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 23, n. 41.

latter two terms interchangeably can be seen from his famous statement
about the status of *'aggadah* at the Barcelona disputation, to be discussed
more fully below: "We have besides [Bible and Talmud] a third [kind of]
book called *midrash,* that is to say, sermons. . . . We also call this [kind of]
book *'aggadah* . . . that is to say, they are merely things that one man
tells another."[65] I would like to focus particularly on a comment that Naḥ-
manides makes in his notes to the second principle in the introduction to
Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Miṣwot.* In the context of that principle, which is
essentially Maimonides' view that not every *miṣwah* derived from Scripture
on the basis of the thirteen hermeneutical principles or by amplification
(רבוי) is to be counted in the class of 613 divine commandments (i.e., biblical
precepts) given to Moses at Sinai, Maimonides notes that sometimes the
rabbis derived laws from Scripture without any textual basis. This proce-
dure, argues Maimonides, goes against the rabbinic dictum אין מקרא יוצא מידי
פשוטו, a biblical verse should never lose its literal sense.[66] In reaction to

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65. *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:308. The interchangeability of the words מדרש and אגדה is by no
means unique to Naḥmanides. See, e.g., Abraham ben Isaac of Narbonne, *Sefer ha-'Eshkol,* ed.
B. H. Auerbach (Halberstadt, 1868), pt. 2, p. 47. See also the sources cited in Talmage, *David
Kimḥi: The Man and the Commentaries,* pp. 74–76.

66. Cf. b. Shabbat 63a; Yevamot 11b and 24a. Of the many discussions concerning this rab-
binic principle, see in particular I. Frankel, *Peshaṭ in Talmudic and Midrashic Literature*
(Toronto, 1956), pp. 71–77; R. Loewe, "The 'Plain' Meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish
Exegesis," pp. 164–167; S. Kamin, *Rashi's Exegetical Categorization,* pp. 37–43. Maimonides'
position is that in the case of an explicit tradition that is traced back to Mosaic revelation at
Sinai it is possible for a halakhic exegesis to take the verse in a nonliteral way. The limitation
on nonliteral exegesis is only applicable in those cases where there is no explicit tradition. Cf.
Maimonides' introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, *Seder Zera'im,* in *Mishnah 'im
Perush ha-RaMBaM,* ed. Kafiḥ, pp. 9–10, where he makes clear that those laws which are con-
sidered הלכה למשה מסיני cannot be derived on the basis of the hermeneutical principles nor is
there any allusion to them in Scripture. Cf. Maimonides' commentary to Nazir 4:7, in Kafiḥ
ed., *Seder Nashim,* p. 123: "this law has no allusion (רמז) in Scripture but is only a tradition
(קבלה)." A similar formulation appears in Maimonides' commentary to Sanhedrin 6:6, ed.
Kafiḥ, *Seder Neziqin,* p. 119. And see Maimonides' commentary to Kelim 17:12, ed. J. Kafiḥ,
Seder Toharot, p. 100: "Whatever is not explained in the language of the Torah (בלשון התורה) is
called 'from the words of the scribes' (מדברי סופרים), and [this includes] even those things which
are laws [given] to Moses at Sinai (הלכה למשה מסיני), for the meaning of [the expression] 'from
the words of the sages' is that the matter is either a scribal tradition [קבלת הסופרים, but see the
alternative reading from the standard printed edition cited by Kafiḥ, n. 26, which has דעת
instead of קבלת] as all the explanations and laws that were received (המקובלות) from Moses, or a
scribal amendment (תקון סופרים), as all the amendments and decrees." Extrabiblical scribal tradi-
tions thus comprise two categories for Maimonides: either that which was received from Moses

Maimonides, Naḥmanides emphasizes that with respect to biblical interpre-
tations connected with halakhic matters the verse does not lose its literal
sense (המדרשים כולם בענין המצות אין בה מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו) because all these
interpretations are contained in the language of the text (כולם בלשון הכתוב
נכללים).[67] Naḥmanides goes on to contrast his conception of *peshaṭ* with both
those "who lack knowledge of the language" (חסרי דעת הלשון)—or, according
to another reading, the "language of those who lack knowledge" (כלשון חסרי
דעת)—and the Karaites, referred to as the צדוקים, i.e., the Sadducees. While it
is not entirely clear to whom Naḥmanides refers by the first category, I
would suggest that Naḥmanides may be attacking those who would limit
peshaṭ to the *sensus litteralis* as established purely on philological grounds,
i.e., on the basis of the grammatical and syntactical construction of Scrip-
ture. Like the Karaites, such a group would fail to see that Scripture is mul-
tilayered and that rabbinic interpretations are themselves part of the text. In
Naḥmanides' words: "the text contains everything (הכתוב יכלול הכל) . . . for
the book of God's Torah is complete (כי ספר תורת ה' תמימה), there is no extra
word in it nor any lacking, everything was written in wisdom."[68] Rabbinic
interpretations, therefore, are to be seen as organically connected to, or
anchored in, the text and not as some external imposition upon it. Here we
have a striking example of a phenomenon noted already by Bernard Septi-
mus: Naḥmanides advanced the Andalusian tradition of *peshaṭ* "by
broadening the conception of interpretation" to include rabbinic, halakhic,
and aggadic, as well as kabbalistic, modes of explanation.[69] This is not to

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or that which was instituted by the sages. Concerning the latter, see the monograph by J.
Neubauer, *Ha-RaMBaM 'al Divrei Soferim* (Jerusalem, 1957). See also the commentary of R.
Aryeh Leib Horowitz, *Margenita' Tava'*, to *Sefer ha-Miṣwot* (Jerusalem, 1985), 18b, s.v., כללו של
דבר.

67. I am citing from Chavel's edition, *Sefer ha-Miṣwot leha-RaMBaM we-hassagot ha-
RaMBaN* (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 44. On Naḥmanides' interpretation of this principle, see Kamin,
Rashi's Exegetical Categorization, p. 38. Naḥmanides, of course, recognized that certain
rabbinic rulings exceded biblical law; see, e.g., his commentary to Lev. 19:19, where he distin-
guishes two types of law, one whose basis is דברי סופרים and the other whose basis is דברי תורה.
And cf. ibid., Deut. 4:2, where Naḥmanides follows Maimonides' opinion regarding the legal
status of *taqqanot* (cf. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Mamrim* 2:9).

68. *Sefer ha-Miṣwot*, loc. cit.

69. B. Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 18. It is of interest to
note that Abraham Abulafia expresses the notion that the Written Torah comprises three sub-
jects: מקרא משנה תלמוד; see Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abul'afiyah," pp. 178–179, 222 (and cf.
now idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 48–49). Of particular relevance to my

say, of course, that in Naḥmanides' opinion every rabbinic statement may
be considered to contribute substantially to the *peshaṭ* of the verse. On the
contrary, any careful reader of Naḥmanides' biblical commentary is well
aware of the fact that he distinguishes different methodological approaches
to the text, and on occasion flatly rejects aggadic or midrashic explanations
(a point to be discussed further on) on grounds that they do not edify the
literal sense of the text. Indeed, Naḥmanides goes on to say, in the very con-
text that we are discussing, that the rabbinic dictum אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו
refers to incidents wherein the rabbis, through their halakhic interpreta-
tions, "uprooted the literal sense completely" שהם עוקרים בכאן הפשט לגמרי. The
key point is, however, that for Naḥmanides both contextual and midrashic
(used now in the broad sense of the term) meanings are to be found in the
text: "the verses of Scripture are true literally and figuratively," הכתובים אמת
במליצה ומשל.[70] He therefore embraces the form of the Maimonidean her-
meneutic, even in the context of criticizing Maimonides.

> Thus is the matter in every place interpreted by them [i.e., the rabbis] with
> respect to the figurative and literal sense (בכל מקום הנדרש להם בענין משל ומליצה),
> they believed that both were true, the internal and the external (שניהם אמת פנימי
> וחיצון). . . . And this is [the meaning] of their dictum אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו, a
> verse should not lose its literal sense; they did not say, אין מקרא אלא כפשוטו, i.e.,
> the verse is only according to its literal sense. We have rather the interpreta-
> tion [of the verse] together with its literal sense (יש לנו מדרשו עם פשוטו), and it

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analysis is a passage from *Sefer ha-Ḥokhmot* cited by Idel, "Kitvei R. 'Avraham 'Abul'afiyah,"
p. 222, for the view expressed by Abulafia resembles Naḥmanides' position. According to
Abulafia the Torah is given in three ways that correspond to the פשט (literal), פירוש (interpreta-
tive or explanatory), and דרש or אגדה (homiletical and legendary or mythical). "It was necessary
for the Torah to perfect the house of the righteous by means of these three ways. The first ones
are dependent on the literal sense (פשט). . . . The second is its [i.e., the verse's] interpretation
(פירוש), for even the words of interpretation (דברי הפירוש) are in accordance with their literal
sense (כפשוטם). And the third are the homiletical and legendary [or mythical] (הדרש והאגדה) when
they too are understood according to their literal sense (כפשוטם). . . . It is appropriate to include
all three ways in the first name, since all are the פשט." For a different rendering in English, see
Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 90. Mention should also be made of Isaac ibn
Latif's somewhat unusual classification of the four methods of scriptural interpretation: the
literal (דקדוק המלות), which comprises grammatical meaning; the aggadic, which is identified as
פשט; the allegorical (משל); and the mystical (דרש). See S. O. Heller-Wilensky, "Isaac Ibn
Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?" *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann,
p. 210.

70. *Sefer ha-Miṣwot*, loc. cit.

> should not lose either of them. On the contrary, Scripture must bear every-
> thing, and both [the literal and figurative] are true.[71]

This notion of two layers of meaning embedded in the text is the basic her-
meneutical principle underlying Naḥmanides' approach to Scripture. What-
ever ancient teachings he was working with, if any, were channeled through
this understanding of the text. The Torah could yield at once historical and
metaphysical truths. There are, in particular, two critical relationships that
must be examined against the background that I have laid in the first sec-
tion, viz., the relation between literal and esoteric, and, secondly, the rela-
tion between Naḥmanides' kabbalistic allusions and the interpretation of
relevant aggadic sources. It is to these two themes that we must now turn
our attention.

II

At this juncture it would be beneficial to take up the issue of the relation-
ship between *peshaṭ* and *sod* in Naḥmanides' thought. Several scholars have
addressed the question of *peshaṭ* versus *sod*, literal versus esoteric, in Naḥ-
manides' biblical exegesis, though a comprehensive treatment is still want-
ing. Funkenstein maintained that there is only one place in Naḥmanides'
commentary where *peshaṭ* and *sod* overlap or correspond, viz, the rationale
for sacrifices offered at Lev. 1:9.[72] Elsewhere *peshaṭ* and *sod* are, in Funken-
stein's words, "quite divergent—at times even grammatically so."[73] Bernard
Septimus and David Berger, by contrast, have pointed out in independent
studies that in many instances kabbalah and the search for *peshaṭ* converge
in Naḥmanides. Septimus, for his part, lists thirteen instances of this
phenomenon in the Torah commentary and suggests that it "requires separ-
ate treatment."[74] Berger, noting some of these examples and adding a few
more both from the commentary and other works of Naḥmanides, con-
cludes, contra Funkenstein, that "Naḥmanides displays a pronounced

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71. Ibid., p. 45.
72. Cf. Gen. 2:8 (p. 35).
73. Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," p. 133.
74. Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 21, n. 37.

tendency to equate *peshaṭ* and *sod* by finding that the plain meaning of Scripture can be explained satisfactorily—or most satisfactorily—only by resorting to kabbalistic doctrine."[75]

From my own examination of the relevant sources it has become clear that the critique of Funkenstein's position by Septimus and Berger is correct, for the sharp distinction between *peshaṭ* and *sod* in Naḥmanides suggested by Funkenstein cannot be upheld. On the other hand, the relationship of these two layers of meaning in all the cases noted by Septimus and Berger is not identical. A detailed analysis of the relevant sources reveals certain nuances that deserve more careful attention. In those cases in Naḥmanides' commentary where there appears to be an overlapping of *peshaṭ* and *sod,* and where the latter does indeed connote a kabbalistic truth,[76] I have been able to demarcate two main lines of orientation. In some

75. Berger, "Miracles and the Natural Order in Naḥmanides," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides,* p. 112, n. 19.

76. In fact, it is not at all evident that Naḥmanides consistently employs the term *sod* to refer to kabbalistic truth. Cf. Naḥmanides' commentary to Lev. 16:8 (cited by Septimus) where the secret of the matter (סוד הענין) of the scapegoat to Azazel, based on ibn Ezra's esoteric explanation, is explained as an offering on behalf of God to the force of destruction in the world that is connected with Mars in the celestial realm, with Esau (i.e., Christianity) in the earthly realm, with goats in the animal kingdom, and with demonic forces that Scripture refers to as שעירים (satyrs). It is interesting to note as well that in that context Naḥmanides approvingly cites ibn Ezra's Neoplatonic position. See parallel in *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:165, where Naḥmanides' refers to ibn Ezra's סוד and calls it the plain meaning, דבר פשוט. And cf. *Perush,* Lev. 18:25, where the "secret of the matter," סוד הדבר, refers to a mystical—though not kabbalistic—idea rooted in older aggadic sources; the text is discussed below. See also the commentary to Lev. 23:17. In another case, not noted by Berger or Septimus, in his commentary to Num. 21:9 Naḥmanides explains the "secret of the matter" (בסוד הדבר) concerning the serpent of brass made by Moses as a reference to the medical principle that illness is sometimes healed by means of the cause of the sickness. Such a principle does not seem to me to have anything uniquely or intrinsically kabbalistic about it, even though kabbalists may have employed some such view in their theosophic systems. See the commentary of Menaḥem Recanati to Num. 21:8, fol. 77d. Recanati cites the "esoteric" interpretation (*sod*) of Naḥmanides and calls it *peshaṭ;* אלה דברי הרב ז"ל וכונים הם לפי הפשט. Recanati goes on to suggest, in contrast to Naḥmanides' view, an esoteric interpretation based on a zoharic passage (cf. Zohar 3:130b). Cf. Perles, "Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch," p. 118, n. 6. See also Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim,* p. 201: "I am astounded at the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory, for he mentions a secret (סוד) in connection with this matter [i.e., the brass serpent of Num. 21:8] but does not allude to any secret. ... Perhaps the Rabbi [Naḥmanides] called even a physical entity (דבר טבעי) a secret, since they are hidden from the many." It should be noted that R. Isaac also offers his own kabbalistic interpretation: the brass serpent symbolized the unity of mercy and judgment, for through it God had the power to both heal and wound. And cf. *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:262 where we find the expression סוד החשבון used to designate the secret of messianic computation. See, by contrast, Scholem's unqualified statement in *Origins,* p. 387: "Authors like Ezra and

instances the literal and mystical meanings overlap because there is only one
textual dimension, whereas in other instances there is an overlapping but the
text allows for two levels, exoteric and esoteric. In the former there is a com-
plete identity between *peshaṭ* and *sod* in the realm of exegesis which refers to
only one distinct reality outside the text; in the latter there is no such identity
in the realm of exegesis but only an overlapping that allows for two levels of
meaning—literal and mystical—which refer to two levels of reality—
mundane and divine. In what follows I will provide detailed examples from
Naḥmanides' commentary for each of these typologies.

1. I will begin by discussing some of the contexts where this overlapping
of *peshaṭ* and *sod* actually implies a form of identification. In such cases, it
seems, we are dealing with only one possible interpretation, with only one
textual dimension. That is, the text can only be understood in one way, for
the literal sense is only explicable by means of kabbalistic truths. In these
instances, then, Naḥmanides transmits kabbalistic truths as if he were expli-
cating the literal sense of the text. Thus, for example, Naḥmanides' under-
standing of the narrative in Gen. 38 concerning levirate marriage is such that
the *peshaṭ* of the text is speaking about the esoteric tradition concerning
transmigration of the soul.[77] There is no other way to read the text but in
this light: the *sod* of *yibbum* constitutes the narrative stuff of the biblical tale.
As was noted above, Funkenstein already observed that in his commentary
to Lev. 1:9, "And the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar, an
offering by fire of pleasing odor to the Lord," Naḥmanides equates the
literal and mystical meaning, particularly with respect to the term עלה אשה.
Naḥmanides takes issue with ibn Ezra's rendering of the expression אשה as
an adjective describing the word הכל in the verse, i.e., the whole—everything
sacrificed by the priest—went up in the fire, and suggests instead that it
should be taken in the nominative form, i.e., an offering by (or of) the fire.

The whole matter is explained in the Torah in which it is said, "My offering,

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Naḥmanides . . . understood by *sod* only that which, in their circle, had already become the
subject of a kabbalistic tradition." See also D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philosophy and Kabba-
lah in the Works of Rashba," pp. 100–101, who writes that "the word *sod* according to Rashba
(as according to Ramban) had a specific connotation: the sefirotic doctrine of the Gerona
school." It can be shown, at least in the case of Naḥmanides, that this characterization is not
borne out by the textual evidence.

77. The same may be said about Naḥmanides' reading of Job 32:3 in his commentary ad
loc.; see Berger, "Miracles and the Natural Order," p. 112., n. 19. See also Katz, *Halakhah we-
Qabbalah*, p. 31.

My food, as offerings by fire" את קרבני לחמי לאישי (Num. 28:2), and it says, "the
food of the fire [offering]" לחם אשה (Lev. 3:12), for they [the sacrifices] are
food for the fire (לחם לאשה), and from it to the [forces of] fire (לאשים), and the
word אשה is from the word אש. . . . The word אשה is a noun like the word אש,
and [the expression] עולה אשה (cf. Lev. 1:9) is [to be rendered] as עולת אשה [i.e.,
an offering *of* fire] "of pleasing odor to the Lord" (ibid.), and so are all such
expressions, for their meaning is like לחם אשה [i.e., the food of the fire offering,
the word אשה being therefore a noun]. It does not say, however, אש but rather
אשה in accordance with its literal sense (כמשמעו), "as you were shown on the
mountain" (Exod. 27:8) at the giving of the Torah, and this is the sacrifice with
the attribute of judgment.[78]

This complicated exegesis serves as part of Naḥmanides' effort to resolve the
apparent tension between those biblical passages related to matters pertain-
ing to sacrifices that employ the name Elohim, or any of its derivatives such
as El, Elohekha, Elohehem, and so on, and the rabbinic teaching, attributed
to Simeon ben Azai,[79] that in the scriptural mentioning of sacrifices only the
Tetragrammaton is employed. The resolution of this conflict involves a
kabbalistic truth regarding the unity of the two attributes symbolized by the
two names. That is to say, by its nature the sacrifice derives from the side of
judgment, referred to by the name Elohim and symbolized by the fire, but
the requirement is to sacrifice to the attribute of mercy, referred to by the
Tetragrammaton. By means of this kabbalistic notion Naḥmanides can
resolve the obvious textual inconsistencies with the rabbinic generalization.
It is perfectly sensible for Scripture to employ Elohim, or any of the names
associated with it philologically, in connection with sacrifices, because the
nature of the sacrifice is such that it is related to this divine attribute;[80] on
the other hand, the mandate is to sacrifice to the attribute of mercy so that
the two attributes will be united.[81] The crucual point for this analysis is that
in this context Naḥmanides relies on a kabbalistic motif—the essential con-
nection of sacrifice and the attribute of judgment—to explain the literal

78. *Perush*, Lev. 1:9 (p. 13).
79. Cf. b. Menaḥot 110a; *Sifre Be-Midbar*, pisqa 143.
80. Cf. *Perush*, Lev. 23:17; "for sacrifices are to the will of the honorable name, שם הנכבד
[i.e., the Shekhinah]."

81. See ibid., where the need to combine the attributes of mercy and judgment is also con-
nected to the act of sacrifices. For a study of a similar motif in much earlier sources, see Y. Baer,
"The Service of the Sacrifice in Second Temple Times," *Zion* 40 (1975): 95–153 [in Hebrew].

meaning of the biblical expression, עולה אשה, and indeed on the basis of it rejects the view proferred by ibn Ezra.

To take a few other examples from the Torah commentary where Naḥmanides unequivocally understands the *sensus litteralis* of the biblical narrative in terms of kabbalistic theosophy. In his commentary to Exod. 14:19, "The angel of God (מלאך האלהים), who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them," Nahmanides rejects ibn Ezra's explanation that the angel of God refers to the "great prince" (שר הגדול), i.e., the archangel Michael,[82] arguing instead as follows:

> In my opinion that which Scripture said, "The angel of God now moved," occurred at the beginning of the night, and "the angel of God who had been going ahead of the Israelite army" alludes to the Court of the Holy One, blessed be He, for the attribute of judgment is called angel in certain places in Scripture. It was this [attribute] which dwelled in the pillar of fire that went before them in the night to give them light. Therefore [Scripture] mentions [in this case] Elohim [the name that denotes the attribute of judgment]. It is possible that [the word angel, מלאך, in the expression מלאך האלהים] is not in the construct state [i.e., the angel of Elohim] but rather is in apposition [i.e., the angel who is Elohim].[83]

We see, therefore, that Naḥmanides rejects ibn Ezra's interpretation of the expression מלאך האלהים as a reference to an angelic being because, in his opinion, it refers rather to one of the divine attributes, the attribute of judgment, the *Shekhinah,* also designated the Court of the Holy One, blessed be He, בית דינו של הקב"ה.[84] Hence מלאך האלהים should be read in the appositive, i.e., the angel *who* is Elohim, and not in the constructive, i.e., the angel *of* Elohim,[85] for here, as in several other contexts in Nahmanides' commen-

82. Cf. ibn Ezra's commentary to Exod. 23:20 (ed. Weiser, 2:162); and see Naḥmanides' commentary to Exod. 33:12.

83. *Perush,* Exod. 14:19 (p. 351).

84. The notion of the court of God has its origin in rabbinic 'aggadah. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 51:2 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 533); *Exodus Rabbah* 12:4. For Naḥmanides, as other kabbalists, the reference is to the *Shekhinah,* the attribute of judgment. Cf., e.g., *Perush* to Gen. 19:24, Exod. 13:21, Num. 15:25; Deut. 8:18.

85. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim,* p. 82: ומה שאמ' מלאך האלהים אינו נסמך לום' מלאך של אלהים אלא מוכרת שהוא ביאור מלאך ומהו מלאך זה האלהים מלאך שהוא אלהים. And see *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN,* fol. 13a; Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah,* fol. 43b, who adds the numerological equivalence of מלאך and האלהים, i.e., both words equal 91.

tary,[86] the word angel denotes the last of the divine emanations, the *Shekhinah*, rather than some created entity, even if that entity be a separate intellect.[87] When Scripture speaks of the pillar of fire that illuminated the way for the Israelites during the nighttime, it is referring to a physical manifestation of this very attribute of God and not to some symbolic correlate. Analogously, the pillar of cloud which accompanied the people in the daytime refers to the divine attribute of mercy, the Holy One, blessed be He. This is made clear in Naḥmanides' commentary to Exod. 13:21, "The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day."

> They [the rabbis] have already said that in every place [in Scripture] that it says "And the Lord" (וה׳) it refers to God and His court (הוא ובית דינו).[88] The Holy One, blessed be He [i.e., the masculine potency or the attribute of mercy], was with them in the daytime and His Court [i.e., the feminine potency or the attribute of judgment] in the night. Thus the explanation of the verse (פירוש הכתוב) is that God [literally, the Name, השם, clearly a reference to the Tetragrammaton or the attribute of mercy][89] dwelled in the cloud and went before them in the day in the pillar of cloud, and in the night His Court dwelled in the pillar of fire to give them light. . . . In the first redemption the Holy One, blessed be He, was with them in the day and His Court was with them in the night, but in the future the attribute of His Court will ascend in mercy (תתעלה מדת בית דינו ברחמים), and the Lord, i.e., the Tetragrammaton (שם המיוחד), will go before them . . . for the All [i.e., the *Shekhinah*][90] will be united with the attribute of mercy (כי הכל במדת רחמים מיוחדת).[91]

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86. Cf. *Perush* to Gen. 18:1, to be discussed below. In several places the *Shekhinah* is also designated as the מלאך הגדול or מלאך הגואל; see Gen. 22:12, 48:15, Exod. 3:2, 12:12, 23:20, 24:1. In his commentary to Exod. 33:12 (p. 519) Naḥmanides refers to the *Shekhinah* as the "first angel" (מלאך הראשון) in whom is the name of God (cf. Exod. 23:21), while in the commentary to Exod. 33:14 She is referred to, on the basis of Malachi 3:1, as the angel of the covenant (מלאך הברית). See below, nn. 99–100.

87. In several places Naḥmanides accepts the philosophical characterization of angels as separate intellects. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 18:1; Num. 22:23, 23:4.

88. See n. 84.

89. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 81; Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, fol. 43a.

90. That the expression "the all," הכל, should be taken here as a technical term for the *Shekhinah* (see below, n. 116), and should not be translated simply as "everything" (as has been rendered by Chavel in his English translation of Nahmanides' commentary, vol. 2, p. 179), is evident from the fact that the verb used is the feminine form, מיוחדת, rather than מיוחד, the masculine form required if the word הכל were to be taken in its normal sense. Cf. *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN*, fol. 13a; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 81.

91. *Perush*, Exod. 13:21 (p. 348). For a discussion of this passage and its influence on the

The critical point is that this explanation of the biblical narrative concerning Israel's delivery from Egypt is not offered as a kabbalistic explanation supplementing another more literal one; it is indeed the very meaning of the text according to Naḥmanides.

Similarly, we find that in the end to the introduction to his *Commentary on Job,* after discussing various passages in Scripture which assume the possibility that angels take the form of men when they appear to human beings, Naḥmanides writes: "the matter is true and set according to its literal sense, established and standing according to its plain meaning; but there is a secret to the matter for the (mystical) tradition is the foundation of the true Torah," הדבר אמת ויציב כפשוטו נכון וקיים כמשמעו ויש לענין סוד כי הקבלה לתורה האמיתית יסוד.[92] In an obvious polemic against the philosophical view, especially espoused by Maimonides, that the appearance of angels in human form in prophetic visions must be treated allegorically,[93] Naḥmanides is affirming the literal, factual objectivity of such appearances, but, he adds, to understand these actual events one must know about the kabbalistic secret. Although it is not specified in that context, from other contexts, especially his commentary to Gen. 18:1, it is clear that Naḥmanides has in mind the esoteric doctrine of the garment, סוד המלבוש.[94] In the aforementioned context Naḥmanides engages in a lengthy critique against Maimonides' view that every prophet, with the exception of Moses, received his prophecy through

author of the Zohar, see E. Wolfson, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *AJS Review* 11 (1986): 40–41.

92. *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:26.

93. See, e.g., *Guide* I, 49; II, 42. And cf. Teicher, "The Mediaeval Mind," p. 10. It must be said that on noetic grounds there is no difference between a prophetic vision and regular sense experience. On the contrary, as Maimonides states in *Guide* III, 24, one of the signs of genuine prophecy is that "all that is seen by the prophet in a vision of prophecy is, for the prophet, true and certain," for "the prophet has no doubts in any way concerning anything in it, and that, for him, its status is the same as that of all existing things that are apprehended through the senses or the intellect." It is nevertheless the case that Maimonides denies the facticity or objective pole of the images seen by the prophet. That is, the images seen by the prophet occur only within the prophet's mind, with no sense datum in the external world. Maimonides can thus contrast that which is and that which is apprehended in a prophetic state. In terms of this doctrine Maimonides followed the view of Avicenna and not that of al-Farabi. See C. Sirat, *Les Theóries des visions surnaturelles dans la Pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Leiden, 1969), p. 142.

94. Naḥmanides himself, as far as I am aware, does not use the expression סוד המלבוש, though he does use the word מלבוש; see citation in n. 98. On the former expression, see Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah,* Deut. 22:5, fol. 88c.

an angel.[95] On the contrary, Naḥmanides, in part following the philosophi-
cal position, argues that, insofar as angels are separate intellects, when
Scripture mentions an angel being seen or heard it must be a vision or a
dream and not a prophetic state. Maimonides incorrectly identified
prophecy with such visionary experiences. In the case of Scripture's relating
that the angel appeared in anthropomorphic form, however, there is an
esoteric matter that distinguishes such occurrences from all other angelic
visions. In Nahmanides' words: "When [Scripture] mentions angels in the
name of men[96] . . . this [involves] the created Glory in [the form of] the
angels, referred to by those who know as the garment, which is perceptible
to the human eyes of those who are pure as the pious and the sons of the
prophets, but I cannot explain," הוא כבד . . . במקום אשר יזכיר המלאכים בשם אנשים
נברא במלאכים[97] יקרא אצל היודעים מלבוש יושג לעיני בשר בזכי הנפשות ובני הנביאים
ולא אוכל לפרש.[98] The real meaning of Naḥmanides' words has escaped most
commentators, with the exception of Shem Tov ibn Gaon, who very cau-
tiously relates some of what he received from his teacher, Isaac ben Todros,
regarding this matter.[99] Naḥmanides, it seems to me, intends to say that

95. Cf. *Guide* II, 41. And see Sirat, *Les Theóries*, pp. 147–149.

96. From Naḥmanides' language, "when [Scripture] mentions angels in the name of men,"
some commentators have explained that he is essentially following Maimonides' view (cf. *Mish-
neh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:7 that only angels from the group called אישים could be
seen by men. Cf. Meir Aldabi, *Shevilei 'Emunah* (Warsaw, 1887), fol. 13c; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat
'Einayim*, p. 49, and Meir ibn Gabbai, *'Avodat ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem, 1973), fol. 162b. See also
Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN 'al ha-Torah, fol. 5d. This interpretation has been recently re-
iterated by Dorit Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1987), p.
30 [in Hebrew]. In fact, however, Naḥmanides did not intend this at all. See Naḥmanides' expli-
cit critique of Maimonides' position in *Kitvei Ramban* 1:148. Naḥmanides was rather speaking
generally of the appearance of angels in anthropomorphic forms. That this generic explanation
is correct may be proven by the fact that after the relevant remark Naḥmanides cites several
other examples, one with Lot (cf. Gen. 19:1ff.) and two with Jacob (cf. Gen. 32:25 and 37:15),
where the angels are in the form of a man, not specifically from the group of angels called אישים.
See also *Perush*, Num. 22:23 (p. 291) where Naḥmanides puts the matter as follows: המלאכים
הנראים בדמות אנושי.

97. See, however, the reading in the fourth part of Ḥayyim Vital's *Sha'arei Qedushah*,
recently published in *Ketavim Ḥadashim le-R. Ḥayyim Vital* (Jerusalem, 1988), part 4, gate 2,
p. 14: כבד נברא כמלאכים.

98. See *Perush*, Gen. 18:1 (pp. 105–106).

99. Cf. *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 30b, where ibn Gaon states that the *malbush* refers to *'Aṭarah*,
i.e., *Shekhinah*, who is called angel, מלאך. On this tradition in Naḥmanides' commentary, see

biblical accounts of angels assuming the form of men refer to the anthropo-
morphic manifestations—or even incarnation—of the created Glory (כבוד
נברא), i.e., the *Shekhinah*,[100] in her descent to the world. Indeed, as we have

references given above, n. 86; cf. *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, chap. 4, fol. 72b, and chap. 13, fol.
185b. On fol. 31a, however, ibn Gaon states, in apparent contradiction to the former view, that
Naḥmanides "called the angels by the name *'Aṭarah* ... because the angels evolve from
'Aṭarah." On fol. 30b the view is cited in the name of the חכם that God makes a "garment" for
his pious ones and at times they come to the world in order to act as God's messengers, i.e.,
מלאכים. Isaac of Acre reports the same view, in slightly different terminology, in the name of his
teacher; see *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 48. See also MS Oxford 1943, fols. 20b–21b. Naḥmanides
himself briefly alludes to such a view in his commentary to Gen. 49:33 (pp. 276–277). Cf. also
Baḥya ben Asher, *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, in *Kitvei Rabbenu Baḥya*, ed. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1970), p.
356. Naḥmanides' view on the מלבוש, if my interpretation is correct, should be distinguished
from the view expressed many times in the zoharic corpus as well as in de León's Hebrew theo-
sophic texts regarding the angels being clothed in the form of mortal humans in their descent to
the world. Naḥmandes was interpreted in this way already by Moses de León; see *The Book of
the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, ed. E. Wolfson, p. 316, and references to
the Zohar in n. 22 ad loc. (Hebrew section). See also Menahem Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*,
fols. 24a–b, who combined the two traditions. For a fuller discussion of the zoharic view, see
Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar*, pp. 26–44.
    100. The term "created Glory" is traceable to Saadya Gaon, where it refers to a created
material light, superior to the angels, that appears in various forms to man. See *The Book of
Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. by S. Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), pp. 130, 151 ff.; *Saadya's
Commentary to Genesis*, ed. by M. Zucker (New York, 1984), p. 9 (Hebrew translation, pp.
175–176); Judah ben Barzilai, *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah*, ed. S. J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1885), pp. 31
ff., 234–235; A. Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, 1969), pp.
152–155. And see, in particular, the language of the responsum of Saadya to a certain heretic
(cf. I. Davidson, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* [New York, 1934], pp. 25–26, who identifies
the heretic as Salman ben Yeruḥam, also known as Ibn Sakawaihi; see however J. Mann, *Texts
and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* [Philadelphia, 1935], 2:1469–70), preserved in
Hebrew translation in Judah ben Barzilai's *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah*, p. 21: "Every angel and every
form is a created light ... and the Holy One, blessed be He, created it for His Glory," כל מלאך
וכל צורה אור ברואה ... ובראה הב"ה לכבודו. In that context Saadya makes a distinction between two
aspects of the Glory: the lower aspect is the created light which is seen by human beings, both
prophets and saints, whereas the higher aspect, although also a created light, is only appre-
hended by the angels. While the former aspect of the Glory is connected with the visionary
experience of angels, the latter is connected specifically with the object of mystical vision in the
Shi'ur Qomah text. Cf. Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut 'Ashkenaz*, pp. 109–111, and idem,
"Kavod Nistar," in *Da'at we-Safah*, ed. by M. Hallamish and A. Kasher (Jerusalem, 1981),
pp. 73–76. Judah ha-Levi and Maimonides likewise identified the *Shekhinah* with the created
Glory that was seen by the prophets; see *Kuzari* IV, 3 (cf. H. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of
Philosophy and Religion* [Cambridge, 1977], 2:93; Efros, *Studies in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*,
p. 152, n. 50; Y. Silman, *Thinker and Seer: The Development of the Thought of R. Yehuda Halevi
in the Kuzari* (Bar Ilan, 1985), p. 178, n. 40 [in Hebrew]); *Guide* I, 11, 25, 46, and 64. For Naḥ-
manides, in contrast to Saadya, ha-Levi, and Maimonides, the created Glory is not really a
created entity at all, but is rather the manifestation of the divine, the last of the emanations. See

already seen, the word מלאך on occasion designates the divine attribute of judgment, the *Shekhinah,* in Naḥmanides' kabbalah. What is relevant for my purposes is the fact that for Naḥmanides, the literal-factual meaning of

in particular Naḥmanides' criticism of Maimonides' position in his commentary to Gen. 46:1 (pp. 250–251): "God forbid that the thing which is called *Shekhinah* or created Glory is something distinct from God, blessed be He, as the rabbi [i.e., Maimondes] thought here. . . . And Jonathan ben Uziel translated [Ezek. 3:12, 'Blessed be the Glory from His place'] 'Blessed be the Glory of the Lord from the place of the inhabitation of the *Shekhinah*' (בריך יקרא דה' מאתר בית שכינתיה). If by the [word] glory Scripture here intends the essence and truth of the Creator . . . behold it says 'place' and 'habitation of the *Shekhinah*'. And if you say that the created Glory is like the view of the rabbi . . . how can the [word] blessed be established [in the verse 'Blessed be the Glory of God from its place'], for the one who blesses and prays to the created Glory [understood, that is, in the Maimonidean sense] is like one who worships idols. In the words of the rabbis there are many things that show that the *Shekhinah* is God, blessed be He." In other words, for Naḥmanides, the Glory is distinct from the infinite Godhead (what he refers to as the Creator in His essence and truth) but yet is not something created or distinct from God. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *'Oṣar Ḥayyim,* MS Guenzberg 775, fols. 13a, 16b, who distinguishes between the כבוד נברא, i.e., an angel, and the כבוד נאצל, i.e., the divine attribute. Naḥmanides' conception has great affinity with that of the German Pietists, particularly from the main school of Judah he-Ḥasid and Eleazar of Worms. See Scholem, *Major Trends,* pp. 111–113, and Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut 'Ashkenaz,* pp. 104–170. See, in particular, the following passage in Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem,* MS British Museum 737, fol. 223a: "It is customary for God to clothe the thoughts of His decrees, to show [them] to the prophets so that they will know that God has set His decrees. The prophet knows His thoughts according to the vision that he sees. At times this vision is called an angel." Cf. idem, *Sodei Razaya,* ed. I. Kamelhar (Bilgraj, 1936), pp. 3–4, 7–8, 11, 34–35, 51–52. And cf. the text from *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* cited in Dan, op. cit., pp. 151–152. The similarity between Naḥmanides' discussion of the secret of the garment and the view of R. Eleazar of Worms was already noted by I. Kamelhar, *Rabbenu Eleazar Mi-Germaiza ha-Roqeaḥ* (New York, 1930), p. 52. Mention should also be made of the view expressed in the early Provençal document published by Scholem, "Traces of Gabirol in the Kabbalah," *Me'assef Sofrei 'Ereṣ Yisra'el,* ed. A. Kabak and A. Steinman (Tel-Aviv, 1940), pp. 175–176 [in Hebrew], and in English translation in *Origins of the Kabbalah,* p. 225. In that text a tradition is recorded according to which the tenth *sefirah* is described as the angelic Prince of the Divine Countenance or Prince of the World who speaks to prophets in God's name. See Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition,* p. 167, n. 14. On the kabbalistic identification of *Shekhinah* with Meṭaṭron, see below, n. 217. Cf. also S. Pines, "God, the Divine Glory and the Angels according to a Second-Century Theology," in "Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 11–12 [in Hebrew]. Pines argues that Naḥmanides' conception of the *kavod* as that which is not distinct from God but yet appears to men in various forms is an echo of a presumably Jewish tradition reported by Justin Martyr (110–165). Curiously, Pines does not mention Naḥmanides' doctrine of the *malbush* in his commentary to Gen. 18:1 which brings his position even closer to that reported by Justin, for according to that tradition the glory, which is not separate from God, appears to men in the form of angels. This is precisely the essence of Naḥmanides' esoteric doctrine of the *malbush.*

these narratives is only upheld by the kabbalistic explanation.[101] In that sense one can speak assuredly of a convergence of *peshaṭ* and *sod*.

The passage wherein this convergence is most clearly expressed occurs in Naḥmanides' commentary to the dialogue between Moses and God after the sin of the Golden Calf in Exod. 33:12 ff. After reviewing the interpretations of Rashi and ibn Ezra, Naḥmanides forthrightly proclaims:

> This section [of Scripture] cannot possibly be explained (להולמה)[102] to one who has not heard the secrets of the Torah (בסתרי התורה). And thus is the matter according to the way of truth: Moses said, "You have not made known to me whom You will send with me" (Exod. 33:12). He requested that two things which [God] said to him be fulfilled. Firstly, "I [God] have singled you [Moses] out by name" (ibid.), i.e., the I [God] will be known by My name on your behalf. . . . And secondly [Moses was told by God] "you have, indeed, gained favor in My eyes" (ibid.), i.e., [Moses] will find grace, which is the cleaving of knowledge (דבקות הדעת). And [Moses said to God] "Now if I have truly found favor in Your eyes" (ibid. 13), [i.e.,] through the attribute of judgment (במדת הדין), [then] "pray let me know" the paths of the ways through which You are known by Your name (נתיבות הדרכים כאשר אתה נודע בשמך). "And I will know You" (ibid.), [i.e.,] to unify You "so that I may find" the great grace (החן הגדול). "Consider, too, that this nation is Your people" (ibid.). You are their father and they are Your children. . . . Then the Holy One, blessed be He, answered Moses, "My face will go" (ibid. 14), [i.e.,] "the angel of the covenant (מלאך הברית) that you desire" (Malachi 3:1), for My face is seen in him . . . "for My name is in him" (Exod. 23:21). "And I will lighten your burden" (ibid. 33:14) . . . that he [the angel of the covenant or the *Shekhinah*] should not conduct himself in relation to you with the attribute of severe judgment (במדת הדין עזה), but rather with the attribute [of judgment] contained in the attribute of mercy (במדה כלולה במדת הרחמים). . . . Then Moses responded, "Unless Your face"—[i.e.,] by Yourself and Your Glory (בעצמך ובכבודך)—go in the lead, do not make us leave this place" (ibid. 15), for You must be with us face to face. . . . Thus it is mentioned above, "[Your people whom You deliv-

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101. The point is well made by Baḥya ben Asher in his commentary to Gen. 18:8 (p. 172): "This section cannot be taught to any intelligent person except by way of the kabbalistic explanation, for the meaning of these angels, referred to as human beings, is that the created Glory [is embodied] in the angels, and the true enlightened ones call this [phenomenon] the garment."

102. For this usage, see A. Even-Shohan, *Ha-Millon he-Ḥadash* (Jerusalem, 1969), 1:272, s.v. הלם.

ered from the land of Egypt] with great power and with a mighty hand" (ibid.
32:11). Thus [Moses] requested that [God] bring them to the land "with great
power and with a mighty hand" (בכח גדול וביד חזקה) just as He brought them
forth from Egypt.[103]

Moses' request to God, and God's answer to Moses, can only be under-
stood, according to Naḥmanides, in terms of the theosophic dynamic of the
divine attributes. Moses wanted assurance from God that the attribute of
judgment, *Shekhinah,* would lead the people through the desert, but only as
it is comprised within, or mitigated by, the attribute of mercy. This is the
mystery of the angel of the covenant (*Shekhinah*) in whom is found the name
of God (the Tetragrammaton, which symbolizes the masculine potency). It
is also the meaning of God's telling Moses that His face would lead the
people, for the face refers to God's attribute of judgment, *Shekhinah,* but
only as it is turned toward the other divine face, the attribute of mercy, the
Holy One, blessed be He.[104] The union of these attributes is finally alluded
to in the expression "with great power and with a mighty hand" (בכח גדול וביד
חזקה), i.e., the former symbolizing the attribute of mercy and the latter the
attribute of judgment. Just as the deliverance from Egypt was realized
through the combination of these two attributes, so too the entry into the
land. In Naḥmanides view, then, the biblical text is incomprehensible to one
who lacks knowledge of the secrets of Torah, i.e., knowledge of the proper
kabbalistic symbolism. One who has such theosophic knowledge, however,
understands the text in its plain sense.

Some final examples of the first typology. Commenting on Jacob's
utterance in Gen. 31:42, "and the Fear of Isaac (ופחד יצחק) was with me,"
Naḥmanides writes:

> By way of truth the verse will be explained in its plain and literal sense (יבא
> הלשון כפשוטו ומשמעו), and it [פחד יצחק] refers to the supernal attribute of judg-
> ment [i.e., the fifth emanation, *Gevurah* or *Din*]. Concerning it it is written,
> "Afterward, the Israelites will turn back and will seek the Lord their God and
> David their king, and they will thrill (ופחדו) over the Lord and His bounty in
> the days to come" (Hosea 3:5). That is, they will seek [the attribute of] mercy

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103. *Perush,* Exod. 33:14 (pp. 520–521). This text was adduced already by Septimus; see
above, n. 74.
104. Cf. *Perush,* Gen. 32:2; Exod. 3:2, 20:3, 23:16, 25:30; Lev. 20:3; Num. 15:25; Deut. 4:32.

[the Tetragrammaton] and the lower attribute of judgment [David their king] and they will bring the Fear of Isaac [reading ופחדו as a noun, i.e., His Fear, rather than as a verb] to God and to His goodness (אל השם ואל טובו) which were mentioned.[105]

The most desirable explanation for the biblical expression, indeed the one that best suits the plain sense, is that which decodes the text as a symbolic reference to the divine attribute, for indeed the expression פחד יצחק is used in Scripture as a proper name of God, i.e., the "One whom Isaac feared," which parallels the words that proceed it, "God of my father, the God of Abraham." Using the same kabbalistic motif Naḥmanides accounts for the plain sense of Gen. 46:1, where it is stated that Jacob "offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac," ויזבח זבחים לאלהי אביו יצחק. According to Naḥ-manides, the last three words in the verse refer to the attribute of judgment, which was the divine grade especially connected to Isaac. Jacob saw fit to offer sacrifices to this particular attribute because he realized that his jour-ney to Egypt was the beginning of exile, a period when the forces of judgment would prevail. To mitigate that somewhat he thought it appro-priate to offer sacrifices to the attribute of judgment, "the God of his father Isaac." The plain sense is therefore completely informed by the mystical nuance.

In a similar fashion Naḥmanides reads the events at the Sinaitic revela-tion purely in terms of a theosophic process—the merging of the attributes of mercy and judgment symbolized as the voice speaking through the fire—for the theophany is explicable on only one level.[106] The decoding of Scrip-

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105. *Perush.* Gen. 31:42 (p. 178). Again, this is one of the examples mentioned by Septimus; see n. 103.

106. Cf. *Perush,* Gen. 15:1; Exod. 19:3, 20; Deut. 4:12, 32; 5:5, 19. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim,* p. 102: "Even though from what is apparent (מן הנגלה) it seems that [Naḥmanides] did not mention this [explanation] here by any allusion to esoteric truth (שלא הזכיר זה כאן בתורה רמיזת בתורה רמיזת sod סוד), and he said the matter . . . [in a way] that one who sees them thinks that the rabbi [Naḥ-manides] did not pay attention to them. Yet, all his intention was dependent on them, to allude through them to the wonderful and hidden secrets. Know that if one desires the words of the rabbi then one will find the external [sense] to be 'silver showpieces' (משכיות כסף), and if one's heart is burning and inflamed with regard to their inner [sense] then one will find 'apples of gold' (תפוחי זהב)." The latter reference is, of course, to Prov. 25:11, the verse which Maimonides, in the introduction to the *Guide,* used to express the inner (*baṭin*)–outer (*ẓahir*), esoteric-exoteric polarity in the text. Cf. Talmage, "Apples of Gold," p. 315.

ture as a map of kabbalistic symbols alone provides the reader with a proper understanding of the text. Similarly, Naḥmanides interprets Exod. 14:31, "And Israel saw the great hand (היד הגדולה)," as a reference to the attribute of judgment (מדת הדין) or *Shekhinah*.[107] Although this interpretation is designated as the esoteric one (על דרך האמת), Naḥmanides does not offer an alternative reading which he finds satisfactory. The same may be said with respect to his understanding of Moses' question in Exod. 3:13, "what is his name," מה שמו. There is, for Naḥmanides, only one way to understand this text, and that is in terms of the kabbalistic system of divine emanations.[108] Indeed, in many instances Naḥmanides' treatment of the divine names in Scripture— especially YHWH (referred to as שם המפורש or שם הגדול or שם המיוחד) and Elohim (שם הנכבד)—betrays this convergence of literal and esoteric, for the names cannot by their very nature be taken in any other way except as referring to the respective attributes of God.[109] To cite but one salient example of this. In his commentary to Exod. 6:2 Naḥmanides writes:

> By way of truth the verse is explained according to its simple and literal sense (ועל דרך האמת בא הכתוב כפשוטו ומשמעו), for it says, "I am the Lord" [i.e.,] I appeared to them through the speculum of El Shaddai [i.e., the *Shekhinah*, the feminine potency]. . . but I the Lord [i.e., the Tetragrammaton or the Holy One, blessed be He, the masculine potency] was not known to them, for they did not gaze upon the speculum that shines [the masculine potency]. . . . the Patriarchs did know the Unique Name [שם המיוחד, the Tetragrammaton], but it was not known to them through prophecy. . . . The Patriarchs had a revelation of *Shekhinah*, and the [divine] speech was [communicated] through the weaker attribute of judgment. . . . But Moses knew [the divine] through the attribute of mercy, which is the Great Name [the Tetragrammaton].[110]

2. Let me now turn my attention to the second typology concerning the convergence of *sod* and *peshaṭ* in Naḥmanides. In some of the contexts in Naḥmanides' commentary where *peshaṭ* and *sod* seem to be equated, the two are, in fact, distinct but parallel layers of meaning. I have already touched

107. *Perush*, Exod. 14:31; and cf. to Deut. 5:15.

108. This example was mentioned by Septimus; see reference above, n. 74. Cf. R. Ezra, *Perush 'al Shir ha-Shirim, Kitvei Ramban*, 2:477–478.

109. See e.g., *Perush* to Gen. 11:2, 17:1, 18:20, 19:24, 22:2, 46:1, 48:15; Exod. 2:25, 6:2, 13:16, 15:2, 19:3, 19:20, 20:2, 32:10, 11; Lev. 18:2, 19:12; Num. 6:24, 15:25, 20:1, 23:16; Deut. 3:25, 4:12, 21, 32, 8:18.

110. *Perush*, Exod. 6:2 (p. 304); mentioned by both Septimus and Berger (see nn. 74–75).

upon the phenomenon of parallelism and its centrality in Naḥmanides' kab-
balistic hermeneutics in the first section of this paper. The crucial point to
emphasize here is that occasionally Naḥmanides will argue that it is only
through knowledge of the parallel event in the divine realm that one can
truly understand the literal or contextual meaning of the text.[111] It is
nevertheless the case that in these instances two levels of meaning, the literal
and mystical, are preserved, which do refer to two levels of reality outside
the text, the mundane and the divine. To be sure, comprehension of the
literal sense is ultimately dependent upon comprehension of the mystical
sense, in the same way that a full appreciation of the lower world is depen-
dent upon adequate knowledge of the upper world. In these cases, however,
the two levels of meaning in the realm of exegesis are parallel, not identical.

Thus, for example, the following kabbalistic explanation is given as the
plain meaning of "And when you sound short blasts (ותקעתם תרועה) a second
time those encamped on the south shall move forward. . . . While to con-
voke the congregation you shall blow long blasts, not short ones (תתקעו ולא
תריעו)" (Num. 10:6–7): the short blast (תרועה) alludes to or symbolizes (רמז)
the attribute of judgment, i.e., the Shekhinah, whereas the long or extended
blast (תקיעה) symbolizes the attribute of mercy, i.e., Tif'eret.[112] Although in
this case the peshaṭ of the text requires knowledge of the theosophic process,
it is not Naḥmanides' intention to negate the literal sense. On the contrary,
he upholds the literal sense of the narrative, thereby maintaining that Moses
actually took the silver trumpets and made the appropriate sounds. These
latter, however, symbolically corresponded to attributes within the divine
realm, and hence the full meaning of the scriptural text—i.e., why these
sounds were commanded and not others—can only be ascertained by kab-
balistic knowledge of the theosophic realm. The peshaṭ in the text, cor-
responding to an event in the mundane world, refers to a kabbalistic paral-
lel, a sod, in the divine world. Here the overlapping of literal and mystical
does not imply identification of the two, but only parallelism.

In his commentary to Num. 15:31 Naḥmanides rejects Rashi's numero-
logical explanation for why the fringe garment is considered by Scripture to
be a memorial (זכרון) for all the commandments.[113] According to Rashi's

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111. See, e.g., Perush, Exod. 20:3; Num. 4:20.
112. Perush, Num. 10:6; and cf. to Lev. 23:24.
113. See also Nahmanides' hassagot to the "first root" in Maimonides' Sefer ha-Miṣwot,

computation,[114] the Torah commands, "That shall be your fringe, look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them" (Num. 15:39), for the word ציצית equals 600, and there are, additionally, eight strings and five knots on each fringe, making a total of 613 corresponding to all the commandments.[115] Naḥmanides raises various problems with this explanation and concludes that the issue of remembrance is connected to the blue thread (חוט התכלת) "which alludes to [or symbolizes: שרומז] the attribute which comprises everything [המדה הכוללת הכל, i.e., the Shekhinah], for She is in the All [שהיא בכל, i.e., Yesod],[116] and is the completion of all [תכלית הכל].[117] Thus it says, 'and recall All,' for it [i.e., the All which is the Shekhinah] is the commandment of God [מצות השם]."[118] According to Naḥmanides, then, the

ed. Chavel, p. 4, where he again criticizes this view of Rashi, ending with these words: "I do not know if it is an 'aggadah, but in any event it is not from the Torah."

114. The earliest source for this computation appears to have been the Halakhot Qeṣuvot attributed erroneously to Yehudai Gaon; cf. 'Oṣar ha-Ge'onim le-Masekhet Sanhedrin, ed. Z. Taubes (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 462. The numerology is repeated in several texts deriving from the school of R. Moses ha-Darshan, and these may have been the direct source for Rashi. Cf. Midrash 'Aggadah, ed. S. Buber (Vienna, 1894), p. 113; Numbers Rabbah 18:21 and parallel in Tanḥuma, Qoraḥ, 12. The latter passage has been long recognized as a later addition to the Tanḥuma text; cf. S. Buber's introduction to his edition of Midrash Tanḥuma, chap. 10, §34, p. 101. See also Tobias ben Eliezer, Midrash Leqaḥ Ṭov, ed. S. Buber, to Num. 15:39, p. 224 (already mentioned by Isaac of Acre in Me'irat 'Einayim, ed. Goldreich, p. 194).

115. Cf. Rashi's commentary to Num. 15:39; and his commentary to b. Menaḥot 43b, s.v. שקולה מצוה זו. See also Hilkhot Ṣiṣit le-RaSHI in Shibbolei ha-Leqet ha-Shalem, ed. S. Buber (New York, 1959), 190b; Sefer ha-Pardes, ed. H. Ehrenreich (Budapest, 1924), p. 21; Maḥzor Vitry, ed. S. Horowitz (Nuremberg, 1923), p. 635; Tosafot to b. Menaḥot 39a, s.v. לא יפחות; Abraham ben Nathan ha-Yarḥi, Sefer ha-Manhig, ed. Y. Raphael (Jerusalem, 1978), 2: 638; R. Asher, Hilkhot Ṣiṣit, §15 (in the name of the Tanḥuma) and similarly in Jacob ben Asher, Tur, 'Oraḥ Ḥayyim, 24; Isaac ben Abba Mari, Sefer ha-'Iṭṭur (Vilna, 1874), Hilkhot Ṣiṣit, 69c; Perush ha-Roqeaḥ 'al ha-Torah, ed. Ch. Konyevsky (Benai Beraq, 1981), 3:60 (concerning the authorship of this commentary see J. Dan, "The Ashkenazi Hasidic 'Gates of Wisdom,' Hommage à Georges Vajda, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati [Louvain, 1980], pp. 183–189). This numerology was clearly intended to be a support (אסמכתא) for the talmudic dictum that the commandment of the fringe garment is equivalent to all the other commandments. See b. Menaḥot 43b, Nedarim 25b, Shevu'ot 29a. For an interesting parallel to this theme in Samaritan literature, see A. Loewenstamm, "On the Problem of 613 Commandments in Samaritanism," Tarbiz 41 (1972): 310–312 [in Hebrew]. For an alternative computation intended to link the 613 commandments to the one commandment of the fringe garment, see R. Ezra, Perush 'al Shir ha-Shirim, Kitvei Ramban, 2:496. R. Ezra's text is cited anonymously by Isaac of Acre in Me'irat 'Einayim, pp. 194–195.

116. Cf. Perush, Gen. 24:1; Exod. 13:21.

117. Cf. the exact language in Zohar 3:175b: מאי תכלת תכלית דכלא.

118. Perush, Num. 15:31 (p. 254). For a similar critique of Rashi's explanation (cited in the name of the "commentators"), see Todros Abulafia, 'Oṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem (Warsaw,

intent of Scripture's admonition that one recall all the commandments by looking at the fringe garment is centered specifically on the blue thread, for the latter symbolizes the *Shekhinah,* the divine grade that comprises within itself all the other grades and is thus the completion of all.[119] It is thus on account of the symbolic reference—and not the numerological value—that the *ṣiṣit* serve as a token of memorial for all 613 commandments. This view is presented by Naḥmanides without any special introduction, as if it were—as indeed in his mind it is—the *peshaṭ* of the verse.[120] The literal sense of the words "look at it and recall all the commandments" is informed by the kabbalistic understanding of the word "all," whose symbolic valence is identical to that of the blue thread mentioned in the previous verse (Num. 15:38), i.e., the "all" is the *Shekhinah* which comprises within itself all the commandments and is symbolized by the blue thread. The import of the proclamation, "look at it," is thus to look specifically at the blue thread, for it is in virtue of the latter that one is reminded of the divine potency referred to as the "all" in the remainder of the verse. Here the convergence

1879), fol. 6a. Naḥmanides' explanation had a decisive influence on subsequent kabbalists, including Moses de León. See Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate,* p. 234 (Hebrew section) and discussion on p. 19 (English section). On the kabbalistic identification of *Shekhinah* with *miṣwah,* a theme that is expressed already in *Sefer ha-Bahir,* see references given in Wolfson, op. cit., p. 18, n. 35, and see pp. 59–61.

119. Cf. C. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Ḥoqer u-khe-Mequbbal,* pp. 346–350.

120. Cf. J. Katz, *Halakhah we-Qabbalah,* p. 31. In yet another context, in his commentary to Lev. 19:19 (p. 120), Naḥmanides takes issue with Rashi's claim that *ḥuqim* represent divine decrees for which there is no reason. "The statutes of the Holy One, blessed be He (חוקי הקב"ה)," counters Naḥmanides, "are His secrets (סודות) in the Torah, which the people do not appreciate [literally, enjoy, נהנים] through their thinking as they do in the case of *mishpaṭim,* but yet they all have a proper reason (טעם נכון) and a perfect benefit (תועלת שלימה)." Cf. Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Ḥoqer u-khe-Mequbbal,* pp. 386–394. The specific rationale adduced for the prohibition of mixed species (*kil'ayim*) is that all vegetative and animal forces below are generated by powers that have their origin in the supernal realm; therefore by combining two different species one "changes and defies the work of Creation." Cf. R. Ezra, *Perush 'al Shir ha-Shirim, Kitvei Ramban,* 2:544. It is interesting to note that Moses de León employs the Geronese formulation but transforms it in light of the Castilian doctrine of dual forces, i.e., the prohibition of mixing the species is construed as the prohibition of mixing the divine and the demonic. See E. Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate,* p. 41, n. 149 (English section). (The reference there to Naḥmanides' commentary on Lev. 19:9 should be corrected to Lev. 19:19). The critical point in this case, however, is even though Naḥmanides insists that the particular biblical injunction can only be understood in light of the kabbalistic rationale, the latter is in no way connected to a particular term in the text and therefore cannot count as an example of the identity or convergence of *sod* and *peshaṭ* in the realm of exegesis. The formulation of this last point is based on a comment of David Berger to the author.

of meaning between *peshaṭ* and *sod* is made possible by the fact that the blue thread in Scripture has a twofold connotation: it refers to both the actual thread and to the symbolic correlate in the divine world. The full sense of the biblical description of the former can only be gained by knowledge of the latter.

To take another set of examples that will illustrate my point. Naḥmanides clearly states that with respect to various items in the Tabernacle, including the "bread of display" (לחם הפנים) set on a table as well as the candelabrum (מנורה), these phenomena can only be understood by reference to the supernal events which they symbolize.[121] In his commentary to Exod. 25:24, "and make a gold moulding around [the table]," Naḥmanides cites Rashi's explanation, which is itself based on earlier midrashic sources,[122] that the table is a "sign of the crown of royalty," סימן לכתר מלכות. In these words Naḥmanides finds a symbolic reference to the last *sefirah*, the *Shekhinah*, which he himself describes as "the secret of the table" (סוד השולחן) upon which the supernal blessing rests.[123] Thus the full comprehension of the literal sense of the words "make a gold moulding around [the table]" is predicated upon an understanding of the kabbalistic symbolism. Although the kabbalistic interpretation does not in this case address a problem that emerges from a straightforward reading of the text, insofar as the *sod* illuminates the *peshaṭ* in such a way that the latter is not understood adequately except by means of the former, it is correct, in my opinion, to speak of an overlapping of the two levels of meaning.

Particularly interesting in this regard are Naḥmanides' comments on the structure of the cherubim. According to Naḥmanides, the cherubim were constructed "with their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings" (cf. Exod. 25:20), for they actually formed the Throne-seat

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121. *Perush,* Exod. 25:30 (p. 463). This kabbalistic orientation is, of course, related to a much older aggadic motif regarding the parallel structure between the terrestrial and celestial Temples. Cf. the comprehensive study of V. Aptowitzer, "The Heavenly Temple in the Aggadah," *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 137–153, 257–285 [in Hebrew].

122. Cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 34:2; *Tanḥuma, Vayaqhel,* 8; *Numbers Rabbah* 4:13, 14:10. For a slightly different formulation, but one which expresses the same idea, see b. Yoma 82b and see the commentary of Rashi ad loc., s.v. שלשה זירין. See also commentary of Rashi to m. Avot 4:13, s.v. וסימן לשלשת כתרים.

123. *Perush,* Exod. 25:24 (p. 461). Cf. *Keter Shem Tov,* fol. 39a; Baḥya's commentary to Exod. 25:24 (p. 280). For a different explanation, see *Me'irat 'Einayim,* p. 121.

upon which the divine Glory sat. "Therefore [God] was called '[the one] enthroned on the cherubim,'[124] for they spread out their wings to show that they are the chariot to carry the Glory (שהם המרכבה נושאי הכבוד). . . . And if you consider further why they were facing one another (ibid.), and why they were of 'hammered work' (ibid. 18), you will know that it was appropriate for them to have 'their wings spread out above,' for they are the supreme Throne, shielding the Testimony [i.e., the Tablets of Law] which is the 'writing of God' (cf. ibid. 32:16)."[125] Moreover, according to Nahmanides, the structure of the Ark and cherubim in the Tabernacle was identical to that of the chariot seen by Ezekiel, described by the prophet in one place in the following way: "This is the living creature that I had seen below the God of Israel at the River Chebar, so now I know that they were cherubim" (Ezek. 10:20). The cherubim of the chariot seen by Ezekiel, in turn, were in the image of the higher Cherubim in the divine realm: "And this is the meaning of [the expression] 'the figure of the chariot' (1 Chron. 28:18), for the cherubim carrying the Glory which Ezekiel saw are the figure [or pattern] of the Cherubim which are the Glory and the Splendor (כבוד ותפארת) [i.e., the sixth and tenth *sefirot, Shekhinah* and *Tif'eret*],[126] and the cherubim in the Tabernacle and in the Temple were in their pattern." Proper knowledge of the structure of the cherubim described by Scripture can only be gained, therefore, by reference to the symbolic correlate of these cherubim in the divine realm. This does not, however, imply that there were no actual cherubim in the Tabernacle or the Temple. The literal sense of the text describing these

124. Cf. 1. Sam. 4:4, 2 Sam. 6:6, 1 Chron. 13:6, 2 Kings 19:15, Isa. 37:16, Ps. 80:2, 99:1.

125. *Perush,* Exod. 25:21 (p. 460). Cf. the recent analysis, which corroborates Nahmanides' explanation, in T. N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 18, 1982), pp. 19–24.

126. Cf. *Perush,* Num. 11:15, and see Racanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah,* Exod. 25:10, fol. 49b: "There are those who explain that the cherubim allude to [or symbolize: רומזים] the *du-parṣufin* [i.e., *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah*], and this appears to be the opinion of the RaMBaN, blessed be his memory." For other Geronese kabbalists the cherubim were said to symbolize *Ḥesed* and *Gevurah;* see Tishby, *Perush ha-'Aggadot le-R. 'Azri'el,* p. 11, n. 1. For still other kabbalists, such as Joseph Hamadan, who wrote in the last decade of the thirteenth century, the cherubim symbolized *Yesod* and *Shekhinah.* Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives,* p. 134. And see Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim,* p. 121, who reports having received a tradition similar to that of Joseph Hamadan in the name of an anonymous "enlightened kabbalist" (מקובל משכיל). On p. 123, however, R. Isaac follows the tradition of Nahmanides and identifies the symbolic correspondence of the cherubim as the *du-parṣufin,* i.e., *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah.*

entities has the mundane realities as its referent, whereas the symbolic sense
has the divine realities as its referent.

A striking example of this parallelism is to be found in Naḥmanides'
interpretation of Moses' and Aaron's sin recorded in Num. 20:1 ff. After
reviewing various prior attempts to explain the exact nature of their sin,
Naḥmanides relates that herein is contained "one of the great secrets
amongst the mysteries of the Torah."[127] An examination of the esoteric
explanation that he offers shows indeed that this explanation alone focuses
on the plain language of the text. In particular, Naḥmanides' kabbalistic
explanation deals with the seemingly innocuous detail of Scripture that
Moses and Aaron hit the rock twice (cf. Num. 20:11). This act epitomizes,
according to Naḥmanides, the essence of their sinfulness, for it represented a
lack of faith in God or, when understood in terms of kabbalistic symbols, a
lack of faith in the unity of the two aspects of God that corresponds to faith.
Naḥmanides explains that the first time that Moses was commanded to
draw water forth from the rock, God said to him, "I will be standing there
before you on the rock at Horeb, and you should strike the rock" (Exod.
17:6). The esoteric meaning of that verse, writes Naḥmanides, is: "My Great
Name (שמי הגדול) was upon the rock at Horeb, which is 'the Glory of the
Lord, a consuming fire on the top of the mountain' (ibid. 24:17)."[128] That is
to say, at that moment it was clear to Moses that there was complete unifica-
tion above between the masculine aspect of God, the attribute of mercy
symbolized by the "Great Name" (שם הגדול), and the feminine aspect, the
divine Glory (כבוד יהוה), the attribute of judgment symbolized alternatively
as the rock or the consuming fire. Insofar as Moses was cognizant of this
unity, he only hit the rock once, an act which symbolized that the two divine
aspects were united. On the second occasion, however, Moses and Aaron
were doubtful about this unification and they therefore hit the rock twice—
one strike for each aspect—in order to bring about the unification so that
the miracle would occur and the water would overflow from the rock. The
double striking thus represents their lack of faith in God, which is to say,
their lack of trust that the two divine grades were indeed united. In Naḥ-
manides' words: "Both [Moses and Aaron] agreed to strike the rock twice
and this was the sin. Therefore it says, 'You did not trust me,' לא האמנתם בי

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127. *Perush*, Num. 20:1 (p. 276); mentioned by Septimus and Berger (see nn. 74–75).
128. Ibid.

(Num. 20:12), i.e., you did not place Faith, אמונה [the *Shekhinah* or feminine aspect] in My Name, שמי [the masculine aspect] and by means of Faith the miracle would occur."[129] The event below therefore directly corresponded to the theosophic process above, for the rock on the mountain symbolized the *Shekhinah,* and Moses' or Aaron's double hitting of that rock reflects the failure to acknowledge the interrelatedness of the two divine potencies. In essence, then, their sin was a sin of misconception, referred to in Scripture as a rebellion (מעילה), directed particularly at the last of the divine grades, the *Shekhinah.*[130] "It says, 'you disobeyed My command,' מריתם פי (Num. 27:14), for 'they rebelled against His holy spirit,' מרו את רוח קדשו (Isa. 63:10), [the holy spirit] is called the mouth of the Lord [i.e., the *Shekhinah*] in every place."[131] Hence, in this case Naḥmanides does not establish any theurgical connection between human action and the divine reality, but rather a symbolic affinity such that one's belief in God—understood in the dynamic categories of the kabbalah—can be ascertained from one's action. It is in this sense that the literal meaning can only be gathered in light of the appropriate kabbalistic symbolism.

Another clear example of this overlapping of literal and esoteric is to be found in Naḥmanides' commentary to Deut. 32:7: "The explanation for this, as is stated, 'these the Lord God allotted to other people' (Deut. 4:19), since for each portion below there is a [corresponding] portion above. And the meaning of '[He fixed the boundaries of peoples] in relation to Israel's numbers' (Deut. 32:8), for the form of Jacob is carved on the Throne of Glory. This is a great secret."[132] For Naḥmanides, then, one can understand Israel's chosenness only when one bears in mind the grade above to which Israel corresponds, viz., the central *sefirah* of *Tif'eret,* which is depicted in terms of the old aggadic image of the form of Jacob carved on the divine Throne.[133] More specifically, this image conveys in kabbalistic terms the

129. Ibid. My explication of this passage is based largely on the explanation of Shem Tov ibn Gaon in his *Keter Shem Tov.* See *Ma'or wa-Shemesh,* fol. 49a, and Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah,* Num. 20:11, fol. 77c.

130. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim,* pp. 200–201, where this aspect of Naḥmanides' explanation is emphasized. See also *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN,* attributed to ibn Sahula, fol. 27a.

131. *Perush,* loc. cit.

132. Cf. *Perush,* Deut. 32:7 (p. 486). Cf. ibid., Gen 33:20, Deut. 4:15.

133. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 82:2 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 978). For ben Yaqar's interpretation of this passage, see above, n. 63.

unity of the masculine and feminine aspects of divinity, the image of Jacob
(the masculine) engraved on the Throne (the feminine). Naḥmanides utilizes
this aggadic image to characterize the special divine providence that pertains
to the land of Israel. Thus in his commentary to Gen. 33:20 he writes:

> By way of truth it is like the *midrash* of our rabbis who explained in the trac-
> tate Megillah [18a], "from where do you know that the Holy One, blessed be
> He, called Jacob 'Lord' (אל), as it says, 'And he [God] called him [Jacob]
> Lord, God of Israel' (אל אלהי ישראל)." There is in this matter a great secret,
> mentioned as well in *Genesis Rabbah* [79:8] in different language: He said to
> him, "You are Lord amongst the upper ones and I am Lord amongst the lower
> ones." They alluded to what they always say regarding the image of Jacob that
> is engraved on the Throne of Glory. And the intention is that the *Shekhinah*
> rests in the land of Israel. The enlightened one will understand.[134]

The only way to comprehend Naḥmanides' juxtaposing of these two rab-
binic passages is to consider carefully the reading of Gen. 33:20 offered in b.
Megillah 18a: "He, the God of Israel, called him [Jacob] Lord." Understood
kabbalistically, the Lord of Israel, who addresses Jacob with the title אל, is
the *Shekhinah*. Jacob is so addressed by the *Shekhinah* because he reflects
the corresponding divine attribute above, viz., the attribute of mercy. Naḥ-
manides applies this kabbalistic symbolism as well to read the passage from
Genesis Rabbah, i.e., the *Shekhinah* addresses Jacob: "You are the Lord
above and I am the Lord below." The grade to which Jacob refers has domi-
nion over the sefirotic realm, whereas *Shekhinah* has dominion over the
mundane realm. The latter is expressed by the rabbinic idea that *Shekhinah*
dwells in the land of Israel. Yet, providence in the land of Israel is of a spe-
cial sort, for it eventuates from the union of the masculine and feminine
potencies of the divine. This union is conveyed by the image of the form of
Jacob engraved on the Throne as well as by Naḥmanides' kabbalistic read-
ing of the two rabbinic texts.[135]

134. *Perush,* Gen. 33:20 (p. 189).
135. See *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN* fol. 7b; Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah,* fols.
31d–32a; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim,* p. 62. In the commentary attributed to ibn Sahula a
second explanation is given whereby Jacob, or *Tif'eret,* is identified with the throne itself, but
this does not imply any feminine image of Jacob, for a distinction is made there between a
higher and lower Throne, referring respectively to the masculine and feminine potencies of
God. Cf. the anonymous commentary on the *sefirot* in MS JTS 8124, fol. 5a: "*Tif'eret* is the

It is of interest that Naḥmanides uses this very mystical notion to explain the plain meaning of Lev. 18:25, where the punishment for sexual offenses is expulsion from the land of Israel. Naḥmanides poses the obvious question: If these laws pertaining to forbidden sexual relations are bodily obligations that are not dependent on the land of Israel for their fulfillment, why then does Scripture connect the two with respect to punishment? Naḥmanides answers by showing that the underlying rationale for these sexual prohibitions is connected to the special holiness of the Jewish people, which, in turn, is related specifically to their being in the land of Israel.[136] All other nations are ruled by celestial forces in their lands, but Israel is ruled only by God in the land of Israel. Naḥmanides further specifies that although outside the land of Israel the celestial forces have dominion, even these forces derive their power from the *Shekhinah,* referred to as the שם הנכבד. In the case of the land of Israel, however, the *Shekhinah* is united with *Tif'eret,* and hence Her dominion over the land is qualitatively different. This is alluded to in Naḥmanides' comment: "The honorable name [*Shekhinah*] is 'the God of gods and the Lord of lords' (Deut. 10:17) for all the world, but the land of Israel is the center of the settlement. It is the portion of God, unique to His Name (נחלת ה' מיוחדת לשמו)."[137] In the last words there is an obvious reference to the masculine potency of the divine, the שם המיוחד.[138] The land of Israel is thus the unique portion of God, for it symbolizes the feminine potency, the *Shekhinah,* which is here most fully united with the masculine potency. The sins of sexual promiscuity affect the unity of masculine and feminine forces that is realized within the geographical boundaries of Israel.

attribute of truth . . . and it is called the Throne. . . . And thus Jacob is [the attribute of] truth, and he is called the Throne of Glory. Therefore it is said that the form of Jacob is engraved on the Throne of Glory." See also Zohar 2: 242a.

136. According to Naḥmanides, the special holiness of the land of Israel is connected particularly to the fact that in this geographical place all the commandments can be most properly fulfilled. Cf. C.D. Chavel, *Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman* (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 166 [in Hebrew]; Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Ḥoqer u-khe-Mequbbal,* pp. 149–154. See n. 139. With respect to this idea of a "mystical geography" Naḥmanides shares much in common with Judah ha-Levi; cf. Silman, *Thinker and Seer,* pp. 138–141; S. Rosenberg, "The Link to the Land of Israel in Jewish Thought," in L. Hoffman, ed., *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives* (Notre Dame, 1986), pp. 148–156.

137. See the exact parallel in Naḥmanides' sermon for Rosh Hashanah, in *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:250. In that context Naḥmanides adds that in the land of Israel the Jewish people will be "especially united with His Name that is there," ונהיה מיוחדים לשמו בה. Cf. Zohar 1:108b.

138. Cf. the usage in Num. 7:23: כי הברכה במקדש מיוחדת בשם המיוחד.

There is thus a deep mystical connection between the laws of '*arayot* and the holiness of the land. Consequently, the Torah specifies that the punishment for these offenses is removal from the land. Moreover, as Naḥmanides informs the reader, the land of Israel below is a symbol for the higher reality that corresponds to it in the sefirotic realm, viz., the *Shekhinah*.[139] "Permission is not granted to explain in greater detail the matter of the land, but if you merit to understand the first land mentioned in the [opening] verse of Genesis and that which is mentioned in the chapter 'If you follow My laws' (Lev. 26:3), you will know the hidden and exalted secret."[140] The reference is obviously to the *Shekhinah*, which is the sefirotic correlate to the terrestrial land of Israel. He who enters one of the sexually prohibited relations is expelled from the land, which symbolically represents his being cut off from the *Shekhinah*.[141] In a similar vein with reference to the biblical portion concern ing manslaughter, Naḥmanides sets out to explain why in one verse Scripture emphasizes that these laws are to be applied "throughout the ages and in all your settlements" (Num. 35:29), whereas in a second verse it is especially emphasized that one should not pollute the land of Israel with murder, "for blood pollutes the land, and the land can have no expiation for

139. Cf. Gottlieb, *Meḥqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 93–94; Henoch, *Ha-Ramban ke-Ḥoqer u-khe-Mequbbal*, pp. 147–148, 152–154. This symbolic correlation between *Shekhinah* and the land of Israel may also explain Naḥmanides' appropriation of the rabbinic idea concerning the equivalence of Israel to all the commandments (cf. *Tosefta*, 'Avodah Zarah, 5:3; *Sifrei Deut.* pisqa 80, ed. Finkelstein, p. 146); see *Perush* to Lev. 18:25 (p. 112). And cf. Henoch, op. cit., pp. 145–146; M. Idel, "The Land of Israel in Medieval Kabbalah," in *The Land of Israel* p. 178. That is, just as the *Shekhinah* is the divine grade that is equivalent to all the commandments (see above, n. 118), so the land of Israel is the particular commandment that is the basis for, or the ground of, all the other commandments. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 26:5; Deut. 4:5, 11:18. For a slightly different formulation on the nexus between kabbalah and the commandments, on one hand, and kabbalah and the land of Israel, on the other, in Naḥmanides, see M. Idel, "Some Conceptions of the Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought," pp. 131–132. On the nexus between the holiness of the land of Israel, fulfillment of the commandments of the Torah, and the presence of God, see W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 18–29, 37–38.

140. *Perush*, Lev. 18:25 (p. 212). Cf. ibid., Gen. 6:13, 7:23, 9:12, 14:18, 24:3, 26:5, 28:17; Lev. 20:3, 26:42. See also Naḥmanides' prayer on the ruins of Jerusalem, in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:424–425 (already noted by Idel, "The Land of Israel in Medieval Kabbalah," p. 185, n. 45).

141. For Naḥmanides the locus of *devequt*, or communion, is the *Shekhinah;* see his commentary to Lev. 18:4, Deut. 11:22. A possible source for Naḥmanides' particular formulation may have been ibn Ezra's commentary to Exod. 3:15 (ed. Weiser, p. 34): אז יהיה דבק בשם הנכבד. Cf. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), pp. 205–206.

blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it" (Num. 35:33). Clearly, the prohibition against murder belongs to the class of laws, *mishpaṭim,* that are operative even outside the land of Israel. Nevertheless, Scripture emphasizes the defilment of the land of Israel by bloodshed "on behalf of the Glory of the *Shekhinah* (כבוד השכינה) which is there . . . the matter of impurity is such that if the land is impure the Glory of the Name (כבוד השם) will not dwell there."[142] That is to say, therefore, that the apparent textual problem is resolved by the fact that there is a special degree of holiness connected to the land that is, in turn, related to its being the symbolic correlate—and hence earthly receptacle—for the *Shekhinah.* Scripture thus can single out the defilement of the land of Israel by acts of manslaughter even though it is a law that is assuredly applicable outside the land.

In sum, then, it can be said that the overlapping of *peshaṭ* and *sod* in Naḥmanides' exegesis encompasses two distinct typologies. On the one hand, there is the typology of coincidence of the literal and figurative. In such cases there is only one textual dimension and, consequently, the external meaning is identical with the inner, mystical meaning. On the other hand, there is the typology of parallelism. In such cases there is a twofold textual dimension for the text refers simultaneously to two ontic referents, the mundane and the divine; yet in this case too one can speak of an overlapping of *peshaṭ* and *sod,* for the plain sense of Scripture only can be fully deduced by decoding the text in terms of the corresponding events in the divine realm.

III

In the third and final section of this paper I will investigate one last topic that is critical to an understanding of Naḥmanides' kabbalistic hermeneutics, viz., the function of *'aggadah* in Naḥmanides' kabbalah. An examination of this question is, in my opinion, crucial in evaluating the kabbalistic orientation of Naḥmanides and the role that creative exegesis plays in his religious imagination. Only by carefully analyzing the complicated nexus of aggadic ideas and kabbalistic motifs will we be in a position to determine the

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142. *Perush,* Num. 35:33 (p. 340).

extent and scope of Naḥmanides' conservatism in the realm of kabbalistic exposition.

The relationship between kabbalah and 'aggadah in the minds of the early kabbalists, especially the Gerona school, has been amply discussed by Scholem and Tishby.[143] Both scholars have exposed the underlying hermeneutical attitude of the kabbalists towards the old 'aggadah: theosophical ideas were often viewed as nothing but expansions and disclosures of ideas hidden in the aggadic sources. R. Ezra of Gerona's description in his commentary on Shir ha-Shirim is indicative of the kabbalists in general: "The rabbis spoke of this wisdom [i.e., kabbalah] in the midrashim and the 'aggadot by means of parables and enigmas (משלים וחידות) to dignify these matters and to conceal them. They scattered them, one here and another there, in order to hide their place."[144] In a similar manner R. Judah ben Yaqar, one of Naḥmanides' teachers, explains the rabbinic teaching that through the study of 'aggadah one comes to recognize the Creator and to cleave to His ways[145] by reference to the fact that contained in the 'aggadot "in several places are the secrets of secrets, one reveals a bit and the other a bit, then you will understand."[146] It is clear that no kabbalist, including R. Ezra and R. Judah ben Yaqar, held that every kabbalistic idea has its source in rabbinic 'aggadah. On the contrary, R. Ezra for his part is careful to distinguish between those symbols that he received as a kabbalah and others that he found exegetically in rabbinic texts.[147] It nonetheless seems clear that kabbalists, for the most part, alleged that they were transmitters of ancient lore rather than innovators.[148] Even Moses de León, the innovative kabbalist *par*

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143. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 86–87, 373–375; Tishby, *Ḥiqrei Qabbalah u-Sheluḥoteha* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 31–35.

144. *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:479.

145. Cf. *Sifre Deuteronomy*, 'Eqev, piska 49 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 115).

146. *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, pt. 2, p. 23.

147. See, e.g., *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:481.

148. An important exception to this is R. Jacob ben Sheshet. See his comment in *Ha-'Emunah we-ha-Biṭṭaḥon*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, 2:370: "If I had not originated this [idea] in my mind, I would have said that it is [of the status of] a law given to Moses at Sinai," אלולי שאני חדשתיו מלבי הייתי אומר שהוא הלכה למשה מסיני. Cf. Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 68, n. 58. See also Racanati, *Sefer Ṭa'amei ha-Miswot*, fol. 3a: "In every place in the Torah where you can elevate an event or a commandment to a thing higher than it [i.e., adduce a symbolic interpretation by connecting the text with the divine realm; see above, n. 29] you must elevate it . . . even though you have not received that explanation [or reason] from a kabbalistic sage or even if you have not seen it in one of the books of the sages." See ibid., fol. 4b, where Racanati, using a

excellence—using Idel's terminology—was committed to the position that kabbalistic ideas were hidden in the aggadic texts of the rabbis. Throughout his Hebrew theosophic writings he expresses this view. To cite but two salient examples. In the introduction to the second part of *Sefer ha-Rimmon* (1287) he writes: "And the sages . . . concealed the matter in the exoteric meaning, but it is hidden, for all their words are within the palace of the king."[149] In a later work, *Mishkan ha-'Edut* (1293), de León expresses this view, combining the terminology of Maimonides and R. Ezra. He notes that he is making known "all the matters which the holy ancient sages were preoccupied with all their lives. For they are scattered in the Talmud and in their words and in their hidden sayings, more hidden and precious than pearls. And they have closed the gate behind their words, and have hidden all their profound books, seeing that it was not appropriate to reveal and publish them."[150]

The kabbalist, then, assumed a hidden dimension within aggadic texts that was known only to the one initiated in the secrets of the tradition. In the *'aggadah* were concealed theosophic truths. This assumption regarding an inner or esoteric meaning to rabbinic passages, coexisting alongside the outer or exoteric, is found in medieval philosophical sources as well. As has been shown by Marc Saperstein and Frank Talmage,[151] the motivation for philosophers to seek an esoteric meaning in *'aggadah* did not always stem either from an apologetical stance seeking to defend the rabbis against the outside attacks of Karaism, Islam, or Christianity, or from an internal rationalistic critique. On the contrary, some philosophers, including Maimonides, assumed that the rabbis cultivated philosophical truths and hid them in the *'aggadah* in order to conceal them from the masses. Yet it seems fair to say that, whatever the theoretical similarity between the philo-

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formulation close to that of Jacob ben Sheshet, characterizes himself as follows: "I have not received these reasons [for the commandments] from a kabbalistic sage, for had I received them I would have said that they are a law given to Moses at Sinai" אילו הייתי מקבל אותם הייתי אומר כי הם הלכה למשה מסיני.

149. Cf. Wolfson, ed., *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 256 (Hebrew section). See ibid., p. 270.

150. MS Berlin Quat. Or. 833, fol. 51a (cited by Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 201–202). See ibid., fols. 53a, 57b, 58b.

151. Cf. M. Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis*, pp. 1–20; Talmage, "Apples of Gold," pp. 333–337. See also Talmage, *David Kimḥi*, pp. 77–83.

sophers and kabbalists on this score, in practical terms the mythic con-
sciousness of 'aggadah was much more central to kabbalistic thinking.[152]
Indeed, unlike the concepts of Aristotelian physics or metaphysics, or even
Neoplatonic ontology, many ideas expressed in the kabbalistic texts, such as
speculation on the divine attributes of mercy and judgment and the divine
names to which they are correlated, developed organically out of aggadic
passages on similar themes.[153] The classical 'aggadah, in all its formulations,
was therefore treated as the fountainhead of kabbalistic truths in a way that
was not reproduced in philosophical circles. Notwithstanding this fact, a
theosophic reading of 'aggadah based on the system of sefirot, as proposed
and maintained by the kabbalists, simply cannot be upheld as the original
intention of the rabbinic texts. Hence, it may said that the kabbalist, like the
philosopher, shared the need and desire to express new ideas in the guise of
ancient authorities. Scholem expressed this feature of the kabbalistic her-
meneutic in the following way: "I do not hesitate, for my part, to affirm that
the literature of the Spanish kabbalah . . . clearly reveals a psychological
attitude that, in the Middle Ages, led men to recast ancient talmudic and
midrashic material according to an entirely new spirit by means of an exege-
tical and homiletical method that in its structure was gnostic."[154] Bracketing
for the moment the validity of Scholem's historiographical view of kabbalah
as the gnostification of aggadic modes of discourse,[155] the critical point in
his description is the extent to which medieval kabbalists sought to root

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152. Cf. Scholem, Major Trends, pp. 30–32. For a partial critique of Scholem's position, see
Saperstein, op. cit., pp. 17–20. Saperstein criticizes Scholem's statement that philosophers in all
cases regarded 'aggadah "as a stumbling-block rather than as a precious heritage." He does
not, however, challenge what I take to be the essential point of Scholem's analysis: the kab-
balists' employment of mythic structures enabled them to live in a world that is "historically
continuous" with that of the old 'aggadah. The same cannot be said about the philosophers. See
also Septimus, Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition, pp. 106–110.

153. Cf. E. Wolfson, "Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer in Sefer ha-Rimmon," in
Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times, ed. D. Blumenthal, vol. 3 (Atlanta, 1988), pp. 62–64.
See also the suggestive remarks of L. Ginzberg, On Jewish Law and Lore (Philadelphia, 1955),
pp. 188–191; and cf. Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives, pp. 128–136, 156–172. The notion that
mystical ideas were embedded in the aggadic proclamations of the rabbis was also suggested by
S. Baron; see A Social and Religious History of the Jews (New York, 1958), 8:4–7.

154. Scholem, Origins of the Kabbalah, p. 86.

155. Scholem's position has been challenged most recently by Idel in Kabbalah: New Per-
spectives, pp. 30–32. See also my review of the English translation of Scholem's Origins of the
Kabbalah, The Journal of Religion, 69 (1989): 139–140.

innovative ideas in the sacred texts of the tradition. For Scholem this kab-
balistic strategy represents one particular instance of a more general
medieval phenomenon referred to by James Preus as the "theological legiti-
mation for innovation." In Preus' own words:

> One of the first factors that has to be recognized here is that medieval society
> in general placed a high premium upon stability and order; in the religious
> realm, innovation and heresy were practically synonymous. . . . Thus, we shall
> not expect to see innovations advertized when they appear. They often come in
> disguise, cloaked in the reassuring garb of ancient authority.[156]

Despite their best intentions, then, the medieval kabbalists were engaged
in creative exegesis, transforming and transposing older texts in a new key
rather than uncovering their historical and literary meaning. The thorny
question of whether or not the "origins" of kabbalah are to be sought in
some prehistorical or preliterary stage of transmission is besides the point,
for even if we grant that kabbalistic ideas did not take shape *ab ovo* in
medieval Europe, the fact of the matter remains that the activity of linking
kabbalistic ideas to older aggadic sources is a major occupation in the
golden period of medieval kabbalah. To understand kabbalah as a literary
phenomenon one cannot ignore the programmatic effort of kabbalists to
connect theosophical truths with ancient 'aggadah. Even if one argues that
this link is to be understood in terms of a rabbinic אסמכתא, i.e., a textual sup-
port for an independent proclamation, the need to create such linkage is in
itself highly instructive of the innovative approach of kabbalists towards
traditional documents, an approach that is often well hid behind the cloak
of conservatism. To be sure, a proper understanding of kabbalistic texts
demands an emphatic reading, to use the term of earlier hermeneutic
theorists like Schleiermacher and Dilthey,[157] by which the interpreter dis-
engages himself—to the extent that this is possible—from his own historical
preconceptions and enters imaginatively into the life and time of the authors

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156. J. Preus, "Theological Legitimation for Innovation in the Middle Ages," *Viator* 3
(1972): 2. Concerning a similar phenomenon of cloaking innovation in the guise of conserva-
tism in the German Pietists, see I. Marcus, *Piety and Society* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 65–71, 82–83;
R. Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 207.

157. Cf. John Llewelyn, *Beyond Metaphysics? The Hermeneutic Circle in Contemporary
Philosophy* (New Jersey, 1985), pp. 161–162.

of the texts he is studying.[158] The critical scholar of kabbalah therefore
would be imprudent to cast doubt upon the kabbalists' own admission that
the truths they were imparting are of hoary antiquity. This conviction is a
key feature that shaped the kabbalists' hermeneutic, and it is therefore
incumbent on the modern reader to engage kabbalistic texts on this level. By
appropriating this posture, however, one is in a better position to see the
mechanism of kabbalistic interpretation for what it truly is: an innovative
transformation of aggadic passages in light of a theosophic system that may
itself have older roots in Jewish mythologumena, but which is, in most
cases, extraneous to the rabbinic material.

A careful examination of Naḥmanides proves that he was not different in
this regard. The linkage of kabbalistic explanations to aggadic sources is a
repeated phenomenon in Naḥmanides' literary corpus. There are so many
examples of this in the Torah commentary that it would be impossible here
to mention even a fragment, let alone all of them. Suffice it to say that in the
vast majority of instances wherein Naḥmanides introduces a kabbalistic
explanation the latter is connected with a midrashic or aggadic text.[159] An
examination of Naḥmanides' commentary to Gen. 18:20 reveals the compli-
cated interweaving of aggadic and kabbalistic strands in his thought.

I will intimate to you the opinion of those who receive the truth (מקבלי האמת).

158. I am well aware of the critique of empathy advocated by earlier hermeneutic theories
in more recent post-Heideggerian hermeneutics. Cf. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New
York, 1982), p. 221. The critical point is the difficulty in assuming that one can get out of one's
mind in order to transport oneself imaginatively into the mind of the author, for this assump-
tion is rooted in oversimplistic ideas about the nature of self-consciousness and intersubjectivi-
ty. Nevertheless this disengagement is the *sine qua non* of the scientific attitude towards texts. A
discussion about the meaning of texts will, of course, always involve self-understanding on the
part of the interpreter, but even this self-understanding is attainable only after one "enters"
into the text that one is reading. Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* p. 113:
" . . . if it remains true that hermeneutics terminates in self-understanding, then the subjec-
tivism of this proposition must be rectified by saying that to understand *oneself* is to understand
oneself *in front of the text*. Consequently, what is appropriation from one point of view is disap-
propriation from another. . . . What is appropriated is indeed the matter of the text. But the
matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of
the text be. So I exchange the *me,* master of itself, for the self, *disciple* of the text" (author's
emphasis).
159. See, e.g., Gen. 1:1, 3, 7, 14, 2:3, 7, 8, 6:4, 6, 13, 8:21, 23, 9:12, 11:2, 14:18, 18:20, 24:1,
26:5, 28:21, 29:2, 33:20, 35:13, 46:1; Exod. 3:13, 14:21, 16:6, 19:5, 13, 25:3, 24; Lev. 1:9, 16:2,
18:25, 20:3, 23:17, 24, 36, 40 (cf. *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:181), 26:12, 42; Num. 30:3; Deut. 5:16, 21:22,
33:1. Cf. *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:90.

Our rabbis interpreted (וירש)[160] in connection with the verse, "For lo! the Lord is coming forth from His dwelling-place, He will come down and stride upon the heights of the earth" (Micah 1:3), that [God] goes and comes from attribute to attribute. He goes out from the attribute of mercy and enters the attribute of judgment. And so is this matter, "God [the Tetragrammaton signifying the attribute of mercy or the masculine potency] said to His heart"[161] [i.e., the attribute of judgment or the *Shekhinah*],[162] "the outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great" (Gen. 18:20). I will descend from the attribute of mercy to the attribute of judgment, "and I will see" through mercy if "they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me" through the attribute of judgment; "if not, I will take note" (ibid. 21), and I will have mercy, in the manner [of the scriptural expression] "and Elohim [the attribute of judgment] knew"[163] [i.e., had mercy].[164]

The kabbalistic explanation is here presented as nothing but an expansion of the midrashic comment of the rabbis. Indeed, Naḥmanides' exposition may be called a back-projection of the kabbalistic interpretation into the rabbinic text. Perhaps even more striking is Naḥmanides' commentary to Gen. 6:6, "And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened." At first Naḥmanides follows good medieval rationalistic exegetical practice and explains the obvious anthropomorphism as an allegorical utterance, citing as support the rabbinic dictum, "Torah speaks in human language." God's heart is to be taken allegorically as a reference to the divine holy spirit,[165] and not literally a physical organ. After explaining the verse in this way, however, Naḥmanides refers to a passage in the aggadic compilation, *Genesis Rabbah*,[166] which explains the notion of God's grieving in His heart by means of the parable of the archi-

160. Cf. j. Ta'anit 2:1, 8b.
161. Cf. Gen. 8:21.
162. Cf. *Perush*, Gen. 6:6 and 8:21.
163. Cf. Exod. 2:25 and see Naḥmanides' commentary ad loc.
164. *Perush*, 18:20 (p. 112).
165. It is interesting to note that some of the commentators on Naḥmanides understood the holy spirit as a reference to the *Shekhinah*. Cf. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 29b; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 36. By interpreting Naḥmanides in this way, however, one fails to grasp fully the two levels of interpretation with which he is operating here, to wit, the allegorical and the midrashic-mystical.
166. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 27:4. In the critical edition of Theodor-Albeck, pp. 258–259, only the first parable about the architect is given. For the reading of the other parable as well, see editor's note 6 ad loc.

tect who builds a palace that displeases the king or the business agent who
through trading causes a monetary loss to the king. The heart then is com-
pared to an architect or an agent and God to the king. This parable, writes
Naḥmanides,

> is a great secret which cannot be written down. The one who knows it will con-
> template why [Scripture] speaks here of the Unique Name (שם המיוחד) [i.e.,
> YHWH which is the attribute of mercy or the masculine potency] and in the
> rest of the section and the matter concerning the flood [it uses the name]
> Elohim [i.e., the attribute of judgment or the feminine potency].[167]

Naḥmanides, as the supercommentaries rightfully point out,[168] understands
the biblical expression "God's heart," as well as the midrashic images of the
architect and agent intended to explain it, as references to the *Shekhinah*.[169]
What is critical is the fact that here two levels of interpretation are offered,
the allegorical and the midrashic, the latter being identified further as the
mystical.[170] The full implications of Naḥmanides' method are brought to
light in Baḥya ben Asher's commentary to this very verse. In the first
instance Baḥya cites the passage from *Genesis Rabbah* under the heading
"according to the way of *midrash*" (על דרך המדרש). He then offers the follow-
ing mystical explanation: "By way of the kabbalah (על דרך הקבלה), 'His heart
was saddened,' it [the heart] refers to the architect and the agent mentioned
in the *midrash,* and there they [the rabbis] explained the secret of the
matter." Any hard-and-fast line separating *midrash* and kabbalah here
breaks down.

    To cite but two other typical instances of this in Naḥmanides' Torah
commentary: in the commentary to Gen. 33:20 Naḥmanides writes: "And
by way of truth it [is found] in the *midrash* of our rabbis . . . and there is a
great secret in this matter."[171] In the commentary to Gen. 46:1 Naḥmanides
puts it this way: "This verse contains a secret which is revealed to us in *Gene-*

    167. *Perush,* Gen. 6:6 (p. 50).
    168. Cf. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov,* fol. 29b; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim,* p.
36.
    169. Cf. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi, *A Kabbalistic Commentary on Genesis Rabbah,* ed.
M. Ḥallamish (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 274.
    170. Cf. Baḥya ben Asher, *Perush 'al ha-Torah,* Gen. 6:6 (ed. Chavel, p. 102).
    171. *Perush,* Gen. 33:20 (p. 189).

sis Rabbah."[172] In this context the line of thinking is rendered more complex by the fact that Naḥmanides includes a citation from *Sefer ha-Bahir,*[173] the influence of which on Naḥmanides I will discuss in more detail further on in this section. That is, from *Sefer ha-Bahir* Naḥmanides derives the symbolic meaning of Isaac as referring to a particular divine attribute, and he then applies this way of reading to Gen. 46:1. Finally, in light of this symbolism he reads theosophic meaning back into the aggadic passage. Naḥmanides, it will be noticed, presents his method in reverse order: the verse in Scripture contains an esoteric truth that is found in *Genesis Rabbah* and further corroborated in *Sefer ha-Bahir.*

On other occasions Naḥmanides simply reads a midrashic source through the lens of kabbalah, without calling the reader's attention to this fact.[174] Clearly, the underlying assumption for him is that theosophic matters are concealed in the words of the talmudic sages. Naḥmanides' commitment to the mystical potential of rabbinic *'aggadah* is made clear in his commentary to Deut. 21:22. Naḥmanides rejects Rashi's figurative reading of an aggadic parable attributed to R. Meir which is intended to explain the scriptural admonition not to leave a corpse hanging on a stake overnight "because an impaled body is an affront to God' (ibid. 22): "This may be compared to twin brothers who are in one city. One of them became king and the other took to thievery. The king gave a command and he [the brother] was hanged. Whoever saw him said, 'The king has been hanged.' The king commanded and he was taken down."[175] According to Rashi, this parable must be interpreted figuratively as referring to the relationship between Israel and God. Naḥmanides opposes this reading in the following cryptic remark: "The parable of the twin brothers contains a secret, and it is not as the Rabbi [i.e., Rashi] thought regarding Israel who are called 'sons of God'."[176] For Naḥmanides, Israel below and God above are not brothers only in a figurative sense, but they are so in a mystical sense, for the secret he alludes to here involves the symbolic, and hence ontological, parallelism between the Jewish soul and the divine paradigm.[177] Several of the super-

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172. Ibid., Gen. 46:1 (p. 245).
173. *Sefer ha-Bahir,* ed. Margaliot (Jerusalem, 1978), § 135.
174. See, e.g., Gen. 2:8; Exod. 21:6.
175. b. Sanhedrin 46b.
176. *Perush,* Deut. 21:22 (p. 446).
177. Cf. Baḥya ben Asher, *Perush 'al ha-Torah,* Deut. 21:22 (p. 383). Baḥya cites the tal-

commentaries on Naḥmanides further suggest that there is an allusion here to the kabbalistic secret of דו פרצופין, the divine androgyny. That is, the one who commits the capital offense causes the masculine and feminine poten-cies of the divine to separate, and this results in an "affront to God," קללת אלהים, i.e., to the feminine potency.[178] The defilement of the Israelite below is therefore a defilement of the divine above. The force of Naḥmanides' kab-balistic reading of the aggadic parable can be seen when one compares his interpretation with that of his student, R. Solomon ibn Adret. The latter removed the theosophic interpretation and proffered an allegorical or figur-ative reading which he called "the literal sense of the parable," פשוטו של המשל, viz., the twins are the soul and its angelic counterpart which is of a purely intellectual nature.[179]

Another telling example of the phenomenon of reading rabbinic texts in light of kabbalistic meaning can be found in Naḥmanides' account of the "mystical secret of the Tabernacle" (סוד המשכן) in his introductory remarks to his commentary to Exod. 25. After stating that this secret involves the in-dwelling of the *Shekhinah* or the *kavod*, which parallels the in-dwelling of the *Shekhinah* or *kavod* on Mount Sinai, Naḥmanides makes the following comparison between the Sinaitic revelation and the theophanous quality of the Tabernacle. Just as at Sinai Moses heard the voice from heaven, so in the Tabernacle he heard that precise voice "addressing him from above the cover that was on top of the Ark of Testimony, between the two cherubim" (Num. 7:89). According to Naḥmanides, the kabbalistic secret—viz., that the voice, i.e., the masculine potency of God or the attribute of mercy,

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mudic passage under the heading "by way of midrash," and then explains that the mystical interpretation, "by way of kabbalah," comprises "an explanation of what is written [in Scrip-ture] and the parable (באור הכתוב והמשל), for the king is the Glory which is called the 'image of God' (צלם אלהים), i.e., separated from him, i.e., the servant of God (עבד אלהים). Since the impaled person is in the appearance of the image of God (בדמות צלם אלהים) it is 'an affront to God' (קללת אלהים) if he is not buried during the day and is left there during the night which is the time of the attribute of judgment." Cf. Judah ben Yaqar, *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, pt. 2, p. 39. See also Recanati, *Perush 'al ha-Torah*, ad loc., 88a, who refers to a passage in Zohar 3:143b. On the divine origin of the soul in Naḥmanides, see *Perush*, Gen. 2:7; *Kitvei Ramban* 1:103, 134; MS JTS Mic. 1895, fols. 11b–12a. And cf. M. Chaze, "Le sens ésotérique du voeu et du serment selon quelques auteurs des XIIIe et XIVe siècles en Espagne et en Italie," *Revue des études juives* 138 (1979): 250–251.

178. Cf. *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN*, fol. 29c; Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 52a; Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, pp. 234–235.

179. Cited by Joshua ibn Shu'aib, *Derashot*, fol. 86a. See D. Horwitz, "The Role of Philo-sophy and Kabbalah in the Rashba," p. 85.

addressed Moses through the feminine potency or the attribute of judgment—is alluded to in the repetition of the expression "He spoke unto him," occurring for the first time in the middle of the verse, מדבר אליו, and the second time at the end in the form, וידבר אליו. Scripture repeats itself, writes Naḥmanides, "to indicate that which they [the rabbis] said in the tradition (קבלה) regarding the voice that came to Moses from heaven from above the ark-cover and from there it spoke to him."[180] What is crucial from my vantage point is the fact that the view which Naḥmanides cites as something the rabbis "said in the kabbalah" is found in a classical midrashic anthology.[181] This "tradition," moreover, is understood in light of a theosophic process involving the dynamic of the masculine and feminine potencies of God. Hence, in this instance, it may be said that for Naḥmanides the word קבלה designates an aggadic tradition whose "real" or implicit meaning is only grasped by reference to a kabbalistic idea. Indeed, on strictly terminological grounds there is evidence that for Naḥmanides the word קבלה is not always restricted to the limited sense of mystical or esoteric tradition; it refers more generally to the rabbinic oral law that comprises aggadic elements which—in Naḥmanides' mind—are connected with kabbalistic themes.[182]

In the final analysis, I do not think that Naḥmanides would have felt the need to distinguish carefully between the aggadic and kabbalistic approaches to Scripture. Naturally, I do not deny that there are instances in his writings where the aggadic or midrashic interpretation is rejected in favor of a kabbalistic one[183] or where the kabbalistic interpretation is offered as an alternative to a more straightforward aggadic one.[184] The point I am

180. *Perush,* Exod. 25 (p. 453).

181. Cf. *Sifre Be-Midbar,* pisqa 58 (ed. Horovitz, p. 56). Chavel has suggested in the notes to his edition of Naḥmanides' commentary (2:452) that the source for Naḥmanides is *Numbers Rabbah* 14:32.

182. Cf. *Perush,* Gen. 46:1 (p. 251) where Naḥmanides says the Aramaic translators, Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uziel, were guided in their translations by "things that were known to them by tradition, and their secret is for those who know hidden wisdom." Cf. commentary to Lev. 18:4 (p. 100) where Naḥmanides says about the spiritual state of Elijah: "as it appears from what is written [in Scripture] . . . and from what we know about him in the tradition (כידוע ממנו בקבלה)." See also Naḥmanides' introduction to the *Commentary on Job, Kitvei Ramban,* 1:23. And cf. *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:160, where Naḥmanides refers to an aggadic passage in b. Sanhedrin 92a in these terms: כי כך קבלת רבותינו. See also *Perush,* Gen. 34:12; Lev. 23:24; Num. 11:16, 22:33, 24:20; Deut. 8:3; *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:266.

183. Cf. *Perush* to Exod. 3:2, Lev. 23:40, Num. 20:1 (noted by Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 21, n. 37).

making, however, is that, methodologically speaking, Naḥmanides did not, so far as I can tell, differentiate between rabbinic and kabbalistic modes of scriptural interpretation. The one as the other assumes, in Septimus' words, a "layer of meaning coexisting but going beyond the plain sense of the text."[185] A key term for Naḥmanides that accounts for both aggadic and kabbalistic meaning in Scripture and that bridges the gap between text and interpretation is that of *remez*. Naḥmanides uses this term, or any of its derivatives, to indicate the layer of meaning that is implicit or inherent in the text. As he says in his commentary to Num. 3:1, כי התורה תפרש ותרמז, "the Torah makes explicit and alludes."[186] It lies beyond the confines of this paper to treat in a comprehensive manner the development of this *terminus technicus* from talmudic and midrashic sources to medieval halakhic and kabbalistic texts. Suffice it to say that Naḥmanides' usage does have its roots in the earlier usage, specifically in those contexts where rabbinic authors used the word *remez* to refer to an allusion to a certain practice or custom in a biblical text.[187] By utilizing this word Naḥmanides is making clear that in his opinion kabbalistic truths—as aggadic explanations—are implicit in the body of Scripture.[188] Paradigmatically, in the introduction to

184. For examples, see Septimus, op. cit., p. 23, n. 41.

185. Ibid., p. 22, n. 41.

186. Cf. *Perush* to Gen. 48:7. And see *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA*, 1:9: "In every thing for which there is a tradition . . . at times the matter is alluded to in Scripture. It is not that this allusion is necessitated [by the text] but only that the tradition necessitates it. And the matter is verified by [both] Scripture and the tradition" בכל דבר שיש קבלה . . . ופעמים יהיה בענין ההוא נרמז בכתוב. ולא שיהיה הרמז ההוא מוכרח רק תכריחנו קבלה ויתאמת הענין הכתוב עם הקבלה. Elsewhere ibn Adret uses the technical expression that the Torah "speaks and alludes," i.e., has both a literal and figurative, exoteric and esoteric, meaning. See *She'elot u-Teshuvot le-RaSHBA*, 1:423: "the words of Torah . . . are revealed and hidden, they speak and allude" ודברי תורה . . . נגלה ונסתר אומרין ורומזין; 5:55: "the Torah in its entirety alludes and speaks" שהתורה כולה רומזת ואומרת.

187. For examples in tannaitic and amoraic literature, see W. Bacher. *'Erkhei Midrash*, trans. A. Rabinowitz (Tel Aviv, 1923), pp. 124–125, 295–297.

188. See Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," pp. 22–23, n. 41, and references cited there. To these may be added Gen. 15:7, 20:3, 23:40, 24:1, 26:5; Exod. 12:12, 13:5, 13:8, 14:19, 16:6, 21:2; Lev. 16:8, 25:15; Num. 8:3; Deut. 32:7; *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:161, 2:303. The word רמז also characterizes typological exegesis for Naḥmanides; see commentary to Gen. 2:3 and parallel in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:168; Lev. 26:16 and parallel in *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:262; Deut. 4:30. On this theme in Naḥmanides, see Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," and esp. the citations in nn. 44–45. And cf. Bacher, "L'Exégèse Biblique dans le Zohar," p. 39, who makes a similar observation with respect to the use of the word רמז in the Zohar as an interpretative method that corresponds to typology in Christian exegesis. Naḥ-

his Torah commentary Naḥmanides writes: "Everything is written in the Torah explicitly (בפירוש) or is alluded to (ברמיזה) in the words, numerical equivalences, the forms of the letters . . . or in the tips of the letters and their crownlets . . . for these allusions are not comprehended except in an oral transmission going back to Moses at Sinai (כי הרמזים האלו לא יתבוננו אלא פה אל פה פה עד משה מסיני)."[189] Again, in the commentary to Exod. 12:12 he writes, "Scripture hints and deals briefly with hidden matters," והכתוב ירמוז ויקצר בנעלם. The text thus makes explicit the external aspect while implying the internal aspect through hints and allusions. This assumption is shared, according to Naḥmanides, by the ba'al 'aggadah and the mequbbal, who both set as their task the drawing out of the implied truths embedded in the text.

The central role played by 'aggadah in Naḥmanides' kabbalah can also be seen from the fact that he cites Sefer ha-Bahir as Midrash R. Neḥuniah ben ha-Qanah[190] or simply as midrash,[191] disclosing the fact that he was of the opinion that this kabbalistic text was not only midrashic in nature but also of tannaitic origin. Thus the same passage cited in the Torah commentary to Gen. 1:1 in the name of the Midrash R. Neḥuniah ben ha-Qanah is cited in Torat ha-Shem Temimah in the name of "our rabbis," רבותינו.[192] In his commentary to Gen. 1:3 Naḥmanides cryptically refers to the Bahir in these terms: "Our rabbis have in this matter a midrash concerning a hidden secret," מדרש בסוד נעלם. Or, again, in his commentary to Gen. 1:8 he thus refers to the Bahir: "they have a mysterious midrash," ויש להם מדרש נפלא. Naḥmanides' implicit assumption regarding the relationship between the Bahir

manides also employs the word רמז or derivatives in the sense of symbol, i.e., a thing below is a רמז for that which is above, for the former is a sign or symbol of the latter. In that sense רמז is equivalent to סוד. Cf. Bacher, op. cit., p. 38 who has noted this equivalence in zoharic terminology. See also idem, 'Erkhei Midrash, p. 125, n. 1. This usage is widespread in medieval kabbalistic sources. The identification of רמז as the allegorical mode of interpretation in the famous acrostic PaRDeS is misleading if one does not bear in mind that רמז does in fact function primarily in the kabbalistic sources in the sense of mystical symbol. This point, as far as I am aware, has been largely overlooked in the scholarly literature.

189. Perush, Introduction (p. 4).

190. See, e.g., Gen. 1:1, 2:7, 24:1, 38:29, 46:1, 49:24; Exod. 2:25, 15:27, 20:8; Lev. 23:40 (see Kitvei Ramban, 1:181), 26:16; Num. 15:31; Deut. 16:20, 22:7, 33:12, 23. See also Sha'ar ha-Gemul in Kitvei Ramban, 2:306.

191. Cf. Gen. 1:3, 8; Deut. 33:6.

192. Kitvei Ramban, 1:157.

and the kabbalistic allusions in rabbinic *'aggadah* is stated explicitly in a
passage from R. Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Soria cited by R. Shem Tov
ibn Shem Tov: "This is the way [of the rabbis] . . . to allude by means of
allusions to a deep, wonderful and hidden secret. And of the allusions which
they mentioned in the *haggadot* in the Talmud and the *midrashot,* the one
that is [considered] the greatest and most important by the kabbalists . . . is
Sefer ha-Bahir."[193] According to R. Isaac, therefore, there is no substantial
difference between the kabbalistic allusions found in aggadic material in the
Talmud or separate midrashic collections and the kabbalistic *'aggadot*
found in the *Bahir.* From the interweaving of aggadic and Bahiric passages
in Naḥmanides one can safely conclude that he would have subscribed to R.
Isaac's formulation.

This assumption is important for two reasons when evaluating Naḥ-
manides' kabbalistic hermeneutic: first, as a source for citation the *Bahir*
was as authoritative as any other standard midrashic collection; second,
insofar as he read the *Bahir* as an ancient *midrash* he was able in turn to read
midrashic texts in light of Bahiric symbolism. One therefore finds that in
many instances where Naḥmanides cites the *Bahir* he cites in addition a
standard midrashic or aggadic passage.[194] We have already seen one exam-
ple where Naḥmanides reads an aggadic passage in light of the *Bahir,* and
this in turn generates a kabbalistic reading of Scripture. Another striking
example of this is to be found in Naḥmanides' commentary to Gen. 24:1,
"And the Lord blessed Abraham with all things," וה'.[195] ברך אברהם בכל In
connection with that verse Naḥmanides discloses an esoteric truth about the
nature of the ninth and tenth divine attributes, *Yesod* and *Shekhinah,* by
interpreting the talmudic *'aggadah* in light of Bahiric symbolism.[196] By read-
ing the text kabbalistically the word בכל becomes a name for *Shekhinah,* who
is so called because she is "in the All," *ba-kol,* the All referring in turn to
Yesod. Hence, through the kabbalistic reading of the aggadic passage one
gains a deeper understanding of the biblical passage, i.e., that God "blessed

193. *Sefer ha-'Emunot* (Jerusalem, 1968), fol. 94a, cited by Scholem, *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut*
2 (1927): 277. For discussion of this text and a partially different translation, see Scholem,
Origins of the Kabbalah, pp. 40–41.

194. Cf. *Perush,* Gen. 24:1, 46:1, Exod. 20:8; Lev. 23:40; Num. 15:31. See *Abudarham ha-
Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 127.

195. Cf. Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis,* p. 220, n. 65.

196. Cf. *Perush,* Exod. 19:5, Deut. 5:16.

Abraham with all things" means not only that the latter was the recipient of all sorts of mundane blessings (the literal meaning) but indicates as well (on a symbolic level) the special relationship that Abraham, the mundane correlate of the attribute of *Ḥesed,* had to the *Shekhinah.* Even a cursory glance at this passage will show how unusual it is, for, instead of giving a sentence or two, Naḥmanides delivers a rather lengthy discourse deciphering the kabbalistic symbolism, utilizing several aggadic texts as well as two key sections from the *Bahir.* Interestingly, Baḥya ben Asher at the end of his commentary on the verse writes: "Understand this principle, for the matter is hidden. The RaMBaN, blessed be his memory, disclosed the matter explicitly, and he extended the explanation beyond what was required." This is indeed a curious remark, coming as it does from the pen of a writer whose kabbalistic commentary far exceeds that of Naḥmanides in volume and scope.

One must also bear in mind that Naḥmanides was fully committed to the notion that the *'aggadot* themselves, although not necessarily in every case, operated on two levels, the exoteric and esoteric. Thus, for example, in his commentary to Gen. 1:7 he cites an enigmatic saying of Ben Zoma from *Genesis Rabbah* 4:7 and suggests that perhaps he "had a hidden explanation whose secret he did not want to reveal."[197] In his commentary to Gen. 6:6 (a passage that I have already commented upon above in a different context) he argues in the other direction, assuming that the *midrash* alluded to a secret truth that he cannot elaborate upon further in writing: "In *Genesis Rabbah* with respect to this important matter there is a parable (ענין נכבד במשל) . . . and it is a great secret which cannot be written (והוא סוד גדול לא ניתן ליכתב)."[198] In his explanation of the issue of separation mentioned in Gen. 1:14, "God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night,'" Naḥmanides brings together several distinct aggadic traditions by understanding their hidden meaning in light of one kabbalistic explanation: "'He separated [the light from darkness]' (Gen. 1:3). R. Judah ben Simon said, 'He separated it for Himself.'[199] . . . And if you can know their [the rabbis'] intention in saying in the Blessing of the Moon, 'a crown of splendor (עטרת תפארת) for those borne by Him from birth,'[200] you would

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197. Ibid., Gen. 1:7 (p. 19).
198. Ibid., Gen. 6:6 (p. 50).
199. *Genesis Rabbah* 3:6 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 22).
200. Cf. b. Sanhedrin 42a.

know the secret of the primordial light, and that of the hiding and separa-
tion [of the light], as it is said, 'He separated it for Himself,' and the secret of
the 'two kings who make use of one crown,'[201] for in the end 'the light of the
moon shall become like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall
become sevenfold' (Isa. 30:26)."[202] The esoteric meaning of the aggadic
explanation of God's separating the light for Himself is identical with the
meaning of the legend regarding the sun and moon, who were compared—
before God diminished the light of the moon—to two kings making use of
one crown. In kabbalistic terms, the sun and moon refer to *Tif'eret* and
Shekhinah, the masculine and feminine aspects of God, alluded to in the
Blessing of the Moon in the phrase "crown of splendor" (עטרת תפארת).
Hence, that God separated the light for Himself means really that God
separated the light from Himself, i.e., there was a separation within the
divine between the masculine and feminine, the sun and the moon, the splen-
dor and the crown.[203] Although there was this primordial separation of these
forces, in the end there will be unity between them, as was prophesied by
Isaiah. The *'aggadah*—and ultimately Scripture itself—is here transposed in
the key of kabbalistic theosophy.

Naḥmanides similarly assumes an esoteric meaning to *'aggadah* in his
commentary to Exod. 19:13 where he rejects Rashi's literal reading of a pas-
sage from *Pirqei R. 'Eli'ezer,* chap. 31, and proposes that this legend
contains an allusion to a kabbalistic secret.[204] Although in this case it is clear
that the kabbalistic understanding is offered as an alternative to the mid-
rashic, it is noteworthy that even the former is linked to an aggadic state-
ment. Moreover, as we have seen, in his commentary to Deut. 21:22
Naḥmanides rejects Rashi's figurative reading of an aggadic text and alludes
to a kabbalistic interpretation. By contrast in his commentary to Deut. 11:8
Naḥmanides cites Rashi's explanation, which is a paraphrase of the follow-
ing midrashic comment concerning the bodily obligations that are to be ful-
filled outside the land of Israel:

"You will soon perish [from the good land that the Lord is assigning to you].

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201. Cf. b. Ḥullin 60b.
202. *Perush,* Gen. 1:14 (p. 23).
203. Cf. *Be'ur le-Ferush ha-RaMBaN,* fol. 1c; *Keter Shem Tov,* fol. 28b; *Me'irat 'Einayim,*
p. 25.
204. See Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," pp. 16–17, n. 21.

Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart [bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead]" (Deut. 11:7–8): Even though I am exiling you from the land to outside the land, be distinguished [or marked, מצויינים] by the commandments, so that when you return they will not be considered novelties for you. This may be compared to a mortal king who got angry with his wife and sent her to her father's house. He said to her, "Adorn yourself with your jewelry so that when you return they will not be novelties for you."[205]

Commenting on this Naḥmanides writes, "In this *midrash* there is a deep secret and I have already alluded to it."[206] Naḥmanides, as Shem Tov ibn Gaon already noted,[207] refers to his esoteric explanation of the expression "the laws of the God of the land," משפט אלהי הארץ, to which he alludes in his commentary to Gen. 24:3 and 26:5. In the latter context he explains that Abraham's fulfillment of the entire Torah, as well as his knowledge of the mystical reasons for the commandments and the secrets of the Torah, was possible only in the land of Israel.[208] Even though there are bodily obligations that are not dependent on the land for their fulfillment, the essence of the commandments is tied to the land, for there is a mystical connection between the land, i.e., the *Shekhinah,* and the commandments.[209] This is the meaning of the expression "the laws of the God of the land," i.e., the laws of that God are particularly bound to the land, and it is the esoteric meaning of the midrashic parable which sees the fulfillment of certain commandments outside the land as a form of adornment which will keep one properly prepared for reentry into the land.

Finally, there is the well-known comment contained in Naḥmanides' own account of his disputation with Friar Paul at Barcelona in 1263. Any treatment of Naḥmanides' attitude towards 'aggadah, even if limited, as in our case, to the role of 'aggadah in his kabbalistic exposition, must take this comment into account. When presented by his opponent with the aggadic statement that the Messiah was born at the time of the destruction of the

205. *Sifre Deuteronomy,* pisqa 43 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 102).
206. *Perush,* Deut. 11:18 (p. 394).
207. *Keter Shem Tov,* fol. 51b.
208. *Perush,* Gen. 26:5 (p. 150).
209. See above, nn. 138–139.

Temple,[210] Naḥmanides at first replied: "I do not believe in that *haggadah,*
but it is proof for my words." When Paul retorted, apparently in an outcry,
"See, he contradicts their books," Naḥmanides responded more cautiously:
"Either this *'aggadah* is not true, or else it has another explanation accord-
ing to the mystery of the sages (מסתרי החכמים)."[211] He then stated, as an
obvious polemical tactic, that he would accept the *'aggadah* literally, for it
afforded proof for his case, i.e., insofar as Jesus was not born on the day of
the destruction of the Temple, he could not have been the true Messiah.
Scholem suggested that Naḥmanides' true intention in the remark that the
aggadic passage might have "another explanation according to the mystery
of the sages" could be gathered from a text by one of Naḥmanides' disciples,
Sheshet des Mercadell, concerning the secret of metempsychosis, in which
this *'aggadah* figures as a key proof-text.[212] If Scholem has correctly under-
stood Naḥmanides' allusion, then the first option in Naḥmanides' remark
that the *'aggadah* may not be true should be construed as a rejection of a
literal reading of the aggadic text. In effect, the two parts of the statement
are not in any way contradictory or incompatible, for the claim that the
'aggadah may not be true simply means that a strictly literal reading is not
true, and this is precisely what is implied in the suggestion that follows
regarding the possible mystical or esoteric reading. It is important to note,
moreover, that the Latin protocol of the disputation does not have any
mention of Naḥmanides' second alternative concerning the possibility of a
secret underlying the aggadic text.[213] Furthermore, there is no other refer-
ence to kabbalistic matters in the account of the disputation. It may very

    210. j. Berakhot 2:4 (5a). For other references to this legend in rabbinic sources, see L.
Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1968), 6:406, n. 53. The use of this aggadic
tradition was extended by Friar Raymond Martini in his *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Judeos.*
See R. Chazan, "From Friar Paul to Friar Raymond: The Development of Innovative Mis-
sionizing Argumentation," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 301–302.
    211. *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:306.
    212. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah,* p. 459. See the text published by Scholem, "A Study
of the Theory of Transmigration in Kabbalah during the XIII Century," *Tarbiz* 16 (1945): 143
[in Hebrew].
    213. The Latin text simply states that Naḥmanides denied the authority of aggadic texts
because "they were, he claimed, sermons, in which their teachers often lied for the purpose of
exhorting the people." I have utilized the English translation in R. Chazan, "The Barcelona
'Disputation' of 1263: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response," *Speculum* 52 (1977):
836–837. The original text is published in Y. Baer, "The Disputations of R. Yehiel of Paris and
of Naḥmanides," *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 187 [in Hebrew].

well be, therefore, that Nahmanides added this one reference for his Jewish audience. In the context of the disputation he only wanted to invalidate the Christological reading of the talmudic legend by either denying the literalness of it or accepting it as literally true for the sake of the argument.

That this interpretation of Nahmanides' remark is plausible may be supported by a second comment of Nahmanides which, to my knowledge, has been overlooked by all writers who have tried to understand Nahmanides' position as expressed in the disputation. I am referring to a statement made by Nahmanides in his commentary to Exod. 24:1, "Then he said to Moses, 'Come up to the Lord.'" Nahmanides interprets the passage attributed in b. Sanhedrin 38b to R. Idi, according to whom the verse must be interpreted as follows: God tells Moses to come up to Metatron, whose name is like that of his Master.[214] Commenting on this passage Nahmanides notes:

> I have already mentioned the [rabbis'] intention with respect to this name [Metatron], and all their words are true. Yet they spoke in that homily (הגדה) as one who conceals his face (כמסתיר פנים), for R. Idi did not reveal to this heretic (מין) who asked the question the matter of the great Metatron and his secret, God forbid.[215]

As may be discerned from other contexts in Nahmanides' commentary,[216] it is clear that, according to his kabbalistic system, Metatron refers to the *Shekhinah*.[217] The latter has Metatron as one of its names because this divine grade is entrusted with providential care, and the name Metatron, at least according to the etymology accepted by Nahmanides, means the "guide of the road," מורה הדרך.[218] In any event, it is precisely this mystical explanation

214. Nahmanides ad loc. rejects Rashi's interpretation, according to which Metatron is the one who told Moses to come up to God. See the commentary of Rashi to b. Sanhedrin 38b, s.v., זהו מטטרון. Rashi's interpretation is accepted by R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia; see Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, p. 167, n. 18.

215. *Perush*, Exod. 24:1 (p. 448).

216. Cf. ibid., Exod. 12:12, 23:20.

217. For other references to this tradition in thirteenth-century Catalan kabbalistic sources, see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 187, n. 214, and pp. 214–215, 299. On the identification of *Shekhinah* as an angelic presence, see above, n. 100. See also the anonymous fragment in MS JTS Mic. 1892, fol. 54a, where reference is made to Nahmanides' commentary to Exod. 24:1.

218. The etymology according to this interpretation is derived from the Latin *metator*, meaning a "measurer" or "one who marks out." Such a usage is to be found already in tan-

that, according to Naḥmanides, R. Idi did not want to divulge to the heretic. Is it unreasonable to draw the methodological parallel between this explanation by Naḥmanides of the talmudic discussion and his own experience at Barcelona? Just as the third-century Palestinian rabbi did not wish to expound upon the mystical meaning of Meṭaṭron before the sectarian, so too Naḥmanides refrained from expounding upon the mystical meaning of the 'aggadah about the Messiah before the Christian.[219]

Indeed, on the next day, Naḥmanides returned to the question of this 'aggadah, this time placing it in the context of a longer explanation on the general status of 'aggadot. Here we find again a two-staged approach on the part of Naḥmanides: at first he states that he does not accept as authoritative the legend about the Messiah's birth on the day of the destruction of the

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naitic sources, as is pointed out by Naḥmanides himself in the commentary to Exod. 24:1. See *Sifre Deuteronomy*, pisqa 338 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 388), and the editor's note 2, ad loc. The reference there, however, is not to Meṭaṭron the angel. Cf. P. S. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977): 164, n. 15. Naḥmanides conflates this supposed Latin etymology with the Greek etymology—which he mentions specifically—of *metator*, which means "messenger." The latter etymology was popularized by the talmudic dictionary '*Arukh* of Nathan ben Yeḥiel of Rome. Such an etymology for Meṭaṭron is found in a citation by R. Ezra of Gerona in the name of Isaac the Blind of Provence; see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 298–299. Cf. also H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (New York, 1973), pp. 127–128 (Introduction). A recent attempt to substantiate the supposed etymology of Meṭaṭron from the Latin *metator* (combined perhaps with the Greek *metron*) has been made by G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Meṭaṭron and Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 287. For another account of the etymology of Meṭaṭron as deriving from the Greek *synthronos* (which is synonymous with *metathronos*), see S. Lieberman's appendix in I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 235–240.

219. In this regard it is of interest to consider the following words of Yeḥiel ben Joseph of Paris in his disputation with Nicholas Donin at the court of Louis IX in 1240 (cited from S. Grünbaum, *Wikkuaḥ* [Thorn, 1873], p. 2): "There are in them [the words of the rabbis in the Talmud] matters of 'aggadah to draw the heart of a person [cf. b. Ḥagigah 14a; *Sifre Deuteronomy*, pisqa 317, p. 359; and see Hillel of Verona, *Sefer Tagmulei Nefesh* (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 181] so that he will understand the external sense (להבין המליצה). And there are in them wonderful [or secret] words (דברי פלא) which are difficult for the infidel, heretic, or apostate to believe. Concerning these there is no need to respond to you. If you want you may believe them, and if not, then do not believe them, for no law is determined by them." These words come strikingly close to those of Naḥmanides (discussed below, see references in n. 222). Cf. J. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York, 1962), pp. 108–113: R. Chazan, "A Medieval Hebrew Polemical Mélange," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 51 (1980): 110, n. 68; Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, 1982), p. 70; H. Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London, 1982), pp. 36–37.

Temple because there is another rabbinic tradition which places the birth of
the Messiah "shortly before the end of days, when he will come to deliver us
from exile." Immediately after stating this, Naḥmanides, quite remarkably,
reiterates his position of the preceding day and asserts that he accepts the
'aggadah concerning the birth of the Messiah on the day of the destruction
of the Temple according to its literal meaning because, when taken as such,
it proves that Jesus is not the Messiah, for he was not born on that day: אני
מקבל אותה הגדה כפשוטה כמו שאתם חפצים בה מפני שהיא ראיה מפורשת שאין ישו שלהם
משיח . . . שהוא לא נולד באותו היום.[220] Clearly, the technique used by Naḥmanides
is to give in to the Christian demand that he accept the 'aggadah because he
could utilize that very 'aggadah in a polemical way to undermine the Chris-
tological stance. Naḥmanides' acceptance of an 'aggadah that he ultimately
rejects is not a blatant contradiction, but merely points to a stratagem used
to counter the claims of the disputant.[221] In this case there is no mention of
the other alternative regarding the possibility that the aggadic statement
may contain a secret or mystical explanation. There is no mention of this
here because at this stage of the argument such a consideration is completely
irrelevant. That is, what Naḥmanides wishes to impart to the reader of his
account of the disputation is that at this point he was prepared to accept
Friar Paul's insistence that he accept the 'aggadah, for by accepting it he was
able to use it to attack his opponent's position.

For the purposes of this paper it is necessary to reflect further on the
implications of Naḥmanides' fuller remark made at the disputation concern-
ing the nature of 'aggadah. Naḥmanides, as I have already mentioned
above, stated with respect to midrash or 'aggadah that if one believes it, it is
well and good, but if one does not believe it there is no harm.[222] Reflecting
on this statement, several scholars in the past had been led to the conclusion
that Naḥmanides was arguing against his own belief; the disclaimer must be
seen only in the polemical context and not as representative of his true view-
point.[223] A growing scholarly consensus, however, challenges this interpre-

220. Kitvei Ramban, 1:308–309.
221. The point is stated clearly in D. Berger's review of H. Maccoby's Judaism on Trial,
Jewish Quarterly Review 76 (1986): 255.
222. Kitvei Ramban, 1:308. See statement of Yeḥiel ben Joseph cited above, n. 219.
223. Y. Baer, "The Disputations of R. Yeḥiel of Paris and of Naḥmanides," p. 184; idem, A
History of the Jews in Christian Spain (Philadelphia, 1961), 1:153; C. Roth, "The Disputation at

tation and maintains that what Naḥmanides said about 'aggadah is a sincere statement of his belief.[224] One of the more cogent presentations of this line of argument is that of Septimus, who has argued that there is sufficient evidence in Naḥmanides' biblical commentary, a nonpolemical context, to show that Naḥmanides was indeed prepared to reject outright aggadic statements. Hence, Naḥmanides did not only want to undercut the force of the Christian stance to prove the truth of Christianity from aggadic statements, according to Septimus, but this represents, on the contrary, his true position. It will be recalled that Saul Lieberman had already argued that Naḥmanides' apparent take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards 'aggadah, or more precisely aggadic passages that have no halakhic implications, had its precedent in geonic traditions such as אין סומכין על אגדה.[225] In Septimus' view, however, Naḥmanides' attitude towards 'aggadah was somewhere in between the literalist approach of the Franco-German tradition and the Andalusian rationalistic attitude, which saw a need to allegorize 'aggadot in order to make them more feasible. Indeed, in Septimus' opinion, when Naḥmanides "resorts to kabbalistic defense it is often of aggadot that are entirely beyond the reach of Andalusian understanding,"[226] i.e., his kabbalistic interpretation of 'aggadot serves first and foremost as a response to rationalist critique. Thus, Septimus calls our attention to "a basic terminological point of contact between Naḥmanides' polemical disclaimer and his mature

Barcelona (1263)," *Harvard Theological Review* 43 (1950): 128; M. Cohen, "Reflections on the Text and Context of the Disputation of Barcelona," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 35 (1964): 170–171: H. H. Ben-Sasson, *Peraqim be-Toledot ha-Yehudim bi-Yemei ha-Beinayyim* (Tel-Aviv, 1969), p. 251; R. Chazan, "The Barcelona 'Disputation' of 1263," pp. 836–837; idem, "From Friar Paul to Friar Raymond," pp. 300–301; J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews,* pp. 118–119. See also H. Beinart's article on the Barcelona disputation in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 4:214.

224. See H. Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial,* pp. 44–48, 58–66, 68–74; and the review of Maccoby's book by D. Berger, p. 225. See also the articles of Lieberman, Septimus, and Fox mentioned in the following notes, and cf. the note of Chavel to his edition of Naḥmanides' account of the disputation, *Kitvei Ramban,* 1:308.

225. Cf. S. Lieberman, *Shikiin* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 82–83. On the geonic tradition, see Aaron Marcus, *Qeset Sofer,* introduction to *She'elot u-Teshuvot min ha-Shamayim* (Cracow, 1895), pp. 22–23; and cf. S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews,* 6:176 ff.

226. Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 19. Cf. S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* (New York, 1970), pp. 223–224, who thus characterized Naḥmanides' presentation of kabbalistic truths: "It was chiefly when philosophy called in question his deep sympathies with even lower humanity, and threatened to withdraw them from those ennobling influences under which he wanted to keep them, that he asserted his mystical theories."

exegesis." That is, Septimus accepts Naḥmanides' denial of aggadic author-
ity at the Barcelona disputation as his genuine opinion on the basis of the
fact that in his commentary "he almost invariably attaches the term agga-
dah to those interpretations about which he seems uneasy, which make
sense only when interpreted nonliterally, or whose seriousness and author-
ity he is calling into question.[227] Although I do not believe that on a purely
terminological basis Septimus' position can be maintained in every case,[228]
the main thrust of his argument is well-taken insofar as Naḥmanides clearly
did not uphold the literal meaning of every aggadic remark. Recently,
Marvin Fox has supported Septimus' position on this score by both locating
Naḥmanides' circumspect attitude towards 'aggadah in the larger context of
rabbinic authorities and by establishing various typologies in Naḥmanides'
commentary, especially on the book of Genesis, in which aggadic passages
are rejected.[229] With respect to this essential issue, then, there can be no
argument.

Septimus is therefore correct in pointing out that Naḥmanides' reading
of 'aggadot is not as straightforward and simple as that of Rashi. To be sure,
as he indicates, there are sufficient examples in Naḥmanides' commentary
where aggadic statements are rejected without any indication that they
embrace a deeper, mystical meaning. I thus agree with Septimus' claim that
"Naḥmanides did not see kabbalistic interpretation as a universal key to the
understanding of all aggadah."[230] Septimus is likewise correct in emphasiz-
ing that the view that "because Naḥmanides was a kabbalist he must have
accepted the authority of all aggadah" is patently fallacious.[231] Nevertheless,
it seems to me that in his effort to correct a widespread misconception
regarding Naḥmanides' attitude to 'aggadah, Septimus gives insufficient
notice to what is in fact the critical issue in determining the role of 'aggadah

227. Septimus, op. cit., p. 21.

228. See, e.g., Perush, Exod. 1:1, 19:13; Lev. 16:8; Num. 1:32.

229. See M. Fox, "Naḥmanides on the Status of Aggadot: Perspectives on the Disputation
at Barcelona, 1263," Journal of Jewish Studies, 40 (1989): 95–109.

230. A similar point has been made with respect to Naḥmanides' disciple, R. Solomon ibn
Adret; see the studies of C. Horowitz and D. Horvitz cited above, n. 29.

231. Septimus, "Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," p. 21, n. 37. This view is attri-
buted by Septimus to Scholem, but I am unable to locate any passage in Scholem's writings that
would warrant such an attribution. See the claim of Maccoby, Judaism on Trial, p. 37, that R.
Yeḥiel of Paris certainly thought that aggadic passages have an allegorical or mystical meaning,
"for Jewish mysticism took much of its sustenance from these very passages, understood in a
figurative or coded sense."

in Naḥmanides' kabbalistic exposition. The real concern is not whether Naḥmanides' posture as a kabbalist forced him to accept as binding every single aggadic statement, but rather the central position accorded to the theosophic reinterpretation and transformation of 'aggadot in Naḥmanides' kabbalistic exegetical activity. When the issue is posed in this way it seems to me undeniably clear that such exegetical activity is beyond doubt the life-blood of Naḥmanides' work in the area of kabbalah. From that perspective it can be said, inverting Septimus' language, that Naḥmanides saw aggadic interpretation as the universal key to the understanding of kabbalah.[232] Moreover, in evaluating Naḥmanides' kabbalah and its relationship to 'aggadah, one cannot simply focus on passages where the author uses the term, for in the majority of cases he cites aggadic texts without labeling them as such. Viewing the matter this way, one is led to the obvious conclusion that aggadic exegesis is central to Naḥmanides' kabbalah. One would be hard-pressed to ignore this dimension when one examines Naḥmanides' kabbalistic statements.

In light of the above it seems to me necessary to qualify somewhat the characterization of Naḥmanides as a conservative kabbalist. It is certainly the case, as Idel points out, that Naḥmanides asserted on various occasions that kabbalah consists of esoteric truths that were received by Moses and have been transmitted orally, and which cannot, therefore, be deduced by reasoning or supposition. The fuller analysis of Naḥmanides' position would require a careful examination of the contexts wherein Naḥmanides employs the distinction between supposition and tradition. It is undeniably true that Naḥmanides had such an image of the mystical tradition. Yet it is somewhat curious that Naḥmanides never, so far as I am aware, mentions a teacher with regard to kabbalistic matters.[233] It is well-known, of course, as I mentioned above, that one of his teachers was Judah ben Yaqar, who in fact was a kabbalist. Naḥmanides mentions ben Yaqar several times in his

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232. In this connection it is of interest to note that later Ḥasidic masters incorporated the study of 'aggadah under the category of the study of kabbalah. See., e.g., R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya, pt. IV, chap. 23, fol. 137a. And cf. B. Z. Dinur, Be-Mifneh ha-Dorot (Jerusalem, 1955), p. 165, n. 37.

233. In the commentary to Sefer Yeṣirah which Scholem published in the name of Naḥ-manides, we do find the author divulging esoteric matters with the introductory phrase "And I have heard," ששמעתי, thus suggesting that he has received these matters orally from a teacher. But, characteristically, no teacher is mentioned by name. See "The Authentic Commentary of the RaMBaN to Sefer Yeṣirah," ed. by Scholem, Qiryat Sefer 6 (1929–30): 404 [in Hebrew]. It should also be noted that in at least three of the manuscripts of the same text, p. 406, mention is made of "the Ḥasid," a term usually taken to refer in the writings of the Spanish kabbalists to

halakhic writings,[234] but never with respect to a kabbalistic doctrine. This fact is somewhat puzzling given Naḥmanides' own insistence on the necessity to have a teacher in order to understand kabbalistic allusions. In trying to chart out Naḥmanides' kabbalah the little we know of ben Yaqar is not terribly helpful.[235] To be sure, it is highly unlikely that Naḥmanides did not learn mystical matters from ben Yaqar; indeed, in the writings of R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, the disciple of R. Solomon ibn Adret and R. Isaac ben Todros, the teachings of ben Yaqar are cited,[236] leaving one with the impression that ben Yaqar's teachings were still revered in Naḥmanides' circle. Moreover, in terms of style ben Yaqar's fluid transition from 'aggadah to kabbalah is reminiscent of Naḥmanides, though I would maintain that in ben Yaqar it is sometimes more difficult to draw the line between the aggadic and kabbalistic reading of a rabbinic source. The laconic and reserved transmission of esoteric matters is also conspicuous in both authors. Nevertheless, in his presentation of kabbalistic ideas, Naḥmanides does not himself rely on tracing his kabbalah to ben Yaqar or to any specific teacher. It seems to me, rather, that in this regard the *Sefer ha-Bahir* is the crucial source which informed Naḥmanides' kabbalah.[237]

One could, of course, argue that these alternatives are not mutually exclusive, for perhaps it was from his teachers, such as ben Yaqar, that Naḥ-

R. Isaac the Blind (see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 254). The reference, though, does not suggest that the author, supposedly Naḥmanides, received anything from the Ḥasid, but merely reflects that he was cognizant of an alternative reading and interpretation. See, however, p. 407 and Scholem's n. 2 ad loc., and cf. p. 410, n. 2. For another discrepancy between Naḥmanides' explanation of a passage in *Sefer Yeṣirah* and that of R. Isaac the Blind, see "The Commentary of R. Isaac of Acre to the First Chapter of *Sefer Yeṣirah*," published by Scholem, *Qiryat Sefer* 31 (1955–1956); 383 [in Hebrew]. This discrepancy was already noted by Scholem, without relying on the evidence of R. Isaac of Acre, in *Qiryat Sefer* 6 (1929–30): 402, n. 2.

234. Cf. Chavel, *Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman*, pp. 38–44.

235. See, however, Idel, "We Have No Tradition," p. 57. See also E. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany, 1989), pp. 108–111, who has noted the influence of Judah ben Yaqar on Naḥmanides with respect to the marital motif connected to the Sabbath. In particular, Ginsburg notes that in three places Naḥmanides, like his mentor, interpreted *Genesis Rabbah* 11:8 as an allusion to the divine wedding. Cf. *Perush* to Gen. 2:3, Lev. 23:26, and Deut 5:15. See also below, n. 237.

236. See, for instance, Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, fols. 29a (citing his teacher, i.e., R. Isaac ben Todros, who received from R. Judah, i.e., Judah ben Yaqar), 37b, 44b. The latter two references refer to the same interpretation found in ben Yaqar's *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, p. 89.

237. One problem with this thesis is the fact that Naḥmanides' conception of the divine emanations varies from that of the *Bahir*. For Naḥmanides the *sefirot* are the divine essence, whereas in the *Bahir* the divine potencies are depicted as instruments or vessels. Cf. Idel, *Kab-*

manides received the *Sefer ha-Bahir*.[238] Interesting in this regard is the following observation made by R. Ṣadok ha-Kohen of Lublin (1823–1900) in the context of contrasting Naḥmanides' kabbalah with various other types of experience or insights that can be found in Jewish mystical literature: "It appears to me that the kabbalah of the RaMBaN and his teachers and students is a new insight (מראה מחדשת) ... and its foundation is based on the *Sefer ha-Bahir* of R. Neḥuniah ben ha-Qanah, which was disclosed to them, and from which RaMBaN cites frequently."[239] While the claim that Naḥmanides received the *Bahir* from his teachers is indeed plausible enough, it is almost impossible to evaluate this adequately in light of our scanty knowledge concerning his teachers in kabbalistic matters. In any event, the critical point is that in his own transmission of kabbalistic truths the role played by the *Bahir* is the decisive one. The importance of this source, as I have already indicated, lies in the fact that it represented a *literary* document whose authenticity and traditional authority Naḥmanides accepted. He therefore read the *Bahir* as an aggadic source, and this factor undoubtedly unleashed his creative imagination to recast aggadic statements in the mold of theosophical kabbalah. While other kabbalists before Naḥmanides had reinterpreted aggadic texts in light of kabbalistic symbolism, Naḥmanides was the first to apply this hermeneutical strategy in a biblical commentary intended for mass consumption. Beyond the specific citations from the *Bahir* that one finds scattered in the Torah commentary, the influence of this work upon Naḥmanides can be seen in the frequent linkage of kabbalistic truth to an aggadic text. In Naḥmanides' thought, then, there is a convergence of theosophy and *'aggadah*, and it is on this basis and through this medium that Naḥmanides can present kabbalah as the "way of truth" of normative Judaism.

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balah: New Perspectives, pp. 137–138. The essentialist view seems to have been taken by Judah ben Yaqar as well; see *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, pt. 1, p. 22, where we find that God is equated with His name and His attributes. On the relation between the traditional thirteen *middot* and the ten *sefirot* in the Naḥmanidean tradition, see the cryptic remark in *Keter Shem Tov*, fol. 31b. See also Ṭodros Abulafia, *'Oṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw, 1879), fols. 16c–d. For a more general discussion of this problem in the early kabbalah, see J. Dan, *Ḥugei ha-Mequbbalim ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 1–10.

238. In the case of ben Yaqar there is no direct citation of the *Bahir* by name, though in some cases in his writings a possible influence of it can be detected. Cf. *Perush ha-Tefillot we-ha-Berakhot*, pt. 1, pp. 110–111 to *Sefer ha-Bahir* §§102 and 157, and pt. 2, p. 42 to *Sefer ha-Bahir*, §157. I am indebted to my colleague, Prof. Elliot Ginsburg, for these references.

239. *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, appended to *Divrei Soferim* (Lublin, 1927), fol. 34d.